



AUSTRALIAN ALPACA

An Introduction To Alpacas



In this issue:

- Frequently Asked Questions
- Alpacas 21st Century Livestock
- Alpaca Products Catalogue



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Publisher

Australian Alpaca - An Introduction To Alpacas is published by the Australian Alpaca Association Ltd.
ABN 30 067 146 481
ACN 067 146 481

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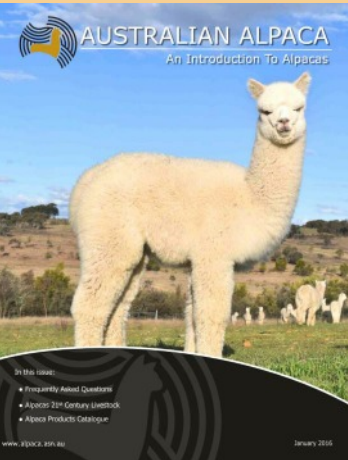
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ISSN 1328-8318



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Cover: Photo by Andrew Munn - Alpha Centauri Alpacas

Contents

Message From Our President4

Alpaca Types.....5

FAQ's.....6

The Emerging Meat & Hide Market.....8

Alpacas - 21st Century Livestock.....9

So you want to buy alpacas?.....10

Alpaca Products Catalogue.....12

Alpha Centauri - A large stud perspective.....16

Herd Guards.....17

Weaving - An alpaca journey!.....20

China Alpaca Seminar!.....22



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President's Message

I would like to welcome you to Australian Alpaca, a publication that provides an introduction to the Australian alpaca industry and the activities of the Australian Alpaca Association (AAA). AAA is the peak industry body supporting members across Australia and internationally through promotion of the alpaca industry, liaison with government and international partners, and through the provision of an animal registry service (the International Alpaca Registry) that contains comprehensive data of over 160,000 animals and their lineage. The AAA was founded in 1990 to promote and grow the concept of the alpaca industry following the importation of alpacas in the late 1980's. During this period the industry has grown and developed into a viable and sustainable primary industry.



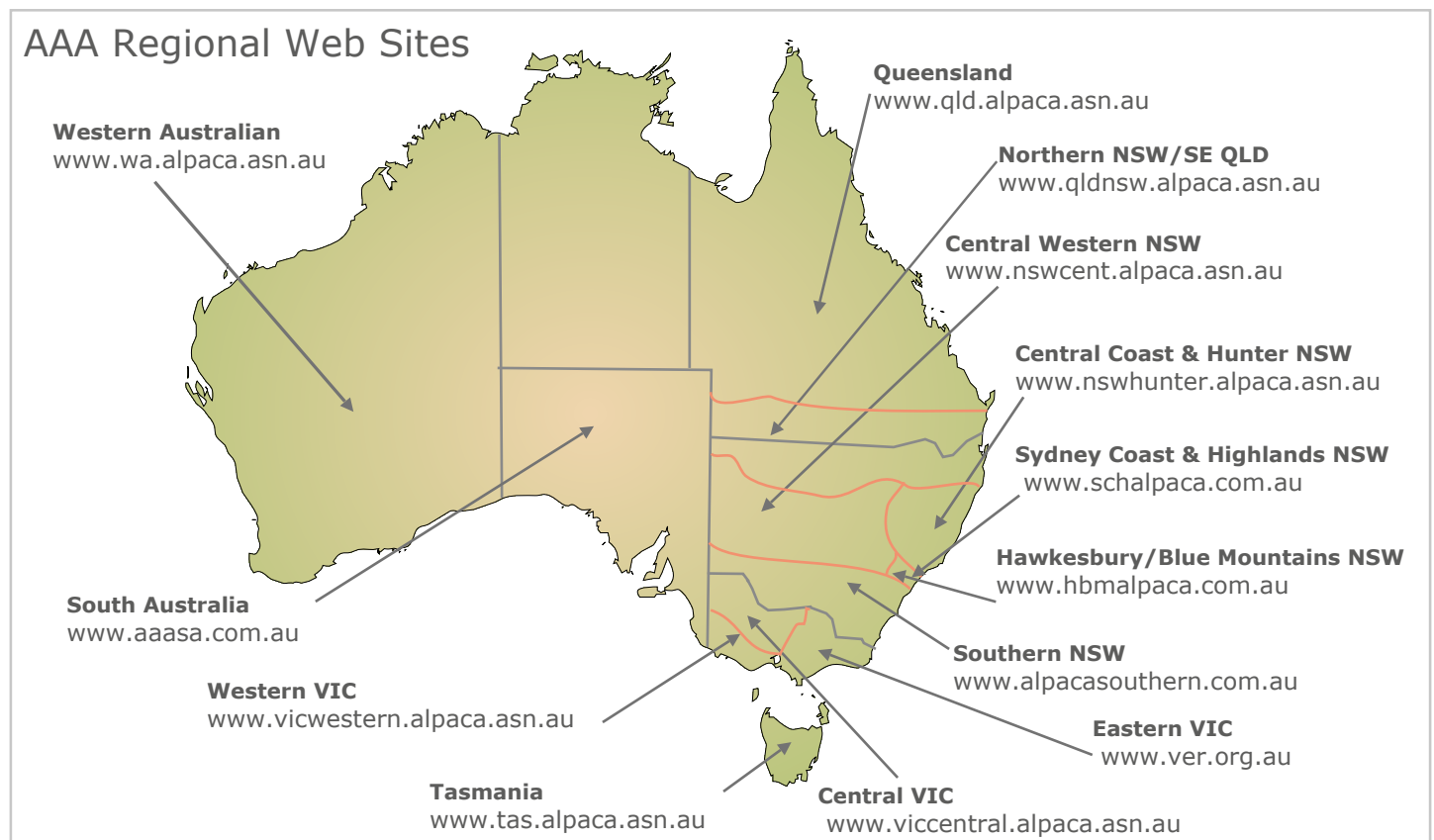
Business opportunities include provision of animals and stud services, with Australian-bred alpacas recognised as being among the best in the world and our genetics have been exported world wide. In Australia there continues to be strong interest for both animals and alpaca fleece, which can be processed into a wide range of products, including garments, homewares and even luxury carpet. An emerging and growing market for meat and hides provides producers with the option of an additional income stream and helps to improve the viability of the industry.

