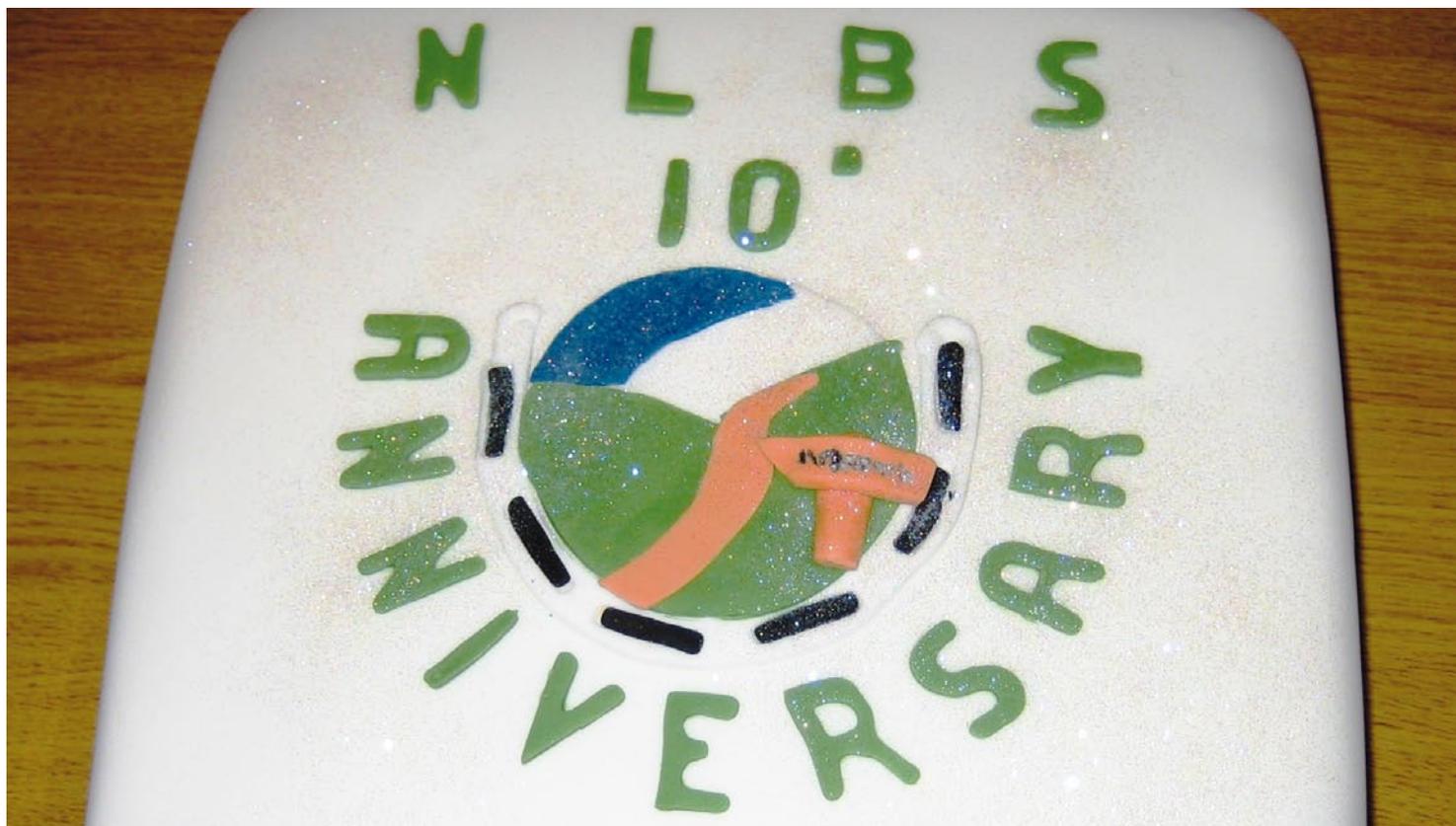


ON THE RIGHT TRACK



NEWSLETTER • DECEMBER 2007



Happy Birthday NLBS!

