

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

The long winter has ended, the last of the snow and ice has finally left our pastures, mud season was extraordinarily brief (we have not had any significant rain this spring) and black fly season has just begun. This winter, with snow covering the fences and drifts reaching to the barn roof, we accelerated our planned purchase of a four-wheel drive tractor with a front-end loader. The tractor has proved to be incredibly versatile, which has prompted me to reflect on the tools that ease the management of our llamas.

Where Have You Been All My Life

If you are totally happy with your relationship with your current toenail nippers then skip to the next section. But if your relationship is not all that it could be, then read on.

We recently acquired a set of curved nippers. They have tapered curved blades that give you incredible access to the llama's nail. My basic problem with the straight nippers is that the llama's toenail is not straight and it can be difficult to get the blades around the area you wish to cut. Not so with the curved nippers. I will never go straight again.

The curved nippers are more expensive than the straight nippers. For us the extra cost has been outweighed by the increased efficiency we are experiencing. Higher efficiency also translates into less stress for the llama.

If It Is This Much Fun It Must Be Sinful

We first read about the John Deere Z-Trak (a zero turning radius mower with a fan enhanced collection assembly) in the June 1999 GALA Newsletter, *Get on Z Track* by Tony Woods. We acquired one to help us with the task of removing and recycling our llamas' manure. It is not perfect but we would not be without it. It carries a hefty price ticket and there are similar products. If you are looking for a solution to the manure collection problem you may wish to investigate zero turning radius mowers further. There is more information on our web site if you are interested (see *Pasture Management* in www.greenbriarllamas.com/volume99-3.htm and Z-Trak Update in www.greenbriarllamas.com/Barnalnia.htm). I strongly urge that you not acquire this type of machine without first trying it on your farm. Also make sure it fits through your gates and in your storage area.

One word of caution, if you have youngsters they will pester you to death for a chance to use the mower.

Last year when I was recuperating from an operation, one of my daughters spent time on our farm helping with the chores. I thought she was spending an inordinate amount of time cleaning up the pastures ... and then I looked out the window and saw my 40-year old teenager doing wheelies on the Z-Trak out in the pasture.

Whither Thou Goest

Several years ago we had acquired snowshoes to use in hiking around our property during the winter. We only used them several times for such recreational activity. This winter they proved invaluable when the snows came. Before we acquired our front-end loader the only way we could make it down to our male pastures was with snowshoes. To enable our llamas to get out of the barn and to our outside hay feeding areas we created paths by walking back and forth several times with our snowshoes. The llamas quickly expanded and compacted the paths. The biggest problem with this process is that your more curious llamas may follow you as you make your first cut at a path. I ended up face down in the snow with a llama on top of me when she inadvertently stepped on the back of a snowshoe.

With a Cane I Am Able

After the most severe of our winter snowstorms I stepped into a drift of snow in an attempt to get to my truck. I immediately, with no warning, sank to my waist and pitched forward. Unfortunately, due to some latent macho genes, I struggled to get out rather than call for help. The end result was a torn leg muscle, which led to the acquisition of a cane.

During particularly adverse weather we let our females have access to our upper barn. However, we need to have them return to the lower portion of our barn when we pull hay down from our lofts. Generally, they will all line up and head down to the lower barn when I appear on the scene and tell them "Good morning ladies, time to go downstairs". On occasion a few will hesitate because they know a chosen few will receive some grain. The first day I appeared in the barn with my newly acquired cane, I brought it up into a horizontal position to block the entrance to the grain room and my recalcitrant llamas looked upon it as a mobile fence and immediately headed for the ramp. I no longer need the cane for my leg, but it may yet prove to be a useful training tool.