Llamas at home, on the range and in the therapist's chair: Trends in the llama industry in Montana

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LLAMAS AT HOME ON THE RANGE
and in the THERAPIST'S CHAIR

Trends in the llama industry in Montana

A professional paper by

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Dixie looked on nervously as the strangers crossed the yard. It was a rare early spring day in the Bitterroot, sunny and warm and special for another reason: Dixie’s cria, baby llama, had just been born. She paced tensely, guarding the spindly, brown furry baby with her imposing near-6-foot woolly frame.

Chuck Sperry calmly approached the llama herd, speaking softly in their banana-shaped ears as the strangers stayed away. He gently scooped up the cria in his arms, humming in unison with Dixie and the other camel-faced creatures. They gathered around to sniff and nuzzle the newborn, and to welcome Sperry, calm, gentle and llama-like himself, as if part of the family.

Sperry cherishes the llama herd he has raised with partner, Myra Ducharme, for the past 10 years at Touchstone Llamas in Florence. They’re gentle and social animals, he says, easy to care for and love, which is one reason llamas have caught on like wildfire in this country in the previous decades.

Ask any llama owner and they’ll gushingly recount the versatile uses of this exotic creature, South American cousin to the camel. But the trendy pack animals that
burst onto the livestock scene in the mid 1980s, being auctioned at record sales of more
than $100,000, are now finding their niche simply as pets.

Cheryl Buckley of the International Llama Association in Denver said that llamas
are used increasingly as companion animals, as cart pullers, as subjects in 4-H
educational projects and as therapy for disabled people and those in nursing homes.

“They’re very attractive to people who’ve never had livestock before,” Buckley
said. “They’re very intelligent, low maintenance and fun to be around.”

While llamas look like big cuddly teddy bear-types, they won’t tolerate much
affection from people, especially unfamiliar ones. But they need each other.

“Llamas don’t do well alone,” Ducharme said. Their personalities are as
distinctive as people’s, the couple say, as they point out and discuss each llama in the
barnyard, as if speaking of their children.

Maggie O’Connell is their flirtatious llama, as fickle as her namesake from
“Northern Exposure.” James bond was getting into trouble from day one, Ducharme said
with a chuckle, as well as Clinton, who was born on Election Day. A particularly feisty,
white fluffy llama is Fast Eddy, who was even kicking as his mother gave birth. Then
there’s Ducharme’s first female llama, Emily Dickinson, whom she acquired in 1989,
because she said, “I always loved llamas.” Emily stands among the aristocratic pack of
ladies, including Sappho, Georgia O’Keefe and Molly Yard.

“They’re so centering and calming,” Sperry said of the llamas, watching them
soaking in the sun. He says they are intelligent and curious, and independent and docile,
easy to raise even for the novice livestock handler. “They seem to know something we
don’t, so if we hang around them long enough, we’ll learn it, too.”
Of course, Sperry acknowledges, this doesn’t seem intellectual or rational, but most llama owners will say the same. “They’re just captivating to be around,” he said.

He and Ducharme sell adult males for packing and others as breeders or pets. Now is the best time to buy a packer, said Ducharme, if you’re thinking about hiking in the high country this summer. Males should be at least 3 years old to pack, and need a little time to be conditioned for the trail, she said.

Backcountry packing was one of the main reasons llamas became so popular, but since prices have dropped so dramatically in the past few years, llama breeding is no longer profitable, at least in the Missoula area, according to the couple. Still, llamas are wildly popular. Sperry says there are some 20 breeders in the Missoula area, each with an average of 15 llamas.

Dave Harmon runs Ecollama, a breeding, rental and packing business, with his wife, Amy Rubin, on a ranch in the Rattlesnake. He said a breeding female sold for about $15,000 several years ago, but will only bring about $1,000 to $1,500 today. An adult male can sell for as little as $500. The couple got into the llama business in the ‘80s for their love of the animals and the outdoors.

“Less people are getting into it for breeding,” Harmon said, who has purposely dwindled his herd from 30 to 18 llamas, “but I still have a use for them.”

Rubin spins the thick, fluffy wool and sells it to Joseph’s Coat in downtown Missoula for sweater-making. The two offer guided pack trips into the wilderness during the summer.
and treat their guests to llama camaraderie and gourmet meals prepared on the trail with the stove and fresh food that the llamas carry. They can even pack small children on their backs. “I bet,” Sperry said, “even if they didn’t do all those things, we’d still have them around.

