



The effect of the use of mules in tourism: a historical perspective

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Abstract

The use of animal power in human history is well documented. The mule, specifically, has been unfortunate as stereotypical images that negatively portray it are profuse, as opposed to its positive characteristics of sufferance, endurance and reliability. The aim of this article is to offer a historical overview of the use of the mule in history, focusing particularly on specific contexts such as mountainous areas, wars, mines and especially tourism. Alternative forms of tourism such as nature-based tourism can revive and grow the use of the mule as a means of transport. However attention to the mule's welfare and 'working conditions' are fundamental. The article is based on a desktop research methodology with the aim of contributing to the literature on working animals in tourism. This is relevant inasmuch as working animals have been neglected in policy-making contexts making it necessary to raise awareness of the working conditions of animals.

Keywords: working animals; mule; tourism; livelihood; animal welfare.

Introduction

The interaction between humans and animals has a long and varied history as animals have provided humankind with food, transport and other services (Lopes, Gomez, Andreaotti & Andreaoli, 2016:574). Humans have used animal power "for thousands of years in Asia, Europe and North Africa" (Simalenga & Joubert, 1997:2). Working animals are still very much used today which is seen by the extent to which they are still employed in a range of functions. For instance, working donkeys, horses and mules comprise about 112 million of the livestock population in less developed countries and they provide invaluable support to human livelihoods in many sectors such as agriculture, tourism, mining and even construction (Valette, 2016:6). Working equines assist about 600 million people across the world, often in poor and marginalised communities (Valette, 2016:6). Thus, the "economic contributions of working donkeys, horses and mules are unequivocal" (Valette, 2016:28).

The ore, a magnetic oxide, is brought down from the mines in the mountains above Cogne, 8350 feet above the sea, on the backs of women, men, and mules, and is of excellent quality (King, 1858:108).

The only remaining want was a mule for the journey (King, 1858:146).

There exists an imbalance between the value of working animals in helping sustain human livelihoods and the value of their worth as assets. Working animals are fundamental for the livelihood of millions of people, especially in developing countries, however "working animals remain largely invisible in the eyes of millions, including amongst decision and policy makers, civil society, and donors, but also those who rely on them" (Ingram & Tekola, 2014:XI). Fundamentally the role of working animals "in the evolution of human welfare remains largely unrecognized, and is greatly underestimated at best" (Devriese, 2012:239). From an Indian perspective, for example, it has been observed that the relevance and acknowledgement of working animals is not balanced, the "beasts of burden such as horses, mules and donkeys, are the power engine of rural India and many other developing countries, yet, their role and contribution remain unacknowledged in national and global policies" (Kharb, 2015:4). A reason (although not justifiable) that could be proffered to explain the 'invisibility' of working animals is their non-recognition as livestock because they usually do not produce food of animal derivation that can assist people's livelihoods (Kharb, 2015:4).



From a tourism perspective, it is “unfortunate that a tradition of moral enquiry over the use of animals in so many different contexts has escaped tourism scholars and practitioners” (Fennell, 2014:984; see also Fennell, 2013:325). Certainly, the work of Fennell (2012) has contributed to opening the debate on animal rights (see for example: Chandra, 2013; Shani, 2012). However, studies on working animals and their welfare are available spanning the past decade (see for example Pritchard, Lindberg, Main & Whay, 2005). Literature and work on burden animals remains “grey” literature and mostly produced by animal welfare organisations but is usually not accessible to policy makers (Valette, 2016:17).

This article does not focus on all “long ears” such as mules, donkeys, burros, and asses which are all used in tourism. These are all considered to be working animals which are deployed in various ways in contemporary tourism. Essays on the use of these animals in tourism are many and replete in extant literature. There are vibrant contestations over the use of these animals in tourism in specific locations inasmuch as there are raging and broader debates on tourism policy and ethics related to these animals (for example see articles in *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2009). This can also reflect the complexity of the human relationship with “long ears” in tourism, and the contestations between those who live with and work with mules, and those tourists who rely upon these animals for their enjoyment.

