

The Napoleon Series

Wellington's Mules

By [Richard Tennant](#)

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Mules - 'without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity' - have served the fighting soldier for almost as long as the horse.

What Are Mules?

What is generally known as the **horse family** is technically termed the ***Equidae Family***.

The Genus ***Equus*** is split into various sub-groups:

Equus: the Wild and Domestic Horse

Asinus: the Donkey, the African and Asiatic Ass, and the Kiang

Dolichohippus: Grevy's Zebra

Hippotigris: the other breeds of Zebra

Rather surprisingly, it also includes tapirs and rhinoceroses.

The words donkey and ass are applied to the domesticated *Equus asinus*. The animal considered to be its wild ancestor is the African Wild Ass, also *E. asinus*. Colloquially, the term 'ass' is often used today to refer to a larger, horse-sized animal, and 'donkey' to a smaller, pony-sized one. Asses were first domesticated around 3,000 BCE, approximately the same time as the horse, and have spread around the world.



Donkeys and asses are adapted to marginal desert lands, and have many traits that are unique to the species as a result. Their tough digestive system is somewhat less prone to colic than that of horses, can break down near-inedible vegetation and extract moisture from food very efficiently. As a rule, they need smaller amounts of feed than horses of comparable height and weight. Donkeys and asses range considerably in size, depending

on breed and management. Most domestic breeds range from 0.9 to over 1.4 m (8.8 to 13.7 hands) tall.¹

The cross-breeds include :

- Mule, a cross between a male donkey and a female horse
- Hinny, a cross between a female donkey and a male horse

The mule possesses the sobriety, patience, endurance and sure-footedness of the donkey, and the vigour, strength and courage of the horse. Mules show less impatience than horses under the pressure of heavy weights. Their skin, harder and less sensitive than that of horses, renders them more capable of resisting sun and rain. Their hooves are harder than horses', and they show a natural resistance to disease and insects.



Background History of Horses & Mules in the Peninsula

When the Arab general Tariq landed at Gibraltar (*Jebel-al-Tariq*) in 711 he had with him 12,000 cavalrymen – of which a mere twelve (probably the senior officers) were native Arabs from Arabia; the other races were Berbers, Zenetes and other races from North Africa.

It was extremely unlikely that thousands of horses would have been marched the vast distance from Arabia when were plenty available just opposite the Spanish shores. The truth seems that while some pure-bred Arab horses were employed to found the celebrated Andalusian breed, the vast majority were Barbs from North Africa.

Certainly, this breed seems to have made an ideal war horse; standing 15 hands of so, he was big for the time, without coarseness, and up to plenty of weight. Arab blood or no, he exhibited the

Arab's hardiness and, above all, the *brio escondido* – hidden mettle – being gentle and kind to handle, but full of latent spirit.

Whilst it does not seem to be documented, one can postulate that during this same period they also created the Andalucian-Cordobesan breed of mule, which can reach up to 1.6 m / 15.7 hands high. The most esteemed were those bred from mares and stallion asses, "*garañones*" (also called "*burro padre*" – ass father). During the 18th Century mule breeding has been massively encouraged, so that in 1810 Commissary Schaumann was able to observe that 'the whole of the mule-breeding industry in Spain and Portugal is on a very high plane of excellence. I have never seen such fine and powerful beasts.'

In order to put the size of this breed of mule into perspective, in the early 1700's the British troop horse was developing into the type that became accepted as the ideal for succeeding centuries: a weight-carrying half-bred animal, well-coupled, with plenty of bone, and standing about 15 hands. The light cavalry of hussars and light dragoons in the

¹ Horses are traditionally measured in hands, one hand equaling four inches. Measurement is done from the highest point of the withers (the area of the spine just in front of the saddle) vertically to the ground, without shoes.

British service were mounted on lighter horses of 14.3 hands. However, in his *Despatches*, the Duke of Wellington insisted that remounts for the cavalry in the Peninsula should be at least six years old, preferably not under 15 hands for the cavalry and horse artillery.



Sofia - Andalusian Donkey of 15.2 hands

The Spanish cavalry were placed at a serious disadvantage by the quality of the horseflesh. Centuries of mule breeding had greatly reduced both the size and quality of Spain's horse herds, so that it became increasingly difficult to provide for the cavalry's requirements. Not only could few horses be obtained, but those that did become available were too small and weak to be suited to the use of shock tactics, even had their strength not been sapped still further by the army's perennial shortage of fodder.

After he came to power in 1792, Godoy made every effort to remedy the deleterious effects of centuries of mule breeding; horses were imported from Normandy, Africa and Denmark to improve the breeding strains; a royal stud was established at Aranjuez (*it still exists today*²); horse breeding was encouraged by financial and legal concessions; and the privileges of the mule breeders were reduced. Even so, in 1808 the Spanish cavalry could only provide 9,256 horses for the 14,440 rank and file.

Leslie (p 135), observing the Spanish cavalry reviewed before Talavera, noted that the cavalry (6,000) were heavy and light dragoons, with some regiments of Hussars. The horses were small, active and hardy, of the Spanish Barbary breed.

The Duke of Wellington writing to Castlereagh on 25 August 1809, after the battle of Talavera, equally commented: 'The Spanish cavalry are ... in general well clothed, armed and accoutred, and remarkably well mounted, and their horses are in good condition.'

² Centro Militar de Cría Caballar de Écija

In Portugal the availability of horses was even more critical. Dickson (3 July 1810) comments that 'in the Portuguese cavalry each regiment consists of about 400 horses and from the difficulty of procuring horses in this country, not more than seven or eight regiments out of 12 which they have are mounted. The horses are small and not capable of undergoing great fatigue.'

The Local Topography

Portugal

Ian Robertson quotes that General Anstruther, then at Almeida, had warned Moore of the lamentable state of the Portuguese roads, hardly one of which did not have 'very bad steps; these are generally in or near villages, of which the streets are almost universally narrow, rocky and full of short turns impracticable for carriages of any sort ...', merely confirming what the Portuguese had admitted: 'that even in their own country they would be at a loss to indicate any road that was practical for artillery.'

Extract from *Conversations with the Duke of Wellington* by Earl Stanhope: He told us that in Portugal the only road at all deserving of the name was from Lisbon to Pombal. From Lisbon to Elvas it was most detestable, often only the dry bed of a rivulet.

What then do they do, I asked, when the rivulets are full? "Stay at home, I believe," said the Duke, laughing. "But I have been obliged more than once to give orders at the villages that the large stones and fragments might be picket out of these rivulets, so that the troops might march on these roads."

Spain

Oman makes a detailed summary of the roads in Spain in Vol I, pages 78 – 85: 'Spanish (and also Portuguese roads), generally avoid the river banks and run along the slopes far above them.

Roads always take the 'line of least resistance' in early days, and seek for easy passes, not for short cuts. The idea that 'time is money', and that instead of going round two sides of a triangle it may be worth while to cut a new path across its base, in spite of all engineering difficulties, was one very unfamiliar in Spain. Nothing shows more clearly the state of mediaeval isolation in which the kingdom still lay in 1808 than the condition of the roads. Wherever the country presented any serious obstacles, little or no attempt had been made to grapple with them since the days of the Romans.

What roads there were, when war of 1808 broke out, were in a state of dreadful neglect. There were many other points at which a division travelling in light order without guns or baggage could cross the watershed ... but for an army travelling with all its impedimenta such bypaths were impracticable.

Summing up the general characteristics of the road-system of Spain, we note first that the main routes are rather at right angles to the great rivers than parallel to them. Just because the roads do not cling to the valleys, but strike across them at right angles, they are always crossing watersheds by means of difficult passes.'

In his *Diary of Campaigns in the Peninsula*, Lieut William Swabey, Royal Horse Artillery, notes for 20th May 1812, 'Close to this town (*Torremexia*) runs a road, or rather the

remains of one, made by the Romans and formerly reaching from Merida to Lisbon, these relics of which there are many in Spain are called *Calhada*.³

Ian Robertson states the following (Oct 1807 – Sept 1809, footnotes p 62) ‘George Ticknor, the American historian of Spanish literature, when first visiting the country a decade later, before any form of ‘diligence service’ had been set up, remarked that ‘There was no travelling in Spain. Between Barcelona and Madrid, in a journey of thirteen days, we met only a few muleteers, a few carts and one single coach like our own, only half a dozen in all; and yet the road was the main highway between the capital and one of the principal cities of the kingdom’; but it had long been so. Major William Dalrymple, travelling in the Peninsula while on leave from the Gibraltar garrison in 1774, setting out from Ponferrada for Galicia, had remarked on the road being ‘very bad’ after having ‘travelled on a new road for about two miles, which is intended to be carried to the sea,’ adding: ‘And here I must observe, that except at La Carolina in the Sierra Morena, and for a few leagues about Madrid, I never seen any made (ie surfaced) roads. There are no heavy carriages in the country I have passed, otherwise it would be impossible, particularly in winter, for them to travel. Left the Camino Real (the Royal Road) and came into an abominable road ... began to ascend the mountain, the road like steps of stairs.’

Given the topography of the two countries and the communications networks, it is therefore not at all surprising that, in both Spain and Portugal, it was customary to carry most merchandise on pack animals rather than by wheeled transport.

