

## Oxen Have A History Of Helping People

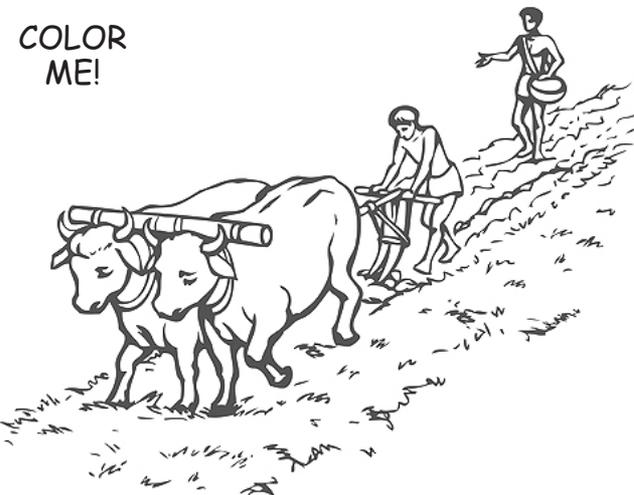
What are oxen? An ox is a large and heavyset breed of cattle that is trained as a draft animal. Draft animals are work animals. Usually they are steers of any larger breed of cattle that are at least four years old.

Oxen have horns that are very useful. Their horns grow as their bodies grow and they help keep the yoke on their heads when they back up or stop. They are used for plowing, transport, hauling cargo, grain-grinding by trampling or by powering machines, irrigation (by powering pumps) and wagon drawing. They were and are in some areas still being commonly used to skid logs in forests to help with logging. Oxen are mostly used in teams of two or more.

They are quiet, unassuming animals that are willing to work long hours. Our ancestors valued these animals.

They filled the pioneer's needs in several ways. They pulled the heavy wagons, some gave milk, meat, leather and plowed fields. On wagon trains, the oxen were often used as they could live off the available vegetation as they pulled the

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wagons along. Plus they were hearty animals and could go through mud and swim over streams. The oxen were slower and only traveled about 15 miles per day, but they were less likely to run off. If they did, they are slow enough that they could be caught!

Oxen are trained beginning when they are young. They learn to respond to the teamster's (ox trainer's) signals. In North America, the commands are "get up, whoa, back up, gee" (turn right) and "haw" (turn left). A wooden yoke is fastened about the neck of each pair so that the work load is evenly distributed across their shoulders. They can pull harder and longer than horses, especially with almost unmovable loads. That is one of the reasons that they can drag logs from forests. Although they are not as fast as horses, they are more sure-footed and do not try to jerk the load.

In folk lore, there was a "blue" ox named Babe that worked with Paul Bunyan, the mythical American logger. President George Washington had 60 oxen that were used to remove stumps, haul logs, pull farm equipment and carts! Many oxen are still used throughout the world, especially in developing countries.