
THE Legacy of the SOUTH AFRICAN — Ankole

- By Cyril Ramaphosa

At last, we can confidently say that the Ankole Cattle are well established in South Africa as a proper stud breed.

We now have the Ankole Cattle Breeders' Society which has been growing at a steady pace with breeder members. This has been a long but incredibly rewarding journey, which I trace back to 2003 when I had my first sighting of these magnificent creatures in Uganda and fell in love with them immediately. Nearly every breeder who is breeding with these incredibly beautiful cattle today can tell their own story of how their first encounter with the Ankole moved them emotionally, stirred their imagination, and affected them in some way. Each has had their own "moment" with the Ankole.

When encountering the Ankole for the first time, Jacques Malan, who had stopped breeding with cattle many years ago, simply said "I've got to have these cattle". They stirred him to such a degree that he relaunched his cattle breeding once again.

Renowned photographer Daniel Naudé has told me how mesmerised he was when he, too, first encountered these cattle in Uganda. "I just had

to start photographing them immediately," he had said. He chronicled his first journey with the Ankole in his book "Sightings of the Sacred" (2016) and then later joined me in publishing "Cattle of the Ages" (2017) which was specifically written and published to celebrate these exquisite animals.

Martin Joubert undertook his own journey to Uganda, a journey he has gone so far as to call a spiritual one. Lesole Mogorosi has told many of how when he first saw the Ankole they transported him back in time and in a way seemed to connect him more strongly with his ancestral history.

When we say these cattle are magnificent, we mean it in word and deed. The Ankole have frequently been called the "Cattle of the Kings" but I have preferred to call them the "Cattle of the Ages". This is because of their enduring nature and their place in space, culture and history. Both scientifically and historically speaking, the Ankole can be traced back to thousands of years before our time – even before the time of the people who have bred





with them more successfully – the Banyankole in Uganda and the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Depictions of the Ankole can be found in cave drawings and other cultural murals and the Ankole are found expressed in many oral traditions. They are found in the histories of India and Ethiopia, Egypt and Europe. In fact, the Ankole's heritage stretches as far back as eight-thousand years to the wide aurochs, the first cattle to be domesticated by humans. Some people think that the aurochs may have grazed the earth for over one-hundred-thousand years before humans even came into the picture.

It is therefore an immense privilege to have been part of the project of bringing the Ankole cattle to South Africa. It is equally an honour to be part of the Society of cattle breeders, members of the Ankole Cattle Society whom are carefully and deliberately breeding with these wonderful cattle.

Many people on seeing the Ankole for the first time have wanted to know where they come from and,

on hearing that the Ankole originate from Uganda, wonder how on earth they got to South Africa.

The Ankole's integration into South Africa happened through a process you can call "A Miracle of Science". After seeing and falling in love with these cattle in 2003, I negotiated a sale and purchase agreement with President Museveni of Uganda, who agreed to sell me a herd of forty-three of his treasured cattle. It was a mutually beneficial transaction in that, apart from the monetary aspect, he wanted to spread the Ankole to African countries beyond his own. In some ways he wanted other African nations, especially South Africa, to enjoy a part of Uganda on their own soil. I must say he has achieved that objective because a piece of Uganda is permanently in South Africa displaying the distinctive resplendent horns of the Ankole.

After buying the cattle I thought that the next obvious step would be a challenging, but a straightforward and easy process of transporting

them by road to South Africa. I knew that I needed the permission of the Animal Improvement section of our Department of Agriculture to bring cattle from another country. I thought it would be a straightforward process but was taken aback when the officials in the Department declined my application to have the cattle transported to South Africa. I was informed that our government was concerned about importing cattle diseases to South Africa from other countries. This meant that we had to devise another plan to bring them to South Africa.

For some time, I wondered what to do next. Then, through a strange set of coincidences, I read a newspaper article about how a Dr Morne de la Rey had cloned a cow called Futhi. On hearing my dream and dilemma of bringing the Ankole to South Africa from Uganda, Dr de la Rey informed me that he had a solution for my dilemma. He told me that we could bring the cattle to South Africa through an embryo process.

To achieve my objective of bringing the Ankole to South Africa I travelled with Dr de la Rey to President Museveni's cattle ranch in Uganda, and together we carefully selected the best genetics from what I believe is the biggest Ankole herd on the continent. The variety, in terms of quality of the genetics and that colour choice, was spectacular. We were spoilt for choice.

It is these carefully chosen cattle that have been the foundation of the Ankole we now have in South Africa. All the original cattle Dr Morne de la Rey and I selected were transported to Ol Pejeta in Kenya where Dr de la Rey has a cattle research facility. That is where the embryo transfers were done and this led to the Ankole cattle finally coming to South Africa.

These magnificent cattle did not only traverse the distance of the 4,000km in embryo form in a nitrogen flask from Uganda (thus constituting "A Miracle Of Science"), but they also traversed space, time, and a cultural journey of enormous proportions. The "transfer" of the Ankole to South Africa is an important development in confirming the position of our continent in cattle husbandry.

The presence of the Ankole in South Africa is now under the custodianship of the Ankole Society's members. Not only are we now graced with these

wonderful cattle who move us emotionally, please us aesthetically, and connect us with our past and our ancestry; but we also now see how they connect us with our future, with the Ankole being a natural gift to beef development, thus helping to consolidate food security, and much more.

The versatility of these cattle from their ability to withstand any weather, environmental and topographical situation, has enabled them to be populated throughout various parts of South Africa with ease. They have an exceptional ability to withstand any climate including the sweltering heat. They are also hardy and can survive in arid conditions and on low-quality foliage.

Ankole breeders have found them suitable for any environmental situation in South Africa, having fitted in with great ease, following the initial embryo transfer process and the natural birth that ensued thereafter. The ability to adapt to South African conditions climatically, ecologically, and pathologically is perhaps the most impressive characteristics of these cattle.

As we all know management plays a key role in breeding of livestock. Ankole cattle need good and focused management. Any breeder who wants satisfaction from the Ankole needs to devote time and effort to knowing the cattle and nurturing them properly. If one does that, it is as though the Ankole will return the care that a breeder bestows upon them with greater productivity.

The Ankole Cattle Breeder Society now has 26 Stud members whom are spread throughout the country. The number of breeders keeps growing, thus increasing the cattle population in the country. The amount of registered Ankole cattle in South Africa is currently 710 and growing every day.

I have every confidence that as the Society grows and the Ankole becomes further established into our husbandry and culture, we will find that the Cattle of the Ages will contribute much more to South Africa than we currently imagine. I have no doubt that the Ankole will make a meaningful contribution to South Africa's stud and commercial cattle industry.