



Welcome to your Autumn newsletter

Hello everyone and I hope your grass has well and truly recovered now that 'normal weather' has resumed! A particular welcome to all our new members - it's great to have such a thriving camelid community here in Cornwall and Devon and our prime aim is to support each other to enjoy these wonderful animals and help them thrive.

Since our last newsletter we've put on the **Cornish Fleece Show** and members have been participating in the **Somerset County Show Halter & Fleece shows** – so we have write ups on both in this issue.

All the details for the upcoming **Vet Day** are also included – so do get your places reserved and paid for – it's always a sell out! If you're new to the CCA, this event is run by our honorary vet, Sarah Caldwell who is one of the county's leading alpaca specialists and it's designed to help us all to learn more about our alpacas and be able to identify issues and take appropriate action quickly. It's also a great chance to meet other members, share each other's wisdom and catch up! See the article for the full agenda and how to book your place. Sarah has also updated us on the **AD&E** situation & given us a little intel on **Palatal Rugae** (you'll have to read it to find out what on earth they are!!) plus there are **Autumn husbandry tips** and details of a **free seminar** you might want to sign up for on **BTB**.

As a community of owners, coming together to help with **rehoming** alpacas is sometimes really needed and wanted – a long time member of the CCA, Chrissie Turpin, is looking for great homes for some of her herd now she is not so able to take care of them all and we also have an update on the Llama and Guanaco Herd who were searching for new homes recently.

Finally, I interviewed Helen Markou from Lydford Gorge alpacas on Dartmoor to get the inside track on her story about setting up an **alpaca trekking business** – quite coincidentally, she is also featured in the latest Alpaca magazine – but we have the 'behind the scenes' detail so sit down with a coffee ! ☺

I hope you enjoy the read and don't forget that you can look back on previous issues on the website and get all sorts of other info there too: www.cornwallcamelidassociation.com

If you are not already a member of our facebook group, please look it up (cornwallcamelidassociation) and ask to join and we will have you sorted straight away.

As ever, all contributions and ideas are welcome for the next newsletter ☺

cornwallcamelidassociation@hotmail.com

Wendy, CCA Secretary

Message from our Chair Sandra Muriel



When I wrote my piece for the last newsletter, I did not imagine we would be not still be in the era of HM Queen Elizabeth when the next newsletter would be due. All of us will have taken many moments to reflect when her death was announced, on her life and how she has been a constant presence in ours. I do not believe she owned alpacas, but we know she was an animal lover. There is little I can add which has not already been said, but I am sure we will miss her quiet, dignified leadership in our country. With her passing, Cornwall has a new Duke and Duchess of Cornwall in William and Kate, hopefully we will see more of them at our county events.

Her Majesty's funeral on the 19th September was full of pomp and circumstance, on 20th September I interred my late Mothers' ashes with my Father, immediate family of 8 in a cemetery corner of Wadebridge with quiet words and cornish ribbons on the flowers - the difference between the two ceremonies (in the space of 24 hours) was stark, but we all miss our loved ones passed and those feelings cannot be measured.

I wish King Charles III the very best in his reign.

In the alpaca world, our long hot summer is nearly over, rain arrived at last and our fields are green and lush again, so lush they need topping already pre winter. With rising prices, it would be prudent to buy some in advance. We cut our fields for hay, this year we made the executive decision to bale the best finest fields into small bales, the rest to be large bales. I had not appreciated how much work is involved in small bales, the cutting and turning was as normal, but when it came to the baling, we had a small workforce working for several days until dark to get the bales stored. We managed about 800 small bales and nearly 200 large, it was quite a crop and hard work in the heat, the camaraderie was great and my barn is well stocked for winter (and next by the looks of it).



During the Summer we had both our alpaca shows, now we look forward to Vet's Day, kindly being hosted by Garyand Felicia at Pophams. This is a very popular event and I urge you to book your place as soon as possible and pay to ensure your seat is reserved. I suggested the topic of first aid for the alpacas using what we might already have in our cupboards and what to do while you wait for the vet if you have a sick alpaca or have had a trauma...this will all be useful information, designed to help in emergencies. Further details are with this newsletter and on Facebook.

