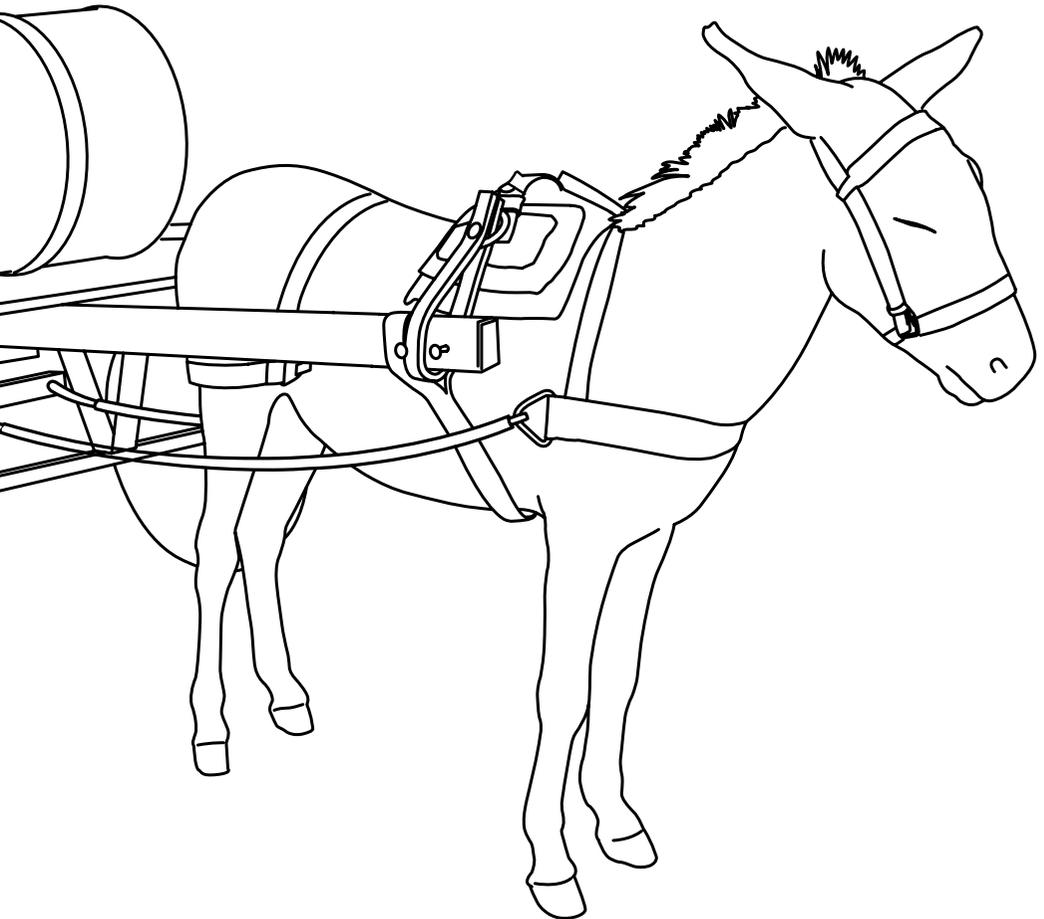


THE GOOD HARNESS GUIDE

By Chris Garrett



**THE DONKEY
SANCTUARY**



thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk

Donkeys are intelligent

They're smarter than horses and can be controlled easily using gentle taps, gentle bit use and words.

But because they don't understand English you have to teach them what each command means, they don't speak English (Arabic, Amharic, Spanish, whatever).

Foreword

Harness is a very simple yet complicated topic. It's simple in that it refers to the way a power source, in our case a donkey, is attached to a load, be it a cart, packsaddle or rider. It's also simple in that, as long as certain basic rules are followed, it is straightforward. Unfortunately, these simple techniques, when acting together, can become quite complicated.

I've tried to show how harness should work in a mainly pictorial way to overcome language and literacy problems. I've also added some suggestions in 'trainer's notes' at the back of the leaflet, which in the past have helped me to explain to donkey owners how harness works. I try to use local materials and construction techniques whenever possible; it's not always easy to find these, but I'm becoming more and more certain that most of the donkeys' harnessing problems are a result of modern living. If you talk to the elders in any community you'll often find that their donkeys didn't have the massive sores that we see now, and one of the reasons was that the harness was carefully made from natural fibres, and the people had a far greater understanding of both the harness' and the donkey's capabilities. Look a little deeper and you'll often find people who can remember how to make this harness, or at least what plants were used to make the materials. I usually learn as much as I teach in any of these communities, and I always try to remember that however much I may think I know, I don't spend my life working with donkeys in the same way as the donkey owners do, and can never fully understand the whole picture.

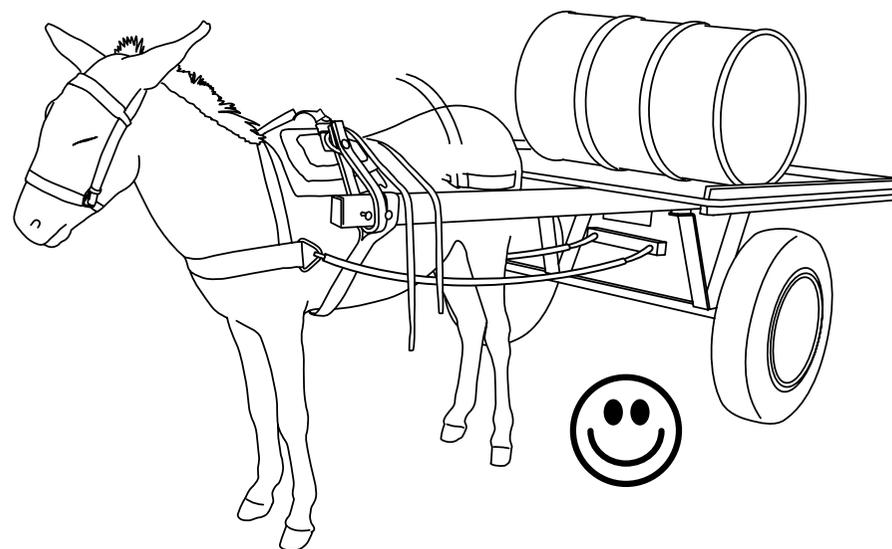
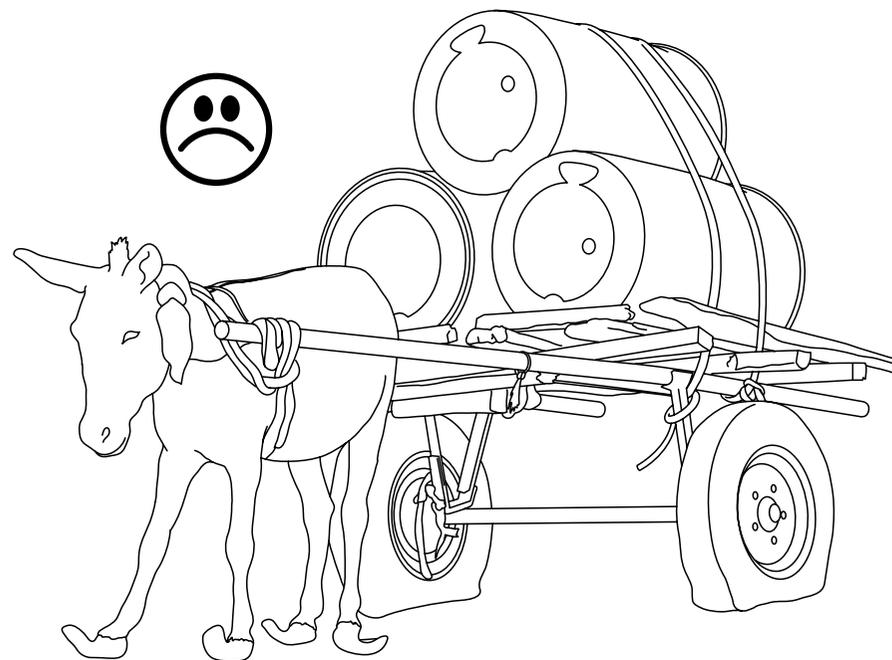


Chris Garrett

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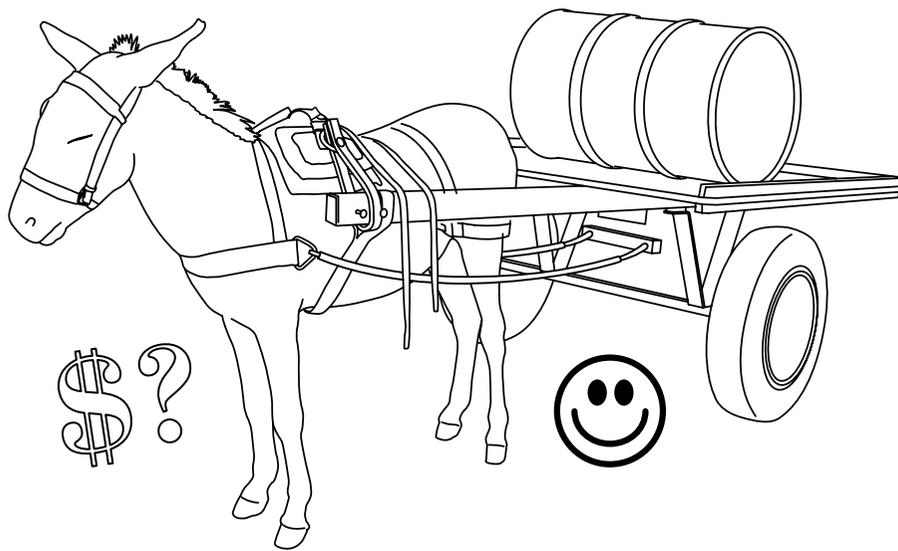
Why worry?



Five months later...



 **Because bad harnesses can kill donkeys!**

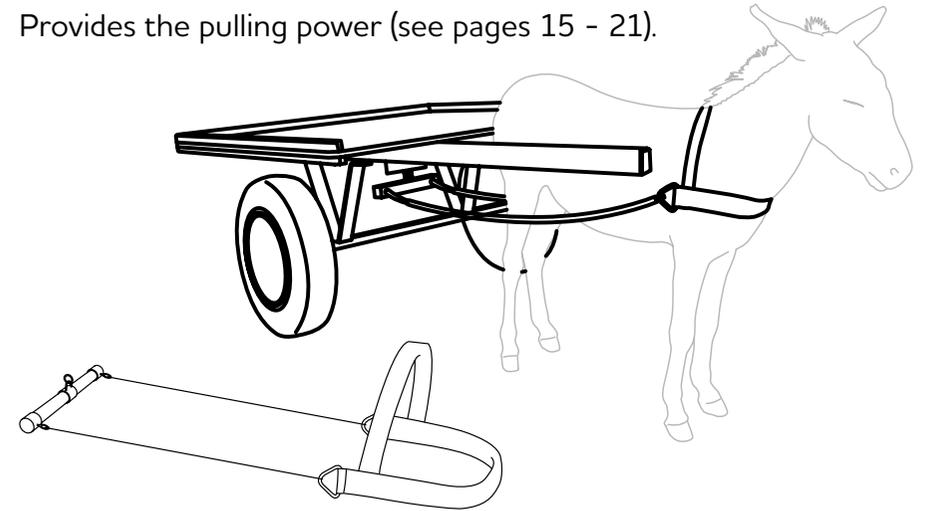


A well cared for donkey should give you 15 - 20 years work.

