

SWALEDALE

Summary

A hardy breed from the Yorkshire Dales which thrives on poor quality forage. Medium sized, with a black face and horns, the agile Swaledale is well adapted to grazing extensive and exposed areas with difficult terrain. It is commonly used for breeding with Leicester rams to produce the popular commercial crossbreed, the North of England Mule.



Ben La Bas/English Nature

Hardiness – a hardy breed, well adapted to extensive grazing in exposed upland or coastal sites.

- *Maintains condition well on low quality forage* – able to seek out the most nutritious vegetation on areas of poor forage. Ewes with lambs, particularly those with twins may need some supplementary feed to maintain condition.
- *Tolerant of extremes of weather* – a sheep with a hairy, dense fleece, adapted to cold and relatively exposed conditions.
- *Well-adapted to utilising available shelter* – a typical hill sheep; adept at digging-in behind rocks and scrub to avoid the worst of the weather.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – a fairly placid breed, capable of self-sufficiency in extensive upland situations.

- *Handling* – flocks well and can be manoeuvred with dogs. Reasonably placid and sensible and not as strong as some hill breeds.
- *Agile and surefooted* – confident in irregular terrain; a good climber.
- *Brambles* – a heavily woolled breed, and prone to becoming entangled in thorny vegetation. Not as strong as the Scottish Blackface or Rough Fell which are generally able to pull themselves out.
- *Fencing* – fairly respectful of enclosure, but an agile breed, so individuals may become good escape artists. Horned, so generally unsuitable for electric fencing.
- *Fly strike* – rare on extensive, exposed upland sites; possibly more of a problem on warmer, more humid lowland areas.
- *Lambing* – not a very prolific sheep but capable of producing a good single lamb when kept on low quality keep. Good mothers, able to lamb unaided, with self-reliant lambs.
- *Feet* – generally good on thin, stony soils; requires routine attention on improved or damper grasslands.

Grazing Characteristics – a useful breed for maintaining poor quality extensive grasslands.

- *Grasses* – strongly favours the species of short swards, although will also take coarser grasses when pushed.
- *Sedges and rushes* – minimal impact; although may nibble Soft Rush.
- *Browsing* – a ‘hard-mouthed’ breed which can be effective on tree seedlings, Bramble and Honey-suckle; may also take live Yew. Adept at grazing Ling. Otherwise, minimal browsing impact.
- *Social behaviour* – when grazing extensive areas, individuals disperse widely. A breed with a strong hefting instinct.

Interaction with the Public – probably best suited to large sites if there is heavy public access, particularly where dog walking is common.

- *Reaction to people* – wary of humans and will keep its distance. On smaller sites, may avoid areas used regularly by people, which may have implications for grazing coverage.
- *Reaction to dogs* – although horned, the Swaledale is vulnerable to attack and will generally run rather than stand its ground.

Marketability – a staple breed in many hill areas; no special markets, except as breeding ewes for more commercial crosses.

- *Breeding* – ewes commonly kept to cross with the Bluefaced or Border Leicester to produce the more prolific and commercial North of England Mule.
- *Fleece* – currently worth very little.
- *Meat* – no special markets for meat, although as part of extensive systems, might attract a premium as traditionally reared produce.

Sites where Swaledale sheep are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Central Chilterns Buckinghamshire National Trust	Chalk grassland and scrub, with some chalk heath and arable reversion.	A semi-commercial scheme in operation since early 1990s. Extensive grazing during autumn and winter by a mixed flock dominated by Swaledales. Largely maintenance grazing, to prevent loss of open downland. None of the breeds browse significantly, but the Swales appear more hard-mouthed than the Scottish Blackface and are certainly more effective than the Mules. Hardy, but some lameness. Swales seem less comfortable grazing confined sites and can be difficult to round up. Now being largely phased out and replaced by Hebridean sheep, although Swaledales (which have done well) are being retained and bred from.	Andrew Jordan 01494 565215 Howard Horn 01491 628562.
Derbyshire Dales NNR Derbyshire English Nature	Limestone and neutral grassland.	Large, complicated site with many graziers running fairly traditional hill grazing regimes. English Nature involved for 15 to 20 years. Swaledale ewes and lambs grazed July to February. Confident and surefooted on the limestone crags; quite capable of climbing walls, but escaping not really a problem. Hardy. Easy to handle. Successfully maintaining Calcareous grassland. Minimal browsing, primarily seedlings, although quite hard mouthed and will eat live Yew; also have been known to strip Bracken at the end of the summer when other forage limited, with no obvious ill effect from either.	Ben Le Bas 01629 815095
Pentire Head & Port Quinn Bay Cornwall National Trust	Cliff, maritime grassland and scrub.	Swaledale (with other hill sheep & Jacob sheep) winter grazed as a flock on coastal grassland. Good restoration grazing impact on coarse grasses, Bramble & Honeysuckle when pushed hard, but generally strongly favour the shorter sward grasses. Tendency to avoid tussocky Cocksfoot. Good footpath maintenance and promotion of short sward species such as Squill. Fairly docile and easy to manage; maintain condition well and cope with exposed coastal site.	Simon Ford 01208 863046
Sandscale Haws NNR Cumbria National Trust	Dunes, grassland, saltmarsh and mire. 282 ha	150 Swaledale ewes + lambs extensively summer graze on site and 100 Swaledale x Mule hogs in winter (with some Herdwicks, Suffolk crosses and cattle). Swaledale sheep are good maintenance grazers; favour the shorter sward of the salt marsh and some will escape to access better forage. Tackle less coarse, low quality vegetation than the Herdwicks. Maintain condition adequately and ewes have a reasonable lambing productivity as long as forage is not too poor.	Peter Burton 01229 462855
Other contacts:		Swaledale Sheep Breeders Association	R Waggett 01748 850280

References