

Elizabeth & Pippa

Its May, we are on Islay, its Wilder Ways first proper pop-up trail centre. This is our first real test. We have brought over four of our own horses on the ferry and are working in collaboration with Harriet Roxburgh of Ballivicar Trekking centre.

Day 2 and our wee Mango suffers a freak leg injury and nearly severs the bulb of his heel clean off. After sedation and stitches, he is now stable bound for the rest of the trip. You can imagine, our spirits are not high.

We meet a group of cheery young teens who volunteer at Ballivicar and they brighten up our day. The most bold, Elizabeth, decides she would like to join us on an adventure with her horse. We are going riding on a beach only 2 miles from their yard – but it seems they do not often venture that far themselves. I suppose neither did we always. Funny how you get into your routine of rides. Wee challenge of the day, ride somewhere new today. Be sensible, be prepared, take a map and tell someone what you are planning etc, but we dare you, ride somewhere new and tell us how it goes, we would love to hear your stories.

Anyway, back to Elizabeth's story. Pippa is a funny little pony. Strangely spotty and sort of disproportioned – and I know Elizabeth won't mind me saying so because we adore that pony and try to buy it off her every time we see her! A young and fairly spirited wee horse, matching her rider perfectly.

On the first day they join us there are two other riders with us, both in their 30s, one riding their own horse and the other on our Billie Jean. Three of the five horses are over 15HH and although our Indi is only 14HH, he is used to keeping up with the big guys. So little 13HH Pippa and young Elizabeth looked a little daunted...but this didn't last long.

When I asked Elizabeth what she wanted from Pippa, she said she wanted her to be more brave and again, she had trouble getting her into water.

So off we set for the longest beach on Islay, a whole 7km of it and more water and scary sea weed lines than most ponies could handle.

If you have read Nickie & Bruno's case study, you will have read about the put your nose on it game – if you haven't read it, check it out, it will help make more sense of this.

Pippa is noseey, quite happy to put her head into almost anywhere, but it was her feet that she was worried about. If she didn't want to step onto something, she could twist and wriggle her little bum around it before you could say 'miss'. First was the change from grass to sand. Didn't want to get her hooves sandy I guess. So we played a wee game of pressure and release. While Pippa was looking at or sniffing the sand and standing still, Elizabeth left her be. If Pippa tried to turn around or go backwards Elizabeth would correct her, facing her back towards the sand. Once Pippa realised she couldn't go back, or sideways, and still ended up back at the edge of the sand, she decided there was only one thing for it, and with a bend of her knees (and me shouting sit up!) Pippa jumps spectacularly onto the sand. Elizabeth is not unseated so we encourage her to let Pippa keep moving, don't make her stop. She is going forward, you ask her to go forward, so don't now ask her to stop now she has done what you asked for. Now while Elizabeth is probably thinking to herself, wow, I stayed on and look at my horse go....seaweed swipe to the left! Wriggle britches is swerving around trying to avoid the seaweed, so we set up a Wilder Ways wheel. Imagine a straight line of horses standing shoulder to shoulder and then they start to ride round in a circle, maintain their formation (i.e. horse on inside

of the circle is doing the smallest circle). So like a riding lesson, I call out instructions, walk, trot, change rein, figure of eight etc etc. I keep the riders busy, busy worrying about the next turn, whilst maintaining the line, and their gate whilst not crashing into one and other...oh yeah and something about seaweed...By Elizabeth concentrating on the job in hand, Pippa concentrated and suddenly there was no room for such silly inconveniences such as seaweed, there was a job to be done. In case you are wondering about her face in the photo, this is Pippa's thinking face.



Mind clear, time to blow out the cobwebs, so we set off down the beach for a good gallop for the horses to relax their minds and enjoy the run. Pippa is a clever little pony, she keeps up well but she paces herself.

Next we hit a big river to cross. It's going to be chest deep on Pippa in the middle of the river and there is a steep gravel slope in and out. Like the sand, Elizabeth keeps her focused on her target and it takes very little effort before she...steps forwards into the river. Smiles all round, Pippa seems to be enjoying herself.

Pippa's final challenge that day was a game of put your nose on it with some serious quarry machinery parked up at the edge of the beach. Quickly she would touch every bit of that machine. The rest of the ride went without any particular excitement (bar the results of Ava eating a flapjack out of my lunchbox but that's another story!) and we all enjoyed an amble and gamble back down the beach and through the dunes. Pippa looked relaxed and yet very pleased with herself...so did Elizabeth.

Two days later Elizabeth came to us with the group of teens, they wanted an adventure. So on one wet miserable day, us two and four teens took to the hills. Visibility was so poor we had to turn back off of the hill and head for the woods. Our spirits were not dampened though. We took to the woods on an adventure of surprise and excitement and so the girls shrieked as we cantered along



hidden paths and jumped some hidden ditches, mud flying, rain falling, steam rising, laughter bellowing.

Our ability to navigate safely on the hill due to poor visibility had changed the course of this ride but not the outcomes. Instead we looked at navigation skills in the lower land, between the trees and through bog. Our Nikki taught the girls about the plants under their hooves and what they told them about the likely ground conditions. The girls lapped it up like sponges...literally, they were soaking!

However, the highlight of this whole ride was when we returned to the yard and the girls asked us, can we go on adventures when you are not here and when we are left alone. Their faces lit up as the

door to possibilities opened. We can't wait to meet up with the girls again this year to see where they have got to, hopefully they will have some new routes to share with us.

Before we left Islay we had a bit of a ground work training session with some of the local girls and their horses. We talk more about this in our Case Study of Emma and Frankie but just wanted to mention here that Elizabeth and Pippa also got involved with this. Elizabeth is a very quick learner and a determined young horse person, luckily she has a very clever and determined young pony so the possibilities for these two really are endless. Their journey together continues and we look forward to catching up with them in July 2017. In the meantime, I asked Elizabeth how Pippa has changed and where they want to go next. She says "Pippa is noticeably more confident and also trusted me more on your rides. I would just love to continue working on trust. X"

OK, so our plan for this year, work on Elizabeth trusting herself, that ought to do it 😊

Oh and don't forget our wee challenge of the day, ride somewhere new and share your story.

Best wishes
Cara, Nikki & The Herd