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Cattle and colonialism: an animal-centred history of southern Africa, 1652-1980s

Glover, M.J.

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Chapter Two: Oxen as colonial wagon labourers in southern Africa, 1653–1890s

Introduction

A farmer at the bottom of the ascent stood ready with twelve fine, stout, beautiful oxen, with horns which spread from pole to pole, ready to be put to the wagon. Sensible creatures they seemed to be, for they did much dislike the business they were going on, and lowed piteously when they found themselves in the yoke.¹ – Anne Barnard

The labour of riding these wearied beasts can hardly be conceived. A tired horse is bad enough, but an ox is beyond description; no amount of flogging suffices to lift him for a dozen yards into a heavy trot, and nothing is left for it but to sit with aching spine and patient endurance while he plods along the interminable road.² – Thomas Baines

The companion of the ox we slaughtered refused food for two days, and went lowing about for him continually. He seemed inconsolable for his loss, and tried again and again to escape back to the Makololo country. My men remarked, 'He thinks, they will kill me as well as my friend.'³ – David Livingstone

A little over a year after the Dutch East India Company (VOC) landed at the Cape of Good Hope, they developed *in situ*, makeshift wagons, loaded them with timber from the forests on the Table Mountain slopes near Kirstenbosch, and compelled horses and castrated male cattle, oxen, to pull these freighted wagons to and from the harbour, where the VOC was building a fort and establishing its base.⁴ That is, one of the earliest things the VOC did was force animals to work for them. The yoke was utterly new in the region. Cattle's new form of labour profoundly impacted the experiences of cattle and the development of southern Africa. Wagon labour was for cattle a major colonial impact, and is the focus of this chapter. For over 200 years after the VOC arrived at the Cape, cattle – yoked into wagons, impelled forward with shouting, whistling, whips, and sometimes knives – would provide the primary mode of colonial transport. In 1700 burgers controlled 8357 cattle.⁵ By 1875 in the Cape, other

¹ A. Barnard, *South Africa a Century Ago (1797 - 1801)* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Limited, n.d), 160.

² T. Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1864), 140.

³ D. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London: John Murray, 1857), 322.

⁴ J. Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon: The Story of the Ox-Wagon in South Africa* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1988), 15.

⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

eastern districts, and Basutoland, of the 1 111 713 cattle counted by the census, 421 762 oxen were employed as draught labourers.⁶ For over two centuries, drudging across the region, initially by following extant animal pathways – including those of elephants and other large mammals – cattle wagon labourers carved out routes that connected the region and that would later become the region’s motorcar roads.⁷

In keeping with this thesis’ objective to explore major impacts of colonialism on cattle’s experiences, this chapter gives an account of different aspects of cattle’s experiences as wagon labourers from the mid-seventeenth until the mid-nineteenth century. It also provides a general regional history of oxen wagon transport until the late nineteenth century, and offers a periodisation of cattle as wagon-labourers. This chapter’s evidence is diverse and comprises published accounts of scientific and other travellers, a few missionaries, military officials’ accounts, contemporaneous documents, and secondary literature. The chapter demonstrates cattle’s contribution to the development of southern Africa, in particular as wagon road makers, and transporters, all of which enabled and expanded settlement and trade in the region, including the exploitation of mineral resources. Until the late nineteenth century, all colonial settlement was premised upon oxen’s wagon labour. As per the previous two chapters, cattle are conceived of as sentient beings who possess agency.⁸

This chapter comprises three sections. The first section introduces the topic, discusses wagon histories of South Africa, and discusses interpretations of southern African travellers’ and explorers’ accounts. The second section describes the introduction of wagon labour as a colonial impact from the mid-seventeenth century, focusing on shifts in cattle’s modes of labour and experiences until the turn of the nineteenth century, when wagon labour decreased. It offers vignettes of oxen subjectivity by reading contemporary, first-hand accounts of oxen’s wagon labour in conjunction with a theory of animal agency where agency is regarded as an experiential species-characteristic striving towards one’s good. The third section focuses on the nineteenth century and demonstrates the contributions of oxen’s

⁶ S. Silver and Co, *S. W Silver & Co’s Handbook to South Africa* (London: S. W Silver & Co, 1880), 253.

⁷ M. Mitchell, ‘Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Transport Infrastructure in South Africa up to the End of the 20th Century’, *Civil Engineering* 22, 1 (2014), 37.

⁸ See Chapter One for the conception of agency.

forced labour to connecting the region, facilitating settlement and trade, and enabling the initial phases of the mineral revolution. It also offers some vignettes of oxen's subjectivity.

Various texts investigate the use of wagons in opening up the interior of southern and South Africa to colonial intrusion. Thomas Bulpin's amateur popular histories, *Lost trails of the low veld* (1950), *Lost Trails of the Transvaal* (1956), and *The Great Trek* (1969) discuss wagon routes and the use of oxen labour, while the latter presents trekkers as brave pioneers overcoming adversity through grit and hardiness in a harsh and hostile interior.⁹ However, these texts do not include references, and are often marked by a pro-settler bias. They are uninterested in the lives and experiences of the cattle themselves. Some scholarship has been interested in wagons as a form of draught power, and usefully provides historical details but lacks an interest in the actual oxen and their experiences.¹⁰ Nonetheless, there are some mentions of oxen's welfare as wagon pullers. Jose Burman notes that the 'horror-stricken descriptions of the old wagon roads' in the Cape came from travellers, not locals, which he interpreted to mean that trekboers, for example, accepted the hard roads as a fact of southern African life.¹¹ He arranged over 40 excerpts from travellers' harrowing accounts of oxen transiting 15 different kloofs or mountain passes.¹² Bruce Joubert mentions that oxen's mistreatment was not uncommon, was associated with poorly trained staff, animals, or both, and absent legislation.¹³ Finally, Donald Morris' account of nineteenth century Zulu political expansion and the Anglo-Zulu war included passages on oxen's death rates, and working conditions of oxen wagon pullers, including them drowning while crossing rivers, whole teams being struck by lightning while yoked, and freighting heavy loads for over eight hours a day, which then required several days for the oxen to recover.¹⁴ While other mentions exist, they are made in passing.

⁹ T. Bulpin, *Lost Trails of the Transvaal* (Cape Town: Books of Africa Party, 1983); T. Bulpin, *Lost Trails of the Low Veld* (London: HB Timmins for Hodder & Stoughton, 1950).

¹⁰ B. Joubert, 'An Historical Perspective on Animal Power Use in South Africa', in P. Starkey (ed.), *Animal Power in South Africa: Empowering Rural Communities* (Gauteng: Development of Southern Africa, 1995), 125–38; P. Starkey, 'The History of Working Animals in Africa', in K. MacDonald and R. Blench (eds.), *The Origins and Development of African Livestock: Archaeology, Genetics, Linguistics and Ethnography* (London: University College London Press, 2000), 483–85; M. Alexander, 'Military Use of Animals in South Africa (1400-1881)', *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies* 7, 4 (1977), 47, 51, 52.

¹¹ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 67–87.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Joubert, 'An Historical Perspective on Animal Power Use in South Africa', 134.

¹⁴ D. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), 312, 314–15.

Since wagon routes prefigured the region's roads, histories of the development of roads in South Africa offer some interesting links to wagon transport.¹⁵ The road engineer Graham Ross's 5th edition *Mountain Passes, Roads and Transportation in the Cape – a Guide to Research* (2013) contains over 700 pages of temporally collated references and quotations related to Cape and South African passes and roads, and in terms of its scope and meticulousness is unexampled.¹⁶ Since most if not all roads in South and southern Africa were first animal paths, then local Africans' footpaths, and then wagon paths, and then roads, the research guide contains manifold references to wagon routes and wagons.

Jan-Bart Gewald's study of the impact of motor vehicles in Namibia indicated various disadvantages of wagon transport, including its reliance on cattle accessing pasture and water, the slow pace of wagons, that they were labour intensive, requiring 'highly skilled and structured occupations', and an entourage needing all attendant planning and provisions, which, as he put it, 'formed small social islands that slowly traversed the veldt'.¹⁷ But it was rinderpest, spread rapidly across the region by cattle along vast wagon routes, as he and others showed, which really emphasised the practical limits of oxen-pulled wagons as a suitable means of transport and trade.¹⁸ Gordon Pirie emphasised the state-funded expansion of steam train systems as ending the era of wagon and wagon transport riding.¹⁹

The most comprehensive history of ox wagon transport in South Africa is Jose Burman's *Towards the Far Horizon: The Story of the Ox-wagon in South Africa* (1988).²⁰ The well-researched book gives an evidence-based and periodised account of wagon transport from 1653 until the early twentieth century. Published accounts of travellers, scientific explorers, and some missionaries form the predominant sources of evidence, which he read minutely. The numerous accounts drawn on by Jose Burman contain first-hand observations of wagon

¹⁵ Mitchell, 'Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Transport Infrastructure in South Africa', 36.

¹⁶ G. Ross, *Mountain Passes, Roads, and Transportation in the Cape – a Guide to Research*, 5th Edition (Graham Ross, 2013).

¹⁷ J-B. Gewald, 'Missionaries, Hereroes, and Motorcars: Mobility and the Impact of Motor Vehicles in Namibia before 1940', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, 2/3 (2002), 276, 279–80.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 258. And see Chapter Three, this thesis, for more details.

¹⁹ G. Pirie, 'Slaughter by Steam: Railway Subjugation of Ox-Wagon Transport in the Eastern Cape and Transkei, 1886-1910', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26, 2 (1993), 319–43.

²⁰ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 7–97, 106–163.

transport and oxen labourers because these travellers themselves rode in oxen-pulled wagons.

Apart from these studies of wagon transport, travellers' writings are a key source of information about oxen labour. The writings of travellers have been explored in many ways. Before Siegfried Huigen's readings of travellers' accounts of southern Africa, influential readings of such texts broadly followed two approaches.²¹ The first was by colonial historians interested in reconstructing the explorers' routes, since these enabled colonial settlement and expansion and was exemplified by Vernon Forbes's *Pioneer Travellers of South Africa; a Geographical Commentary upon Routes, Records, Observations and Opinions of Travellers at the Cape, 1750-1800* (1965).²² He was consumed by an attempt to hyper-accurately reconstruct the routes scientific travellers took. He regarded these travellers as triumphantly forging the routes that enabled the entry of European civilisation and colonialism into southern Africa.

The other approach was most prominently promoted by Mary Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), which critiqued the travellers' writings as instrumentally colonial and crucial to opening southern Africa up to western domination. For her, scientific travellers were like colonial spies in the service of colonial projects.²³ Mary Pratt's readings of a few scientific explorers are fragmentary, and as Siegfried Huigen put it, she saw travel texts as 'attempts to intellectually annex non-European territory and to pave the way for colonial expansion.'²⁴ In her interpretations, the travel texts are colonial views, and we see through imperial eyes when we read scientific travellers' accounts.

In his book *Knowledge and Colonialism* (2009), the recent major attempt to synthesise travel writings from around the eighteenth century, Siegfried Huigen – based on relatively close and contextualised readings of mostly Peter Kolb, François Le Vaillant and John Barrow – argued that knowledge could be gleaned from the travel writers, that their texts were not simply

²¹ See S. Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 26–30.

²² V. Forbes, *Pioneer Travellers of South Africa; a Geographical Commentary upon Routes, Records, Observations and Opinions of Travellers at the Cape, 1750-1800* (Cape Town: A. A Balkema, 1965).

²³ Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa*, 239.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 28.

representations of colonial interests, and that the texts should be read as a symbiotic interplay between predecessors' texts, extant science and the colonial context, from which important scientific knowledge emerged, admittedly sometimes useful to colonial regimes.²⁵ He was critical of Mary Pratt's taking a fragmentary approach to travel writings, making large inferences about science based on small pieces of uncontextualized text, and claimed that scientific travellers had 'too much of an individual profile to allow them to be subordinated to an amorphous and supra-individual discourse in the analysis'.²⁶

Travellers' accounts of southern Africa have been read in many ways. L.C Rookmaker impressively endeavoured to list the animal species described in southern Africa in her *The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa 1650-1790* (1989).²⁷ Other authors have explored travel writings for representations of the Khoisan and Khoikhoi, or examined themes of science, masculinity, embodiment, and knowledge.²⁸ Yet others have focused more narrowly on specific travel writers and their contexts and influence.²⁹ While Siegfried Huigen was critical of analysing small pieces of text and drawing general conclusions about the travellers, he did note commonalities, such as their shared empiricist epistemology.³⁰

Other reasonable general claims can be made about the scientific and other travellers. All of them were dependent on hunting and/or eating animals. They were all involved directly or indirectly in forcing animals to work for them, and harming them by killing them for food. Examples include their European animal consumption habits, using animals to plough land, in the case of missionaries, and compelling oxen to pull wagons. They all saw oxen whipped, all

²⁵ *Ibid*, 39–40.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 30.

²⁷ L. Rookmaaker, *The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa 1650-1790* (Rotterdam: A. A Balkema, 1989).

