

A Time Before Cars: How Horses Helped

Horses were used for many different tasks for 4000-6000 years before cars were invented. They were ridden for travel, used to pull vehicles and farm equipment, and used to carry items long distances. Horses were not viewed just as another animal, but as a key part of everyday life. Horses were brought to North America by European settlers in the late fifteenth century. They were also used by Indigenous Peoples as early as the 1600s. By 1867 there were almost 800,000 horses in Canada, and by 1911 there were well over 1,000,000. Horses were important both for the transportation of people and goods and for performing farm labour.

Horseshoes

Horseshoes are metal items that are attached to the bottom of horses hooves in order to prevent wear. They were originally all hand-made, but in the nineteenth century, horseshoes began to be mass-produced during the Industrial Revolution.

Stirrup

A stirrup is attached to a horse's saddle and the foot of a rider rests in it. A stirrup allows the rider to more easily control the animal.

Bridle

A bridle is a harness that is fitted onto a horse's head and connected to reins used by a rider to control the animal. The reins would be attached to the metal piece at

the bottom of the bridle called a “bit” which goes in the horse’s mouth and enables faster sensing and reaction to rider commands. Bridles can also be made of leather, cloth, canvas, rope and other textiles.

Horse Collar

Horse collars sit around the base of a horse’s neck and function as a way to evenly distribute the weight from the items it is carrying.

Horse Yoke

A yoke is used in transportation or agricultural work where more than one horse is being used to pull a cart, carriage or farm equipment. A yoke would be fixed in front of the horses over their chests to ensure they remained parallel to one another whilst moving and so they could combine their strength to pull cargo. This type of yoke could also be used for other livestock such as donkeys, mules and ponies.

Other animals such as oxen and water buffalo would use a different design.