This article accepts that there exists a lived human-mule relationship in the past, present and in the future. Indeed, there are those whose lives are entangled with mules such as those tourists who keep that relationship going. It can be argued that some readers may want to know more about the actual relationship between owners, muleteers, and tourists, and that working animals used in tourism are beneficial to the environment and to tourists, who are exposed to nature and to a positive human-animal relationship. In that light, given that these animals have been bred for this purpose and used as such historically, some may argue that this might also be good for the animals themselves in some situations. However when viewed in perspective, there are others who may have observed the replacement of these animals with machines.

While recognizing the importance and relevance to pursue a debate on animal ethics, rights, welfare and so forth, this article, deliberately takes a historical and single animal (the mule) perspective that equally unpacks its role and importance. Thus, the article takes a historical perspective, expounds on various ways (obviously not all) in which mules have been deployed in history. Specific emphasis is given to the mule’s role in tourism. In a publication in 2004, Starkey and Starkey observed that worldwide there are “15 million mules (created by crossing a male donkey with a female horse) and their population has also been rising” (Starkey & Starkey, 2004:20). The mule’s role in history as a working animal has been fundamental “and in view of this fact, it is not a surprise that the first veterinary text books was” dedicated to the mule (the *Digestorum artis mulomedicinae libri*) in the fourth or fifth century AD (Devriese, 2012:240).

Based on the historical and current relevance of the mule, the aim of this article is to make an exposé of some fundamental uses to which the mule has been subjected to in history, especially recent history, as well as to focus on the uses of the mule in the tourism sector. The principal intention is to contribute to the propagation and growing the debate and literature on working animals in order to further recognise their important role in human history and, consequently, to advocate for the promulgation of specific legislation and policies that recognise, value and protect working animals – while recognizing the possible value and relevance for some people livelihood.

In this context, this article is also paying tribute to the mule as possibly one of the most undervalued working animal in history; the mule “does not enjoy pride of place in Western culture, and despite being stronger, more intelligent and agile than the horse, is rarely considered a noble creature nor the purveyor of sublime experience” (Vincent, 2015:214). The common idea “that mules are stubborn is not true. The mule’s instinct for self-preservation means they will not put themselves in danger, or be over worked without extreme provocation which has led to the misconception of stubbornness” (The Donkey Sanctuary, 2014a:3). Again, mules have fundamentally contributed a lot in human history “and they deserve a fate better than such an obscure drift toward oblivion” (Savory, 1970:6).



The article, based on desktop research, draws from extant literature and documents. The first part of the literature review provides a glimpse of the deployment of mules in history particularly in wars and mines. In these circumstances, mountain regions have promoted the deployment of mules for various work-related purposes. Thereafter a specific section covering the use of the mule in tourism is provided. A discussion and conclusion make the last part of this article.

Mountain, wars and mines and the mule

Mules have been played an important role in the history of humankind (see some examples in Babb, 2017). A mule which is a hybrid breeding of a male donkey with a female horse “has been deliberately bred by man since ancient times” (Babb, 2017) such as in Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the Third Century BC (Yilmaz & Wilson, 2012:47). Further, “mules were known in Egypt since before 3000 BC...” (Babb, 2017). Similar examples are cited of the historical uses of the mule as reflected in the excerpt that the “humble mule was indeed the most frequently used ‘beast of burden’ in the Roman Empire” (Devriese, 2012:239).

Several mule characteristics are often undervalued, while mules have many positive traits. The two following passages purposively extracted at length show the value of mules.

Mules have many of the best traits of their parents. They can withstand extremes of climate, perhaps due to the origins of the donkey from Africa. They have the calm, stoic nature of their donkey father and the more energetic, flighty reactions of their horse mother. Faced with a fearful situation mules will choose either to use a flight or fight response depending on individual circumstances compared with a horse that would normally prefer to run away [...] They were less likely, than horses, to panic in dangerous situations and could carry much more weight than donkeys. However, in common with their horse parent mules and hinnies can be more “flighty” than donkeys (The Donkey sanctuary, 2014a:2).

