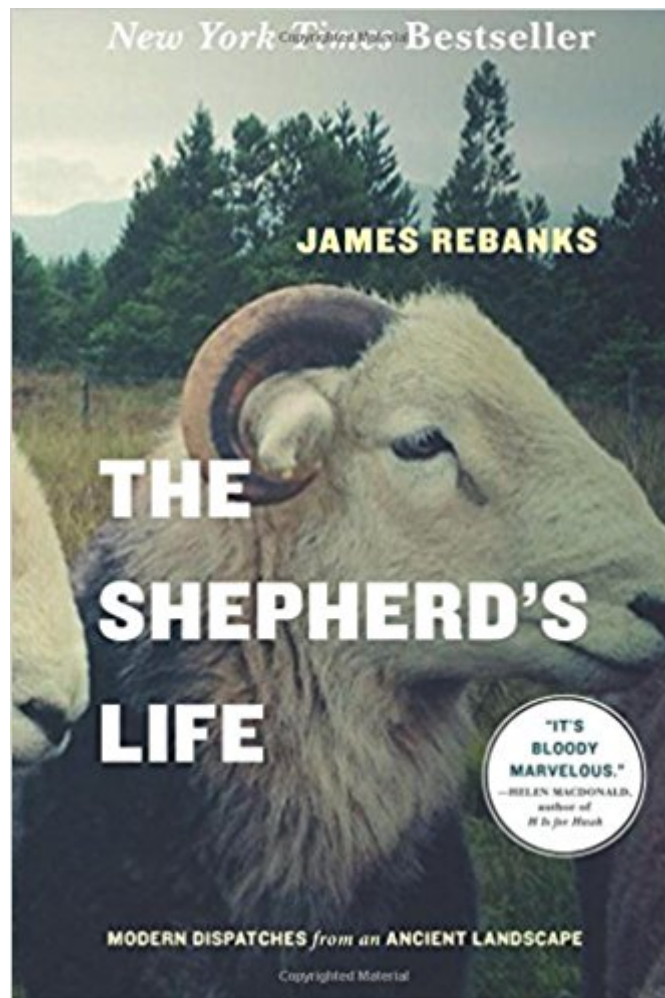




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The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches From An Ancient Landscape



Synopsis

The New York Times bestseller and International Phenomenon One of the Top Ten Books of 2015, Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times. "It's bloody marvelous." - Helen Macdonald, New York Times bestselling author of *H IS FOR HAWK* "Captivating... A book about continuity and roots and a sense of belonging in an age that's increasingly about mobility and self-invention. Hugely compelling." - Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times Some people's lives are entirely their own creations. James Rebanks' isn't. The first son of a shepherd, who was the first son of a shepherd himself, his family have lived and worked in the Lake District of Northern England for generations, further back than recorded history. It's a part of the world known mainly for its romantic descriptions by Wordsworth and the much loved illustrated children's books of Beatrix Potter. But James' world is quite different. His way of life is ordered by the seasons and the work they demand. It hasn't changed for hundreds of years: sending the sheep to the fells in the summer and making the hay; the autumn fairs where the flocks are replenished; the grueling toil of winter when the sheep must be kept alive, and the light-headedness that comes with spring, as the lambs are born and the sheep get ready to return to the hills and valleys. *The Shepherd's Life* the story of a deep-rooted attachment to place, modern dispatches from an ancient landscape that describe a way of life that is little noticed and yet has profoundly shaped the landscape over time. In evocative and lucid prose, James Rebanks takes us through a shepherd's year, offering a unique account of rural life and a fundamental connection with the land that most of us have lost. It is a story of working lives, the people around him, his childhood, his parents and grandparents, a people who exist and endure even as the culture - of the Lake District, and of farming - changes around them. Many memoirs are of people working desperately hard to leave a place. This is the story of someone trying desperately hard to stay.