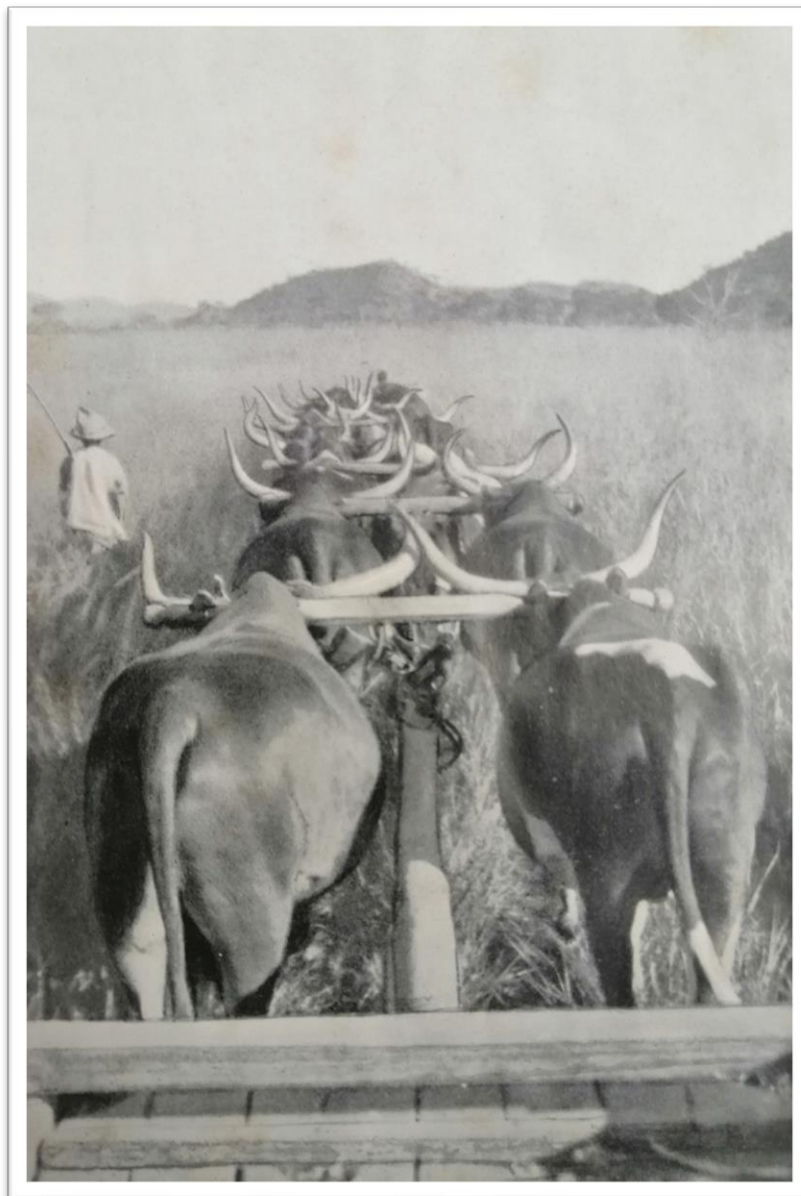
²⁸ R. Ross, 'Khoisan and Immigrants: The Emergence of Colonial Society in the Cape, 1500 – 1800', in C. Hamilton, B. Mbenga, and R. Ross (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol. I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 168–210; W. Beinart, 'Men, Science, Travel and Nature in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century Cape', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, 4 (1998), 775–99; Rookmaaker, *The Zoological Exploration of Southern Africa 1650-1790*.

²⁹ A. Martin, 'Performing Scientific Knowledge Transfer: Anne Plumtre and the Translation of Martin Heinrich Lichtenstein's *Reisen Im Südlichen Afrika* (1811)', *Journal of Literature and Science* 8, 1 (2015), 9–26; D. Driver, 'Lady Anne Barnard's Cape Journals and the Concept of Self-Othering', *Pretexts* 5, 1–2 (1995), 46–65; N. Ulrich, 'Dr Anders Sparrman: Travelling with the Labouring Poor in the Late Eighteenth-Century Cape', *South African Historical Journal* 61, 4 (2009), 731–49; N. Penn and A. Delmas, 'Peter Kolb and the Circulation of Knowledge about the Cape of Good Hope', in M. Lengwiler, N. Penn, and P. Harries (eds.), *Science, Africa and Europe: Processing Information and Creating Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 15–46, for example.

³⁰ Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa*, 30.

the oxen they used needed food, rest, and water. The travellers also all depended on oxen not dying or becoming too weak, or running away, or on the availability of more oxen to replace their lost kin. Further, perpetual, loud whip-cracking and shouting was an inherent part of the experience of travelling by wagon. These sensory experiences intensified when moving through difficult terrains such as mountains, rivers, or scorching Karoo desert sands. A view that travellers would have seen from the front of wagons follows.

Image 2.1. View from the front of a wagon



Source: W. Robertson, *Rhodesian Rancher* (London: Blackie & Son Limited, 1935), frontispiece.

There are hundreds of first-hand observations and scores of drawings and paintings of cattle's oxen labour. What distinguishes this chapter from previous scholarship on wagons, travellers accounts, and animal histories in general, is that cattle do not feature incidentally but are instead foregrounded as sentient beings whose experiences and forced labour contributions are recognised and explored in their own right. The aim is not to make general claims about the travellers themselves but to mine their texts for representations of cattle labour to produce vignettes of cattle's experiences as wagon labourers. This approach, to use travellers' accounts to understand subjective impacts of colonialism on cattle, is without precedent in the southern African literature.

There is a large volume of writing produced by travellers, officials, and missionaries over this period. Those which have good descriptions of oxen's wagon labour, in terms of describing and understanding oxen's experiences, are drawn on in this chapter. Rowland Raven-Hart's *Before Van Riebeeck: Callers at South Africa 1488 to 1652* (1967), arranged fragments of writings from those who stopped at the Cape before 1652.³¹ Jan Van Riebeeck's first of three volumes of journals contains the first recorded instances of cattle and horses as wagon labourers in South Africa.³² European expeditions into the interior became possible post-1652 because the Cape could be used as a base from which to launch expeditions. Buried deep in François Valentijn's enormous multi-volume *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1724–1726), there are accounts of VOC-related journeys into the interior, including that of Simon Van der Stel's journey to Namaqualand (1685–1686) and Henrick's Hops' into what became southern Namibia (1761–1762).³³ These expeditions were linked to VOC interests and business. In 1719 Peter Kolb published *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum* ('The Current State of the Cape of Good Hope'), which was a foundational scholarly text on South Africa, and indeed the first-ever published text to deal exclusively with the Cape.³⁴ Until late in the eighteenth century, writes

³¹ R. Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck: Callers at South Africa 1488 to 1652* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1967), 7, 10, 20.

³² J. van Riebeeck, translated by H. Thom, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck Volume 1, 1651-1655* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1952); J. van Riebeeck, H. Thom (ed.), *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck. Vol. 2., 1656-1658* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1954); J. van Riebeeck, H. Thom (ed.), *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck: 1659-62, Vol. 3* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1958).

³³ See Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa*, 4, 75, 76.

³⁴ Penn and Delmas, 'Peter Kolb and the Circulation of Knowledge about the Cape of Good Hope', 15; P. Kolben, translated by. Mr Medley, *Present State of the Cape of Good-Hope* (London: W. Innys, 1731 [1719]).

Siegfried Huigen, it remained ‘the most authoritative book on Southern Africa’, comprising 900 folios on the colonial settlement, local populations, geography and environment of the Cape.³⁵

The account which contains among the most sensitive descriptions of cattle labourers is Otto Mentzel’s *Vollständige und Zuverlässige Geographische und Topographische Beschreibung des Berühmten und in Aller Betrachtung So Merckwürdigen Afrikanischen* (1787), based on his time at the Cape between 1733 and 1741, which was translated into English as *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope* in 1944.³⁶ Then there is Carl Linnaeus’s student, Anders Sparrman’s *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1785), and the French-Surinamese ornithologist François le Vaillant’s *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa by way of the Cape of Good Hope* (1780 -1784), translated from French into English in 1796.³⁷ Anne Barnard’s letters and journal entries from her time in South Africa between 1797 and 1802 also contain many descriptions of oxen’s wagon labour, as does the British missionary Robert Percival’s *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope* (1804), based on his time at the Cape between 1795 and 1801.³⁸ The early nineteenth century produced texts such as John Barrow’s *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa* (1806), and Hinrich Lichtenstein’s *Travels in Southern Africa* (1812) which covers the years 1804 to 1806.³⁹ William Burchell’s travels and experiences with cattle wagon labourers in 1815, including many drawings of wagons and wagon transport, were published in 1822 in his *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*.⁴⁰ Descriptions of oxen labour from 1816 by the missionary Robert Moffat were published in

³⁵ Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa*, 5.

³⁶ O. Mentzel, *Vollständige Und Zuverlässige Geographische Und Topographische Beschreibung Des Berühmten Und in Aller Betrachtung So Merckwürdigen Afrikanischen* (Glogau: G. F Gunther, 1787); O. Mentzel, translated by G. Marais and J. Hoge, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town: The Van Riebeeck Society, 1944 [1787]), 24, 32, 70, 73, 82, 105–6, 112, 124, 126, 131, 145, 146, 150, 200–202, 245.

³⁷ A. Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, Vol. I* (London: G. G. J and J. Robinson, 1785), 53–54, 121, 123–24, 127, 133, 171, 244, 294; F. Le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796), 24, 43, 65, 139, 144, 156, 160, 170, 172–73, 205, 209, 213, 228–29, 231–32, 264, 276–78, 281–282.

³⁸ Barnard, *South Africa a Century Ago (1797 - 1801)*, 160, 162, 164, 1669, 170, 173, 217; R. Percival, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope* (London: C. and R. Baldwin, 1804), 54–59, 61, 221.

³⁹ J. Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa* (London: T. Cadwell and W. Davies, 1806), 70, 74, 96, 120, 323; H. Lichtenstein, translated by A. Plumptre, *Travels in Southern Africa, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806* (London: Henry Colburn, 1812), 13–15, 22, 31, 33, 43, 53, 64–66, 77, 107, 126, 191–92, 207, 237, 343, 366.

⁴⁰ W. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, Vol. I* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822), 28, 52, 65, 217, 222–23, 225, 227, 231, 239, 253–54, 267, 300.

Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa.⁴¹ The British Lieutenant colonel Edward Elers Napier wrote incidentally on cattle's wagon labour during his stint in South Africa in the 1840s in his *Excursions in Southern Africa* (1850).⁴² And while his work was edited against his will and 'softened' to be more amenable to potential British immigrants, it still contained vivid descriptions of wagon transport and oxen.⁴³ Finally, David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) and Thomas Baine's *Explorations in South-West Africa* (1864), include accounts of our topic from the 1840s to the 1860s.⁴⁴ The texts invoked in this chapter were selected to cover the period when wagon labour was a major feature of colonial expansion, and also because they have detailed descriptions of oxen's wagon labour.

These writers represented cattle as wagon-pullers based on phenomena they all had sustained first-hand experiences of. Many of them travelled by wagon on journeys that lasted weeks or months. So, the many corroborating accounts of oxen's wagon labour over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries do count as useful representations. Such descriptions or representations are not, as Jonathan Saha reminded us, 'transparent windows' into the lives of animals.⁴⁵ But read together, alive to silences, word choices, and the authors' contexts and prejudices, their accounts remain some of the best evidence of oxen's wagon labours for the region and time.

The broad aim of this thesis is to explore some of colonialism's major impacts on cattle's experiences. The colonial impact isolated in this chapter is cattle's transformation into and work as wagon labourers. Cattle performed other forms of labour, as plough pullers, as pack-carrying transporters, as metabolic and reproductive labourers, as milk producers – but wagon labour is isolated for reasons of focus. The approach of this chapter is to read travellers, missionaries, and officials' accounts of southern Africa by mining them for

⁴¹ R. Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1846), 19, 24, 26–27, 65, 73, 76, 80, 82, 94, 99, 101, – 104, 107, 117–19, 124, 134–35.

⁴² E. Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa, Vol. II* (London: William Shoberl, 1850), 1–3, 12–13, 15, 17–18, 38, 111, 176, 330.

⁴³ M. Baker, 'Military Writers and Their Readers: The Transnational Circulation of Campaign Narratives of the Eastern Cape Frontier Wars between 1834 and 1853', *English in Africa* 44, 2 (2017), 20–22.

⁴⁴ Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 10, 11, 54–55, 57, 60–61, 70, 75, 79, 81–82, 94, 104, 125, 138, 153, 168, 177, 322; Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 6, 25–26, 28–29, 37, 58, 62–63, 81, 85, 91, 125, 140, 144–45, 227, 236–37, 389, 403, 450.

⁴⁵ J. Saha, 'Colonizing Elephants: Animal Agency, Undead Capital and Imperial Science in British Burma', *BJHS Themes* 2 (2017), 172.

descriptions of cattle as wagon labourers. These texts are read in conjunction with the biological and social information about cattle presented in the preceding chapter. In terms of cattle's experiences as colonial wagon labourers, this is done to create vignettes of cattle subjectivity. These vignettes – informed by a combination of descriptive representations from different first-hand observers – together form a mosaic-like representation of cattle experiences in southern Africa between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. These accounts were read for all references to wagons, yokes, oxen, whips, transport, and cattle. Such a reading of texts produced hundreds of descriptions of oxen's wagon labours. Since they relate directly to cattle's experiences, themes explored in this chapter include oxen as labourers, processes of inspanning, oxen control by whipping, fatigue, hunger and thirst, travels into the interior of southern Africa, agency expressed as resistance and escape attempts, and oxen as road-makers.