The next excerpt emphasises some very positive traits of the mule:

The mule has more than its share of admirable qualities. It is courageous and intelligent, hard of hide, sure of foot, sound of constitution and able to resist changes in climate and withstand thirst and hunger better than the horse. Such perfection must necessarily be marred by a few minor drawbacks. The mule is markedly sensitive around the head and does not enjoy having its ears fondled in this respect it differs from the horse and resembles its male parent. It will not accept injustice or irrational treatment but meets them with instant rebuff. The common phrase “a kick like a mule” shows how well known is the animal’s major means of protest. The mule can also be self-willed to the point of unreasonableness, as is attested by “stubborn as a mule.” Like their masters, however, mules acquire the unattractive traits of stubbornness and ill temper only when they have been badly brought up. They are essentially sensitive spirits in robust bodies, and when their early training has been sympathetically carried out, their behavior is incomparable (Savory, 1970:2; on the difference between horses and mules – and suggested superiority of the mule – see Hutchins, no date; Hauer, 2014).

Hauer’s (2014) book titled, *The Natural Superiority of Mules: A Celebration of One of the Most Intelligent, Sure-Footed, and Misunderstood Animals in the World* certainly gravitates towards the direction of giving due recognition to the mule which would ordinarily go unrecognised. Mules have been particularly important in mountain regions, such that in Turkey, it was noted that in “2012 mules are found principally in four more or less mountainous and discrete areas of Turkey” (Yilmaz & Wilson, 2012:48).

Along similar lines, the remaining part of the article will present how mules have been used currently and in the past in mountainous contexts. In history, it has been recorded that the mule has permitted



humans to 'conquer' the mountains and that the mule has been fundamental in enabling people's livelihood in the mountains and facilitated for mountain development (see Bevilacqua, 2006:86).

The historical use of the mule does not mean that mules are currently not being used. Animal traction usage has not disappeared. In the Swiss Alps, the mule was used until the opening of roads and railways but until 1949 mules were still being used in the transportation of mail and packages in Saas Valley (Leiterman & Roeser, 2016:28). More recently, in South Africa to small farmers and rural communities animal power "remained essential to their livelihoods despite the introduction of government subsidised tractor schemes", and again in the late 1990s in South Africa, large-scale commercial farmers resorted to using animal power and is on the increase as they see animal traction as being more economical than tractors to transport the crop (Simalenga & Joubert, 1997:3).

Besides the most common use of the mule in transportation and general assistance in human work, mules have been used during wars and in mines. Mules have been associated with wars and conquests. The moving of "Hannibal crossing the Alps not only with (a few) elephants but also (and mainly) with mules, to destroy the Romans, is well known" (Devriese, 2012:239). It can be "taken for sure that donkeys and especially the mules played an important role in this episode" (Devriese, 2012:239). With reference to the United States of America, Babb (2017) wrote: "Mules have played an important role in military action throughout this nation's history. Pack mules provided unlimited mobility to cavalry, infantry, and artillery units. The mule is, of course, the symbol of the U.S. Army." The mule has played important roles in the two world wars: "In the First World War, horses, mules and donkeys were considered vital to the war effort" (Animal Aid, no date:1). In 1918, there were 219,509 mules in the British army and it has been "is estimated that a total of 8 million horses, mules and donkeys lost their lives in the war [WWI]" (Animal Aid, no date, p.1, 4). Again "during the Second World War, mules were very valuable during military operations in mountainous regions [...] Mules contributed ... and paid a high tribute" (Devriese, 2012:239).

In Italy, from a military perspective, the mule is specifically linked to the history of the Italian Alpine Army (the *Alpini*). It is impossible to talk about the *Alpini* without automatically associating it to the mule that has worked with the *Alpini* since the birth of the Army Corp in 1872. Mules and *Alpini* have a long history together of sufferance and endurance in WWI and WWII, but also in military campaigns in Africa in 1887 and 1896 (Lega anti vivisezione (LAV), no date). Resistance and tenacity are the characteristics common to the mule and the *Alpino* (Italian Alpine Army soldier) (LAV, no date; about the incredible relationship between mule and *Alpini* - especially the mule caretaker in the *Alpini* - see Scagliarini, 2014:5). However, in 1993 the Italian Alpine Army sold the last 24 mules (LAV, no date). On the contrary, and in other contexts the mule is still valued in Alpine army. In Switzerland "the Swiss Army purchased 10 new mules in 2016 [...] the Swiss military is re-invigorating packing with mules as a valid option in the 21st century reality of warfare" (Leiterman & Roeser, 2016:29).

