

'Wild Goats Of Britain'

A commentary on an article by David Watkins, source and date undetermined

Raymond Werner, February 2010

Introduction

An article appeared in the Old English Goat Society's Newsletter, number 64, February, 2010, entitled 'Wild Goats of Britain'. The writer was David Watkins, although the name of the magazine in which it originally appeared and the date of its publication remains unknown. It forms a part of the archive of the editor of the OEGS Newsletter, and the present writer has been asked to comment on its content.

Articles such as the one in question are invaluable as a means of adding to our knowledge of the origin and history of the feral goat in this country, whilst their framing reveal how they were viewed, prejudiciously or otherwise, at any point in time. This article is no exception, although a lack of source and date does make it more difficult to gain best value from the information it contains. Also, the rather jumbled way in which the information is presented does, to a great deal, diminish its impact, and reduce its value at first reading. In commenting on this article, it has therefore been considered necessary to reorder and then present the information contained in it under ten sequential, headings. These heading will be: the uses of the goat worldwide; the introduction of the domestic goat to the British isles; place names and traditions associated with the goat; the origin of feral herds; location of feral herds; numbers; lineage; behaviour generally; behaviour with regard to an ability to detect and react to pending inclement weather; status and main threat to survival. Following this, there will be a comment on the new information presented, and a consideration of when the article may first have appeared.

The uses of the goat worldwide

Watkins made the point that the goat is highly regarded, adding that more people drink goats' milk than cows' milk throughout the world. He justified his view by naming twelve uses of the goat, both historically (past times) and the present. These were: meat (food); drink (milk, which is more easily digested and more nourishing than cows' milk); cheese; leather; clothing; parchment; kid gloves; horns (for drinking vessels, knives and decorative articles); skins for carrying water, wine and oil; pets and beasts of burden.

Interestingly, although Watkins referred to kid gloves, he made no mention of kid meat, which formed an important element of the diet of medieval lords and their followers.

The introduction of the goat into the British Isles

Although the article is entitled the Wild Goats of Britain and feral goats are referred to as wild goats throughout, Watkins made the point that goats are not truly native to this

country. Also, he held to a belief that no one seems to know when it was first introduced, although he referred to its bones being found amongst the remains of Stone Age man. He then went on to make the point that 'some people maintain' that it came with the 'first people', justified by the fact that goats were highly regarded for their flesh, milk and skins.

During Victorian times and then up and well into the inter-war years of the last century, there was an assumption that our feral goat herds were genuinely wild and not feral. In fact the 'reversion to wild type' theory, which still prevails today, was based upon the belief that there was a genuine, long-haired, British wild goat, and that this wild species still survived as a component of at least some Scottish 'wild' goat herds as late as the 1930's. It was also believed that domestic goat stock in Scotland was the descendant of, and remained indistinguishable from, this old British Wild Goat. This explains the whole meaning of 'reversion to wild type', the wild type to which feral goats were reverting being the original British Wild Goat. Running parallel to these beliefs, however, was the view that the goat was not a native species and had been introduced during the Neolithic. Perhaps the New Stone Age period (an alternative name for the Neolithic) is synonymous with the reference of Watkins to 'Stone Age man', although his 'first people' is rather confusing, and would assume that the goat was maintained by the Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers who predated the Agricultural Revolution and animal domestication according to standard chronology.

However, his statement that the feral goat has a very ancient lineage here, this being far longer and more ancient than that of other feral animals like the rabbit and fallow deer, is most intriguing. It is generally acknowledged that the rabbit and fallow deer are not native to the British Isles, but whether or not they are acclimatized wild species or feral animals is debatable, although Watkins was clear in his own mind on the point.

A genuinely wild species is one that survives without man's assistance, breeds without man's interference, and whose genes have not been selected by man. A domestic species is one whose survival depends upon man, whose breeding is controlled by man, and whose genes are selected by man. A feral animal is one whose survival and breeding are now wild, that breeds without any influence from man, but whose genes, although formerly selected by man, are now selected by nature.

Oliver Rackham's 'The History of the Countryside' is quite informative with respect to the rabbit and the fallow deer being either wild or feral. Both the rabbit and the fallow deer were introduced in the early twelfth century, and for the same purpose of producing meat from poor quality land. Both were then kept in captivity for centuries, went out of fashion, escaped to run wild, and made a nuisance of themselves.

