

Hill sheep farm



A ewe and her newly-born lamb



Sheep in the snow. Feeding sheep can be a big problem in harsh winters

Right: A hill sheep farm in the Lake District

Sheep farms are often found in hilly areas of Britain such as the mountains and hills of Central Wales, the Lake District, the Pennines and the Highlands of Scotland. In these places the slopes are too steep, the soils too thin and poor and the weather too severe for large-scale crop growing.



Local stones are used for the farm house and buildings. In the background are the hills and 'fells' where the sheep graze on open moorland during the summer. On the lower slopes the fields are bounded by stone walls or hedges and trees. Most of the fields always have grass growing in them. Some are used to grow fodder crops for the animals or sown with temporary grass in rotation with other crops. Some of the grass in these fields is cut for hay or for silage and fed to the sheep. Silage is grass which is stored in a large airtight container called a 'silo'.

Some of the breeds of British hill sheep are Blackface, Welsh, Herdwick and Swaledale. They all have to be tough to survive the harsh winters and heavy snow that can fall in the mountains. They also all have to be able to walk long distances over the steep hillsides looking for grazing land.

The sheep are brought down from the hills during the winter and kept near the farm buildings until lambing. Mating takes place in November, and the lambs are born the following spring in April. The ewes and their lambs are then taken into the hills for the summer. With the help of his sheepdogs the farmer brings them in for dipping against insects and pests in June or July. He brings them in again for the market sales in the nearby town in the autumn. Here they may be sold to lowland farmers for fattening up for sale as lamb. The main income from the hill farm is from the sale of wool and lambs.

The farm buildings are small and fairly simple. There is no need for expensive machinery, fertilizers or seed. Few people are needed to run the farm, but dogs are essential! Costs are low, but so are profits. Many young people find the life hard and lonely, and there are fewer hill farms now than there used to be.

- 1 What are some of the differences between the relief of the land and the weather in these areas of hill sheep farming and those of arable farming in eastern England as shown in the photographs on page 31?
- 2 List all the features in the photograph of the hill farm that are mentioned in the description.
- 3 Draw a diagram of the sheep farmer's year similar to that on page 30.
- 4 What are the names of the hill and mountain areas shown on the map on page 28?
- 5 What do you think you would like and dislike about being the son or daughter of a hill sheep farmer?



Above: Shearing sheep



Sheep auction

Land use, hill slope, soil and drainage