Three functions of harness

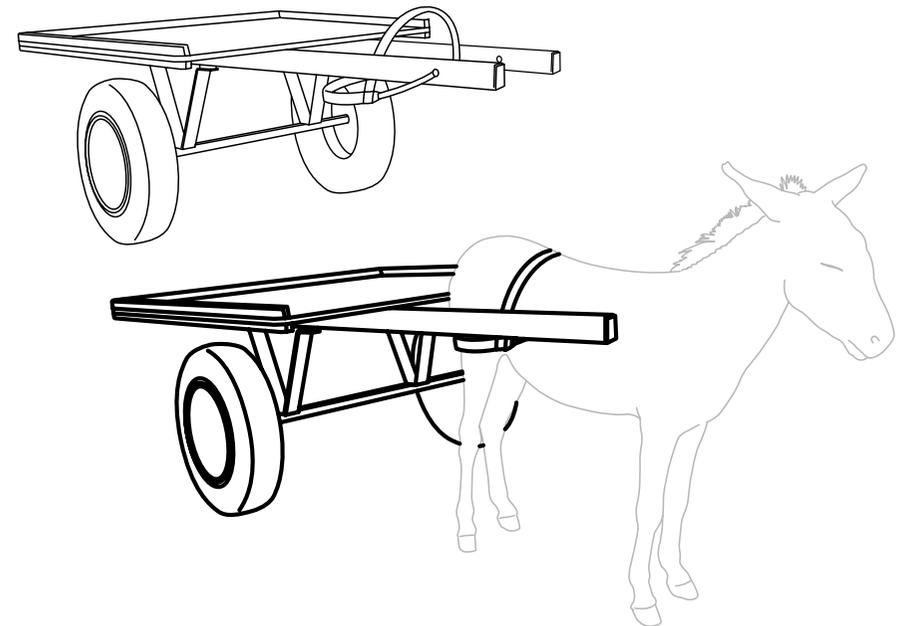
1. Collar

Provides the pulling power (see pages 15 - 21).



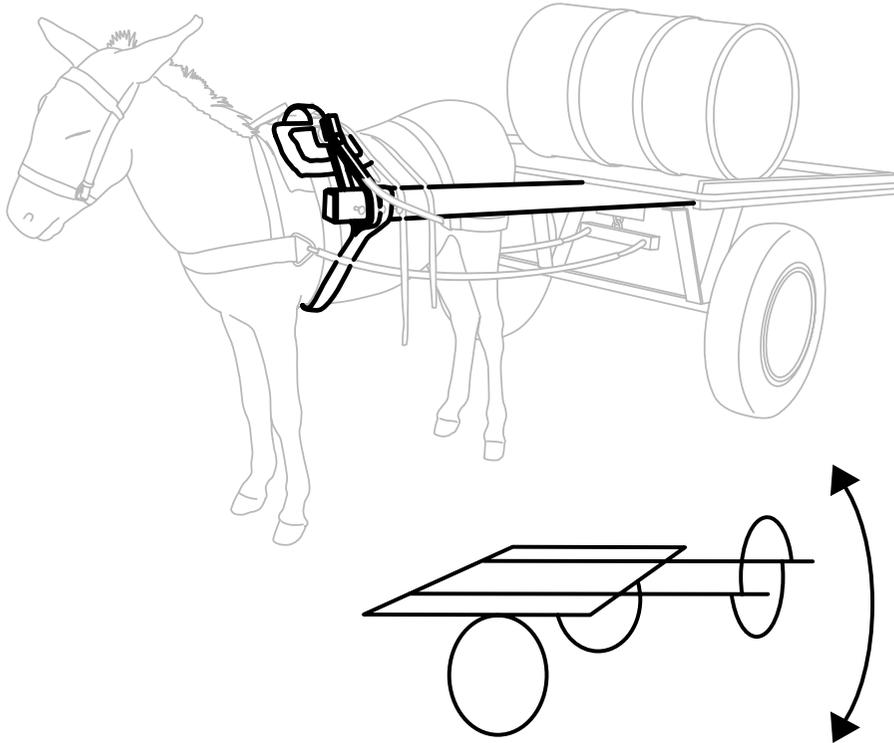
2. Breeching

Provides the brakes (see page 23 - 26).

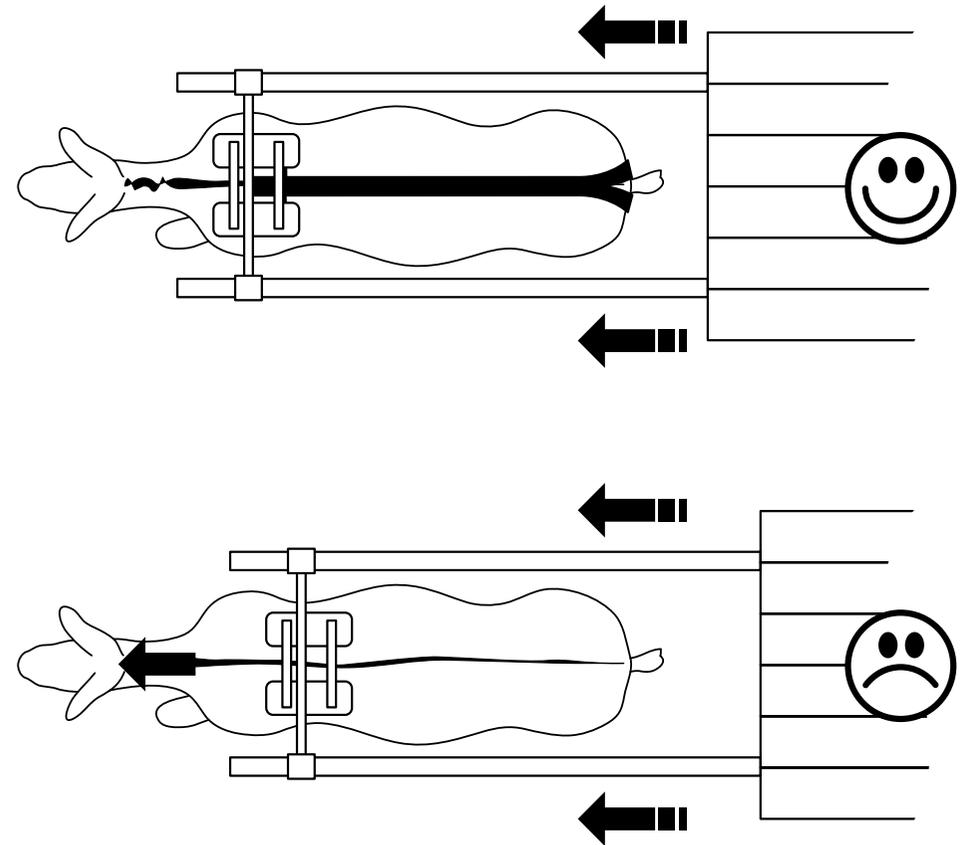


3a. Saddle and straps - balance

To keep the cart balanced (see pages 27 - 30).



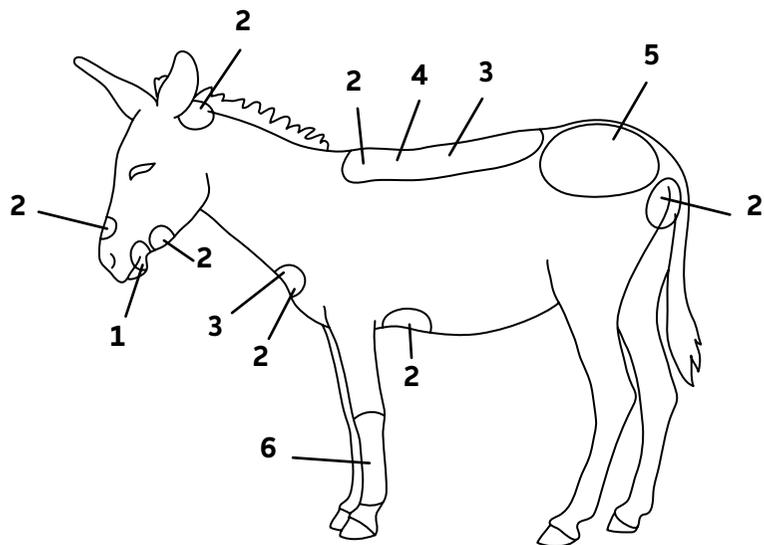
3b. Cruppers/docks



Must be smooth, cool and adjusted correctly.

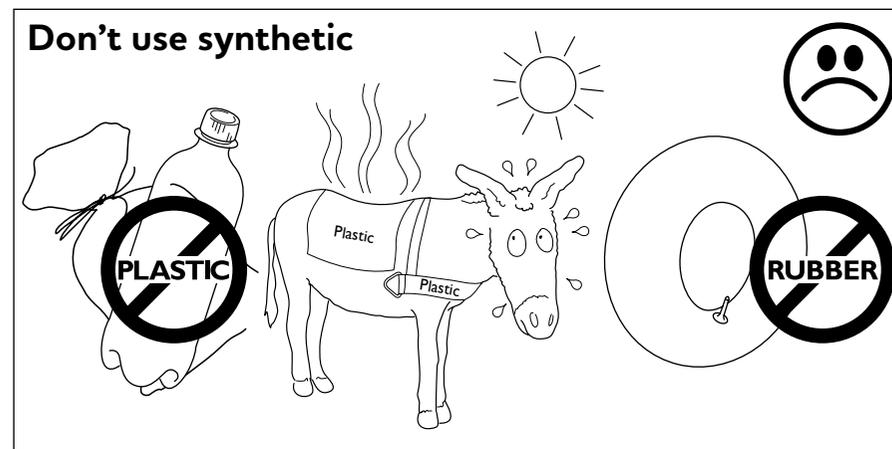
The cruppers/docks are not a braking system, they just stop the saddle from moving forward which is a major cause of wounds.

