


# Stories in the Land

## On the Tracks of the Highland Drovers






*"The Drovers Storyline is wonderful, it has everything you need to set the scene and keep the Storyline going throughout the topic. It fits with history, geography and Scottish-based outcomes in CfE and we used it to cover all our language outcomes for the term. The children loved this approach and were hooked from hearing the first part of the story."*

Teacher, St John's RC Academy

An aerial photograph of a forest, showing a dense canopy of trees. A light blue grid is overlaid on the image, with lines extending across the entire frame. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

# **Stories in the Land:**

## **On the Tracks of the Highland Drovers**



*"We started our topic and our teacher said 'You're going to learn about the drovers'. We thought 'What are drovers?' And now we know what drovers are and what they experienced."*

Pupil, St John's RC Academy

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*Felt feet*

# Foreword

Living Communities is one of the largest heritage participation projects in Scotland, an exciting initiative enabling young people to gain skills that will serve them well in learning, life and work.

Since its launch in December 2011, as a partnership between Perth & Kinross Council and the Gannochy Trust, thousands of pupils and adults across Perth and Kinross have learned - and shared - new knowledge and skills.

At the heart of the Living Communities model is a commitment to people and the places they live. Different generations come together to explore the stories of our communities, preserving local heritage that might otherwise have been lost, and acquiring the skills to interpret what they have discovered through creative expression.

Over the past three years, teachers at primary and secondary schools have found inspiration for new ways of teaching by participating in a range of planned and structured activities they would not always have been able to provide independently.

The wide-ranging subjects young - and not so young - participants have chosen to explore include World Wars and their local impact, the Perth glassmaking industry, brass music, Iron Age archaeology, the challenges faced by small independent shopkeepers, the history of their own schools, and - the focus of this book - the 18th and 19th century cattle drovers who travelled south from the Highlands to sell their herds.

They have also learned the practical skills involved in local industry such as weaving and glass fusing, as well as filmmaking, songwriting, photojournalism, and creative expression through dance.

Valuable original material generated by this research will be preserved in the city's archives and local libraries.

All Living Communities activities are designed to support the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and to further two key Scottish Government priorities:

- **Lifelong learning:** *enabling people to develop the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills needed to participate in economic, social and civic life.*
- **Education for citizenship:** *empowering people to take their place in society as successful, effective and confident citizens, by developing informed decision making and the ability to take thoughtful and responsible action.*

A pupil-led approach encourages active and independent learning. Young people identify the community stories they want to explore and the creative techniques they wish to use, developing confidence by working with different generations and with pupils in other schools. The emphasis is on inspiration and motivation, drawing in those who may be disengaged from education.

This map, showing the main drove routes, was first published in A R B Haldane's *The Drove Roads of Scotland*. Each of the marked routes represents the seasonal flow of thousands of cattle, but there would have been many other lesser routes across Scotland.

*Reproduced by kind permission of Birlinn Publishers, Edinburgh*





# Background to Stories in the Land: On the Tracks of the Highland Drovers

Living Communities has worked in partnership with various local and national organisations. In 2014, it supported Phase 2 of an action research project called **Stories in the Land: On the Tracks of the Highland Drovers**. Led by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) and the University of Stirling, the project encourages people of all ages to become collectors, creators and tellers of old and new stories inspired by the epic journeys of the Scottish drovers. This publication celebrates these journeys and describes how schools and communities throughout Scotland can learn about their droving heritage.

A R B Haldane's book **The Drove Roads of Scotland** is a key resource for the project. Haldane (1900- 1982) was a social historian and writer who became interested in drove roads and the history of droving in 1942.

