

KAIMANAWAS OF NEW ZEALAND

No. 3 – December 2015

Claire Ewen worked closely with Robin Sisley when she received a colt and filly from the 2014 muster.

When did you get your Kaimanawas? Tiger Lilly (Tilly) and Luka are both rising 2 years, from the 2014 muster.



Why did you choose to get a Kaimanawa? I fell in love with the breed as my first pony Kairo was a Kaimanawa. She was a hardy, intelligent, lovely natured mare. After going on one of the ranges trips and seeing them running free I knew I wanted to get involved.

How would you describe your Kaimanawas? Tilly is a beautiful and very affectionate filly – she loves people and attention. She's a clever wee girl, very switched on, and loves showing off

when she learns new things. Luka is a sweet boy, and once he has your trust he will do anything for you. He can be quite unsure of new people, but he's a quick learner and very willing.

Before you got your Kaimanawas, what was your background and experience with horses? I was working at RDA Waikato as the assistance coordinator when the 2014 muster was approaching. I was fairly experienced with horses but had never trained any, or worked much with young horses. From a very young age I was crazy about all things horse and I did whatever I could to get near them. Over the years I spent time working for RDA, having riding lessons, helping with holiday programs, spending a season in the USA at a children's summer camp helping in the trekking centre, studying at Kyrewood equestrian in Palmerston North, working as a show groom, and I got my first pony Kairo when I was 18.



How did you feel when they were delivered? I was over the moon. I couldn't believe that my little ponies were here. I just about burst into tears as I was so excited, but I really felt for them as they had been through so much.

What did you do in the first few weeks? We let them settle in and get used to being around people. I picked a lot of grass and sat quietly while they ate next to me, mucked out the yards, spent a lot of time reading, and just being in their presence without asking anything of them. I was so stoked during the first few days when they lay down for a snooze while I was sitting in the yard. We got them out onto the grass and used to tape fences.



What did you do in the next few months? We got the ponies following me up to the yards, giving them a feed and enjoying their learning environment. Robin worked with a catching pole and rope as I watched and absorbed as much as I could. Soon enough they were comfortable with the routine. Luka needed a lot more time to settle, but before too long I was able to groom them both. We slowly started teaching them to pick up their feet and started getting them used to lead ropes and halters.

Do you have a favourite memory from the first year? So many memories: when they first ate out of my hand; at 2 weeks Tilly walked up to me for scratches with no food around; getting the halter on Luka after 7 months; when they started whinnying when they saw me arrive at the paddock. The highlight was the first time I approached them while they were down having a snooze and they felt safe enough that I got to give them both a big cuddle.



What has been your biggest challenge? Luka's aggressive behaviour was a challenge. He was very defensive to begin with and tried to go for a few people. I believe he needed time to be left alone to realise we weren't going to hurt him and that he could trust us. With careful handling and time he has shown me what a lovely boy he is, and I couldn't be prouder of him.

What has been your biggest success? I don't know where to start – these ponies have blown me away throughout this journey. We are constantly learning together. In October we float trained them in less than a week for the trip home, and once here they settled in beautifully and explored their new home. After their first hoof trim the farrier was delighted with how sensible they were. If the yards are left open they go to their separate pens and wait for me in the afternoon. When I climb the rails they stand alongside so I can practise leaning over and preparing them for backing in the future. They are such characters.



Do you have some plans for your Kaimanawa? I just want to enjoy them and go on adventures together. I'd love to take them to the beach, forest, maybe do some in-hand shows, and compete at the Kaimanawa national show. When they're old enough I hope to start them under saddle for trekking and pleasure riding.

What advice would you offer someone planning to get a Kaimanawa? You are in for an amazing journey. This has been an incredible opportunity and more than I ever imagined. Kaimanawas are such special creatures – to bond with them and gain their trust is a wonderful experience. Just remember it's not a race, and not to rush your horse. Time is never wasted bonding, giving them scratches and reassurance. Work at a pace they're comfortable with and they will trust you more. Finish on a good note every time, and it's better to end the lesson early than to push your horse too far. When you see some progress back off, give your horse a break and lots of praise. Take in environmental factors – if it's too windy, there's too much going on, or the horses are distracted, don't worry as there's always another day. Celebrate each and every little milestone along the way as that's what it's all about. Kaimanawas will be your friend for life.

What facilities did you find useful to begin with? We were very lucky to have the ponies delivered to Robin Sisley's yards. The yards and large undercover sand area were fantastic when the ponies first arrived. The property was deer fenced and we used tape for temporary fences.

What assistance did you have? I could not have done it without the help of my friend Robin Sisley. Robin allowed me to use her facilities and took me under her wing to teach me the kind and gentle approach to horse training. I will be forever thankful that our paths crossed. Michele Haultain



from the KHH committee was always willing to help with any queries. Jacqui Chapman has been a huge help – she's my right hand and has been with us through everything. Carlos Tabernerri, a clinician at Equidays, was amazing – his focus is on the horses welfare and building a good foundation through trust and understanding, never force. His clinics were a game-changer to all that witnessed them.

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.

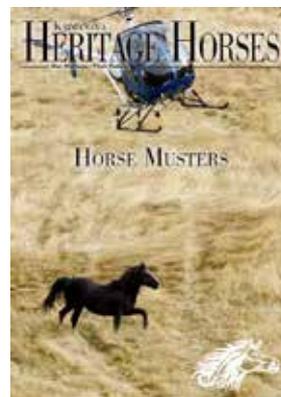
Robin Sisley

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