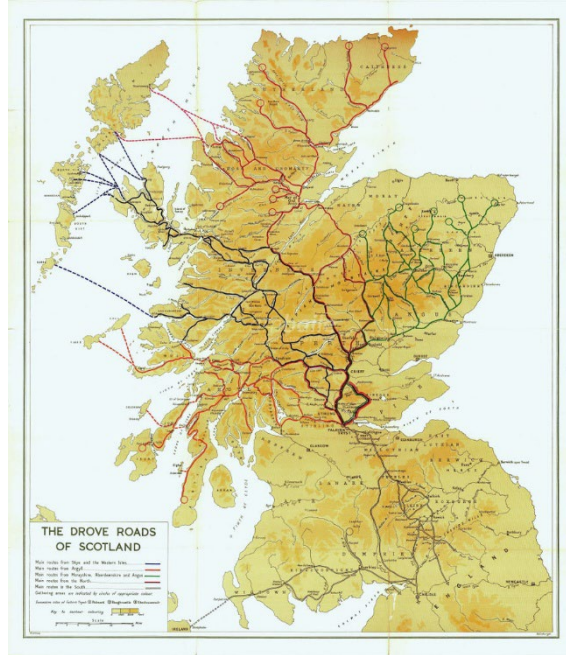




• DORNOCH •
HERITAGE • SOCIETY



'Drove Roads'
talk by
Rob Gibson
4th August 2004

Well, it's a pleasure to be here in Dornoch and I think it's a very appropriate time once again to think about the Black Isle show tomorrow and the many efforts that there are to recognise how important livestock are in the history of the north of Scotland in particular, that we recognise just what an influence this has had in its development, not only here in Britain but also abroad and the way in which many of the skills that were transferred in the 19th century to other parts of the world is a whole story in itself. But I suspect tonight, given that we don't want to have a total e-marathon session, that it might be important to lay the groundwork and look particularly at how the Highlands in particular developed a culture which eventually ended up as a major part of the trade of this country. Indeed, in the period after the union of Scotland and England in 1707, in that following century, the sale of cattle was amongst the biggest, perhaps the third or fourth biggest export that Scotland had in those days and as the

populations moved to towns then more and more cattle were acquired and in some ways, unlike today where we think there's a need to bring cattle back, at that time it was becoming something of a monoculture.

However, I'll try and give a picture of the way in which the livestock industry developed, how droving became a part of the way of life of the North and a bit of the history of how it all started. So I intend to try and stick to the brief, because it's a big subject. The domesticated animals, the first ones were dogs and cats and then sheep and cattle were a bit later because the auroch which all cattle are descended from was a very large, fierce beast and you can say that from about 6000 BC cattle were beginning to be domesticated and indeed cattle of the wild variety, the auroch, still existed in the forests of Poland in the 17th century (AD)

So cattle became a central part of the life of many of the northern parts and many other parts of the world as a result of those efforts. This beast that's represented here is typical of the hornless cattle which developed into the Aberdeen Angus. Now cattle sometimes have horns and sometimes don't.

Genetically horns have been bred out of certain kinds but also it's a fact that this breeding over the years has created regional varieties of cattle first of all and then from the scientific breeding of the 18th and 19th century the modern breeds that we know today. So we're talking about fairly aboriginal cattle and that's the starting point for the story because as the Celts invaded and took over and ran all these islands, theirs was a moving society, an aristocratic society, a cattle-based society. We have quite a lot of important information about this from the writings of Irish law and also about the way in which the Celts lived from archaeological evidence. There's also incredible information about this warlike society's propensity to go and raid hundreds of miles away to bring cattle back as a main trophy item and indeed the major poem, the **Táin Bó Cúailnge**, (Modern Irish pronunciation: ['t̪aːnʲ bʲoː 'kuəɫɲə]) the Cattle Raid of Cooley, is probably the oldest of the great Irish poems which was spoken perhaps from before the time of Christ but written down certainly in the 8th century and concerned a cattle raid.

Cattle were so central to life that it being a warlike society, it was necessary to acquire as many as possible. There are maps that show in Ireland raids of over 150 miles from the north to Ulster and Connacht and down into Munster. In Scotland we're also talking about a warlike society with Dexter cattle and they're much smaller than the breeds that have been developed today, particularly the continental ones. But the Dexter cattle are very much like the black cattle of the Highlands that were historically the animals which the drovers drove hundreds of miles in the 15th, 16th, 17th century and their predecessors the clan chiefs and so on drove for spoils. After the Treaty of Union the borders started to be settled and eventually by the late 17th century there was a very large trade between Scotland and England but it had started long before that.

