

The Drove Road from the North

To one who watched from the hills behind Crieff the gathering of the cattle for the Tryst on an autumn day of the early eighteenth century, it would have been apparent that two main streams of beasts were converging from different directions on the town. While some droves were coming from the north-west down the valley of the Earn or across the hills from Loch Tay, a second stream was moving through the Sma' Glen from the direction of Amulree and the valley of the Tay. Half a century later, when Crieff Tryst had given way before the rising importance of Falkirk, a watcher from the Castle Rock at Stirling might have observed a similar meeting of traffic. While many droves were approaching the crossing of the Forth from the direction of Doune and the north-west, many more were slowly winding their way down the track which led from Sheriffmuir into the Forth valley. A study of the history of the cattle trade between the Highlands and the Lowlands shows that, broadly, there were two main routes by which droving traffic came from the north, north-west and central Highlands to the Lowland Trysts. Of these main streams one, and possibly the larger, had its origin in Skye, the Outer Islands and part of the north-western districts. The other had its source in the far north and the eastern half of the counties of Ross and Inverness, and each was fed by tributary streams from the country through which it passed on its way to the south. The separate existence of these two streams of beasts is accounted for largely by the mass of high ground lying across Scotland both north and south of the Great Glen, which made it necessary for much of the traffic to pass at the west or at the east end of what is now the Caledonian Canal.¹ There were important lateral connections between the streams, but in the main they remained distinct till the markets of Southern Perthshire and Stirlingshire and the barrier of the Forth brought them together. It is with the stream of animal traffic which had its source in the far north, which moved through Easter Ross-shire, Badenoch and Atholl, and which came at last to Crieff by way of the Sma' Glen, that we are here concerned.

¹ See Appendix B (p. 227)

It has been seen that the earliest evidence of legitimate cattle traffic comes from the west and north-west where droving to the Lowlands can be traced back to the start of the sixteenth century. The reason for this would, as has been suggested, seem to lie partly in the need of the poorer north-west districts to export their beasts in the absence of feeding to carry them through the winter. In the natter and richer districts of the east side of Scotland arable farming provided some sort of winter feeding, poor as it no doubt was, and made it perhaps less essential to market beasts on the approach of winter, while the cattle raised in the eastern half of the country seem on the whole to have been less suited for droving than those of the hardier west coast breed. Larger population and the possibility of some coastwise or export trade from the north-eastern counties meant more local demand, while it may be that the character and way of life of the people of these rather more developed areas were also less suited to the droving trade. None the less the volume of cattle traffic which used the more easterly route was by no means negligible, and the evidence available indicates that the stream of beasts which started in the far north had, with its tributary streams, reached a size rivalling the droves from the west by the time it passed through the Sma' Glen to reach the Perthshire lowlands.

In the extreme north of the country, Caithness had, at least as early as the start of the eighteenth century, an outlet for her cattle readier to hand than the markets of Central Scotland. John Brand, writing of Orkney, Shetland and Caithness in 1701 speaks of a considerable export trade with Leith in barrelled beef, tallow, skins and hides,¹ while the Dutch herring boats which came in large numbers each summer to Orkney and Shetland meant a local demand for beef; but not all the Caithness beasts were marketed at home, and the letters of Sir James Sinclair of Mey show that before the middle of the eighteenth century cattle were being sold from the county for droving to the South.² Defoe writing about 1726 refers to many black cattle being bred in Caithness and sold to drovers, mainly for droving to Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex,³ and Pennant in 1772 estimated that in good years the county sold to the drovers

¹ Brand, *A Brief Description of Orkney, Zetland, etc.*, 1701, 149

² *Manuscript Letters of Sir James Sinclair of Mey*, Box xviii. 1738-43, H.M. Register House

