Summer 2024

The Journal of RMLA

Welcome to RMLA!

– – – Mission Statement – – –

The mission of the Association shall be to educate the members and the public as to the breeding, raising, care and use of llamas and alpacas.

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About the Journal

The Journal of RMLA© is a quarterly publication of the Rocky Mountain Llama and Alpaca Association (RMLA). The RMLA Journal Committee and the Board of Directors reserve the right to select and edit all articles and advertisements submitted.

The information in The Journal is not intended to be a substitute for qualified professional advice. Readers are encouraged to consult with their own veterinarian, accountant or attorney regarding any questions concerning their animals or business operations.

RMLA is not responsible for any losses resulting from readers' failure to heed this caution. The views expressed by the authors of articles are not necessarily those of the Rocky Mountain Llama and Alpaca Association, Inc., its officers, directors or members.

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Cover Photo: Courtesy Keith Payne. See story on page 14

From The Editor

Kathy Stanko, Editor, rmlaeditor@gmail.com

Hello to everyone. Positive changes are occurring within RMLA. Please take a moment to look at the Committee reorganization on Page 3. In current times when our members are scattered across the planet, it made great sense to me to have several of the committees placed within the Journal Committee. The members of the Journal Committee have already been doing the work. This reorganization gives them the recognition they deserve.

Now, do I have any takers for the Pack position on the Journal Committee? This position does NOT require that you write a pack article for each Journal, although you can! Your sole responsibility is to help the editor find pack articles for each issue. Perhaps you have an expertise in pack or you know someone who does – can you ask them to submit an article? Very easy, right?

RMLA is a member of the Newsletter Network which currently includes ten llama and alpaca organizations from around the country. The Network lets us know what others are doing and share educational information. Two articles in this issue (pages 9 and 27) offer you, your group, club, or friends ideas for how you can join together to create some fun with your animals.

After two years of digging, Lougene and Ron Baird finally found the report on the study that compared the impact of llamas and horses on hiking trails. I consider this a must read. See page 7.

Among the educational articles in this issue is a reprint on biocontainment and biosecurity (page 11) at your farm or ranch.

Thank you to everyone who submitted an article for this Journal and to all of you who read and learn from the many topics included. Please remember, if you have a great photo, send it to me for possible use in a future Journal. Have a fun and safe summer.

Journal Submission Dates, Ad Rates & Specifications

Issue	Submission Deadline	Publication Date
Spring	February 28	March 31
Summer	May 31	June 30
Fall	August 31	September 30
Winter	November 30	December 31

Ad Type	Width x Height	Member Rate	Non-Member
Business Card	3.5"x2	$ 7	$ 15
¼ page horiz.	7.5"x2"	$ 12	$ 24
¼ page vert.	3.5"x4.5"	$ 12	$ 24
Half Page	7.5" x 5"	$ 24	$ 48
Full Page	7.5"x 10"	$ 39	$ 78

Ad rates are quoted per issue. Lock in the current rate by purchasing an ad for four consecutive issues and receive a **5th ad for free**. You may change your ad once during the year.

To submit articles, ads or photo:

- All submissions go to rmlaeditor@gmail.com
- Documents in MS Word format
- Camera ready ads as a pdf or jpg file. **NOTE:** What you send is what we publish.
- Images/photos as .jpeg (.jpg) or .tiff files. Photo from a camera or phone are sufficient. Please check the background and lighting. RMLA will only crop for fit and/or enhance the lighting.

Instructions for advertising payment:

You may pay for your ad at RMLA.com using a credit card. Payment and ad copy must be received prior to submission deadline. See the table above for dates.

President's Message

Greetings my fellow lama lovers!

I hope your summer is starting out well. Seems that everyone is having weather extremes this year between the wind, the rain, and the heat. Please take care of yourselves and your animals.

It's hard to believe that July is just around the corner! That means that it is close to election time for new RMLA Board members. The Board is looking for volunteers to help us move into our future.

What does it take to be a Board member? Well, I'm so glad you asked! Let me tell you about it.

- One of the most important attributes to being a Board member is a passion for lamas. Please understand that you do **NOT** need to be a lama expert.
- You do **NOT** need to own llamas or alpacas to be on the RMLA Board. You might be just starting your research into the lama industry or retired from the industry – either situation is acceptable.
- Volunteering to be a Board member is **NOT** a full-time job. Being a Board member only requires a few hours a month at most. The existing Board members will work with everyone's schedule to get the job done.
- You should have the desire to contribute to our organization. Your contribution is your time and your brain.
- You will be a part of an amazing close-knit team. The existing Board members all work together seamlessly, and we're excited to add some new energy into our mix.
- Your term as a Board member would start after our annual meeting. This will be around the October/ November timeframe.

Please reach out to me or any of your other RMLA Board members if you have any questions. Express your interest in becoming a Board member by sending an email to me at sschilli9151@gmail.com or call me at 602-403-8166 and we can speak directly. I truly appreciate your time and would love to discuss this opportunity with you.

Sandy

New Members

RMLA continues to grow. We welcome our new members!

Stephanie Corr, Highlands Ranch CO
Scott and Jodi Wilkinson, Graham WA
Carissa Tripi, Alamosa CO
Christi Fontaine, Hudson CO
Kathleen Ryan and Shannon Wright, Las Vegas NV

Upcoming Events

July 27, 2004, Leadville, CO. Llama Lunacy is part of Burro Days in Fairplay, Colorado. This event is FREE. Llama lunacy is an opportunity to educate children and adults about llamas and alpacas while going through a fun and easy obstacle course. Volunteers are available to help the children and answer questions. Each child receives a coupon for a free ice cream cone at the Silver Scoop. Contact Jim Roller for more information and to volunteer! Jim: 303-233-7465 or rollerjim@aol.com.

September 27-29, 2024, Castle Rock, CO. A joint ILR and ALSA show plus educational clinics on llama health and care. September 27 thru September 29th, 2024. Location: Douglas County Fairgrounds, 500 Fairgrounds Drive, Castle Rock, CO. Contact Julie Hall for more information: jmhbluehorse@yahoo.com or 303-910-2134.

Sweety's Rescue - Update

The Winter 2023 Journal featured an article about the rescue of Sweety, a seven year old pregnant llama lost in the Indian Peaks Wilderness on September 13, 2023. A group of highly motivated people led by RMLA members Leigh DiNatale and Fiona Caruthers found Sweety a few weeks later and returned her home to Oregon.

In May, Sweety's male cria was born. Such a happy ending.

Leigh DiNatale and Fiona Caruthers with Sweety

RESEARCH

Landmark Study of Llama Impact on Hiking Trails

By Ron Baird, Research Committee

Claims frequently are made that llamas should be banned from National Parks or U.S. Forests "because they cause damage" and are "not native to the area."

Allegations such as these were made by Walter Dabney, Superintendent of Canyonlands National Park in the 1990s, when he attempted to ban llamas from being used in that park as pack animals. RMLA was a lead plaintiff against the U.S. Department of the Interior in that legal case. Interior ultimately agreed to never impose a similar action against llamas to settle the case. Similar claims have been made in Alaska recently, where the Forest Service was prohibiting llamas but not horses and mules as pack animals.

Debunking such claims are some very salient facts:

- Llamas are in the camelid family, which originated in North America.
- Llamas lived in the Dakotas, Arizona and elsewhere until about 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.
- A well-preserved skeleton of a llama from about 25,000 years ago is in the Mammoth Museum in Hot Springs, South Dakota where it was recovered along with mammoths and some 86 other species from a Pleistocene era sinkhole.
- The Denver Museum of Nature and Science requested the skeleton of a modern llama about twenty years ago to compare with bones it had recovered from an ancient cave in the mountains of Colorado.

