

## Another opportunity to prevent Pit Ponies from being used again in Wales!

Despite our best attempt during the consultation period the new Animal Welfare Act and since we failed to ban the use of Pit Ponies. Despite saying they would the writers of the Equine Code of Practice for Wales. Did not include anything that would prevent Pit Ponies being used again in Wales. The Ivory Tower animal carers in DEFRA decided it is OK to use Pit Ponies and took no interest in our evidence presented to them to the contrary, leaving Pit Ponies not fully protected by the new Act. In fact legal experts tell us a successful prosecution of a person working Pit Ponies under the new Act would be very unlikely.

The RSPCA and other large organisations who fought so hard in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for Pit Ponies neglected them in the latter part. (If you can find any evidence of the RSPCA or others fighting to achieve their promises to get this Victorian practice banned you're a better man than I am Gunga Din).

**High unemployment! A cold winter! Lack of opportunities! The rising price of energy! All very good reasons to re-open small collieries.**

**Here is another chance to help Wales lead the world.**

'We the undersigned, call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to include in the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Equines that equines should not be utilized underground'

**Please sign our petition online at**

[http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/epetition-list-of-signatories.htm?pet\\_id=435&prnc1\\_ptnr=The%20Pit%20Pony%20Sanctuary&clsd\\_dt=01/06/2010](http://www.assemblywales.org/gethome/e-petitions/epetition-list-of-signatories.htm?pet_id=435&prnc1_ptnr=The%20Pit%20Pony%20Sanctuary&clsd_dt=01/06/2010)

In the next few lines we will try to tell you why you should sign. During the 1990's although we were assured there weren't any, our tiny Charity visited the Pit Ponies working in Wales. Our report on their welfare was entitled "Horse Power" Some extracts are reprinted here. The whole document can be obtained from the Centre or read/downloaded at [www.pitponies.co.uk/horsepower](http://www.pitponies.co.uk/horsepower)

**Workload.** At all the collieries visited in our study the workload was haphazard. No apparent system for regulating the workload was ever seen. The piecework and casual work arrangements for the men meant that often the ponies worked double shifts. The average ratio of men to ponies was 9:1 in the study group. Generally there was no spare horse kept, so the ponies had to work whatever. In our study group coal drams (with small iron wheels) that were used were not designed for use with horses, making the work much harder for the ponies than it needed to be. Gradient, size of drams, length of haul, weight of empty dram, deep water underground, the unevenness of the track and the irregular spacing of sleepers made the work even harder again for the ponies. No system was ever observed for controlling the number or size of drams of coal that would be coupled together into a journey for the pony to pull. At Pentwyn Colliery Pit Pony "Dolly" died when the huge load pushed her on into an underground ventilation door. At Craig yr Lyn Pit Pony "Sam" died when his huge journey of three drams pushed him over the trip where the coal drams are normally tipped and came over on top of him. ***Our study showed the workload to be very likely to cause the death or injury of the Pit Ponies. Surely it should be a basic right for all working animals not to be worked to death or injury.***

**Veterinary Inspections.** *Annual inspections are called for in the Act. “A vet as to their suitability and fitness should inspect Pit Ponies annually”.* In our study we found that vets were presented with ponies to examine that were not the pony in the register. It was quite easy for owners to present a pony and call it the name in the register. At Carn Cornel colliery the owner presented pit pony Blackie to the vet late in the day when the colliery was closed and the men gone for the day. He told the Vet he worked alone and his old pony only pulled the few odd half-drams of coal for his home fires. The truth was that the colliery had only one pony “Blackie” and eleven men worked there and it produced 150 tons per week. All of which Blackie hauled 400+yards to the surface. Bringing coal up the slope from the lower face was unbelievably difficult for the ponies. However with eleven men to make you do it, the ponies have no choice. The vets report noted the old injury to his hind leg. However based on the lies told allowed a certificate. The vet also gave a preparation as a painkiller for Blackie. ***Our study has shown that had the ponies been identichipped or freezebranded the substitution of ponies would have been more difficult. Also ponies needed to have been assessed by the vet for suitability of purpose and a maximum gross weight to be applied. Also harness, age of the pony, “bone” or physical stature, should have been included. Annual inspections are not sufficient, at a typical colliery i.e. Carn Cornel Pit Pony Blackie hauled coal 400yards from the coal face to the surface, 150 tons/week were produced therefore 150 drams of coal +at least 150 drams of waste, = 300x400yards = 68 miles each week hauling a full dram, 68miles pulling an empty. All these journeys were made over an appalling roadway full of pot holes un evenly spaced sleepers rocks fallen from the roof and lumps fallen from overloaded drams.***

