

CATTLE AS WORKING PARTNERS:

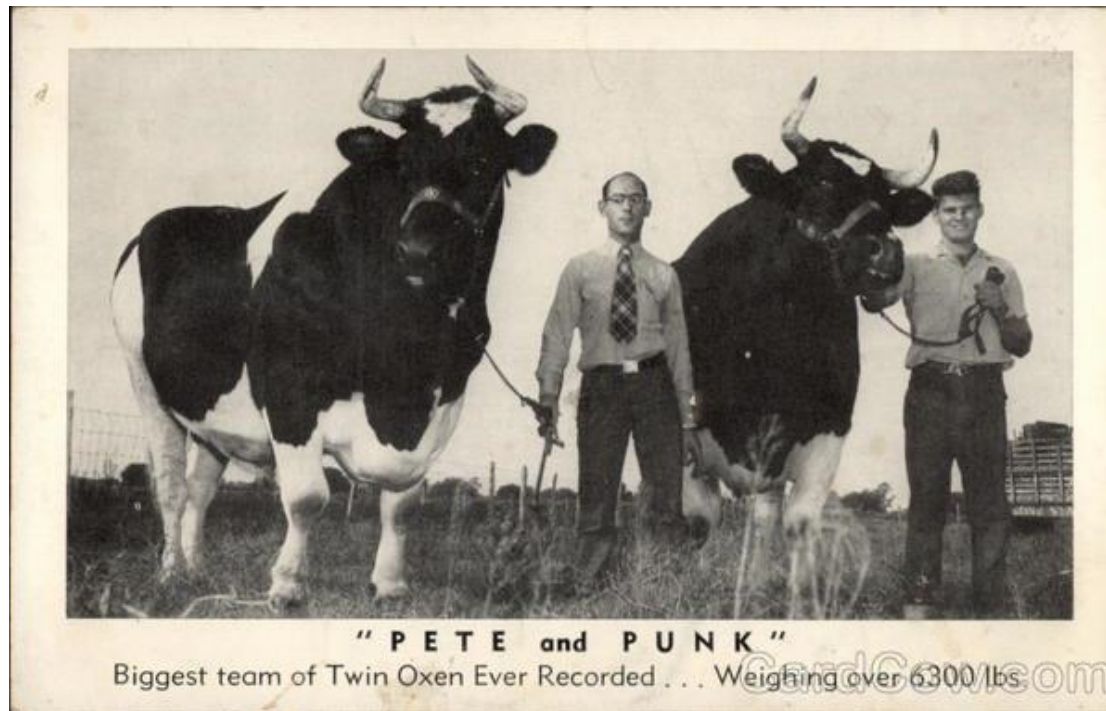
CABESTROS AND BUEYES

Barb Weismann

I have a BA in Biology from UC Santa Cruz and a Masters in Anthropology from Cal State LA. I have been a docent at Sutter's Fort and began researching the Alta California cattle industry while interpreting the Vaquero room there.

Basics: what is an ox?

- Usually a steer (castrated male)
- Usually trained in a pair



What I
call the
English
style ox:
bigger is
better.

Basics: Size

- Size of Californio oxen were about those of the Dexter breed, up to 1200 lbs.



Don Abel
Stearns said his
cattle were 600
to 800 pounds.

Basics: Load

- Oxen can pull a load that equals their own weight:



Carreta

- Guess the weight?

