

After a stern talking to from Gill, I went out on Saturday and tried to build a replica fence in the field, which Aschir then popped over without any trouble. Hmm, still not confident. I really didn't want to end the season on a downer, but it looked inevitable.

Sunday, the day of the competition. I realised that I had a double handful in the dressage, and I'd probably put too much gas in the tank again. The test went OK until the last canter transition in front of the judge when, somehow, Aschir managed to side step and put three feet out of the arena – oops.

The SJ warm up was like a rugby scrum, but Aschir, as ever, remained relaxed and supremely indifferent to everything going on around him. The SJ arena was very imposing, a proper arena used for top BSJA competitions, not the usual roped off bit of a field. Unfortunately we just tipped one fence (mostly due to me trying to hold him back) and finished with 4 faults, but a still a good performance, and on to the XC.

It was magical, the best, most assured round yet. Aschir went round without any hesitation, over everything and had the time of his life. If it hadn't been for me missing a fence and having to circle back (fortunately not counted as a refusal) we wouldn't have got time penalties either. We finished in 15<sup>th</sup>, out of the ribbons, but not far off and we would have been out in front if I hadn't made a couple of avoidable errors – all positive things to take away and learn from for next year, when we'll be moving up to the next grade.

Anyone out there thinking of having a go DO IT. If I can, anyone can, but that said, we couldn't have done it without the help and support of a number of people, who deserve a mention:

Matt Ryan – long suffering trainer

Sally Robbins – top friend and kind provider of manège facilities

Wendy Eames – gifted saddle fitter

Andrew Sankey – maker of Teke-friendly saddles

Gill Suttle – lifecoach, support crew and supplier of celebration fizz

Ruth Staines – e-publicist

Maria Marquise – confidence builder

Matt James – superfarrier

Tim Raby - support crew, photographer and unpaid competition groom



**What a year. What a horse.**

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## A STAR IS BORN

**Jackie Richardson** guides us through the BEF Futurity Evaluation at The Grange, Okehampton – 21.07.09

I read an article about these evaluations in our Endurance GB Newsletter and was hooked. I wanted to take our foal to this event but he wasn't even born. It seemed such a good idea to assess the youngstock that you have bred for the discipline that you have bred them for – be it eventing, show-jumping, dressage, etc. The horses, ranging from foals to 3 year olds, are looked at by a vet and any faults are noted for you to watch over the coming years. It could be a case of remedial shoeing or something for your vet to watch or it may just disappear, as they grow older. Then it's into an indoor school where a team of 3 evaluators look at the horses. There are several venues all over the country, but this year they had included Endurance for the first time but at only 4 possible venues. Okehampton was our nearest but that was 3 hours away.

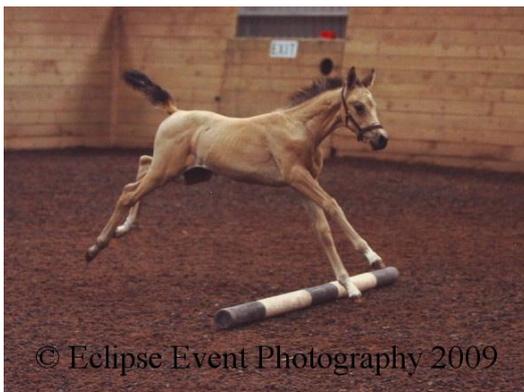
Yoldash was born on 4<sup>th</sup> June and is bred from Firyuza (Fizz), a grey part-bred Arab/Akhal-Teke mare bred by Gill Suttle and Dominik, Darya Hannigan's beautiful buckskin purebred Akhal-Teke stallion. We had 6 weeks to get him leading around sensibly which we did with the help of my friend Harriet who is great with Natural Horsemanship.

The day of the evaluation dawned wet and miserable with a vet time of 10.15am. Fizz loaded fine as usual and I thought Dash would follow but he wasn't impressed and headed off round the field for a few laps before eventually being persuaded that it wasn't so bad after all. They both travelled well for the long journey and weren't fazed by the sight of the other horses at the venue.

We were ushered into the huge indoor arena and the assessors looked him over critically. We had to walk a triangle a couple of times leading them both and then we let Yoldash go to trot beside his mother round the triangle again. Then came the exciting bit as my husband, Neville, held Dash at one end while I walked Fizz to the other end of the arena. Dash was then released to canter after his mother, jumping the poles marking the triangle on the way, much to everyone's amusement. The assessors gave him a 8.64 out of 10, which was very good and far exceeded our expectations. This earned him a First Premium rosette. The assessors said that they liked him very much and that they thought he had a great future in endurance ahead of him and they liked his balance and paces and thought that he could possibly have a dressage future. This in itself I found very interesting and it is something we might pursue in due course.