## **Background to the highland drovers**

*Cattle droving was a vital part of the Scottish economy for over three centuries with highland soils better suited to rearing cattle than growing crops. At market time, drovers would move the cattle long distances south on foot, to sell in towns with larger populations. Drovers have been described as the economic heroes of their time. In the evenings, around the fire, they would tell stories connected with their journeys - folk and fairy stories, cow and horse tales, legends explaining ancient features in the landscape, stories of place-names spanning centuries. Many of these stories are now forgotten or are held by just a few local people who remember living and working on the land.*

*The Black Cattle of the clans which feature in many of these stories were a smaller version of the Highland Cows of today. Descended from Celtic Oxen they were hardy and docile, able to survive on the sparse grazing of the Highlands. They had both long horns and long hair - a thick hide and double layered coat well suited to the fierce weather. Wealth was calculated*

*by the number of cattle held and cattle were the source of wellbeing for the people of the Highlands. With such high value placed on cattle, it's not surprising that ritual cattle raiding (known as 'spreidh' in Scots Gaelic) was an accepted practice in Scotland. This often took place at night and a favoured time was at Michealmas when the cattle were in good condition for the market. To be a 'cateran' or cattle thief was not only regarded as acceptable but admirable, demonstrating both courage and strength.*

*'Before the gradual breakup of clan society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was expected of a young, up-and-coming chief that he would make a raid on the cattle of another clan as proof of his manhood.'*<sup>1</sup>

*Dogs were needed to control the stock, keep the beasts moving on the road, guard the herds at night, and when 'off duty' keep their masters warm when they slept in the open. The cattle dogs were probably healthy mixes but when sheep became part of the drove Border Collies began to appear. After the cattle were sold at the Lowland Trysts some of the drovers stayed on to do farm work during the harvest.*

*They turned their dogs loose letting them make their own way home. These dogs followed the route of the drove and were fed at farms and inns where the drove had rested on its way south. Payment for their food was made the following year.<sup>2</sup>*

*Other travellers would have crossed paths regularly with the drovers offering opportunities to exchange information and to trade. The 'Summer Walkers' is the name the crofters of the North-west Highlands gave to the Travelling People - tinsmiths, horse-dealers, hawkers and pearly fishers who made their living 'on the road'. These people were Gaelic-speaking highlanders who had a rich culture of stories, poetry and songs. They travelled in family groups on foot and with horse and cart, camping in bough tents as they followed traditional routes each summer.<sup>3</sup>*

*Many factors led to the demise of droving in Scotland but in particular the coming of the railway and better roads meant taking cattle 'on the hoof' was no longer necessary. Some Scottish clansmen, crofters, and farmers made their way to the Great Plains of the USA where cattle had replaced the herds of buffalo. Chisholms, Campbells, MacDonalds and*

*MacKenzies became cattle ranchers in Texas bringing with them skills in stock rearing, herding and marketing of cattle. These cowboys herded cattle along the Chisholm Trail from Texas to the railhead in Abilene. Their exploits have been celebrated in song and story as well in the cinema and on TV.*

*During Phase 1, which took place in 2013, the project focused its energies on two key geographical areas (Badenoch and Lochaber), where there was ready access to drove roads and people who could assist with interpreting and educating using the theme of the drovers. Phase 1 was principally funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Ernest Cook Trust, with additional support from The Gannochy Trust, The Robertson Trust, Storyline Scotland and Perth & Kinross Council.*

*In 2014, Living Communities worked in partnership with RSGS, Storyline Scotland and the University of Stirling, to support Phase 2 of the **Stories in the Land project**, to further develop teaching materials which support Curriculum for Excellence. During the second phase, two classes of P4 pupils and teachers from St John's RC Academy spent the summer term exploring their droving heritage.*

Footnotes:

- 1 **Stewart, K**  
**Cattle on a Thousand Hills** (2010) Luath Press Ltd, Edinburgh, P28
- 2 **Haldane, A R B**  
**The Drove Roads of Scotland** (2008) Birlinn Ltd, Edinburgh, P26
- 3 **Neat, T**  
**The Summer Walkers** (2002) Birlinn Ltd, Edinburgh

*"It feels like  
you're in the  
old time."*

Pupil, St John's RC  
Academy

*"It felt like we were John  
Morrison... and Angus  
and Rob and Fergus"  
(key characters in the  
Droving Storyline)*