Having established the general surface conditions of these roads, it is interesting to briefly consider their width, and here Wellington’s General Orders give an insight into this aspect : Whereas it is stated in the Rules and Regulations for the Formations, Field-Exercise and Movements of His Majesty’s Forces, 1803 edition, page 368

“The Column of Route

All marches are therefore made in column of divisions of the line, and never on a less front than 6 files where the formation is 3 deep, or 4 files where it is 2 deep ...

another picture emerges from the General Orders for 16th March 1811 :

The Commander of the Forces requests that for route marches each company in every battalion of infantry may be told off in threes; when the column is to be formed for the march the companies must be wheeled up or backward by threes, and each stand in column of 3 men in front, *which is as large a number as the greater proportion of the roads in Portugal will permit. (my italics)*

It must be therefore considered that with the majority of the roads in Portugal being of this width, an artillery team, two horses wide, could have significant problems.

Larpent makes an interesting note for 7th July 1813 at Iurita, in the Pyrenees, ‘More Portuguese troops and artillery are now passing this way. I believe no English artillery has come this road. The Portuguese guns are not so wide in the wheels, having been made for their own roads, and are therefore more adapted to this.’

³ CALZADAS are roads made of paving materials, such as granite stones, which were built by the Romans during their seven century civilization on the Iberian Peninsula (2nd century BC – 5th century AD approx.). Their extraordinary design and quality led to their regular use as paths and tracks up to the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays, the word Calzada is written with a Z in Spanish (calzada) and with a Ç in Portuguese (calçada).

The Learning Processes

1808

July – the time of the first landing at Mondego Bay.

Wellesley, during his short march down country had merely hired the ox-wagons of the country-folk from villages through which he had passed, dismissing them as soon as they were relieved by those of another hamlet. Some 500 mules, either provided or requisitioned, were placed under control of the Commissary-General's Department. General Orders state 'Besides the quantity of bread to be carried by the men themselves, a quantity, equal to three days' consumption for 10,000 men, must be carried, if possible, on the backs of mules: viz two bags, or 224lb on each mule; this will require 130 mules ... The medical department will require two carts to march with the army, carrying twenty-four bearers (stretchers) for wounded men, a case of utensils and a medical chest.'

October

Sir Harry Burrard writing to the Sec of State reported that Moore found that wagons and mules were almost unprocurable. Commissary Schaumann arriving at this time was equally in difficulties 'It appeared that the whole army had already drawn their mules from here ... At last I was shown a huge mule stallion which had been used to carry the royal litter and, though otherwise sound, had a broken hoof ... the hoof had been clamped together and mule was only slightly lame.'

1809

Horses and mule were scarce in Portugal particularly since the country had already been scoured to provide transport for Sir John Moore's advance into Spain

April – before the advance to Oporto

In the matter of transport for his army Wellesley fell back upon ox-wagons, though with every intention of replacing the wagons as soon as possible by pack-mules and by horses, of which he was expecting a supply from England. He was as little able as Cradock to perform the miracle of finding mules where they did not exist. So precious were transport animals that he actually sent ships round to Puerto Santa Maria to bring away 100 mules which had been collected by the 40th Regiment at Seville for their own use.

May

After securing Oporto, the men were on short rations of bread. Wellesley had no transport because it became apparent that ox-wagons could not keep up. In the pursuit of Soult into northern Portugal, by 14 May, the artillery with all their exertion could not get beyond Braga; however the 3 Pr Brigade (*drawn by Large Lisbon Mules*) kept up for a further 4 days and got as far as the troops did.

Based on these practical problems, Wellesley seems to have determined that mules alone should be used for purposes of transport.

The allowance for regimental transport was one mule to every troop of cavalry and every company of infantry to carry camp-kettles; there were three additional mules to each battalion of infantry to carry the paymaster's books, the regimental surgeon's chest, the armourer's and entrenching tools: each regiment of cavalry had two mules for the sergeant-armourer's panniers, two for the sergeant-saddler's and two for the veterinary surgeon. It must however be noted that the mules for the entrenching tools, armourer, saddler and veterinary surgeon alone were the property of the public, the remainder being supplied by the regimental officers concerned out of the allowance called 'bat, baggage and forage allowance.' This arrangement gave rise to much friction for, if a regimental mule became useless, the officer whose property it was, having no special allowance to replace it, naturally tried to lay hands on a public, a captured or stolen mule, upon all of which the commissary-general rightly possessed, under General Orders, priority claim. Regimental transport carried no provisions; the standing order being that, whenever the Commissaries could issue the quantity, the infantry must carry three day's bread and the cavalry three day's forage. All victuals being brought forward by the mobile magazines, though they were distributed through brigade or regimental stores.

These mobile magazines consisted, it seems, entirely of pack-animals, though carts were used to bring forward ammunition and military chest. Wellesley could not endure the bullock-carts of the country, the extreme slowness of which, on the hilly roads of Portugal, forbade them to keep up with the main body. One such cart only was allowed to each regiment to carry men who fell sick on the march, that is to say, to serve as an ambulance; all others were strictly forbidden. Officers who, in defiance of Wellesley's orders, took carts for their private baggage were sternly ordered to discard them as a public inconvenience. 'It is a determined measure that no baggage is to be carried upon bullock-carts ... those who have baggage to carry must be provided with mules or horses.' This prohibition naturally brought all kinds of forbidden burdens upon the backs of the regimental mules, an abuse which called down renewed regulations and sharp rebukes

June – prior to the advance into Spain

Wellesley sent his Commissaries forward to purchase mules and to arrange for the subsistence of the troops, for in spite of all his efforts he was still very imperfectly supplied with transport.

The problem continued to be acute throughout the ensuing campaign. In justice to the Supreme Junta it must be said that Commissioners had been sent to collect the animals and victuals for which Wellesley had asked, but the people had driven off all their mules lest they should be seized for the public service, and the Junta's authority was too weak to enforce its demands.

1810

Spring

It was Wellington's strict rule that no corps should join the army until first equipped with regimental transport. It was the habit of the Commissariat at Lisbon first to warn the officers that they must not depend upon the Commissariat for 'first echelon' mules, and next to stimulate them by promising that the battalion soonest equipped with transport should be the first to march to the front. But mules were scarce, and the local traders

greedy. Matters generally ended by the officers throwing themselves upon the Commissariat.

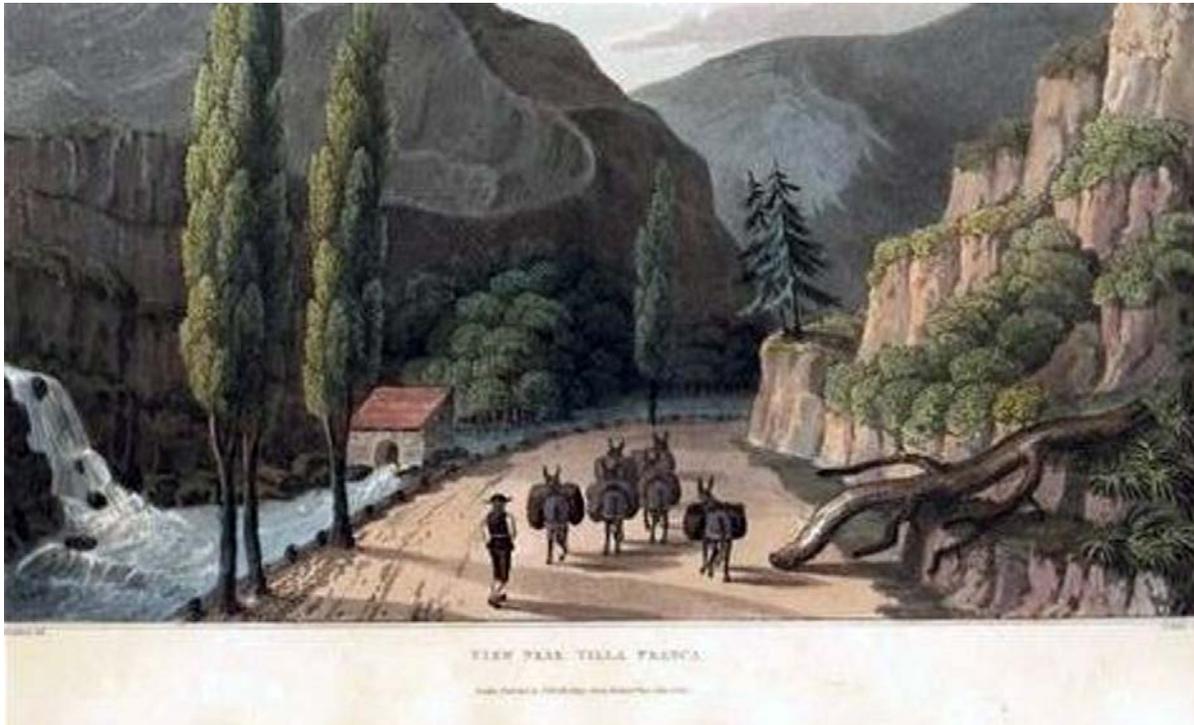
It had also become clear that even the small cart of the Beirao peasant with its solid wheels and moving axels, designed to withstand the rough wear of the country paths, was unsatisfactory for the 'second echelon' (Brigade & Division supply) transport, and Wellington had ordered for it at least the exclusive employment of mules. A number of 'division mules' were attached to each Anglo-Portuguese infantry brigade, cavalry regiment, and field brigade of artillery, which, under the exclusive supervision of the divisional or brigade or regimental commissary, moved back and forth between the formation or unit and its supply depot. The number of mules necessary for this employment varied according to the distance between the depot and the troops, and could be calculated on a purely mathematical basis. Given the fact that mule's load was 200 lbs, that it could go 4 leagues/16 miles in a day (The Portuguese and Spanish leagues were different, and also varied from province to province, but they may be taken as roughly equivalent to four miles, according to Adye's Pocket Gunner), and given the weight of a man's and horse's daily ration, it was not difficult, as Wellington showed, to compute the scale on which mules should be attached to fighting formations. 'A mule', he wrote in speaking of the transport necessary for a cavalry regiment, will 'carry corn for a horse for 20 days; and, it is calculated, will go upon an average of 4 leagues a day. A regiment of cavalry therefore ought to be supplied with mules to carry corn to the horses in such numbers as will bear the same number of days the mules will be travelling to and from the magazine will bear to 20. Thus, if the regiment is 8 leagues from the magazine the mules will be 4 days going to and from. If the regiment should be 12 leagues from the magazine, the mules will be 6 days going and returning, and the number of mules required to keep up the supply will be nearly one-third of the number of horses in the regiment'. Wellington allowed for an average distance of 12 leagues between troops and depot and the average number of mules for each infantry brigade, cavalry regiment or field brigade of artillery varied between 100 and 150. An infantry division complete with its brigade of artillery (six guns) would therefore possess a train of between 400 and 600 mules.

