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The crook walking stick has been an essential companion to farmers and shepherds around the world for thousands of years. They've been used as a tool for herding sheep, to provide stability on hilly ground, to hang a lantern on dark mornings, or even for defence against predators. While farming has obvious changed a lot, the historical significance and symbolism of shepherd's crooks has not! Learn more about them, how they're made and maybe even find a shepherd's crook of your own this guide to The History of Shepherd's Crooks.How Is the Crook Shape Made?There are two main ways that walking stick manufacturers can use to get the iconic crook in their wooden sticks:CarvingThis method is fairly self-explanatory but is easier said than done! Not only is considerable skill needed to smoothly round the crook of the cane, but a piece of wood much wider than the final product is also needed. This is so that the stick maker can carve the shaft and crook from a single piece, instead of having to attach two pieces of wood together, which could compromise stability.CurvingYes, you read that right, curving! Now how do you curve wood, especially wood that you're hopefully turning into a shepherd's crook strong enough to withstand the rigours of farm life? Well the method is quite ingenious:Steam the wood until it becomes pliableShape the end around a metal former to create the crookTie the wood down so that it retains its shape once it cools and dries!The rope used will leave a mark on the wood, which is then sanded off this creates the little divot often found on crooks!What About Horn-Handle Crooks?For an even more regal look, shepherd walking sticks are sometimes topped with animal horns instead of being completely made of wood. This can be done with horns from a variety of animals like deer, cattle, goats and like the majestic crooks below, rams.In stock, delivery as soon as Tomorrow. Order within 13 hrs 11 minsGreat for Catching Sheep!For farmers the primary function of the shepherd's crooks is for wrangling, catching and corralling sheep. The hook and extended length of the crook walking stick make it easier for farmers to grab onto the neck or leg of a sheep and pull them in the direction they need to go. Sheep are faster than they look and moving herds of them can be really difficult, particularly if one of them decides to go for a wander! The crook can help keep them on the right path without farmers having to run around after them as much.Keeps you Steady on Rolling Hills and Uneven TerrainEven for farmers and hikers that are sure on their feet, nature's uneven terrain can be dangerous. A shepherd's crook can help you avoid trips and falls by providing an extra thing to lean on. It can also take pressure of your joints, making walking uphill and downhill much easier.Defence Against PredatorsWhile the average user of a crook walking stick probably won't have to worry about predators on their hikes or walks, farmers and shepherd's might have to. Whether its wolves, foxes, coyotes or whatever else, a crook staff is also great for defending your flock. After all, outside of the regal look and utilitarian hook, it is still a big stick!The Shepherd's Crook as a SymbolThe shepherd's crook is also used symbolically in some religions for high ranking figures to show their responsibility to lead their flock. This idea of the priest as the shepherd has been prevalent in a lot of religious writing and practice thousands of years. For pharaohs in ancient Egypt the crook stood for kingship and the pharaoh's role as a shepherd in caring for the people of Egypt.More Than Just a Walking Stick!We hope that this guide has taught you a little bit about shepherds crooks, both their versatility and history. Whether you're an avid hiker, farmer, or you're just a fan of the classic look, why not have a look at our full range of shepherd's crooks to find the perfect stick for you!Have any more questions about shepherd's crooks or just something to say? Let us know in the comments, or find us onInstagramandFacebook!Tool for managing livestockFor the calculation, see Johnson's SU-distribution,"crook staff" redirects here. For the hieroglyph, see Crook-Staff (Luwian hieroglyph).Shepherd's crookA shepherd's crookA shepherd's crook is a long and sturdy stick with a hook at one end, often with the point flared outwards, used by a shepherd to manage and sometimes catch sheep. In addition, the crook may aid in defending against attack by predators. When traversing rough terrain, a crook is an aid to balance. Shepherds may also use the long implement to part thick undergrowth (for example at the edge of a drovers' road) when searching for lost sheep or potential predators. The innovation of a hook facilitates the recovery of fallen animals by ensnaring them by the neck or leg. For this reason, the crook has been used as a religious symbol of care (particularly in difficult circumstances), including the Christian bishop's crosier.[1]In medicine, the term shepherd's crook is used to describe a right coronary artery that follows an unusually high and winding route. This variant, which has a prevalence of about 5%.[2] imposes technical problems in angioplasty procedures.[3]The letter lamed originated as a representation of a shepherd's crook or goad, from which the Latin letter L has evolved.[citation needed]Ancient Greeks called it, and in their art the crook is often seen in the hands of Pan and also is the usual attribute of Thalia, as the Muse of pastoral poetry.[4]The shepherd's crook is paired with the agricultural flail to form an insignia of pharaonic authority, with the crook representing kingship and the flail symbolizing the fertility of the land.