Claims that llamas cause damage to forests and trails were refuted and debunked in a 1998 study from the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute (Publication #319). RMLA contributed substantial financial grants to the study.

The study's purpose "was to assess the relative physical impact of hikers, llamas, and horses on recreational trails."

The highly technical analysis of these types of impacts from feet was accomplished by assessing the damage caused by horses, llamas, and humans on 56 different hiking trails in the Lubrecht Experimental Forest in western Montana.

All three species were walked across both wet and dry trail plots 250 to 1,000 times each and then compared to control plots that had no foot traffic on them. The amount of soil erosion, compaction, and changes in surface texture were assessed.

The study's conclusion was "differences … between llama and horse traffic indicate that trail managers may want to consider managing pack stock llamas independent of horses."

The following graphs illustrate the authors' conclusion that llamas cause much less damage to trails than other pack animals and about the same as humans.

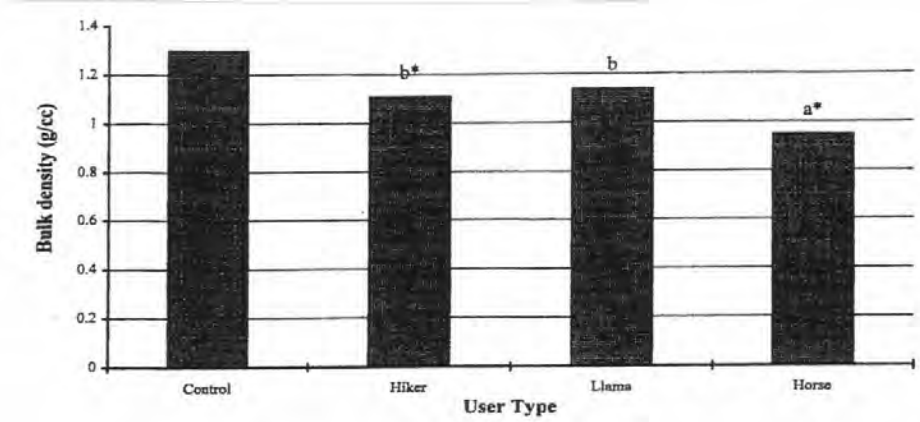

Figure 2. Soil bulk density following hiker, llama, and horse traffic averaged across two levels of traffic application intensity to dry trail segments. Bars with asterisks are significantly different than the control ($P \leq 0.05$) by Dunnet's analysis and bars without similar letters are significantly different ($P \leq 0.05$) by Tukey's test.

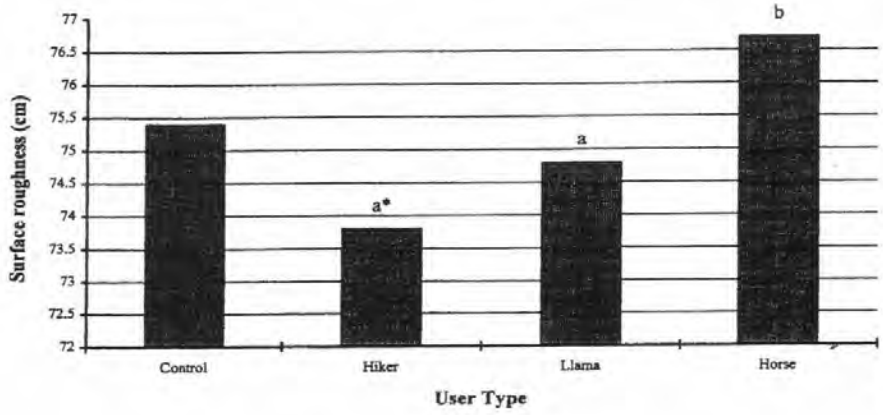

Figure 3. Mean roughness of soil surface as measured by total vertical variation (70 cm = level) across the hiking trail following hiker, llama, or horse traffic averaged across two levels of traffic application intensity and wet and dry trail moisture conditions. Bars with asterisks are significantly different than the control ($P \leq 0.05$) by Dunnet's analysis and bars for without similar letters are significantly different ($P \leq 0.05$) by Tukey's test.

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The study, entitled "Influence of Llamas, Horses, and Hikers on Soil Erosion from Established Recreation Trails in Western Montana, USA" is available from the RMLA Library, under the care of Sandy Lockwood. It also is available from the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, Rocky Mountain Research Station, 790 E Beckwith Ave., Missoula, MT 59801 or at https://leopold.wilderness.net/publications and data.

When that page opens, go to Publications Search. The key word is llamas. The start and end years are 1998.

Then Search, the following comes up: https://leopold.wilderness.net/pubs/319.pdf. That pdf is named "Influence of Llamas, Horses, and Hikers on Soil Erosion…

Now you can print the entire pdf document, which is eight pages in length.

RMLA members may want to read this study as it can be extremely useful in explaining to the public or possible purchasers the exceptionally light impact llamas have on the environment compared to other livestock.

Great American River Clean-Up

by Cali Roberson

Reprinted with permission from the Fall 2023, LANA News

We know that our llamas are designed to be a beast of burden, so it is a great privilege to put their design to use by serving the community. In September, LANA Board of Directors member Lee Beringsmith organized a group of volunteers and their llamas to assist with the Great American River Clean Up (GARCU) in Sacramento, CA. The GARCU is hosted by the American River Parkway Foundation who states, "cleanups are essential to removing trash and debris from the Parkway, allowing the environment to heal itself and preventing trash and debris from entering the ecosystem and the waterways." Since 1983 this nonprofit group has been dedicated to the conservation of the American River Parkway through clean-ups, trail maintenance, invasive plant management, and educational programs. This is no small task when you learn how immense the American River Parkway actually is.

Planning for the American River Parkway began as early as 1915 with city planner John Nolen submitting a plan that called for a continuous park along the American River called the "American River Parkway." In 1960, Sacramento County began acquiring the land needed with the last acquisition occurring in 2008. The main trail that spans the 32-mile length of the parkway, the Jedediah Smith Memorial trail, was recognized as a national trail in 1974. In total, the park maintains 82 miles of trails that wind over its 4,800 acres. The parkway encompasses the area from the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers at Discovery Park to the Nimbus Fish Hatchery, with the last ten miles from the hatchery to Folsom Dam being Federal land. It is estimated that eight million people visit annually to walk, bike, horseback ride, kayak, boat, fish, and enjoy the scenery.

During the GARCU, volunteer groups meet up at different locations depending on the size of their group. Lee Beringsmith and the LANA group gathered with dozens of other volunteers at the 444-acre River Bend Park. Lee brought his daughter Honey and her son Bradley. They

brought two llamas, Pandora and Kitzi. LANA President Kathy Nichols brought Billy for his first trip off the ranch in several years. LANA Vice President Stephanie Pedroni came in her van with the sturdy Sno. The Roberson family of Charlotte, Audrey, and myself arrived with our three youngsters: McClure, Don Pedro, and Shasta.

The llama partners that were in attendance ran the gamut from young and inexperienced yearlings to seasoned veterans. For the veterans, it was a nice change of scenery. They showed the youngsters how to navigate water crossings and narrow trails overhung with branches. They also shouldered the heaviest loads. (Even if some of that load was a collection of notable rocks.) For the youngsters, there were nearly infinite training opportunities. They navigated changing terrain: sand, loose river rocks, deadfalls, grassy areas dotted with shrubs, and paved, busy roads. Their friends would disappear around a bend and test their willingness to be alone. By the end of the day all of them were comfortable with their handlers stuffing all kinds of strange things into their packs.