³ Defoe, *Tour through Great Britain in 1724* (1762 edn.), IV, 253

as many as 2,200.¹ By the end of the century, the annual number driven south had risen to about 3,000,² and the writer of the Statistical Account for Wick speaks of the parish being full of black cattle which are sold to drovers for Falkirk and England at a price of 405 to 505.³ He maintains that these cattle from the north-east coastal districts drive as well as those from the Highland districts. The general view of many contemporary writers was, however, that cattle of the true Highland breed from Skye and the West Highlands were better in quality and more suitable for droving, and the relatively poor quality of Caithness cattle for droving may well explain the important place which barrelled beef and hides occupied in the list of exports from the district. The beasts from Caithness moreover, faced a four weeks journey to the South of Scotland, and a letter from James Gunn of Braemore to Sir James Sinclair, whose beasts he had bought in 1743 suggests that drovers of Caithness cattle were fortunate if all their beasts 'held out to travill.'⁴ An account of a recent Falkirk Tryst contained in a letter written from Edinburgh in October 1805 makes the following comment on Caithness cattle: 'Large cattle from Caithness will not answer. Sir John Sinclair's Galloway oxen, worth £14 each in Caithness, only fetched £7 3 6d at Falkirk. The true breed for droving to be established in Caithness is either the pure Sky or the Argyle breed or a cross between the Argyle or Sky Bull and the best sort of Caithness Cows. That kind of stock would always fetch a fair price . . .'⁵

As the stream of cattle from the far north moved down the East Coast by Helmsdale and Brora, it was augmented by droves coming from Strath-Naver and Strath Halladale and the glens immediately to the westward and by other cattle driven across the hills from the north-west coast. Here in the upland glens and on the Atlantic seaboard of Sutherland cattle rearing had for long been the main, if not the only, industry of the country. In the district of Reay the breeding of cattle and the inevitable accompaniment of cattle thieving had figured in the Privy Council records of the seventeenth century,⁶ and when the Statistical

Pennant, *Tour in Scotland*, 1772, III, 202

O.S.A., Caithness, XX, 519

" *O.S.A.*, Wick, X, 22

Manuscript Letters of Sir James Sinclair of Mey, Box xviii, 22nd Oct. 1743, H.M. Register House

Sutherland Estate Papers. Letter from John Sinclair, 12th Oct. 1805

R.P.C., 3rd series, II, 566, 567

Account was compiled at the close of the eighteenth century the parishes of Reay and Eddrachillis had a combined cattle population of close on 6,000 beasts.¹ Sales to the drovers at a price of £2 IDS to £4 a head were, says the Account, the main support of the people. Cattle were evidently being regularly driven to the South from the Sutherland Estates at the beginning of the century, for in a letter written from Edinburgh on 31 August 1703 addressed to the Earl of Sutherland, Mr Charles Ross asks that 'Your Lordship will be pleased to order one of your drovers to give me two fatt cows to be my winter beef.'²

For those cattle from Caithness and East Sutherland, the Kyle of Sutherland and the Dornoch Firth were formidable obstacles on the route to the South. Some of the beasts may have been taken across at the Meikle Ferry near Skibo, but many of the drovers appear to have preferred to cross the Kyle at Creich. The minister of that parish writing in the Statistical Account in 1794 reports that this crossing is necessary for all the cattle of Caithness and Sutherland and also for those coming from Lord Reay's country except the Assynt district. The cattle swam the Kyle, he writes, or if necessary were ferried across, the readiness with which the beasts took to the water foretelling, according to a local supersition, whether the prices at the Trysts would be good or bad.³

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century there existed north of Inverness little in the way of roads save the tracks of pack-horses and cattle. There were no bridges over the large rivers, and though some of the smaller ones appear to have been bridged, Telford in his Survey and Report to the Commissioners for Highlands Roads and Bridges in 1803 reported that the lack of bridges over the Conon and the Beauly was one of the chief weaknesses of communication in the north.⁴ These water barriers were a deterrent to dealers coming from the south in search of cattle, and a further discouragement appears to have been the difficulty of droving through and finding stances for their beasts in the relatively rich cultivated farming lands of Easter Ross-shire. As late as 1831 drovers were refusing to go north of Bridge

