

Project Cabesi, West Pokot



# Use of Camels for Transportation



Project Cabesi, West Pokot



# Use of Camels for Transportation





**Use of Camels for Transportation**

© 2004 International Centre of  
Insect Physiology and Ecology.  
All rights reserved.

**ISBN: 92 9064 164 9**

*Published by:*

ICIPE Science Press  
P. O. Box 72913-00200  
Nairobi, Kenya

Te: +254 (20) 861680-4

Fax: +254 (20) 860110

E-mail: [ipu@icipe.org](mailto:ipu@icipe.org)

Home page: <http://www.icipe.org>

Compiled and illustrated by Rolf Gloor

Edited by A. N. Mengech

Design and DTP: Irene Ogendo

Photographs: Rolf Gloor

# CONTENTS

Foreword.....	v
Camels in Kenya.....	1
Camels in Cabesi.....	2
The very first steps of the Camel Programme.....	4
Camels as transport animals.....	5
Pack camels.....	6
Training of camels in four steps.....	7
Camel saddles.....	9
Remember these important factors in selecting or making saddles.....	10
Uses of the saddle.....	11
For riding.....	11
For carrying goods.....	11
Riding camels.....	12
10 good reasons to introduce and keep camels in semi-arid lands.....	13





*Training in improved apiculture*



*West Pokot, Kenya*

# FOREWORD

West Pokot is a marginalised region where natural resources are under-utilised due to lack of technologies, market access and means of transportation. The Cabesi Project is based on ICIPE's beekeeping and wild silk farming technologies linked with camels for transportation. The Project provides the complete infrastructure from enhanced modern beekeeping methods and technologies of wild silk farming to processing of final products on site and connection with buyers, and camel training, all to meet the two main goals:

- to support rural communities of West Pokot to enhance their sources of income and by capacity building;
- to support arid land management (and fight soil erosion) through assistance of pollination and pollinators and support of camel husbandry.

As the Project progresses, other development problems on which ICIPE conducts research and development, including malaria, ticks, tsetse and crop pests will be addressed.

Three collection centres for honey and silk cocoons will be constructed initially, at Kirenget, Cherangan and Lomut. Processing of these products will be done in a marketplace at Chepareria, after which the value-added products will be offered for sale directly to traders. Camels will be used to transport the honey and silk from far-away sites.

New employment will be created for farmers, cattle owners, carpenters, collection centre operators, transporters and silk and honey processors.

This project is sponsored by the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in collaboration with Action Aid Kenya and Biovision International, Switzerland.

**Rolf Gloor, Cabesi Project Leader**

**Suresh K. Raina, Commercial Insects Programme Leader**





# CAMELS IN KENYA

Most camels are kept in the arid- and semi-arid areas of northern Kenya. Traditional camel-keepers are the Somali, Gabra, Rendille and Turkana. The Pokot communities recently came into contact with camels through cattle rustling and trade with the neighbouring Turkana people, although their lowlands along the Ugandan boarder and Kerio side are typical camel environments.

Pastoralists keep camels for many reasons: milk, meat, transportation of goods (water, firewood, food), for drawing water from wells and dams, for cultural purposes such as bride price, to settle disputes and for trade with Arabia for slaughter (a rising demand and good foreign exchange earner). Riding camels has started in recent years in Maralal in the Maralal Camel Derby.

The relationship between the role of the camel and the deteriorating environment as evidenced by soil erosion, for instance, needs to be addressed in the development planning of Kenya, in order to utilise







70% of its hot and arid land. More attention should be paid to the improvement of camel husbandry for a well-planned usage of the fragile ecosystem. Unfortunately, camel pastoralism arrived in the northern regions after the desert had already been created. It is likely that if the camels had arrived earlier, there would have been less desertification.

