

ROUGH FELL

Summary

A hardy hill breed from the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District, the Rough Fell typically grazes extensive, exposed coastal and upland sites. Intelligent and docile, it also adapts well to being confined on smaller sites and is particularly suited to maintenance grazing of unimproved and semi-improved grassland.

Hardiness – a hardy hill breed, suitable for grazing low quality forage on exposed sites.

- *Supplementary feed* – rarely required; maintains condition well on poor quality forage. Even in snowy conditions prefers to dig through the snow to find favoured vegetation, and will often ignore supplementary feed provided. Breeding ewes on nutrient poor vegetation, such as chalk grassland, may need additional feed.
- *Resilient to extremes of weather* – has a coarse, dense and hairy fleece, which provides good insulation and waterproofing.
- *Shelter* – good at ‘digging-in’ behind rocks and scrub on open hillsides to avoid the worst of the weather.
- *Surefooted* – confident negotiating difficult terrain, such as limestone pavement and crags.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – an easy to manage breed, requiring routine husbandry.

- *Handling* – placid, easy to handle and can be gathered with or without dogs. Approaches familiar humans, so easy to treat individuals as necessary. Tends not to struggle or object to being up-ended. Medium sized.
- *Fencing* – relaxed when confined and generally shows little inclination to escape. Horned, so electric fencing not suitable, particularly mesh.
- *Fleece* – adults tend not to get trapped in Brambles and other thorny vegetation, which may be attributable to the breeds ‘hairy’ rather than ‘woolly’ fleece. Lambs may become entangled, not having the strength to escape.
- *Hooves* – generally good on thin, stony, free draining soils of the uplands; on more improved and damper soils, may require more attention.
- *Fly strike* – not particularly susceptible on exposed upland sites. The risk is higher on lowland sites and being a horned breed, it is more susceptible to head fly, which can progress to fly strike.
- *Breeding* – not prolific, but able to produce a good single lamb on low quality keep. Good mothers which lamb easily.
- *Disease resistance* – the breed may be free of Scrapie.



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Grazing Characteristics – a good maintenance grazer on a range of grasslands, with some potential for restoration grazing.

- *Favours grasses* – readily grazes both fine and coarse grasses, including rank Cocksfoot. Eats Upright Brome until it gets too long; Tor-grass only in season and when other forage is limited.
- *Other grazing characteristics* – may nibble occasional stems of rushes or sedges, but with minimal impact. Favours Heather and other Ericaceous vegetation. As with most sheep breeds it will take some Ragwort.
- *Browsing* – minimal impact, although can have good effect on Bramble scrub and Honeysuckle if stocked quite heavily. It will eat seedlings, a little scrub regrowth and young Gorse tips.
- *Social and ranging behaviour* – disperses widely to graze, but will tolerate/adapt to confinement.

Interaction with the Public – provided the site is large enough, the Rough Fell is suitable for grazing where there is public access.

- *Reaction to the public* – docile and not unduly alarmed by the presence of humans.
- *Reaction to dogs* – the Rough Fell is vulnerable and not particularly confident when faced with an attacking dog.

Marketability – currently not a very commercial breed.

- *Fleece* – no market available.
- *Meat* – currently not a very commercial breed; some opportunities for direct marketing.
- *Breeding* – Rough Fell ewes may be crossed with other breeds of ram in the production of Mules.

Sites where Rough Fell sheep are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Hutton Roof Crags Cumbria Cumbria Wildlife Trust	Limestone grass-land, limestone pavement, heath, scrub & Bracken.	Year round grazing by local commoners since 1998; previously none for many years. Lambing time sheep removed. Graze the grasses fairly hard; not obvious whether they eat substantial amounts of Sesleria; little impact on scrub; do not appear to be having a negative impact on species of limestone pavement or on the Juniper. In winter, tend to concentrate heavily on heath where Bracken has been cleared, browsing Heather and Bilberry heavily; a potential problem. Maintain condition, but are supplementary fed. A site with high tick population but no obvious adverse affect on sheep. From December 2000, no longer Rough Fell on site due to a change in grazier.	Kerry Milligan 01539 448280
Martin Down NNR Hampshire English Nature	Chalk grassland, semi-improved grassland & scrub.	Rotational commercial grazing within electric fenced compartments. Helping to reduce dominance of Upright Brome and improving sward diversity; effective maintenance grazing. Favour the better grasses but readily eat the coarser forage. Limited browsing. Out wintered; currently problems with breeding ewes maintaining condition on nutrient poor site; considerable supplements required. Some problems with lameness in the long grass, caused by scald.	David Burton 01980 620485
Melbury Down Dorset National Trust	Chalk grassland & scrub.	Commercial grazing. Helping to successfully maintain and increase floristic diversity on the downland, promoting habitat for species such as Dark Green and Marsh Fritillaries. Little browsing impact. Wood False-brome increasing because of lack of spring grazing. Hardy, do not get hung-up in the Brambles, easy to handle and generally do not require routine foot treatments or dipping; done individually as necessary. Not prolific producers of lambs so suitable for low quality keep.	Chris Gingell 01722 716341
Pentire head & Port Quinn Bay Cornwall National Trust	Cliff, maritime grassland & scrub.	Winter grazing on coastal grassland. Good restoration impact on coarse grasses, Bramble & Honeysuckle; good footpath maintenance and promotion of short sward species such as Squill. Docile and easy to manage, maintain condition very well and cope with exposed coastal site.	Simon Ford 01208 863046
Whitbarrow Cumbria Cumbria Wildlife Trust	Limestone grass-land, limestone crags and pavement, mixed woodland, scrub & Bracken.	Grazing at low stocking density from August - end October. Previously, site not grazed for 30 to 50 years. Primarily maintenance grazing to promote botanical interest; also important site for butterflies including Pearl bordered and High Brown Fritillaries. Some restoration grazing of coarser vegetation. No significant impact on the Sesleria dominated community, but promoting diversity on the margins. Little interest in rushes and sedges; some barking of Yew, Ash, Sycamore & Holly in winter; but no significant impact on scrub and woody species. During initial years provided with mineral supplement – not really required. Organic meat production with direct marketing of meat utilising local abattoir and butcher.	Bill Grayson 01524 701280
Other contacts:		Rough Fell Sheep Breeders Association, Cumbria	Mrs P Tyson 01539 623238

References