

Inspection Process for Inspecting Whitefaced Woodland sheep

Introduction

The purpose of inspection is to only permit correct Whitefaced Woodlands into either the Hill Register or the Supplementary Register.

First and foremost the sheep has to be a good sheep.

The sheep must not have any physical or genetic deformity that it might pass on to its offspring but injuries that are not life threatening or which do not require immediate veterinary care are less important to this process.

Secondly, the inspector must decide if the animal is correct by the breed standard. Only approved inspectors will inspect sheep and they will only be approved if they can demonstrate a good knowledge of the breed.

Thirdly, only good examples of the breed will be passed for the Hill Register. Any sheep that while physically correct and basically a Whitefaced Woodland, but not of good type, must be rejected. Being white faced and horned is not enough. Furthermore, even pure bred Woodlands from known provenance that show poor qualities, should be rejected.

James Gill with the Champion of Champions 2012

The WWSS Breed Description reads

“The Whitefaced Woodland is one of the largest of British hill breeds. Mature ewes weigh 60kg (135lb) but may reach 72.5kg (160 lb) in good grazing. Animals of this breed are strong-boned and robust. When left undocked, the tail is long. The wool is white and finer than that of many other hill breeds, being suitable for the manufacture of knitting or hosiery wool.

“The staple length is 15-20cm (6-8 inches), and the Bradford Count is 44-50, although the wool on the britch is coarser. The head is strong and the face and muzzle are broad. Both sexes are horned strongly; the rams having heavily spiralled horns. The extreme Roman nose should be avoided. “



RBST Breed Description: The Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) describes the Whitefaced Woodland (WFW) as follows:

“The Whitefaced Woodland, which originated on the borders of Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Cheshire, was also known as the Penistone [author’s note: this is incorrect, the Woodland came from the Woodlands of Hope] after the Yorkshire town where a sheep fair has been held since 1699. Sizeable commercial flocks exist in the area of origin, and the breed has spread to other areas throughout the UK.

“It is one of the largest hill breeds. Mature ewes can weigh over 60kg when moved to lowland grazing. Although it is classified as a Pennine hill breed, and has common roots with breeds such as the Swaledale and Lonk, it differs from other members of this group of black-faced hill breeds by having white legs and face and shorter finer wool. Both sexes are horned, those of the ram being heavy and spiraled. The tail is especially long and muscular.

“Apart from its ability to thrive in its area of origin the Whitefaced Woodland has been used to cross with ewes of other hill breeds to impart size and vigour. Kept in lowland areas, the ewes can produce large crops of lambs and give a good yield of milk, enabling the lambs to grow rapidly.”

Physical Inspection

In the first part of the inspection the inspector is checking to see if there are any obvious physical deformities. In appendix 1 there is a picture of the anatomy of a Whitefaced Woodland. This would be a good place for the novice to familiarise him/herself with some of the terms that we will use below. Most breeders will know the following but we are including it as a guide for anyone with doubts.

The Mouth



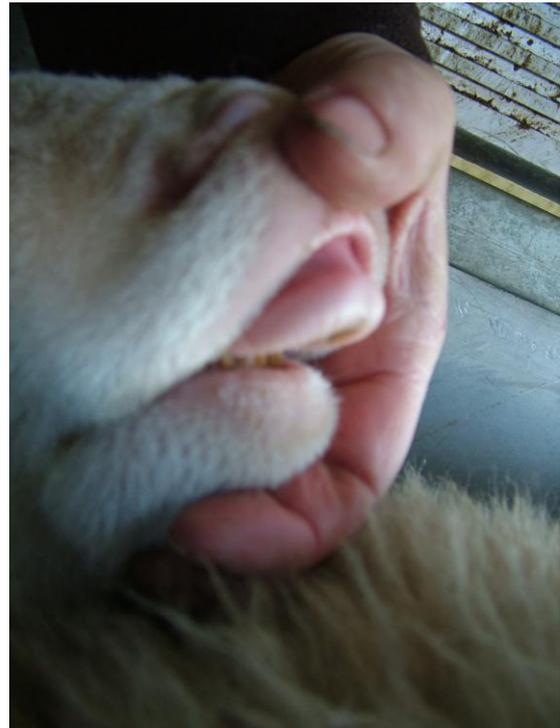
This is how a shearling’s mouth should look; note that the teeth bite onto the upper jaw firmly.