**Dangers.** The collieries in our study were generally messy with unfenced scrap heaps, open excavations, moving equipment, dangerous substances, discarded items abound. Presenting immense dangers to what is essentially a flight animal and naturally inquisitive grazer/browser. Often fuel, noxious substances have contaminated the ground. At Craig yr Lyn colliery a spillage of fuel oil contaminated the mud accumulated in the colliery entrance, the fuel contaminated the lower legs of the pit ponies causing hair loss and dermatitis. This situation was left untreated and unheeded for several weeks until eventually the National Rivers Authority to the Mines Inspectorate reported the contamination and a prohibition order was put on the colliery. Also food waste/rubbish was often observed and left to rot creating a real danger of poisoning. Poor maintenance of buildings/equipment adds to the dangers for the four-legged colliers as well. The piecework culture of the collieries visited created “a coal production at all costs” culture that was not conducive for safety. Underground roadways constantly become low and narrow from the up-heave and crush. At Carn Cornel Ponies had to squeeze down under a low roof to pull up the coal dram from one face. The resultant strain this action put upon their bodies was unbelievable. All three Pit Ponies from this colliery are now retired at the Centre. They are all very head shy and show evidence of old injuries to their heads, necks & backs. Items on the roadway fallen from overloaded drams or from the roof add to the difficulties and cause a real risk in the total darkness underground. Safety/Risk management for the Pit Ponies was un-heard of. ***Our study showed that in the 1990’s there was a serious risk of suffering by the acts and omissions of colliery owners. Surely working horses should be protected from the dangers highlighted above.***



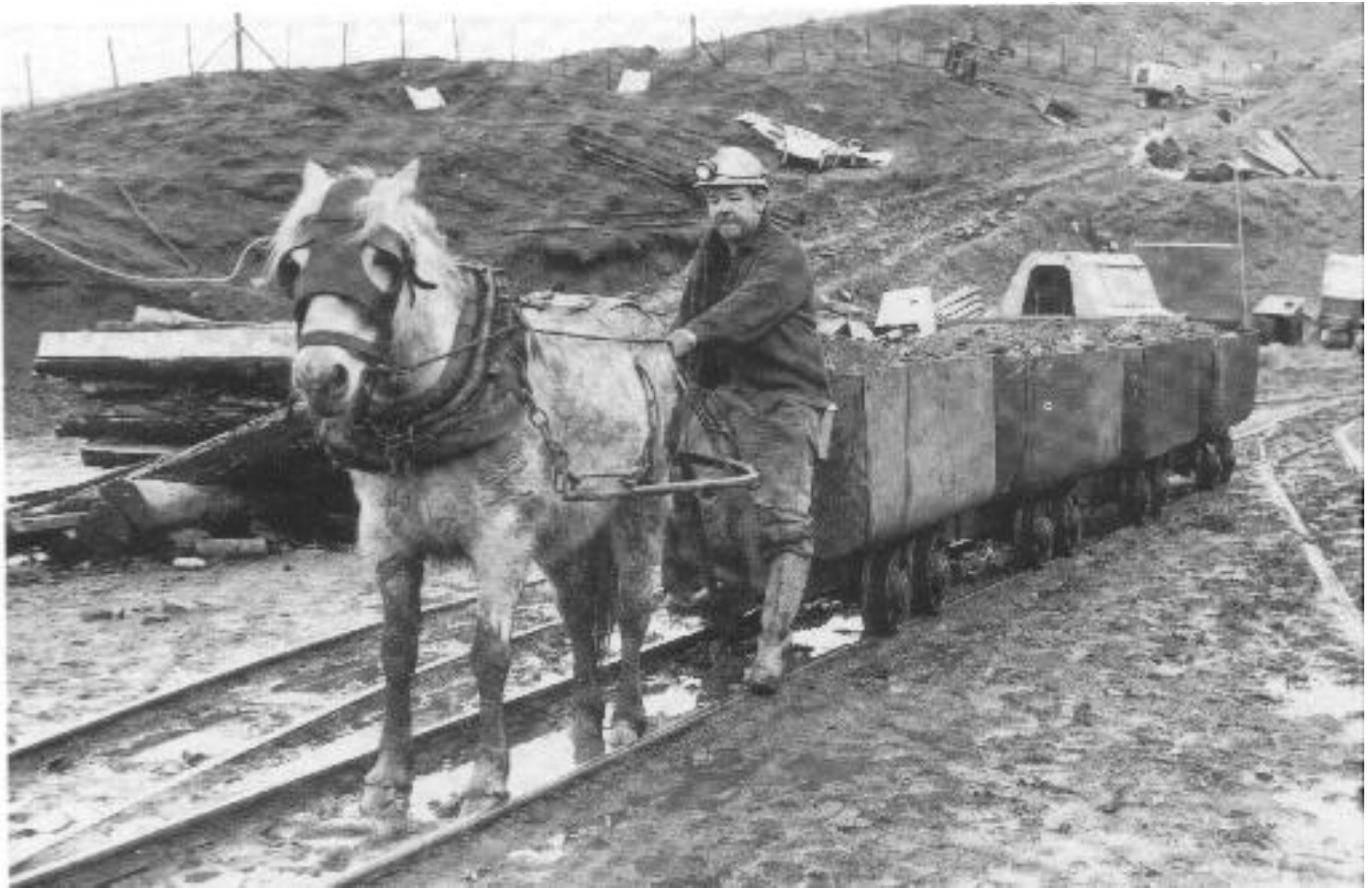
Picture courtesy of Simonin "Underground Life"

Q. How do you get a Pony to go down underground?

Ans. With enough manpower anything is achievable!

Go to <http://www.sgfnet.co.uk> or directly at

<http://www.vimeo.com/7957681> to hear a collier describe the screams of terrified Pit Ponies descending in the cage at Big Pit.



*Picture courtesy of "Small mines of South Wales" Adrian Booth*

Steel pictured here is pulling 4 full drams of coal and a collier, a combined weight of some 6+ tons, an unbelievable load for a 13hh child's size pony to pull. These drams were designed for mechanical haulage and their small iron wheels make it even harder for the pony to move the load.