

WELSH BLACK CATTLE

Summary

Small, hardy, intelligent and adaptable, the Welsh Black is being used on a wide variety of nature conservation sites including coastal cliffs, fen, heath, and chalk and limestone grassland. A good choice of animal for the restoration phase of a site as The Welsh Black will happily make its way into scrub where it browses usefully.

Hardiness – a hardy breed suited to a range of climatic conditions.

- *Extremely hardy* - the majority of herds out winter with little or no supplementary feed.
- *Tolerant of wet and cold climates* - facilitated by a thick hide and long wavy hair.
- *Suitable for out wintering* - may be best to clip the coat if wintered under cover, as overheating may lead to health problems.
- *Summer heat* - does not seem to suffer from summer heat stress.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – an adaptable and intelligent breed, well suited to a range of conservation grazing situations.

- *Handling* - generally placid and approachable when outdoors. Indoors or in confined spaces it is likely to be livelier. Historically the breed had a reputation for possessing a rather fiery nature, although this has largely been bred out in recent years. The breed may be horned or polled.
- *Breeding* - Cows are very protective of calves, and will continue to produce calves well into the teens. Calve easily. Bulls are happy provided they are in a herd situation.
- *Sure-footed* - grazes safely on steep sites, including sea cliffs where cows guide younger stock.
- *Background* - an ancient breed of uncertain origin, of which two types occur: the northern or Anglesey type which is shorter in the leg and heavier in the body than those from South Wales.
- *Fencing* - largely respect electric strand and flexi-net fencing. At one site they learnt to cross cattle grids very effectively.
- *Flies and ticks* - no undue problems.
- *Size* - average weight of a cow 400 - 450 kg.
- *General health* - good, but will put on weight readily if kept on productive pasture, which can lead to too large a calf in breeding cows.

Grazing Characteristics - an excellent forager and one of the most efficient breeds for browsing.

- *Fens & marshes* - favours Purple Moor-grass, Common Reed and Meadowsweet. Will also graze Saw-sedge, trample reed and happily stand knee-deep in water.



Matthew Oates

- *Rushes and sedges* - consumed variably. In some instances only taken when young, in others throughout the year. This may depend on background of stock and other forage available.
- *Limestone grasslands* - very good at controlling Tor-grass, Upright Brome and Tufted Hair-grass.
- *Browsing* - will effectively browse a great diversity of trees and shrubs, including Silver Birch, Rowan, Oak (seedlings and regrowth), young Gorse, Bramble and Willows. In winter will browse Bilberry and Ling. Moves through and browses amongst dense scrub if pathways are cut first. Will trample Bracken and sometimes graze it late in the season.

Interaction with the Public – though sometimes flighty, will generally ignore both people and dogs.

- *Curiosity* - will generally ignore people.
- *Reaction to dogs* - not disturbed by their presence.
- *Temperament* - young stock, where used on their own, may be flighty to start with but will soon settle down and get used to passing walkers and dogs. Cows highly protective of calves, therefore probably unwise to calve on well-visited sites.

Marketability - a commercially viable breed, which may require finishing away from conservation sites,

- *Fattening* - will usually need finishing on richer pasture or supplementary feed if it has been on pasture of low productivity. The breed will put on weight quickly when moved to improved pasture or diet otherwise improved. Trials by the National Trust and English Nature are currently underway in the Cotswolds to raise commercially viable Welsh Black calves on unimproved pasture only, with no supplementary feed.
- *Commercial value* - there is a beef marketing scheme for the breed (see contact list) which achieves an average 20p / kg premium for its members. Beef is fine grained, deep in colour, and not unlike venison in texture.

Sites where Welsh Black cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Cors Erddreiniog Anglesey Countryside Council for Wales	Open fen over peat and fen meadows over clay. (40 ha)	Fen split into compartments for grazing. Cattle graze the fen May-September/October and are then moved to drier fen meadow for winter. Aiming to improve diversity of plant communities. Well-suited to grazing on wet terrain. Good impact on potentially problematic grasses, sedges and rushes, and significant amounts of browsing achieved. Fed hay from own meadows.	Les Colley 01248 853427
Cotswold Grass-lands English Nature	Limestone grass-land – various sites.	Flying herd used to graze 5 or 6 difficult Cotswold sites. Good on steep slopes. Good control of Tor-grass & Upright Brome.	Paul Hackman 01531 638500
Bickerton Hill Cheshire National Trust	Dry heath.	Summer grazed since 1993 with a varying number of cattle. Public access includes horse riding with no problems encountered. Fixed point site monitoring since 1993. Ling and Bilberry browsed in winter.	David Morris 07831 561588
Brean Down SSSI Somerset National Trust	Carboniferous limestone promontory with steep south-facing slope. (64 ha)	Cattle graze the site September – January each year for the past 10 years. Feral goats all year. Very varied flora across the site. Cattle venture into all areas including steep cliffs. Good control of False Oat-grass and Cocksfoot.	Adrian Woodhall 01934 844518
Pembrokeshire Coast (various sites, all SSSI) National Trust	Several sections of unfenced cliff, with narrow cliff-top pastures. Also, inland wet and dry heaths.	Stock run by National Trust, which purchases hardy steers which are finished at 30 months. Successfully outwintered on cliffs and adjacent pasture, producing short turf for Chough. Inland heaths grazed in summer. Some sites also have Welsh Mountain ponies.	Robert Young 01348 837860
ADAS Pwllpeiran Aberystwyth ADAS	Purple Moor-grass and dwarf shrub heath.	Trial work being undertaken using Welsh Black heifers for summer grazing in rank Purple Moor-grass. Early indications are that they are achieving excellent control and that the sward diversity is improving. The cattle are coming off in excellent condition. Work continues until March 2001.	Dr Owen Davies 01974 282229
Other contacts:		Welsh Black Beef Marketing Scheme	Mrs Ann Barney 01437 532256
		Welsh Black Cattle Society	Mrs Evelyn Jones 01982 551111

References