We have just reached our 10th birthday and are still growing. From very small beginnings our membership has swelled to over 300 and with each new member our fundraising, networking and clout increases. Look at the pics on page two to see the party celebrations. If you have any friends who might like to join, pass this letter on and point out the membership form enclosed. Definitely a case of the more, the merrier.

Don't forget the NLBS website for more info, articles and smashing pictures. www.nlbs.org.uk

The next newsletter is due out in May (ish!) so if you have any reports, pictures, announcements, sales - woteva, forward them to sheena@creativemarketingsolutions.co.uk

Thanks to all for huge enthusiasm and hard work and here's to 2008.

Happy riding,

BHS ACCESS CONFERENCE

In September Vicky and Eve attended the BHS Access Conference in Bath. There were presentations by Sustrans, Wind Farms, Natural England, Emagin, Transport Architecture. This was certainly a diversity of presentations under discussion.

The Sustrans representatives when questioned could not explain satisfactorily why horse riders are not allowed to use the many cycle tracks being constructed under the Connect2 scheme.

The Wind Farm representative was keen to point out that it is the riders perception of the rotating blades that is frightening and that most horses are not worried. We were not totally convinced because each horse is different.

The Natural England representative said their remit is access for. Vicky tackled him at lunch time - watch this space!

The Emagin system will show all bridleways, national routes, circular routes and B & B for horses. Click on the bridleways to see if it is passable, the state of the gates etc.

The Transport Architect talked about motorway bridges and safe crossings of major roads.

In the afternoon there was much valuable inter-reaction on many topics with us getting 'our oar' in at every opportunity. I was referred to as the 'Lady in Green' as I was wearing our NLBS polo shirt. I was reprimanded for interrupting to hurry up proceedings. A successful networking weekend.

Eve and Vicky

WILLIAM'S THINK TANK

William and I have won a rosette, a red one! OK it was only a small gymkhana at Greenhall stables and a small round of small jumps and I suspect everyone else stopped to admire the view halfway round, but William and I were the fastest clear round so I'm very proud of my first rosette, (the first of many of course). I always knew that big rump must be good for something other than snoozing on after a hot summer ride. In fact William really enjoys jumping, his ears go up at the sight of a course of jumps and he's instantly into 5th gear looking where to go next. He was also very good at the handy pony, but let down by his rider who wasn't going fast enough.

Anyway after our success at the gymkhana I have been boasting about how good he would be at LeTrec (assuming that I can read a map). My friend Linda decided it was time to take matters into her own hands; even if we couldn't get William to a competition, I could have a go. So next thing I know I'm entered in the open competition in the winter series at Bigland Hall, riding her husband Steve's horse Kerrie, a 15.1 hh Friesian. Oh dear, shouldn't have been boasting, I don't think I'm ready for this. Fortunately Kerrie has done a few competitions and had already been round the course with Steve so I thought we had a very good smooth round. Even though we didn't get a very good score, we didn't disgrace ourselves and it might help if I read the rule book first and knew quite how the scoring worked! Having got over the shock of being told at 10 o'clock the night before that I was entered in the competition, I really did enjoy myself so now I really don't have any excuses not to get William to the next one. With my vast experience and his unflappable temperament I'm sure we'll be winning another rosette. Not that I like to boast, of course.

Helen Wilkinson

CHARITY EVENING - BROOKE HOSPITAL FOR ANIMALS

Another very successful evening, £160 was raised. I made a two course meal, nothing fancy, with the help from Liz who made a trifle.

Everybody brought a bottle and donated very kindly. Thanks to Barbara Hartley, Liz Davison, Catherine Blackwell, Trisha Jones, Gitte McLeod, Andrea Lishman & Jo Atkinson.

