

Shepherding Grazing Systems

A trial grazing scheme in the Wyre Forest

MARK CLEAVER

During 2010, the Wyre Community Land Trust (WCLT) hosted a Lottery funded placement, Alice Briggs, for six months. The placement scheme is part of a national programme run by the Grazing Advice Partnership (GAP) and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. The aim of the placement scheme is to address the decline in traditional skills associated with livestock handling and conservation (extensive) grazing that would have been passed on within the family but now increasingly depend upon an ageing and predominantly male workforce. These skills underpin the management of much of Britain's wildlife, landscape and cultural heritage (GAP).

To help build Alice's knowledge of conservation and livestock, she undertook a practical research project studying the behaviour of cattle under a shepherded grazing system in the Wyre Forest at Hitterhill Coppice. After researching a method and putting together her proposal, Alice and two volunteers from the Wyre

Community Land Trust walked two Dexter cows into the woods to enable them to graze along the newly created rides and glades in the forest on several days during the summer. Whilst shepherding the cattle Alice took detailed recordings of their behaviour including: when and on what they were feeding; where they spent their time and how they reacted to people and dogs. The aim of the trial was to assess the practicalities and effectiveness of using cattle as a management tool for the forest rides and glades. Whilst the project was very brief, background research and first results indicate that cattle grazing is an appropriate management tool for some areas of forest.

Alice's work builds on wider research on grazing livestock for nature conservation from a range of National Nature Reserves and other sites with high wildlife value and provides a base for further work in the Wyre Forest. Full details of Alice's project are available from Mark Cleaver, info@wyreclt.org.uk



Dexter cattle grazing within the forest, 2011

Alice Briggs