The presence of the mule in wars has been a worldwide phenomenon (see Babb, 2017 for some examples). For instance, the mule has been used in Burma and India in WWII (see Veterans Affairs Canada, no date), in WWI (Animal Aid, no date), in the Spanish civil war (Seidman, 2010), in WWII (Devriese, 2012:239), in the war in Afghanistan (Grau, 2004). In the mountains of Afghanistan mules were very important and, from a Mujahideen and American perspective, the supply of mules became an international military matter. Around 1984, many mules were flown from United States to Pakistan, however, after seeing that American mules were not proper for the needs, other mules were flown from the Middle East (these mules were also found not to be fit for the purpose) (Grau, 2004:140).

Mines have been another specific context where mules have been extensively used. Sprowles (2011:27) observes that in mines,

[the mule] is particularly suited for labor, inheriting the donkey's endurance and sureness of foot, while gaining some of the horse's strength and its more cooperative temperament. Mules resist disease well, and are able to do the work of a horse under conditions harsh enough for a donkey. For



these reasons, mules were considered exceptionally qualified for work in the deep recesses of mines.

Mules have been used in mines around the world. For instances, in the United States, mules were still used in the coal mines after electric and compressed-air locomotives were introduced, so in 1927 there were 37,000 mules and other “mine animals” working in the United States against 4,280 electric locomotives (Sprowles, 2011:31). Not so long ago mules were still working in the mines. In “1970, mules still moved coal at small mines along the New Mexico–Colorado border” (Sprowles, 2011:31). The “mules, chosen partially for their endurance, lasted as long in the U.S. as the age of industry itself”, however, the roles of animals working in the mines has generally drastically decreased and at the end virtually disappeared. Welfare and safety regulations on animals “of the 1960s and early 1970s finally freed this beast of its burden within the mines of the United States” (Sprowles, 2011:31).

On the other side of the Atlantic, in West Cornwall, it was estimated that in 1800, there were 1500 mules engaged in the mines making mules a feature of the landscape (Cornwall Council, 2011). In the middle of 19th century in Cornwall, mule trains underground were moving the ore and could consist of up to 50-60 mules which were managed by a driver (Skillen, 1992:46). In Namaqualand, South Africa besides underground work, the mules were used as part of a transport system on the surface such that the “most common vehicle was the light Cape wagon drawn by ten mules” (Kostka, 2005:5). These are some examples of the extensive uses through which the mule has been used in mines around the world.

In fact the mule was extremely valuable in the mines. The value of the mule in mining was extreme if we consider that until the 1900s, the old saying was: “it was cheaper to lose a man than a mule, because the company could always hire a new man, but had to buy a new mule” (Mark, Pappas & Barczak, 2011:60). Finally, in a United States study child labour in the mines is often associated with the mules as the main duty of children/small boys. As recorded in a 1906 article the main “duties of the few small boys who work inside the hard coal mines to-day are as mule drivers, spraggers, and gate-tenders” (Lovejoy, 1906:295).

The use of mules has not disappeared. While today mules are still used in mountainous regions or in difficult working environments for many working tasks, their use in wars has probably decreased and in mines might have disappeared. As in the past (see for example King, 1858 for trip across the Alps with mules), mules are currently being used in tourism.

