

**Fencing of Marley Common for Management Purposes
(including feedback from previous fencing project at Black Down)**

David Elliott - National Trust

Feedback on fencing of Black Down

Many thanks are due to the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex for their Support for the fencing and grazing project on Black Down which was completed earlier this year. The animals have been out on site grazing since the early summer and have already had a number of very important beneficial effects on the site. In particular in the wet heath areas of the site they are controlling purple moor grass, which up until now has been very invasive. The control of this species means that opportunities are being opened up for some of the rarer and more interesting species, such as the round leaved sundew. The gentle poaching action of the animals in the wet heath areas is also allowing for seed dispersal of these interesting plants and we are hoping to pick up on their increase with our survey work over the coming years.



The other huge benefit the animals are having is in the way they are helping to control the scrub. They are browsing the new shoots of the gorse and pine and are already starting to control birch scrub and bramble. To my mind this has a dual benefit. Firstly it manages the habitat and provides ideal conditions for the heathland flora and fauna to flourish, and secondly it ensures easy open access across the heath for visitors to the site. The cattle have been very well received by regular visitors to the site, and I know that

many people now come to visit the site specifically to see the animals. We recognise that there will always have to be an element of mechanical management in looking after the heath on Black Down. The cattle are not the entire answer, but they are a very large part of it.

We worked very hard on the fencing project to try and ensure that there was a minimal effect on public access. The fencing was put as much as practically possible on the old stock proof boundary of the common and was kept out of sight in scrub and woodland along virtually its entire length. We have also worked in conjunction with local users with regards to the design, positioning and type of gateways. We spoke to both the British Horse Society and the Ramblers association about the design of the gates, and used their advice in the construction of the gateways. We have put in mounting blocks where they have been requested and always try to ensure that the self closing mechanism on the gates is not too fierce.



We have found the breed of cattle we are using to be particularly useful, they have proven to be very placid and calm, especially around dogs. Black Down has always been a big dog walking area, and we have been pleased to see that use of the site has not had to change as a result of changes in its management.

We will be taking the lessons learnt in the Black Down project and applying them on Marley.

Fencing Proposals for Marley Common

Marley Common is the next hill over to the West from Black Down and has many of the same sort of issues. The property was open grazed heath right up until the 1950's, when the grazing was taken away scrub birch and pine took over and much of the wildlife disappeared as the heath became shaded out. A great deal of time and effort has gone into restoring the heath on Marley over recent years and it has become an increasingly important habitat for wildlife.

This is a joint project between the Lynchmere Society and The National Trust. The two organisations own two separate but immediately adjoining parts of Marley Common. The boundary between the two areas is not in any way discernable on the ground, by fencing as a joint project we are aiming to avoid putting any fences in the middle of what would otherwise be an open landscape. We aim to fence only along existing subdivisions in the common, ie along the old common bank and along Marley Lane. Wherever possible, as on Black Down we will hide the fence line in blocks of tree's and scrub. The only places where the fence would come inside of these restrictions would be to keep the car park outside of the fence, and at the Northern end where by following the proposed line it can be better hidden from view.

Consultation has been taking place locally to let people know of the plans for the commons and to seek peoples views on the project. So far we have received a great deal of support for the project amongst the locals, with both of the parish councils (the common crosses the parish boundary) sending letters of support for us to pass on when our application to fence is made. We have consulted with both the Ramblers Assoc and the British Horse society on both the design and site's for gates, and have their support for the project too. We will of course also be making applications for permissions for gates on Public rights of Way in due course, as we did at Black Down.

With Regards to access points onto the common, we would put gates on all of the existing points where the common is accessed, we have told all of our neighbours that if they require an extra gate in the fence line we will be quite happy to put one in as the aim is solely to keep the cattle in, not the people out.

This is a much smaller area than Black Down (about 26ha) and so will require far fewer animals, we will start the grazing with 5 or 6 cattle and see how things go from there. The habitat will benefit enormously from the grazing, and as is the case at Black Down I think that as landscapes that came about largely due to the actions of grazing animals the picture is incomplete without them there.

A good deal of support is building locally for what will be a fascinating joint project. We hope that the link between the trust and The Lynchmere society will allow us to engage with the locals and will if anything reinvigorate people's interest in the common. We would very much appreciate the support of the Access forum, if you felt it was a project that you were interesting in supporting.

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