The responsibility for procuring all these forms of transport, including mule transport for the Ordnance corps and the ammunition reserves, was borne by the Commissary-General. The task of the Commissary-General was by this measure eased to some extent, as in both Spain and Portugal it was customary to carry most merchandise on pack animals rather than by wheeled transport. The whole internal commerce of Spain having been dislocated by the French invasion, the vast system of muleteers, with their mules and asses, in the face of unemployment readily placed itself at the disposal of the British Commissariat in ever increasing numbers as the war proceeded.

The creation of a permanent body of mule transport attached to each division is difficult to trace. Something of the kind must have existed both before and after the divisions in 1809, but the emergence of such a system as has been described does not make itself known until the resumption of active operations in September 1810. A divisional baggage train was certainly in existence in the retreat from the Coa on Buçaco in that month, and it is clearly recognizable as a mule-train during the next operation, in which Massena was pursued from the Lines of Lisbon in March 1811. The systematic allotment of the train on a scale devised by Wellington becomes apparent during the autumn of that year, and henceforth the 'division mules' were a permanent feature of Peninsula transport. The gradual transformation of a practice into a system is characteristic of Wellington's method, and in this instance the influence of the Commander is plainly discernible. By allowing the

fighting formations to move, as it were, like a horse on a picket-rope, fifty miles from the forward depots, he gave their movements a mobility which the country's lack of resources in their immediate vicinity would otherwise have denied them.

Even so, in Tomkinson's opinion, it was not for almost another two years that the system of supplying the army by means of mules was brought 'to the greatest perfection,'



The Mules

Mostly Spanish, the muleteers brought varying numbers of mules into the British service, where they were organized into 'mule brigades', which might consist of as few as twenty or as many as fifty mules, each under its own *capataz* or foreman. G Dias de Lunas, to pick one name out of many, brought in five brigades, two of 28, one of 29, one of 132 and the other of 35 mules. The 'brigade' remained the unit and does not appear to have been split up but assigned in its entirety to the charge of the commissary of a division, who kept account of its service and paid (or at any rate owed) the owner, the *capataz* and the muleteers at the rate of a dollar a day for each mule and, according to SGP Ward, a dollar a day for each muleteer; according to Lieut Swabey RHA this was lower; he quotes variously \$1 per week and \$18 per month.

Schaumann, who, as a cavalry commissary officer worked almost exclusively with mules, describes that, amongst the brigade of mules, his foreman – '... had some magnificent beasts which I rode by preference. When they are on the road they are decked with numbers of bells which tinkle melodiously in the distance. If they have not got these bells, the leading mule at the head of the column has a bell, or rather a cylinder, slung around his neck, the constant clanging of which makes the rest follow. (described by Ford as a copper bell with a wooden clapper, "*cencerro zumbon*" which is shaped like an ice-mould, sometimes two feet long, and hangs from the neck, being contrived, as it were, on purpose to knock the animal's knees as much as possible.) According to the cruel Arab custom, neither horses nor mules are allowed to lie down in their stables; they are given

high-sounding names such as Queen, Frigate, Coney, Count, Princess. Their endurance, strength, unexacting wants and gentle pace, and the fine manners and certainty with which they climb up and down the impracticable mountain roads in which the country abounds, are incredible. I have often travelled as many as forty-five miles with them in one day, and they carry the largest loads day after day, on long marches, and patiently and unwearingly subsist on the most exiguous supplies of food and water.'

According to Ford 'The bearer of all this tintinnabular clatter is chosen from its superior docility and knack in picking out a way. The others follow their leader and the noise he makes when they cannot see him.'

With these bells on Spanish pack mules there is an account of the anxiety with which a cavalry regiment, who were out of rations, listened for the sound of the bells coming up from the rear.

One contemporary source describes that the backs of the mules were closely shaved and the tails tied up in a bunch with red or other coloured worsted binding.

Capt Eliot describes that 'The muleteers both in Spain and Portugal have a custom of shearing the hair quite close on the back and sides of their beasts, in order to prevent the pack-saddle galling them; the rump is usually ornamented by this means with flowers and other devices. On one in Spain I saw the following ludicrous caricature – the Devil welcoming *Señor Don Josef Naopoleon* to his infernal mansion; underneath was carved, *Entra Señor D Josef, siempre servicio de usted* (*Enter Signior Don Joseph, I am ever at your service*; a common phrase in the country).'

Richard Ford wrote the Handbook for Spain in about 1830, however many traditional aspects probably did not change over the years; he describes 'The mules in Spain, as in the East, have their coats closely shorn or clipped; part of the hair is usually left on it striped like the zebra, or cut into fanciful patterns, like the tattooings of an Indian chief. This process of shearing is found to keep the beast cooler and freer from cutaneous disorders. The operation is performed in the southern provinces by gipsies, "*gitanos*" who are the same tinkers, horse-dealers and vagrants in Spain as elsewhere. In the northern provinces all this is done by Arragonese, who, in costume, good-for-nothingness, and most respects are no better than the worst real gipsies. (*one detects a little prejudice here ?*) The mule-clippers are called "*esquiladores*"; they may be known by the formidable shears, *tijeras*, *gipsicè* "*caches*", which they carry in their sashes. They are very particular in clipping the pastern and heels, which they say ought to be as free from hair as the palm of a lady's hand.'

Interestingly, in a letter to his brother James, who was sailing out to the Peninsula, Major Edward Cocks suggested that he bought his horses and mules on arrival in Lisbon (the latter preferable *macho* or he mules) he added: 'your horse and mule must be of the same sex or you will have great trouble.'

As mentioned earlier, mules need smaller amounts of feed than horses of comparable height and weight. Kincaid found this out the hard way in 1812 (page 87)

My Irish *criado* ... exchanged my baggage-horse for another. ... I found that he could eat as much as he could carry, and ... he was obliged to carry all that he could eat ... I was obliged to put him on half allowance to make room for my baggage; ... an exchange between him and a mule, getting five dollars to the bargain.

The British commissary was under an obligation to provide the following quantities of these provisions:

Horses, and carriage and saddle-mules: 10lb oats, barley or Indian corn, hay or cut straw

Mules: 5lb oats, barley or Indian corn, 10lb cut straw

Dickson was obviously working on this basis of 10lbs per day in April 1810:

Return of the number of artillery mules belonging to the brigade of Portuguese artillery at Cabeço de Vide and the proportion of corn necessary for the same for three days. Mules 108 Corn pounds 3,240

For the lower echelons, according to Maj Gen Long, the innumerable mules of the Spanish muleteers were grazed in the fields as they travelled along.

When one studies the various artillery returns in the Dickson Manuscripts it is apparent that mules were much hardier than horses and less prone to illnesses. Even so, heavy campaigning took its toll, as his entry for 4 March 1813 explains

‘Pray inform the Marshal (Beresford) that in inspecting the mules I observed that a good many are not yet sufficiently re-established from the severe fatigue of the late campaign, and that several have had mange which is however now nearly cured (being the case also in every respect with most of the British Artillery horses I have seen).

In stating this I must observe that the Officers appear to have taken every care possible of their animals, which will all however require green food for three or four weeks, and then I think almost all will be efficient for active service.’

Even though Schaumann describes his mules as having ‘fine manners’, they have a general reputation for being stubborn. However, this is probably due to some handlers’ misinterpretation of their highly-developed sense of self-preservation. It is difficult to force or frighten a donkey into doing something it sees as contrary to its own best interest.

The Muleteers

The muleteers, usually one to every three beasts, were on the Commissariat role of employees, and given the same ration as the troops.

Lieut William Swabey, “E” Troop Royal Horse Artillery (4th Nov 1812) noted in his diary –

‘Our commissariat supplies were regularly brought to us by alternate services of two brigades of muleteers, one of these was Spanish and the other was Portuguese. The Spaniards were Andalusians, the finest specimens of that superb people. The Portuguese had some very handsome fellows among them, particularly the *capitão* or leader.’

However, for George Simmons, being evacuated on 27 July 1810, having been wounded after the Combat on the Coa, was not so fortunate and ‘found the Portuguese muleteers had disappeared and left the spring wagons without the mules.’

