

CHAPTER 2. HARNESSING AND TRAINING

2.4 TRAINING OF DONKEYS

2.4.4 TRAINING SINGLE 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 WITH IMPLEMENTS

The training so far suggested, has been carried out with the donkey working alone. If they are eventually to be hitched in a team, then a separate training programme described in **Module 2.4.3** should be followed during Step 4. The objective of the training described below is to accustom the donkeys to work alone with a range of different implements and equipment.

LEARNING TO USE THE PLOUGH

After the donkey has become accustomed to pulling the larger 20 kg log for a few days, it may be introduced to the idea of working alongside a furrow. Prepare a straight furrow with a lightweight mouldboard plough and a trained animal.

Now lead the donkey along the side of the furrow with the log dragged along the furrow bottom. It will be necessary to lengthen the pull chain as the log will follow slightly to one side, unlike the plough which will eventually follow directly behind the donkey. Whereas an assistant should help at first to lead the animal, it should be controlled from behind with the steering ropes. Continue the exercise until it responds correctly to the voice commands and the leading assistant is no longer necessary.

Now hitch the donkey to the lightweight plough and, with the help of the assistant, lead it to pull the plough alongside the furrow. Start by holding the plough clear of the ground so there is little resistance but the animal can become accustomed to the noise of the wheel and chain.

After a few practice runs, the plough can be engaged at a shallow depth. Gradually the depth can be increased and eventually the assistant will no longer be needed to lead the donkey, the voice commands from the trainer being understood and obeyed. Remember to reward the animal after each successful exercise (eg. water, mineral licks, etc.)

LEARNING TO USE THE SCARIFIER

Training to use the lightweight scarifier is very similar to that followed when learning to use the plough as again, the donkey needs to be trained to follow alongside the strip of land which has

already been tilled. A straight strip should first be prepared with a trained animal, several passes being preferred so that the animal can clearly see the contrasting land surfaces of the tilled and untilled parts. Follow a similar procedure as before and lead the donkey to pull the log alongside the tilled strip. Continue the exercise until it responds to the voice commands given from behind by the trainer and the lead assistant is no longer necessary.

Hitch the donkey to the scarifier in the field and again lead it alongside the tilled strip. Start by holding the implement clear of the ground until it becomes accustomed to the noise and then gradually engage the implement in work. Several days of practise will be necessary until the animal responds correctly to the trainer's commands.

LEARNING TO USE THE HARROW

The problem to be mastered in using the harrow, is to keep a straight line of work across the field with only the less distinct marks of the previous harrow passage to follow. For this reason, another voice command "Go straight ahead!" should be introduced, once the animal is facing in the correct direction.

As with the previous exercises, an assistant will first be needed to lead the animal across the field whilst it is steered and given voice commands by the trainer from the rear. With practise, the help of the assistant should no longer be needed.

TRAINING THE DONKEY TO WORK BETWEEN ROWS

This stage of training can be undertaken "out of season" by placing rows of stakes in the field to simulate the rows. Practise leading and later, driving the donkey to pull the log between the rows of stakes.

The cultivator may now be hitched. Lift it clear of the ground so that it runs on the support wheel and steer the donkey along the rows until it becomes familiar with the new sound of the implement. Later the cultivator should be engaged at a shallow depth and the exercise repeated until the donkey becomes fully familiar with the system of work. Once a crop is established in the field, inter-row weeding can be practised following the same method of gradual introduction of the implement until the donkey works correctly, following the voice commands.

LEARNING TO PULL THE CART

This part of the training can be undertaken at any time and is separate from that undertaken in the field. Normally, a different harness will be used as the donkey not only needs, but must also be able to brake the cart with the help of the breech strap (see **Module 2.3.1**).

The training principles however remain the same. Introduce the donkey first to the harness which will be adopted and allow it time to become used to wearing it. Hitch the animal to the cart and, with the help of an assistant, lead it across the training area.

Make full use of voice commands and the steering reins until the assistant is no longer needed to lead the animal. Eventually the cart may be taken down quiet roads and later, the donkey should become familiar with the noises of people and traffic.

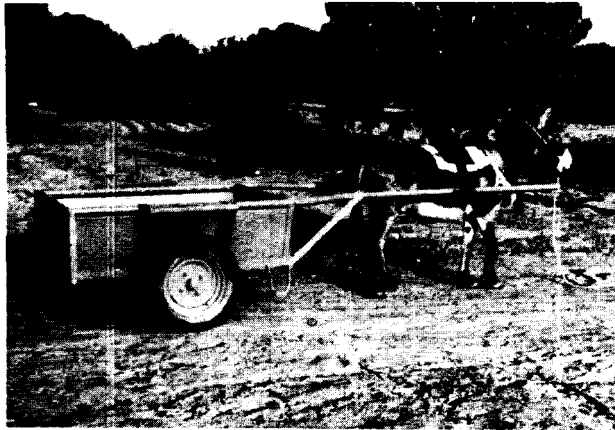


Fig. 1 Donkey harnessed to a cart in Burkina Faso. Note that no breech strap has been fitted to the harness.

Source: FAO, 1982