

On The Road

The Equine Journal attends many shows and events throughout the region each month. In this column, we share our experiences with you.

FELL PONY SOCIETY GOLDEN JUBILEE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

Cumbria County, England • August 3-10, 2002
WITH LAURA HART, JOURNAL REPRESENTATIVE

By Laura Hart

From the length and breadth of Britain and from around the globe, people gathered with just one thought; to learn more about the rare British native pony breed, the Fell pony. This event, held in the north of England and titled "The Fell Pony Society Golden Jubilee International Convention," had been long anticipated by a worldwide population of Fell pony devotees. Its purpose was to celebrate the Fell Pony Society's patron, Her Majesty the Queen's, Golden Jubilee, to foster interest in the Fell pony breed, and to encourage tourism in the region, which was hardest hit by Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001.

This convention took place in and around the northern regions of England where the Fell breed originated and still mainly resides. Most, events were held near the town of Penrith, which is in the northern county of Cumbria. Within Cumbria is the Lake District National Park, an area some 30 miles across, containing England's highest mountains, and some of the biggest lakes. Artist and author Beatrix Potter (a great Fell pony supporter) lived there for most of her life and many of her stories were inspired by her Cumbrian farms. William Wordsworth was born and

lived in this region, writing much about its rugged beauty.

Events were held from August 3-10 and were full of non-stop whirl-wind activities which culminated with a glimpse of HM Queen Elizabeth II's husband, His Royal Highness Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh, competing with his four-in-hand team of Fells at the famous Lowther Driving Trials.

The convention began with the 31st annual Fell pony breed show on Saturday August 3rd. Classes included in-hand, mounted, group progeny, driving, handy pony (is similar to American 'Trail' showing) and costume. This show is also a qualifier for the Ponies (UK) Summer Championship Show held at Peterborough, in the south of England, later in August.

Sunday, August 4, was a Driving Clinic and Livestock Transportation presentation at the Cumbria

Campus of the University of Central Lancashire at Newton Rigg.

The driving clinic was led by Jane Brindley who is well known for being the long-time owner of the famous Fell pony *Edenview Moon Stroller*. *Moon Stroller* was much loved and celebrated for his spirit, willingness, and longevity. He was born on July 21,



Photo: Anne Fishburn
HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, with his team of Fell ponies, going through part of the hazard's course at the Lowther Driving Trials.



1969; the day man first walked on the moon, hence his name. He died on January 1, 2001 at the age of 31. He was still winning ribbons four months before his death.

Brindley used two Fell ponies for her demonstration. A three-year-old stallion named *Peepings Geoff* was used for the novice pony, while an older Fell pony mare, *Windybanks Dukes Rose*, with a traditional ralli car, show harness and lamps was used for advanced. *Rosie* and her driver looked quite dapper with her proper dress, groom /assistant, and fancy cart. Everyone enjoyed watching them and getting rides after the clinic.

The livestock transport presentation was part of a British program called N.V.Q. (National Vocation Qualification) training, which is like our American on-the-job training programs. Many useful topics were covered such as proper weights in a horse trailer, air flow, heat/humidity, and special skills, physical/physiological, behavioral, combined stress during transport, numbers of horses allowed in various size vehicles, protection of horse during transport.

Monday, August 5, was the “Murthwaite Stud High Fell Walk,” which was truly spectacular and unique because Murthwaite is one of the few places left where the ponies still live and breed semi-feral out on the open fells (hills). Owner, Thomas Capstick who has bred Fells for about 35 years, led a group of about 70 convention attendees up on the fells to see his ponies. Ponies from the further fells were herded in using quad bikes - an inspiring and breathtaking sight.

That evening was the official dinner and auction to launch the convention. Bob Charlton, Chairman of

the Fell Pony Society, gave a welcome speech and introduced many council members and judges who were in attendance. This was a social evening with an opportunity to interact with the officials from the Society.