Schaumann, describes the leader of his mule brigade as 'a well-to-do Castilian peasant and an exceedingly honest man.'

Wellington also had certain respect for them; writing to Lieut Colonel Torrens on 2nd Nov 1810

'The Spanish muleteers, who perform the greatest part of the transport service of the army, would not submit to the brutal violence of a drunken English soldier, and these people would desert with their mules, if escorted by troops; and I believe that the delays which the drunkenness and irregularity of the troops would have occasioned in the arrival of the stores, and the loss by their own thieving, would have been still greater than those suffered by the dishonesty of the muleteers.'

In his book *A Treatise on the Defence of Portugal* published in 1811, Captain Eliot makes some interesting observations on Portuguese muleteers

'The *Arriéiros*, or muleteers, are another hardy race of peasantry; after the vintage they are chiefly employed in conveying the wine to the more distant parts of the kingdom by the mountain passes, on the backs of their mules. Each muleteer has generally four of these animals, called a *tiro*, under his charge. They frequently march in convoys of three or four hundred, and the care the drivers bestow on their mules is astonishing. During the journey the man and his beasts partake of the same fare, consisting of bread made of the Indian corn, soaked in wine, an excellent food for the horse when fatigued, and of which the country horses are particularly fond. In the heat of the day the convoy halts; the beasts with their fore legs tied, are covered with a blanket to keep off the flies, which are exceeding troublesome, are turned to graze; whilst the drivers enjoy the siesta, or afternoon's nap, a custom common to the whole of the inhabitants of the peninsula. At this time in all the country towns the shops are shut, from about one o'clock till three; the stillness of the night reigns throughout the place, and according to a saying of the Portuguese, none but Englishmen and dogs are to be seen in the streets.

Schaumann again recalls that

'the Spanish muleteers form a large and hardy class of men. They seldom change their clothes or sleep under shelter throughout the year; they are always on the road and are very merry and constantly singing. When their mules are hired out for riding they are able to run alongside them at a trot for ten miles at a stretch in the greatest heat without getting tired. (*see the illustration depicting this*) While running along in this way they fling their arms about and this seems to give them great relief. They are very temperate, but also greedy and devoted, and I had many in my brigade, who, if I had wanted it, would have faced death for me. More than once, on retreats and marches, while in charge of my baggage and public funds, and when everything was in confusion, they were separated from me and might easily have escaped and made their fortune by doing so, but they always turned up sooner or later. They wore large black felt hats with tassels, short jackets, a mantle, a blanket with a hole in the middle for their heads, blue plush breeches and spats or sandals.

On arriving at an inn or public house, they are very smart in finding accommodation for themselves and their beasts. Eggs cooked in oil, cod-fish, garlic, sardines, bread

and a measure of wine are then prepared, and round this meal they sit, to the accompaniment of much noise and smacking of lips. In the morning, before they start on a march, they always like, if possible, to attend mass at the nearest chapel or church. But towards the end, the war had turned them into such radical free-thinkers that, not only did they cease to trouble about mass, but actually assisted in the plundering of churches, and decked themselves and their beasts in the vestments of the priests.'

Richard Ford did not seem quite so enamoured with them

'The muleteer either walks by the side of his animal or sits aloft on the cargo, with his feet dangling on the neck, a seat which is by no means so uncomfortable as it would appear. His rude gun hangs in readiness by his side; The approach of the caravan is announced from afar: "How carols now the lusty muleteer!" For when not engaged in swearing or smoking, the livelong day is passed in one monotonous high-pitched song. The same absence of thought which is shown in England by whistling is displayed in Spain by singing. "*Quien canta sus males espanta*"; accordingly, either a song, an oath or a cigar are always in his mouth !'

There were however some fundamental differences, as Wellington explained to Colonel Gordon on 12th June 1811

'In addition to embarrassments of all descriptions surrounding us on all sides, I have to contend with an ancient enmity between these two nations (*Spain and Portugal*), which is more like that of a cat and dog than anything else, of which no sense of common danger, or common interest, or anything, can get better, even in individuals.

Our transport, which is the great lever of the commissariat, is done, principally, if not entirely, by Spanish muleteers; and, to oblige Mr Kennedy, they would probably once or twice carry provisions to a Portuguese regiment, but they would prefer to quit us, and attend the French, to be obliged to perform this duty constantly.'

So long as Portuguese battalions were mixed up with the British, the haughty Spaniards could not tell whether or not they were serving their despised neighbours.

On 16th Dec 1810 Wellington wrote to his brother, the Right Hon H Wellesley, the British Ambassador to Spain

'I have had some difficulties lately with the Spanish muleteers attached to the British army, in consequence of the general requisition which is said to be made of all individuals of the military ages for the (*Spanish*) army.

I hope some arrangement will be adopted upon this subject; and can I only say that if something is not done, and I am to be deprived of all those persons of this description who have until now been attached to this army, I shall be entirely crippled, and it will be a question whether we ought not to quit the Peninsula entirely. I doubt that even here (*Cartaxo, behind the Lines of Torres Vedras in Portugal*) we could exist one day without their assistance.'

It falls to Lieut Gen RB Long writes the most eloquent tribute

‘The spare ammunition for the Troops is conveyed in this manner, and follows the columns, and I have seen these fellows always at their posts regardless of the Enemy or his fire. I think an observation I heard the other day not a very unjust one – that the Spanish muleteers ought to be the nobility of Spain, and all Nobility muleteers.’

Dress

Obviously there was no uniform style of dress, but the Spanish in particular are described in several diaries.

Schaumann, quoted above, records that ... They wore large black felt hats with tassels, short jackets, a mantle, a blanket with a hole in the middle for their heads, blue plush breeches and spats or sandals.

Another, un-recorded, source describes that they ... wore large hats, or a pocket handkerchief of various colours tied around their head with the corners hanging down their backs. They have a sort of red Moorish sash around the loins; dark blue or green velveteen breeches open at the knee; and leather gaiters with innumerable buttons up the sides and open in the middle so as to show off the calf of the leg to advantage.

Edmund Weatley noted that ... the more buttons they can show on their waistcoats and trousers, the finer they are dressed in their own opinion. He also recalls them as ... rascals who carry long knives in their breeches and they do not scruple to use them.



Image taken by René Chartrand; Courtesy of Osprey Men-at-arms Series, No 334 [Spanish Army of the Napoleonic Wars \(3\) 1812-1815](#) by René Chartrand

The illustration covers many of these aspects of costume. Although these muleteers have rather small hats, their hair is tied up in handkerchiefs. The left-hand figure has ribbons on his shoulders, whilst the central figure has bands worn on both jacket sleeves. Both the left and central figures have a sash. The left figure has buttons just visible on his left cuff and down the side of his breeches, as well down the sides of his gaiters. The central figure may not be sporting any buttons or have gaiters, however he does have a very fancy pair of Spanish spurs. The right-hand figure displays the 'innumerable buttons' and he has these open on the thighs of his breeches; probably because he is needing to run with his mules, his lower legs are bare and he appears to have long-laced sandals.

Hire

Lieut Gen RB Long writing in 1811:

... each mule is paid one dollar per diem, besides a ration for the muleteer and ½ ration of forage for his beasts. Some Spaniards have 50 mules of their own thus employed, and as they are fed chiefly in the fields, they absolutely realise per diem a better salary than the Commander in Chief himself receives.

*Note: One Spanish dollar = 4s 6d 50 mules = 225 shillings / £11.25 per diem⁴
Army Pay per diem – Colonel Cavalry: 32s 10d Infantry: 22s 6d*

Thus it is a very valid comment. However, given the factors involved:

- the investment in the beast had a replacement value of, say £60,
- it was actively involved on campaign with the high risks of hunger, disease, death or capture / appropriation by the enemy
- very late payment by the contractor, leading to financing costs of a further £20+
- when paid in British Treasury Bills, these would need to be negotiated at a discount then the annual hire, which amounted to £82 per year, was not too unreasonable.

Whilst Long quotes some persons having 50 employed, SGP Ward, quoted above, refers to a G Dias de Lunas, to pick one name out of many, brought in five brigades, two of 28, one of 29, one of 132 and the other of 35 mules; this was 252 mules, netting £56.70 per diem !!

Tomkinson felt that had it been possible to have paid the muleteers earlier than they were, more reasonable terms might have been agreed. As it was, a 'dollar per diem for each mule was an immense allowance.'

By July, in the Summer 1811, the pay of the muleteers was already six months in arrear. In November 1811 Swabey noted in his diary 'Intelligence came from the paymaster to say that Lord Wellington would not allow a halfpenny to be issued to the troops but had appropriated the money to the payment of the muleteers and others concerned in the transport of the provisions for the army.'

By September 1812 a proportion of the muleteers had not been paid for as long as fifteen months.

In December 1813 Wellington wrote to His Excellency the Minister at War, Cadiz

⁴ This is equivalent to £811.60 per day / £296,234 per year in 2014 !

‘The greater number of the muleteers with this army have been with us from 2 to 5 campaigns. They came voluntarily to be hired; and they stay, not because they were well paid, for I am sorry to say that the debt due to them is very large, but because their accounts are regularly kept; they are worked with regularity, they are well treated and taken care of; justice is done them; and they know that the debt due to them, however large, will be paid.’

