



History of the ANKOLE CATTLE

- By Martin Joubert, Full Blood Genetics

The origin of the Bahima and their Ankole cattle have been traced to the Ethiopian highlands and there is evidence in Saudi Arabia depicting Ankole on ancient rock art.

Ankole long horned cattle are evident as early as the fifth millennium in the Nile valley, Egypt. These cattle were depicted in Egyptian arts, on pyramid walls and as the hieroglyphs, such as that of the sky bull and the seven cows of Hathor, on the walls of Nefertari's tomb that dated back to 2300BC. They are also evident as depictions on Rock in the Sahara region.

The Bahima travelled down the Nile River and entered Uganda in the 1300's. Ankole long horned cattle have played a vital role in African tribes for

over 6000 years. This breed has spread to Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and other parts of Eastern Africa. The cattle are presently kept by the Banyankole, who are a tribe from South West Uganda. These African long horns were kept by numerous nomad groups across East Africa, for example, the Bahima, nomads of Ankole, Tutsi and nomads of Rwanda.

The fact that these tribes were nomads, land laws in the 1960's to 1980's marginalised these groups, leading to many young men and women joining armed struggles against their government.





In Uganda, President Museveni, led the National Resistance Army which captured power in 1986. However, since the early 2000's those concerned about the Ankole cattle's threatened status, including the President Yoweri Museveni, started a campaign to revive the breed and other farmers followed suit, albeit in an uncoordinated manner. Incidentally, many Rwandan young men were a part of this struggle.

These Rwandans were born in Uganda, their parents and grandparents migrated to Uganda during the 1950's genocide in Rwanda. This same group led the core that formed the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), which in 1994 captured power in Rwanda and ended the genocide. President Paul Kagame and others first liberated Uganda before liberating Rwanda. Again, the struggle for these young men at the time, was land for their Ankole cattle to graze, as Ankole need extensive land due their grazing habits.

With a change in Government in 1986, the farming methods altered and the farmers moved to the more economical cow in terms of milk-profit. The

Friesian and the Ankole cow, which was a more traditional cow with less milk and no commercial value in Uganda at the time, was abandoned. Already the extinction threats started becoming visible. The high population pressure on land had forced the pastoralists to consider alternative breeds which can be reared on limited land. The drive for more economic gain rather than prestige, also forced some herdsmen to acquire exotic breeds like the Holstein Friesian, which produce a greater quantity of milk.

At the entrance of Mbarara town, the capital of Western Uganda, is a statue of the Ankole long horned bull. This immortalised stone symbol is a reflection of just how significant the long horned cattle are to the people in this region. Traditional Kinyarwanda dancers even mimic their horns with their arm movements in their choreography. These cattle are clearly a reoccurring theme deeply rooted into the Ugandans culture and history.