

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by JONATHAN OEHM, 2006 Churchill Fellow

THE JAMES LOVE CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP to study advanced techniques
in therapeutic and remedial farriery in the UK

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Signed

Dated

Jonathan Oehm

25/07/07

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“Horses are a study in improbability...all that mass is held up by four spindly columns of bone that have to line up just so as they pass through a series of delicate-looking joints. Underneath those columns, where the rubber meets the road, so to speak, everything – including the fate of the horse – rests on four overgrown toenails called hooves. Far, far too many times to count, a diseased or injured hoof has spelled the end of an otherwise vital animal.”

www.vet.cornell.edu/education/farrier/instructor/htm

INTRODUCTION

Farriery is one of the little known, ancient crafts which still has a place in today's world – in fact, no real substitute has ever been found for the practice of attaching a material protection to a horse's feet so that it can perform designated tasks over a substantial time.

Since there is a real shortage of qualified farriers in Australia, but a burgeoning industry in performance horses and racing, there is also a major need for qualified farriers able to pass on their knowledge of techniques which are “out of the ordinary.”

The James Love Churchill Fellowship enabled me to study remedial and therapeutic techniques (especially in foals) with the world's leading practitioners in the UK.

This was a life-changing and eye-opening experience for me.

Thank you to the trustees of the James Love estate and to the Churchill Trust for the faith and funding which made this trip possible.

To the fellowship of farriers in the UK, and to Simon Curtis in particular, for their huge investment of time and support – thank you.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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I timed my Fellowship travel to coincide with the peak foaling time for Thoroughbred horses in the UK, from April 24 to June 5, 2007. My aim was to spend time with several top farriers, all either Fellows or Associates of the Worshipful Company of Farriers, both to gain an insight into their particular specialties, and to practise my craft under their supervision. The camaraderie of farriers in the UK was such that my experience really exceeded my expectations.

Highlights

Because of the extraordinary hospitality offered by Simon Curtis, chief examiner of the WCF, I was able to use his Newmarket base for a number of extra opportunities, and was also invited to accompany him and his wife as the first Australian farrier to be a guest at the annual Guild dinner of the WCF at Mansion House in London. I also was able to visit the properties of ten of Britain's leading racehorse trainers and the National Stud, and to attend a number of smaller seminars and conferences, plus two major seminars:

- 103rd annual weekend seminar of the 150 year old National Association of Farriers, Blacksmiths and Agricultural Engineers at Maidenhead, Berkshire.
- International Farriery and Lameness seminar at Robinson College, Cambridge.

One highlight was the chance to visit Haydn Price in Welshpool, Wales, learning about the practical application of gait analysis software, which I plan to use in my practice in Queensland.

Haydn Price, in association with Dr John McEwan, developed the Equinalysis video/computer system which allows vets and farriers to diagnose problems which cannot be seen with the naked eye, and therefore allows very fine tuning of remedial work.

Recommendations

There are several aspects which could be markedly improved in Australia, to raise the standard of farriery and education of everyone associated with the welfare of horses.

- *Increased education and heightening of awareness for owners, vets, breeders and trainers, which should go hand-in-hand with improved farriery training.*
- *The addressing by Australian farriers of the urgent need for standardised training and registration*
- *The creation of greater unity among Australian farriers, including registering all farriers under one trade organisation*

Implementation

In summary, I plan several immediate areas of knowledge dissemination: - the planning of a sponsored trip by Mr. Simon Curtis to Australia to hold both farrier and horse-owner clinics; articles for both national and Queensland-based equine magazines; talks and information days or demonstrations to equine associations. My personal website is already in preparation and will be operational in September 2007.