Now it's hard to know in the middle ages what happened. Before the wars of independence between 1295 let's say 1370 there was a long period of peace in which trade was the main activity around Europe. The Scots sold sheep and skins and the like into Europe and bought cloth, tiles and things like that. They traded cattle and we have extant a document which shows a rite of passage into England during one of the

truces in the wars of independence for a couple of cattle dealers given a year to sell their cattle in the south, that in the 1350s.

So probably we're talking about a far longer period before that when cattle dealing was a major activity. But since it was an ancient practice it also was to overtake the clan society which was then tamed at the time of the Union. It was to take over the skills that were honed over thousands of years by people who could raid into other people's lands, bring the cattle back by the most circuitous routes safely from one part of the country to another. So the McDonald's on the west coast might well raid into near Nairn. Kilrock is one of their favourite areas of the McDonald's of Keppoch and that's about 100 or so miles from their homeland on the west coast of Lochaber. And similarly we could say that people from Caithness might well have raided into Wester Ross, people from Lochaber raided up into Wester Ross as well as we know. But these skills were transferred into a much more commercial practice.

Now with plenty of evidence from archaeology of these Pictish bull carvings, this one from Elgin. There are many of these scattered around the Pictish areas which of course includes here and some of them mainly are of the type which we had in the original carving. That is they've got very short if any horns at all, whereas on the Gask stone in Perthshire you can see that there's long horn cattle there. So it depended how people organised the cattle that they domesticated and how a particular regional variety developed. But the Buchan Humbies the small black cattle of the north tended to be hornless and that was encouraged because they were easier to handle. Cattle are obviously more difficult to handle than say sheep but the fact is that those became characteristics

Now when I say that the idea of raiding and trading go hand in hand. A pair of 17th century spurs belonging to Watt of Hardin are in Edinburgh, the National Gallery of Scotland. He was a reever in the borders of Scotland and used to raid across the border like his ancestors had done for centuries. The story we have about the spurs is interesting. It is said that his wife used to present these spurs to him on his plate when they had run out of supplies, as a hint that it was time that he was getting onto another raid to get some cattle back home. I can imagine that's probably true.

A picture by George Washington Wilson taken in Skye in the 1890s could easily have been taken in the west of America at that time because very similar cattle in some ways to the long-horned beast were being herded on the plains of America by people who came from places like west of Ross and Skye and many other parts of the world, but particularly from Scotland. It is interesting to contrast that with later pictures in which you see of people on horseback because of course our kind of cattle droving was done on foot and this developed in a fashion where people would work in large teams to move the beasts along a set route and whether it was the cattle droves of America or the cattle driving in Scotland, animals can only walk so far each day. So you can see distances such as 10 or 12 miles, maybe less depending on the terrain, in between stops and you can see where stops were en route. At the time of the Treaty of Union, Galloway, closest to England, had the greatest opportunity for selling cattle into the large markets in the towns.

The Carnivores of London, as a Welsh historian has called them, was a huge market, a town which was probably, if anything, certainly about 10 times larger than any town

outside of London at that time and growing hugely fast. So when you think about it, driving cattle from Scotland to London, it's about 350 miles, something like that. If you take it from Caithness it's a good bit further but people regularly travelled those roads to deliver cattle to the markets in the south east of England.

This picture of Glen Coe presents a classic 19th century impression because in the Highlands you have mountains, mist and very often there's cattle involved in them or sheep but more often cattle or deer. Indeed for most of our history the main mixture of beasts that lived in the hills were cattle and deer. There were sheep as well but sheep were much smaller and indeed their impact was only very much something that happened during at the end of the 18th century.



Glen Coe would be the classic scene for people who envisaged the Highlands and at the end of the 19th century Beaulieu Mart showed how cattle were sold at local markets all over the country. We think about auction marts today with rings and pens and chutes and walking around in a fenced area. In the 18th Century cattle were sold in the open and indeed when it came to the huge sales in the at Crieff, at Doune and Perthshire and eventually at Falkirk they would run their cattle round in a circle in a very big open space making sure that the poorest beasts were in the middle so that the drovers who were buying couldn't see the worst ones.

