

KAIMANAWAS OF NEW ZEALAND

Nº. 2 – December 2015

Nickie Dove is a coach at the Waikato RDA who got two horses from the 2014 muster to join their other Kaimanawas.

Why did you choose to get a Kaimanawa? We already have two Kaimanawas at RDA Waikato and they are really good ponies. We wanted to save two ponies from slaughter and we hoped they would make a great addition to the team in time.



Tui - June 2014



Tussock - June 2014

How would you describe your Kaimanawas? Tussock and her foal Midnight have got great temperaments and are very friendly and trainable. Tui is shy and takes more time to bond - but her foal Poppy is very cheeky and confident and needs a firm hand as she can get quite pushy. They are all lovely ponies and given time will be a big asset to the Centre.

Before you got your Kaimanawas, what was your background and experience with horses? I have trained and backed most of the ponies at RDA Waikato myself or with the help of my

daughter Michaela. I started my first ponies when I was ten and I enjoy the challenge of working quietly with young horses.

How did you feel when they were delivered? It was exciting to finally see our ponies as we had no idea what we were getting. They were initially delivered to another trainers property, but access to the site and available time made things difficult. Some unfortunate mishaps on their journey home were a setback, but having them closer was a big improvement.

What did you do in the first few weeks? We spent our first few weeks just making friends with the ponies. Tui was obviously pregnant and very wary. Tussock was bolder and more willing to take grass from our hands. They were very scared of things like quad bikes, trampolines, cellphones ringing, children playing, clothes flapping on a line, and more. They learnt about tape and we were able to get them back on grass within a couple of days which was excellent. They also learnt about the wonders of feed bowls which made them easy to worm. I was shocked by the number of red worms that they passed - like their manure was alive - and Tussock had a lot of bot larvae. Over the next few months they came to enjoy their daily grooming and handling.

What did you do next? It would have been easy to get halters on them in a crush, but as they were pregnant and we were in no rush we relied on building trust. Tui had her foal in November and Tussock had hers in April. The foals have been a delight, although



Midnight 8 Months old and Tussock - Nov 2015

Poppy can be a bit of a brat, whereas Midnight has been amenable and cuddly from day 1. All are easy to halter and lead apart from Tui who is reluctant to be more than groomed. Midnight was amazing for the farrier, and Poppy and Tussock were pretty easy for first timers. Luckily Tui has great feet as she is the only one who has yet to be trimmed. Inca, one of our Kaimanawa RDA ponies has a very similar temperament to Tui, and she is a great RDA pony - we will get there.

What are your next goals? Once Tui and Tussock have learnt to float we will take them down to the RDA to begin their training. There is no rush as they are only four and have their whole lives ahead of them. Poppy and Midnight will stay with us until they are at least 3, and they will be much easier than their mothers as they have been handled young. Both are likely to be bigger than their mothers, and Midnight might well make 15hh or more which will be great as the RDA needs some bigger mounts.

What advice would you offer someone planning to get a Kaimanawa? I think anyone considering taking Kaimanawas from the muster needs to have considerable horse experience. They need to be prepared to invest a lot of time, every day, to build a relationship with them. They need to be very patient and quietly confident around them. The horses need time to adjust to a whole new way of life and owners need to respect that they will always retain some wild horse instincts. Kaimanawas are not used to our rich grazing land and will need careful monitoring of their grass in Spring. A good worming programme and mucking out the paddocks is essential, and a well set up property is a big help.

Kaimanawas respond well to people they trust, are wonderful ponies, and very versatile. Ours already have demonstrated their jumping skills. With the right care and training they can become your best friend.



Tui - Nov 2015



Poppy 1yr old, Midnight, and Tussock - Nov 2015

The Wild Horses' Perspective

The First Days

The newly mustered wild horses have had their lives turned upside down. Being captured and then separated from their family band members and close companions is traumatic for them. And, to add to that, they have been removed from their familiar home ranges. They have lost all that is near and dear to them.

Understanding the horses' predicament as they make their transition into captivity is helpful to the horse and makes it easier for them. It's hard for them to adjust initially so it's up to us humans to make it as easy for them as possible.

