

This donkey dash is the cutest race you'll ever see

[00:00:06] **Celesta Larita** There's a community tucked away in Arizona dating back to the Pioneer days. It's less ominous than it sounds. In fact, it's a rather adorable society.

[00:00:18] **Speaker 2** They're just very sweet and very cuddly little guys.

[00:00:23] **Celesta Larita** You're listening to Valley 101, a podcast by the Arizona Republic and azcentral.com about metro Phoenix and beyond. I'm intern producer Celeste Larita, and today we're zeroing in on a very niche and tight knit donkey community in Arizona. Every year in the small town of Superior, a rather curious event takes place. That is the sound of bull racing. A herd of 27 donkeys took off at well and ambling pace. Despite their less than quick start, the crowd cheered them on. This donkey race is known as the BRAY Superior Jackass Dash. History of this local race is a little fuzzy, but the first bro race took place in 2019, held by Monique Williams and the Superior Chamber of Commerce. Now, Bray is shorthand for the organization's full name, Burros Rock Arizona and Yonder. Now the acronym works out since it spells BRAY the sound that a donkey makes.

[00:02:08] **Celesta Larita** Superior is just shy 45 miles east of Phoenix. You can get there in about an hour. Nestled against the Apache Leaf's mountains and ringed by the Tonto National Forest Superior is a visually stunning place. Even its main streets with its colorful buildings has a cozy, Wild West feel. And with less than 2500 residents, there's a real small town ambiance. Before I had the chance to really look around the burrow race started immediately. The race took about 3 hours and 17 minutes and Jitterbug, led by Tyler McGee, snagged first place. After the race, I caught up with Michael Walker, whose donkey Clover one second placed.

[00:03:08] **Michael Walker** So we rescued two. And then we found out about the New Mexico Park Girls, which is a group of like 11 or 12 of us, and just started practicing with them. And then we started traveling. So we did a few races in Arizona and a couple in Colorado this year.

[00:03:25] **Celesta Larita** Depending on who you talk to. Donkeys are said to have an incredible worse sense and are even more intelligent than horses. And Michael thinks this too.

[00:03:37] **Michael Walker** They're just super smart and they just are kind of preservationist, right? They like to look around and make their own choices. You know what I mean? About how they want to run or where they want to run. And so you kind of let them lead and then choose the best path. That's great for them.

[00:03:52] **Celesta Larita** Studies and anecdotal reports both show that donkeys are much calmer than horses. In other words, they don't get spooked as easily. And if they do get frightened, they're less likely to bolt. Rather, they tend to freeze up, which might be where the notion of donkeys being stubborn came from.

[00:04:12] **Michael Walker** Just wonderful animals, really fun to have, and they like to run in a pack. They run real well when you get some other donkeys around them. So we tried to stay close to the first place runner and just to keep pace with them.

[00:04:29] **Celesta Larita** Ahead of the race. I spoke remotely with Kelly Smith and Rachel Breashears, the president and vice president, respectively, of BRAY, to learn more about the burro race and what inspired it.

[00:04:39] **Kelly Smith** So we wanted to make some activities and things that are specific to donkeys and answer that by providing some of these activities, which include hikes and the the races, which is what we're going to do in Superior.

[00:05:09] **Celesta Larita** Kelly said that there's a stereotypical idea of what a donkey is.

[00:05:13] **Kelly Smith** Beaten down old creature in the back pasture, or sort of this kind of third world transportation idea that they have in their head. Typically your standard donkey that you see out in the desert or anything like that, down to the minis, which is what I have. Even the mammoths which are the larger breed, they are not large enough to ride for the most part for the average American adult.

[00:05:39] **Celesta Larita** But there's more to the event than just the raise. It's a chance for burro lovers to come out and celebrate their favorite animal. Here's Rachel Breashears.

[00:05:51] **Rachel Breashears** We do have a DJ that's going to be playing. We do have a dance company that's not just showing off some dance moves. They're giving some lessons at the park, which is pretty cool, and most of all, which many people get excited about when we tell them it is the best Bray competition. And the first question usually is what is that with the donkey makes the noise? Which one has the best noise? Sort of. It's not the donkey that we're judging, it's you, the person. So it is a competition for people to do their best impersonation of a donkey.

[00:06:45] **Celesta Larita** The racetrack runs from Main Street Superior through the Coconino National Forest. Depending on the chosen course, donkey owners had a choice between a five or ten mile hike. This is what donkey handler Chris Repka had to say about it.

[00:07:03] **Chris Repka** Oh, the course is beautiful. We've done this short course in the past and we decided we wanted to get it. Everyone has told us that the through the canyon out there is gorgeous. You're on the Arizona trail for a bit and there's a lot of their water and some deciduous trees. And it's nice and cool in there. I think they just wanted to stay, stay in the cool area. So that was our favorite part of the course. I'm glad we did the long run, even though, you know, I think I think Mac likes the ones that are closer to six miles or so.

[00:07:38] **Celesta Larita** The burro community appears to share the similar story when it comes to falling in love with these little equines. Here is what Kelly Smith had to say.

[00:07:48] **Kelly Smith** I came about it accidentally. To be completely honest, I went to buy a horse. My mom wanted to go look at a horse to buy. And the woman happened to have this donkey that was in with her. Her studs, her horses. And I said, You know what, I. I want that donkey. He's. He's very cute. And I just immediately fell in love with him and said, How much do you want for the donkey? I'll take him to. I do love my horses. The donkeys are to me one. They're cute. Let's be real. They're very cute to look at. Their ears are adorable. They've got those beautiful eyes. Just the coloring that most of them have where they've got that light around their eyes. Not big, dramatic eyeliner. They're very, very cute to look at. And they are very sweet. A horse is a little bit flighty or you have to be

a little bit more careful around a horse as far as, you know, some things that may upset them and cause big movement and things like that. A donkey and everybody likes to say they're very stoic and a lot of people refer to them as like the dogs of the equine world. I, I disagree with that. I would say they're more like cats that you when you're donkey. And a lot of people may disagree with this with dogs versus cats, but people who have cats and really love cats will understand that they may not be as effusive as a horse when or as a dog when you first meet them. But once you've earned their trust and kind of been allowed into their world, they're so, so sweet and they're just they make great companions. And they like I said, they're just they're really steady. They're really sweet. They're really mine are very snuggly. Like Rachel said, she's got some that are and some that aren't, but they don't like. They'll come up and well, we can't give you hugs, but they'll kind of wrap their head around you. Mine are tiny again, so they kind of just brace their head up against you like a show lamp.

[00:10:31] **Celesta Larita** Thank you so much for listening to this week's episode of Valley101. Do you have any questions about Arizona? Let us know by visiting valley101.azcentral.com. Thank you to our guests today for providing their insight. This episode was written and produced by me, Celeste Larita, with editorial help from Kaely Monahan and Amanda Luberto. News Direction by Kathy Tulumello. Audio oversight by Kaely and Amanda. Today's musical scoring came from Universal Production Music. You can support Valley 101 by subscribing to us on your favorite podcasting app. Leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you're listening to us. And if you like today's episode, share it with a friend. You can follow us on social media @azcpodcasts. Valley 101 is an Arizona Republic and azcentral.com production.