

LABYRINTH PATHWAYS

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The Troy Ride: A Labyrinth for Horses : Cordelia Rose

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The Troy Ride: A Labyrinth for Horses

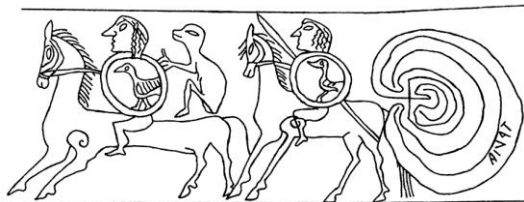
Cordelia Rose

Interest in equine labyrinths has increased dramatically in the early 21st century. A survey conducted by Jan Hornford in 2010 shows different uses such as training for horses and riders; calming effect for horses; and equine assisted therapy for those with physical disabilities or other special needs. Working with my brother Ben Nicholson, a labyrinth designer, I have used an equine labyrinth since 2002 at Whitewater Mesa Labyrinths in New Mexico. To bring this new discipline to a wider audience, an Equine Labyrinth Workshop was conducted at the 2010 Labyrinth Society Gathering in New Harmony, Indiana.

The New Harmony Equine Labyrinth project focused on two different topics: the recreation of an eight-horse Troy Ride ceremony, based on a description in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and a demonstration of the therapeutic use of Equine Labyrinths. To accomplish this project would require months of dedicated research and training, and the Posey County Saddle Club of Indiana agreed to assemble a team of eight horses and riders. Over the next year, three different labyrinths were created before the final design and size were determined. Meanwhile research in the Southwest identified labyrinths being used for Equine Assisted Therapy and a short film was made on location in Arizona, at Therapeutic Riding of Tucson (TROT) and at Centaur Leadership Service, Prescott College, and this was also shown at the Equine Labyrinths Workshop in New Harmony.

For the first prototype equine labyrinth, the Classic labyrinth was employed, following the famous design etched onto the wine jar from Tragliatella, Italy, dating from c.630 BCE [see *Labyrinths & Mazes*, Jeff Saward, p.43]. The seven circuit design was laid out on the dirt of the Posey County Fairground using the same white lime that horses are familiar with during competition rides. Interest was such that five riders and extra horses arrived, and more were summoned by cell phone, to be introduced to riding in a labyrinth.

*Riders exiting a
labyrinth inscribed
with the word
TRUIA (Troy) on the
Tragliatella Vase.
Graphic: Jeff Saward*

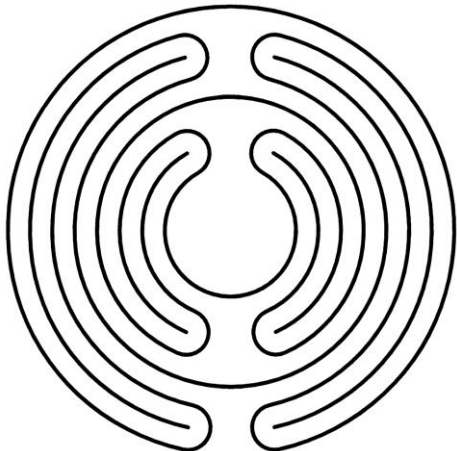


Riding multiple horses in the labyrinth, we learned several things quickly - the most dramatic being that eight horses will not fit in the center of a conventional classic labyrinth! Another hurdle to the project was that because horses are herd animals, they like to run in the same direction, so it is counter intuitive for them to go between or at each other in close quarters without being trained to do so. Furthermore, our initial 3 foot wide paths were not wide enough to allow horses to pass between each other.

The horses assembled had been trained for competition and trail riding, so would clearly require extra training by their riders to negotiate the labyrinth and get on together amicably. Despite these problems, the Posey County Saddle Club riders immediately saw the benefits of riding their horses in a labyrinth and we agreed to meet again the following year, with a new design that would solve the problems encountered in the first trial ride.

