



DONKEYS FEET ARE DIFFERENT

DONKEYS ARE ADAPTED TO A DRY ENVIRONMENT. THEY THRIVE IN SEMI-ARID PARTS OF THE WORLD, WHERE THE GROUND IS DRY AND STONY AND WHERE, FOR MOST OF THE YEAR, THE VEGETATION IS OF POOR FEED VALUE AND VERY FIBROUS. THEIR FEET ARE MORE EFFICIENT AT ABSORBING WATER THAN HORSES' HOOVES ARE: THIS IS PROBABLY AN ADAPTATION TO THE DRY ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THEY EVOLVED.

When donkeys are kept in the UK, on lush, wet pasture, their feet easily become soft and more crumbly. They quite frequently get foot diseases associated with this, such as:

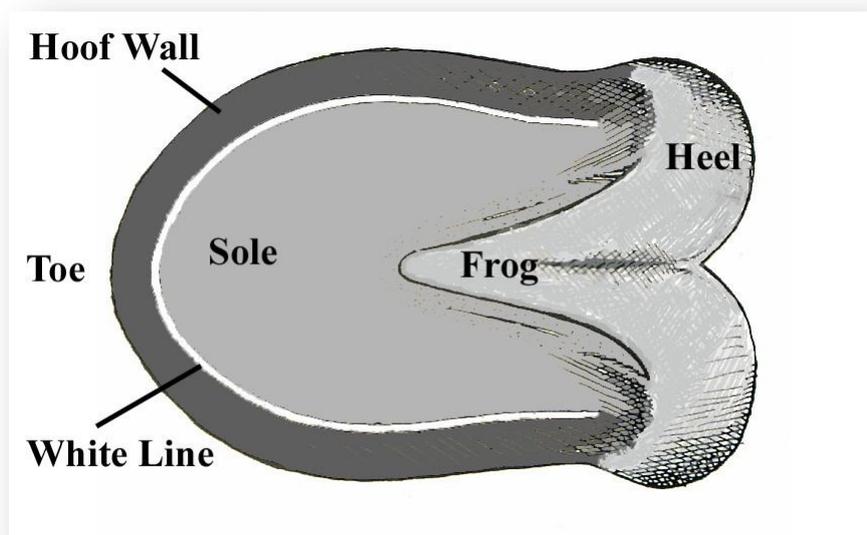
- infection of the sole and frog (thrush);
- infected, penetrating wounds (abscesses); or
- seedy toe (see below).

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DONKEY'S FOOT

There are a number of differences between horse and donkey feet.

- Donkeys' feet are more upright (between 5° and 10° more) than horses' feet.
- The donkey foot is "boxier" than the horse foot (the horse's foot is more conical).
- The sole is more U-shaped (the sole of a horse's foot is more round).

Fig. 1: Diagram showing the names of structures underneath the donkey foot.



- Donkeys' feet appear to grow more from the heel than from the other parts of the foot.
- The donkey grows nearly as much sole as hoof wall and this needs paring by the farrier (in horses the sole growth tends to flake off).

The illustration below (Fig 2.) is a simplified, diagrammatic section through the donkey's foot, indicating some of the important structures. P3 is also known as the "pedal bone", 'coffin bone' or the "third phalanx" and it is this bone that can be displaced in severe laminitis. More of the second phalanx, P2, lies inside the hoof capsule than is the case in the horse's foot.