Oxen's wagon labour: vignettes of subjectivity, 1653–1800

Cattle were not first compelled to perform labour when the VOC arrived in 1652. As I discussed in Chapter Two, from the tenth to the sixteenth century Proto-Nguni speakers were innovating a range of terms as part of a larger cattle breeding, reproduction, and accumulation lexicon. New terms started to distinguish cattle by age, sex and reproductive capacities, suggesting that cattle had begun to perform reproductive labour. Cattle were also performing metabolic labour – they were eating so that they could grow, reproduce, produce milk, and be accumulated by southern African human groups. These forms of labour became increasingly entrenched and widespread over the next several centuries, so that by the time Adam Kuper drew on mid-nineteenth century texts to write *Wives for Cattle* (1982), he could claim that cattle were central to cattle-keeping societies across southern Africa.⁴⁶ But cattle did not only perform metabolic and reproductive labour.

There were many cattle in the Cape by the late fifteenth century. When Bartolomeu Dias landed at Mossel Bay in 1488 he called it *Angra dos Vaqueiros*, Bay of cattle herders.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A. Kuper, *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1982), 11.

⁴⁷ P. Raper, *Dictionary of Southern African Place Names* (Johannesburg: Lowry, 1987), 68.

Travellers who had stopped at the Cape in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries claimed to have observed cattle performing other forms of labour. Vasco da Gama described the cattle he saw in the late fifteenth century as ‘very large... and very marvellously fat, and *very tame*’.⁴⁸ He noted that the bulls were ‘gelded’, castrated, and that the larger ones were fitted with saddles loaded with cargo. There is evidence, including texts and rock paintings, that cattle were ridden and loaded with cargo in north Africa at least two millennia ago.⁴⁹ Oxen were forced to pull ploughs from about three to five thousand years ago in north Africa.⁵⁰ Oxen also pulled funeral sledges in Egypt over three thousand years ago.⁵¹ A later depiction of the Khoikhoi method of castrating bulls is reproduced below.

Image 2.2. ‘The Hottentots method of gelding their bulls and rams’



Source: P. Kolben, translated by Mr Medley, *Present State of the Cape of Good-Hope* (London: W. Innys, 1731 [1719]), 170.

Also, sticks were thrust through the noses of cattle and they were led and ridden by this method.⁵² Cattle also performed military labour. Francisco d’Almeida noted that cattle in 1510

⁴⁸ Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck: Callers at South Africa 1488 to 1652*, 7, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ K. Lindblom, *The Use of Oxen as Pack and Riding Animals in Africa* (Stockholm: Riksmuseets Etnografiska Avdelning, 1931), 7–9.

⁵⁰ Starkey, ‘The History of Working Animals in Africa’, 478–79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck: Callers at South Africa 1488 to 1652*, 7.

were trained to respond to whistling and ‘other signs’, and that they could surround an enemy and form ‘a defensive wall’, ‘since they [cattle] are trained to this warlike device’, from behind which the cattle’s human masters could attack their enemies with volleys of hard, sharp sticks.⁵³ But this defensive operation was likely not simply ingenuity on the part of the Khoikhoi. Albeit later, the *Journal* records that:

Something remarkable was observed among our cattle in the kraal.... As soon as they become aware of the leopard in the fowl-house they all collected in a body with their horns towards the door and formed a crescent, so that the leopard had all he could do to keep clear of their horns and escape – even though, by their bellowing, these animals gave ample evidence of their terror of the wild beast. Indeed, we have *often* noticed that leopards, lions and tigers are unable to harm cattle when they form themselves into a protective circle, so that not a single one of the calves inside it is carried off by the wild beasts – a wonderful sight to see.⁵⁴

The Khoikhoi likely copied these defensive strategies by training and giving signals to the cattle to protect them as their own calves, and from this position launch attacks. In other pre-VOC cases, cattle’s horns were sharpened and they could be commanded to rush at enemies.⁵⁵ There are frequent mentions of cattle obedience to human calls and whistles, long before the VOC set up its fort.⁵⁶ So cattle in southern Africa were trained to be responsive to whistles and calls, they were saddled with cargo, and controlled for riding via sticks through their noses, and they could perform military operations for themselves and their masters. Male cattle’s testes were amputated, gelded, likely to control their reproduction, reduce defensive aggression, and increase their pliability. There is no known pre-VOC record of cattle pulling sledges or carts, however.⁵⁷ There were no wheels, and there was no writing.

With the arrival of the VOC, a new form of cattle labour emerged: cart and wagon pulling to transport humans and cargo. Jan van Riebeeck learned from local humans that cattle could be obediently responsive to commands and perform transport labour. Oxen are castrated adult male cattle. Just over a year after arriving, he was coercing oxen to carry wood from the

⁵³ *Ibid*, 10.

⁵⁴ van Riebeeck, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck Volume 1, 1651-1655*, 315, emphasis added.

⁵⁵ Joubert, ‘An Historical Perspective on Animal Power Use in South Africa’, 125.

⁵⁶ Raven-Hart, *Before Van Riebeeck: Callers at South Africa 1488 to 1652*, 23, 82, 121, 123, 180.

⁵⁷ Joubert, ‘An Historical Perspective on Animal Power Use in South Africa’, 125.

Kirstenbosch forests on a carpenter's cart that had been expressly developed. On the 26th of May 1653, VOC men were 'making gear for the cart to be drawn by oxen'.⁵⁸ Two days later oxen were harnessed into the cart/wagon, which they 'pulled reasonably well'.⁵⁹ Two weeks later there were eight oxen employed as wagon-pullers – two per cart, while the other six were trained or rested.⁶⁰ The wagon was loaded with beams of wood and the cattle pulled it along what became Main road and Newlands avenue in Cape Town towards the inchoate VOC base near the port. It was the first European-built road, superimposed onto older animal pathways, and was called *Die Ou Wagen Pad Na 'T Bos*, the old wagon path to the forest. Thus, a dramatic shift in southern African cattle's history began – but not quietly.⁶¹

From the first, oxen resisted this new form of coerced labour. Because they butted their horns at their new masters, the *Journal* described the oxen as 'dangerous to handle', on account of their being 'unaccustomed to hauling or other similar tasks'.⁶² Jan van Riebeeck thus started to prefer horses over oxen, after the VOC had imported the former.⁶³ Sometimes cattle resistance reached a supreme intensity. Describing what may be the first recorded cattle self-annihilation associated with wagon labour in southern Africa, on 15 June 1655 the *Journal* notes that:

Last night one of the oxen which [sic] had been yoked to draw the wagon, behaved in so strange and wild a manner that it broke its [sic] own neck, proving again that oxen will not be a success, so that we shall have to be provided with a few more horses to haul our timber and firewood from the forest.⁶⁴

Reasonably interpreted, that nameless oxen preferred to break his own neck rather than be yoked to and pull a VOC wagon. Accepting that cattle have minds and experiences, based on information presented about cattle biology and minds in the preceding chapter, this ox surely recognised that his neck-jerking was becoming gravely injurious and potentially deadly. Considering that agency in this thesis refers to a sentient, perceiving being's conative striving

⁵⁸ van Riebeeck, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck Volume 1, 1651-1655*, 157.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶¹ Ross, *Mountain Passes, Roads, and Transportation in the Cape*, 68.

⁶² van Riebeeck, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck Volume 1, 1651-1655*, 317.

⁶³ S. Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 18, 21.

⁶⁴ van Riebeeck, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck Volume 1, 1651-1655*, 331.

towards their species-characteristic good, the ox's persistence permits the inference that he preferred potential self-annihilation to VOC wagon labour.⁶⁵ By rejecting the yoke, the oxen pursued his good, namely not being yoked and coerced into wagon labour, even if this meant his own annihilation. His own annihilation was a good preferable to the only other option. Where humans are concerned, there are powerful reasons to believe that under certain conditions suicide is rational.⁶⁶ This includes 'fates that are both worse than and only avoidable by death'.⁶⁷ The same may be true for sentient animals. If, less boldly, this was not a suicide, it was akin to the frequent cases of purposively trapped animals, especially mothers in desperation to return to their young, who gnaw their own limbs off to escape traps set by animal fur traffickers – a reaction called 'wringing off' by trappers.⁶⁸ The oxen's agency made a strong enough impression to convince Jan van Riebeeck, temporarily, that oxen were unsuited for such labour.⁶⁹ In the same year, however, the Cape had its first wagon-builder or wainwright.⁷⁰ Wagons of this time would become the prototype of the *kakebeen* wagon, and oxen pulling such wagons would come to comprise the main form of colonial transport in the region for over the next 200 years.

In 1657 the VOC gave farmers land along the Liesbeek River, and provided them with harrows, ploughs, and twelve plough-trained oxen.⁷¹ Thus the free burghers, full-time farmers, were born, and the Cape shifted from a mere refreshment station to becoming a settlement.⁷² Farmers after this started to adopt semi-nomadic lifestyles, using their wagons as their homes, indicating how important wagons and oxen labourers were becoming to their lives. They eventually became the trekboers. Cattle were extremely prized by the VOC, and on one account the first war between local human groups and the VOC broke out in 1659 because of cattle theft.⁷³ In 1662 a wagon was first used to carry supplies on an expedition towards the

⁶⁵ See my extensive discussion of animal agency in Chapter One.

⁶⁶ D. Benatar, *The Human Predicament: A Candid Guide to Life's Biggest Questions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 163–99.

⁶⁷ Benatar, *The Human Predicament*, 163.

⁶⁸ PETA, 'The Jaws of Death: How Steel-Jaw Traps Torture and Kill Animals (blog)', *PETA.Org*, 9 September 2020, <https://www.peta.org/features/steel-jaw-trap-fur-cruelty/>, accessed 5 June 2020.

⁶⁹ van Riebeeck, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck Volume 1, 1651-1655*, 342.

⁷⁰ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 147.

⁷¹ Joubert, 'An Historical Perspective on Animal Power Use in South Africa', 126.

⁷² S. Swart, 'Settler Stock? Animals and Power in Mid-Seventeenth Century Contact at the Cape, circa 1652-62', in P. Cuneo (ed.), *Animals and Early Modern Identity* (London: Routledge, 2016), 253.

⁷³ Silver and Co, *S. W Silver & Co's Handbook to South Africa*, 9.

little Berg River, where there were no paths except those forged by eland and the Khoikhoi.⁷⁴ Twenty days later, having broken down repeatedly, the wagon was buried. The supplies were loaded onto the oxen's backs, but they 'bucked furiously', and damaged the cargo.⁷⁵ Four days later, and after much heavy treatment, some of them complied but others remained intractable.⁷⁶ Despite such setbacks, from the VOC perspective, wagons were becoming engendered and more developed. In 1663 the VOC fixed the price of woods used for wagon-making.⁷⁷ The first non-VOC employed wagon-maker and blacksmith was established by 1666.⁷⁸ Annually, by 1671 oxen pulled over 500 wagon loads of their own manure from the Groote Schuur kraal to fertilise gardens in Table Valley and Rustenberg.⁷⁹ Just over ten years later, a wagon was designed to be disassembled to transit over the forbidding passes in the Cape. This technological development would start to transform wagons into highly robust and versatile tools, meaning that cattle would have to pull them over passes like Hottentots Holland, Houw Hoek, and myriad daunting others. VOC explorations could thus advance further, which for oxen meant that journeys became longer, more arduous, and their loads heavier. After this, Cape wagons were designed to be dismantled swiftly and carried.⁸⁰ Oxen were thus required to freight cargos on their backs, also.

⁷⁴ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 21; Ross, *Mountain Passes, Roads, and Transportation in the Cape*, 73; Raper, *Dictionary of Southern African Place Names*, 76.

⁷⁵ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ G. Theal, *Abstract of the Debates and Resolutions of the Council of Policy at the Cape from 1651 to 1687* (Cape Town: Saul Solomon and Co, 1881), 87.

⁷⁸ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 19.

⁷⁹ J. Bottaro, 'The Changing Landscape of the Liesbeek River Valley' (Master's Thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 1996), 29.

⁸⁰ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 23.

Image 2.3. William Burchell's depiction of a wagon being dismantled to change a wheel



Source: W. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, Vol. I* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822) 534.

The free burghers, pulled on their wagons by oxen, were moving and settling in areas like Stellenbosch (1679), Drakenstein (1687), and Franshoek (1688).⁸¹ Between 1691 and 1700 about one in ten settler farmers owned wagons, whereas a century later between 1791 and 1800 settler farmers on average owned one wagon each.⁸² The numbers of cattle and sheep under the control of settlers started to increase quite rapidly at the turn of the eighteenth century. Between 1652 and 1699, VOC records indicate that 15 999 cattle and 36 636 sheep were purchased by the VOC from the Khoikhoi, although the actual numbers are thought to be higher.⁸³ In the eight years after the opening of trade between free burghers and the Khoikhoi, 1700-1708, colonial ownership of cattle and sheep 'jumped dramatically' by 8 871 and 35 562 respectively, although theft and raiding enabled part of these transfers.⁸⁴ Thus in the eighteenth century settlers were increasingly involved in trafficking cattle and sheep. Around 1710 settlers controlled 20 082 cattle and 131 000 sheep.⁸⁵ This meant that large grazing areas were required, and trekking with wagons increased. To stimulate cattle and

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 29.

⁸² J. Fourie, 'An Inquiry into the Nature, Causes and Distribution of Wealth in the Cape Colony, 1652-1795' (PhD Dissertation, Utrecht University, Utrecht, 2012), 48.

