

Discover the American Curly Horse... Equine of Your Dreams

By Janice Voss-Crosby

***"They knew not what they were, nor from where they came.
They were just there, and came from some other time and place."
Peter L. Damele, from novel: The Dameles and the American Curly Horse by Dale E. Woolley***

The American Curly Horse is a true Native American breed that is finding a world wide audience with its growing popularity. The curly horse, originally found in the wild mustang herds of the west, has been selectively bred to include many different types, all possessing the distinctive curly horse characteristics that set them apart from other breeds. Through careful out crossing, the curly horses of today now range in size from miniature to 16+hh, comes in many body types and movement, and are found on the trail, in the show ring, performing dressage, eventing, driving, in therapeutic programs, and in the backyard. No wonder these personable and unique horses have been exported to Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The secret is getting out, there really is a curly horse for everyone!

The origin of the American Curly Horse is unknown. There is an Indian legend that the curly horse is 'the horse before there were horses'. Curly horses were documented in Asian artwork as early as 161 AD. We also know that the Crow and Sioux documented having curly horses in their winter counts. High Dog, a Lakota Indian, depicted the Sioux stealing Curly horses from the Crow Indians in the winter count of 1801-1802. This was called the year the Sioux stole Curly horses from the Crow, and places the Sioux in the Standing Rock/Cheyenne River area at that time. The curly horse, or buffalo ponies were sacred horses to the Indians, and were used by the Chiefs & Medicine Men. Chief Red Horse, a Minneconjou, created drawings of the battle of the Little Bighorn in 1881, and one of the pictures depicted an Indian riding a Curly horse. A 'wooly mare and a bald colt' were listed in an Ohio estate inventory from 1828. There

are numerous documented instances of curly horses from the last three centuries, including Charles Darwin referring to Felix Azara's work in 1802, that documented Curly horses in Paraguay. South America. P.T. Barnum also purchased a curly horse from a Cincinnati agent in 1847, and promoted it as a woolly horse. Curly horses have been intertwined with our history for centuries.

The Damele family of Eureka, Nevada, started the modern history of the curly horse when they captured feral curly horses in the first half of the last century. They noted that these extremely rare curly horses were the only range survivors of the harsh winters of 1932 and 1951, and decided to incorporate this hardiness into their working stock. Other pockets of curly horses were found in various wild herds scattered throughout North America, and these are the foundation of the curly breed. The curly horses of today are the descendents of these native curly coated North American horses.

Eli Bad Warrior was a Native American that raised curly horses on the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation, and acquired his curly horses from his father. Eli sold his curls to Slim Berndt who then sold them to Ernie Hammrich. Ernie bred these curls and sold many to the Neidhards (NTS), and also kept some Native stock, which he bred to foundation Quarter Horses, calling this line the "Bad Warrior", "Warrior" line in honor of Eli Bad Warrior.

Ron Gale remembers that there were two pockets of curls in Alberta many years ago, which were not necessarily related. One was in the Skjonsberg's area, and the other was around the Cypress Hills. Bob Pollock, along with two brothers, arrived in the Cypress Hills area of Saskatchewan in 1883 from Winemucca, Nevada with at least one curly

horse, and is the beginning of the eventual "Cypress" curly horses. The curls that George Naismith raised came from Bob Pollock originally. Ken and Marg Perrin acquired their breeding stock from George Naismith, and were the ones that registered their curls with the "Cypress" label. The Skjonsberg line first came into Alberta with a mare caught at a watering hole in the Dakotas by Mr. Johnson, who was Ole Skjonsberg's grandfather, in 1902 or 1903. Ole started raising curls in the 1930's and very few, if any, records were kept. An old timer remembers seeing curls working the fields in Alberta when he was very young, along with curls in both Montana and North Dakota. Ron Gale trained curls that were caught wild in Montana in the forties.

There are still a few feral BLM Curls found in the Rock Springs area of Wyoming, and these Wyoming curly horses are a unique pocket of feral curls that are well built stout horses with wonderful temperaments. The Rock Springs Wyoming Curly Mustangs trace back to the Laramie Stud, a ranch curly horse, who was bought by Isaac Newton Brooks between 1942-1945 from a horse trader in Laramie, WY. The Laramie stud produced Rocket, a curly. The horses, which belonged to Ike and his nephew John Knappes, became a part of the BLM land when they no longer allowed the ranchers to use the rangeland freely for horse breeding. The remnants of that herd became the BLM Rock Springs mustangs and the Curls trace back to Rocket and Laramie stud.