Lorraine Hind

10TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS AT ARKHOLME VILLAGE HALL



JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES

Or thereabouts! Taking a Highland Jaunt was very much an unscheduled, hurriedly-arranged affair. I was going to Scotland to visit friends but through the HPEC message board had made other friends, some I had met before and some I hadn't. How many could I visit during my trip? It seemed more of an idea than a reality, you know, one of those things you think about but never actually get round to doing? First step was the Isle of Mull, to stay with Islander, who regularly posts pictures and accounts of her adventures with her forum-famous ponies. From the starting place of Lancaster; famed for the trial of the Pendle Witches and the handless corpse (grim history!), this first stage of the journey was an over-estimated, very respectable three-hundred plus miles. I was at Oban before I knew it, having apparently driven through my scheduled stop of Rest and be Thankful without even noticing! I'd been told that the house was the first on the right and to just walk in and put the kettle on. Faced with two front doors I realised that I hadn't thought to ask address or surname. The clue lay in a pair of Harry Halls, thoughtfully placed outside the front door! After a timid knock I walked in, reassured by the sight of more horsey stuff, to be met by a duo of jack russell terrorists who I hoped had been fed! Contemplating the consequences of walking boldly in to entirely the wrong house, I was suddenly greeted by a man who fortunately recognised me from a photograph and amicably introduced himself. Imagine if it had been the wrong house and the wrong husband – how would I have talked myself out of that?! Islander arrived soon after and from there we nattered forever! The evening wore on but we made time to go up and meet the ponies and to check out the recently rescued, possibly very pregnant cat, Gem. All were gorgeous! I was struck by the complete quietness. No sounds of city or sirens, just nature's peace. And a cuckoo!

The following day, we went up to the ponies, packing the two JRs into the boot of the car and taking our picnic and cameras. With a whistle and a lead from Amber, the ponies trooped into the bar, followed by Gem. Camrie was soft and kind and enjoyed a fuss; Amber was more self contained; rejected the fuss but never-the-less demanded to be acknowledged. With looks like that, she is certainly commanding!

I was riding Camrie that day so I set about grooming and tacking up. Out of the barn, through the gate and onto the track and Camrie was reluctant to go. 'Use your voice' I was told but as a Neonatal Nurse, I generally employ mine only to calm and lull babies to sleep. I wasn't terribly effective! Once we got going, he was fine and very good at finding his way through the rocks and bogs. I would never have believed it possible for a pony with a rider on his back to scramble over such rocks or to barge through the undergrowth quite like he did! As for the bogs and the forty-five degree banks – wow! Camrie is amazing in that he doesn't like any or much contact and in fact would probably prefer not to have reins at all. Going down vertiginous banks or scrambling up rocky faces really demonstrated just how much the leg and seat is used, rather than the hands. As such, it was a very useful and extremely confidence-building exercise. ►

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The following day, I was expecting to ride Camrie again and was very content with that thought. Islander asked if I would like to ride Amber. No thank you, I replied too quickly in dead earnest. A bit later, all tacked up and ready to go, I was asked again. This time, looking over Amber's saddled back, I weighed up the pros and cons and searched the eyes that asked the question for signs of uncertainty - or mischief! I found neither; only belief that I could and would be fine. The deal was that I would ride her out and that I could swap back on to Camrie at any point I wished.

It had rained heavily through the night, the ground was very wet and the bogs were even boggy. I was very uncertain and uneasy on Amber and she knew it. We dismounted to walk through one such bog, leading the ponies through instead of riding. After we remounted, using a stone shaped like a pyramid, I felt sick and would happily have cried! I got on and announced that I was way out of my comfort zone. 'What's that?' replied Islander! I decided that I would just get round the next corner and decide then whether to change and ride Camrie instead. But something else changed instead. Amber and I found a place of understanding and from there on rode in partnership, each enjoying the other's company. We trotted up a grassy track and suddenly Amber was cantering! No big deal for the brave and able amongst you, but a huge obstacle for me to overcome as a result of falling and breaking my leg very badly during canter a few years ago. Since then, I have ridden very little and have become terrified of canter and injury. That first canter on Amber was just the start of things! Later, having walked sideways down steep muddy banks, jumped over burns and snaked through woods, we arrived at an uphill track called Green Hill. I was given the option of cantering in front but declined on the basis of 'not being sure'. We set off and straight away I realised my mistake as Camrie kicked blob after blob of cloying mud straight in to my face and eyes! I had my first ever post-injury gallop on a tiny powerhouse of a red pony with only one eye open! Stopping midway, Islander turned and laughed at the muddy apparition that followed! Still inordinately pleased with myself, I was oblivious to the intent of the others till all at once Amber set off at a gallop in pursuit of Camrie. It was absolutely exhilarating! To be able to enjoy the freedom and feel of wind on my face and to hear little hooves belting onwards after so many years of fear and anxiety was just indescribable and to do so in the beautiful surrounding and countryside of the Isle of Mull was just pure magic!

