

CHAPTER 2. HARNESSING AND TRAINING

2.4 TRAINING OF DONKEYS

2.4.1 THE FIRST STEPS IN TRAINING THE DONKEY

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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 unable to attend.

The programme described below should be treated as indicative only. It is likely that several improvements may be made, according to local experiences and suitable modifications or additions to the Modules should be made in the light of these experiences.

The programme is built up in four steps, the first three of which are carried out with the animal working alone. However it often helps if a trained animal can duplicate the training exercises alongside the "novice". The steps consist of the following:

- (1) Catching the animal, placing a rope loop and leading it to walk (2 to 3 days)
- (2) Fitting the halter and eventually, part of the harness, to the animal and directing it to walk (7 to 14 days)
- (3) Directing the donkey from behind to walk, stop, turn and reverse; eventually to pull a log of 20 kg (7 to 10 days)
- (4) Training the animal to work, alone or in a team, with tillage and other implements (21 to 30 days)

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 harnesses, halters 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, 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 until the commands are obeyed correctly.

USE OF TRAINING AIDS, HARNESSES AND EQUIPMENT

Some training aids together with the harnesses and equipment will be needed 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 little time is lost in the field.

STEP 1 - ROPING AND WALKING THE DONKEY

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.2).

CATCHING THE DONKEY

A rope loop should first be made from a length of about 3.5 metres of rope with a slip-knot tied at one end (Fig.1).

Donkeys are not normally difficult to catch, provided that the trainer approaches slowly and quietly, preferably offering some food.

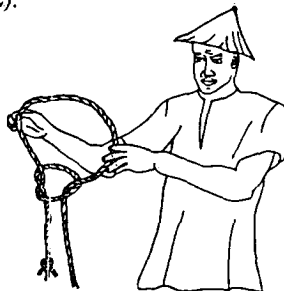


Fig. 1 The slip-knot used on a lasso
Source: Barwell & Ayre 1982

Calm the animal when approaching, talking quietly. When the opportunity arises, place the rope loop around its neck and close the noose. Again calm the animal, tightening the noose but not pulling too hard.

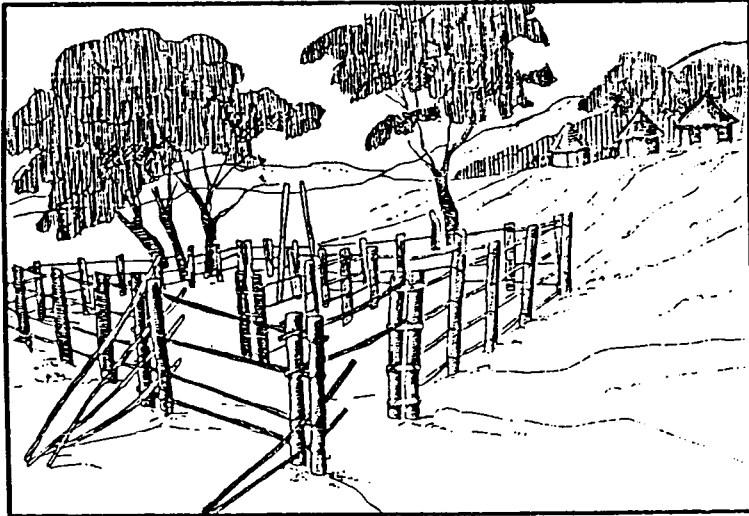


Fig. 2 A corral similar to that for cattle, may be used for donkeys in the early stages of the training programme
Source: AETC, 1986

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 rump with the free end of the rope, but do this only as necessary. Never use a stick with a nail on the end as this can injure and seriously infect the animal!

Now shout the word 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 donkey 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 it finally decides to stop - now the reward can be given. Considerable patience and repetition is required as probably the next problem will be getting the donkey to move again!

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

SUMMARY OF STEP 1

- Approach the donkey calmly, catch it and place the rope loop
- Use voice commands and encouragement to make it walk
- Use voice commands to make it stop, tugging on the rope
- Approach the donkey 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 harness!"