I think all the births are done for this year, it is always a pleasure to follow the members who are breeders and see their cria arrive, hopefully without complications. These cria will be the juniors in next years shows, all the



owners hope their breeding decisions were right and the next generations will be producing good fleeces for the future of alpaca yarn. If you are thinking of breeding, the winter months with long evenings are a good time to look over genetics and stud records, to consider any outside males to use, speak to the owners during the winter and book matings in advance. I have had a special arrival, late but special nonetheless, our first suri born on farm, not just a suri but a black suri girl and we are delighted. I have to confess I had nearly given up on my black suri project, having imported some females and males in 2017 from New Zealand. Our male Shadow Wood Night Moves of Crewenna has had several progeny to outside matings but, despite best and vigorous efforts, none to the girls here. After receptal, estrumation, mineral drenching, moving fields, fertilising fields, early matings, late matings, teaser males and going to stay with other suri's, at last Larkspur has managed to hold her pregnancy and deliver this precious girl, named Hope, having new black suri genetics on both sides of her pedigree, she is very special.

I am hoping that we can have an AGM and Dinner in the New Year, due to Covid we have had to meet via 'Zoom', which is a pleasure to see everyone but would be great to have a face to face evening to meet members old and new - we will release details after the vet's day. In the meantime, stay safe and enjoy your alpacas.

Best wishes

Sandra

CCA VET DAY 2022 – Book your places now !



When: 22nd October 2022

Time:

arrive 10.00 am (for 10:30 start)

finish 3:00 pm

Where: Popham Alpacas, Hatt, Cornwall, PL12 6RB

Costs: £ 30 per person - members

£ 40 per person - non-members

The CCA's honorary vet, Sarah Caldwell, will be presenting the 10th annual vet day!

Always a really popular and informative day - at the request of members, the hands-on, station-based event will include topics:

- On-farm first aid and skin issues
- The pseudo-ruminant stomach; complications and corrections
- Biosecurity scenarios; Protect, Prevent, Prevail!
- Reproduction; the practical elements of breeding and birthing

As always, there will be ample opportunity to ask questions and detour as necessary

Gary and Felicia Sanders have kindly offered to host again. We will be using their barn so please bring extra layers and suitable footwear.

To book your place, please make your payment by BACS and confirm by email to :

Cornwallcamelidassociation@hotmail.com

Cornwall Camelid Association Sort code 30 94 07 Account 00878828 Reference: your initials Vet Day 22

2022 SHOW SEASON

The Cornish Fleece Show July 8th @ Alpacas of Cornwall

Hopefully, you will have seen the feature on our fleece show in the Alpaca Magazine this month together with the full run down of the results.

The CCA team did a fabulous job preparing for and running the show and then getting all the lovely fleeces back to their owners afterwards – a big thank you to Sandra, Nigel, Ros, Abha and Lin for all their hard work.

Our judge, Barbara Hetherington, commended the standards of fleece for both Huacaya and Suri – with the supreme champion fleeces scoring 88 and 87.5 points respectively and the reserves not far behind.



It was great to have entries from owners new to fleece showing and we hope they enjoyed getting their fleeces back with their scorecards feedback and, hopefully, rosettes too!

SUPREME CHAMPION HUAYACA FLEECE , JUDGE’S CHOICE AND BEST OF BRITISH HUACAYA - TEIFI SOUL MAN

CHAMPION HUACAYA WHITE - TEIFI SOUL MAN - 88 (Teifi, Susan Myerscough)
 RESERVE CHAMPION HUACAYA WHITE – CASTLINGS EMERALD WIGHT - 87.5 (Castlings, Rebecca Block)
 CHAMPION HUACAYA LIGHT - LIME TREE TOMMY 81.5 (Lime Tree, L Verill)
 RESERVE CHAMPION HUACAYA LIGHT - APPLE VALE LIBERTY - 81 (Apple Vale, David Bearman)
 CHAMPION HUACAYA FAWN - DARK SKY TORANAGA - 81.5 (Dark Sky, Tom & Wendy Scott)
 RESERVE CHAMPION HUACAYA FAWN - DARK SKY GIGI (Dark Sky, Tom and Wendy Scott)
 CHAMPION HUACAYA BROWN - SNOWSHILL JUNO MONETA - 75.5 (Nero, Paul & Kathryn Shrimpton)
 RESERVE CHAMPION HUACAYA BROWN - CASTLINGS EL CONDOR - 72 (Castlings, Rebecca Block)
 CHAMPION HUACAYA BLACK - NERO BLACK NORDIC - 75.5 (Nero, Paul & Kathryn Shrimpton)
 RESERVE CHAMPION HUACAYA BLACK - CREWENNA GISELLE - 73 (Crewenna, Sandra Muriel)