Everything follows the mouth. Grass and forage are basically very low in nutrients, so sheep have to eat or chew the cud for twenty hours every day. Any fault in the mouth will make them less efficient at cropping grass or chewing it.

However, because sheep

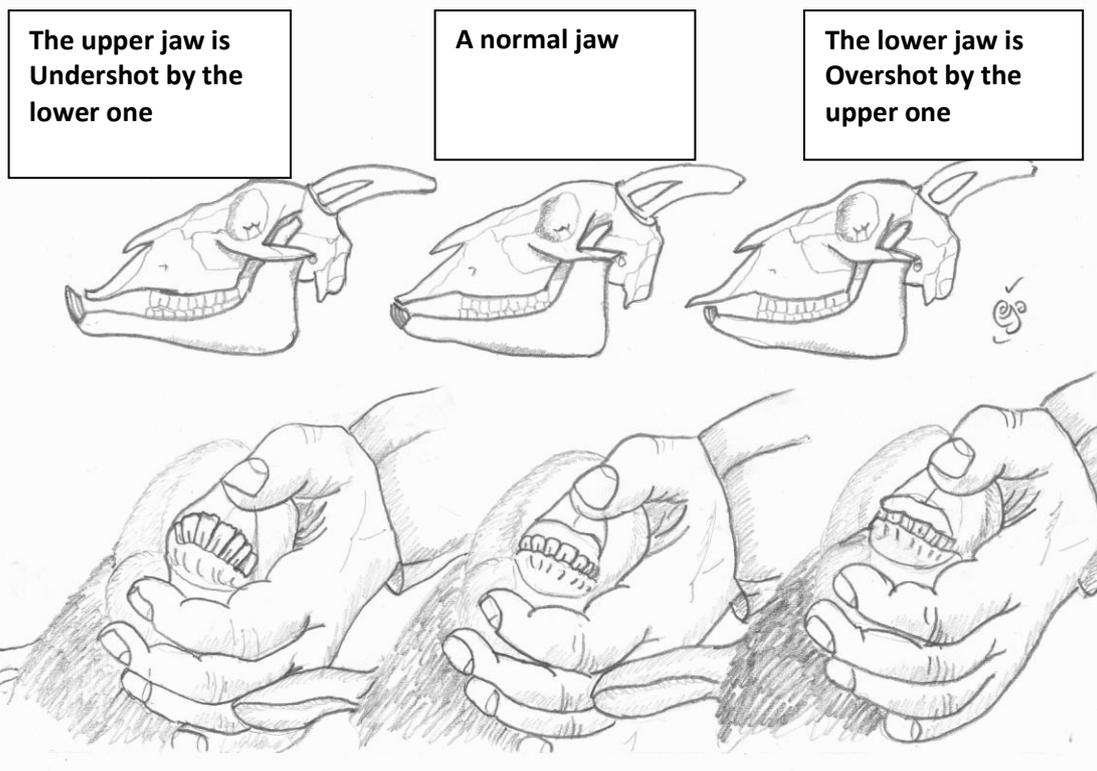
are so good at digesting grass, it is surprising how often sheep with deformed mouths can survive and even thrive, especially if their diets are supplemented. Deformities of the jaw can be passed on to offspring and as the Whitefaced Woodland is a hill breed and therefore expected to thrive on poor grassland, the mouths must be inspected either visually or by feel.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The front teeth (which are on the bottom jaw only) must bite onto the hard pad on the upper jaw; they must not be behind it or in front of it.



Top: one can see that the baby teeth in this gimmer are just beyond the outer edge of the dental pad at the front. As she grows older her adult teeth may protrude from beyond the pad; that would be a fail. Right: the teeth of this shearling are far too far behind the pad; she should be culled and not bred from at all.