According to the International Llama Registry, there were 28,000 llamas in the country in 1992. The increased demand caused a llama baby boom - there are more than 100,000 today, not counting others in the Lama genus, which includes alpacas, guanacos and vicunas.

Buckley said that the llama economy in Western Montana is not indicative of the rest of the country. “In parts of the country there is a depressed market, in others it’s booming. It depends on supply and demand,” she said.

The reason llama prices are so low in Montana now, Buckley said, is that the market has been flooded. Sperry and Ducharme think this is due, at least in small part, to a llama ranch in the Flathead Valley, Storm King, that dispersed a herd of some 200 into the market about two years ago. In a rush to get rid of the herd quickly, the couple said, the llamas were sold at unheard-of low prices.

Buckley said that there are many areas where the market hasn’t been saturated with llamas that it is very profitable for breeders. She said the fastest growing areas of the country are probably Ohio and the Southwest and Texas. The Spring Celebrity Show, held the first week of April in Oklahoma City, drew crowds from across the country, including many first-time buyers, she said. The average llama sold there for $9,000, with
the top-selling male llama fetching $30,000. Buckley said that llama breeding has come a long way, and one of the most popular qualities is strong, smooth wool fiber that rivals that of the traditionally finer alpaca wool. "The llama business is alive and well," Buckley said.

Harmon says outfitting is still one of the best uses for llamas, as the animals provide a way of getting in touch with wilderness in its natural state in an environmentally-friendly manner. "Llamas fill the niche between the horse packer and the backpacker," he says.

Llamas are sure-footed and nimble on the trail and can carry an average of 80 pounds of camping gear after only a couple days of training. Their wide, soft feet are padded underneath, so that they walk on trails as if they were wearing moccasins, Harmon says.

Evolving in a dry, sparsely vegetated climate has provided llamas with an efficient metabolism, allowing them to survive on a diet of pine needles, hay, tree bark and little water.

Llamas are also preferable to horses, Sperry said, because they are quieter in the backcountry, and says people claim to see more wildlife when llama packing. Harmon says that llamas are also good watchdogs, recalling a trip where his llamas sensed bears in the area and alerted him with their high-pitched alarm call.

Ducharme says that showing llamas has become another popular llama activity, but thinks that llamas are best simply left to their stately, serene selves. "Their preference is this," she says, indicating the nonchalantly grazing herd, "total freedom to wander among us as we wander among them."
The West Wasn’t Won by Llamas
But They are Here to Stay

“The West wasn’t won by llamas,” said Bill Goslin, ranger in the Bitterroot National Forest. But if recent trends in backcountry packing and sheep tending continue, they just might be its future.

Goslin coordinates the district’s llama program, where the exotic animals are used as pack animals for trail crews in the summer.

The Bitterroot staff experimented with their first llama in 1990, and now use three, but they still rely on the traditional horses and mules for the brunt of the heavy trail work.

Advantages to using llamas in the backcountry, Goslin said, are threefold: They are safer to work with than horses, they cost less to feed and maintain and they require little training.

Nobody’s ever been hurt working with llamas,” he said. They don’t “wreck,” or spook, like horses are prone to do, are not as large and intimidating, so relatively inexperienced people can go out on the trail with llamas.

Goslin said that llamas typically require one pound per day of pellets and graze for the rest of their meals. They cost $150 to $200 a year to maintain. By comparison, a horse needs about eight to 10 pounds per day of supplemental pellets and costs twice as much to care for.
Llamas also seem to learn from each other and need very little formal training. They just follow the leader, Goslin said.

However, the big difference from horses and mules, he acknowledged, is that llamas are lighter on the land, and that’s why the ranger district started using them for trail work.

“What gets people’s attention in the backcountry is impacts to campsites,” Goslin said. “Hikers don’t like the impact that horses have had – manure, churned up, muddy trails. They come up to the most beautiful place they’ve ever seen and see a big manure pile.”

While llamas leave manure piles, they have a strange, but welcome habit of all going in one place, or stepping off trail to go, said Chuck Sperry, a llama breeder in Florence.

