

The keeping and trading of cattle determined the economy of Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein to a considerable extent from the end of the fifteenth until the eighteenth century. Countless herds of cattle were driven south from Jutland through Schleswig-Holstein during this period. Some sources even mention this at an earlier date: in 1389 Danish cattle were sold at Dutch markets, and in 1439 in Cologne.

There were three main routes along which the cattle were driven south from Jutland.

The drover's trail to the east led from Aalborg via Vejle to the customs point of the Duchy of Schleswig, and then to Kolding. From here the trail led to Haderslev, Immerwatt, Kl. Dannemwerk, Kropper Busch, Nübbel/Rendsburg and on to Jevenstedt. Here the road divided. Part of the cattle herds were driven to the market in Itzehoe, part of them were taken via Neumünster to Bad Bramstedt, where the trail to the Elbe again divided. One meeting point was the market in Wedel, which the herds reached via Ütersen; other herds were taken to the Elbe crossing at Zollenspieker via Ochsenzoll and Bergedorf.

The central trail came from Skive and led to Tønder via Viborg and Løgumkloster. At this point it joined the western trail, along which, coming from Holstebro, one reached the market in Husum in twelve days via Ribe, Tønder, Süderlügum and Leck. Cattle which had not been sold were driven further south via Hollingstedt in the direction of Kropper Busch, later directly.

A minor trail from Schleswig past Eckernförde, Kiel, Preetz, Plön and Eutin to Lübeck may be mentioned.

Towns were usually avoided due to the narrow streets.

Even today street names bear witness to these former times. In Flensburg we find, for example, the street name "Am Ochsenweg", in Kropp the "Ochsenweg", in Krogaspe near Neumünster the "Ossenweg" and in Ütersen the "Ossenpadd".

The old trails have, of course, disappeared to a great extent. Agricultural cultivation and roads have superimposed them. The last traces can be found south of Leck and in the region around Kropp.

Maritime trading must be mentioned. From the west coast of Denmark the ships went to Westfriesland, and the Danish Baltic islands supplied the area around Lübeck.

The land trail through Schleswig-Holstein ended in Wedel, Blankenese or Zollenspieker at the ferries which crossed the Elbe, mostly without the use of sails, and manned by eight men using poles. The order of transport was determined by the time of registration, but princes, counts and landowners naturally enjoyed privileges. Round about 1600 up to 23,000 cattle per annum were transported by ferry in Wedel. Crossing the Elbe was not always easy. Reports show that on

The road southwards was difficult. Three to four miles were covered in one day. Sometimes the herds were on the move for up to four weeks, and often the cattle arrived at the markets in poor condition.

A herd normally consisted of 40-50 cattle, with two or three drovers. The drovers were tempted by the decent wages, which lay above their earnings in their native country. They also received free lodgings and food on the outward journey.

At the height of the cattle trading era a large number of taverns came into existence along the large cattle trails, the so-called "Krüge" (inns - N. German dialect). Such inns were to be found in Rödekro, Oeversee, Rothenkrug or Kropper Busch, always away from the towns at a site where land was cheap. The amount of land needed to accommodate the herds was quite considerable at times.

The inn at Bommerlund north of Flensburg has its own story to tell. In 1760 a wounded soldier was put up and nursed here. On his departure he paid the innkeeper by giving him a formerly unknown recipe for spirits. After this the first "Bommerlunder Aquavit" was distilled. The inn, unfortunately, is not there any longer; a memorial stone at the site reminds us today of this story.

But now we must return to the drovers. Before the herds reached a tavern, the "Futterschaffer" - often the son of one of the traders who was supposed to learn the trade - rode on ahead, in order to find accommodation. This became more difficult the further south they went, because more and more herds assembled.

Every pair of oxen was given 7-8 kg of hay. The farm hands had bound the sheaves during the winter, and often they did not take the weight very seriously. The animals were not given the best hay.

Accommodation and food were to be found at the inn, and the drovers took it in turns to watch over the animals. The tradesmen had a special room, and they were given a special meal. The drovers, on the other hand, were usually given pea soup; the innkeeper's wife described their food as "fodder". Due to the free food, enormous quantities were often consumed; one had to consider the return journey, which would indeed be more meagre.

It remains to be said that they were often not paid until the return journey, after the business transaction had been concluded.

The journey was also dangerous. Here is a citation from the Kropp Chronicle:

"Although Kropp was only a settlement with a few hundred inhabitants in the middle ages, it was well known all over the country - and notorious. Tradesmen and travellers, drovers, dispatch-riders and the drivers of the mail-coaches

robbers and gangsters, who were well hidden in the low brushwood forest, and in their own special way went about improving their vital necessities. The words "legality" and "morals" were unfamiliar to them, or they suppressed them... In 1665 even the state mail-coach was attacked and completely looted at Kropper Busch".

