

WILDER WAYS

Straight from the horses mouth



IT IS THE CALL OF THE WILD, THE WILL OF THE HERD,
THE THUNDER OF HOOVES, THE POUND OF YOUR HEART.
IT IS RIDING ... WILDER WAYS.

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www.wilderways.scot



2023 SCHEDULE



2023 will be our 9th year of Wilder Ways adventuring. Much has changed over this time - the herd has grown from 2 horses to 22! Nikki & I are nearly a decade older and we'd like to think at least a little bit wiser. We've had over 2,000 riders through our doors to date, you've ranged from 4 years old to 81 years young and have come from nearly every corner of the world. Amongst you we've met all abilities of riders and all different appetites for adventure. This has enabled us to hone our products to the adventures that you love the best. It has also been a joy to observe what the horses enjoy. Over this same time we too have honed our own skills and passions and our 2023 schedule is set to focus on the best bits for all, for us, the herd and guests alike.

In 2023 we will be staying at home to run all our adventures from the Mull of Kintyre. Whilst this is in part to help us recoup after the implications of COVID on the business, we also want to make great use of all of our new facilities, including the arena, horseback archery equipment, show jumps and our brand new cross country course.



Our riding holidays enable guests to fully immerse themselves in our approach, our herd and our beautiful wilderness. We also believe our horses enjoy the holidays the most out of our products, since they get their own 'human' for the whole trip, which enables them to make connections and feel loved by their one in particular. The holidays are also our favourite product since we have time to get to know you and make meaningful connections. As such, in 2023 we will focus on our adventure holidays and therefore regrettably we will no longer be offering any half day rides. We will offer limited full day experiences, including jumping, horseback archery and beach rides. We will also continue to offer learning opportunities and lessons for our locals as we are passionate about life long learning.

Our adventure holidays will be split into two types. Our Wilderness Journeys, available to all riders and our Extreme Adventures, only available to experienced riders. The differentiation is designed to suit the needs of all and to give variety to our guests, our team and our horses. All our holidays will start with a session dedicated to horsemanship to enhance the experience for horse and rider. Horseback Archery is included to maximise empowerment opportunities, and jumping experiences will be available to those who have a hunger for leaps of faith!

[CLICK HERE TO BOOK YOUR 2023 ADVENTURE NOW](#)

2023 is set to be a truly immersive season. **Let yourself go. Go wild. Laugh often. Eat well. Breathe deeply. Sleep deeper. Challenge yourself. Fall in love with your steed and give them back even half of what they give you.**



THE VALUE OF HORSES



Value is defined as: 'the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something'. Many of us profess to be horse-lovers but have you ever considered what value horses are to you? **Can you set a price on it?**

I have devoted hours to mucking out, grooming, feeding, tending to my horses' needs and keeping their tack supple. This has cost me over the years, a significant proportion of my wages, all of my pocket money as a child, and a not insignificant toll on my muscles as I lug heavy sacks and bales around the place on their behalf. Why? What is it about these animals that drives us?

We have harnessed their endurance and intelligence in so many ways.

Now, however, many of their traditional uses have been overtaken by machines. Horses are predominantly seen as a luxury item, especially in the developed world, for recreation and sport. They are expensive to keep and require huge commitments in time and money to care for. Yet there are over 60 million domestic horses throughout the world and nearly a million horses within 400,000 horse owning households just in the UK.

large animal has also taught us, and our horse-loving children, a whole raft of valuable life-skills: responsibility, attention to detail, getting on even in the toughest weather and the importance of strength and fitness.

I would also note that the equestrian world is predominantly female, despite the heavy work and mud. We as women tend to undervalue what we do yet the reputation of 'horse-girls' is to be resilient and to have grit. I take great pride in this.

"THAT FEELING OF FREEDOM, PURE EXCITEMENT AND JOY AS YOU GALLOP FLAT OUT DOWN THE BEACH IS LIKE HARNESSING YOUR INNER CENTAUR."



Horses have always been a part of my life. That feeling of freedom, pure excitement and joy as you gallop flat out down the beach is like harnessing your inner centaur. It is, for me, the obvious reason that I devote so much time to them and why they are worth any amount of drudgery and, for many of us, it is the drudge that provides us with reason two. We love it: the mud, the muck, the smell of horse sweat, fresh straw and sweet hay, the pliant feel of well-oiled leather, the gleaming order of a well organised tack room...I could go on.

