

British riders are joined by those from Ireland and the United States for this year's Pony Club Hunting Exchange – in very British weather.

SARA WALKER looks at the benefits of equestrian exchange visits abroad – and how you can get your own organisation involved.

Equestrian exchange

If you're in an equestrian club or organisation, you'll know just how worthwhile membership can be, with benefits such as instruction, demonstrations and general support from like-minded friends and colleagues. Your club can also be a stepping stone to different equestrian cultures and ideas. Organising an exchange visit or twinning your club with another abroad is a great way to experience different types of riding, skills, terrains, scenery and horse breeds.

PONY CLUB HUNTING EXCHANGE

Since 1929, the Pony Club has worked to promote knowledge in young riders. It is still hugely influential and now has several international branches. As part of a commitment to helping riders increase their equestrian experience, the Pony Club runs its Hunting Exchange.

Jo Hayward, its mounted games and overseas branches secretary, helps to organise this activity-based event, which currently involves the United States, United Kingdom and Ireland, with each country selecting four or five riders to travel to the host country.

The United Kingdom hosted the 2013 exchange and split the visit between Buckinghamshire and Hereford to give the riders as much variation as possible.

"This year, as we were visiting two areas, we were essentially organising two trips," says Jo. "With host families and hunts all involved, there were 37 helpers as well. These were people who opened their house for guests, lent their horses, cooked, acted as a taxi service and generally worked away behind the scenes to make sure it all ran smoothly.

"The local hunts really get behind the Pony Club scheme. This year, we also went to Cheltenham racecourse and attended a hunt pantomime."

"The local hunts really get behind the scheme, and the exchange riders come over for about 10 days, of which they spend six or so hunting. This year we also went to Cheltenham racecourse, visited hunt kennels and attended a hunt pantomime – I'm not sure what the American contingent made of that!"

of the British riders picked for the 2013 exchange and spent the visit hunting with four different hunts, including a beagle pack.

He has plans to keep in touch with his fellow riders and remains enthusiastic about the trip. "It was a lovely mix of hunting and the kindness of everyone who went out of their way to look after us," he says.

"The riders stay in small groups in host homes and join in with their host family's life, including looking after any resident horses."

Most of the riders picked are aged between 17 and 23, and all must be full members so that they can travel under Pony Club insurance.

Peter Richards, of the Pony Club's South Devon Hunt (Moorland) branch, was one

Jo adds: "The exchange doesn't necessarily run every year, as it needs to fit in with the hunting season. It's Ireland's turn to host next, so we'll get a break! It's hugely rewarding, though, and a great experience for everyone involved."

For more information about the Pony Club Hunting Exchange, log on to www.pclub.org and click on the "Member Activities" link.



Pony Club members and their foreign visitors enjoy sharing riding and other activities together.

‘Riders flung boots, hats, T-shirts and waterproofs into their bags in an attempt to outwit the unpredictable french autumn weather.’

RIDING CLUBS EXCHANGE VISITS

For those of us who aren't involved with a specific breed, skill or equestrian discipline, riding clubs organise some of the best exchange visits, which are suitable for almost anyone.

I spend a lot of time in south-west France, between Toulouse and the Pyrenees mountains, which mark the Spanish border, and was quickly persuaded to join the local riding club, the Centre Equestre Aurignac.

This club is already twinned with the Spanish club Bennebarre, on the other side of the mountains, and members make an annual trek to visit their equestrian counterparts.

“When I've ridden in Spain, the discovery of new countryside and different cultures is always a rich experience,” says club treasurer Jean François Zapater. “As I say to my Spanish friends, ‘es la diferencia que hace el sueño’ – it's the difference that makes it so special.”



Michel Ferbeyre, Debbie Robinson and Sara Walker hit the trail, as Lisa Pritchard (above) takes in the stunning scenery.

With the French club already so open to the benefits of the exchange visit, the idea of a British exchange quickly followed.

My British club, New Barn Riders, in Cheshire, was enthusiastic and the first visit took place last October.

Because the exchange was informal, riders organised their own flights, insurance and a share in a joint hire car, before flinging boots, hats, T-shirts and waterproofs into their bags

in an attempt to outwit the unpredictable French autumn weather.

Jean François was keen for us to see as much of the local countryside as possible, leading us on all-day rides that crossed hillsides, splashed through rivers, traversed forests and followed meandering tracks.

Members of the French club joined us on an ad hoc basis to ride and the week culminated with



Gill Newton, of the Centre Equestre Aurignac riding club, and Sara Walker explore the French countryside.

an “international farewell dinner”, where the British offerings of shepherd's pie and bread-and-butter pudding competed with French delicacies and some potent home-made local prune liqueur.

For me and my British friends, Lauren Roberts, Lisa Pritchard and Debbie Robinson, the visit was a chance to ride sure-footed, well-adapted horses over stunning terrain and discuss our shared interest's differences and similarities with sympathetic people.

“Exchanges, in my opinion, promote a better understanding of a country's culture and history – for me, a way of satisfying my natural curiosity and opening up a new world,” says the French club's chairman, Michel Ferbeyre.



Lisa Pritchard and Jean Francois Zapater saddle up for the day.



Time for a spot of lunch for the French and English riders...



...and a chance for the horses to rest.



The French riding club throws a farewell meal.



Left: American farriers Vern Powell, at the anvil, and the Edward Martin Cultural Exchange Program's Matt Lybeck work together at the Royal Show (now called the National Farriery Championships).

Below, top: American Brian Osbourne strikes for Steven Beane at the Great Yorkshire Show.

