

The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust

Fighting Poverty – Feeding Families

Registered Charity No: 1096814

Autumn Newsletter 2010

Calum's Road is built!

Our regular readers will know of Stella's Dream – to



rebuild a stretch of road which is under water for seven months of the year and which was vital for the economy of the region.

Many new readers will wonder why a horse and donkey charity is building a road. Calum's Road leads from our communities to the nearest secondary school, hospital, market (to buy and sell produce) and to the rice fields. The whole economy of the region was suffering, people were dying en route to hospital and animals were

being injured whilst traversing it. It is poverty which causes many of the problems that we see; we felt that by helping to improve the economy we were also helping the animals. Before her illness, our co founder Stella Marsden had intended to raise funds for the road but sadly she died before she was able to.



It was to be a journey of extreme highs and lows. We had the highs of meeting and greeting our wonderful

motor bikers, **the magnificent seven**, who managed to raise a lot of money for the road, followed by the low when the email came from a road building company who had agreed to do it for us, telling us that they could no longer do it. This was just six weeks before the rains were due to start and after the community had worked so hard to make the preparations before the machines were due to arrive. If we waited until after the rains, all the hard work would be wasted

I still don't quite know how it came about. In desperation I decided to hire the machinery and with the help of the community and the National Roads Authority, we would do it ourselves. We hired, begged and borrowed most of the machinery. The team that materialised around me in the days after I made the decision were a force to be reckoned with. I have never ever met a harder working and kinder team of men and I was absolutely humbled at the efforts that they went to in order to get the road built before the rains began. It was an incredible feeling to see everyone, working together as a team. The whole community participated; it was Gambia at its very best. People came from far and wide to see it and some of the women broke down in tears at the emotion of it all. They certainly left us in no doubt about what the road meant to them. It was a very special time. **Our sincere thanks go to everyone who helped to make it happen**

And so the long awaited road was built, we were inspired by a determined old Scotsman called Calum Macleod of Raasay, Scotland and it was built in loving memory of Stella Brewer Marsden, our co founder.



EDITORIAL

Welcome to the new look newsletter. In these tough times we have decided to invite people to advertise with us to help cover the costs of the newsletters and we are very grateful to those who have taken us up on our invitation and who are supporting us.

All our advertisers are people whose products we and our supporters use and many have supported us with goods, raffle prizes or sponsorship and we are extremely grateful to them. The award winning **Gambia Experience** fly us and our many supporters to The Gambia on a regular basis and their customer care is second to none, they are also great supporters of our work and help us on a regular basis. If you come to visit us, **Hidden Gambia** is well worth looking at, they have the beautiful Bird safari camp fairly close to us and they will be able to show you parts of The Gambia that most other visitors never see.

Closer to home and with all our doggy fundraising activities in mind two addresses worth noting are **Darlings natural dog** foods and **Big Dog World**. My dogs love natural food and thrive on it. Darlings have also provided goody bags of delicious natural treats at each of our dog walks as well as hampers of their beautiful food as raffle prizes. Finding Big dog World has been a godsend when looking for any type of equipment for the dogs.

We have had a great deal of help and support from the driving enthusiasts of this country and if you are a carriage driver or thinking of becoming one, then a subscription to **Carriage Driving magazine** is a must have, with Christmas coming up it would also be a lovely gift if you have friends who drive horses.

If holidays with a difference but closer to home are for you, then **Saisons** may be able to offer you the solution, I am told that exploring the waterways of the country is a wonderful way to see the hidden parts of UK.

We would like to thank all our advertisers for their support and we hope that through them you will find new experiences and some of the things you have been needing for both yourselves and your four legged friends.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and if you know of anyone who you think may like a copy, please let us know and we can put them on our mailing list.

SAISONS are pleased to be able to sponsor a class at the Horse and Donkey Show.



We are at Whilton Locks, Nr Daventry. Boats are available all year round

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Donkey School Bus

Many of our supporters will know that we have a small sister charity that sponsors children in our community to enable them to get a good education. SSS (Stella's School Scheme) has also recently built a brand new nursery school for the community.

