INTRODUCTION

Just like horses, most donkeys will require a foot trim every 6-10 weeks however care must be taken when trimming donkey’s feet as there are many ways in which the anatomy differs from horse feet. These notes are intended to provide an overview of those differences and a guide to the trimming of normal and overgrown feet, as well as some of the commonly encountered conditions and their treatments.

THE NORMAL DONKEY FOOT

As can be seen from Figure 1 on page 2, there are several differences between the donkey and horse foot:

- Hoof pastern axis is more upright and can be broken forward compared to the horse
- Hoof walls are more upright (5–10° more).
- Frog is usually wider than in the horse
- Sole is U shaped with a flare to the heels.
- Sole grows nearly as much as the walls.
- White line should be 1mm wide (an increase could indicate laminitis or white line disease).
- Heels need trimming regularly.
- Donkeys are adapted to dry climates so hooves have a higher water content and are more ‘elastic’ than horse hooves.

TRIMMING THE NORMAL FOOT

Trim every 6-10 weeks as required. Take care with older donkeys — arthritic changes may mean they resent lifting of the limbs. Try to keep limbs as low as possible during trimming.

TOOLS

- Your normal farrier kit
- Half round nippers
- Loop knife
- Short bladed knife
- Coarse rasp

SOLE

Remove any loose or unhealthy material. Trim frog to a tidy ‘V’ shape. Pare sole so that it is concave and gives slightly with firm thumb pressure.
**Figure 1:** A comparison of the donkey and horse foot

*Source: The Donkey Sanctuary*
WALL

Outer layers can be bevelled with a rasp to prevent splitting but avoid excessive rasping.

The point of the frog or mid-point of the sole should be approximately 6mm (1/4 in) above the wall so that the walls are weight bearing — not the sole.

Above: A correctly trimmed donkey foot

TRIMMING THE OVERGROWN FOOT

The overgrown foot (see Figure 2) often has long heels which have collapsed under the foot resulting in the donkey’s foot resembling a ‘Turkish slipper’. This causes the flexor tendons and joints to be under great stress so it is advisable to consult a vet as pain relief is often necessary.

Radiographs (see Figure 2) should also be obtained prior to trimming to check the position of the pedal bone within the hoof and determine the degree of laminitic change.

Figure 2: The overgrown foot

The images show an overgrown donkey foot on the left and a radiograph of an overgrown donkey foot on the right.

Source: The Donkey Sanctuary
Post radiographs it is possible to remove all overgrown horn in one trim following the guidelines below (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Removing the overgrown horn

(All images are of the same donkey foot)

1. First plan your trim using the radiographs for guidance.
2. Clean trim and shape sole first.
3. Trim hoof wall starting at the heels. Always bear in mind the position of the pedal bone.
4. Once the heels have been trimmed and a more normal shape has been recovered, the long toe can be addressed.
5. When rasping back the hoof wall, use a finger’s width of horn at the top of the coronary band as a guide for the angle of the front wall.

**Source:** The Donkey Sanctuary

**SEEDY TOE**

The affected horn has a grey crumbly texture with lesions varying in severity from minor slits in the hoof wall to extensive cavities with separation of the wall from the white line. Seedy toe lesions are rarely painful unless there is extensive hoof instability, but the widened white line may allow entry of organisms and subsequent abscess formation.

In severe cases the farrier should work with a veterinarian. All necrotic and discoloured material (Figure 4) should be removed to expose clean, healthy horn. Exposure is necessary to provide an aerobic environment which inhibits bacterial and fungal colonisation. It is possible to resect high up the hoof wall (more so than in the horse), to remove all the affected material. (Figure 4). Due to caudal load bearing in a donkey, extensive dorsal hoof wall resection may not require shoe support as it would in a horse.
If extensive resection is necessary radiographs may be appropriate to check for any laminitic changes that might affect the stability of P3.

**Figure 4: Treating Seedy Toe**

The images show the grey crumbly appearance of seedy toe within the white line on the left and an example of a hoof post seedy toe removal on the right—showing how much hoof wall can safely be removed in one trim without needing shoe support.

**Source:** The Donkey Sanctuary

**POST TREATMENT**

Post seedy toe removal it may be useful to apply ‘sugardine’ to the exposed hoof to promote drying and hardening. ‘Sugardine’ can be made by combining povidone-iodine and granulated sugar to form a crumbly mixture which also has a fungicidal and antibacterial action.

Keep in place by applying under a thick cotton wool pad and a layer of cohesive bandage (see Figure 5). Duct tape or silage bag patches can be used to waterproof the bandage (see Figure 5). Change every 2 days until the desired effect has been achieved.

**Figure 5:** Seedy Toe aftercare
THE LAMINITIC FOOT

The laminitic foot may require more frequent trimming or veterinary consultation to provide radiographs for confirmation of position or changes to P3 and depth of sole assessment. Radiographs will also show the position of the frog in relation to P3. The tip of P3 is approximately 2cm in front of the point of the frog in a donkey - this means frog supports or heart bar shoes are not appropriate treatments for laminitic donkeys as these could exacerbate rotational forces. Instead pad the entire sole using thick cotton wool and bandage as previously described.

In some laminitic donkeys the sole may be too thin to trim. If radiographs are not available then use thumb pressure test to check for yielding of sole and stop trim once this point is reached.

In these cases of thin soles which are load bearing, it may be appropriate to apply ‘rim shoes’ to donkeys for support. Ensure the donkey’s foot is clean and dry before application of Super Fast glue to form a plastic shoe (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Applying ‘rim shoes’**

First apply Super Fast to build up a shoe shape. Once finished building up layers, rasp evenly.

**Source:** The Donkey Sanctuary

Watch how to apply ‘rim shoes’ at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T21JkFs3YoI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T21JkFs3YoI)

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