¹ *O.S.A.*, Eddrachillis, VI, 283

² *Sutherland Estate Papers*, Bundle 19, Nos. 619-44

³ *O.S.A.*, Creich, VIII, 372

⁴ So rapidly did the work of the Commissioners open up the country that in 1818 the *Inverness Courier* was able to report that 'From Inverness to John o' Groats it is now possible to travel without crossing a ferry or fording a river.'

of Conon because of the action of local landowners in confiscating cattle straying from the drove roads, particularly on that part of the route which led from Kincardine on the Dornoch Firth to Strathrusdale.¹ From the reference to this route it seems that the drovers after passing the Kyle of Sutherland crossed the high ground between the Dornoch and Cromarty Firths by the hill road past Aultnamain Inn, or possibly by tracks farther to the westward.

At intervals on the drove route from the northern counties, small local trysts had been established, at least by the mid-eighteenth century, for the sale of cattle brought from the glens and the grazings lying to the westward. Contemporary records of the cattle trade contain scattered references to Trysts at George-mas and in the Strath of Dunbeath in Caithness, at Clashmore, Monibuie and Dornoch in Sutherland and at Kildary in Ross-shire. Some of these were certainly in existence in the first half of the eighteenth century, but the most important tryst for the droves from the north dates only from the first quarter of last century.

Midway across the narrow neck of low land which lies between the head of the Cromarty Firth and the Beaully Firth and in the direct path of traffic from north to south, the position of Muir of Ord gives to it many of the advantages which made Falkirk the great cattle market of Central Scotland. For traffic from the north and north-east reaching the Cromarty Firth about Alness the only route to the south was by the crossing of the Conon at the head of the Firth. To the west and north-west of Muir of Ord radiated Strath Garve, Strath Bran, Strath Conon and Glen Orrin, the first two affording to this day the main overland communication with the seaboard of Wester Ross. A few miles to the south lay the valley of the Beaully leading inland to Strath Glass, Glen Strathfarrar, Glen Cannich and Glen Affric. All these glens sent their quota of cattle to the Muir of Ord market. The valley of the Beaully and the road up Strath Glass offered, moreover, a route to the south by way of Fort Augustus, while the road to Inverness gave an alternative route to Crieff and Central Scotland. The Tryst at Muir of Ord was established about 1820. At first it was held near the village of Beaully and was known as ' Feill-na-manachainn.' Later it was moved to a better site about a mile to the north, and though it never rivalled

¹ *Inverness Courier*, 1st November 1821

m size the great Trysts at Crieff, Falkirk and Dumfries, ' Blair dubh ' as it was then called remained until near the end of last century the greatest market in the north for cattle from Caithness, Sutherland and Ross-shire.

Before the development of Oban, Mallaig and Kyle of Lochalsh, Poolewe on the West Ross-shire coast was the main port of entry for traffic from a considerable part of the Western Islands. The cattle of Skye and many of the Outer Hebrides crossed to the mainland, as has been seen, at Kyle Rhea, but for sea-borne traffic from the islands to the mainland, Poolewe was almost the only port. It seems probable that the use of Poolewe for island traffic dates back to comparatively early times. John Knox who toured in the Highlands and Islands in 1786 reported that he sailed from Stornoway to Poolewe in a small unseaworthy vessel used for the transport of cattle to the Ross-shire coast.¹ Evander Maclver, for many years factor on the Sutherland Estates, has described how as a boy he sailed from Stornoway to Poolewe about the year 1818 in a sloop laden with cattle which had been purchased at the Lewis cattle tryst. The beasts were thrown overboard in Loch Ewe and made to swim ashore.² At least as early as the end of the eighteenth century the route between Poolewe and Dingwall appears to have been in frequent use. James Hogg, describing a tour in the Highlands in 1803, refers to the Inn at Kinlochewe as having been built to accommodate those travelling from Dingwall to Gairloch or towards the ferry of Poolewe ' where there is a packet once each week to Lewis,' and in the same year George Brown, reporting to the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges, refers to the route from Poolewe by Loch Maree and Kinlochewe to Achnasheen, Strath Bran and Garve as ' the great line of communication ' from Lewis and the West Coast to Dingwall and Inverness.

