



# This is the Aurochs



From "Steve's Hodge-Page" collection of extinct animals.  
www.aristotle.net/~swarmack/aurochs

"Hmmm...that's funny, Steve...he doesn't look very dead..."

Yeah...I guess you're right...How about this then !!?...

"That's better...but it's still a cow..."

Aaahh my friends...but it is not just ANY cow. No sireee...It's THE cow... the grandfather of the entire domestic bovine race... Bos primigenius...the Aurochs.

"Whatever."

No, I'm serious ! It is thought that all domestic dogs can be traced back to wolves that early man kept as pets...right?

"I don't care."

Right. Well, its the same with cows. The aurochs is thought



to be the original wild stock from which all European cattle breeds eventually descended...Hereford, Charolais, Angus, Holstein...you get the picture. (and speaking of pictures...)

The aurochs was the great black bull that was painted on cave walls alongside bison and mammoths by tacky prehistoric minimalist artists who had no sense whatsoever of modeling or perspective.

In prehistoric times the aurochs was endemic throughout temperate Europe and Asia. It is known to have been hunted by men from the earliest times with stone age weapons.

Julius Caesar wrote of the great black bulls in an account of the Black Forest..."They are but a little less than Elephants in size, and are the species, color and form of a bull. Their strength is very great, and also their speed.

They cannot be brought to endure the sight of men, nor be tamed, even when taken young. The horns, in amplitude, shape and species, differ much from the horns of our oxen. They are much sought after (the horns); and after having been edged with silver at their mouths they are used for drinking vessels at great feasts."

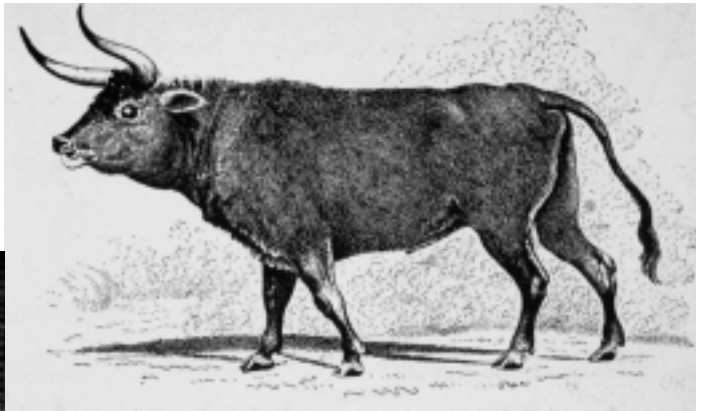
The Europeans had pretty much wiped out the Aurochs by the Middle Ages, and by the year 1300 or so it only survived in East Prussia, Lithuania and Poland...and would have disappeared completely during this time if it weren't for a royal decree in Poland that protected it under threat of death.

It lasted the longest in Jaktorowski Royal Forst in

Mazowsze, where the local villagers acted as gamekeepers. Exempted from taxes, their only required task was to look after the last herd of aurochs, but even this in the end was not enough to save them.

In 1564, there were 22 mature cows, 3 young, five calves, and eight bulls. By 1602 there were three males and one female. Eighteen years later there was only the female, who was reported to have died in 1627.

So...the true Aurochs checked out in the renaissance, and that would have ended the story, but in 1920 two brothers - Heinz and Lutz Heck - set out to "re-create" the Aurochs by back breeding domestic cattle with aurochs-like qualities. Hentz worked at the Hellabrunn Zoological Gardens in Munich, and Lutz worked in Berlin, starting with slightly different stock but producing similar results. The Berlin breed failed, but the Hellabrunn breed is still around, and any "aurochs" you may see in a zoo or on a farm is most likely one of these. They have distinctly Aurochs-like



characteristics but are a little smaller than those of fossil record. (Photographs shown are the Hellabrunn "re-created" Aurochs. Artist rendition above from the 1600s. Cave painting from pre-historic times; and ancient fossil Aurochs skeleton found in Denmark.)



# This is the GAUR.

Another endangered species, the GAUR is considered to be the progenitor of the Zebu or Brahman (Bos-indicus) cattle. There are still a very few of these cattle, primarily in India, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula.

In 2000, in efforts to save this species, cloning was attempted. The Gaur embryo was placed into a surrogate mother and all went well. A bull calf, named "Noah" was born on Jan.8, 2001 but died at 2 days of age from scours.

**Some 25,000 years ago a migration of Zebu (Gaur?) from Indian made it's way into the north-western region of Italy. They inter-mingled with the native Aurochs and gave rise to the Piedmontese Breed. This migration of Zebu is well documented - though the reason behind the migration is not clear. The Zebu influence can be seen in all the Italian "White Breeds" born fawn, then changing to grey-white.**

by Vicki Johnson