The AAA is an active membership based organisation overseen by a Board of Directors. A range of events including educational workshops, displays and shows are organised at a local level across Australia. The AAA is a company limited by guarantee, and we have a national office based in Mitcham, Victoria, supported by a small team of employees.

Ownership of alpacas is a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Alpacas are easy on the environment and relatively easy to breed and manage. Membership of the AAA is open to all and provides various benefits, development opportunities and the security of animal registration on the International Alpaca Registry. Members contribute to industry development via marketing initiatives, a range of research activities and herd health programs. Various membership options are available, including overseas and educational memberships.

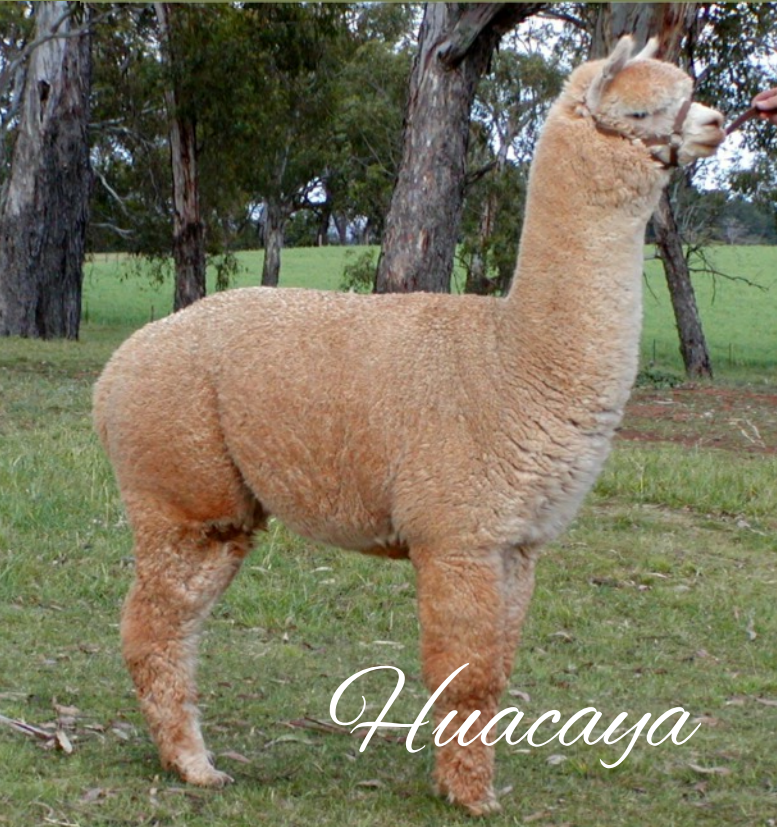
I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Australian Alpaca, and if you are interested in joining the AAA, or would like more information about the Australian alpaca industry, please visit our website at www.alpaca.asn.au or call our national office on (03) 9873 7700. *Michelle Malt - AAA Ltd President*

AAA Regional Web Sites



Alpaca Types

Which is right for me?



Introduction

The "ideal" alpaca has a squared-off appearance with four straight, strong legs. It is a well-balanced animal with the neck being two-thirds of the length of the back and the legs matching the length of the neck. It carries its head high when alert and is strong boned and vigorous.

Alpaca fleece comes in varying shades of colour from white to black. In between there are shades of fawn, brown, roan and grey. Animals may be solid in colour or be any combination of the above.

Huacaya

Pronounced wua'ki'ya, this is the most common alpaca type in both South America and Australia.

Huacayas have crimped fleece which grows at right angles to the body which gives the animal a rounded appearance. The fleece should be well nourished and exhibit a defined, highly aligned crimp across all fibres with an excellent bundling staple definition. Coverage should extend down the legs and up the neck to a full bonnet on the head with a clean muzzle. The fleece should feel soft and ideally contain minimal guard hair.



Suri

As a type, the suri (soo'ree) is less common than the huacaya, and in Australia a smaller percentage of alpacas are suris, however, suri numbers are continuing to increase.

