

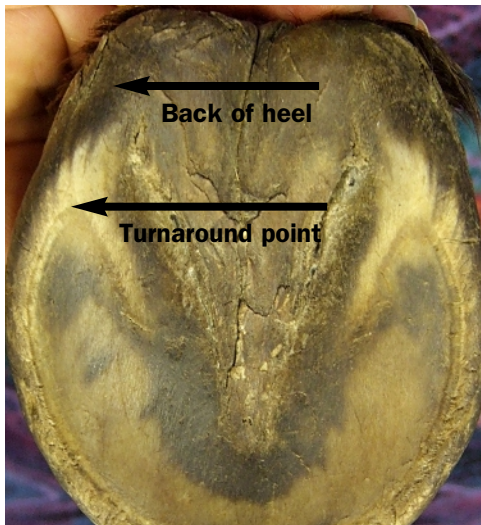
Barefoot Trimming

Trimming the Heels

by James Welz

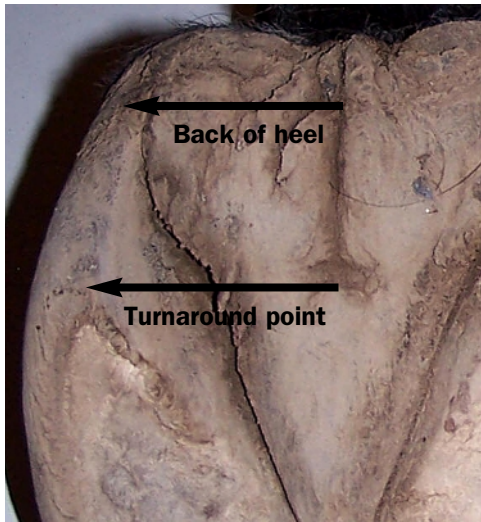
For guidance on how to trim the heels of our domestic horses, I kept looking at the examples of healthy wild mustang hooves provided to us by Jaime Jackson, Pete Ramey, and others. I noticed things immediately that contradicted my training. As time went by, I also noticed that nobody was talking about these things. Not wanting to contradict what I had learned, I changed my trim very slowly. As I moved closer to the form of this wild foot, I noticed increasing soundness, and decreasing abscessing and bruising.

All photos ©The Horse's Hoof



A mustang cadaver hoof, showing the distance between the rear weight-bearing at the heel, and the heel-bar turnaround point.

I now believe that a **comfortable heel** is paramount to continuing the health of the hoof, as well as improving hoof form. A comfortable heel promotes balanced loading of the foot, spreading the impact and load over a greater area of the foot. It also encourages even expansion of the hoof capsule and improves



Close-up of the heel platform area, mustang cadaver photo courtesy Pete Ramey.



Closeup of the very well-rounded heel area of a mustang hoof.

the blood circulation via “hoof mechanism.”

Of course, you’re asking, what did I see in these healthy wild hooves? Well, the first thing I noticed, and subsequently added to my trim, was the fact that the turnaround point, which is the area where the bar meets the wall at the heel, was not a point at all—it was more of a **“platform.”** This area—where the bar and wall come together—is usually between 3/8” to 5/8” in length, sometimes even longer. I have never seen an example of a healthy wild hoof that didn’t have this heel platform feature.

Then I noticed something even more disruptive to my training. I was taught never to bevel or round the wall behind the widest point of the hoof, because this would contract the hoof. However, I couldn’t get over the fact that all the healthy wild horse examples accessible to me had a “mustang roll” that extended *all the way around the hoof including the heel.* I believe this feature decreases peripheral loading and encourages better hoof form, and, yes, **decontracts the foot.**

With this in mind, I was told by someone I greatly respect that the reason I “get away” with rolling the heels is that my ground is so hard. I respectfully disagree. I believe trimming this way balances the load throughout the heel and, in fact, helps to distribute the load through a greater area of the hoof. Because of this, I now feel that others only “get away” with not rounding or beveling this area because their ground is so soft, which allows the peripherally-loaded wall to sink in, effectively distributing the load over a wider area. Another important thing to consider is that even if your horse lives in the mud and the muck, we seldom ride in it.

We need now to talk about length of the heel. This is a bigger subject than it first appears. Since the

variance in pathology is infinite, I will discuss only healthy length, proportional hooves. If the hoof is of a healthy length, I rasp the heel to between 1/32” to at the most 1/16” above the viable solar plane, then I round or bevel the wall all the way around the heel, even the heel point (actually all the way around the hoof but this article is about heels), leaving the entire heel-bar junction anywhere between 1/4” to 3/4” long.

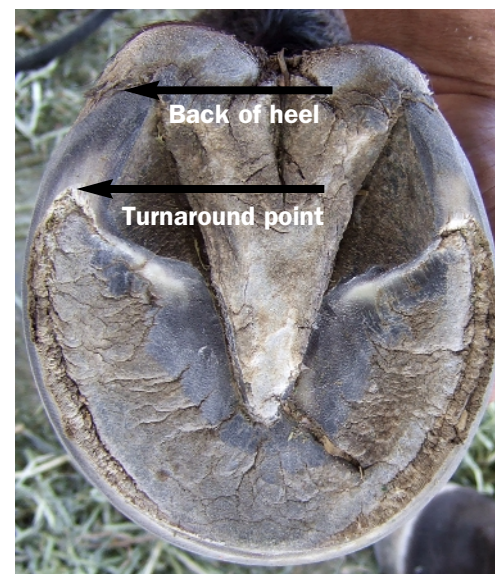
The entire hoof is affected by this, and especially the bars, but this must be left for a future article.

Through all this I have learned not to doubt the healthy wild hoof. I believe it holds all the secrets we are searching for, if we only know where to look. 🌱

For more information on James’ trimming techniques, please visit the all new Hoof Corner: <http://thehorseshoof.com/hoofcorner.html>



Closeup of heel area on a healthy hoof, trimmed to simulate the structure of the wild hooves.



The heel platform allowed to develop, through trimming, on a healthy hoof.