To Poolewe or to points on the nearby coast came the cattle of Lewis. The New Statistical Account for Stornoway records that near the town ' there is a square mile of moor enclosed for a cattle tryst where several thousand head are exposed for sale and 2,000 at least change hands in 2 days. From 20 to 30 drovers come from the Mainland and some from England.'³ Some cattle from Harris also landed at Poolewe, and evidence given in

¹ Knox, *Tour through the Highlands of Scotland and the Hebride Isles in 1786*, 193-3

* *Reminiscences of Evander Maclver*, 1905, 6

• *N.S.A.*, Stornoway, Ross and Cromarty, XIV, 140

the course of litigation in 1868 by those who had taken part in the droving trade in the early years of the century tells of landings of cattle from the Outer Isles at Gairloch, Aultbea and Gruinard.¹ From Poolewe these island cattle together with those of the parish of Gairloch of which as many as 500 were sold off each year, appear to have followed the north shore of Loch Maree to Kinlochewe and Achnasheen, while many of those which landed at Aultbea and Gruinard went up the valley of the Gruinard River past Loch-na-Shellag near the head of the river and so by hill tracks to join either the road from Ullapool to Dingwall or that from Achnasheen to Garve.² The landing of cattle from Lewis at Poolewe and near Aultbea as late as 1880 is confirmed by Mr Angus McLeod, a retired drover now (1948) in his looth year living near Gruinard who started droving about the year 1868. The beasts which came ashore near Aultbea at that time were, it seems, driven to Muir of Ord by way of Gruinard, Dundonnell and Braemore as being shorter than the route by Kinlochewe and Achnasheen. The hill route by Loch-na-Shellag which had been upheld as a drove road in the litigation of 1868, was apparently by that time no longer in regular use. From Braemore the beasts were driven east to Garve and Dingwall but two deviations from the main road were used by the drovers, and it appears from local information that these are still in occasional use. One of these turned due south from the main road near Altguish and crossed the forest of Corriemoillie to Garve, so shortening the distance and keeping the beasts on soft ground where grazing was available. The other short cut left the Ullapool-Garve road near Inchbrae Lodge and crossing the saddle between Ben Wyvis and Little Wyvis rejoined at Auchterneed the road to Dingwall.³

The Statistical Account records that in 1794 the parish of Applecross in Wester Ross-shire contained about 3,000 cattle, the annual sales of cattle being the chief means of support of the people.⁴ For these, the natural route would be by Strathcarron

¹ *Mackenzie v. Banks*. Court of Session Cases, 1868, G Macpherson's Reports, 936 and Notes of Evidence in *Session Papers*, Signet Library. * *ibid.*

² From information collected in the Ullapool district it appears that cattle from Lewis were regularly landed at Ullapool within living memory. It is also reported that cattle from the Ullapool area were at times driven through Glen Achall into Glen Einig and so to Strathoykell by a branch road turning off at Craggan in Glen Einig which leads into Strathcarron and so to Ardgay. These routes, it seems, were regularly used for taking beasts to the late autumn sale at Ardgay.

³ *O.S.A.*, Applecross, III, 371

and Strath Bran to the East Coast, and local tradition tells also of the regular use of droving tracks from the districts of Lochalsh and North Kintail to Glen Cannich and Glen Affric bound for the Muir of Ord market.

Many of these tracks across the North of Scotland are certainly of very early origin ; how early cannot now be determined, but when General Roy surveyed the Highlands in the years between 1747 and 1755 some of the routes, such as that from Loch Broom to Dingwall by Strath Garve were marked on the large-scale map of Scotland which was at that time prepared, and Pennant in 1772 noted that in the Loch Broom district the sale of black cattle to drovers from as far south as Craven in Yorkshire was the chief support of the people.¹ For these the only practicable route to the South was by Strath Garve to Muir of Ord and Beaully.

