

The Old-Time Tradition of Driving Cattle

By Lynn Coffey



Drovers; Ralph Cash, Darren Poole, Kenneth Fitzgerald, Luther & Doris Cash, Lowell Humphries, Taylor Cash

drive and take photographs for an upcoming article in the Backroads newspaper. Although Ralph and Doris are now deceased, and the family no longer keeps a large herd of Hereford cattle, the memory of that special day will always be with me and I was honored to be a part of a spring rite that is fast disappearing in rural communities.

In talking with Doris, I learned her grandparents, Hampton and Rose Fauber, used to drive their cattle all the way from Spottswood to their summer grazing grounds behind Mill Creek School, near Montebello. Family and friends would walk alongside the cows and their calves, keeping them headed in the right direction on the trip that would take an entire day on foot.

In the 1940s, Doris's parents, Wilson and Ethna Seaman, continued driving cattle to the old Fauber homeplace six miles from their farm located just past the Montebello Fish Hatchery. As a child, Doris remembers the annual ritual and how their neighbors would come help walk the cattle the six miles up to Mill Creek to their land known as the "Mag Field". She was a part of the tradition for as long as

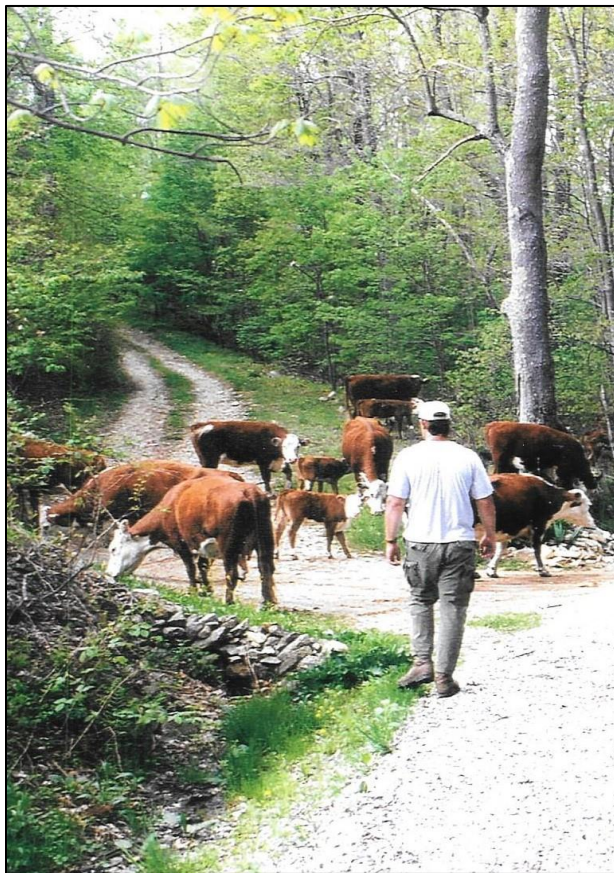
In many areas, the mountain custom of driving cattle to different grazing lands for the summer is still a common practice. This is done to let the grass in former pasture fields grow tall and lush so farmers can make hay to feed their stock over the winter. Here in Love, I've stopped my vehicle many times to watch Jesse Bridge and his family drive their herd of black Angus cows down the middle of Route 814, summering them from one field to another. It was an amazing sight and no one stopped seemed to mind the slight delay, rather, they were excited to witness an old tradition that you don't get to see too often in today's world. Another family that continued the tradition was the Cash family of Montebello. Ralph and Doris Cash and their two sons, Luther and Stanley, along with a bevy of other volunteers, always made their spring cattle drive in the month of May and again in the fall, driving the cattle back to pastures closer to home after the hay was cut. The Cash family continued this early practice for generations and in May of 1999 I was invited to be a part of the

she lived. In 1952, she married Ralph Cash who laughed when he told me, “It was because they needed more hands for the cattle drive”. When their two sons came along, they also were incorporated into the spring walk as soon as they were able to keep up. For four generations, the Cash family continued to make the six-mile trip each spring.

The cattle themselves knew when it was time to leave for the summer grazing fields. Around the first of May, the cows would start bawling and pacing the fence line, knowing it was time for the annual trek through the mountains. One year the cattle apparently thought the family was dragging its feet and they left on their own! A call from a nearby neighbor alerted Doris that the herd was making its way down the road in front of their house, completely unattended but heading in the right direction. Several generations of the same herd have made the trip so many times, they seem to know the way.

