



Grazing Network Strategy

Camcattle is a herd of local Red Poll, rare breed, cattle that graze several meadows along the river Cam. The cattle are bought as stores (between 6-18 months old) and finished on grass. The meat is sold at Farmer's Markets around Cambridge every week, the main market being the Sunday local produce market in Cambridge Market Square and one butcher (Waller, Victoria Avenue). The herd consists of between 40-60 animals.

Midsummer Common

Camcattle have grazed Midsummer Common, belonging to Cambridge City Council, for about 5 years. The Common is used extensively by local people to walk and cycle across and on good days for picnics, kite flying and other

recreational activities. There is also one pub (Fort St George) and one restaurant (Midsummer House) in the middle of the Common. For about 30 days of the year there are big fairs (Spring Fair, Midsummer Fair, Strawberry Fair) and some charity bike rides and runs. The end of the season on Midsummer Common is marked by a big bonfire on the 05.November. The grazing season starts on the 1. April and finishes on the 1. November of each year. We graze on average 10-15 steers and young heifers. As the river has a wall for mooring along the whole of the Common the cattle have 2 troughs to drink from. During the time of the fairs they are rounded up and taken to Coldhams Common or Sheep Fen. The residents around the Common have always re-assured me that they feel the cattle keep a good balance so that this space is not over used for too many events. The grass on the Common is more than sufficient for the number of cattle and depending on the year has to be topped occasionally. The cattle will also eat the cut grass therefore removing the dead organic matter and allowing new growth. This has a positive influence on maintaining a good grass swart and surpressing the spread of chickweed, which can be major problem where grass is cut and left.

The City Council provides a 'Pinder service', a 24h telephone line with someone on call in case of any emergency. Two years ago a small part of the Common was fenced off and is now a communal orchard, right next to a allotment plot that has been there for a long time

Midsummer Common and the Cam must be unique in providing a corridor for walking and cycling connecting two parts of the city, a pub and a Micheline Star restaurant, an orchard, allotments, a space for fairs and big events, mooring for many house boats and last not least grazing for a herd of cattle.

Sheep Fen

Sheep Fen is a small meadow along Fen Causeway, belonging to Cambridge City Council, that is only used intermittently. The cattle have no water troughs here and have to walk into the small stream in order to access the water. Sheep Fen is usually only grazed for 2-3 weeks at a time, due to limited availability of grass.

Grantchester Meadows

Grantchester Meadows belongs to Kings College and is farmed through Trumpington Estates. The meadows hold the main stake of the herd usually about 30-40 animals between April and November of each year. The meadows stretch all the way from Newnham in Cambridge to Grantchester. Gates allow the subdivision of the meadows into 4 sections to portion off grazing and also allow 'cattle free' access to the river for people at the busiest times of the year. The meadows have no troughs and the cattle drink from the river. This has caused the break down of a small stretch of riverbank along

three parts. These areas are used by semi-aquatic plants and some insects (dragon flies) and birds are taking advantage of the shelter and different environment created. The stocking rate is low (less than 1 animal/acre) and there has not been a problem with the use of the river.

Unlike Midsummer Common, which is used continuously regardless of weather, Grantchester Meadows has very intense times (concerts, outdoor cinema) and quiet times. There seem to be more problems mixing the cattle and people than in town.

River Walk

For the last three years young stock (between 10-15 animals) have grazed River Walk in Shepreth belonging to the Cambridge County Council. River Walk has a tendency to flood, even in the summer, and this can reduce the amount of grazing considerably. The site has very old willows that are still coppiced and retained. The cattle drink from a pasture pump, but do use one area to access the stream. River Walk has parking spaces and there are quite a few local walkers, mainly with dogs.

Mixed use of grazing land

Cambridge is unique in combining public use of open spaces with cattle grazing in the centre of the city. The river Cam does not only provide a green corridor though out the town, but has created many open spaces used for many different purposes and benefitting many different users. Camcattle has used these spaces to produce locally grown and sold beef from a traditional East Anglian breed in traceable, extensive and environmentally friendly way.

Considering the number of years the land has been used for grazing and the thousands of people and dogs that walk. cycle, play and use the same space very little conflict has arisen. There has been the odd drunk trying to ride a cow, the odd steer chasing someone, the odd dog biting one of the cattle, but overall no serious accident has yet been recorded. There is an unfortunately tendency by some members of the public to think of the cattle as 'tame' and try and get too close to them. It might be worth putting up some bigger signs explaining about the cattle themselves, their purpose and use and how to treat them sensibly.

Financially Camcattle pays a grazing fee to each of the different owners and does not get any of the stewardship grants paid out to the owners.

Summary of grazing strategy

- have a sensible stocking rate to avoid overgrazing, oversoiling of footpaths and limited use of the river banks for drinking
- keep the grazing land open to the public, but do give advise and warning about the animals' presence
- keep graziers informed about decisions around the river and the use of land that may impact their business or where they might be of use.

One of the local residents of once said: "When the cattle are gone Midsummer Common is like an empty aquarium" I like that!