

Emma & Frankie

Frankie is very green and not particularly fit (he is only 4) so you would have thought the 1 hour ride to meet us at Ballivicar would have had him tired out and he have been on his best behaviour...

Emma has been on an adventure with us on one of our horses, earlier in the week so we know how well she can ride. But she looks nervous on-board Frankie.

Emma wants us to help her get Frankie in the water, so we are planning an early evening beach ride. We get chatting and learn some of her troubles. Mainly she has difficulties bridling and dealing with his lack of manners. She is playing it down but we can see she is bothered by him. Emma bought a mare in foal in 2012, Frankie is the result. So he has lived with his mother all his life, was late gelded at 2 years and is generally pushy with all the women in his life. Emma backed him at 3 and then turned him away until breaking him fully at 4 years old.

We tie him up inside the arena at Ballivicar. We ignore him and turn our attention to our Ava and Indi who are also in the area. Cara gives a demo of a few of the Parelli Natural Horsemanship Level 1 games with Ava. For those of you know the games we were focussing on circle and yoyo games to demonstrate how very subtle movements could have your horse manoeuvring around you quite precisely. We also worked on the friendly game with scary objects to show how giving your horse more confidence stops spooking. And finally, the simple task of leading your horse...with your body language. Thankfully, Ava played to the crowd and really made it all look very easy. Nikki then completed a similar exercise with Indi, our 14HH Irish Cob. He might not look the most agile of creatures standing there with his hairy legs, but he showed that it isn't just Ava that can dance.

Now it was Emma's turn. First we wanted her to get the feel of things without Frankie. So Emma played some games with Ava. And of course Ava enjoyed playing games with Emma. For a minute there I thought Ava was trying to show me up and then I realised, she was merely trying to make a point. When Cara was leading Ava, she could run around, Ava would follow in hot pursuit but slam on the breaks the instant Cara stopped, never once touching Cara until asked to. Yet when Emma walked and then came to a stop, Ava walked straight into her. Emma had her lightbulb moment and realised that although she is saying what she means, she did not mean what she was saying. This time, Emma picked up her energy and when she stopped, she meant it. Ava respected Emma's space and stopped maintaining a distance. Emma had got the hang of things with Ava, which really meant she just became really aware of her own body language and what she actually wants to say.

Now work started on Frankie. First to test his brakes – wallop – he walked straight into my elbow which seemed to appear from nowhere. He is startled. When I stopped and he didn't want to, he expected me to move. Instead I just lifted my elbow nearest him to point upwards and he walked into it. He didn't like that. A few more times he tried to either run over me, which met with my elbow, or run round me, until Ava very tactfully reminded him to stay away from the edge of the arena and keep his eyes on the game. The game we were playing was merely following any dancers etiquette rules, this is my personal space, keep out unless I ask you in. It's impossible to explain exactly what we did over the next 20 minutes of so, but we moved around and there was pressure and release, my space was defended, he was invited in, all the while keep changing, keep giving



him things to think about. Then the brakes test at trot...he stopped like a pro.

This one session did not 'fix' Frankie. Frankie does not need 'fixed' he is just like a cheeky teenager flexing his muscles and testing everyone he meets in the only way he knows how – to physically push the boundaries and to push your buttons. By teaching Frankie to seek release from pressure, life becomes a lot gentler and more productive. We do not all need to be the Chief Executive, this is a Partnership between my horse and I, but I am the 51% shareholder. I always like to think that the extra 1% we get is just to make up for our small size so we can play with our horses safely.

We then worked on bridling. The key is it not being about bridling. If you are in a hurry to put on a bridle you will never train your horse to bridle well. Training takes a little time and patients, never start something you can't finish because you are in a rush. The issue was in fact his ears. He was happy to have the bit, just would reach his neck up so you couldn't touch his ears. So let's touch his ears. If you can't reach, get a longer arm. In the end we used a dressage whip with a plastic bag tied to the end of it. Never did we hit Frankie with the stick, we only played the friendly game. We rubbed the bag on him where he could tolerate it and as soon as he stopped moving and relaxed, we would withdraw the stick (release the pressure). We repeated this working up towards his head and eventually his ears, by which point you could rustle that bag between his ears all day. Then we put the bridle on. Again, Frankie will continue to test this. Consistent handling, making him realise the pressure stops when he stops and relaxes then makes tacking up much less stressful and couple this with stimulating riding and the boy will be taking himself off to the tack room each morning.