This alpaca has fleece with a strongly defined lock, not unlike dreadlocks. The fleece exhibits lustre and has a slippery and silky feel. Locks should be well defined and independent, exhibiting compactness (fullness) of fibre. A lock may be loosely twisted, corkscrewed, curling or flat. Locks can be with or without a wave, but ideally their formation should be apparent, close to the skin and with a uniform separation or twist that becomes more pronounced towards the tip.

The fleece hangs from a centre part – neck through to tail – with the locks lying close to the skin in a draped free swinging curtain. Locks should be uniform in structure from the base of the ears to the hock.

Photos courtesy of Bumble Hill Alpacas

FAQs



Are alpacas related to llamas?

Alpacas are very closely related to llamas. They are both from a group of four species known as South American Camelids. The llama is approximately twice the size of an alpaca with banana shaped ears and is principally used as a pack animal. In Australia alpacas are bred for fleece, and as stud animals, pets and herd guards against foxes; they are unable to withstand an attack by a pack of two or more dogs.

How many alpacas can I run on my property?

That will depend on what sort of pasture and how much pasture your land is capable of producing. Different climatic regions and different soil types vary widely in their carrying capacity.

A standard unit of carrying capacity is the Dry Sheep Equivalent per hectare (DSE). For example, in areas of good soil and high rainfall your property might sustain 10 DSE/ha, compared with dryland areas that might be 1.5 DSE/ha. The DSE for your property can be determined by speaking to an agricultural consultant, or perhaps your neighbour if they are experienced farmers. As a general rule, one alpaca wether is equivalent to one DSE. The nutritional requirements of pregnant alpaca are half as much again as those of a wether. The nutritional requirements of a lactating alpaca are twice as much as a wether. If you are prepared to supplementary feed, you may be able to increase your stocking rate.

What sort of fencing do alpacas need?

Any fencing in broad acreage rural areas that keeps sheep contained is satisfactory, preferably without barbed wire. Alpacas do not tend to jump fences but are quite capable of clearing a standard fence if sufficiently stressed. Electric fencing is not very common but it may be used. Advice on the correct height settings of the hot wires is best sought from an alpaca breeder who has experience with alpacas and electric fencing.

If you live in a well populated area, wandering dogs are an issue - there are always some that are not locked up at night, despite their owner's claims. In these areas, it is essential that the boundary fencing is suitable for keeping dogs out. Dog attacks, in some areas, are becoming an increasingly prevalent problem and when they occur they have disastrous consequences.

What do alpacas eat?

Alpacas are principally grazers but sometimes they enjoy casual browsing. They are fastidious food selectors that are highly adapted to eat small amounts of a variety of plants. Although they can survive very harsh conditions, alpacas do best on good quality pasture and benefit from having access to plant material with long fibres: eg. hay.

There are a number of commercial alpaca mixes available but these are best thought of as supplying vitamins and minerals rather than the bulk feed which is obtained through grazing. One important rule to remember is to introduce any changes to the diet gradually, over a period of a couple of weeks.

This way, the microbes in the gut have time to adjust to any feed changes. Although some people think alpacas don't drink huge amounts, they do need to have ready access to good quality, fresh drinking water.

How often do you shear alpacas?

Alpacas are shorn once a year, usually in spring. Shearing is the biggest maintenance required and usually takes around five to ten minutes per animal for an experienced alpaca shearer.

Depending on the fineness and density of the fleece, alpacas cut on average anywhere between 1 and 4kg of fleece. Some of the high quality stud males will cut higher weights.

What do you do with the fleece?

There are a number of options for alpaca fibre, a list of commercial buyers is available on the AAA website. Marketing opportunities also exist with spinners, felters and textile artists. Some alpaca owners also process their own fibre and value add by processing the fibre into yarns and garments. A few alpaca owners prefer to home spin their fibre. Commercial prices depend on quality with a premium paid for finer micron fibre. Sales to home spinners vary and prices may be higher.

What sort of diseases do alpacas get?

Compared with other livestock, alpacas are relatively disease free. Because of their dry fleece and naturally clean breech, fly strike is not an issue with alpacas. They do not require mulesing or crutching.

They are vaccinated twice yearly with the same '5 in 1' vaccine used for sheep and goats to protect against tetanus, pulpy kidney, black leg, black disease and malignant oedema. When buying alpacas for breeding purposes it is advisable to arrange a veterinary check to ensure you are buying a healthy animal.

Do they make good pets?

Most alpacas make very good pets if they are treated well and the owners are realistic in their expectations. Like any livestock, the more handling they receive as youngsters, the quieter they are as adults. Given time, most alpacas will eat out of your hand and training them to lead by a halter is a straightforward process.

Alpacas spit don't they?

Spitting is perhaps the least endearing feature of alpacas. It is one of the few defence mechanisms an alpaca has and it is quite an effective deterrent.

The material is basically regurgitated or recently chewed grass and it brushes off when dry.

It does have a distinctive and somewhat offensive odour and it is best to avoid being a target. However, it is quite rare that alpacas spit at people. It is normally used as a pecking order mechanism with other alpacas. If a human hit occurs, it is usually because



Can I just have one or do I need to have lots?