Causes of wounds

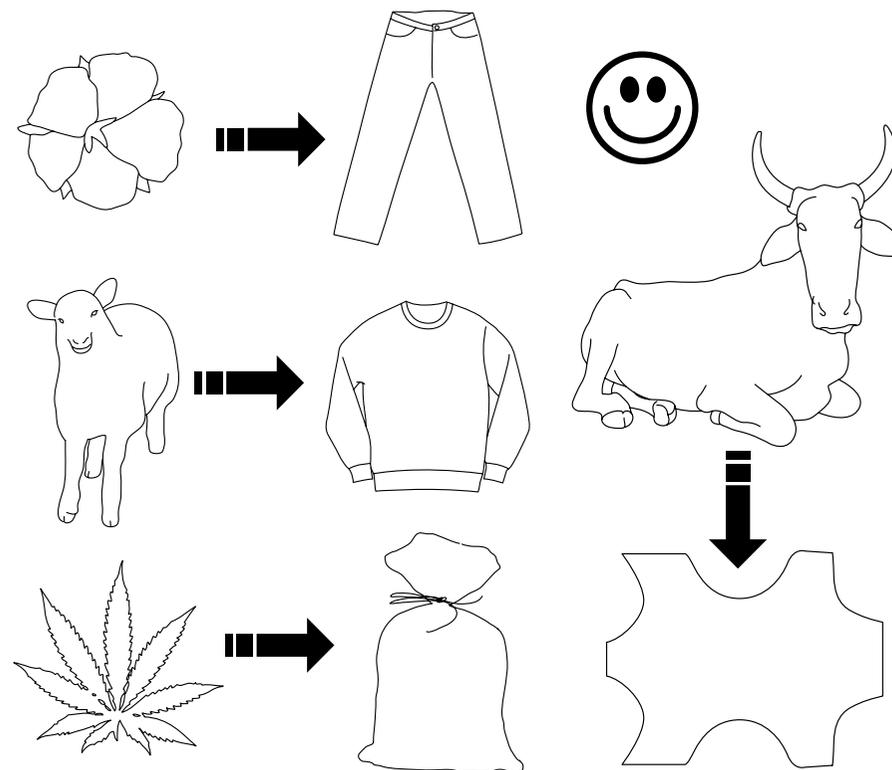


1. Badly made bits/badly fitted bits/bad materials.
2. Bad materials/too much pressure/incorrect fitting/incorrect crupper/dock.
3. Cart/cargo/no swingle tree/balance/wrong materials.
4. Badly made saddle/no saddle/badly fitted saddle.
5. Beating or badly fitted/made shafts.
6. Tethers & hobbles that are too tight/too thin.

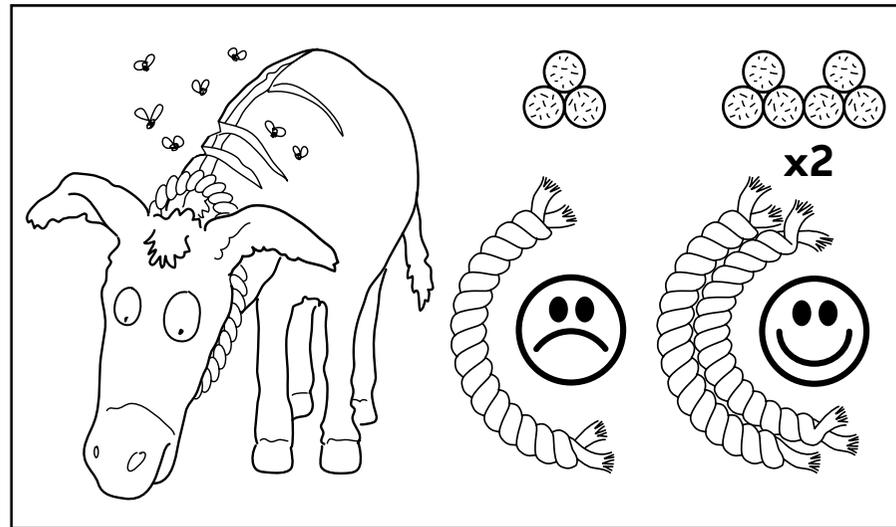
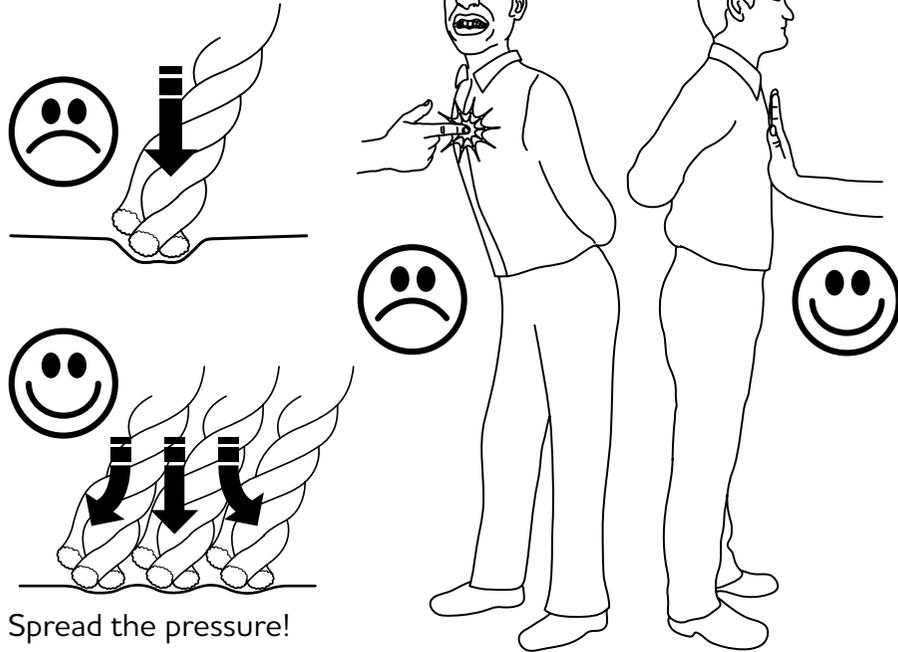
Materials



Use natural (from plants and animals)



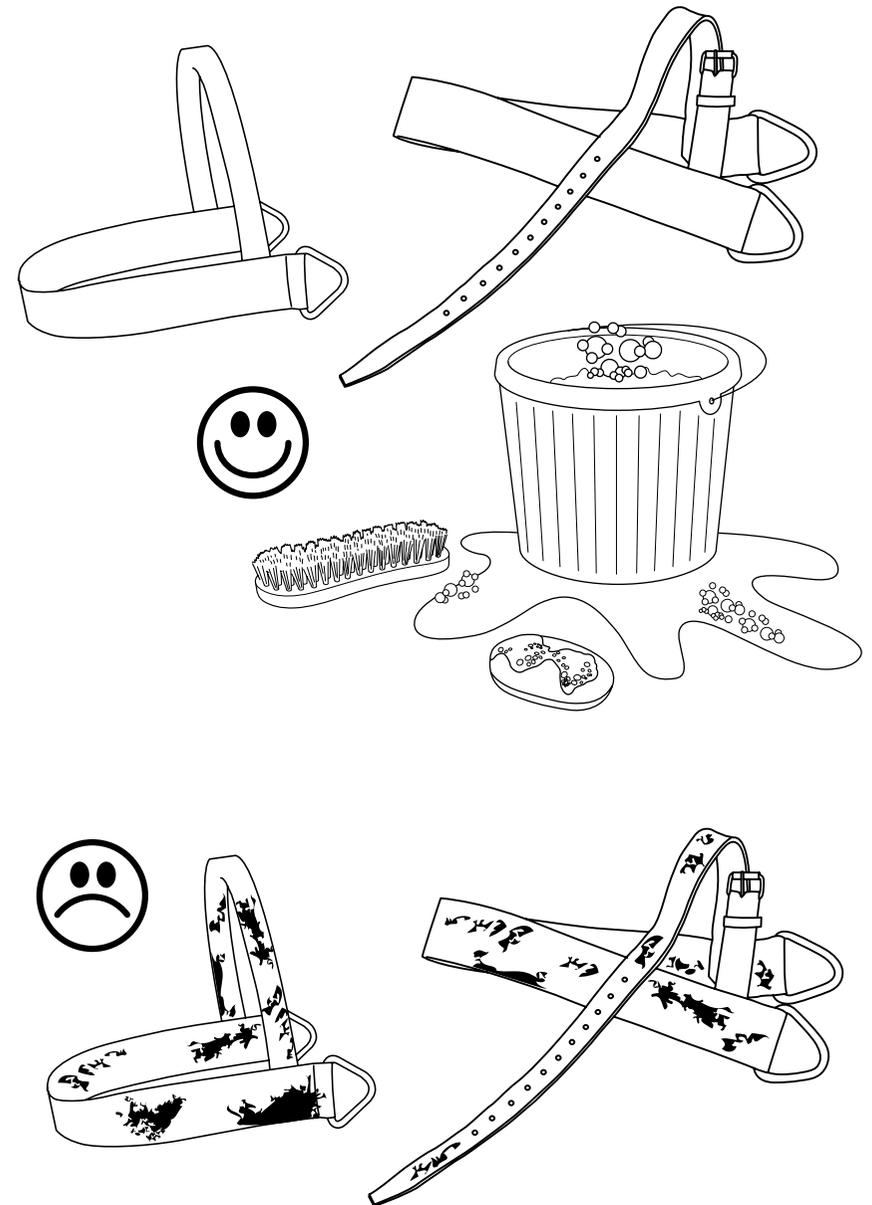
Pressure



Don't use single rope!

It will hurt your donkey and cause infections. Use double or triple-braided rope instead.

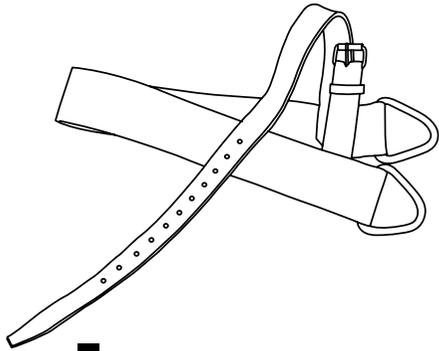
Keep harness clean!



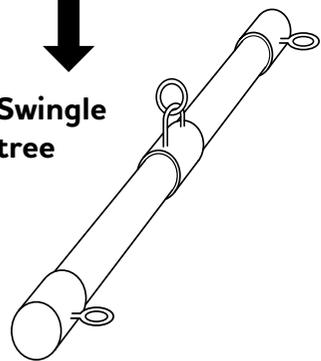
Collars - which type?

Breast collar

Cheap, simple, transferable, easily made and repaired.



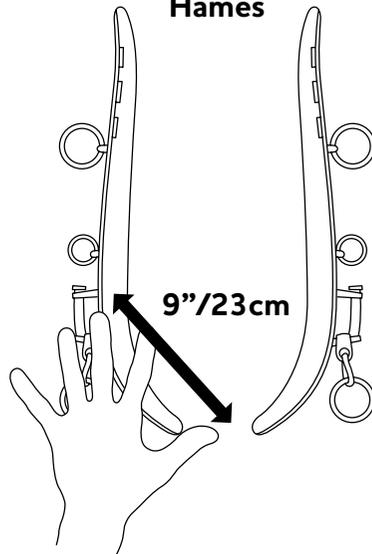
Swingle tree



But, these need to be used with...

