

# Historic farming systems have tourism appeal

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**IMAGE:** THE HERDWICK SHEEP IS PART OF THE UNIQUE FARMING HISTORY OF THE LAKE DISTRICT

*World Heritage Listing used to be seen as a way to stop bulldozers from destroying historic sites, but it's increasingly being used by local regions as a marketing and branding opportunity. As **Belinda Tromp** reports, rural landscapes such as England's famous Lake District and Australia's Adelaide Hills region see World Heritage listing by UNESCO as way of attracting tourists.*

With its dramatic mountain scenery, the Lake District in north west England claims to have inspired more painters and writers than any other place in Britain.

It was in these hills and valleys that local lad William Wordsworth penned his famous 'I wander'd lonely as a cloud'.

It was here too that Beatrix Potter wrote and illustrated many of her much-loved children's stories.

But it's the rare Herdwick sheep that's most closely associated with the farming history of the Lake District.

Local breeder James Rebanks says the Herdwick came 'on boats with the Vikings about a thousand years ago'.

These hardy animals can survive for days under snow, a useful attribute in 'one of the toughest places in the UK', he says.

The entire national flock of around 50,000 Herdwick, are concentrated almost entirely within a 25 kilometre radius around the town of Coniston.

They are managed under an ancient farming system that's all but disappeared in western Europe, known as 'commoner fell grazing rights'.

As James Rebanks describes it, 'it enables you to take a certain number of sheep up into mountains to graze them.'

Growing Herdwick sheep is a way of life sustained by just two or three hundred farm families in the region and explains why the Lake District has been put forward by the government for World Heritage Site designation by UNESCO in 2016.

James Rebanks successfully campaigned for the Lake District listing, while writing a seminal study of all 878 World Heritage Sites around the world.

He says the Lake District attracts 16 million visitors a year, and if listing draws in an additional one per cent, that adds twenty million pounds to the local economy.

He's identified a trend for listed destinations to attract 'high value cultural visitors' with 'world heritage literacy'.

James Rebanks is in Australia to guide the Adelaide Hills region in its push for World Heritage Site recognition as a 'working agrarian landscape'

Known officially as 'The Mount Lofty Ranges Agrarian Landscape World Heritage Bid' spans the food, wine and tourism regions of the Barossa Valley, the Adelaide Hills, Mount Lofty Ranges, Fleurieu Peninsula and the Fleurieu Peninsula.

It's seeking the support of the Australian government as the first stage of what could be a long year process.

## The world is changing around us from every angle and it's not an option to keep doing what we're doing

**JAN ANGAS, BAROSSA VALLEY FARMER**



**IMAGE:** SIX YEAR OLD BEA REBANKS IS PART OF A FAMILY TRADITION TRACED BACK TO 1420 (JAMES

The success story of the Lake District is music to the ears of Barossa Valley merino breeder Jan Angas, whose family's ancestors settled in the valley in 1843, giving the picturesque village of Angaston its name.

Jan Angas believes listing means that 'from the inside the sense of pride lifts to another level and it gives the outside world information about food and wine, and agricultural and artisan production.'

She says 15 years ago landholders in the Barossa viewed tourism as 'a bit of a nuisance', but it is now 'our most important customer', underpinning the viability of agricultural producers in the region.



IMAGE: THE BAROSSA VALLEY IS ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S FARMING REGIONS. (CHRISTO REID/LEEO PHOTOGRAPHY)

She says while a small number of food and wine producers in the region worry that UNESCO listing will protect heritage at the expense of progress and going forward, 'the world is changing around us from every angle and it's not an option to keep doing what we're doing'.

James Rebanks says the original motivation for applying for UNESCO recognition, dating back to the first designated sites in 1978, was 'emergency protection for heritage at risk and for 'celebration of heritage preserved'.

He says that since the mid 1990s, more regions are motivated by the desire for a 'quality brand' and 'tool to develop powerful new identities for places'.

He says the Barossa is an excellent example of 'people's deep seated relationship with land'.

There are 11 UNESCO World Heritage agricultural sites but none in the southern hemisphere.

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## Guests

### James Rebanks

Herdwick sheep breeder, Penraddock, Cumbria; World Heritage expert

### Jan Angas

Hutton Vale farm, Angaston, SA

## Credits

**Producer** Belinda Tromp

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