Francis and Dora Fredell of Boulder, Colorado, are the founders and breeders of the Fredell line of curly horses. The Fredell history with curly horses goes back to when his first curly mare presented as a gift from his father, who also bred curly horses, and kept up the line

until Mr. Fredell was old enough to start up his own operation. At the beginning, the curly horses at the time were typical stock horses from the Old Spanish feral stock. Mrs. Fredell's influence turned their breeding program toward the stock type that mirrored the American Quarter Horses, with the goal of producing horses with exceptional temperaments, good deep chests and long pasterns to improve the horses' stamina and action.

Curly Jim is the foundation stallion of many gaited Curlies. He was a curly horse out of Tennessee of unknown pedigree, who resembled a Missouri Foxtrotter in build and did a foxtrot gait. He arrived in Missouri around 1956 and was trained to ride as a three year old. Curly Jim was bred to a mare named Bradford mare and foaled the Curly mare Blaze, who was then bred to Walker's Merry Lad, may have been registered as a MFT and TWH. The offspring of Walker's Merry Lad x Blaze was Walker's Prince T; the most widely used gaited Curly in the gaited curly line. The Curly Jim line is of lighter build than the feral or Native lines, has a soft gait and keeps the mane and tail. This is the only line so far that has not shown the extreme shedding pattern for mane and tail.

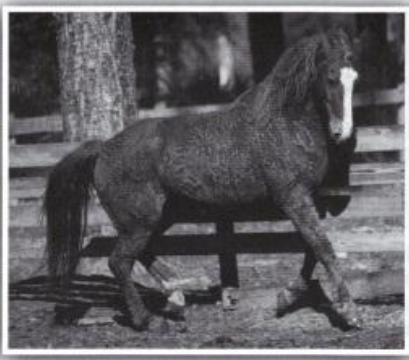
Due to BLM's continual massive round ups of our country's Wild Horses from their rangelands, the rare and unique Wild Curly Mustangs are rapidly nearing complete extinction in the wild altogether. There are now currently more BLM Wild Curlies in captivity than there are left out in the wild. If the BLM round ups continue to remove entire herds of Wild Horses off of our rangelands, then the original Wild Curly bloodlines will cease to exist except for those few horses that people have adopted and have on their personal ranches. There are only two original Wild Curly Horse ranches still in operation in the entire world that might have enough of these horses with different bloodlines to possibly save the Wild Curly from to-

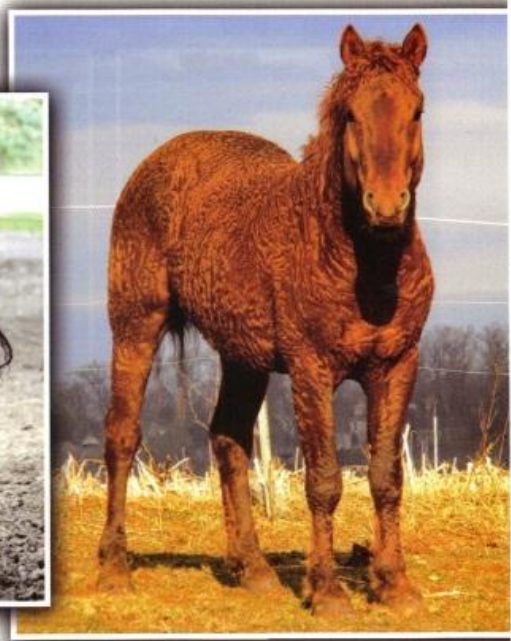
tal extinction. One of these, the Circle H Ranch, has been trying to preserve what's left of these very rare and special horses for over 17 years. This preserve will allow the horses to live in a more natural environment where they can still pass on their rare and unique wild curly genes. It will also ensure that future generations of people will be able to come out to watch and learn about these special horses, and make it possible for people to adopt and own their own Wild Curly Mustang in the years to come.