Most of the damage from horses, though, comes when they are tied up at night at a camp site. They trample soil and vegetation with their heavy metal shoes and are apt to chew away tree bark, Goslin said.

Llamas can be secured in camp by tying up one llama with a picket line, which is staked into the ground, and the other llamas will stay close by, because of their strong herd instinct.

Llamas, actually, are more suited to Montana’s mountainous landscape, having been domesticated in the towering Andes Mountains of South America, said David Cole, research biologist at the Forest Service’s Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute.
Cole coordinated research the past couple of summers that may put the debate to rest over which pack animal is more acceptable in the backcountry. The study, which will be published later this year in the journal, “Environmental Management,” sought to determine who – hikers, horses or llamas – had the greatest impact on soil erosion on established trails in the backcountry.

Other studies examined effects on vegetation and looked at the social acceptability of the three groups.

By 1990, Cole said, more than half of the wilderness areas in the United States where packstock were used had some llama use. Proponents claim llamas cause less ecological impact than traditional pack animals. Opponents say horses have more claim to the backcountry and get freaked out by these camel-faced newcomers.

What the research found, Cole said, is that llamas do indeed cause less soil erosion and impact to trails. Apparently, it is no more harmful than a Vibram sole, since the study also concluded that a llama’s impact is equivalent to that of a hiker. It also showed that llama and hiker traffic tended to smooth a trail surface while horses churned up the soil, producing a muddy wake, and also caused more damage to vegetation.

Researchers studying the social acceptability of llamas found that horse groups disliked encountering llamas on the trail about the same as hikers disliked bumping into horse parties. This is further proof, Cole said, that llamas are more closely allied with hikers than with other packstock, and is telling of the lifestyles of those who use llamas.
According to the International Llama Association, llama owners are a diverse group, ranging from teachers to lawyers and doctors, many being first-time livestock handlers. Horse people are more likely to have raised horses all their lives.

Most of the 100,000 registered llamas in the United States are congregated in the West, especially Oregon, California, Washington, Texas and Montana. Even the International Lama Registry, which compiles census and genealogical information, has its offices in Kalispell, after moving from Rochester, Minn., last year. There are 3,500 llamas and 350 llama owners registered in Montana.

Llamas aren’t only making inroads on outfitting territory, they’re gaining in popularity as sheep guards. John Stahl, a sheep and cattle rancher off Mullan Road west of Missoula, said he routinely lost 10 head from his herd of 65 sheep each year to coyotes and dogs. After putting Zach, a 4-year-old llama, in with the flock last year, he hasn’t lost one lamb.

When Stahl first got Zach, the llama had no interest in the sheep. However, after the first lamb was born, Zach bonded instantly with the herd, Stahl said. Now the llama watches over the sheep day and night. He has learned to imitate the sheep’s bleating and calls to the lambs if they stray too far.

“I’ve seen him chase off a half dozen dogs,” Stahl said. “It’s pretty fun to watch.”

A study at Idaho State University in Pocatello found that “llamas vigorously defend their sheep flocks,” from small herds to flocks numbering in the hundreds.
Llamas are “100 percent effective in protecting sheep” the study said, and no training of the llamas is necessary. They simply need to be present when lambs are born to form a close bond.

Stahl, who runs a horse outfitting business in addition to his livestock, believes that animals can and should co-exist in the wilderness. He recommends that, in horse country, llama groups follow the accepted protocol when meeting horses on the trail by stepping 100 feet down slope.

“There’s definitely a place for llamas in packing,” he said. “There’s better treatment of the land with their no-trace packing.”

Goslin admits that llamas have an image that some people feel isn’t appropriated for the Forest Service to have. And there are some areas where horses will always outshine them. Horses are stronger and can travel faster than the leisure-loving llamas. Goslin said horses can easily travel 20 miles a day with 200 pounds on their backs, while llamas average eight miles a day and can only pack 60 to 80 pounds of gear.

And, of course, “giddy-up” is meaningless to a llama.
Llama Facts and History

Llamas are the domesticated species of the Lama family, which also includes the domesticated alpaca, a shorter animal with finer wool than llamas; the wild guanaco; and the wild vicuña, and endangered species. They originated in North America 40 million years ago and migrated to South America about 2.5 million years ago. Camels, cousins of the llama, migrated to the Middle East. Llamas went extinct in North America after the last Ice Age 10,000 to 12,000 years ago and are one of the oldest domesticated species in the world.

