

# CHAPTER 2. HARNESSING AND TRAINING

## 2.2 TRAINING OF DRAUGHT CATTLE

### 2.2.3 TRAINING DRAUGHT CATTLE TO PULL IMPLEMENTS

#### SUMMARY OF THE TRAINING PROVIDED IN STEPS 1, 2 AND 3

The First Step in training the draught cattle has been described in **Module 2.2.1**. This will normally have occupied a period of 2 or 3 days and covered the following items:

- placing the rope loop and calming the animal
- the use of voice commands to make it walk
- the use of voice commands to make it stop, whilst tugging on the rope
- approaching the animal cautiously, calming it with the voice

The Second Step, lasting between 7 and 10 days, was described in **Module 2.2.2** and covered the following aspects:

- Placing the yoke on the animals in the shed or in the corral
- Walking the pair of oxen and use of voice commands to "Walk!" "Stop!", "Turn Left!" and "Turn Right!"

The Third Step, normally scheduled over 1 or 2 weeks, was also described in **Module 2.2.2** and covered the following points:

- Walking the pair of oxen, pulling an increasingly heavy log
- Guiding the oxen so that the right-hand animal follows in a furrow whilst pulling a log
- Introduction of the voice command "Reverse!"
- Eventually, the animals should respond to commands given from behind by the trainer holding the reins. They should not need to be led from the front.

#### STEP 4 - PULLING IMPLEMENTS

During this final part of the training, the animals will gradually become accustomed to using the full range of implements on the farm. The more the animals are used daily, the better they will eventually perform and respond to the given commands.

### LEARNING TO USE THE PLOUGH

The animals should be taken to a practice area where a straight furrow should be prepared by a trained pair of oxen. This can be the same furrow already used to pull the log along during Step 3.

Line the animals up with the right-hand ox in the furrow. Hitch the plough but hold the share clear of the soil (some trainers prefer to adjust the plough for shallow ploughing at this stage). Use an assistant to lead the animals along the furrow so that they become accustomed to the direction in which they should walk and also to the noise made by the support wheel and trek chain.

At the headlands, they should be turned, using the voice commands and lead by the assistant. Patience will be required and the animals should be rested frequently.

Make several trial runs with the plough running along the top of the ground, and until the animals are fully used to following in the furrow and turning on the headlands. Now the plough should be set for a very shallow depth of work by hitching to the lowest hole on the vertical regulator (see **Module 3.2.2**). Start ploughing the field, keeping the furrows as straight as possible.

Gradually the depth of work of the plough may be increased during the next few days but the animals should not be worked more than about 2 hours during each session.

### LEARNING TO USE THE HARROW

The problem to be mastered in using the harrow, is to keep a straight line whilst the animals walk over tilled land and do not follow a furrow. For this reason, another voice command "**Go straight ahead!**" should be introduced, once the animals are facing in the correct direction.

As with the previous exercise, an assistant will be needed to lead the animals across the field whilst the trainer steers with the reins and gives the appropriate voice commands. Eventually as the animals become accustomed to the routine, they should no longer need to be lead.

### LEARNING TO PULL A CART

It is preferable to undertake this exercise with a loaded cart so that the animals are less likely to take off when it is commenced. The animals are fitted with the yoke and the cart moved into position. Attach the beam to the yoke, lashing it with a thin cord so that it can be more easily detached in an emergency.

An assistant again leads the animals at first, whilst the trainer holds the steering reins. It is not advisable to ride the cart when recently commencing the training. The animals must become used to the beam between them and the noise made by the cart. Lead them in straight lines to start with and later introduce them to the sensation of turning in tighter and tighter spaces. Eventually the trainer should direct the animals alone, and whilst sitting on the cart (Fig.1).



*Fig. 1 A fully trained pair of oxen being directed along a road whilst the driver sits in the cart*

*Photo: J.E. Ashburner*

### TRAINING THE ANIMALS TO WORK BETWEEN ROWS

Training the animals to pull a cultivator between the rows, can be started during Step 3. Rows of stakes are arranged to simulate the lines of plants and the animals are lead between them. Eventually the log can be pulled between the row of stakes, the animals being directed by the trainer without being lead.

Once the plants in the field are sufficiently tall to be easily visible to the animals, they can then be lead to walk down the rows without trampling the crop.

As the animals become used to this new system, the cultivator can be hitched and the animals again lead down the rows (Fig.2).

### CONCLUSION OF THE TRAINING COURSE

Four steps in training have been described in this Section. Only constant practice with the animals will lead to successful work in the field.

Training can easily be forgotten however and some steps may need to be repeated, particularly when some considerable time passes before the use of a particular implement. For example, working in rows can be difficult at first as the animals have only recently finished working with the plough and harrow.

Patience and firmness during the training will be rewarded as the animals become more capable to provide a significant assistance for the field and transport work.

Detailed advice as to how the field work may be performed with the various implements available, is given below in Chapters 3 and 4.



*Fig. 2 Weeding between rows with a beam mounted cultivator. Note that the yoke only spans one row in this demonstration.*

*Photo: J.E. Ashburner*