SUPREME CHAMPION SURI FLEECE AND JUDGE’S CHOICE - DARK SKY EL NINO **BEST OF BRITISH SURI - CADBURY JUNIOR**

CHAMPION SURI FAWN - WELLOW DESTINY’S CHILD - 76 (Sheriff, Caroline Barugh)
 CHAMPION SURI LIGHT - DARK SKY EL NINO - 87.5 (Dark Sky, Tom and Wendy Scott)
 RESERVE CHAMPION SURI LIGHT - CADBURY JUNIOR - 83 (Cadbury, Miss C Brockwell)
 CHAMPION SURI WHITE - DARK SKY LOVEDAY - 71 (Dark Sky, Tom and Wendy Scott)

The SWAG at Somerset County Show Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th September, Taunton Race Course



Abha Wells, PowWow Alpacas

The SWAG halter show was my first halter show.

It was interesting to watch Barbara Hetherington from Beck Brow make her choices. She has taken her time with each animal giving us feedback on why the animal got placed where they were. To my surprise, I learned that one of my boys, even though he has a better quality fleece got placed below another one of my boys due to the fact that the guard hair line started higher up on his belly.



Some of my boys are used to walking with Glampers around our field but standing still, separated from their buddies not knowing what to expect was a different story. I will have to rethink the halter training for the next shows. They all walked liked little lambs when they were home again.

I learned a lot and loved hanging out with other alpaca lovers and personally I enjoy the second day most. The public had a chance to get up close and even have a little walk with the alpacas. We all were able to share traits and facts about our animals.

I think the majority of people just come to county shows to look at animals. They would not necessary understand what the judging is all about. The show was a good balance, we, the breeders got our technical judging on one day and the public got their fun getting to know about alpacas the other day.

I enjoyed my little holiday with the boys and look forward to taking part in other shows.

Wendy & Tom Scott, Dark Sky Alpacas

This was our second time at the Somerset Show and it was a great show again – being part of a County Show always makes for an interesting weekend and the weather was really good which always helps!



Because there were a few less entries than usual, the organisers decided to compress the alpaca show to one day on the Saturday and make Sunday a day fully focused on engaging with the public, hopefully gaining some brand new alpaca fans!

Tom jumped on the microphone with all sorts of alpaca facts (and possibly some fictions!!) to drum up interest and all the alpaca owners brought their most friendly, obedient alpacas into the ring and conducted supervised



walks with children and family members. Toward the end of the day we had a really interesting demo from Geoff of Marshwood Alpacas who showed his Easy Pen system in action and how this can help you with your husbandry tasks – even though we already own this system, it was really enlightening to see it in action 😊!!

At the show itself, we were delighted to win Champion Huacaya Fawn Male with Dark Sky Toranaga, Champion White Female Suri with Dark Sky Kahlua and Reserve Champion Light Male Suri with Dark Sky du Maurier and between them our team of 6 picked up 4 x 1st, 2x 2nds and a 3rd place in what was a really high quality competition, judged by Barbara Hetherington.

The Fleece Show Sandra Muriel, Alpacas of Cornwall

I entered 3 fleeces, one for a recheck on colour (Giselle was registered and judged on halter as brown, but at Cornish Fleece Show was determined by Barbara Hetherington to be black (and won Reserve Black Champion). At SWAG Fleece the judge also moved her to the black class, she won a 3rd place in the junior class. Our Light Adult Fleece was placed 2nd, losing a few points on weight but good marks on the fleece traits.

Our surprise was ACC Cambridge Evian, who at nine years old was entered in the 72+ months white fleece class, she won first place and Reserve Champion White fleece - well done Evian. Judge's comments praised the lack of guard hair and style for her age, plus the fleece was well skirted. I was extremely pleased with this results, Evian was purchased from EPC for her genetic prowess and has given us some wonderful progeny to build the herd as well as being the sweetest natured female.



