

CHAPTER 1. SELECTION AND CARE

1.4 CARE OF DONKEYS

1.4.1 DAILY CARE OF DONKEYS

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the working day the donkey should be called and caught and a halter placed on its head - a good way is using a rope that passes behind the ears and around the nose (Fig. 1). Lead the donkey to a tree or post to groom and prepare it. Donkeys like routine, so use the same place each day. A

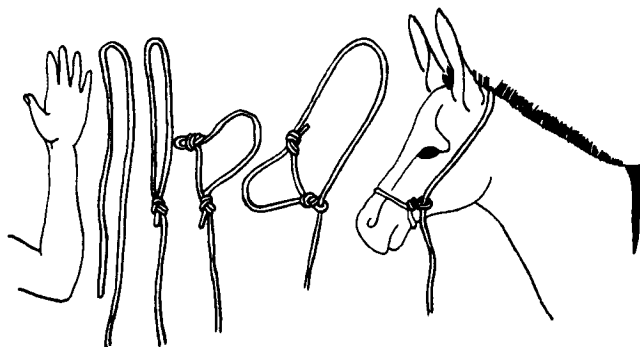


Fig. 1 Simple headrope or halter. Knot one end to make a small loop; the remaining length goes through the small loop to fit behind the ears.
Source: after Jones, 1991

hitching post is easily made by fixing two 1.5 metre upright poles in the ground 1.5 metres apart and joining them with a horizontal pole at about the height of the donkeys' nose (Fig. 2).

If the donkeys are being fed concentrates or byproducts, this is a good time to give some. Even if there is no concentrate to feed, have some form of treat to give them - perhaps some fruit peelings, a banana or a handful of maize. This will encourage the donkey to come and enjoy human attention.

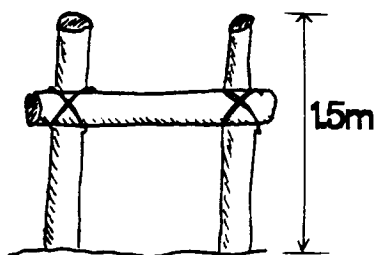


Fig. 2 Hitching post

GROOMING

Daily grooming is important for the health of working donkeys. Donkeys enjoy being groomed and so they become more tame and willing to obey. Grooming keeps the donkey's skin healthy and prevents dirt from causing harness sores. The most important area is the skin in contact with the harness and/or back pad. Grooming is usually done first with a stiff round

comb, made of plastic, hard rubber or metal (Fig. 3). This is used to loosen the dirt. A body brush is then used to remove the dirt. If such items cannot be purchased locally, a scrub-

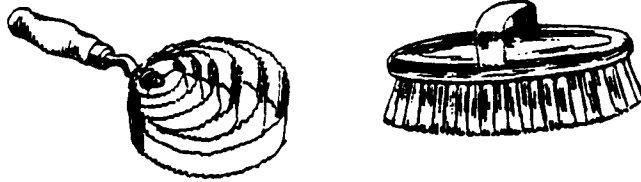


Fig. 3 Grooming brush and comb

bing brush with stiff plastic or fibre bristles can be used (Fig. 3). Brush in the direction of the hair (ie, head to tail) using firm pressure. A piece of cloth or wad of straw rubbed in a circular motion also helps to clean the donkey. Take a damp cloth and wipe out the nostrils and around the eyes. Keep grooming equipment clean and periodically soak in a disinfectant. This will help prevent the spread of disease, especially if the equipment is used on more than one animal. If a donkey gets very dirty or sweaty, it may be helpful to wash it all over with clean or soapy water.

CARE OF THE HOOF

The foot is a very important part of the working animal. Be sure to observe the donkey's feet daily and take care of them. A donkey's foot should be short and upright and oval on the bottom. If the toe becomes long and slanted, it should be trimmed off. Excess hoof wall, as well as ragged loose pieces

of frog, can be removed with a sharp, strong knife. Cracks and chips in the wall can spread, and eventually destroy the entire hoof (Fig. 4). Metal shoes are used in some countries to protect the feet of donkeys. Their

design and fitting is a

skilled job. If shoes are not available, the rough edges of the donkeys hoofs can be smoothed with a wood file. Hoofs which are very dry or brittle, badly cracked or broken may be helped by coating them daily with oil or grease (old engine oil will do).