On the same subject he also wrote to Earl Bathurst

‘Your Lordship is also acquainted with the state of our financial resources. We are overwhelmed with debts, and I can scarcely stir out of my house on account of the public creditors waiting to demand payment of what is due to them. Some of the muleteers are 26 months in arrears; and only yesterday I was obliged to give them bills upon the Treasury for a part of their demands, or lose their services.’

Some have asserted that the payment in arrears of muleteers was deliberate policy, not just because money was tight, which while it may have caused some discontent and occasional recalcitrant or theft, discouraged desertion, for in such circumstances they would lose the accumulating wages due to them. I would tend to disagree with this statement.

There is no doubt that, for various reasons some ‘withdraw their services’ which could encourage fraudulent practices by Commissaries ... another way was when dealing with muleteers, ‘many of whom were owners of ten to twenty mules’ and were paid ‘a dollar a day for each mules, and likewise furnished with a ration for themselves & their animals.’ As this payment was frequently several months in arrears, in despair some of them eventually deserted, taking their mules. ‘Thus all their arrears of pay were forfeited, but these arrears were drawn by the Commissary when the day for payment came & remained in his own pocket.’

Purchase: Supply / Demand = Price

Supply

1809

Schaumann – The mules and horses that were offered for sale were, however, either lame or blind, or excessively dear. All the good ones had been purchased by the army already on the road. ...all horses, mules and donkeys in the small town has already been requisitioned for the public service, and were not to be had even at a high price ...

mid-July – during the advance into Spain The most of the reinforcements were detained at Lisbon for want of twelve mules apiece for their regimental transport.

1810

The Commissariat in despair was fain to send to Tangier for both mules and oxen. Happily this resource proved to be successful in the matter of mules.

1811

Marmont wrote to Berthier: 'I beg urgently for twelve to fifteen hundred pack-mules for my supplies ... The English have twelve thousand pack-animals for their artillery and supplies; hence all their movements are made at ease and they draw their beasts from Spain.'

1812

Dickson submitted two sets of calculations of the number of mules required for draught and transporting of 6, 9 and 24 Pr howitzer brigades , allowing for each 180 rounds a gun, and 120 rounds per gun as a reserve, as also the number of mules necessary for conveying 6 days corn and provisions for the same:

Draught Mules: Battery 670
Reserve 302
Baggage Mules: 329
Total: 1,301

However he comments that 'with that proportion of ammunition require a number of mules much greater than it may be possible to supply. I also enclose diminished calculations for those brigades as agreed on in conversation with His Excellency (Beresford).' His revised calculation saved 531 mules:

Draught Mules: Battery 555
Reserve 0
Baggage Mules: 215
Total: 770

1813

18 April – Captain Cator had succeeded in purchasing 300 mules at Seville.

17 May – letter from Sir RH Kennedy, Chief Commissary, to Lord Fitzroy Somerset, Wellington's Military Secretary.

'I sent one hundred & ten mules and a Commissariat Officer on the 14th inst. to Sabugal to join the Reserve Artillery under command of Captains Thompson & Cleves. I this day sent one hundred and twenty mules & a Commissariat Officer to join Captains Hutchesson & Bentham at Sabugal upon their arrival there. I am in hopes of having about two hundred mules at my disposal tomorrow or the following day, and it is my intention to attach them likewise to the Artillery. I have no expectation of any more mules at present.'

Demand

George Simmons Sept 1809: The officers of our regiment – most of them ride on horses or mules – did not experience the fatigues (of the marches) so materially. As I had no money to spare, I was obliged to walk.

April 1810: In our company we have three mules and an ass to carry provisions and wine, which, when we move about, we carry in deer skins.

By July 1812 he had two mules.

John Kincaid, writing in 1810, 'A brother-officer was kind enough to strap my boat-cloak and portmanteau on the mule carrying his heavy baggage.'

John Blakiston, appointed to a company in a Portuguese Caçadores regiment in 1813 had two horses and two mules, and nothing but a little Portuguese boy to look after them.

Lt Swabey RHA, 21st June 1813 at Vitoria – My baggage had meantime arrived and I ordered my servants to unpack my two mules and my led horse ...

When Lieutenant-Colonel Hussey Vivian took the 7th Hussars to the Peninsula campaign in 1813, he equipped himself with seven horses, four mules and one pony.

By 21 January 1813, Gen Charles Colville had rejoined the 3rd Division (*he commanded the 2nd Brigade*) ... together with his nephew as ADC with four horses and seven mules.

One British brigadier, Maj-Gen FP Robinson had only a single staff officer (his Brigade Major) and an aide-de-camp in 1813, yet he did not live in solitary discomfort for his establishment included twelve servants 'Four horses, Ten mules, Five sheep, Two goats & a large Dog', and was, he thought, one of the most modest in the army.

Spring 1813 Samuel Broughton remarked on the 'concourse of mules, carrying the baggage of the army, and the various camp followers, [which] occupied more than treble the space of the army itself, and presented a moving scene so far as the eye could reach on all sides.'

Price

The Defence of Portugal by Eliot, page 344: 1 Spanish dollar = 4s 6d

Traditionally the prices of horses are quoted in Guineas.

In pre-decimal currency this was 21 shillings / £1 1shilling = £1.05

1810

Schaumann: The price of a mule depends on its size, strength and beauty. Fifty to sixty guineas (£52.50 to £63) are frequently paid for a first-class mule.⁵

1811

Wellington wrote to Beresford in August that it was out of the question to purchase many mules, for their price had risen to 150 dollars/£45 apiece – this seems very low, but he was at Castello Branco.

Lt Swabey RHA, newly arrived in Lisbon the same month, needed to pay much more – 'Horses of middling value, worth £50 in England, are sold here for £150, mules frequently for £80.'

⁵ £63 in 1810 would be the equivalent of £4,419 in 2014 - and £80 in 1812 the equivalent of £5,082 !

1812

Schaumann purchased a charger (*very good horse*) for £80.

Simmons – I am very unlucky with my animals, and no person can be more careful... One day my horse took it into his head to fight. He was kicked upon the thigh, and being on the march, he died. By him I lost two hundred dollars (£45) The mule that bought my brother through the retreat died this morning; about 130 dollars (£29.25) lost for ever.

On page 265 he states "I sent into town for a pound of English butter, only six shillings per pound." These days English butter is a bit more than £2 per pound.

Assuming the same relationships of price levels, this would convert to :

<i>cost of a horse</i>	S\$200	=	£45	=	£300
<i>cost of a mule</i>	S\$130	=	£29	=	£195

Relying to a comment in a letter from his father – ‘Do not talk to me about Spanish donkeys. It is really too ridiculous. You had better request me to send you a load of diamonds !’

1813

GR Glieg, 85th Foot, disembarked at Passages in mid-August

‘The following day was spent chiefly in purchasing horsed and mules, which were brought in great abundance, by the country people, to the camp. For these we, of course, paid considerably more than their just value; but it was essentially necessary to procure them without delay, as we were in hourly expectation of a move.’

Simmons – My riding horse, which cost me twenty guineas (£21)... I bought Joe (*his younger brother in the same battalion*) a good pony. I have now got him a strong donkey to carry his equipage, so he is not dependent upon me.

1814

Simmons – following the Battle of Orthez

A horse of mine died here. I purchased a horse for twenty-five dollars ... The next morning the Frenchman would not have sold me the horse under a hundred dollars (£22.25), so that I was very lucky.

The Work Done by Mules

Capt Eliot states that they were chiefly employed in conveying wine to the more distant parts of the kingdom by the mountain passes, on the backs of their mules.

The wine carried in this manner is stowed in large hogskins turned inside out, the seams neatly sewed and pitched, in consequence of which it has rather a disagreeable taste, particularly if the skins are new; for this reason old skins are

valuable; two of them when full are a load for a mule. They are carried one on each side, on a packsaddle without a tree, and a pad over it; underneath this the muleteer places his blanket, and covers the cargo with a few sheep or goats skins, which together with his cloak forms his bed; no despicable one either. During the whole of the late campaign in Spain and Portugal, I used it constantly, with the difference only, that instead of placing the blanket next to the animal on the march, I put it between the pack-saddle and the pad, which preserved it dry, whereas, in the first instance, the perspiration makes it disagreeable.'



The pack-saddles issued to Wellington's Army in Spain and Portugal from 1808 onwards: They were called 'Devonshire crooks' or 'haucoms' (the saddles were also known as 'cradles' . The 'Devonshire crook' saddle, as used on the farms in the West for all classes of farm produce, tools, etc, was made by bending strong poles of willow sapling, cut green and bent into the required shape for the two arches, and when dried out connected by sideboards like any other saddle. The arches, or pommels and cantles, were known as the crooks and were connected with longer sideboards for loads like sheaves of wheat and shorter ones for heavier material. A third type for carrying manure, etc, was known as a 'dung-pot' and must have been some sort of pannier. The same type was in use on farms in central Spain.

This then was the prototype of the Army pack-saddle of the times, which, judging by its successor, would have weighed between 40 and 50 lb. The whole tree would certainly have been made of beech-wood like the Army Saddles, both for Heavy and Light cavalry. Each infantry battalion had 13 mules with these pack-saddles. Each company of infantry had a mule for the camp kettles, the surgeon had one for his panniers, these being the crooked haucoms – the boarded haucoms took entrenching tools and the straight haucoms the paymaster's books. Each cavalry regiment had 14 mules; cavalry had two mules for the sergeant-armourer's panniers and two for the sergeant-saddler's. In addition, each squadron of cavalry had mules, four in number, for the portable forges issued to each regiment.

