

Grazing Regime Evaluation Case Study:

Site 2 - Northumberland

- 53 ha degraded wet heath
- Restoration by cattle grazing in summer



Background

This site is in the Hadrian's Wall area of the Northumberland National Park, and is part of the Drovers Project managed by the Northumberland National Park Authority. The focus of the project is to highlight the value of native and traditional breeds of cattle in the management of conservation sites, their role in farming, and also to research the culture and traditions associated with such cattle. One aim is to demonstrate how native cattle can rejuvenate under-grazed areas dominated by moorland grasses that are unpalatable to sheep, by grazing during the summer.

The grazing objective for the site has been the reduction of purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and to improve the structure of dwarf shrub heath. Initial results indicate that the cattle are behaving as intended, by concentrating on the *Molinia* dominated areas of the site and avoiding the sensitive heather and mire habitats.

The site lies within the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage site, a Special Area of Conservation and is managed under a Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreement.

Habitat condition assessment

The wet heath (53 ha) has been degraded by previous management, with *Molinia* dominating at the expense of dwarf shrubs. The site is in unfavourable condition with respect to plant species composition. Only 20% of the sample points have the indicator species *Erica tetralix*, and none of the sample points have at least 25% cover of wet heath indicator species. However, the heath is in favourable condition regarding invasive species, browsing levels, burning, drainage, erosion and disturbance. There

were no signs of burning or any other disturbance in sensitive areas. Less than 10% of the total feature showed signs of drainage and there is no sign of erosion.

Farm business and livestock

The farm itself is 600 ha, principally on what were originally three holdings. All the land is in Countryside Stewardship with the exception of one field.

They run 100 cows, half being Galloways and the remainder Blue Greys, plus five pedigree Whitebred Shorthorns. Of the Galloway herd, between 20 and 30 are bred pure but unregistered with the remainder crossed with the Whitebred to produce Blue Greys. Most of the cows calve in the spring outside on land up to 350 m above sea level, finding their own shelter. Blue Grey calves are sold at about 18 months old.

Other Management

Cattle are moved around the moor through the season to graze different vegetation at the appropriate time.

Shooting, recreation and landscape

The area is not managed for shooting. There is public access and guided walks led by the Drovers Project.

The landscape is heterogeneous in appearance with no sharp habitat boundaries. Site boundaries are in good condition. Flowering *Calluna* is striking but patchy in distribution.