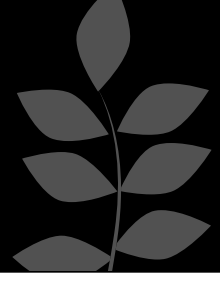


A GUIDE TO THE COUNTRYSIDE: PEOPLE WHO LIVE & WORK IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

by Hunter Adair



Introduction

The countryside and open spaces take a great deal of management every day. Many people make a living from the countryside and they do a great variety of different jobs. They work away quietly at their work every day.

No matter what part or area of the countryside you visit, you will always see and find people busy at their work. When you look closer at the type of work some people do, it is very interesting and the wide range of activities going on every day makes the countryside what it is today.

Much of the work which is done in the countryside is seasonal. The farming community work very much with the seasons which is very often controlled by the weather. The forestry workers, the National Trust workers, the River Authority workers and the National Park workers, also work with the seasons.

Gamekeepers are a group of people that work very much on their own account in the countryside and their work is very much seasonal. They work on estates of various sizes and on various small game shoots. The very biggest estates may have two or three gamekeepers, while many small estates may have a part time gamekeeper and there are many small shoots throughout the country with no gamekeepers, the shoot members do the work.

The old fashioned gamekeepers never trusted anyone. They always thought that everyone was scheming to steal their pheasants, which was utter nonsense. It was just the type of people they were. Today's gamekeepers are more open and they have to deal with the highly skilled modern poachers, or villains who will steal anything just to get some money.

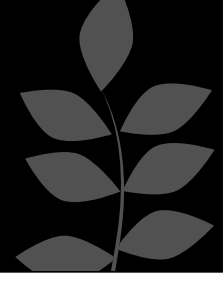
There are a number of organisations that have a great say on how parts of the countryside is managed and developed, such as The National Parks, The Countryside Commission and the National Trust are but a few and they have staff working in the countryside every day and they may operate an advisory service.

Farming is a seven day a week job looking after the animals. You just can't stop tending the animals because it is the weekend, or a holiday time. The weekend and the holiday period is when most people visit the countryside, although many school children now visit the farms and the countryside during the week.

Let me now start and tell you about some of the people that work in the countryside and what they do and also about some of the field sports in the countryside which many people from all walks of life pay money to take part in the field sports and enjoy it.

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Tom Warde-Aldam, a Land Agent who works and lives in the North of England

Would you like to be a land agent?

There are many jobs in the countryside that overlap with one another and apart from the farming and forestry there are a number of very responsible jobs in the countryside which help to manage and advise on the various aspects of the land, buildings, woodland, livestock, crops and parkland etc.

If you wish to train to be a land agent you have to be a professional surveyor. You must complete a degree or diploma course, this is followed by two years practical training with a company and then a final examination to test your competence.

Before you start thinking about doing a degree or diploma course to be a land agent you need five GCSE's at grade C, including Maths and English and two A levels. First check with the University as an advanced National Diploma or

Certificate may also be accepted. It will also be a big help if you have a little knowledge of the countryside and you have a liking for the rural lifestyle. As you have to deal all the time with people, it will also help you if you get on well with people.

Although some land agents work in private for some small landowners, there are fewer and fewer estates large enough to employ their own land agents directly, so they employ a firm which can offer a widespread of expertise that an individual resident agent couldn't possibly hope to cover.

We live in a rapidly-changing environment and it has become almost impossible for one person to be master of all facets of the estate business.

There are also the scope for employment with several company landowners, such as the Water, Gas, Electricity and British Rail. There are also the National Parks, the National Trust and English Nature which may also provide work for land agents. There may also be work abroad for land agents with agricultural experience among cattle and crops. Among the rural Practising surveyors there are specialists in their own field. However, there is a lot of work which overlaps among them.

So what does a land agent actually do? They are employed to manage estate property for individuals and for companies. They advise on the sale and development of farm land, woodland, buildings and livestock.

They also deal with farm rents and the letting of farms on the estate. They also advise on new farm buildings, or on the alterations being carried out to existing farm buildings, or to farm cottages. They may also advise on the rotational crops that are grown on the estate.

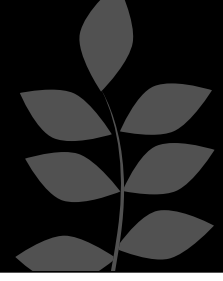
Some land agents may also advise on the sporting and fishing rights on some estates. Many land agents take part in all the various country sports themselves. There is a great variety of interesting work being a land agent.



A Northumberland National Park Officer at Haltwhistle with a farmer

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Sheep being collected in a crate for easy handling.

