

Equine-Assisted Cyber Experiences at Dunrovin Ranch



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DaysAtDunrovin's Cyber Front Porch has effectively created a real place where online participants experience Dunrovin Ranch virtually, yet much in the same way that people on-site do.. Experiencing real events, with real people and animals, in real time through a cyber portal can create the same sense of intimacy and belonging that those who are physically present feel. The key is crafting experiences that blend the on-site with the online, giving online participants an active role in the on-site events. Dunrovin has pioneered the way for creating equine-assisted learning experiences that bridge the digital divide to actively incorporate online participants into real experiences.

Many of these experiences require people with little to no knowledge of horses to clearly identify a specific horse among a herd of horses. Dunrovin has long used art to celebrate and honor the unique human/horse bond, and has perfected the art of equine body painting in a manner that is not only benign, but actually enjoyable to the horses. Painting the body of a horse can also afford its easy identification, which is why Dunrovin uses body painting in many of its cyber equine-assisted experiential learning activities. Using a single color to paint designs on each Dunrovin horse transforms and renames them into the RED Horse, the GREEN Horse, the BLUE Horse, etc. By asking online participants to engage in determining the design to be painted on each horse, they are actively brought into the process.

Equine-Assisted Learning: Herd Hierarchy Exercise

Horses and humans see the world differently— quite literally. Humans are predators. Our eyes are set forward, and work together to target a single prey. Horses are prey. Their eyes are set apart and work independently to scan large areas for the presence of predators.

Both horses and humans are sociable, and benefit from living with others of their kind. The primitive, lone human was an ineffective hunter; the primitive lone horse was easy prey. Human and horses' primal needs for social connection arose from necessity, and have persisted through time. It has been a great evolutionary advantage for both, but each seeks companionship for nearly diametrically opposed reasons. Humans socialize to be better predators; that is, to be more successful hunters through cooperation. Horses socialize to be less vulnerable prey, and to increase their mutual security.

Social animals living together evolve behaviors and social structures to reduce friction among members of the group. By watching horses behave within their herd structures, we can gain insights into human group structures and to our individual emotional responses relative to the social structures that profoundly influence our behaviors.

The purpose of the herd hierarchy exercise is for participants to witness and analyze the behavior of a small herd of horses that is subjected to the stressful situation of competing for limited resources (i.e. food). Exercise participants engage in the following ways:

1. Assist a Dunrovin Wrangler in painting a horse with a single color of paint to make the horse easily identifiable from all other horses.
2. Watch their painted horse as it competes with the other herd members to eat from piles of hay that are successfully added to a confined space which limits the horses' movement and forces competition.
3. To record:
 - 1) the number of times their painted horse eats from each pile of hay,
 - 2) the color of each horse that causes their horse to move away, and
 - 3) the color of any horse that is forced to move away by their horse.
4. Work with other online and onsite participants to determine the order of dominance (the hierarchy) in the herd.
5. Discuss both the benefits and costs of individual horses living within the herd social structure.
6. Relate the witnessed herd hierarchy to human social structures.

Horse Painting for Equine-Assisted Learning Exercises

Background:

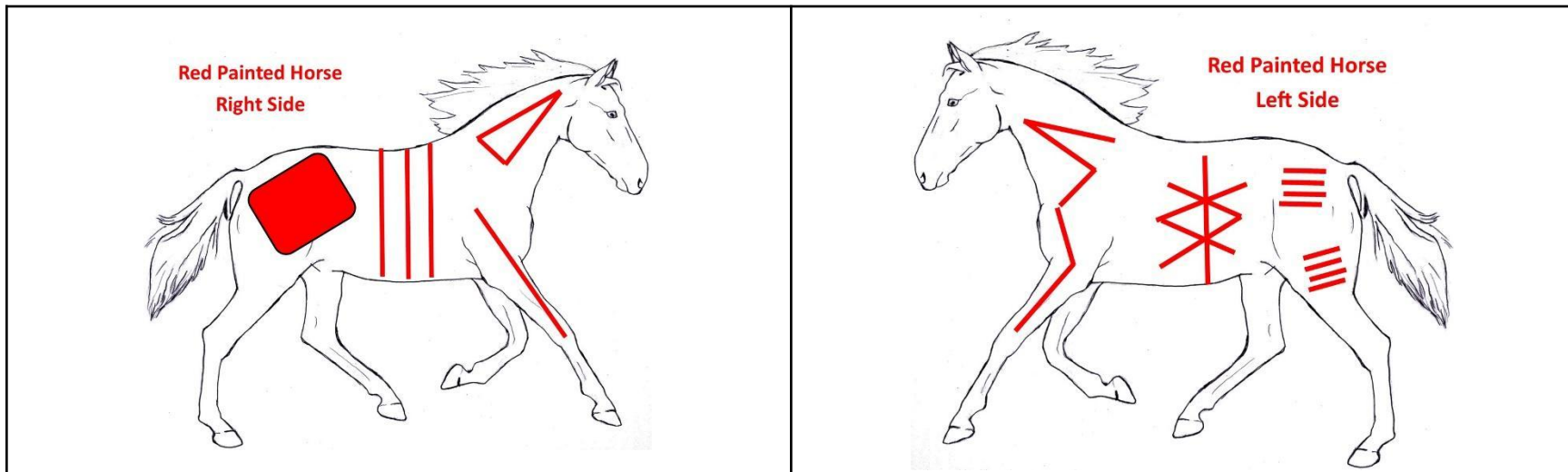
Many equine-assisted learning exercises require observers to monitor the behavior of individual horses in a small herd. To facilitate easy identification of individual horses, each horse is painted a different color, and each horse is then known by its painted color (e.g., the GREEN Horse, the RED Horse, etc.).