FELLOWSHIP HIGHLIGHTS AND VISITS

April

8 th -9 th	WCF Trimming for Soundness Seminar, The Forge, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire
16 th	Newmarket Farriery Competition, run by Newmarket chapter of the National Association of Farriers, Blacksmiths and Agricultural Engineers (NAFBE)
16 th	Laminitis Seminar presented by Dr Celia Marr at Rossdale Veterinary Hospital, run by Beaufort Cottage Educational Trust
18 th	WCF Livery dinner at Mansion House, London
19 th	NAFBE International Farriery Seminar at Maidenhead
19 th	NAFBE Annual Ball, Maidenhead
20 th	NAFBE International Farriery Seminar, Maidenhead

May

3-4 th	The 23 rd International Farriery and Lameness Seminar at Robinson College, Cambridge
7-8-9 th	National Equine Forum at the Royal Society, Oxford
13-14 th	Royal Show International Farriery Competition at Stoneleigh Warwickshire – steward for two judges
14 th – 16 th	Three-day trip to the British Army's Farriery Training Centre at Windsor, Berkshire, the Hereford School of Farriery, and the Myerscough Farriery School in Lancashire to observe training and speak with instructors
19 th	NAFBE Farriery Competition at Petersborough, Ipswich
21 st	Shadwell Stud in Camley, Ireland

Other Places Regularly Visited and Other Competitions/Outings

- Prescott's Stables (Sir Mark Prescott's, racehorse trainer for the Queen)
- The New England Stud, Newmarket
- The 2000 Guineas Race Day, held by Newmarket Jockey Club
- Hamwell Stud, Wooditton, Suffolk
- Lilybrook Stud, Wooditton
- Suffolk and Newmarket Royal Shows, Farriery Competitions
- The National Stud in Newmarket
- The Animal Health Trust, Newmarket
- National Racing Museum, Newmarket
- Curmani Racing yards, Newmarket
- Badminton Horse Trials
- The Royal Mews, Windsor, Berkshire
- Stoneleigh Park International Farriery Competition, Warwicks
- Hattonvale Stud, Newmarket
- UK Racing School, Newmarket

OUTLINE OF FARRIERY IN THE UK

"In order that the labours of centuries past are not in vain in centuries to come."
Denis Diderot - Author of the first encyclopaedia 1767 – Encyclopedis of Trades

Newmarket, in Suffolk – with its highly concentrated equine industry – was the base for my studies, but I also travelled to other parts of the UK to work with well known farriers and to attend a number of seminars and agricultural shows.

I arrived in Newmarket on April 25 to meet Simon Curtis FWCF, Hon. Associate Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. His workplace is called The Forge and has been his family's place of work for more than 150 years. Simon Curtis is one of the most respected farriers in the world. He is the only farrier ever given an honorary veterinary degree - for his advancements in correcting foal limb deformities, his work in bringing vets and farriers together, his lectures and the three books he has written on remedial farriery, which are sold in over 40 countries and are now in their third reprint. He also runs probably the largest farriery business in the world with between 15-20 staff at any one time. This is unusual because most farriers are lone operators or perhaps have an apprentice. But because of Mr. Curtis's reputation and his location in Newmarket, his firm shoes/trims more than 1500 horses per month.

On top of this there are horses brought to Rossdale's at Newmarket (the vets where he is a consultant and has a clinic) from places such as France, Belgium and Germany each week for him to work on them. I saw one horse travelled from France for a trim – a 15 or 20 minute job! On another occasion, I was invited to accompany Mr. Curtis on a light plane trip from New England Stud to the Shadwell Stud in Ireland to shoe and trim a couple of horses.

It was eye-opening to see the respect accorded between vets and farriers in the UK, and the far greater understanding between owners, breeders, trainers, vets and farriers, compared with Australia. This is basically because of long and inter-connected efforts at communication, awareness and education. The farrier is acknowledged as an equal partner in his treatment of the parts of the horse which are his specialty, so there is no need to negotiate territory, and a great reduction in angry reactions or the kind of "turf war" which can occur in Australia. In fact, the UK farrier does almost the same number of years in training to treat horses' feet, as a vet does in training to treat all animals.

I also noticed a great camaraderie among farriers, which would be a wonderful thing if it could be encouraged here in Australia. Because all farriers must do the same basic training in order to be registered, everyone has basic respect for his associates, and farriers often discuss cases together quite freely.

In the UK I was able to gain a temporary registration through the UK Farrier Registration Council so that I could actually practise on horses rather than simply observe. This registration was organised before my visit and had to be ratified on my arrival in the UK by an Approved Training Farrier. It proved to be invaluable.

BACKGROUND: WHAT DOES A FARRIER DO?