Later that evening we went over to Erray to check out the ponies and foals that lived out on the hills there. A yearling had been brought in for possible sale, Erray Forget-me-Not and what a little sweetie she was! Such a lovely face and nature; just not quite able to fit in my car! Erray showed us the stallion, Moss-side Dorlach and his collection of mares and foals. One in particular, a little chocolate-coloured filly (?) was particularly fetching and with another mousey coloured foal, bounded over the hill, to the concern and consternation of their whinnying mothers!



My time with Islander passed all too quickly and soon I moved to the next stage of my journey, to Inverness to stay with Jan and Jock. Jan lives on a hill overlooking Loch Ness, with views reaching over to the snow-capped tops of Glen Affric. The mists and changing seasons cast a different mood on the landscape each time it is viewed. It is never boring and never the same. The following morning, we brought Major out into the sunshine and brushed his dapply coat, though in summer livery, these were less pronounced. Major loves fuss and attention and all but fell asleep with two of us pampering him from both sides! By the time he was tacked up and ready to board, he really didn't want to go anywhere! After a few moments of gentle persuasion, we set off up the track that climbs high above Loch Ness, looking down upon the ruins of Urquhart Castle. The view was magnificent, with blue skies and sunshine shimmering on the water and company to walk alongside. There is a oneness that comes with being at peace with beast and nature and in the beauty of those surroundings, it was easy to achieve. It is a privilege to ride an animal whose strength and ability far exceeds anything man could achieve and who chooses, for the purpose and privilege of the rider, to contain that strength in amiable partnership. It is an awesome experience.

After a leisurely lunch I was all too soon again, on my way to the next stage of my trip. This time down, to stay with friends, Jo and Angus, who had removed from my home town to a homestead near Inverurie. The lovely Sula, Maysie, Briar, Millie and Tillie all live there but ironically, Sula and Maysie were running with the stallion only a few miles from my Lancashire home! The other Highlands were all waiting for the farrier so we were unable to ride them. Instead, it was arranged that we should go for a carriage ride with the Clydesdales from a local stables at Strathorn. I had no idea what to expect, imagining anything from the golden carriage of regal renown to the tinker's cart that belts around locally. The truth was somewhere in between as the carriage used was just for exercising but the pair of Clydies, Jamie and Max, were regal and accomplished at the job in hand! Upon returning, we were informed by Geordie that there was a single going out, would we like to ride behind that? Absolutely, until it was revealed that actually we were to be used as ballast! King was a magnificent 18hh, the biggest horse I had ever seen, yet so gentle! He belted round the tracks with power and determination then put on a show for us in the dressage ring. Watch out for him at the RHS!

Knockandy lives just over the hill from Jo at Insch and had some newly born foals for us to see. The next day Jan and Jock and Teasle came down to meet Jo and Knockandy and to see the foals. One of the mares was four weeks overdue and absolutely huge! Jan and I were convinced that we could see contractions and announced that the foal would be born that night. Jo supplied the detail that she would foal at four am. Well, Marilla did foal that night but at three thirty not four!

Knockandy has the stallion, Moss-side Lairig Ghru, a stunning example of a Highland Pony with steel grey dapples, the kindest of eye and a body to die for! With his mares in sight he is full of huff and bluff and puffs his chest out for pure show but aside of that, he is such a sweet and gentle fellow who snuggles in and trades whispers conspiratorially! Knockandy had promised that I would ride him next time I was up and this was it! I've never ridden a stallion before but fuelled by the confidence-enriching experience of the past few days, I agreed. He is lovely! It was obvious that he has great power and ability but he was soft in my hands and very relaxed. We wandered down to Leith Hall, admiring the beautiful array of spring flowers along the verge and then posed in front of the Hall. It'd be lovely to think that this was my country pad!