The curly horse has come a long way since their days of running free over the rangelands of North America. When the few and rare wild curly horses were captured in the early 20th century, they were crossed with Arabians and Morgan's to prevent excessive inbreeding. Eventually, outcrosses with Appaloosas and Missouri Foxtrotters were also incorporated into the bloodlines. Other breeds have been introduced over the years, and now there are a variety of types to suit most equestrian needs. In spite of this outcrossing to expand the gene pool, the curly horse of today continues to share many physical characteristics with primitive horses, including wide-set eyes with an elliptic slant to them, and wide-set ears that are somewhat blunt at the tip or gently curved. Their faces can be long and narrow, with a generally straight profile, along with a somewhat shallow and fairly short mouth, and medium to small nostrils. The curly horse generally has a short back with a medium length neck that is deep at the base, solid boned legs with a short cannon bone as compared to the forearm, and almost round tough

thick walled hooves. They may have smaller chestnuts and smaller or missing ergots. This is in addition to their most obvious characteristic, the curly coat!

The winter coat is the most distinguishing feature of the curly horse and ranges from almost straight to crushed velvet looking, to marcelle waves, to tight ringlets, to "french knot" microcurls. Their thick winter coat is made up of several layers of hair. The thick curly outer layer repels rain and snow. Manes and forelocks can be corkscrewed, ringletted, or dreadlocked, and is often split with ringlets hanging down the sides of the neck. Tails may have some wave or curl. The hair in their ears is curly, the whiskers, eyelashes, and fetlocks are often curly or wavy. Some shed part or their entire mane and tail hair in summer. There are also curly pedigreed horses born with straight, soft bunny fur type coats.





Whether curly or straight coated, the most notable trait of the curly horse is their hypoallergenic quality. People allergic to horses are more tolerant of curly horses, with many showing no allergic reaction at all. Through research, the curly horses have been found to have fewer allergens causing proteins. They have the same proteins, but there are less quantities of it so people do not react as much. What makes Curly hair different is the twist that is found in the hairs, it is three-dimensional curl, shaped like corkscrew. It most resembles the shape of the Suri alpaca as they also have three-dimensional curls. Curly hair is even spun and used to make garments!

The curly coats of these horses become spinnable fiber in the spring when they shed their winter coats. Foal coats are the best fiber a curly will ever have and they are prized by spinners, as they are usually very soft. The best adult curly fiber is the soft and fine hair found around the ear area, and between the front legs and chest area. These areas are usually soft enough for next to skin items. The collected hair fiber is washed and blended with other fibers like wool, alpaca, llama, mohair or even cotton, and spun into yarn. This curly yarn can be made into any item by crocheting, knitting, weaving or any fiber art craft. The carded Curly fiber blends can be felted by using needle felting or wet felting. Anything you can imagine can be made from Curly fiber and yarns.

Curly fiber and yarns can also be dyed with commercially produced dyes, Kool Aid or Easter egg dyes. The fibers that take the dye the best are white, palo-

mino, buckskin and light grey colored Curly hair. Some Curly horses have a low micron count, meaning the diameter of the hair fiber is very small. The lower the number of a micron count, the finer the fiber. In Curly horses with a low micron count, their entire body coat is useable for spinning. These horses are prized for their hair coat as well as all the other curly attributes.

Some Smooth Coat Curlies also produce very fine spinnable fibers, too.

The ICHO Curly Fiber Guild is made up of several fiber artists that work with curly fiber. This is a place for fiber artists to share techniques, ideas and items they have created. This group provides finished items for horse fairs and expos to show what can be made from curly horse fibers. Some of these creations made by the curly fiber artists can be seen at the ICHO website, along with contact information.

Another remarkable quality of the curly horse is their tractable, steady and calm temperament. The curly horse has a gentle, kind manner and a tolerant nature, extraordinary intelligence, a willingness to work, and an affinity to training. They learn quicker than most horses, and retain their lessons, making them generally easy to train. Curly horses also tend to assess, and think things through rather than panic and flee when faced with unexpected situations. They do not frighten easily, and will wait for help when in a bad situation, rather than struggle and hurt themselves. The curly horses are generally people orientated, sensitive, and tend to bond closely with their people.