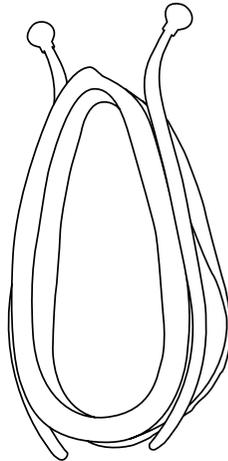


Hames



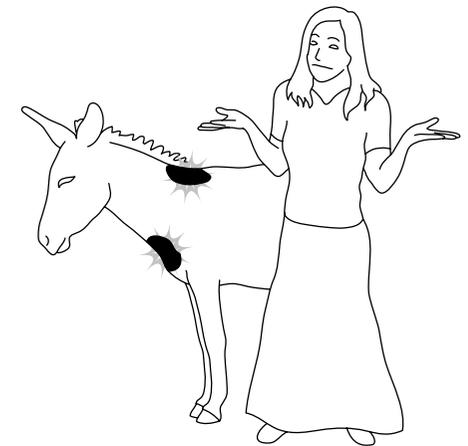
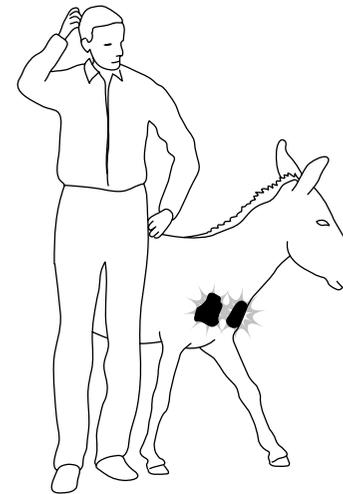
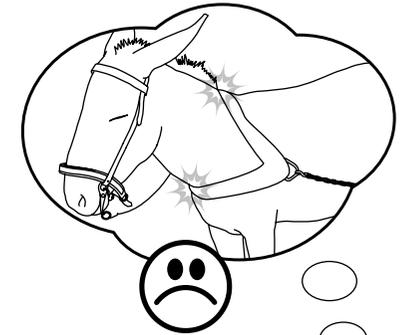
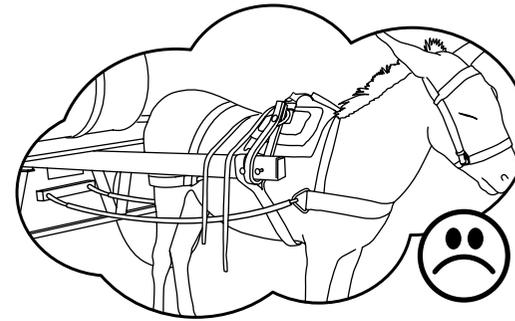
Full collar

Expensive, **not** transferable, difficult to make and repair **but** more efficient.

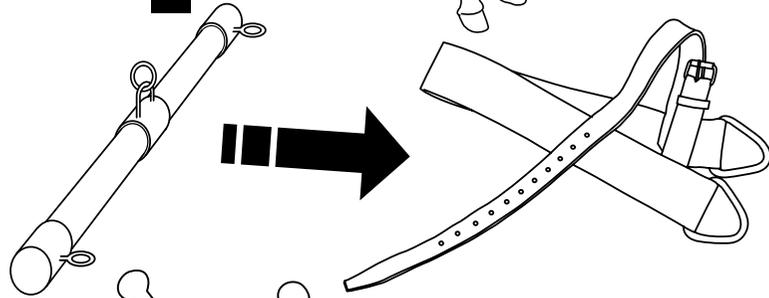
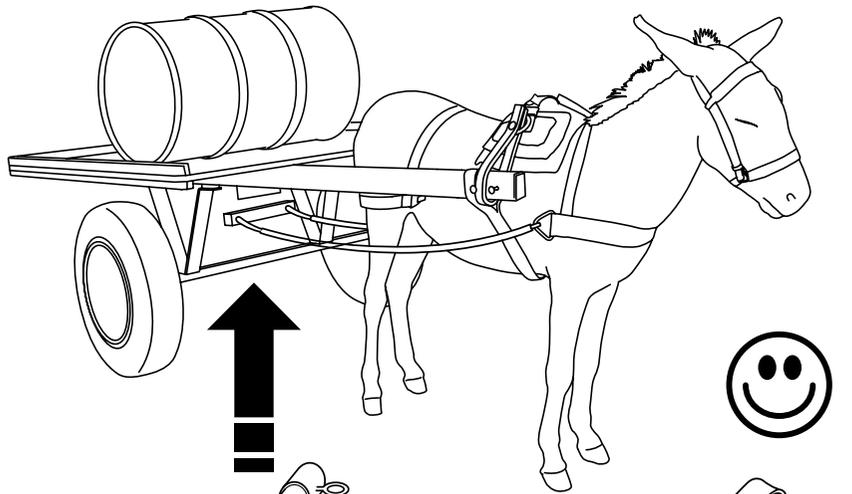


Collars - continued

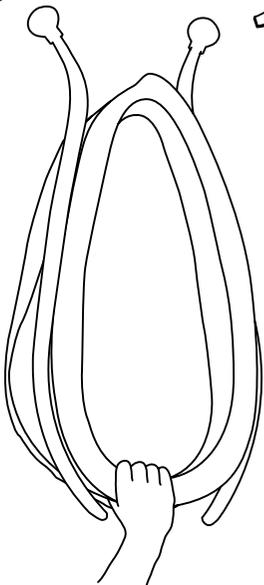
Swingle trees (balancers) & hames prevent sores.



Swingle tree



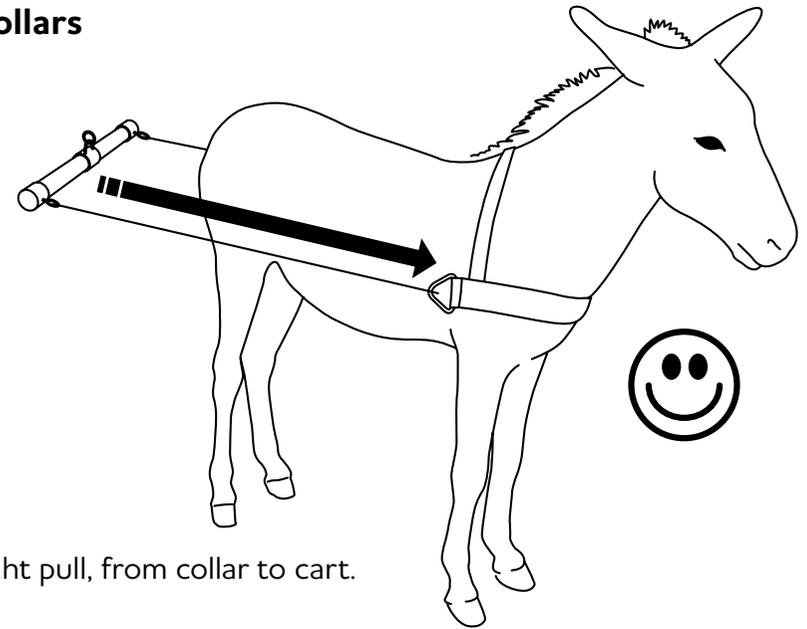
Hames



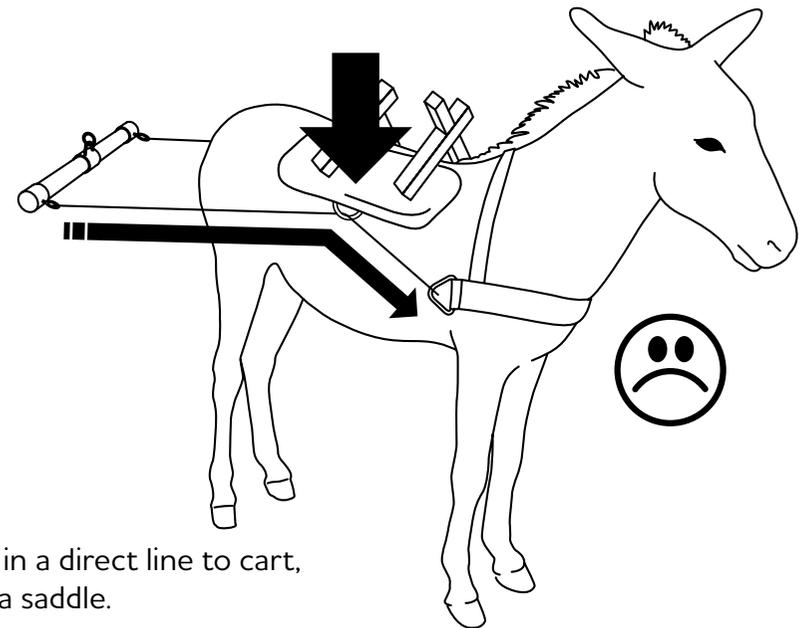
When fitted, the collar should have enough space to fit your hand in between the collar and your donkey's neck.

Collar fitting

All collars



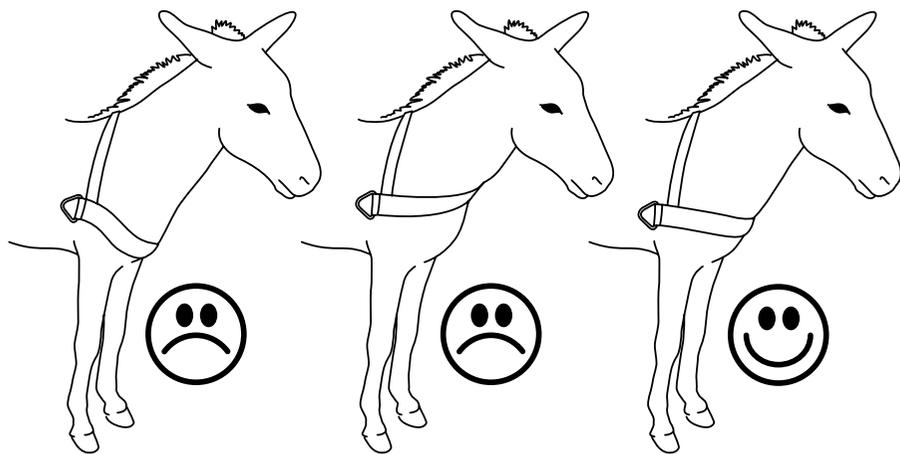
Straight pull, from collar to cart.



Hitch in a direct line to cart, not via saddle.

Collar fitting

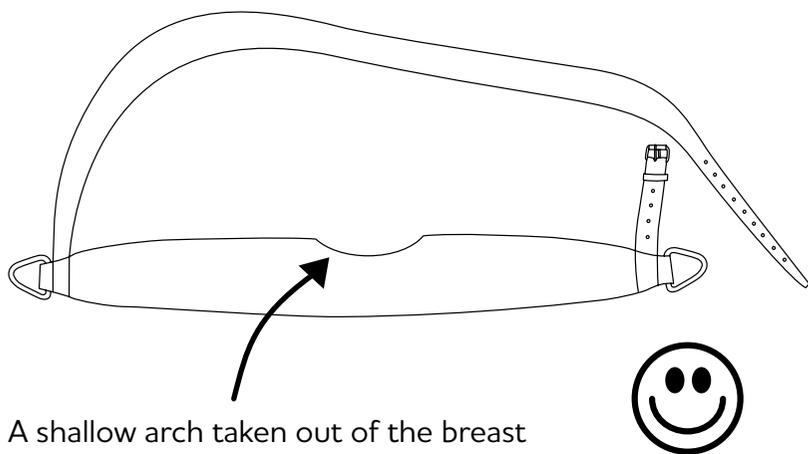
Breast collars



Too low/loose
Restricts leg movement and causes sores.

Too tight
Restricts breathing.

