

CHAPTER TWO

Introducing the Bovine Ancestors

Having touched on Park cattle history and some reasons why they exist (since they have been mentioned over and over in the Speckle Park fairy tale), there must now be an outline of five British breeds in the Speckle Park maternal ancestry, which is the Lindsay Lineback.

These are: Shorthorn, Highland, Angus, Jersey and Galloway. Their appearance will be explained as we go along, and it can be seen what each breed did for the Lindsay Lineback and for the Speckle Park.

Shorthorn

The Shorthorn breed has the oldest Herdbook: 1822. Well-known Shorthorn breeders influenced the breed for the better in the 1700s. Eventually the breed was known for two types, the Dairy Shorthorn and the Beef Shorthorn. By 1800 some of these animals were huge by any standards, and the breed began to dominate nationally. Quick growth was one feature, along with good marbling, and a strong level udder. Eventually the breed was influential all over the world. The coat colours became red or roan and a white strain. It could be said to be a breed of the Midlands of England.

The Highland or Kyloe

This is what one could call a breed of Romance. In the Victorian era the Highland breed became a favourite subject for artists, who painted them in their mountainous and thrilling habitat, the Highlands of Scotland.

It is truly an ancient Celtic breed with spreading horns and a long shaggy hair coat. The calves look like delightful huggable pets. Possibly this is the purest breed in Great Britain, thriving for generation after generation on rocky land with sparse grazing. On its own it developed tough feet and great durability. How fortunate these qualities never became destroyed by careless breeding, for the beef is considered excellent.

The usually docile Highland is slow to mature. It comes in red or brown, yellowish or cream, even brindled or black.

Its Breed Society dates from 1884 and oh, yes, its lesser known title of Kyloe came from the Kyles, narrow straits between the mainland and the islands. The cattle would be swum across the Kyles to new pastures.

The Angus

Now on to another fine breed, the ancient Angus, long called the Aberdeen Angus, now as the Red Angus or the Black Angus, the latter being that which is of interest to this book. This is another Scottish breed, well known for good feed conversion and, along with most British breeds, for good beef or maybe beef which is perhaps even better than most. It was a lighter-boned animal, polled, easy calving, with good feet and in appearance well-balanced. This same description will show up again in these pages about the Speckle Park.

At one time they were known as humble cattle, which meant polled. This is a little amusing as some people have said that Speckle Park had humble beginnings, – but they meant unassuming and simple, in today's meaning of humble. The coat colour then was all over the spectrum, including brindle, including a dorsal stripe, and oops! at one time some had horns, a long, long time ago.

I found an interesting reference to certain Angus in Valeria Porter's excellent book *Cattle, A Handbook to Breeds of the World* (my cow Bible) with beautiful illustrations by Jake Tebbit. This was when she wrote of Angus Doddies, polled, in the area of Forfar, which is where the Lindsay family lived in Scotland, north of Dundee (and Aberdeen is north of that).

The Angus was known for a short, dished face; I compared it to the Jersey cow or the Arabian horse when it came to heads. To see an Angus bred to be taller than myself (5 foot 5) and with a long narrow face can only raise suspicion in my mind – and I hope that type is vanishing.

How fortunate that those men responsible for fixing the breed characteristics in the 1800s did not destroy that which made it distinctive. A Herdbook was started in 1862. The breed's ability soon made it known and appreciated all over the world where its genes were crossed into many breeds to create something better.

The Jersey

And now to one of the prettiest breeds in the world, the Jersey. Jersey calves are definitely "OOH" and "AAH!" babies with their sweetly dished faces and big brown eyes. Because they were isolated on an island in the English Channel this breed developed without being compromised. In fact no importations of cattle were allowed on the Isle of Jersey. Words most used for this breed are "dainty" and "deerlike." A Jersey cow can pop a calf out in the twinkling of an eye through her wide pelvis. And oh! that rich milk and, I have also been told, tender, tasty beef.

The bulls have always been reputed to be vicious, just the opposite of the cows. Although I had but one Jersey bull on the farm and was told more than once, "He'll kill you!" he showed no inclination to damage me or anyone else, although I once jumped over a fence to see how he was doing and landed in a hornet's nest and that did damage me!

The Jersey itself is a bit tougher than it looks, although it never gets the thick coat to live outside in a Canadian winter. It has been sold all over the world. Once one has owned Jerseys they stay in the heart.

Galloway

The last British breed to enter the Lineback real history is another polled breed, the Galloway, a breed often remarked upon because of its unusual coat. The part of Scotland where it was developed might require that humans wear a raincoat with a warm lining and that was just what the Galloway cattle developed. It is double coated, with rain-shedding hair over another thick, soft coat.

The Galloway, I think, has a unique head. The calves often seem to be wearing bangs in a Dutch Boy cut. It is definitely a tough animal which can survive on poor grazing. When I say poor grazing I don't mean over-grazed, badly managed pastures but rather the kind of land which does not produce lush grass, but hard grass and plants for browsing.

Here again is a blocky or balanced animal with good feet, good beef and a good nature. In their breed there were many colours too, but today we see very dark red, dun or black, with occasionally white, the latter having an interesting history. Finally there is the striking Belted Galloway with a wide white belt running right around its middle.

The five important breeds of the maternal Speckle Park line have now been introduced. Descendants of some of them eventually came together to create some of the best beef in the world. I would like to think the people who raise these breeds today can be proud of what their chosen breed has contributed to the Speckle Park.