While the accident of a nineteenth-century litigation has established beyond all doubt the existence of droving traffic from the Poolewe area and one of the routes by which these droves crossed the country from the West Coast, it is hardly possible at this distance of time to establish with equal certainty the routes of all the other cross-country traffic in this great area of hills and glens and lochs. But if the exact routes cannot be determined the general trend of the traffic is not in doubt, and it would seem to be beyond question that to Muir of Ord came cattle not only from Caithness and Sutherland and from the many glens which drain to the Beaully and Cromarty Firths, but also from the whole seaboard of Wester Ross lying between Loch Broom and Loch Alsh.

To the south of Muir of Ord two alternative routes lay open to drovers bound for the Trysts at Crieff or Falkirk. Some part of the droving traffic from the north went by Beaully and the Aird of Lovat to Inverness, and after 1817 Inverness became the great centre for the wool and sheep trade in the North of Scotland. For cattle traffic from the north, however, Inverness appears to have been of minor importance. The town never figured in the list of important cattle markets. The *Inverness Courier* for 28 October 1824 reports that the tryst recently established at Muir of Ord has almost superseded that at Inverness, but it is on record that in the third week of May 1818 as many as 1,500 cattle purchased at the Ross-shire Trysts passed through the town.²

¹ Pennant, *Tour in Scotland*, 1771, I, 364

² *Inverness Courier*, 31 May 1818

The route by Inverness reaching the Spey Valley about Nethy Bridge or Aviemore passed south through the Pass of Drumochter, while it also gave access to the high passes through the Cairngorm Mountains to Deeside and the Angus glens. A Survey of the Agriculture of Inverness-shire in 1813 mentions the existence of a periodical cattle market at Kingussie and a new one established in 1804 on a date fixed to suit drovers for the South passing through Badenoch,¹ while in 1814 a Tryst was in existence at Pitmain near Kingussie for the sale to drovers of cattle for Falkirk.² The alternative route to the South chosen by many drovers from Muir of Ord illustrates their preference for the less frequented ways leading them through hill country which offered greater freedom of movement with more abundant and cheaper wayside grazing for their cattle. A few miles south of Muir of Ord, the valley of the Beauly leads south-westward into Strath Glass and the hills of the Forests of Fasnakyle and Guisachan. What proportion of the droving traffic from the north chose this route cannot be accurately estimated, but it is known that many and probably most drovers preferred it. An article which appeared in the *Inverness Courier* for 26 September 1827 contains the following passage: 'We believe the great Northern Drove Road begins somewhere about the Kyle of Sutherland (at which place a number of important cattle markets are held throughout the year) and runs nearly parallel with one of the Parliamentary roads for a considerable distance, through the lands of Ardross, by Fowlis, and Dingwall to the Muir of Ord (another great market)—then branching away through the mountains towards Fort Augustus and from thence southwards—avoiding the public lines of road throughout the whole distance till it touches occasionally on the turnpike roads in Perthshire. There are other branch drove-roads leading from various points of the country into this line, but this is unquestionably the principal one as proceeding direct from two of the greatest market stances in the North of Scotland.' From the point where Guisachan House now stands near the head of Strath Glass, an easy route leads across the hills of the Guisachan Forest to Torgyle in Glen Moriston, connecting with the old military road leading to Fort Augustus, and when in 1888 a right of way past Guisachan was unsuccessfully challenged, the evidence brought in its support revealed the steady use by drovers

¹ Robertson, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Inverness*, 1813, 302 ¹
Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, 1898 ed., 248-9

of this and other cross-country routes throughout the preceding half-century. The traffic at that time recorded was mainly a traffic in sheep, but cattle traffic too used these roads and there seems little reason to doubt that this route had long been in use for cattle droving.¹