The rabbit originates from the Western Mediterranean, where it does not burrow. In England, it was kept in warrens that were set up on islands and heathland, within parks and later in forests. In essence, the mediaeval rabbit was a very different animal to our wild rabbit of today, being delicate and in need of shielding from the vagaries of our climate, and at first unable to dig its own burrow. Although it has been repeatedly stated that the rabbit was domesticated early, with its survival depending upon man, there is little evidence that there was any real attempt to control its breeding and thus produce varieties through gene selection. The Romans, in fact, kept rabbits in enclosures but left them to live as if they were in the wild, and this is the sense in which it is believed the Normans maintained their warrens.

Obviously, genetic changes were involved, but warrens did not, by definition, involve controlled breeding, and the rabbit's acclimatization to our climate, and behavioural changes with regard to burrowing, may be considered adaptation and acclimatization rather than domestication. It is likely, therefore, that although the rabbit of the present day is not the same as its Mediterranean ancestor, the genetic changes involved are consistent with a new wild variety with different ecological behaviour rather than a variety that is different due to domestication. With regard to this, it should be pointed out that their captive ancestors were nearly identical in appearance to the wild Spanish species.

In similar vein, the Normans treated the fallow deer as an imported exotic animal that produced meat. Its homeland is the Near East, and it reached England by way of the Normans settled in Sicily who had inherited the classical and oriental traditions of imparking beasts. Having been kept enclosed in parks and protected in forests for many centuries, it escaped into the wild as late as the previous two centuries. Unlike the rabbit, there was no meaningful genetic change apart from the appearance of variable colour patterns (spots) that occurred within the context of more restrictive breeding and little pressure from natural selection. As the rabbit, the fallow deer is best viewed, therefore, as an acclimatised wild species. Perhaps the main difference between the rabbit and the fallow deer is that the former is highly domesticable, and has been of late, whilst the fallow deer is not, although it can be tamed.

Elsewhere in the article, Watkins referred to feral goat herds being based upon 'British Native Stock', even though he believed, quite clearly, that the goat was not a native species. Is this a contradiction? Doubtless it isn't, as whilst Watkins acknowledged that the goat was introduced into the British Isles as a domestic species, and thus its wild-living off-spring could only be considered feral (returned to the wild) as opposed to a genuinely wild species, the term 'native' can also be used alternatively and legitimately to acknowledge the landrace status of an old-established domestic breed.

We seem to have little difficulty in referring to 'native' pony breeds, and the term has also been applied to cattle and sheep without promoting an outcry. In fact our original and only domestic goat breed in England - generally known as the Old English - was commonly referred to as 'our native goat' or 'the native goat' in the earlier part of the last century. 'Native', in this context, refers to an original or old-established breed that has been shaped by the environment (including climate), husbandry/farming practices and traditional uses of a particular region, regardless of whether or not it was introduced. Thus, the Exmoor pony is a native breed within this definition. Our old British goat (the British Primitive) has been 'native' to the British Isles for at least as long as the Exmoor pony, so why should it be a heresy to call the goat, and in particular the feral goat, a native animal? Perhaps the answer lies in the baggage it brings with it, should the term ever be acknowledged. Feral goats have no status in law, being neither wild nor domestic animals legislatively. Because our feral goat population is based upon the original goat stock of the British Isles (as pointed out by Watkins, as we shall see), the term native goat, if ever applied to it, would suppose that it represents an old-established and now rare breed. Thus the term native, as applied to feral goats, is rather political, and raises issues regarding status and preservation; far better to think of feral goats as non-native and an intrusion upon the landscape - rather like the grey squirrel, in fact.

It would therefore seem likely that although Watkins was quite hazy with regard to when goats were introduced into this country, he had quite a firm grasp on its status as a domestic breed (British native stock) and feral animal (descended from British native stock).

Traditions and place names associated with the goat

Watkins made the point that the goat has entered our Island's place names and traditions. When referring to the British Isles being dotted with place names associated with the goat, he mentioned five areas in particular. Goat Crag is in the Lake District, Cumbria, and Goat Stones in Northumberland, near Wark. There was once a feral goat herd associated with Goat Stones, although it is now extinct. Goat Mire and Goatlings were also mentioned although in neither case can any geographical or topographical feature be related to these. The last name is Crap-Na-Gower, which is Gaelic and associated with Scotland.

