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This Ebenezer has many friends Donkey attracts visitors with his personality, marking.

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Article Text:

Ebenezer is a donkey.

He's a 14-year-old overweight donkey with skin that sags below his belly and hair like bristles on a worn-out toothbrush. Dust flies when you pat his side.

If **Ebenezer** were a dog, nobody would ever pet him.

But **Ebenezer** is a donkey, and people love him.

Maybe because he's what's known as a ``Jesus donkey" by virtue of the markings on his back: a dark brown cross which runs from his neck to the tip of his tail and flank to flank.

Probably not, though, because you can't spot the cross from the road.

``Can we pet the donkey?" strangers sometimes yell from the car as Benjamin Alvarado feeds **Ebenezer** in a pasture.

``Sure," Alvarado yells back. ``He likes carrots. Carrots and apples. " For a dozen years, **Ebenezer** has lived on 5 acres on the western edge of Grandview. A winding creek separates pasture from woods that stretch up a hillside.

People visit him regularly. They park at the side of the road.

They bring him carrots. Carrots and apples.

Alvarado has always been a little puzzled by the way his donkey attracts strangers.

He concedes that **Ebenezer** is a fine animal, but he's sure not a cuddly pet. And **Ebenezer** can be kind of ornery. If you stop petting him, he'll nudge your arm until you start again.

Snooty, too. If you stop talking, he'll walk away.

He's even been known to run a few people off.

``But he's got more friends than I do," Alvarado, 73, said on a recent cool morning as he carried a bucket to the small

barn where **Ebenezer** sleeps and eats.

Ebenezer has no bigger friend than Alvarado himself.

It is an affection that dates to the 1930s in the rural lands of southern Mexico. Alvarado was 7 or 8. He really doesn't remember how old he was when his family left their home in Kansas City, Kan., to go to Mexico so his mother, who suffered tuberculosis, could die in her native country.

For the year or more that he lived there, his uncle would often put him up on a donkey's back for a trip to town or church. He remembers the donkeys becoming pets during a sad time in a strange land.

The family moved back home after his mother's death. Alvarado finished school, went to college, landed in Normandy on D-Day and later opened up an advertising business. He and his wife, Victoria, raised five children.

In the mid-1980s, the couple decided to take a trip to Israel.

``Let's go to where Jesus walked," they said.

On the busy trip's rare day with nothing planned, the couple walked the streets of Jerusalem and ran into two little boys.

``We know where Jesus mounted the donkey," the boys told them.

They went to the site, near a temple. Donkeys were there.

``It reminded me of my childhood days in Mexico," Alvarado said.

So when they returned home, Alvarado set out to find himself a donkey.

He bought a 2-year-old animal in Lee's Summit, named him **Ebenezer** and put him in the Grandview pasture.

Ebenezer was shy at first. He often hid in the woods and peeked out from behind trees when Alvarado arrived to feed him.

This donkey is shy no more.

He's a favorite of children and grown-ups and a ``family pet" to Alvarado's 12 grandchildren.

Arvine Wyatt, a superintendent with Grandview's public works department, often drops in after work or on his lunch break.

``He's got a funny personality," Wyatt said. ``He's real friendly and seems to listen when you talk. I just like going over there and seeing him. " A visit to **Ebenezer** could make for a nice outing this holiday season. Alvarado won't mind.

Just take Grandview's Main Street west from the downtown. The city limit sign is right by the donkey's pasture.

But if you go, remember: **Ebenezer** likes carrots.

Carrots and apples.

Caption:

CAPTION: With **Ebenezer**'s ornery nature, owner Benjamin Alvarado of Kansas City often wonders why so many people visit the donkey in its Grandview pasture. **Ebenezer** is known as the ``Jesus donkey" because the cross on his spine and shoulders.

Photo