Pupil, St John's RC Academy

*"All the activities  
were fabulous,  
really exciting and  
different. It was a  
great way to get  
them to develop their  
own stories."*

Learning support worker,  
St John's RC Academy



*Stealing cattle game*

## Stories in the Land: Working with St John's RC Academy in Perth

The project started with a series of outdoor workshops which were set within the context of the daily lives of the drovers. Typically these sessions would involve three facilitators and the day would begin by establishing a drovers' camp which was intended to represent overnight stops known as 'stances' used by the drovers. Local plants were harvested and a fire was lit using flints or a bow drill under the expert eye of Alastair Davidson of Ar Tir (Our Land). This was followed by bannock and butter-making (and eating!) and included storytelling/story-making, singing and crafting with storytellers Alasdair Taylor and Claire Hewitt.

It took each group of St John's Academy P4 pupils a matter of minutes to walk from their school to the camp in a clump of trees beside the River Tay, yet on both occasions the atmosphere was completely different from the classroom.

Pupils spent a whole day at the camp, gaining insight into the daily lives of the drovers. They foraged for edible plants, learned to make a camp fire with a bow drill, baked bannocks and made butter. A bushcraft expert passed on the skill of string-making, and they created 'felt feet' out of sheep fleece.

Discussion of the drovers' superstitions and their faith in the magical properties of the Rowan tree was followed by singing songs and listening to stories round the camp fire as the drovers did two hundred years ago.

After lunch, pupils dispersed into small groups and created their own stories, which they shared with their classmates around the fire.

### Story-making


*The journey pupils take to the drovers' camp is a story in itself. Around the campfire, they experience the rhythm of the drovers' days, the bannocks and butter they made, the spindles that spun the wool for their plaid, the plants that were useful to them, their deep knowledge of and connection with their environment - and the traditional stories they told.*

*At the end of the day, pupils gather in small groups to create a story that responds to the journey they have taken and to the natural environment around them. They become storymakers, and then storytellers. Each has an opportunity to weave into the story what they have learned, heard, seen and felt during the day. Characters can be invented or taken from the Storyline, further developing the adventures of Angus and Rob.*

*Having created their story, they take it back to the classroom, storyboard it and, together, further develop its themes.*

*There is a rich fund of traditional oral Scottish stories and Scottish Traveller tales which have been handed down for generations, and so bring the drovers' timeframe to life. Teachers interested in developing their storytelling skills can contact the Scottish Storytelling Centre:*

**[www.tracscotland.org/scottish-storytelling-centre](http://www.tracscotland.org/scottish-storytelling-centre)**



*"It feels like you were  
actually drovers  
going to Crieff."*

Pupil, St John's RC Academy

*Making fire*

## The Drovers' Camp

The drovers set up camp to sleep, eat, tell stories and rest their cattle. This was usually at known locations called 'stances' where grazing for cattle had been agreed. Sometimes there might be an inn or other hostelry.

For pupils taking part in the **Stories in the Land project**, the drovers' camp was a place to explore from, return to, and share stories. No specialist equipment was required. However, creating something a little different from the usual, or in a different location, provided children with the spark to fire their imaginations. Anyone who is trained in Forest Schools can easily set up a drovers' camp but it's possible to set up a simple camp with little or no experience.


Choosing a site was explored with the children taking part in the project. What would the drovers need to think about? Proximity to water, food and firewood were important. Ideally we were looking for somewhere a group could sit comfortably, talk and listen, undisturbed. It didn't have to be far from school and could even be within the school grounds.

### Shelter

The drovers might have used natural materials to make an improvised shelter but usually they withstood the elements by simply using their plaid. If the weather closed in during the Stories in the Land project, simple group shelters were constructed using tarpaulin and rope.

### Fire

In the past, a drover's fire provided light, warmth and possibly heat for cooking. Fire was made by friction using a bow drill or with flints ('forced fire' was believed to protect cattle against witchcraft). At our improvised Drovers' camps, pupils made fire using a bow drill. Inexpensive bow drills, firesteels and other fire-making equipment can be sourced online. It may be useful to enlist someone with experience of outdoor fires, but pupils can often come up with their own rules and precautions.