However, I think, for many of us, the main reason is the relationship that can develop between you and this incredible, characterful animal. A horse can listen and understand, communicate with you, mirror your emotions, and is willing to carry out the most obscure tasks on your behalf. Being a half of this partnership with an animal is a great honour.

Where else can you gain this much? Horses may not 'work' as they used to, but the equestrian relationship experience is enriching on so many levels. What is the value of horses? **Priceless.** I rest my case.

Another reason is just the joy of graft. Horses are hard work, but understanding the responsibility of caring for such a

-Nikki Belati



Throughout history, horses have been, as John Seymour puts it, 'a way to convert grass into power'. They have ploughed and pulled throughout our drive towards agriculture, increased the range and speed of transport both of people and goods, and facilitated communication over distance. Empires have been built on their strength and agility, we have ridden into battle on their shoulders and forced them to drag cannons through the mud.





THANK YOU - A 2022 ROUND UP

July to October we ran back to back holidays and we were definitely ready to take a break, but not before we completed this years big project – our brand new Cross Country Course! Better late than never but we can't wait to show this off this year. Lots of horseback archery and horsemanship have been enjoyed by all, in addition to our epic trail rides across the wilds of Kintyre. We swear the beaches have never looked so beautiful and the salty coastal air has never felt so fresh.



November saw us back at the Horsemanship Showcase to further develop our own skills and top up our ideas bank. We look forward to welcoming Sean Coleman to Scotland in May for our next Horsemanship clinic, so checkout our Clinics page- [click here for more details](#).

After the season to end all seasons, horses and humans are in dire need of a rest. Therefore we will close this winter until the end of February so we can all regroup and recharge ready for an action packed and empowering 2023. Thanks again for the overwhelming support last year – as ever we couldn't do all this without your amazing appetite for adventures."

*Nikki,
Cara &
The Herd
x*

We also ran our first pilot for therapy and well being holidays this year and we can not wait to run more of these. An amazing experience for guests and horses alike. We collaborated with a mindfulness and life coach from the USA and psychologist and therapist from Holland to offer these very fulfilling holidays. I think we could all do with prioritising a bit of personal time and space to breathe and just be.



At the end of April we set sail to Knoydart. It felt so good to be back in this wilderness after missing it for 2 years. It was also amazing to see our International guests return, how we've missed your wild enthusiasm for Scotland.



May & June went by in a blur and before we knew it we were home again just in time to shear the sheep before it all kicked off here.

Dare we say it, this year has been 'back to normal'? We started the year with the purchase of a new horse, Roxi, and hope was definitely in the air. But we had ourselves braced as it was set to be a busy year. Not only were we still catching up on rollovers from 2020 and 2021 but there were a whole load of new people desperate to get out on adventures after 2 years of lock down and adventure-deprivation.



2022 did not disappoint, it was our busiest season yet, and it was insanely intense! We hit the ground running with adventures at home in the Mull of Kintyre in April. We made good use of our new arena to run our first ever horsemanship clinic with Vladimir Mustakerski. It was a great success and lovely to see guests, both on their own horses and ours, able to enjoy this first '[Be with Me](#)' horsemanship clinic in the UK.





AN UNDERVALUED INDUSTRY - EVEN FROM WITHIN



Since their domestication some 6,000 years ago, horses have become a commodity. Rarely are they valued for their intrinsic worth, but routinely they are exploited for it. The commercialisation of horses is not only an ethical conundrum but can also be devastating to horse welfare.

If you piece all this together, increasing requirements from every angle and spiraling costs, horse riding stacks up as a pretty tricky business. Competition and market forces should, like evolution, lead to survival of the fittest. But what is the fittest and how do businesses survive this welfare/value dichotomy?

Thankfully horse welfare has improved substantially in recent times and high standards of horse care are greatly desired by our end users as well as horse owners. In addition to higher welfare requirements, consumers also expect evermore exquisite and authentic experiences. We welcome these developments wholeheartedly. The catch is that they come with a significant price tag and balancing what is best for the horse with what the consumer sees as 'value for money' is one of our hardest challenges.