It is possible, but not desirable to have a single alpaca, and it is not a pleasant existence for the animal. Alpacas are herd animals and are instinctively gregarious, as are other domestic livestock. They obtain security and contentment from having at least one other alpaca for company. For this reason, it is usually recommended that two alpacas are the desirable minimum. Sometimes if a single pregnant female is bought for breeding, a wether can go with her for company.

How do you transport alpacas?

Alpacas travel very well in a van, covered trailer or horse float. Most alpacas will sit during the journey and travel best in the company of another alpaca. On long trips over two or three hours it is advisable to plan for a stop so the alpacas can have a toilet break. Clean straw on the floor of the vehicle helps to absorb jarring on rough roads.

Can I run alpacas with other livestock?

Alpacas can bond well with other types of animals. Naturally, alpacas and aggressive dogs are not a good combination, but there are many cases of quiet dogs mixing well with alpacas. Individual alpacas have been very successfully run with sheep and goats to act as fox guards. The alpacas tend to bond with the foster herd and they are naturally aggressive towards foxes.

The Emerging Meat & Hide Market

By Ian Frith - Illawarra Prime



Another year has rolled past and this period of time has allowed consolidation of the meat and hide industry. With distribution now throughout NSW, VIC, QLD, SA and WA, interest is well and truly on the rise. Whilst WA and QLD are in the embryo stage, SA, VIC and NSW continue to grow strongly adding new clients including restaurants, hotels and private clients on a weekly basis.

We have demand for export but until our abattoir is certified for export those orders are on hold. New Zealand breeders are showing keen interest and we perceive that sample orders will be shipped within the first quarter of 2016.

Leather and hides are progressing well and hopefully the first ladies leather handbags will be available by second quarter of 2016. We have partnered with a processor to make this happen and have to work at their speed.

Alpaca breeders in all states have been increasingly great supporters in supplying wethers for us for the meat industry with several specific breeders planning their herd sizes to accommodate our demand.

The first three years of the PhD study has been completed with excellent results. Three papers have already been published globally. RIRDC, Sydney University and our PhD student Miss Melanie Smith have worked tirelessly to prove that the alpaca meat industry is totally sustainable and accepted by consumers. In fact, so successful has this research been that we have extended the research for another two years to include further research into hanging, ageing, marketing and presentation to the general public.

Our two training chefs Alejandro Saravia from Pastuso in Victoria and David Campbell from Wharf RD and Hungry duck in NSW have been an incredible help in attending the Hospitality Tafe Colleges in both States, training apprentice chefs and introducing them to this great product.

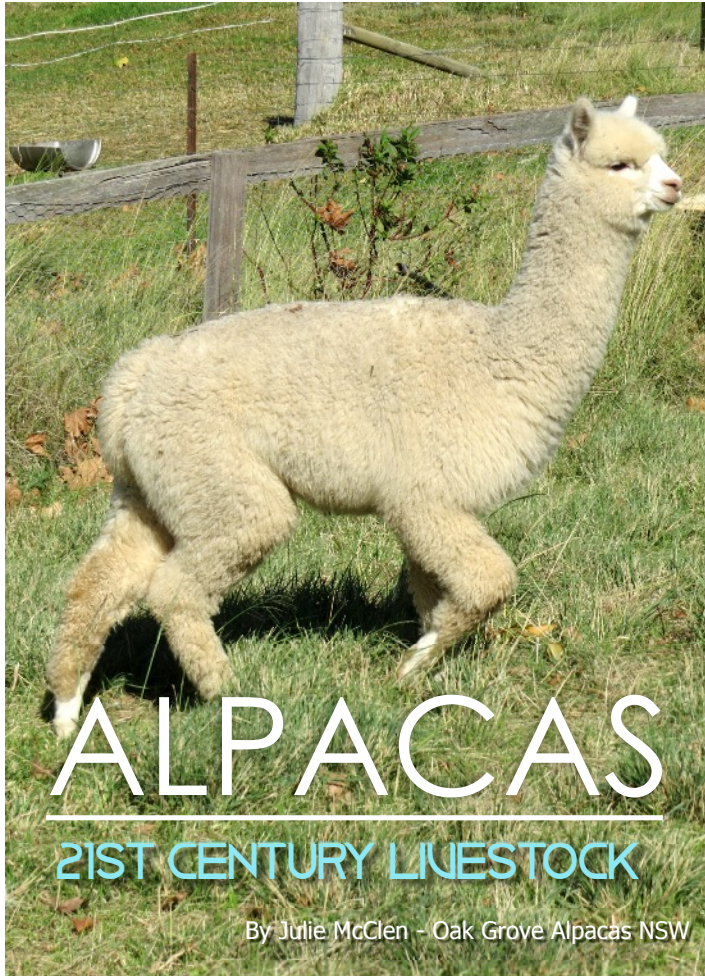
Normally the day is spent breaking down a carcass, preparing the different cuts and presenting a dinner to their chefs and other interested chefs. This has an incredible acceptance and one we will continue to support. One Victorian Tafe College has already introduced preparing alpaca into their curriculum for 2016, and we hope others will eventually follow suit.