Strange things were indeed found! It was a slow start as we worked out from our starting point. When we departed from the park, we were part of a large group of volunteers that each had trash bags in hand. Since we had llamas to carry our trash, we lined their panniers with empty bags. In the beginning, we mostly picked up small bits of trash and cans. Our team split up and began working in areas off the beaten path. The further off-trail we went, the more we found. Lee and his group's top finds were an old pair of underwear and a rusty frying pan. We saw an ottoman but didn't think we could pack that out. Our group came across several cardboard boxes that contained a variety of trash and a smelly, deteriorating, sleeping bag. We were able to roll up the sleeping bag into a larger trash bag and put it on top of Billy's back. He made our group look as if we'd been picking up trash all week as he packed his tottering load back to the park.

The walk back to the park was also an excellent public relations opportunity. Hundreds of people use the parkway daily for bicycling and walking. Passersby shouted the familiar question: "llama or alpaca?" While many zoomed by giving a friendly wave, there were many that stopped to talk. It was great to have full packs of trash to show the public how our llamas can use their natural talents for public service. Stephanie and Sno with her luxurious lofty locks were the stars of more than a few selfies. At the park we unloaded our haul and said our goodbyes. We are already looking forward to helping with this event again next year

Biosecurity and Biocontainment for the Llama and Alpaca Herd

Robert J. Callan, DVM, Diplomate ACVIM, Retired

One important aspect of raising llamas and alpacas is minimizing the risk of infectious diseases. That starts with utilizing management systems that minimize the introduction of disease into the herd (Biosecurity) and also minimize the spread of disease between animals in the herd (Biocontainment). In this presentation, we will discuss the principles of biosecurity and biocontainment. An important aspect of infectious disease control is knowing what samples to collect and how to test for the common infectious diseases. Isolation or quarantine protocols are important for incoming animals. Lastly, understanding what disinfectants can and cannot do and how to use them will help minimize transmission of infectious diseases within the herd.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity is the process of keeping potential infectious diseases out of your herd. The most common way of acquiring a new disease in your herd is through the introduction or exposure to outside animals. While a closed herd is a wonderful concept, it is rarely if ever a possibility in normal facilities. Animals are bought and sold. Animals from the herd may go to shows, packing, the veterinarian, or other events where they are exposed to other animals and could bring a disease back to the herd. Wild animals such as deer, elk, fox, coyote, waterfowl, etc. can have access to pastures or pens. Some infectious diseases are transmitted by insects, such as West Nile Virus. Colostrum from cattle used as a replacement if colostrum is not available from the dam can transmit infectious disease and was incriminated as a possible source of Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus (BVDV) infection in alpacas. So, while a biosecure herd is a terrific goal, it is virtually impossible to attain in the real world setting. Instead, our goal is to take the steps that we can to minimize the risk as much as possible.

Know the Herd of Origin: One of the simplest and least expensive steps of a good biosecurity program is knowing the herd of origin. More specifically, it is good to know the basic management, husbandry, nutrition, vaccination, and disease control procedures of the herd. It is a good idea to request a health and vaccination history for any new animals entering the herd. If possible, visit the herd of origin and examine the other animals in the herd. Put your hand on a few animals and assess the body condition score. Ask the owners what they feed, if they provide any vitamin and mineral supplements and if possible, get a label of the product. You can then evaluate that product, particularly for adequate levels of vitamin A, D, and E (should be around 200,000-250,000 IU/lb., 20,000-30,000 IU/lb., and 5,000-10,000 IU/lb. respectively). If you are concerned about parasites in the herd, ask the owner if you can collect some fecal samples from dung piles and submit them for a herd composite fecal float. This will give you an idea of what intestinal parasites are more prevalent in the herd.

Entry Diagnostic Tests: Testing for pathogens can be helpful prior to entry of a new animal. However, for camelids, many of the common health related pathogens are endemic throughout the United States and testing may have limited benefit. For example, while *Mycoplasma haemolamae* can cause serious disease in individual animals, surveys in the Rocky Mountain region suggest that up to 70% of animals have previous exposure and may be asymptomatic carriers. Thus, the value of pre-entry Polymerase Chain testing (PCR) for this pathogen may be questioned, particularly if you do not know the status of your own animals. The same can be said for coccidia, *Eimeria macusaniensis*. While this parasite can cause serious disease, it is relatively widespread throughout camelid populations and may be difficult to detect in healthy animals. Requiring a negative test before entry does not ensure the animal is not a carrier and will likely have little impact on your herd if there are other animals in your herd that are carriers. So if you have not performed regular testing within your herd to show that the pathogen is not present, it may not make sense to test new animals.

All new animals entering a herd should be tested, or confirmed tested, for BVDV status. Persistently infected (PI) carriers are the primary source of BVDV in camelids and the current PCR tests are very effective at identifying PI animals. Another important infectious pathogen that could have significant negative impact if it entered a new herd is

Johne's Disease (*Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*). Johne's disease is a slowly progressive infection of the small intestine that results in inflammation and thickening of the intestinal wall and reduced nutrient absorption. Animals that develop clinical signs show progressive weight loss and eventual death. There is no effective treatment to cure the disease. Testing feces by a Johne's fecal PCR is a good test to minimize the risk of introduction of this pathogen.

Quarantine Protocols: The use of a quarantine procedure is important in minimizing the risk of exposing the entire herd to an infectious pathogen brought in by an outside animal or any animal from your herd that is exposed to other animals outside of the herd. The main concept of the quarantine protocol is to allow time to obtain biosecurity test results for newly introduced animals and to allow the animal to clear any recently acquired infectious pathogens. Results for most of the diagnostic tests used to identify common pathogens are available within two weeks. In addition, potential shedding and transmission of most transient infectious diseases rarely exceeds three weeks. Based on this, three weeks is a commonly recommended quarantine period. Note that this time is three weeks from the introduction of the last animal to enter the quarantine group.

The quarantine pen must be isolated from other animals if it is truly going to be effective. A distance of at least 100 feet is recommended to help minimize aerosol transmission as well as indirect transmission through people or objects. Routine aerosol transmission for most pathogens can extend for distances of ten feet, but decrease rapidly after that depending on environmental conditions and the specific pathogen. Movement of people and supplies between the quarantine area and the rest of the herd is a more common means of transmission. Separate cleaning, feeding, and watering equipment and supplies should be dedicated to the quarantine area. Humans should feed and handle quarantine animals last and if possible, wear protective clothing while in the quarantine area, and wash hands when finished with the quarantine area.

Entry Treatment and Vaccination: It is a very good idea to treat incoming animals for ear ticks as soon as possible and preferably even before they enter the trailer for transport. Treatment can be as simple as spraying Catron IV fly and tick spray into each ear right away, and again at two weeks and one month. Ear ticks are easy to control and can cause so many problems in the herd if they are not controlled that this is one of the simplest and most cost effective precautions. You may also consider booster vaccinations while in quarantine, particularly if the vaccination history of the animal is not known. This should at least include Clostridial CD&T toxoid. West Nile and rabies vaccination may also be considered depending on the risk in your local area. Routine deworming would not necessarily be recommended unless something unusual was found on herd or individual animal fecal floatation tests.

