

Llamapacking 101
Margaret Van Camp
Pitchfork Ranch
Swartz Creek, MI



About the presenter

Margaret Van Camp

- From Swartz Creek, MI (60 mi NE of Detroit)
 - Working with llamas since 1996
- Aficionado and breeder of classic (ccara) llamas
- Together with Cindy Cieciva, own & operate Pitchfork Ranch
 - 10 llamas and (about) 50 longwool sheep (3 breeds)
 - 4H show judge (llama and sheep)
 - Llama packing presenter at multiple MI llama events
- Former Chair of Michigan Llama Association Pack Committee
 - Organized multiple PLTA trials
- Former Board member of the Pack Llama Trial Association
 - Recently Retired high school Spanish teacher

Choosing a pack llama: The South American Perspective



Llamapacking in Peru

Photos courtesy Sherry Sheridan

Choosing a pack llama



What can be observed:

Gender

Wool type

Size

Conformation

Physical & mental maturity



How to choose a pack llama:

Gender

Male



Female



Gelding



How to choose a pack llama: Wool type / Breed

Classic



Everything else



Choosing a pack llama: size



Photo: Lost Creek Llamas



Photo: Ganadera MAVIC, Peru

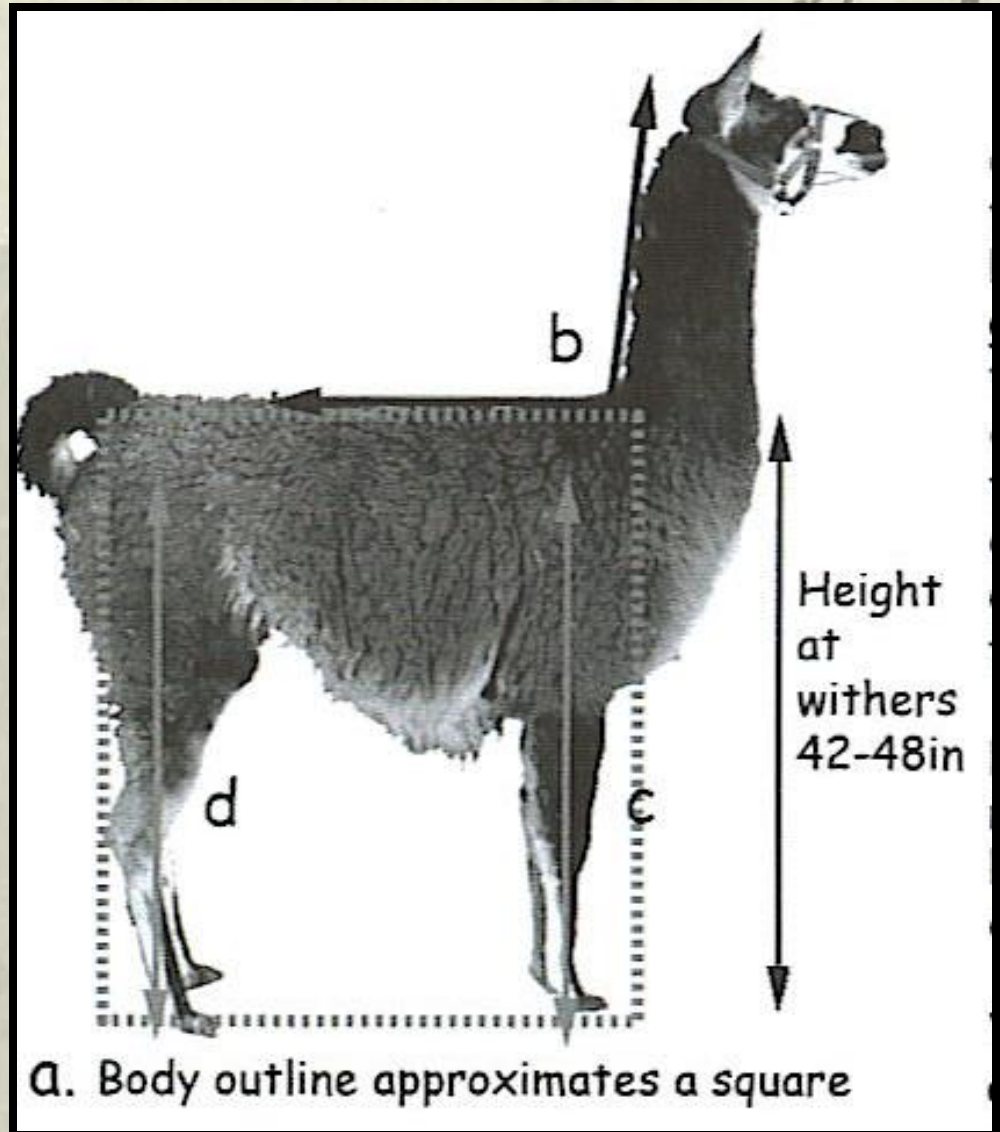
- ❖ Most are between 42” and 48” at the shoulder
- ❖ Balance is more important than size