## CAMELS IN CABESI

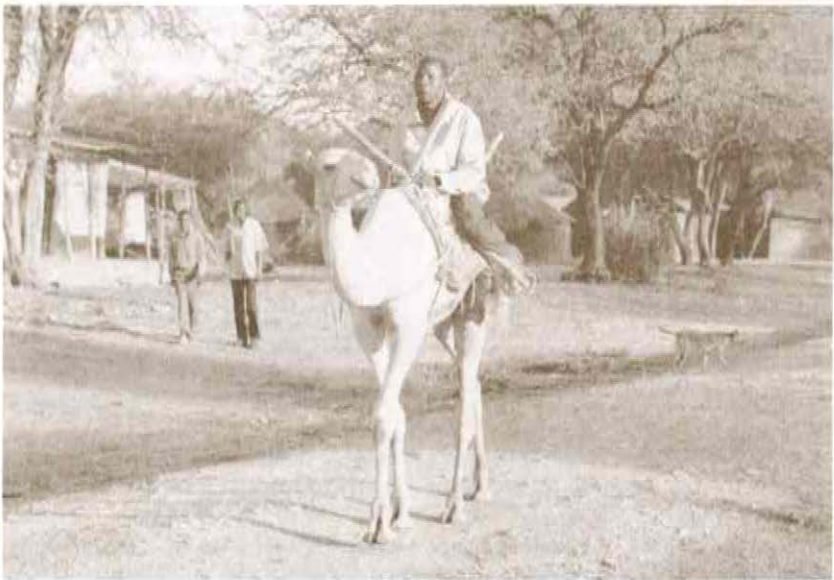
Within the self-help **Project Cabesi (Camels-Bees-Silk)** in West Pokot District, Kenya, honey and wild silk are being developed as products to enrich the rural livelihoods of the communities. The Project includes a complete system for production, transportation, processing and marketing of the products.

Large quantities of honey are already harvested in the lower lands along the Suam and Turkwell Rivers and up to Alale in the west and between Weiwei- and Kerio River in the east. Unfortunately, much of the honey does not reach its market due to lack of transport. The opportunities for income generation

for the local farmer is therefore very low depending on how far he/she lives from the roads leading to the collection centres. Lack of transport therefore limits the potential value of the natural product honey.

With the introduction of camels for transporting honey and silk cocoons (a new activity) from the farmer to the collection centre(s), Project Cabesi strives to meet the following goals:

- increase income generation in the most remote rural areas of West Pokot through a secured trade and transportation system for honey and silk cocoons;
- set up a transportation infrastructure as a business, to ease the main transportation difficulties in the region; develop a wide-spread transportation business (for water, firewood, food, carrying sick people to dispensaries, etc.);
- attract more people to keep camels;
- bring sustainable, income-generating jobs to these regions, thus enriching the livelihoods of the communities using existing resources.



## The very first steps of the Camel Programme



A component of **Project Cabesi** (Camels-bees-silk) in West Pokot is the use of camels for transportation of honey and/or wild silk cocoons from the far, remote places to the collection centres. The idea was first communicated to the camel communities on 12th December 2003, and was received with both scepticism and interest. Camels

are quite new in West Pokot and have never been used for transport.

Within a week, reports were received that a camel team had already been formed with chairman Mzee Musa Lotidomo Longarmoi as the Chairman. In January 2004, other interested camel owners were identified on the Sigor side and also the Katcheliba area. In barazas attended by chiefs of the areas, a few members of the camel communities were chosen to take part in an educational tour on camel usage.

Our camel education trip began on the morning on 4th February, 2004 with the following people: Joseph Ayomo (Asst. Chief in Sekerut Location), Thralakapel Korwa (camel owner, Sekerut/Lomut area), Kapelo Lotukotiang (camel owner, Kunyao), Siwareng Tulian (camel owner, Cherangan) and Mercy Kiyapyap (translator).

After a long drive we reached first Baringo and then Nginyang, the camel centre of East Baringo. Unfortunately the camels were out at the time, but the ranch manager was available to talk with us. After returning to Baringo for the night, the next morning we drove from Baringo through Loruk and Tangulbei to Rumuruti in Laikipia. At Ol Maisor Ranch we met the owner, Mr Jasper Evans, who had just arrived by plane. He patiently explained to our small group the advantages of handling and using camels. About 30 camels were later seen being used in a camel safari.

Long discussions were held concerning the construction of saddles. Putting on a headrope on a camel was practised on site and every detail was explained thoroughly.