The Portable Cavalry Forges were invented by Captain Scovell, Deputy Quartermaster General on Headquarters Staff, in 1810. In countries having passable tracks for wheeled vehicles, especially in Ireland, the farriers' forges and tools were carried on two-wheeled carts with two horses abreast, the off horse being in shafts; but the carts were too heavy

for a pair and on the Portuguese and Spanish tracks could not keep up with mounted men. A horse needs to be shod all round every three weeks, more often if the roads are rocky, and though a horse will carry on for some time in grass country unshod or shod only in front, this is never satisfactory. On active service it the farriers were to keep abreast of their work their forges had to be available immediately their unit halted for the night, which was never the case with the carts. This was the sort of problem that Wellington thoroughly understood. As soon as sets were available early in 1811 two were issued for trial at Headquarters, the pattern was slightly modified, and by April 1812 all regiments had them. Each mule carried load of about 200 lb, excluding the saddle. The specification for the fitting of the saddle taking the anvil, weighing 37 lb, was that it should be contained 'in a strong leather case with a back of wood larger than the anvil so as to lie easy on the side of the mule with things of equal weight to balance it on the other side, or the side of the saddle should be of wood.' Presumably this means that both sides should be fitted with 'boarded haucoms'. This arrangement was a great success and these portable forges were still in use in the present (20th) century fitted for packs. One mule carried iron and one coal, the other two had the tools and anvil. The Arsenal at Lisbon made these forges and, though it is not stated, it is presumed that the saddles were the GS pattern. In time, this invention would be credited with saving dozens of horses.

These were not the only pack-saddles used in the Peninsula; the Spanish so-called 'Albarda' of the treeless type was used in large numbers by the Commissariat mules hired in thousands in Spain with their own muleteers. This saddle, like all those in use in Spain, weighed about 60 lb, was heavy and bulky, well stuffed and very satisfactory. There were various types of fittings, a pair of panniers of triangular or sugarloaf form, thrown over the saddle, points downwards and fastened together with a rope under the belly; and the Small Arms Ammunition carriers taking 1,000 rounds of ball cartridge, slung as high as possible up the mule's sides, with lighter packages on top between them. This is the earliest description of ammunition saddles met with. These saddles had covers, either woollen or tarpaulin and the muleteer rode on the pommel of the leading mule with two or three mules fastened to the pack of the mule in front. Bales, portmanteaux or canteens were slung in the same way and as officers had to carry everything on pack mules the containers were made specially to fit the saddles. A sumpter mule had two or three small wicker panniers a side, 'and if the load is light your cook can ride too'. If no containers were used each saddle had two large rectangular panniers to hold whatever was required. Capt Eliot recommended that for Portuguese mules 'particular care should be taken not to overload the beasts; two hundredweight is sufficient for a mule.' [*being equal to 16 stone / 224 pounds / 102 kilogrammes*]

Ford observed that

they are heavily but scientifically laden. The cargo of each is divided into three portions "*tercios*": one is tied on each side and the other placed between. If the cargo be not nicely balanced the muleteer either unloads or adds a few stones to the lighter portion – the additional weight being compensated by the greater comfort with which a well-poised burden is carried. These "Sumpter" mules are gaily decorated with trappings full of colour and tags. A complete furniture is called an "*aparejo redondo*". The head-gear is generally equally gay, being composed of different coloured worsteds, to which a multitude of small bells are affixed; hence the saying "*muger de mucha campanilla*", a woman of many bells, of much show, much noise or pretension.

Schaumann recalls

‘When ladies travel on mules, two often sit together, one on either side of the mule, which looks very picturesque. If wool is being transported, it is impossible to see the poor brutes; all one can perceive are three enormous sacks, one on each side almost trailing on the ground, and one on top, and they look as if they were moving along automatically.’

General Orders for 4th July 1809 :

17. The Commander of the Forces requests the attention of general Officers commanding divisions and brigades to the General Order of the 4th and 5th March, by the late Commander of the Forces, relative to the use of mules allowed for carrying camp kettles, in any service excepting the carriage of camp kettles.

18. The consequence of loading them with baggage is, that they are unequal to carry the kettles which they are given to convey, and the loads are so ill put on that they fall from the mules, and the camp kettles do not arrive from the march till after the hour at which they ought to be used by the troops.

In the winter of 1812-13, Wellington adopted the practice, originally suggested by Craufurd but then rejected as impracticable, of serving out tin camp-kettles to the men, to be carried by themselves. The mules which had hitherto been used for carrying the iron kettles were now destined to carry tents, for the army was in future to encamp and not to bivouac, partly to keep it in better health, partly to remove it from the temptations of towns and villages.

Johnny Kincaid of the Rifles, writing about 1811, relates

‘As our baggage was always in the rear on occasions of this kind, the officers of each company had a Portuguese boy, in charge of a donkey, on whom their little comforts depended. He carried our boat-cloaks and blankets, was provided with a small pig-skin for wine, a canteen for spirits, a small quantity of tea and sugar, a goat tied to the donkey, and two or three dollars in his pocket for the purchase of bread, butter or any other luxury which fortune might throw in his way in the course of the day’s march.’

Being a cavalryman however, Tomkinson obviously believed in campaigning in style. In 1813 he set out his ‘Plan for baggage in Spain’ :

The whole of the baggage to be carried on two mules, each of which being *good* will march constantly with 300 pounds. (*the larger Andalusian-Cordobesan mules could certainly carry much more than others*)

One of the mules to carry a trunk for clothes, which is to be balanced by a canteen*. The second mule to carry two baskets**, or one, which must be balanced with a tent and bed – English packsaddles – to be made to keep well off the backbone.

*The canteen to be very complete should dine six people, though four is sufficient.

Twelve plates – four or six of each of which to be deep enough for soup – six dishes, two of which should be covered, and one of them deep enough for soup,

with a cover making a dish of itself. Six silver cups for wine. The same, but larger for water – Queen’s metal, very good. Neither knives nor forks in the canteen, but in two leather rollers, and, if room, a place may be left in the canteen, though they will carry anywhere. The soup ladle to be in the canteen and to answer for a punch ladle. The soup dish to answer for a punch bowl; decanters in the canteen. Four tea-cups and saucers. Independent of which, a basket for picket, containing two plates, both deep enough for soup, a coffee-pot, kettle to boil meat in, *frying pan*, two tea-cups and saucers. Space for cold meat, tea, etc. These will go, though not so well, in the wallet.

**The two baskets

One contains three partitions

1st For a nest of kettles, with a smaller one for kitchen knife, spoon, etc, with a *penrice spit*. In the nest of kettles two or three things for tarts, pies, etc.

2nd Butter tub, oil can, kitchen lamp, pickle jar, lard, etc.

3rd Tins for flour, rice, sugar. *Tin for candles*. The four, rice, etc, as well in bags.

The 2nd basket contains a partition for meat, with a cover to separate salt from fresh; another for vegetables, and a third for hams. This is better with only one partition, the other things to be carried in bags.

A wine and brandy tub. A picket tent. Four or six table cloths. Knife cloths. The handle to the tea kettle to be fixed to it. Neither tinder box, lamp, nor any of those small things in the canteen.

Artillery – British & KGL

Lisbon April 10, 1809 State of the Five Brigades of Artillery in the Field	Horses		Mules	
	Riding	Draught	Riding	Draught
Light 6 Pr	6	45		8
Light 6 Pr	8	45	3	53
Light 6 Pr	4	75	4	21
Heavy 6 Pr		74		50
Light 3 Pr				66
	18	239	7	198

Remarks:

The guns are supplied with English Horses except the 3-pounder Brigade which is furnished with large Lisbon mules

All other wheel draught is in general from English Horses and the leading draught from country horses and mules; the latter are too small and weak in this service.

Part of the non-commissioned officers of drivers, the clerks and conductors of stores are supplied from the most inferior horses and mules not fit for draught.

The mules of Captain Lawson’s Brigade of six Light 3 Pounders are described as being very fine ‘large Lisbon mules’ which would indicate that were probably about 15 hands, the same size as artillery horses. Alexander Dickson, writing to General McLeod on 12th April states “it really is a pretty brigade, chiefly drawn by the fine carriage mules of Lisbon, almost beyond price.”

Wellington's campaign in May 1809 was to drive Marshal Soult out of northern Portugal. As Dickson notes in his *Manuscript* for that year, this Brigade was ideally suited for the most difficult route that was taken:

14th & 15th May – they pursued the French retreat though Penafiel, Guimarens to Salamonde. “These guns kept up very well, whilst none of the 6 Pounder Brigades which had followed the coast road were able to advance beyond Braga.

16th May – late in the afternoon the Guards and just two of the 3 Pounders joined the Dragoons confronting Merle's rearguard.

18th May – marched from Ruivaens to Montalegre. “The 3 Pr. Brigade got on as far as the troops did. *However the cost was high*

20th May – “The 3 Pr. Brigade suffered so much from the dreadful mountain roads as to be obliged to remain in Braga to refit.”

