

Alberta Donkey and Mule Club News, May, 2010

COMING EVENTS:

May 8-9. Driving Clinic for ALL equines in central AB. at the Donalda Arena. Co-sponsored by the ADMC and the Stonebridge Driving Club. Instructor is Cheryl Fotheringham, Driving Coach. For more information, check www.albertadonkeyandmule.com or Contact Colleen Campbell at 780 672-6105. Auditors Welcome! Starts at 9:00 am each day.

May 21- 23, Ft. Assiniboine Wildland Park Trail Ride. This is a great ride in some gorgeous sand hills so no shoes required. Lots of wildlife and history on the trail. Fred says he will have a shelter up with a stove. Water and a portapotty will be provided. Signs will go up Friday evening. There is lots of room to camp and it's always a great time and great riding. For more information, contact Fred Godberson at 780 674-5775

June 25 –27, Jerry Tindell Ground Work Clinic. This clinic is geared for young stock or problem stock or for those not feeling ready to ride.

June 28 – 30, Jerry Tindell Colt Starting Clinic. Jerry safely guides you along the steps to taking your first ride on your animal.

July 2 – 4, Jerry Tindell Basic Mule/horsemanship. Geared to those that have not taken one of Jerry's clinics yet.

July 5 –7, Jerry Tindell Intermediate Mule/horsemanship. This clinic is set up to progress for those that have previously taken a Tindell clinic.

All Jerry Tindell clinics will be held at the Lakedell arena, Westeros. AB. All clinics are open to mules, donkeys and horses. You do not have to be a club member. Contact Marlene Quiring at 403 783-5210 or email marlenequiring@hotmail.com or check Jerry's website at www.jerrytindell.com

The club received an e-mail from Mike Downing recently that included some very good points about handling our donkeys and mules. Mike lives at Lac La Nonne, northwest of Edmonton, and took part in the Sandhills ride a few years ago and plans to be back this year with a 4-up of donkeys. He owns two teams of large donkeys, which he uses for logging, since he heats his house with firewood. Here is some of the excellent information that Mike has passed along to Donna Quick who so kindly wrote the following.

I think the way to get to a donkey's mind is through friendship, love, and repetition. If you are willing to spend the time, the donkey will give it back 10-fold. I have found that you can't make a donkey do anything; the donkey has to trust you. Interacting and working with your donkeys, getting into situations where the donkey has to look to you for support will start to build a trust. I do everything in small increments and end every interaction on a positive. This will help the donkey want to continue building trust.

Every so often, change your routine in all aspects. As soon as you get a set program inside your donkey's head, they seem to get a one-track mind and are not open to trying new things. A donkey can usually stay two steps ahead of his owner mentally when in his safe zone. Do something completely different out of his zone and he will crash because he no longer has his two steps or the repetition to fall back on. All he has is you to look to for support.

I find that donkeys are very perceptive when it comes to an owner's mood. Just by the sound of my feet in the snow and the swish of my snow suit, they know. They are listening for how heavy you step and the speed at which you step. I also try to wear the same coveralls every time. This will make catching and interacting faster. Donkeys never change their coat or scent for life, so when you walk up to your donkey with new clothes, cologne, or a different hat and they shy a bit, take a look at yourself and think.

One of the things I do is go down to the hay feeder with my donkeys and pretend to eat. I just move around some, pull twine, or shake snow off. However, do not let your animals push you off your spot at the feeder. They are testing you to see who's boss. Don't give up your position. Act possessive, but within reason so as not to excite them. I usually do this for 30 minutes twice a day, just listening to them munching and also watching for behaviour traits amongst the herd and how they interact.

Our animals get bored with their winter routine: moving from the feeder to the water to the bedding and repeat. I try to keep the herd guessing by changing feed locations or hiding some feed here and there in the animals' environment to stimulate movement.

There is something to be said about having a team in your hands – all that power in front of you versus under you. Until you make 25 miles in a teamster's boots . . . well, it's hard to explain. The world just seems to make sense when you are behind a good working team. And a working animal is a happy animal.

I like using logs to start because they won't slide up and spook your animals, you can choose the weight of the pull, and it starts them on their way with crossing over on both front and back as the log goes around corners. The log also catches a lot of underbrush, making lots of extra noise.

I like to use different names for the animals for different tasks. When feeding or grooming or any other tasks around the yard, I call them by their pet names in a soothing tone. When harnessing up and working, I use their regular names. It seems to send a clearer message that it is time to work and I am now expecting their best behaviour. I use more confident tones but I don't excite them. Your animal is about to do something he probably deep down doesn't want to do, so he will be watching you for signs: weakness, fear, sweating, and overall body speed/movement.

I also find it helpful to go out among the animals in a no-stress situation before using them to check their mental level. I usually pet them in a normal fashion and then put some pressure on their weak spot, just as a test. If the animal is ill or rank, try another day.

When you are all hitched up, if you or your animal is having doubts, it's your call. I have taken some chances and had good luck – things went well – but I have also

had the exact opposite happen. The final decision is yours. It's no good having an animal in harness that really doesn't want to be there.

My donkeys also have taught me never to give up in all aspects of co-existing, especially catching. When there is a problem, I don't make a big deal or a fuss. I wait for the donkey to realize that running is work and that he should just let me catch him.

Having one-on-one interaction with your animal is important. It gives you a chance to let the animal tell you things it might not when around buddies. My animals know where the feed comes from on the property, so I stand in front of the location and pretend to drive or climb on. They will not want to leave as readily because of the food they think you're going to give them. I pet and move among the animals loose, drawing one out and maybe petting the shoulder, back, and then hip until I can get behind the animal without it kicking or walking away. This requires a lot of timing, patience, and knowing when your animal is no longer responding.

So get out there with your donkeys and mules, people!



Thank you to Mike and Donna for this article! Hope to see many of you at the Driving Clinic and at the Ft. Assiniboine Ride.

Marlene Quiring