Obviously only a few cattle were sold locally at Beaulieu Mart and that was the way in which it was done since time immemorial. That was destined to stop because the cattle which went from the north tended to cross the Kyle of Sutherland, go up the hills at the back towards Aulnamain and the old road across past Stittenham at Ardrross, cross the Skiach through the glen behind Evanton, which is a grouse moor, and cross over the River Glass and along the back of the Skiach cross over the road at Milnane near Strathpeffer and go back over into Muir where the major centre was..

The reasons for this route were that it avoided the areas which had fields with crops and also it allowed free grazing. So the line above which the land had been improved would have been on the ridge where the drovers took their cattle. The improved land at lower level was farming land or at least it's out by grazing in Strathskeiach.

People talk about the black cattle of the Highlands. Now whether there was a prejudice in that direction by people who started to think about standardising cattle is another thing but cattle of the native varieties appeared in red, dun, black and brindled colours that were quite mixed indeed. But the name black cattle is the code for native cattle of the Highlands and indeed there were native stock in Aberdeenshire which was very similar and it was a combination of these Highland and Aberdeenshire cattle that were blended to make eventually the Aberdeen Angus that we know so well today.

Those Highland cattle however were themselves eventually developed probably from a fold which was taken from Glen Lyon in the early 19th century to the Western Isles

and that standardised colour of red coloured Highland cattle with the horns and the docile characteristics are very ancient indeed because although the Aberdeen Angus has got a short coat the picture of the Washington Wilson earlier on shows that in fact we're talking about much more shaggy cattle in the past.

Now this is a hill near Glen Coe with a building in the forefront which was a droving inn and the Wade road, which was built by the military in the mid-18th century, goes right past. Wade and his successors built a whole series of roads to allow access to the more remote and troublesome parts of the Highlands but also in the process helped set up a whole series of staging posts, a bit like the stagecoach posts in the American West, where you might change horses and drovers could shelter. These Wade roads followed many of the drove roads.



So let's think about the mid-18th century for a minute. The one thing that most people know about it was Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobite Risings and the fact that they were able to penetrate right down to Derby. Well of course all these people, it's not a foreign country, they all knew the routes to England. They followed the routes that avoided the main towns, they

followed the drove routes right through the Pennines and so on whilst making their progress. So people had a wide experience, folk from the furthest ends of the country.

Before the Bonnie Prince Charlie era, Rob Donn, the poet of the Mackay country, had been a drover's boy and walked barefoot to the Crieff Trists for dozens of years as part of his job. And it was two of the Mackay family who organised the whole droving effort from the northwest Highlands, the northwest of Sutherland, in the early 18th century. So it was the aristocracy or the clan gentry who were the main elements that organised society in all its fashion, whether it was for hunting or for trade and it was the ordinary clansmen who became the drovers. But these commercial elements were very important because these were the ones that were transferred later on to much bigger projects.

However with the clearances, the disruption of the clan society, a big section of the people who organised the major pieces of business were knocked out of the jigsaw which really altered the way in which people operated because they were replaced by farmers and sheep and the like. So here we are Charlie Beattie from Och dressed in his Jacobite gear. He's a member of the White Cockade Re-enactment Society. And there is the drover with his dog and in this case, since it's in the 18th century, he's well armed and he's dressed in a plaid. He would have slept on the hill and just wrapped himself in the plaid, because the small kilt, the dress kilt and so on, was something that was developed later. All people who travelled any distance had a plaid and were able to wrap themselves in it and sleep in that.

There are some very fine descriptions of this at a later stage. In the 18th century, of course after the Jacobite Risings, arms were forbidden for clansmen in many areas,

even in the areas that had been loyal to the Hanoverians. But drovers specifically could get certificates to exempt them from the need not to carry arms. They were able to carry arms and there are extant certificates today that show people who were allowed to carry weapons. An ancestor of Robert Cunningham Graham who stayed near the Lake of Menteith, Nicol Graham in the 18th century, computed that there had been £37,000 sterling worth of thefts of cattle in 1747 in the period just after the end of the Jacobite Risings. It was a pretty turbulent period because £37,000 sterling was a lot of money in those days and this is precisely why drovers were armed, to protect a very important asset that they were taking to market.

So you wrap yourself in the top part and you trudge along with the cattle. The topsman would possibly ride a horse, perhaps the clan gentry too.



There is a description of that in Walter Scott's famous short story *The Two Drovers*, one of whom is purportedly a Highland gentleman. He may well have ridden a garron, a small, sturdy horse or pony. Certainly later cattle drovers did. But the ordinary guys walked on barefoot to the markets in the central belt and beyond.

