

## **Grazing Archaeological sites**

### **Extracts from Nibblers online discussion forum**

Many of the grasslands in the Cotswolds, both unimproved and improved, have unfenced Scheduled Ancient monuments and other archaeological and historical features. These range from neolithic and iron age ramparts and earthworks, to long barrows, deserted medieval villages, field systems and WWII defences. All are grazed with no apparent harm. Archaeologists within the Cotswolds are supportive of grazing as it assists with the management and presentation of the feature.

The Cotswolds AONB partnership and Gloucestershire County Council have recently published a booklet 'Archaeology and Farming a guide to the care and management of archaeological sites':

'Livestock - The major problems of erosion and poaching on earthwork sites are often caused by overstocking, or inappropriate stocking levels, during wet or dry weather. By far the best stocking regime for archaeological sites is sheep, possibly with a few cattle included to ensure balanced grazing. Sheep rarely cause problems unless they are overstocked. Sites can usually support fewer cattle than sheep due to their weight, and most sites can only support a very limited number of horses. Pigs can cause as much, if not more, damage to archaeological sites than cultivation and should be avoided. Most problems can be dealt with simply through varying and restricting access during exceptionally wet or dry periods. Controlled grazing using moveable electric fencing can often provide a solution on problematic sites.'

I will send a few copies. The guide is also available on our website [www.cotswoldsaonb.com](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.com)

Mark Connelly  
Land Management Officer

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n Dorset, one of our chalk grassland NNRs, Hambledon Hill, is also a major archaeological site with Bronze Age features, an Iron Age hillfort and extensive Neolithic earthworks including a long barrow. All lie within areas grazed with cattle in the summer and sheep in the winter. There are many other examples of archaeological sites in the county that are grazed and this management is supported by English Heritage.

Grazing, provided stocking levels are appropriate, helps to protect the archaeological features. Keeping features free from scrub and trees prevents root damage. It helps to maintain a good grass/herb sward that is shallow-rooted, and prevents wind and water erosion by binding the soil together. It also reveals the form of any earthworks to best advantage. A long history of grazing at Hambledon is considered to be a key factor in the high degree of preservation of its archaeology. Remarkably, recent surveys by archaeologists even found small hollows on a few of the Iron Age hut platforms - the original doorways, eroded by the passage of many feet!

You don't say what vegetation exists on the features at present. If it is largely a grass sward, then any adverse impact would be much lower than if there was a lot of bare ground or something like bracken, particularly on a slope. Assuming it's the former, to start with, I would suggest you set stocking levels somewhat below optimum just to be on the safe side. Monitor the impact on any areas of bare ground and, if they are increasing, make sure that English Heritage is aware. You may find they take a relaxed attitude to small areas of bare ground in less important areas if the overall result is favourable. Try to get a feel for what EH considers to be the relative importance of the various features and at what point they would start to consider a particular impact to be damaging.

Good luck!

Ian Nicol  
Site Manager

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I assume the big problem you have here is that the stock have direct access not to turfed historic features, but to something more identifiable as a "built" structure, which might get damaged through stock using it as a scratching post and the like, and also congregating in the area might poach the locality. I know White Cliffs Countryside Project graze St Martin's Battery in Dover, which a Napoleonic / WW1 gun emplacement, and also Drop Redoubt - a Napoleonic bastion (or more correctly, a redoubt), and the cattle can wander into it and potentially onto the turf on top of it. I do not recall that the cattle which grazed there caused any problems. But the project did put grills over the doorways to some of the former bomb stores there primarily to keep Dover's unwashed from loitering there. I don't think cattle would have had much incentive to wander into a smelly dark enclosed space.

The other issue on archaeological site management which I have found to be of some importance is to include land which makes the site a sensible grazing paddock rather than just fence the feature. Linear earthworks are going to be doomed with a livestock motorway if they are managed within a linear paddock. Similarly Silbury Hill in Wiltshire is a nightmare to manage as the fence is at the bottom of the artificial slope, and the top is currently fenced off for safety reasons - there is absolutely nowhere less than a 1 in 2 slope so nowhere for water and nowhere for stock to rest.

If you want to contact White Cliffs Countryside Project on their historic feature / grazing, Melanie Wrigly is the one to talk to, and her number is 01304 241806

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