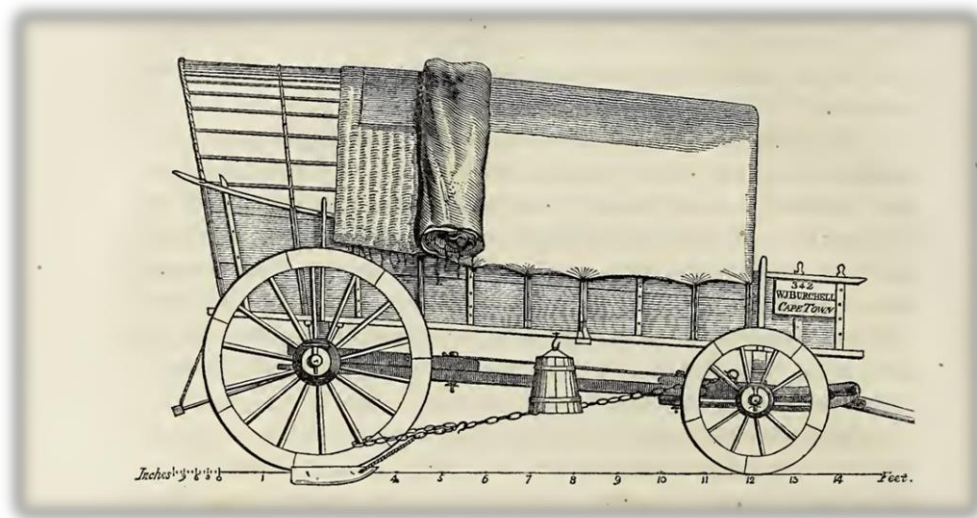
⁸³ R. Elphick and V. Malherbe, 'The Khoisan to 1828', in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee (eds.), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 19.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

⁸⁵ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 35.

sheep breeding and crop production, by 1720 the VOC granted free burghers farms at low rent, farms that could be exchanged for other farms when grazing capabilities diminished.⁸⁶ Trekboers continued to move further into the Cape, and as they did their wagon technology developed further. The kakebeen wagon was coming into existence. It was named kakebeen because it resembled a cattle's jaw. A depiction of a later iteration of the kakebeen wagon follows.

Image 2.4. William Burchell's wagon in 1815



Source: Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol. I, 147.

Kakebeen wagons comprised two parts, the carriage and the wagon on which the carriage rested. The wagon had two pairs of wheels. The axels were made from wood but could nonetheless handle a weight of 800 kilograms.⁸⁷ An early iteration of a kakebeen wagon pulled by oxen at the Grand Parade in Cape Town in the eighteenth century is depicted in Jose Burman's *Towards the Far Horizon* (see below).

⁸⁶ Joubert, 'An Historical Perspective on Animal Power Use in South Africa', 126.

⁸⁷ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 47–57.

Image 2.5. Oxen wagon labourers at work at the Grand Parade, eighteenth century



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 20.

During the 1730s, in the context of increasing cattle populations, trekboers moving further into what became South Africa, and increased wagon labour, the German Otto Mentzel lived in the Cape and was much moved by the oxen's labour he observed. His book *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope* contains remarkably cattle-sensitive descriptions of among others inspanning, breaking oxen in to wagon labour, and oxen agency. Although he published it in 1785, forty-four years after he left the Cape, he is an important source for a history of oxen's wagon labour because he was well-educated for the time (he worked as a teacher for a wealthy farmer's children), lived in the Cape for a decade, had plentiful opportunity to observe wagon labour, and he was uniquely impressed by the oxen he observed. Further, many of his claims about oxen's wagon labour are corroborated by later observers.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, 13–15, 31; Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, 155, 375; Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol. I, 242; Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, Vol. I, 39–41, 50, 53–54, 123, 127, 244, 294; Le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa*, 43, 144, 228; Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa*, Vol. II, 17, 38; Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 322; Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 37, 62–63, 342, 403.

Owing to their skill at commanding and communicating with cattle, and the deep knowledge of the climate, terrain and landscape, settlers often used Khoikhoi men as drivers of their wagons. These drivers sat at the front of the wagons or walked alongside them and wielded lengthy whips. They, the settler farmers and trekboers also knew all of the oxen by name and shouted or spoke to them individually during their toils.⁸⁹ As Otto Mentzel put it, 'the reader should know that the farmers of Africa give special names to all their trek-oxen, horses and cows'.⁹⁰ Oxen labourers were recognised as individuals, with discrete personalities, temperaments and strengths. Otto Mentzel left vivid descriptions of the process of 'breaking' oxen in to wagon labour spans. A span is a team of wagon labourers and inspanning refers to connecting the oxen to their yokes, which are linked to the wagons. To outspan is to unyoke the cattle for grazing and rest. Outspan as a noun is a place where oxen are outspanned, often near water and pasturage. A span comprised between six and ten or more oxen, depending on the terrain, load, and similar considerations. Otto Mentzel described breaking oxen in to wagon labour:

When an ox is three years old it is inspanned and taught to pull. The poor animal learns in a hard school. Firstly, a young ox that has never been tied up before is caught in the following manner. A slave approaches the animal stealthily from behind and throws over its horns, and if possible also over its head and around its neck, a looped cord which is tied to a long stick. Then... another slave catches the opposite end and the ox is led to where it is to be inspanned next to an old mate under a yoke. Usually this is done when manure is being carted to the fields, so that the apprentice may tire more quickly on account of the heavy load and may be managed more easily. Since the young animal is entirely ignorant of the yoke and not trained to walk and pull in a straight line with its team, it is continually whipped with the eight to ten yard long lash. Truly, it is piteous to see how the long lash at each blow removes hair, causes weals to rise and blood to flow; but in this way the animal becomes so exhausted and worn-out that after three or four days it patiently lets itself be caught and inspanned, although shivering and shaking. Then the rigid training is over. The newly broken in oxen are harnessed in pairs to the middle of the wagon and the plough, the oldest and strongest to the shaft, and those that respond best to their names, right in front. Every ox is given a name, and one hears the continual shout of the driver e.g.

⁸⁹ Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 23–24; Le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa*, 65; Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 236–37; Barnard, *South Africa a Century Ago (1797 - 1801)*, 173; Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, 14; Percival, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, 60–61; Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol. I, 175.

⁹⁰ Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 24.

“*Stuurman hot! Bootsman hoar!*” or vice versa, and one is astonished to see the... animals immediately turning right or left at the call.⁹¹

Uninitiated oxen were inspanned with older oxen, and the process took four days of intense flogging. The ‘training’ process required a psychological breakdown, in which the oxen were forced into a dreary fate. Oxen disobedience and infractions, however marginal, resulted in heavy floggings. That cattle could hear sounds at higher frequencies than humans and shouting caused them alarm, disorientation and fear, was used against them. The oxen were shouted at and beaten *individually* – this brought home to them the understanding that individual actions caused individual consequences. Infraction equalled punishment – screams and lashes. Their intelligence and experience was used against them: those most responsive to their names lead the span, while the newly broken-in oxen were placed in the middle. Oxen responding to their names clearly demonstrates their ability to anticipate likely future events, namely that when shouted at by name non-compliance would be followed by pain. This suggests that cattle have the capacity to learn and remember, and that they have a sense of time, and a sense of causality. This also speaks to the likely constant state of psychological distress that the oxen were in. This is because during journeys the agents of the oxen’s suffering were around the oxen at almost every moment of every day. Studies into cattle’s brain and blood biomarkers of stress-related psychological disorders, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), have shown that when exposed to wolf simulations, cattle who have hitherto been exposed to wolves present biomarkers of psychological disorders whereas wolf-naïve cattle do not.⁹² Cattle recall previous threats and are physiologically and psychologically distressed by recurrent threats.⁹³

The psychological effects of making other mammals, namely elephants, submit to forced labour offers insights into oxen’s likely psychological consequences of being broken in to wagon labour. Researchers who studied compelled elephant labour in Thailand argued that a combination of psychological torture and chronic physical abuse was required to make

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 200–201.

⁹² R. Cooke *et al.*, ‘Effects of a Simulated Wolf Encounter on Brain and Blood Biomarkers of Stress-Related Psychological Disorders in Beef Cows with or without Previous Exposure to Wolves’, *Journal of Animal Science* 95, 3 (2017), 1154–55.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 1155.

elephants rideable for tourists.⁹⁴ This ‘domination-based’ approach resulted in elephants’ ‘psychological and physical breakdown[s]’.⁹⁵ The psychological effect for the elephants was among other things PTSD.⁹⁶ It is plausible to think that the oxen initiated into wagon labour also suffered PTSD, since they, like the Thailand elephants, endured chronic physical abuse and psychological torment. That the oxen were ‘shivering and shaking’, once dominated into the yoke, is plausibly indicative of their torment. The oxen then became dependent upon their masters for rest, food, and water – which could be withheld as punishment. The psychological breakdown involved in initial inspanning bears emphasis because all oxen who became wagon labourers in southern Africa, from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth century, endured some variation of this process. They were all broken down psychologically, endured chronic physical abuse, were screamed at individually, and many plausibly suffered PTSD.

Otto Mentzel also left more focused descriptions on the oxen in the yoke, which he disparaged as ‘most impracticable’ – *abgeschmackteste*, which connotes that which is superlatively absurd/vulgar/tasteless.⁹⁷

On the necks of the animals inspanned side by side, lies a round piece of wood...In it are four holes, through which bars (*Jukscheiden*) are pushed; two for each ox; these hang along the animal's neck and are fastened below the neck with a small piece of rope. One of these yokes, for the hindmost pair of oxen (called “Achterossen”) is chained to the front of the shaft with an iron ring and staple; but for the other four pairs of oxen it is fastened to a chain, rope or cord...the oxen merely push the yoke before them, so that the wagon connected to the hindmost yoke by its shaft and to the foremost yoke by the long chain or rope, has to follow. I could not help pitying the poor animals that were tortured in this way. For since the hindmost yoke is tied to the front of the shaft and as both oxen are held under one immovable yoke, one may easily imagine how the animals are flung from one side to the other by the shaft whenever the wagon moves from side to side. On all rocky and uneven roads, such as have a high track on one side and a lower one on the other, the conditions are very bad, and it would not be surprising if the hindmost pair of oxen quite often had their necks broken; for if by chance a loaded

⁹⁴ J. Rizzolo and G. Bradshaw, ‘Human Leisure/ Elephant Breakdown: Impacts of Tourism on Asian Elephants’, in N. Carr and J. Young (eds.), *Wild Animals and Leisure: Rights and Wellbeing* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 113–14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 113.

⁹⁶ G. Bradshaw, *Elephants on the Edge: What Animals Teach Us about Humanity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 82, 109–10, 221–23.

⁹⁷ Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 231; Mentzel, *Vollständige Und Zuverlässige Geographische Und Topographische Beschreibung Des Berühmten Und in Aller Betrachtung So Merckwürdigen Afrikanischen*, 231.

wagon should overturn, the hindmost two oxen would have to fall with it, unless the bars of the yoke should snap and the oxen be thus freed from the yoke. But one can imagine what the animals have to endure when they are twisted and choked by the yoke... No ox can defend itself with its head and horns against insects, wasps, gadflies and hornets, for since it is inspanned and imprisoned under one yoke with another ox, it cannot move its head.⁹⁸

The oxen at the back of the span, nearest the wagon, had yokes connected to the wagon. The oxen in the front and middle of the span had yokes connected to the yokes of the hindmost oxen. The hindmost pair of oxen could not move their necks, so that if the wagon became unbalanced or crashed, they followed it. The wood which connected the other oxen to their paired mates meant that one ox slipping caused the other to follow. Otto Mentzel considered this method of yoking *martern*, torture. His German text reads: *Ich habe es nie ohne Mitleiden ansehen können, wie das arme Vieh auf diese Weise gemartert und geplagt wird.*⁹⁹ Translated, this means: I have never been able to see without pity how the poor cattle are tortured and plagued in this way. The word *gemartert* is a past-tense derivative of *martern*, which according to a 1783 dictionary signified the verb 'to torture'.¹⁰⁰ *Geplagt* at the time meant tormented or vexed.¹⁰¹ In his view, for the oxen, yoking cattle and forcing them to pull or push wagons was a form of torture. The English translation deployed the word torture on four occasions when Otto Mentzel was referring to oxen labour.¹⁰² The explicitness of his views are rare because he viewed the oxen more sympathetically than many other observers; he acknowledged to a greater degree that they were beings capable of feelings and experiences. What did cattle do in response to these new forms of labour? Jan van Riebeeck's *Journal* reveals frequent complaints and mentions of cattle he had trafficked being stolen.¹⁰³ Otto Mentzel took a different view, he argued that cattle ran away to escape back to their previous masters. He claimed the motivation for the early VOC outpost at Salt River was:

⁹⁸ Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 146–47.

⁹⁹ Mentzel, *Vollständige Und Zuverlässige Geographische Und Topographische Beschreibung Des Berühmten Und in Aller Betrachtung So Merckwürdigen Afrikanischen*, 232.

¹⁰⁰ N. Bailey, *A Compleat English Dictionary Oder Vollständiges Englisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: Waysenhaus und Frommannische Buchhandlung, 1783), 823.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 853.

¹⁰² Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 147, 148, 173.