As stated at the beginning, the reason for moving the cattle from one pasture to another is to let the grass grow tall in the field they left to provide hay for the cows in the winter. Doris said her grandparents put the pasture in several types of grain needed to feed the animals over the following winter while they grazed on the summer grass at Mill Creek.

The following is an account of the day I was a part of the Cash family’s 1999 cattle drive: Nine people met for the drive the afternoon of May 10th, at the cattle pen on Second Creek Farm in Montebello; Ralph and Doris Cash, sons Luther and Stanley Cash and Stanley’s son, Taylor, Lowell Humphries, Darren Poole, Kenneth Fitzgerald, and myself. Stanley went ahead in his truck to help hold up traffic along route 56, since the cattle had to be driven a short distance down the main road.



Luther Cash, lead man starting the cattle drive was a festive air as people who lived along the road came out on their porches to watch the moving procession and wave. A few minor roundups were necessary but the bulk of the cattle continued on at a brisk pace. They moved so fast that at several pints we were forced to jog in order to keep up with them. Whenever they got off course, someone

At four o’clock, 16 cows and 9 calves were turned out of the pen and began the walk to the Mag Lot, six miles away. Luther acted as lead driver, walking ahead of the cows a small distance to head them in the right direction. Darren, Lowell, Lowell, Kenneth and myself walked alongside and to the rear of the herd to keep them moving. Ralph, Doris and Taylor drove their truck out to route 56 to meet Stanley and help hold traffic when we got to the paved road.

We started out walking up the old logging road through the mountains behind the Cash farm until we came out on Painter Mountain Road (rt. 686). Walking along, we did our solid best to keep the calves moving down the gravel road instead of veering off the bank in search of tall grass. There

would yell to Luther up ahead and he called to the cattle to give them direction. Even with the mischievousness of the calves, everything went smoothly the whole way.

Working our way up Painter Mountain Road and out to route 56 where Ralph, Doris, Stanley and Taylor were holding up traffic, people in their cars were agog at the scene taking place before them. As the herd veered off at Zink's Mill Road in front of Homer Anderson's Store, they



Lowell Humphries herding the cattle up Painter Mountain Road



The cattle moving up Zink's Mill School Road on their way to the Mag Lot

began to slow their pace on the narrow gravel road, giving us drovers a breather. Ultimately, we turned right onto Mill Creek School Road and headed for the high pasture of the Mag Field.

Passing the old schoolhouse which is still owned by the Cash family, and the home of Hampton and Rose Fauber, up the gravel road we walked, with the cows beginning to bawl in recognition of the



The Mill Creek Schoolhouse



Hampton & Rose Fauber's home

grazing grounds they knew so well. Reaching the gate at the Mag Field, I looked at my watch and was amazed to see the entire trip only took an hour and fifty minutes, cutting ten minutes off last years' time! As the cattle entered the gate to the lush green fields they'd call home until autumn, I felt blessed to be invited along for the ride (or, rather, *walk!*).

Sipping Dr. Peppers and taking a much-needed break ourselves, the beauty of the day surrounded us with blue skies and warm spring sunshine. The men piled on the back of Stanley's truck, heading back to the farm while I stayed on with Ralph, Doris and Taylor, never realizing I was going to get another special treat before the day ended. Climbing into the truck, Ralph slowly drove up to the top of the mountain where the cattle were now contentedly grazing. Up, up, up we went, on the narrow grassy cut alongside the steep hill while Doris pointed out familiar landmarks across Dowell's Ridge and Fork Mountain. The higher we went, the more spectacular the view. At one point the cattle looked like small specks down below us as we climbed to the top of the ridge. When Ralph finally stopped, we

were on the very top of a high grassy meadow entirely surrounded by mountains.

Doris told me this land was named after an old woman by the name of Maggie Coffey, who lived on the property of her great-grandfather, Dave Fauber, and how her family always referred to the land as the Mag Lot or Mag Field.

The beautiful spring day came to a close as the golden sun dipped behind the ridges and the air chilled up. I



View from the Mag Lot-- Dowell's Ridge, Fork Mountain in distance

thought about the rich storehouse of memories the Cash family must have had, living their lives on the same ancestral farm and keeping the old traditions alive. For preserving the past for future generations, I am in the Cash family's debt and they will always hold a special place in my heart.