

The final step involves introducing the camels to implements and carts and doing the actual work. It is important at this stage to use all the commands the camels have learnt. This may be done for about a week.

Note:

- Camels get out of training if not worked regularly and also need 'training up' for prolonged work. As such, it is recommended that training of camels precedes the beginning of the cropping season.
- It is important to keep harnesses and equipment around the camels' *boma* so that they become familiar with the objects, but the harness and equipment must be kept in good condition so that they are comfortable and do not damage the camels.



Picture by Piers Simpkin

Trained camels ploughing



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Training Draft Camels



Picture by Piers Simpkin

Isn't it amazing the kind of work that trained camels can do!

Camels are very intelligent animals and recognise emotions very quickly, and usually respond very soon. It is important that a camel handler is fearless but friendly.

Training of camels should start when they are still young. Initial handling and getting accustomed to head rope can start as young as a few months old. Proper training can start at 2¹/₂-3 years old. However, sustained work must wait until they are old enough, say four years old, and have attained full body weight.

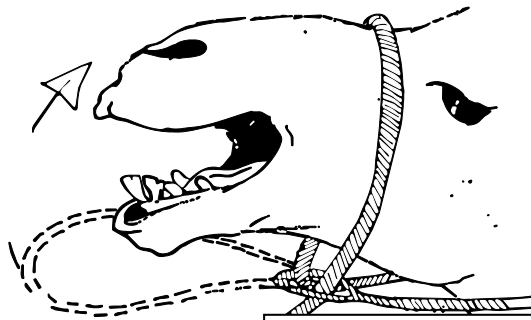
Breaking in

The very first step in the training process involves establishing mutual relationship between camels and the trainer/user and trusting each other. Allow the camels to smell you, to become accustomed to recognise you by smell. Start calling each animal by name.

Stroke their flanks and shoulders slowly to enable them to get used to your touch. Keep talking to the animals, let them familiarise themselves with your voice.

It is advisable to separate two or three animals for training and send the rest of the herd out of sight so that they are not distracted. A camel left on its own will probably feel lost and want to get away to rejoin others.

The first thing work camels have to be taught is to accept head ropes. Both jaw nooses and nose pegs are not recommended as they may cause injury to camels. Head ropes are preferred.



Picture by Debbie Atkins

To start with hobble one front foot to facilitate putting on the head ropes; in time they should accept the head ropes without needing to be hobbled. The head ropes should be put on gently so that the camels do not rear their heads. Try not to fight the camels by excessive pulling. The camels may be led round a bit with a second man following to keep them moving.

All this time, talk to the camels in order for them to recognise and familiarise with, not only the voice of the trainer, but also the commands. And the commands can be in any language as long as the trainer is consistent in words.

Next the camels must learn to couch/sit on command. In this case, one front foot is hobbled up and the other foot is tapped with a stick while giving the command until they sit down. Eventually, they should sit without having to hobble them or tapping a stick.

These steps are continued for about four hours a day for 5-7 days, until the camels are competent. Sometimes a recalcitrant camel has to be fought to obedience.

Harnessing

Harnesses may be put on even on the first day of training. These must fit and be fitted properly. Anything loose or flapping may cause it to panic. Nothing upsets camels more than constant stopping and starting and fiddling with their gear.



Picture by Piers Simpkin

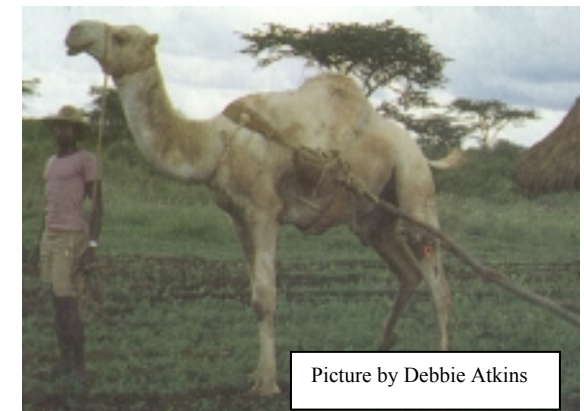
The harnesses should be worn for a day without any attachment or load to accustom the camels to the feel. It is also important to pair the camels to get them used to working as a team. This should be in more open, unrestricted area. Start training with the commands: stand up, sit down, walk, stop, right, left, etc.

Note:

- After a while, the camels should be given a brief rest (reward). The exercise should be continued for about four hours a day for 4-7 days, until the camels show competence.
- Untrained camels that have never seen a harnessed camel may easily panic at the sight, even though it is one of their own. Either the newly harnessed camel must be hobbled or the herd confined until they recognise their fellow, or they may run for miles, chased by their bewildered friend!
- Many camels have never seen vehicles or wire fences, accustom them to these strange objects.

Draught/Traction

Attach a light pole on each side and let the camels pull these poles round for a few hours. The aim here is to develop the muscles and stamina, and train them to pull loads and even walk straight in a field. After that, attach something that clatters and makes noise. Progressively increase the weights over days. Other additional commands here could include: straight, go, reverse, etc. Once camels are used to pulling these, they are most patient and determined.



Picture by Debbie Atkins

This exercise should be carried out repeatedly every day for about four hours per day for 5-7 days.