¹⁰³ van Riebeeck, *Journal of Jan Van Riebeeck Volume 1, 1651-1655*, 183, 191, 192, 195, 206, 207, 227, 232, 249, 297, 324, 370, 376.

to see that the cattle bartered with the Hottentots did not cross the Salt River and return to their homes. The Hottentot cattle still retain this habit on all possible occasions up to the present day, and thereby make it clear that they prefer staying with the... Hottentots to being forced to do hard labour for more civilised people.¹⁰⁴

On his view, when cattle went missing it was 'more probable that the missing oxen turned back and returned to their former masters, the Hottentots'.¹⁰⁵ He was probably right because for the next 120 years there are manifold examples of oxen fleeing their station as wagon labourers.¹⁰⁶ The practice of tying oxen up at night during travels was commonplace, lest the oxen 'strayed'. That oxen probably ran away from VOC and other settler masters does not imply that cattle lived merry lives with the Khoikhoi. There are many descriptions of the stick-through-the-nose method of making cattle rideable. Here is one from Mentzel's stay during the 1730s:

When Hottentots leave their former haunts and migrate to a different locality, they take their huts apart and put them on a pack-ox together with all their effects. A stick is then thrust through the nose of this animal and if it refuses to follow is led by it. For this purpose a hole is pierced through the wall separating the two nostrils while the animal is still young, and kept open to prevent it from growing together. When the ox is about to be laden a stick about 18 inches long, with a little barbed hook at one end to keep it from falling out, is thrust through the hole. Since this hurts the animal it is forced to stand still and suffer whatever treatment to which it may be subjected. If the ox refuses to follow willingly, it is guided or led by this stick. If it moves without being guided it turns its head at each step to the side towards which the stick swings, from which one may infer that this nose-band must be painful to the animal.¹⁰⁷

This stick approach was corroborated by many later observers.¹⁰⁸ Cattle's noses contain many nerves, meaning that acute pain was felt by the oxen when their noses were thus pierced.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Mentzel, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*, Vol. I, 303, 433, 450, 510, 549; Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, 27, 99, 102, 107; Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 81, 85, 96, 125, 227, 403; Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 57, 168; Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa*, Vol. II, 38.

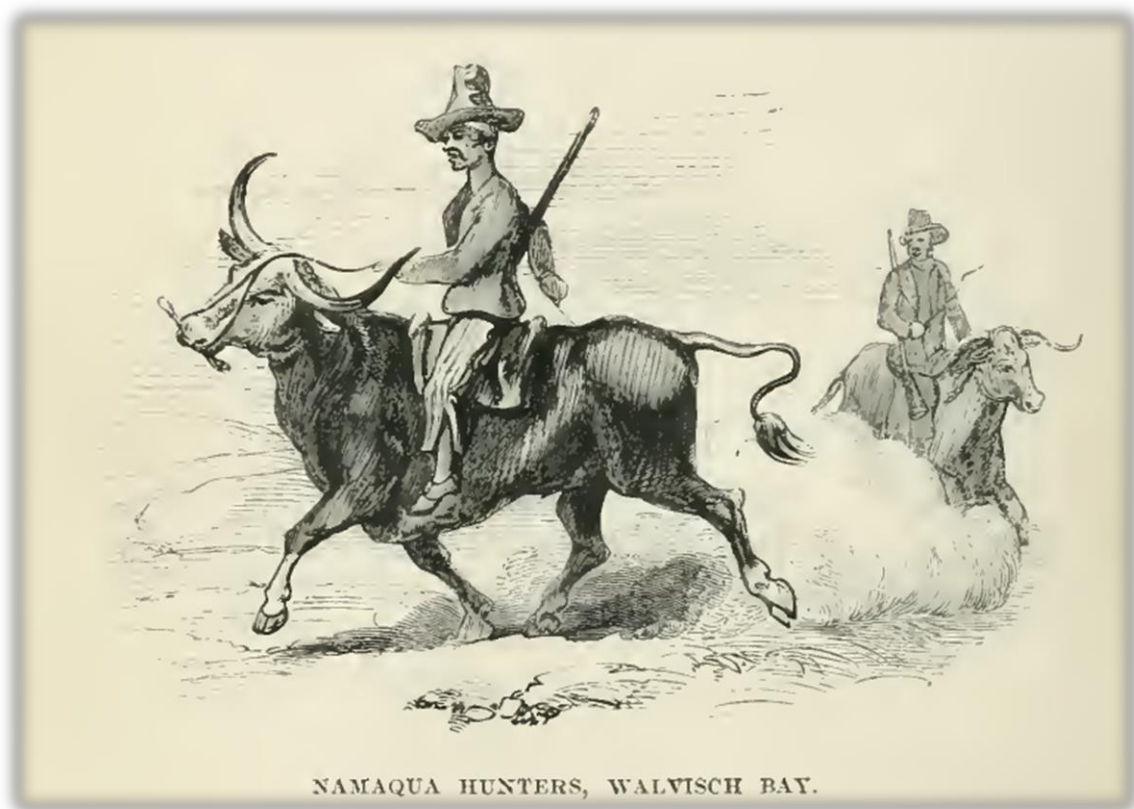
¹⁰⁷ Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 295.

¹⁰⁸ See for example Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, Vol. I, 237–38; Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 379.

¹⁰⁹ I. Salazar *et al.*, 'Anatomical, Immunohistochemical and Physiological Characteristics of the Vomeronasal Vessels in Cows and Their Possible Role in Vomeronasal Reception', *Journal of Anatomy* 212, 5 (2008), 686–96.

That they could be directed in this way further evidences this. Thomas Baines in the early 1860s depicted oxen in what became Namibia being controlled and ridden in this way. Like wagon labour, this form of oxen labour spread across the region. This way of riding cattle was also adopted by the Xhosa and Basuto tribes, the latter, according to one account, using a grass or cattle skin (leather) rope instead of a stick.¹¹⁰

Image 2.6. Thomas Baines' depiction of the stick-through-the-nose method of riding cattle in South West Africa



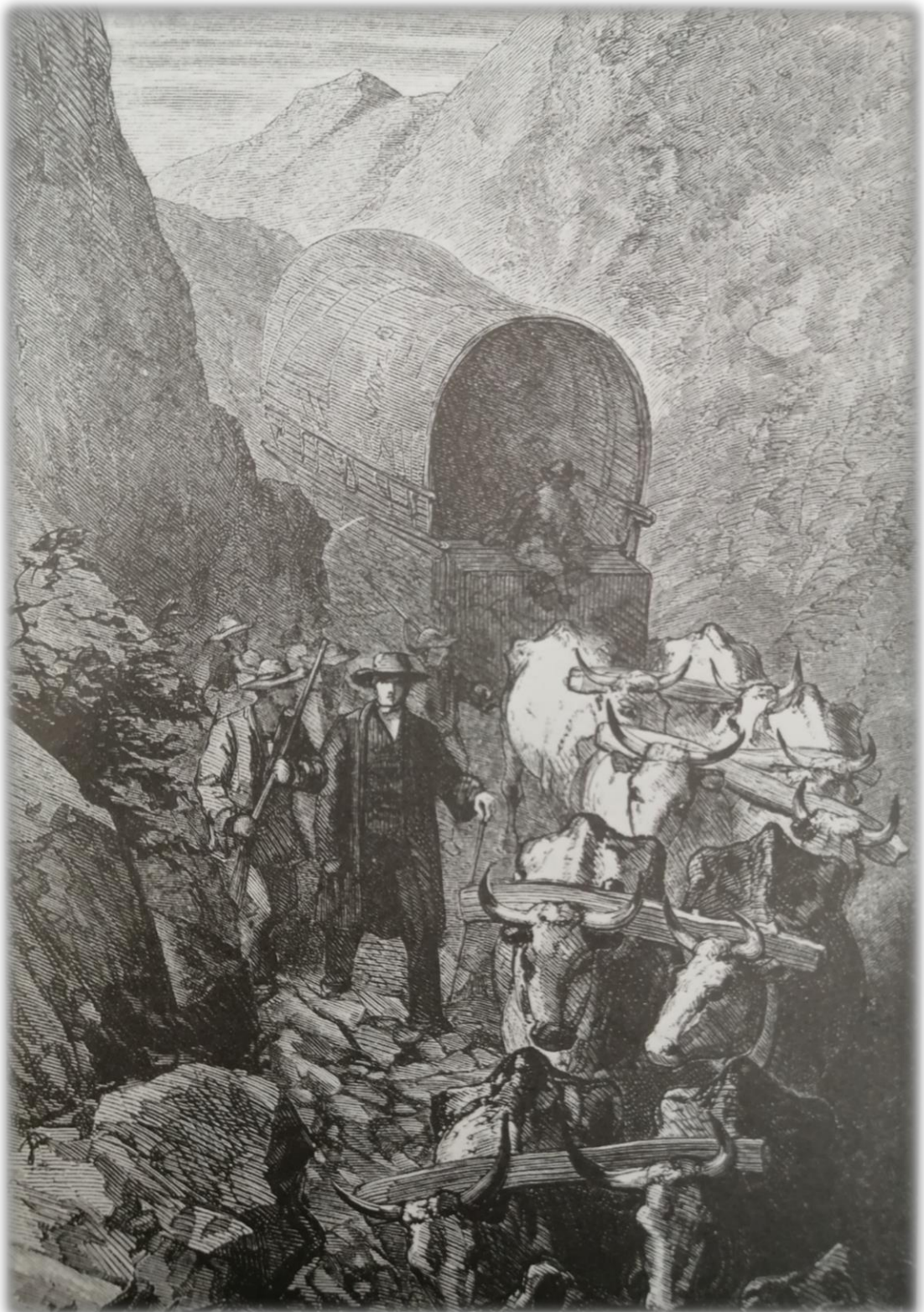
Source: Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 10.

Trailed by traders, settlers, and missionaries, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, trekboers trekked further inland, freighted by oxen labourers.¹¹¹ Oxen's labours were perceived by trekkers and their followers as a necessity.

¹¹⁰ M. Martin, *Basutoland: Its Legends and Customs* (London: Nicols & Co, 1903), 8–9.

¹¹¹ Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa*, 41.

Image 2.7. Oxen pulling a missionary's wagon



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 87.

By the 1760s much of the west coast of what became South Africa, up to Namaqualand, and the south coast to the Great Fish River, towards the edges of the little Karoo were patchily inhabited by the migrating trekboers. The north and east regions of this area were unoccupied by Europeans.¹¹² Over the next four decades travellers, scientists, hunters, and clergy moved and lived in this area.

One such scientific traveller was Carl Linnaeus's student, Anders Sparrman, who travelled in the Cape for nine months between 1772 and 1776 and made contributions to zoology and botany.¹¹³ He was also an ardent hunter and enjoyed killing a wide assortment of animals. Nicole Ulrich examined Anders Sparrman's writings on the 'labouring poor' humans, such as 'sailors, servants, guides and wagon drivers'.¹¹⁴ The oxen were not regarded as labourers in her analysis and, without recognising it as such, Nicole Ulrich said of oxen's labour only that the 'management of the oxen demanded much skill'.¹¹⁵ Anders Sparrman left some remarkable descriptions of oxen's labour, however. The following is a description of his oxen-pulled ascent of that forbidding Hottentots Holland range in 1775.

[W]e got up by day-break, in order to take our journey over Hottentots Holland's-Mountain, in the cool of the morning. The way up it was very steep, stony, winding, and, in other respects, very inconvenient. Directly to the right of the road there was a perpendicular precipice, down which, it is said, that waggons and cattle together have sometimes the misfortune to fall headlong, and are dallied to pieces. It is said too, that in order to drive up this and other mountains of the kind, even with the strongest team of oxen, a man must not only have the knack, as it is called, and a perfect government of the beasts, but must also at the same time make use of a whip like that of the African waggoners. These whips are fifteen feet long, with a thong somewhat longer, and a lash three feet in length, made of stout white leather. This (in a certain sense) most powerful instrument in getting the waggon forward, the driver holds with both hands, and, sitting on the seat of the carriage, can reach the fifth pair with it, and at the same time smack his whip, when necessary, and distribute his cuts and lashes among the oxen without intermission, never failing to touch them on the very spot he wishes, so that the very hairs come away with the whip. By this means he possesses such an ascendancy over them, as to oblige them to join their strength all at once, and pull the waggon out of deep pits, or lift it over large stones and precipices that lie in the road. But it requires a great nicety of attention, not to drive them too far

¹¹² Joubert, 'An Historical Perspective on Animal Power Use in South Africa', 127.

¹¹³ Beinart, 'Men, Science, Travel and Nature in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth-century Cape', 778.

¹¹⁴ Ulrich, 'Dr Anders Sparrman: Travelling with the Labouring Poor in the Late Eighteenth-Century Cape', 731.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 743.

at once, nor to rest them too long at a time; as in the former case they grow faint, weary, and, in consequence of this, restive; and in the latter case, they lose the spirit to which they have been previously wrought up, and which is necessary for the getting them on; and for want of which it often happens, that the waggon cannot be got from the spot.¹¹⁶

Much is worth isolating in the above quote. Anders Sparrman's taxonomy places the wagons and the cattle in the same category, in that they both sometimes have the 'misfortune' of falling headlong down the mountain. The oxen and the wagons are objects in this view. These misfortunes also speak to the deadly occupational hazards which accompanied oxen's wagon labour. Domination of the cattle was extreme, to achieve 'perfect government' of them. Such 'ascendancy' over them was achieved by distributing 'without intermission' lashes and cuts from whips. Whips, he says, were the 'most powerful instrument in getting the waggon forward'. There are also indications of oxen agency, such as their becoming 'restive', or their refusal to move after a period of rest, which he says 'often happen[ed]'. Oxen required spirit, *gees*, to transit over mountains. The epigraphs of this chapter also demonstrate oxen's agency, in that the oxen 'lowed piteously' before sumitting a mountain pass, refused food after one of their kin were slain, and sometimes simply refused to work.

A human-centred history such as Nicole Ulrich's, which misperceives animals as non-subjects, can interpret such passages and consider that the point worth making is that the wagon drivers possessed 'much skill', which is to mirror Anders Sparrman's own view.¹¹⁷ At the same time, it elides the oxen's own forced and harrowing labour contributions. Oxen were in fact often yoked into a bi-directional whipping regime, particularly on more arduous terrains: flogged by a man or boy walking to the side of the front oxen, and the driver who sat on the wagon behind the rear oxen.¹¹⁸ Road builder Charles Mitchell's later drawing of oxen ascending the Cradock Kloof depicts this whipping regime.

