

The value of donkeys

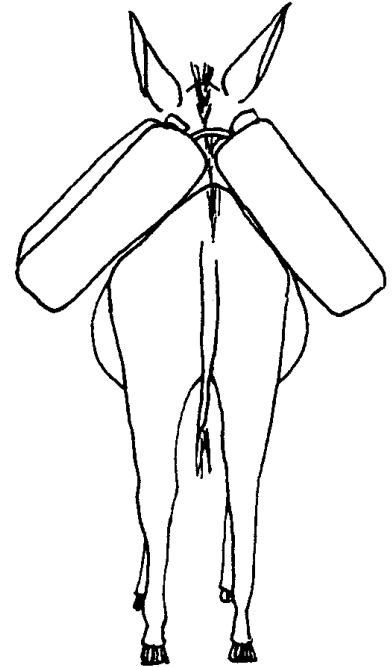
Working donkeys

Donkeys have been working for humans for thousands of years. They are intelligent animals and willing workers that are easy to train. They can learn to follow voice commands and do some jobs without the help of humans. For example, they can learn to go from one place to another while carrying something without anyone having to be with them. A donkey that is very well cared for can live more than fifty years and work for about thirty years.

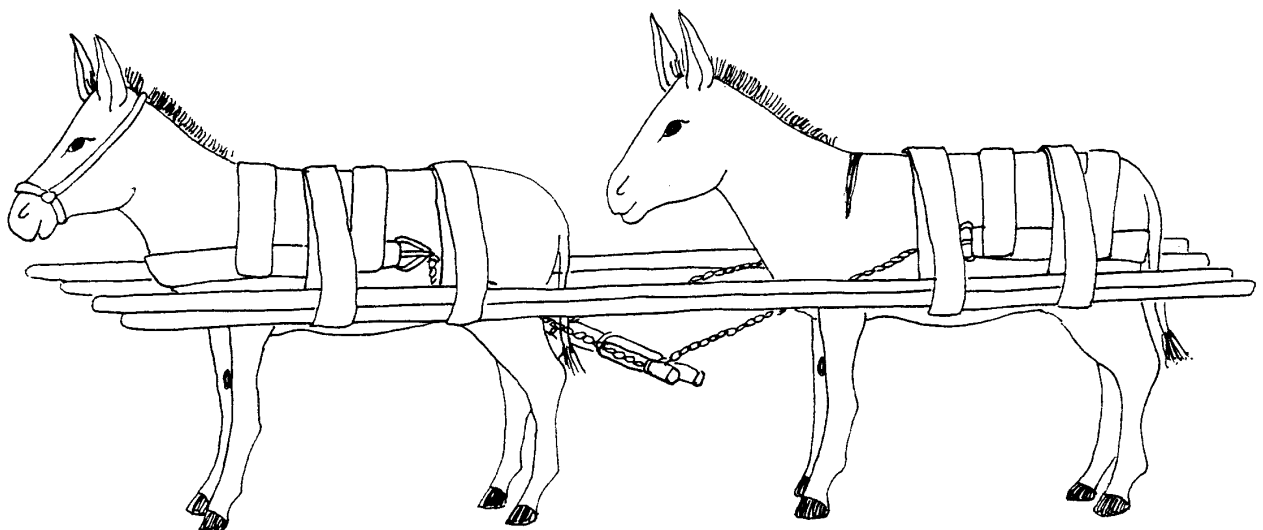
Carrying loads

Donkeys can carry all sorts of things for people. In areas of South Africa where people don't have running water donkeys carry large cans of water. They also carry wood, especially in areas where people do not have electricity.

Donkeys are used to carry the packs of hikers so that they can walk freely without a rucksack. In the Western Cape, for example, tourists can walk from Calitzdorp into the Swartberg Mountains, following a route that was used by donkeys long ago before a road was built.