I talked about the Highlanders going via hills and so on. One of the things they had to do was to try and avoid tolls, just as many other people have tried to avoid tolls. But in the days of having to cross from the islands the issue here was the added distance, the danger and so on.

Kyleakin wasn't the crossing point initially of cattle from the islands of Skye. Cattle were shipped in large boats to Skye, driven through Skye and crossed at Kyle Rhea. They would be driven along by a man with a whip and stick and with his plaid and his dogs. The cattle were driven across the land. But when it came to the crossing from Skye the drover had to deal with the issue of crossing the water. And they were swum across. And from the 16th century descriptions of this they used the daisy chain method. That is that the lead cow, which was probably one that was chosen to lead the herd when it was marching, was pushed into the water and its tail was tied, perhaps with a bit of rope, to the lower jaw of the next beast. So the cattle could shut their mouth so they wouldn't drown. And the tail of that one was tied to another one and so on. And they were actually swum across these narrows at the time when the tide was neutral because the tide can be very fierce indeed.



Where boats were required for the cattle, the first case it was easy. Obviously cattle are big beasts so how do you deal with it? Well in you didn't want to break their legs obviously, but they managed to get them into the boat off a pier head. But to get them

out they had to throw them into the water. That's the only way that they could get them onto dry land again. It also helped to clean them a bit as well because cattle don't exactly enjoy the experience of being herded into such close proximity. In the 18th century there was a slip at Kyleakin, where they were taken across in boats. But for many centuries before that and in shorter places they were sent across by their own paddle power.

The whole issue about how cattle survived is becoming increasingly clear as we understand how woodlands were being utilised and cared for by the society in those days. In the pre-clearance era there's a lot of use of woodlands. Proven for example by Robin Noble in Sutherland when they found a 500-year-old coppiced willow in the middle of the wilds of Assynt and many other trees like that which show that people harvested and managed the woodlands. In winter woodlands were used to shelter cattle and there is also evidence of cattle being taken into the house along with the people. Well that may have happened for the very coldest months but they were usually kept in sheltered areas and particularly in woodlands.

The cattle had to be matured over several years before they were fit to sell and were probably four years old when they were being driven to market. In the whole of the north of Scotland the point at which the drove roads met was at Muir of Ord and the black moss, a flat area at Muir of Ord, was the major market.

Beauly was an established local market but the marketplace for the gathering in September of the major amount of cattle moved from Beauly towards Muir of Ord onto the flatter land where the golf course is now. In fact that was the point at which a lot of dealers then shod the cattle and took them on the long journey further south. The houses there were used as banks in the 19th century because that's how important the whole cattle business was. Indeed there's a description in 1848 at Falkirk of the various names of the banks appearing in tents at the huge cattle sales that took place there. By the later 19th century the banks were organised to build their own stone-built offices right beside where the sales took place, on the golf course in this case.

From Muir of Ord the routes south were mainly down through Strathglass, not necessarily to Inverness at all because that was going down into land which was heavily farmed. To avoid that, the Highland Straths were used, which took you over to Invermoriston crossing through into Speyside by the huge Coriarach which was a major route into Speyside and down towards the south. The military road goes through it to this day.

This is a contemporary picture of cattle in India being shod. Now you can imagine with a large beast like that it's quite a job. And of course they're cloven hoof beasts so they have to have two shoes put on the cattle. It was one of journalists of the Scottish Farmers Newspaper who was in India about 1995 who took these pictures. You can imagine at Muir of Ord blacksmiths putting shoes onto the cattle. There are some shoes that are in museums. Because they were going long distances that kept them fairly slim and they were fairly fit. They weren't pushed; they went at a pace that they could manage but they did protect their feet by this means.

Edwin Landseer presented us with this idealised 1835 picture of the 'Drover's Departure'. It depicts a scene in the Grampian Mountains in Northern Scotland where a drive of cattle and sheep is about to begin, in order to take the animals south to the



larger English markets. Well that might have been a drover who was the head of the clan perhaps. The commercial nature of droving in the 19th century was something which was very much into the hands of specialists because when the clan system broke down at the end of the 18th century and the clearances started to take place a new breed of professional drovers became very much a part of the scene. We'll talk about one of these later

on but this was the time when drovers were carriers of news and wasn't just the prices at the mart that people were interested in, they wondered what was going on in the rest of the world. Of course some of their children would have been captured by the Royal Navy and taken off forcibly by the press gang and done more travelling in the world; other people would have been in the army, some of them eventually might have come back and brought news but drovers were regular travellers. I like to think that they were the kind of telegraph, the newspaper of their days, they brought the news from elsewhere and took the news from the Highlands to the south.

