

Jake Szoneberg

Hawick Common Riding Essay 2016

As it is swiftly approaching the Common Riding In Hawick I was beginning to make a few plans. The Common Riding is the best time of the year for me and most others in Hawick. As you know, I have been pleading with you for a while to come down for the Common Riding and I was wondering if you wanted to travel down from Dunblane and come with us to one of the Ride Outs? I'm also going to give you some background information about the history of why we have the ride outs and some insight into what happens during the ride outs in the modern age.

First, I shall give you some fascinating and compelling historical understanding of riding the marches or boundaries of Hawick Common. An intriguing history that will draw you in and persuade you that the ride outs are the only place to be each Saturday in May.

The Ride Outs come from a time, hundreds of years ago, when Hawick was a very different place. The Common Riding is meant to commemorate the times of the past when local men risked their lives in order to protect their family, town and local pride. The first recorded Ride Out was to Lilliesleaf in 1891. Even though there are ride outs on a Saturday, there are also ride outs on a Tuesday. This is because Tuesdays were and still sometimes are holidays for shopkeepers. My Uncle Robbie owns a family butchers on the street and his shop is usually shut on a Tuesday. This then allows him to Ride Out or just watch the horses on their way. The Saturday Ride Outs were also traditionally for mill workers and children. The Ride Outs are not really officially part of the main celebrations that take part on the weekend of the Common Riding, although it really depends how you look at it. The Ride Outs do also build anticipation for the main weekend and gives exercise to the horses. The cheering when the cavalcade goes by echoes distant memory of young callants returning from Hornshole (which I have told you about in previous letters).

Now, I will inform you about the events that go on during a Ride Out and also what my favourite parts are. The first Ride Out is Bonchester and takes place the Saturday after picking night (which takes place on the Wednesday night in May). The horses muster at the Backdamgate (across the road from Beanscene where we went for lunch) and leave at around 1pm. We usually stand at the foot of the Howegate and watch the Cornet, the left hand man, the right hand man and the acting father lead the procession along the packed streets, of cheering crowds and waving plans, up towards the first field. As soon as the final horse has past everybody races to their cars to get to the front of the long queue, heading to the first stop. The first stop is a few miles from where to horses started. This time allows riders to regroup and get refreshments and lets the horses get a quick rest and a drink of water (and lets supporters make sure riders have stayed on their horses!). After several minutes the rest of the cavalcade start again. Everyone then rushes back to their cars and head straight towards the half way point of the ride out. When you arrive you have to pay around five pounds to get into the field and then park your car, open the boot, set up the deck chairs, lay

out the picnic and enjoy the atmosphere and feeling of the Common riding. There is also a bouncy castle for the little ones and we usually take a football or rugby ball to play with. It is also a good chance to go and chat to friends and have a good time! I especially enjoy playing with friends (and eating loads of sweets) at the Ride Out. After two hours at the ride out the riders remount and follow the Cornet on his way home.

The cavalcade returns back to Hawick after eight o'clock. Crowds of people go down the Backdamgate to cheer and wave as the horses return to the town. Then they sing songs in front of the Tower Knowe. The Big Four then throw bronze and silver coins into the gathering people. We call this a strive and they do this after big events during the Common Riding. This is also a good chance for everybody to get photos signed by the Cornet.

My favourite parts of the Ride Outs are seeing all of your friends and playing with them and also seeing the horses galloping over the hill.

I hope this letter has influenced you to come down soon and cheer the Cornet and his cavalcade as they go on their way!

Yours sincerely, Jake