As costs keep rising, the natural thing to do is increase price – it's the fundamental of business. However, this doesn't seem to have happened in our industry. Without profitability, the reality is, the horses work harder, and low prices undervalue the whole industry – from within. All that is left to do is run hard just to stand still, horses and staff exhausted, facilities tired and all standards, including customer experience, starting to fall. I'd describe that as an own goal!

At the same time, the regulatory framework has become cosmically complex, and this adds further significant cost and time. Environmental Directives, Animal Acts, Employment Regs, HACCP, RIDDOR, GDPR the list is mindboggling. And once you have all the paperwork sorted and internal procedures nailed, brace yourself for your annual inspections, and you are even expected to pay for the privilege! Only then can you turn your attention (and your budget) to the direct care and training of the horses, not to mention your staff, product development, marketing and sales. Oh yeah – and then you actually have to deliver it all to the customer! I know all businesses are affected by increasing demands over time but, as an industry, horse riding has been hit particularly hard.



Supply costs – well I need say no more. I understand I am preaching to the converted. Every one of us has been hit by (dare I say it) unprecedented increases in our cost of living, and this is only magnified the more mouths you must feed – and fun fact – horses eat 18 hours a day!

So how on earth are equestrian businesses to cope with this disparity between costs and price?



1) **Cut costs** - which means short cutting or short falling – below optimal horse welfare – run down and uninspired facilities – poor working standards – dull, risk averse customer experience. Is this the industry we want to be proud of, or the experience you want to look forward to? This picture has become all too common with very few businesses being sustainable, never mind being able to reinvest such that they can keep providing you with new and exciting adventures, learning opportunities and unadulterated horse time.

2) **Better pricing to match the costs** – as the meercats say, "simples". So why hasn't this happened? If the price does not reflect the costs this must mean that either a) the end user does not see the value of horses – do you? Or b) we providers don't value the horses or ourselves enough and are too scared to test the market with appropriate pricing. Why does our industry shy away from a fair price? Horse riding is so much more than just an activity – with lifelong learning, physical, emotional and wellbeing benefits. Does that 'value' not warrant a premium price?

3) **Other sources of income** - The only other industry I can think of with as much red tape as ours, with commercialised animals at its core and an equally unsustainable pricing mode - is agriculture. And how does it survive - massive subsidies. Despite horses eating grass, they do not qualify, nor do I want to see the horse industry subsidized, since my personal view is that it strangles innovation.

The only other alternative income source is charity, and again my personal values won't let me go there. Some riding businesses have gone down this route and several now have Go Fund Me pages. Some fundraise to feed their horses in the winter, whilst others seek charity to build stables and other fundamental infrastructure for their businesses. Charity belongs where it is needed, and I don't feel its place is to prop up private business, especially businesses providing leisure pursuits. If a quadbike company asked you to donate money to buy petrol to fuel the bikes or to build them a new shed – would you?

So, I find myself repeating my question - how on earth do we cope with this disparity between costs and price? If costs can't be cut and neither subsidies nor charity are valid (or ethical) options, prices must increase. But why isn't this happening?

I wondered, do other rural leisure activities have such low pricing – maybe it is a rural issue? However, comparable rural activities are generally priced quite a bit higher than horse riding.



Activity	Price	Unit	% Higher than 1hr riding lesson
Field Archery	£35	1hr basic session	Same
Paint Ball	£60	1.5hr session	15%
Quad Bike	£60-£155	1hr starter lesson - 2.5hr advanced	>40%
Surfing	£60	1hr private	70% (against our private rate)
Clay shooting	£50	1hr (30 shots)	70%

Of course, I do not know the intricate costings behind each of these businesses, but I am confident that our set up and running costs are significantly higher. And you can't switch off a horse when it's not in use, nor mothball it off season. So, if rurality is not the issue – what is?



It's a controversial and hot topic just now, but I raise the gender card! In my experience, these 'other' rural activities businesses are male dominated, whilst horse riding is typically more female led. Does that mean it is us women who are undervaluing our own worth, rather than horses being undervalued by the consumer?

At this stage I would love to plug the Beyond Borders PodCast we recorded for Diva ([click here to have a listen](#)). Whilst it was focused on our personal journey, I found myself talking about all the women I've met who deserve to be better valued, by themselves and others. And this got me thinking, perhaps this undervalue of women is fundamental to the issues we are seeing within the horse-riding industry. Please note, I am not placing blame here at anyone's door for 'why' this is the case, but I would like us gals to take some responsibility for trying to address it.