So the drove roads of Scotland were a whole series of routes through the glens. Haldane's book which is essential for understanding the whole business of droving in Scotland. You can see from the north-east, from the far north-west, from the islands, in various areas, converging on places like Crieff which is right in the centre.



Down towards Falkirk and then down on into England, Hawick was quite important in those days because it was on the main drove route and I suppose you could say that's why invasion routes were also following these sorts of areas. From the borders going on south and the west coast route into the Pennines were very much the principal routes for people going down into England and through which people drove.

So how long would it take? Well if you think about three weeks from the north of Scotland to Falkirk maybe a bit less, it depends how well they were getting on. If you think about going to London you're talking about seven weeks or eight weeks. If you're thinking of going from the north of Caithness add an extra week, and the same if you're thinking from the islands. Because people were steadily marching 10 to 15 miles a day every day all the way, that's the kind of pace at which the cattle could go.

At the same time there were cattle coming from Ireland via the short crossing into Galloway and that allowed Galloway to have an early part in the trade in the period after the Union of the Parliaments between Scotland and England in 1707.

The days of needing to be armed changed. A major menace or a major change in the whole use of land came with the arrival of sheep in the period from the 1780s till the 1820s, fuelled by major wars that Britain was having with France. Large numbers of people were moving into towns and into industrial sites which had iron and coal for the mills. So the cattle and sheep were equally important even in the 1840s.

There were far more sheep than cattle but there were still huge numbers of cattle being sold at Falkirk Mart, at Falkirk Tryst. When Napoleon was defeated there was a depression in all trades which intermittently continued throughout the 19th century. Land use had changed due to the clearances and the removal of many people who had been drovers and kept cattle. More professional farmers like Patrick Seller who bred sheep and drove them to market and gave way to some extent to people who wanted to come to the Highlands for sport.

Walter Scott who had written about the two drovers was lamenting a passing era. He was the writer who created the image of a heroic past age in the Highlands which the Romantic movement built on as a means for the rich to come and enjoy the sports of the past which they imagined to be the hunts and the hills. This is when the deer forests and so on began to impinge on the ways that people had driven cattle and sheep to market. Even Patrick Seller, a man who had cleared so many people off the land by the 1820s was bemoaning the way in which deer forests were starting to stop people moving sheep and cattle through the drove roads that had been used since time immemorial.

So the changes with the beasts roaming right across that area because they've taken down all the fences were a major factor in the Highlands in the 19th century. Not just Patrick Seller who complained about not having access but, of course, access is something we have now had to legislate.

So the changes of the 19th century were such that the population at the beginning of the century four-fifths of people in Britain lived in the countryside. At the end of the century four-fifths of people in Britain lived in towns and cities so there was a massive change where they were. They had to be fed and initially they could be fed from the resources of Ireland, of Cornwall, of Wales and of Scotland, in particular the Highlands where sheep and of cattle were the main source of food.

The change in the 1840s of abolishing the Corn Laws which restricted the prices that were being paid for corn and opened up a free market from abroad was a precursor of the competition that was to come in the cattle trade as well. This is a picture in Mull at a place called Crackaig. It's an abandoned village at the end of the 19th century. It looks down towards the Dutchman's Cap, the Treshnish Islands and down towards Iona. It's just one of the kind of settlements where people used to live and used to have a cattle society which underpinned so much of what they did for century upon century.

But by the middle of the 19th century so many things were made in cities. So many goods were manufactured that the idea of living in places like this, without the means of survival like the trade that there was in the past, was lost. The people were forced in fact to leave in huge numbers. So the period of the 19th century is one of massive population movement, much of it abroad. If we think of the filling up of America with people, the three countries which emptied more of their people than any others in terms of percentage were Ireland first, Scotland second and Norway third.

