

Whitebred Shorthorns in South West Cornwall

by Donald Hendry Chairman

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A recent trip to the Penzance area in SW Cornwall provided a very interesting insight into two very different uses for the Whitebred Shorthorn. Karen Wall, owner of the Trenow herd, and Gerald and Anne Babcock, owners of the Pendeen herd, work closely with their animals despite using their cattle in totally different ways.



View from Trenow across to Penzance

Trenow Whitebred Shorthorns

Trenow Cove Dairy is a micro dairy, run by Karen Wall, processing milk from rare breed Whitebred Shorthorns. She is currently milking six cows. Following calving in April and early May the cows were producing about 72 litres of milk per day. 6 months on they are producing about 48 litres daily. She normally calves a cow in the autumn to boost milk production through the winter. enow Whitebred Shorthorns.

Karen has developed a local market for her milk supplying local hotels as well as a good number of private customers. She charges her hotel customers 80 pence per litre with the remainder of the milk fetching £1 per litre to private clients. Demand always outstrips supply. (Current payments to most modern large dairy herds fall into the mid 20 pence per litre bracket).

Supermarket milk is homogenised, a process that breaks down the fat into fine particles which prevents separation of the fat at the top of the milk. These fragmented fatty acids are readily absorbed by our digestive system leading to higher cholesterol levels. Pasteurising milk does not fragment the fat and is therefore less readily absorbed by our digestive tract allowing it to be enjoyed without the uptake of potentially harmful levels of high cholesterol fats.

All Karen's cows have individual names which are used day to day. Karen told me that a study by Newcastle University found that cows treated as individuals with a name produced 500 pints more milk yearly than those without that individual touch!

Karen has built a very impressive small dairy unit for milking her cows and pasteurising/bottling the milk.





Milking unit and pasteurising/bottling plant

Incorporated in the dairy building is an isolation pen and feed store. It's a very impressive and easily managed unit.

Trenow Cove dairy has a traditional approach and has turned the clock back to a slower, less intensive approach using simple equipment, but with a modern approach to hygiene. The cows are stocked at low density and are out-wintered. Karen's extensive management of her Whitebred Shorthorn cows and dairy unit result in a low carbon footprint.



Trenow Cove Dairy Tuk Tuk

The milk is all sold within a 2/3 mile radius of Trenow Cottage and is delivered by a very distinctive Tuk Tuk.

Karen's cows are impressive and all have wonderful temperaments, good udders and teats and are great examples of the Whitebred Shorthorn.



Raeburnfoot Snowflake, a ten year old cow and great example of the dual purpose Whitebred Shorthorn breed

Pendeen Whitebred Shorthorns

Gerald and Anne Babcock run a beef suckler herd at Pendeen. Gerald has always been interested in re-introducing grazing to the Penwith Moors. The moors have been abandoned for the last 60+ years mainly due to mechanised farming methods and the huge increase in the volume of motor traffic on the unfenced Penwith country narrow roads.



Penwith moorland

In 2008 the Heath Project came to West Cornwall. It brought increased European funding to Penwith's hard pressed rural economy. Heathland is a generally open and dynamic landscape that develops on impoverished, usually acidic soils and supports a range of plant communities. These include heathers (*Calluna* and *Erica*), acid grasses (eg *Festuca* and *Agrostis*) and Gorse (*Ulex* spp.) This project recognised the vital importance of reintroducing an extensive grazing regime to Penwith Moors.

Gerald and Anne welcomed this incentive and identified Whitebred Shorthorns as the ideal conservation grazing animal to return the moors to productive heathland.

Large areas of the moorland had become bracken invaded and the Heath Project allowed Gerald and Anne to form a small company offering a unique Moorland Management Service to farmers entering the aid funded Heath Project.

The Whitebred Shorthorn foundation stock for the Pendeen conservation grazing herd came originally from the Bell family at Bloch and from Gordon Gilligan's High Creoch herd . The current stock bull Spoutbank Major has bred very well but is currently for sale as he is coming into his own stock.

Penwith stock numbers have been boosted with the introduction of the annual calf crop from Trenow. All the Trenow calves are hand reared by Anne with most of the male calves being castrated and the females being brought on for Karen's Wall's dairy replacements or to expand the Pendeen herd. All these young stock are used for conservation grazing on the Penwith Moor heath areas.



The return of cattle to the Penwith Moors have already provided a major influence in halting the spread of scrub and stopping the cycle of huge wildfires. This is improving biodiversity on the moors and wildlife numbers are on the rise again after decades of decline.



Kissing gate, interpretation and field access gate supplied with Higher Level Stewardship Funding through Natural England and supported by Gerald's landlords, the National Trust

Wrapped silage is made from grass cut late in the season. This allows ground nesting birds to fledge their young. The bales are evenly spaced to allow easy manual moving of the lightweight ring feeders. This eliminating the need for tractors in the wet winter months and thereby reduces poaching damage by tractor wheels and problems from feeding in the one spot. An electric fence protects the unused bales.

In summary I was impressed with the huge enthusiasm displayed by Gerald, Anne and Karen Wall. They are all ardent Whitebred Shorthorn enthusiasts and are doing all they can to promote and expand the breed in SW England. They are looking closely at marketing surplus stock and are hoping to support the society sales in Carlisle with their surplus stock in the fairly near future. Although severely disadvantaged geographically our breeders in SW Cornwall are determined to try and expand their businesses and markets. Many thanks to Karen, Gerald and Anne for the hospitality and time they made available on my visit.