



[The Big Weaver and the Pairc Farm Cattle Poind (early 19th century)]

Poinding, or the detention by the tenants of the Park Sheep Farm, of animals belonging to the crofters who happened to stray on to the farm land, was one of the ways used by farm tenants to harass the local people. It was also used as an additional source of income for the farm tenant.

A poind or pen-fold was a small enclosure, not unlike a small sheep fank of about 20 feet square or so. The owners of the stray animals had to make good any alleged damage that might have been done by their animals, as well as pay a fine for each poinded animal before it was released. As money was extremely scarce at that time because the crofters' economy was not based on money, they were often obliged to pay in kind with blankets, plaids, wool, grain, potatoes and other agricultural produce, even one of their beasts or anything else of value could be taken in lieu of money.

When however stock from the farm strayed on to the crofters land, as they often did, they were simply driven back over to the farm land. Although the crofters had just as much right to poind the stray stock from the sheep farm, but they dare not, because there was one law for the crofters and another law for the farmer and the landowner.

Furthermore there was constant friction over boundary dykes, although of equal use to the farmer as it was to the crofters, as a division between their respective animals. Nevertheless it was the crofters that usually had to build and maintain these dykes, sometimes stretching for miles. If by any chance an animal from either side managed to get over the dyke, the crofters were held to blame.

As the crofters were being progressively cleared from Southern Park, the poind was moved northwards, and the most Northerly poind was at 'Allt-na-Saidhe', on the Steimreway side of Tob Eishkin. Animals were often injured as they were driven by dogs into these confined spaces, or perhaps crushed or gored by stronger animals, from which they couldn't escape. There was no compensation or even an apology forthcoming to the crofters for any such damage.

The inhabitants of Park had not their sorrows to seek since the sheep farm was set up at Valamus at the beginning of the 19th century. Before that they were pretty well off. It was said that none of the inhabitants ever needed to go elsewhere for anything, from one year's end to the other. Fish was plentiful, their flocks and herds of cattle, sheep, goats and horses provided them with food and clothing, as well as a little money to pay the rent. The hill pastures of Park were very favourable for stock.

Once the tyrannical Stewart brothers 'Gillean Ruadh na Pairce', still remembered in Park for their cruelty, acquired the Park Sheep Farm, they treated the local inhabitants with the utmost contempt. It was in these circumstances that the people of Seaforth Head, where there were seventeen families at that time, heard that some of their animals were impounded at the farm house at Valamus.

The villagers agreed among themselves that the most suitable person to retrieve the impounded animals was the Big Weaver, 'Am Breabadair Mor', because of his magnificent strength and his quiet disposition.

Accordingly the 'Weaver' set off over the sixteen miles of rugged road less moor land and when he arrived at Valamus the Stewarts were not at home. Although the servant girl from Balallan was apprehensive, she nevertheless provided the 'Weaver', whom she knew very well, with food for which he was quite ready for after his long journey.

Once the 'Weaver' was refreshed he looked around, and on finding the poind he freed the poor frightened and hungry animals, and they immediately made their way home with their rescuer coming along behind them.

About half way home the 'Breabadair' came face to face with the Stewarts who, as might be expected, were angry and set about him, because he had the audacity to release the animals without their permission. In the ensuing fight the 'Weaver' held his own and may well have taught the Stewarts a lesson, but for the fact that his trouser braces broke in the scuffle and his trousers dropped and entangled his legs, so that he fell and was overpowered.

A shepherd lad from Lemreway who witnessed the fight kept out of sight in case he suffered the same fate himself. When the freed animals arrived at Seaforth Head unaccompanied, the crofters realised that something serious must have happened to the 'Weaver'. Search parties went out but found no trace of him anywhere.

Some days later the battered body of the 'Breabadair Mor' was found by a man from Garyvard.

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