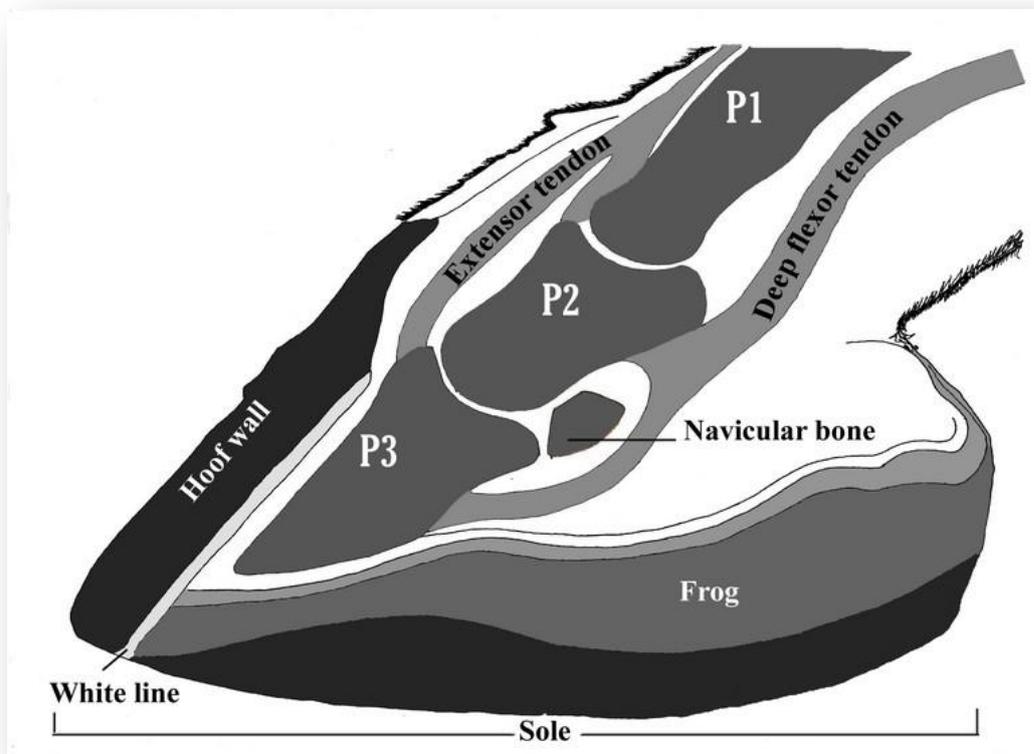


Fig 2: A section view through the donkey's foot.

ROUTINE FOOT CARE

Because of the damp, British climate, it is not possible to keep donkey's feet dry. However, the aim should be to keep donkeys on dry and clean bedding when housed. When kept outdoors, muddy conditions should be avoided. It is useful to have a dry exercise area, which is very well drained.

All donkeys should have their feet picked out daily using a hoof pick. Be careful to keep the donkeys foot low and do not lift a donkey's foot too high, this make it more comfortable for the donkey and mean that they are less likely to kick. Especially in older animals with arthritis, it can be painful to lift and twist the leg. If necessary, bend your knees so that you and the donkey are comfortable.

Your farrier should visit every six to ten weeks. It is important to establish a good relationship with the farrier and a good start is to ensure the donkey is tied up in a well-lit area with freshly picked out feet and excess mud washed off the limbs. You are the client and if you are not happy with the standard of work you should seek the services of another farrier.

After trimming, the foot should be left with a concave sole, with the wall bearing the weight. Ideally, the point of the frog or mid-point of the sole should end up around 6 mm (¼ in) above the walls, so that the there is no pressure on the sole when the foot is on the ground. However, if the farrier had to do any corrective work, for example for seedy toe, the foot shape may be different at the end of the farrier's visit.

COMMON HOOF ISSUES

Many foot diseases are entirely preventable

SEEDY TOE

When a donkey gets “seedy toe”, part of the white line area becomes weak and crumbly. Often little stones and dirt get stuck in the space under the horny part of the hoof. Eventually it can extend quite far up the hoof, towards the coronary band. It is treated by cutting out the affected part of the hoof wall and allowing new healthy horn to grow down. The donkey must also be kept on clean, dry ground.

THRUSH

Thrush is an infection of the underneath of the foot, particularly affecting the frog. It has a distinctive, unpleasant smell. It is often associated with keeping the donkey in wet conditions.

Thrush is prevented by keeping the feet clean and dry as much as possible.

LAMINITIS

This is a cripplingly painful disease often with irreversible consequences. There are several causes – too much rich food, infection, pregnancy for example – but the end result is a destruction of the support mechanism of the toe bone within the hoof such that the toe bone can rotate or move downwards. It is a veterinary emergency. If your donkey is unwilling to walk, lying down more than usual and has easily felt pulses in the blood vessels around the fetlock, contact your vet immediately. Do not make the donkey walk but preferably put in a well bedded stable with easy access to food and water until the vet arrives.

FOOT ABSCESS

Usually as a result of a wound that penetrates the sole or white line, an abscess can develop in the foot, when the wound is infected and pus builds up. Such wounds can be a cause of tetanus: ensure that the donkey is protected by vaccination or ask your vet how to protect the donkey.

If you suspect an abscess, you should seek veterinary advice. The vet may recommend a poultice, to help draw the infection out of the foot, and/or cut away the abscess with a hoof knife to help the infection to drain out. An abscess in the foot is intensely painful and requires urgent attention.

FOOT DRESSINGS AND FEED SUPPLEMENTS

It is not normally necessary to use hoof oil or any food supplements if the donkey is kept on a good, balanced diet. However, do be guided by your vet as some foot conditions may benefit from vitamin/mineral supplementation.

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THE DONKEY SANCTUARY

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The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969.

The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588) both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU.

Incorporating: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST); The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT).

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