We have now reached our first intended target of 3000 breeding females and are Looking for another farm to continue on with our expansion. The demand has been created and more than ever we must maintain sustainability.

Nutrition and husbandry play a major role in maintaining our progress as does the choice in breeding females and stud males to give us the line of animals that maximises cria to be big, healthy and well boned to carry more meat. This is past any culling programme as animals must be specifically bred for the table. Restaurants want consistency for their portion sizing as this is how they base their costings. We have found that 39-40 kg dressed carcass is the ideal for these customers.

Hopefully next year when we report in the export will be up and running, New Zealand has embarked and are well under way with their plans, and we all as alpaca breeders are enjoying the fruits of our past labours.





We live in a world becoming greener by the day, green as it relates to an environmental conscious that is. Most modern consumers have an understanding of the concepts behind environmental sustainability and new catch phrases relating to environmental issues are populating our language at a rapid rate.

Carbon footprint, eco friendly, global warming and sustainable agriculture, are but a few of the newer members of the new dialect of environment, joining those more established terms like recycling and greenies.

Add to this growing environmental consciousness the desire by consumers to consider the welfare of the livestock that provide the raw products of fleece, leather, milk and meat to name but a few, and you have a farming environment like no other in the history of agriculture. With global animal rights groups like PETA drawing attention to the practice of mulesing sheep and battery farming of chickens, severe economic consequences are occurring for farmers unable to adapt. Some countries are now banning imports of animal products whose husbandry involves practices on the blacklist of animal rights organisations worldwide.

But all of these issues are something we look on from a distance as alpaca breeders. We have livestock designed by

nature to fit perfectly with the greener consciousness of the 21st century.

The eco friendly traits of alpacas are something as an industry we could better use to our advantage, by promoting alpacas as livestock suitable to Australian conditions, and appealing to the environmental groups whose influence is growing stronger each year. They in turn could lend their support to the promotion of alpacas as an environmentally friendly alternative to sheep or goats.

How can anyone fail to be impressed by the alpacas soft padded feet putting less pressure on our fragile soils than other livestock, and even our native animals? At 39 kPa the static load weight of an alpaca is much better than sheep at 82 kPa, cattle at 185 kPa and man at 95 kPa, and even better than our native kangaroo coming in at 46 kPa.

Their soft padded feet do not damage our shallow top soils like other harder hooved livestock and they do not rip out grasses damaging the roots, or ringbark trees, therefore compaction is less, fertility is maintained, less soil erosion occurs and less weed invasion is likely.

Alpacas do well on native grasses and as browsers they tend to select a variety of plants to eat, so biodiversity is maintained and since native pastures require less fertiliser this can in turn reduce waterway contamination from chemical run off.

The practice of alpacas to have communal dung piles that they tend to not graze around reduces worm burdens and therefore the need for chemical drenches is also reduced, and the ease of manure collection offers the opportunity for another side line to supplement farm income and improve soil fertility naturally.

Due to their clean breach and the lifting of their tail to urinate and defecate, they do not require crutching or mulesing, now a major issue for the sheep industry. They tend not to suffer from fly strike or parasites like other livestock and this also reduces the use of chemicals in the farming process.

Their fibre is produced in a variety of natural colours lending itself perfectly to producing products from undyed fibre, a process which requires environmentally damaging chemicals. The lower grease content in alpaca fibre also requires less chemical use in the scour process further enhancing its ability to appeal to the growing natural and organic markets worldwide.

So when you are next promoting the farming of alpacas, don't forget to mention they were 'green' long before the term was even adopted to represent the environmentally conscious!

So you want to buy alpacas?

The ownership of alpacas is a fabulous experience as well as having the potential to be financially rewarding if you protect yourself from initial mistakes when you take your first steps in this industry. If you wish to be a serious breeder there are a few very important areas of knowledge to safeguard your investment.

Important guidelines before selecting

- Learn as much as you can about alpaca conformation, fibre and price structure before you select.
- Realise that the duty of a breeder or an agent is to sell you stock. Do not blame them for your lack of knowledge.
- If you are not confident, employ someone reputable to select for you.
- Select with 90% brain and 10% heart!
- You, or a selector, are not veterinarians. If something about an animal bothers you, ask a vet to check it.

What should you expect from the seller?

- Alpacas should be fully vaccinated and drenched with health and veterinary records available.
- Fleece statistics should be available.
- Current feeding regime.
- AAA registration papers should be available for all registered alpacas.
- Pregnant females should have a live cria guarantee.
- Weanlings should have a fertility guarantee.

Publications to help new breeders

- Managing Alpacas in Australia – Available online from AAA.
- Farming Alpacas - Available online from AAA.
- ABC for Alpaca Owners – Available online from Grande Verge & Alpaca Dynamics.

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Clifden Alpacas - Archie The Black Alpaca Books

Clifden Alpacas has now published 2 children's books - "Archie The Black Alpaca" and "Archie's Big Win" (story details on our website). Both books are beautifully illustrated in full colour with a soft cover and are wonderful read aloud stories for young children. Lindy and her husband Bill breed black huacaya alpacas on their property in West Gippsland and sell the books on farm and online for \$22 including GST, postage and handling within Australia.

