



Whitefaced Woodland Sheep Society

Web site: www.whitefacedwoodland.co.uk

Newsletter 94 – May 2015

Message from the Chairman...

As of yesterday, Paul still had more than 150 ewes still to lamb and the weather was not being at all kind to him. So he sends you all his best wishes and hopes to see as many of you as possible on the Society's stand at North Sheep.



NORTH SHEEP 2015

Wednesday 3rd June

Millstone Moor Farm, Cockermouth,

Cumbria CA13 0QA

www.northsheep.org.uk

The event is open from 9am to 5pm and the Society's stand is in building 4. NSA members are entitled to free entrance for one person, but must show their 2015 membership card. Agricultural students go free on production of their student union card. Otherwise, ticket price is £12.

Farm visit and AGM

Can and Sam Hodgson have very kindly offered to host this year's Annual General Meeting at their farm - Glencoyne, near Glenridding, at the south western end of Ullswater.

This will be on Sunday 4 October, so please make a note in your diary now, and keep the date free

Can is suggesting a similar format to last year: coffee, meeting, followed by lunch and then a look at some of their livestock.

Editor's bleat

With our lambing safely over, I've no excuse to delay sending out a Newsletter. Over 80% of our flock lambed in the first four weeks (partly thanks to Larry, our teaser ram), so the end was in sight by the third week of April. The weather was pretty kind to us, apart from two really bad nights in which we lost lambs (one at least killed by a fox).

We lambed almost everything outside this year, as opposed to last year, when about 90 pure breeding Woodlands were in the barn. I only have four pet lambs now, including two whose dam has just died from mastitis. I haven't had time to compare the figures, but my guess is that a few weaker lambs have died in the field at, or just after birth, whereas last year we would have kept them alive and lavished care and money on them, only to have them die later. My record with Woodland pet lambs is not good!

My next task is to get to grips with our new registration program – Breed Society Record. All the data has been input for us, so it's just a matter of my getting to know how to use it! Registration certificates should be pretty much unchanged and we should now be able to print a Flock Book.

AG

Sale of Rare, Minority, Traditional and Native Breeds

North West Auctions will be hosting an Autumn Sale on **Saturday 5 September**. It will take place at their Junction 36 Rural Auction Centre. This is just off the M6, on the Cumbria Lancashire border, and was featured in our Newsletter 88 of March last year.

For more details, try www.nwauctions.co.uk or contact Bill Nelson, Livestock Manager, on 07785 542738.

The Lees of Rochdale

Now don't get me wrong, I love Yorkshire and Yorkshire folk, heck I even married a Yorkshire lass, but just sometimes we in Lancashire get a little tired of you lot in the east assuming that you invented everything!

Now take the Whitefaced Woodland for example; I have lost count of the times I have read somewhere that the Whitefaced Woodland comes from the town of Penistone. Why do we call it the Woodland then and not the Penistone? They call it the Woodland because the breed comes from the Woodlands of Hope, which is in Derbyshire is it not? Okay it has Penistone blood in it, but it is still a Woodland and as I have been saying for years and years now, it also has Limestone genes in it and they came originally from Westmorland (which some Yorkshire folk could just about stomach as a foot note to their breed from Penistone, their Yorkshire breed) but that part of Westmorland is now split between Cumbria and Lancashire and do you know what? That is just unacceptable; it's just too far! How can your own breed of sheep, a sheep which even now, most reading this will still believe to be a Yorkshire breed have anything to do with Lancashire?

So it gave me enormous pleasure and self satisfaction to visit Edward Lees' farm in the hills above Rochdale (that's Lancashire by the way folks) to visit another successful sheep breeder who keeps Whitefaced Woodlands in Lancashire!

Now not only does Edward have Woodlands, but his wife Jane's family, the Earnshaws, have been keeping them since before the last World War! How brilliant is that? They might be, if not the oldest flock, certainly they are one of them!