Choosing a pack llama: conformation

❖ Balance

❖ Gait

smooth, with little to no side to side motion



Choosing a pack llama: Conformation

Topline and balance



Photo: N. Kuklenski



Photo: Lost Creek Llamas

Choosing a pack llama: Conformation

Front legs



Choosing a pack llama: Conformation

Rear legs



Photos: N. Kuklenski

Choosing a pack llama: Physical & mental maturity

- ❖ Training period: birth to four years
- ❖ Most llamas are full-grown at age 4
- ❖ Mental maturity and experience helps make pack llamas “bomb-proof.”



Choosing a pack llama: What must be ascertained

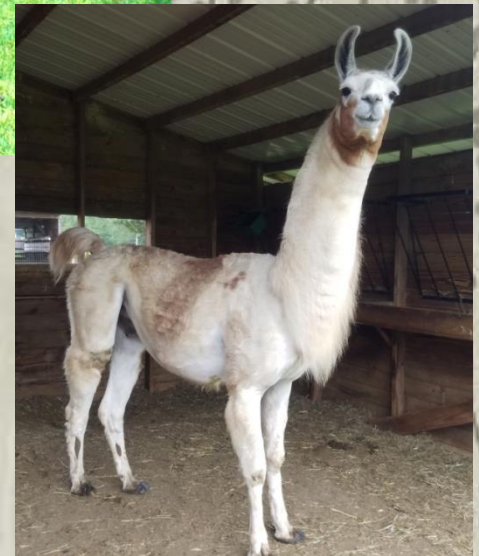
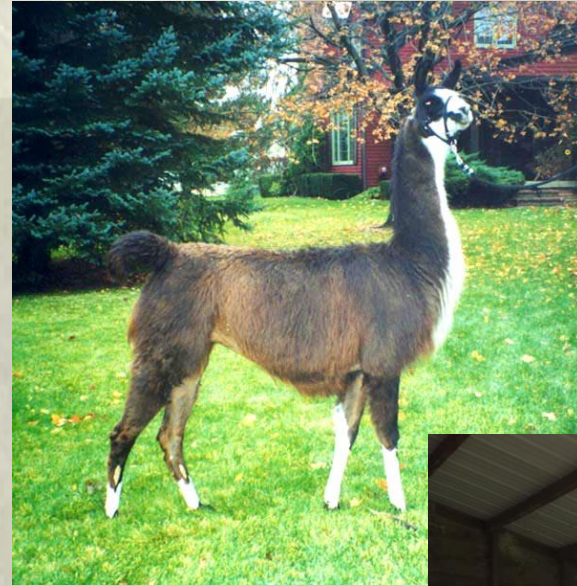
1. Physical longevity