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- Cot Quilt. 100cmx135cm \$140.00ea

Quilt Measurements

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- Queen. 210Cm x 210Cm x Approx weight of 2935Gms. \$350.00ea
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- King Super. 270cmx240cm x Approx weight of 3200Gms. \$450.00ea

Underlay Measurements

- Single. 91cmx193cm with an Approx weight of 1.25kg. \$200.00ea
- Double. 137cmx193cm with an Approx weight of 1.4kg. \$250.00ea
- Queen. 152cmx203cm with an Approx Finished weight of 1.5kg. \$275.00ea
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Didohama Suri Stud

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To fit adult, medium size head.

Finished measurements:

Cap: 42 cm diameter, stretched 65 cm.

Scarf: Length 54 cm, width 16 cm (blocked), 13 cm (unblocked).

Materials: Cap approx. 75 g 100% suri or huacaya alpaca yarn 3 to 4 ply, 2.3metres/gram.

Scarf 100-150 g (depending on desired length) 100% suri or huacaya alpaca yarn 3 to 4 ply, 2.3metres/gram

Note: 3 x 50 gram balls should be sufficient for both – Yarn required could vary depending on yarn weight, needle size and tension.

Knitting Needles: 4.5 mm or size 7

Cable needle

Tapestry needle (to sew the seam on cap)

Gauge: 21stitches/10 cm and 25 rows/10 cm (adjust your needle size if needs be)

Abbreviations: K = knit, P = purl, K2tog = knit two stitches together to decrease

Cap Pattern

Cast on 100 stitches.

Hint: if you slip the first stitch on each row you will get a neater seam.

Cabled Brim:

Row 1: K2, P2, K4, P2, repeat to end

Row 2: K2, P4, K2, P2, repeat to end

Row 3: Repeat row 1

Row 4: Repeat row 2

Row 5: K2, P2, (slip next 2 stitches onto cable needle, leaving stitches in front of work), K2, then (K2 stitches from cable needle), P2. Repeat to end

Row 6: Repeat Row 2

Repeat these 6 rows twice. (total of 18 rows)

Row 19: Repeat row 1

Row 20: Repeat row 2

Stockinette/stocking stitch commences:

Row 21: K (knit) to end

Row 22: P (purl) to end

Repeat these two rows nine times (total of 18 rows)

Decreasing rows:

Row 1: K8, K2 tog. Repeat to end of row. (90 stitches)

Rows 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 i.e. alternate rows: P (purl) all stitches

Row 3: K7, K2 tog. Repeat to end of row. (80 stitches)

Row 5: K6, K2tog. Repeat to end of row. (70 stitches)

Row 7: K5, K2tog. Repeat to end of row. (60 stitches)

Row 9: K4, K2tog. Repeat to end of row. (50 stitches)



Unlock your creativity!

Row 11: K3, K2tog. Repeat to end of row. (40 stitches)

Row 13: K2, K2tog. Repeat to end of row. (30 stitches)

Row 15: K1, K2tog. Repeat to end of row. (20 stitches)

Row 17: K2 tog. Repeat to end of row. (10 stitches)

Break the yarn, leaving a length approximately 35cm long (to sew the seam), and draw through remaining 10 stitches, then sew up the side seam with the remaining yarn.

Weave in the ends.

* * * * *

Scarf Pattern

Cast on 42 stitches.

Purl 3 rows

Cable pattern:

Row 1: K2, P2, K4, P2, repeat to last 2 stitches, K2

Row 2: P2 then (K2, P4, K2, P2), repeat this to end of row.

Row 3: Repeat row 1

Row 4: Repeat row 2

Row 5: K2, P2, (slip next 2 stitches onto cable needle, leaving cable in front of work), K2, (K2 stitches from cable needle), P2. Repeat along row to last 2 stitches, K2.

Row 6: Repeat row 2

Repeat these 6 rows until the desired length is reached.

Repeat rows 1 and 2 again.

Finish with 3 purl rows. Cast off.

Weave in the ends.

Block scarf if required.

Enjoy! Pattern courtesy of Banyandah Alpacas 34 Power Road Gympie 4570.



ALPHA CENTAURI

Achieving Our Vision

By Andrew & Bronwyn Munn

Alpha Centauri Alpacas was established in 2003 on our first property of 40 acres near Bungendore in Southern NSW. Our working life up until that point had consisted of over 30 years of combined service in the Australian Army. Upon leaving the Army we both took up full time employment with Government in Canberra and wanted something more out of our lives when away from the daily grind. We both had a deep love of animals and desire to be in a rural setting. We first came across alpacas in the late 90's at a show in Sydney and decided to further explore this option and attended the Totally Alpaca Field Days in Goulburn in 2002 and were immediately hooked.

We decided to concentrate on breeding Huacaya for show and stud stock while also building a white commercial fleece herd. We purchased our first two breeding females in late 2003 and this quickly grew to the point where we now manage a herd of 250 alpacas including our small Suri herd. In March 2010 we relocated to our current farm of 400 acres at Jerrawa (near Yass) in Southern NSW. We run the herd on a mixture of improved and natural grass pastures.

