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Horsing around on the BIG ISLAND

Friday, August 24, 2007 10:08 AM HST

PBS show 'Equitrekking' shoots segment here

by John Burnett
Tribune-Herald Staff Writer

Her presence on the Big Island didn't attract the kind of attention that surrounded the local shoot for the fourth installment of the Indiana Jones adventures. But Darley Newman experienced some real life adventures that would make Harrison Ford's July stay here seem tame by comparison.

Newman is producer and host of PBS-TV's "Equitrekking," a show about real-life globetrotting -- on horseback.

"Actually, we were in Hilo for the (Aug. 13) earthquake," Newman said while basking on the beach at the Kohala Coast's Fairmont Orchid Resort. "That was my first earthquake experience. That was kind of interesting. Then, we ended up leaving Hilo early because of Hurricane Flossie. It was becoming a tropical storm, but nonetheless, conditions were less than ideal for filming. So we ended up coming to Waimea a little bit early.

"Then, we were in Waipio Valley and it was interesting because there was, I guess, a tsunami watch (actually a tsunami advisory) going on. It was very brief while were there. Then, we were at Parker Ranch and there was a wildfire nearby."

Newman came to the Big Island with her husband and executive producer, Chip Ward, and her director of photography, Greg Barna, to film an episode of their program, which travels to far-flung locales to explore the terrain on horseback. The Myrtle Beach, S.C., native, who has filmed in places as remote as Ireland and Iceland, came to the Big Island after filming for an episode of the half-hour program on Maui.



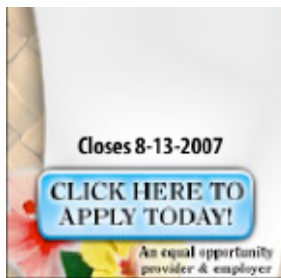
Darley Newman, left front, rides with Maile Hannum, front right, of Na'alapa Stables at Kahua Ranch. Darienne Hannum, left back, and Samantha Glisson, right back, also join in on the Big Island ride for the PBS TV show called "Equitrekking." - Photos By Chip Ward/Equitrekking

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"When you travel on horseback, you interact a lot with local people; you ride the local breed," she said. "You get to places that you wouldn't normally get to necessarily by car, or you may not want to hike to, like Haleakala Crater. I was watching those hikers going up and down and thinking, 'I'm glad to be on horseback!' I think it's a fabulous way to travel."

While in Waimea, Newman and crew filmed at Parker Ranch and Kahua Ranch. They also experienced a slice of what's left of the "real Hawaii" with a ride in the Hamakua Coast's secluded Waipio Valley.

"Waipio was really neat, because we rode a Hawaiian horse, which is a breed that they have that are running wild down in the valley," she said. "And Maile Hannum was born and raised around there, and actually trained the horses that we rode there -- and they were fabulous.

"They were saying before we took the ride that the horses are a tough breed, very independent. They survived in this valley and they're some of just a few horses they can take down there on tours. And that was really interesting, because on our show, we look at different breeds of horses wherever we go.

"I've never been anywhere like that. There were the rivers and also the black sand beach, but we didn't go over there on horseback. We did go see it though, because I'd never seen a black sand beach before, so that was really cool.

"You're riding through rivers and it's so lush and beautiful down there and the history is really interesting, you know, 'The Valley of Kings.' And being down there with someone who grew up there, I thought it was great to get that insight."

Newman said it was a different experience seeing horses unstabled, uncorralled and unconcerned about their surroundings or the presence of humans.

"There was a mare in this place called the fruit orchard," she said. "There was fruit everywhere and this old mare was walking around and didn't think at all to be afraid of us or being alone or anything."

Newman was asked if she had heard about the shootings of several horses in the valley about a year ago by a farmer who claimed the horses were trampling his taro.

"I did read about that and did some research about the controversy surrounding the horses down there, as well," she said. "Now that I've been there, I'm interested in keeping up with what happens with the horses in the valley."

With "Equitrekking," the telegenic Newman, who worked behind the camera on CBS News' "48 Hours" and on the PBS "Frontline" documentary "Missile Wars," came upon an idea that combined two of her passions, plus her vocation.

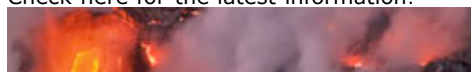
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"I've always loved horses and I've always loved traveling and I was working in television," she said. "I thought it would be such a great way to travel and see the world. I'd taken a riding vacation in North Carolina. I went to the Biltmore Estate with my mom and that's a very historic place. Those are trails that George Vanderbilt rode on during the Gilded Age.

"You know, I didn't own horses when I was a kid. I rode at camps in the summer and took lessons and that kind of thing. ... I love animals in general, but being introduced to horses at a young age, (riding) was something that I always wanted to pursue."

The dates and times of local airings are not yet known, but one of the sponsors of the show's first season, the Big Island Visitors Bureau, will receive a definite return on its investment when the show's second season airs on PBS starting in January.

"One of the reasons I wanted to come here is that I think the history of ranching is really interesting," Newman said. "But also, the Haleakala Crater ride on Maui is so unique. I don't know anywhere else where you can actually ride into the crater of a volcano.

"It's a lot of hard work, but this is my dream job, so I'm very happy to be on the Big Island and tour on horseback here."

On the Internet: <http://www.equitrekking.com>.

John Burnett can be reached at jburnett@hawaiitribune-herald.com.

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