A farrier trims horses' feet, and often shoes them in (mainly) metal plates, to protect their feet and make them suitable for the work being undertaken by a particular horse. Secondary reasons may be for improved traction or therapy, as in providing support for a broken hoof while new tissue grows. While most people think first of racehorses, in fact the highest percentage of work in the Australian industry is in the performance fields, including eventing, dressage, Western or sporting events. In a 1999 survey done by the Rural Industries Development Corporation it was found that there are 25000 thoroughbreds in racing in Australia and over 73000 horses used for recreation or hobbies.

Farriers work in either hot or cold metal, usually steel or alloys (and occasionally in plastics or resins) to shape a shoe to the horse's foot, both for everyday use and for therapeutic treatment reasons. Ideally, a farrier will also be a horseman and able to interpret a horse's reactions and adapt to them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD FARRIER IN A HORSE'S LIFE

Horses need basic care simply for comfort. Beyond that, the stresses put on their feet and legs can be exacerbated so much by incorrect care, that it can mean the difference between a long working life – and the knacker's yard. A horse puts nine times its body weight on each limb as it goes from walk to canter; four tonnes of pressure per limb on an average-sized horse at a gallop (*Shoeing the Performance Horse*, Butler et al, Vol.25 American Farriers Journal,1994)



Pic: Jonathan Oehm

Before: Poor hoof care, SE Qld

After: Same foot, six months later (treatment included use of surgical staples and specialist therapeutic glue-on support shoes).

From the knee down, there is no muscle and everything works on a system of tendons and levers. If a farrier is out by as little as three millimetres in judging hoof preparation, he can cause joints to shatter, ligaments to break, and tendons to rupture... a pretty major problem for the horse! So while it may seem obvious that a good farrier is essential to all horses, in fact there is a major shortage of well trained farriers, and also a lack of knowledge by owners of what they should be looking for.

VARYING STANDARDS WORLDWIDE

Only one country, the UK, has a system of training and registration of farriers by legislation. It stands head and shoulders above other countries.

Anyone in the UK who wants to be a farrier has to serve a four to five-year apprenticeship. Once qualified, he can be de-registered if found doing sub-standard or shoddy work. Under the Cruelty to Animals Act, a farrier who then continues to operate unregistered may be charged. One aspect of this legislation is that owners are prohibited from doing farriery work on their own animals, so the horse becomes a highly valuable, and valued, animal.

Apart from the UK, work in other countries with similar values to Australia tend to be of similar levels to Australia – there are good and bad farriers, but no overall assessment or training levels, although the USA is working towards a standard certification. Australia has four different training centres and two trade bodies, but there is no common curriculum or acknowledged levels of competence and testing, and no requirement for registration. Some Australian States have no training at all.

In Third World countries, there are cultural differences in the way in which animals are treated and ideas about shoeing horses are very different. Apart from the training of farriers, levels of owner knowledge also vary and this may well be in direct proportion to the level of farrier standards, by my personal observation.

In the UK, the WCF supports and/or sponsors training sessions for owners, publishes pamphlets and books aimed at owners, and sponsors demonstrations. Many farriers also provide owner-education in local areas through open days or evening theory training sessions.

“BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING”: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UK/AUSTRALIA

The importance of regular and early care of legs and feet in foals is a major difference in equine breeding between the UK and Australia. This applies both to racehorses and performance horses, and its ongoing effect may be observed in the lesser need for therapeutic techniques in Britain. Vets and farriers are called in as a routine in the early weeks of a foal's life and work closely together in early treatment if necessary. For example, foals may be born with any of a number of lower limb deformities which can be corrected whilst the growth plates (physis) are still malleable. The physis solidify at three months and six months in the metacarpus and carpus respectively (Angus Adkins BvSc MRCVS personal communication). Any developmental problems are diagnosed and treated within a fairly short window of opportunity, which is basically in the first few months of life, as the growth plates in a foal's leg gradually ossify and later treatment is far more invasive and costly with a lesser chance of success.

There are few things more tragic for an Australian farrier skilled in remedial techniques, than to be asked to treat a yearling or an adult horse which he knows could have been treated successfully if only the owner had called him in early... farriery techniques can have astounding results at an early stage.



Pic: Archives

Before and after remedial farriery treatment for carpal valgus on a young foal (a deviation at the knee which can be fixed by a farrier if caught early enough).