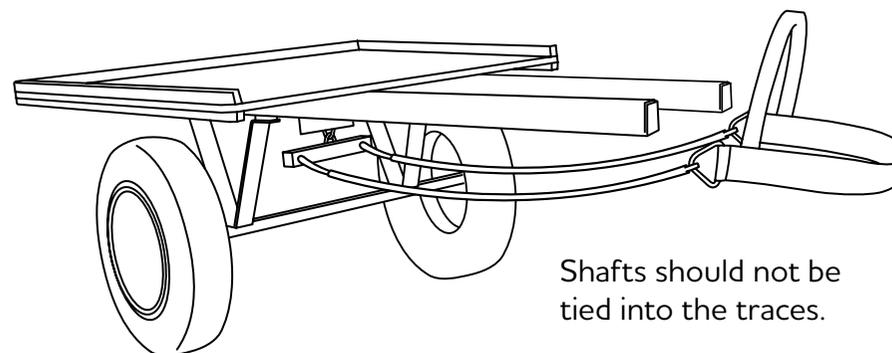
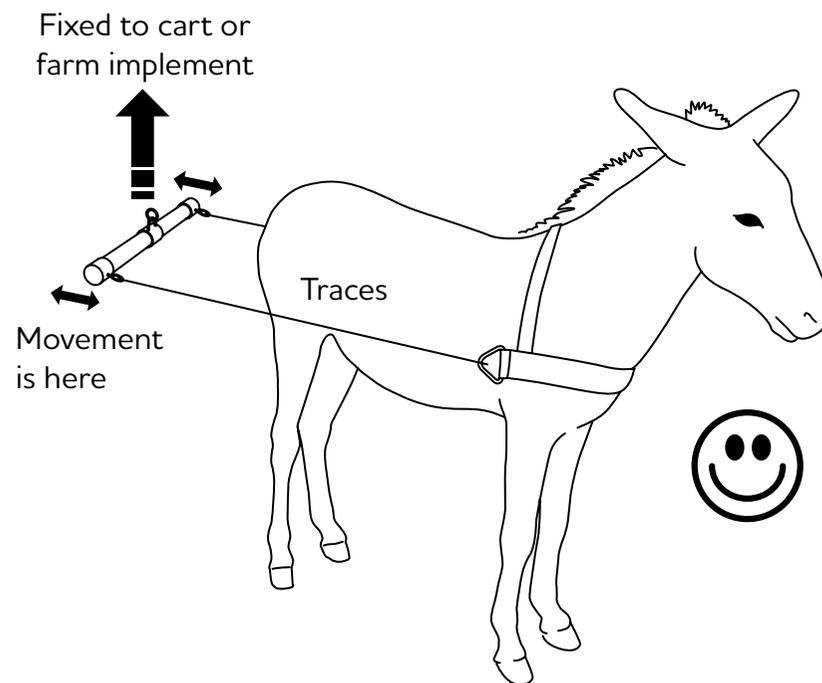
Good
Fits well, with room to breathe, but not too loose.



A shallow arch taken out of the breast collar can help the donkey breathe.

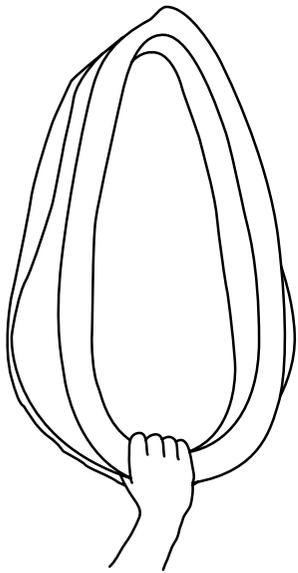
Breast collar

Attaching to the cart

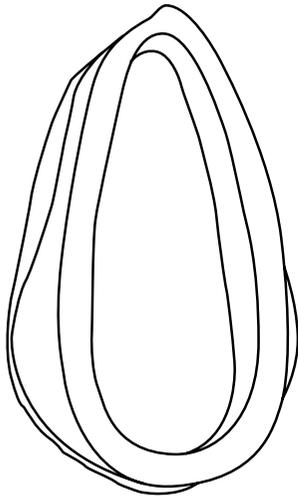


Shafts should not be tied into the traces.

Full collars



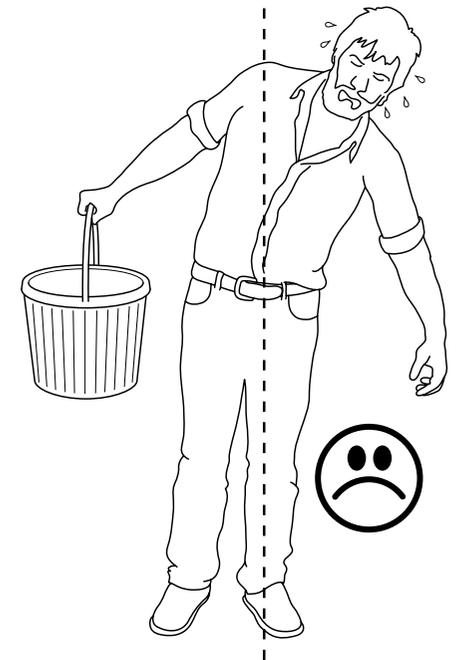
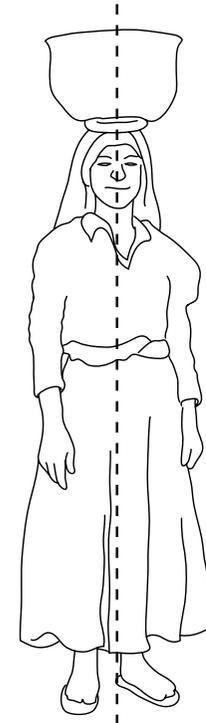
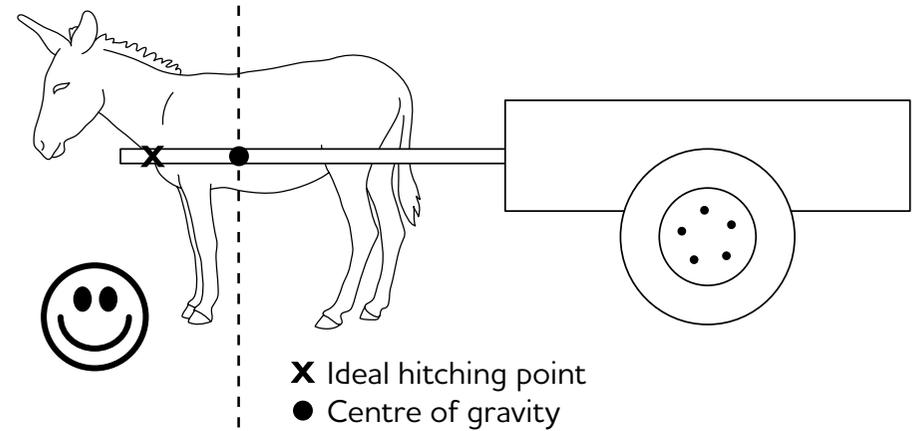
Should fit snugly and evenly, up against the shoulders, with a space large enough to put four fingers in at the bottom.



Too small with a gap at the top, or sides that don't sit evenly will cause sores and choke the donkey.



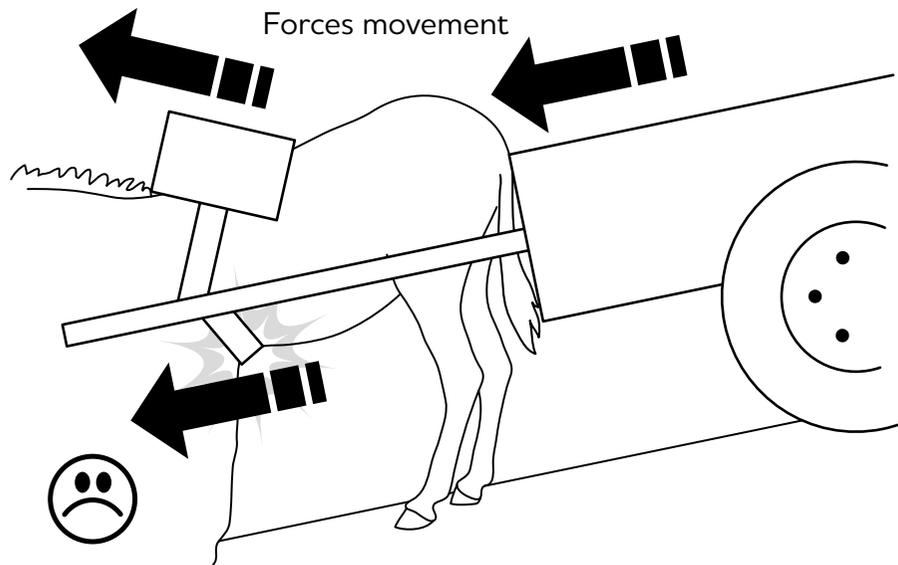
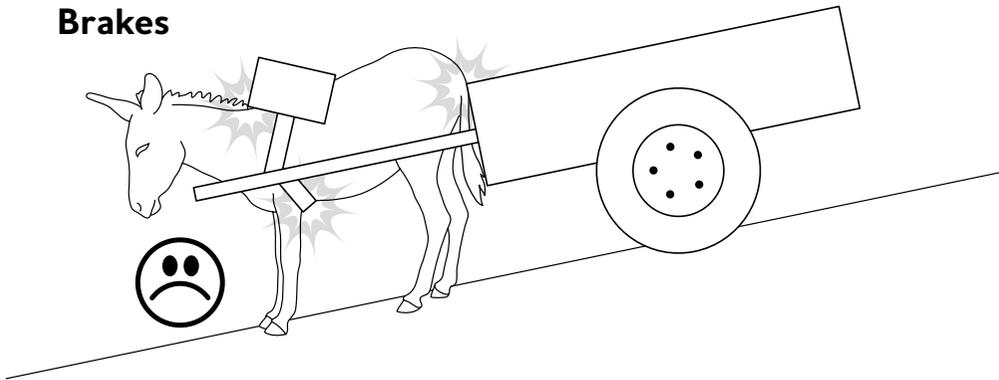
Keep centre of gravity