*"There are excellent opportunities for children to work on their own initiative. The children lead this topic, using their ideas and developing the Storyline. Every time you do it with a different class, it will go a different way and this is part of the beauty of it!"*

Teacher, St John's RC Academy

*"The Drovers Storyline is wonderful, it has everything you need to set the scene and keep the Storyline going throughout the topic. It fits with history, geography and Scottish-based outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence and we used it to cover all our language outcomes for the term. The children loved this approach and were hooked from hearing the first part of the story."*

Teacher, St John's RC Academy

A photograph of two young children, a girl with dark hair and a girl with blonde hair, both looking upwards and to the right with attentive expressions. They are outdoors, with green foliage in the background. The girl on the left is wearing a white t-shirt and a colorful beaded bracelet. The girl on the right is wearing a black jacket with orange lining and gold buttons. A large green brushstroke graphic is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

*“When Hennie (storyteller) was telling some stories, they were about trees and a rowan tree, and we passed a rowan tree when we came out from school, and she started leaning on a rowan tree outside the camp, and then it felt like she was the person in the story!”*

Pupil, St John's RC Academy

*Listening to stories*



## The Droving Storyline - A Teaching Tool for Upper Primary

The outdoor sessions were supported by some school-based topic work using a resource called 'The Droving Storyline' which was written by Sallie Harkness of Storyline Scotland, with support from consultant Terry Williams to ensure it was historically accurate.

Storyline is a technique that models and encourages democracy and good citizenship and involves a partnership between teacher and learners. Work in the classroom is centred around key questioning. Learners answer these questions with creative role play, art activities and various forms of writing, fleshing out the story and bringing the characters to life.

Sallie Harkness began the Droving Storyline by writing a series of story extracts following the progress of a drove from Highlands to the Tryst at Crieff. The main characters are two teenage boys Rob and Angus who, in the year 1745, and with their dogs Dileas and Patch, follow the well-trodden road to the south on an adventurous journey that includes encounters with travellers and clansmen. Eventually the drove reaches the Tryst at Crieff. A main feature of Storyline is the creation of a

large frieze which shows the setting of the story. At St John's Academy (primary) one wall of each classroom was taken over by a giant frieze of hills and glens and life-size images of Rob and Angus created by the pupils. What did Angus eat? How did he keep his cattle safe from thieves? Pupils' answers found their way into the frieze as artwork. Phase 2 of Stories in the Land allowed the refinement and development of the Droving Storyline which has now been translated into Gaelic and has been trialled in Gaelic Medium classes in Oban and Edinburgh. The Storyline has also been revised to take the story into the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the destination Falkirk and this version is now being made available to schools in the central belt of Scotland. Full versions of all Storylines with additional support material including guidance for teachers, are available on the RSGS website:

[www.rsgs.org/excitinglearning](http://www.rsgs.org/excitinglearning)

*"The children were motivated by the characters and produced good descriptive writing about the lives of Rob and Angus. They also enjoyed developing the story and writing endings for the cliffhanger stories such as the loss of the cows in the fog or crossing a flooded river."*

Teacher, St John's RC Academy

*"It felt like we were so far away from the school... even though we could hear the bell."*

Pupil, St John's RC Academy



*Droving camp - the Bannocks song*



*Making Bannocks*



*"I never knew that sometimes if you were a special drover, then you have to work... like... for a gun if you have one, and you have to work hard for one to protect yourself and your family"*

*Pupil, St John's RC Academy*

*Listening about a Drover's weapons*



*Making felt feet*

*"It's a nice way of passing it on to the other school, and a good culmination. They knew from when they started that they were doing it for this, and when they do something for a reason they always do it much better. One of the things that's been very good for them about this is getting them speaking. A lot of our children have English as an additional language."*

