

FACT SHEET 3:



Farming in The Peak District National Park

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Farming in The Peak District National Park

Farming has shaped the landscape of the Peak District National Park [PDNP Fact Sheet] over thousands of years. From the gentle rolling fields of the White Peak, criss-crossed by drystone walls, to the remote sheep-nibbled Dark Peak moorlands, farming has had a major impact on the Peak District scenery we see today.

The whole of the Peak District National Park is classified by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as a Less Favoured Area with the majority considered 'severely disadvantaged' and being mainly Grade 4 or 5 which indicates it is the poorest agricultural land. This means to a greater extent that the whole area is reliant on agricultural and increasingly environmental payments for continued economic viability.

The Peak District National Park Authority supports the farming community with a number of

initiatives, including the Peak District Land Management Advisory Service which provides help and advice to farmers and land managers on applying for funding from national agri-environment schemes such as the Environmental Stewardship Scheme and the England Woodland Grant Scheme; the Authority's own small scale agri-environment scheme, the Environmental Enhancement Scheme, which is used to plug any gaps left by the national schemes; the Environmental Quality Mark.

Early farmers

The light, well-drained soils of the limestone uplands of the Peak District National Park were first farmed by Neolithic people between 4,000 and 3,500 years BCE. These early farmers cleared woodland to rear sheep and cattle and grow crops like beans, pulses, wheat and barley. Farming continued over the next few thousand years, and at Chee Tor and Roystone Grange it is possible to see the outlines of fields and terraces that were cultivated during Roman times.

More woodland was cleared by the Saxons and this continued until after the Norman invasion in 1066, resulting in the open landscape that we see today. From the 12th to 14th centuries many abbeys and monasteries in the Peak District had extensive sheep farms (granges) and exported wool to the continent. In medieval times there were large open fields of ridge and furrow around settlements, with rough, open, common grazing land beyond. Enclosure of these open fields began around 1,500 CE. The long narrow reverse-S-shaped fields that can still be seen around many Peak District settlements are the result of this enclosure. Between 1760 and 1830, further enclosure produced the rectangular-shaped fields

outside the settlements with the land divided by miles of drystone walls. This landscape management, together with improved grass growth and quality, allowed more intensive sheep farming to take place.

Improved roads and the coming of the railways brought easier movement of goods, and arable farming declined in favour of sheep farming. The area is principally given over to grazing for sheep, beef and dairy cattle. Now, only a small percentage of agricultural land in the Peak District National Park is left fallow or used to grow crops. The main crop is grass, cut to provide winter fodder for livestock. Some barley and root crops are also grown.

Effect of landscape on farming

Two of the Peak District's distinctive landscapes, the White Peak and the Dark Peak, have different underlying rock types [Rocks and Minerals Fact Sheet] – limestone in the White Peak, and gritstone and shale in the Dark Peak. The rocks help determine the soil and vegetation and, therefore, the type of farming that is possible.

Gritstone edges and outcrops interspersed by deep shale valleys shape the exposed remote moorlands of the Dark Peak. Gritstone is a slightly porous sandstone while shale is impermeable to water. The acid soil is peaty and nutrient poor, and there are extensive areas of peat bog. Heather is often the

dominant vegetation on dryer soils with cottongrass growing on the bogs. The landscape generally has a low agricultural value, being used predominantly for sheep grazing or grouse rearing. Some areas of heather moorland are maintained through regimes of cutting and burning to aid heather regrowth. The valleys have been used for livestock grazing and arable farming from late prehistoric times until the present, although arable farming declined significantly in the 20th century.

Limestone shapes the landscape and land use of the White Peak. The limestone plateau is covered with green fields criss-crossed by drystone walls. Farm buildings form clusters of grey stone buildings which blend into the landscape.

Cutting the plateau are steep, grassy dales or valleys which

are often grazed by sheep and cattle. Some of these are protected as National Nature Reserves or Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Farmers are paid grants to help conserve [Conservation Fact Sheet] and protect these areas. Meadow grasslands which have not been ploughed, re-seeded or fertilised are rich in wild flowers such as ox-eye daisies, cowslips and early purple orchids.

Traditionally dairy cattle have been kept on the more fertile limestone plateau of the White Peak, whilst sheep and beef cattle grazed the higher, poorer quality rough grazing land of the Dark Peak. However, because of the sustained economic pressures threatening their viability these dairy herds are increasingly being lost and replaced with beef herds and sheep.