The distances involved for some of these younger children meant that we had to come up with the idea of how to transport them. We have many donkeys going through various stages of rehabilitation and training at any time and we came up with the idea of a donkey school bus to collect the children each morning and take them home at lunch time. Everything was going to plan, but we hadn't anticipated that the parents would be so enthusiastic about their new nursery school and we have been surprised to learn that 143 children have applied for places.

Michael Mart of Bennington Carriages has offered to help us come up with a design for a vehicle that could be pulled by two donkeys or one of our horses and safely carry some of nursery school children to and from school as some of them will be coming from the neighbouring villages. If a suitable vehicle could be designed, I know that it would be used all over the country because we have already been approached to provide donkeys to certain schools that require a school bus. It may even spread throughout Africa.

Neuro Disease

Our dreaded neurological disease is still rearing its very ugly head and has taken its toll on the donkeys in particular. The scientists from Glasgow University and Liverpool University are gradually getting a better idea about what may be causing it and we would like to say a very big thank you to each and every one of their staff who are involved as well as the scientists from The Veterinary Laboratories

Agency for the wonderful help they have given us.



Unfortunately research of this kind is very expensive and we are desperately seeking funding to enable them to continue their work, hopefully find the cause of it and a means of treating and /or preventing the disease. It seems particularly unfair that people who are already so poor, have so many more challenges to contend with to keep their animals healthy than we do in Europe and North America.

It is more important to prevent animal suffering, rather than sit to contemplate the evils of the universe praying in the company of priests. ~♥~ Buddha

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Travels on a Tandem and Other Stories....

or the tale of 2 newly graduated vets working with the Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust during the summer of 2010 *by Catherine Wilson.*

It all started, as many slightly bizarre ideas start, while Jo Melliush and I were revising for our final veterinary exams. Talk of donkeys and horses, exotic places, starting out as vets, fancy dress costumes and tandem bicycles kept us sane. Our aim was to raise money for the Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust..... and we wanted to be part of it.

Our cycling efforts raised £500 for the Trust. We also appreciated the beauty of the English countryside and the kindness of strangers and found that it is entirely possible to listen, to try and out-sing each other and shout constant abuse while cycling uphill and still remain firm friends!

Having a night to recover from our adventure, we strolled into the Donkey Sanctuary in Devon, the next morning with very enthusiastic smiles but very weary legs! The staff there very



A good relationship

kindly spent 3 days teaching us the differences between horses and donkeys on topics ranging from anatomy to behaviour and we were lucky enough to be taught a short but very intensive course in donkey dentistry and farriery. This offered us skills which would be useful when faced with donkeys in The Gambia. We were really grateful for the time and enthusiasm with which the vets at the sanctuary spent teaching us and the skills which we learnt were of definite use to us out in Africa.

So after this mini-adventure, the biggest excitement began. Now fully qualified and graduated, we keenly boarded the 'Tuesday' flight bound for The Gambia. We knew that The Gambia is a popular holiday destination for European travellers but it is not just a country consisting of sun, sea and sand. Away from the coastal capital city of Banjul, the country borders the river Gambia, and is populated by peasant farmers, making the most they can of the fertile land along both sides of the river. The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust (GHDT) is situated 4 hours by pick-up truck (or twelve hours by public transport!) to Sambel Kunda village. From this base, the staff of the Trust make regular weekly visits to markets and offer veterinary services as

well as selling affordable equine-friendly tack to owners, much of which is made by GHDT staff.

On arrival at Sambel Kunda, we met with the long term English volunteer, a former veterinary nurse Max, who has the job of working with the 15 staff members of staff working in the community.

We were impressed by the separate stallion and mare yards (castration is only rarely performed in The Gambia)



And the donkey ***One of the permanent residents who also works as a demonstration model.*** barn and we met the long-term equine residents of the Trust for the first time.

The exact numbers of the residents at Sambel Kunda is constantly fluctuating but is always over 25. During our 6 week stay 4 new residents arrived with a range of conditions including a fractured limb, a progressive neurological disease and 2 horses suffering from horrendous burns, to be offered ongoing veterinary and nursing treatment, and the chance to rest and recuperate before being returned to their owners.