The Shepherd

Shepherds are a similar breed of men or woman to gamekeepers. They both work on their own account and at certain times of the year they work very long hours.

You have to be very interested in sheep to become a shepherd. It is a profession in its own right and can be a very lonely occupation. You also have to be able to work on your own and if you decide to be a hill shepherd, then you are most likely to have a great deal of walking to do in all weathers, although many shepherds now use quad bikes to look their sheep.

At one time it was only men that were employed as shepherds, probably because it was thought the job wasn't suitable for a female. The thought of a female being away out on the hill tops on her own was just not the done thing. It was also thought a female couldn't man handle the sheep the same as a man could. This is just nonsense, as there are quite a number of female shepherds working out on the highest hills today, that are doing a first class job and are every bit as capable as men at handling a flock of 1500 sheep.

At certain times of the year most shepherds need help. When they clip the wool of the sheep in the spring or summer and when they are dipping the sheep against the disease "Sheep Scab". Lambing time is also a very busy time for the shepherds, they have to work nearly round the clock during the lambing season. If the shepherd is married his wife or the partner may help with the lambing. Many shepherds and farmers lamb the flocks themselves.

When it comes to the summer clipping most shepherds with big flocks of sheep need help. Each hill shepherd will have certain days in the summer when they clip their sheep. This will depend a great deal in the weather, as you can't clip sheep when they are wet or when it's wet weather.

The farm staff, or the neighbouring shepherds will come along and help, in return the shepherds will go and help his neighbour to clip their sheep. I have many times visited a hill farm when the shepherd and farm staff were busy clipping the wool from the sheep round the back of the farm in the sheep pens. Two or three people would be clipping the sheep, while one or two more people would be sorting out the sheep and wrapping each wool fleece. The wool fleece would then be put into large sacks which then would be delivered to the wool factory.

Dipping the sheep is another busy time for the shepherds. By law all sheep have to be dipped with a recognised chemical between September and November the same year against the disease "Sheep Scab". Sheep scab is a skin disease and is caused by a certain member of a small insect known as "Acari". The Scab is also known in other animals such as dogs as the "Mange", where the dogs lose much of their body hair.

The sheep are collected into the sheep pens and then one at a time the sheep are dipped into a bath which is filled with a sheep scab approved chemical dip. Each sheep must be immersed in the bath for not less than one minute and the head and ears of the sheep must be immersed at least once to have them dipped properly.



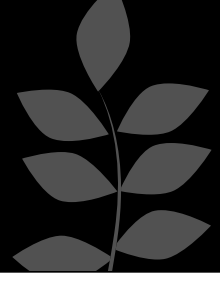
Sorting sheep in their pens



6000 sheep being driven with several dogs

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The gamekeeper checking over his grouse butts on the moor.

Gamekeepers

There are various types of gamekeepers throughout the country. There are the gamekeepers that look after and manage the Scottish red deer away out on the high hills. There are also the gamekeepers that manage the grouse moors, and there are the gamekeepers that manage and look after the pheasant and partridge shoots.

There are also many part time gamekeepers that look after the game birds and do a very good job on many small shoots. You are more likely to see the pheasant gamekeepers than the hill and moorland keepers, as the pheasant gamekeepers are normally on lower ground and are nearer to country villages and towns.

You may be lucky if you are out on the moors, or on the Scottish hills to bump into the gamekeepers. They are never far away from their patch and can be anywhere at any time managing their shoots.

No matter what gamekeepers you happen to meet, they all have different skills and their jobs not as easy as one thinks. You may see a gamekeeper walking about in a county village in his tweed suit and you think I could do his job. To become a gamekeeper you have to learn the skills of the job which can take many years. Take the gamekeeper on a grouse moor for instance, he has many jobs to sort out and do. His main job is to manage the moor and to provide a good crop of grouse for his employer and his guests.

To achieve this the gamekeeper has to be out on the moor at the break of daylight ever morning. He may be cleaning out some water streams which may have got partly blocked with sheep walking through them. The grouse need a fresh supply of water every day to keep them healthy. The gamekeeper will also have his grouse butts to repair, this job alone can take a good part of the summer. He will also have to burn strips of old rank heather on the moor at certain times of the year to keep the young heather coming along for the grouse.

The moor gamekeeper can burn the old rank heather between the 1st October and the 14th April the following year. This is normally done in rotation about every 15 years and is the basis on which the healthy grouse stocks are founded. The gamekeeper will also have the moor roads and bridges to repair so that the landrovers and guests can get out onto the moors. The grouse shooting season starts on the 1st August until the 10th of December the same year.

