



Yan, Tyan, Tethera

Lancashire photographer Neal Andrews spent more than six months recording life in the raw on a hill farm in the Grisedale Valley

Left: Sunset on the hillside
Below: Ewes after tugging



Set in the Grisedale Valley, Braesteds has been a working hill farm for more than 200 years, but today it is managed by Paul Renison, a modern-day farm manager and shepherd.

He lives there with his partner, Nic, and their baby daughters, Belle and Poppy. Along with his farm hand, Andrew, and a team of very capable sheep dogs, Paul manages a livestock of more than 1,000 sheep and herds of Simmental and Belted Galloway cows.

Like many farms they have diversified by converting part of the farm to a B&B, exploiting the farm's location on the popular Coast-to-Coast route.

As a keen fell walker, I was initially drawn to this project because I often wondered how such places survived.

Anecdotally, it is thought that since the mid-19th Century hill farms in this part of the world have declined by about three quarters, and today they face a number of challenging issues.

These include an ageing workforce and loss of skills which is accelerated by rural depopulation, youth apathy and the high cost of farmhouses and land.

If that were not enough, there is also the constant threat of livestock disease, the impact of regulation, tourism and other economic pressures such as low incomes and general economic hardship.

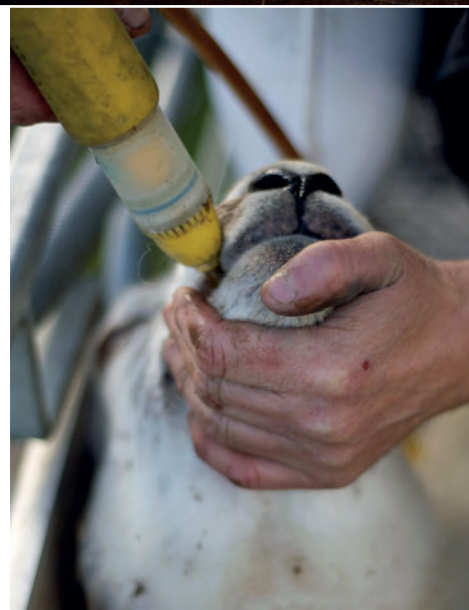
These factors threaten the sustainability of many hill farms, but they also impact upon the fabric of the rural communities and on the future maintenance of a landscape shaped >



“It is thought that since the mid-19th Century hill farms in this part of the world have declined by about three quarters”



“It is about the relationship between man, animals and the landscape”



Top: Dramatic hillside
Above: Cleaning the cowshed
Right and left: Treating the sheep
Below: Feeding the Belties



Below: Moving the flock



by farming, a landscape that tourists demand and expect.

This project was framed by the annual lambing cycle, which is, after all, the farm's raison d'être. But it is not just about that. It is about the relationship between man, animals and the landscape.

It is about the seasonal rhythms and routines of hill farming, and the hard work and dedication that is required. It is about the beauty and dominance of a rural landscape, set against the day-to-day gritty realities of agrarian lifestyles that are less well represented.

Above all, this project is a personal tribute to a farming family that is passionate about improving both the landscape and their livestock, preserving hill farming traditions and securing a sustainable future for Braesteads Farm, run by a family who have become my friends, and for whom I have the greatest admiration and respect. 🍷

* Yan, Tyan, Tethera is part of the ancient hill farmers' dialect for counting sheep

Neal Andrews is a social documentary photographer based in Manchester. This project was undertaken as part of his MA in Documentary Photography, in which he recently graduated from the University of Bolton.





Social documentary photographer Neal Andrews



The Hill Farm

As part of his MA, Manchester-based photographer **Neal Andrews**, 36, documented life throughout a lambing cycle on a hill farm in Patterdale. Here he describes the project and shares some of his images

Words and text by Neal Andrews

I'm a social documentary photographer living in Manchester and recently completed an MA at the University of Bolton. As part of the MA, which was in documentary photography, I produced The Hill Farm project and from November 2009 to May last year had the pleasure of capturing life at Braesteads Farm in Patterdale.

Set in the Grisedale Valley, Braesteads has been a working hill farm for more than 200 years and today is run by Paul Renison, who lives there with his partner Nic Francis, and their youngsters Belle and Poppy. Along with his farm hand Andrew Winter, and a team of capable dogs, Paul manages 1,000 or so sheep – Swaledales, Cheviots and the odd Herdwick – and has Simmental and Belted Galloway cattle. Part of the farm has been diversified into bed and breakfast.

As a keen fell walker, I was initially drawn



to the project because I'd often wondered how such farms survived. I'd been told that since the mid-19th century hill farms in Cumbria had declined by about three quarters and that socio-economic pressures threatened the sustainability of many of the remainder.

The viability of the hill farms has an impact, of course, on the wider rural community and on the maintenance of a landscape shaped by farming and which the county's millions of tourists expect to see.

The Cumbria Farmer Network kindly emailed their members for me and Paul and Nic got in touch. From the outset they welcomed me with open arms, letting me stay over for days at a time and putting me up for free in their B&B. I witnessed incredible sights including the sheep being gathered by the dogs and Paul lambing a ewe. But what

touched me most was Paul and Nic's hospitality and openness. I was, after all, a stranger with a camera.

The project was framed by the annual lambing cycle but is also about the symbiotic relationship between farmer, animals and landscape; about the seasonal rhythms and routines of hill farming; and about the hard work and dedication required. Above all, it's my tribute to a farming family who are passionate about improving their livestock and the landscape, about preserving hill farming traditions and securing a sustainable future. [Life](#)

■ For more pictures or a video version of the story, see www.nealandrewsphotography.co.uk/hill-farm.htm
To contact Neal, tel: 07970 546302 or email neal.andrews@gmail.com.

'It's my tribute to a farming family who are passionate about improving their livestock and the landscape'