

Alberta Donkey and Mule Club News, September, 2011

By Alice Todd

On July 12, 2011 members from Alberta and BC met at the Calgary Stampede for 3 days of donkey and mule demonstrations. Tom Barker and Mavis Urlansky traveled from Falkland, BC and brought Ruby, a Peruvian mule and Bart, a yearling donkey who won Grand Champion at Bishop Mule Days in California. Joni Roberts from Foresburg, AB. brought her hinny Buddy and Matt Leopard brought our standard donkey Sonney who had been staying with Matt and Joni for the better part of the summer.

As for myself and my husband Ron and granddaughter, Dylan Todd, we also brought Mandi my mule, [also Peruvian] for the demonstrations, travelling the shortest distance from Nanton, AB. Last but not least were Bob Leggette and Ida Newell from Innisfail bringing Jessie, a quarter horse mule.

After a few hours of what seemed to be organized chaos, the mules were settled in their stalls and the booth was decorated. A sigh of relief and after some breakfast at Mel's place and we could start relaxing and settled in for a busy 3 days at the Stampede.

All club members spent time answering questions from passerby's. Barn tour guides would bring several guests to the booth and members would explain what donkeys and mules are used for today as well as explain the many purposes they had in past generations. The number one question asked was "What is the difference between a mule and a donkey"?

The ADMC provided at least two demonstrations each day. Jessie, driven by Bob Leggette stepped out so proud and showed how the animals can move out even in tight spaces. Matt Leopard to the delight of the audience, let our granddaughter Dylan help him drive Sonney. Buddy the hinny performed flawlessly before the crowds and demonstrated what an easy going fellow he was. Ruby ridden by Tom Barker and Mandi, ridden by Alice Todd did a great job of demonstrating how smooth mules are to ride and the various gaits that they have. Bart, the yearling donkey shown by Mavis Urlansky won everyone's hearts as he was so sweet and loved the folks and everyone wanted to take him home and hug him.

By Thursday night everyone was exhausted and it was time to get ready to go home. Although all tired and weary it was agreed that everyone had a great time and already talking about next year. The club is hoping to be invited back in 2012 for the Stampede's 100 birthday. If you would like to have these interesting equines present at a show in your town please inquire at www.albertadonkeyandmule.com



A short time after the Calgary demonstrations, we also attended the Club Hummingbird Trail Ride, July 22, 23, and 24. Club member Keith Kendrew organized the annual trail-riding event at the Hummingbird, west of Rocky Mountain House. Members arrived as early as Wednesday for several days of riding in awesome country. Trails were very well marked and although rocky were safe for a well-conditioned horse, donkey or mule.

There were over 20 riders on the weekend. Friday, July 22 was rainy, cold and wet but that did not deter the trail riders. Many completed the loop that led well into the valley and after crossing the Hummingbird river, returned back to camp on the other side of the valley. Despite some rain it was said the views were still remarkable.

Saturday everyone woke up to sunny skies and with 20 riders ready to ride the group broke into 2 smaller groups. Riders again took the loop and found it to have astounding views and so many nice spots to stop and have lunch or a rest. The second group took a shorter ride that took riders to higher elevations with breathtaking views. Saturday evening around the campfire was time for telling tales of various things that have happened over the years and reminiscing of days gone by. Makes a person realize they have missed a lot in the past but hope there will be many rides in the future to add new stories to the old.

Sunday morning a ride was organized to travel to the Burn. Blayne Johnson led us up the valley and then after some fairly steep climbs we were at a level where a forest fire had run rapid some several years before. Trail was well marked and again you would want your mode of transportation to be in good physical shape. It was on the elevation climb section of the ride that I was glad I was traveling on a four-legged animal as opposed to hiking.

After a much-needed rest for the animals and lunch for the riders we started the descent down the Burn. It was as steep going down as up, and when back on level ground all animals welcomed a nice cold drink from the many watering spots along the creek. After a quick snack on return to the camp we had to pack up and head home Sunday afternoon.

It was great to have so many members and past members attend the annual trail ride. Of the 20 animals approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ were long ears and $\frac{1}{2}$ horses. Organizer Keith Kendrew typically rides a big black donkey but was riding a mule for the weekend. He was undecided if he preferred the mule or the donkey. Many folks were checking dates in their 2012 calendars to make sure they organized time to get back to Hummingbird next year. My only suggestion would be – go earlier in the week and stay longer to enjoy the many beautiful sites and campfire stories that the Hummingbird has to offer.