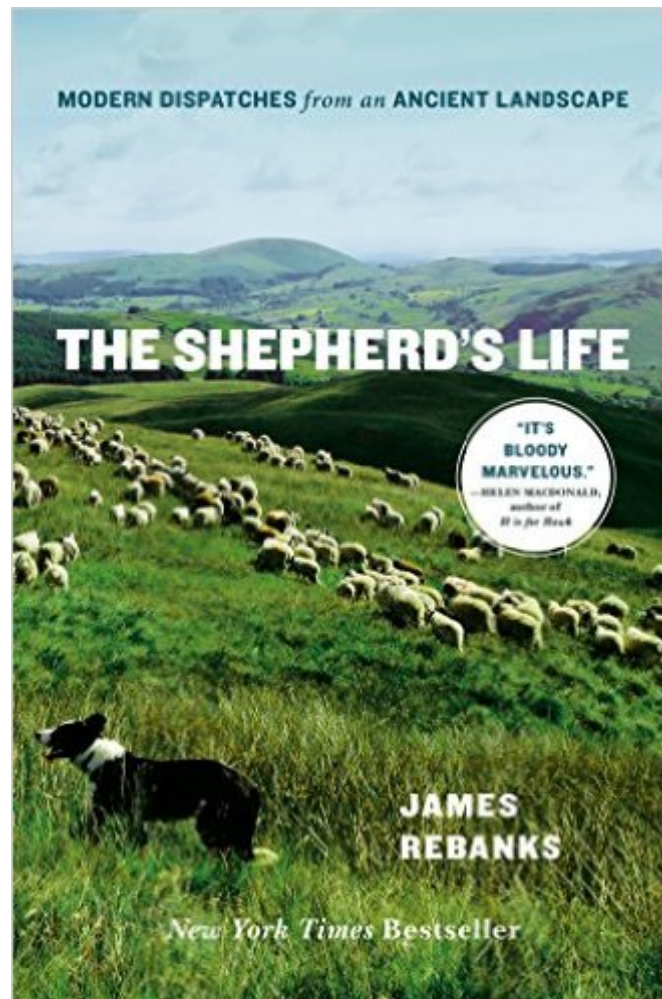


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The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches From An Ancient Landscape



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I wanted to love this book, because I think that James Rebanks' primary message is an important one: that young people can and should be able to view their past as an advantage; that they should take pride in their traditional ways of life rather than being taught to be ashamed of it and encouraged to abandon it in favor of some urban ideal. Moreover, I think that too many of us do precisely what Rebanks describes: we drive through a scenic landscape, appreciating its beauty but ignoring the people who work there -- treating it as a playground. I can't quite relate to the depths of the fury he experiences in school when he is presented with this view of his world by outsiders who "had an ownership claim ... based on principles I barely understood" to the same land that he, his father and grandfather and their ancestors had farmed for centuries -- a view that excluded them. Decades later, Rebanks has set out to redress that act of cultural appropriation. He has only partially succeeded, but that doesn't mean that this isn't worth reading. You'll just need to temper your expectations. First of all, the book has grown out of the author's successful Twitter account. If you expect this to be about how a Lake District shepherd learns to handle technology and tap into the wider world via the Internet -- if your mental image is of an isolated shepherd on the fells tapping out Tweets to connect with the wider universe -- you may want to correct that image, sharpish. Firstly, Rebanks isn't an isolated shepherd but part of a closely-knit community of sheep farmers in his part of the Lake District; moreover, his second job, working with UNESCO, has taken him as far afield as China. And there's no mention of Twitter here.

I was interested in this book because it's set in the Lake District of Northern England--a more rugged and difficult area--and it's about shepherding. I'm a hobby (small scale, not primarily for profit) farmer in America and got a degree in college in animal science, but we didn't learn much about sheep so I was curious. A little over half of the book specifically talked about shepherding and the rest was about the author's life, relationships, and opinions. PROS: The book was an interesting, fast read and did give me a better knowledge of the Lake District and the fell style of shepherding (which is unique). His descriptions brought his way of life vividly alive to me, but I'm not sure how much of that was simply because I'm a farmer and have had similar experiences. CONS: The book is a collection of very short stories. Each entry--or chapter--read like a short blog post and was

generally only a paragraph or two long. They were grouped by related themes, but these chapters often jumped all over in time, tense used, and subject. It was like snapshots of someone's life that were mixed together rather than a narrative of life along a timeline or grouped by specific topics. Since each story was very short, it was easy to set the book down at any time. Overall, it was an interesting and informative book. But realize that it's about modern shepherding. In America, someone who does small-scale farming around a heritage breed and who holds a secondary, non-farming job to bring in the money to make it possible would be called a hobby farmer. The author is essentially the same thing, using modern equipment and technology in his shepherding and needing a secondary, non-farming job. However, he views himself as shepherding in the traditional ways.

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