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Customer Reviews

“Captivating... A book about continuity and roots and a sense of belonging in an age that’s increasingly about mobility and self-invention. Hugely compelling” — Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* “It’s bloody marvelous.” — Helen Macdonald, *New York Times* bestselling author of *H IS FOR HAWK* “Rebanks’s family has farmed sheep in the hills of the lake District, in northwestern England, for some six centuries. The work, detailed lovingly in this memoir, has changed little | Rebanks is concerned with the survival of the landscape, of the life that it has fostered, and of its inhabitants’ view of the world.” — *The New Yorker* “James Rebanks’s unsentimental, sharply detailed memoir about his life as a shepherd in England’s Lake District gripped me from the first page.” — *The Wall Street Journal* “James Rebanks’s life stands in blissful earthbound contrast. Farming the high fells of the Lake District, the first son of a shepherd, who was himself the first son of a shepherd, Mr. Rebanks writes with loving eloquence about a kind of deep-rooted life that is all but lost in the developed world. Herdwick sheep, the local breed, are set free to graze on unfenced commons and could head off to Scotland were they not hefted — tied to their home range by invisible bonds of instinct and inheritance. Mr. Rebanks is himself hefted to his land and deftly conveys the worth and beauty of such a connection.” — Geraldine Brooks “A gorgeous book, unsentimental but exultant, vivid and profound, and a fierce defense of small-scale farming against the twin threats of agribusiness and tourism.” — *National Geographic* “A powerful — and quietly electrifying — meditation on the gruelling truth of rural life... Rebanks’ prose is beautifully sure-footed.” — *The Sunday Times (UK)* “Rebanks’ enthusiasm and talent for poetic writing is infectious... [His] words create not only a gorgeous landscape painting of the Lake District and its inhabitants, human, animal, bird and fish, but also a useful social document... What is most striking about this book is its authenticity; this is the real thing.” — *The Times (UK)* “Beautifully written” — Alan Cumming, *New York Times* Bestselling author of *NOT MY FATHER’S SON* “May well do for sheep what Helen Macdonald did for hawks.” — *The Guardian (UK)* “Superstar Shepherd.” — *The Daily Mail (UK)* “Affectionate, evocative, illuminating. A

story of survival - of a flock, a landscape and a disappearing way of life. I love this book

• Nigel Slater, author of the internationally bestselling *Toast: The Story of a Boy*,
Hunger and Tender

• Rebanks writes about his native Lake District with a loving eye for its past and present, its working denizens--humans, dogs, sheep--who continue to shape our picture of what Pastoralism is.

• Brad Kessler, author of *Goat Song*

• “The Shepherd’s Life weaves together the human history of the farmers with factual history of the farms, the spiritual pull of the land with the physical demands it makes, the cruelty and beauty, optimism and pragmatism of the most beautiful corner of the world. A vivid, honest, unforgettably written account not just of one shepherd’s year, but of an ancient way of life.

• Lucy Dillon, author of *LOST DOGS* and *LONELY HEARTS*

• “THE SHEPHERD’S LIFE is a reader’s delight. Rebanks lives, breathes, and works his landscape - which gives him an inside edge as sharp as shears over most of the flock of current countryside writers. He has written a marvelous autobiography - of himself, his family, and the hills themselves.

• John Lewis-Stempel, author of *MEADOWLAND* and *YOUNG JAMES HERRIOT: THE MAKING OF THE WORLD’S MOST FAMOUS VET*

James Rebanks runs a family-owned farm in the Lake District in northern England. A graduate of Oxford University, James works as an expert advisor to UNESCO on sustainable tourism. He uses his popular Twitter feed - @herdyshepherd1 - to share updates on the shepherding year. The *Shepherd’s Life* is his first book.

THE SHEPHERD’S LIFE: MODERN DISPATCHES FROM AN ANCIENT LANDSCAPE by James Rebanks is a stunning book. I couldn’t put it down (and not only because I raise sheep myself). What I do - on a tiny hobby farm in Maine, USA - is not even remotely comparable to Mr. Rebanks’ occupation and lifestyle. (We both love sheep though!) While reading, I kept pausing and thinking of all the James Herriot books I read and reread years ago. The tone and style and passion of the writing is similar - the love and respect of the land, the landscape itself, the enthusiasm and joy for daily farming and shepherding tasks - these thoughts leap out of the pages at you, embrace you and don’t let you go. Several of my students and co-workers (I, too, needed a money-paying job) used to ask me: Why did I have sheep and chickens and a big garden? Why did I have muddy shoes sometimes at school? How come pieces of hay dropped out of my hair sometimes? Why learn to spin and weave wool? Don’t I know about Wal-Mart? Isn’t that where food comes