Watkins quoted the Robert the Bruce story of how a herd of feral goats, by resting up across the mouth of a cave in which Bruce was hiding, steered his pursuers away from searching the cave itself, and thus saved his life. This story was recounted in accordance with the historical tradition, although the context within which Watkins placed it was of particular interest. He gave it as an example of a group of traditions that purported to demonstrate that goats will help people in need. Prior to this, the Robert the Bruce story has not been intended to imply that the goats wittingly protected the cave's incumbent, nor is there any knowledge of other traditional stories that might suggest something similar. Perhaps Watkins intended his meaning to be that there are traditions that centre upon goats unwittingly helping people.

The origins of feral goat herds

Watkins mentioned five main reasons why feral goat herds were founded. Four are quite well known, although he added new information to two, and one is highly original.

He made the point that feral goat origins may be quite nebulous, and also a matter for conjecture, although he stated that many herds had lineages that dated far back into the past.

The first reason was quite basic: Some goats undoubtedly escaped from domestic herds and entered a wild existence. Wrapped up in this is the widespread assumption that goats readily go feral, sometimes by degrees due to the herding, free-ranging and transhumance practices of the past.

He also thought it probable that farmers may have deliberately liberated goats, these few goats that were released eventually wandering off on their own to form new herds. We now have goats that escaped in times past, and goats that were liberated. This second reason why feral herds formed- deliberate releases- was associated by Watkins with the prevention of contagious abortion in cattle due to the goats eating, and not being adversely affected by, ergot. It is interesting in this context that eating ergot is placed within a grazing regime. Not mentioned is the fact that it was also common for billies to be stabled with horses for the same reason, added to which they were supposed to keep the horses company and lead them calmly out of the stable in the event of a fire.

The third reason was the belief in Scotland that goats were efficient killers of wild snakes. The remarks of Watkins are interesting at this point for several reasons. Firstly, he specifically mentioned Scotland, whereas the tradition is more usually associated with adders along the Border Hills. Secondly, he maintained that the goats were deliberately liberated for this purpose, whereas it is usually a reason given for shepherds liking to see

goats on the high ground (maintaining their presence). Thirdly, Watkins stated that it was believed that feral goats hunted adders and other snakes for food. This has not been mentioned before, although the snake-killing tradition has been recounted alongside the fact the Markhor means 'snake-eater' in Persian.

The fourth reason given by Watkins is that feral goats can sense the coming of storms and hard winters, and so were thought of as a valuable creature in the countryside for the reason that they wandered down to the fertile areas before adverse conditions could take a grip, followed by the sheep and the cattle. Watkins wrote of farmers in this context, whereas elsewhere the tradition is usually associated with shepherds and in particular those of the Border Hills. Also, it is more usual to report the shepherds going up to bring their sheep down when the goats have acted as weather barometers, rather than the sheep and cattle vacating the high ground in the wake of the goats.

The last reason why feral herds were established is quite new, and relates to what Watkins termed 'sporadic records of hunting'. He stated that goats were treated as game by rich hunting families when deer - their usual sport - became scarce or disappeared completely. If this occurrence is associated with the origin of feral goat herds, then the implication is that goats were released for the purpose of hunting, and some survived to go wild. What is of particular interest is that in England the Forest Laws banned goats from royal hunting grounds because their smell encouraged deer to vacate an area. Thus goats were an anathema to those who hunted game for sport. The reference to sporadic records relating to the hunting of wild goats therefore adds a new dimension to the traditional relationship between goats and the hunting classes.

For an analysis of the view of Watkins that goats replaced deer as an animal to be hunted, we turn to Rackham again. Red deer have always been abundant in the Highlands of Scotland and remain so today. However, as farmland advanced in England, deer declined. Consequently, red deer were no longer common by the Middle Ages. There were, even so, red deer in thirty of the eighty or so royal forests set up by the Normans. With the instituting of parks and forests, however, the red deer was given the status of a semi-domestic animal. Parks, meaning deer-parks, were absent in Anglo-Saxon times, but became common during the Middle Ages, multiplying in the twelfth century. There were 3,200 parks in 1300, covering around 2% of the country. 90% were for fallow deer, a species more suitable for systematic management (more easy to keep in a confined space), than red deer, although there were parks for red deer too, and on occasion for roe deer, wild boar and wild cattle. The boar became extinct in England in 1260, although it continued to be kept in parks, and hunted as organized sport, between the 13th and the 17th centuries. There are also records of about twenty parks where wild cattle were maintained, the bulls of which were the 'object of especially thrilling hunts'. Records of wild (feral) cattle are to be found in the Middle Ages, but became more numerous in the seventeenth century. Roe deer numbers had declined more sharply than those of red deer during the Middle Ages, and the species was supposedly extinct in England and Wales by 1800.

