

# CASPIANS IN IRAN 1992

*Louise Firouz*

There are 38 Caspians registered in the post-revolutionary Iranian section of the new ICSB. This is a paltry figure compared to the numbers that will appear from Great Britain and the sum total of the numbers that will appear from over the world.

But, instead of apologizing for lagging behind, we heave a sigh of gratitude that many have survived and reproduced and introduced new strains which we hope will join those that left Iran before.

A few of the mares and one stallion (Sekandar\*) were found in the usual manner. The mares were in large herds of motley collections grazing near the Caspian Sea. They were caught with ropes and motorcycles and it took some time to patch the sores and establish a rapport after they arrived at Ghara Tepe Sheikh on the Turkoman steppes. Sekandar was relieved of a heavy bundle of wood on his way down from the mountains and he remains grateful to this day.

The bulk of the 'new' Caspians were purchased from the Revolutionary Guards who were disposing of their pack and etc. animals now that the war with Iraq was over. The Guards had made a broad sweep of the Turkoman Steppes and the mountains bordering the Caspian Sea and had come up with some extraordinary animals. One of them had a mule's head and a horse's body and tail. We were tempted but, no, we did not. Instead we stood ankle deep in dust in corrals while herds of horses milled around at a dead gallop. We purchased about 25 out of about 2000 head and, of these, kept only about 15 for breeding.

We had bought 15 hectares of land on the Turkoman Steppes near a village called Ghara Tepe Sheikh shortly after we sold Norouzabad to the Royal Horse Society in 1975. The horses were wintering with a friend in a village in Kurdistan but he needed his barn back and some Turkoman friends suggested we make a permanent home with them in northeastern Iran, beyond the Caspian and next door to Russian Turkmenistan.

They were right in their arguments on all counts but one. They are hospitable to people they know, the land is rich and well watered in winter which makes good grass and hay and everyone had horses in those days. We felt right at home slapping mud together to make the walls for a barn and cutting trees in the nearby forests to build a fence. But it is a seven hour drive from Teheran in the very best of conditions which never seem to apply when you settle behind the wheel of a car. There was snow and frequent avalanches in the winter but a great view of the 19,000 foot dormant volcano Demavand from the 10,000 foot pass of Imam Zadeh Hashem in the Alborz mountains. The last few miles to GTS were impassable and we would park the car in a village and ride the rest fording a river and slipping precariously near steep ravines. Summer was fine if you could see for the dust.

But we are still there and so are most of the Caspians.

Sometime after the war with Iraq started we were having trouble getting back and forth because of strict gasoline rationing. Also somebody or bodies upstream on our river were using up all the water in the summer and the horses were going thirsty. I decided that we had better find some place closer to Teheran and struggle through for the duration.

We bought 3 hectares of land, 45 kilometers west of Teheran. Kurdan was a middle-sized village of mud huts snuggled under large old plane and mulberry trees and the peace was only broken by the occasional donkey or the large flocks of black ravens that cawed loudly on their way to the near mountains.

We built stables for the horses and a house for ourselves and settled within earshot of Teheran being bombed.

The stables at Ghara Tepe Sheikh were empty as they were when the Caspians were nationalized in 1977, and empty once more when the revolution came and we were told that we were only allowed to keep one horse - the rest we released in the mountains near a spring. They were still empty when the Caspians at the Royal Horse Society Stud in Gonbad-e-Ghabous were auctioned off to local Turkomans and Kazakhs; the latter mainly ate theirs.

The stallion Zeeland was the only Caspian we had when we built Kurdan but we slowly started putting the herd together again. None of these Caspians bear any relation to the ones that were exported in the seventies and eighties to England but DNA studies with the Caspians here in Iran and those in England indicate that they are all part of the same genetic pool (Dr. Gus Cothran, University of Kentucky).

Most of the Caspians have returned to GTS where we built a new stable with a tin roof that catches the rain water and stores it in a underground concrete tank. Some emaciated Akhal Teke mares began to show up led by Turkomans who had caught them amongst the now wild herds or bought them from somebody else who had. We purchased a few outstanding examples and now breed Akhal Tekes too. The sixteen hand Tekes and 11 to 12 hand Caspians graze the same pastures and the wolves think twice before attacking.

Louise Laylin Firouz  
Kurdan, Iran  
Sept. 22, 1992