

Renowned Ox Power Experts Meet: Paul Starkey and Drew Conroy visit Bhaktivedanta Manor 16th April 2004

The following is a report on the visit today to BM of some influential persons in the field of ox implementation.

As a consequence of participating in the TAWS workshop on the 15th of April 2004, Paul Starkey, a consultant specializing in animal traction, and also an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre of Agricultural Strategy, University of Reading, requested a site visit to Bhaktivedanta Manor for the next day.

Accompanying him was Drew Conroy, lifelong ox teamster, prolific writer on working oxen, International ox trainer PHD and lecturer in Dairy science. There was also Jorg Bremond from Germany with knowledge of Padded Harness for oxen and Cozette Griffin-Kremer from the French center of Ox History and Techniques.

The weather was a perfect setting for the Manor to host such distinguished guests in the field of animal traction. Surya (Sun God) showed himself in pleasant spring glory.



(from right to left) Drew Conway, Cozette Griffin-Kremer from the Centre D'histoire des Techniques, France, Syamasundara das from Bhaktivedanta Manor, Paul Starkey, and Jorg Bremond from ZADI Germany and specialist in the 3 padded harness

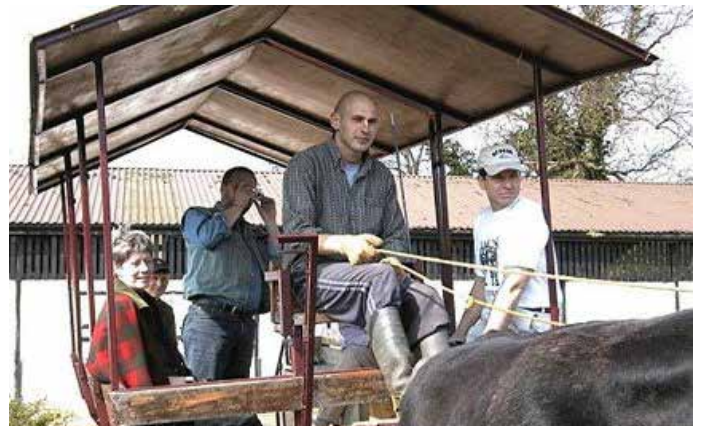


"Drew mentioned the shirt (ISCOWP shirts are now available) he was wearing right away. I told him there was another one that said 'Kiss My Ox'. He was interested in that one as well." - Syamasundara said. From left to right Drew Conway, Paul Starkey, and Syamasundara.

On arrival the group was shown around our current farm facilities where we explained the method of farming practiced and the philosophy behind it. The numerous farm implements were shown and we explained how we were interested in using modern machinery as far as possible that complemented the working of the oxen. There was quite some interest in the ox mill that we are manifesting at the Manor and Paul Starkey was able to give some global insight into the practicalities or not of such a system. Whew! He knows his stuff

In the barn we displayed the main oxen in the team and Drew shared his extensive knowledge on the subject of suitable breeds and their characteristics. At this point we demonstrated the hitching of the oxen and Drew commented that the yoke we were using could be more comfortable with additional sanding along the neckline. He expressed that it didn't seem rounded enough for the best comfort. We confirmed we would address this concern. We mentioned how castration and nose rings fitted into our system and during the yoking of two of our oxen we were able to show how we harness to the nose ring. Drew mentioned some of his experiences where nose ropes had been placed in young bulls and then not replaced when the bulls grew which led to damage and discomfort to the respective animal. He had concern particularly in this case when the rope was made of nylon because they never broke.

From this point we took the ox team out and hitched them to a wagon where our guests sat comfortably whilst we transported them some 500m to the plowing fields. Drew noted how the yoke sat on the shoulders and how the bows were not fully utilized by the oxen. Later he commented that the materials they were made from would bend if they were to be used in the US teamster style. He was able to identify that the oxen had neck developments as a consequence of hauling out and he gave his own experience of how he would train his oxen to stop doing it by tying their horns together. When they walked normally he would untie them and again when they hauled out he would tie them again and in this way they learned not to do it.



The visitors were transported by ox cart.



"We had a fine visit with the folks at the Bhaktivedanta Manor ox power project. They have a wonderful plot of land and lots of animals to do the work. I recommended some improvements in the yoke, which will make the oxen more comfortable. Here is a photo of me driving from the morning visit." - Drew Conway

mentioned that where horses replaced oxen was because of the speed consideration and because of the profile of horses over oxen. He said that when people are given a tractor and it brakes down after 5 years or so they have forgotten how to use the oxen and therefore they seek another tractor, which makes no financial sense. His point is that they should have stayed with the oxen.

With time pressing our guests we invited them to take a meal with us and showed them around the Manor and into the temple room. During the meal there was much discussion on ox training and working with animals around the world. They wanted to know about how we were placed within Hinduism, how does ISCOWP connect with ISKCON, how does the farm work financially. In turn we were able to ask about animal traction around the world. We explained how Vaisnavism (religion of ISKCON members) fits into Hinduism, and how ISCOWP is a parallel charity run by devotees.

