

## **MULE CROSSING:** *The Inaugural Parade*

By Meredith Hodges



Mules and donkeys once again made their appearance in a prestigious fashion at the Inaugural Parade held in Washington, D. C., on January 20. Being invited to participate was indeed an honor, and the American Donkey & Mule Society was respectfully represented thanks to the long hours and hard work contributed by A.D.M.S. representative and parade coordinator Janet Luke, from Alta Loma, California. Prospective parade entrants had to be contacted and advised as to the strict requirements of such a parade. Arrangements had to be made for animal transport and stabling, signing of applications and release forms, and general organization of the group. Just trying to arrange for transport of my own mule and airline tickets for myself was complicated--not to mention expensive--enough for my taste! Thank you, Janet Luke, for a superb job of organizing and coordinating our parade group entry!

Taking a full week to drive back east to Washington, D.C., was out of the question; I could not leave the ranch for that long, so Lucky Three Bea C.T. was shipped via Nation-Wide Horse Transportation, Inc. to Hunter Mountain Farm in West Augusta, Virginia, where friends and fellow parade participants Barbara Hunter, Cindy Powell, Crystal Wilfong, and Wynn DiGrassie graciously cared for her for two weeks before the parade.

Then, on January 18, my friend--and newcomer to the mule industry--Jack Skendzel and I flew to Washington, D.C., to meet with the rest of the A.D.M.S. parade participants at the Prince George Equestrian Center in Alexandria, Virginia, the following day. Everyone was in high spirits and excited about the impending parade, and the best efforts were made to organize as much as possible before the next morning. Our group consisted of Janet Luke, our group leader; Susan Lowery, her assistant; Crystal Wilfong, youth mule rider from Hunter Mountain Farm; and Dean Hudson, who all rode in a three-seat surrey pulled by two lovely Percheron draft mules owned and driven by Ronald Hudson of Asheboro, North Carolina. Escorting the group in the surrey was Cindy Powell, riding Western mule Lucky Three Stardust, and Wynn DiGrassie, riding Western Side Saddle mule Adkins Banjo, both from Hunter Mountain Farm in West Augusta, Virginia; Loyd Hawley rode Western mule My Darlin Clementine, from Hawleywoods Mule Farm in Prairie Grove, Arkansas; Christie Mc Nerney from Prince George, Virginia, rode her Appaloosa mule "Old John" Western, as did Skip Neese from Liberty, North Carolina; Garon Stutzman of Clifton, Virginia, was our Hunt Master on a tall, sorrel mule that he had recently named Hillary, while Judy Young from Marrietta, South Carolina, represented the Dressage discipline on her tall, bay mule, Laser; Allan Valk, our rather outspoken mountain man from Cornelius, North Carolina, riding his donkey jack, Tricky Dick, was nearly captured by an all-girls' trick riding unit! Ronald Banks of Charlotte, North Carolina, Cindy Langley, and Cindy Robinson of Liberty, North Carolina added to our colorful donkey entries and Chuck Robinson from Liberty, North Carolina provided yet another Western mule entry. Lucky Three Mae Bea C.T. and I represented the English Side Saddle entry from Loveland, Colorado. Our group was led by the official Democratic donkey, Irene, and we were also accompanied by another spotted donkey who had been designated the official "Donkey for a Change." All together we had 17 donkeys and mules and twenty-five people in our Inaugural Parade entry.

Though we had lined up our trucks and trailers the night before according to our parade position, we were required by the military to report to the Equestrian Center at 5:30 A.M. the morning of the parade for meetings and a briefing. Typically, it was a hurry up and wait situation, as there turned out to be no meetings or briefing, and our unit was not allowed to depart for the makeup area and parade route until 10:00 A.M., four and a half hours later! As we pulled into Washington, D. C., proper, I think we were all quite overwhelmed by the millions of people in attendance and by the history that surrounded us! It took awhile for our military escort to find us a place to park the trailers in preparation for the parade, but we did receive a wonderful tour of Washington, D.C.'s historical monuments, including the Capitol building, the White House, the Washington Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, the Vietnam Vet's Wall Memorial and all of the buildings housing the Departments of "this and that!" This turned out to be somewhat of a thrill for my friend Jack, and some of the others who would be driving the rigs and unable to view the parade route. Our drivers deserve a hearty thank you for their part in keeping us on time and well organized! After we unloaded the mules and donkeys, our drivers were escorted to parking at the end of the parade route where they patiently waited until the end of our part in the parade. After being lost in Arlington Cemetery and at the Pentagon the day before, Jack and I felt that being lost with the trailer in D.C. proper was simply the completion of an adventurous tour!

Though we arrived at our makeup area at about 10:30 A.M., we were not fed into the parade until around 5:30 P.M.! Horses in the other equestrian units were becoming somewhat tired and anxious, but our donkeys and mules, patient and durable animals that they are, waited in anticipation with dignity and purpose while group members exchanged humorous stories and experiences.

Then the parade finally did get underway, and the sounds were deafening! Our unit was preceded and followed by bands, and as we moved down Pennsylvania Avenue, the noise reverberated off the high-rise buildings that were on each side of us. The donkeys and mules, however, all behaved remarkably well and went about their business like the troopers we all know them to be. Spectators waved and encouraged us along the route, which was lined on both sides of the street by the Secret Service, who somewhat resembled the guards at Buckingham Palace with their stern and stoic faces! Occasionally, the Longears caused a few of them to abandon their reserve and crack a smile as we passed! We passed the reviewing stand shortly after dark where President Clinton looked up briefly from a conversation with one of his aides to smile, wave, and give us the high sign. At the end of the parade, we were routed down about 10 blocks of dimly lighted streets, lined with buses and high-rise buildings on both sides.

It was a bit eerie riding down these streets to where the trailers were parked and we were all happy to arrive safely. It was truly an exciting and stimulating experience and once again, our beloved Longears proved that MULES CAN DO... AND DONKEYS, TOO!

For more information about Meredith Hodges and her comprehensive correspondence training program, *Training Mules and Donkeys*, please visit **[www.LuckyThreeRanch.com](http://www.LuckyThreeRanch.com)** or call **1-800-816-7566**. Also, find Meredith Hodges and Lucky Three Ranch on Facebook and Twitter. And don't forget to check out her children's website at **[JasperTheMule.com](http://JasperTheMule.com)**.

© March 1993 Lucky Three Ranch, Inc. All Rights Reserved.