

Louise Firouz died in the early hours of Sunday 25th May 2008 aged 74, in her beloved Iran, surrounded by her horses and dogs.

Louise was a graduate at Cornell University, USA, studying Animal Husbandry, Classics and English. She married fellow student Nancy Firouz, an Iranian aristocrat, and returned with him to Iran where she formed a large Equestrian Centre, with mainly spirited Turkmen mares and stallions.

In 1965, determined to find something more suitable for her own two daughters and son to ride, Louise decided to investigate rumours that a small, narrow type of pony, known to local peasant farmers, existed in a small isolated pocket of the Mazanderan province. She found what archaeologists now believe to be the forerunner to the Arab, thought extinct for over a thousand years, and she called it the Caspian. This small, narrow, animal, standing approximately 11.2 hands, with amazing jumping and driving ability, proved to be a horse rather than a pony, with horse structure, gaits and temperament.

At the suggestion of H.R.H. Prince Philip, Caspian stock was exported in small numbers to the UK and thereafter to Australasia. More recently they have been exported to America, Scandinavia and Europe. Careful breeding has increased the numbers outside Iran to more than a thousand (live) specimens.

Louise spent a short time in prison between the revolution and the war with Iraq. At the end of the war Louise moved the stud from her home near Tehran to a Turkoman village on the steppes of north eastern Iran. In 1999, in order to fund her breeding programme, Louise began to use the mares to take international trekking parties into the forests, often spending ten hours a day in the saddle. Although in her seventies, Louise continued the forest rides until a fall injured her shoulder severely in 2007. A typical Louise comment to her doctor's remark that she was foolish to be riding in the forests at her age was that she was simply foolish to fall off. Louise's vast knowledge and intellect was as much a part of the ride as the pleasure of being on horseback in spectacular surroundings.

Attempts to export further Turkmen and Caspian stock in recent years, in order to increase the bloodlines, proved impossible and she had grave concerns for the future of the Caspian breed outside Iran.

Having devoted most of her life trying to gain recognition for, and preserve the Iranian breeds, she had strong views about the ancestry of the Turkmen and Caspian, borne out by extensive research, including that of the University of Kentucky, which proved them to be the most ancient of the breeds tested. She disapproved of the word 'Arab', arguing that they descended from Turkmen and Caspian stock in Iran. By the same theory she felt strongly that the Thoroughbred was descended from the Turkmen, rather than the 'Arab'.