Now in terms of the large size of population in England, the number of people who ended up abroad was far smaller as a percentage than for example Scotland and particularly Ireland. So as we know, famine due to a monoculture of potatoes in Ireland which was susceptible to blight, hit Ireland worst of all. But it also hit farmers in Germany and right across Europe and into Scotland and that was a major force in pushing people out. So while cattle were much cheaper in Ireland and sent to Scotland and England to the English markets it was a fact that people driving cattle from the highlands were forced to accept less and less in prices in the 1840s. In Ireland when people were starving the last thing they sold was their cow. It was a means to a lot of things just like the ancient Celts who milked them and eventually killed them but so society saw cattle as very important. But when they sold their cow they were finished. That meant that major drovers like Cameron of Corriechollie, who we'll come to in a while, found that the prices that he was selling his cattle and sheep had dipped very badly in the period of the famine because of vast competition from Ireland.

At the same time there was a recurring cattle disease called Rinderpest which had flared up right across Europe at various times, which they couldn't solve. They didn't have the means to do so medically even in the 1860s. The disease recurred in the 1860s to such an extent that the population of cattle in Europe dwindled to about a tenth of what it normally would be in a healthy year. People didn't eat beef, people ate mutton, lamb if they could get it, if they ate meat at all. Beef became very rare in that period.

So the people who left places like this, and many other communities much more prosperous, not only sailed across the seas but in the story we have to tell of the cattle and droving trade began to change too because railways came along. Now that helped the areas that had developed the cattle into specific breeds that had better characteristics. It was very difficult for people in the far-flung areas who didn't get railways to where they lived until the same time as those in the America. They didn't do the Mallaig extension till 1901. Most places in the rest of the world had railways by that stage despite the fact that we had started off building them. Therefore the competition from abroad to bring cattle, corn, mutton and the like from other countries started to impede the whole way of life. The railways were not a benefit to us although I remember as a child going to school and seeing cattle and sheep going to the meat market in Glasgow in trucks on the railways at that time in the 1950s.

That's not something which has been acceptable in terms of welfare for a very long while. But in the 1860s after the American Civil War there was a great move to try and take cattle across the Atlantic in large numbers but they had been left to their own devices in the south of Texas and into the eastern markets indeed as far as New York in the 1850s. People realised that they could possibly sell cattle from there to Britain

and Europe and indeed they did. First of all in the 1870s during the Rinderpest period they sold them as livestock which crossed the Atlantic in huge ships in tens of thousands. There were riots in Liverpool when the first boats arrived with beef when the working-class people had not had beef for years. Obviously cattle survived somehow but I hate to think in what condition.

The cattle which were driven from the north of Scotland to London were fattened on the grass. They talk about Highland bone and English grass the best combination for making something worth eating. Highland cattle were not only hardy they were able to put on weight and muscle in time to be sold in the autumn of each year when they were driven south. Bringing cattle from Texas to the UK required them to be fattened up in America and then subject to several weeks journey across the Atlantic, albeit steam helped to reduce that. The first refrigerated ships were a French one, the *Frigorifique* which went from Argentina to France and a ship which sailed from the USA to Britain at about the same time in the late 1870s. That allowed cattle to be slaughtered in America and transferred in a frozen dead state.

Well let's come back into the heart of the Highlands. This is a picture in the 1950s in Dingwall and it's a common factor in many towns where there were marts that after the animals were sold they were driven from the mart to the railhead. In Dingwall there are many stories about plate glass windows being broken because of cattle running amok on the High Street. You can imagine that sheep could do the same if in enough numbers and I think many a town and village in the north of Scotland would have seen scenes of havoc like this.

I talked about John Cameron of Corriechoillie, a professional drover of the 19th century who lived from the beginning of the century till about 1857. He was the son of a poor man and became a droving lad who walked barefoot to Falkirk. But eventually through his acumen he became the biggest drover in the Highlands. He is said to have owned 20 or 30 farms because by the time that he was driving you had to pay for the grass that the cattle or sheep ate enroute. So from farms or the huge sheepfolds that he ran in Lochaber he would then drive them across Rannoch Moor into Glen Lyon down through towards Crieff and Perth and on to Falkirk. He had to own farms or rent farms so that his animals could feed on the grass. He was a man who not only owned large numbers of beasts where they were growing but also he owned the means to feed them on route to market.

John Cameron of Corriechoillie's 'Welcome to the Northern Meeting' is a pipe tune that many people might know. He was known to ride his garron back to Spean Bridge and back up to Inverness. On one occasion, having forgotten to bring some money or a bank draft he did the journey in 24 hours or less. He was a man who was hardy and rich at a particular period. There are many rumours about the fact that he was incredibly well liked and appreciated, But he was a man who bought and sold, a businessman first and foremost. Disguised by his scruffiness however, because of the prices in the 1840s and 50s, he wasn't a rich man when he died. He started off with some goats and he ended up with some goats but he was the most important drover along with the Sellars family and the Kennedys and the Williamsons from further over in Murray and Banff plus the McTurks from further south and Galloway. Names that were known throughout the country. So he's mentioned in 1848 at the

Falkirk Mart along with other major drove masters. And that's the man concerned, the Lochaber drover of Corriechoillie.