Could it be that Woodlands have been kept in these Lancashire hills for even longer than that?

Edward and I soon get chatting and Edward tells me that he often comes to Bentham Auction Mart (still Yorkshire but just down the road from me), Clitheroe (Lancashire) and Gisburn (Yorkshire) too. Now today that is not that unusual, we can travel quite easily from market to market but did that also happen before Ifor Williams trailers, before big sheep wagons or trains even? We'll never know for sure, but families tend to have traditions that pass down through generations and what works for those farming here today, probably worked in the past too! So who knows? Perhaps drovers used to bring sheep this way, years before we had modern modes of transport.

If sheep were being traded from Bentham, Clithero and Gisburn to farms near Rochdale, then there can be no doubt that the now extinct Craven breed would have followed that route. Now the Craven was a Yorkshire breed; just like the Penistone it had a white face and both ewes and tups were horned, but like the Limestone (to which it was closely related or perhaps even the same breed by another name) it had a tuft of white wool between its horns...Sound familiar?



A picture of Craven sheep from ML Ryder

But I digress, you don't want me gloating and saying "I told you so", you want to read about Edward's flock.

Edward and his family live high up on the hills north of Rochdale. It's a sparse landscape, windswept and bleak. Apart from the rugged terrain and the rugged sheep, the main features in this landscape are the windmills, harnessing the ubiquitous gales that sweep up the valley from the lowlands beyond and stone built farms clinging to the hillsides.

The first thing that hits one climbing the road towards the Lees' house (apart from the rocky track belting the underside of the wife's car) is how hard it must be to grow anything up here! Lower down the hill the fields were all green and thick with what looked like lush grass and were being grazed by numerous fat lambs, including many very healthy looking Woodlands but the higher one goes, the poorer the herbage becomes.

Later on Edward informs me that the Woodlands in the fields that I passed before belong to his Father in law and Brothers in law, the Earnshaws. Edward and his family have a few fields below the fell and share the hill grazing with the rest of the family.

A few years ago Edward's tups were being fought over by some of the top breeders, but he's fallen on harder times since they lost 90 acres of really good fertile lowland pasture down "somewhere near sea level". Now Edward struggles to get the same results with his stock, confined as they are, to poor soil 800 to 1,000 ft up in the Pennines, where the soil has a pH of 4 and whether it is raining or not, the wind blows hard and cold.

The breeding is still there in his sheep, they carry the same genes that they carried before, but now the constant struggle with the coarse vegetation up here has taken its toll on their size and condition and Edward tells me how difficult it is to get any real size into his lambs these days.

But here's the thing folks, any young sheep coming from up here are going to be hard little things and put them on some decent grass and they are going to explode into life, blossoming out into the strongest, hardest of all stock! But I shouldn't be telling you that, because I will certainly be looking to buy some of these gimmers the next time I see them at Bretton!



On top of the World!

Flock Profile

Date of Profile: 05/11/2014

Name of Flock: Stony Lane Woodlands

Flock Prefix: Stony Lane

Name of Breeder: Edward Lees

Address: Middle Trough Farm, Shawforth, Rochdale, Lancashire OL128XE

Telephone: 01706 853681

Flock Details

Year started farming: : Jane's family started in the 1920s

Size of Woodland Flock Medium

Small 1-20, Medium 21-50, Large 51-100, Major 101+

Edward and Jane started the flock about 25 years ago with 23 hogs from Jane's father Billy Earnshaw. As Edward has a busy electrical contracting business to run it now falls on George, their son, to do much of the day to day running of the farm. George is doing an apprenticeship at Myerscough.



George and his father Edward Lees

Breeding Policy

The tups go out as late as they can, because up here they need to lamb as late as they can, but usually this is around the beginning of November. This year it was later. They lamb mainly outside and the sheep are only fed a few feed buckets as the grass dies back at the end of winter. The Lees expect to lamb at about 120%.

