



Stock

of The New Forest



Who owns them?
Why are they there?



WHAT ARE THEY?

Forest stock comprises ponies, cattle, donkeys, pigs and a few sheep.

The New Forest ponies are a major attraction particularly for the many visitors who come to the Forest every year. Although in the past Thoroughbred and Arabian blood was introduced into the Forest herds, every effort is now made to ensure that the New Forest ponies are of a type and build to thrive on the open Forest all year round. Only stallions which have been passed by the Verderers are allowed onto the Forest, in an effort to ensure that the best and strongest foals are bred.

It must be remembered that the ponies on the Forest are semi wild and are rarely handled. They should never be fed by anyone other than their owners and they should never be touched by the general public.

Some of the ponies and foals are sold at the annual sales held at the Beaulieu Road Sale Yard. Many are sold as riding ponies as they are extremely versatile and excel in all equine activities.

There are various types of cattle on the Forest including belted Galloways, Dexters, Angus and Herefords. The Highland cattle with their extremely long horns are the most distinctive and can look quite formidable although they are quite docile!

Cows often leave their calves unattended in the undergrowth while they go off to graze. If you come across a calf, which you think has been abandoned, do not disturb it as its mum will come back periodically to feed it.

The numbers of stock depastured on the Forest varies from year to year but there are approximately 4802 ponies, 2584 cattle, 132 donkeys, 390 pigs and 114 sheep.

WHO OWNS THEM?

All the grazing stock on the New Forest is owned by people known as commoners who live in and around the Forest and occupy land to which certain common rights attach. Commoners who turn out ponies, cattle and donkeys must occupy land which benefits from the right of Common of Pasture, whilst those who turn out pigs and sheep need to occupy land to which the right of common of Mast and Common of Pasture for Sheep respectively is attached. Each owner has his own individual brand so that the animals can be easily identified by the Agisters if and when the need arises.

The Agisters are people employed by the Verderers' Court to supervise the farming of the Forest.

There are currently approximately 655 commoners turning animals out onto the Forest. It is they who are primarily responsible for the welfare of their animals although the





Agisters supervise the stock on a daily basis and deal with any emergencies such as road traffic accidents. Each commoner has to pay an annual marking fee for each animal they depasture.

WHY ARE THEY THERE?

Commoners have owned the right to graze their stock on the Crown land and Adjacent Commons for generations and it is the animals which have helped to create the New Forest as it is today. Their constant grazing and browsing assists in the management of the open woodland and heathland, as well as the lawn areas. They are often referred to as the architects of the New Forest.

Pigs are allowed onto the Forest during the autumn pannage season which lasts for a minimum of 60 days. The pigs eat the fallen acorns which can be poisonous to other stock if eaten in great quantities. Some sows which are in pig (i.e. expecting piglets) are allowed on the Crown land after the pannage season but owners must first obtain written permission from Forestry England. These pigs are known as privilege sows. The exception to this is on certain commons where different rules apply.

HOW DO THEY LIVE?

Many of the ponies, cattle and donkeys live in the Forest all year round, grazing the Forest lawns in summer and browsing on gorse, holly and heather in winter. The ponies grow thick coats in winter to protect themselves against the rain and the cold. The animals live an almost natural life and the

Forest provides them with lots of cover and shelter during the winter months.

In the early autumn the Agisters hold annual pony drifts or round ups at which time the ponies are checked over, branded when necessary, have their tails cut to indicate that marking fees have been paid and, if the owners have so requested, the ponies are fitted with reflective collars. The drifts also provide an opportunity for commoners to have their ponies wormed. Most of ponies are turned back out onto the Forest after each drift, although some will be taken by their owners and may be sold at the local pony sales.

There are approximately 40 pony drifts held every year between mid August and early November. Three or four drifts a week are held, rounding up anything between 50 to 150 ponies at any one time. It is a hectic period for the Agisters who have to somehow carry out their normal duties as well.

During the drifts, the ponies are herded into holding pens adjacent to the pony pounds which are strategically placed throughout the Forest. Reflective collars are fitted to many of the ponies each year, particularly those which frequently graze the verges of the unfenced roads and are therefore most at risk from passing vehicles. Unfortunately, some Forest animals are killed or injured each year and collars are just one of the ways we hope to reduce the number of accidents. All unfenced roads in the Forest have a maximum speed limit of 40 mph but not all motorists abide by the rules!

Road traffic accidents, involving Forest stock, must be reported without delay to the police by dialling 999. They will contact the appropriate Agister. This will ensure that the animal involved can be dealt with as swiftly as possible. There is a substantial reward for information which leads to the prosecution of a motorist who fails to report his involvement in an animal accident. Other incidents involving Forest animals in danger or distress, should be reported to the Verderers' Office on 023 8028 2052 between 9.00 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, or Forestry England on 0300 067 4600 (24 hour service). Deer and other wildlife come under Forestry England's jurisdiction.

Dogs must be kept under proper control at all times. Occasionally, there are incidents where Forest animals have been attacked by dogs and this is very distressing both for the animal concerned and its owner.

Welfare is the uppermost consideration in the management of the Forest stock and the Verderers work closely with animal welfare organisations. Representatives of the RSPCA, World Horse Welfare, British Horse Society, The Donkey Sanctuary, The Government's Animal Health Agency, Blue Cross and local veterinary surgeons, visit the Forest twice yearly to monitor the animals' condition.



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