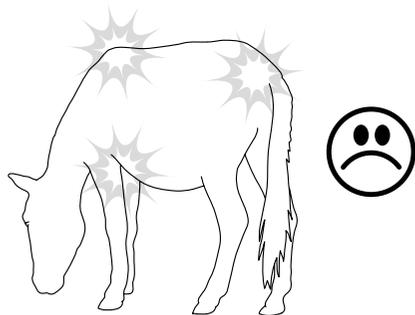
Centre of gravity

Breeching

Brakes

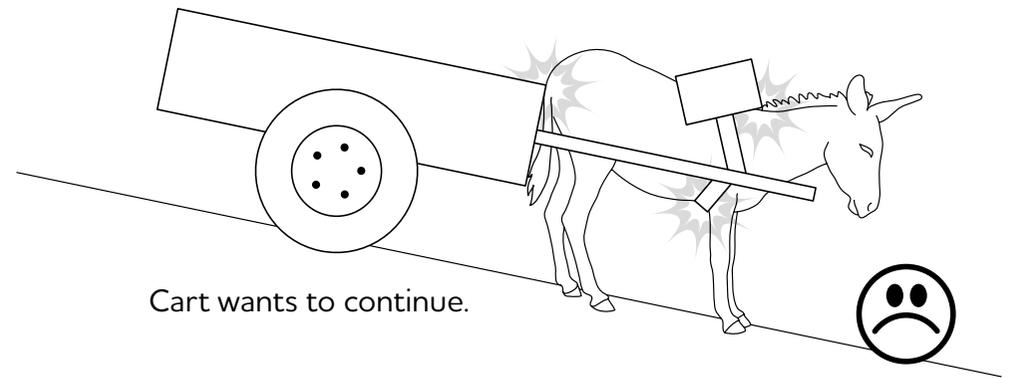
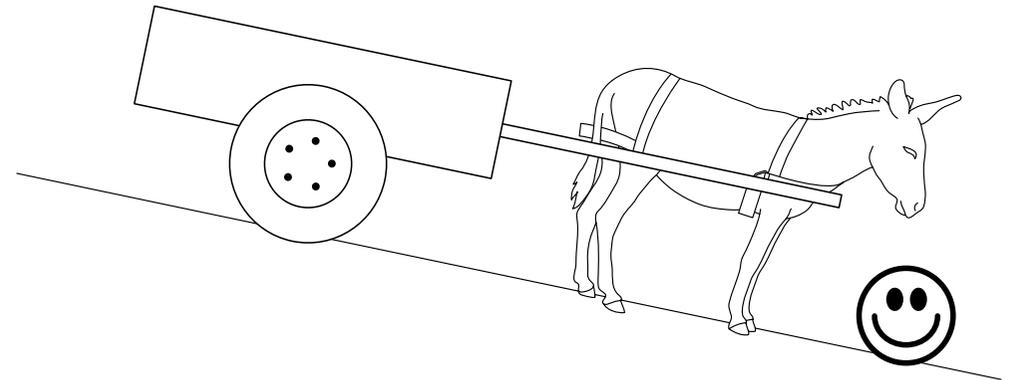


Sores from no, or wrongly fitted breeching.

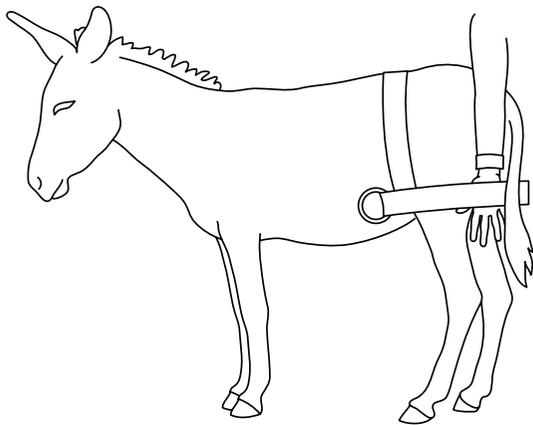
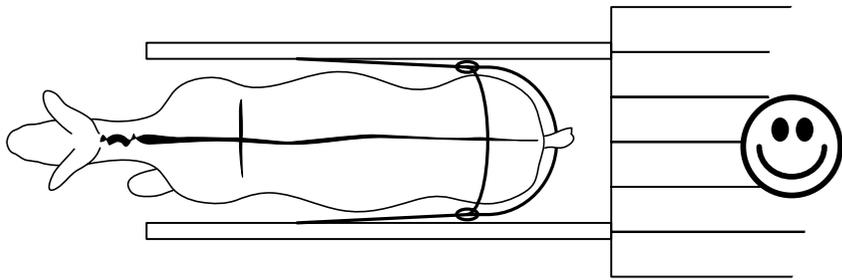


Breeching

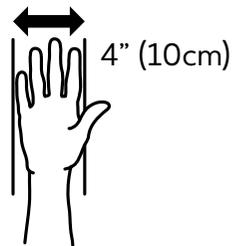
Brakes



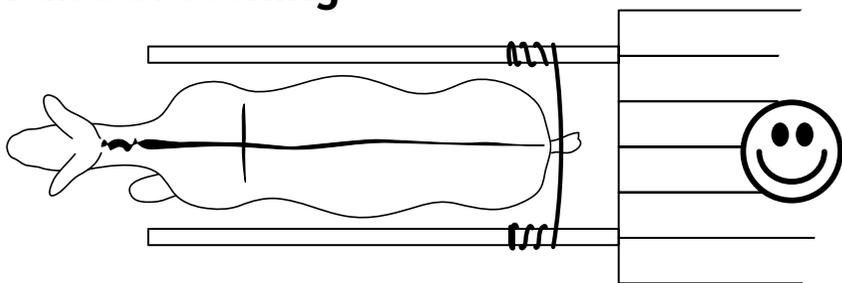
Full breeching



Both types of breeching should fit level with stifle, and when the donkey is pulling, there should be one hand width between breeching and donkey.



False breeching



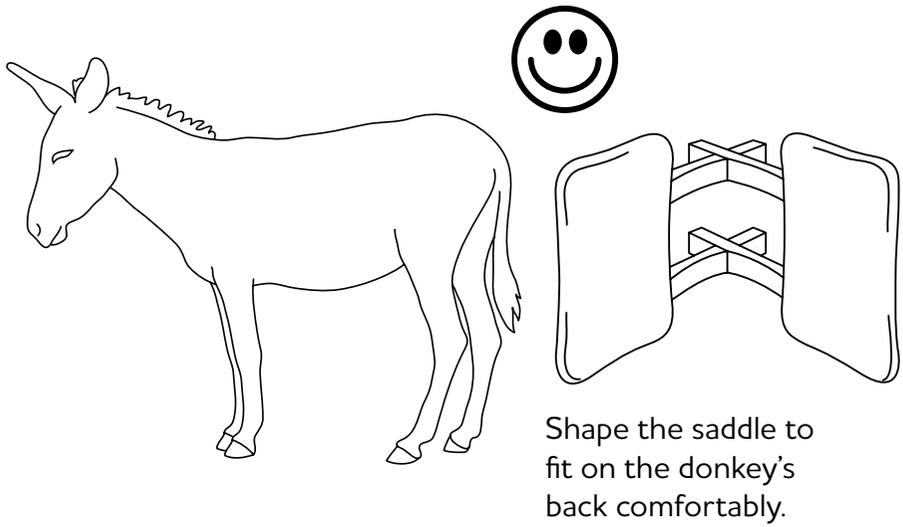
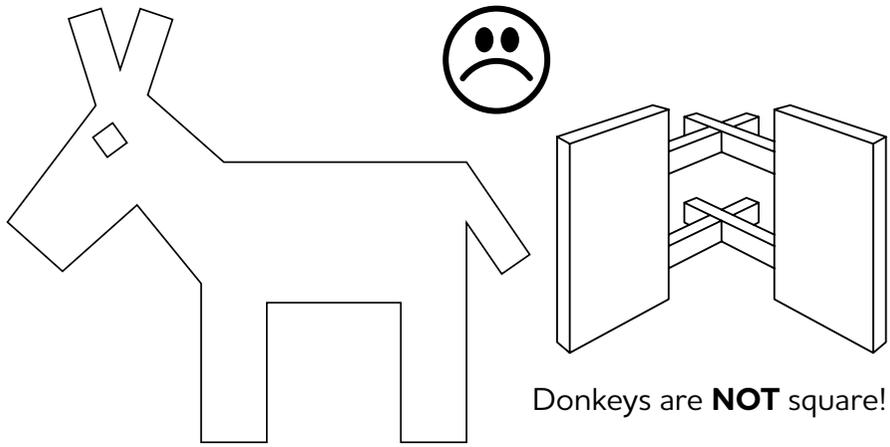
Simply a broad strap fitted across the shafts.

Breeching problems

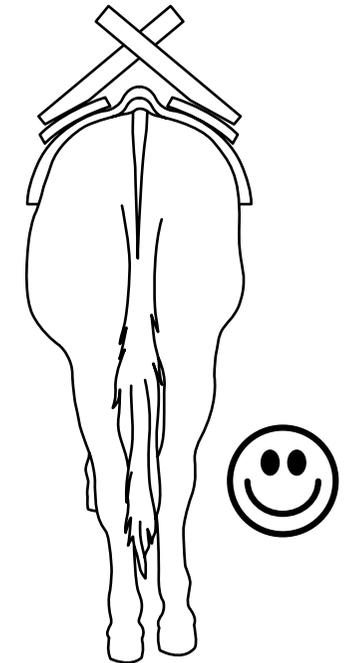
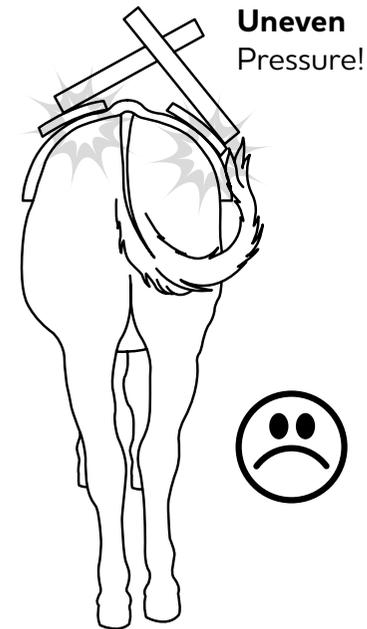
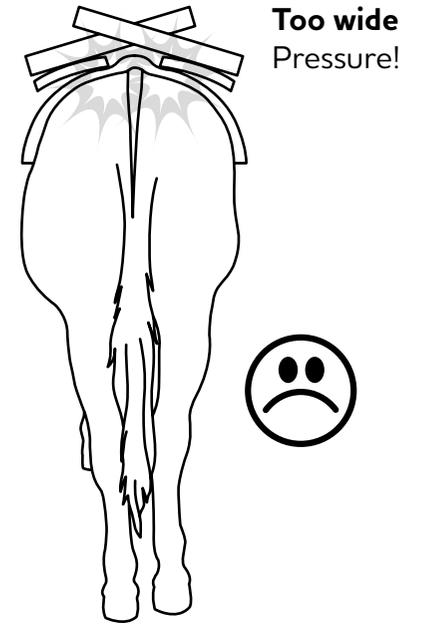


No breeching + short shafts + bad loading.

