

# Crofters' Common Grazings in Scotland

By JAMES R. COULL

IN temperate Europe, the utilization of rough or unimproved land for grazing in common has been for centuries a feature of the traditional economy—especially in regions of hill and mountain; indeed the use of hill grazings in such regions as the Highlands has been the stamp of adjustment to environment of economies dependent principally on stock rearing. In the old way in the crofting districts, the stock had to exist mainly on the hill, although they also grazed the inbye lands of townships after the harvest had been gathered; this is changing somewhat, now that croft land is used more for producing food for animals rather than people, although the hill grazings are still of vital importance. Some idea of the extent and importance of hill land may be got from the ratios of inbye to outbye land computed by F. Fraser Darling: this ratio is 1:12.5 in the Outer Hebrides, 1:20 in Skye, and rises as high as 1:85 in Wester Ross and 1:90 in the North-West Mainland.<sup>1</sup>

The survival of common land, along with the ways of utilization, is certainly not peculiar to the Scottish Highlands. Thus there are more than 4,500 units of common land totalling some 1½ million acres in England and Wales, and significantly most of it is in hill areas like the mountains of Wales and the Lake District.<sup>2</sup> W. G. Hoskins has pointed out that commons are among the most ancient institutions of England.<sup>3</sup> It is also known as far apart as Norway and Greece. Indeed, the use of part of the landscape for pasturing stock in common has been a feature of man's activity in agricultural villages throughout Europe. At subsistence level the use of pasture in common is indeed one of the most widespread and most permanent of geographical relationships.

In the crofting districts, as elsewhere, common grazings were linked with the team-work which used to exist in considerably larger degree in crofting townships, based on co-operation between neighbours in the tending of stock. In fact, it is on common grazings that a measure of the team-work which was once a general feature of township organization has survived; crofters generally join in the gathering of sheep and lambs for separating, dipping, etc., and in some cases (especially in Skye) the sheep are owned on a club system. Township organization also shows in the 'souming' (i.e. stint-

<sup>1</sup> F. F. Darling, *West Highland Survey*, Oxford, 1955, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of Royal Commission on Common Land*, 1958, pp. 16-20.

<sup>3</sup> W. G. Hoskins, in *Report of Royal Commission on Common Land*, p. 149.

ing) of grazings, and in the administration of these by grazings committees (of which there are 681) and grazings constables (of whom there are 23).<sup>1</sup> Before the 1886 Crofters Act the regulation of the grazings was traditionally performed by a constable, and up to that time the Shetland 'scattalds' (commons) were generally unregulated,<sup>2</sup> but now most of the grazings constables are actually in Shetland. However, the decline of the old way of life is shown on the commons too, as stocking regulations often count for little, and overstocking with sheep is especially frequent.

While common land is now mainly found on the western seaboard, north of the Firth of Lorne, and on the Western Isles and Shetland, there are still plentiful examples of it in areas where the farming landscape was reorganized by the Improving Movement. Thus there are fifteen in Caithness, nearly forty on the east coast of Sutherland, about a dozen in Easter Ross, and a handful in Orkney; and commons are to be found in Glenurquhart and Lochaber, at Newtonmore (Strathspey, East Inverness-shire), on Lochtayside (Perthshire), Glenlivet (Banffshire), and there are a few in the northern part of Argyllshire. There are few commons in the Hebrides south of Tiree and Mull—and, indeed, in Mull they are largely confined to the Ross in the south-west; there is one common on Jura, two in the Rhinns of Islay, two on Colonsay, one on Arran, but none on Gigha. The commons in these outlying areas of the crofting region do show remnants of township organization, and they are still soumed (at least officially); on the other hand, they are often attached to crofts a good deal larger than the West Highland average, and are parts of more viable agricultural units. At the same time, crofting townships can be found which have no common; these are mainly old fishing townships like Shieldaig (Torridon, Wester Ross) where stock were in any case of limited importance, but they also include ones like Kenovay and Salum (Tiree) where agriculture is advanced. In addition there are many crofts scattered throughout the Highland zone of Scotland—mainly towards the south and east—which have no commons attached.

The size of commons and the regulations for their use show great variations throughout the crofting districts. At the simplest, each township has its own common in which there are a number of equal shares: this can be found on both west and east coasts (e.g. Toscaig (Applecross, Wester Ross) 2,837 acres in 24 shares; Airdens (Creich, Sutherland), 1,133 acres in 21 shares). In the West Highlands, this sort of system is the general but by no means the universal rule; and in practice the general lack of fencing between adjoining townships means that the formal division often has little significance.