[5]Rameses II, with the heka crook. Museo Egizio, Turin.The crook and flail on the coffinette of TutankhamunWilliam Blake's hand painted print for his poem "The Shepherd" depicts the idyllic scene of a shepherd watching his flock with a shepherd's crook. This image represents copy B, printed and currently held by the Library of Congress.[6]Cattle prouCrook and flailGoadLassoMazzarellaShepherd's hat" Caeremoniale Episcoporum (Vatican Polyglott Press, 1985) ^ Shriki, Jabi E., Shinbane, Jerold S., Rashid, Mollie A., Hindoyan, Anteras; Withey, James G.; DeFrance, Anthony; Cunningham, Mark; Oliveira, George R.; Warren, Bill H. (March 1, 2012). "Identifying, Characterizing, and Classifying Congenital Anomalies of the Coronary Arteries". *RadioGraphics*. 32 (2): 453468. doi:10.1148/rfg.322115097. ISSN0271-5333. PMID22411942. ^ Gossman, David E.; Tuzcu, E. Murat; Simpfordorfer, Conrad; Beck, Gerald J. (January 1, 1988). "Percutaneous transluminal angioplasty for shepherd's crook right coronary artery stenosis". *Catheterization and Cardiovascul Diagnosis*. 15 (3): 189191. doi:10.1002/ccd.1810150313. ISSN1097-0304. PMID2973842. ^ A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities (1890), Pedum ^ Steele, Philip (2002). Ancient Egypt. The Rosen Publishing Group. p.12. ISBN1435851730. ^ Morris Eaves; Robert N. Essick; Joseph Visconti (eds.). "Songs of Innocence, copy B, object 4 (Bentley 5, Erdman 5, Keynes 5) "The Shepherd"". William Blake Archive. Retrieved January 17, 2014. Media related to Shepherd's crooks at Wikimedia Commons The dictionary definition of shepherd's crook at WiktionaryRetrieved from " Dr Clive DaltonHistoryA crook, staff or stick has been a shepherds multi-purpose tool-of-trade since man first herded sheep. It has even become a religious symbol for high-ranking clergy to show their responsibility for their flocks.A stick has many uses. Its a support for walking over rough terrain as in New Zealand high country mustering; a means of catching ewes and lambs around the neck or legs, and a defence weapon against flock predators.Photo shows me at The University of North Wales, Bangor (1956-59) during a lambing collecting data for my Ph.D. My trusted Hazel stick with Blackface ewe's horn handle never let me down. I did have problems with the dog though, as it worked to commands in Welsh!Few shepherds ever had money to buy a stick, even if they were available. Sticks in shops were for sale to tourists, so unless an old shepherd and stick dresser gave you a stick, the only option for a young shepherd was to start and make their own, hoping they'd get some help from a local expert who would reveal his secrets!It was lucky enough to be given my first stick at age13 by a noted Border Shepherd, Michael Anderson, when I plucked up enough courage to ask him how to bend a sheeps horn. He was generous with his knowledge and honoured me with a stick. It was a memorable visit to his workshop with few tools, but much wisdom. But a shepherds stick is more than a tool of trade; it also makes a personal statement about the owner so you'd never criticise a fellow workers stick, no matter how ugly it was. So its easy to see how the craft of stick dressing developed into a competitive art form, with one shepherd trying to beat his mates on the next farm, in the next valley or in my birthplace in Northumberland, across the Border. There was intense competition among shepherds for sticks to be presented to Royalty, so their secrets became even more jealously guarded.This all changed, thankfully for the better in 1951, by the formation of The Border Stick Dressers Association (BDSA) at the home of Mr J. McCuffie in the College Burn valley in the shadow of The Cheviot hill on the English side of the Scottish Border.Their first patron was the Duke of Northumberland, and the first president was Mr George Snaith. George without doubt was the most famous stick dresser of all time who turned the craft into a mind-boggling art form. I had the enormous privilege of visiting his workshop with few tools and no electricity. He did all his intricate artistic work in a cold shed illuminated by a paraffin lamp, with a pocket knife he made himself. Some of his massive stick collection is now housed in Alnwick Castle while his relatives hold the rest. The BDSA aims were to keep alive the dying craft, to help fellow stick dressers obtain horns and shanks, and to have demonstrations and competitions (for prize money) at shows and to appoint judges.Contacts:Border Stick Dressers Association. Contact Will Laidler (see below).Laidler, W. (2007). Border Stick Dressers Association. The first 50 years.Contact Will Laidler, 18 Crumstone Court, Killingworth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE 12 6SZ.This Association fortunately has widened interest in the craft far beyond shepherds who are a dying breed world wide, but in 1996 the European Union nearly regulated it out of business. They brought in a regulation which deemed that the head of all sheep and goats (with the exception of the tongue) had to be incinerated to prevent the spread of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE).However, a massive stick dressers campaign in 2000 won the day with the British and EU parliaments, so the use of tups horns was still allowed. What sweetened the victory was the acceptance of the Prince of Wales to be the Patron of the Association.Stick types1. Straight staffs. Made from stout sticks of native timbers such as Manuka or Lancewood.2. Thumb sticks. These are made from sticks with a natural V near the top used for the walkers thumb. Deer antler is sometimes used to make the V and its joined to the shank with a spigot on the shank fitting a hole in the horn.3. Wooden headed sticks. These