When the lower jaw is too long, the front teeth miss the upper bite pad altogether (think bulldog) and the lower jaw is undershot. When the lower jaw is too short, the front teeth do not reach the bite pad (think parrot), the upper jaw is overshot. Neither condition is acceptable in breeding sheep.



A Broad Head

A broad skull is followed by a broad skeleton and therefore in breeding sheep that means a strong frame to carry more meat.

THE STANDARD: The head is strong and the face and muzzle are broad.

Narrow sheep are often also thin and difficult to finish; this may be because there is not as much room within the body cavity of the sheep to digest food efficiently as the rumen is a large organ. Thin sheep with less flesh and fat are more vulnerable to cold and to make matters worse, sheep with longer, more open fleeces and narrow shoulders, tend to have their wool part down the middle of their backs, which lets in the cold and rain and makes them even more prone to chilling in bad weather. Would you want a coat that was open at the back in the winter?



The head on the left is narrow and the head on the right is broad. The sheep on the left was narrow in the shoulder, back and rump, whereas the one on the right, much broader in the shoulder, back and rump.

Broad mouths are also good, it is argued that a broad mouth can cut and consume grass quicker and in more quantity than a narrow one, so broad mouthed sheep should be able to eat better than narrower faced sheep.

The disadvantage of broad heads is at lambing time, broad heads are more difficult to lamb than narrow ones. However to compensate for this, if the sheep breeder is breeding generally wider sheep, then the pelvis is wider too and that there is more room for the lamb to pop out. But care must be taken when putting a tup with a very broad head onto ewes with very narrow bodies.

Strong Bone



The ewe on the left is fine boned, the ewe on the right has stronger bone

The primary function of sheep farming is the production of meat. To carry a lot of meat on a big animal, one needs a strong frame. This is done by breeding from stock with “strong bone”. In inspecting sheep the inspector is looking for sheep of either sex to have this strong bone, but as with so many things in breeding sheep, this is of most importance in tups. The Woodland tup must have good strong bone. The best place to see that in a sheep is in the legs, the front legs in particular, because there is very little meat or wool to hide the bone beneath. A very fat sheep or a very woolly sheep can appear to be “big boned” when in truth it is no such thing.

THE STANDARD: [Animals of this breed are strong-boned and robust.](#)

A straight Back



The tup on the left, has a “dippy” back, seen better because he is lean; the tup on the right has a much straighter back.

Along with strong bone in the legs, the bones of the back need to be strong enough for its frame to carry the weight of the sheep’s flesh.

THE STANDARD: [Animals of this breed are strong-boned and robust.](#)

In general the rule is that the straighter the back, the better. But the inspector needs to bear in mind that the loin and the rump are where some of the most valuable cuts are on the carcass and a well fleshed rear end to the sheep is to be encouraged above the need for a visually straight back. So here the inspector has to decide for him/herself, is this a weakness in the skeleton of the sheep or is this because of the shape of the meat below the skin. A well rounded, well fleshed, meaty back end, must take preference over a straight looking back every time. This is not just a job for the eyes, to get “under the skin” the inspector must feel the back, preferably in several places along its length (for example at the shoulder, back, loin and rump) to get a good feel for the meat and fat covering the bone. If the shape is one that is caused by bone and the back is clearly dippy, then the sheep should be rejected. If however the curves and contours of the back that give the impression that the rump is raised up is because of the heavy build up of firm



muscle even if this has a covering of soft fat, then this is to be encouraged. Pictures and text are not enough, the inspector has to learn this art by experience.

Good Carcass Conformation

The term “Conformation” is one broadly used by farmers, breeders and butchers when discussing sheep, but means slightly different things to each. Put simply it discusses how a sheep’s body “conforms” to an “ideal” body shape, when considering health, purpose and breed standard for that sheep. It could be argued that the whole inspection process is discussing a sheep’s conformation, but here I want to focus on that part of the conformation that makes a good product for the butcher. The main purpose of keeping sheep is, after all, to produce meat.