Saddles

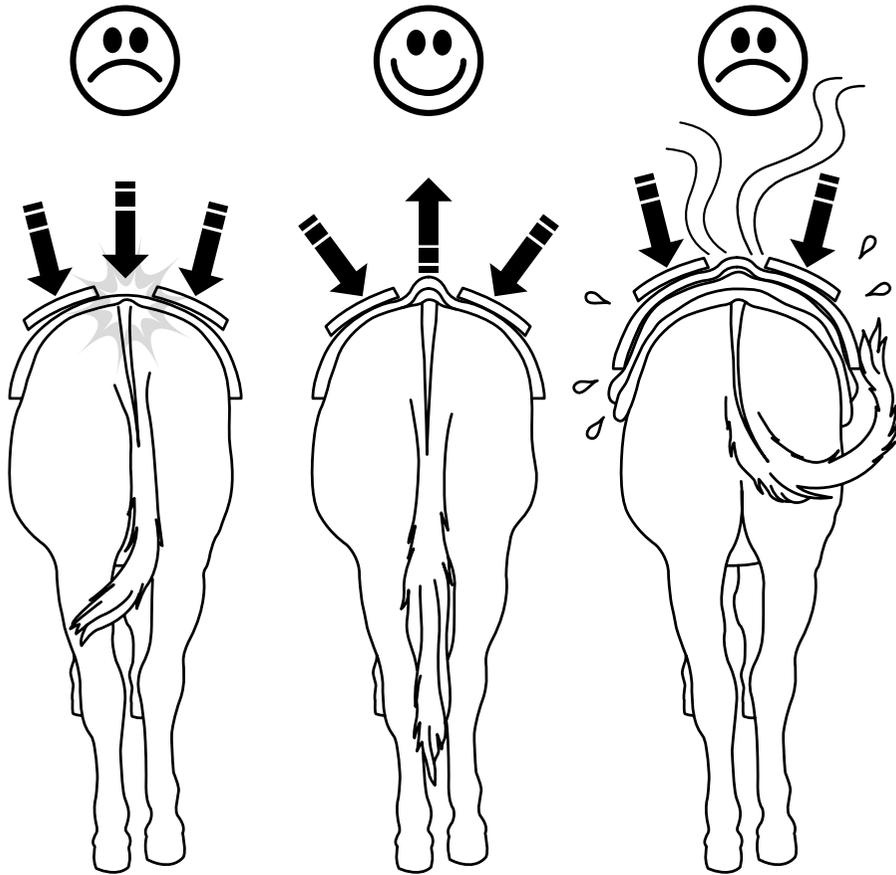


Saddle fitting



Saddle padding

Many saddle wounds are not the fault of the saddle, but the padding.



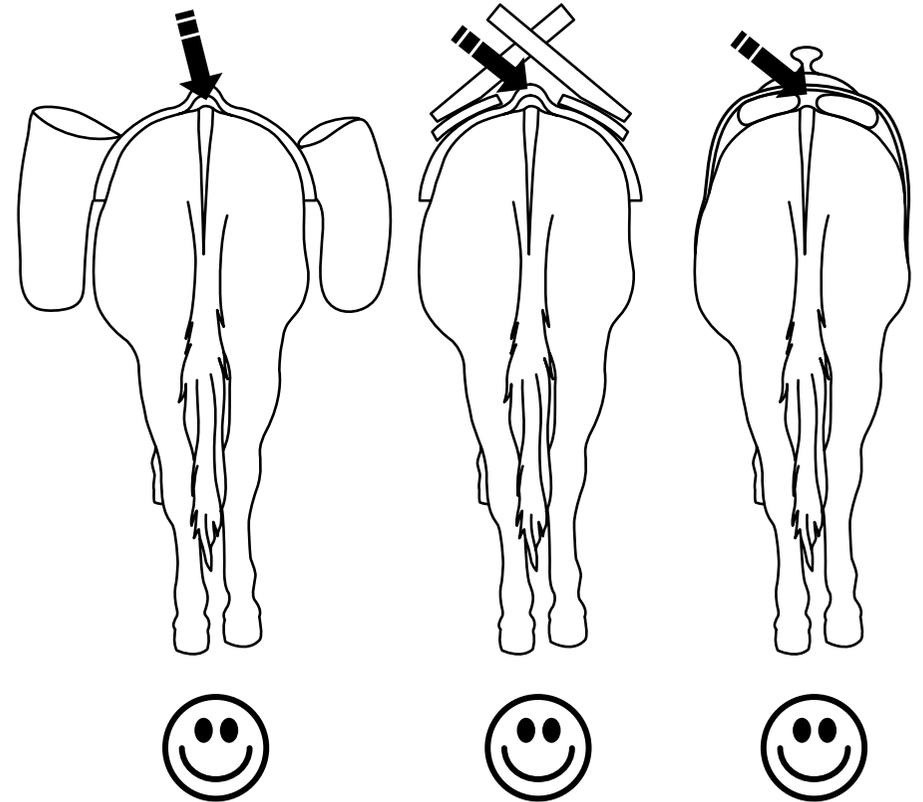
Poor
Padding is too tight, which rubs and causes sores.

No pressure
Lift it up!

Pressure
Don't use too much. If the saddle fits, it's not necessary.

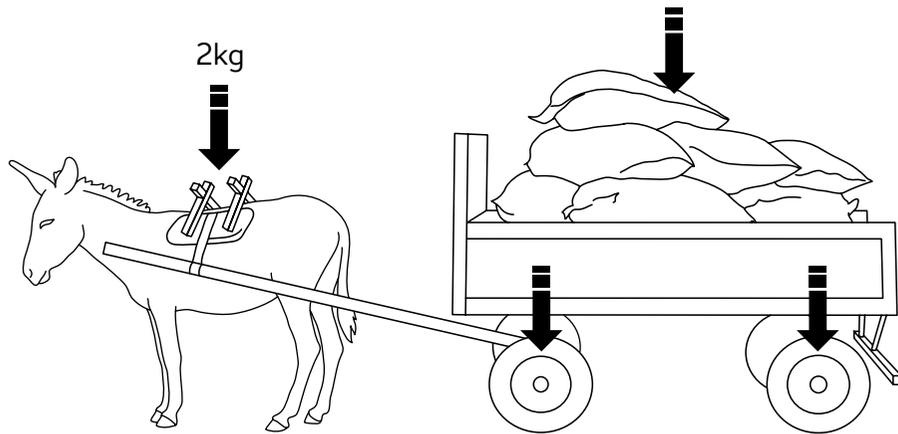
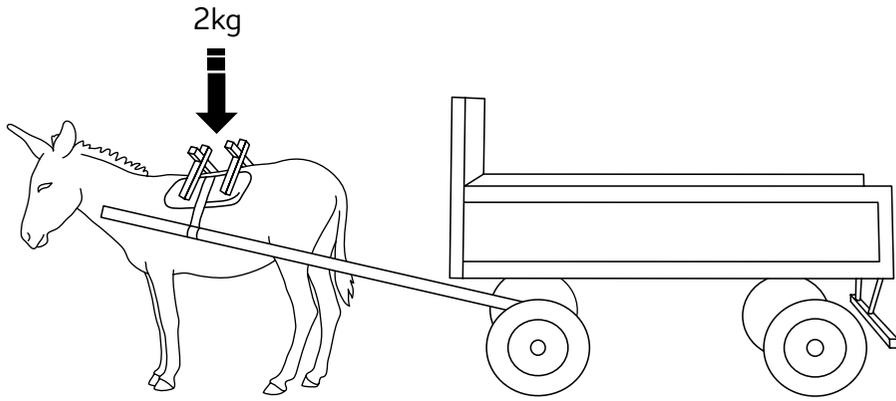
Saddles

All saddles and types of padding need a gullet space.

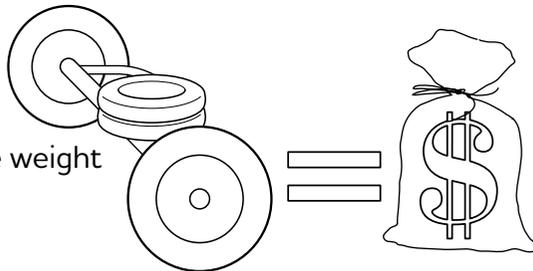


Carts

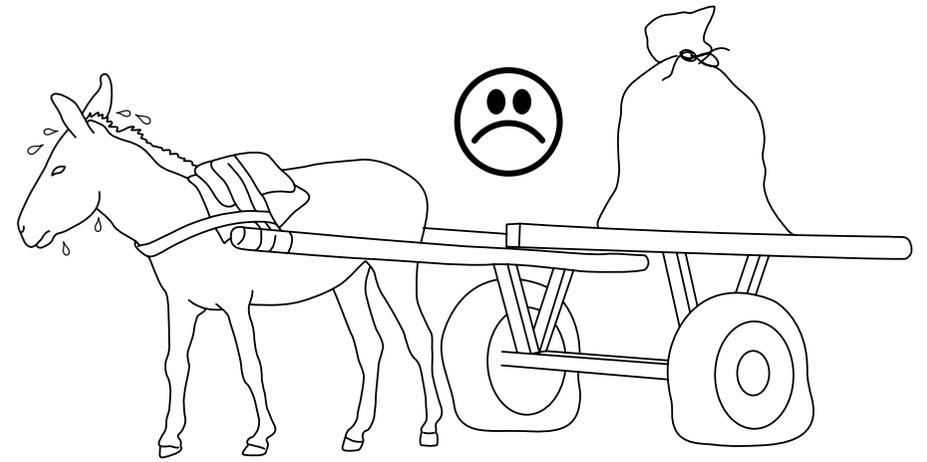
Four wheel cart



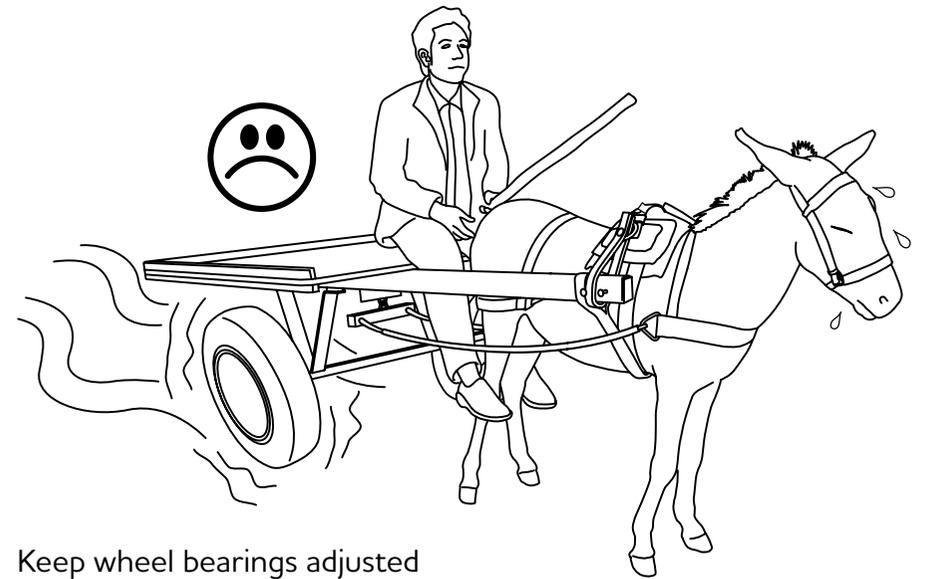
No balance problems
BUT adds 60-100kg more weight
AND costs more money!



