

“Bei uns ist immer was los!” Feste in Bayern

„ALMABTRIEB“ oder “VIEHSCHIED“ / „CELEBRATING THE COWS“



Some twenty-four different villages in Germany's Allgäu region have Viehscheid celebrations every fall when the cattle come down from the alpine pastures.

Following a glorious summer grazing in the mountains, the elaborately decorated cows of Weissach make a festive return

A large jovial crowd, many attired in Lederhosen or Dirndls, gathered outside the beer tent. Everyone's eyes were on the mountain road in the distance. Soon they shouted and pointed. What they came to see appeared rounding a bend up in the hills. Cows. A small group of the beasts led by herders. Bells clanged. Men guiding animals shouted and shoved. The crowd cheered.

The animals came closer and closer. The clanging and ringing grew louder and louder. The herders worked the cattle with their staffs to keep them on track down into the valley.

It was the Viehscheid (driving the cattle down from the mountain), a traditional folklore festival in the village of Weissach in southern Germany's Allgäu region. The fun and lusty celebration went on for several hours as some one thousand cattle marched down the mountain.

The cattle, many decorated with elaborate wreaths and headdresses of greenery, flowers and ribbons and all wearing huge

bells, were divided into groups according to their owner. Franz Meisburger's cows, a group of seventy, were the first down at 8:40 a.m.

In Germany's mountainous Allgäu, in parts of Switzerland and Austria, the cows are feted in the fall when they return to the valleys after spending summers high up in alpine pastures where herdsmen live in huts near their charges.

Peter Berg, a local who came by to "have a small beer" and watch the festivities, explained that "Viehscheid" actually means separating the cows. The animals from different owners all mingle together over the summer. Each has a tag in its ear, which identifies to whom it belongs. Before returning, the cows are separated into the appropriate groups.

A Dirndl-clad woman carrying a sign with the name of the owner precedes each herd in the parade. Children wearing the traditional garb are often by her side. Then come the cows and the herders, also dressed in the local costume. They are a happy bunch, skipping, bouncing and running down the moun-

tain as they celebrate the end of a successful summer.

One cow from each owner's herd is chosen to be the "Kranzkuh" and wears an especially elaborate headdress for the big day. It is usually a good-looking specimen who is docile enough to tolerate the huge decoration around its head and neck. Many of the colorful wreath-like headgear include a small mirror to ward off evil spirits.

If misfortune has befallen a group of cows during the summer, such as a death or injury, that owner is not permitted the honor of having a Kranzkuh in his herd. At Weissach, of the fourteen herds that paraded by, only one group was minus a Kranzkuh. Each of the cattle are weighted down with an enormous bell, and many are decorated in greenery too. Some groups even have a few goats or horses mixed in with the cows.

There are pauses between the appearances of the different herds, time to browse the souvenir stands selling everything from cow bells and stuffed cows to Bavarian scarves and socks, wooden shoes