

Our Newhaven Horses

by Jac

You wonder at the funny turns life offers to you, one day you are set on a definite path and the next onto a trajectory never considered before. My introduction to Newhaven horses was one such trajectory, taking us on a fantastic mission and adventure to the heart of this big country to meet another family of beautiful historic horses; it happened this way.

Ben and I were settled on our little property on Bruny Island on the banks of D'entrecasteaux Channel in Tasmania. We had our waler stallion Dardanelle and 2 mares Romani and Tipperary and Emily's Lilli Marlene, we also had Birdwood, a young colt, and Courtney Hill. We had sold off the young stock and were waiting for the next generation to arrive.

Our little house was perched on the bank above a beautiful rocky foreshore where we could sit on the verandah and watch the water world go by and one day a kayak came by, the paddler pulled into our little cove and climbed up the bank to our cottage and asked us if we wanted to sell! We were taken by surprise, although buying and selling real estate has been a good income for us in the past, we hadn't really considered letting this one go just yet, so the paddler left his contact details and paddled on; he subsequently kept phoning us over the next 6 months. Just checking.

I had succumbed to a bout of breast cancer and on the last day of radiation treatment we took off in the camper on the adventure of a life time, looking for more walers to add to our little mob, one last go but also to give back some positivity to my life. We had been in touch with many people around the outback. Peter Fischer had directed us to various contacts and on the day we left Melbourne, it was literally the traffic that we were trying to avoid that set us on the road that would take us to Wilmington S.A. and Noel Fraser's cattle property.



Before we had left Tasmania we had been besieged by television and journos wanting to be included. Word had got around, one lot even wanted to fly into Maree and meet us there, someone else wanted us to take one of their cameras and video the trip but Ben told them that as we were just wandering we may not even meet a wild waler or even a camel for that matter. We had unknown people phoning us from all over Australia asking whether we would get them a waler, some we were impressed with and promised to find them a horse, others we put off.

One phone call we received set in train a lifelong friendship and it started like this "Hello Jacqui, you don't know me, my name is Doug Treasure and I

want you to get me a Waler" well. Of course, as you do! Doug, charming direct and just a bit mischievous. I had met his son John and John's then wife Rachel but had never met or heard of Doug or Mary. So with a list of potential waler owners, we were on the way.

We were passing through Gisborne and the thought occurred that it might be nice to have a Waler stud in Victoria, maybe more lucrative than Bruny Is., which, although beautiful, had issues with transport so on the coffee stop I went real estate shopping, as I tend to do and we found a property at Woodend that looked promising. Ben then phoned the paddler who was still very interested so we put it all in motion. No one could say we're impulsive, but that's what you get when you put two left handed geminis together.

We went to Wilmington and met Noel Fraser, a lovely man, rodeo star, cattle breeder and transporter of livestock for the various meat works. The meat works don't give anything for foals so Noel would bring them home, turn them out for a couple of years then re present them, unless someone like us had made contact and wanted some particular horses.

For the last couple of years he had been carting horses off New Haven station for Alex Coppcock when Alex had sold the place to Birds Australia and so Noel had accumulated quite a few young ones. We had phoned Noel and told him what we were after, it looked like being about 12 horses.

When we arrived at his property we found he had rounded up 50 or so young horses and had them in the cattle-yards ready for us. It was quite a visual experience, wide open dry plains, not a tree in sight, massive stock piles of the big square bales standing alongside the yards, a makeshift windbreak against that continuous cold draft. A low set house set away a bit, not much garden, massive cattle yards and a huge enclosed arena with lights .



Apparently Noel lent his Bulls and yards for young aspiring buckjumpers to try their prowess in bull riding under lights most nights, the young fellahs in turn helped out around the place. We climbed out of our truck and made a beeline for the yards to look at these first Newhavens. I'm not sure what I was expecting, the first wild mob in capture that I had seen was Dardanelle's lot and they were older and possibly bigger boned but were pretty thin and in poor physical condition with rainscald etc.

These were definitely smaller, seemed to be quite nicely conformed, lovely shiny coats and well covered, not fat but healthy looking, but so small! They were in pens holding 4-5 horses, it was hard to see whether they were male

or female as they milled around when we approached, trying to get as far away as possible from us, all were branded. As Noel said ,anything coming off the station had to be branded ,mind you some had 2 brands, some half or just a bit of a brand, some brands were upside down and most were in places other than where they should have been, but they all had them.

