

Dental Care for Mules & Donkeys

By Marlene Malcher

www.mammothmules.com

I'd like to take this opportunity to discuss something I've seen very little written about on mules or donkeys, and that is dental care, specifically the problem of wolf teeth. I admit I'm a real dummy, but for some reason because I'd never heard of any Longears owner's having dental problems, I never even thought about my own mules having wolf teeth.

Yes, every horse I've ever ridden for myself has always had somewhat regular floating and ALWAYS been checked for wolf teeth, and had them removed. Are others like me and have been blindly assuming mules or donkeys have been immune to dental problems? Well, I'd like to set the record straight on wolf teeth...Yes, mules do get them.

Out of our four 2 and 3 year old mules they ALL had them and a trip to the dentist was quickly arranged for their removal. One 3 year old was having problems with her snaffle bit, which prompted me to consider teeth problems. *Do not automatically slap a severe bit in your animal's mouth when your animal has problems accepting the bit.* And remember, even your mules teeth need floating now and then, not just to correct chewing and digestion problems, but also sharp points can interfere with the action of the bit and cause head tossing, tooth grinding, bit chewing and so on.

The animal's pain and discomfort can cause many kinds of negative behavior. Ill-fitting equipment for whatever reason be it bit or saddle is very often overlooked as a cause of "bad behavior". It is much too often assumed by the rider that the animal is behaving badly on purpose, when in fact the poor beast is in pain and has no other way to defend itself.

I am often amazed at our lack of understanding that animals, like us, usually have a very good reason for their actions. This makes me wonder if this could be some of the explanation as to why so many "mule people" ride with such severe bits. Could it be that instead of finding out why their animal is fussing with a simple snaffle bit, they just assume the animal is being disagreeable and needs a more severe bit? If a severe bit was the only way I could control an animal I don't think I'd feel to proud of that. That goes for many horse riders too.

But back to the wolf teeth, do not confuse them with canine or bridle teeth that males get, but females usually don't. Wolf teeth usually appear in the upper jaw, just in front of the molars. They can be quite small, but sharp and are greatly irritated and cause much discomfort by the presence of a bit, ANY BIT! The only way to handle them is to have them removed.

So, PLEASE, if your animal has never been checked for wolf teeth, do them and yourself a big favor and get a vet to check or you can do it yourself by inserting your “least favorite finger” in the interdental space between the molars and incisors and feel for the presence of this offending and useless tooth.

You may be very happy you took the time to have you animals wolf teeth pulled and teeth floated, and I’m sure your animal will be so relieved you did. Remember, when your animal misbehaves he usually is in pain or discomfort, whether physical or mental, and it’s up to you to find the cause and remedy the situation.