The butcher is looking for the most valuable cuts of meat to be as large as possible, while he/she is less interested in the areas that give cheaper cuts. The butcher will however, be concerned by the body parts that he/she will have to pay someone to cart away. So the Woodland sheep is already at a disadvantage in being horned and heavily fleeced; to the butcher these parts represent increased costs.

The most valuable cuts are back legs, loin and loin chops. The gigot, at the top of the back leg is especially sort after; a well muscled gigot is the first sign of really good conformation. The shoulder, neck and brisket are much cheaper and parts of these, and the belly and flanks are often minced or diced and represent the poorest returns on any sheep carcass. So a carcass with good conformation will be well developed in all the areas that supply the choice cuts; which simply put means the back end. It may be less developed in the areas of the poorest cuts, such as the belly.

Woodlands tend to have better carcass conformation than most other hill breeds and may often top the fat market for horned sheep. We are keen to maintain this position and the inspector needs to weed out sheep with very poor carcass conformation; that is sheep with weak back ends and bigger front ends.

Perhaps it would help to point out that all sheep have the same number of bones (except Herdwicks which have an extra rib) so a general rule of thumb is that longer or broader sheep will tend to have more room for meat on those bones.

The inspector also needs to balance that we are breeding hill sheep that have to feed on poor quality pasture, so when considering carcass conformation, allowance needs to be made for animals to have deep enough bodies to accommodate the internal organs needed to digest those fibrous diets, so deep bodies are better in that respect – bearing in mind that this is all cost to the butcher.

Good Feet

Sheep by their very nature are grazers and need good feet to get around and consume enough grass, hill sheep even more so. Sheep are also flight animals and when scared will run, regardless of terrain, it is vital that they can do so without risk of injury. When inspecting sheep the inspector must be mindful that all sheep can be subject to foot rot, which is treatable and that sheep’s feet may also be overgrown. Any sheep presented in that condition should not be rejected just on those grounds alone. However being prone to foot rot can be an inherited characteristic (see notes on foot colour below) and flock owners would be well advised to cull out sheep with persistent problems of this kind.

Woodland sheep, especially heavier, well built sheep can carry a lot of weight and they can become low on their pasterns as a result. In the worst cases the sheep ends up walking on the heel of the

foot and not the hoof. The hoof then does not wear as it should and often becomes long, overgrown and is prone to maggots. In the worst cases a sheep running on the heel of its foot can injure the foot and become lame or even break the heel. This is a serious welfare problem.



The rear near leg on the ewe to the left is just down enough to be a fail, while the rear legs on the ewe on the right are straight with the ewe standing on the tips of her toes.



THE STANDARD: once again this is not specifically mentioned in the standard but as Woodlands are prone to being low on their pasterns, sheep that are low on their pasterns should be rejected

Horns

A defining characteristic of the Whitefaced Woodland is its horns. The shape and nature of horns is unique to each animal and dependant on complex genetics, diet and environmental conditions and subject to great debate and concern amongst Woodland breeders. It is also an area that is of concern when inspecting the physical condition of an individual animal, as there are welfare implications. If a sheep's horns are growing into its face, it is not only permitted by the breed standard, it is **essential** that the horn is "slabbed"; that is that horn is cut, filed, trimmed away or removed completely (by a competent person using anaesthetic if removing horns) so that it does not push into the animal's face. Horns that rub the face will cause discomfort, the skin may be rubbed away and become infected or infested with maggots or the horn may trap blood vessels and/or nerves which may lead to blindness or ulceration.



THE STANDARD: horns may be slabbed.



The tup's horn on the left has been slabbed, the one on the right has had his horns removed; both procedures are not just permitted, but recommended if the horns are growing into the face.

Horns also represent a welfare issue at birth and it is felt that horns that grow off the top, as a goat's might or out the side of the head, offer problems at birth. Goats do not develop horns until after birth while sheep have the start of horns before they are born, particularly tup lambs. Horns that grow up off the top of the head could therefore trap the lamb's head in the ewe's pelvis or cause her to rip or tear the soft tissue around the birth canal. Therefore upward or outward growing horns must be rejected on welfare grounds. We do not want to breed sheep with upward growing horns. Look instead for horns growing backwards from the back of the head as if they are streamlined.