As these droves from Strath Glass and Guisachan descended into Gleri Moriston they joined one of the routes used by the cattle which had crossed from Skye at Kyle Rhea. A Memorial of 1805 presented to the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges refers to the use by cattle from Skye and the Outer Isles of the military road to Fort Augustus, and a Memorandum of about the same date among the *Breadalbane Papers* speaks of this as the alternative line for the droves which did not use the route by Glen Garry.⁸ South of Fort Augustus the droves from Skye or from Muir of Ord crossed the hills to the Upper Spey Valley by the Pass of Corrieyairack, the route which Wade chose for the construction of his military road in 1731, and over which Prince Charles Edward passed in 1745. This route from the North of Scotland to the trysts was evidently in active use by stock in the early nineteenth century, for the *Inverness Courier* of 24 July 1823 reports that in the course of discussions over the Bill for the Maintenance of Highland Roads and Bridges then before Parliament, a concession had been made whereby cattle might travel from Strath Halladale in Sutherlandshire westward and southward to Fort Augustus, and so over the Corrieyairack road to Perthshire without payment of toll except tod per score of black cattle and 5d per score of sheep and lambs payable once at the Pitmain Bridge over the Spey. This route over the Pass of Corrieyairack was almost certainly the route used by the large droves from Skye which Bishop Forbes met at Drumochter in 1723, and references to it in contemporary records show the Pass to have remained in extensive use by drovers till the second half of the nineteenth century.

At Dalwhinnie the droves which had crossed the Monadhliath Mountains from Fort Augustus joined those which had come from Inverness and the North by the more easterly route, and it seems probable that during the droving days the hills which enclose the Pass of Drumochter looked down on a concentration

¹ *Winam and Chisholm v. Lord Tweedmouth*, Court of Session Cases, 1888, 15 Rettie's Reports, 540 and Notes of Evidence in *Session Papers*, Signet Library, No. 98, 1888. ³
Breadalbane Papers (Roads), Box 4, H.M. Register House

of droving traffic as great as was to be seen at that time in any part of the Highlands. At Dalwhinnie on 31 August 1723 Bishop Forbes found eight droves—1,200 beasts in all—bound for Grieff, and in the Drumochter Pass a drove a mile in length, with 300 more resting at the head of Loch Garry.' A few miles south of Drumochter Pass the drove road from the North left the valley of the Garry at Dalnacardoch, and crossing the hills by Trinafour and the head waters of the Errochty on the line of General Wade's military road, came to Tummel Bridge and the borders of the Rannoch country. Passing to the east of Schiehallion the route of the cattle then led to Coshieville near the junction of Lyon and Tay. In the 14th Report to the Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges in 1828 the route from Dalnacardoch to the valley of the Tay is referred to as the route by which go to Falkirk, Doune and other trysts 'almost all the cattle and sheep of the North and North-West Highlands.'²

From the foot of Glen Lyon part of the cattle traffic appears to have gone by Aberfeldy and Wade's Tay Bridge, while part forded the Lyon and the Upper Tay, crossing the hills to the south of Kenmore into Glen Quaich and so to Amulree on the road to Crieff. Here, at the crossing of the Tay, the drovers were on ground trodden by the feet of their less reputable ancestors. Mackintosh of Borlum, writing in 1742, refers to Kenmore as 'a very frequent and beaten Pass for driving stolen cattle from Perthshire, Stirlingshire, Kinross and Clackmannan into Glenlyon, Rannoch, Breadalbane, Glencoe, Appin and Lorn.'³

Until the middle of the eighteenth century Crieff remained, as has been seen, the main centre of trade for the cattle from the North of Scotland and for many of those from the West Coast and the Hebrides, but shortly after 1750 various factors undermined the importance of Crieff as a cattle market and led ultimately to the transference of the main trade to Falkirk Tryst. By the last decade of the century when the Statistical Account was compiled, though many thousands of cattle were still using the route through the Sma' Glen to Crieff, they passed the town on the day before the date fixed for the Tryst, so avoiding the market dues which were still levied.⁴ By that time Crieff Tryst

¹ *Bishop Forbes' Journal*, 235
Mackintosh, *A Short Scheme*.
Scotland, 1742

² *H.R. & B.*, 14th Report, 1828, Appendix D to
stop depredation . . . to the Northern Counties of*

had shrunk to a mere shadow of what it once had been, and a description of the cattle route from the North must follow the beasts a short distance farther to their destination at Falkirk Tryst.