WELFARE

VET SPOT

Sarah Caldwell BSC (hons) BVSc MRCVs

ADE update

You may have seen my FB post, but as of later this month we should be able to order injectable ADE. Please speak to your vet ASAP if you are anticipating wanting some, as we are having to produce import certificates.

We are unlikely to be able to place multiple orders due to supply and demand so get in there quickly!

The dose rate is 2000IU per kg, which equated to 0.2ml per 10kg (100,000IU per ml vitamin D). This dosage should NOT be exceeded unless advised by your vet due to toxicity. The product will be supplied in 100ml bottles.

What are Palatal Rugae?!

I have recently been asked what the ridges are in the roof of the mouth of this newborn cria. They are called Palatal Rugae and are present in all animals. Much like fingerprints in people, the arrangement of the ridges are unique to the individual and extend across the front portion of the hard palate. In cattle, the number of ridges between the right- and left-hand side of the mouth also differentiate sex.

The depth, shape, position and pigmentation of the ridges are established in the latter stages of pregnancy and do not change after birth, except in length due to normal growth. Failure of this development will result in a hole, known as a cleft palate and is fatal without corrective surgery.

The area contains nerves which play a sensory role when feed is pushed against the hard palate with the tongue. Ruminants, including camelids, have prominent palatine rugae compared to other species due to their roughage-based diets, whereby the ridges hold boluses of feed for chewing. This section of the mouth is one of the few areas that does not secrete saliva.



AUTUMN HUSBANDRY TIPS

1. Buy in and ensure you have enough **hay** to last through the winter months
2. Check stocks and commence **vitamin supplements** where required especially dark coated/pregnant/young/old
3. Ensure adequate **winter accommodation** is available and secured against winds if 'mobile'
4. Body score, check jaws, teeth and toenails, look for evidence of mites.
5. Make sure cria have been **vaccinated** against clostridial disease, to include booster 3-4 weeks after initial vaccination

TB prevention in alpaca and llama herds

TB Advisory Service, Torch Farm Vets, Camelid Veterinary Services and Mullacott Alpacas are pleased to invite you to a free seminar

Date: Tuesday 8th November, 2022

Time: 2-4 pm

Free of charge, refreshments provided.

At: Lower Mullacott Farm, Ilfracombe. EX34 8NA

Speakers

Claire Whitehead: *Bovine Tuberculosis in camelids*

Claire is the UK's first camelid specialist vet, and runs Camelid Veterinary Services. She has unparalleled experience in dealing with TB in alpacas. Claire is president of the British Veterinary Camelid Society.

Jenny Schmidt: *TB Advisory Service - how TBAS advice visits can benefit your animals*

Jenny has been in first opinion farm animal practice in North Devon since 2004, and delivering TBAS advice visits for almost 4 years. She very much enjoys working with small holders.

Kate Brookes: *Mullacott Alpacas and voluntary TB testing in camelid herds*

Kate and Simon have been breeding alpacas in North Devon for over 20 years. They have developed an outstanding herd of animals. Kate and Simon are affiliated trainers for the British Alpaca Society and deliver a variety of training courses on farm.

This meeting will be suitable for owners of herds of all sizes.

Please reserve your free place by contacting Torch Farm Vets Mullacott on 01271 879516.

Joining instructions will be sent by email.

Re-homing opportunity For alpacas owned by Chrissie Turpin



Chrissie has owned her herd of Huacaya alpacas for many years but, as a result of ill health, she is reluctantly looking to rehome most of them in the near future.

There are 2 boys: a two and a half year old white male and an older proven black male. In addition there are 15 females of various colours and ages of which Chrissie intends to keep 5. She says only one of them is a bit stropy 😊 but everyone else is good and used to being touched on the back and being around people – although not halter trained.

If you are interested and able to help, please contact her to discuss further.

