

Beef Production from the Hill to the Abattoir

By F.J. Young

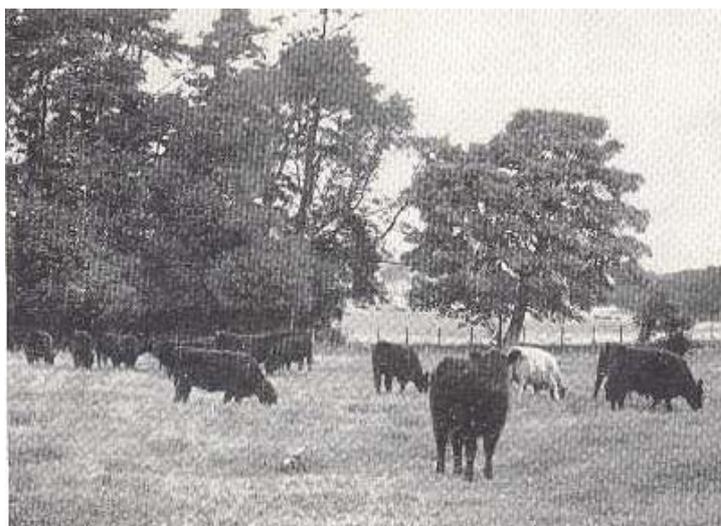
Reprinted from the 1955 *The Galloway Journal*, the Official Publication of The Galloway Cattle Society, Scotland

One of the claims made for Galloways is that they are economical producers of quality beef. Partly to substantiate this claim and partly because it may be of interest to others who have a similar set-up consisting of a lot of inferior hill land and a little good arable land., I have been asked to describe methods of Galloway beef production practiced by the Duke of Norfolk at his hill farm Kinharvie, New Abbey and his arable farm Lantonside, Caerlav-erock.



The start of the Story – Cows and Calves on Kinharvie Hill

Kinharvie extends to 3000 acres on the north hip of Criffel and runs up to a height of about 1300ft. It is entirely a hill sheep farm of 40 score of blackfaced ewes rearing pure bred lambs. The herbage consists of heather and blow grass with some useful bogs, not just really quite good enough in my opinion for hill cows. There is no arable ground whatsoever apart from about 30 acres of meadow which is cut for hay and there is no land under the plough. Lantonside extends to about 280 acres of useful arable land on the estuary of the Nith, plus about 2000 acres of merse land which is tidal with most of it under water probably a dozen times per year, mostly during the high spring tides in March and April. Of the 280 acres, about 100 are under crop producing the necessary food for the cattle at the two places. The combination of these two farms is proving to be ideal for the production of Galloway beef and blackface mutton, the hill farm being the nursery and the arable land the finishing ground.

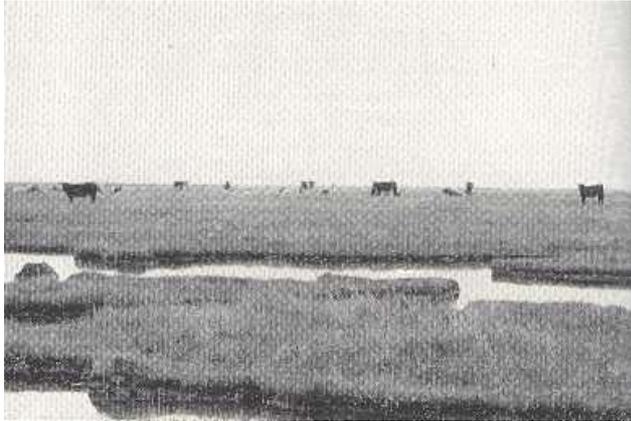


At present between 40 and 50 pedigree Galloway cows are carried at Kinharvie and the herd is being gradually built up to 80 as the grazing is improved by the cattle and by drainage, heather burning and the application of slag, etc. The herd comprises a small number of the best cows which are run as a normal pedigree breeding herd for the production of a few bull calves and show steers and do not really concern this article, while much the larger number of cows run on the hill the whole year round and are of course out wintered. These cows calve during April, May and June and the calves are weaned at the end of October, at this stage being what one would term small hill calves about six months old.

