

LONGHORN

Summary

Hardy and adaptable, with good grazing and browsing characteristics, the Longhorn has good potential for expanding use within conservation grazing management.

Hardiness – a hardy breed, adaptable to a variety of harsh environmental circumstances.

- *Robust* – thick hide and dense silky coat allows breed to withstand wet weather. Able to outwinter on dry ground with some supplementary feeding. Too heavy to winter on wet ground.
- *Thrifty* – maintains condition well on rough pasture.
- *Agile and adaptable* – reputedly happy on a range of habitats including steep cliffs and wetland fringes. Young animals will learn to wade through water from older individuals.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – a large, docile breed, but with special handling requirements in horned animals.

- *Size* – one of the largest and heaviest of UK native breeds. Average weight of a cow around 750kgs.
- *Appearance* - light roan to dark brindle in colour; the tail and stripe along the back are white, with white also on the underside and legs.
- *Confined areas* – care needed to provide plenty of space if kept in yards; a shortage will lead to disputes and possibly injury from horns.
- *Horns* - long and sweeping, usually downwards. If horns start growing into the face, they will need cutting back. Disbudding of the young animal makes it easier to transport and yard, and may improve marketability of steers.
- *Breeding* – long lived and will calve until 13/14 years old or longer. Good mothering ability and abundant good quality milk. One of the quietest breeds of bull. Bulls usually work until around 10 years old, after which they become very heavy and fertility seems to decrease.
- *Hooves* – as with other breeds, may need occasional foot trimming.
- *Handling* – docile with people and responds well to gentle handling. Easy to halter train.
- *Fencing* – respects electric fencing, though horns can tangle badly.
- *Flies and ticks* – no problems reported.
- *Longevity* – generally long-lived.
- *Background* - rare, but increasing in numbers, the Longhorn was formerly the dominant breed within Eighteenth Century Britain, as a draught animal and for the production of meat and milk.



Longhorn Cattle Society

Grazing Characteristics - a breed with good grazing and browsing characteristics.

- *Impact of social behaviour* – ranges widely, grazing methodically. Due to horns, individuals generally graze further apart than some breeds.
- *Grazing preferences* – variable reports as to impact on rank grasses, particularly Purple Moor-grass. See site details overleaf. Some good results on False Oat-grass and Upright Brome.
- *Thistles and nettles* – will eat if pushed hard.
- *Rushes and sedges* – grazes rushes if wilted after being cut or if pushed hard; grazes young shoots of Tussock Sedge and Reedmace.
- *Browsing* – occurs year round. Good control of Alder, Birch, Buckthorn and Hawthorn. Browsing of Creeping Willow has encouraged regrowth in a prostrate form, helping the plants to compete in the same way as Heather. Tramples, but does not appear to eat Bramble. Significant role in pushing through and opening up dense mature scrub; particularly in hot weather and to escape flies.
- *Bracken* – may browse young Bracken fronds; good at trampling down rank Bracken litter.

Interaction with the Public – suitable for use on public access sites, if fears about its appearance can be allayed.

- *Public perception* – although docile, graceful and photogenic, can appear intimidating due to large size and horns.
- *Reaction to dogs* – generally unconcerned.
- *Reaction to people* – unhandled animals easily spooked, although if used to people, very calm. Not particularly curious.

Marketability – a breed with good commercial opportunities, particularly within niche markets.

- *Fattening* – a slow maturing breed which finishes off grass at 4 years. Additional feed 6-8 weeks prior to slaughter can allow steers to be finished between 24-30 months. Some livestock markets will not be able to handle the breed if horned. May need to seek specialist niche markets.

Sites where Longhorn cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Heydee Hill Cheddar Cliffs Somerset National Trust	Limestone and neutral grassland, dense Gorse and Hawthorn scrub, areas of rock and pavement.	Around 19 ha of the site summer-grazed by a mixture of Longhorn and Highland cattle. Good impact grazing rank To-grass. Successful at opening up mature scrub.	Adrian Woodhall 01934 844518
Long Running Epping Forest Essex Corporation of London	Lowland wet heath 1.6 ha	Heathland restoration project commenced 1994. One area of soil was stripped and grazed, the other managed by grazing alone. Grazed May – September in restoration phase; subsequently May – July. (See reference below for site survey information). Longhorns have had good impact on rank Purple Moor-grass. Have maintained condition well on the coarse grasses and woody growth.	Jeremy Dagley 0208 532 5313 Mr. Michael Davies 0208 508 2579
Brook Farm Derbyshire	Wet valley grassland (1.6ha) and steep grassland (12ha).	Longhorns grazed July / August –October since 1991. Graze young shoots of Tussock Sedge and Reedmace. Cows outwintered and maintain condition on grass silage fed in open straw yard with free access to field to give 'space'. Spring born calves weaned and housed late autumn. All young stock sold fat off grass diet (spring born) or silage (summer born). No supplementary feed needed to ensure stock finished before 30 months so long as good fodder always available. Ready market for quality carcasses with local rare breeds butcher.	Peter Hogbin 01335 360515
Stoke Common South Bucks Corporation of London	Lowland heath 200 ha	Grazing recommenced in 1998 following a period of neglect and a fire in the late 1980's. Around 15 head grazing April – September.	Helen Read 01753 647358
Fernhills Essex Corporation of London	Boulder clay grassland. 12 ha.	Grazing of this neglected area began in 1999 with excellent impact on the sward. Opened up patches encouraging Adders-tongue Fern and reduced scrub encroachment.	Jeremy Dagley 0208 532 5313
Cotswold Farm Park Gloucestershire	Limestone grassland 4 ha	Grazing management started around 1995. Generally Longhorns used but White Park & Highlands have also been on the site. Exmoor ponies used for scrub management. Site grazed August – October. Within this late summer grazing regime, Rank Cocksfoot is left until last.	Adam Henson 01451 850307
Oughton head Common and other sites Hertfordshire	Varied river valley sites with chalk streams, wet grasslands & areas of peaty, light soil.	Scrub increasing with no grazing at Oughton head. So Longhorns introduced with good effect into 3 fenced areas in 1994 in conjunction with some mechanical clearance. Robert Williams (grazier and President of the Longhorn society) has owned Longhorns since 1980 and has grazed other sites for longer than Oughton head. Some cattle are finished off grass in the summer months with very few beef nuts as additional feed. On a site at Milton Keynes, a cow happily crossed a lake to access island vegetation during a dry summer period	Robert Williams 01462 434762
Other contacts:		The Longhorn Cattle Society	Miss E L Henson 01392 270421
		Rare Breeds Survival Trust	024 7669 6551

References

DAGLEY J and SAMUELS S *Heathland Restoration at Long Running, Epping Forest* Essex Naturalist 1999.