Exercise participants may be observing the horses either on-site at Dunrovin Ranch, or online via the DaysAtDunrovin webcam broadcasting system while interacting via Zoom.

It is important to apply sufficient paint on each horse to readily distinguish it by its painted color. A small roller is used to paint the horses, because rollers can quickly apply a thick coat of paint on a horse in an infinite number of designs.

Dunrovin requires each individual horse to be painted, at minimum, on both sides of its body, from its neck to its shoulder, on its flank (side), and on its rump. Exercise participants who assist Dunrovin Wranglers in horse painting are free to request any straight-line design that is easily executed with a small roller.

Examples of an appropriately painted RED Horse



Equine-Assisted Learning: Herd Hierarchy Score Card

My Horse is Painted the Color _____								
Number of Times My _____ Painted Horse Eats from Each Flake								
Feeding Round	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
Number of Times My _____ Painted Horse is Moved by Another Horse								
Feeding Round	Orange	Black	White	Red	Purple	Green	Yellow	Blue
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
Number of Times My _____ Painted Horse Moves Another Horse								
Feeding Round	Orange	Black	White	Red	Purple	Green	Yellow	Blue
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								

Equine-Assisted Learning

Instructions for Herd Hierarchy Score Card

The Herd Hierarchy Equine Exercise demonstrates horse behavior among herd members competing for limited resources (i.e. food). Each member of the small herd (from 6 to 10 horses) is painted with a unique color on both sides of its rump, back, shoulder, and neck so that experiment participants can easily identify each horse by its painted color. The experiment consists of the following steps:

1. The herd is moved into a confined space together.
2. The herd is fed a new pile of hay in successive rounds:
 - a. A flake (small pile) of hay is put into the space.
 - b. The horses compete to capture the hay pile while participants observe and record:
 - 1) The number of times their painted horse takes a bite of hay from the pile,
 - 2) The painted color of any horse that moves their painted horse around, and
 - 3) The painted color of any horse that their painted horse moves around.
 - c. Once a single horse captures the pile of hay for itself, the next feeding round begins. Rounds continue until every horse has its own pile of hay.

Example and Discussion

In the example of a scorecard completed for a Green-Painted Horse (see next page), we notice the following features:

1. The Green Horse did not get to eat any hay from piles #1 and #2. He got one bite from pile #3, and then, during round #4 he was able to eat a bite from pile #4. He continued to eat from pile #4 throughout the remainder of the experiment.
2. The Orange Horse moved the Green Horse around during the first round, while the Purple Horse moved the Green Horse around during the first three rounds.
3. The Green Horse moved the Blue Horse around during the first five rounds, while the Green Horse moved the Red Horse around during rounds #5 and #6.
4. Conclusions:
 - a. The Orange Horse established dominance over the Green Horse right away. At the same time, it took several challenges for the Purple Horse to assert its dominance over the Green Horse.
 - b. The Green Horse had to continually assert its dominance over the Blue Horse, while the Red Horse did not even challenge the Green Horse until rounds #6 and #7
 - c. Orange and Purple dominate Green, and Orange probably also dominates Blue. Green clearly dominates Red, but his dominance over Blue is constantly contested.

