

Donkey Society of Western Australia Inc

To lead your donkey

This is where the donkey comes into his own and says, 'won't and you can't make me', which is quite true; they are so strong several strong men can't make a donkey move if he doesn't want to. One way to get him started is to pull him sideways. He can brace his legs to resist a forward movement but by pulling him sideways in the start of a circle he is off balance and will have to take a least one step to the side to retain balance. This is enough to begin . . . loud exclamations of praise, tell him he is the cleverest donkey in the world, give him a reward. Donkeys really do like to please their owners but sometimes they haven't realised this! A lot of praise goes down well and they start to look for more. Maybe you will now have to pull him back the other way to get another step. More praise. Another trick is to put the halter on and then get someone to bring in a bit of hay. Get him to walk to it, praising him all the way, stopping every now and then to make him start again. If he is hard to stop, make him walk in a circle around you. This would be my last resort as you won't always be able to have him tempted with hay, but if that is what it takes to get him to move the first time you might have to try it. However, the principle behind this is that you find out where your donkey wants to go and lead him there. If he likes going out of the gate to the left better than to the right then take the left turn until you know he is happy being led, then try the right turn when he is in a relaxed state. Another way is to have someone clap hands or rustle a plastic bag behind him. This is where you have to read your donkey. Some would be terrified at a plastic bag being rustled behind them, some would spin around looking for the carrots that come in plastic bags, and others will be just wary enough to walk on without being distressed. Of course the plastic bag shaker must stop the moment there is any movement.

Say 'walk on' in a conversational manner. Say 'Walk On' in a determined manner. If he still won't walk get the helper to rustle the bag as you say 'WALK ON' in a no nonsense voice. As soon as he takes a step praise him effusively. If you think he is about to stop say 'whoa' just before he does, and praise him. Say walk on again in your conversational voice - if he does praise him to the hilt, if he doesn't get your helper to clap, click or rustle while your voice becomes more and more stern. Remember that your donkey doesn't know that you wanted to walk the length of the paddock; if you think three steps is all you are going to get out of him the first time then stop after three steps and pour on the praise, you can walk the length of the paddock another day. Be very clear in your voice, both with tone and words. Most people use 'walk on', 'whoa', 'stand' and 'trot

on', but the words don't really matter as long as you are consistent. You can't say 'walk on' one time, 'gee up' the next time and 'come on let's go' another time. Also try to match your tone to the urgency of the demand. Such as 'waalk onn' to start, then 'Walk On' if that doesn't work, then 'WALK ON'. If your donkey is being difficult and trying to pull away, we mostly tend to raise our voice bit by bit until we are shouting at them to 'WHOA'!! Whereas we should be slowing down from 'Whoa' to 'Whooa' to 'Whhooaaa' in a slow deep voice.

Because of the need a donkey has to freeze when there is danger, you will find donkeys will often stop and look into the distance while being led. Don't rush them, watch their ears, and don't ask them to move on until you can see the thing is no longer so interesting. The more your donkey goes about and sees different things, the less time he will need to check out possibly dangerous situations. If however, he is really concerned, say with a cardboard box on the other side of the road, it is no good trying to get him to move on. You will have to leave him where he is, go over and pat the box, talk to it, examine it closely, then go back and tell him it looks OK to you, at which he will say "You didn't think I was nervous, did you?" and walk past without another glance. My first clue as to how a donkey thinks was when trying to get our two out of a small dry paddock, through a gate with flood waters already running through it and onto higher ground. After two hours of using every method available I told them they would have to stay there and drown, and I went out the gate with water up to my thighs, at which they followed me. They knew what was required but all they wanted to know was how deep the water was and how fast it was flowing.

It is also important to ask your donkey where he likes to be led from. Donkeys consider themselves to be equals and will pull back if you get too far ahead, so lead them from beside the head. Some prefer you to be half a step in front to cover the dangerous situations, while others prefer you to be half a step behind to show you are not trying to be superior. There is a place between the shoulder and the nostril where your donkey will feel you are doing it properly.