

Nevada's 'Desert Canary'

hg- Oolil Ce,ve,i

REMEMBER THE BURRO?
When replaced by the Model T, burros were turned loose all over Nevada wherever they happened to be.

In Goldfield these animals were known as the automatic garbage collectors. Every night just about supper time they made regular rounds to various houses where they stood braying at the back gate until some tidbit was thrown out to them. Others became quite adept at opening gates. Once inside a yard they ate the tops off trees, trampled flowers, and did all kinds of mischief.

Known throughout the west as the "desert canary," the burro's loud, raucous hee-hawing resembles in no way the sweet trill of a bird. Often their loud, raptuous braying is heard just before sun-up or the last thing at night.

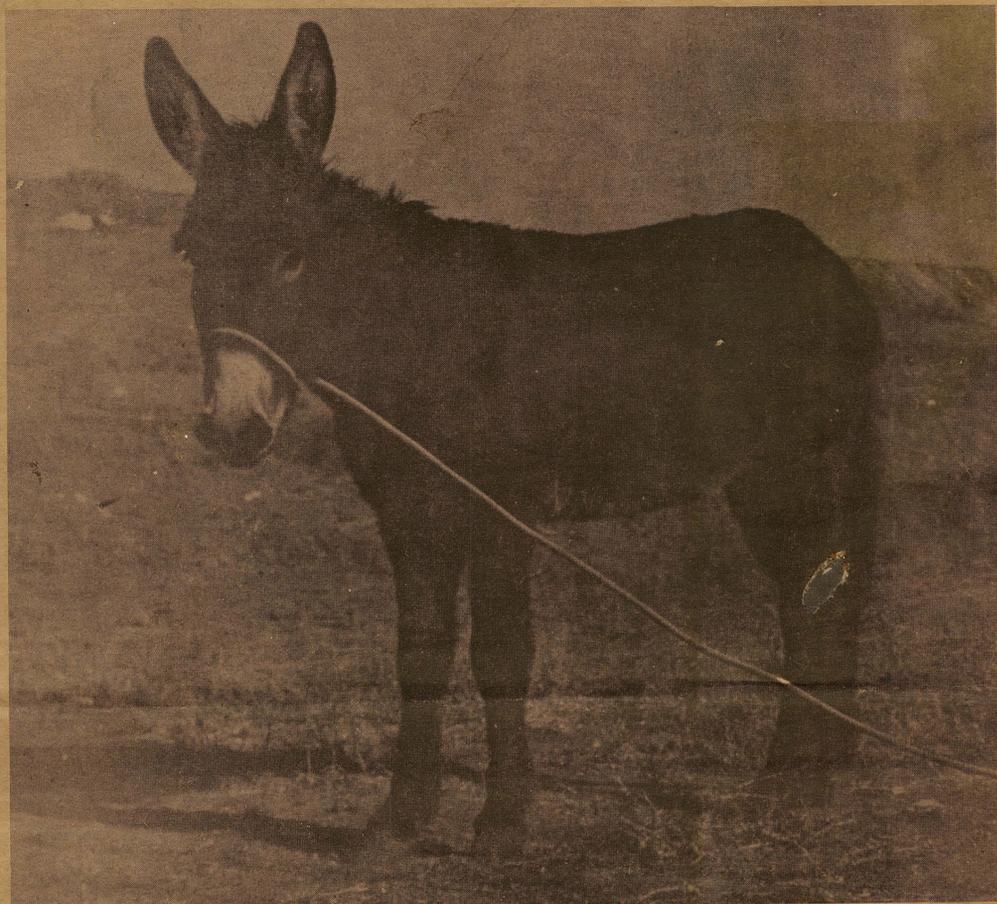
Considered their most valuable possession, burros were preferred to any other animal by most prospectors who searched hills and gullies for riches. They could survive for some time without feed or water where horse could not. These plucky animals even scaled the Sierras with their gold hungry masters. On such trips the "desert rat" discovered his long-eared friend was as cautious and sure-footed as a mountain goat. When the burro decided, though, that a spot on the trail was too narrow or unsafe to pass through with his pack no amount of prodding could budge him.

Out in the desert, too, the burro exhibited the same "horse sense". A waterhole might be miles away, but the burro's keen sense of smell could detect it. Once found, however, he would refuse to drink the water if it were poisoned or contaminated in any way. Any man who disregarded this by drinking the water usually died.

To some people the donkey is just another stupid animal. Nothing could be further from the truth. If mistreated, his contrary ways make him very difficult to train, but when treated kindly he is cooperative and affectionate.

A burro knows exactly to the ounce how much he can carry comfortably. Put one fraction more on his back and he will refuse to budge. No amount of prodding, cajoling, whipping, or shoving will change his mind. If shoved around long enough he will lie down, roll over, or in some devious way manage to get rid of the pack or disarrange it so that the entire load will have to be repacked. Burros have also been known to lie down in the middle of a stream when overloaded so that the supplies on their back became thoroughly soaked with water.

Although they are loyal, patient, and plodding, they are also accomplished thieves and



"BURROS are not the stupid animal thought by some people," says the author Dorfs Cerveri: "Not only do they know how much work they can stand but also how much weight they can carry." This honery, stubborn,

annoying nuisances. They have been known to eat anything and everything when no suitable food was available, including thorns, bitter creosote bush, any kind of household (198 gunnysacks, long Wlaerw, and the paper off

There was once a miner who had a sack of flour included in his supplies, which was self-rising. When mixed with water to make bread it had the same action as yeast. While he was away one day working in the hills his donkey ate all the flour he could hold, then went to a nearby spring where he drank his fill. When the miner returned at night, he found the donkey still at the spring, very swollen and very dead. The self-rising flour had risen to new heights.

Used to talking to their burros for hours on end, especially when they didn't see another human being for many months, oldtimers insisted they had a limited vocabulary. Urays, whines, and guttural grwits

were supposed to have many meanings. Their ears and tails were expressive, too. Usually a swift swish of the tail indicated a feeling of disgust, and anger was shown by a quick drawing back of the ears. Prospectors have insisted, too, that many valuable gold and silver ledges would never have been discovered if it hadn't been necessary to run down Jenny or Jack who either strayed or hid behind some inaccessible ledge. Jim Butler's burro is credited with the discovery of silver in Tonopah. Jim started to throw a rock at his burro when he noticed the richness of its color, and a new strike was discovered.

Burros are becoming so numerous in the Death Valley area that the Death Valley National Park Service is trapping them alive to be sold as pets for children on guest ranches. In other localities their lot is not so fortunate. In some parts of southern Nevada they are rounded up and slaughtered for

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hen food bought by California ranchers. Almost evilly deserted or nearly deserted mining town has a few strays roaming around, also.

In spite of his shortcomings this ornery, stubborn, lovable and downright cussed little shaggy-haired animal is nevertheless affectionately remembered and thought of as a symbol of the old West in much the same way as cowboys, Indians and grizzled prospectors.



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