There are many varied and viable opportunities in the alpaca industry to pursue - whether it be breeding for show and stud stock; selling wethers as herd guardians to deter foxes; the emerging hide and meat market; producing fibre for the cottage and commercial market place or producing end product for retail. Looking for a sustainable, long term approach that would suit our lifestyle and passion, we decided to put our focus on three areas in this vibrant industry – showing and judging; breeding for fibre, show and stud stock; and collecting and selling fibre for the commercial market.

Showing and Judging is an aspect of owning alpacas that we thoroughly enjoy. Being around like minded people who are passionate and enjoy the camaraderie and competition of showing their animals. Showing is a fantastic way to showcase your stud and benchmark your alpacas against other studs and the industry standard. It is a great tool to learn by, striving to refine and improve your own breeding goals and hopefully validate your breeding decisions along the way! Whilst showing is fun for us, it does have a serious side, as performing well in the show ring leads to the opportunity for sales of stud stock. Judging is the serious side of showing and it is such a privilege to have the opportunity to see halter and fleece exhibits in the show arena and to judge them against the breed standard.

We have found that successful breeding is a combination of hard work, educated choices and sometimes just plain gut instinct. As most breeders would agree, we are all striving to breed the best alpacas possible that perform consistently.

We are committed to a long term involvement in the alpaca industry and in developing alpaca fibre with a strong and viable commercial future in Australia and overseas. Andrew is an AAA judge and qualified Wool and Alpaca Fleece classer. Andrew is also heavily involved with developing opportunities for breeders for their fibre and education of breeders to advance their breeding and fibre. He is also a member of the AAA Fibre Market Development Committee. Bronwyn is currently training to also become an AAA Judge and is progressing through her judging apprenticeship. We believe that no matter what your motivation or direction within the industry that there is equal opportunity for breeders of all sizes to achieve any goals that they set their mind to.

HERD GUARDS

By Debbie O'Neill – Signature Alpacas

The alpaca industry has been growing in Australia for 25 years with alpaca numbers increasing from a few hundred to over 200,000. One aspect of alpacas, being that of their ability to bond with a range of livestock including sheep, goats, deer and chooks, has been exploited to great financial advantage to the farmers that breed these animals.

With the current price of lambs, the cost of the initial purchase of a pair of herd guards is easily recouped in the first lambing season. There still aren't many investments that will do this. As alpacas will live for up to 20 years this is an investment that keeps on paying year on year.

Sheep farmers Laurie and Debbie O'Neill have had alpacas for over ten years starting with herd guards to combat a fox problem resulting in a loss of 40% of lambs in their first season. They now regularly achieve lambing percentages in the 100%+ range. Alpacas aren't the total solution to fox control but do play a significant role.

One other side benefit that they have had is that alpacas are also excellent shepherds resulting in a reduction of miss mothered multiples which has also increased lambing percentage.

Alpacas are soft footed animals having a pad rather than a cloven hoof so they are gentle on our fragile soils; in fact they exert less pressure on the soil than kangaroos do! If you are a sheep farmer, you have all the infrastructure that you need to run alpacas. The fencing, yards and watering points as well as the grazing and rotation for the sheep fit well with alpacas which are also ruminants like sheep. Alpacas will also browse as well as graze which assists with weed control.

Over the last few years we have sold herd guards to farmers from large corporate farming enterprises, stud breeders and broadacre graziers all of whom have reaped the benefits of these animals and are often repeat buyers as their sheep stock numbers are increasing.

Protect your chooks

By Ann West

We purchased six chooks about 12 months after we bought our first alpacas. For a short time the alpacas were wary of the chooks however they quickly bonded and have alerted us on countless occasions to potential attacks from foxes, goannas and dogs. Several times we have been outside working, unaware that a fox was around, until the alpacas have given their warning call.

Many of our neighbours have chooks and all have lost some in fox and dog attacks and we are in no doubt that without our alpacas guarding our chooks we would have lost them to predators. Thanks to our alpacas our chooks are safe, contented and happy, giving us the pleasure of lovely fresh eggs every day.



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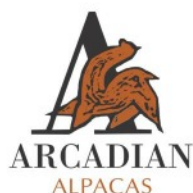
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WEAVING AN ALPACA JOURNEY!

By Karen Grady (kgHandwovens) & Gordon Drake (Black Ant Alpaca)



Our Alpaca journey began in 2010. It actually began 30 years earlier with the purchase in the 1980's of 30 acres of land in Kin Kin in the sub-tropics of South East Queensland. The land had been in the family for three generations and I secured the steep, rocky, sandstone, 'crappy' parcel, but, otherwise, nice acreage with a great view and fantastic ocean breezes.

My partner, Gordon, and I both enjoyed careers in senior corporate roles in environmental sustainability working for some of Australia's largest resource companies and associations. But we opted to retire early to return to Kin Kin to build a home and to manage the long neglected, but now beautifully forested property.

In a few short years and with the help of many agricultural 'boys toys', we are starting to transform the property from what was an overgrown bush block into the ultimate lifestyle farm.

