Horses's feet by Dr. John Fudens DVM HMC PH

When I had my practice in Florida i was treating a horse for a client. She went on to train in horse trimming and shoeing and this is a letter I received from her when I had some difficult horse feet cases.

I am more than happy to help with any cases you run into that you need advice on. I will do the same for cases I run into that could use your help. I'd say Cushings disease is the biggest hurdle I face. Horses with severe cushings will get laminitis at the slightest change (weather, diet, etc...). Fortunately, cases this severe are far and few between but they get to a point where nothing can be done for them. Once you get them out of one laminitis spell they immediately fall into another because of some slight change in their environment. I have had 3 clients that ended up euthanizing their horses because the disease could not be controlled. I wish I had referred them to you to see what you could do for them. I would like to understand the cause of this disease more, it doesn't seem like much is known about it.

As far as shoeing goes. Yes, shoeing does overtime weaken a hoof, at best. If the trim has been decent and just a basic shoe applied with barefoot periods during winter months, you can prevent a lot of the problems but is still not the best for the horse. A shoe keeps the sole and frog from contacting the ground and thus getting the stimulation it was meant to receive, this overtime causes those areas of hoof to atrophy and weaken. Horses that have been shod regularly typically have very weak, diseased frogs and a weak, flaky sole. A weak frog will eventually open itself to infection and the horse will develop thrush in the central sulcus which can be very painful and is 90% of the time the cause of "navicular" disease. I have completely rehabbed many "navicular" horses by simply pulling shoes and having owners treat the frog until infection is completely gone (can take up to 3 months of daily treatment). Founder is a bit different, 90% of the time it is caused by high-sugar diet (too much green grass, grain, etc) getting the horse's diet under control at that point is the key to a successful rehab and re suspending the coffin bone.

The problem with horses these days is that they live on soft pastures but are asked to be ridden on rocky trails or terrain they are not conditioned for. For a horse to be able to be ridden on rocky terrain barefoot, it has to spend most of it's time on it, this will allow hooves to toughen and adapt to that terrain. A big part of the reason horses back in the day didn't require shoes, their hooves were conditioned for it because they were ridden on it all the time. So anyways, to get around this dilemma but still keep your horses barefoot people ride their horses in hoof boots. My favorite are the Renegade hoof boots, they are widely used by endurance riders and have an excellent rating. Just slip them on the horses front hooves before ride and slip them off after ride. Typically just the fronts need to be booted because that's where they carry most of the riders weight. For some people it's a matter of convenience and they just don't want to take the extra 2 minutes to boot before a ride. That's why they say: "Barefoot is for every horse but not be for every rider"