



The Inn at the Top: Life at the Highest Inn in Great Britain

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The hilarious and delightful tale of a young couple who in the late 1970s arrived as the new landlords of the most remote, bleak and lonely pub—The Tan Hill Inn—in the most remote, bleak and lonely of the Yorkshire Dales. This remarkable story takes us back to deepest Yorkshire and showcases life at a different pace, peppered with a host of fascinating characters.

The Inn at the Top: Life at the Highest Inn in Great Britain Details

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From Reader Review The Inn at the Top: Life at the Highest Inn in Great Britain for online ebook

Andrew says

The book had a promising opening with a witty introduction by Gervase Phinn. The way in which Neil & Sue Found themselves running the Inn saw the introduction of the two dodgy owners of the Inn. There is some carefully observed comparison between life in this remote corner of Yorkshire and the more urban lifestyle of other places.

This book was not what I expected. The anecdotes relating to the Inn and its customers and characters did not make up as much of the story as I had expected. However, this does not mean that it is not worth reading.

There are some interesting observations of the social changes which were happening both at the time of writing and looking back over the history since the Inn was built. The history of the old drove routes, the changes in land ownership and the effects of the Enclosure Acts. More recently the growth of the shooting estates and the affect this has had on access and traditional farming.

The final third of the book is somewhat long and drawn out, covering the long lonely winter at the Inn. It was at this point that I decided the book is only 'OK', rather than good.

Caroline Berry says

I bought a signed copy of this book and the sequel in a lovely wee gift shop in Muker (in the Dale - Swaledale - from which the road to the Inn At The Top begins its ascent) whilst on holiday in the area, so naturally holds a special place in my reading history, given the fond memories I have. And whilst it's no blockbuster or page-turner, it's a bucolic tale of life as an innkeeper in a remote rural farming community that both warms you to the people and place being described at the same time as being a salutary tale that will prevent all but the hardiest of souls to consider being a pub landlord as an occupation - even in less remote circumstances! Witty, informative, warm and beautifully told, this is a splendid read!

Rachel Green says

A most enjoyable read - full of fascinating facts, observations, characters & witty comments!

Freda Pierce says

Nope - did not like this book. I have been to the Inn at the top and I love the Yorkshire dales so I was really looking forward to this. Unfortunately the author has made the locals appear almost like caricatures and I didn't feel he was respectful - I felt he was laughing at rather than laughing with.

John says

This book turned out to be a lot different to my initial expectation of it. I had anticipated a light hearted telling of stories of life in a country pub, with lots of quirky characters, along the lines of Chris Stewart's Spanish adventures. Whilst there is some of that, this is a more serious book overall, telling us the social history of the area and highlighting many of the problems of the people living there, particularly the hardships suffered during the winter months. It was never less than interesting, but lacked pace and storytelling. I was quite irritated by the rather coy way the author never revealed place names.

Roxanne Hawkin says

Saw this book for sale in a pub in the Dales and bought it expecting something akin to *The Yorkshire Shepherdess* - but was rather disappointed.

Rather than it being a story about their year running this pub on top of the moors - it was more about the characters in the area, the history of the Yorkshire Dales, farming practices, annual festivals in the area, etc, etc.

Whilst this is very interesting and some was quite fascinating, humorous and also informative I also found it got a bit long-winded and tedious at times.

I enjoyed the bits about their actual day to day experiences of running the pub - but these were few and far between.

It also felt like the author was trying too hard - too many overly descriptive sentences with unnecessary flowery language. It felt like he'd written the book then gone back with a thesaurus to put in as much little-used and cumbersome vocabulary as he could, for example - one sentence which stands out in my memory: "Such pusillanimous prevarication was not for me."

I think the book could have done with some heavy handed editing to be honest. It has the makings of a good book - with a fascinating subject matter - but sadly spoilt by the writing style. I enjoyed the last 3 chapters, about how they endured a frozen winter, snowed in for much of a 4 month long period, and left by the pub owners with no hot water, heating, means of communication or any basic assistance with getting through the winter, the most. This bit felt the most personal and real.

Lastly, I have a big gripe - why does the author refuse to name real place names in the book? It comes across like he's telling some imaginary story about some made up place because he never mentions the names of villages or towns in the area throughout the story - preferring to refer to them as "the village to the west of the river at the foot of the dale". It just makes it so cumbersome to read - and given a lot of the book is about actual history and mining/farming/ practices in the Yorkshire Dales - naming the places talked about seems not only desirable but entirely necessary.

As it happens I actually bought his second book at the same time - *Pigs Might Fly* - so I guess I shall have to read that one too and see if it is equally as annoying in this regard.

Dunkthebiscuit Kendrick says

This book, while maybe not as funny as intended, gives an intimate view of a way of life - Yorkshire sheep farming - that was becoming precarious even in the late 70s. For that alone it is worth reading.

The author and his wife became landlords of the highest pub in Britain - the Tan Inn (though he never names it, nor any of the surrounding towns or farms) - in time to survive the brutal winter of '79, where they were frequently iced and snowed in for weeks at a time, sometimes with punters who'd only dropped in for a pint and ended up staying for a fortnight. With no heating other than the main fireplace, a dodgy generator, a septic tank and a ram pump to get water from a nearby stream, they did not have much fun. This story is the final third of the book and, for me, was the most compelling part. I love my native county, and I love the sheer brutal beauty of it, but I could never live the winters like this.