Our days at the GHDT were never the same and I can honestly say there was never a dull moment. One day we would be visiting a market and diagnosing and treating whatever came our way, be it harness wounds, dental problems, Trypanosomiasis, worms and tick infestations, strangles, tetanus, eye infections, coughs, colic or even sheep! Other days would be spent looking after the in-patients, changing bandages, giving medication or performing routine health checks of the long-term residents, or teaching the Gambian staff about the basics of veterinary and nursing treatment and drug use. We would sometimes be called out in the night to emergencies and on our busiest evening we treated 3 donkeys; one with a

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fractured leg, one with a difficult foaling and one which had been burnt by a fire over its rear end; this certainly kept us new graduates on our toes! Although there are not always qualified vets working at the clinic, the staff there are very



Our staff are now well trained and have benefitted from all the training they receive from volunteer vets

experienced and we worked together to offer ideas on treatment and nursing care.

Six weeks at Sambel Kunda passed by in a flash and so many memories had been made. The GHDT is performing amazing

work and the health and livelihood of the animals and people in the area has definitely increased since the charity was founded. There is still a long way to go but thanks to the extremely hard work of Heather, Max, the staff, many volunteers who visit the clinic and kind donations of tack and medicines from horse lovers in more developed countries, the lives of many animals and humans in this small riverside country are steadily being improved, **and you can't ask for more than that!**

Right – tongue damaged by locally made bit.



These are every day cases in The Gambia, but they provide good experience for British vets.




Donkey Project



We would like to thank all the people who purchased donkeys as part of the donkey project. Your generosity has made a very real difference to a number of families. Sadly, we had to close the project, hopefully temporarily, as so many donkeys were being lost to the neurological disease. We have also lost donkeys to snake bite and three have died as a result of attacks from bees.



Luckily, we have a number of "rehabilitated" donkeys who are able to replace some of those lost and many of the dedicated vets who have worked with us have also purchased replacements from their own pockets, so the families are continuing to receive support.



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Thank you for your support



An injured child being transported to hospital in our vehicle after an accident. He broke his leg & pelvis.

It is very easy with so many dreadful things going on in the world to become distanced and hardened to what is going on in other countries, but perhaps you should consider just how you would feel if your child, parent, horse, dog was sick and you were unable to find the money to get him /her to hospital. Just try and imagine how helpless you would feel. Add to that the fact that if it is your horse or donkey, it is also your livelihood and ability to feed your family that is going to be affected.

On a recent trip I was woken late at night by a young man from a nearby village, who had bought his mother on a horse and cart to ask us if we could help him by taking her to hospital in our vehicle.

The poor woman was dreadfully ill and it must have been painful to be bounced around on a cart on the local unmade roads. As if that wasn't enough, whilst I was getting the keys for our vehicle the heavens opened.

The poor lady was too weak to move and the cart driver, her son and I had to carry her into the vehicle. En route to hospital her heart stopped and she was resuscitated and I am pleased to say that she has made a wonderful recovery much to everyone's surprise, but I often think of the despair I

would have felt if that was my parent or child.

Without your support we wouldn't have had the vehicle to take her and ours are the only vehicles for miles around. When you make a donation to Horse and Donkey it usually goes via the animals to the people, but there are occasions such as this one when thanks to the kindness of our supporters, we are able to help a family in need directly. It is hard to imagine such poverty, but the many people who volunteer their time to us see it for themselves and when you all live and work together in a community, it is natural for everyone to help each other. We thank you for your help in the past and hope that you will continue to support us. **The global economic crisis has had a major impact on our funding and we need help now, more than ever before.**

Letters like this are so good to receive!

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to spend some time as a volunteer vet with the Horse and Donkey Trust. It truly was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. The work and effect that the Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust has had on the local community and region is incredible, you must be so proud to have made such an amazing difference to both animals and families. We were made to feel so welcome by all of the team at GHDT who were all very committed to their roles at the Trust.

We were very sad following the loss of Molly; she had such a gentle personality. We would be keen to know what the pathology department say following examination.

I cannot thank you enough and the work that the Trust does is just amazing. I will certainly be doing everything I can to increase people's awareness of the charity Katherine

Ka.

Gert de Jonge

Everyone at The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust and the communities who use Calum's Road in the The Gambia send their condolences to the family of Gert de Jonge who died in an accident in October.