Example: pasterns



*Choosing a pack llama:
What must be ascertained*

2. Weight tendencies



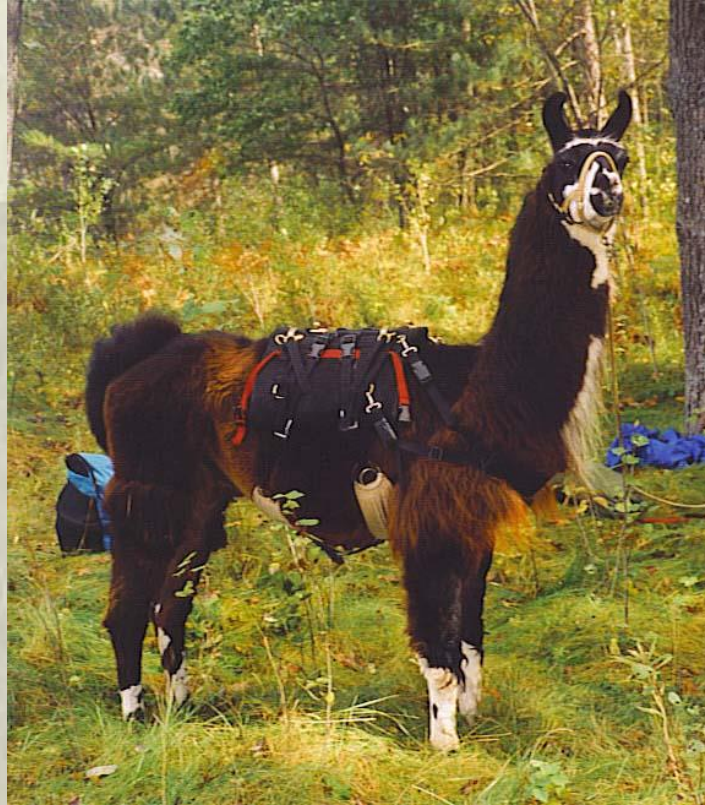
Choosing a pack llama: *What must be ascertained*

3. Attitude (don't try to judge too young)

- ❖ Interested in new experiences or frightened/bored?
- ❖ Keeps pace or drags quickly?
- ❖ Aware of surroundings or flighty?
- ❖ Compliant or adversarial?



A few examples to consider...



❖ PFL Spartacus—gelding (APL)

A few examples to consider...



❖ PFL Chancellor♂ (BPL)

A few examples to consider...



❖ Toby ♂ (MPL) (Owned by Niki Kuklenski)

And one more...



❖ Sir Trumpkin ♂ (APL)

Developing a pack llama

- ❖ Training
- ❖ Conditioning
- ❖ Experience



Developing a pack llama: Training

- ❖ Training—GO SLOW. BE PATIENT.
- ❖ Desensitizing: *Begin immediately*
- ❖ Accepting the training pack: *Begin no younger than 12 mos. of age (no weight!)*
- ❖ Accepting saddle and panniers: *Begin no younger than 18 mos. (no weight!)*
- ❖ Loading panniers: *Begin no younger than 2 years*
- ❖ Maximum loads by age
 1. 2-3 years: 10% of llama's body weight
 2. 3-4 years: 15% of llama's body weight
 3. 4 year and older: 25% of llama's body weight

Developing a pack llama: Training

❖ **What every pack llama should know**

1. Trailering
2. Positioning on the trail
3. Picket line
4. Handling feet, legs, belly, tail and head
5. No snacking (unless invited)
6. Hiking in a pack string
7. Obstacles
 - Jumps, step-overs, duck-unders
 - Water and mud
 - Bridges
 - Deadfalls and rock rubble
 - Encounters (dogs, people, horses, wild critters)



Developing a pack llama: Conditioning

Typical conditioning plan for 3-4 YO llama preparing for a 5-mi event:

1. Begin 4-6 weeks ahead, twice a week or more
 2. Begin with short (30 min) walks, no pack
 3. Add packs (10% weight), lengthen to an hour
 4. Add hills, 15% of weight, 90 min. hike
 5. Lengthen to two hours
 6. Including obstacles is ideal
 7. Vary the route if possible
- ❖ Remember: Don't underestimate the importance of conditioning. It's the most neglected part of llamapacking.

