

BEEF SHORTHORN

Summary

Very hardy and adaptable to harsh environmental conditions, the Beef Shorthorn thrives on coarse, poor-quality vegetation. Agile and sure-footed, it has proven ability to do well in upland moorland situations. Equally, as a calm and placid breed, which is reputedly easy to manage, the Beef Shorthorn can be considered for grazing a wide range of nature conservation sites

Hardiness – very hardy and readily adapts to extremes of environmental conditions.

- *Very hardy* - historically the Shorthorn was grazed and out wintered on poor quality grassland on the Carboniferous Limestone of the Burren in Southern Ireland. Currently used largely on upland moorland situations in Scotland.
- *Foul weather resistant* - has a double coat, with a cotton wool-like undercoat and will happily out-winter in most situations.
- *Summer* - moults very quickly to give a very tight coat and thus, is not susceptible to heat stress.
- *Adapted to outwintering on poor quality keep* - Beef Shorthorns readily put on weight during the summer months, which helps to see them through the winter. Some supplementary feed may be necessary.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – a placid breed, which is easy to manage.

- *Handling* - very quiet, placid and easy to handle.
- *Fencing* - respects electric fencing.
- *Flies and ticks* - a thick hide means that the breed is not unduly bothered.
- *Breeding* - easy calvers. Cows show good mothering instincts, but are usually tolerant of people once calves are a few days old; this allows tagging of calves within the five day stipulated period. Bulls are very placid within a herd situations.
- *General health* - very good. Cows will produce calves until 10 or 12 years old. Resistant to Red-water, but may be susceptible to Blackleg.
- *Size* – medium, with average weight of a cow 500-600kgs.
- *Background* – the breed originates from the Durham and Yorkshire areas. It has perhaps been the most widely used bloodline in the development of other breeds world-wide.
- *Status* – a rare breed (vulnerable) which is widely used in the uplands of Southern Scotland and the Borders.



Karl Barton

Grazing Characteristics - a breed with a proven ability to graze and do well in upland moorland situations.

- *Grazing* - the breed grazes and does well on rank upland and unimproved grasses. In Scotland where used widely, does not have a significant impact on rushes. See table overleaf for site-specific details.
- *Browsing* - the Beef Shorthorn browses readily, although the extent to which they will control scrub has not been ascertained. They are known to favour Willows and Ivy. For site specific details, see table overleaf.

Interaction with the Public – a breed which is suitable for use in most situations with public access.

- *Temperament in breeding situations* - although cows show good mothering instincts, they will usually be tolerant of people once the calves are a few days old.
- *Curiosity* - the breed would rather carry on grazing than look at visitors.

Marketability - the Beef Shorthorn may be one of only a few breeds which when reared on the unimproved vegetation of most nature conservation sites, will readily gain sufficient condition to allow commercial viability.

- *Fattening* - the breed is an excellent converter of forage. It is more susceptible than other breeds to run to fat, although this is unlikely to happen on conservation sites. It will quickly put on weight to finish between 20 and 30 months if put on fertile grass or given supplementary food.
- *Marketing* – a ready market is available through the RBST Traditional Breeds meat-marketing scheme.

Sites where Beef Shorthorn cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Grange Farm Castle Douglas Scotland Private	Upland moorland and herb rich pastures. 1,500 acres	A commercial farm running around 360 cows and followers. Around 20% of site within Stewartry ESA, rest in Countryside Premium Scheme. A mix of pure bred and crosses kept.	Mr Donald Biggar 01556 660205
Lodmoor and Radipole Lake Dorset RSPB	Flat coastal neutral grassland and fen. 91 hectares	Currently 36 cattle, but number is likely to decrease. Part of the site is grazed. Use young stock 12-18 months between May - October. Stock from Karl Barton (see Chisel Farm Organics below). Impressed with impact on coarse vegetation. Considered to be the best grazers that have been used on these reserves.	Keith Ballard 01305 772519
Hod Hill Dorset National Trust	Chalk downland. 32 ha	Grazing May - October with Beef Shorthorn cattle, although as grazed by Chisel Farm Organics now grazing with Dairy Shorthorn and Dairy/Beef Shorthorn crosses. The cattle readily venture onto steep rampart slopes, tackle Tor-grass, but leave Upright Brome until last. Ash is readily browsed. See Chisel Farm Organics below.	William Keighley 01297 678263
Kingcombe Meadows Dorset Dorset Wildlife Trust	Varied site with dry grassland over chalk and greensand and wet rush/fen over fullers earth and gait clay. 174 ha	Seek out orchids in the sward. Readily browse Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Bramble and Ash. 35 Shorthorn, including some crosses. Finished stock sold to Chisel Farm organics. Grazed with Galloways, but Shorhorns used on drier meadows than the Galloways.	Paul Comer 01300 320573
Chisel Farm Organics Dorset	Large mixed organic farm, grazing a number of conservation sites.	Note: Chisel Farm Organics is having to change from Beef to Dairy Shorthorns. Many animals are crosses. Use 400 Dairy Shorthorn; 500 Beef Shorthorn Crosses to Dairy Shorthorn. Chisel Farm is looking for more grazing sites or farms in Dorset, but must be able to convert to organic.	Karl Barton 01258 861908
Various sites West Surrey Surrey Wildlife Trust	Heathland, unimproved grassland and semi-improved grassland.	33 Pure and crosses graze a number of heathland sites in summer (split into groups). In winter, lay-back land includes river flood plain alluvium (mostly semi-improved swards of 'standing hay') and aftermath graze (improved swards) on clay with flints over Chalk on downs. Winter grazing supplemented by haylage cut from the improved swards on downs. Better doers than British Whites they are kept with. Finish within 30 months. Non breeding animals get grossly fat. Less keen to browse than British Whites, but keener to graze emergent vegetation in wet areas.	Rob McGibbon 01483 579713
Other contacts:		Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society	Frank Milnes 02476 696549
		Rare Breeds Survival Trust	024 7669 6551

References