Below, middle: British exchange participant Martin Haige, at the anvil, is joined by Brian Osbourne.

Below, bottom: Former British Farriers & Blacksmiths Association presidents Richard Hurcomb and Craig D'Arcy work in Vern Powell's shop in the United States.



SKILLS EXCHANGE

Started in 1982, the Edward Martin Cultural Exchange is one of the longest running equestrian exchange visits, aiming to promote education and sharing of ideas between farriers from the United Kingdom and United States. Since the programme began, dozens of farriers have crossed the Atlantic to share their skills.

“We think British farriers are the best in the world – no surprise there!” says Amanda Hill, national secretary of the British Farriers' and Blacksmiths' Association (BFBA), which is responsible for organising the British side of the exchange.

“Students follow a training programme that lasts about four-and-a-half years. In the United States and Canada, the training might last only a few months, but most of their farriers do progress their training throughout their careers, as they do in the United Kingdom.

“In many countries, there's no legal requirement to be trained – or registered – at all. We take two American students a year for 90 days each and we've just started offering short exchanges of a couple of weeks.

“The students stay with host families, living, working and socialising with them. There's no set programme but, at the end of their visit, they're asked to steward at the International Team Horseshoeing Championships, in September.”

It's a requirement in the United Kingdom for farriers to be registered with the Farriers' Registration Council, so Amanda's organisation pays for temporary licences for the American students so that they can shoe legally.

“Shoeing styles in the UK and the US are different,” says BFBA president Cliff Barnes. “Whereas we use a hunter-type fullered shoe – with a groove, to give it more grip on tarmac roads – the Americans use ‘peg’ shoes, which tend to be flatter and were developed for

British and American teams take part in the International Team Horseshoeing Championships.



“The overall experience of the American Farriers Association’s Cultural Exchange Program is life-changing for many people.”

different disciplines, such as barrel racing and Western riding.

“American exchange students are always keen to learn how to make and fit fullered shoes, but it’s just as interesting for us to learn about their shoeing styles.”

Vern Powell, chairman of the American Farriers Association’s Cultural Exchange Program, is responsible for organising his country’s side of the exchange. The visit is very prestigious and the committee uses an extensive selection procedure to find the right candidates.

“The benefits of this programme are too many to list,” says Vern, “but the overall experience is life-changing for many people. The chance to ride with 12 different farriers for the summer, be totally immersed in another culture and get to see and experience so many new things is priceless.

“I would absolutely recommend this programme to anyone and, in fact, do when I talk to younger farriers over the course of every year both in the United Kingdom and the United States.”

For more information, log on to www.forgemagazine.co.uk.

DIY EXCHANGE

Organising your own exchange visit could be easier than you think. If you belong to an equestrian club, other countries could well have a similar organisation open to the idea of an exchange.

For example, Britain’s largest breed society, the Welsh Pony and Cob Society, is currently looking at the possibility of an exchange visit with Australia.

If you belong to a general riding club, start by asking other members for any contacts they have abroad. Visits are much easier to organise if you have a person already on the ground there and it’s a huge advantage to have someone who speaks the local language.

Don’t despair if you’re starting completely from scratch. Decide broadly which region and country you’d be interested in visiting and contact local tourist boards for a list of clubs. Alternatively, many countries have a governing body similar to the British Horse Society. In France, for example, it is the Fédération Française d’Equitation, to which clubs are encouraged to be affiliated. The FFE should be able to provide a list of affiliated clubs in your chosen region and you can then contact them individually.



DOGS AT RISK!

EVERY time our dogs leave the house, they are at risk of picking up worms. Some can cause damage to your pet and even be passed on to humans, with some nasty consequences.

Lungworm and heartworm, for example, can prove fatal for cats and dogs if not diagnosed and treated. There are reports of infestation throughout the United Kingdom, with symptoms that include coughing, breathlessness, vomiting and prolonged bleeding from cuts. Some dogs, however, show no symptoms at all until it is too late.

What can be done?

A routine worm count will reveal whether your dog is carrying a parasite burden and bring you peace of mind. They are quick and easy to do – a veterinary lab will analyse a small sample of your dog’s faeces to see what is happening in the gut and the findings will then be reported directly back to you.

Wormcount.com Veterinary Laboratory specialises in faecal worm counts, which are carried out by simply ordering a stool sample kit online and sending it back by post. You can have your pet tested for lungworm and other internal parasites at a surprisingly low cost, without having to wait for a vet referral.

This specialist laboratory tests for all roundworms, including toxocara worms (the ones that can cause blindness in humans), hook worms, wire worms and tapeworms, as well as lungworms.

A trained and qualified animal health adviser at Wormcount.com provides free professional advice on prevention and, where necessary, on correct and suitable methods for you to manage your parasite control, which might include the use of chemicals or herbal medicine. It’s all part of the service.

The worm count kit comes with very simple, easy-to-follow instructions and a special return envelope. Wormcount.com guarantees always to test samples on the day they are received.

Results are sent direct by email or text the same day, along with advice and recommendations on any further action that might be necessary.

The laboratory at Wormcount.com can test all animals, reptiles and birds. It screens for more than 100 parasites. A routine faecal egg count costs only £8.50 and a lungworm test £9.50. If both are bought together, there is a special offer combination kit costing only £15.

Order your kit online from www.wormcount.com or, for more information, telephone us on 07967 114030.

DOGS WITH LUNGWORM CAN LOOK PERFECTLY HEALTHY, BUT IT CAN BE FATAL IF NOT TREATED.

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