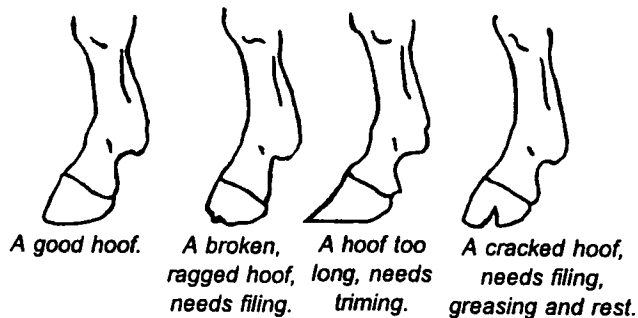


Fig. 4 Donkey hooves. Source: after Hutchins and Hutchins, 1981



Fig. 5 Hoof pick

Be sure to clean out the bottom of the hoofs before each use of the donkey, to prevent lameness from stones penetrating the sole of the foot. The donkey will pick up its foot if the tendon is pinched at the back of the leg, just above the pastern. Pick up and handle the feet of the donkey early and often in its training, so that it will not object to this care. A hoof pick can be easily made by bending a piece of steel into the desired shape, making one end flat and pointed (Fig.5). Clean from the heel towards the toe, especially in the grooves between the frog and the bars of the hoof (Fig.6).

If the area around the frog becomes black, oozing and very smelly the animal has "thrush". This bacterial disease results from



If the animal is sick, give it rest in a quiet place with food and water provided. If possible, consult the local animal health agent or veterinarian.

GETTING READY FOR WORK

Check the harness or pack saddle to be sure there are no parts broken or about to break, and no sharp wires or other rough parts sticking out to injure the donkey. Make sure that important areas which receive a lot of pressure (under the pack saddle, the inside edges of the breastband or collar) are well-padded. Try to keep the padding soft and clean to prevent injury. When placing the harness on, be sure to smooth the hairs down so they lie flat. If a crupper is fitted, make sure no tail hairs are caught underneath it - not only will this give the donkey a sore, it may cause the donkey to kick. Make sure the harness is properly adjusted for the donkey. Don't allow it to be choked by the breastband. The breastband strap should run across the chest just above the point of the shoulder (Fig. 7), not higher. When packing loads, check that both sides of the load are even. Never pack without a back pad or pack saddle. Remember - good donkey owners do not have to treat pack and harness sores, because they prevent them.

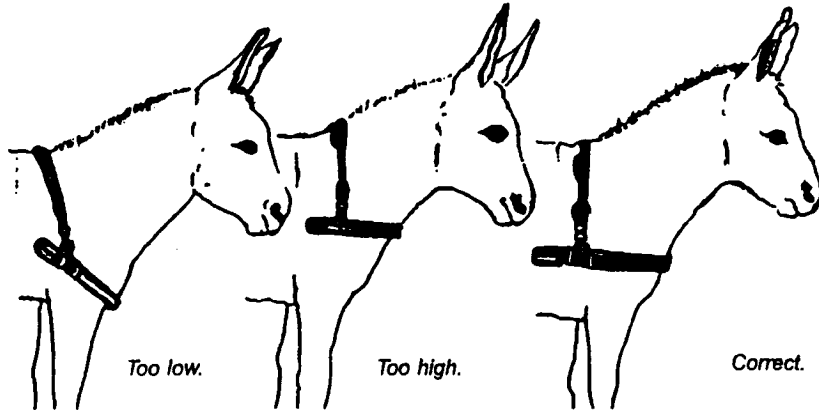


Fig. 7 Breastband positions.

Source: Ellis, Ellis & Claxton, 1980

WORKING SCHEDULES

Donkeys are strong for their size and will work long and hard if they are treated well. Do not overload donkeys. They should not have to carry more than half their body weight. A large donkey can carry 80 kg (the weight of a large man). A well-fed donkey in good health can work 6 to 8 hours, depending on the speed and the load. A donkey that breaths very hard or fast needs a rest. If the donkey is very hot and sweats, it should have access to water during working hours, if this is possible.