from? I tried to explain that the animals, the plants, and the work kept me grounded and in touch with the earth, the seasons, life itself. But this thought process and lifestyle is hard to explain and justify to most people - children or adults. That is why I am so pleased to have discovered this book. It will always be on my shelf and referred to often. Some of my favorite passages revolve around the attempt to justify a choice of lifestyle and profession and the attempts to resolve living and working in a revered landscape. The words that come to mind when thinking about this book are - passion (#1), love of animals, love and respect of the land, tradition, history, connectivity to surroundings, a sense of community, cooperation and compromise, reflections, mind-numbing work. I do like the short chapters and blog-style writing. I do enjoy Mr. Rebanks's Twitter account. @herdyshepherd1 He is a great photographer. I do enjoy the reflections and musings of Mr. Rebanks about land use, landscapes, love of tradition, love of family and love of sheep and farming. I do highly recommend this book.

Especially now, the chaotic start of 2017, this book will calm and enlighten you about an imperiled way of life: the hard work of raising sheep for meat and wool in England's Lake District. The work with amazing dogs who can alone bring down stranded sheep from crags and deep ravines, the all-generation family involved in the work, the history of sheep farms in the region and the effect of tourism and climate change on the seasons and the sheep. Rebanks himself is the fourth-generation sheep farmer who went off to Oxford on a scholarship, now runs the ancestral farm and some neighboring leased farmland, raising children who all get involved at some level with the relentless work: breeding, lambing, dipping, shearing, safeguarding through harsh winters. A lovely book.

A friend recommended that I read this book, so I picked it up. I'm not usually a memoir guy and have no connection to or previous interest in the habits of shepherds or their sheep. I didn't expect to like this. But I did. A lot. I enjoyed the way Rebanks structured the narrative - following the four seasons of a Shepherd's life (Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer) while weaving in a narrative of the different seasons of his own life. I have never set foot on a sheep farm, but I came to identify with world he described: the cycles of work and rest, the family blessing and family tension, the need to prove yourself... I also came to long for many aspects of his experience: the deep connection to the land (being hefted) and to the people who lived on it and worked it before you, the deep and real sense of community with (the few) others who know and have experienced your life, and the ability to watch your decisions play out over a long period of time in order to both learn and

improve your skill. This is not a sentimental look at the shepherding life. It is full of joy and family - but it is also realistic in its descriptions of the landscape, the work, and the people who dwell in it. Like his farm, after you walk through this, you will look down and see that you have muck on your shoes. And if you are like me, you'll be glad you do.

An immersion into a way of life requiring strength, fortitude and a deep commitment to a way of life completely outside the cognition of most of the industrial world. Deprivation and sacrifice characterize daily life but the cultural and societal rewards seemingly compensate for the economic and physical hardship. The complex relationship between sheep and shepherd and the annual cycles in the landscape are enthralling. The defensive tone of the author sometimes undermines the rich narrative.

This is a great book. Like just about everyone else in the world, I presumed the Wordsworth description of shepherds - sitting around all day in a field watching sheep eat grass - was about it. Instead, this book gives a very zen-like sense of the immediacy, the hard work, and the sense of history and tradition these families experience. A wonderful book in a time of electronic numbness.

I read this on a visit to Cumbria, U.K., which made my visit to this beautiful rural county so much richer. It's sheep country and this delightful, but sometimes heart-breaking memoir, made viewing the wonderful Herdwick and Swaledale sheep with new lambs really meaningful. But you don't have to plan a trip to north Britain to enjoy this book; you only have to be curious about the life of a sheepman, who loves his lifestyle. Highly recommended.

This is a beautiful book. The life of a shepherd as described is hard and beautiful in equal measure. James Rebanks tells the story of his life from child to man with great sensitivity and clarity. I read the Kindle edition and am going to get the book itself because I want to hold it in my hands.

I first came across this book in the library and then had to buy it for myself. I've since bought copies as gifts for others. So interesting, this inside look at a surprisingly well-preserved lifestyle. Very well written - candid, thoughtful, and intelligent.

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