

## Sheep Leaning

**Jeff Stewart**

After shepherding a small flock of sheep for about a week I noticed that when they had settled in the shade after eating their way across the pasture, they would begin to ruminate, stop, regurgitate the cud and chew it slowly before swallowing again. And while I watched over them, keeping a lookout for wild dogs, I liked to think that while ruminating they were also turning over thoughts in their minds just as they were turning over grasses in their mouths, that they were meditating deeply on their chewing, their standing, and being together, and it was during these communal meditative breaks in-between spurts of grazing and what appeared to be sudden and almost panicked decisions to move onto other paddocks or more favoured pasture, that one would lean into another, resting its head on the side of the sheep nearest to it, and even though each leant with a definite weight, it was gentle and tender, speaking of vulnerability and trusting calm. And once one sheep leant into its neighbour others in the flock would also lean until all were touching head to side in what looked like deep affection. Occasionally one would be standing only a little away after perhaps having remained eating longer than the others, and once, when the sheep had stopped in the shade of the barn where they would later be milked and housed for the evening, I saw one such sheep lean toward the barn's stone wall and rest its head, gaining the same communal warmth from what had once been the home for generations of farmers and shepherds.