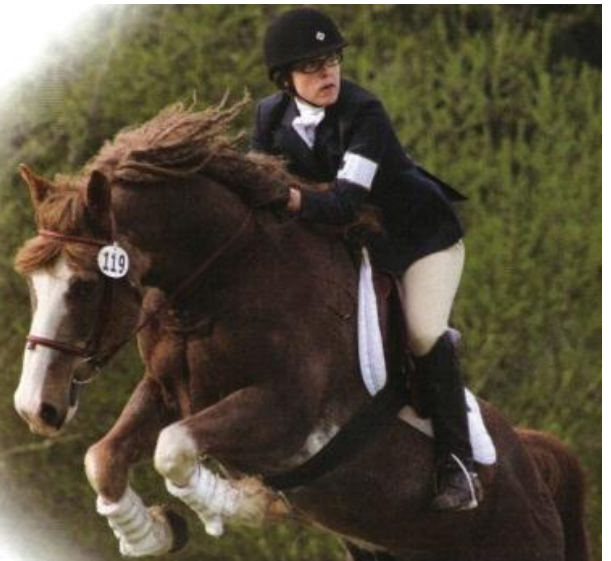
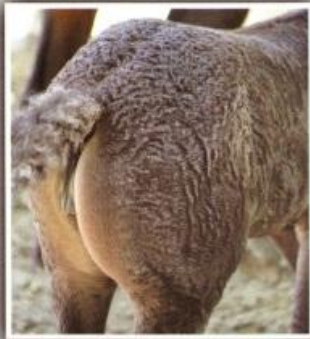
There are many stories about how hardy the curly horses are, and that is why

they were first noticed by the Damele family in Nevada. Broadly speaking, they are hardier than other breeds, will do better on their feed, and are generally not high maintenance horses. However, they do require the same care as any other horse, including quality hay and grain, farrier care, vetting, and vaccinations.

The curly horse is generally sound, well proportioned and balanced with an overall desirable conformation. Their movement is bold, long strided, and forward moving. You can find a curly horse suited to any discipline you participate in. Curly horses are now competing in every discipline, on the trail, and in the family backyard. When shown, curly horses are not required to be clipped in order to display their unique curly traits.

Curly sport horses participate in dressage, eventing, and combined driving. A curly sport horse should show free, straight, forward movement with good suspension and power, moving with an elevated forehand, pushing well from the hocks and hindquarters, and showing elastic and energetic forward moving gaits. The back should be swinging and showing good freedom of the shoulder, good reach with the hind legs, and long strides. You will find curly horses excelling in the discipline, and their growing success is being seen everywhere they are shown.

DCC Traveler, a well-known curly sport horse stallion is successfully competing at the USEA Recognized level in 3-Day Eventing. Traveler achieved the Curly Sport horse International "2011 Horse of the Year" rating in Combined Training



in the Novice division. He also placed in the Top 3 at his last 3-Day Event and is eligible for the Open USEA 2012 Novice Championships. DCC Traveler was purchased when he was eight years old and had only been used as a breeding stallion, with very little training and handling. In four years, Traveler went from a snorting, screaming stallion to an accomplished, calm and focused athletic. Traveler is one the rare horses who has been able to handle the mental and physical stress of competition, successfully, so late in his career. Not only he is able to master one sport — but has also proven himself in dressage, stadium jumping and cross-country jumping. In addition, he has competed in Endurance racing and is a great trail horse. DCC Traveler embodies the spirit and soul of the Curly horse — proud, hardworking but with a calm and curious personality.

The stock type curly horse is a working saddle horse, with well-balanced stock horse conformation. The muscle pattern is thicker than other curly types, but not to interfere with athletic movement, and having a long free-strided movement for a ground covering walk, smooth fluid trot, and comfortable lope. Other curly types include the gaited curly horses, smooth coated curly horses, curly miniatures and ponies, curly drafts, and non-specialized curly saddle horses.

The American Bashkir Curly Horse Registry (ABCR) was established in 1971 with 21 curly horses. In 1999, the abcregistry.org. ABCR closed its books to any out-crossing, and anticipates that the ABCR curly horse type will be set in five to ten generations. Various programs are offered for promotion of the ABC horse.