Edward selects tups based on what he needs for his own sheep; so in recent years he has felt that the horns are starting to get a bit close to their heads, so next time he will be buying a tup with wider horns to try and counter this.



Tight fleeces and tight horns with a sheep at the back showing a tuft between the horns, the Craven coming through in it?

Edward wants his sheep to have a tight fleece to keep out the weather. He'd like big sheep up here, but that is a difficult thing to do working with this acid soil and he has found that really fat or heavy boned sheep have come to the farm and not stood up to the harsh conditions here as well as they could. He finds that his thinner boned, smaller sheep do better in the long run than ones that arrive in much heavier condition. It is always difficult bringing sheep up the hill. But going the other way, these sheep will be hard!



Farm Details

Year Farm started: 1992

Size of Farm: d

Group a 1-20ha, b 21-50ha, c 51-100ha, d 101- 500ha, e 501-1000ha, f 1001+ha

Land Classification [LFA](#)

Altitude: 800 – 1,000 ft above sea level

Description of farm:

The farm has about 50 acres of lower land, but most of the sheep are kept on the moor above for most of the year with the Earnshaw family's sheep. Here the grass is coarse and full of bent grass and rushes. Even the lower fields, while they looked green enough on the day we visited, are poor quality, tough grasses.



Their fleeces show lots of colour from the peaty soil

With a pH of around 4 it is very acid and peaty. It is also wet and boggy and full of soft rushes.

Philip Onions

Woodland crossing

My attention was caught by a 'conversation' on Facebook about Woodlands put to a Teeswater or Wensleydale tup, as we have both. I think the item was prompted by a photo from a [slightly smug] Philip Onions of his Teeswater ewe with her quads!

Debbie Wardell wrote:

"We have been crossing woody ewes that are not good enough to breed pure with a Wensleydale for a few years now. The hogs go through our markets as Mashams and return excellent prices for very little input. We have also kept some gimmers for breeding who make excellent mothers and produce good lambs to the Texel or in this year's case back to the Wensleydale. Teeswater is definitely the better crossing sire and is what we would use if we didn't already have Wensleydales."

Rachel and I have put some of our Woodlands to a Teeswater and a Wensleydale tup for three years now - about 35 to each. Wethers have been sold as stores or, more profitably, as half sides of lamb. Finished off grass, the killing out percentage is about 45% and we have received a lot of positive feedback on the quality of the meat. Gimmers have been kept as replacements, and we tried lambing them in their first year – an experiment which was not particularly successful. However, our oldest crosses, born in 2013 and put to a Texel, have produced some good lambs this year, and seem to be excellent mothers.

I asked Debbie why she considered the Teeswater a better cross, to which she replied:

"I think Teeswaters would be better because they have cleaner legs, (no wool) and I think they are maybe slightly harder especially in the wet weather. Overall they do tend to be a larger, bigger framed sheep and if you wanted to keep a few purebreds then there is definitely a better market for gimmers around us."

For cute looking lambs, it's the Wensleydales every time, with their great grey eye surrounds and furry legs, though maybe the brown knees are because our tup is black. However, they are a total pain if they get at all shitty; I end up dagging the whole back end, including the legs! The Teeswater crosses certainly win on that count!

AG

PS Today my black Wensleydale ewe finally produced a lamb. She just would not hold to the Wensleydale tup, so in desperation I threw her in with the Teeswater. So is this strange little tup lamb a Teesleydale or a Wensleywater?

2015 Shows update

There are one or two amendments to the list published in the last Newsletter:

Paul Thorp is to be the judge at the Ryedale Show, Kirkbymoorside on Tues 28th July.

Elise Priestley is the new Livestock Secretary for the Hope Show on August Bank Holiday Monday. E-mail: livestock@hopeshow.co.uk

Royal Three Counties Show - Rare Breeds Day on Sun 14th Jun has five Woodland classes in the schedule.

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