Cuppage Light 3 pounder

The British Brigade of Col Cuppage's mountain 3 Pounders was later transferred into Portuguese service. Schaumann detailed their organisation – ‘one mule bears the falconet (*barrel*), another the carriage, and another the ammunition. And by the means of some shears which were easily adjusted, the gun is lifted from the mule without difficulty, put together and replaced.’⁶

The British & KGL guns and limbers employed draught horses, however a number of draught and pack mules were also on the strength. 2nd Capt RM Cairnes RA writing on 4 April 1813

‘The other five spare carriages are the Forge, the Spare Wheel, the two Store-waggon, & the Captain's Cart *of two wheels* – which is to carry the books of your Serjt. Major (for returns), Pay Serjeant's books, etc, etc, and any little spare things he may have, such as shirts, stockings for the men, etc. The rest is for the *Jolly Captain's Shirts & Stockings, etc*, besides a mule for his other traps (slang: goods and chattels of any kind, but especially luggage and personal effects; probably a contracted form of “trappings”). I think I shall take a Captain's marquee for myself this campaign, but if I do, I must, I fear, buy a mule for the purpose; which will be rather a snipe (slang: meaning a long bill).

Five of my spare carriages (the two Store wagons, the 2 Reserve Ammunition & small-store Cart) are drawn by mules, and for them I prefer these animals, as they are not likely to go under fire, and are so hardy under privations.’

⁶ An excellent drawing of how Col Cuppage's Light 3 pdrs was transported can be found on page 166 of *British Napoleonic Field Artillery* by CE Franklin published by Spellmount.

26 April 1813	State of horses and mules	Horses		Mules	Total
Capt Cleve's (KGL Artillery)	1st Division of Reserve	English	Country		
	Effective on parade	52	12	32	
	with 2nd Captain A Thompson	1		3	
	at Head Quarters for money			2	
	Orderlies			1	
	Total on 26th	53	12	38	
	Joined 27th April from Lieut Evans	40	5	10	
	Transferred 27th to Lieut Evans	6	3	3	
		87	14	45	146
	Distribution :				
	for draught	87		37	
	for riding & pack		14	8	

2 October 1813	From Capt (Brevet Lieut Col) AS Fraser RHA to Dickson								
	Lt-Col Ross			Major Smith			Capt Ramsay (Bull's)		
	Horses	Mules	Total	Horses	Mules	Total	Horses	Mules	Total
Effective	126	25	151	164	11	175	163	24	187
	76%	96%		87%	79%		95%	96%	
Sick at present	13		13	12		12			0
Worn out or clearly objectionable, including blind	23	1	24	11	3	14	5	1	6
Unservicable	3		3	2		2	3		3
Total	165	26	191	189	14	203	171	25	196
Numbers actually required, exclusive of spare			277			185			185

Artillery – Portuguese

Dickson describes them as ‘The Portuguese guns had no limbers, the shafts serving as a trail; they went with double draft by means of an outrigger. Their ammunition was carried on mules with pack saddles.’ Due to the extreme shortages and limitations of Portuguese horses, their artillery only employed mules, both for draught, pack and riding.

A calculation by Dickson of the number of mules required for draft and transporting the ammunition of a Portuguese 9 Pdr brigade with 180 rounds per gun and 120 rounds for reserve. Also the number of mules necessary for the conveyance of six days corn and six days bread and spirits for the men:

Elvas	20 April 1811	Draught Mules	Baggage Mules
	5 x 9 Prs and 1 howitzer, each at 8	48	
	18 waggons, being 189 rounds per gun & 135 per howitzer, at 6	108	
	Forge	6	
Battery	Wheel car	6	
	2 Store carts	4	
	Riding for Officers and N.C. Officers	14	
	Spare	18	

		204	
	12 waggons, 120 per gun & 90 per howitzer, at 6	72	
Reserve	Spare	6	
	For conveying 6 days corn for the foregoing		84
	For conveying 6 days bread and spirits		12
		78	96
	Total	282	96

Artillery – Spanish

Again observed by Dickson on 26 February 1810

‘A large corps of Spanish artillery arrived here this day belonging to the army late the Duke del Parques. There was about twenty pieces of cannon, a great many ammunition carriages, mules loaded with ammunition and upwards of 500 men. The artillery and carriages etc appeared strong and efficient, although arranged and equipped in a most slovenly manner. They were generally drawn by mules, from 5 to 8 employed according to the size of the gun etc. The mules were fine ones but many of them out of order.’

Commissariat

Return of Muleteers and mules belonging to the Commissariat Department and attached to the different troops and brigades of Royal Artillery for the undermentioned purposes.

	Nov 10, 1810							
	Number carrying small-arm ammunition with the divisions		Number carrying forage and provisions		Number carrying general stores		Number carrying gun ammunition	
	Mules	Muleteers	Mules	Muleteers	Mules	Muleteers	Mules	Muleteers
Capt Bull's Troop Cavalry Division	37	12	22	8	12	4		
Capt Ross' Troop Light Division	101	36	50	15	13	4		
Capt Thompson's Brig 1st Division	52	15	27	9	4	1	3	1
Capt Lawson's 9-pr Brig	122	44	64	16	9	3		
Capt von Rettberg 2nd Division	71	25	6	2	9	2		
Capt Cleeve 4th Division	51	17	6	2	9	2		
Mr Causton 3rd Division	52	17						
	486	166	175	52	56	16	3	1
<i>Mules per Muleteers</i>		2.9		3.4		3.5		
TOTAL	720	235	3.1					

In a letter from 2nd Capt RM Cairnes RA in April 1813 he describes ... the Asst Commissary General attached to the (artillery) Brigade who is answerable for the rations & supply of corn, for which purpose he has a Brigade of forage mules at the rate of one mule to two horses.

And Dickson noted in his diary for 7 May 1812 –

Marched this morning from Elvas with the following ... equipment :

2 Portuguese block carriages, each conveying 6 long ladders, 30 feet long each; the ladder wagons were drawn by four pair Spanish hired mules each.

6 tin pontoons; these drawn by three pair Spanish hired mules each.

General Usage

Robert Blakeney, escorting the captured Prince D'Arenberg to Lisbon, relates

'The prince travelled very comfortably in a handsome carriage taken at Arroyo Molinos. The mountains we had now to cross were very steep and excessively difficult of ascent, especially with a wheeled vehicle. Four large Spanish mules which drew the carriage being insufficient to haul it up those hills, I directed that a couple of bullocks which were ploughing alongside the road should be added to the team ... after a long pull we at last reached the summit.'

General Cuesta at Talavera is noted by Oman – page 490 ... in a coach drawn by nine (white) mules whilst Schaumann (page 182) saw ... an old-fashioned coach drawn by six gaily-caparisoned mules.

Finally there was another branch of logistics where mules played an important role. Military intelligence is of little value unless it is timely, and Wellington, from a fairly early period in the war, insisted on precision and punctuality in the dating of reports and their transmission, both to him and to different parts of the Army. For the routine methods used in daily intercourse the Army made use partly of the civil postal service of Portugal and partly of its own resources within itself: letter-parties from the cavalry and infantry and the newly formed Corps of Mounted Guides.

The Portuguese post-office was not a go-ahead institution. An attempt had been made to bring it up to the standards of other European countries in 1798. But the lack of postal traffic, owing to the absence of a flourishing inland trade, and the bankruptcy of the treasury had brought these improvements to naught, and in 1804 the service reverted to a jog-trot carriage of mails by post-mules and messengers on foot along two main routes. The first was from Lisbon to Oporto, with branches at Castenheira for Castello Branco and at Coimbra for Almeida. The second was from Lisbon to Elvas, with a branch at Montemor-o-Velho for Vilar-Real-de-Santo-Antonio. The post left Lisbon every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday at 6 in the evening.

These arrangements formed the structure upon which the system of military communications was built up while the Army was in Portugal, that is to say, during the years 1809 to 1813. The Portuguese post-mule was a reliable beast and the mails travelled with as much expedition as the country permitted in all seasons.

However it was obvious that there was room for improvement both in the frequency and in the routes if the post was to serve an army disposed along the eastern frontier. Wellington from 1809 onwards had arranged with the postal authorities for at least a daily service from Headquarters to Lisbon. It would appear also that the routes were extended to serve some of the advanced formations and to keep up the communications (when the Army was divided) between the force in the Beira and Hill's force in the Alentejo, by a new road running close under the western extremity of the Serra da Estrela through Espinhal, Thomar and Abrantes. The expense of all these additional posts were paid for by the Commissariat and the extended service appears to have been in full working order by April 1810. In July 1810 it took about three days for a letter dispatched at Headquarters at Celorico to reach Lisbon.

When, after April 1811, the Army took up its advanced positions beyond the Portuguese frontier and the lateral communication between the Beira and the Alentejo could no longer be kept up through Fundao and Castello Brance, to the east of the Serra da Estrela, the military mail was organised by the Military Post Office under George Scovell.