<sup>1</sup> *Crofters' Commission Report*, 1955-6, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1884, p. 28.

Also frequent is the sharing of a general common by several townships in a district: thus in the Ness district of Lewis there are 16 townships sharing a common of 20,000 acres, and several of these have their own township commons in addition. In the Bettyhill district (N. Sutherland), 9 townships share a common of 2,953 acres in  $52\frac{7}{8}$  shares, with an enlargement of 1,568 acres in 86 shares; in Sutherland these enlargements, often separately soumed, are quite frequent as a result of the break-up of some of the sheep farms after 1918. A township may also have its common in two parts—often on two contrasting types of terrain: most significant here are those of the machair isles (mainly Tiree and the Uists) where townships may have common on both the low sandy machair and the hill; but it is also to be found elsewhere as at Tighphuirst (Appin, Argyll) where there are 8 acres of hill and 3 acres of shore common.

The pattern of a mixture of big and small commons is, however, most characteristic of Shetland, and here the pattern can be very complicated, with small groups of crofts sharing odd parcels of rough land. Thus in the southern part of the island of Unst there are 13 scattalds, unfenced from each other, from 300 to 600 acres in size and with a total area of 5,052 acres, in which there are well over 100 shareholders. An example of the amplitude of scattald size is given by the 5 townships of Maywick, Ireland, Bigton, Channerwick, and Levenwick in the South Mainland. Here there is a big scattald of 3,081 acres in 96 shares; one of 57 acres in 4 shares, one of 45 acres in 3 shares, and two of 12 acres in each of which there is now only one share. The pattern of fragmented commons is also well instanced by Walls parish, where the big scattald of the district (in this case a whole parish) is over 2,000 acres, while there are 16 smaller scattalds varying from a few acres to over 400 acres in size. The usual Shetland pattern is that of a big district scattald extending to several thousand acres, while odd fragments of rough land intermingled with inbye croft land are grazed in common by the crofts adjacent to them.

The great part of crofters' common grazings is poor hill land with a low carrying capacity for stock. The distribution of types of hill land in the Highlands has been outlined by M. E. Hardy.<sup>1</sup> The great majority of the grazings come into the category of 'marshy grass moors', but with 'peat moors' on the flatter areas of the North Coast and Lewis, and with 'dry grass moors' on the Durness limestone and on parts of the hill land to the east of the main watershed. Also included in some cases are 'mountain pastures', which extend as far up as 2,500 feet beyond which there is little grazing. Common grazings

<sup>1</sup> M. E. Hardy, *Esquisse de la Végétation des Highlands d'Ecosse*, Paris, 1905.

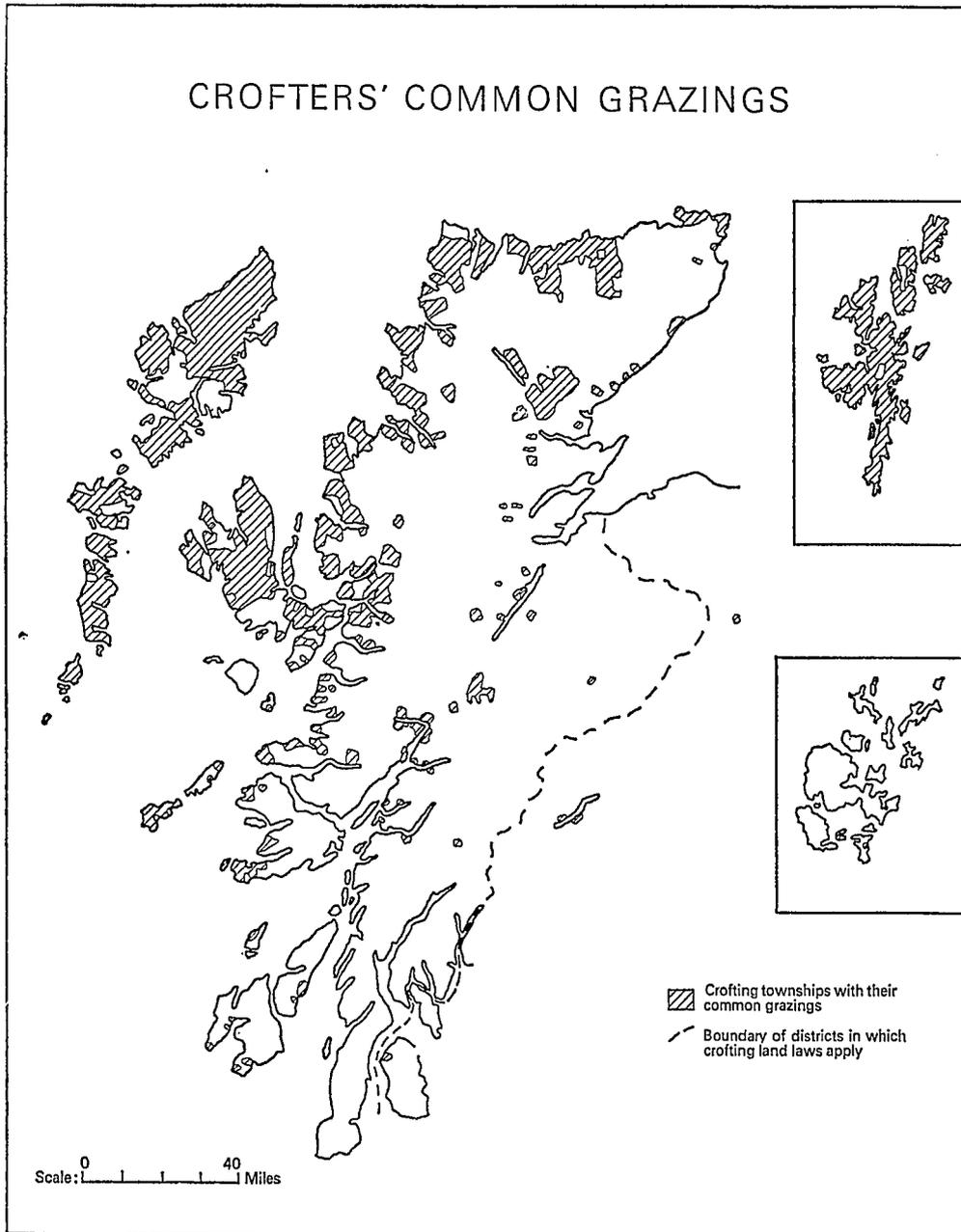


FIG. I

*Note.* This map is based on a variety of sources and cannot claim absolute accuracy, but it shows in a general way the distribution of crofting townships and their grazings.

cover a fragmented band from the Ardnamurchan Peninsula round the coast to Strath-Halladale in Sutherland, together with outliers in the east already mentioned. The great part of the outbye land on the islands from Tiree northwards (including Shetland but excluding Orkney) is also occupied by common grazings. The great bulk of the remainder of the hill land in the crofting districts is occupied by farms (mainly sheep farms), deer forests, grouse moors, and forestry plantations.

The carrying capacity of the grazings depends principally on drainage and geology, although the human factor of management and improvement can be of great consequence. In the wetter west, there is very little of the heather moor common in the Eastern Highlands; on most of the land heather is mixed with sedges and rough grasses, or is absent. The herbage is generally low in quality—there is enough protein and carbohydrate in it for two or three months in summer, but it has too much fibre for the rest of the year, and is always low in mineral content.<sup>1</sup> In the North-West Highlands, the grazings on the acid Precambrian rocks are poor, and can only support one ewe to some 10 acres; and on the poorly drained old peneplains of North Sutherland and Lewis, with their great thicknesses of peat, the ratio is a good deal wider. The position is better on the volcanic rocks of Skye and Mainland Argyll. Here the better sward can support one ewe to 3 or 4 acres; and on the Durness limestone of the north-west, one ewe to 2 acres is possible, while on the rich grazings of the Hebridean machairs a ewe requires less than an acre.<sup>2</sup> There is thus a wide variety in the capacity of the commons to carry stock, but generally speaking the carry is low.

Virtually all commons have at least paper regulations to control the stocking of the grazings. In the Gaelic-speaking areas these 'souming' regulations appear to go far back into history, and they probably came into being with the filling in of the settlement map and the competition for the use of the grazings between communities and between individuals. They are recorded by such writers as MacDonald.<sup>3</sup> Soumings vary considerably, both between townships and estates. In Shetland, on the other hand, there were no regulations for stocking the scattalds (apart from one or two estates) until after the Crofters Act of 1886, and this may well be related to the more individualistic tradition that was associated with the udal owner-occupier system of tenure. Even under the old subsistence economy, there seems to have been a constant tendency to overstocking, and for the stronger members of the

<sup>1</sup> A. R. Wannop, in 'Symposium on Science and Hill Farming', *Advancement of Science*, 1958, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> J. MacDonald, *Agricultural View of the Hebrides*, Edinburgh, 1811, pp. 458, 466.

community to take advantage of the weak: this again is instanced by Mac-Donald and by the Napier Commission Report.<sup>1</sup>

The soumings are very varied, and they depend only partly on the size and carrying capacity of the grazings. Generally they take the formula of " $x$  cows and  $y$  sheep per crofter" or "per share", but with a number of other provisions. On most commons, both sheep and cattle are allowed, but on the commons of most townships on the mainland of Argyll and in Lochaber no sheep are allowed, although the townships may be let for the wintering of hogs. Here the crofts have generally been looked on as providing homes where one or two cows for the family could be kept. The same is often found in former fishing townships like Plockton and Shieldaig (Wester Ross) where commons are small or absent, and only cows are allowed. In the former fishing village of Jeantown (Loch Carron, Wester Ross) there are 35 shares in a common of 164 acres, each of which has a souming of a single cow.

In many townships, there is an equal souming with each croft. Thus in Barrapoll (Tiree) each has the right to graze 5 cows and 14 sheep, Toscaig (Applecross) has a souming of 2 cows, 2 stirks, and 12 sheep per share, while at Airdens (Creich, E. Sutherland) the souming is 16 sheep. Soumings may be quite high—thus at West Hough (Tiree) 6 yeld cattle and 40 sheep are allowed; at Strome More (Loch Carron, Wester Ross) each croft has a minimum of 3 cows and 1 follower and 40 sheep; and at South Olnafirth (Delting, Shetland) there are 80 sheep per acre.

The basis of the souming may, however, be the rent or acreage of the crofts: thus in Melness (Sutherland) the souming is 1 cow and follower and 6 sheep per £1 of rent in 1886; Dunie (Kincardine, Easter Ross) has 6 sheep per £1 of rent in 1886; in the Ness district of Lewis, the usual township allowance is 1 cow and 7 sheep per £1 of present rent; while at Achengill and Nybster (Caithness) the souming is 1 sheep per croft acre. It is also possible, because of the vagaries of historical division and consolidation, to find that the soumings follow no simple formula: thus at Balephuil (Tiree) and Achork (E. Sutherland) the crofts all have different soumings, while crofters may have multiples of the same basic allowance, as happens at Garvan and Duisky (Lochaber) where each crofter has a multiple of the basic allowance of 1 cow and 12 sheep. Occasionally the position may be even more complicated, as at Blairmore and Culdrain (E. Sutherland), where all the crofts have different soumings on the old common pasture (from 1 to 36 sheep on 593 acres, but equal soumings on an enlargement (3 sheep each on 263 acres).

The system is usually more elastic than the above would indicate, as it is generally possible to substitute one type of stock for another, or younger for

<sup>1</sup> A. Carmichael, in *Crofters' Commission Report*, 1884, pp. 468, 469.

older animals, at a stated equivalence. On the Mainland and Western Isles, a cow is usually equivalent to from 4 to 6 sheep, although in Harris it is as high as 8 sheep. In Shetland, where the souming is usually stated in sheep only, the ratio is narrower—often 1 cow to 3 sheep. A horse's grazing is more than that of a cow, and as a rule is equivalent to that of 2 cows. Thus in Adabrock (Ness, Lewis) 1 horse is equivalent to 2 cows or 10 sheep; in Melness (Sutherland) 1 horse is equivalent to 8 sheep, 1 cow to 5 sheep, 1 cattle beast of less than 2 years to 3 sheep; and in Milltown (Applecross) 1 cow is equivalent to 6 sheep. In West Hough (Tiree), 2 cattle of more than 3 years are equivalent to 3 two-year olds or 4 one-year olds, while at Kilmory (Ardnamurchan) 2 sheep are equivalent to 3 hogs. There may even be equivalences for stock grazed part of the day or year; at Achancarnan (Assynt, Sutherland) 1 cow grazed for half a day is equivalent to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  sheep, while at Bigton (Shetland) 1 work pony grazed part of the year is equivalent to 3 sheep (as opposed to 6 sheep for one grazed the whole year). These variations are a reflection of local tradition rather than any rational appraisal of different stock types.

However, there may be limitations within the equivalences, usually to control the selective grazing of sheep. Thus in Ruaig (Tiree) cows may only be replaced by sheep (in the ratio 1:4) from 1 May to 15 November, to save the winter grazing; and at Middleton on the same island, sheep may only replace cattle till their total reaches 146; while in the Melness district (Sutherland) the sheep total must not exceed 2,000. In Tiree too are the fine Reef grazings which are reserved for winter use for cattle only. At Shielfoot (Ardnamurchan) cows from the neighbouring township of Newtown may graze on payment of 25s. a year per head. At Blaich (Lochaber) horses may not be replaced by sheep, and horses at Airds (Muckairn, Argyll) may only graze three months per year. A vestige of the immediate past—the need for work animals—can be seen in the existence of a number of horse-parks, as at Knockvologan (Mull) where on 9 acres 3 crofts are each allowed 3 horses; and at Caoles (Tiree), where there are 15 shares in 90 acres, each with a soum of 2 horses; horse-parks are also found at Ardmore and Upper Halistra (Waternish, Skye) and Opinan and Sand (Wester Ross), although these horse-parks have been largely rendered redundant with the advent of the tractor, and are in fact little used.

A number of townships too have additions allowed to the stated soumings for special circumstances. Thus on the Shetland scattalds (e.g. Ireland and Bigton, Dunrossness) crofters may graze milk cows above their soum without penalty, although at the same time geese are expressly forbidden. At Blairmore and Culdrain (Rogart, E. Sutherland), 2 cattle beasts may be grazed morning and afternoon above the souming; and at Trislaig (Locha-

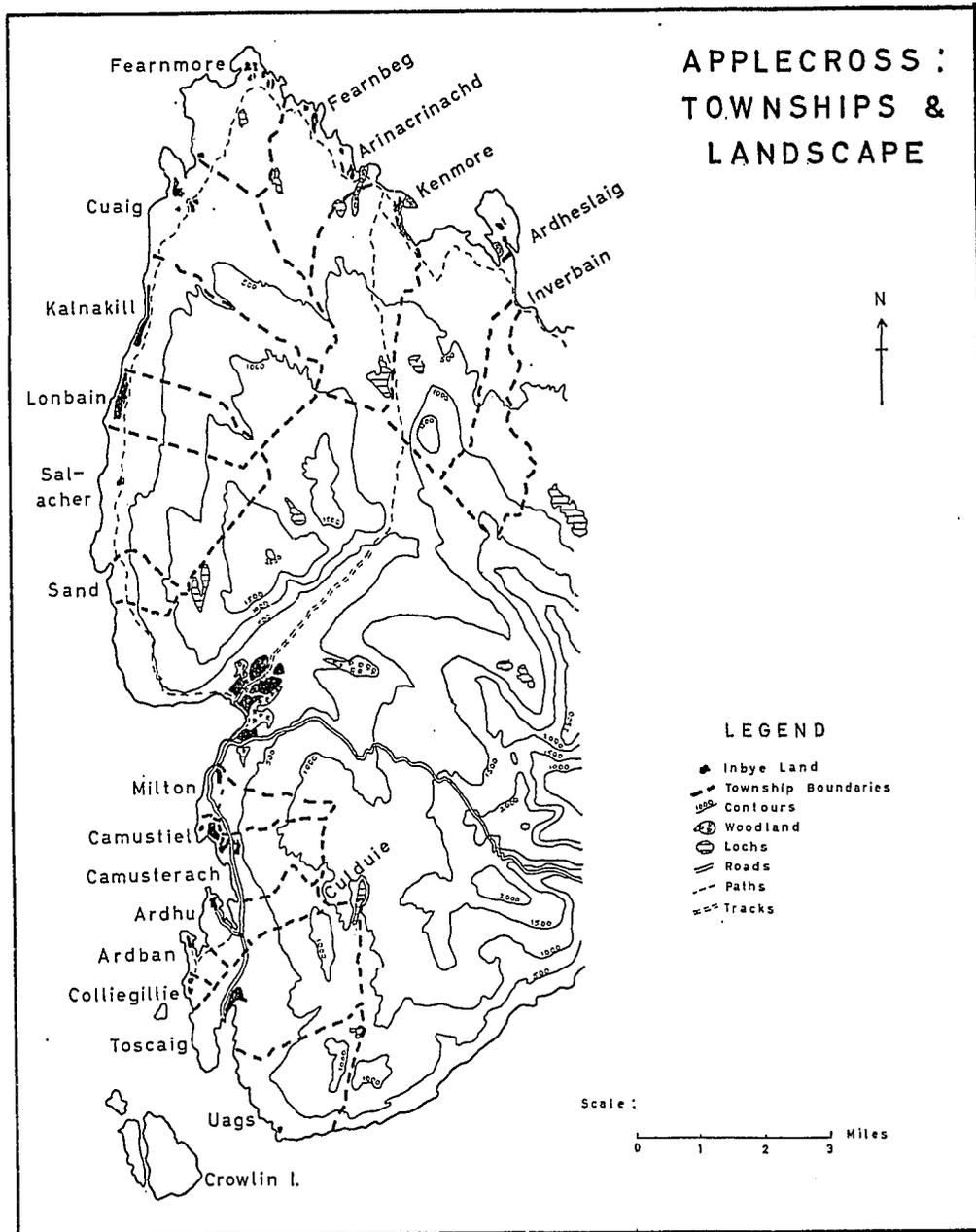


FIG. II

*Note.* The boundaries between townships are unfenced and of limited significance now. But the 'soumings' of the townships are still officially fixed on the basis of the extent of grazing land available.

ber), if any crofter wishes to retain a horse he can graze it on the common (as well as his cattle). Occasionally, too, it may be permissible to keep extra hogs in summer and autumn to replace ewes to be cast later in the year: thus in east Harris and at Airdens (Creich, E. Sutherland) 4 extra hogs are allowed, and at Maywick, Ireland, Bigton, Channerwick, and Levenwick (Shetland), 1 extra hogg for every 5 sheep.

In the event of souns being unused—a common occurrence now with the big proportion of elderly crofters—grazings committees have authority to let them on the payment of an extra rent, generally £1 or £2 a year. The committees also have a number of other powers for the maintenance and control of the grazing, although most of them are now little used. Thus the provisions for the engaging of herds and shepherds are almost a dead letter, although shepherds are employed on the big and economically important grazings on Hynish and West Hough (Tiree), and a winter herd for the Reef grazings in winter on the same island. A shepherd is also employed in winter in Ness (Lewis) where the many crofters need pay but little per head to cut down their sheep losses in the bogs. They are also employed by some sheep clubs, as Dunbeath (Caithness), but for the most part the Agricultural Employment Act at the outbreak of war, by instituting wage minima and conditions, gave the death-blow to an institution already in decline. Written into the regulations are provisions for the committees to control bulls, rams, and (in Shetland) pony stallions; but few townships now have their own bull—more often a bull is kept between several townships or is supplied by a neighbouring farm, and it is now frequent for crofters to keep their own rams. Committees also may insist that animals prone to stray be kept on a crofter's own land; in Shetland, sheep prone to force their way through fences are often fitted with a triangular wooden collar to prevent their wandering.

Township regulations usually provide for the control of the cutting of peats and the maintenance of head-dykes, and (in the Uists and Tiree) for the prevention of sand-blowing on the machairs, and these are still quite often enforced. It is uncommon, however, to find enforcement of the provisions for regulating the taking of seaweed from the beaches, the construction and maintenance of hill drains, muirburning, and bracken control. The condition of most commons well attests this.

Key dates in the agricultural calendar have always been the times of the closing and opening of the inbye land of the townships to stock; these allowed the keying together of crop and animal husbandry in the economy, by keeping the stock off the crofts until after the harvest was gathered. In most townships the old system of letting the township stock range all over the inbye land in winter is still retained, although with the increase of en-

closure and sown grasses it is becoming common for exceptions to be made within townships: crofters who improve their land are given the right to enclose their own animals on their crofts. In the progressive Isle of Tìree, for example, only one township (Ruaig) out of thirty still opens its gates in winter. On the other hand, where tradition is still strong, the leaving of gates open in winter may be a condition for use of the commons—as in Ness (Lewis). In some townships the dates for shutting and opening of gates are fixed at the same times every year: at Ruaig (Tìree) it is the 1st of May to the 15th of November; in Melness all yeld sheep must be out by the 15th of April, and ewes by the 25th of May, and they are not allowed back till the 25th of November. In other townships, there is more flexibility in the dates to allow for the vagaries of the seasons, the grazings committee fixing the dates each year, as happens at Taynuilt (Argyll) and Ness (Lewis). The usual time for adjusting the souming is at the time of the gathering of the stock into the township for winter; up to this time the offspring of the year—lambs, calves, and foals are not counted, but thereafter they are part of the souming, and excess animals must be sold or slaughtered if the regulations are enforced; in practice they are usually disposed of earlier, at the autumn sales.

Cattle are almost always wintered on the crofts—generally indoors—the chief exceptions to the rule being the Hebridean machairs. Sheep are usually brought down from the high hill to winter in the township and on the parts of the common immediately adjoining; they may be taken into the crofts for part of the day and oats and hay fed to them, and put on the hill at night. In Shetland the hardy native breed are kept on the hill all year, but the hogs are often wintered in sheds, while on the Mainland and in Skye it has become fairly common for crofters to send their hogs to east coast farms for wintering.

Linked with the use of commons in the old way of life was the use of shielings,<sup>1</sup> with the associated practice of transhumance; this now survives only in Lewis, and there in a modified form, although it is not beyond living memory on the West Highland Mainland, and existed east of the Great Glen until the first part of the nineteenth century. While shielings were bound to decline in any case through contact with industrial civilization, which made the effort involved uneconomic, the turning over of many of the hill grazings to commercial sheep rearing certainly accelerated the process. In Lewis, shielings have survived in the northern part of the island—especially with the congested townships of the Ey Peninsula, which have commons several miles away on the main part of the island. They are also used to a limited

<sup>1</sup> I. Whitaker, 'Some Traditional Techniques in Modern Scottish Farming', *Scottish Studies*, III, 1959, pp. 167-72.

extent in Barvas parish, but to a much lesser extent than a generation ago. Traditionally there was always something of a holiday in the shieling visits, and this is now their main function, many crofters not taking any cattle with them. The shielings of some Barvas townships, such as Borve, were close enough to make daily journeys feasible, and now crofters from the Ey Peninsula may make daily journeys by bus. The use of shielings in the last few centuries is unrecorded in Shetland, although here the grazing in common of small, uninhabited islands is still practised, as it is in several places on the Western seaboard.<sup>1</sup> The profusion of small 'holms' in Shetland gives scope for this, although landing on some of them is hazardous as there may be no real break in their surrounding cliffs. A. C. O'Dell has instanced a case at Gletness, Nesting, where island pasture is used by crofters in annual rotation;<sup>2</sup> this is a variant of the practice still known in some Shetland townships whereby inbye pasture is held in annual rotation (e.g. Tresta (Fetlar), Norby (Sandness)).

Before the coming of commercial sheep-rearing at the end of the eighteenth century, the grazings of the Highland hills were not at all fully utilized. Most of the grazing was considered too rough for cattle,<sup>3</sup> and in any case it was found impossible under the old system to keep enough stock alive over winter to make full use of the summer growth. Since the coming of sheep, there has been progressive deterioration of the vegetation because of their selective grazing; and this deterioration has in modern times been accelerated on many—probably most—crofters' commons by overstocking. While understocking is known—especially in the townships in the southern part of the crofting region which have only cattle in their soumings—overstocking often reaches serious proportions, especially in the Hebrides. The position is worst in the islands of Lewis and Barra, where squatters may graze stock in addition to those of congested townships. Thus in 1959 the stocking of Gravir in Park was over 200 per cent of the souming,<sup>4</sup> and at Kneep (Uig) in 1960 the figure actually reached 358 per cent:<sup>5</sup> this excess of stock is doubly unfortunate in that it results in poorer quality sheep as well as poorer grazing, but it is a situation very difficult to remedy. The multiple responsibility for the common, and the short-term thinking of an ageing population militate against improvement. Nothing is ever done to improve many commons—

<sup>1</sup> I. Whitaker, 'Some Traditional Techniques in Modern Scottish Farming', *Scottish Studies*, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. O'Dell, *Historical Geography of the Shetland Islands*, Lerwick, 1939, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland*, 1772, London, 1790, p. 308.

<sup>4</sup> J. B. Caird and Associates, *Park. A Geographical Study of a Lewis Crofting District*, Glasgow, 1960, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> H. A. Moisley and Associates, *Uig, a Hebridean Parish*, pts I and II, Glasgow, 1961, p. 44.

especially on the Mainland; and for the rest the only treatment the majority ever get is burning in spring to bring on the new growth. This may be done on a planned rotation system with good results, but it is often haphazard and may have as its chief effect the spread of bracken.

The spread of bracken on the lower slopes,<sup>1</sup> generally up to 600 or 800 feet, is indeed one of the worst features of hill regression. It is useless for grazing, it may give cattle bracken poisoning, it may conceal sheep infected with the maggot fly, and it harbours ticks dangerous to stock. It tends to be worst on the best hill land, and now covers much abandoned arable land. It is only in Shetland and some other islands—for example the boggy moors of north Lewis—that bracken is not a serious menace. Several factors have undoubtedly contributed to the modern spread of bracken: estates cannot now obtain cheap labour for cutting it, and very seldom do townships now combine to cut it; it is no longer used for thatch; climatic fluctuations have even been invoked; but a major cause seems to be the upset of the former ecological equilibrium which existed when cattle were dominant in the economy, sheep stocks were smaller, and muir-burning less frequent. Sheep have caused degeneration by their continued selective grazing, while cattle grazed more completely and also bruised the bracken fronds. Bracken can be eliminated by ploughing in or repeated cutting, but the best hope now seems to be the development of a suitable chemical spray; it is a world-wide problem, and a great deal of research is being devoted to its control. At the same time, the spread of bracken is only one element in the problem of grazings management—other plants such as juncus (in wet areas) are reducing their carrying capacity.

Rather exceptionally, grazings regulations may be well adhered to, generally where crofting is active and the maintenance of the grazings a matter of real concern. This occurs, for example, in some of the townships of Tiree, such as West Hough, and in those on Loch Inchard (W. Sutherland) where the Westminster Estate has encouraged the crofters and provided supplementary employment in forestry. In addition, improvements to hill land are proceeding in some townships with the help of the grants available under the Crofters Act of 1955. Particularly in Lewis, townships have fertilized and reseeded parts of their commons of anything up to 50 acres, and greatly improved them for grazing. In Shetland improvement is most frequent of all, and here the general practice is by individual effort—a crofter's share of the scattald is delimited, fenced, and improved. In these isles, the opportunities for hill improvement are often at their best: the land is steep enough for drainage, yet not too steep for tractors to work on it, and much of it is neither

<sup>1</sup> F. F. Darling, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-3.

too rough nor too rocky; in addition with the less compact scatter of crofts general in Shetland, it is often possible for a crofter to get his share of the scattald adjoining his own holding. In 1961, for example, there were 1,014 claims for such improvements aided by the Crofters' Commission, at a cost of over £46,000; 360 of the claims were in Shetland and 536 in Ross (mostly in Lewis).<sup>1</sup> The total acreage now improved is well over 20,000 acres,<sup>2</sup> although in Lewis the pace of improvement has slackened as most of the accessible land in the vicinity of the townships has already been improved. Improvement of hill land is certainly now well within man's technical abilities, although it would not be economically feasible for crofters without outside help.

Although partial apportionment is now frequent in Shetland and occasional elsewhere, commons are still very much part of the crofting scene. Despite the modern trend towards economic individualism, they seem likely to continue so in most of the crofting area for the future; even if the amalgamation of crofts is achieved, it would still be uneconomic and impractical in most cases to apportion the commons. This is well shown by the island of Tiree, and by most of the crofts in Skye created after 1918, where commonity is still very significant despite the bigger size of the holdings. It would seem that even with a system of small farms in much of the Highlands, common grazing might well continue—as it has in parts of Wales and the Lake District: such is the enduring influence of a hill environment.

<sup>1</sup> *Crofters' Commission Report*, 1961, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Information from Crofters' Commission. The bulk of the material in this paper comes from the files of the Crofters' Commission, access to which is gratefully acknowledged.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS *continued from page 141.*

FUTURE CONFERENCES

Enquiries are being made about the possibility of holding the 1969 conference at the Agricultural College at Wageningen in the Netherlands, and further details will be included in the next issue. As a result of the questionnaire on the future of the December conferences it has been decided to hold these at irregular intervals whenever it seems opportune.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF GRANGER MOVEMENT

Scholars and librarians may obtain, upon request, from the Agricultural History Center, University of California, Davis (95616), an annotated Granger bibliography. The guide, *A Preliminary List of References for the History of the Granger Movement*, was compiled by Dennis Nordin, and published by the Center in co-operation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.