¹¹⁶ Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, Vol. I, 122–23.

¹¹⁷ Ulrich, 'Dr Anders Sparrman: Travelling with the Labouring Poor in the Late Eighteenth-Century Cape', 743.

¹¹⁸ Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, 15.

Image 2.8. Charles Mitchell's 'State of Cradock's Pass' in 1840



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 84.

It is reasonable to assume that, for oxen, chronic suffering was a core part of their forced wagon labour. This would include chronic pain from whipping and whip-wounds, muscle pain and ligament damage from grinding over rocks and mountain passes, the chaffing from the yoke, the psychological distress of frequent shouting, including likely PTSD, the distress of having their human tormentors nearby, and their anticipation of future agony. It is also very likely that the oxen suffered chronic disorders such as forms of arthritis, including

osteoarthritis, also known as degenerative joint disease, which is currently ‘commonly reported in cattle’.¹¹⁹ Historically, arthritis is well documented in cattle, with one veterinary researcher noting that arthritis ‘has been recognized in this species [cattle] since the beginning of veterinary history’, as evidenced in analyses of old skeletons.¹²⁰ Inflammatory arthritis in cattle is often coextensive with ‘systemic manifestations such as elevated body temperature, hot swollen joints, anorexia, depressed appetite, suppressed ruminations, and obvious pain that is not alleviated when the animal is recumbent.’¹²¹ Degenerative joint disease in cattle ‘often is a chronic debilitating condition’.¹²² Given the arduous labours of wagon pulling it is reasonable to infer that many oxen were afflicted by painful arthritis and degenerative joint disease. This connects to oxen’s agency. It is likely that oxen, as a team, were forced to choose between either being whipped and shouted at, or the pain of their grinding arthritic joints as they walked on. In that oxen were yoked in teams, many oxen plausibly had no choice but to drive forward with the fellow oxen, impelled along by each other, the slope of the terrain, and/or their distance from or to pasturage and water.¹²³ In light of this, travellers’ frequent mentions of oxen running away and lesser forms of resistance is readily understandable.¹²⁴

Unlike Otto Mentzel, Anders Sparrman was unfeeling towards oxen labourers. He did, however, leave rich descriptions of the way oxen were yoked, the way cattle were individually shouted at, broken in to wagon labour, sometimes had to swim across rivers, and that oxen were intelligent enough to navigate their own way home after being turned loose.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ J. Barbosa *et al.*, ‘Degenerative Joint Disease in Cattle and Buffaloes in the Amazon Region: A Retrospective Study’, *Pesquisa Veterinária Brasileira* 34, 9 (2014), 846.

¹²⁰ J. Shupe, ‘Arthritis in Cattle’, *Canadian Veterinary Journal* 2, 10 (1961), 369.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ My thanks to Les Mitchell for making some of these points to me and for the above two references.

¹²⁴ Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 32, 200; Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa*, 26, 99, 102, 107; Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 81, 85, 96, 125, 227, 340, 342, 403; Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 17, 322; Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa, Vol. II*, 38; Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, Vol. I*, 39–41, 294; Le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa*, 228; Barrow, *Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa*, 30, 398, 433, 450, 549.

¹²⁵ Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, Vol. I*, 127–28, 133–34, 295.

Ornithologist François Le Vaillant travelled in southern Africa between 1781 and 1785, including one trip to the border region of what became South Africa and Namibia, and another east of the Cape.¹²⁶ He made major contributions to ornithology and innovated a new genre, namely, the illustrated bird book.¹²⁷ Although his writings were professionally edited, they remain important descriptions of oxen labours.¹²⁸

François Le Vaillant's journeys were multi-species endeavours. Describing his entourage during his journey to Namaqualand, he notes that he travelled with two wagons, 19 humans, 13 dogs, three 'milch' cows, 36 primary oxen labourers, another 14 oxen for relays, 11 goats, and for his 'amusement' and 'society' a baboon named Kees, whom he had chained up in the Cape but who nonetheless acted as a protective, quasi-body guard, and of whom he says by 'the acuteness of his smell, his hearing, and his sight, this animal was always the first to put us on our guard against danger'.¹²⁹ Baboons were commonly used as security and lookouts for Boers in the nineteenth century.¹³⁰

Reflecting on his previous journey to the east of the Cape, he addressed future travellers, saying 'they must expect to suffer amidst the deserts of Africa, if they do not provide themselves with oxen as friends, and young goats as play-fellows'.¹³¹ But suffer the cattle did. He says 'in the midst of a dry and burning desert' he was 'obliged to abandon [his] waggons and effects', after watching his oxen 'perish with thirst'.¹³² He wrote movingly on the oxen's desperation for water.¹³³ On one occasion along a river bank, the sand was so soft that wagon wheels sunk almost halfway into the sand, and 16 oxen were yoked into each wagon.¹³⁴

Like David Livingstone, who I discuss later, François Le Vaillant was *from a cattle perspective* dangerously ignorant in the face of desert conditions, when he, François Le Vaillant,

¹²⁶ Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa*, 122.

¹²⁷ I. Glenn, 'Levaillant's Bird Books and the Origins of a Genre' *Alternation* 16 (2009), 91–101.

¹²⁸ Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa*, 17.

¹²⁹ Le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa*, 16–17, 19, 172–73, 269.

¹³⁰ J-B. Gewald, 'Brothers in Arms: Baboon-Human Interactions, a Southern African Perspective', in J-B. Gewald, M. Spierenburg, and H. Wels (eds.), *Nature Conservation in Southern Africa Morality and Marginality: Towards Sentient Conservation* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 56–58.

¹³¹ Le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa*, 24.

¹³² *Ibid*, 170.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 278–79.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 209–10.

proceeded into cattle-fatal landscapes such as the Namaqualand desert. After arriving at Oliphant's Kop, long without water and food, and where there was yet neither water nor food, and wanting to continue travelling, he told his servants to yoke the oxen, but when they began to 'harness [the] oxen, not one of them was found fit for service, they all lay down around the waggon so apparently exhausted that there was reason to apprehend they would never rise again upon their legs'.¹³⁵ The occupational hazards for the oxen were extreme. 'Of the fifty-four oxen with which I began my journey, thirty-one had died', he says, a death rate of 57%.¹³⁶ In the midst of this hardship, he leaves evidence of what is likely oxen's empathy, however. Describing an accident during a descent, where one of his Khoikhoi companions, Klaas, slipped off the front of the wagon, and after which six oxen walked over his body, so that he expected serious injury, he says:

[Klaas] had... suffered some contusions from the oxen; but these animals had, from an instinct of which I admired the sagacity, spared him from as much as circumstances would allow: and indeed it is almost incredible that so many feet would have passed over him without crushing him to death.¹³⁷

In his view, the cattle's 'sagacity' had spared Klaas a likely death. So, in conditions in which more than half of them would perish, and after suffering much deprivation, whipping, and drudging desert toil, the oxen appeared to seek no revenge and perhaps mustered empathy for Klaas.

Sometimes the hardships of wagon labour, like exhaustion, thirst, hunger, and bodily pain were so intense for oxen that dexterous, unrelenting whipping was not enough to drive them forward. Captain Robert Percival, who would later lead the British attack against the Dutch at Muizenberg, described a case where flogging was insufficient.

The means employed to render the cattle manageable are, however, revolting to humanity. It excites not only compassion but horror to see many of these unfortunate beasts cut and mangled, as they are, in various parts of the body; for a Dutch boer, or farmer, if he finds his cattle lazy, or stopping from fatigue, or where they meet with obstacles which their strength cannot easily surmount, will not

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 281.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 277.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 229.

hesitate to draw out his great knife and score their flesh, or even cut slices off without mercy. These wretched animals seem indeed to know their cruel master's intentions; for their fear and agitation become excessive when they observe him taking out the instrument, and rubbing it to the waggon, as if making ready for the purpose of tormenting them.¹³⁸

The sound of a knife scraping against a wagon indicated to the oxen that disobedience would be followed by cuts and stabbings. These oxen were not knife-naïve. It is unlikely that Robert Percival's above account was fictive and informed by his prejudice against and low views of the Dutch. Anne Barnard, who was in the Cape and travelled at times between 1797 and 1802, claimed to have seen the effects of the knife-stimulus method used against oxen, also. After descending Hottentots Holland, she writes:

Mr. Barnard stood by the team of oxen, and called, "Anne, don't look this way!" but, at the sound of his voice, I naturally and involuntarily turned my head, and saw what made my heart sore, how much the poor animals had suffered in our service, their sides streaming down with the blood which the knives of their savage drivers had brought. They are very cruel here to their cattle; the whip itself, which carries away with it the hide, is not thought enough on some occasions; with their sharp knives they cut the poor creatures, till, bellowing and kicking, they perform their almost impossible task, and they are sufficiently good anatomists to know exactly the vital parts to be avoided.¹³⁹

Some aspects of oxen's wagon labour applied to all oxen who pulled wagons up mountains and into waterless and scorching desert terrain, for example. Virtually all the accounts examined in this chapter confirm that oxen were each called by name, and all regarded wagon labour as extremely hard and often deadly. But there was variation in how oxen were treated by their drivers and masters.

¹³⁸ Percival, *An Account of the Cape of Good Hope*, 57–58.

¹³⁹ Barnard, *South Africa a Century Ago (1797 - 1801)*, 162.

Image 2.9. Sketch of an oxen span and a light wagon, 1798, Anne Barnard



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 35.

The German doctor Hinrich Lichtenstein, who travelled in the Cape between 1802 and 1806, and became the Cape governor's personal physician, said that among 'well-ordered teams' the whip was used only when full exertion was expected from the oxen. The 'drivers manage the animals with merely calling to them; every ox has his particular name', and whips, he wrote, 'are very seldom used among a well-ordered team; never unless any of the poor creatures happen to be extremely weary, or the difficulties to be encountered in the way render a more than usual exertion of strength necessary'.¹⁴⁰

Over the eighteenth century, numbers of settlers increased. Whereas soon after the VOC occupied the Cape there were several hundred settlers, by 1798 the population of Khoikhoi, slaves, and European settlers had reached 60 000.¹⁴¹ The VOC was liquidated by 1795, and Dutch fears that the British would take control of the Cape seemed less paranoid and more likely. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the colonial power balance at the Cape and globally was shifting. There were also significant shifts in transport and oxen labour – though these would take some time to manifest.

¹⁴⁰ Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, 14.

¹⁴¹ Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa*, 10.

The expansion and demise of oxen's wagon labour, 1801–c1890s

The first public transport system was set up in 1801, comprising a routinised passenger-carrying wagon operation between Simonstown and Cape Town, known as a post-wagon.¹⁴² Now post and wagonless persons could be freighted by wagon weekly. These were pulled by horses and were swifter than oxen-pulled wagons. European explorations into southern Africa were increasing, as were the number of oxen labourers, who would connect the region by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1801 an expedition to the Tswana interior powered by a caravan of oxen-pulled wagons was led by Petrus Truter and William Somerville.¹⁴³

Around this time, especially the mountain passes and the wagon roads further inland from the Cape were often arduous and fatal for oxen. As Hinrich Lichtenstein put it, 'the interior of the colony', was in 'the highest state of dilapidation' – and to give an indication 'of the difficulties to be encountered in taking long journeys in this country' he described a case in which 24 oxen were required to pull two connected wagons and during which 'great efforts were necessary to get them on'.¹⁴⁴ In 1805 a Cape Ordinance stated that

One of the most effectual means to promote internal trade and civilisation is a regular and safe inland communication; the Field Cornets [military officers or local government officials] shall take particular care, therefore, to establish this.¹⁴⁵

Wagon transport was proliferating quickly, and would only increase over the nineteenth century. Already in the early 1800s, 5000 wagons passed over Hottentot Hollands Kloof.¹⁴⁶ The period between 1806 and 1895 saw 'formal, permanent road construction... carried out vigorously in the Cape'.¹⁴⁷ This was especially so after the British took control of the Cape in 1814. Describing a road near Salt River towards the Cape Flats, in 1815, William Burchell noted that 'wagons are constantly passing to and from distant parts of the colony'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² L. Green, *A Taste of the South-Easter* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1971), 107.

¹⁴³ G. Theal, *History of South Africa since September 1795* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1908), 87–91.

¹⁴⁴ Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, 42–43.

¹⁴⁵ Mitchell, 'Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Transport Infrastructure in South Africa', 37.

¹⁴⁶ Ross, *Mountain Passes, Roads, and Transportation in the Cape*, 136.

¹⁴⁷ Mitchell, 'Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Transport Infrastructure in South Africa', 37.

¹⁴⁸ Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa, Vol. I*, 52.

When the 1820 settlers arrived at Algoa Bay, adjacent to Port Elizabeth, they were met by spans of oxen wagon labourers ready to freight them into the colony.¹⁴⁹ According to the 'Regulations for the Introduction of Agricultural Emigrants into the Cape of Good Hope', rule eight, the British government was to 'provide and pay for their land transport, in wagons or other vehicles to their respective locations'.¹⁵⁰ The mountain passes remained extremely dangerous for oxen in the early nineteenth century. For instance, of the 4000 wagons which crossed the Hottentots Holland Kloof in 1823 - implying over 48 000 oxen labourers - 800 wagons were damaged by accidents (20%), meaning that over 9600 oxen labourers were involved in accidents, on that one pass, in one year.¹⁵¹ With British control over the Cape came a new set of travel expectations. The British looked down upon the Dutch mode of kakebeen wagon transport. Its robust versatility and capacity to grind over large rocks and up steep passes was looked upon less as innovation and more as short-sightedness, and an obstacle to efficiency, punctuality, and trade.