*Teacher, St John's RC Primary School*



*"When we were doing our stories, we did practise them and we thought we didn't practise enough, but when we got to St Dominics, we remembered them!"*

*Pupil, St John's RC Academy*

*Pupils from St John's Primary School share their stories with St Dominic's Primary School*

## Travelling Tales - Celebrating the Stories in the Land Project

Reflecting on what has been learnt and sharing new perspectives is an important part of Storyline. Towards the end of the St John's RC Academy droving topic, the two groups of pupils travelled to Crieff, the drovers' destination centuries ago, to share stories inspired by the drovers with pupils at Crieff Primary and St Dominic's RC Primary Schools. They split into small groups and told the stories they had devised together, bringing the narrative alive with actions and pictures.



*"It was exciting  
to tell our  
stories to other  
children."*

Pupil, St John's RC  
Academy

## *Travelling Tales at St Dominic's School*





*Crieff Primary School enthralled  
by the droving stories*



# Stories in the Land and Curriculum for Excellence - Action Research

**Stories in the Land** has been designed to further the aims of the Curriculum for Excellence, with its emphasis on active, outdoor and locally-distinctive learning.

The focus is on sustainability, with pupils learning age-old rural skills and engaging more closely with local places. An interdisciplinary approach incorporates history, music, geography, storytelling, cookery, folklore and outdoor crafts, responding to place to understand the past and inform the future.

The project is being researched and evaluated by Dr Greg Mannon, Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Stirling. A key feature has been the opportunity to take an experiential and interdisciplinary approach to 'meaning-making' by linking times (past, present and future) and places (indoor and outdoor settings, and in-school and in-community).

This has included:

**(a) Place-responsive learning** which involves memorable, sensory, and embodied experiences of actual journeying in a manner resonant with that of the drovers (inclusive of walking, meeting 'drovers', spending time in these landscapes, fire lighting, cooking use of native plants, etc).

**(b) Story-based experiences** which involves participants hearing, creating and telling oral stories in ways that were linked with the Droving topic. The thread of the Droving Storyline, and the opportunities for stories to have live audiences, often outdoors, facilitated imaginative and meaningful engagement over a sustained period.

**(c) Interdisciplinarity:** Because of the approach taken, the project affords learning about (inter alia) geography, science, literacy and history. As a result the pupils come to understand and connect real and imagined places in a unique way.

**(d) Community Involvement and Intergenerational Learning** which involves linking in-school and community-based knowledge bases and experience. Pupils are supported by expert facilitators, teachers and community members to understand and connect understandings across generational boundaries within real (local and distant) places as well as past and imagined places. This allows reflection on contemporary lifestyles and provides insights for how they might live in a place more sustainably in the future.



*"I liked picking the flowers.  
We got told about what  
flowers were dangerous  
and what ones weren't"*

*Pupil, St John's RC Academy*

*Picking flowers*

## Professional Facilitators

While some schools have used the Droving Storyline successfully with no outside support, Scotland has a wide range of professional storytellers, artists, craftspeople, historical re-enactors, naturalists, bushcraft experts and other facilitators who can share their skills with pupils and enrich a project about droving.

### Facilitators used in the St John's RC Academy Drovers Project

Bushcraft

**Alastair Davidson**

**[www.facebook.com/learningthroughland/info](https://www.facebook.com/learningthroughland/info)**

Storytellers

**[www.clairehewitt.co.uk](http://www.clairehewitt.co.uk)**

**[www.tracscotland.org/tracs/storytelling/directory-of-storytellers/storytellers/aldasair-taylor](http://www.tracscotland.org/tracs/storytelling/directory-of-storytellers/storytellers/aldasair-taylor)**

Other Scottish Storytellers

**[www.tracscotland.org/tracs/storytelling/directory-of-storytellers/storytellers](http://www.tracscotland.org/tracs/storytelling/directory-of-storytellers/storytellers)**

Artist/Craftworker

**Sarah Hughes**

**<http://room13international.org/contact/>**

Drove Re-enactor

**Alastair Strachan**

**Email [astrachan18@googlemail.com](mailto:astrachan18@googlemail.com)**

## Weblinks and Bibliography

Highland Drovers Storyline (1745 version; 1840 version suitable for urban schools; and Gaelic translation of the 1745 version) with teacher notes, including full topic plan, additional factual material and bibliography.