are cut out of a solid block of wood from which the sapling shank is growing.4. Horn headed sticks. These are made from animal horns, usually rams but goats and cattle horns can be used.Horns in New Zealand1. Merino. These are good but tend to be thin and dont have the mass of horn seen in the Drysdale or Dorset Horn.2. Drysdale. Ideal horns but very low numbers available.3. Dorset Horn. Ideal horns but low numbers available.4. Goats. There are large numbers of feral goats and horns of bucks grow very long. There is not a great bulk of horn to work on.5. Cattle. Not very suitable to work on as there is very little solid end. The stick pictured I made from a Wiltshire Horn ram's horn. It would be classed as a 'plain stick' in contrast to a 'fancy stick'. The shank is Hazel wood.The Hazel (Corylus avellana)The hazel is the 'Rolls Royce' of stick shanks. It's very light to carry and use, but the fibres in the wood make it very strong and will bend a long way before it will break. If a stick shank does break, it's usually not a clean break but more of a split and tearing of the fibres, and you see many old shepherds' sticks resued with electrical insulating tape.Hazel trees showing their growth form which encourages suckers from the base and lower branches. The suckers make the stick shanks. The main advantage of the Hazel is that it is very easy to coppice and produced new growth from the base. So traditionally this was used for barrel hoops and hurdles for folding stock. They were also used in hedging where they were easily bent to bind and keep the top branches of the Hawthorn hedge in place once it had been cut and bent over.In early British history Hazels were use in wattle-and-daub huts and half-timbered buildings in areas with chalk areas) where timber, stone and clay were hard to come by.See H.L. Edlin (1949). British Woodland Trees. Batsford Ltd.A good day's stick huntBelow is a mouth-watering heap (to a stick dresser) of Hazel shanks cut from the trees in the above picture. They will take a year to dry. It's very important not to tell anyone else where you got them from.A stick in good hands!This is Arthur Cowan, aged 94, an icon of a Kiwi. He fought in North Africa to get rid of Romel then in the Italian campaign in WW11, spent time in a German prison camp. He returned to farm hill country near Otorohanga in the North Island of New Zealand and has dedicated his latter years to conservation. He is never idle, planting native trees, preserving bush, and educating others to the wonder of New Zealand landscape.I was very proud to make him a stick - which as you can see is in very good hands.More informationGoogle 'Shepherd's Staves' for more information on the history of the shepherd's stick. The origin of the shepherds crook can be traced back to ancient times, specifically to the agricultural practices of early civilizations. As humans began to domesticate animals for their own use, the need to guide and protect these animals arose. The shepherds crook, also known as a shepherds staff or a pastoral staff, emerged as a tool to aid shepherds in their daily tasks.In its simplest form, the shepherds crook is a long, curved staff made from wood or metal. Its distinctive shape, with a hook or crook at one end, allows shepherds to easily catch and guide their flock. The curved end can be used to gently and effectively control the movement of sheep, ensuring that they stay together and do not wander off.The use of the shepherds crook can be seen in various cultures throughout history. In ancient Egypt, for example, the crook was closely associated with the god Osiris, who was believed to be the ruler of the afterlife and the guardian of the souls of the deceased. Osiris was often depicted holding a crook and a flail, symbolizing his role as a shepherd of souls.The symbolism of the shepherds crook extends beyond its practical uses in herding animals. It has also become a metaphor for leadership and guidance. The crook represents the responsibilities of those in positions of power, who must guide and protect their flock or people. This symbolism is evident in various religious and political traditions.For instance, in Christianity, Jesus is often referred to as the Good Shepherd who leads his followers and cares for their well-being. The image of Jesus carrying a shepherds crook has been depicted in countless artworks and sculptures throughout history.Similarly, in ancient Egypt, the pharaohs were considered the shepherds of their people, responsible for their well-being and protection. The crook and flail were symbols of their authority and leadership.The use of the shepherds crook as a symbol of leadership and guidance has continued in more recent history. Kings and emperors, as well as religious leaders such as popes, have been depicted holding a shepherds crook to symbolize their role in shepherding and leading their people.In my personal experience, I have seen the shepherds crook used as a symbol in various religious ceremonies and processions. It serves as a reminder of the importance of strong leadership and the responsibility to guide and protect others. The imagery of the crook can be both powerful and comforting, evoking a sense of trust and security.The origin of the shepherds crook can be traced back to the practical needs of shepherds in guiding and protecting their flocks. Over time, it has evolved into a powerful symbol of leadership and guidance, seen in religious, political, and cultural contexts. The crook represents the responsibilities of those in positions of power to shepherd and lead their people, ensuring their well-being and safety. Share copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. 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