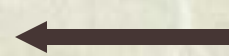
Developing a pack llama: Experience

- ❖ Nothing can replace trail work for experience
- ❖ Requires time and repetition
- ❖ Result: a “bomb-proof” pack llama
- ❖ Best pack llamas often have 3 or more years of experience (age 7 or older). Very short in supply.
- ❖ Organized pack trials can be an excellent learning experience

Safe practices

- ❖ Adequately prepared and conditioned?
- ❖ Not overloaded?
- ❖ Familiar with route? Maps? Others are aware of your plans?
- ❖ Ready and alert for the unexpected (i.e dogs, broken equipment, etc)?
- ❖ Llamas are trained to tether calmly?
- ❖ ID tags on halters?
- ❖ First aid kit?
- ❖ Emergency communications? (the dreaded cell phone)

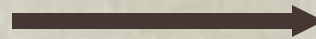
Equipment basics: Packs



Training pack

- one piece
- two cinches
- two zippered pouches
- \$57 to \$90 new

Intermediate Pack



- Soft saddle
- Detachable panniers
- Chest and butt straps
- \$175-200 new



Equipment basics: Packs

Photos from Useful Llama Items catalogue



Flaming Star full-size pack

- **Soft saddle**
- **System includes saddle, two panniers, all cinches and straps**
- **Around \$450 new**

Equipment basics: Packs

Photos from Mt. Sopris Llamas website



Traditional saddle



Pannier



Lumbar saddle

Mt. Sopris full sized pack

- **Rigid wood (Traditional) or Soft (Lumbar) Saddle**
- **System includes saddle, two panniers, all cinches and straps**
 - **Traditional may require a saddle blanket**
- **Around \$620 (Traditional) or \$400 (Lumbar) new**

Equipment basics: Halters

- ❖ Comfort and correct fit
- ❖ Room for chewing
- ❖ My preference: X-type halters
- ❖ Recommended maker: Mt. Sopris
- ❖ Always carry an extra
- ❖ Lead should be substantial, easy to tie. Carry an extra.



Photo from Useful Llama Items catalogue

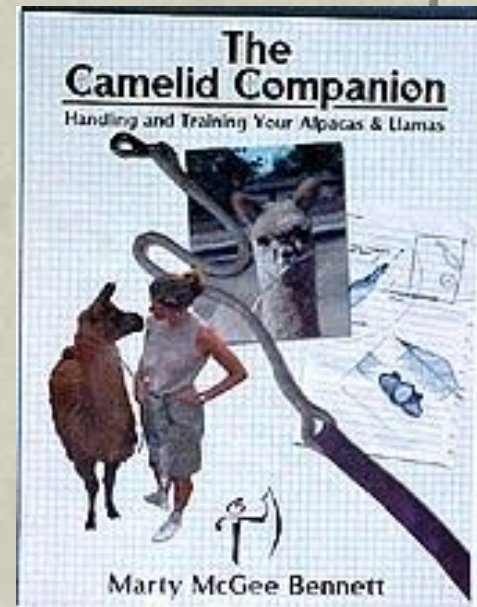
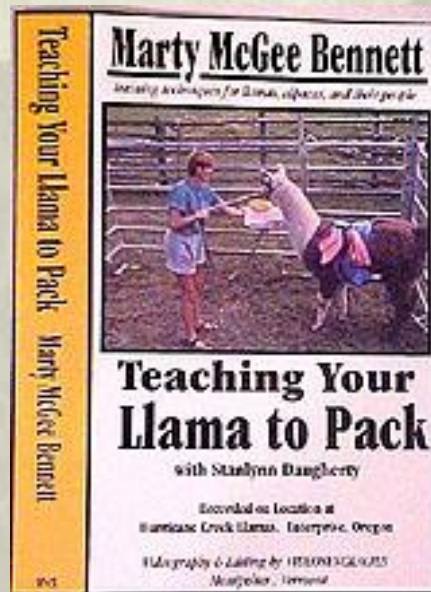
Equipment basics: accessories

- ❖ Stake-out line and picket screw (with shock absorber)
- ❖ First aid kit
- ❖ Scale
- ❖ Brush
- ❖ Collapsible bucket, feed pan



Wrapping up

❖ Some recommended reading:



Plus: *Llamas on the Trail* by David Harmon and Amy Rubin

Llamapacking 101



Thanks for your attention! Happy trails!