

Although we know very well that cattle of the Iron Age and medieval periods in particular were very small, it is difficult to envisage them, even with the aid of the famous sculpture of the Iron Age ploughman and his beasts housed at Newcastle-upon-Tyne Museum. The large Friesian dairy cows to be seen in every other pasture form a rather easier mental image. To see live, and afterwards to examine the skeleton of, a dwarf Dexter steer was therefore a salutary experience. Unfortunately I do not have the actual dimensions of the live animal or its weight, but the dressed carcass weighed 109kg (240lb). The animal was a pedigree Dexter, destined for sale as a breeding bull. However, at the end of his first year of life his owner decided he was not growing properly and had him castrated. Thereafter he grew hardly at all, and was eventually slaughtered at three years old, thus having the sort of life history which an historical animal might have had.

The animal was probably a pituitary dwarf, and therefore not entirely normal. The flesh was pale, reminiscent of veal, but inordinately tough. There was very little body fat. Bone maturation was late and the metapodials and distal tibia had unfused epiphyses, but it was not likely that much further increase in length was going to take place. Bone measurements were as given below. Compared with archaeological specimens, the bones gave an impression of shortness. Apart from the metacarpals, which had taken their size and shape before the animal was castrated, the bones seemed to have a more slender form than those of other modern breeds.

'Ugly one too¹, the name of this animal, had a little brother. He is now 20 months old and has a withers height of 0.74 m (29 in). He was left entire and reached puberty at 18 months. I am not likely to get his bones, though he will be of some value in a childrens' zoo or similar establishment.

Bone measurements (in mm; abbreviations follow von den Driesch, A. (1976) guide to the measurement of animal bones from archaeological sites).

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| Humerus | GL 220; Bp 83; Bd | | GL 35; Bp 25; Bd 22; |
| Radius | GL 213; Bp 76; Bd | SD 36; | GL 35; Bp 26; Bd 22; |
| Metacarpals | GL 150; Bp 55; Bd | SD 30; | GL 36; Bp 27; Bd 24; |
| | GL 149; Bp 54; Bd | | GL 36; Bp 26; Bd 22; |
| 1st Phalanges | GLpe Bp 28; Bd | | GL 36; Bp 28; Bd 23; |
| | GLpe Bp 28; Bd | | GL 37; Bp 27; Bd 25; |
| | GLpe Bp 27; Bd | Femur | GL Bp 83; Bd 82; SD 34; |
| | GLpe Bp 27; Bd | Tibia | GL Bp 85; Bd 59; |
| | GLpe Bp 27; Bd | Metatarsals | GL Bp 47; Bd 47; SD 25; |
| | GLpe Bp 27; Bd | | GL Bp 46; Bd 48; SD 25; |
| | GLpe Bp 26; Bd | Scapula | HS GLP 52; 5LC 48; |
| | GLpe Bp 26; Bd | Pelvis | IA 60; |
| 2nd | GL 35; Bp 27; Bd | Calcaneum | GL |
| | GL 35; Bp 25; Bd | Astragalus | GL1 GLm 55; Bd 40; |