

The Kerry Bog Pony – Back from the Brink

Despite being approved as Ireland's third native equine breed very little was known about the origins of the Kerry Bog Pony. The Department of Agriculture's Grant Aid Scheme for the Conservation of Genetic Resources approved a grant application for a publication which would be the book of record on the subject.

I first began to read around the subject, to research and compile notes. This involved visiting the library in Tralee, the National Library Dublin, the RDS Library, the local studies section of Kerry County Council, the National Museum of Country Life, Castlebar, the National Museum, Dublin, and the National Folklore Collection at UCD. I carried out extensive research on line and made contact with the Shetland Museum, the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and the Viking Ship Museum, Denmark. I also found the late Dr Stuart Lane's unpublished PhD thesis on the "Economic Role of the Horse in Nineteenth Century Ireland" of great interest. I wrote to all founder members of the Society and to the local papers and the Irish Times requesting information.

As the ponies comprised part of an impoverished rural economy in an isolated part of Ireland there was remarkably little written information available. I feel confident that I have searched most of the relevant resources however here were still major gaps in the story and much of our knowledge was based on hearsay. The key to the pony's origins lay in the "Characterisation of the Kerry Bog Pony" an MSc thesis by Aisling Heffernan carried out under the guidance and supervision of Dr Emma Teeling in UCD and Dr John Flynn at Weatherbys' DNA Laboratory. Consequently I invited Aisling and John to submit a Chapter for the publication. I also invited Dr John Feehan and David Shaw-Smith to write chapters on aspects of the Kerry Bog Pony's history and environment. Given the pony's potential role in Equitourism and Ecotourism contributions were sought from Una Cosgrove the Heritage Officer of Kerry County Council and Paddy Mathews, Environment and Planning, Failte Ireland. Finally I enlisted the help of my sister Gay to edit the text and pull it all together.

The book was laid out by Vermilion Designs, printed by Nicholson and Bass and published by Associated Editions who are also responsible for distribution through Gill and Macmillan.

We had two launches in the autumn of National Biodiversity Year: one in Kerry by John Mulvihill the man responsible for the pony's survival and one in the Department of

Agriculture by The Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Mr Brendan Smith, facilitated by Mark Maguire at the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food.

This is a good news story and we received very good press coverage and some excellent reviews. The whole undertaking was a pleasure and we would like to thank the Genetic Resources Committee for their financial support and their confidence in our ability to produce a worthwhile publication.

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