Gert was one of the Calum's Road motor bikers who made the journey from Scotland to Sambel Kunda to raise funds to enable us to build the road for the community in which we work. His passing was a great shock and he will be sadly missed but his great contribution to the development of this area of the country will live on in people's hearts and memories for many years to come.



The Annual Show - December 2010

As I write this we are in the midst of preparations for the annual show, huge thanks to Dengie Crops for their sponsorship of the show rosettes and to Carr Day and Martin for providing rosettes for the Donkey Club children who will be competing at the show. Thanks also to Allen and Page, Saisons, Liz Haines, Judith Parkes, Maggie and Colin Hannan, Stephanie Gallo and Mandy Bowerman for offering to sponsor classes, trophies and farriery on the day.

We are still looking for class sponsors, so if there are any companies or individuals who would like to sponsor a class, it costs just £70 and is a wonderful way of ensuring that our training reaches as many people as possible at the show.

This year's celebrations will cover 2 days and we shall not only have the show but also the official opening of Calum's Road and the nursery school to cover. Some 42 volunteers from UK and Belgium will be joining us to help at the show and with decorating the walls of the new nursery school and repairs to the playground we built last year. Hopefully it will be a happy



celebration for the many people in The Gambia and in UK who have made it all happen.

The show is the perfect way to get the maximum amount

of information to a large number of people and it is fun. We are able to issue headcollars and bits and see that feet are trimmed by the farriers attending the show.

For the opening of Calum's Road we are hoping to have a genuine Scottish piper - in a kilt? and a fiddler (who also double up as vets!) as well as local drummers and musicians, so it should be a wonderful day.



Welcome to Max Hannan

We would like to wish Max a very warm welcome to 'Horse and Donkey' Max has kindly taken over from Anna and has had to work for the first few months on her own as we were unable to find another volunteer to help. Being a volunteer with us is extremely hard work with incredible highs and a lot of lows and frustrations as well. Fortunately for Max, her partner, Ed Nevilles also kindly offered to volunteer and teach at the school. We are very grateful to them both for their help. We hope their stay in The Gambia will be enjoyable and fulfilling for them both.

Goodbye to Molly

Many of you will know of Molly the filly who suffered such distressing burns, but who survived as a result of the excellent initial veterinary care and the dedicated and inspired nursing that she received from Anna. Sadly Molly recently died, despite the best efforts of the vets who were visiting at the time. We suspect it was as a result of the neurological disease mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. Molly was a sweet, gentle creature with immense courage and an enormous will to survive. She is badly missed by us all, but special sympathy goes to Anna who gave her so much love and care and devotion.



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Christmas Greetings



A Christmas plea

(With apologies to the proper poets out there!)

Please help us to find the funds
To keep GHDT going
We try so hard to make it work
And our references are glowing.

Our Gambian staff receives some pay
But our admin works for free,
They do their best and give their all
For this small charity.

We do it for the horses
and the donkeys which we treat
and for the Gambian people
who work so hard to eat.

We may be small and not well known
But we punch above our weight
Our team works very, very hard
And does the work of eight.

We owe the vet profession
A debt of gratitude
They freely share their skills and care
With hard working attitude

Our supporters are the very best
They make some dreams come true
Families feed and equines rest
And it is all with thanks to you!

We know full well that times are tough
For those the whole world over
We may THINK we have it rough
But we know we sit in clover.

And so we ask this Christmas tide
Be kind with your donations
Please think of little donkeys
and folks in other nations.

We send out thanks and joy and peace
And wish you well with reason
Our wish is that all troubles cease
for you this Christmas season

We recognize that for many of us Christmas will not be easy this year. Things are tough and going to get tougher. We have managed to achieve a great deal in the last year with very little money and a great deal of good will from our wonderful volunteers. Only our Gambian staff receives a salary, ALL other administrative and veterinary support is provided by volunteers. We need your support more than ever this year to be able to continue our work and we can assure you that we are able to make a little money go a very long way and it will be spent where it is needed most, in The Gambia.

Could you please support us over this period, please? If you visit the website you will find our On Line Shop where you buy Gambian crafts made by our communities as well as other unusual gifts.

If you would like to support us but cannot afford to, please visit the following websites which will enable you to raise money for us without it costing you a penny just in your normal shopping. The retailers make a small donation to attract your custom.

www.thegivingmachine.co.uk

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