THE STANDARD: horns must not come up out of the top of the head like goat horns; but out of the back of the head.



To the left, horns growing from the top and side of the head, to the right, from the back of the head



It is also worthy of note that horns can break off, most often in lambs but old sheep can get brittle bones in their horns and the horns themselves can crack and they can break off. In general a sheep should not be rejected because of an environmental or physical damage to its horn. However if an old tup breaks off one horn, the weight of the other would cause it discomfort and the owner should be encouraged to remove the other horn to balance the head.

Apart from the welfare reasons above, the WWSS discourage horns that grow out too widely from the face, it is felt that such sheep look primitive but more importantly experienced hill shepherds don't like sheep smashing their wide horns into the backs of the shepherd's legs when working in pens with them. Please note this is a minor choice it is not a requirement and Woodland ewes should not be rejected just for having wide horns alone, but when taken with a second minor fault, is enough to disqualify the sheep.



Ewe on the left has horns that are a bit too wide, those of the ewe on the right are fine; if the ewe on the left is otherwise good, then this would not be enough for a fail, but with any other minor faults (narrow shoulders for example), it could become a fail because they come off the top of the head and are too wide.

THE STANDARD: Both sexes are horned strongly; the rams having heavily spiralled horns.

We note here that some breeders believe in a slightly different approach, they believe that sheep with horns that grow into the head should be discouraged altogether because horns that are too close to the face present welfare issues. Remember, inward facing horns should be slabbed

White Faces and Legs

THE STANDARD: The face and legs are mainly white, although a little speckling is permissible. The skin of the muzzle may be wholly or partly pink.

Note: the WWSS have moved on from this standard and now insist that all Woodland tups must be white faced (pink nosed) and have virtually no speckling at all. Some light speckling in the ewes is permissible.

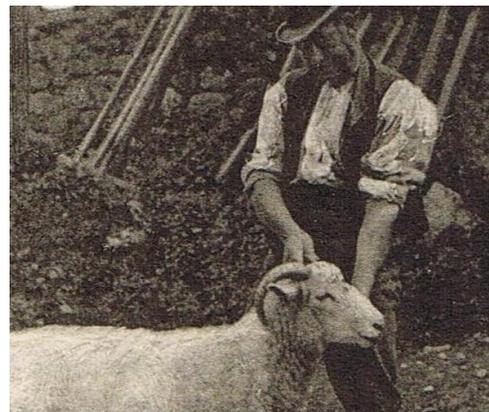
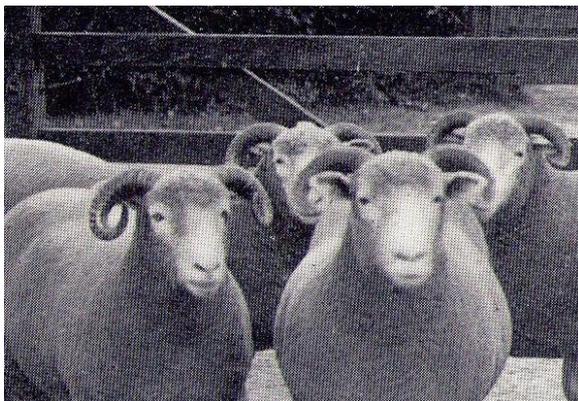
Showing sheep need to be white faced and pink nosed, but when inspecting sheep for registration purposes a little light speckling is perfectly acceptable in ewes on the nose tip and around the eyes. Larger black spots are not permitted on any sheep whether on faces or legs, but black on the hoof is acceptable for registration purposes.



The sheep on the left is unacceptable; the one on the right is acceptable

It is worthy of note that many older, more experienced Woodland breeders have observed that pink feet are more prone to Foot Rot than those with black colouration, therefore, while frowned upon, black hooves should not be penalised. The Limestone sheep of Westmorland had pink feet and they died out as a breed because of foot rot problems; we will be doing the breed a disservice if we concentrate on breeding only sheep without any dark colouration on their hooves.

