

CHAPTER 2. HARNESSING AND TRAINING

2.2 TRAINING OF DRAUGHT CATTLE

2.2.1 INTRODUCTION TO DRAUGHT CATTLE TRAINING METHODS

INTRODUCTION

Training of animals requires patience, firmness, perseverance and above all, consistency. Continuity of the training programme is of prime importance as previous lessons are soon lost by the animal (and indeed the trainer) when breaks occur.

Training may be carried out in Animal Training Centres, but perhaps when it is undertaken on the farm or within the village community, this provides a more practical and convenient environment.

Certain training aids will be found useful and these are suggested below. Duration of the training period required can vary greatly and depends on the skill of the trainer and the acceptance of the animal undergoing the programme.

Communal training programmes in rural areas can offer a useful interchange of ideas between the participants. Such programmes can also assist in ensuring that the training is continuous, replacement farmers or assistants carrying out the programme when the original participants occasionally are not able to attend.

The programme described below, has been used for some years in Zimbabwe (*AETC, 1986*) and comprises four steps in the programme:

- (1) Holding the animal on a rope loop and leading it to walk (2 to 3 days)
- (2) Harnessing the animal and leading it to walk (7 to 10 days)
- (3) Accustoming the animal to pull a load (7 to 14 days)
- (4) Training the animal to work with tillage and other implements (21 to 30 days)

The training sessions, as with normal work tasks, should always be carried out early in the morning during the cooler period of the day.

GUIDELINES TO CONDUCT DURING THE TRAINING SESSIONS

Animals undergoing training will be in close contact with unknown people, upsetting noises and physical restraints such as yokes, reins and equipment. They must become accustomed to all of these and also learn to follow clear indications as to what is expected of them. The following points may be useful in this respect:

- The trainer should keep a calm, firm, patient and consistent approach to the animals
- Follow the training steps as described and repeat until full control of the animal is obtained. Do not try to train too quickly but follow the animal's acceptance of the training
- Reward correct behaviour of the animal with a short rest, some choice food or at least a noise in a "kind" voice. Repeat the exercise if the commands are not obeyed correctly.

USE OF TRAINING AIDS

Several training aids will be found useful as the course progresses and these will be described as they are required. However, they should be prepared in advance of the training session so that valuable time is not lost in the field.

STEP 1 - ROPING AND WALKING THE DRAUGHT ANIMAL

THE CORRAL

The corral makes it easier to approach the animal in the early stages of training but is expensive to construct unless a more long term use is envisaged (Fig.1).

ROPING THE ANIMAL

Take a length of about 4 metres of rope and tie a slip-knot at one end to form a loop or lasso.

The trainer should enter calmly into the corral, call the animal by name and attempt to place and tighten the rope loop around the animals' horns (or its neck if dehorned). If the animal is difficult to approach, the rope loop can be held on a long stick to assist with its placement (Fig.2). Once the rope loop is placed, the animal should be rewarded and calmed down with gentle words.

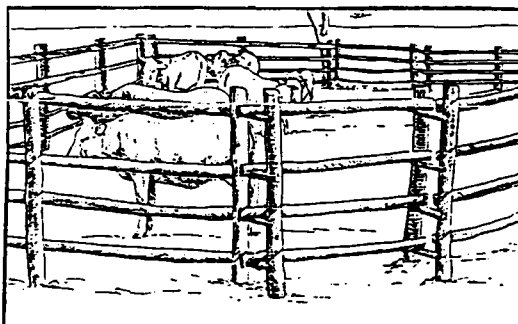


Fig. 1 A corral may be constructed to constrain the cattle

Source: AETC, 1986

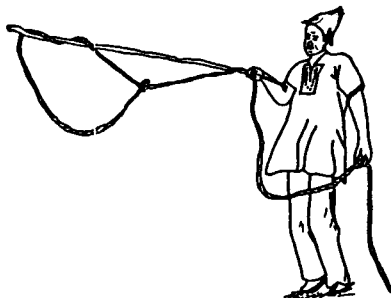


Fig. 2 The rope loop can often be placed more easily by holding it on a stick about 3 metres long

Source: Barwell & Ayre 1982

The animal should now be encouraged to walk forwards whilst shouting the appropriate command and holding the rope from behind. It may be necessary to lightly whip its back legs with the free end of the rope, but only do this if really necessary.

Now shout the command to halt, giving short pulls on the rope until the animal stops. As after every successfully completed exercise, reward the animal with a rest.

If the animal fails to stop however, don't allow the trainer to be dragged along, pulling harder and harder on the rope. Much better to repeat the commands, apply further short pulls and follow it until finally it decides to stop - now the reward can be given. Considerable patience

and repetition is required. Repeat the "Walk!" and "Stop!" routine several times, calming the animal after successful completion. Try to approach the animal, but with great caution, whilst continuing to calm it with a friendly voice. Repeat this, always with great care, so that it gradually becomes used to the approach of the trainer.

SUMMARY OF STEP I

- Place the rope loop and calm the animal
- Use voice commands to make it walk
- Use voice commands to make it stop, also tugging on the rope
- Approach the animal cautiously, calming it with the voice

USE OF VOICE COMMANDS

Two voice commands are required during this exercise, together with calling the animal by name. A few more commands will be needed in the later steps. These should be kept to a minimum but normally will need to cover at least 7 situations. The table below can be completed in the field during the training session, the appropriate word being added to the list and used by all participants

MEANING OF COMMAND	LOCAL COMMAND TO BE USED (TO BE COMPLETED)
Come here!	
Walk!	
Stop!	
Reverse!	
Go straight ahead!	
Turn right!	
Turn left!	

Other commands can be added with more experienced animals, amongst which the following may be needed:

"Get into the corral!"

"Go home!"

"Close up!"

"Lift your leg!"

"Follow the furrow!"

"Come for the yoke!"