When you have to buy horses for half a dozen people that you have never met, it makes the task a bit daunting. We had told the purchasers that we could only guarantee the sex of the horse, nothing else. It was impossible to see whether they had conformation problems, age injuries or anything Else. Noel could see we were a bit worried so he compounded the problem by offering to take us to the back paddock where he said, he had a few more. So we hopped into his old ute (we even left the door of our ute open, bags, mobile etc, on the seat) and took off to the back paddock.

Two hours later, we had arrived, middle of the desert, we could see plains disappearing from horizon to horizon, not a sign of a tree, hill, out-buildings. Roads, nothing, just miles of red dust and silence.

"Let's go looking for horses, " says Noel and we take off in a direction of dust and more dust. No horses to be seen, Noel reaches for his mobile, calls back to the homestead to his son."Where was that mob we saw last week, the one with the big grey?" son answers something but then the phone goes dead, Noel mutters something about a battery and off we go in that perpetual cloud of red dust. We see a group of horses, about five, we circle around and around I get to see them moving at least and point out a couple, one was obviously pregnant. Then we move onto another mob, and then another, all mobs were no more than 5 horses, some only 3.



All of a sudden there was a bang and a wheel, presumably off the ute, spun past us. We slid to a stop. Noel, who had been chatting away nonstop until then was suddenly silent. When the dust settled from our abrupt stop I looked around, all we could see from horizon to horizon was a red plain. We climbed out of the ute, there was the wheel lying a few metres away, still in one piece but no wheel nuts.

Ben looked in the back of the ute, "Is there a jack?" he asks, "apart from Jac?" funny hah hah. Noel shook his head, nothing, no spade even. Noel mutters something about a dead mobile and we realise we have left ours in the other vehicle, thinking the back paddock was near the property. Ben asks whether the 2 way radio works, Noel shakes his head again "hasn't for years". The enormity of our situation suddenly dawns on me, this is not looking good! But all is not lost. Our hero, Ben the ex mechanic, bounds into action, starts pulling the radio to pieces and eventually gets Noel to put a wire onto another and magic we hear a crackle.



Above – horses in the yards at Wilmington. Jac has a tough job - those not saved go you-know-where.

Noel manages to get a call through to the son, who I don't think was very sympathetic to our predicament (said something about being out there without survival resources and knowing better). The son duly arrives, with a jack, nuts are taken off the other wheels to replace those lost and he takes off in a cloud of dust, not much said! But Noel says, "Well, lets chase horses!" so off we go again, with fewer nuts on all wheels and still no jack. The son took it with him!

We chased around a few mobs, me pointing out which horses looked likely, I mentioned to Noel that he couldn't possibly remember which ones but he reckoned he would. Actually he didn't have to, as it turns out as he eventually bought in the whole lot, 100 horses give or take a few. We went back to the homestead, our trip down the back paddock had taken about 6 hours. Noel then remembers he has some more in another paddock, he must have seen the look on my face and quickly assures me that they're close by. It's there that we spot the 2 little brown horses with the black points, two peas in a pod, absolutely identical, Ben, being an old harness enthusiast says we'll have those two - a perfect pair. They were named Pearl and Fisher (we being opera buffs).

Then we are shown a gorgeous coloured stallion with fabulous movement and I say "can't leave him behind, he is stunning," and so it goes on - we named him Turendot (after the opera). By this method of selection the mob of 12 grew to 17. We had started out looking for 6 mares to increase our little herd, but you know, when they're available and especially when you know what the other outcome for them will be, what to do?

We put in place a plan for the collection of the horses, Noel had agreed to get them onto a backload on a road train that would be picking up animals for the meat works in Caloundra. First though, he would round all the back paddock horses up and said he would give us a call when they had been bought in. We are then instructed to be ready to come asap as he didn't want them hanging around the yards for days. Noel would then organise the backload and send them over to Victoria. He couldn't give us a date but told us to be ready. Of course another potential problem was that we hadn't really worked through the logistics of getting some horses back to Tassie either. How would we do it? We hadn't even at this stage finalised the deal on the property in Woodend but then, they were just logistical details, nothing to worry about really!

We set off to finish our trip, we wanted to go to New Haven Station and meet Alex Coppock. I also wanted to go out to the Garden Station and along the Plenty Rd. to see Cordillo Downs and generally have a look at the NT as it was our first visit. So off we went again, we spent a night in Cooper Pedy, wonderful town, the last of the wild frontier, when you see a sign outside the local grocery store spuiing "Nitro glycerine" for sale on special and all the house wives lined up to purchase, you just know you're somewhere special.

