

NORTH DEVON

Summary

A very old, hardy breed of cattle, the North Devon is suitable for grazing a range of habitat types. Commonly called Devon cattle, it is also known as Red Rubies or Ruby Red due to its deep rich red colour. Attractive in appearance, placid and easy to handle, the North Devon provides a good option for sites with public access.

Hardiness - an adaptable breed, suitable for use in a range of climatic conditions.

- *Very hardy* - has a thick skin and dense curly coat which protects it from driving rain and cold temperatures.
- *Winter* - able to outwinter on most sites. However, in recent years, use of Saler blood by some breeders has produced anecdotal evidence that these modern (often larger) animals do not fare so well on less improved pastures especially in the winter months. Thus origin of stock may be an important factor.
- *Condition* - renowned for its ability to convert forage into growth.
- *Heat* - tolerant of hot conditions and not susceptible to sunburn. However, like all animals, requires some shade.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry - a quiet, easy to handle breed. Most suited for use on flat ground.

- *Handling* - one of the quietest breeds, making it suitable for first time cattle keepers.
- *Fencing* - respects electric strand and flexi-net fencing.
- *Flies and ticks* - thick hide means it is not unduly bothered. Some people feel the breed may be more prone to redwater (transmitted by Red Deer ticks) than other breeds, although this disease is site rather than breed linked.
- *Size* - shorter in height than Shorthorn or Hereford, but heavier, so may cause poaching on soft sites. Average weight of a cow 400 - 450 kg.
- *Horns* - traditionally the breed have magnificent horns, but most animals are disbudded as calves. Many breeders are trying to maintain naturally polled herds.
- *Terrain* - probably not suitable for sites with slopes, particularly if steep. Prefers grazing flat areas.
- *Breeding* - easy calving with good milk yield off poor quality pasture, although milk quality may be better if the cow is not on the very poorest areas at calving. Cows may calve into mid-teens. Bulls usually even tempered in a herd situation.



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- *Temperament* - a tolerant breed, but which when it has had enough of a particular site or area of pasture, will let you know by bellowing.

Grazing Characteristics - a breed which moves back and forth across a pasture, producing a well-grazed sward.

- *Behaviour* - a grazer, rather than a browser. However, as it gets fat, the breed becomes lazy, does not move around a site so effectively, and tends not to browse much.
- *Grazing preferences* - for details overleaf.
- *Browsing* - where paths have been cut into scrub the North Devon has been found to keep them open, but this is mainly due to trampling and not browsing. It is unlikely to make major in-roads into scrub control otherwise.

Interaction with the Public - a very docile, even-tempered breed.

- *Curiosity* - unlikely to approach people, but equally unlikely to walk away. On one site, however, they run away from mountain bikes.
- *Public perception* - a placid, non-threatening breed, although horned animals may cause concern.

Marketability - A high quality beef breed, producing much sought-after meat.

- *Fattening* - possible to finish within 30 months on poor grazing, although carcass size is slightly on the small size.
- *Meat* - reputedly the finest beef available and is much sought after. The Breed Society is aiming to obtain a European Union "Certificate of Specific Characteristic" to aid in the marketing of the meat.

Sites where North Devon cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
Cogden Dorset Part SSSI	Coastal site. Natural reversion calcareous grassland, reed bed and seasonally flooded meadows. 75 ha	Grazing site since around 1994/5. Low stocking density as little forage. 24 cows + some followers. Cattle off site in winter. Organic. Not grazed on most species-rich area of site during mid-summer as preferentially graze Butterfly Orchids. Eat Tor-grass if really pushed, but do not graze it down tight. On reversion area have effective grazed grasses dominated by Bents with good effect, and floristic diversity is improving. Not keen on Creeping Thistle unless really pushed. Willingly eat Common Reed, creating tunnels through it and ragged ride edges, particularly beneficial for invertebrates.	Ellen and Adam Simon 01308 897781
Hartland Moor NNR and surrounding heath Dorset National Trust	Lowland heath. Old heathland SSSI with new adjacent land in arable reversion to heath. Part acidic, part more alkaline. 650 ha	Grazing reintroduced around 1993, after surveys showed that floristic diversity on the site was declining in comparison to a survey carried out in the 1930's. Old heathland grazed July - November, as cattle do not seem to graze the Purple Moor-grass until it has set seed. Consume rush in autumn, but not enough to control it. Browse Heather in the autumn, when they are also receiving additional feed, which is opening up the sward well. Reversion area (in CSS) grazed late autumn/winter. A large open site. Older cows lead young stock around, so that it is well utilised. Show preference for grazing more alkaline areas before moving into acidic areas. Calving in smaller fields. Finishing of young stock indoors from 24 months. Cows out winter. Disturbed by and run away from Mountain bikes. Ponies also used on site. Currently have 54 animals.	Geoff Hann 01929 450259 Grantley Smith 01929 480373
Shapwick Heath NNR Somerset English Nature	Herb rich wet grassland, wet heath and wet grazing marsh. 100 ha	Cattle introduced in 1999. A mixture of burning, topping & grazing undertaken on site. Cattle resident all year but only graze NNR May - October. Early indications suggest that they will be effective in controlling Purple Moor-grass. Aiming to build herd up to 30 cows in time. A known Redwater site and measures being taken to manage this.	Julian Hosking 01823 283211
Other contacts:		Devon Cattle Society	Mr & Mrs Lane 01837 810942
		Devon Cattle Breeders Society	01837 810942

References