

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ALPACA BREEDERS' SOCIETY

December 2024

Volume 11, Issue 10



**MERRY CHRISTMAS
TO ALL
OUR MEMBERS
AND A
VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR**



(This article taken from exactly five years ago - our December 2019 newsletter) ...

SERENA ALPACAS - THE END OF A JOURNEY

Peter-John Garbutt

It is with a sense of sadness that I write this today, letting you all know that we have sold our beautiful farm “Heaven’s Gift” in the Natal Midlands, as well as all our alpacas.

It has been a journey that has been full of challenges, heartache when losing an alpaca, joy at the birth of a cria, and the great pleasure of just being out in the field in the presence of these beautiful creatures.



I still don't fully understand why I took this path. In hindsight it would have been much easier and far less emotional to have grown carrots. Not that I have any idea of what it is like to grow carrots. I've never done that before and I'm not putting any carrot farmers down.

Becoming involved with alpacas just seemed a really cool thing to do. The Country Life article showing the idyllic lifestyle of Dawn and Warren Kay in Lady Grey back in 2003 was a significant motivator. Alpacas seemed as if they came from another world. There was a sense of mystery around them.

In reflecting back over the last 16 years I see that I have been blessed in so many ways. I have met many wonderful people and had experiences that would have never been possible if I had grown carrots.

I thank each person that I came to know along this journey for your own uniqueness and the energy that you brought. Without you the experience would never have been the same. Whilst there is sadness, the overwhelming feeling is one of deep appreciation. Thank you all.

Blessings
Peter-John

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We are a bit short of news this month as everyone prepares for Christmas. So whilst rummaging through previous December newsletters I found the above story. Amazing to think it was five years ago that PJ sold his herd. And what a lot he did for us, bumpstarting us all with his Belfast mini-mill.



It must be coincidental that *Serena Alpacas* has gone from Mooi River but rough 45 kms down the road in Lions River Shelly McKerrow began her alpaca journey a couple of years later as *Serenity Alpacas*.

On Friday the 13th, just over two weeks ago our neighbours' house caught fire just after 6.30 in the evening and was reduced to ashes in little more than an hour. Old house, wooden floors, thatched roof and a wind from hell that only the Cape can deal. This was Di and John Bullivant's home in whose guest cottages some of you have stayed for AGMs and seminars. Right across the road from Helderstroom. I know some of our members have experienced fire. This was terrifying, and a tragedy.

Lani Bruwer has been working her magic to create SAABS's new website which has now gone live. Click on <https://alpacasociety.co.za> and navigate your way ... Huge thanks to Lani for giving up her time to do this.

Lani has also written a touching article which begins on the following page. We all tend to beat ourselves up when we lose an alpaca and yet all the time we are doing what we believe is the very best for the animal. Losing your first one is tough though, very tough.

Shelly McKerrow has also recently suffered her first alpaca loss - Merlin who was an older boy, having been born at Helderstroom in 2009, the same year as our twins. Merlin sired many lovely cria for us, and for Lorna Ramsden in Noordhoek and at the time of his death he was being a wonderful uncle to a male cria Cisco. The good news is that Shelly's cria halter training has advanced in leaps and bounds - not perhaps the correct term here. I actually believe there are no leaps or bounds, just calm and disciplined walkies! Well done to you Shelly.

I hope you all have a wonderful Christmas and find time to switch off a bit. On a personal note it's been a good year for us - lots to do to keep busy, a happy bunch of alpacas, dogs sadly lost, dogs gained and a new alpaca friend in Helen. Thank you again Helen for coming to South Africa. (Helen is on the newsletter distribution list by the way)! So here's wishing you all a very merry Christmas and an even better 2025.

ABOUT GOODBYES

By Lani Bruwer, The Phantom Stud, Knysna

It's the end of the year and the season of goodbyes. Goodbye to a year that (again) went by too quickly. Goodbye to friends and family we see only once a year (or sometimes less) over the Christmas period. Goodbye to all the good intentions of what we wished to achieve this year, all the lists we wanted to tick off, the ambitions of projects we hoped to complete. It's always a little sad – like goodbyes usually are.

I also had some sad goodbyes recently. My tiny herd of two pregnant ladies grew to four around Easter. With only this one small female herd, I couldn't keep our little male cria.

What made it worse was that he is the most beautiful grey boy, with such a pleasant personality. He'd come running to the car for nose kisses when we arrive home. And as much as we knew we shouldn't cuddle him, we sneaked in some hugs and kisses from our side, which he so fondly received.



With my four alpacas being lawn ornaments and much adored pets, it felt like I'm giving away a child. I pushed his goodbye to as late as possible. But it had to be done, and I chose to swop for a female from Alison Notley (from whom I received my first two females).