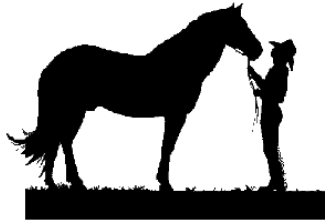
Ben did the deal for the sale of Bruny Is, and the purchase of Woodend, standing in the middle of the Cooper Pedy cemetery (don't ask!). We got to

Alice springs in the middle of a torrential downpour, we were told we couldn't get out to New Haven as the roads were flooded but we managed to catch up with Alex Coppock for lunch in town. Luckily we could show him some photos we had taken of the horses at Noel's place and he in turn took us out to show us 2 walers he had bought back to Alice, Anzac and Tobruk.



Newhavens in the yards at Wilmington

He also told us the sad story of the horses he had put aside to send to his family in W.A. The horses were yarded in Alice and sadly were mistakenly picked up by the meat works truck and taken to the abattoir. He was devastated about this and really angry. Who wouldn't be. He reckoned they were the best of the lot.



The weather cleared up and we thought we would make the most of it and head for the Garden station, drove for hundreds km's, and only saw a camel in the distance no horses but I had heard there was a pub out along the track that everyone makes for, we found it and of course it was closed. We were sitting there wondering whether we should go on or back, when a park ranger appeared out of nowhere and asked us what we were doing as the roads in and out were about to be closed as there was more flood water on the way. I told him I wanted to get to the Garden Station, park ranger says "well love, you're on it, you've seen it and now you can go back." I mentioned the fact that there were no signs indicating the name of the property and was informed that there weren't any names anymore, since many of the properties had been returned to native title. I do think the lack of names is a shame. It is after all part of the historical tapestry of the Territory. It was the same everywhere we went.

We came back to Alice and it's raining again. We are told that if you see the Todd river flow 3 times you're a native. Well we've now seen it flow twice, one more to go. We decide to go out to King Canyon and on the way we spy groups of very nice looking wild horses, we get out of the car and trot after them taking pictures and all of a sudden realise we can't see the car, or which way we'd come from (think we'd have learnt some sense by now). Luckily we see the dust from a passing truck in the distance, so not quite lost.

We make some enquiries at an aboriginal gallery down the road and are given some contact details for the CEO of the station [an American living in Adelaide?]. We make contact with him and he seemed to be very interested in the possibility of making money out of these horses. We passed the info onto Peter and I believe there has been some investigation done into these horses since. Not sure of the outcome.

We visit a couple more tourist spots then head out from Marla to Oodnadatta, hoping to get to Lake Eyre, Ben has tried twice before and failed to make it. There had been a lot of rain and we seem to be in 4x4 all the way with a massive bow-wave in front of us, at one point I ask Ben to stop so I can get a photo of him coming through the water, I step out of the truck and sink up to my knees in red mud, gave that pic. a miss.

We didn't see another vehicle for over 200kms. Finally reaching Oodnadatta only to find that the road behind us has been closed and the Simpson desert was in flood. We are stuck there for a week!

Oodnadatta is not my favourite holiday venue, and apart from being locked up in a compound at night (for our own safety) with a few other travellers, there's not much to do really. A long strip of road of some 600 metres down the middle of the town and we were advised not to go down that end at night, "it's a bit rough." Actually it was all a bit rough and mostly intoxicated.

There was a museum there in the old railway buildings, our saving grace really ; so we spent most of every day there just reading up on the history of Oodnadatta , it was absolutely fascinating and we discovered some buried waler treasure. Apparently J. M. Robb ,buyer for the remounts for the British army, owned a big cattle station in the area (name?). We found a story written at the turn of the century about an import of 1000 blood mares to the station and we then found another article written about 1939 talking about the lack of buyers for the horses and how they had literally opened the back gate and let the breeding stock go.

Of course there are no names on the old stations now. Most people didn't seem to know where the particular station was but we started asking questions in the local pub (in the good end of town) whether anyone knew anything. We were advised to look out for an old aboriginal stockman by the name of Johnnie as he had worked there as kid, helping break horses; Johnnie found us. Black as ink, no teeth in the widest grin, white wild hair, old battered Stetson, bowed legs and RM s.

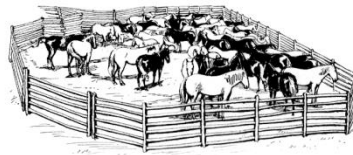
The whole parcel. He knew what we wanted and he wanted to tell us but he was totally intoxicated and speaking in pidgin English, we asked other compatriots what he was saying but everyone just shook their heads, he wanted to tell us so badly and we couldn't understand, it was just so sad. Before we left we went back to the pub to say goodbye and he was there again, the racing was on the TV , he came up to us, an arm around our shoulders and pointing to the tele got really excited about the show but we still couldn't understand and neither could anyone else. What a lost opportunity, but someone else may go back to that pub in Oodnadatta and have better luck, you have a starting point, there must really good horses out there somewhere.