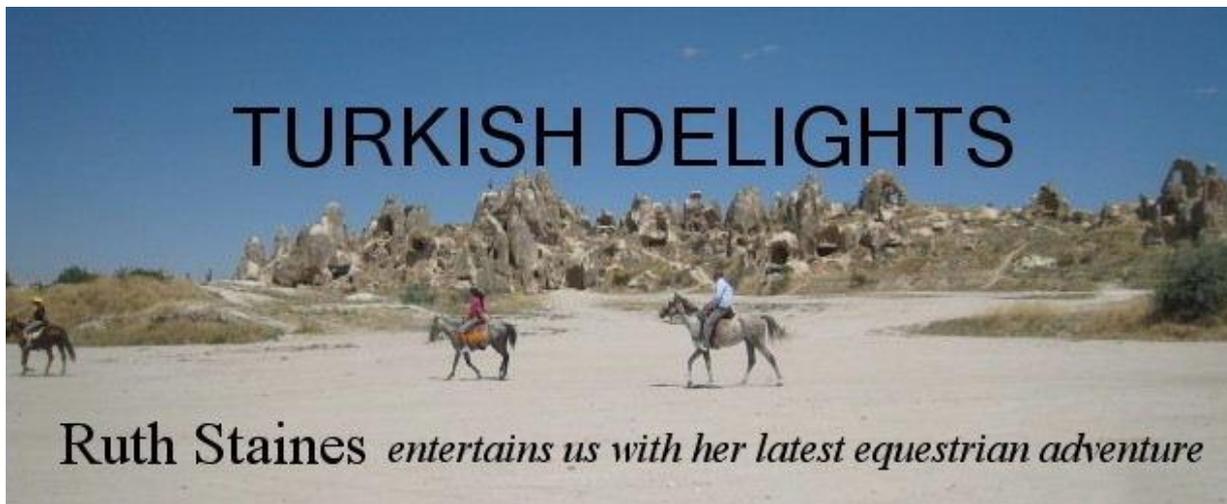
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He also received a Reserve in the Endurance section and a rosette from Endurance GB for just turning up. So a little 6-week-old foal ended up taking home 3 lovely rosettes – can't be bad. Out of the 4 venues and 15 endurance foals and youngstock put forward, Yoldash came 4<sup>th</sup> – marvellous.

If you ever have a chance to go to one of these events, I would strongly recommend it as I found the evaluators very helpful and impartial. They gave very good advice where necessary. Well worth the money. The results go on the youngster's record with National Equine Database (NED) and could be useful if you are thinking of selling in the future.

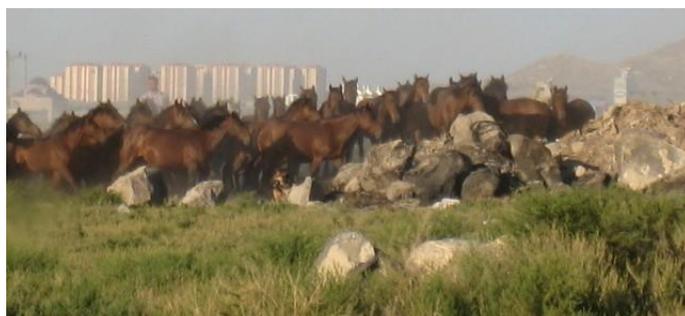


In August I joined some friends who collect horse hair samples for a genetic research project on a trip to Cappadocia, Turkey. Cappadocia's extraordinary landscape has been formed by the erosion of soft rock from volcanic eruptions, and generations of the local populations and various religious communities carving out the rock to form dwellings, churches, even whole underground cities.

We stayed at a pottery at Avanos, to the north of the region. Pottery has been manufactured from the clay from which the Kizilirmak (Red) River takes its name. The potter, of a long line of potters, had relatives involved with horses, and his Dutch born wife was happy to take us to meet them and take us round to find horses to sample. For the first couple of days we found many of the horses on which tourists could ride through the incredible rock formations. Some of these were bred locally, but apparently the tourists demanded 'Arabs' to ride: these were found at a market near the Syrian border, and though their heads did indeed look 'Araby', many were 16hh or more, and we were told that they were thoroughbred crosses.

One ranch was intriguingly named 'Akhal Teke Horse Riding Center' – but disappointingly although their website names several Akhal Teke horses, we were told there was only one, an ancient light buckskin mare from which the Center takes its name. Apparently she was smuggled over from Turkmenistan many years ago. This tied in with what the potter's wife told us – I was delighted to find our hotel decorated with Turkmen garments, hangings and carpets – she said just after the fall of the Soviet Union much was smuggled over by desperate Turkmen. Now many Turkmen goods are sold in Istanbul.

