

# and Other Wild Things

An important clue to the date of the last wolves is the first mention of sheep on the fells. Cunliffe Shaw wrote (p397) "sheep never appear in the accounts of the vaccaries in the Forests, though they do appear on the lower ground in the west of the County". The place-name "fold" is common in the foothills, and may be relevant. The earliest mention we have found for sheep on our local fells is 1571 at "Totridge and Fence Brow, ancient stints for cattle and sheep" (Cunliffe Shaw, p237).

Assuming, therefore, that wolves were eliminated from the Chipping area somewhere between 1350 and 1500, where were their last lairs? Again, place-names may help. Wolf Fell springs to mind.

In the local dialect, Wolf Hall and its farm and fell are called "Woofus". This is an unusual name, but at Chapel-le-Dale above Ingleton there are two places called "Woofas". This gives the clue to the wolves' lairs. At least one of these two is a large water-sink "pothole" in the limestone, a collapsed cave inaccessible to man but where the wolves could hide up safely until the hunters got tired of waiting for them to come out. So "Woofus" probably means "wolves' house", the impregnable lair where they held out for centuries. And Wolf Fell is (or was) just such a place. The front of Wolf Fell, adjoining Parlick, is a huge landslip. Between large fallen blocks of rock are crevices, now filling with peat but which formerly would be an ideal stronghold for wolves. The area is marked "foxholes" on the 1800 Derby Estate map, and foxes have lived there in recent years. "Holdron Castle", about three miles to the north is an even better landslip stronghold.

One writer gives 1481 as the last recorded wolf-hunt in England, with "sometime between then and 1550" as final extermination. The date for the last wolf in Wales is given as about 1570, Scotland 1743 and Ireland 1760.

"The Lancashire cattle of those days were long-horned with thick hides and shaggy hair, hardy and active, capable of thriving through severe winters on the upland pastures and withstanding the attack of wolves" (Camden, writing in 1600, quoted by Cunliffe Shaw, p357)



## WILD BOAR

England formerly had other wild beasts which we have long ago forgotten. Brown bears and beavers probably survived till around the year 1000. Wild pigs could be dangerous to humans, but they were regarded as game for the gentry to hunt, whereas wolves were regarded as a menace by everyone. The accounts of the Forest of Pendle for 1295/6 show the sale of 80 wild boars for £3-6-1d as a major item of income. The record of the "Forest Eyre" - rather like a public enquiry - of 1334-1336 seems to suggest that there still were wild boar to be hunted (Cunliffe Shaw p151).

## SCOTSMEN

But perhaps the most spectacular damage to the vaccary system was the great raid by the Scots in 1322. Robert Bruce and the Scottish army crossed the border on 17th June, moved down the west Cumbrian coast, crossed Morecambe Bay sands and rounded up all the best cattle in the Fylde and down as far as Chorley, and from the vaccaries in Rossendale, Pendle, Bowland, and Bleasdale and Quernmore. On 24th July they returned to Scotland with the plunder of what must have been a very well organised campaign. The vaccary system was thrown into chaos and the farms were let to private tenants for a term of seven years to allow time for recovery (Cunliffe Shaw p363).

Soon after the Scots raid the constable of Skipton Castle and accomplices raided the Pendle area and drove away many horses and cattle (p368). These were lawless days in a period of weak government.

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