Mule and tourism

The use of animals in tourism is widespread as animals have been used (arguably exploited) in various tourism activities and role, such as being displayed in captivity, in circuses and for transport for many years. In tourism “animals are more often objects than subjects in tourism [...] they are more usually manipulated than recognised as purposive agents or actors in their own right” (Çalik & Çiftçi, 2013:45). Mules have been specifically used since time immemorial for transporting passengers, tourists and goods. Mules are recognised as favourite animals for use with tourists and for other difficult circumstances because well trained mules are “very calm and steady which is why they were so popular with the armed forces for carrying explosives and ammunition or for tourist destinations such as the Grand Canyon” (The Donkey sanctuary, 2014a:2). In various cameo appearance in travel literature in the Alps, the mule “usually personifies not stubbornness or female victimhood, but instead prudence and trustworthiness: before being replaced by the steam piston, it was an indispensable component of travel in the Alps” (Vincent, 2015:214). For a long time and today the mule carries tourists and goods along mountain paths (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Riding mule in Switzerland. Past and present. Source: Leiterman & Roeser, 2016:31.

A book chapter about the historical and current meanings of mule use in mountain areas (Bevilacqua, 2006:84) after noting the decrease in the use of mules (and donkeys) caused by new mechanical machines which can do their work, further notes that the use of mules is being revaluated based on new ecological, energy saving and tourism trends. Examples where mules are used in the tourism include trekking/rides such as in countries such as India (Nathan, Kelkar, Fuquan & Yin, 2013) in Nepal (Saville, 2001), in USA (Holland, Quayle and Trompp, 2014), Italy (Club Alpino Italiano, 2016), and Morocco (Cousquer & Alyakine, 2014). As such mules (and donkeys) “are commonly used as tourist taxis, carrying passengers or luggage” (The Donkey Sanctuary, 2014b:1).

In relation to animal activities in tourism, it was noted that many animals are required “to carry overweight passengers and are denied access to shade, water and rest for hours at a time. Poor quality saddles and bridles are often used and safety guidelines are regularly ignored, placing tourists at risk of injury” (The Donkey Sanctuary, 2014b:1). The Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad (SPANNA) a charity organisation for working animals of the world with programmes, amongst other in Ethiopia, Jordan, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Zimbabwe, and Tunisia advance that (SPANNA, 2016:1):

Thousands of donkeys, horses, mules and camels are used in the tourism industry worldwide to transport holidaymakers on rides, treks and tours. These animals generate a livelihood for their owners, ensuring that they are able to earn an income to support their families. But despite the relentless hard work of animals pulling carriages or carrying tourists and luggage, they can be poorly treated, neglected and beaten. Also many do not receive any



veterinary care in the event of illness or injury, which can lead to serious health and welfare issues. As a tourist, you are in the unique position to positively influence the way owners treat their animals.

While the involvement of the mule in tourism is not new, this article suggests that new tourism trends such as ecotourism, trekking and ecologically friendly holidays open possibilities for the use of mules in tourism. However, this possible usage of mules in tourism need to, fundamentally and unavoidably, revisit and implement new parameters and measures linked to tourism regulations and laws that govern mule welfare – not as a voluntary tourism industry strategy but enforced by various states and or interested international institutions. At the same time it is important to recognise the value and relevance that mules can have in the livelihood of people that own (or are involved with) them in tourism.

A Moroccan case, however, shows how the use of the mule included in the historical patterns of its usage has possibly been compromised by the inclusion of external actors who do not want, or care, to understand the value of the mule at the grassroots level.

The Moroccan mountain tourism industry has grown considerably since it first emerged in the 1980s. Its success can be attributed, in part, to the widespread use of pack mules and muleteers for this leaves trekkers free to carry a small day pack, whilst the mules assure the transportation of rucksacks, camping equipment and other essentials [...] Where previously mules only had to worry about whether they had a good master, their lives and welfare now depend on the actions and priorities of agents who they may never set eyes upon. Where these third parties are all powerful but not all-seeing, the needs and views of mule owners and their mules are typically overlooked. The industry thus fails to 'know' the mule (Cousquer & Alyakine, 2014, p .1).