A high standard of early care in the UK, plus regular care throughout the animal's life, means that problems tend to go away rather than become greater, and the percentage of developmental problems is considerably lower. Sixty per cent of all thoroughbreds in Australia (Rural Industries Developmental Corporation of Australia 1999) have some degree of orthopaedic developmental disease versus 17% in the UK (Animal Health Trust 2000). *Developmental diseases are those that arise from some form of outside influence, as distinct from a congenital defect.*

There is an economic aspect to this also, as there seems little point in paying large fees for a mare, stallion service and keep, then losing the potential of a foal because of orthopaedic problems. It was found in the Hunter Valley alone that DOD costs as much as \$60 million in lost or unusable horses per year (RIDC 1999). In addition, a higher level of owner and breeder knowledge in the UK means that owners recognise the signs of developmental orthopaedic disease. Thirdly, there is a high level of respect and cooperation among vets, farriers, owners, breeders and trainers.

This may be attributed largely to standardised training and registration. Owners and breeders know that if a farrier advertises a certain level of competence, he is bound to perform at that level. Therefore, a vet has confidence in both consulting and working with a farrier on specific leg and feet projects. The farrier also then achieves a high level of job satisfaction.

THE UK SYSTEM OF TRAINING FARRIERS

The UK is the only country in the world to have a legislated system of training and registering farriers. Under this system, every potential farrier must do a pre-apprenticeship course of one year, which gives them basic skills and tests their interest in the job. These courses are held at four farrier colleges located geographically fairly equally around the UK. Then they must do a three-day course and examination on forging skills, making sure that they have the necessary hand-eye coordination and physical skills.

The next step is to apply to an ATF (Approved Training Farrier) to do a four years and two months apprenticeship. The ATF himself will have undergone advanced training to acquire this level. At the end of an apprenticeship, an independent, external examination is given by the Worshipful Company of Farriers over three days at one of the colleges, at a nominated time twice a year. Those who pass are awarded the Diploma of the WCF.

Apprentices who pass the exam and gain their diploma then apply to become registered under Section Two of the Farrier Registration Act and are then able to shoe as an individual for monetary gain. After five years of practice, a farrier can apply to become an Associate of the WCF. It takes an absolute minimum of 15 years before a farrier can be invited to become a Fellow of the WCF – and there are only 44 throughout the world at present.



Pic: Jonathan Oehm

Daniel Planas, a farrier at Simon Curtis's Newmarket forge, hammers out a shoe for a Suffolk Punch (a large draught horse, of which there is only a few hundred left).

TRAINING IN AUSTRALIA

Anyone in Australia can hang out a shingle and practise as a farrier, with or without any training. This is the bare fact, but many individuals have passed through various training schemes and/or undertaken their own programmes of ongoing education. I would not wish to denigrate any self-taught farrier, as some of the best have worked hard on their own to achieve their present standards.

However, there is currently no common, external bench mark by which owners can gauge the quality of a farrier's work or his professional standing – or indeed, for a farrier to qualify his own work or that of his fellows. In addition, a number of owners (perhaps through frustration at failing to secure a farrier's services, or through confidence in their own abilities) attempt to trim or shoe their own horses. With usually little or no knowledge of anatomy and footfall stresses, they may do substantial damage.

Over some years, there have been attempts in Australia to set a standard and to standardise training. There are two professional bodies – the Master Farriers Association and the Australian Farriers and Blacksmiths Association Inc. Membership of the former is restricted to farriers who have successfully completed the MFA four-year apprenticeship. Membership of the AFBA is wider, and can include anyone working as a farrier or blacksmith.

At present in Australia the following training is available:

- ❖ The Master Farriers Association of Australia runs a four-year apprenticeship scheme in NSW and Victoria, with apprentices working for master farriers and attending workshops/seminars at Scone, Melbourne and Sydney through TAFE. The MFA is the only training body recognised by the Australian Government.
- ❖ Two farriers run private schools in Queensland, affiliated with the AFBA, and issue their own certificates.
- ❖ A horse shoer who has worked with a farrier (qualified with MFA or not) may apply to The Department of Workplace and Training for Recognition of Prior Learning to obtain a Trade Certificate of Farriery and may subsequently apply to the MFA to sit for qualification exams. This may effectively shorten the apprenticeship period, if the farrier has a high enough skill level.