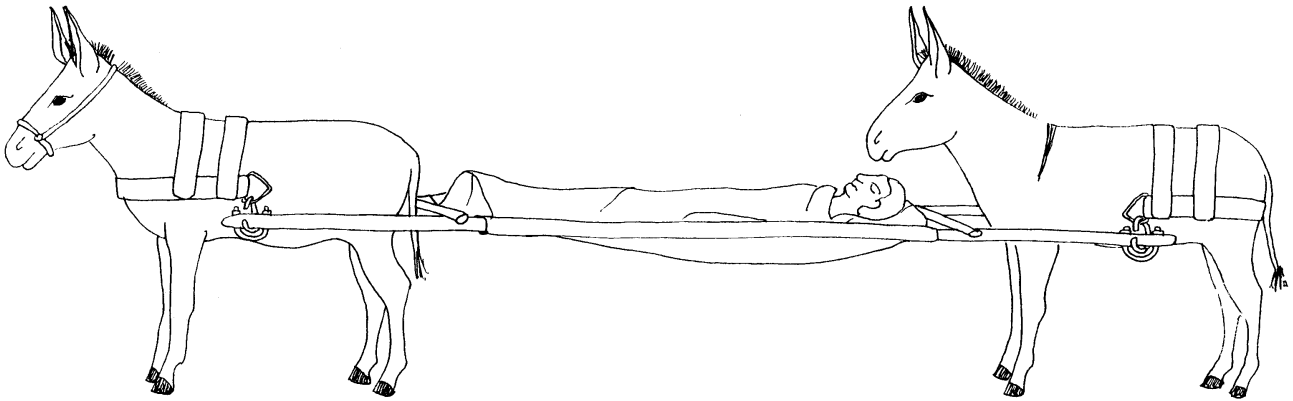


This picture shows how two donkeys can be used to carry long poles.



Carrying People

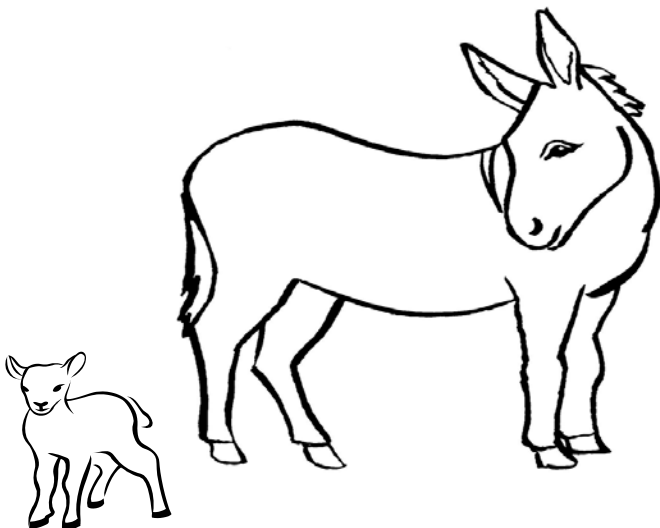
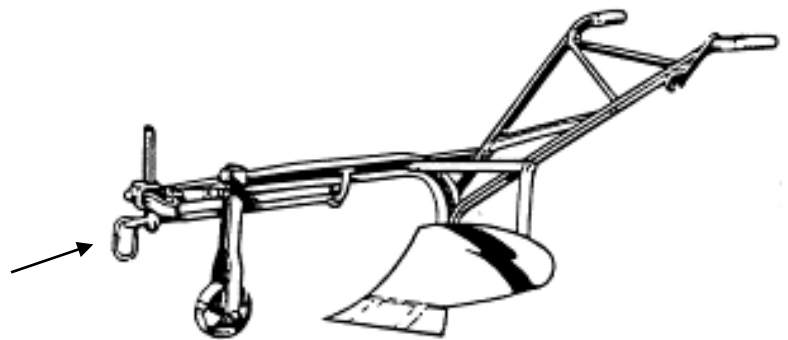
Long ago donkeys were used to carry kings. Today they are still used to carry people. Donkeys are not as comfortable to ride as horses because their backs are not as flat. However they can be easily ridden without a saddle or stirrups as their movements are smoother than those of a horse. They are ideal for carrying children and sick or old people. The drawing below shows how you can use two donkeys as an ambulance.



Donkeys on the farm

Donkeys can be attached to a number of different farming tools that help to prepare the ground for planting. The most commonly used tool in South Africa is the plough.

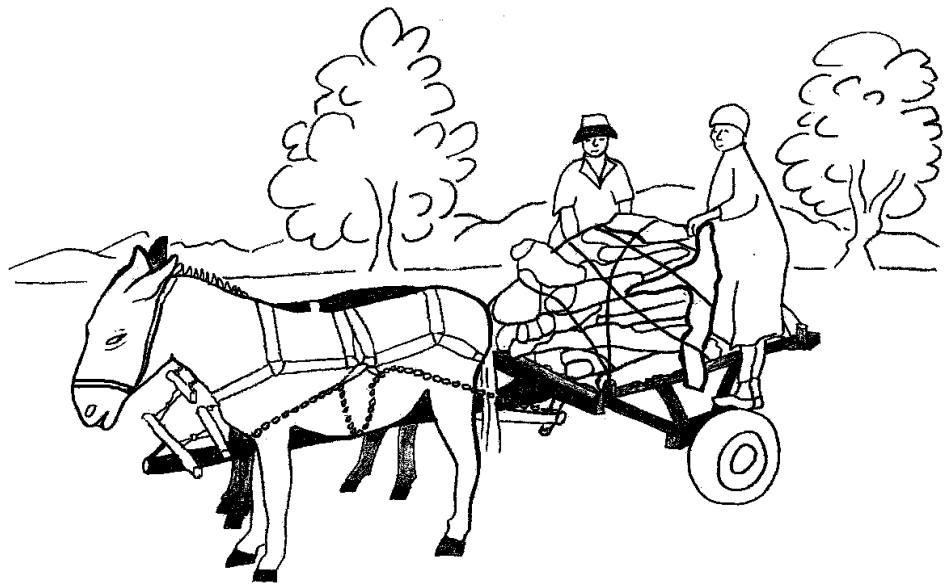
A person needs to walk behind the plough holding on to the handles to guide it. An arrow points to the place where the donkey is attached. The sharp blade at the bottom cuts into the soil whilst the donkey pulls the plough.