This is Corriechoillie is near Spean Bridge and the pass that goes through onto Rannoch Moor. This was the route that he used instead of going down to Glencoe to take his cattle over the Rannoch Moor and down onto Glen Lyon. That way of driving cattle and sheep continued into the 1850s 60s but because of the railways and because of the auction marts, droves started to become much more local. I was talking to Kenny McKenzie who's the boss of the mart in Dingwall, the new mart there, and when he started off as a lad he actually drove cattle in 1965 in North Uist to the initial mart that still takes place in Lochmaddy; it was the last year they did so before they started using lorries even in the Outer Isles.

People I know, like Alistair the drover in Dingwall who's dead since 10 years, spent a lifetime travelling across Ross-shire. I'm quite sure that there are many people in Sutherland who were the same who used to travel with their cattle through the glens to a point where it was cheaper to get to a mart where somebody would buy them. That was the sort of process to the middle of the 20th century. This is a photograph on the beach in Skye in the 1890s and we can see cattle roaming wild and free. That's the kind of way in which things were. A township would look after the cattle they had; someone would be designated to drive them as far as it was necessary to link up with others and eventually get to the central mart for example at Muir of Ord. So all these routes that people had planned and found to be the most useful over the years were the ones that were followed right through and indeed many of the roads that we have today clearly follow what were droving routes. This is a fanciful kind of picture in the 18th century of Highland cattle arriving at the Ochil Hills because the route that you take to get to Falkirk requires you to stay in the high ground until you can reach across the Forth. These are the areas near Kincardine and the Forth that cattle were swum across or taken across in boats. You didn't want to cross the bridge at Stirling because there were tolls there. And this modern song by Brian McNeill from Falkirk, a famous musician in the Battlefield Band, in the chorus of which he's written about 'The Trysting Fair' at Falkirk with one of the verses :

*'So Geordie hawed the pony for the way is steep and stony,
three long weeks from the Isle of Skye,
the beasts are thin and bony,
we'll tak the last of the Ciller
and we'll go and have a dram or two.'*

The Falkirk Tryst was a huge event, in the last weekends of September and two in October each year, when cattle from all the different parts of Scotland converged upon there for the major markets further south.

I talked about the Lochmaddy Mart and this picture is of the Mart in the 1890s. Again not the kind with fences but the kind where people sold their cow to somebody else on the open ground so that folk could have a good look at them. This picture, which looks from near Aultanamain across in the direction of Dornoch or slightly to the south of Dornoch, is close to the major drove route from Sutherland, from Caithness and so on. There's an abandoned farm down there called Ramor and there's still a lot of farms a bit further down than that. The person who I'm going to talk about finally was born

at Ramor there in the 1860s. This is literally three quarters of a mile further inland, that's the old droving inn at Aultanamain. It used to be an inn until very recently and that was an important stopping point for people, with flatland round about it, grazing up in the hills, long before the peat was chopped up for firing up Glenmorangie. But that's the kind of place in the hills that people would stop at and it's a particular distance from various places. If you go on from there through Strathrory you come to a point in the map called Stittenham. Now Stittenham is one of the Stafford names because the Marquess of Stafford named lots of places. There are Stafford streets and Stafford houses and all the Trenthams and Stittenhams and so on that you find throughout the areas where the Stafford and Sutherland families had their lands. While the cattle might have been left in the open there, this area which has been recently cleared of trees is marked on the maps till the 1950s at Stittenham as cattle stands. Now that's an obvious kind of place to overnight cattle; steep sided banks with a river running through where the cattle could drink and they could be easily guarded. A forester built a house at the far end recently after it had been cleared of trees. That is but one of the places called cattle stands on the maps and there are many, many of these throughout the county.

This is Mr Dyson Perrins who owned Ardross Castle in the early 20th century. Obviously very proud of what he had shot.