There is one national occasion on which farriers and vets can meet and talk about their work, the annual Australian Equine Veterinary Association three-day conference (the Bain-Fallon Memorial Conference), held in 2007 in Perth and to be held in New Zealand next year. In association with this, the EVA runs the Shoeing for Performance seminar every second year, usually in conjunction with the Bain-Fallon conference.

Competitions for farriers are held at several State Royal shows and country centres, sponsored generally by the AFBA. These test various farrier skills including actual shoeing, forging and blacksmithing. There are also occasional seminars sponsored by groups or individuals, examples in Queensland being an Equine Lameness Seminar held in 2006 by Eagle Farm vets, or a one-day talk and demonstration by top competition farrier Grant Moon, made available free to farriers by John Gilchrist of Stockman's Supplies at Hendra.

TRADITIONS AND OBSERVANCES OF THE FARRIERY FRATERNITY

The UK is a perfect place for learning about ancient practices and traditions. Farriers there talk about things which happened 200 years ago, as if it were yesterday. It is observable that pride in the past and the traditions of the craft have a bearing on the desire to uphold their standards.

I was honoured to be invited to the annual Guild dinner of the WCF in London, and was introduced as the first Australian farrier to attend. The dinner is preceded by a parade from the WCF Guildhall to Mansion House. We marched about two kilometres, uninterrupted and under police escort, in formal dinner attire. All officials or past officials wore their chains of office over their dinner jackets.

Arriving for the dinner itself, we were escorted in by members of the King's Cavalry and heralded by the Blues and Royals. The party was led by two military farriers in full dress uniform, each carrying a large silver axe over his right shoulder.



Pic: Jonathan Oehm

Military farrier in full ceremonial dress at the annual WCF dinner, London.

The origin of this custom is a little macabre – apparently this started some 650 years ago, when horses were branded on their feet, and if one died for any reason, in battle or otherwise, the cavalry farrier had to cut off the branded leg at the knee to prove to the commanding officer that the horse did in fact die and was not sold to the enemy.

Princess Anne, who is a past Master of the WCF and a great supporter of farriers, attended this dinner and I was introduced to her and chatted for several minutes about different farriery problems in the UK and Australia. She mentioned that she thought the Churchill Fellowships were a great institution. We discussed how different the mileages are in Australia. In some English villages, it may be possible for a farrier to do a day's work and arrive home having travelled as little as one kilometre, while an Australian farrier may well travel 200 kilometres in a day. Costs, therefore, vary a lot and while our travel expenses are much greater, their husbandry costs are higher than ours.

PLACES AND PERSONALITIES; OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

- I was able to work for several days at the National Stud in Newmarket. This is a thoroughbred stud which is basically funded and run by the English government, a high quality set-up and very well run. My study here was concentrated on foals, and I was able to get hands-on experience under supervision.
- At the International Farriery Competition at the Royal Show in Warwick, I was asked to be a steward assisting judges by marking down points and comments, which was a wonderful chance to learn what top farrier judges are looking for in world class work.
- In Wales, I observed the three farriers who have won nine of the past 10 world shoeing titles. The three – Jim Blurton, Billy Crothers and Richard Ellis – work at a single forge and support each other in their work. Their shoe-making and blacksmithing skills are unbelievable, but they do spend a minimum of two hours per day honing these skills, almost like practising the piano. In fact, Crothers compares shoeing to playing a musical instrument. He says you can't expect to make top quality shoes without the practice... on top of everyday work. These farriers hand-make all of their shoes from straight bar stock, rather than re-shape factory-made shoes which is a more common practice. Time prohibits many farriers from competition work.
- In my five days in Wales, I visited Haydn Price, developer of a video gait analysis software system known as Equinanalysis. The software makes it possible for the practitioner to assess the dynamic balance of the horse – ie, its footfall, landing, flight of trajectory of the limb (or kinetics and kinematics). In turn this makes treatment less subjective, more targeted. Although still in its infancy, this software has potentially massive implications for the horse industry.
- I was able to study practical anatomy, micro-anatomy and pathology with Sergio Muelle-Goldstein, AWCF, who was born in Portugal, raised in Peru, then in his second year of a veterinary degree changed to farriery and eventually gained his English qualifications. He is now a highly travelled lecturer and speaker throughout Europe, especially in Spanish-speaking countries.