Farming today

Today, some 86% of the Peak District National Park is classed as farmed land. Farmland is mostly permanent grass (51%) or rough grazing (41%). There are an estimated 2,000 farms in the National Park of which half are very small (<20 hectares). The numbers of small and large farms (>100 hectares) have increased since 1990 while medium-sized farms have decreased in number. This may be the result of two trends: more people buying small-holdings where the primary income is not from farming; and medium-sized farms being too small to be economically viable.

A typical Dark Peak farm will have land stretching from the high heather moorland down to the rich valley grassland. There may be a small herd of suckler cattle, which are raised for beef and sold on to more fertile farms for fattening, as well as a flock sheep.

The fields on the lower slopes may be more intensively farmed by ploughing, fertilising and re-seeding with grass every few

years. The grass in some fields is cut to make silage (where the grass is stored without drying so that it 'pickles' to provide winter food for livestock), and the grass in other fields is cut and dried to provide hay. The higher moorland provides rough grazing for sheep.

A typical White Peak farm, by contrast, is more likely to be dairy and therefore have more intensively farmed grasslands, providing grass for silage and grazing. It may also have a larger flock of sheep and some beef cattle.

The Peak District National Park Authority is helping farmers to diversify into other areas such as sustainable tourism, wildlife conservation, woodland management and other activities that build on the special qualities of the National Park. The Authority works with other organisations to achieve its aims. For example, in 2001 the Authority set up the **Peak Birds Project** in collaboration with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The project aims to halt the decline of three species of endangered Peak District birds, the curlew, lapwing and twite, by helping farmers apply for grants to create favourable habitats on their land. By 2007, some 145 farmers were implementing bird-friendly management on their farms as a result of advice

from the project. The success of the project is largely down to the enthusiasm of Peak District farmers. Along with other projects and initiatives, the Peak Birds Project is helping to deliver the **Peak District Biodiversity Action Plan**.

As well as supporting farmers and land managers in applying for support and grants from **Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Scheme**, The Authority also manages the Live & Work Rural programme (2009-12). **Live & Work Rural** is an innovative rural micro-business support and community renewal programme based on the creative use of the high-quality environment as an economic driver, providing a 'bottom-up' approach which will actively involve individuals, businesses and communities in a wide range of activities guided by sound sustainable development principles. This three-year partnership programme is designed to complement and reinforce the services available through Business Link and other organisations and involves supporting people & networks including farmers and land managers to access other sources of local and national funding for diversification and business development such as the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and the RDPE Peak District

Rural Action Zone LEADER Action Group

The Peak District Land Management Advisory Service is a partnership involving the Peak District National Park Authority, Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency. The service provides a 'first-stop-shop' providing help and advice

for farmers and land managers in the Peak District and includes a drop in centre at the Agricultural Business Centre in Bakewell [Bakewell Fact Sheet] every Monday Livestock Market day from 10am to 3pm. The Peak District Land Management Advisory Service aims to:

- support local farm business;
- enhance the environmental

- qualities of the Peak District;
- clarify procedures and help farmers through the maze of advice, grants and regulations;
- help secure conservation agreements and explore any other potential opportunities; and
- offer advice on economic development and diversification.

Peak quality

There are a number of schemes involving farmers and other food producers designed to promote the Peak District as a source of high quality, environmentally sustainable goods and services.

The National Park Authority has developed the **Peak District Environmental Quality Mark (EQM)**, the first of its kind in England. The Peak District Environmental Quality Mark (EQM) is a certification mark for businesses that are making efforts to reduce their environmental impact as well as helping conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Peak District National Park. Around

39 farms have been certified to the EQM, along with 54 non-farming businesses.

Farms gain EQM by managing land for wildlife, as well as preserving the landscape features that make the Peak District special, such as dry stone walls, traditional stone buildings and archaeology. Food, craft and holiday accommodation businesses achieve the award through high standards of environmental management, as well as supporting conservation of the Park by regularly purchasing produce from EQM farms. In this way all businesses can play their part in protecting the Peak District environment. A full list of businesses that have achieved EQM is available at www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/eqm

Other food and farm-related initiatives include:

- **Peak District Foods** is a group of local food producers and businesses based in and around the Peak District National Park.
- Peak District Cuisine aims to encourage the use of local produce in restaurants, hotels, guest houses and pubs in the Peak District to create new, innovative or traditional menus.
- A network of Farmers' Markets are becoming well established in the Peak District, which are essential sales outlets for many food and farming related businesses.

Further information

- **The Farming Life Centre**
- **Peak Directions**
- **Peak District Landscape Character Assessment**
- **National Farmers Union**
- **Natural England**
- **Friends of the Peak District**