As we shear much later in Knysna (only in December), little Phantom had to be shorn before he could leave for Worcester's warmer climate, where the herd he'd be joining would also already be shorn. Manfred Obermuller is an absolute master in this field and came out specially for this single shearing.

Little Phantom wasn't pleased. He was so stressed and tense that he struggled to walk afterwards. But, as my reward for the empathetic trauma I felt for him, I'll be able to knit his few blocks into my alpaca blanket as a memento of our special few months together.

I chose to drive him down to the Notleys when we got the chance to coincide it with a business trip to Cape Town. I just couldn't send my baby in the back of a courier. I had to see him off myself. So, he went in the back of my husband's Volvo instead.

We put all the luggage on the back seat and made a lovely bed for Phantom in the boot. I multi-promised my husband that alpacas cush as soon as the wheels turn and won't poop laying down. So, there is no risk of any accidents in the car.



I didn't reckon with Phantom being so comfortable around us that he won't be scared into cushing all the way there. He pooped in the car three times – one of which was with his rear towards us and over the back seat and onto the luggage. He also tried to climb over to come and sit with me in front. My husband knew to rather say nothing. The goodbye was hard enough for me.

Christopher and Alison met us with so much warmth that I was again reassured that Phantom is going to the right home. It took him only a few minutes to settle in and run around with his new friends. To be honest, I felt a little stab seeing how quickly he adjusted to his new surroundings.

We continued to Cape Town, whereafter I dropped my husband for his business trip and returned to Helderstroom to spend the night before driving back to Knysna with similar-aged Deedee and adult Clemmy.

The Notleys housed me in their attic room, which took me back to days when life was slower and more peaceful. I so wished I could just stay much, much longer.

The room was so tastefully decorated – complete with bedspread (a delight coming from a house where we use only duvets), a dressing table with a hand mirror (I forgot about the existence of these!), and a beautiful alpaca rug.

From the window, I learned how the staff halter train the young alpacas by walking them to the gate and back.



We spent the evening talking about their younger year adventures, and I felt envious of all the rich experiences they've enjoyed compared to the rat race life I'm living. How much rather I'd like to be able to sit in such a lovely farm kitchen – eating home-made bread and Marmite. Or hang out in Alison's studio. What a life!



The next morning, I said my final goodbye to little Phantom. Loading both Deedee and Clemmy in the car was a little trickier. Luckily, they were better behaved than Phantom and stayed absolutely still all the way to Knysna.



It was a very long drive back home, with lots of roadworks. I had to just quickly drop them off upon arrival, and rush to fetch my three boys from school and drive them around to activities for hours thereafter. I figured it'll give the two new girls some time to settle in peacefully, without human interference, and get to know my other three in their own time. I was happy to see that they took to the shelter I've built for mine (which they never use, as they prefer the garage when it rains – which means my car now permanently sleeps outside).



Clemmy on the left, and Deedee (RIP) on the right, at the back

A few days of heavy rain followed, so Deedee and Clemmy were mostly laying down in the shelter – probably also adjusting to the new climate. I kept my distance to minimise their stress and didn't worry too much when they weren't interested in the horse mix we feed our alpacas, as there is abundance of grazing all around them.

Then the shock... On the way to school a week later, we found little Deedee dead in front of the shelter. As there wasn't time before school to assess what happened, I dropped the kids in town, and fought the tears all the way back home to do my own postmortem. I checked for all the obvious – no bite marks, no bloody nose or eyes, no vomit or foam around the mouth, nothing lodged in the throat, a soft belly and area around the anus... nothing that could indicate this unexpected cause of death. Maybe heartache? But she had Clemmy... Maybe the trauma of the long car ride?

I was devastated.

And extremely nervous to admit to Alison that I failed to provide a good home to Deedee. I shouldn't have just dropped them off after we arrived from Worcester. I should've first spent some time with them. I shouldn't have left them laying in the shelter. I should've forced them to walk around to make sure they're fine and grazing well.

So many should've.

I cancelled all the extra murals and my meetings that afternoon, and sat down in the garden to closely watch Clemmy for over an hour. That's when I realised she is struggling to pass stool. Her tail was up in the air and she tried a couple of times, but nothing happened. She was clearly constipated. Probably because of the long car trip (which also happens to me) and then the stress that followed after arriving in a new environment. It was already getting dark, but I realised that something must be done immediately to avoid a second death.

