

# WELSH MOUNTAIN

## Summary

A hardy hill sheep capable of exploiting the low quality forage of upland Wales, the Welsh Mountain is a lively and agile breed with an important role in the UK commercial meat industry. Adapted to roaming over large areas, it is suited to extensive grazing in a variety of conservation situations.

**Hardiness** – a hardy breed, adapted to survival on low quality forage.

- *Extremely hardy* – well adapted to the exposed harsh conditions of upland Wales. Its close-textured fleece protects against the worst of the winter weather; pregnant ewes were traditionally wintered on the cliffs.
- *Shelter* – utilises natural forms of shelter.
- *Thrifty* – small, and a very active forager with catholic tastes, so tends to do well on poor keep.
- *Supplementary feed* – rarely required. Even breeding ewes maintain condition well and lamb successfully without supplementary feeding. Benefits from a feed block if kept on particularly rough/scrubby forage.
- *Surefooted and agile* – at home on the rough terrain of the uplands and on steep coastal cliffs; grazes on hazardous ledges and slopes.

**Physical Attributes & Husbandry** – a lively breed which requires routine husbandry.

- *Fencing* – not easily contained. Tends to push through and under fences and hedges; also good at climbing. Thick fleece protects it from electric shocks, so flexi-netting is required rather than just a few strands of electrified wire.
- *Handling* – small and light, so easy to up-end to shear or foot trim; however, lively and skittish so challenging to gather, although once familiar with surroundings can be moved around fairly easily with a dog(s).
- *Brambles* – thick-fleeced, so risks entanglement, although tends not to get hung up too badly.
- *Size* – small, ewes weigh about 35kg, although on improved lowland grassland, may weigh as much as 50kg. Rams weigh around 80kg.
- *Appearance* – thick white fleece with a close-texture. Rams horned; ewes polled.
- *Hooves* – generally has good feet. On dry hard ground little foot-trimming necessary.
- *Insects* – not particularly prone to fly strike; the close-textured fleece may not provide favourable conditions for egg laying. The horned rams may suffer head fly.
- *Breeding* – ewes able to lamb unaided out on the hills; good survival rates. Good milky mothers, easily able to produce and support one good lamb when on poor forage.



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**Grazing Characteristics** - an effective maintenance and restoration grazer.

- *Grazing preferences* – readily grazes both coarser and finer grasses, including tussocky species. Will eat new flush of Tor-grass, and if pushed will take it when old and brown and even make inroads into the ‘thatch’.
- *Browsing ability* – moderate. Browses most woody plants, including Holly and Ash. Good at breaking down larger blocks of Bramble and other low growing scrub into smaller clumps. Readily eats Heather, which can be a problem.
- *Sedges and rushes* – not especially interested in rushes; may graze sedges of shorter swards.
- *Impact of social behaviour* – has a strong hefting instinct; the flock spreads quite widely with individual sheep tending to heft to its own particular ‘spot’ on the site.

**Interaction with the Public** – suitable for use on public sites where there is sufficient area for the sheep to avoid dog attack.

- *Public perception* – a healthy sheep which maintains condition well, so unlikely to attract welfare concerns from the public.
- *Reaction to dogs* – small and fairly vulnerable to attack. On large sites will keep its distance from dogs.

**Marketability** – an important breed in the breeding programme for the production of commercial meat.

- *Breeding* – Welsh Mountain ewes are popular for crossing with longwool rams; the resultant ‘Mule’ ewes are crossed again with a terminal sire breed such as the Suffolk, to produce a fat lamb for slaughter.
- *Meat* – has a good flavour and is suitable for the commercial market, although niche marketing is also a possibility.

## Sites where Welsh Mountain sheep are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
<b>Fulking escarpment</b> West Sussex  National Trust	Chalk grassland and scrub.	Welsh Mountain (and other sheep) grazed in compartments. Welsh Mountains brought in first at a fairly high stocking rate and pushed hard with no supplementary feed. Good impact on coarser vegetation including the Upright Brome and scattered Tor-grass; keen browsers; ring-barked Ash and Holly in winter. Maintained condition well and produced good lambs (lambing rate 130 to 140%). Self-sufficient with few foot or insect related problems and minimal foot trimming required; initially not very biddable or easy to handle but became more so with time.	Charles Cain 01273 857712
<b>Glaslyn and Dyfnant Meadows</b> Montgomeryshire  Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust	Moorland, heath, acid grassland and mire.	Grazier's Welsh Mountains (and Black Welsh Mountains) grazed on licence on the hills between April and January. Cope well in all weather conditions. Hard-mouthed with catholic eating tastes; good on rougher grasses; eat rushes in the absence of grasses. Maintain condition well with little supplementary feeding required, just mineral licks and a little hay in winter. Difficult to contain and quite hard to handle	Clive Faulkner 01938 555654
<b>Lundy Island</b>  National Trust	Maritime heathland, and improved grassland.	Commercial flock including Welsh Mountains (+ other sheep, ponies & a dramatically fluctuating rabbit population); grazed throughout the island, partly for conservation aims. Welsh Mountains chosen because of hardy nature (the exposed conditions are equivalent to hill grazing) and ability to do well on rough grazing. Happy with their performance; good at creating short sward for rare species (e.g. dwarf Adders-tongue Fern), & suppressing rough grasses, such as Purple Moor-grass on the maritime heathland. However, not easily shepherded; do not respect enclosure; climb all over the dry stone walls causing some damage.	Eliza Cole 01237 431831
<b>Marloes Deer Park, Ynys Barry, Tre-seissyllt</b> and other sites Pembrokeshire  National Trust	Maritime grassland, heath, and semi-improved grassland.	In-lamb ewes from mid-Wales winter grazed on the cliffs (traditional Welsh upland grazing regime). Grazed to promote the maritime mosaic by suppressing coarser species; good at tackling coarse grasses and Bramble scrub, but eat Heather with damaging effect and some of the rarer species, such as Prostrate Broom. Summer grazing would be preferred. Maintain condition well & lamb successfully. Escape artists. A few losses to dogs.	Debbie Kearsley 01348 837860  Haydn Garlick 01348 837860
<b>Other contacts:</b>		Welsh Mountain Sheep Society – Hill Flock section	WGM Jones 01970 64011
		Welsh Mountain Sheep Society – Pedigree section	Mr M Voyle 01884 881222

## References