

CHAPTER 2. HARNESSING AND TRAINING

2.4 TRAINING OF DONKEYS

2.4.3 TRAINING DONKEYS TO WORK WITH IMPLEMENTS

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

The First Step in the training of donkeys has been described in **Module 2.4.1**. This will normally have occupied a period of between 2 and 3 days, covering the following items:

- catching the animal, placing a 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 donkey cautiously, calming it with the voice

The Second Step, lasting from 7 to 14 days, was described in **Module 2.4.2** and covered the following aspects:

- placing the halter and walking the donkey on a closely held lead rope
- use of the voice commands "**Walk!**", "**Stop!**", "**Turn Right!**" and "**Turn Left!**" whilst being lead
- walking at the end of a 5 metre lead rope in a circle whilst obeying the voice commands to "**Walk!**" and "**Stop!**"
- accepting a breast strap or collar harness and continuing to accept the commands "**Walk!**" and "**Stop!**" when held at the end of the lead rope

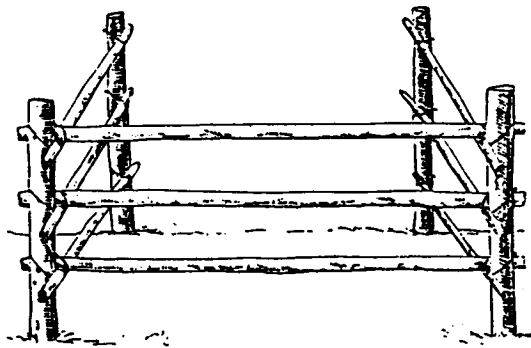
The Third Step, normally scheduled over 7 to 10 days, was also described in **Module 2.4.2** and covered the following points:

- driving the donkey from behind with the part harness fitted (the breast band or collar harness, complete with straps)
- introduction of the voice command "**Reverse!**"
- dragging one trace and eventually two traces along the ground, with the swingletree attached, so as to become used to the sounds
- hauling a 10 kg and later a 20 kg log, whilst obeying the voice commands "**Walk!**", "**Stop!**", "**Turn Right!**" and "**Turn Left!**"

STEP 4 - WORKING AS A TEAM

The training so far suggested, has been carried out with the donkey working alone. If this practise is to continue, a separate training programme described in **Module 2.4.4** should be followed during Step 4. The objective of the training described below is to accustom the donkeys to work in pairs.

Before commencing the exercises, the donkeys should be fitted with the breast band or collar harness and held in the stock for a few hours at a time over several days (**Fig.1**). Each animal should always be tied on the same side, a position which will later be maintained when working in the field.



Once the pair are familiar with each other, they should be lead together from the stock with the harness fitted.

Choose a training area with plenty of space and hitch the animals to the 20 kg log. An assistant should lead the animals whilst the trainer uses voice commands to direct them from behind.

Fig. 1 A stock such as this is suitable for tethering the animals alongside until they are familiar with each other.

After a couple of days pulling the log along the ground, the pair should be introduced to the idea of working in a furrow. Prepare a straight furrow with a mouldboard plough and some trained animals. Now lead the donkeys to pull the log along it, the right-hand animal walking in the furrow and the left-hand one walking on the land. Always maintain the animals in the same relative positions for this exercise and repeat until they obey the voice commands and no longer need to be lead by the assistant.

LEARNING TO USE THE PLOUGH

Lead the animals to the furrow used for the log pulling exercise. Hitch them to the plough and, with the help of the assistant, lead them to pull it along the furrow. Start by holding the plough clear of the ground so there is little resistance. This is to let them become accustomed to the noise of the chains and wheel in work.

After a few practice runs, the plough can be engaged at a shallow depth. Gradually the depth can be increased and eventually the assistant should no longer be needed to lead the animals, the voice commands from the trainer being understood and obeyed.

LEARNING TO USE THE HARROW

The problem to be mastered in using the harrow, is to keep a straight line whilst the donkeys walk over the tilled land and have no furrow to follow. For this reason, another voice command "Go straight ahead!" should be introduced.

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 uses the appropriate voice commands. Eventually, when the donkeys become accustomed to the routine, they should not need to be lead.

TRAINING THE DONKEYS TO WORK BETWEEN ROWS

This stage of the training can be undertaken "out of season" by placing two lines of stakes in

LEARNING TO PULL A CART

This part of the training can be undertaken at any time and is separate from that carried out in the field. Normally a different harness will be used as the animals not only need to pull, but also must be able to stop the cart.

The training principles however, remain the same. Introduce the animals first to the harness which will be adopted. Allow them time to become used to how it feels. Hitch them to the cart and, with the help of an assistant, lead them across the training area.

Practice the use of voice commands and the reins for steering until the assistant is no longer needed. Eventually the cart may be taken down quiet roads and later, the animals familiarized with the noises of people and traffic.



Fig. 2 A pair of donkeys with a collar harness being used for ploughing

Soucre: Hoffmann, Nari & Petheram (1989)