

Why are cattle being re-introduced to Carn Kenidjack?

The HEATH Project (Heathland; Environment, Agriculture, Tourism and Heritage) is a Natural England led initiative which aims to restore neglected heathland landscapes in west Cornwall in a sustainable way to achieve its full potential for wildlife and people. It is working with heathland owners, managers and farmers in west Cornwall to help with scrub and bracken management, the re-introduction of grazing, increased awareness and understanding of the archaeology and improved access, all with a view to long-term sustainability.

The project partnership includes local farmers, commoners, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, The National Trust, Cornwall County Council, and Penwith District Council as well as Natural England. The HEATH Project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the EU Interreg Fund.

The aims of the project include learning through first hand experiences and providing demonstration sites, and we are delighted that three farmers and two commoners groups have agreed to work with the project on Carn Kenidjack, Lanyon Farm, Trewey Farm, Nine Maidens Common and Busvargus Common.

Any works on the registered commons will require permission from the Secretary of State for the Environment which involves a statutory public consultation. Consultations are planned for the new year and will be widely advertised to encourage the local community to get involved. Works off the commons do not usually require consultation.

Grazing is key to sustainable heathland management. In fact grazing, scrub and bracken cutting and controlled burning were how the moors were used by our ancestors. Left alone the moors will eventually scrub over, reducing the biodiversity and denying future generations the experience of accessing and enjoying them.

Abandonment

The largest problem with heathland conservation since the Second World War, apart from the land being broken in and improved, has been the continued abandonment of the land by farmers. This is because making a living from livestock farming is becoming ever harder.

On the Penwith Moors abandonment is common. When grazing ceases so does the maintenance of the moors. This leads to the development of scrub and bracken. This can be seen on land owned by The National Trust, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, and many private owners/tenants; it is on the private land that this problem is hardest to solve. One of the key aims of the HEATH Project is to find a solution on key private heathland sites and registered commons on the moors. Carn Kenidjack, Carnyorth Common, Botallack Common and Truthwall Common are all lovely examples of the Penwith Moors, but from a conservation point of view they could be so much more. The area is also a great example of a privately owned area of heathland and

lends itself to being an excellent demonstration site. Following a burn carried out within the last ten years the land is now halfway through the scrub development cycle and now grazing is required to slow down this scrub development.

Cornish hedges and fences

At Carn Kenidjack most of the boundaries around the land are formed by Cornish hedges and are stock proof, as they were built to be. Where they are no longer stock proof or where no hedge currently exists, the plan is to erect new fences on the boundaries of the sites. In order to minimise the impact on the landscape, most of these will be placed beside the existing Cornish hedges. Unfortunately, there are two unavoidable stretches on Carnyorth common where new fences will be installed across open ground and these will be more visible. One stretch is in the south to keep cattle out of the very boggy area and the other to the west near the pool, just beyond Hale Glower Farm. This fencing and new traditional granite boundary stones will replace an existing old fence which runs east to west across the middle of the open land. The removal of this old fence will make a significant landscape improvement.

Historic features

Fencing around archaeological features will be unnecessary. Ann Preston-Jones, Cornwall's Historic Environment Field Advisor for English Heritage has recently stated: "I personally do not have any objections to the grazing of Carn Kenidjack, and believe that it has the potential to be of benefit to both archaeology and wildlife. The area would have been grazed in the past and I understand was grazed within the last century. Grazing is the traditional, best and most sustainable way of ensuring that the common does not become totally overgrown and also of ensuring that there are not any more uncontrolled fires up there, of the sort we have seen in the past, that leave huge areas blackened and burnt". At present, local groups have to actively cut scrub around from the archaeological sites to keep them visible. The introduction of cattle should hopefully reduce the need for this.

Improved access

Access on foot and horse back will continue as before. The right of access on foot to heathland and registered common land is now protected in law and maintaining that right of access is a statutory requirement of the stock proofing works. Although the word 'common' appears three times in the names of this area – Carnyorth Common, Truthwall Common and Botallack Common - the land is not in fact registered common land but classed as agricultural land. Therefore consultation with public users regarding stock proofing of the land is not a statutory requirement.

Horse riding

The HEATH project team and Mr Trembath, the farmer who will be grazing the land, want to ensure that the public access already enjoyed on this beautiful part of Cornwall remains as it is. Mr Trembath has specified that bridlegates are to be installed across the public footpaths currently used by horse riders to access the land. Adrian Bigg, British Horse Society County

Access Officer, says he is very satisfied that Natural England are preserving the access for horse riding, which has historically always been enjoyed on the common, and which is such an essential amenity for local riders. He does not see that the cattle will cause problems to most riders and hopefully they will also help keep the paths and tracks clear.

Information about the stock proofing work will be posted at the access points to the land. It is intended to let public users know what is planned and why grazing is to be re-introduced. As the proposed stock proofing works do not intend to restrict access to the current users of the land and with the very low number of cattle grazing per hectare, access, recreation and grazing can all co-exist on the land. It is our intention that by grazing the vegetation the heathland will open up and provide better access in the future.

Extensive grazing vs. breaking the land in

The project requires that all farmers who receive stock-proofing infrastructure from the HEATH Project must graze the land extensively for a minimum of ten years. We believe this is the minimum amount of time required to restore the heathland to its full potential. Breaking the land in is against the aims of the project and would counteract all the hard work and financial input involved to safeguard these areas as open heathland.

To discuss the proposals at Carn Kenidjack please contact Joe Oliver, Partnership Manager, The HEATH Project, Natural England, Pydar House, Pydar Street, Truro, TR1 1XU, tel 01872 245045 or email joe.oliver@naturalengland.org.uk. He will be happy to discuss any issues or meet on site if necessary. For more information about the HEATH Project please visit www.theheathproject.org.uk