The entire group was very excited about what was seen and learned, and all who participated promised to put into practice what they had learned as soon as they got back home with their animals.

Project Cabesi is indebted to Ol Maisor Ranch and especially Mr Evans for his detailed introduction, in which he made a positive and strong impact towards achieving the goals of Project Cabesi.

***Rolf Gloor, Cabesi Project Leader, West Pokot, 2004***




# CAMELS AS TRANSPORT ANIMALS

The importance of the camel as food producer is evident: a female camel produces 5–10 times as much milk per lactation as a cow. Unlike other livestock, the camel achieves this without serious damage to the environment, due to its extended reach and varied diet as a browser compared to that of cows.

Camels, however, are also used as pack animals. Due to poor road infrastructure, vehicles and fuel, the development of these remote areas in Kenya depends on the use of camels as a means of transport. Some traditional camel-keeping communities seem to be aware of that. Others, like the Pokot, face many social and psychological barriers in using camels for this purpose, but positive signs are emerging: within one month of awareness visits and communication with local camel owners, it was found that a large number of the people were interested and ready to learn the techniques for training camels as pack animals.





While the role of camels for transportation has been overtaken by motorised transport, it is also true that the latter means of transport (motor vehicles) has a limited action radius due to many factors. The camel, used for local distribution and transportation of goods in small-scale farming, has, without doubt, economic and ecological advantages. A camel is cheaper to buy and maintain than a vehicle, and it can reach very remote places irrespective of the road network in place. As such, camels are able to assist communities living far away from commercial and administrative centres.

## PACK CAMELS

Loads to be carried and distances to be covered each day depend on the condition of the camel (i.e. training, body weight, health). Generally it can be said that 25% of the body weight of the camel is a realistic load for the animal to carry the entire day or over many days, and up to 30% for short distances. The normal speed is about 4 km/hour, which translates to 24–32 km in a 6- to 8-hour day.

Camels below the age of 4 years should not be used, as their required full body weight is not attained until 7 years.

Camels to be trained need to be selected carefully. The better their character, the easier to train. They need to be healthy and in good condition. Castrated males have been used traditionally in many communities, but females can also be trained.

Camels to be used for work have to be conditioned, just like athletes, before they can achieve a good performance.

# TRAINING OF CAMELS IN 4 STEPS

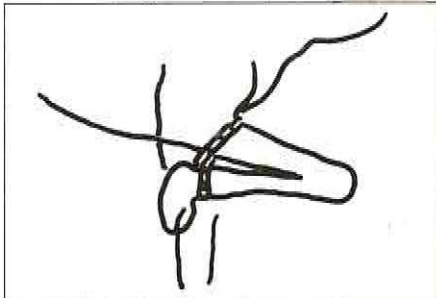
- The camel handler needs to be fearless but friendly. Camels are very intelligent animals and recognise emotions very quickly.
- The best approach is to choose a few camels (2-3) for training and to send the rest of the herd out of sight.
- Although camels are not supposed to work at a young age, they should be trained to obey commands. The younger and earlier, the better. Such training can include getting use to the headrope, sitting down, standing up and carrying a saddle.

## ◆ Step 1:

A work camel needs to be taught to accept a headrope. Hobble up one front leg to facilitate fitting the headrope, until the camel gets used to it and accepts it. The rope has to be put on gently (do not fight the camel by excessive pulling). If the camel needs to be calmed down, move around a bit and talk to it.



*Fitting a head rope*

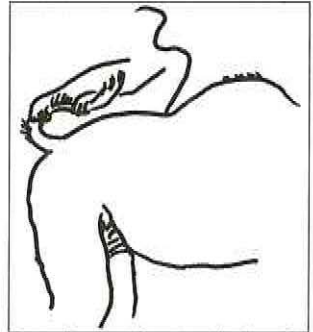


*Hobbling a front leg*

## ◆ Step 2:

- The camel must learn to sit down on command (the usual command word used is 'tu').