We got the call. Back to Wilmington to choose our horses. On arrival at Noel's property again there were a 100 horses in the yards, Noel's instructions were, "leave you to it, probably take you a couple of days," it

took 3. And he also added, "that big grey colt you wanted for your daughter, is a filly and she has damaged her foot somehow." I was really disappointed, Em had given me Courtney Hill so I thought if I could find a nice big waler for her it would be great. This one was head and shoulders above the rest when we saw her out on the plain but somehow she had managed to cut her foot right through from the heel to the front, you could see all the inner structure of the hoof, it was an awful wound, so I said to Noel that we couldn't take her, as apart from the trip in the truck she would be going onto a property in Vic and we would not be there to help her, we would be taking a load of horses back to Tas, picking up our lot and coming back, there was no one to care for her, she was unhandled and it would just have not worked. I said all this, knowing what her fate would be; tried to put it out of my mind, get on with the job, all the rest of those horses that we didn't take would be going the same way as her, it was heart breaking.

First we had to draft them into smaller mobs and those smaller mobs needed to be run individually around the big yard so we could see if there were any obvious problems. Well that was the theory. As we found out, when you only want 5 horses you get 20, they're all related and they're sticking together, no matter what. The other problem was that of getting horses for other people that you have never met. Tricky!



First we worked to find mares, somehow they were mostly colts. We would get 5 (or so) into the yard and move them around, this way we could see whether they were reasonably straight in their action, we eliminated a couple with really bad cow hocks and some very small obviously pregnant mares but mostly they were all pretty good.

One little poppet came into the yard and after doing a couple of laps decided that the 2 legged variety weren't having to work so hard in the middle, so thought she'd join us, and she did, stood in the middle for the whole time while we worked around her. We called her Fleidermaus (from the Opera). We ended up with another grey colt for Emily (Tosca, from the opera) he was a bit of a dag, waltzed over to the rails and sniffed noses with me and that was it. Love. So we purchased 3 colts and 14 fillies; we left the Noel to organise the rest of the transport.

We went back to view our new property in Woodend , organised that the past owner could stay in place for another 3 months on the condition that she keep an eye on the new horses and fed out the hay we purchased, while we went back to Tas to pack up the property. But before anything could happen we had to find a truck to buy, to bring some of the New Haven

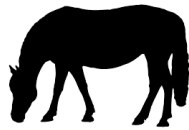


Top - El Salt arrives at Old beach at Shirley Roberts place in Tas.

Lower - wild horses seen at King's Canyon during the expedition (Editors note - then good Waler types, now unfortunately bred out to Circle M quarter horses).

horses back to Tas and the old originals over to Vic. We found an old Inter, dual fuel truck in Darraweit, painted all colours of the rainbow. I bought a tin of paint thinking I could give it a quick makeover before we hit the road but it rained like crazy for the rest of the week, so that never happened, our rainbow truck would have to do.

We got the call from Noel that they were loading the horses that night and they would be with us in the morning and he was chucking on the grey filly and we'll drop her off at the meatworks on the way. You guessed it. We said "Don't drop her off, bring her all the way", I just couldn't bear the thought of that beautiful filly being dogged, if she survived she survived. We'd give her the chance.



We had spoken to Doug who was coming up with his little truck to collect his Waler "Major" and we had done a deal with Doug (he loved deals). Doug would get his horse for free if he would agist the extra colts until we got back from Tas. So we phoned Doug to see if he could be at Peter's place by 6 a.m. the next morning.

He must have jumped in the truck straight away and we were all sitting around the table at Peter's that night before landing, finishing a bottle of whisky and waiting for the next saga. It was going to be a saga to the finish line that's for sure. The road train arrived, we backed the small truck up to it's tail gate and opened the gates to try to usher 3 horses through to the small truck through (three only please ladies!) as if ! they all came in one heap of course, after some persistent quiet juggling we managed 3 in the front and 2 in the back.

Fleidermaus was coming through backwards and managed to get her back hoof down into the small gap, between the 2 trucks, hearts in mouths but the truck driver said "get way from the truck!" We all backed off, the horses stopped, backed up and let Maus pull her foot back and turn around. I couldn't believe my eyes, any other breed and we'd have had a broken leg.