Biocontainment

Biocontainment is the process of minimizing the spread of infectious pathogens within a herd. The concept accepts the fact that some pathogens are either environmental, or endemic within a herd and there are basic management practices that can help minimize the development of clinical disease in the herd. The most fundamental aspect of biocontainment is basic husbandry, including animal nutrition. Perhaps the most common cause of immunosuppression is poor nutrition, particularly vitamins and minerals such as vitamin A, D, and E, copper, zinc, and selenium. Dry hay forages in the Rocky Mountain area seem to be notoriously deficient in vitamin E, and often also in vitamin A. We also know that camelids are susceptible to vitamin D deficiency due to the thick fiber coat, particularly in animals with a dark fleece. This is accentuated at northern latitudes such as Colorado and further north but can be seen in southern states as well. Nutritional supplementation with an appropriate vitamin and mineral salt mix is helpful maintaining appropriate vitamin and mineral levels to support normal immune system function. Insufficient energy and protein during the winter months is also a common nutritional problem that can lead to immunosuppression and increased risk of infectious disease. Providing supplemental energy and protein in the form of alfalfa hay, camelid pellets, or simply a corn-oats-barley (COB) grain mix can greatly help maintain body condition and immune system function during the winter. Forage nutrient testing of hay is a very inexpensive way to evaluate what you are feeding and determine how to supplement during times of stress.

A proper vaccination program is helpful in biocontainment. Annual Clostridium CD&T vaccination should be provided

for all animals. Animals less than one year of age should receive at least one vaccination at four to six months of age and again two to four weeks later based on label instructions for the vaccine that you use. This is true even if the animals received CD&T vaccination prior to four months of age. West Nile and rabies vaccination should be provided in areas at risk. Work with your veterinarian to develop an appropriate vaccination program for your area.

Animals with a suspected or confirmed infectious disease that is considered contagious should be separated from the herd until they have recovered. If available, you can use your quarantine isolation area. The same contact precautions should be provided for these animals as new animals entering the herd.

Disinfectants: There are numerous types of disinfectants and they all have their advantages and disadvantages. Common and economical disinfectants include alcohols (isopropyl alcohol), hypochlorites (bleach), povidone iodine (Betadine), phenols (Lysol), and biguanides (Chlorhexidine, Nolvasan). It is important to note that all disinfectants will work better on solid surfaces that are already cleaned with a detergent and water. Detergents themselves can denature the surface of pathogens and the act of washing dilutes and removes pathogens from the surface. That is why washing your hands with soap and water goes a long way to help prevent transmission of pathogens. A proper disinfection procedure starts with thorough cleaning of the solid surface with soap and water followed by application of an appropriate disinfectant. The disinfectant can then be applied to the clean surface with a spray bottle or a garden sprayer. Recommended dilution rates of common products for disinfection are:

Bleach 5%

- Add 1 to 1 ½ cup Bleach to 1 gallon water
- Note, bleach will degrade over time when stored at room temperature. Recommend to replace if not used in one year or mix at a lower dilution.

Povidone Iodine 10%

- Effective disinfectant from 1-5% Povidone Iodine
- Add 8 cups Povidone Iodine to 1 gallon water to give a 5% solution
- Add 1.5 cup Povidone Iodine to 1 gallon water to give a 0.9% solution

Chlorhexidine 2%

- Add 1 ounce (30 ml) Chlorhexidine to 1 gallon water

PACKING/HIKING

Llama Adventures In The Royal Mountains Of Bolivia

by Keith Payne, New Zealand

Author's Note: All photos taken by myself on the high plateaus we crossed are known as the Tiwanaku Altiplano.

In May last year, I ventured to Bolivia, intending to complete a five day trek in the Bolivian Cordillera Real (Royal Mountains), using llamas to transport the gear—Andean style, meaning the llamas would not be using western style packs, and they would be driven in front of us instead of us leading them.

Jose and Keith

After four exhausting flights, I finally arrived in Bolivia and stepped into 4,200m (13,000 feet) of altitude. A short drive to La Paz and 3,500m (10,800 feet) of altitude—still pretty high up and exhaustion and dehydration were kicking in. But after two days of adjustment and a good sleep, I felt ready for my llama/trekking adventure. I was to be joined on the trip by a Bolivian guide and my good friend Jose from Peru; Jose would be my guide and translator for the duration of my stay in Bolivia.

We were collected at 6 a.m. and once underway advised there had been a meter of snow in the mountains and it was still snowing. Sure enough as we navigated some interesting roads, the snow accumulated, and eventually we were obliged to stop. We ended up finishing the day in a deserted building, leaving the following morning on foot to try and work our way to a well-known base camp called Chiar Khota where we could assess the situation further. Meanwhile, we learned that the vehicle transporting our llamas had also failed to navigate the roads. A couple of neighborly donkeys were engaged and ably transported our supplies.

The trip to the base camp on the Tiwanaku Altiplano was long, but the snow had stopped and the sun became hot. We travelled down a wide valley full of llamas and alpacas, all of whom seemed amused by these visitors to their domain. The landscape was dotted with basic sod cottages, most of which had 2 or 3 stone corrals nearby; some appeared to be lived in and an equal number had been abandoned, left to slowly decay into the hills. A close look at the camelid herds would disclose a person watching over them, keeping an eye on our movements, but not welcoming communication. As we moved along, I began to understand the danger presented to camelid farmers by way of pumas and poachers. Accordingly, they are wary of strangers.

The base camp is positioned at an altitude of 4,700m (14,500 feet) (by comparison the Mt. Everest base camp is at 5,350m [16,600 feet]) and it was filled daily by professional climbing clubs from Europe, Argentina and Asia. Jose and I had a mattress to throw our sleeping bags on and falling asleep was a breeze.

A herd of llamas who wandered freely around base camp and the nearby mountains.

The managers at the base camp kept their own herd of llamas. Of course, in Andean fashion they were never contained and wandered about the hills overlooking the camp. I would be up early each morning to watch them arise at the first hint of light and after toilet they began to graze, just as I have observed my own llamas doing over the years. The temperature was always -5 to -20C (23 to -4F) each evening, but would work its way to mid/late teens by noon for a couple of hours. And so this mountain herd would wander along the very steep and slippery mountain sides, munching as they went, and very relaxed. I could not see any vegetation that would sustain a llama, but they managed well. These were very fit and healthy animals.

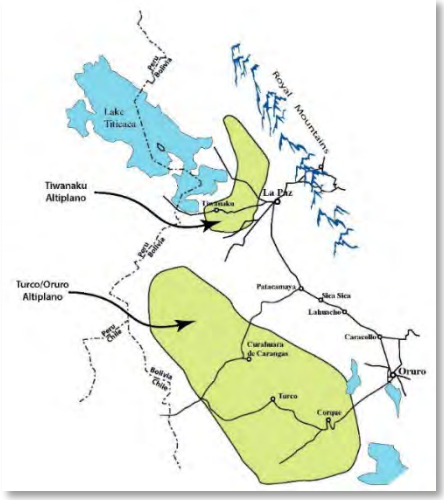
The snow had made it too dangerous for us to travel through passes to other locations so Jose and I occupied ourselves around the nearby magical high mountain lake, preparing for the next day when we would attempt to conquer a majestic peak nearby, called Pico Austria.

We were up early, and we followed a path down a few hundred meters before beginning the ascent. It went well on the single file trail in the snow. Until about 4,900m (15,000 feet) we got the shock of our lives. There on the trail ahead of us appeared the llamas from the base camp (**see cover photo**). We were a bit dumfounded but their reaction towards us was classic "what are you humans doing on our mountain, eh". But they were gracious enough to jump off trail into deep snow so we could continue on. They were totally unfazed by the snow, the cold, the altitude etc. My question was "what do they eat up here" and Jose pointed to the tips of ichu grass sticking up through the snow. It was very coarse and now frozen as well, but not an issue for the llama!

Eventually we had to turn back before reaching the summit. At 5,180m (16,000 feet) our guide decided the deeper snow made it too dangerous to continue and after paying tribute and an offering to the mountain apu, we began our descent. It turned out to be much more difficult than the ascent but that is another story.

In some areas only the tips of ichu grass were visible in the snow; this is all the llamas had to eat.