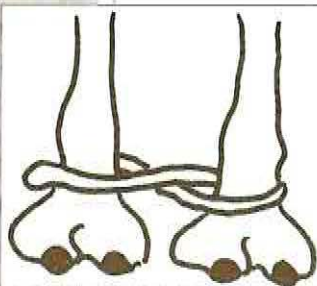
- One front leg is hobbled up while the other foot is tapped with a stick while giving the command, until it sits down.
- Sometimes if a camel is reluctant, it has to be forced to obey. This requires courage on the trainer's part, a feat he must win or the camel will remain unmanagable. In case of a fight, never beat a camel on the head!



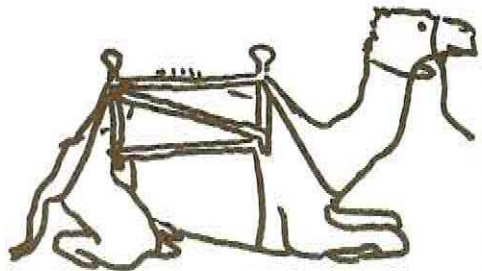
*Bending the tail firmly straight upwards is said to calm the camel down*

### ◆ Step 3:

Saddles may be put on, even on the first day of training. Whatever the style of saddle, it must be fitted and fixed properly. Nothing upsets a camel more than constant fiddling with its gear. The saddle should be worn for a day without any attachments.



*Hobbling front legs to prevent straying*



*The saddle has to be fixed properly*

### ◆ Step 4:

First attach a light load and make sure that everything is properly fixed. Anything loose may cause panic. At the beginning of training, loading and off-loading the

camel frequently will condition the animal. Camels, like humans, get out of training if not regularly exercised. For prolonged work, a camel has to be hardened and trained accordingly.

**Note:** Camels are happier training in the company of other camels.

## CAMEL SADDLES

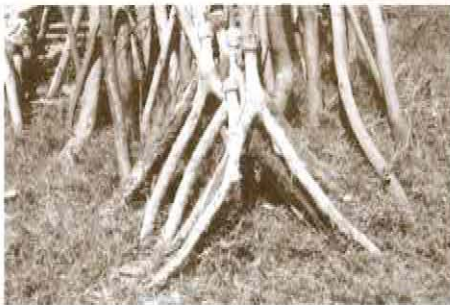
Traditionally, saddles are produced in a variety of shapes and sizes depending on the camel community and the type of goods to be transported. Rendille and Gabra people move entire households with camels, demanding a very different kind of saddle from that used by the Turkana for transporting firewood or that of an Arab for riding.

There are multipurpose saddles, one of which was developed at Ol Maisor Ranch in Rumuruti. This model seems to be the most versatile saddle used in Kenya today. It is cheap and easy to make and can be used for loading or riding.

Saddles must be produced in accordance to the size of the camel. The following is a short guide on how to build a saddle for your camel:

### ◆ Step 1:

You need two forks of a tree with about equal arms (as close to an equilateral triangle as possible). Connect them with 2 crossbars (2–3") on each side of the hump. For increased stability, add a diagonal crossbar on each side. The length of the crossbars is determined by the size of the camel.



Forks







## ◆ Step 2:



*Padded saddle*

The inside of the forks needs to be padded with cloth, wool, sacking or other soft material. The front fork needs enough padding to sit snugly on the shoulders. The rear fork needs sufficient padding on top of the short ribs and between the hump and the rump.

## ◆ Step 3:

If the saddle sits properly on the camel, four ropes have to be fitted. Flat sisal ropes are preferred to round nylon ropes. All ropes should be padded with skin or wool to reduce rubbing.

*Girths:* Two girths are needed. One to be fixed just behind the front legs, and the other around the abdomen (but in front of the penis).

*Neck rope:* This passes around the base of the neck.

*Crupper:* The crupper passes under the root of the tail.

## **Remember these important factors in selecting or making saddles:**

- Sufficient padding between any hard frame or load and the camel.
- No movement of the saddle to avoid blisters and wounds.
- The weight sits on the ribs and not on top of the hump.
- The girths are firmly tied and the load cannot slip or slide.
- Padding is soft and absorbent.
- The load is well balanced and the camel comfortable.

