

Environmental Stewardship

Case study: Strathairlie Farm



Name:	F.W. Grayson
Region/County:	North West/ Lancashire
Address:	Strathairlie Farm Lancashire
Farm Size/Type:	1,000 hectares. Upland (mainly); rural lowland (some); coastal (some)
Stocking:	Beef and Sheep
Land features:	Internationally important areas of limestone pavement and associated flora, calcareous grassland, yew woodland and juniper scrub with fragments of heathland
Key objectives:	The maintenance of appropriate conservation grazing levels and an ongoing plan of scrub clearance and control, implemented by the Forestry Commission.



Bill Grayson runs an unusual farm business which has used agri-environment scheme funds to create a business out of offering a cattle grazing service for owners of sites of high nature conservation and landscape interest. The Environmental Stewardship Scheme is a vital component of his business and is achieving both his and his landlords' objectives for the condition of the Hutton Roof Crag Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Mr Grayson's ambition is to use his cattle grazing service to deliver his landlords' objectives over the medium term and the scheme is helping him to achieve this.

Managed by the Forestry Commission since 1947, Hutton Roof Crag SSSI was used as a trial area for the afforestation of limestone soils. Later years have seen the removal of most non-native trees with further felling.

This SSSI contains some of the best areas of limestone pavement in Britain, which were formed by the combined effects of the scouring action of glaciers in the last Ice Age and slow weathering over the subsequent ten thousand years.



Dark-red helleborine

It harbours a wealth of nationally rare and scarce plant species including dark-red helleborine, rigid buckler fern, bloody crane's-bill and the Red Data book Lancastrian whitebeam. The whitebeam berries are a valuable source of food for birds and animals in autumn.

The pavement occurs in a mosaic of woodland, scrub, grassland and heath, however the grassland is heavily encroached by wood and scrub due to undergrazing.

Mr Grayson signed up for the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS) in 2007. His long term objectives, whilst working in tandem with the Forestry Commission, were to restore the SSSI to 'favourable condition'.

"The scheme fits in with my business and personal ethos", said Mr Grayson "The whole thing is driven by the aim of finding a way to farm in an environmentally sustainable way, bringing neglected sites under better forms of management. Managing the grazing with suitable breeds of cattle will create the appropriate structure to the vegetation".

The main option within the scheme, adopted by Mr Grayson, was the restoration of species-rich, semi-natural grassland. This option is targeted at grasslands that are potentially rich in plant and associated animal life. They are often on 'difficult' ground and may have suffered from management neglect or they may have been selected for agricultural improvement.

The botanical diversity of such grassland may be enhanced by simply amending existing management practices. The option can also contribute to protecting valued landscapes and archaeology, and the promotion of good soil conditions.

When asked if he thought entering the Scheme was worth the effort, Mr Grayson replied "Yes – unequivocally. It is something we wanted to do, it works well and the cattle are delivering the benefits, and cattle are well - win-win-win."

Simon Webb, Mr Grayson's Natural England advisor added "Bill and his cows have made a huge difference to Hutton Roof and its wonderful limestone pavements and I am full of admiration for the job he has done.

Restoring this type of habitat mosaic is not straightforward. Bill's focus on delivering the SSSI objectives has meant that the difficulties and adjustments which come with such a restoration project have not been seen as a problem. His cattle have not seen it as a problem site either and are in excellent condition always looking happy and healthy.

Bill has been an advocate for cattle grazing on limestone sites and has been a valuable source of advice and reassurance to other graziers locally. Hutton Roof and the other sites he grazes have become demonstration sites and the approach he takes is copied on other sites across Cumbria and Lancashire. The impact of Bill's grazing is therefore seen far beyond the land he directly manages."

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