In the 1830s transport by oxen-pulled wagons was relatively slow. There was variation in speed depending on the terrain, access to pasturage and water, and weather. In 1836 a wagon with ten to twelve oxen labourers, road depending, could travel between four and six kilometres per hour. Oxen laboured for eight hours a day, a 'schoft', shift, often pulling during the cool early morning and late afternoon. On an even road, 20 to 25 kilometres was a good distance to cover in one day, but more than 16 kilometres was seldom achieved until late into the century.¹⁵² Where there were rivers or mountains the distance was shorter still.¹⁵³

Travel into the neighbouring areas of what became South Africa was not well established in the early nineteenth century. For example, James Alexander, after whom Alexander Bay at the Orange River was named, took eight months to travel by oxen-pulled wagons from Cape

¹⁴⁹ Silver and Co, *S. W Silver & Co's Handbook to South Africa*, 34; J. Noble, *History, Productions and Resources of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town: W. A Richards & Sons, 1886), 53.

¹⁵⁰ Silver and Co, *S. W Silver & Co's Handbook to South Africa*, 342–43.

¹⁵¹ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 71. This assumes, conservatively, an average of 12 oxen per wagon.

¹⁵² Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*, 312.

¹⁵³ E. Burrows, *Overberg Odyssey: People, Roads, and Early Days* (Swellendam: Swellendam Trust, 1994), 25; See also Ross, *Mountain Passes, Roads, and Transportation in the Cape - a Guide to Research*, 179; See also Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 58–66.

Town to Walvisch Bay in what became Namibia. Oxen were martyred in great numbers on this expedition, and for them near-death experiences were frequent. On one occasion, after finding pasturage, he wrote,

[o]ur herd had not seen more grass than would have satisfied one of them, since we left Kuisip at Hou'tous, three days before, and eighty miles distant; they now rioted in plenty.¹⁵⁴

He left Cape Town on 10 September 1836, and arrived at Walvisch Bay on 19 April 1837, 'and in the horizon gleamed the welcome ocean, now reached for the first time at this point from the Cape, from which it is distant 12 degrees of latitude', he wrote, on arriving there.¹⁵⁵ Back at the Cape, around the same time, thousands of trekboers and settler farmers were increasingly dissatisfied with British rule of the Cape Colony, and they started migrating into the interior of what became South Africa.

Though their journeys and contributions to the Great Trek, in which myriad cattle and oxen pulled and accompanied thousands of voortrekkers, first trekkers, and trekboers into the interior of southern Africa from the mid-1830s requires a book of its own, here I emphasise only that oxen laboured with the trekkers to open up South Africa's interior to colonial settlement and wheeled transport in ways that are not well recognised. This is not to suggest that wagons were not north of the Cape before the Great Trek.¹⁵⁶

The contemporary South African word *gees* means 'spirit', and has wider connotations of grit, hardiness, hardy enthusiasm, vitality, liveliness, tenacity, resilience, and stamina. *Gees* has its origin in the parent term *trek gees*, which likely emerged during the voortrekker and trekboer migrations into the interior of southern Africa, and denotes the spirit with which they faced the region's harsh, and to them, mostly unknown interior.¹⁵⁷ The term *trek gees* was an

¹⁵⁴ J. Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa, Vol. II* (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), 115.

¹⁵⁵ J. Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa, Vol. I* (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey and A. Hart, 1838), 20; Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa, Vol. II*, 1838, 76–77.

¹⁵⁶ P. Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14, 16, 22–25, 118; V. Malherbe, 'The Life and Times of Cupido Kakkerlak', *The Journal of African History* 20, 3 (1979), 370.

¹⁵⁷ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 156.

important concept to Afrikaaner trekkers who, after 1885, trekked north of the Transvaal, into the Kalahari Desert in modern-day Namibia and Botswana, and as far north as Angola.¹⁵⁸ But, what is elided and unrecognised in the term *gees* is that it was not only the voortrekkers and trekboers' *trek gees*, but also the oxen's *gees* – under duress of whips and sometimes knives, in conditions of acute hardship, including scorching sun, starvation, severe water-deprivation, and fatigue that could reach a fatal pitch – which enabled these migrations. It was the oxen's resilience that underpinned the voortrekkers' *gees*. Oxen possessed the true *gees* or *trek gees* which today still resonates in a broader South African colloquial vocabulary. It was on the backs of oxen that the trekboers established the Transvaal and Free State Republics. Oxen forged the paths that connected the interior of South and southern Africa to the Cape Colony.

Image 2.10. Oxen pulling trekboer wagons during Great Trek in Transvaal, anonymous



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 117.

But, while oxen-pulled wagons were for Dutch descendants a core part of their culture and heritage, the British increasingly looked at their wagons with disdain. In the mid-1840s multi-book author Lieutenant colonel Edward Napier, who fought in the seventh Frontier war

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 156–159.

against the amaXhosa, illustrated this kind of view. He described the Dutch wagons as ‘cumbersome’ and ‘sluggish’, moving in ‘slow and sleepy succession’ – galvanised only by ‘dint of incredible exertion of whips and lungs – of blows and oaths’.¹⁵⁹ His attitude towards wagons, albeit in a military context, signified a broader shift in view regarding wagon transport, after the British took control of the Cape. He wrote:

As these sluggish convoys drag their long and weary length, they are at every step in danger of being cut off by an active, unseen and lurking foe...But such is the force of prejudice and habit! Because Van Riebeeck’s followers travelled, in days of yore, with these unwieldy conveyances, not only do they continue to be used by their descendants, at the present day, but the English Settlers must also needs follow their example... a system entirely subversive of everything like punctuality, certainty, or celerity... We have, during the course of our wonderings, been driven by many strange modes of transport and locomotion, from a donkey to an elephant – from a dooly [i.e., palanquin] to an express-train...never in our peregrinations did it fall to our lot to meet with such ‘slow coaches’ as the aforesaid bullock waggons of Southern Africa.¹⁶⁰

The British around that time were at the height of the industrial revolution, they were a superpower empire, advancing quickly in terms of trade, imperialism, and technology. To many of them, southern Africa was a backwater, and the semi-nomadic Afrikaner trekboers and farmers were primitive and backward. For cattle, British and Dutch colonialism were discrete processes with distinct impacts.

The hardships and hazards accompanying oxen’s wagon labour were by no means lessened by the 1840s. Speaking of long journeys in the interior of what became South Africa, Edward Napier said that ‘spare horses and oxen in great numbers must be provided, to replace losses by accidents, death and other contingencies’, such as death by tsetse flies.¹⁶¹

Importantly for cattle’s experiences as wagon labourers, one thing the British authorities did in the Cape and later elsewhere was to carve out mountain passes to make wagon travel

¹⁵⁹ Napier, *Excursions in Southern Africa*, Vol. II, 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 2–3.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 176.

easier. Sir Lowry Cole, writing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1830, in defence of having opened what became Sir Lowry's Pass near Grabouw, without prior approval, said:

The colony is miserably poor, with a population separated from the more civilised parts by mountains over which there are few passes. Being cut off from a market for their produce there is no stimulus for industry and the inhabitants must ever remain in their present state of poverty and semi-barbarism until these passes are made passable.¹⁶²

Thereafter many mountain passes were constructed, such as Franshoek, Cole's Pass, Houw Hoek (1831), and thereafter Hex River Pass, Bainskloof, Mitchell's Pass and myriad others.¹⁶³ In 1843 a road between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town was developed by bridging rivers and constructing the Montagu Pass, so that by 1849 this 965-kilometre trip regularly took three days by post-cart relays.¹⁶⁴ In 1847 road construction between Pietermaritzburg and Durban began.¹⁶⁵ After constructing a new road from the Cape Flats to past Stellenbosch in 1845, at a cost of £40 000, it was estimated that between 50 000 and 60 000 animal pulled vehicles would use the road per year.¹⁶⁶

While road-and pass-construction was proceeding in earnest in the Cape, the rest of southern Africa still involved dreary and harsh conditions for oxen freighting travellers, explorers, settlers, and missionaries. David Livingstone, for example, on his journey in present-day Botswana, and just after 17 of his oxen labourers had run away from him, was warned of the serious desert conditions he would encounter by BaNgwato chief Sekgoma Kgari, who pleaded with him not to leave the Serotli spring: 'You will be killed by the sun and thirst and then all the white men will blame me for not saving you.'¹⁶⁷ In the mid-nineteenth century, oxen wagon labourers were still dying in great numbers while enabling European settlement and incursions into southern Africa.¹⁶⁸ At one point, while in what is today east-central

¹⁶² Mitchell, 'Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Transport Infrastructure in South Africa', 37.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*; Ross, *Mountain Passes, Roads, and Transportation in the Cape*, 51–55, 171.

¹⁶⁴ Mitchell, 'Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Transport Infrastructure in South Africa', 38.

¹⁶⁵ Mitchell, 38.

¹⁶⁶ J. Bond, *They Were South Africans - 1820 Settlers* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1956), 110.

¹⁶⁷ Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 57.

¹⁶⁸ Compare this claim to concerns raised in J-B. Gewald, M. Spierenburg, and H. Wels, 'Introduction: People, Animals, and Marginality: Reconfiguring Wildlife Conservation in Southern Africa', in J-B. Gewald, M. Spierenburg, and H. Wels (eds.), *Nature Conservation in Southern Africa Morality and Marginality: Towards Sentient Conservation* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 2–3.

Botswana, David Livingstone noted that before him in his journey lay 97 kilometres ('sixty miles') of waterless desert, with 'deep soft sand', which was 'very distressing for the oxen'.¹⁶⁹ He sent his herd to a well in Nkowane, and half of them died, while those he found alive had been without water for five days.¹⁷⁰

When Thomas Baines travelled to what became Namibia in the early 1860s, he told of similar miseries for oxen wagon labourers. Frequently oxen serving him ran away or exhibited protestations, including one occasion when 'an entire span of oxen had escaped'.¹⁷¹ The desert sand scorched oxen's feet and hooves. While in Swakopmund, he noted that the ground was 'thickly strewn with pebbles and quartz – fragments hard and sharp to the feet of oxen'.¹⁷² It is remarkable how unchanging the process of yoking and inspanning oxen was from the time of Otto Mentzel's observations in the Cape in the 1730s to Thomas Baines' in the 1860s in Windhoek in present-day Namibia. He spoke of 'yet untrained' oxen taking a 'fearful amount of punishment'.¹⁷³ While stuck in a river in Windhoek with hired but uninitiated oxen:

Half a score of active young Namaquas came to our help, and with shouts and screams, twisting and biting of tails, and every mode of inflicting pain (except the last resort of fire) that ingenuity could suggest, succeeded in forwarding us about half a mile before sunset.¹⁷⁴

The next day, stuck again with non-psychologically broken-down oxen, he writes:

we had a repetition of the same... At the next drift it struck again, and no persuasion could induce the oxen to draw it out; not that it was over-weighted now, but that none of our cattle had been properly trained to the yoke. One of the foremost lay down, and not until the third man had taken his spell with the long whip did he consent to spring to his feet again.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 153.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Baines, *Explorations in South-West Africa*, 81, 85, 96, 227, 403.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

In a rare passage for accessing oxen's experiences of wagon labour, we learn that Thomas Baines was himself once lashed by a wagon whip (*voorslag*). He writes:

I left Walvisch Bay and walked to the edge of the plain, on which I found the wagon with the oxen already inspanned: and cruel work this inspanning had been. One of the after oxen especially was covered with large wales, while the red blood stood in drops upon his back, till I felt almost tempted to give master Kachawbie a sample of the caravasse he wielded so unmercifully. In a short time I was better able to sympathise with the poor cattle, for Onesimus, in one of his back strokes, brought the long wagon-whip across the calf of my leg, raising a wale from front to rear as broad as two fingers and marking the path of the *voorslag* by a cut which even three weeks later was not quite healed.¹⁷⁶

From when the first oxen wagon labourers were initiated in 1653 until the last in the early twentieth century, the process ineluctably involved intense psychological and physical abuse. Such was the labour and colonial impact on cattle experiences – it was a precondition for colonial settlement, trade, and regional transport.

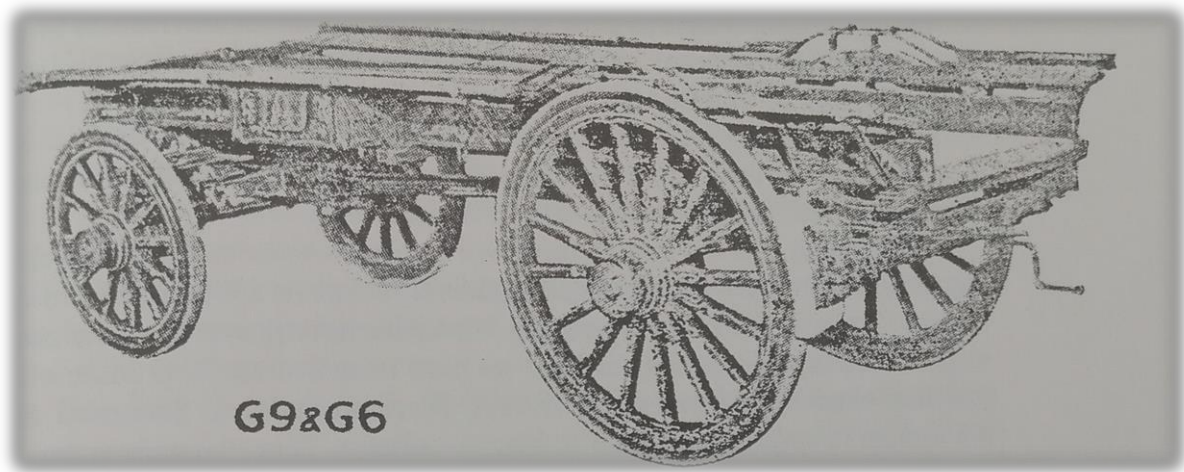
Around the mid-nineteenth century, however, oxen wagon labour was shifting. A new wagon, the Bokwa wagon, had been designed; it was much heavier than the kakebeen wagon, and capable of hauling heavier loads. Transport wagons or Bokwa wagons were 5.5 to 6.5 metres long and 1.5 to 2 metres wide, and could carry loads of up to 4500 kilograms.¹⁷⁷ The record load was 8000 kilograms.¹⁷⁸ By the 1860s they commonly had iron axels. Initially, their main purpose was to freight large cargos between the coast and interior of present-day South Africa. Wagon transport had become increasingly commodified as new towns such as Graaf-Reinet, Bathurst, and Grahamstown had emerged after the 1820 settlers arrived, and some trekkers settled in the interior, and so requirements for supplies from the coast to the interior increased. Thus, transport wagon pulling was born.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 37.