Llamas were bred in the harsh, perpetually snow-covered Andes Mountains of Peru, used as beasts of burden for more than 5,000 years. The Incas bred bigger, stronger llamas to aid in building their vast empire that reigned from 1200 to 1532 across the treacherous Andes.

Peruvian villagers still depend on llamas today, using them for transportation in the oxygen-scarce altitudes of over 12,000 feet. The fine llama wool is also a valuable resource, and excellent insulator, used to make many of Peru’s rugs, sweater and ponchos.

One of the animal’s first acquaintance with the United States was when William Randolph Hearst, famed media mogul, imported llamas for show on his California estate.
According to the International Lama Registry, there were 28,000 llamas in the country in 1992. The increased demand has brought the number of registered Lamas in North America to 115,000 today. There are 7 million Lamas in South America.

- **Height:** 5 feet to 6 feet at head, at maturity.
- **Weight:** 250 to 350 pounds.
- **Life Span:** 15 to 29 years.
- **Reproduction:** Llamas can breed any time of year. Gestation is on average 350 days. Mothers deliver babies, called “crias,” while standing. Crias weigh between 20 and 35 pound at birth, nurse and stand within 90 minutes.
- **Color:** Solid or spotted, ranging from white to shades of black, gray, brown and roan.
- **Characteristics:** Intelligent (can learn to pack and accept a halter quickly), sure-footed and agile; sociable herd instinct, yet independent, gentle, curious and generally calm-natured. They communicated by humming. Males “orgle” during mating.
- **Uses:** Wool production, packing, cart pulling, animal-facilitated therapy, companion animals, sheep guards, exhibition, project animals for 4-H.
- **Diet:** Llamas are browsers and grazers with efficient digestive systems who eat hay, grass, pine needles and even knapweed.
- **Spitting:** Generally only spit at each other to establish a pecking order or to fend off unwanted affection from other llamas. Rarely spit at humans.
- **Cost:** Variable, but average low (in Montana) of $500 for males and low of $2,500 for breeding females.
For more information contact: International Llama Association, 2755 S. Locust
St., Suite 114, Denver, Colo. 80222, 303-756-9004; or International Lama Registry, P.O.
Box 8, Kalispell, Mont. 59903, 406-755-3438.
Review of Reporting Process for Professional Project

My interest in llamas began many years ago, as I grew up in a house decorated with stuffed llama dolls from Perú, but I had never seen one in the “wild” until I traveled to Peru a few years ago. The animals are in fact a domesticated species and do not run wild even in the Andes Mountains of South America, where they number in the millions. But in the remote mountain villages, they are used as beasts of burden as they have been for thousands of years, and offer a substantial economic base to the people who make traditional livelihoods from the land. In Perú, llamas are used to transport goods to market and to produce wool to spin into sweaters and rugs, but they are not a principle source of meat, as is commonly believed.

I first became acquainted with llamas in this country last year, when I met Dave Harmon’s Ecollama herd on a hike through the Rattlesnake neighborhood in Missoula. At the time, I wrote a short story about those llamas for the Montana Kaimin. When I began a reporting internship at the Missoulian in January 1997, I was given numerous daily reporting assignments and was expected to generate original feature story ideas. My first suggestion for a feature began as an idea to talk with Harmon and some of the other local llama breeders, to seed what plans they had for summer wilderness treks. The idea grew very quickly – there seemed no end to the abundance of llamas ranches and the people who wanted to talk about them.
I pitched an idea in early February to the Missoulian’s “Outdoors” section editor, Sherry Devlin, to see if anything “new” was happening on Harmon’s ranch. Since she didn’t know much about llamas, Sherry suggested I do a simple primer on llamas for a spring issue of “Outdoors.”

My first step was to call Dave Harmon, who to my surprise, said he was scaling back his breeding business, but he gave me an idea for another story angle. He put me in touch with some people doing studies on llamas as sheep guards and the impact they have in the backcountry.

