

Introduction

to each

breed

and

description

of its

area of

origin



The first of the true mountain breeds to arrive in Ireland from France was the Salers.

Salers is the name of a small medieval town and commune in the département of Cantal which is part of the Auvergne Region of France. The surrounding area is known as *Le Pays de Salers* (The Salers Country).

Salers also names a cheese, a liqueur and, of course, a breed of cattle. In formal French the name is pronounced 'sal-air' (the terminal 's' is not pronounced) and in the local *patois*, it is often pronounced 'sal-erse'.

Historically, Cantal was the least accessible part of France and was often the last area to surrender to outside forces. The most famous event occurred when the Gaulish leader Vercingétorix was finally defeated by Julius Caesar in 51 BC. Vercingétorix was the king of the Celtic Arvernes tribe (Latin Arverni) which lent its name to the Auvergne.



Cantal is situated in the heart of the *Massif Central* and this makes it the most mountainous département of France. It is an area of high volcanic peaks and very deep valleys, with farms located in the valleys and on the lower mountain slopes. The Cantal peaks divide the area into three weather zones : (a) the western zone which receives a lot of Atlantic rain - 1,250 mm. annually ; (b) the central mountainous zone which is even wetter with Salers village itself receiving 1,600 mm (incl. snow), rising to 2,500 mm near the *Puy Mary* - the wettest part of France and (c) the eastern zone. Having disgorged most of their moisture on

THE SALERS



Looking east towards the Plomb du Cantal from near Saint-Jacques-des-Blats.

the mountains, the wind-driven clouds from the south-west retain very little for the eastern plateau of Cantal, making it one of the driest parts of France : Allanche averages 880 mm per year and Massiac less than 600 mm, making the eastern zone dry all year round.

The soils in the area consist of fertile free-draining volcanics, but the difficult high-altitude mix of climate and topography has restricted their full exploitation for agriculture. Nevertheless, this unique mix has led to the evolution of one of France's toughest breeds of cattle.

Agriculture and tourism are the main economic activities, with Salers cattle, through beef sales, cheese manufacture and the export of weanlings, providing the single biggest source of income.