Interpreting the image of a pair of horses riding out of the labyrinth together on the Tragliatella Wine Jar and reading the animated poetry of Virgil's description of the Troy Ride suggested we would require a brand new labyrinth design. Jeff Saward became closely involved in the project and after listening to the practical difficulties of riding eight horses in a tight space, and wanting to remain faithful to Virgil's description, he designed a twinned classical labyrinth. With this new design it would be possible to reenact the escape on horseback of Helen's son Iulus from the Siege of Troy, whilst Virgil's story was read out loud, so the spectator could understand the connection between the riding, the image, and the story.

This second version, made in 2009, incorporated 3 foot 6 inch paths and a 20 foot diameter center circle. As the form of the ride was developed, the design proved perfect and the dimensions were further refined. The final version used 4 foot wide paths, allowing for horses to be ridden between each other without knocking stirrups. The entrances to the labyrinth and the center were made 8 foot wide, to accommodate two horses as they entered and exited. Furthermore, the center itself was increased to 30 foot, allowing eight horses to circle each other in opposite directions and then group four on each side, ready to ride out in pairs on opposite sides of the labyrinth. The total diameter of the design was now 80 feet, a perfect size for use by the horses.



*The Troy Ride Labyrinth.
Graphic: Jeff Saward*

During the final six months of practice, the third version was made at full-scale and sessions were filmed to help riders see the difficulties as the Trojan Ride was developed. The riders were divided into two teams of ‘warriors,’ with identifying red and yellow colors on their denim jackets. It was determined to ride the labyrinth at a walk rather than a gallop, but it still required riders to keep an eye on each other and go faster on the outside paths, and slow almost to a standstill on the inside paths, so that the horses formed diagonal and radial lines across the labyrinth and all turned corresponding corners at the same moment.

To demonstrate training for the warriors, two talented competition riders practiced riding their horses through the labyrinth at speed, turning on a dime as they met each other at the mirrored turns in the labyrinth’s paths. If the Troy Ride labyrinth was ridden at speed with eight horses it would develop great agility and courage in both horses and riders!



The Troy Ride Labyrinth ridden at a gallop. Photo: Jim Buchanan

For the Equine Labyrinth Workshop at the 2010 Gathering in New Harmony the Troy Ride labyrinth was built on the lawn between the Wabash River and the Atheneum Visitor Center. The Atheneum is a striking building designed by Richard Meier, with decks at different levels that were perfect for spectators to safely view the equine labyrinths, which were wonderful to see from above. The labyrinth was built out of leaf mold mounded 4 inches high and 8 inches wide covered with athletic field lime to delineate the paths. The material was safe for horses and they were familiar with the stark whiteness of lime - it also looked good against the green grass and the white Atheneum building. These materials would not be suitable for a permanent equine labyrinth however, as they required daily maintenance to remove the footmarks of horses, deer, dogs and rabbits - not to mention

the tire tracks of visitor's bicycles and scooters! During the performance, the Troy Ride passage from Dryden's poetic rendition of the *Aeneid* was read aloud, whilst the horses and riders made their turns in perfect synchronicity, a breathtaking sight.



The Troy Riders in formation. Photo: Jeff Saward

A second nine circuit labyrinth was also built alongside, of the same materials. The design, known as Syzygy, was initially designed by Ben Nicholson for the author and her horse, who ride steep switchback trails in the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico, and was designed to have narrow paths and many tight turns that flick back and forth, to train horses for trail riding. During the workshop, equine chiropractor Louise Cash narrated a ride through this labyrinth, by a young horse that had never seen a labyrinth before. It was coaxed into the labyrinth behind a horse familiar with labyrinths and the attendees readily saw the difficulties the young horse encountered, making the turns and meeting another horse coming from unexpected directions. The difference in attention, agility and flexibility between the two horses, and therefore the gains made by riding in labyrinths, were immediately apparent.



The Syzygy Labyrinth

Our thanks go to the Posey County Saddle Club riders who performed in the Equine Labyrinth Workshop: Janice and Keith Woods, Phillona Steele, Angie Stewart, Sue Aldrich (who kindly lent Cordelia a labyrinth trained horse to ride), Misty Watson and Jennifer O'Neil.

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