How? Serendipity stepped in.

We tossed around lots of ideas for managing the land, sheep, goats, a couple of cows and horses. We needed grass cutters. Then we saw an article about National Alpaca Week in the local newspaper and were immediately hooked when we visited a local alpaca farm.

Alpacas fitted perfectly with our philosophy of 'sustainability' - doing the best you can with the resources to hand, and with care and consideration for the environment and community. Alpacas were the best choice for our land. They are beautiful, gentle animals, tread lightly on the land and yield luxurious fleece, which, when hand spun and hand woven, looks and feels stunning.

We started out with two alpaca 'grass cutters'. Without the fencing quite finished our two new members of the family spent the night in the carport while we rapidly went about creating proper 'accommodation' for them. Several years on, there are multiple paddocks, dams, irrigation and water points, and shelters. An alpaca paradise.

As it turned out, one of those 'grass cutters' was a certified male from a famous Grand Sire, Purumbete Ledgers Dream, and at eleven he is still producing a good fleece. Why was a certified male sold as part of a package of grass cutters? We decided to try him over our females, but no progeny was produced for 2 years, so it seemed he was a dud, but not quite as four years on we have 11 alpacas with more cria on the way, and our boy is producing beautiful progeny each with stunning fleece. There were some initial setbacks, however, we have learnt an awful lot on our alpaca journey and have been helped every step of the way by other members of the Alpaca Association willing to share their time and experiences.

During this period of growth I acquired a second-hand Ettrick Original spinning wheel. I had to learn to spin, to hand process alpaca fleece and then to work out what to do with it. I will weave I said, bravely, not having had any experience of spinning or weaving (or anything fibre related for that matter).

I learnt to spin at the Noosa Arts & Craft Association, and was later to find out that there are more hand spinners within cooee than we can imagine (a great market for the small farm alpaca breeder providing your fleece is relatively clean and free of vegetable matter). Oh, and colours, hand spinners love, love, love colour.

To learn to weave, I turned to the internet as there were no available weaving classes. I started on an old Sheridan table loom. In 2014, we 'rescued' a very much cherished Leclerc Nilus II loom which had, sadly, been though the devastating 2010 Brisbane floods - with some TLC she, 'Harriot', was returned to near perfect condition.

My heart and my weaving have soared, and quickly lead to my first solo exhibition.

I now work and teach with three spinning wheels and three floor looms.

We have also established a Mulberry tree plantation in order to grow silk worms. I combine alpaca and silk to make hand spun, hand woven garments - local, from the farm; paddock to garment, and we are selling items not only locally, but also into Europe, Asia and the United States.

It is time consuming 'slow fashion' and while we may never make a lot of money from it, the property has been transformed, and we have a gorgeous studio/gallery and teaching venue.

I relish seeing the alpacas in their paddocks, knowing the characteristics of each fleece, seeing the silkworms emerge, considering the blends of alpaca and silk I will use in each item. I hand-dye the silk, and blend these gorgeous fibres before spinning and weaving in my studio - only metres from the fleece and fibre producers.



Hand spun & Handwoven Alpaca and Silk - sold into central Paris



A very striking piece which sold into the United States.



One of the first woven items with Handspun alpaca and hand-dyed silk

I strive to bring out the best in alpaca and silk using colour and texture to create beautiful, one-of-a-kind garments, from start to finish. Generated from our land worked by generations of family before me, we now create sustainable pieces to wear, and wear, and wear. Forever garments.

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CHINA ALPACA SEMINAR

By Steve Ridout - Wildflower Alpacas & Quarantine Services

中国羊驼养殖国际培训大会暨羊驼产业联合会第三次会员大会

A Chinese Alpaca Association seminar was recently held in Taiyuan China. Representatives from Australia were invited as guest speakers covering Breed Standards, Products, Health and Nutrition, Alpaca Management and Business Success. Kerry Dwyer represented the AAA and presented the benefits of an Association through marketing and strategies from an industry perspective. An Australian veterinarian with vast experience in alpaca gave the Health and Nutrition presentation providing valuable information to current and new prospective importers.

A variety of delegates from across many provinces in China, prospective importers, university graduates, Chinese vets and previous importers attended the seminar keen to engage the speakers and gain valuable knowledge on an emerging industry. Australian fleeces and products were on display which created an enormous amount of interest.

The current industry in China is at its infancy, stock numbers are low and the Chinese Association has been newly formed. Interest from within the delegates was strong, not only in the products that can be created by using alpaca fibre but interest from universities and vets from a knowledge base was pleasing to see.

The future of the alpaca exports is bright, the Australian ability to supply both alpacas and knowledge to assist in the growth of the Chinese market will enhance an already strong relationship. Opportunities for all Australian alpaca breeders to venture into this market is varied. Not only being able to supply China with alpacas but providing support in education, husbandry and the sharing of knowledge is very important in fostering such relationships.

To date Australia has exported 1541 alpacas over three charter aircraft with more orders expected in 2016. Presentations were made to the three importers as a gesture of gratitude and memento of a very special phase in the Chinese and Australian alpaca industries.



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