

Review: Reed Point 24th Annual Great Montana Sheep Drive—Little to Crow About

I've already been warned about the possibility of getting a citation for vagrancy, "people are funny." Okie dokie smokie, but call them immoral, don't call them funny. The reader will therefore have to tolerate the fact that this article will not be as good as I had hoped on account of the fact that I gotta get outta town.

Big Timber, MT, Sept. 4 (ECM)—Local sheep ranchers kicked off the 24th annual Great Montana Sheep drive wiz-bang benefit for the dying one horse town of Reed Point, MT Sept. 2.

Despite the local brouhaha over the, not herd, but stampede of sheep through town of Reed Point, the outlook for the pancaked Montana sheep industry is not encouraging.

Its continued viability as an industry bone fide in Montana is doubtful. Instead all economic indicators point to its overall decline to a future "hobby industry" in the coming decades.

In a dismal Aug. 2011 [report](#) by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the agency among other things said: "During 2007, sales of sheep and goats and their

products in the United States totaled \$704.9 million. These sales accounted for 0.2 percent of all agricultural products sold in the United States during 2007. The largest increases in sales were seen in California (+\$19.5 million), Iowa (+\$16.8 million), Texas (+\$13.6 million) and Colorado (+\$12.3 million). Weld County in Colorado was the largest single county in terms of sheep and goat sales during 2007, with \$60.9 million, or 8.6 percent of the total

United States sales...Sheep numbers have shown a steady decline since peaking at 56.2 million in 1942...By the end of the 1980's, sheep numbers had fallen just below 11 million head. The decline continued in the 1990's, and in 1994, inventory dipped below 10 million head for the first time. From the start of the 20th century to the end, sheep numbers declined 86 percent...On January 1, 2011, total sheep and lamb inventory in the United States was estimated to be 5.5 million head...The United States has been a net exporter of live sheep over the past two decades, with the majority of these exports going to Canada and Mexico. The United

States imports very small numbers of live sheep, with most imports over the past 25 years coming from Canada and Mexico."

Montana has never been, nor will it ever be, a leader in this industry.

Despite declining numbers, lamb and sheep prices have in fact increased. "United States lamb prices in 2010 were nearly \$50.00 per



E. H. Campbell, Helena, MT Aug. 2012. Sign reads "Too Stupid to Steal. Please Help."

hundred weight (cwt) higher than in 1987, and 2010 prices for both sheep and lambs were the highest in history.” (Ibid.)

Which indicates that a decline in overall numbers would be an advantage for the small numbers of sheep ranches that remain in business. For them, a long term loss is a short term gain. Showing that those who are in it for quick buck have a keen interest in the industry’s overall decline and would cut-off the hand that feeds them by trying to save it

Easily beaten by Texas, California, New Mexico and Colorado, Iowa, Idaho, Utah, and Nebraska, Montana isn’t even a large producer of sheep and lambs in spite of the wild claims made by Montana sheep ranchers.

For instance the official travel site for Montana, VisitMT.com boasts: “The Reed Point Community Club’s annual ‘Great Montana Sheep Drive’ features hundreds of sturdy

Montana bred woolies charging down the six blocks of the main street in an event some say is matched only by the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, Spain.” Hardly, a stampede yes, a Running of the Bulls no. In fact it took twelve people to stampede 300 ewes down the street, four in front and eight behind. But does not the Montana sheep herder heed the voice of *our savior* Jesus Christ when he said: “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep

follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” (John 10:1-5) The ranchers here follow their sheep, not their sheep them. At the Reed Point self-declared “Sheep Drive Capital of the World” the sheep were just a window dressing for a street fair where everything but sheep and sheep by-products were sold: pulled pork, philly cheesesteak, Greek Gyros, authentic Mexican food, fine Filipino cuisine, Alpaca products. No fleece, no yarn, no pelts, no sheep. “Gun fight begins at 11:30.” There was an auction but there was no livestock just knick-a-knacks and bric-a-bracs from someone attic. Only one person even offered to sell lamb: Available end of September, est. at 135 lbs, whole \$150 + \$10 for delivery, 1/2 @ \$80 + 5 for delivery, no antibiotics, no hormones, Gayle Ott (406) 326-2187.

Two sheep were sheared: a woman, if it means anything to you, sheared the second of the two, done a real fine job. Otherwise, everyone was convinced that this shin-dig was all about sheep, but if you looked around you’d have to conclude that ignorance must be strength; no hand spinning, no knitting, no felting, no crochet.

Montana sheep ranchers themselves are the ones to blame for the whole-sale slaughter of the sheep industry. If it was not for the simple fact that the owners of these animals are about as stupid as they come, we can easily see that they have failed to promote the consumption of Montana sheep products such as exploiting the “Made in Montana,” or “Montana Organic” marketing labels to sell sheep products. Albeit there is a Montana Wool Growers Association, but the

[Welcome to](#)

[Reed Point, Mt](#)

[Population 96](#)

[Sheep Drive Capital of the World](#)

ranchers themselves won't eat their own produce.

The Big-T IGA, the only supermarket in Big Timber, home of the "Herders," and the closest to Reed Point, does not even sell lamb or mutton. To wit: the nearest place, aside from local niche markets, to buy lamb is COSTCO in Billings which on its package proudly boasts "Made in New Zealand."

As for stupidity we should witness the fact that sheep herds in the state were required to slit the scrotum of a lamb, suck the testicles into their mouths, bite them off, and spit them into a pail as recently as the 1980s, a move widely and superstitiously believed to prevent tetanus, castration of male lambs itself being otherwise utterly useless. Let's ignore the sexual side of the abuse of these animals at the hands of these ignoramuses and just recognize it as abuse. Unnecessary surgical procedures performed on animals is animal abuse. Enough said.

If this were not infuriating enough we should also note that herder employment is being farmed out to foreign nationals through visa paper mills such as the Western Range Association and the Snake River Farmers Association.

Seeing all that, we should all be hoping that the sheep ranches that remain will also fail except for the looming threat that such real estate will be swapped out by the [American Prairie Reserve](#), or to cattle ranching, not that I'm against the noble cause of returning the American Bison to the prairie, but should not the noble profession of the shepherd, Gk. Νομοθετες; Lat. Pastor—lawgiver—the very root of Western Civilization also be preserved? Was not Solon the lawgiver to Athens? Was not the elder Cato the author of the first Latin book *de Agricultura*, a Shepherd.

Like a fool and his money, a this state and its sheep shall soon be parted.

But the future of the Montana sheep ranching will be the hobby farm, rejoice for the hobby farmer will do a much better job. It's time that this dying breed, the Montana sheep rancher, do just that die! And stay dead. "Thank ewe for coming."

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Otherwise self-taught, Edward Campbell has an advanced certificate in [Sheep Shearing and Wool Management](#) from Montana State University, learned to herd sheep in the Occupied West Bank, is the author of the manuscript [Discontents at Rome: 63 B.C., Class Struggle and Social Praxis in Republican Rome](#), and inter alia is the translator of the [Poem of Parmenides](#)—a poem never before translated into English, and the [Spartacus Rebellion](#) from Appian's Civil Wars.