Slowly we managed to get them all off the big truck, onto the smaller one, trucked into Peter's yard, sorted, some put back on Doug's truck and delivered to our new home and 3 colts sorted to go to Gippsland with Doug. The rest were to stay with Peter for a few days till we could get our truck on the road and then we would pick them up and take them to Tassie. The grey mare, now named Madam Butterfly (after the Opera) was left in the yard with mud and manure and constant rain. She would stay there till we got back, as yet she showed no lameness or infection; incredible.



Top – Newhaven Patterson and Es Salt being fed by Jac at the Peter Fischer's
Lower - Madame Butterfly ,Fleidermaus,Traviata and Lucia learn where the feed comes from at their new home in Woodend



Top - Cosi fan Tuti gets friendly with Ben at Woodend
Lower - All the walers coming home with jac at Woodend

Then of course we realised that we had no proper loading facilities at Woodend and the horses would have to be sorted into those that were going to Tas and those that were staying. Peter Fisher kindly offered to lend us his facilities to sort them and then we realised that the road train wouldn't be able to get into Peter's place, the gate ways were too narrow. What to do!?

We left Rigoletto, Cosi Fan Tutti, Lucia, Fleidermaus, Lakme, Traviatta, Pearl and Fisher at Woodend. Major, Turendot, Tosca went with Doug and we loaded El Salt, Patterson, Nurse Edith, Poppy, and Old Salt for the trip across the strait in Rainbow truck.

Like I said, saga to the end, the transfer for the truck hadn't come through and we were loaded and sitting in the driveway waiting for the call to get the truck on the road to the Spirit of Tas. It came just in the nick of time and we were away, thank heaven the trip across the strait was uneventful and we landed safely and wound our way down over the hills to Woodsdale where the first of the Tassie contingent were off loaded. A very tired little bunch struggled off the truck into Pru's yard and then Old Salt made a break for it, back onto the truck, his safety spot. We delivered all horses and got back to Bruny [another ferry trip], packed up our old mob and house and came back to Vic.

We actually moved ourselves and Ben did the trip 3 times in Rainbow truck till we were all installed at Woodend. When we went to pick up Butterfly from Peter's place she had a lot of proud flesh built up around the foot, still hadn't been handled so had had no antibiotics but she was not lame. We took her back to Woodend and put her in the round-yard for the night intending to start the handling process the next day and get the vet to her asap. But when we went out to the yard next morning she was nowhere to be seen. She had jumped the rails 5'6" and gone back to her old friends that she had seen down the paddock. Walers are incredible. The foot was later shod to hold it together but she has never been lame on it and she has had 3 beautiful huge foals since then. Blu Puccini (from the opera) and Quambatook plus a new baby (name). To think that those fabulous genes could have been lost, what a wonderful little horse.

Before we made the last trip back we had a call from the old owner of the Woodend property to say that Traviata had dropped a foal and it was really sick, we asked her if it was at all possible to yard them and catch the foal and have her put down, reasoning that the foal wouldn't have lasted in the wild and the mother being probably less than 2 years old, she herself was tiny. But when we got back, Traviata and baby Casta Diva (from the opera) were doing well, we were about \$700 lighter in the pocket, but mom and bubs doing well. Diva was sold on later and became a top endurance horse.

We now have her home again and hopefully in foal to Akbah, (always breed from the performers, you know they're good, Veterinary advice). Two other foals were born that year from those little mares, Lakme had Virtuoso (entire) and Rigoletto had Maestro, all were a bit sickly but like little Diva they thrived and are waving the flag for the breed. Of the 17 we have only lost two, sadly Traviatta but she had also left us with Verdi by Akbah who is starring as a carriage horse and won the Champion Carriage horse in Tas in 2016 and of course Diva has proven what a good line that was.



Horses at home at Woodend, quickly get tamed.

Turendot sadly ended his days back in the knackery but we believe he bred a few foals around the Kyneton area, out of mares that had come from Lindsay McComb's Newhaven lot, probably unregistered but worth keeping an eye out for. All the rest are happily homed and doing their bit for the breed, most of them under saddle, which is remarkable for wild walers. So that's our story of a wonderful bunch of wild Walers. Newhaven walers that we are proud to have owned, loved and worked with.

All performing well and the epitome of what a Waler truly is, kind, hardy, useful, honest horses and to think there was a chance that they might not have been accepted as Walers in the beginning, if it were not for Alex contacting the Waler group for help to save his beloved horses, Peter's persistence in getting the horses recognised as Walers and many people doing what they could to rehome these beautiful animals, it could have been a very different story and what a loss that would have been to all of us.

Jacqui Kindblad