*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Waiting till the cows came home**

“*I could dance with you till the cows come home. Better still, I’ll dance with the cows and you come home.*” — Groucho Marx

Recently, I needed to call customer service for a phone issue. I was put on hold for such a long time it felt like I was going to be on the line till the cows came home.

Come to think of it, they did.

The expression “till the cows come home” dates back to the late 1500s or early 1600s. While it generally means a long time, it actually refers to the cows coming back to the barn from the pasture, ready for milking.

In my case, it applies to beef cattle as well.

This past winter, the few Scottish Highland cows that weren’t sold were with the sheep, goats and donkeys in a paddock area. They had spent the summer across the creek out on pasture. I had intended to round them up at some point in late spring and sell a few more.

But early in May — Mother’s Day weekend to be precise — our two remaining cows, their two calves and a two-year-old heifer decided it was time to go to their summer pasture. I came out on a Monday morning and they were all gone.

I was slightly flummoxed by their escape. But it turned out my grandsons, who had been visiting the previous day, had been running around in the paddock trying to catch a lamb. I suspect the cows — who can be skittish Scottish when chased around — jumped over the fence.

I drove up and down our road looking for them. I was ready to call the neighbors when I looked across the valley and saw them on the hills of their summer pasture. Because the grass was greening up I guess they figured it was time to find the other side of the fence.

Rounding them up would have been a challenge without the aid of a battalion or two. So the cows spent another summer on pasture with some other beef cows from the farm.

As the growing season came to an end, the plan was to open the gate to have all the cattle come down the lane. I could corral the Highlanders in the shed and sell them. That was the plan, anyway.

But the Highlanders decided they wanted independence from the Angus-crossbred bunch. They showed up in the hayfield next to our house one night. I chased them back where the other cattle were, thinking they would settle in.

How wrong I was. They escaped a few more times only to be chased back. Then I came out of the house one morning to feed the other animals — and the rogue Highlanders had escaped again. They were all standing near the winter paddock.

In a rare moment of discretion over valor, I simply opened the gate. They followed me into the paddock to reunite with their winter roommates. There they have remained for a few weeks, perfectly content. I hope I have enough hay to feed them and the other animals through the long winter.

By the way, I received a follow-up email after my phone issue, asking me to rate their customer service. Comparing it to male bovine excrement may be a bit harsh, but I will tell them the wait time was “udderly ridiculous.”

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