¹⁷⁷ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 137–38.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 146.

Image 2.11. 'Bokwa' or transport wagon



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 151.

Instead of spans of ten oxen, spans of 16 to 20 oxen were used, i.e., double spans of oxen. Usually, oxen were worked from 2 AM until an hour after sunrise, and from 4 PM until 10 PM, with grazing and rest permitted during the day.¹⁷⁹ Wagon labour was becoming more routinised, standardised, and commodified. Transport riders had to commit to cargo prices and time frames, and so oxen labour had to become more predictable. Initially there were two main transport routes: to Algoa Bay via Colesberg, Graaf-Reinet and Grahamstown, and to Durban, via Harrismith, the Drakensberg and Pietermaritzburg.¹⁸⁰ Oxen freighted serious volumes of cargo at this time.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 138.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 136.

Image 2.12. Nineteenth century transport wagon



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 134.

During the three sheep shearing months in 1854, for example, 4000 wagons reportedly entered Port Elizabeth, and 2000 oxen-pulled wagons freighting other goods entered the town.¹⁸¹ Assuming that ten oxen were employed per wagon implies that 60 000 oxen were employed in this one town in three months.¹⁸² It was big business. In the mid-1850s transport costs between Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth were at £85 000 and those between Port Elizabeth and Graaf-Reinet were at £71 000.¹⁸³ In the 1850s there were routes from Lourenço Marques to the Transvaal and Durban to the Transvaal.¹⁸⁴ The route from Transvaal to Lourenço Marques, which involved a mix of porters and wagons, was by 1855 annually handling imports of 100 000 kilograms of lead and 2 500 kilograms of sugar, and exporting mealies, vegetables, hippopotamus teeth, and buffalo horns from the Transvaal.¹⁸⁵ Other

¹⁸¹ J. Inggs, 'Liverpool of the Cape: Port Elizabeth Trade 1820-70', *South African Journal of Economic History* 1, 1 (1986), 96.

¹⁸² This assumes that all the oxen who laboured over this period were different individuals.

¹⁸³ Inggs, 'Liverpool of the Cape', 97.

¹⁸⁴ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 143.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 136.

regional wagon routes included one from the Cape to Namaland in what later became Namibia.

But oxen's transport wagon labours were significantly increased with the mineral rush in Kimberley and the Transvaal. The mineral rush was tremendously transformative for the region, as is well researched. One little recognised aspect is the extent to which it expanded oxen's wagon labours, and connected the region via wagon transport. In 1867 diamonds were discovered in Hopetown near the edge of the Great Karoo, gold was found in the Murchison range in the north-eastern Transvaal in 1870, and on the Witwatersrand in 1880, while its main reef was discovered in 1886.¹⁸⁶ Diamonds were discovered in Kimberley and the Orange Free State border in 1871. Regionally, during this time, demand for oxen labour boomed as never before. Wagon transport connected the mines to the major ports. The primary route which started to connect the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Northern Natal, and Northern Cape is still in place today.¹⁸⁷ In 1873 a colonial official remarked that: '[h]undreds of wagons enter Basutoland and traverse it in every direction... collecting and exporting the grain of the country to the Free State and the Diamond fields'.¹⁸⁸ In Basutoland, countless thousands of oxen pulled wagons for the next two decades.¹⁸⁹ In what became Botswana, the 'Road to the North', a wagon route that linked what became Botswana and South Africa, initially for trading elephants' ivory, ostriches' feathers, and guns, saw much-increased traffic in response to the mining boom.¹⁹⁰ Present-day Botswana was also connected to what became Zimbabwe by wagon routes. The first cargos that oxen pulled all the way from Delagoa in Portuguese East Africa reached the goldfields in February 1875.¹⁹¹ Before the railways, all of the early heavy mining machinery was freighted by oxen. In the late 1870s, there were 2500 mules, oxen and horses working daily on the Kimberley, De Beers, Bultfontein and Dutoitspan mines, as compared to 350 steam engines.¹⁹² In 1882 the four major diamond mines were using 500

¹⁸⁶ Mitchell, 'Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Transport Infrastructure in South Africa', 37.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ T. Keegan, 'Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment: Mercantile Capital and the Economic Transformation of Lesotho and the Conquered Territory, 1870-1920', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12, 2 (1986), 200.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 200, 204, 207.

¹⁹⁰ B. Ntombingwenya, 'The Development of Transport Infrastructure in the Bechuanaland Protectorate 1885 - 1966', *Botswana Notes and Records* 16 (1984), 73.

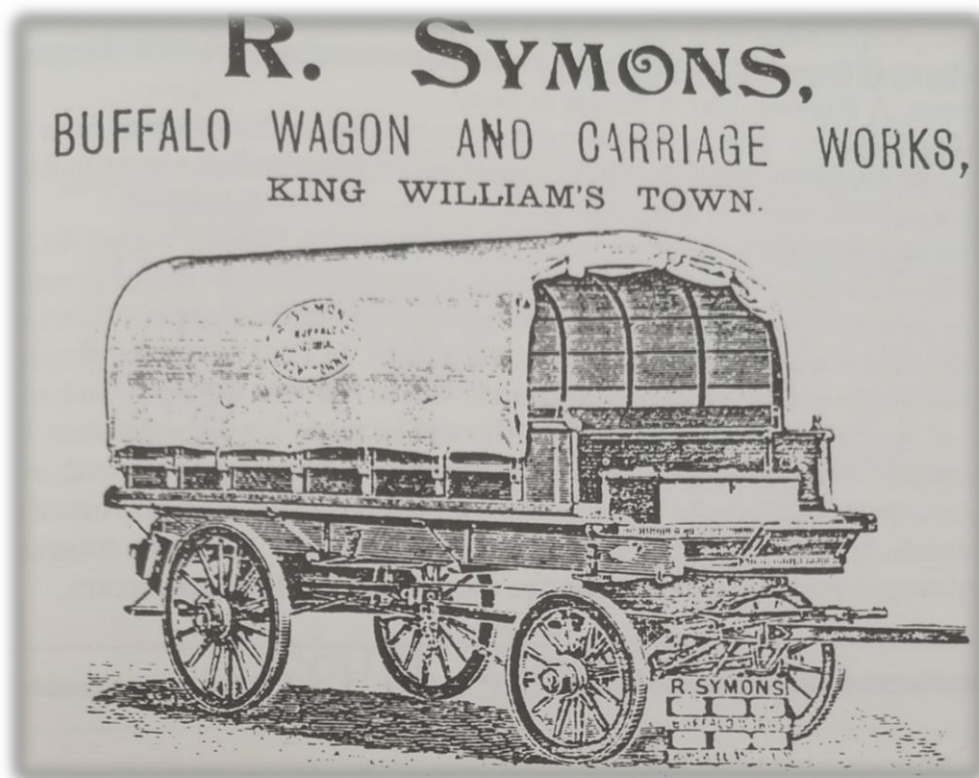
¹⁹¹ Silver and Co, *S. W Silver & Co's Handbook to South Africa*, 482.

¹⁹² Noble, *History, Productions and Resources of the Cape of Good Hope*, 213.

wagon loads of firewood alone per week.¹⁹³ In the 1880s in the vicinity of 18 185 oxen pulled wagons and other vehicles entered the Kimberley market annually and about 20 468 went to the Dutoitspan and Bultfontein mines.¹⁹⁴ In the Cape the cattle population increased from 160 000 in 1855 to 405 000 in 1891.¹⁹⁵

Wagon-building industries in the Cape and Natal boomed in the 1880s. In 1891, Paarl, Worcester, Oudtshoorn, Grahamstown, and King William's Town produced at least 3000 wagons and 4000 carts.¹⁹⁶

Image 2.13. Transport wagon advertisement



Source: Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 149.

¹⁹³ Pirie, 'Slaughter by Steam', 320.

¹⁹⁴ Noble, *History, Productions and Resources of the Cape of Good Hope*, 104.

¹⁹⁵ W. Beinart, 'Transhumance, Animal Diseases and Environment in the Cape, South Africa', *South African Historical Journal* 58, 1 (2007), 22.

¹⁹⁶ M. Wells, 'The Effect of the Wagon Building Industry on the Amatola Forests', *Bothalia* 11, 1 & 2 (1973), 153.

Meanwhile, in Natal, cargo transported by oxen and some horses by road between Pietermaritzburg and Durban between 1875 and 1881 amounted to 144 407 tons.¹⁹⁷ This was much lessened after the railway was built in 1880, although in 1885 some 5049 wagon licenses were issued in Natal.¹⁹⁸ In 1890 oxen in four towns in Natal pulled 27 698 wagons loads into the interior.¹⁹⁹ In the eastern Cape in the 1870s and 1880s, hundreds of local Africans worked as transport riders, implying thousands of oxen labourers.²⁰⁰

But oxen-pulled wagons were slow in comparison to railway trains and often expensive, and could not meet the requirements of the mineral boom that was transforming the region. Wagon transport largely ended in Basutoland in 1899 owing to first rinderpest and then the South African War.²⁰¹ Wagon labour was rapidly reduced in Natal after the Pietermaritzburg and Durban railway was built in 1880, and long-distance transport virtually ended by 1895, after the railway between Natal and the Transvaal was completed the year before.²⁰² In 1895 a railway from Lourenço Marques to the Transvaal was completed.²⁰³

Conclusion

Southern Africa was deeply interconnected via oxen labourers and their wagon routes in the late nineteenth century. Wagon routes connected the Cape to Bulawayo, Gaborone, and South West Africa. The Transvaal and Kimberley were connected to Portuguese East Africa. Basutoland was linked to the Transvaal, Free State and Natal. And Natal was linked to Zululand, Swaziland, and the Transvaal. The Transkei and eastern Cape were connected to the Transvaal and the Cape. All of these regional transport connections were mostly premised on oxen's wagon labour. Although unevenly and in differentiated ways, regionally, in the end it was the twin expansion of railway development and the rinderpest pandemic which largely

¹⁹⁷ D. Heydenrych, "'A Colony of Carriers': Transport-Riding in Nineteenth-Century Natal', *Kleio* 23, 1 (1991), 31.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 29.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 28.

²⁰⁰ Pirie, 'Slaughter by Steam', 320.

²⁰¹ Keegan, 'Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment', 211.

²⁰² Heydenrych, "'A Colony of Carriers': Transport-Riding in Nineteenth-Century Natal', 31; Pirie, 'Slaughter by Steam', 320.

²⁰³ Burman, *Towards the Far Horizon*, 142.

ended oxen's stations as wagon labourers. In fact, it was oxen's labour as wagon pullers that enabled the spread of the terrible Lung sickness epidemic and the rinderpest pandemic in the nineteenth century – with the latter profoundly altering the course of cattle history in the region. The impacts of these diseases on cattle are the focus of the next chapter.

This chapter offered a lengthy treatment of colonial animal labour in southern Africa. The chapter drew on first-hand observers' accounts of oxen's wagon labours to approach the subjective aspect of oxen's labour contributions. It demonstrated that cattle were forced labourers, that they underpinned the regional transport routes into the late nineteenth century, that they enabled the initial stages of the mining boom, and that scientific explorations, missionary travel, the Great Trek, and local and regional trade was premised on oxen's labour. It argued that oxen deserve recognition in the region's labour history. The chapter argued that initial psychological breaking down of oxen was a necessary feature of wagon labour, as were whipping regimes and shouting, i.e., continued violence was used to maintain the oxen's wagon labour. It suggested that oxen faced serious, often lethal, hazards. Oxen were at times forced into situations by their masters where they starved to death, died from dehydration or collapsed from exhaustion. It argued that oxen plausibly experienced psychological and physical suffering from wagon labour. The chapter also showed that new markets, such as in Kimberley, and those associated with the 1820 settlers caused shifts in the mode of oxen's wagon labour. Further, oxen's wagon routes prefigured the main motor car road systems that started to connect the region in the twentieth century. The chapter positioned cattle, specifically oxen, at the centre of its analysis, conceiving of oxen as subjects – sentient, experiential beings – who felt and experienced wagon labour. The chapter also showed instances of oxen agency, such as when François Le Vaillant's oxen spared Klaas' life, or the manifold instances when oxen fled their station as wagon labourers, or lowed and bellowed at their lot. Principally, the chapter explored oxen's experiences of wagon labour, in terms of them being impacts of colonialism in the region.