The vermin also have to be controlled on the moors and this task takes quite some time. The gamekeeper will also put grit out on various parts of the moor, as the grouse need a supply of grit which helps them digest the heather and the mosses they eat. Also on the moor the gamekeeper has to get on well with the farmers that graze sheep on the moors and that's not always easy. Grouse are wild birds on the moor which are not hand reared. The weather, disease and vermin such as foxes, eagles, crows, stoats and weasels all prey on the grouse. But the grouse are very hardy birds and can soon recover when they are very near to extinction on some moors. The gamekeeper on a pheasant shoot also has many different jobs to do. Most pheasants are hand reared which the gamekeeper has to tend to daily in the rearing pens which he keeps as near to his house or cottage as he can.



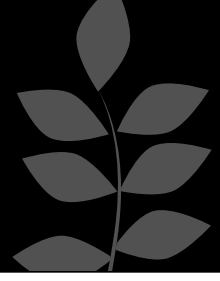
The gamekeeper giving his young pheasants some fresh water in their wire pens



6000 sheep being driven with several dogs

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At the end of a pheasant drive.

Gamekeepers

Many gamekeepers on pheasant shoots hatch and rear their own chicks, other gamekeepers buy in day old chicks and rear them on, some gamekeepers buy in young pheasant poults which are young pheasants about half grown.

The young day old pheasant chicks are normally reared under heat lamps for several weeks and are fed on chick pellets. Then after a few weeks the young birds are put into special pens in the woods until they are fairly well grown, before they are set free in the woods. The gamekeeper has his rearing pens to clean and maintain every year. He also has the vermin to control which can take up a great deal of his time. Foxes, crows, cats, stoats and weasels can all kill the young pheasants.

Some gamekeepers may also thin out the undergrowth in some of their woods every year so that the beaters can walk through the woods easier to flush the pheasants forward. The gamekeeper always has plenty of work to do trying to improve the habitat for the pheasants to keep them from straying. The pheasant gamekeeper like the moor keeper is employed to provide a good show of birds for the coming shooting season.

Many things are against the gamekeepers from the start. The modern poachers and villains can also shatter a years work for the gamekeepers, as they will steal anything from the countryside just to get money. The pheasant shooting season starts on the 1st of October and finishes on the last day in January the following year. Gamekeepers have a very pleasant life, but there is a lot of hard work in the job.

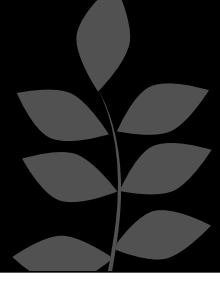
If you think you would like to train to be a gamekeeper you don't really need any particular qualifications. But you need to have a real interest in wildlife, game birds and the countryside. It is most likely there will be a gamekeeper in the countryside not all that far from where you live, if you are really interested in being a gamekeeper go along and make yourself known to the gamekeeper, I am sure he or she will be willing to help and advise you.

Remember there is a lot of hard work and long hours being a gamekeeper and its not only boys that train to be a gamekeeper, girls can also do the job if they are really interested enough in the countryside, working with game birds and working a great deal of the time on your own.



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Farmers and landowners gather for a meeting

Farmers

There are around some 270,000 farms or holdings in Britain which vary a great deal in size, from about one hectare to farms with a few thousand hectares. The purpose of the agricultural industry is to produce food to feed the population and to export any surplus food when there are any.

However the farmers in Britain don't produce sufficient food to feed the population, and because of this between 20 to 30 per-cent of the food is imported every year, because of various trade agreements. Some farmers however do export grain, lamb and they also sell pedigree beef cattle abroad for improving herds.

About 50% of the farmers in Britain own their farms and the other 50% are tenant farmers. Many farming families have farmed the same land for generations, either as tenant farmers or own occupiers. Some farms are too small to support the family and either the farmer or his wife have to take a part time job, or full time job to make ends meet and to bring up their families and pay the bills.

There are a vast range of different types of farms in Britain. There are beef producing farms, stock rearing farms, pig farms, dairy farms, sheep farms, poultry farms, fruit and vegetable farms, and there are farms that grow a mixture of cereals, such as barley, wheat, oats, oil seed rape and there are various other mixed producing farms. There are some farms which specialise in producing one product only. However most farms in Britain produce a mixture of food products and don't have all their eggs in one basket. The food the farms do produce is of top quality.