It seemed that once I started the llama primer, every other person in the Missoulian newsroom either had a llama or had a neighbor with a llama and they began giving me names of other people to contact. Myra Ducharme and Chuck Sperry were the most receptive to my inquiries and spent a lot of time with me at their llama ranch in Florence, answering all my questions and letting me hold a newborn baby llama, or cria. For more statistical information, most of the people I talked with referred me to the International Lama Registry in Kalispell and the International Llama Association in Denver. Both organizations loaded me down with pamphlets, catalogs, brochures and newsletters.

I also conducted in-depth interviews with David Cole, a research biologist with the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, and Bill Goslin, who coordinates the llama program at the Bitterroot National Forest. At this point in my research, Sherry, who also served as my internship mentor, suggested I focus on writing an article on the trends of the llama industry in Montana as a professional project. She said the unusual
aspect of the llama industry and the research I had done so far would warrant a full cover of the “Outdoors” section.

My first attempt at the article was 40 inches that read more like a report, Sherry said, since I focused mainly on David Cole’s research, which found that llamas were more socially acceptable in the backcountry and also had much less environmental impact. She suggested breaking the story into two articles, since two dominant themes were evident: The idea that llamas are being used more as pets, and that “The West wasn’t won by llamas.” Since I had so much information on the unique animals, that I thought was necessary to the story, we included the “Llama Facts” sidebar.

I spent many hours going to the various llama ranches on weekends and taking my own pictures. In the end, I thought the Missoulian photographer’s shots complemented the stories better than mine did.

After the articles were published, the biggest criticism I received was that “llama breeding really is profitable.” I have included two letters to the editor that were sent to the Missoulian. In retrospect, I should have clarified in the article, “Llamas at Home on the Range,” that breeding is not the huge money-maker it once was in western Montana, according to the breeders I spoke with. I called the International Llama Association to discuss the issue, and they said in many other parts of the country, where the market wasn’t flooded, it is indeed very profitable to raise llamas. I included those statements by Cheryl Buckley in the article.

Another mistake in the “West wasn’t Won by Llamas” article was due to an editing error. Chuck Sperry told me he never said that horses trample vegetation and
chew on trees while llamas aren’t also guilty of these acts. In fact, that paragraph should have been attributed to Bill Goslin.

If I were to start the project again, I would talk to more llama breeders, taking a wider cross section of Montana, instead of concentrating on the Missoula area. This would give me more data to determine whether the llama market is declining across the state. I relied on a few sources who said they knew the industry well.

I also would have liked to have experienced first-hand a llama packing trip through the wilderness or seen a Forest Service trail crew at work with llamas. At the time I was researching and writing the story, late winter, llamas in the area were all enjoying their vacations.

If I were to expand the llama package, I would explore further the use of llamas for animal facilitated therapy and in 4-H projects. Trudy Green, a llama breeder in Frenchtown, is using two of her baby llamas in what she calls the first organized 4-H llama project in Montana this year. Included in my professional paper are query letters that I have sent to various magazines on the issues of llamas as 4-H projects, llamas used in “llamathons,” and a trend that is still somewhat taboo among llama people, but that is starting to catch on – using llama meat as a specialty food item.

I have also written another full-length feature article on how llamas are starting to be used in animal assisted therapy for troubled children and as companion animals for the disabled and the elderly.

One of the things I learned through my “hands-on” research is how sweet-natured and curious llamas are. While snapping pictures at Touchstone Llamas I soon found myself surrounded by the entire herd of tall, toothy llamas as they poked their noses,
literally, into my camera. By just raising a hand, the llamas scurried away, not wanting to be petted. Another important quality of llamas is how light they are on the land, making them a good alternative to packing with horses when hiking in the wilderness.

It seems that there are as many reasons to breed llamas as there are llama breeders, but I might have generalized those reasons slightly in the article. This was apparent to me after speaking with Trudy Green, who runs Tranquillity Base Llamas, after my article was published. She insisted that she breeds llamas for the sole purpose of producing strong packers, not for “cuteness,” and that she does turn a profit. She said other than showing her llamas at fairs and on the Internet, she doesn’t need to advertise.

Dealing with llamas means much more than what goes into your pocket, Trudy told me. As for those who say llama breeding is no longer profitable, she said, those people are just disillusioned. Raising llamas isn’t a get-rich-quick scheme, she said, it’s hard work.