All too soon it was time to move on, this time to head for home. I had arranged to meet Kate and Durrrie for a quick lunch en route through Perth, an enjoyable and welcome sojourn to complete a remarkable trip.

There's a shop near Inverurie called 'Touched by Scotland'. I can honestly say that I was! For those of you who don't do mushy and sentimental, turn the page now!

This journey was about so much more than the geographical miles covered. It was about a psychological journey that I needed to make in order to overcome the fears that had developed since my accident four years ago.



On losing Scottie, my first-ever schoolmaster shire-cross loan horse, I lost my key to a life that had purpose and reason for getting up in the morning. I also lost the social side and inclusion of being part of a yard. In shattering my leg, I shattered the confidence I had in my ability to earn a wage and to look after myself. Riding as an adult necessarily involves consideration of the responsibilities that a house and home brings. Being unable even to care for myself, let alone live in a house with stairs that make Everest look less daunting, I was truly overwhelmed by the loss of the life I had previously enjoyed and the independence and freedom that was a part of it. This journey enabled me to face those fears, and to achieve something I had begun to believe was beyond me. It was only possible through the kindness and belief of those who not only shared their most precious companions with me but also their belief and confidence in me. Words cannot really express what this means to me, to achieve this position of peace with myself.

I do not have a pony at present so it would be very easy to become excluded from a world that I am completely enchanted by, and all the containment and contentment that having a pony brings. This hasn't happened, mainly because of friendships and connections formed through the message forum. I have not been cast out. Far from it, I have been included and welcomed and permitted to share, just for a time, those wonderful, beautiful and totally engaging ponies which have captured all of our hearts

So, to all those special folk who were willing and welcoming and open to sharing not just your wonderful ponies but part of yourselves too – thank you! Don't pick lemons.

Pat Oliver



DO YOU FANCY GOING ON A LONG RIDE?

Well what can I say? If anyone knows Sue Clowes they will immediately understand the reason why I hesitated when Sue asked, "Do you fancy going on a long ride?" Sue's long rides are full of first time experiences. Come to think of it so are her short ones! So much so, I presented her with a book titled "A Travellers Guide to Unforeseen Surprises". e.g. What to do when one comes across a lion attack, a swarm of killer bees, a tornado you know the sort of thing?!

We set out...three intrepid explorers on a beautiful ride over open fields, and tall hedged brambly lanes looking out over the scenery, thinking how lucky we are... especially when we emerged unscathed out of an extremely overgrown bridle path, that threatened to strangle me every few feet, with clawing bramble fronds to strip me from the saddle with every branch, each one appearing one second after the other! I could hardly see Jackie on Kizzy in front. Oh yes I'm ok, I can see the top of her head above the undergrowth! Where's that book when you need it?



This is when Sue surreptitiously dropped the bombshell... "Oh by the way we just need to cross a river" It is amazing how we all follow Sue without question, nodding our heads, when really any sane person would be doing quite the opposite. (Me, thinks she has been using Natural Horsemanship techniques on unsuspecting Jackie and !!!) I now want to break into the song "You can't get over it, can't get under it, got to go through it !!!!!" "So then I say "Where's the bridge?"... "Oh no bridge, Mmmm!?".. Sue sends me in first (because my Shaw-nee likes water apparently!) "This is where you cross Sharon" Sue points. Here she is pointing again!



When I came through the water and out the other side Sue then tells me "Oh, there is normally a big deep shelf in the middle- it must have gone"!!!!!!????? "Jackie reaffirms this!" (I Know who I can trust now... NOBODY!) Yes... I'm lucky to be able to tell the tale, this would have ended- glug if fate were not on our side! We had a wonderful time really, and stopped in at the Longlands (for a strong drink-should've had it before the ride!) for refreshments. They brought us two enormous pieces of homemade parkin, fresh raspberries and clotted cream!

Sharon Cash