Tufts on the Head



Left: Dorset Horn ewes. Right: Limestone ewe, both pictures from early 20th century.

It has long been known that at some point in the past Dorset Horn was bred into Woodlands, and before that probably Limestone sheep too. Both of these other breeds will have added characteristics that Woodland breeders have been trying to breed out of the breed for some years, especially very tight horns and tufts on the head. This however is considered a minor fault in ewes and if the ewe has no other minor faults then she should be passed, under the inspection regime. However tufts on a tup's forehead will not be accepted.

Only shearlings and older sheep should be inspected so that the true adult form of the sheep can be seen; lambs may grow out of tufts.



Top: this tup lamb has a tuft on its head, if as a shearing the tuft remains, it would be a fail in a tup, but only become a fail in a ewe when taken in with another minor fault, such as bad horns.



The ewe on the right is heavily tufted on the head, this is a minor fault, but taken with the wide horns and low pasterns, it would be a fail.



The ewe on the left has a similar tuft and conformation to the one above, but better horns; she would be a pass. As a minor fault the tuft is only a fail, when in conjunction with another minor fault.

Wool

There are two ways of looking at the wool, both have merit. Commercial breeders (who tend to be in the Hill Register) want their sheep to be hardy and able to survive on the hill. They require sheep to have a shorter, denser coat that is weather proof, called a tight skin. Other breeders point out the influence of the Merino in improving the quality and value of the wool (these breeders tend to be in the CFB) and require their Woodlands to have higher quality wool, which tends to be longer finer and more open. The two standards are not mutually exclusive, and it is possible for the wool to be tight, fine and long, but this is unusual. Normally, higher quality wool is fine and long and this tends to be an open fleece. Also "tighter skinned" sheep, that is ones with a very tight fleece, tend to have shorter coarser wool. So when inspecting sheep for the Hill Register, inspectors need to favour sheep with tight fleeces or "tighter skinned" sheep, but when inspecting sheep for the Supplementary Register, inspectors may favour sheep with a long, fine staple.