Mrs Christine Turpin,
Broadlands Farm,
Bradworthy,
Devon,
EX22 7QY

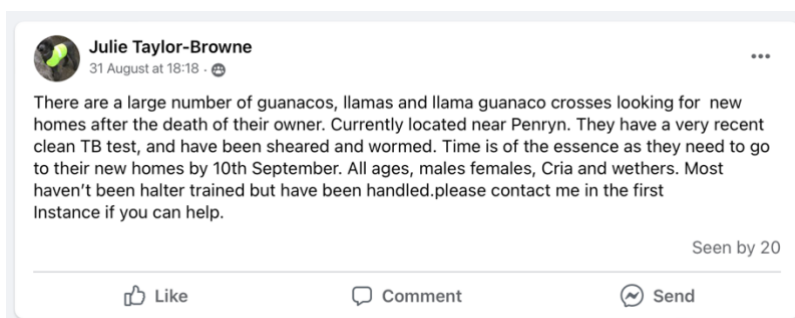
My three words by the gate:- alarm.boil.formless
landline 01409241817
mobile 07930926977



A re-homing story with a happy ending



Some of you may have seen this appeal from Julie on our CCA Facebook page back in August:



We are delighted to be able to provide this update from her:

Every single one of the 136 llamas and guanacos at Calamanky farm were saved. A team effort by Sue and Alan (the people looking after them), the British Llama Society and one of the heirs to the estate meant that guanacos ended up with guanaco herds, and castrated llamas ended up in sanctuaries as far flung as Scotland, Norfolk and Porkellis (yes ok I did take some!) Head and Head (their vets) heroically stepped in at the eleventh hour and castrated 22 unwanted entire males which meant that they too could go to the sanctuaries. All travelled safely and are now settling into their new homes. Disaster well and truly averted by a great team effort.

ADVERTISEMENTS

The CCA's honorary vet; Sarah Caldwell BSc (Hons) BVSc MRCVS is now providing a **bespoke camelid consultancy service**.



TheHumanVet offers:

- A second opinion for clinical cases; working alongside your vet for a consistent approach,
- Health planning for all herd sizes, new and established, for all experience levels.

For more information visit www.thehumanvet.com

Contact Sarah at info@thehumanvet.com

GETTING TO KNOW ...

Interview with Helen Markou, Lydford Gorge Alpacas

Interviewed by Wendy Scott



Helen, we first met you after the Devon Show when you were on the hunt for your first alpacas in your new home at Lydford Gorge. Can you wind back a bit further and share what brought you to take the huge step of moving out of Software Management and into alpaca experiences?

Animals have always been quite literally the love of my life (sorry humans!) and so I always hoped to be able to work with them as a career. My first dream from a very young age was to become a vet but this proved far too expensive a route in the late 90s (showing my age there!!). So I took a different path which followed my other passion for travel which started with a degree in Business, Travel and Tourism and ended with a 20 year long career in software for Travel businesses. Working in the travel industry you get a lot of cheap travel and it was on one of those trips I met my first alpacas in Tasmania in 2007. Meeting Woolly and Ginger that day completely captivated me with an animal that seemed to understand everything I was saying to them. I just knew then I had found what my later midlife crisis needed to be. In 2018 I was finally able to take the plunge, drained by corporate life and knowing I needed to make the move now or I would never do it. So in April 2019 myself and Rupert (cat not husband) travelled down the M4 to Dartmoor to start a new chapter.

All that software experience managing airlines, hotels and tourist attractions as clients over the years would shortly come into its own with managing the business side. I just needed to add on poo picking skills, managing large animals and managing the public...

Having made the decision to start up an alpaca experience business, how did you go about looking for and buying your first alpacas?

After buying my farm specifically with alpaca experiences in mind (I am opposite a huge tourist attraction and can walk my alpacas from the door straight onto the moors) I saw that the Devon County show was on in May 2019, just a few weeks after I had moved in. I knew there would be alpacas there so thought I would go check it out but had definitely not planned to buy any just then. After all I needed to go through planning permission first for my animal housing since I was in the National Park and grade 2 listed.

However these things don't always go strictly to plan and alpacas seem to have a magic all of their own. So when I got chatting to Paula from Winsaula Alpacas at the show and found out that the beautiful Batman was going to be looking for a new home I was smitten. He was there with his best pal Joker and it was the sight of these two impressive suris that just got me! I had seen suris before but these two were quite standouts and I was similarly impressed with the quality and reputation of Winsaula Alpacas as a breeder.