Thus, we have a picture of red and roe deer in decline throughout the Middle Ages, as attested by Watkins, although the setting up of parks especially for the maintenance of deer, and in which the newly-introduced fallow deer proliferated, balance this out. Add to this the fact that wild bulls, boar and roe deer were also hunted, it would seem that the hunting classes had no shortage of game for sport, and thus no real necessity to turn to hunting the goat.

Were there 'wild' goats in England at this time, even so? Certainly, there is a record of feral goats in the New Forest during Norman times, although George Turbervile, who wrote a treatise on the noble art of hunting in 1576, claimed not to have seen or have heard of any wild goats in England. He did, however, state that they were to be found in Wales and the mountainous districts.

Within a century, however, John Manwood indicated that there were 'wilde goats' in several forests. In his treatise of the laws of the forest, dated 1665, he alluded to the fact that 'there be some wild beasts....that so long as they are remaining within the bounds of the forest, the hunting of which is punishable by the laws of the forest, such as wilde goats, hares and conies'. There were also feral goats in the Forest of Kingswood, Gloucestershire, in the seventeenth century.

Some parks also maintained feral goats. Perhaps the best known is the Bagot goat of Bagot Park, Blithfield, in Staffordshire. This herd was most certainly present here from the fourteenth century, although when it acquired its distinctive, and oft times elusive, colour pattern is not known. There is also a record of wild goats in Tredegar Park, Monmouthshire, in the late seventeenth century, and a herd of white goats of ancient origin in a Park in Herefordshire in the early twentieth century, as well as others.

What all this means is difficult to access. The peculiar dislike of goats by deer led to the banning of the goat from royal forests, and on the understanding that goats and a passion for hunting do not mix, although the herding husbandry practiced during the Middle Ages almost certainly allowed for goats to go feral in these hunting domains. In respect of this, we have records of wild goats in forests from the early Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, with a somewhat ambiguous comment that there were none in the sixteenth century. Likewise, there are records of imparked wild goats from the fourteenth century. The fundamental question is, even so, why would goats be hunted when deer, bulls and boar remained available? Perhaps the answer lies in the reference of Watkins to 'spasmodic records', meaning that in some pockets of the country wild deer were scarce, deer parks were non-existent, and imagination had to be resorted to to maintain the chase.

Lineage

Here, we are discussing the breed(s) to which the feral goats of Watkins's time belonged. He was of the opinion that our feral herds originated from 'British native stock', meaning the original domestic breed of the British Isles. He then reasoned that in his time they were 'of very mixed breed' because so many of them had their lineages dating back far into the past. He went on to assert that it was 'known' that Crusaders brought back many breeds of goat with them, and that these were released to intermingle with the British native stock. Following this, and in more recent times, other breeds were transported to England in ships, in which they had provided meat and milk on the voyage.

This is all highly controversial. What is clear is that Watkins believed that our present feral herds were founded at a time far in the past that predated the importation of imported stock from foreign lands. This would have been no later than the early Middle Ages as it was the breeds brought back by the Crusaders that were released to mingle with the British native stock. Then, more breeds were added by way of ship borne stock.

His reasoning here is twofold. Firstly, he maintained that there has been a long history of goat breed importations, beginning with the Crusades. Secondly, he maintained that because feral goats have a long history, and one that predates these imports, this would presuppose that representatives of all these breeds have been released over time to intermingle with the original stock.

But was Watkins right when he wrote of many goat breed importations as a result of the Crusades? The present writer has come across only one reference that fits this assertion, this relating to the Bagot goat. One of the several traditional origins relating to this breed would have it that Richard II presented the goats to Sir John Bagot in acknowledgement of a good day's hunting in Bagots's Park. All well and good, but from where did the King obtain the goats in the first place? Here speculation steps in to suggest that they were brought back by Crusaders returning home on foot through Europe. Interestingly, Sir John Bagot is associated with a second tradition, this being that he brought them back personally from a crusade. The 'crusade' in question was in actuality a disastrous war fought in Portugal, and had nothing to do with the Crusades at all. In this tradition, Sir John returned overland from Portugal by way of the Rhone Valley, collecting Schwarzhals goats on the way as either souvenirs or a source of milk. Several things are wrong with this story. Firstly, the army of the Duke of Lancaster, to which Sir John belonged, was thoroughly beaten in Portugal, and would have returned home expediently and by ship. Had Sir John walked across the north of Iberia and into France, digressing into Switzerland on the way, he would then have had to take his newly-acquired goat herd through hostile France to reach a point of embarkation for England.

