

A SAFER FOOTING

When leading a pack string, one of the most important considerations on my mind is, can the mules and horses in the string handle the footing in the area that they are going to be asked to travel? The Olympic Mountain Range is strange in its appearance on a map, as it pops up almost in the middle of no where and is not connected with any foothills or other range. It is surrounded on all but one side by ocean or inland salt water. This gives it a very moist rainforest-like environment, making any smooth rock or bridge planking surface prone to slipping about 90% of the time. We do most of our volunteer packing in this area for the Olympic National Park and the Olympic National Forest, because of this exposure; we are always looking for the best form of traction on the shoes of our critters.

Borium (tungsten) crystals that have been brazed onto the metal horseshoes have been our method of choice for years and have worked very well. This requires an Oxy-acetylene gas torch and related equipment to apply these crystals.



Currently I have been learning how to take care of all of our farrier needs and began wondering if there may be a better mouse trap, rather than investing in a torch and the equipment to get the needed extra traction. The inter-net offered the opportunity to look into many

different traction options and the one that struck my fancy was the drive-in tungsten pins, as a replacement for the brazed on borium. These pins are manufactured by Michel Vaillant (a French firm) and distributed by Delta, a

horseshoeing mercantile supplier. They are the CW0 size, 5.1mm at the top and tapered to fit into a 4.6mm drilled hole, in the location of choice on the horseshoe. They offer the same kind of traction that



borium does, but are much easier to install and can be driven out and used repeatedly. Our observation is that they ought to be far easier on the animal's joints than heel and toe caulks and even borium. Because of their small size, they grab only when they need to and will pass easily through soft dirt and mud, allowing a more natural slip for the horse or mule's foot. The ease at which they are applied may be of some interest to farriers, since there is no need to lug around gas bottles and a torch. Once the shoe is shaped, simply clamp the shoe into a vise and drill the holes where you deem necessary and



drive the pins into these holes (with an old hammer). If additional light hammering on the shoe becomes necessary for shaping, it maybe ok but do not hammer in the area of the holes after you

have installed the pins as this may distort the holes and the pins may come out. To re-use, at the time of shoe replacement, simply drive the pin out of the old shoe with a punch and put it in the new shoe. I suggest that you drive them out over a hardy hole in the anvil or over another piece of metal with a hole in it. These pins are so hard that they will easily dimple an anvil as well as any hammer you will be using to drive them in. We are very pleased with their performance and intend to continue using them on all of our shod stock.



I obtained my tungsten pins from Olympia Farrier Supply at www.olyfarrier.com . At the time of this writing these pins cost \$.75 each in a lot of 100 and a free 4.6mm bit was included. I wish to thank Sandy Craig, the farrier in the photos, a fine Olympia, Washington area Natural Balance farrier and graduate of the Mission Horseshoing School in Snohomish, Washington.

TUNGSTEN

Symbol W

A hard, gray to white metallic element that is very resistant to corrosion. It has the highest melting point of all elements and it retains its strength at high temperatures. It

is used to make light-bulb filaments and to increase the hardness and strength of steel. Atomic number 74; atomic weight 183.84; melting point 3,410°C; boiling point 5,900°C; specific gravity 19.3 (20°C); valence 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Also called *wolfram*.

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