During my stay in the UK, I was constantly offered time, support and knowledge by colleagues and “fellow travellers” in the horse industry. My special thanks to the following:

- Simon Curtis FWCF MRCVS
- Haydn Price Dip WCF
- Jim Ferrie FWCF
- Alan Ferrie FWCF
- Sergio Muelle-Goldstein AWCF
- Richard Ellis AWCF
- Billy Crothers AWCF
- James Blurton AWCF
- David Gill AWCF
- Sandy Beveridge FWCF
- Huw Dyer AWCF
- Andrew Bathe MA Vet MB MRCVS
- Dr Celia Marr

RECOMMENDATIONS

My major conclusion from my trip is that marked improvements can – and should be - brought about in Australia through:

- ❖ ***Increased education and heightening of awareness for owners, vets, breeders and trainers, which should go hand-in-hand with improved farriery training.***

It is noticeable in the UK that many farriers are retained by families over generations, not years or even months. Owners, breeders and trainers are well educated in what to expect from their farrier. It would be unheard-of for a farrier to arrive at a job and have an owner demand: “I want half an inch off this hoof and such-and-such a type of shoe,” instead of trusting the farrier’s judgment and experience.

Because of low standards of owner education and expectations in Australia, clients tend to be fickle and fashion-driven. This can have dire consequences for horses which are subjected to practices which have been banned in the UK and USA.

Part of the education of owners should include what to provide to maximise the standard of a farrier’s work – a minimum standard such as a clean, level surface and if possible under cover from the elements, plus a horse which is presented with clean legs and feet. It is not part of the farrier’s job either to catch a horse in a paddock or to train it to stand still, therefore an owner/ trainer/breeder should appreciate that the horse will need basic schooling in manners.

There is a chicken-and-egg element to recognition and respect between vets and farriers. If minimum farriery standards are met, and advanced standards recognised, farriers can expect greater consultation and respect from vets. Conversely, vets can learn to rely on the advice and cooperation they receive from the person who has trained for years in the care of equine feet – the farrier.

- ❖ ***The addressing by Australian farriers of the urgent need for standardised training and registration.***

This needs to be at a level that demands work and aspiration, not something that is too easily obtained. If successive levels are recognised, the ambitious farrier can advance in stages and not be over-faced by a seemingly impossible standard at first. The USA has begun work towards an accreditation scheme with the WCF. If we set goals now, we can begin to do the same and become accredited with the WCF (which fits well with one of their stated aims, to help raise the standard of farriery worldwide, not only in the UK).

- ❖ ***The creation of greater unity among Australian farriers, including having all farriers as members under one trade organisation, working in the direction of improving their trade.***

Little can be achieved if farriers do not get together. Recent figures given in Australian Census records show that 1400 people claim to work as farriers Australia-wide. Only 250 belong to the AFBA. The MFA has around 200 members, some with common membership of both organisations.

IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION

Clinics - before I left the UK, I spoke with Simon Curtis about his travelling to Australia to hold both farrier-specific and horse-owner clinics, in Brisbane and perhaps on the Gold Coast. He would be happy to do this, possibly in 2008. The event would need sponsorship, and several industry suppliers and a vet have already offered support, and I have found an organiser for this potential visit. I have also spoken with the vice-president of the MFA (Mr. Jim Middleton) about their possible involvement in the above clinics, and with the acting president of the AFBA (Mr. Richard Hanson). This would be a major project and is still in the initial planning stages.

Media - My local newspaper the Beaudesert Times has already published an interview on my return, under their regular weekly Personality Profile column. I have been asked to do several articles on different aspects of farriery for national and Queensland-based equine magazines.

Requests for talks and information days have also come in from other sources, and I will be fulfilling these requests also, the first being a demonstration day on August 12 for the Beaudesert Cutting Club. Other requests have come from interstate.

My personal website should be operational in September, and will give me the opportunity to post this report and up-to-date news items.

On an individual level, I have had several Queensland farriers ring me for advice and have been happy to help them, or any others who contact me.