

## Sheep, Landscape & Biodiversity

### **Dan Jones, Parc Farm, Great Orme, North Wales**



I farm the Great Orme, a limestone mountain that rises a mere 207 meters above sea level, but sometimes feels closer to 2007 meters. This rocky outcrop is a recognised Country Park, Special Area of Conservation, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and part of the Heritage Coast. With views right across the Irish Sea and Anglesey in the short distance, little wonder this rugged landscape attracts over 600,000 visitors a year, bring its own challenges.

But the Great Orme is far more than just a tourist attraction. It has been my home for the past five years, along with my family, my 650 ewes and my 5 working sheepdogs. I'm halfway through the Farm Business Tenancy of 145 acre Parc Farm, extending to 900 acres of grazing rights for 416 ewes plus followers on the hill.

I was brought up on a small family farm on Anglesey and farming has always been my passion. My parents wanted me to do anything but farm, but farming was all I wanted. I went to Llysfasi College and then on to Aberystwyth University to study Agriculture. Without the opportunity to go directly into farming myself I took to a range of jobs that kept me in the industry, from contract shearer to abattoir worker and anything in-between. At 25 I got my big break, renting 33.5 acres from my boss of the time and self-appointed farming advisor, for which I will mostly always be grateful.



The National Trust bought Parc Farm in 2015, halting the plan to convert the 150-acre farm into a golf course. Instead, the woolly residents stayed, grazing rights were maintained, and priority given to the landscape and biodiversity.

As a traditional upland sheep farmer I farm in a nature first way, meaning food production is sustainable, non-intensive, and goes hand in hand with looking after the environment. I follow the seasons, rather than go against them, and like generations of Welsh Upland Farmers before me, I don't use inorganic fertilizer (sigh of relief) and supplement the sheep as little as possible to produce a quality product.

As the new tenant, one of my priorities was to introduce a hefted flock to the Great Orme. The hefted flock would need to work as Conservation Grazing tools, thrive in the harsh exposed environment as well as produce a quality product within my farming system. After discussions with the National Trust Ecologist I eventually decided on two breeds, the Herdwick and the Lleyn.

My time as a shearer taught me that there are variations within breeds. It was important to me to select what I would call traditional breed types. 340 Lleyn of a medium size were chosen with a good tight coat to help keep out the winter weather. I bought foundation females from the Cernioge flock, and rams from Bronallt and the late Miss Nia Williams of the Fadog flock. I also bought 65 Herdwicks.



The system I run now sees the majority of females kept as replacements, with the surplus sold as breeding ewe lambs. Males are castrated at birth, finished off at grass from Augusts to October, and then sold through the Sainsbury's 'Taste the Difference' scheme. By October any remaining stock are housed and supplemented for finishing, something I am aiming to do less and less of each year.

Both breeds have done their job superbly here. The Herdwick's graze the rockier parts whilst the Lleyn's tend to stick to the Calcareous grasslands. The Lleyn are working well here at Parc Farm and going forward, I think the Lleyn have a big part to play in conservation and food production in the UK.