

A whorl, (also called a swirl, crown, cowlick or trichoglyph), is where the hair grows in different direction from the surrounding hair. Combined with other descriptive factors such as gender, age, colour, other markings and scars whorls are a one of the best ways to identify horses and ponies. Most horses have one somewhere on their face, although the position and shape varies. The whorl can be high, between the eyes, or low on the horse's face and be big, small, round, long, messy...some horses can even have two or more. Whorls can be found on other areas of the horse's body such as the neck, chest, belly and in front of the stifles. Whorls are formed by changes in direction of flow of the hair. Their recording is one of the oldest methods of identifying horses from birth, since their site and character vary to some degree in every animal. They may take various forms, depending on the interface at which two or more flows of hair meet, e.g. simple, tufted, linear, crested, feathered, and sinuous. A guide to the recognition of the various types of whorl is:

- Simple - a focal point into which the hairs seem to converge from different directions.
- Tufted - as for a simple whorl, but the hair converges and piles up into a tuft.
- Linear - two opposing sweeps of hair meet from diametrically opposite directions along a line. Crested - as for linear, but the hair from each of the two directions rises up to form a crest.
- Feathered - two sweeps of hair meet along a line but the direction of flow of each sweep is at an angle to the other so that together they form a feathered pattern.
- Sinuous - two opposing sweeps of hair meet along an irregular curving line.

Common places to look in each area are:

Head: mentally draw a line from the poll through the base of the forelock and down to the muzzle. This is the median line. A whorl can be described as median (along that midline), or in relation to it, i.e. right or left, working down from the forelock to the muzzle eg.

- Base of forelock
- Between eyes - for description, imagine lines across the face joining the upper, mid and lower level of the eyes and describe the location accordingly. Combined with the position relative to the median line, this should pinpoint the location clearly, and match your X on the diagram of course!
- Under Jaw - whorls along the lower jaw line are known as mandibular whorls or you can just say under lower jaw.
- Muzzle
- Base of Throat

As an example you might find a "median whorl upper eye level" i.e. the middle line between right/left and level with the top of the eyes.

Neck: mentally divide in three along the length - upper, mid and lower and locate according to these areas and the height on the neck (from crest to underside) as follows:

- Crest - along the top line of the neck, just below the root of the mane
- Side of neck - lower than crest, often along the jugular groove
- Down the front/lower side of the neck

So for example you might have "bilateral crest whorls, mid crest" i.e. a matched pair of simple whorls on either side of the neck.

- Body:
- Axillar - these are whorls found at the join of the chest and foreleg, and often come in pairs i.e. at the same point on both sides.
  - Flank/stifle area - a very common location and again sometimes feathered upward - mark the X and direction/extent of any feathering

As an example, you might see "whorl at flank, feathering up".

Legs: each leg marked separately.

The site of a whorl is recorded on the outline drawing with a black X. Record whether the whorl is clockwise CW or counter clockwise CCW.

Mark the direction with an arrow above the X. Anything other than a simple whorl is recorded with an X to mark the site and a line showing the direction and extent of the whorl.



Scars and/or unreadable brands can also be recorded. Chestnut patterns, unique as fingerprints, can also be used for identification. All four chestnuts can be photographed and submitted for identification. Trim long chestnuts close to the leg and clip and obscuring surrounding hair first.

If you have any difficulty describing the location or type of whorl/s take a nice clear photo of the whorl/s and send the photo/s attached to the whorl ID form.