**[www.rsgs.org/excitinglearning](http://www.rsgs.org/excitinglearning)**

Living Communities

**[www.pkc.gov.uk/livingcommunities](http://www.pkc.gov.uk/livingcommunities)**

Royal Scottish Geographical Society

**[www.rsgs.org/excitinglearning](http://www.rsgs.org/excitinglearning)**

Stories in the Land Project Blog

**<http://storiesintheland.blogspot.co.uk>**

Storyline

**[www.storyline-scotland.com](http://www.storyline-scotland.com)**

Traditional Scottish Tales

**[www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandsstories](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandsstories)**

Tree Stories

**[www.forestry.gov.uk/PDF/fcms128.pdf/\\$FILE/fcms128.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/PDF/fcms128.pdf/$FILE/fcms128.pdf)**

Drovers' Camp Equipment and Blog

**[www.greenmanbushcraft.co.uk/blog/bushcraft-articles-guides/](http://www.greenmanbushcraft.co.uk/blog/bushcraft-articles-guides/)**

**[www.ddhammocks.com/](http://www.ddhammocks.com/)**



Muile  
Mull

Kerrera

An t-Òban  
Oban

Craoibh  
Crieff

An Eaglais Bhreac  
Falkirk

Choisich na dròbhairean bhon Oban gu Craoibh no dhan Eaglais Bhreac.

Mapping the Drivers' routes in the classroom

## Books

### Non-Fiction

Mears, Ray

**Outdoor Survival Handbook: A Guide To The Resources And Materials Available In The Wild And How To Use Them For Food, Shelter, Warmth And Navigation** (1992) Ebury Press

Baxter, C and Taylor, K

**The Highland Cow\*** (2005) Colin Baxter Photography

Butterfield, I

**The Famous Highland Drove Walk** (1996) Greystone Publications

Cochrane, Una F

**Highland Cattle Galore**, Stenlake Publishing

Combe, I

**Herding Dogs** (1987) Faber and Faber

Creegan, E R

**Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover (edited by Margaret Bennett)** (2004) John Donald Publishers

Douglas, S

**Last of the Tinsmiths - The Life of Willie MacPhee** (2006) Birlinn

Gibson, R

**Plaids and Bandanas** (2003) Luath Press

Haldane, A R B

**The Drove Roads of Scotland** (2008) Birlinn

Neat, T

**The Summer Walkers** (2002) Birlinn

Toulson, S

**The Drovers** (1980) Shire Publications

Stewart, K

**Cattle on a Thousand Hills\*** (2010) Luath Press

Williamson, D

**The Horsie man**

### Fiction

Fidler, K

**The Droving Lad** (1955) Canongate

Williamson, D

**Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children** (1983) Canongate


Williamson, D

**Jack and the Devil's Purse** (2011) Birlinn

*\*can be read by primary pupils*





An aerial photograph of a forest with a path. A person is walking on the path. The image is overlaid with a grid pattern.

*'Bannocks o' ber meal, bannocks o' barley,  
Here come the Highlandmans' bannocks o' barley.  
Travelling Highland, travelling Lowland,  
Here come the drovers with bannocks o' barley.'*

**The Drovers Rant (sung by the children at the drover's camps)**

*"Sometimes  
I walk in  
my garden  
barefooted  
to help me  
remember... just  
to feel like what  
the drovers felt."*


Pupil, St John's RC  
Academy.





UNIVERSITY OF  
**STIRLING**



An aerial photograph of a park with a grid overlay. The grid consists of thin, light-colored lines forming a rectangular pattern across the entire image. The park features a mix of green grass, trees, and paths. The colors are slightly desaturated, giving it a soft, ethereal appearance.

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