This matter is fundamental as the mule, in some circumstances, can be 'controlled' by outsiders who may see the mule differently from the mule owner and/or handler. The mule risks becoming an object for exploitation as a pure means to make profit in the short term. Unfortunately, the tourism institutional milieu seems to struggle to recognise working animals. In the World Tourism Organization's (WTO) Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, a fundamental gap has been noted regarding the almost total absence "from the discussion on environment is any specific reference to animals, apart from the need to preserve endangered species of wildlife" (Fennell, 2014:984). This article advocates that it is vitally important to recognise the mule (or any other animals) otherwise ignoring the possible sufferance and persistence of animals "as workers in tourism we imply that they have no interests: interests in not suffering, interests in being with their own kind, interests in expressing what would be normal behaviour for the species in question" (Fennell, 2014:988).

Discussion

All in all, the mule in history has been of great value to humans. Especially in mountain regions, mules have been fundamental for supporting human livelihoods. Mules have been participating (exploited) in wars. These wars have usually been in mountainous region and/or in extreme weather conditions such as the mule with the *Alpini* in Russia during WWII. Furthermore the mules have been a 'fundamental anchor worker' in the mines by contributing its sacrifice, power and endurance (or their exploitation) in the interest of human advancement. Despite the mule's role in history, it has consistently been undervalued and unrecognised. Today, the image of the mule remains an image of stubbornness and poverty as its value is still not recognised. The mule seems to represent the proletariat (if not lumpenproletariat/under-proletariat) of the animal kingdom. From the perspective of livestock animals, similar expression have been used, suggesting that "Livestock animals are in a sense the workers operating in the shadows, an ultraflexible under-proletariat, exploitable and destructible at will" (Porcher & Schmitt, 2012:42). The stereotypical negative characteristics and humble images of the mule make the mule, possibly, the perfect animal belonging to the animal proletariat milieu. Mule 'soldier' and 'miner' can be associated to proletarian milieu. Specific reference



from a United States base study but arguable replicable in other contexts, regarding the military service that people “with lower family income are more likely to join the military than those with higher family income” (Lutz, 2008:184). The consideration of soldiers and miners as a proletarians and the bond that soldiers and miners often have with mules in those specific difficult and dangerous contexts, certainly contribute to associating the mule with the proletarian animal milieu. In the tourism industry, the mule should also be seen as pertaining to the proletariat animal milieu as it is exploited by a number of stakeholders in order to earn their profit and for purposes of survival.

The new tourism trends based on ecotourism, nature-based tourism and other similar forms of alternative tourism seeking to be more environmentally friendly and/or in contact with nature and adventure, can be used to revive the use of the mule as a mode of transport. Mule riding tourism and holiday are currently being offered around the world in many countries. However, while mule rides can be welcome as a tourism product, specific attention needs to be considered so that mules are properly managed and their welfare is properly taken care of.

First of all, as already mentioned elsewhere, “the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics should be revised to include an Article 11 concerning the welfare needs of animals used in tourism. In an effort to move the agenda forward” (Fennell, 2014:992; see also Duffy & Moore, 2011 on Global regulations and local practices on the use of animal – specifically elephants – in tourism). Along this line, it can be argued that tourism policy and legislation should be introduced both internationally and locally to regulate and control the use of mules. For example, some possible action which can be taken is the: inclusion of working equine animals in livestock policy and programmes; increase the visibility of working equine animals in data collection and research; reconciling the multiple values of working equine welfare; and greater political commitment on working equine welfare (Valette, 2016:7).

Mules should be recognised in all their working tasks however when used in tourism, external new factors such as tourists themselves and the travel broker/agents need to be taken into consideration. The role of the external actors have the potential to influence the nature and content of the mule working conditions. It is also proposed that these specific regulations and actions in the tourism sector should be enforceable and not be under industry voluntary and/or self-regulating arrangements. Governments and international institutions should be strongly involved in these regulations (on voluntary self-regulation and government’s roles in tourism see Mowforth, Charlton & Munt, 2008:37).

