

STOCKING LEVELS ON THE COMMONS OF DARTMOOR

OCTOBER 1995

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At the request of MAFF Regional Service Centre, Exeter I have walked over and surveyed the principal Commons of Dartmoor to assess if overgrazing is occurring.

I have used the data prepared by Steve Scull of the ADAS Resource Planning Team at Bristol on Land Cover statistics for registered common land within the Dartmoor ESA, to prepare basic stocking levels for the individual commons.

The livestock carrying capacity used for each class of herbage has been based on my own practical experience in this area and discussions with [REDACTED] - Leeds and [REDACTED] Starcross. This carrying capacity has been divided into a summer growing period from May to October and a winter resting period from November through until April. It provides a baseline from which to examine and compare the actual stocking levels.

The serious damage which occurs during winter from poaching and rutting has been largely dealt with, but the change of vegetation which occur as a result of heavy grazing pressure and winter feeding has yet to be resolved.

These notes provide some facts on which to enable a decision on overgrazing to be made. Cross checking with IACCS information and livestock subsidy files will be essential.

[REDACTED]
18/10/95

The carrying capacity of the common has been based on the following table.

	Livestock Unit Carrying capacity	
	Summer	Winter
Improved Permanent Grassland	0.7	0.3
Unimproved Rough Grazing	0.5	0.3
Heather Moorland	0.3	0.225
Fragmented heather moorland	0.4	0.225
Grass Moor	0.5	0.225 0.3
Burnt (heather)	0.3	0.225
Bracken	0.15	0.225

Scrub, woodland, water bodies, roads and recreational areas have been ignored.

PRACTICAL POINTS

The vigorous spring growth of herbage which occurs on the high moor in May and June is largely unutilised. It therefore becomes mature and unpalatable and its carrying capacity is reduced. It could carry many more cattle during this period but they are not turned out because of bulling.

From late July to the end of October the commons are flooded with sheep as they are turned to the moor and dried off. This heavy grazing pressure weakens the heather which is at its most vulnerable, the seed is not allowed to set and the plant reserves of the nutrients are depleted.


The use of the Commons as a winter feed pad is still a major factor, causing in many areas, a complete change of vegetation and a weakening of the western heath species.

Comparison of Actual and theoretical stocking rates.

I have used the actual stocking rate figures submitted by the Dartmoor Commons Council for the following commons.

Blackdown
Gidleigh
Okehampton
South Brent

and compared them with the theoretical carrying capacity. The results demonstrate that the theoretical figures are realistic and highlight the overgrazing that is taking place on some of these commons.


October 1995

ACTUAL FIGURES SUBMITTED BY THE COMMONERS

OKEHAMPTON CL155 (1312 Ha)

Livestock Units Present

		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
Ewes	0.15	719	719	604	353	484	724	794	749	749	749	315
Ewe lambs	-											
Cows hill	1.0	254	254	254	304	329	219	219	219	464	484	589
Cows other	1.0	160	160	120	120	120	60	60	160	160	160	160
Young cattle	0.4	16	16	16	36	36	44	48	48	48	48	48
Ponies	1.0	110	110	109	109	112	115	115	115	115	111	110
TOTAL		1259	1259	1103	922	1081	1272	1236	1291	1536	1552	1222

	Total	Average	Lu/Ha
Summer livestock units	7968	1328	1.01
Winter livestock units	7247	1208	0.92

Comments

A seriously overgrazed common

COMPARISON WITH THEORETICAL STOCKING LEVELS

	Actual LU	Theoretical LU
Summer	1328	414 558
Winter	1208	279 348

ACTUAL FIGURES - SUBMITTED BY COMMONERS

CL3 + CL193 BLACKDOWN/MARY TAVY

		<u>Livestock Units Present</u>											
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Ewes	0.15	240	240	118	41	102	177	246	336	336	177	24	100
Ewe lambs													
Cows hill	1.0	85	85	80	70	60	60	-	60	60	60	75	80
Cows other	1.0	40	40	40	-	-	20	20	20	32	32	60	40
Young cattle	0.4	80	8	8	8	8	8	4	8	8	24	8	8
Ponies	1.0	58	58	55	55	53	8	8	23	53	53	58	63
TOTAL		431	431	301	174	223	273	278	437	489	346	225	291

	Total	Average LU	LU/ha
Summer livestock units May - Oct	2046	341	0.44
Winter livestock units Nov - April	1853	309	0.40

COMPARISON WITH THEORETICAL STOCKING LEVELS

	Actual LU	Theoretical LU
Actual Summer	341	273
Actual Winter	309	177

Comments

The recent fencing of the main road over Blackdown Common has allowed/encouraged this area to be fully used. Many more sheep are now turned out and this will have a significant impact on the vegetation.

We shall need to monitor continuously to assess any changes on this heather moor.

ACTUAL FIGURES SUBMITTED BY COMMONERS

GIDLEIGH CL 134 (990Ha)

Livestock Units Present

		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Ewes	0.15	103	103	103	78	98	100	128	128	135	108	-	37
Ewe lambs	-												
Cows hill	1.0	161	156	154	154	49	51	51	22	52	127	127	167
Cows other	1.0	39	37	21	6	11	37	37	53	50	62	42	42
Young cattle	0.4	-	-	-	-		86	86	16	13	13	11	3
Ponies	1.0	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
TOTAL		352	348	330	290	218	248	276	281	302	362	232	301

	Total	Average	Lu/Ha
Summer livestock units May to Oct	1687	281	0.283
Winter livestock units Nov - April	1856	309	0.312

COMPARISON WITH THEORETICAL STOCKING LEVELS

	Actual LU	Theoretical LU
Summer	281	416
Winter	309	263

Comments

We have always regarded this common as being well managed. There is a surplus of herbage during the summer period which is harvested over winter.

HA ACTUAL LIVESTOCK UNIT PRESENT

SOUTH BRENT CL 161 1187

		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Ewes	0.15	169	166	133	90	120	151	256	370	337	269	226	142
Ewe lambs	-												
Cows hill	1.0	450	450	420	360	390	400	350	490	510	510	490	440
Cows other	1.0							15	15	15	15	15	15
Young cattle	0.4	-	-	10	18	18	54	54	54	60	60	54	18
Ponies	1.0	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
TOTAL		656	653	600	505	565	642	712	966	959	891	822	652

	Total	Average	Lu/Ha
Summer livestock units	4735	789	0.66
Winter livestock units	3888	648	0.546

COMPARISON WITH THEORETICAL STOCKING LEVELS

	Actual LU	Theoretical LU
Summer	789	782 414
Winter	648	473 279

Comments

Southern edge of this common has been converted to acid grassland which is overgrazed.