The donkeys capably transported our supplies out and we returned to La Paz. The next day we were scheduled to make a presentation at the La Paz University about llamas in New Zealand and my guanaco/llama breeding/training program. This was followed by an adventure living on the Turco altiplano with llamas for two weeks. Stay tuned!



Reference Map of the Altipanos by Ron Hinds

These donkeys were recruited to carry our supplies; they were great!

Library News

By Ron Baird, Research Committee

A treasure is in the RMLA Library. Hidden among the many useful publications are some of historical significance. One of these is a first edition copy of *Speechless Brothers, The History and Care of Llamas* by Andy Tillman. Tillman is regarded as one of the founders of the lama industry in North America, having begun raising them in 1975 and publishing the first newsletter about them in 1978. The volume is interesting to read if for no other reason than to compare ideas on the care and welfare of llamas then and now.

If you are an RMLA Member, click https://rmla.com/lending-library/ to check out up to three items from the library.

Safety Considerations for Driving a Llama

By Susan L. Gawarecki © 2024
Pathfinder Farm, Andersonville, Tennessee

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Choosing the Right Llama

This is probably the most important step for success and safety in driving. Most people imagine that the right driving llama would be large, tall, and strong. While these may be considerations, it turns out that size has little to do with a llama's ability—and especially willingness—to pull a cart. A rule of thumb is that most llamas can pull twice their body weight on level ground, and considering that a metal easy-entry cart weighs about 100 pounds and a driver possibly as much as two hundred pounds, you are still not close to the theoretical physical limit for an average llama (except on steep hills).

Driving Clinic at the SSLA Annual Conference

Sex of the llama doesn't seem to matter; females can be driven as easily as males. Intact males may have other things on their mind instead of driving, so unless you are fully confident in the behavior of your intact male, a gelding may be preferable. Age is also a consideration. While ground driving may be started with a two-year old, it is preferable to wait until a llama is fully physically and mentally mature before hooking it to a cart, typically no sooner than four years old.

The most important consideration is the llama's temperament. If the llama is uneasy when separated from the herd, startles easily, balks when being led, is an unrepentant kicker, or doesn't readily adapt to new situations, that is not the llama you want. Choose a llama that may graze or hang out separately from the herd and is not overly eager to return when away from the barn. It should have a relatively calm disposition and accept handling well. I also look for the llama that likes to surge ahead of me when being led, that is tolerant of or even enjoys public outings (parades are always a good test of this attribute), and that has a long reaching stride (llamas that have short strides, move more slowly and tire more quickly). Your best performance llama may not make the best driving llama, because performance animals are taught to follow the handler, not to take instruction from behind or perform at all independently.

Desensitization

By the time you have hooked a cart up to a llama, most of the desensitization work should have been done. These steps are laid out in detail in my online articles *Fitting the Harness for Ground Driving* and *Fitting the Harness – Training Alternatives* (see links and QR codes at the end to download these). To summarize, the llama:

- must be trained not to kick during the harnessing process;
- must be desensitized to wearing a complete harness by introducing pieces in steps during ground driving training;
- must be taught to back up using voice and rein commands; and
- must be desensitized not to bolt or panic from barking dogs, traffic noise and passing cars.

When beginning to introduce the concept of pulling something, the llama needs to both be accepting of pressure against its chest as it moves forward, and the noise of an object directly behind it where it does not have complete visual coverage. I like to start with a drag, such as a small log or piece of landscape timber, about five feet long, that is tied crosswise behind the llama. Use ropes or straps around the wood about a foot from each end, and tied to the ends of the traces. Be sure that it is at the approximate position that the front of the cart would be in. The driver will walk behind the drag. You should start with a handler leading the llama until it seems accepting of the noise and pressure of the drag. Then ground driving with the driver alone can take place over a variety of surfaces. Note that this does not help with braking practice, although the llama should be periodically stopped completely with voice and rein commands. Backing up with a drag should be avoided.

After the llama has been successfully worked with a drag, have your helper introduce the noise of the cart. The first time this is done, you may lead the llama beside the cart as the handler pulls it. Do this with the cart on each side of the llama. When it is calm about this, move into the driving position and repeat. Finally, have your helper move directly behind you and pull the cart in that position. You should work through the repertoire of starting, turning, gait changes, and stopping. Only after any nervousness about the noise and presence of the cart has disappeared should you go on to the next step. When using the cart, always be sure the tires are properly inflated.

Connecting To The Cart

Initial connection of your llama to the cart requires an assistant. The llama must either be securely tied or held. You need to approach it from behind with the llama between the shafts. Often at this point, the llama wants to swing sideways to get a better view of the situation; just patiently reposition the llama or approach it with the cart from a different angle. The first point of contact will be the shafts being inserted through the tugs, generally hanging behind the connecting loops (for the holdbacks) on the shafts, unless the llama is very large and long bodied. This is the first time the llama will feel the weight of the shafts, so give it a moment to get used to that. On flat ground, the place at which the shafts rest in the tugs should be level with, or preferably slightly elevated from, the height at which they connect to the cart. From the side, the shafts will appear horizontal or slightly angled upwards towards the llama. At this point, you can then begin the connecting process. If the llama is unruly or kicking, you may have to back up a step to do more desensitization training.

Once the cart is connected, lead the llama with the cart behind it so it becomes used to the noise and presence of the cart, the shaft weight (this will change with a driver in the seat), and the sensation of braking and moving downhill with the cart weight being taken up by the breeching. Backing up should also be practiced. It is important that the harness be adjusted so that the shafts are held vertically in one position by the tugs and tie- down straps but are allowed to move a couple of inches forward and backward to allow pulling from the breast collar and braking/backing to be taken up by the breeching. Harnessing should not be so tight that both are under pressure at the same time, nor should the tie-downs wrap around the shafts, causing these forces to be transferred to the belly-band/back-saddle unit. Again, work through the repertoire of starting, turning, gait changes, backing, and stopping until the llama is comfortable with the changes to cart and shaft positions and changing pressures on the harness pieces.

Ground Driving With The Cart

Once the llama seems at ease with being led while pulling the cart, you can begin ground driving with the cart. Again, begin with a helper on the lead rope, and the driver walking behind the cart with the reins in hand. If the reins are too short for this to be comfortable, add a length of rope between them. As these sessions continue and the llama shows increased confidence, the driver can ground-drive without the helper leading. At this point it is imperative that the llama stop reliably on command, both verbal and with rein pulling, from any gait.

Cart Driving Safety

When the llama is accepting of the previous steps, the driver can move into the cart. The handler should hold the llama still at this point because the driver will suddenly be adding considerable weight to the shafts by stepping onto the floor of the cart. Get in and out of the cart a few times to get the llama used to the feeling before starting to drive. With the driver in the seat, check the shaft weight at the tugs—it should be nearly weightless but not pulling upwards, nor likely to do so on modest uphill stretches. Shaft weight can be changed by adjusting the relative lengths of the tugs

and tie-down straps as well as by moving the cart seat forwards or backwards on its mount. The driver can also affect shaft weight by leaning forwards or backwards in the seat as part of the process of cueing the llama or adjusting for road conditions.

Begin driving with the handler on the lead rope and run through the repertoire of maneuvers until the llama is comfortable. Then the handler can be dispensed with. Leave a short length (not long enough to interfere with the legs) of lead rope dangling from the driving halter in case the driver needs to dismount to lead or restrain the llama.

