

Ben Ledi Whitebred Shorthorns

November 2011 saw the arrival of the first Whitebred Shorthorns for the new Ben Ledi herd at Gartchonzie Farm, Callander, Perthshire. Gartchonzie Farm lies to the west of Callander, with stunning views to the north and Ben Ledi.

Females were bought from several long established herds after considerable time and effort visiting most of the remaining herds and identifying suitable animals. Once identified, animals were subjected to health screening with the requirement that they test clear for Johne's, BVD, IBR and Leptospirosis. Only "clean" animals were then purchased.



Ben Ledi Joe 2nd a Blackburn Grafter son

The stock bull is Blackburn Grafter, a Lochdochart Nemo son out of a Milnholm cow. He was selected for his wonderful temperament, length and excellent deep fleshing. His first crop of calves are looking very promising. Artificial Insemination has also been used this year with three of the best cows now confirmed in calf to a 1979 bull, Wolfhills Chieftain. These semen straws were found after an extensive search of vets and AI practitioners in the north and west of Scotland. Their collection on the Islands of Islay and Tiree proved to be mini holidays due to the travel distance and ferry time involved.



Some of the Ben Ledi 2013 Calf crop

The main market for Whitebred Shorthorn bulls in North and West Scotland is to Highland Cattle Folds for use crossing with their heifers and the cows that are not being bred pure. In the early years of the Whitebred Shorthorn Association there were 6 pure Whitebred Shorthorn herds in Argyll and the islands supplying this need. The Whitebred Shorthorn delivers a superb first cross female when mated to the Highland cow. These heifers are increasingly in demand as a hardy, long lived and milky suckler cow. The male calves show a 50+ kilo weight advantage at weaning over pure Highland calves and in the region of £200 cash advantage.

The Highland Cattle Society has a very good health status with many of the Folds having elite health status. The availability of crossing sires matching this status is highly attractive to them, especially if they can view them within relatively easy travelling distance. Gartchonzie Farm is an ideal location in that it has no farming neighbours (Health Scheme) and is also notorious for ticks and the diseases they carry! Stock for sale will have high levels of immunity to tick borne diseases. (Animals from non-tick areas are at high risk when exposed to tick with risk of anything from temporary sterility through to fairly sudden death from Louping ill and Redwater).



Yearling Heifers

There are currently 12 Whitebred Shorthorn cows and incalf heifers at Gartchonzie with animals from many of the well known herds including, Blackburn, Byers Hall, Lochdochart, Longley and Parton. The aim is to keep the herd at around this number and to try and encourage new breeders through the availability of both bulls and heifers.



Two year old heifers

The Munro Ben Ledi in the background of photos above

A Ben Ledi young bull has been purchased by the monitor farmer in Mull, Mr Iain Mackay. Iain plans to use the bull on two year old Highland heifers, using the easy calving characteristics of the

Whitebred Shorthorn to allow calving at three years of age instead of the traditional 4 years of age. He currently uses a Simmental bull on the crossing element of his Highland cows but is finding this takes too much out of some of his cows, causing them to miss a breeding year. He will use the Whitebred Shorthorn to reduce the demand on the cow but at the same time still giving him a very valuable cross calf to sell. It will be very good publicity for our breed.

***Donald Hendry
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