

CREATURES OF THE CREATOR

Part Six: The Ox



The ox is the great beast of burden. For centuries it has pulled wagons, plowed fields, and moved people and their belongings from one place to another. The ox has been humanity's "workhorse." As with the horse, it is difficult to imagine man's progress and survival without this animal.

What Is an Ox?

The ox is not a special breed or kind of animal. Oxen are any simply cattle (generally steers over four years of age) which have been trained to work. A full grown ox is generally larger than a bull of the same breed merely because they are typically allowed to live longer and thus gain their fully mature size. Oxen generally have a good set of horns so they can back up without having the yoke slip off.

Oxen can pull harder and longer than horses. Thus they were often used for dragging logs out of the forests or dislodging stumps from the ground. They are also not as prone to injury as horses because they are more sure-footed and pull with a more constant pressure rather than jerking the load.

Especially in pioneer days, oxen were often cows rather than steers. So in addition to pulling the load, they also gave milk to the families.

Training

Training is not particularly difficult, but it takes patience and consistency. The animal needs to be taught how to respond to certain voice commands.

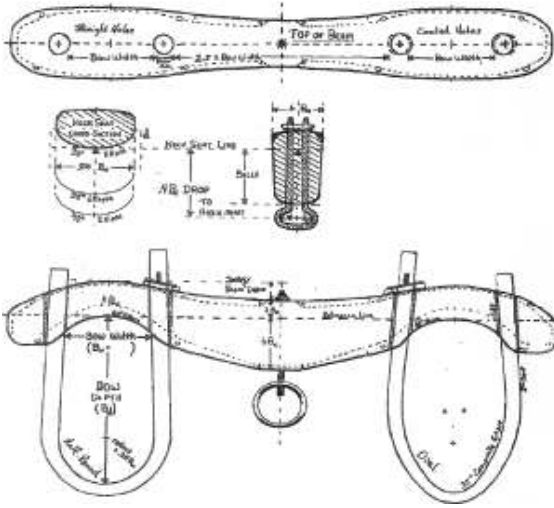


Oxen typically work in teams of two, and many teamsters train their oxen by using a light rod or whip to tap the animals in a particular direction while issuing voice commands. The traditional voice commands for oxen are *Giddup* (forward), *Whoa* (stop), *Haw* (turn left), *Gee* (turn right), *Back* (reverse).

Cattle are fairly quick learners, and when they are cared for properly, oxen are patient and hard working animals. Training begins at a very young age, and it is not unusual for the ox to go through many different sizes of yoke as it grows.

It is important for the trainer to show the oxen who is "boss." You must show them that you can be trusted to care for them by meeting their basic needs (food, water, shelter, etc.) You must also be able to give consistent verbal and visual commands so that the animals know what to do without becoming confused. They must trust their leader and be trained to understand that people are completely dominant over them. The trainer must convince the animals that they can never challenge him. The basic rules of training are: 1) Train regularly, 2) Maintain control of the animals (and yourself), 3) Be firm and insist on obedience, 4) Be patient and understanding, 5) Be consistent in everything you ask.

The Yoke



Instruction For a Neck Yoke

The yoke is, of course, used for connecting the oxen to a wagon or plow. It also connects the two animals together so that they pull together and work together as a team. Yokes come in "neck" or "head" varieties. One does not

necessarily seem to be more efficient than the other, but here in the United States, the "neck" yoke is more common.

Oxen In the Bible

In Bible times, the ox was the principal draft animal.

Proverbs 14:4 Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest.

When Elijah came to choose his successor, he found Elisha plowing in the fields with twelve yoke of oxen. When Elijah called him, he left the fields, burned his plowing equipment to cook the oxen, and had a feast before leaving to preach and teach.

1 Kings 19:19-20 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of

oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye," he said, "and then I will come with you."

Although we don't necessarily leave our regular jobs to go preach the way Elisha did, what might his response to Elijah's call tell us about the importance of the work in God's mission field?

The parable of the wedding banquet (Luke 14:15-24) makes reference to oxen:

Luke 14:19 Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

What was Jesus warning against with this parable? What was he encouraging with this parable?

The Apostle Paul uses an illustration involving the work of oxen:

1 Corinthians 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain."

What was Paul's point? (See 1 Corinthians 9:7-12.)

The greatest reference to this beast of burden is no doubt this one from the lips of Jesus:

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Being connected with Jesus is never a burden!

Resources

<http://prairieoxdrivers.com/>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ox>