But catching a new alpaca on an open lawn when you're on your own (my husband on his trip, my teenager at a friend's, and no workers on the property) was harder than I imagined. When I finally managed and my middle son passed me the gloves so I could feel for an obstruction, my arms were just too short to hold both her neck (she is a fighter!) and reach her anus. It took four tries of my two younger kids (12 and 8) holding her while I tried to examine her before I gave up. It was only when I fetched my teenager when our team was strong enough to get the job done.

Then the disappointment: there was no obvious blockage. So, I let her go. Only to realise that it would be helpful if I could do an enema. By that time, it was almost 21:30 and it was way overdue to put the kids to bed for school (no time even for a meal, homework or bath that night). I ran to get the huge syringe my youngest son plays with (actually for turkey stuffing), but it was cracked. I then found our most squishy water bottle and filled it with olive oil. All three kids had to help while I gave Clemmy my homemade enema of two bottles of olive oil, followed by three bottles of lukewarm water. By that time, she was so tired of fighting us, that she just sat down calmly.

I called the vet out the next morning, but Clemmy passed a tiny poop while he was watching her. So, my enema did the trick. I lost one, but managed to save one. What a rough start. But, since then, Clemmy has settled in so well and already managed to fill a bit of the hole Phantom left in my heart.

Who said having alpacas is easy? Goodbye 2024.

May 2025 hold many new adventures.



SAABS REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| ♣ Kwa Zulu Natal: | Wendy Channing | wendy@endeavouralpacas.com |
| ♣ Free State: | Corlia Boshoff | corlia@plettafrica.co.za |
| ♣ Gauteng: | Tawheda Schuitema | schuitema.taw@gmail.com |
| ♣ Western Cape: | Position vacant as at September 2024 | |

TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS - OUR NEW COLUMN ...

KEEPING ON TOP OF TOPKNOTS

Alison Notley

Last month's contribution to this new column covered the "spit-off test" as a indication of alpaca pregnancies. This month a bit about bonnets / fringes / topknots.

Is once a year shearing enough for fringes? In most cases probably not. As is the case with humans, some of us have frizzy hair, some of us have sticky-uppy hair, some of us have floppy hair and when your alpacas' fringes droop over their eyes and begin to impair their vision, it is time for a trim. It also looks so much neater.



Some shearers, I think particularly in America, favour not shearing the head at all like this chap on the left. Looks like he's wearing a snood. Then you are left with a visually unbalanced picture of a colossal head on top of a very thin neck. Looks completely out of proportion. Might work in very cold climates but not here.

This dude on the right appears quite often on social media. No idea where he comes from but I found him on the internet once again. He may have a perfectly formed heart-shaped nose but the poor thing can't see.



Be careful with sharp scissors particularly if you have a jumpy alpaca. They sometimes aren't ideal unless you are very careful. Dog thinning scissors work but will give you blisters on your fingers if you're working on several animals at a time, although you may get a more natural look with these. Actually the good old fashioned hand shears work best of all for this job.

Keeping bonnets under control also helps with less accumulation of hay, grass and burrs which stick in long fibre when they rub their heads. Picture right shows two of Helen Macdonald's "neat about" alpacas. The fibre is long enough to be protective and it is well trimmed around the eyes. Thank you Helen for this photo.





Here, using hand shears, Helen Macdonald demonstrates fringe trimming on alpaca *Blackout*. Note how she cradles and steadies *Blackout*'s head with one hand while 'scissoring' with the other.

(South Gloucestershire, UK in December and Helen is in shirtsleeves)! Photos taken by Claire Macdonald.

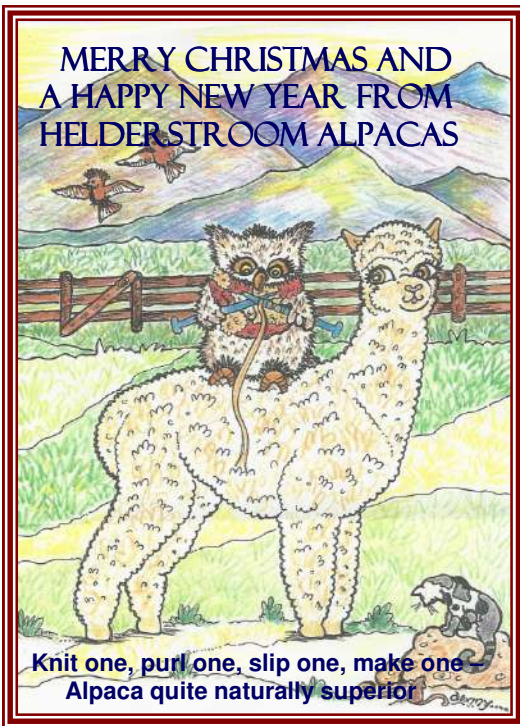




MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY, HEALTHY
AND SUCCESSFUL 2025
FROM
EVA AND CHRISTOPHER



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SAABS'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT - OUR NEW WEBSITE !!!