Training Locale It is wise when starting off the farm, and especially near a road, to have an assistant holding a lead rope at the beginning of each session until the llama has demonstrated reliable behavior near traffic. Training often progresses more quickly off the farm because the distractions of herd mates and the possibility of returning to the barn are eliminated. On weekends and most evenings, school parking lots are an ideal place to practice. They typically have little if any car traffic or onlookers, are well-paved, and there are wide parking lots and large circles to accommodate bus and car loading zones. The llama can safely be worked in this restricted and safe environment, using traffic cones if desired for maneuvering practice, until it is comfortable and reliably responding to cues and commands.

At this point, the llama can be moved onto roadways or greenways. Driving on a road, a llama cart is considered a vehicle, and is thus required to drive on the right side with traffic. The llama must be used to cars approaching from the rear, slowing down, and passing on its left side. It must be tolerant of barking dogs and dogs that may run after it (I tend to forgive llamas that kick obnoxious dogs). The llama must stop on command and with rein pressure. If it bolts or refuses to stop, the driver can lead forward to increase shaft pressure on the llama's back saddle. Considerations for travel in the presence of vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and dog-walkers are given below.

Protective Gear Driving gloves should be worn for all rein work. Control of your llama on the street, in the ring, or in any public venue is of the utmost importance. Gloves allow you to grip the reins securely without risk of rope burn, and they minimize hand fatigue. Bicycling gloves with padded palms and ventilated backs are an excellent choice, although any well-fitting glove is better than none. Gloves should fit you snugly so they cannot slip off under pulling stress.

A properly fitted bicycle or riding helmet is a good idea for all driving in traffic and for the early experiences of driving under new conditions, for example on a busy greenway. If a helmet is not worn, protect your face with a brimmed hat. It's a nice bonus to wear a brightly colored hat.

Visibility An orange or yellow safety vest is a good idea under all public driving conditions. A lightweight mesh vest with reflective panels is inexpensive and can be worn over any clothes.

If you drive on public roads, you must have a DOT reflective triangle mounted on the back of your cart to indicate you are a slow-moving vehicle. These are available at most farm stores. The triangle can be removable if you use the cart in the show ring.

For roads and greenways with blind hills or otherwise restricted sightlines, a tall bicycle flag can alert drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians of your presence in advance. Mount it on the back left side of the cart. Ensure it is removable, so it won't interfere with transporting your cart in or on a vehicle.

Another option is to mount a bicycle bell or horn within easy driver reach so you can alert pedestrians or bicyclists that you are coming up behind them. It is courteous to call out the side you intend to pass them on by saying, "On your left" (most typically, but some situations may demand passing on the right).

Carry-Along Items When you are driving a llama for an extended distance away from your vehicle or farm, you will want to carry items for use in minor emergencies. A storage box bolted to the cart beneath or behind the seat is a good option. Be sure it (empty or full) is not so heavy to significantly affect shaft balance, or else re-balance the shafts as above. Safety and convenience items might include: first aid kit with basic supplies for both driver and llama, cell phone, wallet with money and/or credit card, a bottle of water, snacks for driver and treats

for the llama (or a portion of llama feed for long drives), rain jacket, tire repair kit, extra inner tube, hand pump, replacement nuts and bolts (especially for shaft hardware), an adjustable wrench large enough to remove a wheel if a tire change is necessary, extra straps and/or short lengths of strong cord, a pocket knife, a clip-on dog collar, a 6-ft or longer lead rope for tying the llama, sunscreen, LED headlamp, and other items you may want to carry.

Conclusion

Driving is the most fun thing I have ever done with llamas. I want other drivers to also have a fun experience, and best safety practices are the way to ensure that driving doesn't turn annoying, and in the worst case, tragic. This is accomplished by proper desensitization and training of your llama, having your equipment in good working order, following the rules of the road and legal requirements for driving a slow-moving vehicle, utilizing safety equipment, and being prepared for various—and possibly changing driving conditions and minor emergencies.

For more detailed information on the training and harness fitting process, see the following online articles:

Fitting the Harness for Ground Driving (PDF)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DRiIkEhh4KqCgrv-xXvzeSQL5yl71iH6/view?usp=drive_link

Fitting the Harness – Training Alternatives (PDF)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/15HFYbxSgRzR4qJ29PqvVsWcWklkhKhxC/view?usp=drive_link

BEHAVIOR/TRAINING

Keeping the Frustration Level LOW

By Marty McGee Bennett, CAMELIDynamics

Animal handling and training is a skill that humans learn and ges better at with practice but you must practice what is working; not keep doing what isn't working hoping like crazy that it will suddenly work. Repeat something three times that is not working and you have just taught your animal what NOT to do!

Too often when it comes to working with animals, we blame the animal for what we cannot accomplish… "that llama is difficult or that alpaca was rescued and had a hard time or that one was just born difficult." There may be a kernel of truth in these assumptions but it really doesn't matter because the only thing you CAN change is your approach. It is your job as the human to lead the dance and to learn the skills and techniques required to accomplish what is needed in a way that is the most positive and least intrusive.

The following is my laundry list of things to do to stay focused, avoid frustration and learn what it is you actually need to learn. It does no good to remain attached to the old ways that aren't working.

Practice new skills using a training aid. The most powerful exercises that we do at a clinic are the people-to-people exercises; not only do they teach a new skill but they offer a powerful window into the mind of the animal. In my opinion everyone should have a blow-up training aid. These are portable, fun and the person holding the blow up can tell if the handler is squeezing or holding. They are hands-down the best way to teach any new handling skill that involves the head. Once you have practiced with a training aid, you can move up to working with a VERY easy animal for real life practice.

Avoid practicing with difficult or very young animals. These animals are not likely to help you learn the skills that you need because they are the ones that are the least equipped to have some patience with your learning process.

Be SAFE! Always have a good look around for anything that could be a danger to you or your animal student. For example, if you are worried that the animal you are working with might jump out of the pen, you will no doubt hold on tight to the rope which will frighten the animal. Holding on makes it more likely that the animal will not feel comfortable stopping and will more likely try to jump out.

Take notes. Not only will the process of writing things down help you remember what you did last time and what you want to work on next time, but it will help you to problem solve; the very act of writing something down changes the way you process it.

Feel free to back up to what WAS working. There is nothing lost and everything to be gained by backing up to what is working. It is much better to have a plan NOT a goal. If things are not going well, back up a few steps to what was working. This will give your animal more confidence for next time. Feeling comfortable retreating makes advancing safer, you can always challenge your animal a bit AND you can always back up to what is easier.

Focus on your set up. You are almost always outnumbered by your animals; investing time to set up a handling area benefits every animal you own. Even if you only have a few animals, working with them efficiently teaches them to be cooperative. Wasting time is a sure way for you to become impatient and the animals will feel it and be concerned.

Spend time setting up a good system for herding animals to a central location so that you can manage them instead of chasing them around the pasture. Create various pens of different sizes to use for different management tasks. One size does not fit all when you are working with animals. Create at least one perfect pen (I love 9' x 9' square 5' high) that is safe, centrally located and pleasant to work in for you and the animals.

Use laneways and catch pens.

Use interconnected catch pens for moving animals.

Invest in your balancing skills Have someone take video of you working and watch it. In my early years I was determined to create training videos as soon as I could. I viewed hours and hours of video tape of me NOT doing what I wanted in order to find an hour of footage that showed what I did want. It was a powerful and sometimes painful learning tool.

Look for times when the lead is taut for several seconds and notice what the animal is doing. The most common difficulty with animal handling is applying steady pressure on the animal or on the lead or catch rope attached to the animal. This extremely common tendency causes the animal to pull back which starts the chain reaction that leads to all manner of difficulties.

The only way to learn when you are putting steady pressure on the animal is to trust the reactions of the animal (hard to do in the moment) or to watch yourself later and see it for yourself on a video. Only then you will be more likely to understand that the animal's behavior is actually a response to what you are doing.