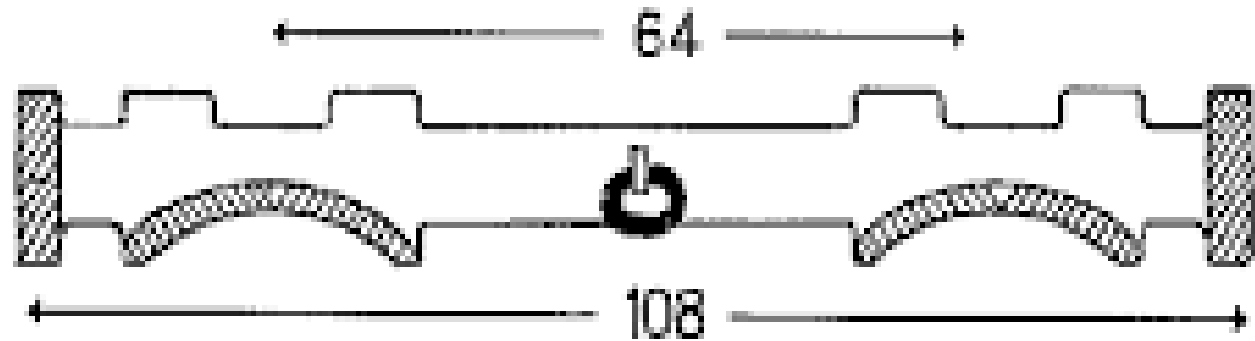


Basics: Load on *carreta*

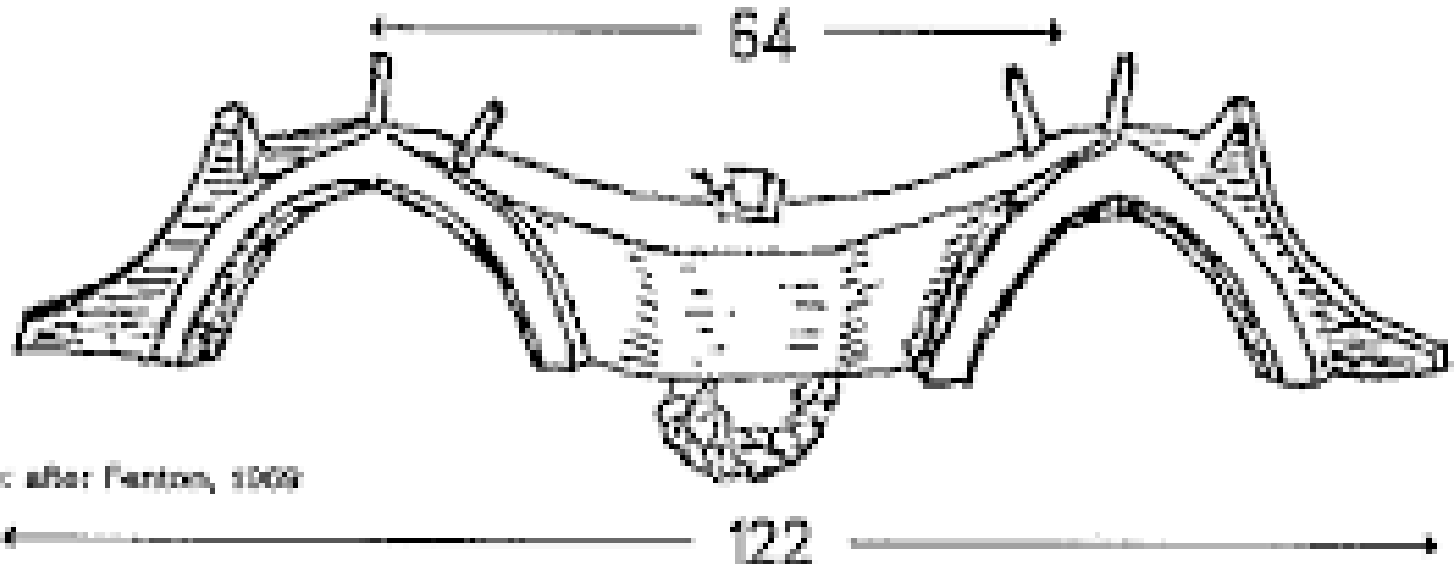
With a *carreta*:

- Weight of bueyes (1000 lbs. X 2) less weight of *carreta*: (guess) 1000 lbs. = 1000 lb. carry capacity
- A rawhide bag of tallow weighed 25 to 40 *arrobas*, or 625 to 1000 lbs.
- Hauling hides and tallow was not efficient, so *matanzas* were close to where the boats came.

Basics: yoke or *yunta*



Source: after Starkey, 1961



Source: after Fenton, 1969

Basics: head yoke

- Head yoke at La Purísima



Basics: neck yoke

- Neck yokes not used in early California:



Basics: yoke to tongue



This photo shows that oxen can still turn their heads and move easily in a head yoke. Neither head yoke or neck yoke is “better,” traction-wise.

Basics: yoke to tongue



Uses of bueyes

- Traction:
- Plowing, harrowing (preparation of soil for planting)
- Pulling carts
- Other potential uses: dragging felled trees to the sawmill; dragging stone on a stone sled; pulling up stumps
- Less likely: grist mill

Cabestros: lost knowledge

- “Nowadays....we see many illustrations depicting the various phases of the vaquero’s’ work. But I have yet to see a picture of an ox leading a wild steer or bull.” A. B. Hunt, in Rojas
- “Why the ranch management had quit training oxen to serve as leaders of the wild cattle we don’t know. Perhaps there were no men left to do the training.” p. 169 Rojas

Cabestros

Tame cattle that:

- Came when called by their name;
- Could be led on a rope, and would follow a leader
- Had a hole drilled in one horn, with a spike inserted, so unruly animals could be tied to them to pull them around.
- Were used to make a *parada* when separating branded cattle at a rodeo.

A parade is a group of cabestros brought to a rodeo-for-separation. Vaqueros gently move a cow with their owner's brand to the side of the whole group. They then yell at it so it runs: but cattle only like being within a group, so they run to the parade of cabestros brought by the ranchero.

Cabestros: from the literature

During fiesta: “The *Caporal de cabestros* would move his charges into the arena, and bar the enclosure. He would then mark out a brand or a letter on the ground. When this was done he mounted his horse and called an ox by his name. The animal would immediately leave the band at a run and approach the *caporal* who would indicate the place where the ox was to lie down. The *caporal* would then call one ox after another until the oxen were all in position to form the letter or brand which was made up of living animals.” p. 144 Rojas

Sheer numbers: “Senor Vejar offered to sell me seven hundred head of tame milch cows, many of them with suckling calves, and fifty head *cabestros*, for seven thousand dollars.” William Heath Davis. *Sixty years in California* (Kindle Locations 9349-9342). . Kindle Edition.

Cabestros: contemporary examples

- Dan Stein, Professor of Animal Science, University of Oklahoma: using a donkey to tame an unruly calf: The donkey, tied to the calf, would pull it around, not let it eat or drink, and rule it until it became tame.
- Valencia, Spain, bull fight: *cabestros* brought in to remove a rejected bull. The bull moved into the center of about 8 cows, the dominant position, and was then easily herded out of the arena.

Why do oxen obey?

- Handlers provide food, water, shelter, safety.
- Handlers provide pleasurable experiences, such as grooming, scratching.
- Handlers show dominance at all times.
- Handlers provide “leadership.”***
- Handlers are recognized as being dominant without the big body shape and horns.***

***Barb's theories

William Heath Davis

- In 1837: Mission San Jose's inventory showed 149 yoke of oxen.
- 4-wheeled wagons were used as well as two wheelers.
- *Carretas* and wagons were fitted out with mattresses so families could travel and camp.

References

- Davis, William Heath, Seventy Years in California, kindle edition.
- Rojas, Arnold, These Were the Vaqueros, Collected Works. Alamar Media: 2010.