In reality, the so-called Bagot goat 'traditions', are little more than fire-side speculation, all of which have been disputed by various lords Bagot over time. Attempts to link the breed with the Crusades emanate from the belief that the Bagot goat is identical to the Schwarzhals breed of the Rhone Valley and must therefore be descended from it. It is thus necessary to explain how Bagot goats got to England from the Rhone valley during the fourteenth century. For some reason returning crusaders have been picked upon as the most likely candidates. What is not usually thought about, however, is that the colour patterns associated with both breeds are, in fact different, the Schwarzhals having (unsurprisingly) the Schwarzhals colour pattern, whereas the idealized Bagot goat markings appear to be essentially like the Cou Noir colour pattern. Cou Noir is not the standard colour pattern of the Bagot goat, however, and it would seem that Bagot goats have the spotting allele at the spotting locus, modifiers associated with which have been exploited to try to achieve the black forequarters and white hindquarters that is the breed ideal. Thus, there is no need to associate the Bagot goat with the Schwarzhals, which means that Crusaders no longer need to be called upon to have brought them into the country.

With regard to ship borne goats having been landed in England in more recent times, there is much evidence of this. The earliest records unearthed by the present writer relate to pygmy goats being found in the Bristol area in the late eighteenth century. During the Victorian period, goats were brought into the country from the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East and Mediterranean basin by way of steamships and private yachts, thus becoming established in areas contiguous with the major seaports. By the 1860's, however, goats belonging to many and varied foreign breeds were being established in other parts of the country, and due mainly to both the establishing of a railway network and returning gentry taking foreign goat stock back to their country estates. Importantly, though, the regions

where feral goat herds were established during the nineteenth century and earlier, were located in quite remote and upland areas where herding, and sometimes transhumance, husbandry was still practised. For this reason, foreign goat stock did not make an impact on the domestic stock of these more remote areas until the twentieth century, it being generally agreed that introgression within feral herds was not an issue until the 1920's or thereabouts.

Thus, there is not evidence of many breeds, in fact any breeds, being imported during the Middle Ages, and particularly not by returning Crusaders; nor is there any evidence of foreign goat imports by way of ships during the nineteenth century being released to intermingle with the British native stock in established herds prior to the period following the Great War.

Behaviour

Watkins associated feral goat herds with mountains, the high ground and the less fertile areas.

They were characterized by being timid (mentioned twice) and most unapproachable, avoiding human contact.

He believed that they had no urge to roam, hefting themselves in the same area for generations when established and not disturbed. Within this area, they searched for solitude and substance.

They mated in October, and kidded in February. Kidding occurred in the most severe of weather conditions, and Watkins believed that kids surviving this challenging month of February were destined to grow strong and healthy.

Watkins noted that it was a female that was normally in charge of the herd, although a big male would establish a harem of nannies during the rut by fighting fiercely, and thus serve the females.

This view of the natural history of feral goats is most enlightening. Watkins painted a picture of isolated herds in remote areas that although largely left alone, were so timid as to avoid any human contact by way of being unapproachable. This behaviour is suggestive of either being so isolated as to rarely come across humans, or being shot on a fairly regular basis. The now-extinct Whickhope herd of the Border Hills was extremely timid and unapproachable in the way described by Watkins, and their home range was on an estate that let out shooting rights for trophy hunting.

Watkins described how feral goats became hefted on to a home range, giving food requirements and freedom from persecution as the important criteria for so doing.

He also stated that the rut occurred in October and the kids were born in February. Kids may be born as early as January in Scotland, and as late as March and April along the Border Hills. His comments about the February weather acting as a fine sieve for the survival of only the fittest kids is in keeping with the concept of survival of the fittest, which was said to be the mechanism by which goats released to go wild reverted to the wild type during the 1920's and 1930's.

Much of the literature pertaining to 'wild' goats published up to and including the middle of the last century stated categorically that a billy was in charge of or led the herd. It is interesting in this context that Watkins recognised that herds were matriarchal. He still, however, described feral goat rutting behaviour along the lines of that of red deer, which is manifestly wrong.

Ability to come down to lower ground before the bad weather set in

When relating the traditional belief that feral goats will sense the oncoming stormy weather and hard winters, Watkins questioned whether or not this instinct was actually true or open to conjecture. He stated that 'many farmers have testified' that they have witnessed herds being trapped in snow on high ground, and even meeting with serious disaster. He put this down to not having avoided the bad weather conditions in good time.