Travel agencies and all tourism spheres internationally and locally should be involved. This calls for a shift in mentality towards “a change in perception and understanding of the intrinsic value of horses, mules and donkeys [which] is a critical step towards addressing their welfare needs as working animals and livestock” (Valette, 2016:35). It is also proposed here that especially in disadvantaged contexts, mule owners and handlers should not be misunderstood, and possibly automatically blamed, when they overuse the mule. For example, their overuse of the mule (or affected by other mismanagement actions such as saving from adequate veterinarian control) is for them a means of survival (however, and importantly, this does not justify the exploitation of the mule). In these contexts, it is necessary not to incriminate the owners and handlers of the mules but to understand them and recognise their living conditions and this also calls for the need to give them the necessary tools and resources which allow them to improve their livelihoods. It is necessary to facilitate to use (and not overuse) the mules in an efficient and balanced manner while safeguarding their overall welfare. This does not mean that mule owners and handlers should not carry their responsibility but this is to underline that all the involved stakeholders should be responsible for the mule’s welfare – as such, responsibility needs to be balanced amongst all actors involved.

From a more animal perspective it is necessary to take into account, together with people’s livelihoods and the tourism industry the following:

The fact that animals do suffer is a position that is rarely, at least in the present day, called into question. [...] In accepting this view, a key question that tourism agents must face, is whether tourism can use the “responsible” label if it is a cause of so much psychological, social and physiological



suffering in the lives of animals who work in innumerable ways to achieve a better quality of life for those who enlist them? (Fennell, 2014:989).

Of equal importance is to evaluate and understand the role and value of mules (as most working animals) to many people whose livelihoods depend on them. This implies that not all working animals are badly treated – it remains difficult to understand what suffering means and how to know and judge this aspect? This paper does not include these issues, such as their importance in the livelihoods of people and their potential and positive roles in their lives. Given these roles which they play as well as the potential good relations that may exist between animals and humans, it is important, instead, to take these into account as possible trajectories. These issues are valuable and need equal consideration, they however, go beyond the aim of this paper and its limitations as it merely focused on the use and exploitation of a mule as a specific animal.

Conclusion

This article presents a historical perspective on the use of working animals, specifically the mule. Humans have used animals for a variety of tasks and working animals have been fundamental in enhancing human livelihoods. However, working animals are seldom recognized and appreciated for their value while their welfare requirements are often ignored. This article thus offers an examination on the use of mule specifically focusing of some important roles the mules have played (and arguably still playing) in human history. Mountainous areas or difficult environmental contexts have usually been and are the contexts where the mule has been (over)-worked. The mule has been extensively used (exploited) in wars and mines across the globe and its use has not completely disappeared. The tourism sector has witnessed the use of mule since time old and current alternative forms of tourism, such a nature based tourism, ecotourism and community-based tourism, could use mules in tourism in a manner that safeguards their welfare. This is specifically in relation to trekking, mule rides and other forms of tourism that involve the use of the mule as a means of transport.

The article has been a desktop research with the aim of contributing to the literature on working animals. This is relevant as working animals have been neglected in policy making contexts therefore it is necessary to raise the awareness of the working conditions of animals especially if they endanger them. The mule specifically has been portrayed negatively via stereotypical images overshadowing its positive characteristics. One of the intentions of the article is to cultivate the debate and disseminate literature on working mules (and other working animals) in order to promote specific legislation and interventions that ameliorate their working and general life conditions. All actors involved in mule work in tourism that is the tourism industry at its various levels, the owners and handlers of mules, specific local and international governments and institutions need to partake in promoting decent working conditions for the mules which protect their welfare. The use of the mule in history, its value and characterises need to be disclosed, recognised and appreciated. For the tourism sector, since it has for a long time, used mules to transport passengers/tourists and goods, is in a unique position, thanks to its size and resources, to take decisive action in support of mule welfare. However, specific – enforceable – legislation and policies at various levels and by various actors such as governments, animal protection agencies and tourism bodies need to be promulgated, implemented and properly monitored. In addition, facilitation of disadvantaged social-economic contexts involved in tourism using mules need to be properly addressed without necessarily blaming the people (often the poor) involved. Instead, the facilitation of holistic people improvement strategies and tactics should be done so that possible overuse (or other mismanagement actions) of the mule can be avoided.

While what has been presented in this article mostly referred to the mule, it applies to all working animals involved in tourism. The article advocates for the comprehensive involvement of all tourism stakeholders to advance, implement, and monitor enforceable actions towards the greater recognition and the welfare improvement of working animals.



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