This is Robert Bontine Cunningham Graham who went to South America and learned to become a cowboy there, a gaucho. He also described the drovers bringing ponies from the Highlands past his own home at Gartmoor near the Lake of Menteith in the 1850s. In a little story called 'The Falkirk Tryst' he evokes the beauty of the scene and of the changing nature of society, of the coming railways, of the livelihood that the shaggy looking men with long hair and plaids lounging along like bears, as he describes them, times were changing, something that was passing. His sympathy was for people whether it was the Highland Scot or the Indians in America, whether in South America or North America, who led him to be a great supporter of peoples not only at home but also on those continents who were downtrodden by the imperial powers of big business which he abhorred. He tried to become a rancher himself and his cattle in West Texas were driven off by the Indians but that doesn't change his view about them.



It was William McCombie and Mr Watson from Angus who created the Aberdeen Angus cattle. McCombie blended two types of polled cattle from the Aberdeen and Angus varieties to form the basis of the black Aberdeen Angus cattle. He referred to the date he founded his herd as 1832, which was the year his cattle gained a first prize in exhibitions. Over five hundred prizes were won by his cattle throughout the UK and at major exhibitions in France. When rinderpest struck northeast cattle herds in 1865, McCombie organised Aberdeenshire farmers to raise a compensation fund that made possible the rigorous slaughter policy that extirpated the disease, thus providing the model for modern disease control measures among farm stock.



in Edinburgh.

This is a picture of the Royal High School in Edinburgh in the time when it was just built in about 1812 and what do you have in it? All the elements of society that you would expect. There's wee boys playing in the steps, there's a stagecoach coming from the south and cattle being driven in front of it. So this gives a flavour of the early 19th century with cattle being driven even

But to come back to Ram Moor, the man I want to talk about from here is called Murdo Mackenzie and he was one of a big family in a small tenant farm and since he was the second son there was no way he was going to inherit the farm. So he trained as a bank clerk. His older brother, I think it was, one of his brothers anyway was a bank agent in Tain. He had a job which was huge, much bigger than Al-Fayeds (Balnagown) estate is today. And these ruins where he was born are of the farm which is about three quarters of a mile from a major drove road. His skills were headhunted by the Scottish American Investment Company. Any of you who are old enough in the tooth and Scottish terms can remember the Earl of Airlie who, like many people, realised the potential of the American West. Mackenzie was headhunted from Balnagown to go out and manage the Prairie Land and Cattle Company in Texas and he went on from there in the 1880s to manage the Matador Land and Cattle Company. These cattle companies were respectively owned in Edinburgh and Dundee, Scotland.

Murdo MacKenzie in black hat with cowboys at Matador Ranch chuck wagon 1891.



Indeed Mackay and Irons, the accountants, used to go out to Texas from Dundee every year to check out the books in the different headquarters of these companies at the time. The company secretary was indeed one of the accountants in Mackay and Irons. Now in his late seventies, originally from Dundee, he now lives in Inverness.

But the man who came from the cattle trading area of the Highlands went on to be, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, the greatest of American cattlemen. Do the people in Edderton know this? Well some people who are related to the family do. Some people are beginning to realise the importance of the man. Some people even question just exactly why he left. Nevertheless, when running the Matador Company he took on the railways on behalf of the cattle trades people of America to barter down the prices. They had to get the federal government to help to do this and that is why he became involved in the political world of the cattle industry in North America. Theodore Roosevelt, the president at the beginning of the century, the 20th century, described him, as I say, as the greatest of Western cattlemen.

When he ran the Matador Company had sections in Saskatchewan, Montana, South Dakota and also the home ranges in Texas. So Murdo Mackenzie had to travel huge distances in order to carry out his work and it's a classic example of the Scottish business, where you bring in your cousins, your nephews, your sons in order to run the business because you can trust them and you know what their pedigree is. That's why they were so successful and so loyal to the point of getting things done. But without going into the whole story of Murdo Mackenzie this serves as one example of a link directly between what was the old cattle trade of the Highlands which spread out into other parts of the world, in this case to the great plains of North America.

So the droving which started off as the raiding of cattle in the Celtic classical period led to great poetry like 'The Cattle Raid of Cooley' and in turn started to serve the needs of the towns for food. Then because of the circumstances of change of land use, because of free trade and because of improvements in transport, it ended up with people who had the skills from that age-old trade, so important in the Highlands, to take that along with the breeds of cattle which had been developed in Scotland and elsewhere onto the world stage. And people like Murdo Mackenzie sum up the importance of this whole issue of droving and you can understand why, if I'm given a chance, I can tell the other half of the story at another time.