A little way down-stream from Crieff the old ford of Dalpatrick crosses the River Earn. The ford is on the direct line from Gilmerton where the Sma' Glen road emerges from the hills, and the name of 'Highlandman' which the nearby railway station still bears is locally believed to date back to the days when Highland drovers in large numbers came that way. At Dalpatrick Ford the droves crossed the Earn and, coming into Strathallan by way of Muthill and the Muir of Orchil, they crossed the Allan Water about Greenloaning, and came to Sheriffmuir. Here on the north-west slopes of the Ochils, at a point immediately to the east of the site of the battle of 1715, extensive common rights of grazing for long existed. The area was a favourite stance ground, and when the common was divided in 1771 the evidence of local witnesses agrees as to its frequent use by drovers bound for Falkirk. The situation of Sheriffmuir made it peculiarly well suited for the purpose, for this was the last hill grazing available for beasts from the North on their way to Falkirk, and here drovers who were not pressed for time could rest their droves perhaps for a day or more before taking them on to the Tryst. From Sheriffmuir the droves moved down the south-west slopes of the Ochils to Bridge of Allan and the valley of the Forth, on the last miles of the long road to Falkirk Tryst.

While the extensive use of this route by Sheriffmuir is well established by a variety of contemporary evidence, it seems that some of the cattle from Crieff and a portion of those which passed through Perth from the north-eastern counties reached Falkirk by a different route. Due south of Crieff across Strathearn, Gleneagles and Glendevon provided a ready way through the low range of grassy hills which a contemporary writer called 'those verdant Downs the Ochil Hills,'¹ while to the east of Gleneagles other tracks offered an easy crossing of the Ochils and the best of upland grazing. In his *Memorial respecting the Road from Yetts of Muckhart through Glendevon and Gleneagles into Strathearn*, Sir Patrick Murray of Ochertyre records that between July 1812 and July 1813 at the side bar on the Hillfoots road giving access

¹ Knox, *op. cit.* II

to the Glendevon road at Yetts of Muckhart the following tolls were collected :

Cattle, 863 at is a score
 Sheep, 13,219 at _<jd a score

but it is not clear from the context whether these beasts were going south or north or both. The numbers are small, but Gleneagles and Glendevon comprised only one of several routes through the Ochils, and it must be borne in mind that drovers were adepts at avoiding tolls. For droves crossing the Ochils by any of these routes bound for Falkirk, the natural crossings of the Forth were at Alloa and Kincardine-on-Forth, and the Minute Book of the Justices of the Peace for Stirlingshire for the year 1827 shows the two ferries in active use by the drovers. In May of that year the Justices had before them a complaint that the existing rates for ferrying black cattle at Alloa were too high, and that for this reason many droves took other routes to the South. New rates were fixed at 4d. a beast up to six and 3d a beast for more, or 55 a score. In the spring of the following year a steam ferry boat was put on at Higginsneuk (Kincardine) Ferry in addition to the sailing boats used for black cattle, the ferrying rate being fixed at 6s 8d a score. The cattle traffic at the Higginsneuk Ferry appears to have interfered with the ferrying of passengers, for in the autumn of the same year it was found necessary to make special rules for dealing with the ferrying of cattle droves. It was provided that a drover coming to the ferry should have the right of using the first boat to cross, but that passengers should have the right of the next boat even if they had arrived after the arrival of the drove, and so on alternately till the whole drove had been ferried. No passengers were to cross with cattle except those in charge of them, and extra men were to be available to help with the ferrying at times of Fairs or Trysts.¹

The crossing of the Forth behind them, a few more miles brought the tired cattle from the North to the tryst ground at Stenhousemuir, there to merge in the vast assembly of men and beasts which was gathering from every part of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

¹ *Minute Book of Quarter Sessions, o.J.J.P.'s for Stirlingshire, 6th December 1819*