Shortly after meeting Paula I then met Tom and Wendy from Dark Sky Alpacas (hmm this is now turning into one of those dangerous shopping trips where you're not supposed to try anything on...). They had Huacayas and were so charming and approachable I can't be held responsible for finding more boys.

Fast track a few weeks later and I had been to both Winsalua and Dark Sky and secured my first lot of boys - suri boys Batman, Mr T and Mr Sharps, Huacaya boys Macca and, Pen. I had to be patient though as I wouldn't be able to get them until I was all set up which was not until December 2019.

Since I ended up buying my first animals quite quickly it was a good thing I already had a solid business plan down for what I wanted to achieve. So I knew exactly what sort of animals I needed and that I was not at all interested in breeding with females. I think when you buy these animals it is so important that you have a long

term plan thought out well in advance. After all, these animals live long lives, are a huge commitment and can sometimes be very expensive to keep.

And when your first 5 boys arrived, what was it like to have them? How did you go about training the alpacas to walk with members of the public?

The three Suris arrived on day 1, the Huacaya boys on day 2 and day 3 I ended up with a couple of supreme champion livery boys (their field had flooded so I could hardly say no.. 😊). Luckily I was so



dazzled and blown over there was no room to feel scared. I just felt overwhelming love for all these boys the minute they got here and it was second nature to take care of them. I had also done my homework and attended multiple husbandry courses over a 7 year period. I hadn't taken these boys on lightly but having your own herd certainly teaches you a lot every single day. Having had 18 lambs to care for in the 9 months prior to the alpacas arriving also really helped settle me in to farm life and the work it entails caring for outdoor animals. I actually kept 5 of those lambs which was not at all in the original plan...

Training the alpacas for trekking ended up being quite a long and arduous journey. All my boys were halter trained and I think this is hugely important to check when you buy alpacas for trekking. I then rallied all my neighbours and other locals to come out on countless training treks. This was also a great way to get the local community involved and the alpacas are now held very dear by many and I'm known as Llama lady in the village (they need some more education clearly...). After 4 months of intensive training I was ready to open for business in March 2020 but I couldn't have got my timing so badly wrong. The various lockdowns tested my training program to the limit as the boys would go nowhere for months at a time. 9.5 months were lost in total and certainly put paid to some of the animals trekking careers. Macca Paca was one boy who doesn't really trek now as he was only a short way into his training before the first lockdown. His confidence was gone and nerves kicked in so badly he spooked himself on a stone and literally took off across the moors. I thought this was quite unheard of with alpacas but I've learnt now not to be surprised by anything. Luckily it was a training trek and I knew that Macca was perfectly safe as the area I trek on is completely fenced and cattle gridded. Nethertheless I was pretty worried but turned everyone around calmly to walk back to go fetch him. After 25 minutes we reached the starting gate to find Macca there kissing some cyclists. He'd instinctively run towards home clever boy. Imagine those cyclists faces when he came flying round the corner just weeks off being sheared so resembling a large, skinny and gangly poodle. Poor Macca, he's been out a bit since but I don't push it. I know each of my animals intimately and can read their stress signs however small. We have an employees charter 'Our Paca Principles' that we stick to religiously as the animals welfare is paramount. Macca is definitely more comfortable as a stay at home boy but with the occasional outing.

The lady walking Macca on that runaway trek actually booked again for the autumn this time spending real £. She was a bit disappointed though that she couldn't walk Macca but it just shows how much they capture people's hearts no matter what happens.

From a business perspective, how did you set yourself up and start marketing?

I had a really clear vision and structured plan in place for what I wanted to achieve which I think is the most important thing to have before you start with anything else. You absolutely have to know where it is you are heading with your goals laid out and know how to measure the success of those goals. Don't ever buy these beautiful animals on a whim as they will need your love and care (and money!) for a long time to come.

That structured plan however was soon to be tested to the max as when I set out to launch the business to be open to the public, the pandemic started. Faced with the first major lockdown and being closed before I had even started I had to think very differently. My primary market was suddenly gone, that of overnight holiday makers and daytrippers. So I changed tack and first concentrated on building my brand and reputation locally. I had already made good progress in strengthening my relationship with the local community through the alpaca

trek training program and knew that local people would be the first ones to 'be let out' when restrictions eased. They would become my first stream of customers but I didn't know then just how important and strong that locals market would become.

