The Ponies of Cefn Bryn

Mountain ponies have grazed on Cefn Bryn for centuries and in 1910 Arthur Davies registered Section A ponies with the Welsh Mountain Pony and Cob Society. These were among the first Welsh Mountain Ponies to be registered in the area and all the animals were given the prefix “Cefn” as they are still. His son Colin, who many of you know, was born in 1926 and since childhood would accompany his father to check on the ponies on Cefn Bryn. Then when he was nine years old the family moved to Bryn View where he still lives and works with the ponies. For several generations Colin’s family have had Commoner’s rights and over the generations have helped to manage the habitat of the Bryn by the action of the ponies. Their importance in trampling down the bracken, and using their front hooves to bruise the gorse so they can bite off the young shoots, do vital work in maintaining this important habitat.

Colin was made Honorary Vice President of the Welsh Pony and Cob Society in 2008 in recognition of his service to the Society and to the Welsh breeds. The long tradition of managing ponies and cobs on Gower is continuing to this day. The whole family are involved in their care and from a young age Colin’s daughters Susan and Irene, both took an active interest. Colin’s grand-daughter Alyson was born in Reynoldston and still lives in the house where she grew up with her late parents, Howard and Irene. She works alongside her grandfather in managing the ponies on the hill and has exhibited in the show ring. Irene was a very active member of the Cefn Bryn Pony Improvement Society, and like her father, a member of the panel of judges for the Welsh breeds. Since Irene’s death, Philippa Grove has made a vital contribution in ensuring the stud administration has been kept in good order.

Cefn ponies have won many awards over the years. In fact, since the animals were first registered they have won numerous prizes in shows all over the country - The Royal Show, The Royal Welsh, the Three Counties Show and many, many more.

The animals live to a good age, sometimes to 25 years or more. The majority foal and live their whole lives on the Bryn, but need a fair bit of care and attention throughout their lives. Since 2006 any ponies born must be microchipped by a vet by the time they are one year old and also require a passport for any movement around the country or abroad - an expensive business at around £35 per foal. They also need worming although this is not so great a problem for animals on the Bryn due to the salt in the sea air.

There are also a number of dangers which the animals are exposed to. One is obviously the traffic, which becomes a much greater problem when the pretty ponies are encouraged near the road by people feeding them, often from their cars.

Another danger is the dumping of mown grass which can give the animals colic, thereby poisoning them. There have even been pony rustlers, attempting to lead off a couple of ponies a few years ago and it was only the prompt action of Alyson which prevented this theft. Ponies sadly are also occasionally dumped on Cefn Bryn, which can be a danger to the Cefn stud as abandoned young stallions can upset the controlled breeding of the ponies.

All together there are about 80 ponies in the stud, all pedigree. They have a superb temperament which makes them perfect riding ponies particularly for children. Many are sold for driving, showing, riding and most importantly breeding and have in the past gone as far as Ireland, Holland, Australia, Germany and the USA - in 1956 for example, Cefn Susan was the first of Colin’s ponies to be exported to the USA where she subsequently won many championships.

This piece could go on much longer - in fact I think I could have filled the magazine with the story of the Davies family and the Cefn Bryn ponies and cobs. I must say I very much enjoyed talking to Alyson, Susan and Colin and thank them for the information they let me use. We all love to see the ponies on Cefn Bryn and their story is a long and fascinating one - I hope you enjoyed reading it too.