

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PASTURE

Musings of an Old Coot

I tend to wax philosophic when I engage in the process of scooping poop. This morning I focused on one of the advantages of maturing into an old coot, namely you begin to appreciate the really important things in life. Those of us who are able to share our lives with llamas are truly fortunate because we have access to their aura of serenity. I am reminded that the material trappings of our society can be ephemeral. I am also reminded that financial security can disappear quickly ... just ask former employees of Enron and WorldCom. After 9/11 we witnessed, briefly, a resurgence of interest in living a less material life. At the Fryeburg Fair immediately following 9/11 Jeanne and I witnessed a substantially increased interest in llamas by families who felt a need to get away from the material and to get closer to nature. Sadly this awakening to the more sublime aspects of life soon disappeared. The best way to combat this unfortunate turn of events is talk up the advantages of living with llamas ... we all will find more serenity if we can increase the number of those who start their days by scooping poop.

Here Comes Spring ... and Winter Repairs!

"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome."

Anne Bradstreet, *"Meditations Divine and Moral"*

The development of this column is, at times, an evolutionary process. While it had not been my intention this column is, in a way, an extension of my previous column on superannuation. Specifically it addresses those tools and other equipment which enhance my ability to meet the needs of our llamas.

In this column I mention several brand names and several businesses. I am not endorsing these brands or businesses. I am providing this information as a starting point for your research if you should be interested in the products involved.

At this time of year I would normally be writing about the joys of spring after a long Maine winter. However, when I first began to write this column the Vernal Equinox was less than 186 hours away we were in the middle of a snowstorm which more than a foot of fresh snow on the ground (and our fence lines were fast disappearing). For over a month our weather had been controlled by a blocking high over Greenland. As a result our temperatures had been

much lower than normal and we had an unending series of storms ... not very conducive for waxing enthusiastic about spring. However, the storm has long passed; the weather has moderated; the snow is beginning to melt; we should see the ground by mid-April. It is now time to begin those spring repairs.

Last fall we replaced all the metal roofing on our barn, our shelters and Jeanne's fiber art studio. We also built an extension onto the back of our barn to provide additional shelter space for our female llamas. Fortunately, there is an eight foot overhang over the side that incorporates the entrance to the new shelter. Not only does it provide additional shelter for our llamas, but it also has proven to be a valuable safety factor for the wellbeing of our llamas.

If the temperature is close to the freezing mark and we have as little as four inches of snow on the roof of our barn, we are subject to snow slides. We did not have this problem with our old roofing. As little as four inches of snow on a large roof quickly becomes an overwhelming and dangerous amount by the time it hits the ground.

During this most recent storm we had to quickly block off the primary exit from our lower barn and construct a safe passageway from the lower barn up into the upper barn and thence into the new shelter where there is a safe egress because the positioning of the overhang shunts any sliding snow safely away from the llamas.

The task of blocking the primary exit and constructing a passage into the new shelter was facilitated by the use of green (raspberry) panels and bungee cords. In less than a half-hour we had the exit blocked and the passage constructed. I was reminded of a conversation I had with Lars Garrison where he posited that you can never have too many green panels. I put bungee cords in the same category. Sooner or later, you may have an emergency where green panels will come in handy. For example, a stray moose or a stray ATV may look upon your fences as a challenge rather than as a barrier (we have experienced damaged fences from both).

Speaking of Fence Repairs

We use woven wire field fencing. Occasionally we need to make repairs or desire to move the fencing. Having a fence stretcher, a crimp & cut tool, together with several boxes of fence wire splices has made this task easy and the end-results professional looking. I use a 22 inch crimp & cut tool. The larger

size provides a degree of leverage not found in a smaller tool. It has proved handy for cutting tasks other than fence repair. When looking for these tools I started my research at www.NorthernTool.com.