Animal behavior on a tight lead.

Animal behavior on a loose lead.

Look at behavior and the conditions under which it occurs. Let go of the past and any theories you have about where the behavior came from; it doesn't matter and you can't change that anyway. Begin anew and figure out what is being reinforced and what is being discouraged and come up with a plan to reinforce the behavior you want.

For goodness 'sakes be as kind to yourself as a learner as you are to your animal learner. None of us gets to be amazingly competent at something immediately. Have fun and enjoy the process as you both learn.

HEALTH/MEDICAL

Update On Parasite Control In Camelids

By Dr. Luisa De La Cuadra, DVM, Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital

The meaning of the word *parasite* comes from the Greek *para-* (alongside) and *-sitos* (food), meaning "eating at another's table," and p*arasitos* that either lives inside the animal (in which case has the prefix *Endo-*) or it lives on the animal (in which case it will have the prefix *Ecto-*) characterizing the type of parasite. When thinking about parasite infections you can picture an animal that appears generally thin or unthrifty and from there the clinical signs can vary from mild to very severe. While endoparasites often lead to gastrointestinal signs (inappetence, diarrhea, colic), ectoparasites are associated with itching, hair loss (alopecia) and crusty skin.

Now you may be thinking: Okay doc I know all that but, when do I need to treat?

First, you need to know what parasites are present and where the infection is located. Different antiparasitic medications are needed to treat parasites within the gastrointestinal tract (endoparasites) and on the skin (ectoparasites). And even though some medications can treat both, depending on the parasite it may not work, and you may risk creating more resistance to antiparasitic medications. Parasites have evolved for millions of years to learn how to live with other species, and this relationship is not always bad. It is important to understand this relationship to improve prevention on farms.

For early diagnosis of endoparasites, tools like the FAMACHA ©-score and body condition score (BCS) have been recently validated in South American camelids. The FAMACHA ©-score involves checking the mucus membranes of the lower eyelid and comparing it to a score card to determine level of anemia (see link: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vetpar.2017.06.004). Research studies have shown that animals with a FAMACHA ©-score of 1 or 2 and BCS score of 3 are less likely to need treatment for parasites. For animals with scores in between, for example: FAMACHA ©-score 3/5 and BCS score 2/5, more diagnostics will be needed to diagnose a parasitic infection. All diagnostics and treatment decisions should always be discussed with your herd veterinarian.

Further diagnostics that your veterinarian may perform to look for endoparasites include blood work and a Fecal Egg Count (FEC). It may be that only 10% of the animals in a herd will shed 90% of the total number of eggs. This can make it very difficult to find the shedder(s). It is therefore helpful to utilize frequent FAMACHA © and BCS scoring to detect animals that may require FEC tests and treatment. Animals with clinical disease (e.g. presence of diarrhea, poor fleece, wasting, lethargy) should be evaluated for possible parasite infection regardless of the FAMACHA© and BCS scores. It is also important to identify the parasite species when interpreting FEC data. For example, even one *Eimeria Macusaniensis* egg (commonly named E-Mac; see Figure 1) would indicate specific treatment recommendations. Other parasites found in low numbers on FEC may not neccessitate treatment in order to preserve *refugia*.

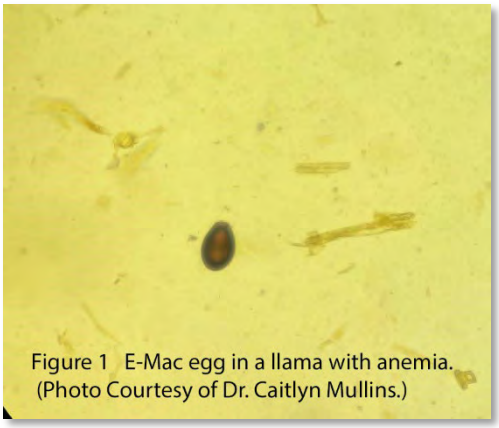

Figure 1 E-Mac egg in a llama with anemia. (Photo Courtesy of Dr. Caitlyn Mullins.)

So, what is *refugia* and why is it important?

Well, *refugia* is the percentage of parasites that are still sensitive to the dewormer you are using for treatment. When you treat only the affected animals, you should only have a small percentage of parasites that develop resistance to the medication. This will ensure that a large enough population of susceptible parasites exists within the herd to dilute out resistant parasites. This will preserve your dewormer efficacy and prevent antiparasitic resistance from developing on your farm. Unfortunately, resistance to anti-parasitic medication is becoming increasingly concerning for endoparasites and for ectoparasites and you need to be very careful when choosing the route, being very precise on the right dose,

and being consistent with good biosecurity protocols (see article on page 11). Working with your veterinarian is crucial for parasite diagnosis, prevention and implementing treatment protocols.

Ectoparasites

For early diagnosis of ectoparasites, it is important to focus your attention on changes in the skin and fleece: dryness, spots of loose fleece, thickened or crusty skin, and itchiness (see Figure 2). Chronic cases may also have weight loss and may even show failure to thrive. Ectoparasites in camelids include lice and mites. Shearing, exposure to sunlight and a dry environment reduces the likelihood of ectoparasite infection. Moist environments and cold weather are risk factors for infection. Mites are of particular concern, as these arachnids dig deep within the skin and can be difficult to diagnose and treat. Your veterinarian can perform a skin scrape, which will be analyzed under a microscope for a definitive diagnosis.

Figure 2. Male alpaca showing thickening of the skin, crustiness and loss of fleece.

There are a variety of mites that affect camelids in haired regions: sarcoptic, chorioptic, and psoroptic mange mites. *Sarcoptes* organisms are deep burrowers and may respond variably to treatment with ivermectin, amitraz, or fipronil spray. This can make mange infections in camelids difficult to treat. In 2024, a case report from Italy was published that documented treating a severe *Sarcoptes* infection with oral fluralaner (Bravecto®) in an alpaca that had failed to respond to ivermectin (see link: https://doi.org/10/1007/s11259-024-10316-0). The response to treatment in this alpaca was excellent, as the animal made a full recovery in three months. It should be emphasized that this was a single clinical case and further research is needed to understand the efficacy and safety profile of this treatment in camelids. Therefore, more effort and support for investigations into antiparasitic medications will be required to provide better recommendations to camelid owners for prevention of endo- and ecto-parasites in their herds.

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FIBER

Felting Fun

by Kathy Nichols,
LANA President and newsletter editor

Editor's Note: *reprinted with permission.*

LANA held a fiber clinic on November 4th at Board of Director Margaret Drew's ranch in Vacaville, California. Yummy breakfast goodies awaited our arrival and were thoroughly enjoyed. People visited and caught up with each other as we settled in to our work stations. A good time is guaranteed when you're with your llama friends.

Margaret and Giovanna Sensi-Isolani were the instructors for the 12 people (three kids and nine adults) who attended. Our project was wet felting a bowl or

Examples of the finished projects.

basket. We were shown finished projects to get an idea of the intended outcome. Some of the participants attended previous felting clinics; some were newbies. Everyone was eager to start.

Rubbing the fiber after layering on the resist and adding soapy water

We were shown how to layer the fiber on a round resist (thick sturdy plastic) making sure to extend the fiber beyond the edge of the resist. Wet it with sudsy water, lay bubble wrap on it and rub which causes it to felt. Flip the resist over and fold over the extended fiber, layer, spray sudsy water, bubble wrap, rub and repeat.

We each took turns using a palm sander which furthered the felting process.

Once the projects were checked, the colored fiber could be added. More spraying and rubbing was done to felt-in the colored addition.