Another interpretation would seem to come close to the truth of the saying: Here the drovers' trail was very sandy and full of holes, the coach drivers had problems both in the winter and in the summer, and they were afraid of this stretch of road. "Du büs Kropper Busch noch ni vörbi!" was their warning when they passed one another. Even today this saying is emblazoned on the wall of the inn there and reminds us of the dangers and wrongs of bygone days. Incidentally, the first inn was situated about 100 metres east of the present one. It was pulled down in 1845 when the new road (the present B77 road) was built.

Apart from the accommodation and food for the drovers and the money for fodder for the oxen, it was the customs duty that presented a financial strain on the traders. As far as the Elbe one had to estimate about 10% of the cost price, as far as Westfriesland a further 10% for the customs duty for bridges and roads, as well as ferry charges. Here the "great duty" must be mentioned, which had to be paid at the border between Denmark and the Duchy of Schleswig. The royal customs points at Ribe and Kolding were to become true goldmines, especially when a duty of two shillings per ox was increased twentyfold in 1542. About a fifth of all the Danish customs revenue went into the treasury in prosperous years. For oxen from the Duchy the "great duty" was paid at the first customs point.

On the way south further customs points had to be passed. At these places the duty for bridges and roads usually only amounted to a few pennies. The customs receipts served as passes for the remainder of the journey.

On repeated occasions the customs officials demanded more than required. Letters of complaint in the archives bear witness to this.

Customs books are a good and a useful source of obtaining more exact figures about cattle droving. The documents of the customs offices of Gottorf and Rendsburg are particularly important. There are hardly any documents from the customs point at the Eider crossing in Friedrichstadt, but the number of herds passing through here was probably not very considerable.

In Rendsburg about 360,000 oxen passed the customs point between 1545 and 1554. 70-80% of the annual customs revenue was attained through the cattle trade. From about 1580 up to the beginning of the 17th century the number of cattle herds receded, then it increased dramatically again. In 1612 alone more than 50,000 animals

were able to be reached.

There are reports, too, about smuggling, especially at the border. In 1567 the Danish king threatened the death penalty on anyone who committed a customs offence, and customs officials supervised the border along the Kongeå on horseback.

Estimated figures for smuggled oxen fluctuate between 1000 and 5000 per annum.

The destinations of the cattle herds were mostly the large markets in Husum, Itzehoe and Wedel. In Hamburg there was a cattle market even in the 13th century. In Bad Bramstedt there must have been a market from time to time; Roland, a symbol of market legitimacy, points to this at all events.

The cattle on the western drovers' trail, coming from Jutland, were initially offered for sale in Husum. Here a market is documented to have existed since 1493. The best animals were purchased most readily here, the others were driven on to Itzehoe. But there it was not only the poorer cattle which were put up for sale. The supply was increased along the eastern trail, and experienced tradesmen were quick to see to what extent the value of the emaciated cattle could be increased by suitable feeding.

In Wedel, where the market gained importance during the 15th century, there is also a "Roland" as a sign of market legitimacy. The first one, incidentally, is supposed to have been made of wood.

The market for the lean cattle usually took place at the end of March. Cattle traders came from Niedersachsen, the Rhinelands and from the Netherlands. They purchased on a large scale, while the so-called "buyers" mostly only bought one or two animals.

Even in those times the principals of free enterprise determined the price. If more cattle came, the prices dropped. These were bad times for the tradesmen, even though the old and respected ones had their regular purchasers and managed to overcome these times better than the others.

Frequently a transaction would be concluded before delivery, whereby the markets determined the purchase prices for the coming six months. A good measure of mutual confidence was essential for carrying out business in this manner. The trader had to rely on proper feeding, the supplier had to be sure that the tradesman would pay according to arrangement.

Market trading had its habits. A transaction was considered to be concluded when both partners had noted it down on their boards. A purchase was also concluded by shaking hands. Trust and belief prevailed, money was handed over in sealed bags. More important business was often transacted by means of a middleman in Hamburg.

Disputes were resolved there and then by the market court with the senior official from Pinnenberg as chairman.

steadily until it completely lost its importance. Even today there are many possibilities of experiencing the history of these old trails. Those who are good walkers should take part in a seven day walk along the drovers' trail from Schleswig to Viborg. This is arranged by the Danish People's Sport Association and touches on many historical points of interest along the 300 km long stretch.

The book by Jürgen Pieplow mentioned below makes some interesting suggestions for a trip by bicycle or by car along the tracks of the cattle traders. A more extensive literary journey into the past can also be undertaken with the help of a large number of suggestions.