The International Curly Horse Organization (ICHO) was founded in 2000 for registering all Curly Horses, including those adopted from the BLM. It provides for those wishing to continue crossing and improving curly horse quality, setting specific types toward breed genesis, as well as preserving old bloodlines. Education and research is a primary focus. The Inter-

national Curly North American Curly Horse Inspection Program (NACHIP) is an inspection program implemented by ICHO to provide quality evaluation of Curly Horses using uniform rating and inspection scores compatible with ICAMS, the International Curly Approved Mare and Stallion studbook.

Curly Sport Horse International (CSI) was created in 2003 to support sport-horse curly owners and breeders in improvement of breeding stock, promotion, and marketing. CSI also sponsors Horse of the Year awards, a futurity, and USDF All Breed Awards for performance. CSI advocates evaluation of breeding stock and their offspring to ensure the quality of horses produced.

There are two types of curly horses, those who carry the recessive curly gene, and those who express the dominant curly gene. The American Curly Horses are a group of horses that share the dominant curly gene, or group of genes with modifiers, and these genes are dominant over straight haired horses. In 2010, new research was funded for a new complete gene scan of the curly horse DNA in hopes of locating the curly hair gene. At this time, the actual genetics of the curly horse remains unknown. It is known from observation that the curly horses can be homozygous, carrying two dominant curly genes and always producing curly offspring. The great curly horse, Spartacus was homozygous for curl, always producing curly offspring from both curly and non-curly mares. Other horses expressing the dominant curl are heterozygous, having one curly and one straight gene, producing both curly and non-curly horses. Interestingly, these straight foals often exhibit the bunny-haired coat and can also be hypoallergenic. ICHO is currently expanding its research to include tracking of the straight —haired curly pedigreed horses to learn more about how these genes are passed through the generations.



Currently, ancestral DNA testing is also being conducted to try and determine where the curly horse originated. What this testing has shown is that there is no breed all curly horses trace back to. The only thing they seem to have in common is the curly coat dominant gene(s). There are many theories as to the origin of the curly gene, several of which are likely possibilities, however there is no proof of these yet. There are indicators from the sayings handed down by the Sioux, Blackfeet and Crow that would indicate they were identified separate from other horses. And since there is more to the American Curly Horse than just the curl (hypoallergenic, personality, strong bone, hardiness), these factors are an indicator of a genetic cluster, or even a breed. We do not know where that coat gene came from and it has not been isolated yet.

If you would like to learn more about the American Curly Horse, please visit the curly horse registries, curlyhorses.com, and curlyhorsecountry.com on the web to learn more about the American Curly Horse, their breeders, and their very happy owners.

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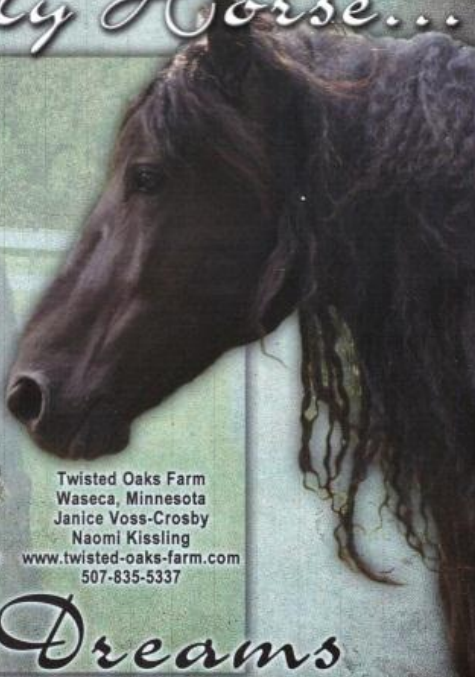
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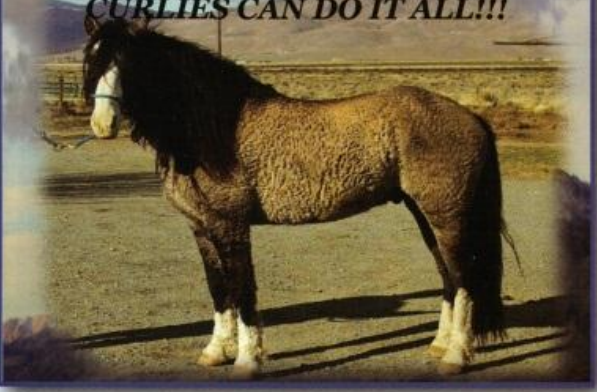


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