On some large farms in South Africa donkeys are used to guard sheep and young ostriches. Donkeys are very protective and can easily kick a predator, such as a jackal, to death.

Transport

Carts are two-wheeled vehicles and wagons are four-wheeled vehicles. Most carts and wagons pulled by donkeys in South Africa are made from heavy car axles. This is the cheapest way to make a cart or wagon, but it means more donkeys are needed to pull the load. A lightweight cart can be pulled by one donkey. A lightweight cart can be pulled by one donkey.

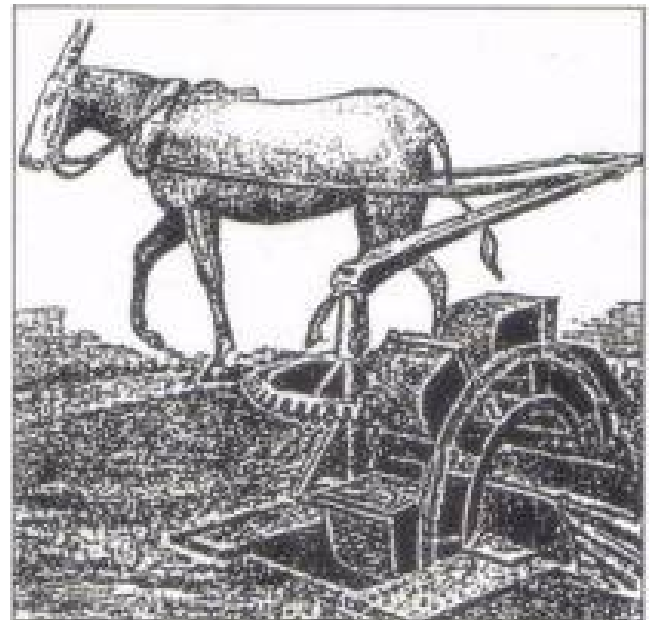


Carts and wagons are not just used to carry goods. In some places wagons pulled by donkeys are used to collect rubbish. They are also used for special occasions like weddings and children's parties.

Milling and pumping

A mill is a building where grain is ground into flour. Most mills today use machines that run on electricity. A donkey can be used to help mill machines work without electricity.

They can also be used to pump (lift up) water. When donkeys are used in this way they usually have to walk in a circle for many hours.



Donkey milk is the closest to human milk and can be used for drinking. It is said that Cleopatra used to bath in donkey milk to keep her skin looking young and beautiful. Cleopatra, born in Alexandria in 69 BC, is the most famous Egyptian queen. Today the milk is also used in beauty products like soaps and creams. You don't find many donkey milk farms, however, as donkeys do not produce a lot of milk.

Donkey manure can be used to improve the soil. Mixed with mud it can be used to make sun-dried bricks for building. It can also be used as fuel for fire.



Helping people

Donkeys are used for riding for disabled children. They allow people to cuddle and stroke them and in this way help people with sad hearts to feel better. Some people keep donkeys as pets.

Donkeys deserve more

Despite all the incredible and different things that donkeys can do for humans, they are often treated badly. Donkeys can suffer in many ways. They can be overloaded or incorrectly loaded and then they can suffer from saddle or harness sores, bruising, heat stress, dehydration (lack of water) and exhaustion. Sometimes they are overworked and not given enough food, or the correct food. Often their hooves are not trimmed regularly, if at all, and the donkeys end up with very painful feet.

Care for your donkey

It is important when you own a donkey, or any other animal, to find out as much as possible about how to care for the animal correctly, for example, filing a donkey's hooves. You need to know about what food and drink it needs. Does it need a shelter, and if so, what kind of shelter? Does it need to see a vet regularly? If you are using a donkey to work you need to find out as much as possible about the equipment it needs and how to best use the equipment. Owning an animal is a job that requires knowledge and responsibility. Donkeys, like all animals and humans, deserve all the loving care and attention that we can give them.