

It could bounce up a steep, rocky mountain. It could creep through a swamp. It could even float across a flooded river. Tough was the word for it.

Some kind of tank, perhaps? No—the old covered wagon called the Conestoga.

It got its name from the place it was made—the Conestoga Valley in Pennsylvania. In that valley lived many carpenters and blacksmiths. Most of them were from Germany. It was there they had learned their trades. And they had learned them well indeed. They made their wagons almost entirely by hand.

No one knows who designed the wagon. Some say it was a shipbuilder. That may be. It *did* look like a boat. The front and back were raised. The middle dipped down. (There was good reason for this shape. It kept the load from sliding to front or back.)

The wagon bed was four feet deep. It was built of heavy oak. The wagon top was eight or more hoops. They were made of ash and covered with heavy cloth.

But the wheels were the most important part. The strongest wagon was useless if a wheel gave out.

The wheel rims were made of ash. The spokes were made of hickory. These wooden parts were carefully fitted together by the

carpenter. Then the blacksmith made the tires. These were thick bands of iron, four inches wide.

On the left side of the wagon was a board. It could be pulled in and out. It was called the lazy board. When the driver got tired he could sit on it.

However, most drivers walked. Hardly ever did they sit inside. The wagon was too full. There was barely room for children and sick people.

Several buckets hung on the back of the wagon. Two held feed and water for the horses or oxen. There was also a tar bucket. In it was a mixture of tar and grease. This paste was used to oil the wheels. (There were leather hub caps on the wheels. But sand got in anyway.)

The Conestoga was almost 26 feet long. It weighed 3500 pounds and held five tons. It was a giant. But that didn't keep it from getting around.

Conestogas squeezed through the Cumberland Gap. They inched along the Santa Fe Trail. A few even reached Oregon. But by then small, lighter wagons were taking over. The giant was just too slow. When the railroads came, it was finished for good. But it will always be part of America. It was the wagon that opened the West.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The Conestoga got its name from the**
 - A man who designed it
 - B place it was made
 - C wood it was made from

2. **Most of the men who built the Conestogas were from**
 - A England
 - B France
 - C Germany

3. **The writer thinks that the Conestoga wagons were built**
 - A very well
 - B not strong enough
 - C too slowly

4. **Some people think that the wagon was designed by a man used to building**
 - A ships
 - B tents
 - C bridges

5. **The wagon bed and hoops were made of**
 - A wood
 - B cloth
 - C steel

6. **The most important part of the wagon was the**
 - A top
 - B wheels
 - C bed

7. **The wagon's tires were made of**
 - A rubber
 - B wood
 - C iron

8. **Most of the wagon drivers**
 - A sat on the lazy board
 - B walked beside the wagon
 - C rode in the wagon

9. **The paste in the tar bucket was used to**
 - A feed the animals
 - B oil the wagon top
 - C grease the wheels

10. **The Conestoga was finished when the**
 - A railroads came
 - B West opened up
 - C bigger wagons were built