# USES OF THE SADDLE

## For riding

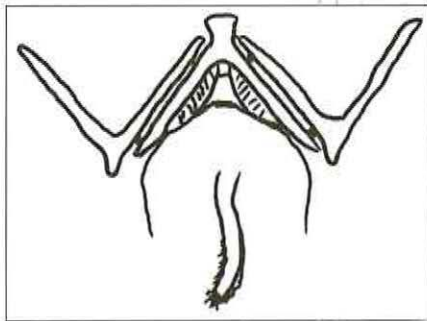
This is done by adding a padded seat.



## For carrying goods

The type of saddle used depends on the type of load. This saddle frame can be used in a variety of ways:

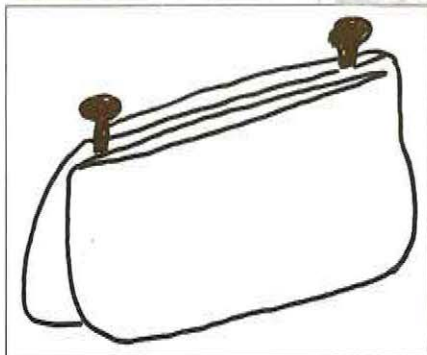
- (i) A complete saddle for transportation of firewood. Notice the hanging forks on each side.



- (ii) Boxes (multipurpose system)



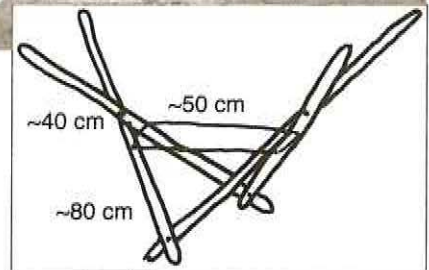
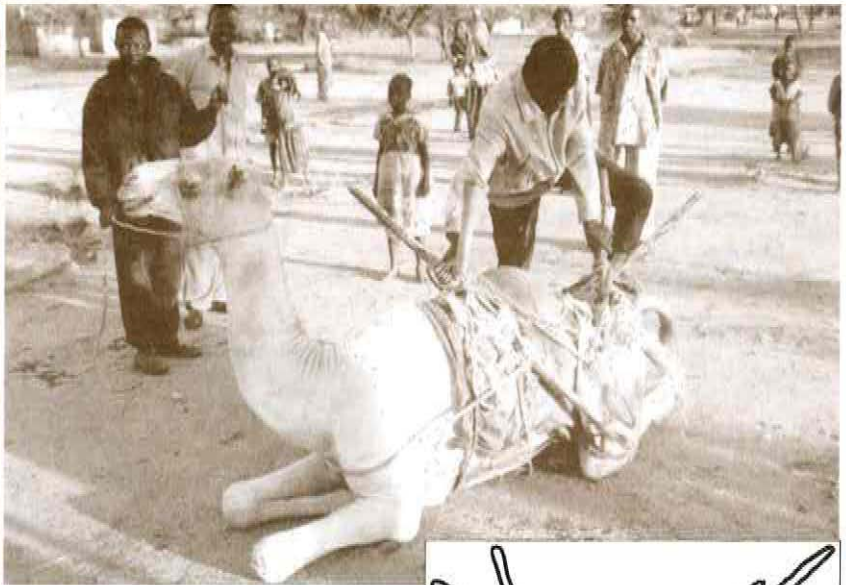
- (iii) Sacks (for transportation of maize, etc.)



## RIDING CAMELS

Once a camel is used to a saddle and commands, it can be mounted by one person and led by another until it is used to being driven by the rider himself. The lead rope should be used as a rein.

The picture and illustration below show the Somali style 4-stick saddle frame, which is especially useful for riding.