We were able to explain how there is an internal economy for the products of the cows and bulls and how there was vibrant charity support from the visitors to the Manor.

We received books from Drew and from Paul and in reciprocation we gave them going away gifts of Prasadam (foodstuffs offered to God, Lord Krsna) and a vegetarian cookbook and a mantelpiece ornament of Lord Krishna.

The day went exceptionally well and will, I am sure, be the springboard of future collaboration and sharing of advice and resources. Drew invited our participation on the yoke discussion he was going to start as a result of the TAWS meeting he had attended the previous day.

All in all it was a very worthwhile day to be able to host such important people in the world of animal traction.

TAWS - World Association for Transport Animal Welfare and Studies - April 15th 2004 (UK)

The following is a brief report on the proceedings about the above workshop. In about a weeks time there will be a more intensive report on the TAWS website.

On the 15th of April 2004 ISKCON was invited to attend a workshop in the area of traction animal welfare. The meeting was in the impressive setting of Silsoe Research Institute in Bedfordshire 50miles north of London. The institute researches different elements of modern farming and production systems and has its base in a magnificent Country Mansion placed in extensive grounds and buildings.

The Keynote address was by Lord Soulsby, a member of the House of Lords, who gave a very informative presentation on the link between animal welfare and the welfare of people particularly in the African Continent. He also alerted the participants to the dire predicament of this part of the world as a consequence of the spread HIV-aids, which was set to fatally effect 20% of the population. He noted that endeavors to develop animal traction would be effected by the growing epidemic. On a side point and perhaps somewhat

On reaching the plowing fields the oxen were transferred to the plough, a ride on sulky plough imported from the USA, wherein numerous photographs were shot by everyone armed with a camera. We plowed a few furrows and then to everyone's surprise Drew took the seat on the sulky plough, took the reins (oh yes, but he asked us not to tell the New England teamsters with a smile on his face) and ploughed one furrow encouraging the oxen on with his calm and yet commanding voice. At this point we posed for group photographs and then remounted the ox wagon to return to the farm. During the trip back, Paul mentioned to us that the primary reason why oxen and other animals are displaced by tractors is prestige. He explained that generally tractors don't make economic sense on less than 50 hectares (125 acres) yet people were adopting them because governments were subsidizing them for prestigious reasons. It is just not so impressive for most governments to be known to be dependant on animal traction. Paul mentioned the success of Cuba in animal traction where it was valued by the leader Fidel Castro who awarded prizes for the best ox teams. He also



Paul Starkey getting to know a resident of the Bhaktivedanta Manor

tongue in cheek he was predicting that as a consequence of insufficient support for agriculture in the British Government for a number of years there may be a need to return to animal traction in the UK. Some in the audience expressed the desire for this prediction to come about.

Paul Starkey a world authority on animal traction development then gave an interesting resume of animal systems currently employed around the world. Paul has extensive experience in this field having visited over 120 countries. It was fascinating to see the spectrum of uses of animal traction. In some places it was more economic to use oxen for tourism in the hauling of bus wagons than it was for petrol engines.

John Smales (ex Brigadier) Chief Executive of the International League for the Protection of Horses, ILPH then presented in a thorough and humorous way considerations for inter charity cooperation and what to watch out for.

Next came a presentation by Jorg Bremond on the utilization of a German 3 Pad ox harness.

Drew Conroy, then gave a detailed presentation on suitable yoking of oxen and the types of considerations to bare in mind. He gave a number of practical applications and modifications dependant on the area of use and the types of oxen employed.

Following came a presentation about donkey harnessing and then a presentation about the work of the centre of ox history in France. They are documenting and presenting the history of the methods and practice of working oxen. They are concerned that the information is not lost but rather is preserved.

After lunch there was a demonstration of a team of donkeys plowing and then there was a modern hitch cart with mounted engine and 3pt linkage presented. The engineer behind the power cart was inviting orders for the tool, which would enable animal dependant farmers to drive modern farm machinery with the draft retained by the animals. In the afternoon the body was divided into three groups for a discussion.

1. Working with other welfare groups.
2. Harnessing.
3. Transportation.

Each group then reported on practical proposals to address their areas of discussion.

Now the question from an ISKCON perspective: what was gained and what is to be gained in such workshops.

What did we gain?

1. Networking. By attending the meeting we were able to make contact with a significant number of persons who feel passionate about animal traction. Albeit they do not share our philosophical perspective about the need to protect animals for their whole life yet we are singing from the same song sheet regarding the importance of animal traction.
2. We met people who appreciated our dedication to work oxen and wanted us to participate in various functions
3. There were people who had various skills and vast experience who we could call on as required
4. ISKCON became associated with a number of third world development agencies
5. Participants were interested in visiting Bhaktivedanta Manor and seeing the working farm.

What is to be gained?

1. An on going opportunity to give input to world development agencies in ox dependency
2. Networking/meeting other similar minded bodies
3. Gaining knowledge of resources and possible funding
4. Bhaktivedanta Manor farm may be able to play a role as an ox-training centre for overseas development students.
5. Influencing a different area of society in a number of ways.

Their website is www.taws.org