The instructors carefully wrapped and rolled the projects in Saran wrap. We secured our creations with many rubber bands, then they were each sealed in a plastic bag. While we enjoyed a delicious potluck lunch, the fiber projects were taking a spin in the dryer which was set with no heat on fluff.

Projects were removed from the plastic wrapping and laid out. It was interesting to see the different color combinations the participants used.

Then the big decision….where to cut the hole. Depending on how we wanted the finished design, a hole was cut just large enough to insert a heavy duty latex balloon or a small inflatable beach ball. We wrapped our projects in netting and bounced and rolled them in a bowl for more felting and to smooth out the seams.

When the projects got the OK, the balloon or ball was removed and voilà— a finished project.

HIKING/PACKING

Another Perspective on Tethering Llamas

By Ron McFarland

Editor's Note: *The Spring Journal featured an in-depth article by three RMLA members on what and how they successfully and not so successfully have staked out their llamas in the backcountry. This article features how Ron McFarland stakes out his llamas. He credits Bill Gardner, former owner of Antero Llamas, for teaching him the stake out system he uses.*

Clip position

At the halter we use two small hardware store carabiner style clips. They are attached opposite, meaning they go off from opposite sides of the center ring. It's a bit fiddly but it works. The idea is that it is doubtful a llama could rub both of them open. The clips are spring loaded and I take a couple of extras on trips as they can lose the spring retention.

The same clip setup is used on the stake end with a swivel. The idea is the swivel would break if the llama was threatened. But, I'm not entirely sure of that as the tension might not be aligned for the force to be directly applied.

Ring position

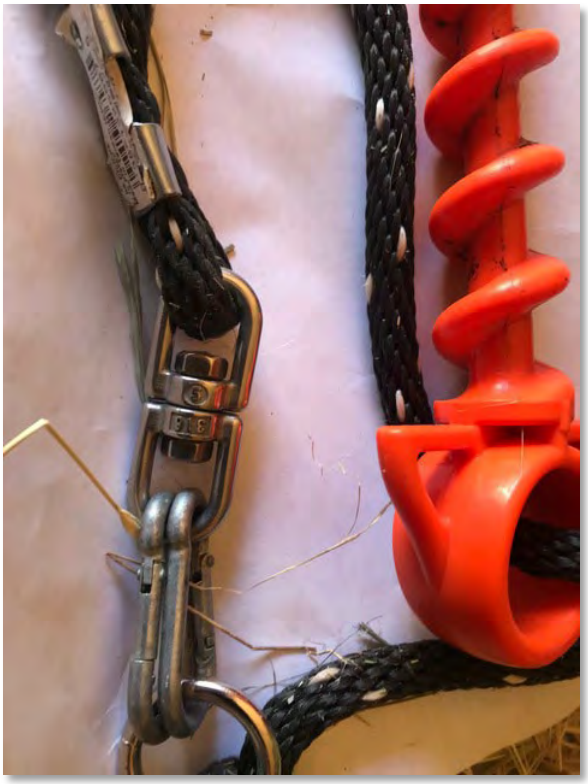
Next, I place a ring about 20 inches from the end that the clips attach to. The ring is held in place by a simple knot.

I have been using orange screw pegs which seem pretty reliable but they do require a sleeve to screw into ground. I take extra sleeves and pegs with me.

The lead rope is about 3/8" and heavier than probably needed, but now that we pack with four llamas I don't worry about the weight. With a bit of shopping a lighter set up could be put together. I did see an outfitter in Montana selling an adjustable stake out lead, 20' to 16'. That's a nice feature, but I am not sure what the best length should be. I have camped where we needed to shorten the lead in which case I ran a rope through the stake and had all the clips on the halter.

A word of caution: Carry a knife because if something has to happen quickly, a knife might be the solution especially when there's tension in the rope.

Rope connection to the stake



Close up

Here is our lead rope system. It is a simple brass bolt snap to the halter with a panic snap on other end. Place a ring about 20 inches from the panic snap and clip the snap into the ring to make a loop around a tree or shrub. Bill Gardner used this for rental llamas because clients didn't have to learn how to tie knots. Stan Ebel is right about using a bowline knot for stringing and staking out. I use it for hanging panniers up a tree, with a quick release in rope.

Lead rope system using a panic snap

The only time I had difficulty undoing a panic snap was in the rain or if the llama gets on wrong side of a tree in a string. There can be a lot of tension.

I did learn that because bull snaps require two hands to undo, they make a one handed version. But I'm guessing that a llama could bump it and get it loose. Some people use duct tape to keep bull snaps closed and never remove a halter in the backcountry. It might make sense in a rental situation.

I tried beekeeping once and learned that for every beekeeping task, any two beekeepers always did it differently. This is probably true for llama packers too.

RMLA EVENT

John Mallon Clinic

By Sandy Schilling, event organizer

The John Mallon Clinic scheduled in northern Arizona over the Memorial Day weekend was planned to be an intimate training event at the Ranch of the Oaks, owned by our very own RMLA members, Tom and Mette Goehring. The participants included many RMLA members – Sheri Bowman, Karen Freund, Tom, Mette and I all from the area. The other participants traveled from southern Arizona, Colorado and Utah. This group consisted of breeders of alpacas, folks that hike with their llamas, fiber mill owners as well as brand new llama owners.

John Mallon and the group

As the first day of the clinic began, John suffered from a medical emergency and was rushed to the hospital. Fortunately, one of the clinic attendees has a medical background and traveled with John and his wife Stephanie to the Emergency Room.

Spoiler Alert: John is now fine. He's working on getting his voice back to 100%. As a side note, Stephanie told me that silence is bliss.

What do we do now that the star of our show is gone? Improvise, of course!

Earlier that week, I had invited RMLA's own Llama Linda Hayes to the training site to see her longtime friend, John Mallon. As John left for the Emergency Room, Linda arrived to discover what was happening. After a short discussion, Linda volunteered to give some training pointers to our group. Linda worked with my two year old llama, Narnia, while our group gathered on the shady porch to learn. Linda talked and answered questions for about an hour before we broke for lunch.

Tom and Mette took the group on a personalized tour of their fiber mill and educated everyone about their process. Participants were able to watch the machines at work and view the end products ready to ship back to their owners.

Linda Hayes and Narnia discussing life.

Luckily, Ranch of the Oaks is home to multiple llamas and alpacas. A few alpacas were due for a hoof trim. Sheri taught members of the group proper trimming techniques and allowed others the opportunity to get some hands on experience.

The day ended with lots of conversation, sharing of experiences and making of new friends.

All participants were made whole of their clinic costs and each received copies of John's training CDs as a thank you.

Thank you to RMLA for sponsoring the event and providing us insurance coverage.

Many, many thanks to Llama Linda Hayes for stepping in, completely unaware and unprepared, to share her training tips, advice, and experience.

A huge thank you to Tom and Mette Goehring for hosting the event at their home and business. They deserve a second bigger thank you for tolerating me continuously bugging them about our event planning.

Sheri showing proper hoof trimming techniques.

International Year of Camelids

The United Nations (UN) has designated 2024 as the International Year of Camelids. Camels, llamas, alpacas, vicuñas and guanacos are an important source of livelihood for millions of families - most of them pastoralists - in dryland and mountainous rangeland ecosystems around the world. The Year is meant to raise the public's and policymakers' awareness of the significant role of camelids in protecting ecosystems, conserving biodiversity, assuring food security and adapting to climate change. The resolution for the International Year of Camelids, proposed by the Government of Bolivia and presented by Ecuador as Country Chair of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), was approved by the UN General Assembly on 17 October 2017 upon recommendation by FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN).

Visit International Year of Camelids for more information and resources you can use to plan public activities. The videos are awesome.