The next day was a tour of the “Fell Pony and Countryside Museum” at Dalemain. Dalemain is a much loved Mediaeval, Tudor and early Georgian family home set against the grandeur and picturesque splendor of the Lakeland Fells and Parkland in Cumbria.

Sue Millard ran this event. Millard is a University lecturer, artist, Fell pony judge, author, and historian, and web master/writer for the on-line version of this museum. She gave a talk explaining her involvement with the museum including the murals she painted for it many years ago. The Fell Museum visit was part of her Master’s degree survey to see how people would react to this real museum as compared to her virtual version on the Internet.

The museum is full of old farm implements and the Fell section contains such items as bits, harness, saddles, sidesaddle stirrups, stud cards, and photographs. It is housed in the Great Barn at Dalemain, a building dating from the Elizabethan era; therefore people must be careful where they walk due to old floorboards!

The evening’s event was dinner and a tour at Jennings Brothers, Castle Brewery in Cockermouth,

Including a slide show titled “Prince of the Northern Fells; in the Footsteps of the Drovers” by David Anthony Murray.

Murray focused on one of his many projects called ‘Net Quest 99,’ which was a project in which he traveled for 167 days covering 1,740 miles along ancient drovers’ paths, packhorse routes, bridleways, and hunting tracks. He began in Lizard Point in England (the most southerly point in mainland Britain) to Dunnet Head in Scotland (the most northerly point in mainland Britain). He utilized pack ponies within their traditional geographical areas - such as a Welsh Cob through Wales and a Highland pony through Scotland. The slide show that evening was mainly about the Fell pony, Sleddale Black Prince, who he used in Cumbria and Northumberland.



Photo: Laura Hart
 "Wolds Woodcock" a 12-year old Bay Fell gelding, is pictured here at Lowther. He won 1st place in Ridden Geldings Class and Best Ridden overall.



This talk was very engaging because Murray took on the role and persona of Prince, rather than himself. As Prince, he would refer to himself - David Murray - as "Packhorseman!" Prince said quite a few derisive comments to Packhorseman such as "We Fell ponies have to suffer humans terribly!" He described this amazing journey through the Lake District and how the weather can change quickly and dramatically. There was no vehicle back-up for this trek and he barely used any roads.

The next day, Wednesday, August 7, was an open house at the Lownthwaite Fell pony Stud, which has been in existence since at least 1889 and where they still run their ponies semi-feral on the Northern Pennines mountain range. People wandered the farm and roamed from field to field meeting the Lownthwaite Fell ponies. An historical photographic display was available.

Fell breeder and judge, Bert Morland, gave a judging clinic that day. As ponies were led in, he



Photo Laura Hart

Part of the Murthwaite herd at Thomas Capstick's stud farm where they still run and breed semi-feral on the hills. Gray Fell foals are born dark and slowly turn gray over time.

would share comments about how to find a good Fell, such as, "Look in front (at a pony), head-on you should be able to look into the nostrils, eyes, and ears."

That evening featured the "Rare Breeds Trust's Seminar on the Fell Pony Syndrome." The "Rare Breeds Survival Trust" is a charity formed in 1973 and currently supports over 70 breeds of animals in Britain. A full team of experts was assembled to communicate the current status of research on this immunodeficiency disease.

The next day, Thursday, August 8, was the "Appleby Agricultural Society" Annual Show held in Appleby-in-Westmorland. As well as this show, Appleby is well known for the 300 year old Appleby Horse Fair held each year in June. Traditionally the fair was an annual event where gypsies gathered to sell their horses and also as a meeting place where they congregated from all over the country.

This Appleby Show, which was on our convention schedule, had many attractions and competitions such as dairy and beef herds, Fell and Shetland ponies, hunters, driving classes, dogs, dry stone walling, walking sticks, art, crafts, photography, wines, various homemade foods, various children's competitions, and horticulture. Trade stands included: animal rescue, children's games, foods, arts and crafts, toys, furniture, products, music, clothing, etc. There was a falconry demo, parade of vintage tractors and vehicles, and a gymkhana

The next convention event immediately followed the show - an open house

at the Linnel Fell stud, located in Hexham, in the county of Northumberland.

