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HARNESSING AND SADDLING OF WORKING CAMELS

Camels are increasingly becoming a means of livelihood in arid and semi arid regions of Kenya. In the past, they mainly served as a source of milk and meat as well as for transport. However, the realisation of their suitability as draught animals has created a demand for their use in farm operations such as tillage. Therefore, there is a need to adequately harness their energy for work.

Harnesses

Generally, harness is a system that transmits animal's power to its workload and is used to attach equipment, implements, sledges and carts to animals. A properly designed, well fitting, comfortable harness allows the animal to pull to the best of its ability without risk of injuries.

When harnessing working camels, the following considerations are important about a good harness:

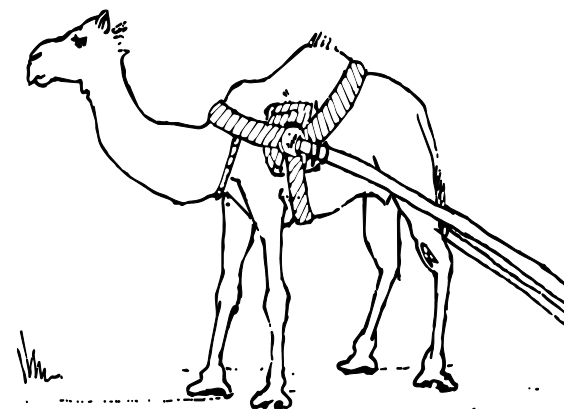
- It should efficiently transmit pulling energy directly from the camel to the equipment or implement.
- It should not cause chafe or wounds on the skin of the camel.
- It should not impede the camel's movement or natural functions like breathing.



- It should not have sharp edges, which could be injurious to the camel.

A carting harness for a camel

Simple harness can be made out of 3 rolled up sisal sacks, as below.



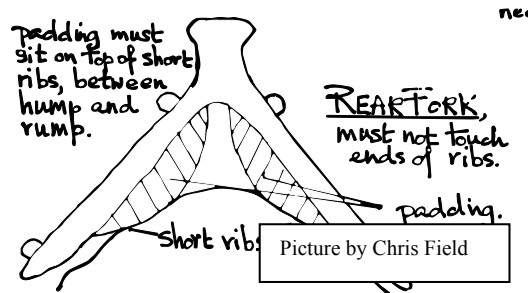
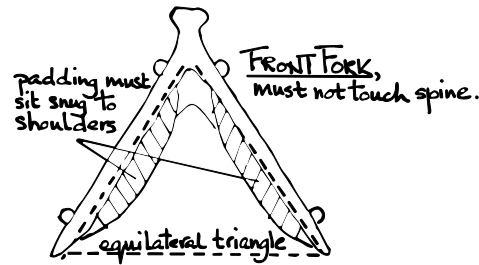
Saddling

Saddles are mainly used for carrying loads or people and normally sit over the hump. However, the weight of the saddle should rest on the ribs not on the hump itself. Some saddles have been adapted for use in pulling carts, ploughing etc.

In selecting or using a saddle, it is important to ensure that:

- there is sufficient padding between any hard frames or parts of the load and the camel body;
- there is no movement of the saddle that can chafe or cause sores through friction;
- the girths are firmly tied and the load does not slip or slide;
- padding is soft and absorbent i.e. made of materials that do not prevent sweat evaporation;
- the camel is comfortable and the load well balanced;
- it is easy to place on and remove from the camel;
- it is not twisted but lies flat along the body contours;
- it is wide enough and padded to distribute pulling or weight bearing force rather than concentrate it in one area;
- it is designed so that it rests on muscles rather than bones.

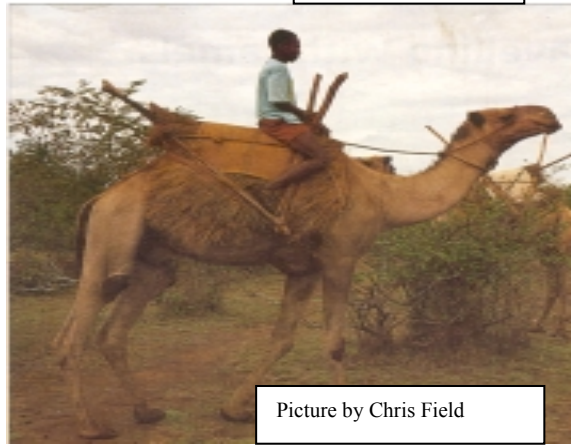
Saddles can be very simple to make. A common saddle consists of two inverted forks of a tree connected by two wooden crossbars on each side of the hump. Sometimes a third diagonal crossbar is added for stability. The inside of the inverted V is then pared down and padded with cloth, wool or sacking. Cow tail hair makes good padding as it does not absorb water. Otherwise, use cotton waste, sponge mattresses or grass and hay.



Picture by Chris Field

Drawing by Debbie Atkins

The Somali style Picture by Chris Field



Picture by Chris Field

Saddle made out of inverted tree forks

A saddle is used to carry weight on the back, the harness to pull from the chest.



Picture by Piers Simpkin