Laura says

I picked this up from the library and then read the less than glowing reviews on here and was a bit put off. But having worked for a weekend (all I could manage so far away from civilisation) I was still interested enough to give this book a go. I'm glad I did. I love reading about the local area, with a bit of history as well as stories of the weird and wonderful characters who popped in the pub. It was also fun to read about the 70s and realise not much has changed! I know for sure I couldn't survive a winter Up there! Great read.

Leila says

This review of The Inn at the Top is after the second time I have read it and if I am honest the first time I did skip it here and there and never quite got into it properly. I therefore missed such a special read... but not this time. The author is the narrator and he is a born story teller. It begins fairly slowly with the initial description and background of how and why the author and his wife make the decision to take over this inn as Landlord and wife even though the two men who are looking for someone to run the inn are down and out rogues. I would imagine most readers would wonder why after reading this part, why they would be so unwise. I did. However this time I soon became totally absorbed.

I read and read on throughout the day, glued to the constant and diverse problems such as the presence of rats...(ugh!) and the ancient equipment which continually breaks down... both of which are among the often serious setbacks that the young couple meet with such a stoic acceptance. (To the annoyance of my puzzled cats who wanted attention and food. They did get their food but not too much attention... bless them)

The book is described in the blurb as "Dales Tales from the Seventies" The author beautifully describes a continual and in depth series of fascinating and personal anecdotes about the local characters in particular such as the farmers, or residents from one or other of the villages dotted about below the "Inn at the Top." Any one who has read "All Creatures Great and Small" will be familiar with the ways of the Dales farmers who visit the inn on a regular social basis. Then there are the seasonal tourists and fell walkers who come and go.

There are lots of background details about the inn itself and the many continuing problems this young couple have in order to keep the inn open. These difficulties are intertwined among all the tales describing the personal characters of the individuals who are regulars. You have to read the book to appreciate both the humour and the more "touching" personal stories.

There are many dangers involved in living in such a bleak and remote place and the farmers have hard lives coping with in winter, desperate conditions. They will risk their lives to search and rescue their sheep.

The author and his wife encounter many traumatic and dangerous incidents of their own too. Towards the end of the book the author writes so much about the frightening and dangerous effect that snow has on their inn and their lives.

Writing a review about this book has not been easy for there is much to take in. It is a compelling read

though with fascinating content and I found it difficult to tear myself away. The sudden ending feels like an anticlimax and disappoints in the abrupt way it is dealt with but I could understand why. This book is highly recommended if you like stories that deal with characters rather than plot.

Mac.Hawk says

This book turned out to be not quite what I was expecting. I was expecting a series of anecdotes from a former landlord who spent many a year managing the Highest Inn in GB.

What I actually got was some anecdotes, some of the history and some pontification from a landlord/manager who spent a single year managing the pub. Generally 2 out of 3 made the book pretty enjoyable. The anecdotes were expected (it says they're their on the rear cover), the history I generally appreciated and the other bit ('landowners', 'the shoot', 'poaching' etc) I could have lived without.

The main reason this book only gets 3 stars is the appalling anonymity of everything.

The Inn at the Top is plainly the Tan Hill Inn and I can understand why the author might possibly need/want/have to not name the pub directly and I can understand why the people in the book have had their names changed to, as the author quite amusingly states, 'protect the innocent - and the guilty alike' but

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Why on earth the author felt the need to anonymise place names is beyond me. Kirkby Stephen, Appleby, Keld, Reeth etc are all towns/villages regularly featured but in the book they become the 'small town to the west of the dale', 'the Horse Fair town' or 'the village at the foot of the dale'.

High Cup Nick becomes 'The Nick'. The Settle-Carlisle railway line & Ribblehead viaduct are 'the line that was threatened with closure' and all this pointless anonymity quickly becomes very tedious and reduced my enjoyment of the book markedly.

Caroline Southgate says

Gave up, just could not get into it. Tried really hard but mind kept wandering so I knew it was not the book for me

Tracy says

I wanted to appreciate this more than I did. The voice of the storyteller seems to patronise the local characters rather than bring their unique behaviour to the page with gentleness and kindness.

Stephen says

Didnt enjoy this book thought I would though, maybe it was the writing style and found the book overall not to stand out.

Esmeralda says

Too slow to keep my interest.

Michael Taylor says

I received this book as a Christmas present and read it within two weeks. As a Yorkshireman living overseas, I'm often bought or buy books that remind me of home -- be they James Herriot tales or Simon Armitage books. Sadly, I didn't take to this one, despite really wanting to. The premise of this book is a good one, and the first third really flew by -- who they are, the gamble they took, the description of the inn and surroundings, and the characters emerging. But on finally settling in at the inn, things began to turn either dull or clichéd. I'm not sure whether it was the storytelling or lack of real depth with the characters Hanson met, that left me unfulfilled. The fact that Hanson was only at the inn for around 12 months (despite repeatedly being told how he had been accepted by the locals) maybe meant that large gaps had to be padded out. To fill these gaps, we're left with tales that aren't as amusing as the writer thinks they are (Hanson meets a racist punter, Hanson goes down a disused coal mine, Hanson's liberal views on all matters, Hanson goes for a walk, Hanson's eccentric uncle, Hanson's dislike of the pub's owners). The author is clearly an accomplished historian, but some of the local background details, on sheep farming for example, didn't quite work for me.