When they arrive off the truck, which is yet another traumatic experience, they are in a state of shock. Often they just shutdown, as it's all been just too much; this can sometimes be misinterpreted as being quiet and people take advantage of them being in this state and begin their handling. But, a shutdown frightened horse (or any being) cannot learn, or retain much, if anything at all, in this state – they can also become dangerous - because they can explode unexpectedly.

Giving the wild horses what they need most is up to the human. As prey animals, horses, and especially wild horses, are instinctively scared of new things, so the horses need time to figure out that everything new is not going to hurt them; that includes people and everything else in their environment.

They need the company of another horse or horses, food and water and to be left in peace for at least the first day/night. Putting another horse into an adjoining yard will help the new arrival to settle more. It would be wise for the horse provided for company be quiet and without a cover, as a horse wearing a cover can frighten the wild horse enough to have it attempt or even succeed in escaping.

All the Kaimanawa horses are different and will react accordingly. Some will be absolutely shutdown as previously mentioned. Some will be highly reactive and if pressured, will either attempt to jump over the yard railing or crash through it, while others can appear more confident. They will respond better with thoughtfulness and consideration from humans.

The next step

Introduce yourself quietly by entering the yard and standing still, while offering a big handful of cut long grass (long grass is more

appealing) or hay. If the horse is highly reactive, offer food through the fence at first. It may take some time for the horse to take food, just be patient... it's a big deal for the wild horse. Patience is key to helping the horse.

Get the horse used to you by entering the yard, offering food and then leaving, to let it be. If the horse is reacting strongly to your presence, only stay in with it a short time till it settles, then leave. That way he learns that you being in with him doesn't hurt. He has to learn you are trustworthy. Leaving while he is calm allows him to learn this.

Don't put the horse into a position so he thinks that he needs to defend himself. There should be no reason for him to bite or kick if you are aware of how the horse is feeling – putting too much pressure on him is unhelpful to the horse – and not safe either.

Go into the yard for short periods, several times throughout the day. Increase the time spent with the horse slowly. Some come on in leaps and bounds, taking food readily, others require more time, and some will take a lot longer. Resist the urge to reach out to touch the horse - wild horses don't want to be touched by us, they don't understand our intentions – they perceive humans as life threatening.

Wild horses senses are acute – they are aware of everything in their environment – so every movement you make should be slow, deliberate and smooth. Keep the environment quiet too if possible. Kaimanawas are extremely sensitive. Especially during this initial stage, they have no idea what lies ahead of them, so they're expecting more trouble. Keep in mind what they've been through already to reach this point... they've lost their family and their home, the only thing they have left is their life!

Being able to read the horse and use feel as a guide goes a long way. Be watchful, be aware - look for signs - read his face and body, they will show you how he's feeling. Notice his expression, his eyes, ears, mouth – are they relaxed or tight. Same with his body, is it reasonably relaxed or coiled tight and about to spring. We have to anticipate what he is about to do next and react before he does. Keep the horse calm by withdrawing just a bit or all together.

Be self disciplined. It's hard for us humans to do nothing when we are with horses, yet it is one of the most powerful tools we have. Just stand/sit with the horse, offer food by hand and wait... Patience, patience and yet more patience... It's not a race.

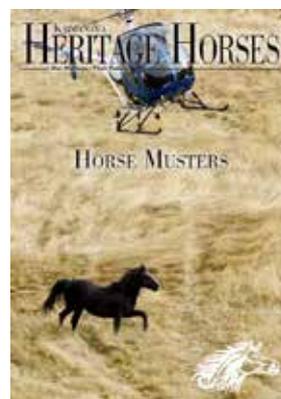
Robin Sisley

Author of *Eat the Wind*

Visit our website to learn more about getting a wild horse from the muster. You can download our booklet on the muster process, about the Kaimanawa horses, and options for getting a Kaimanawa Horse. There are also application forms for when you are ready to apply.

If you would like a Kaimanawa but don't want to do the initial handling or don't have the needed facilities, then we can put you in touch with registered handlers who can get your Kaimanawa ready for you. We also have Kaimanawas at our welfare centres that may be just what you are looking for.

Once your Kaimanawa is delivered you can contact us to ask for advice on any matter. Our experienced committee members and area representatives can point you in the right direction for a long and happy journey with your Kaimanawa.



www.KaimanawaHeritageHorses.org