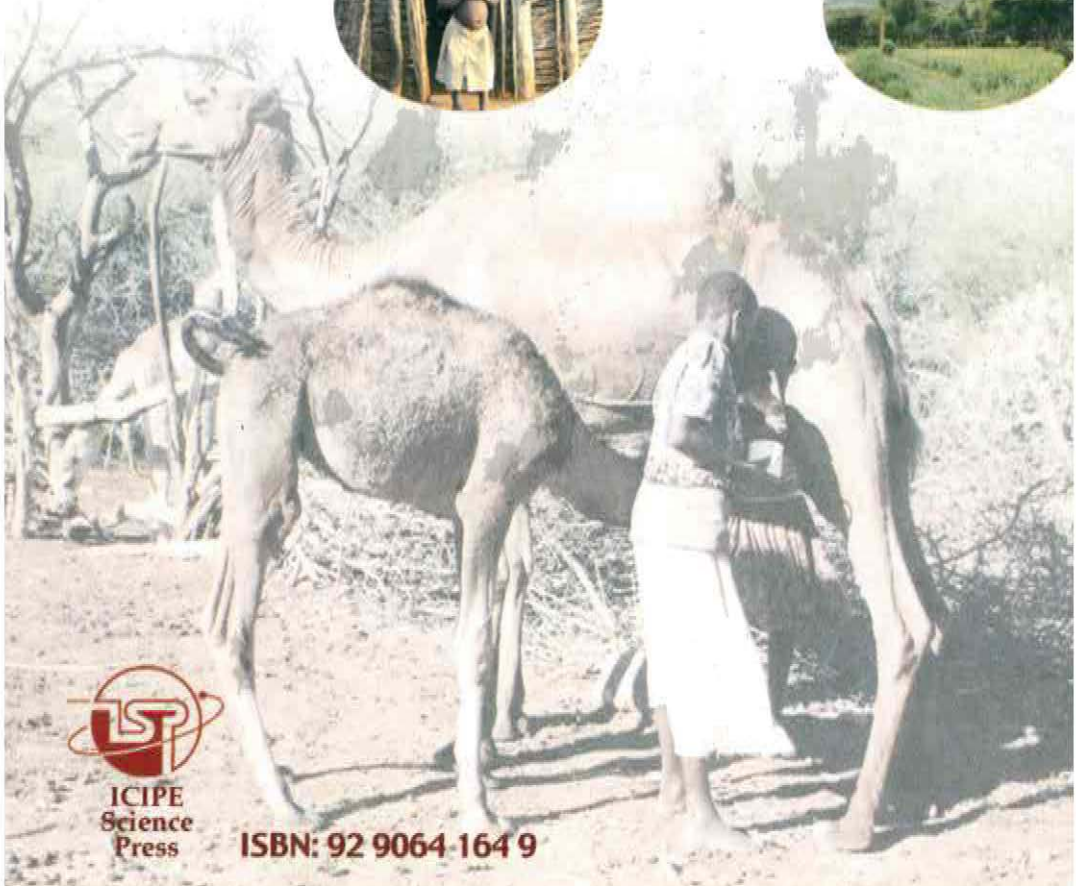
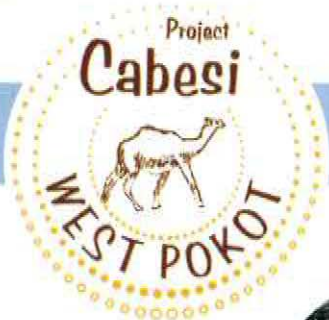
## 10 good reasons to introduce and keep camels in semi-arid lands

1. Camels are the most adaptable domestic animals in arid- and semi-arid lands.
2. Camels produce much more milk than cows.
3. Camels are browsers and enjoy a wide range of food—without spoiling the land.
4. Camels need to drink water only after every few days, which allows them to reach places far away from water.
5. Camels can easily be trained as pack animals and are thus able to assist a family in its daily transportation needs (of firewood, water, food, etc.).
6. Camels can survive and deliver their services (for milk and meat and for transportation), when cattle, because of drought, have to be driven out or die from hunger.
7. Camels produce a lot of healthy and nutritious meat.
8. Camels can be used as riding camels, to visit friends and relatives and the market, etc. Such transport is easy, cheap, comfortable and fast.
9. Pack Camels can be professionally used as an income-generating business for transportation (of goods, tourists, etc.).
10. In replacing cows with camels, life will become more comfortable and soil erosion can be slowed down or stopped!

**It is up to you!**







ISBN: 92 9064 164 9