

Simon Leaning Clinic Niagara Falls Canada April 2008

On a whim I signed up in snowy January for Simon's April 2008 clinic at Tee Creek Farm near Niagara Falls, Canada. Tee Creek is fairly close for me, spring will come, and this chap is from Australia.... should be fun.

And fun it was! It was an inspirational learning experience as well - which was of course the point of it all. I was immediately drawn in by Simon's teaching manner and enthusiasm, and his excellent preparation. I have a problem being attentive (one of the joys of the senior years - that second childhood thing) but was easily able to focus on all aspects of Simon's presentation and didn't want to miss a word - serious or humorous. Failure to pay attention could mean missing key features - or the fun, and there were lots of laughs. Communication was a bit of an issue - until we identified the "tiles of the mob", and then we were merrily on our way to understanding "Austrine" English. Simon is articulate, expressive and entertaining; we all enjoyed his illustrative anecdotes as well.

This was a wonderfully novel and refreshing clinic experience. Simon's obvious passion for herding, for dogs and for stock, and his extensive knowledge, were soon evident. The focus was on function and partnership, on the work that good dogs eagerly do with stock to make life easier for the stock person. I appreciated the sense that Simon was happy to share with us whatever we could assimilate, of his knowledge and experience. I felt that he respected each handler's potential in partnership with his or her dog.

He presented us with a variety of challenges. For the novice this offered an exciting promise of what to work toward - and how to get started. For the experienced handlers he offered opportunities to work through various approaches and solutions.

Simon was patient and encouraging with all the humans, who ranged from novice through competent to very experienced. There were several breeds of dog including Corgi, Sheltie, German Shepherd and Beauceron - though nary a Kelpie to be found - and Simon handily adjusted his approach to each. His explanations and evaluations made sense.

Lessons were always well planned, questions and comments were invited and respectfully dealt with, and Simon's drawings were always a treat :o) It is a special aptitude to be both entertaining and instructive, and Simon has this skill. I never caught him checking his watch and never felt hurried, and yet everything moved along nicely. Exemplary time management. Video presentations during lunches were a bonus.

Fuelled by Dave Harris' marvellous home cooking and working with Kathy's well-prepared and co-operative sheep, and with the sun shining Warmly every day - Kathy and Dave offered a weather miracle! - We had a full and productive 4 days.

The clinic was such a treat and left me and my canine sidekick eager for more of the same. Laughter and learning, and encouraging the promise and potential of our dogs on stock - can it get any better? I have already signed up for the clinic at Tracy's (thank you Tracy!) In Michigan (Sept. '08) and my daughter will fly in from Calgary for the clinic. This is too exceptional an opportunity to miss; we both will thoroughly enjoy and benefit from Simon's clinic and we are happily looking forward to that weekend.

Jane Neysmith, Ontario