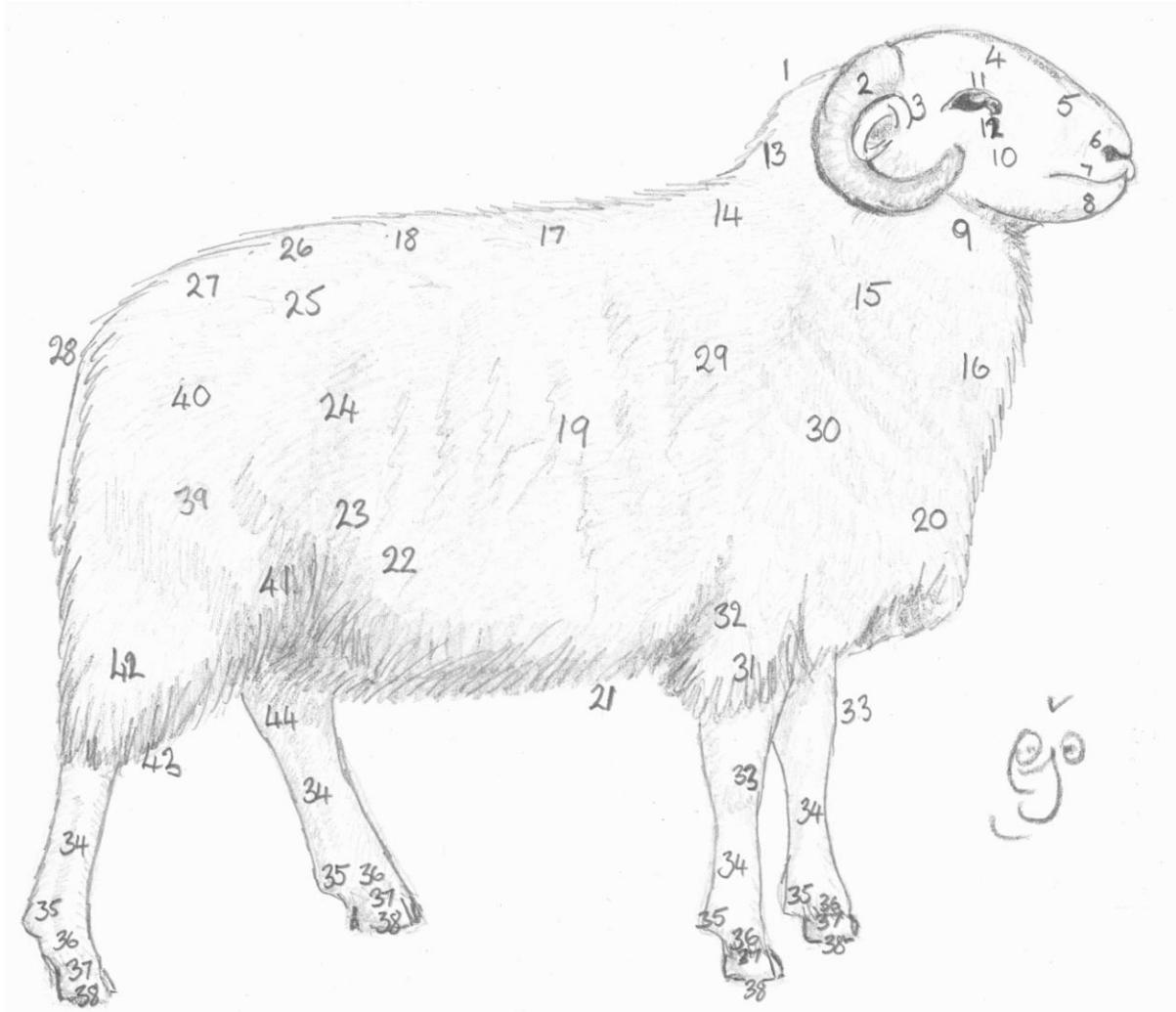


Left: a tight skin, note no parting. Right: fine long wool (winner of best fleece GYS) note the central parting

The important thing to note is the absence of kemp. Kemp is coarse hair and is most often seen in the legs, breech and belly (and sometimes in a “beard” down the chest of the animal; actually it does not grow from the chin, but grows down the chest of some sheep in a line). Wild sheep, goats and deer have long guard hair with soft under wool. The outer hair helps shed water and provides pigmentation for breeding or camouflage. The under wool provides an insulation layer, it also has waterproofing qualities because it holds natural oils (lanolin) that prevent the wild animal from chilling when wet. In the domestic sheep, man has bred out (or is still trying to) the outer coarse hairs as we only really want the inner wool for its textile qualities. The value of a wool clip will be reduced if kemp is found, however fine the wool is, therefore any sheep showing a lot of kemp should be rejected. A small amount of kemp, especially when confined to one area such as the bottom of the legs, in ewes is to be tolerated in an otherwise good sheep.

Coarse manes or “beards” in any sheep (more often seen in tups) should be discouraged.

Appendix 1



The Anatomy of a Whitefaced Woodland

Anatomy of a woody, based on Prof. R. P. Wright's (1910) *"The Standard Cyclopedia of Modern Agriculture"*

1. Occiput	4. Forehead	7. Mouth	10. Cheek
2. Horn	5. Nose	8. Chin	11. Eye + Lids
3. Ear	6. Nostril	9. Throat	12. Infra Orbital Sinus

Neck

13. Nape	14. Hinder part	15. Throat	16. Dewlap
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Trunk

17. Back	20. Brisket	23. Flank	26. Croup
18. Loin	21. Fore Flank	24. Depression over Paunch	27. Haunch or Hip
19. Side	22. Belly	25. Rump	28. Tail

Fore Limbs

29. Shoulder	32. Elbow	35. Pastern Joint	38. Hoof
30. Shoulder Joint	33. Knee	36. Pastern	
31. Forearm	34. Shin	37. Coronet	

Hind Limbs

39. Thigh or Quarter	41. Stifle Joint	43. Hock Joint
40. Hip Joint	42. Leg	44. Hock

From the hock down the parts of the hind limbs are the same as for the fore limbs.