

## EQUINE NOTES for November 2017.

“There is as much horse sense around as ever. Unfortunately the horses have most of it.”

Anon.

“Horse Sense is the thing a horse has that keeps him from betting on people.” Anon.

Hello Again,

It seems the winter months are fast approaching and the hard work of keeping horses begins in earnest. Mucking out in the early mornings, carting fodder, filling the hay nets and unfreezing the water troughs are all necessary for the welfare of our equines. It is quite enjoyable when it is cold and the sun shines, but in heavy rain, soaked clothing and mud up to the knees it is no fun, yet because we love our animals the duty performed is endured, but there is nothing better than returning indoors, sitting against the Aga and drinking a cup of good old hot tea while the extremities thaw out.

When I was a child I used to talk frequently to a Romany couple who parked their caravan and horse along a quiet lane in our village. The horse was a traditional coloured cob of substance and the caravan a traditional bow top wagon. They cooked on an open fire and there was always a large kettle of steaming water hanging from a tripod above the flames. It was amazing to me how quickly the water boiled. Potatoes and Swedes, turnips and meat were cooked in the hot ashes. This couple would often advise me on what to feed my pony, but the best advice was to let it pick out the plants and herbs along the wayside and bridle paths, but avoiding damp places where poisonous plants like Hemlock, Hogwort and Mares Tail grew...

Over the years we have domesticated our equines and limited them to the pasture field which inhibits their roaming. They are unable to pick and choose what to eat. When a horse was off colour I would walk it in hand along my farm track and it was interesting to see what plants were selected.

Cow Parsley or Queen Anne's Lace, as it was sometime known was a favourite, also Couch grass, Dandelions, Hawthorn leaves, Wild Garlic, Comfrey, and Cleavers and I am sure many more I failed to recognise. Instinctively horses knew what would heal and cure them and foraged eagerly. The roots of some plants were beneficial too, as they penetrated deeper into the subsoil than grass, and so drew up more nutriment. I can only recall Wild Carrot, Dandelions and Plantain, but there must be many more.

Nettles were often cut and left to wilt before being fed to ponies prone to Laminitis and have you ever watched a donkey eating a Thistle? It starts at the root and munches upwards to avoid the prickles.

The last lovely horse I rode was a wonderful Fjord horse. Born in Finland and exported here. He was one of the rescues from Spindles Farm, but some years before it was closed down because of the massive cruelty and welfare cases there. In Finland there are no snakes, and Ben had no instinctive fear of them. Tragically he was bitten by a drowsy adder one December day. He must have thought it was a coiled bit of rope and went to investigate, was bitten in the mouth and never recovered. The only nutriment that I could get down him was Guinness, which he survived on for three days as his head had swollen too much to allow him to eat.

Instinct is a strange and wonderful thing but sometimes a dubious friend.

I hope by now that you have prepared for the winter with mended and reproofed rugs ready for use, clippers serviced and blades sharpened. Hay in the barn and building maintenance completed.

I recently gave my well used Sunbeam Stewart clippers bought in 1957 to the couple who have the driving ponies which I bred. I had even managed to buy new blades for shearing my own sheep during the year of "Foot and Mouth." They still work perfectly, if a little heavier than the new plastic makes, one of which failed only a year after being bought and just outside the guarantee period. So much for modern equipment!

I have had no welfare problems to deal with this month, but please do not hesitate to contact me, in confidence, if you have any worries about a horse or pony near you which might need help. Often just a chat will put your mind at rest or if not I will be able to implement some action to remedy the situation.

Heather Lee B.H.S contact for E. Devon and W. Dorset