Certain areas of the country are better suited to grow and produce certain types of food. For instance the land down parts of the east coast are more suitable for growing cereals and rearing beef cattle, where most areas down the west coast are more suitable for producing milk and beef, because of the higher rain fall in the west which produces more grass. This doesn't mean to say that there are no dairy herds down the east coast of the country, there are not as many as there are down the west coast of the country.

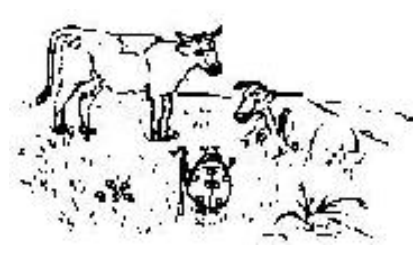
The climate in the north of the country is much colder and damper than it is in the south. Because of the climate difference, the fruit farms in the south are more suited to the warmer weather conditions.



Quadbikes are used everyday on the farm

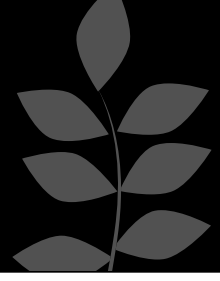


Loading a trailer with small bales of hay



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Bales of straw in the farmyard

Farmers

I am also very friendly with some farmers and their families who have large farms. Many of them own their farms and have hired labour. There are some very good employers among the big farmers and they look after the farm staff very well. The farm workers on these big farms today don't work as long hours as they used to, except at the silage making time and the harvest time. The farm workers now get paid for all the time they work on the farm, at one time they were lucky if they got a day off and they got very little pay for working very long hours.

Some of the large farms may keep a herd of dairy cows, as well as rearing beef cattle and growing cereals. They may also have a head cowman and a head tractor man, although the farmer will decide on the farm policy and the staff will carry out the work. Many large farms have an office at the farm where all the records are held. They will also have a computer and may have a visit once a month from an agricultural consultant, or they may have a farm secretary who calls at the farm once a month to advise the farmer and to bring the farm records up to date.

Some farms may not have a farm office, they may use a room in the house or, the farm kitchen as their office, where they keep all the farm records and modern equipment such as computers and up to date office technology to keep abreast of the farm business.

When you visit a farm in the countryside, ask the farmer, how big is his farm, does he own the farm. How long has he been farming, how many staff does he have, what does he grow on the farm and what types of farm animals does he keep?

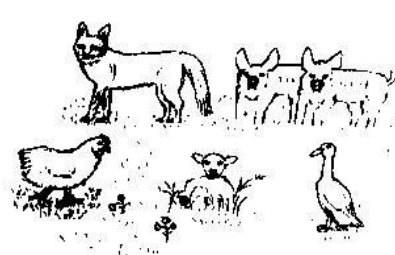
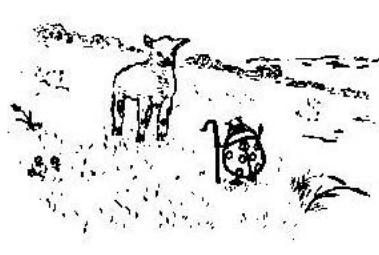
The farmer will be very pleased to answer all these questions and he will probably show you around the farm and show you the farm animals. Write a few notes down about the farmer and the farm, then when you get back to school you can write a story about the farmer and his farm animals.

If you think one day that you would like to be farmer, like many people do that work in the countryside. It takes a lot of money, to buy a farm of any size you need quite a lot of money. It is not just buying the farm you then have to stock the farm. Good agricultural farm land can cost anything up to around £4,000 an acre. To rent a farm from a private land owner or company, again you would need a fair amount of money. The landowner would most likely want to see a five year plan from the applicant stating what they intended doing with the farm.

It is not impossible to become a farmer. If your family has quite a lot of money, it will help, or you could marry into farming. However it is very very difficult to try and save up enough money to get started in farming today, as the farms are becoming bigger and bigger.

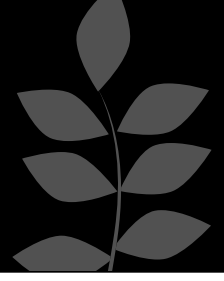


Three generations of the Wilson farming family from Charlesfield Farm in Cumbria



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Other pictures



Bobby and Jean Gordon from Peacock House Farm in Hexhamshire.



Selling cattle at Tyneside Cattle Market which has now disappeared.



The National Farmers Union A.G.M. at Newcastle in 1983.



The Gibson family from Newbrough in Northumberland feeding sheep at the trough.



A Shetland pony with its foal.



The author with bee expert Brother Adam from Buckfast Abbey.