Cart wheels

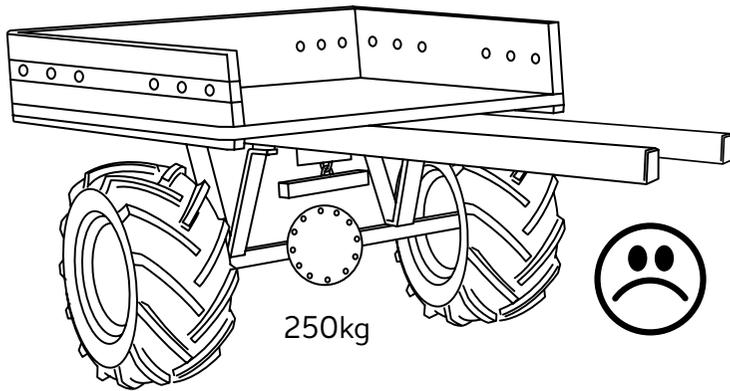
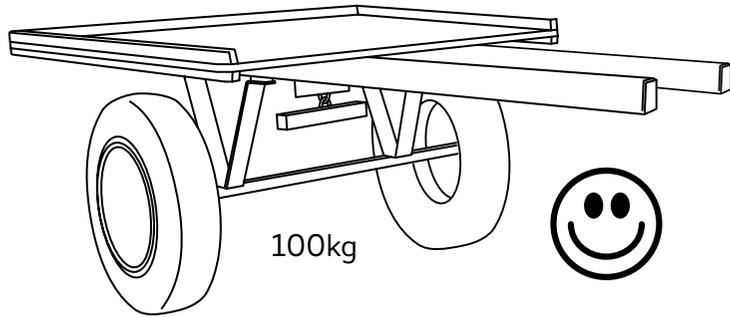


Keep tyres pumped up!

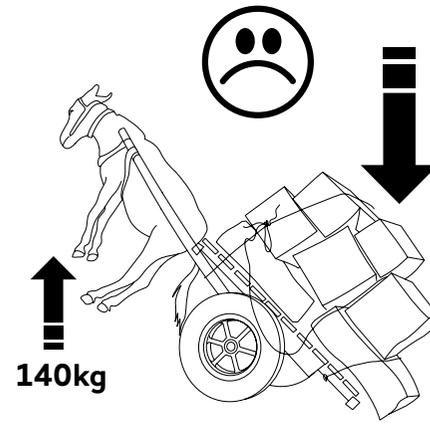


Keep wheel bearings adjusted
and in good condition.

Two wheel cart

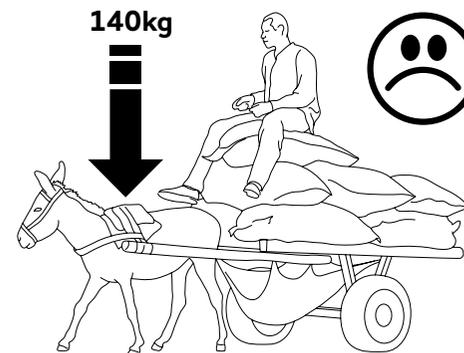
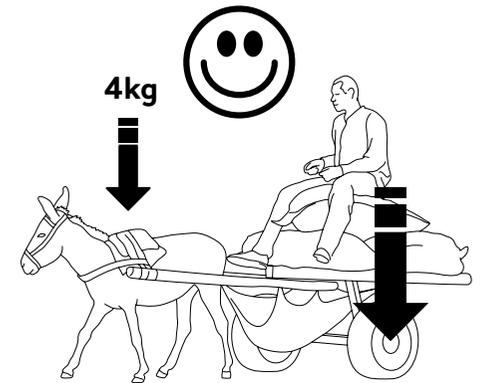


Balance of cargoes and weight



Weight too far back - donkey is lifted up, making it hard to grip ground or actually lifting animal into the air.

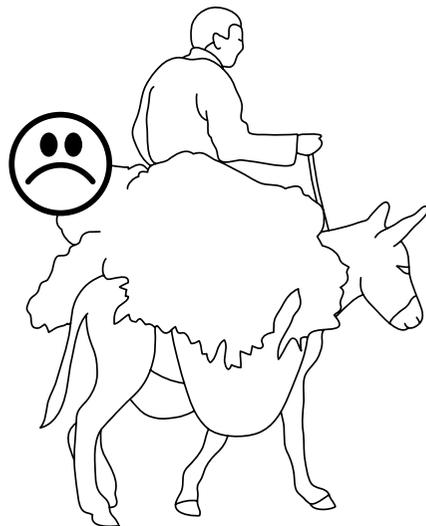
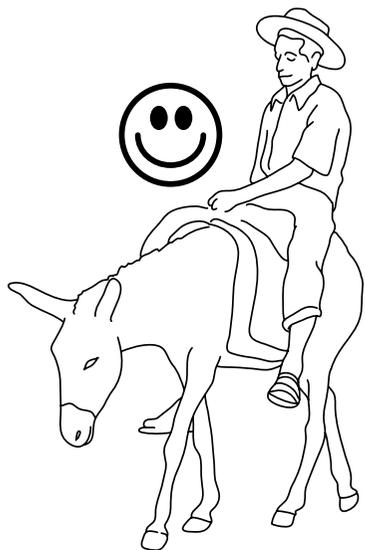
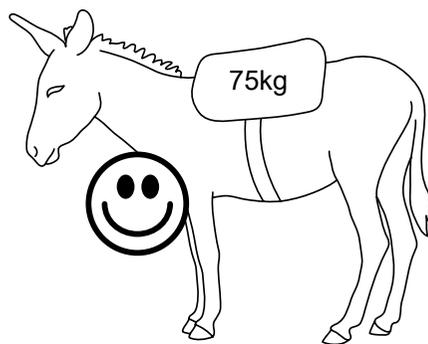
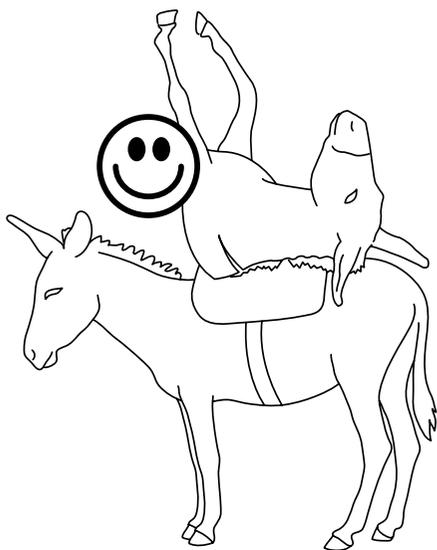
Balanced load. Donkey can work on pulling.



Weight too far forward - donkey is actually carrying cargo as well as pulling.

Packs/riders

A donkey should only carry up to half its own weight.



Trainer's Notes

It's easier to explain something through demonstration than by talking. I use a lot of physical demonstrations to get my point across, which works for me. You obviously don't have to use my ideas - as long as it works, do your own thing!

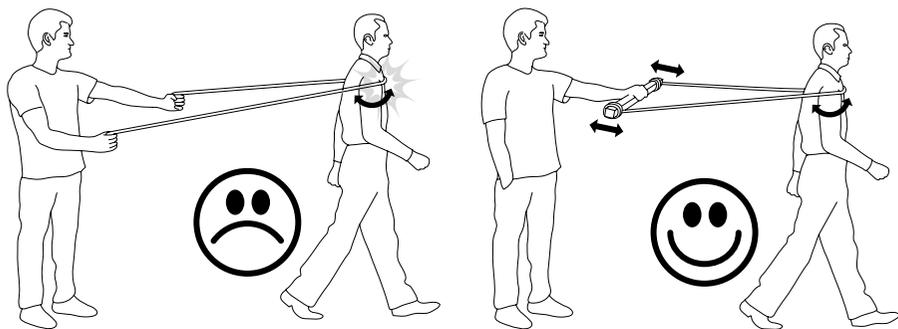
Warm ups/ice breakers - These are a good way to get a new group going. Speak to your Community Development Officers, or look on the web for ideas.

Parts of the Harness - We have a model that might be available. If not, use a real donkey and cart if possible. If you're in a classroom you can use volunteers and rope to simulate donkeys and harness (this can be great fun!)

Materials - In most hot countries you'll find that people are wearing cotton, and they know that nylon is hot. This is not always true, so use your eyes first before you put your foot in it! If you're in an area where people use inner tubes to cover harness, get a volunteer to put their arm inside a piece and stand in the sun. Around one minute 20 seconds is the record so far, before the tube is ripped off (in a hot country)!

Pressure - See the demo in the book. I often use this in any group, as it's another good ice breaker. I usually try and get a good competitive spirit going; I want them to feel a little pain and remember the lesson. I also use ropes, but be gentle as it's easy to cause a bad friction burn.

Swingle Trees - These can be demonstrated easily by using a stick and some string or rope. First get a volunteer to be the donkey. Get them to swing their shoulders and pretend to be a donkey walking (on the spot, not moving). Put a rope around their shoulders and hold it rigidly in your hands. You are the cart, your arms are the shafts. The volunteer donkey will soon complain that the rope hurts; try and get as many people to be donkeys as possible.



Now! Change the rope, take a 6 – 8 foot length of rope and tie each end to the opposite ends of a 2 foot stick. Place the loop you've made around your volunteer's shoulders and either hold the centre of the stick loosely, or tie a short piece of string to the centre and hold that. Get your volunteer to 'walk' again; this time there will be no pain. Again, get as many people to experience this practical as possible.

Fitting – You need to demonstrate harness fitting on a real donkey and cart or saddle. I've never managed to explain it theoretically alone. For general harness fit, I often use a rope and get volunteers from the class. You can do a lot with these by tying them up quite tight and asking them to run, or by leaving the loops very loose, in which case they get entangled. Either way you can demonstrate the idea that harness needs to be adjusted correctly.

Breeching, Balance and Cargo – I often put the students into the shafts of a cart for this. If that's not possible then a wheelbarrow is good too. These can be used to demonstrate the effects of flat tyres, poor harnessing, load balance etc.

When demonstrating balance, remember to illustrate that the driver and any passengers are also part of the cargo and must be included.

There are many ways to demonstrate all aspects of harness fitting. I usually make stuff up on the spot, using whatever I can find to hand and trying to make it fun. I try to make myself the butt of the initial fun, at least to start off with, as it's easy to upset people who haven't yet got into the swing of things.

Chris Garrett

Glossary

Breeching	Similar in appearance to a breast collar, and works in a similar way to act as the brakes.
Bridle	Where reins are used the bridle is a key part of the system, working as a method of communication between the owner and his animal.
Cargo	Used here to describe any weight pulled, or carried by the animal, and includes drivers and passengers.
Cart	Used here to describe any type of wheeled animal drawn vehicle.
Collar	Covers two basic types: the BREAST COLLAR, which is a simple strap-like arrangement used to allow the donkey something to push against, which in turn pulls the cart, and the FULL COLLAR, a far more sophisticated piece of work that does the same job, but more efficiently.
Crupper	A strap that passes from the saddle, under the donkey's tail, to keep the saddle from slipping forward.
Docks	Another word sometimes used to describe a crupper.
Dorsal process	What looks like the spine or backbone of the animal, no part of a saddle should touch this area.
False breeching	A strap that passes from shaft to shaft about 4" or 10cm behind the donkey and acts as a brake in the same way that a breeching does, except it's not attached directly to the donkey.
Gullet	The space that separates the two sides, or panels of any type of saddle. Should be wide enough to clear the Dorsal Process all the way along the saddle.
Hames	Two metal, or wooden bars that sit either side of the full collar. Their function is to transfer the weight of the load evenly along the collar, allowing it to sit correctly on the animal's shoulders, and spreading the load evenly over them. They also serve as a fixing point for the traces.

THE DONKEY SANCTUARY

Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, Devon EX10 0NU

T [44] (0)1395 578222 **F** [44] (0)1395 579266

E enquiries@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk

thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk

The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969.

The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588), both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU. Linked charities: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST); The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT).