

## **Important Animal Welfare Considerations for Pack Mule Supported Expeditions:**

### **(i) Does the pre-departure programme allow adequate time for the mules and their equipment to be examined and passed fit for purpose?**

The pack mules and their equipment should be examined and evaluated on the eve of departure. This will allow time for fit mules to be sourced if a lame, thin or sick mule is presented. Where the equipment is inappropriate, this also allows time for any deficiencies to be addressed. Such checks should not be left until the morning of departure.

### **(ii) Can you see the ribs / backbone / pelvic bones?**

The mule should be in good body condition. Emaciated mules with prominent bones are particularly vulnerable to saddle sores.

### **(iii) Are there any saddle sores?**

The mule's back should be carefully palpated and examined to ensure that it is pain-free and free of any sores or swellings.

Mules with sores over the withers, back bone or pelvis should not be used.

### **(iv) What has caused the sores?**

The cause of any sores should be sought by carefully examining the saddle blanket.

The cause should be addressed wherever possible: Any contact, pressure or friction arising between the saddle blanket and the bony prominences (withers, pelvis and back bone) should be eliminated.

### **(v) Does the saddle blanket touch the withers or back bone?**

The mule's saddle blanket should sit clear of the back bone so that weight is born to either side of the midline.

### **(vi) What sort of tethering system is used?**

The tethering system should make use of a wide non-traumatic material that can be safely secured around the mule's lower leg without cutting into the skin.

### **(vii) Are the mules' legs free of open tethering wounds?**

The presence of such wounds are sadly very common. It is essential that Guides and Expedition Leaders insist on the use of well made tethers made from leather or cotton. Nylon rope should never be used against the skin. In many cases it may be necessary to provide such equipment and insist on its use.

### **(viii) Is the mouth free of any injuries?**

The bit should be well made, free from sharp edges and should not cause injury to the tongue, bars of the mouth or lips.

**(ix) Is the mule lame?**

If the mule is obviously lame unloaded and at the walk, it is unlikely to be able to carry a heavy load over difficult terrain without struggling.

**(x) Are the shoes secure?**

Worn or loose shoes may be lost during the expedition leading to bruising of the foot and other problems.

And don't forget: "for the want of a nail, the shoe was lost, for the want of a shoe the horse was lost and for want of a horse the rider was lost..."

**(xi) Are there enough mules for the group?**

Whilst a young, well proportioned and fit mule may be able to carry more than 100kg (or a third of its body weight), such practices are unlikely to keep it fit and prolong its working life, particularly where the mule will often also have to carry its owner. A recommended maximum weight of 80kg should therefore be used as a working guideline and varied according to the terrain, distance travelled and other key variables.

Consider taking a spare mule on longer expeditions.

**(xii) Is supplementary feeding provided?**

The budget should allow the muleteers to buy an adequate supply of good quality hay and barley. The addition of 250ml of vegetable oil to the diet every night will provide additional calories.

**(xiii) Has the itinerary taken into account the mules' needs?**

An easy first day will be appreciated by all members of the team. Any problems with the team or its equipment can then be evaluated and addressed.

The availability of food and water should never be overlooked. Additional supplies may need to be obtained en route from local souks, for mules and men alike.

**(xiv) Does the Guide / Expedition leader have a first aid kit for the mules and the necessary training in emergency care?**

The ability to deal with common injuries and health problems falls within the guide's responsibilities.

Wounds need to be cleaned and dressed to reduce the chance of infection. More serious injuries such as a broken leg may, however, require euthanasia. A severely injured mule should never be left to die a long agonising death.

The contact numbers for local animal welfare charities and veterinary services should be carried for use in an emergency.