

## SYNOPSIS

THEN	NOW
Herders worked in relative isolation throughout the summer.	Modernization has moved the majority of dairy production to centralized farms.
Dairy products were produced for the consumption of the dairy farmer's family.	Products are marketed more widely and recognized as potentially healthier.
Unique homegrown Cika breed of cattle well adapted to dangerous terrain and harsh weather.	Starting after WWII other varieties were introduced to the Cika breed changing the attributes of the local herd.
Fall celebrations were held in local villages at small village inns as individual herders returned from the alpine pastures.	Celebrations are concentrated in Ukanc on specific dates, and includes a larger variety of events and activities.
Celebrations were not recognized beyond the local villages	Tourists from around the world come to Ukanc to join in the celebration every year.

<sup>1</sup> Article in Traditiones 42(2):49-68 · November 2013

<sup>2</sup> EAAP – European Federation of Animal Sciences: volume 131

<sup>3</sup>. Where the Cowbells Ring: European News; RTV SLO, Jaka Bartolj, August 2017

<sup>4</sup> Slovenia Revealed: MMC RTV SLO, Jaka Bartolj, August 29, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Slovenia: Lonely Planet 2<sup>nd</sup> addition: pg. 148



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## Slovenia

### The Cows' Ball Festival (Kravji Bal) of Lake Bohinj

Slovenia is an alpine country located at the north end of the Adriatic Sea. Dairy farming has been an important agricultural method for many centuries in Slovenia. Carrying on a tradition that started in pre-Roman times, Slovenian herders have taken their cows into the mountain pastures for the summer months<sup>1</sup>.



Thanks to its dense concentration of high-altitude alpine meadows, the Bohinj valley became the center of alpine dairy farming in Slovenia. To take the greatest advantage of the alpine pastures breeders developed a local breed known as Cika cattle, which are extraordinarily resilient and became distinguished for excellent milk yields<sup>2</sup>.



*Boy and Cow*



*Lake Bohinj Valley from Mt. Vogel*

In the alpine pastures herders would graze their animals and harvest the milk to make butter, curds and cheese as a means of preservation. Initially for family use, in 1873 they formed a cooperative that allowed them to sell their products more widely<sup>3</sup>.

Due to living in isolation during the summer months the cowherds return in the fall became a time of celebration. For decades the cattle owners of Bohinj organized local, informal festivities for their herdsmen in their respective small village inns<sup>1</sup>.

The Cows' Ball has its origins in these traditional celebrations. In the 1920s local residents began to join the festivities, which were moved to the small village of Ukanc. Waiters from nearby hotels joined in the fun and the ritual became a village event<sup>4</sup>.

In 1954 the Cows' Ball became an organized annual event. Surrounded by mountains and located within Triglav National Park, Ukanc is perfectly situated to enable the Cows' Ball to remain an authentic local celebration while attracting large numbers of visitors<sup>2</sup>.



*Cowherds of Bohinj*

Today the Cows' Ball includes many activities traditional folk music and dancing, folklore

performances, agricultural equipment demonstrations, local crafts, and local food/drink/cheese (nothing on a stick). The big event is the return of the cows' parade that culminates in the judging of the cows.



*Cows' Ball Parade*

The traditional life of Bohinj herders survived well into the 20th century but ultimately large-scale dairy production made traditional high-mountain grazing uncompetitive. Now a modern dairy farm produces the same volume of product as the alpine farmers did previously<sup>5</sup>.

In recent years there has been increased demand to maintain the cultural environment on Alpine mountains and conserve the Cika breed. Research has found the milk fat of these cows grazing in the Alps to be more nutritional, with an increased amount of polyunsaturated fatty acids<sup>3</sup>. The European Union has also recognized traditional Mohant Cheese as a product with its designated origin in the Bohinj valley<sup>5</sup>.

Currently several herders continue the tradition that had been passed down from their ancestors, although on a much smaller scale than it was 70+ years ago.