His comments here are interesting because other writers have alluded to the shepherding belief that the feral herds come down from the high ground at the outset of bad weather, but none have disputed its validity. However, a significant number of herds along the Border Hills were caught up in snow storms and lost during the extremely hard winter of 1946-7. This winter was exceptional, and there was virtually nowhere for the goats to go. It is possible, therefore, that the farmers that Watkins either spoke to or heard about, were referring to this particular period in time, which could help to date the period of the article.

Feral goats are quite canny, and Les Goodyer of the British Feral Goat Research Group has collected information on the College Valley population that includes local knowledge that the goats are known to burrow right into gorse thickets when lying snow makes it difficult to graze, and then feed on the walls and ceilings of their well insulated and dry sanctuary.

Status and threat to survival

At the time of writing, Watkins believed that the main threat to the survival of feral goat herds was the Forestry Commission. Giving the goats the title of 'the most ruthless browsers in the animal world', he asserted that the presence of feral goats in a plantation caused havoc by damaging the work of the Commission considerably. Because of this, the Forestry Commission had become the main enemy of the feral goat. 'Strong measures' were therefore necessary to 'discourage their marauding'. This is taken to be a codified reference to the shooting of any goats found within plantations.

The Forestry Commission came into being during the aftermath of the Great War, which helps to date the article as no earlier than the 1920's. A full-blown policy of extermination took place as a result of the extension of the Commission's work following the Second World War, and many herds were lost in the 1950's and 1960's.

What is particularly sad here, and Watkins may have actually missed his own point in relation to this, is that feral goats had been hefted for generations on bleak upland areas, causing no damage and remaining largely undisturbed. In fact their presence on the upland was approved of by farmers and shepherds as they added interest and variety to a bleak landscape, acted as weather barometers and allegedly killed adders. When planting began, the Forestry Commission targeted the very areas occupied by feral goat herds, changing the landscape onto which they had been traditionally hefted. The goats did not at first move

on, but saw the change as a balance between human interference and opportunities for dry beds, shelter and a more varied food source. For exploiting a change to their own home range, they were then shot.

New information and views and how we fit the article into time and space

Watkins gave us seven new pieces of information, or a new slant on or understanding of, our existing knowledge. He quite cleverly distinguished between the feral goat not being a true native (although this is now in dispute) and a native in the sense of being a landrace breed. He introduced the idea of traditions relating to goats consciously helping people, although he quoted only one well-known historical tradition in this respect. The actual hunting of adders and other snakes for food is an original and interesting slant as to why feral goats have a reputation for killing ‘serpents’, and he questioned the validity of goats having a natural instinct for divining the onset of bad weather, and thus acting as weather barometers for the farming community. He linked an ignorance of feral goat numbers with an assumption that numbers would be underestimated, and contested that the Crusaders brought back many breeds of goat to this country. Lastly, he made reference to spasmodic records with regard to rich hunting families resorting to the chase of the goat when deer were extinct or not easily available in their area.

Thus, there is an element of originality to his article. He quotes what is ‘known’, the views of ‘many farmers’, nobody knowing something, the ideas of ‘some people’, ‘sporadic records’, old beliefs, traditions and folklore. His knowledge base therefore appears to be both academic and to some extent practical. He is vague on some points of information-when goats first arrived in the British isles, for example- and quite dogmatic on others, such as the multiplicity of breeds that supposedly have turned up on our shores since the early Middle Ages. In essence, it is a general interest article in which the writer draws upon a wide knowledge base and then seeks to present this information to a non-specialist audience. The sub-headings don’t quite match the information contained within them, nor is the information presented in a logical and sequential way, but it is easy to read with peaks of interest to keep the reader going, and this is probably the rationale behind its presentation.

The overall feel of the article is of one that would have appeared in a magazine like *Country Life*, either between the two world wars or not long after the Second World War. The audience is either rural or a readership with a general interest in the countryside.

Its setting appears to be biased towards the upland areas of England, or possibly southern Scotland, and this due to the topics relating to place names, folklore, the origin of feral herds, locations, references to the Forestry Commission, comments on the ability of feral goats to escape inclement weather or not, and feral goat behaviour.

The ‘when’ is tricky. Locations suggest pre First World War, although other evidence confirms post 1920. The general feel of the article, along with some comments, would suggest not long after the Second World War, although some time during the inter-war years and not long after would be a good way of hedging all bets.