The second stage – Yearlings at Lantonside

The steer calves are sent to Lantonside the day they are weaned and the heifer calves are tied by the neck at Kinharvie for a month where they are broken in – in other words they get accustomed to human beings, to being held and to being trough fed, as they have not seen anyone except the shepherd and his dog since birth – for the first day or so they find this treatment a bit of a shock but they very soon get over it. At the end of a month they are taken down to Lantonside to join the steer calves, and all are wintered inside in a large court with plenty of air and ventilation.

During this their first, and in my opinion most important, winter they are given hay, straw, turnips and crushed oats with about 5% fish meal or linseed cake. In the following spring – at the end of April or the beginning of May – both steers and heifers are summered together at Lantonside. The usual cropping rotation for this part of the country is practiced at Lanton-



The merse land on which the bullocks spend 12 months

and wintered again at Lantonside on the poor land to which I have already referred. The reason for this is that we have found that Kinharvie is not good enough to take heifers back at two years old and have their first calves at three, so they stay on the worst land at Lantonside until three years old, go back to the hill at that age, are summered and wintered there and have their first calf at four which I think on this inferior land is well worth while.

side, i.e. oats, turnips, sow-out oats, hay and 4 or 5 years grass and the yearling steers and heifers are summered on the 3rd or 4th year grass. It may be of interest to note that this year 24 steers and heifers are still grazing the same 25 acre field to which they went out at the end of April and this has also carried a normal stocking of half-bred ewes and lambs.

During the next winter the steers and heifers are divided but the treatment they receive remains the same – they are out-wintered at Lantonside on the worst land – the only non-arable land on the farm – and they receive turnips, hay and straw. In the following spring, the two or three best heifers are drawn out and sent back to Kinharvie to be put to the bull and to join the select breeding herd there., the remainder of the heifers are summered

The steers when rising two years old go out to the merse at the beginning of May and remain there for 12 months, and then when rising 3 years old they are brought back on to the best available pasture at Lantonside, i.e. the 1st and 2nd year grass, and are finished there, being marketed in October and November when about 3 ½ years old.

Now, all this may seem a long and costly process, but when you analyse it you will find that while it may take a year longer than for cattle which are reared on very good land it is certainly not costly, and once you have your cycle set up you have your draft of very good fat steers going off each autumn, prime slowly matured Galloway beef at a very low cost of production. If you look at the wintering costs you will find this is so. The cows, which, of course, are kept permanently at Kinharvie, are wintered on hay alone, the calves for the first winter, as I have said, get only hay, straw, turnips, crushed oats with about 5% fish meal or linseed cake, and as yearlings during the second winter only turnips, hay and straw. Then from two years old to three years old their keep in fact costs nothing but the herding; the merse grazing is free and common to four farms and the herding is done day about. During their winter on the merse the cattle get nothing except what they pull and during the last three winters these cattle have had straw on not more than a dozen days. Snow does not lie for any length of time on the merse ground, and the only time the cattle are given straw is after a very high spring tide followed by dry weather, as on these occasions 95% of the merse is covered with salt water and dirt and the cattle will not graze it again until it has had rain. You may lose an odd bullock in a mud creek in the merse – we have lost one in three years – but apart from this we have had not trouble whatsoever. In very hot weather a headache to the people who are doing the herding is that the cattle go away out on the sand when the tide is out and sometimes they appear to be nearer England than Scotland, but they always come back in front of the tide.



The final stage – Bullocks ‘finishing’ on the good land at Lantonside, with Criffel in the background



FJ Young snapped while he was judging the in-calf heifers at the Royal Highland Show at Edinburgh 1955

Following is a list of the weights, grading details and prices of the steers marketed last year and demonstrates that the finished product is a good one:-

Grading Weights and Details

	Date of Sale and Number Sold	Average Weight	Average Price per Cwt	Average Price per Beast	
	8/10/54	9 steers	11 cwt 3 qrs	£ 7 12 6	£ 88 3 0
	1/11/54	9 steers	10 cwt 2 qrs	£ 8 13 0	£ 91 0 0
	13/11/54	8 steers	11 cwt 2 qrs	£7 14 0	£ 88 17 0
	<u>26 steers</u>		<u>11 cwt 18 lbs</u>	<u>£ 8 0 0</u>	<u>£ 89 5 0</u>