

What are the hills and uplands?

The English and Welsh uplands are elevated areas with dramatic features such as hills, moors, valleys and mountains. Despite harsh conditions, for hundreds of years, hill sheep and cattle have shaped this iconic landscape and created one of the most important managed environments in the country.

The high elevation and soil makeup of these areas makes farming a particular challenge, with factors including high rainfall, low temperature, severe weather, acidic soil and isolation from services making some everyday tasks difficult – some hill farmers have to own snowmobiles!

Keeping livestock on the hills is the key to maintaining the character of these areas which include such treasured landscapes as the Lake District, the Yorkshire

Dales and Snowdonia - in fact 9 of the 13 national parks in England and Wales are in hill farming areas.

Features to look out for

Each area has its own distinctive features. Farming includes hardy, often local cattle and sheep breeds. There are few arable areas in the hills and uplands, simply because crops cannot thrive in the often challenging conditions.

This history of livestock farming has led to some large areas of grazing to be designated as common land, where certain farmers have the right to graze cattle and sheep. Off the commons, it has also led to the development of very distinctive field boundaries, including dry stone walls and Devon hedges. These boundaries have been maintained for hundreds of years so fields are often smaller in the hills than in other parts of the country where field sizes have increased. Nowadays this can cause problems for large modern machinery trying to navigate through small gateways.

Contributing to the economy

Beyond creating and managing Britain's cherished hills and uplands farming is the driving force behind its economy. Farmers buy feed and machinery from local businesses, process food through local abattoirs and of course buy their own groceries in the local town, not forgetting socialising on a market day!

In the South West, home to Exmoor, Dartmoor and Bodmin moor, each livestock farming job supports an extra 0.5 jobs elsewhere in the economy - jobs in feed companies, vet surgeries, auction marts and hauliers.

Outside obvious industries, the very landscape created by farming is part of what brings over 3 billion visits to the countryside every year. This in turn supports local jobs in tourism, hospitality and other local businesses.



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Why is farming important in the uplands?

Almost every aspect of the hills owes its existence to generations of livestock farmers and their animals. Centuries of farming has created unique views and distinctive characteristics of some of our most loved countryside.

Farmers' craftsmanship ensures miles of stone walls, hedges and buildings withstand the buffeting of gales and winter storms and managed grazing balances the natural progression to thick woodland and scrub. These features are part of a landscape beloved by millions of visitors (wildlife and human) every year.

Today, as in the past, productive and sustainable farming is essential for their future.



Farm animals of the uplands

Upland farmers are proud to produce high quality beef and lamb for us to eat as well as breeding stock for many lowland farms. Due to the nature of the area they farm the majority of hill farms are also involved in environmental schemes. These schemes provide benefits for local wildlife, water quality and even migratory species from countries as far away as Alaska and sub-Saharan Africa!

England's 2.2m hectares of uplands are home to 44 per cent of breeding ewes and 40 per cent of beef cows. In Wales, 75 per cent of breeding ewes and 85 per cent of beef cows are found on 1.1m hectares of Welsh uplands.

Cattle breeds chosen by hill farmers are usually less selective grazers than others and are particularly good at converting low quality forage into high protein human food. They eat a wide range of semi natural vegetation and they can help reduce the dominance of invasive species, such as purple-moor grass and bracken, which may otherwise smother heather moorland. Popular breeds you might spot include Aberdeen Angus, Ruby Red Devon and Belted Galloway.

Sheep are another crucial part of the landscape making up the nucleus of Britain's unique stratified sheep farming



system. Tough hill sheep are crossbred to produce hardy breeding stock for lowland farmers to produce lamb. Hill areas often have their own area specific breeds, most famously the Herdwick from the Lake District, but also the incredibly popular Swaledale from Yorkshire, now found all over the country, and the distinctive Exmoor horn from the South West.

Hill farmers often graze their sheep and cattle on common land – land that they share with other farmers. Stock become 'hefted' or 'leared' to a specific part of a common, learning from generation to generation where to go for water, shelter, and how to get back to the farm and the 'in bye' land (the best land around farm). This hefting and learing is one of the most important and unique parts of hill farming, as it takes generations to build up the ancestral memory in a flock or herd.

Have you brought your four-legged friend with you on this trip to the great British countryside?

The NFU, together with the Kennel Club, is promoting responsible dog walking to make sure we can all enjoy the countryside safely.

Farms are working environments so please be aware of your surroundings – your dog can scare or even harm farm animals. Please stay safe and use a lead around livestock, but if you are chased by cattle, release your dog so you can both get to safety separately. Remember to clean up after your dog – bag it and bin it wherever you are to prevent spreading disease to livestock.



LOVE YOUR COUNTRYSIDE



Three simple ways you can help our uplands thrive:



Keep visiting the countryside – by visiting or staying in the upland areas you'll be contributing to local economies and farm diversification activities.

Buy British food - looking out for the Red Tractor logo is one way to make sure you are buying quality food and drink which can be traced back to British farms. The Union flag within the logo guarantees the food comes from British farms.



Ask difficult questions - if it's not clear, ask in your local shop or restaurant where the food is from. Vote with your feet if you're not happy with the answer.

Pocket guide to...
THE ICONIC BRITISH HILLS AND UPLANDS



BACK BRITISH FARMING

Almost 35% of all English common land is in the North West, with the uplands containing fewer but larger commons than the areas in the south of England.

This is an area that has one land owner but many commoners were the first to graze their livestock. Hefting is very important (see overleaf).

99% of all Herdwick sheep are commercially farmed in the central and western Lake District. This iconic hill breed was badly affected in the 2007 foot and mouth outbreak when 25% of the breed were lost.

Swaledale sheep, named after the valley in the Dales, are one of the most popular breeds of hill sheep, found in Britain.

These hardy animals are able to survive in harsh conditions on the hill. When cross bred they produce the famous north country mule and form part of the backbone of British sheep production.

The Dales' stone field barns were built to provide winter housing for animals and storage for hay. Largely redundant now, they are still maintained as a key landscape feature.

The highest dairy herd in England can be found in the fields around the village of Flash in Staffordshire, also the highest village in England.

Look out for Wales' stone walls which go as far as the eye can see up into the hills and mountains. Farmers also maintain 34,000 miles of hedgerows in Wales.

In Derbyshire look out for Derbyshire Gritstone sheep, named for the Dark Peak region of the Peak District which is based on gritstone and shale. This area is categorised by peat clad moors and harsher ground than the White Peak region.

The Welsh uplands are home to a native breed of cows. Welsh Black cattle, a hardy breed, are easily identified by their black coat and horns. They are complimented by similarly compact and tough Welsh Mountain sheep.

The high limestone plateau of the White Peak has free draining ground, making it suitable for livestock rearing and milk production off grass. The milk produced by dairy farmers in the White Peak is used in a variety of ways – to make local stilton and other specialist cheeses, being bottled for the surrounding towns of Buxton, Castleton, Matlock, Wirksworth, Cheadle and Stafford, and even skimmed milk powder for export.

An iconic feature of the South West hills are the hedgebanks, often punctuated by veteran boundary trees. These ancient structures contribute to agricultural management by providing shelter to livestock and crops as well as supporting valuable wildlife habitats. On the fringes of Dartmoor, some hedges continue the boundaries of Bronze Age field systems from 3500 years ago.

The South West is one of the heartlands of livestock production in the UK, with breeds such as Red Ruby Devon cattle and Exmoor Horn sheep forming part of a heritage that stretches back hundreds of years.

Don't forget to try lots of delicious fresh produce from the upland areas including Stilton cheese, Cumberland sausages, Wensleydale cheese, Herefordshire beef, Welsh lamb and Devonshire ale.