And with that, his wee brain having had a good work out, we rode to the beach. Here Frankie put in his final test. If we had more time, I would have liked to give Frankie a break, he had already had a lot to take in and I expect that is why he resisted once we got to the water's edge. He rode down to the beach beautifully and relaxed, his mind in a whirl no doubt. We reached a river, one he has never been over despite several previous attempts, and he walks straight through it. So far so good. He also walks straight up to the sea edge, but then he remembers, or protests from overload I don't know which, but he plants his feet and the resistance starts. Not wanting to leave Emma with a losing battle on her hands, we work through this. I'll be honest, it takes a lot of pressure to get Frankie in the water. Nothing aggressive or mean. Just saying what you mean and meaning it. By this point Emma too was mentally drained. We did have a few chuckles at the situation, which was good for relieving tensions. We were laughing about how often Emma said good boy or clucked at Frankie like he was a chicken even when he was being as stubborn as a mule and not doing anything. If he isn't being good, don't tell him he is, otherwise it loses its value. Emma said it was a habit she had developed from when she backed Frankie. It was like saying good boy to him actually reassured her that he was going to be a good boy...horses are not that complicated, for them it either is or it isn't.

So we sit on the shore line, he stamps and paws and even throws in a couple of half heated rears. But as the light is fading, he finally realises we are not giving up. He has a choice. Walk into the water, or stay here. He paddles. We do not push it. Today has been about lots of lessons for Frankie and we want to end on a success for us all. He has his wee paddle and we ride home. By this point you can see him really tire mentally. The key is knowing when to quit. Not because you can't win, but because you have come to the end of a successful lesson and that is enough for one day. In retrospect I would have rather we did the beach ride on a second day, but time didn't permit, as life often does not. However, by ensuring that we did finish on a success (albeit a smaller one), Emma was able to go on from this experience and now Frankie is confident and willing in the water.



I wish we'd had more time with these guys but I am glad we were able to start the process. Emma just needed a few tools and some reassurance from us that she was on the right track so she could safely enjoy her horse. We can't wait to catch up with them this year when they are already signed up to another training session and a separate riding day.

At the time we were with Emma, she provided some lovely feedback for us. Recently I asked Emma to reflect on what this has actually meant for her and Frankie over the last 12 months and this is how she describes her Wilder Ways experience with Frankie.

"I learned and realised from Cara and Nikki's courage and positivity that I should remember to treat Frankie as I would like to be treated myself, fair but firm. I realised I needed to go back to basics and concentrate on ground work and work on our relationship to gain each other's trust. To think more positively – We over ME – We will get in the sea, we will go through that river, we will canter along that beach, we will safely pass that scary tractor – We will stay together, I will not fall off LOL!

The changes are unbelievable, he is so much more willing and we have so much more trust in each other. He is even nicer to be around during feeding time! We have been continuing to play Parelli games – Thanks to Cara and Nikki's tips I am so much more interested in different Natural Horsemanship techniques as I can see the benefits. I have even been tarpaulin training and working in the sea!"

While it is always lovely to receive positive feedback, more than that we most love to see what is going to happen next. Emma now has clear goals and we really look forward to crossing paths with her along her journey. From the woman we first met who looked nervous, if not slightly afraid of her own horse...well look at her now...."My goals in 2018 are work on the collection and balance of our canter. To tech Frankie to jump and build my jumping confidence as I used to love it! To sit my trailer licence, purchase a trailer and start attending mainland shows with Frankie in 2018. I also plan to use my experience with Frankie to break my new horse – yes I am getting another one!"

So our wee challenge to you, in fact I guess it's our own mantra for training really, *say what you mean and mean what you say*, and perhaps even more importantly, *know when to stop*.

Thanks for letting us share some of our stories with you. We hope our Case Studies may inspire an adventure for you and your horse. If you would like any further information about any of the

techniques we have tried to explain, please contact us at adventures@wilderways.scot or 07826 273 291.

Best wishes
Cara, Nikki & The Herd.