

An 1833 pack train on the Spanish Trail headed for California carried the following: 1645 sarapes, 341 frezadas, 171 colchas, and 4 tirutas [*sic.*]. (Hafen & Hafen).

In 1841-2 a fabric was worth 3 to 5 piasters each. Two blankets were traded for 1 horse. Herds of 2,000 horses were driven back from California along with mules, burros, and Chinese silks .

The pack saddle/system used was called an aparejo. A short-haul aparejo was made of agave and other fibrous plant material or rawhide. A long-haul aparejo, such as those used on the Spanish Trail, were made of hide or leather.



Illustration by Nick Eggenhofer
"Wagons, Mules, and Men"

Glossary

Mules and Donkeys:

Jack – A male donkey

Jenny or Jennet – A female donkey

Mule – A cross between a Jenny and a Stallion horse

Hinny – A cross between a Jack and a mare horse.

John or "Horse Mule" - A male mule

Molly – A female mule

Bell Mare– The lead animal of a pack train with a bell around the neck (that the mules will follow).

Stallion - A male horse

Mare - A female horse

Tapajo/Tapajo - A cover tied over the animal's eyes while packing up.

Carga - Cargo

Packing:

Arrieria – Arabic term from "arre"-“to get along”. The profession of mule packing

Arriero – A professional muleteer/packer

Aparejo – The pack saddle/system

Atajo – A small pack train or segment of a large pack train.

Jornada de Recua – A day's pack train journey.

Recuas – A large pack train

Goods Transported:

Colchas - Embroidered bedcovers

Frezadas – Blankets

Sarapes – Woolen shawls

Tirutas – (???)

Tapalos - Woman's Shawls

Mules on the Old Spanish Trail



Illustration used with the permission of the Jo Mora Trust.

Mules provided the mode of transport on the Old Spanish Trail.

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What is a mule?

The mule is a hybrid of a Jack (male) donkey and a Mare (female) horse. They can weigh from 1,000 to 1,200 pounds and stand from 56" to 68" high. (A cross between a Jenny (female donkey) and a Stallion (male) horse is called a Hinny.) As a hybrid, mules are usually sterile animals and can not breed. For this reason they are also not a species like a donkey (*Equus asinus*) or a horse (*Equus caballus*). They are, however, born gendered. Female mules are called Mollys and male mules are called Johns. The mule is the original hybrid mode of transportation.

Mules are not stubborn, just very smart. They will not go into danger and are the ultimate self-preservationists; muleteers learned to trust their mules' sense of danger. They are more sure-footed, longer-lived, sturdier, faster, and have a longer stride than a horse. A mule has the best qualities of both breeds.

"The California mule is a cross between the burro and cayuse (pony), with large and deep belly, short in stature, was a great climber and a hardy packer." (*The manual of Pack Transportation by H. W. Daly, chief packer, War Dept. Office of the Quartermaster-General*). As California was still part of Mexico, the Mexican mule and the California mule were one and the same. They remained so later, with the only distinction being that a Mexican Mule is born in Mexico.

Pack Mules:

Missouri mules were bred for pulling and were large in stature, whereas California/Mexican mules were bred for packing. Each endeavor requires a different conformation or body build. The size of the animal is important for ease of packing and their ability to carry weight. Pack mules can carry as much as 400 pounds, but were usually loaded with about 300 pounds - 150 pounds per side. They traveled 12 to 15 miles a day and a day's journey was 5 to 6 hours. There was no stopping for lunch, as the mules would then lie down with the packs on, and this was not desirable. They generally moved from grass to grass or from one feeding and watering area to the next. There could be as many as 200 animals in a pack train. A crew of 6 muleteers, or Arrieros, working in pairs was in charge of 40 to 50 animals. (*Max Moorhead, Spanish Transportation in the SW. NM Historical Review Vol.32 pg.109*)

The Profession -Arrieria/Arrieros:

The word "arrieria" has Arabic roots and is the Spanish word for the profession of packing. The job of packing mules, burros and occasionally horses is centuries old and is a cultural system and tradition of important economic impact based on trust and a handshake.

Arrieros were responsible for many families' woolen goods that provided the income for a whole year's work. A familiar farewell among arrieros was "Packers all, someday on the trail we shall meet."

The Pack Train - Atajo:

The pack trains left New Mexico in the fall when water crossings were easier, and returned in the early spring before the snowmelt swelled the rivers. The whole outfit was overseen by a Majordomo or foreman/boss. His assistant was a head packer called a Cargador, who oversaw the individual packers called Arrieros. There were 150 to 200 animals in a train (recura) and it was divided into segments called atajos. Pay was \$2 to \$5 dollars a month. "Packing goods was much cheaper than outfitting a wagon train" (Max Moorhead).

Of added benefit, the pack trains, unlike wagons, could meander across the terrain, taking advantage of the best routes at a given time, and avoiding potential danger spots.

Rations were carried for the people on the journey, but the animals would forage for themselves.