Last year I acquired a post-hole digger attachment for our tractor. Due to other pressures on my time I did not get to use it as much as I had planned. However, I was very impressed with it the few times I did use it. Not only did it do the job quickly and efficiently in our rocky soil, but it did so without the adverse effects on my muscles, joints and nerve endings I have encountered with lesser methods of digging post-holes. This year I look forward to starting a program of upgrading our fencing. I did find attaching and removing the attachment to be a significant hassle. Thus I do not recommend it for small jobs. I intend to attach it in this spring after the snow disappears and not remove it until the earlier of the fall and the completion of the fencing upgrade for the year.

Farm Repairs on the Fly

Because of a variety of priorities on my time I like to address minor repairs immediately, before an interruption sidetracks me. For years I have carried a Swiss Army Knife to help me with minor repairs, but in my heart I have lusted after a Leatherman multi-tool. My grandson gave me a multi-tool, not a Leatherman, for Christmas. I found it to be indispensable this winter when I needed to make some repairs to the telephone wiring going to the Network Interface which is on the outside of our house. To make a long story short, the only items I needed to carry when trudging through the three feet of snow to the Network Interface were new telephone cable, a cordless drill and the multi-tool. Ultimately I had to retire the multi-tool because of a problem with one of the tools. But I had learned much about how a multi-tool should be engineered and felt that Leatherman did a superb job of engineering. Their equipment also has a 25 year warranty. After reviewing the multi-tools made by Leatherman, www.leatherman.com, and the reviews of these multi-tools on www.amazon.com I decided to acquire the Charge XTi model. In lieu of scissors the Charge XTi has a cutting hook. I often have assistance from herd members when I cut the baling twine on a bale of hay. The cutting hook, not only is direct and efficient, but also is less apt to be a risk to a helpful lama.

Cordless Tools

Over the years I have acquired a number of low-priced cordless drills designed for the casual consumer. None of them proved truly satisfactory and their relatively short lifespan made them rather costly. Linda Hoyt, at a Maine Llama Association meeting, mentioned how happy she was with a DeWalt cordless drill she acquired. After chatting with one of the carpenters we use I decided to acquire a DeWalt. There are a number of other excellent brands. My advice when it comes to investing in cordless tools is to:

- decide on a single brand for all your cordless tools, and
- decide on the voltage you wish to use. I decided on 18 volts which gives me the power I need for farm-related tasks.

With a single brand and a single voltage all my battery packs are interchangeable giving me significant backup.

One of the “tools” we use all the time is a DeWalt 18 volt pivoting-head flashlight.

Incidentally, every time I use my current cordless drill I marvel at how well it works in comparison to all my cordless drills that preceded it.

Navigating through the Snow Pack

During the winter we encourage our llamas to spend as much time outside as possible. It provides exercise, fights boredom and helps them manufacture vitamin D. To encourage them to move outside I put their hay bales a good distance from the barn and hang their grain bowls on a distant fence. Carrying hay and grain bowls through deep new fallen snow can be quite a challenge. Jeanne gave me a plastic utility sled which has proven most helpful. I still have to maneuver through the snow, but I am no longer carrying heavy bales of hay or balancing a collection of grain bowls.

Dealing with Inflation

If you live with lamas the chances are that you are also living with a large number of tires which require inflation. We have 26 tires (including the tires on two all-terrain bikes). With that many tires there is always at least one needing inflation. To cope with our inflation needs I acquired a Campbell Hausfeld Cordless Inflator. I wanted a cordless inflator because I cannot be guaranteed that I will be near an electrical outlet when I need to inflate a tire. It also facilitates taking the inflator with us when we

attend events ... when was the last time you checked the tire pressure on your trailer?

The model we have also has a 12 volt DC outlet which can prove handy for other tasks.

Other Tools and Equipment

I recently placed a number of earlier *Observations* columns on our website. They may be found at:

<http://www.greenbriarllamas.com/observations.htm>

Tools and equipment covered in these prior columns include:

Observations09 Toenail nippers; Use of John Deere Z-Trak to collect manure; Snowshoes

Observations16 Fiskars Collapsible Buckets

Observations22 Chutes; Tub-Trugs

Observations29 Standby Generator

Enjoy this change in seasons!