Local working horses were of more interest to the project, and we travelled towards Kayseri (formerly Caesarea) late one afternoon, with a French girl married to a Turk – she found the bureaucracy involved in keeping animals in the EU too oppressive – to see a large herd of locally bred animals. We could see many horses grazing in the distance, as well as water buffalo (we drank their yoghurt; the Turks turn it into a refreshing drink, diluted and slightly salted) and a couple of riders cantered away from the village. Soon a cloud of dust turned into a herd of mares and young stock being driven towards us. With the help of a couple of dogs (one of which was an enormous beast with a spiked collar – he turned out to be a bit of a softy, but it was a difficult to fondle him while keeping off the spikes!) they were enclosed in a compound. They seemed to be 13.2 – 15hh, looking in pretty good condition, although they were too wild to sample. However a couple of young lads rode up on horses - and then we found their lives away from the herd were not so good, as their bits consisted of a combination of a chifney and a high ported, long cheeked bit, and the poor things were holding their heads in the best way they could to ease the pain.



# FAWKES AKHAL TEKE STUD

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## **SALIMRASHID**

Palomino 15.3hh

**Dam SINEKCHI Sire SHAOL**

**Line EVERDY-TELEKE**

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Cecilia, the French girl, had bought some of her horses from this herd, so we were able to see them at close quarters, indeed two of us rode with her for a couple of days. Many of them paced, and they reminded me of the Yaboos in Iran, small, but forward going and tireless. Cecilia thinks so much of these local horses that in ten years' time, when her son is seventeen, she plans to ride them, with her son and her husband, to Mongolia. She will ride through Turkmenistan – she thinks by then the political problems will have been sorted out – hope springs eternal! My mare was half Arab, half local, and 24 years old, though she certainly didn't feel it! The other two were both locally bred. We had a splendid overview of the National Park which is at the centre of Cappadocia. Despite the towns being full of tourists, we were soon alone with the landscape for most of the time.

We had tea at a caravanserai, recently renovated with the help of Unesco. It even had rings in the outer walls to tie our horses to! Travelling south from Avanos the landscape soon began to change; we were riding past walls of pink or white rock, with many intriguing holes in them. There were hills and plateaus, conical rocks and the quaintly named 'fairy chimneys', though many tourists refer to their shapes in rather different terms! We rode up a hill where a crowd of Japanese tourists carried umbrellas to shade them from the sun. Fortunately the horses did not bat an eyelid. We looked down on these strange rock formations.



Time did not permit us to explore the many churches and underground cities, but Cecilia took us down a narrow track to a tiny church away from the tourists. We tied the horses to bushes, and scrambled up the soft and slippery rock to the entrance. We found the remains of wall paintings, a ceiling carved with what looked like Celtic crosses, then through a hole in the wall we found a stable, with mangers and even tying places for the animals hewn out of the rock. We were provided with delicious picnics – Cecilia's husband brought the food, lit a fire, and roasted aubergines, tomatoes, peppers, garlic, all from his friend's

grandmother's garden – and made the freshest aubergine salad I have ever tasted. All this under apricot trees. Another picnic was in a hollowed out conical rock, which gave us welcome relief from the midday sun.

We had some fast canters along tracks that would perhaps be too hard to canter on at home, but horses have to be tough out here. At times we rode along ridges and plateaus with stunning views below, at other times we would have cliffs towering above us, and round every bend we would be greeted by a completely different shape of rock. Occasionally we passed a horse and cart, or saw a tethered horse – at every opportunity we took hair samples from them! A couple of towns were on hills surmounted by great pinnacles of rock, as usual carved out for the original inhabitants who could keep watch for advancing enemies. Another, Roman town, was in a deep valley, with a very slippery bridge, over which we led the horses. The houses were either carved out of, or clung onto, the steep hillsides.

This is a place that deserves more exploration, both on horseback and on foot. We finished our trip with a couple of days in Istanbul, a complete change, again a taster that calls for more exploration. While on a tour of the Topkapi Palace, we had two other members in our group, gentlemen resplendent with gold teeth. The guide was having problems talking to them as he said they spoke in a dialect. When I asked which part of Turkey they came from, he said 'Turkmenistan'! When we chorused we had been there, the gentlemen, instead of, as we expected, trying to make some sort of conversation about their country, beat a hasty retreat and kept well away from us after that revelation! Turkey is a country of surprises.