Robert Blackett Charlton is the current owner of the Linnel stud. Bob's great grandfather, another R. B. Charlton (there were at least three of these 'RBs' in succession), bought Linnel around 1890. He (Bob's great-grandfather) had lost a leg when 18-years-old and therefore became interested in driving ponies subsequently there were Fell type ponies around their home for many years. The first Linnel-prefix pony was registered with the Fell Pony Society around 1915. Bob's grandfather authored the well-respected, out-of-print book titled "A Lifetime with Ponies" which chronicles the Charlton family's history with ponies up until that point. Bob currently serves as Chairman of the Fell Pony Society Council.

Tours were given of their farm and ponies. Old family photographs and memorabilia related to their history with Fell ponies were on display.

The final event on the convention calendar was the Fell pony showing day at the Lowther Horse Driving Trials and Country Fair on August 10, Saturday. Fell pony classes included Broodmares, Foals, Geldings, and Young Handlers. HRH Prince Philip, competed in the "Teams of Four Ponies" driving class with four of the Queen's Fell ponies. He came in fifth out of a field of nine teams. George Bowman, world-renowned driving competitor, was also a competitor in this year's trials with his team of Cumberland Cobs in the "Teams of Four Horses" class.

Lowther Horse Driving Trials are the oldest and longest running trials in the United Kingdom. HRH Prince Philip attended that first one with his Oldenburg horse team and he has hardly missed one since!



Even when the Queen Mother her 100th birthday, he attended her celebrations and then flew north to compete. The trials have expanded to include a Country Fair - many country interests are now included such as terrier racing, hound and dog shows, fly-casting competitions (fishing), hunt displays, local arts and crafts, local foods, military displays, private as well as competition driving, working hunter horse/pony competitions, Cleveland Bay show, and of course the Fell pony show.

2001 was the first time in 30 years that Lowther was not held due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak. Lord Lonsdale and his family own the Lowther estate, and many other areas around Cumbria, including common land where Fell ponies run. Lowther businesses include forestry, a caravan (trailer) park, a business center, a holiday park, and a 'model village.' It is also home to many forms of British wildlife including bats, birds, badgers, and the rare red squirrel.

The British have a saying: "At the end of the day it should be about' the ponies." Perhaps the lesson of this convention was that it is more than the ponies; it is also their history, traditions, people, and land all intricately woven together.

A Snapshot of Fell Facts:

- **Breed origin:** Believed to have originated during Roman times, almost 2,000 years ago, on the border between England & Scotland when mercenaries may have left their war stallions behind. A cross between these French, Friesian, German, Polish or Spanish horses and the Celtic pony is believed to have helped shape many British native pony breeds, including the Fell pony.
- **Breed color:** Although brown is the traditional color, over the last few decades black has become the predominant color, followed by brown, bay and gray. The oldest present day Fell pony men strongly prefer a brown or bay pony because they say it cannot be beaten for hardiness.
- **Breed Registry/Society:** The official breed registry, the Fell Pony Society, located in England, was formed in 1916. Although Queen Elizabeth II is Patron of their breed society, it is still known as a 'working-man's pony'. There are no affiliated organizations in North America; therefore all Fell-related activity must still go through this Society.
- **Breed presentation:** Fells are presented at shows clean and well groomed yet untrimmed and unadorned to emphasize their natural state and hill-bred tradition
- **Breed height:** Their desired height is 13.1-13.2 hands, but the maximum height allowable is 14 hands high
- **Breed numbers:** Globally there are less than 6,000 registered Fell ponies, with approximately 70 in North America presently

Laura Hart may be contacted at:

Featheryfeet@yahoo.com
http://www.Fellpony.com

Fell Pony Society
North American Liaison Officer
P.O. Box 174
Eau Claire, Michigan 49111 USA

FAX: (508) 519-6533

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FALL POINT WORLD EQUESTRIAN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
Columbus, Ohio, August 1-4, 2007
www.fallpoint.com