The Numbers Employed

John Edgecombe Daniel in his *Journal of an Officer in the Commissariat*, calculated that some 12,000 mules followed the army in their 1811 Spring offensive, carrying forward food and equipment for each Division, together with ammunition, entrenching tools, regimental books, medical supplies, forges for shoeing the cavalry, officers baggage, not to forget candles, etc. This figure does not include those for Hill's 'Corps' which was probably another 3,000

According to Fortescue, it is to Mr Bissett that we owe an exact account of the organisation of the transport and supply in 1812, the year which may be taken as that in which it was finally perfected. According to his book (*The Duties of the Commissariat*, pp 37-45), the unit of infantry for the purposes of the commissariat was the division of two brigades and one battery of artillery; the unit of the cavalry was the regiment; and the unit of horse-artillery the troop; while the reserve of artillery, exclusive of the batteries attached to division, formed another unit, and headquarters of the army yet another. The item of forage of course accounted for the apparent anomaly that a regiment of cavalry, four hundred strong, was placed on the same footing with a division of infantry numbering six thousand. Even in the infantry the feeding of the field-officers' horses and the baggage mules, which were attached to each regiment, was a very heavy task, requiring, roughly speaking, one mule to every six men. But in the cavalry the allowance was one mule to every two men and horses; so that a regiment of four hundred dragoons, having nearly five hundred horses and baggage mules, required for the filling of all mouths and for the provision of fuel – which was always scarce in the Peninsula – nearly three hundred commissariat mules to itself. Altogether for all units the British army, at a strength of barely fifty-three thousand of all ranks, needed between nine and ten thousand commissariat mules over and above those employed in regimental transport.

Wellington's Army		25th May 1813				
	Regimental Officers	Officers & Men	Private Mules	Public Mules	Division Mules	TOTAL Mules
Cavalry	354	8,317	575	350	4,625	5,550
Infantry	3,154	67,802	4,000	1,160	4,010	9,170
Artillery		4,307	35	900	1,715	2,650
Musket / Carbine ammunition					800	800
Engineers Department		444		50		50
Headquarters Staff		420		80		80
		81,290	4,610	2,540	11,150	18,300

Assumptions :

Private Mules

Number of infantry officers	+15%	therefore	36	officers have	41
Number of cavalry officers	+20%	therefore	20	officers have	24
		Staffs:			
		Brigade	10	Divisional	15

Number of Portuguese officers estimated

Public Mules

Infantry Battalions : 13
Cavalry Regiments :
6 troops plus mule forges 16

Data per SGP Ward & Bissett:

Number of Headquarters Mules

Data per James Thornton :

Divisional Mules

Infantry Brigades : 150
Light Div Brigades : 175
Artillery Companies : 100

Data per SGP Ward & Bissett:

Cavalry Regiments:

1 mule to 2 horses & mules

RHA Troops: 1 mule to 2 horses & mules

Robertson, on the other hand assets that Daniel provides a detailed summary of the numbers of horses and mules assembled for the forthcoming advance (in 1812): seven infantry divisions require almost 4,000 mules; and the ten cavalry regiments and Horse Artillery, with 5,600 horses, require almost 3,000 mules. In addition there were mules 'transporting ammunition (about 800), and those appropriated to the conveyance of entrenching tools, regimental books, medicines, forges,' etc: in total 'scarcely less than 10,000 public mules were perpetually following the army, besides the crowd of baggage animals belonging to officers ...', say another 2,000; and this did not include those of Hill's Corps, which was followed by a train which 'could not fall short of 3,000 animals.' Thus the total number of mules accompanying the advance was in the region of 15,000 ...

I decided to apply the numbers quoted above by Daniel & Bissett to the Marching Strength per 25 May 1813 of Wellington's Army in the Vittoria as listed in Oman, volume VI (*refer to the summary of the detailed workings*). This brings out some interesting conclusions :

- > at the level of 18,300, there was one mule for every 4 men in the army
- > even allowing that officers had, on average, two horses each, these, plus the cavalry & artillery horses were still outnumbered by the mules.

However, on 17 May 1813, Colonel Frazer, commanding the horse artillery, was under the impression that the main reason for the delay in taking the field was the 'deficiency in transport', and 'that 900 mules were wanting in the Artillery Department alone, and I believe, 3,000 or 4,000 in that of the Commissariat'. If that were correct, then the total number would be about the same 15,000 of the previous year.

Since there was usually one muleteer to every three beasts, this would mean that there were about 5,000 muleteers with the army. This was the equivalent of a small infantry division.

Then What?

Having battled the French back over the Pyrenees, peace was declared in April 1814. With this, the demand for mules, certainly on the previous scale, evaporated.

For the Portuguese and Spanish muleteers who had hired out their beasts, there was the long march home. As we saw earlier, in December the previous year, Wellington that some of the muleteers were 26 months in arrears and that he was obliged to give them Treasury Bills for a part of their demands. The lucky ones would have been paid off in specie; those not so fortunate would have probably traded their bills on at a discount.

Then there were all the mules owned by the Commissariat and privately by the officers. The British cavalry and some artillery marched across France to Calais before sailing for home; it can be assumed that they took a proportion of their mules with them to continue carrying fodder and supplies. The infantry were being shipped home or to North America from Bordeaux and one must assume that shipping transport space was limited. It is perhaps surprising that George Simmons does not make any references to his losses at this time; a year later, in Sept 1815, he bemoans the fact that – ‘When I landed I bought a horse, which cost me nineteen pounds; now that I want to sell it, I cannot get £10 for it.’ Certainly, with the drying up of demand and an apparent excess supply of animals becoming available, one could have assumed with a fair degree of certainty that the price of mules would have dropped significantly. One can only speculate that the southern area of France had been stripped of mules by heavy requisitions for the French Armies whilst they were fighting in Spain. Certainly the Andalucian-Cordobesan mules were even larger than the French mules traditionally bred out of the large Poitou donkeys, so perhaps, after all, the market prices were not too drepressed.

The Summing Up

This must come from Wellington himself:

‘The people of England, so happy as they are in every respect, so rich in resources of every description, having the use of excellent roads, etc, will not readily believe that important results here frequently depend upon 50 or 60 mules more or less, or a few bundles of straw to feed them; but the fact is so.’

As often happens, once the article is published, one comes across another reference !

In his book *A Treatise on the Defence of Portugal* published in 1811, Captain Eliot makes some interesting observations on Portuguese muleteers:

“The *Arriéiros*, or muleteers, are another hardy race of peasantry; after the vintage they are chiefly employed in conveying the wine to the more distant parts of the kingdom by the mountain passes, on the backs of their mules. Each muleteer has generally four of these animals, called a *tiro*, under his charge. They frequently march in convoys of three or four hundred, and the care the drivers bestow on their mules is astonishing. During the journey the man and his beasts partake of the same fare, consisting of bread made of the Indian corn, soaked in wine, an excellent food for the horse when fatigued, and of which the country horses are particularly fond. In the heat of the day the convoy halts; the beasts with their fore legs tied, are covered with a blanket to keep off the flies, which are exceeding troublesome, are turned to graze; whilst the drivers enjoy the siesta, or afternoon’s nap, a custom common to the whole of the inhabitants of the peninsula. At this time in all the country towns the shops are shut, from about one o’clock till three; the stillness of the night reigns throughout the place, and according to a saying of the Portuguese, none but Englishmen and dogs are to be seen in the streets.

The wine carried in this manner is stowed in large hogskins turned inside out, the seams neatly sewed and pitched, in consequence of which it has rather a disagreeable taste, particularly if the skins are new; for this reason old skins are valuable; two of them when full are a load for a mule. They are carried one on each side, on a packsaddle without a tree, and a pad over it; underneath this the

muleteer places his blanket, and covers the cargo with a few sheep or goats skins, which together with his cloak forms his bed; no despicable one either. During the whole of the late campaign in Spain and Portugal, I used it constantly, with the difference only, that instead of placing the blanket next to the animal on the march, I put it between the pack-saddle and the pad, which preserved it dry, whereas, in the first instance, the perspiration makes it disagreeable..

The muleteers both in Spain and Portugal have a custom of shearing the hair quite close on the back and sides of their beasts, in order to prevent the pack-saddle galling them; the rump is usually ornamented by this means with flowers and other devices. On one in Spain I saw the following ludicrous caricature – the Devil welcoming *Señor Don Josef Naopoleon* to his infernal mansion; underneath was carved, *Entra Señor D Josef, siempre servicio de usted* (*Enter Signior Don Joseph, I am ever at your service*; a common phrase in the country).

Particular care should be taken not to overload the beasts; two hundred weight is sufficient for a mule.”

Sources:

This article is largely a collation / a collage taken from a range of sources – the diarists of the period making passing references to their animals; the members of the Commissariat and Artillery for whom mules were fundamental to their mobility. Historians, writing years later, have included ‘mini-studies’ within their works to explain the key role of mule transport in Wellington’s Army. All these have been extracted to combine the various threads into a more composite history on these remarkable beasts.

If you have any other references that I have missed, I will be very pleased to hear from you.

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A History of the Peninsular War by Sir Charles Oman
Wellington's Headquarters by SGP Ward
The Spanish Army in the Peninsular War by Charles Esdaile
Tactics and the Experience of battle in the Age of Napoleon by Rory Muir
A Commanding Presence by Ian Robertson
The Man who Broke Napoleon's Codes, the Story of George Scovell by Mark Urban

Nearly all of the sources used here are British, whilst the great majority of the muleteers and their beasts were Spanish. As I did not wish the paper to be criticised for being totally Anglo-centric, I enquired of Charles Esdaile whether he had any Spanish sources in his private reference base.

He was not aware of additional local information and could only recommend the memoirs of Henry Swinburne and William Dalrymple who toured Spain in the late 1700's, as well as the books of the Frenchmen Bourgoing and Laborde, both of which were published in translation in 1808.

I would like to thank Charles for his 'professorial oversight' of the manuscript.

I would also like to express my thanks to Ian Robertson and Philips Haythornthwaite (as always) for their cooperation and freely providing both data & illustrations.

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