Please browse on <https://alpacasociety.co.za>



THANK YOU LANI !!



THE SAABS WHATSAPP GROUP

If you are worried or need help with a veterinary or health problem with your alpacas don't forget to make use of the **SAABS members' Whatsapp group**. There are breeders out there who have gained a wealth of experience over the years and who are keen to offer assistance.



For those alpaca owners who live far from veterinary help do use this platform. Post a photo or short video of your alpaca and very often someone will come to your rescue. We are **not** vets but can often offer help or put you in touch with a vet. And let me tell you - these dramas nearly always happen at a weekend or public holiday.

If you have any doubts as to whether you are on the group listing please do contact Di Kruger who will add your name. This platform has proved its worth over and over again.

Just please don't use it for the frivolous - the frivolous and fun go on the Alpaca Hum group. We don't want a cry wolf situation. There is also our Facebook page, *Alpacas in South Africa*, and private messaging.

POST SHEARING COURSE SUCCESS!!

Wendy Channing from Endeavour Alpacas in the KZN Midlands reports

I should like to share some shearing pictures of animals I sheared after Jan's course -jip, 60 plus isn't too old to learn something new! I am half way and will take a break due to my right hand being on leave ...



Good effort Wendy, Rome wasn't built in a day ... *Ed.*

ONE, TWO THREE PLENTY - THE “QUIPU”

The Quipu, or khipu was the Incan equivalent of the modern day calculator. Made of coloured, spun and plied threads of either cotton, llama or alpaca fibre the Quipu was used to maintain financial and or numerical records, whether for tax obligations, debt settling, calendar information or even counting numbers of alpacas in a herd – a sort of ancient South American abacus. Objects that can be identified unambiguously as quipus first appear in the archaeo-logical record in the first millen-nium CE.



They subsequently played a key part in the administration of the empire *Tahuantinsuyu*, controlled by the Incan ethnic people, which flourished across the Andes from circa 1450 to 1532 CE.



As the region became subsumed under the invading Spanish Empire, the use of *quipus* would soon be discontinued, to be replaced by European writing systems.

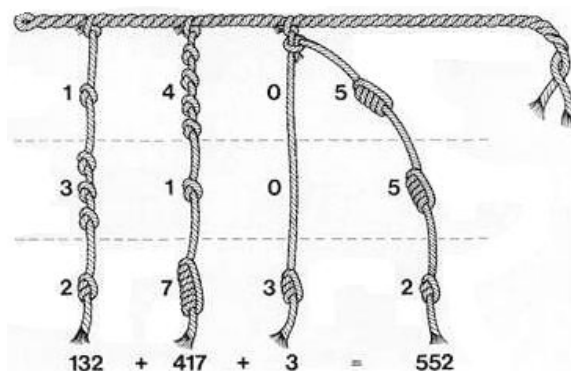
The quipu typically leader, from which hung as required. More could be of knots nearest the top second level of knots lowest level represented were included in the sum by knots tied above the cord, as shown on the right in the drawing below was used to amend or total the original tally.

The set of knots nearest the top represented hundreds, the second set of knots represented tens and the lowest set represented single digits.

consisted of a main cord, or many cords as would be added as needed. The set represented hundreds, the represented hundreds, the represented tens and the single digits. If thousands they would be represented hundreds. The secondary



Few of these quipus are found today and it is believed that many were buried along with their Inca people during the time of the Spanish Conquest. *Quipu* is the Spanish spelling and *Khipu* is the word for "knot" in Cusco Quechua (the native Inca language).



AND THIS IS HELDERSTROOM'S VERY OWN QUIPU

Alison Notley, Western Cape

Our long line of blue roan cocker spaniels, over 30 years of them, have all been given 'pointed' names. We had previously had a Quill and a Quiver and because of our oblique connection with South America we decided to call this girl Quipu. Well with a bit of artistic licence you could call the *quipu* pointed.

Symphony was our little bottle baby three years ago and Quipu was most definitely her carer. Always free with her face washes, she is amazing with any sick or poorly cria and is company for them if we can't be. A real mother's little helper - and always happy to give a little shove from behind.



Always free with her licks and kisses Quipu is at the ready to help.
Little comforter ...

***The Glove Box Guide to Alpacas* by Dr Jane Vaughan
R1480.00 per copy plus either PAXI parcel service
or PUDO. Please order by contacting
Alison on 082 662 9670 or Di on 079 895 4121.**

**Take care on the roads if you're driving anywhere,
stay safe, eat lots of good food and a very merry
Christmas and a happy new year to you all ...**