As with most things, I suspect the answer is, a bit of everything.

Fundamentally, I fear society does undervalue horses. Horses have become so familiar and 'accessible' that people are out of touch with their costs, complacent to their value and to the sacrifice of their service. Our industry needs to step up and better communicate with our customers on this.

"FUNDAMENTALLY, I
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UNDERVALUE HORSES."

In addition, I think we all must grow up a bit and accept that horses are an expensive pursuit and perhaps not accessible to everyone's budget. In a society of instant gratification, expectations are outstripping what is humanly possible under current pricing models. A riding instructor has recently posted a great version of 'We don't owe you affordability' (<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMFosYoxT>), which, for me, hits the nail on the head and provides much-needed inspiration.

Perhaps even more importantly, it is also up to our industry to empower women (& men) from within – to value all that we and our horses do to provide exceptional experiences to good folks like you.



So here is our opportunity to take some responsibility and put things right. Let's continue to proudly raise the standard of horse care and welfare, alongside the quality and integrity of equestrian experiences. We shall do so, unashamedly charging a fair price for this. The industry and consumers must work together to encourage improvements, not squeeze prices down to wounding and unsustainable levels. We hope that you will stand proudly beside us as we provide you with unforgettable adventures, whilst empowering and valuing your horses and hosts just as they deserve – together, let this be our legacy.

*-Cara
Belati*



WILDER WOODS

We have always been committed to environmental responsibility, both personally and as a business, and during a recent exercise to identify the core values of our business, it was flagged up as one of our top three values. Putting our money where our mouth is has, of course, significant challenges in time, money and practicality within our leisure tourism enterprise. However, putting environmental considerations at the core of our decision making is ensuring that we seek innovative solutions to some of our knottier issues.

We have invested in solar electricity and storage and are committed to buying local produce wherever possible. We recycle everything we can, we fix and reuse where possible, our pensions are green and even our sheepskin rugs are tanned organically. However, something we cannot control is the distance our riders travel to adventure with us. We are proud to welcome guests from all over the world, from the US, Canada, South Africa, Australia, but air travel is consistently highlighted as a major cause of carbon dioxide pollution.

Carbon offsetting schemes are offered now by most airlines but have something of a dubious reputation. Planting trees should show a net benefit to the environment but scratching the surface of many schemes has shown inappropriate species planted in inappropriate locations, with poor implications for third world development and local sustainability.

Here on the farm we appreciate our wooded landscape and use our trees to manage the rivers, to provide habitat for wildlife and shade and shelter for our animals. During our time here we have taken over the management of 27 acres of mixed woodland, removing old, strangling tree guards and non-native species. During 2022 we planted an additional 900 native trees, mainly along the riverbanks to replace senescent trees and reduce bank erosion.

All our new trees are of local provenance and are fertilized using only well-rotted horse compost (home produced 😊). We have also spent considerable effort reclaiming and reusing the old tree guards so that we are not increasing the production of single use plastic. As you can see, they are doing well.





If you are as passionate about the environment as we are, you can help us to plant and manage the woodland on and around the farm by joining our own carbon offsetting scheme 'Wilder Woods'. A typical return flight within Europe of about 1000km would take approximately 20 trees to offset the carbon used, whereas a flight from America would need more like 100 trees (79 New York, 123 Toronto), so we are offering you the opportunity to add some ecological value to the farm and blot up some CO2 at the same time.

Our trees cost about £2.50 per tree including delivery, tree guards and labour. To simplify matters we have set the price of offsetting a trip from Europe (20 trees) at £50 and from the US (100 trees) at £250. If you just want to contribute a smaller amount (or coming from within the UK) you can just go for 10 trees at £25. Just click the appropriate button on your booking form and whichever level you have chosen will be added to your invoice. We'll continue to send updates and post pictures of our growing woodlands on the website blog page and facebook. We hope that you will consider joining this scheme, both for yourselves and to make a genuine contribution to the wildlife and environment at Glen Kerran Farm.



EUROPE - 20 TREES - £50
 US - 100 TREES - £250
 WITHIN UK (OR SMALLER
 AMOUNT) - 10 TREES -
 £25



GET READY FOR 2023...



...YOUR ADVENTURE AWAITS!