

# Julia Bradbury»

Julia's emails with Yorkshire farmer Amanda Owen reveal both their contrasting lives and a blossoming friendship



Amanda Owen, the daughter of a fashion model from Huddersfield, first paid a visit to Ravenseat Farm when she was freelancing as a shepherdess and needed a tup, a male sheep, for the flock she was tending. A tip-off led her to Clive Owen, a sheep farmer in North Yorkshire who happily lent her the required beast. It was the start of another beautiful union. Today they tend their own little flock (Ruben, Raven, Miles and Edith) as well as 1,600 sheep and a 100 head of cattle.

I met the Owens when Clive came to our rescue on the moors while we were filming my *Coast to Coast* series for BBC Four. They welcomed us into their home and Amanda plied us with her delicious scones. We hit it off immediately and we've kept in touch ever since. I love getting emails from her – she's so down-to-earth and funny. "Miles (the second youngest) finds all the hen's eggs in whatever weird place they've been laid," she said recently. "He leaves well alone if the hen is still on the nest, due to an unfortunate pecking encounter."

This February I was working in London when the snow hit and the capital ground to a halt. I received an email from Amanda. As

you'd imagine their farm in the remote hills of Birkdale had been hit hard, but she couldn't believe how us town-dwellers struggled to cope with a few snowflakes. It put it all in perspective. As she typed, Colin was out trying to find lost sheep under the drifts. He had no idea if he'd find them alive. Suddenly not being able to get up the road to work wasn't such a big deal.

It wasn't all bad for the Owens though. The four kids were loving having snow days off school, sledging the easy way as their sleighs were pulled up the hills by quad bike. Why just go careering down the snow when you ride on the way up too?

Thankfully, my next email from Amanda was a happy one. "All sheep (and children) accounted for and safe," she wrote. "Frozen mitts are warming by the fire."

And so the year has continued, with emails flying up and down the country, all bringing our lives into sharp contrast.

**"Our lives couldn't be more different but our friendship has grown with every exchange"**

**While Julia was planting some olive trees she was given for her birthday, Amanda and her husband Clive (pictured above right with Julia) were in the middle of lambing season and trying to fit daily life around delivering 1,600 lambs**



When I enthusiastically sent her pictures of a yellowtail fish caught fresh in South Africa over new year, she told me of the tiny trout they catch and throw back from her very own river. A month later Channel 4 broadcast my episode of *Celebrity Come Dine With Me*. I entertained Christopher Biggins, Philip Oliver and Edwina Curry to a three-course feast. Amanda, who hardly ever gets chance to watch telly, came back with her own celeb story. They were due to become stars in the local paper as their champion heifer had won a cattle show at Kirkby auction. Now that's showbiz!

## Opposites attract

After Matt Baker spent most of our first photoshoot for *Countryfile Magazine* taking the mickey out of my lilac wellies, Amanda countered that most of her outdoor gear was snot green and immensely practical. I tried to find the time to plant some olive trees Mum had given me for my birthday, while Amanda tried to find time to have lunch in the midst of lambing (Her first email on the subject still makes me smile: "We have started lambing. One down, 1,599(ish) to go.") Our lives couldn't be more different but our friendship has grown with every exchange. Yet another friendship I can thank the countryside for.

I came within a whisper of seeing her again last month. I was taking part in a charity 4x4 navigational challenge to raise money Macmillian cancer nurses. But I was gutted as, on the second day, we were within a lamb's tail of Ravenseat but had no time to stop! Never mind, we made more than £92,000 for the cause.

The emails continue and long may they last. The Owens work hard, but they wear big smiles and exude a happiness that is difficult not to envy, whatever walk of life you are in.



Don't miss Julia on *Countryfile* every Sunday at 7pm on BBC One.