

Alberta Donkey & Mule Club Newsletter, January 2010

[Thank you to **Fran Hobbs**, our secretary for writing this month's newsletter. Just a reminder that our Annual General Meeting is coming up on Sunday, March 7, at the Drop In Center, 5015-46 Ave in Ponoka, AB. Please bring Potluck and join us for dinner around noon; meeting to follow at 1:30 p.m. Everyone Welcome!] Marlene Quiring

Why A Mule? Why a Donkey? Why A.D.M.C.?

It doesn't always have to be the same sequence of events; get a donkey for the younger family members, or get a mule for the older riders, then join the Alberta Donkey & Mule Club. You can join the ADMC first and find out all about the animals before acquiring one or two ... or twenty. Or you can join the club, work a fund-raising casino in Red Deer or the Tees Longears Days, then go to some meetings and get to know the wide variety of people who are interested in the wide variety of activities that you can do with a donkey or a mule. Or you may bring your horse for a riding or driving clinic offered by the club but open to all equines, and come away wowed by what those mules can do with a lot less fuss than a horse. This time of year there are lots of local cutter rallies. Ponoka, Lacombe, Wetaskiwin and Rimbey are just a few. I haven't been to one yet that didn't have at least one team of mules in it. Check out our website to see some of the activities the club has planned for 2010. We won't hold it against you if you ride or drive a horse.

As one of many who have come over to the longears side, I've got nothing against horses. I've owned, liked and ridden quite a few breeds myself. But when normal wear & tear started to severely limit my time in the saddle, mules expanded it again. They opened up new vistas in the mountains. For someone nervous of heights, a sure-footed, bold mule was a delight. Smooth gaits were an added bonus; as was the weight-carrying abilities of a shorter animal for a less limber rider. I may have to put my mules in my will, given their longevity, but they sure look after themselves a lot better than horses. And they look after the horses in our herd that haven't noticed that the gate to fresh pasture or water is open, or a strange dog or coyote is slinking thru the herd.

As so often happens, we acquired a donkey when an older one needed a free home. "Dusty", a small standard, came with very little history. So we tried her driving that first Christmas. She wore her reindeer antlers and bells with stoic dignity and pulled the grandkids thru the snow to endless choruses of "Jingle Bells". She may not have stood well at first for trimming, but never budged when little hands groomed and hugged her. She had a strictly enforced load limit when ridden. But she was safe for young beginner riders, great along the highway, and oh so handy around the farm for packing electric fence posts, firewood, or dirt for the planters. You could drop the lead rope to push in the electric posts. When she tried to graze and stepped on it too often, Dusty would coil the rope in her lips and move along with you. She's retired to lawn mowing now. Her neat little feet don't make a mess of the wet lawn. She's a little hard on the marigolds, but does well on the thistles. It might take a pair of donkeys to replace her. I'm sure there's enough harness around here to break them to drive. I only wish I'd known how good-tempered donkeys were when I was trying to find good ponies for my own children.

I hope the New Year will bring you a new interest, to brighten the days until spring. Whether it's riding or driving, perhaps consider a longears. Ride a good mule/donkey long enough and the oddest thing happens. The view becomes so much better between those longears!



Taken in Late Fall at the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch in the Rocky Mountains, Twyla Daly [our treasurer] on her horse Luke and Blayne Johnson on his mule Myrtle.



Fran on one of her mules that carried her on many mountain miles, participating in the Jerry Tindell Clinic.