To reach out to the local community I concentrated on building my social media presence and getting published in local magazines. With so many people at home all day I knew there would be a huge appetite for this material. I made sure my presence was not too 'salesy' as after all you couldn't really book yet and that is also not my style. The alpaca boys sell just by being themselves so I share a lot of content of them doing just that - all the mad things they get up to. When bookings were able to start 64% of them were coming from Facebook and that proportion continued right up to late 2021 when the overnight 'googlers' were back in force. Its still a strong booking source at 34% but is now rivaling Google Search & Maps as I see a broader spectrum of customer types coming through.

That initial targeted local marketing also paid dividends in that it got my business known to a lot of local businesses and accommodation providers. They afterall have a captive market of ready customers to recommend me to as something to do in the local area.

It sounds like lock down came at probably just the wrong moment – how did you get through that?

Lockdown, which one? 🤔. It couldn't have happened at a worst time as the March 2020 lockdown was just weeks after I had tried to open. Financially it was really difficult but I wasn't to be deterred and I went out and got myself another job to run alongside the farm and the business. Yes it was really tough as I ended up doing that job working for the government for almost a year and a half. Much longer than I expected but even when I could open back to the public I needed the security. It meant working 7 days a week but it also meant I could keep the animals in tip top health and not have to shelve the business. I was only able to go full time on the alpaca business in January 2022 and am now battling through the effects of the cost of living crisis. But hey I like a challenge!

The pandemic though also produced opportunities as those many months of being closed to the public weren't wasted. I used it to continue training my alpacas where I could, to carry on the farm renovations (the place was a mess!) and to improve my digital presence. And let's face it who wouldn't enjoy lockdown with some gorgeous furry creatures for company. I even had my two March lockdown 7 month old 'babies' so I was in a happy place despite the long hours.

Once everything started opening back up, how quickly did you get bookings and has business been busy ever since?

Bookings came in pretty quickly as soon as the plan for the first lockdown to end was announced. These were 100% from that locals market as it was still not confirmed when people could stay overnight again. The locals though were desperate to get out and about, to do something positive, safe and outdoors. And we were there waiting for them! Covid in a way opened up this market which I always thought would be a secondary one for me. However even now in late 2022 it's really a joint primary market with those overnighters. Building that initial connection through social media and other local publications was also key.

Business has been pretty strong ever since being able to open continually and restriction free from 12th April 2021 and is still growing month on month. The cost of living crisis though is proving to have an effect on bookings and means I'm having to be very creative again to get that business in. It's out there but you need to work hard to find it.

You regularly have lovely stories and competitions on social media - how important do you think that presence is for you in getting and keeping customers?

I've touched a fair bit on social media so I won't waffle on too much here. I will say though that it is fundamental to any business these days to have a presence but its even more important to



create the right presence! You need to find what works best for you, don't copy others and find your own personal, unique style. I don't let social media rule me in any way and I only post when I think I've got something fun to share. If that means I don't post for a week or two then that's what happens. Luckily with alpacas they are normally doing something bonkers most days so content is pretty forthcoming.

Turning back to the alpacas themselves, you've grown the team over the past few years and it sounds like you have such lovely characters amongst them. How different are they each from one another and what sort of different challenges have you had with them. I know when Macca hit puberty he was a real handful for a while and you feared he might not be suitable for meeting the public again – but you managed to work through that – can you share what you did and how it's turned out? We've also recently seen the story of Joker and I hear you have managed to train him to sit down for his injections – can you share your secret???)

I currently have 12 boys under the age of 5 years so imagine looking after that many hooman teenagers and you will begin to understand what my days can be like! Each and every one of them are completely unique and I



find that my suri boys have the most distinctive personalities. My two Huacayas Macca Paca and Penfold though continue to come out of their shells and I wonder if it's the influence of the suris. Penfold just from a month ago is now letting people sit down right next to him and even enjoying being stroked on his neck. I never thought I'd see the day but he's becoming more mellow. The suris are all very tactile animals so it must be catching.

