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The Impact of a Holistic Approach to Animal Welfare within Moroccan Mountain Tourism.



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A collaborative initiative between the Donkey Sanctuary and SPANA Maroc has allowed a multimodal, holistic approach to promoting pack mule welfare within the Moroccan mountain tourism industry to be developed. This pilot scheme was initiated within the Aït Bouguemmez valley, in the Central High Atlas, in 2009. This remote, mountainous area is home to the national mountain guide training school (CFAMM) and is Morocco's second most important destination for trekkers, after the Toubkal National Park.

Community building: This initiative has sought to involve and bring together a wide range of actors in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, skills and understanding. The networks created are complex and interact in different, often unpredictable ways, creating learning opportunities for all involved. This holistic approach to promoting animal welfare within the mountain tourism industry recognises the need to promote 'communities of practice'¹.

Communities of practice "are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope.

In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."²



Figure 1: The students undertake an evaluation of the mule during a practical session at the CFAMM. The owner is a muleteer who always seems to buy 'the wrong mule'. Understanding why this is so can only emerge with time.

Networks and networking: In developing the training programme at the CFAMM, we have established networks and relations between a wide range of groups that previously had no contact. This has been achieved by actively seeking to facilitate a wide range of interactions at a range of levels, both in (Fig. 1) and beyond the classroom (Figs. 2-5).

The programme incorporated:

- i. An educational programme** that targeted the student guides studying at the CFAMM. These guides will work as trek leaders and will represent tour agencies on the ground. As such, their decisions will impact on mule welfare and their professional development is essential if norms and standards are to be established across the industry.
- ii. Veterinary clinics** allowing the various welfare problems common in the valley to be appraised. Work was undertaken both in the local souks – to evaluate the wider population of working equids – and at the guide school, where mules are subjected to a clinical examination before and after the expedition. During the expedition, the students are involved in the ongoing monitoring of the mules' condition.
- iii. Wider consultation and engagement with** the authorities, muleteers, animal health technicians, traditional saddle makers and farriers. Consultations are undertaken in a reflexive, non-didactic, way, allowing individuals to reflect on their own assumptions, practice, roles & responsibilities.

The educational programme drew on experiential learning theory, as practised in outdoor education^{3,4,5}. This approach proved invaluable as a means of identifying, studying and exploring the commonly encountered animal welfare problems seen on treks and expeditions. Students were exposed to a corpus of skills and knowledge bases. Higher-level learning was encouraged through assignments and, perhaps most significantly, by ensuring the learning was applied during the course of a two-week, 300km expedition. This experience required students actively participate in team selection (Fig. 4) and then problem solve and work through the various challenges encountered en route..

Figure 2: The students at the CFAMM often attend and help out with SPANA Maroc's mobile clinic in the Sunday souk. This provides an opportunity for common problems (such as hoof balance) to be discussed with various members of the team including Ali, the farrier.



Working collaboratively with the mules and their owners, a range of solutions and options have been explored in a reflexive way. Student guides and owners are thus encouraged to consider various aspects of good packing practice, including team selection, harness and equipment design, nutrition, loading and packing, route choice, group management, risk assessments, wound management, first aid and emergency care (Figs. 3 & 5).

Figure 3: One of the muleteers acts on advice provided by the students and makes repairs and adaptations to a burdâas in order to eliminate contact over the withers.



Figure 4: Students assist Prof. Alyakine in the pre-expedition evaluation of the mule team. It has taken several years for the value of this check to be accepted and recognised by the authorities at the CFAMM.



Figure 5: Promoting a care ethic: Students are charged with wound care and for identifying and eliminating the cause of the wounds.

Knowledge sharing and exchange has thus been promoted:

- between institutions: UoE, DS, SPANA Maroc, IAV and the CFAMM.
- across disciplines: outdoor education, philosophy of education, medical geographies, tourism studies, animal husbandry and veterinary science.
- across the mountain tourism industry.
- between student guides and muleteers at the CFAMM.

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