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**A history of transport in South Africa:
Exploring DITSONG's animal-drawn vehicle collection**

Did you know that October is Transport Month? It's a universal subject and it is very interesting how each mode of transport had its own pace of evolution. To celebrate, *Creative Feel* interviewed Jaco Schoonraad, Curator of Animal-drawn Vehicles and the Numismatics Collections at DITSONG: National Museum of Cultural History, and Acting Deputy Director of the Sammy Marks and Pioneer Museums, to find out a bit more about the history of transport in our country.

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Of zebras and bank heists: The history and mythology of the Phaeton carriage

We recently worked with DITSONG'S Willem Prinsloo Agriculture Museum to look at some of the fascinating uses of the horse-drawn phaeton carriage throughout history. Extravagance and scandal ensue in this short piece: what do you get when you mix gentlemen, flamboyant wives, zebras, bank robbery, and radical revolutionary Marxists? One heck of a story on the history of transport!

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Donkeys and horses were domesticated as early as 5000 B.C. in Kazakhstan and 4000 B.C in the Eurasian Steppes, the land between Hungary and Mongolia. They were used for riding, meat, and milk. Horses have been used in later times to draw transport, such as mail coaches and goods wagons. Horse-drawn carriages were a popular form of human transport, pulled by horses and having four wheels. The suspension was initially made from leather strapping and in later centuries steel springs. Donkeys were mainly used as draught animals to pull various carts and wagons over the centuries.



Oxen are mainly used as draught animals. The oxen at Willem Prinsloo museum are the Afrikaner Breed and the males, which can weigh as much as 1000kg, are commonly used for heavy work. From a young age they are trained to accept a yolk and work in pairs. They are traditionally used as working animals on farms to plough and to pull wagons. The Afrikaner were used to draw the ox wagons that carried the Boer farmers and families on the Great Trek from the Cape in 1835 up to what was then known as Natal, Transvaal, and the Orange Free State to escape British rule.



Many of the wagons and carts drawn by horses, donkeys, and oxen are on exhibit. The oldest form of transport on exhibition is a petrified wooden sleigh. This sleigh is extremely old and was used to pull goods before the invention of the wheel (ca 3500 B.C). The sleigh was used as a means for transporting goods over a vast distance using oxen. A close look reveals that the pegs to join the cross poles are made of wood. The animal-drawn cart section contains a number of different types of cart.



Spider Cart

Many of the wagons and carts drawn by horses, donkeys, and oxen are on exhibit at DITSONG: Museums of South Africa. The oldest form of transport on exhibition is a petrified wooden sleigh. This sleigh is extremely old and was used to pull goods before the invention of the wheel (ca 3500 B.C). The sleigh was used as a means for transporting goods over a vast distance using oxen. A close look reveals that the pegs to join the cross poles are made of wood. The animal-drawn cart section contains a number of different types of cart.



Pioneer Wagon

This big tented wagon was used by the Voortrekkers in the 1800s to move inland from the Cape colony in order to escape the English. Everything on the wagon was handmade and hand-painted. The tent can be removed for washing and then put back on. The smaller size of the wagon enabled disassembly of the wagon to go around or over obstacles such as mountains and rivers. The wagon was then reassembled to continue the journey. It was pulled by eight to ten oxen depending on the weight of the wagon.



Travelling Wagon

A big, high wagon used for travelling vast distances, pulled by oxen. There is enough packing space to put anything one might need on the road inside the wagon either in the wagon-box on the front, underneath the bed, or hanging in baskets under the wagon (such as chickens for eggs). The wagons were also used as a shop by Jewish travellers to get supplies to and from the moving Voortrekkers.



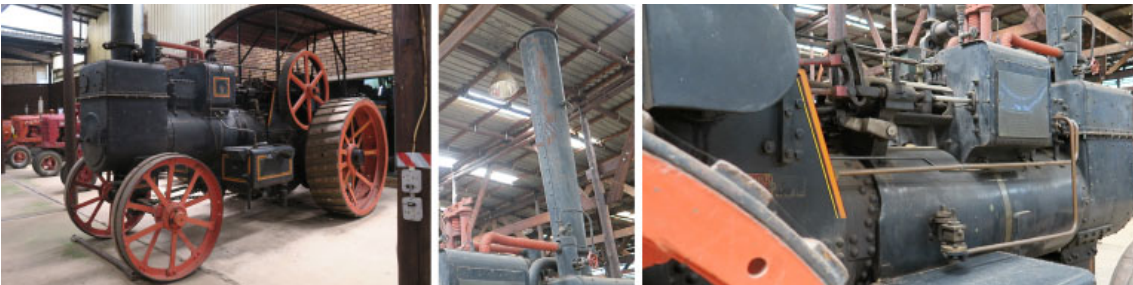
Landau coach

W. Rogers & Son's undertakers used this coach as a mourning vehicle riding through the streets, pulled by six to eight horses with white feathers attached to their manes as a sign of sympathy for the family who lost a member. Because of the modern shape of the coach former South African president Paul Kruger sometimes used it to go on official trips. The low shell of the coach allowed for maximum visibility of the occupants and their clothing, which made it a popular coach for mayors, royalty, and presidents.



Hearse

This hearse was pulled by two horses and used in the town of Piet Retief until the late 1930s. It carried bodies covered in a cloth inside a reed coffin. The bodies were dumped straight into the grave. No respect was shown to this hearse or its bodies as it usually carried thieves and murderers.



Steam engine

A favourite vehicle of visitors to the museum. The power needed for the engine to turn is generated through steam. Water is heated by a coal fire inside the round drum belly and the heat flowing through the pipes generates enough steam to turn the wheels. The extra steam is let out of the big chimney. It is one of the first self-driven vehicles. The museum also houses a very large selection of tractors and other agricultural vehicles from various periods during the evolution of agriculture.

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