Macca Paca is an absolute legend and is most people's favourite Paca on an Animal Encounter experience (because of his infamous kisses) but he's not always been an angel. He was fighting a lot with one of the other boys but he was never the instigator. Fast approaching two and a half years old these two boys were booked in for castration. The very next day post op all fighting ceased immediately but something very unexpected happened in that Macca switched his aggression to me. I was suddenly being reared and charged at, quite a frightening sight with an 80kg animal. Joker even stepped in several times to protect me from being charged by moving in quickly and up close in front of me, going side on and with tail up. This behaviour from Macca went on for around 3 months and luckily was mostly during the second big lockdown so I didn't have to worry about customer safety but my thoughts were firmly on his future here. I couldn't have this behaviour with the tourist activities I wanted to run so I found him a possible forever home. However I wasn't ready to give up on him and felt it was my duty to try and retrain him. After researching and learning about herd mentalities in an animal psychology program, I carried out a training regime where I had to reassert myself as the alpha. This involved in part having to stand your ground as you are being stampeded, quite a scary prospect but was very effective in that he would stop at the last second. After a month of trying these techniques the behaviour stopped, at least the rearing and charging. Macca then entered his 'hannibal lecturer' phase where he would aggressively chatter at me and try to spit. I again stood my ground and would walk right up close to him and put my hand on his nose and push his face down gently so that he had to lower his eyes to me. It took a lot of confidence and I would advise anyone not to just copy what I've done as every situation is different and could be dangerous. Take proper advice and do your homework. Macca is now like a big teddy bear but he really hates being touched on his body so I fully respect that. I will never 100% trust him but I don't with any of my animals and manage risk continually especially when the public are in close contact with them.

Joker is a very different story. This boy is quite literally one of a kind and seems to have a superior intelligence level. For a breeding stud he has the most extreme gentle temperament (except when he's around the ladies and becomes the biggest showoff going). Jo seems to understand everything I say to him and from an early stage I have seen him respond to my requests. The first one was 'Jo, why don't you go through the gate for your breakfast where it's quieter' and I was amazed that he trotted off to do just that. He has eaten on the other side of the fence line every morning since but waits patiently each time for me to tell him it's time to walk round. When Jo had his tooth abscess I was faced with the daunting prospect of having to inject him daily for 6 weeks. It's just me here managing everything singlehandedly and Jo's a big lad at well over a 100kg of pure muscle. I practice a lot of touch methods with my animals and can even put my sheep to sleep so I thought just because

he's a big lad doesn't mean it won't work on him. I have regularly relaxed Jo by working on his face, jaw and head so I extended this down to his front legs every morning just before his injection. After a bit of stamping he quickly got used to it, to the point where I can now pick up his front legs for toenails (I'm yet to master the back ones as his legs are rather huge and kicky). I also started to tell Jo what I needed him to do and that it would be easier if he sat down. Putting light pressure on the top of his back at the base of the neck and gently pushing the top of his head down along with the command of 'down, down' (he already knew the command of 'up, up') Jo started to respond and kush for me. Within a week he was sitting down on command and now I don't even have to say anything. He sees a syringe coming out, he sits down even when it's not for him 😊. After the jab he even waits to be told 'up up' and to come over for his bravery sweets (dried peas). When he sat down for the vets when he went into the surgery, I felt like a proud mum.

I'm now teaching Joker his colours but was amazed when one of my other boys Jasper joined in and was so alert and focused on this new game. Alpacas really are endless fun and I can't wait to teach them new tricks.

Finally, looking back over the past few years, what are your big learnings and do you have any advice for other people setting out to do trekking or experiences?

Probably never to give up on your dreams and that if you have the determination then you can succeed through most things. Those dreams though will be more easily realised if you have a solid plan behind them and you are prepared to be flexible on that plan when the need arises.

My biggest piece of advice for trekking is that it's not an easy business. It is hugely rewarding but it can be very challenging, is high risk if you walk off farm and you must pay attention to your animals welfare when doing it. It's not a get quick rich scheme. You can make a decent living from it but you need to work hard at it and remember that not all alpacas like trekking. You even need to be prepared for your animals to change as they mature if you start with young ones. If they decide they don't like trekking you need to still be able to home that animal for life.

There are quite a number of places trekking now and I am one of the newer ones. So you must make sure you have something unique to offer, don't copy others and respect your 'competition' if you are in closeish proximity to someone else.

Thank you for sharing Helen and wishing you all the best with your alpacas and your business 😊