-30-
Learning From Llamas

Owners of the big, woolly beasts of burden say their animals are good not only for packing and wool producing, but for their company and therapeutic values.

*Note: The children in this story have been given pseudonyms to protect their privacy, at the request of their therapists.

The new antidote for the hectic pace of society, alienation from the natural world, loneliness, depression and stress, is not wonder drug, but a woolly, long-legged, six-foot, standoffish creature called a llama.

So say llama owners across the country who are promoting the therapeutic effects of the animals traditionally known for their packing abilities in mountainous terrain and for their wool production.

"Llamas make for good therapy because they are unique, they act like people," said Marty McGee, a llama trainer in New Mexico who has written several articles on trends in llama use.

Animal assisted therapy, or AAT, the practice of using animals to facilitate improvement in physical as well as psychological therapy, is a routine practice in nursing homes, hospitals and rehabilitation centers, McGee said.
“With this receptivity to animal therapy and the growing interest in llamas, it's only natural to see llamas making an appearance in therapy situations.”

The burgeoning interest in llamas in the United States took off in the 1980s as the trendy pack animal. Sure-footed and quiet on the trail, these exotic beasts from South America were also cheaper to maintain than horses. The prices skyrocketed in the ‘80s and early ’90s, from the low thousands of dollars to the tens of thousands for breeding females and show llamas, making breeding a profitable business, largely in the western states. But as the markets flooded and the novelty wore off, many llama owners and breeders found that just having their animals in the yard was a reward in itself.

Dick Reichle is one such llama owner who found that his llamas were worth far more than their earning potential as packers. He was always an energetic, entrepreneurial sort of man, leading an active life running a packing, rental and llama supply business, Ollie Llamas, in southwestern Montana, for the last 10 years. Six years ago a near-fatal car crash put an abrupt end to this lifestyle, leaving him in a deep depression. Bed-ridden with many serious injuries, including two broken legs, Reichle could only lie in pain, unable to lead pack trips into the mountains. He watched his stately, camel-faced llamas from his bedroom window gently ambling in the fields, chewing hay and tending to their young ones.

Reichle said what finally gave him the strength he needed to recover was the calming presence of these llamas.
Linda Reichle saw her husband watching the serene animals from his room, and knowing their soothing, calming demeanor, brought them inside to help ease Reichle’s restlessness and pain.

“My wife brought my two favorite pack llamas into the bedroom. If I had a bad day, they relaxed me,” Reichle said. “Everybody I know who owns llamas is pretty stress-free.”

When he was able to get out of bed, Reichle said the llamas helped his recovery further by carrying all the heavy camping gear for him as he made small, spirit-reviving trips into the mountains surrounding his home.

The therapy Reichle received from his llamas inspired him to spread the word of what he considers their healing effects. Reichle, along with his wife and two children, began taking some of their better behaved llamas to the local nursing home. The family is still enthusiastic about the llama visits, making the trip a couple of times a year to the Park View Acres Home in Dillon, Mont., where they bring their most people-friendly llamas into each of the rooms to have the residents take their picture with a llama.

“It puts a smile on their faces,” Reichle said. “They all get their hair fixed and put on their best clothes. It’s really something to see a man or woman who can’t roll over in bed, reach out to stroke the llama. I think it really helps and if it’s just for one day, that’s worth it for me.”

Therapists have suspected for many years of the benefits of animal facilitated therapy. Studies conducted during the 1980s by veterinarians, physicians and social scientists from universities such as the Uniformed University of Health Sciences,
bolstered such theories. They showed that spending time with pets such as a cat or dog can ease loneliness and depression and can even reduce stress and lower blood pressure, while providing friendship and a sense of worth. The studies also indicated that pets were especially beneficial to the mental and physical health among the elderly, the disabled and the young.

Aphrodite Clamar, a clinical psychologist in New York, has practiced psychology for the past 30 years, but only began using her tom cat, Barney, two years ago in her sessions. Clamar fell into pet therapy by accident, when she started bringing her cat to the office after her husband died and she wanted “something alive to talk to at night.”

She said from children to adults, meeting Barney is never a neutral experience. “They either love him or hate him, but everyone reacts to him,” she said. “And if they hate him, they wind up loving him. I think it’s easier for us to talk to people through animals. And it’s hard to be critical of animals because they give so generously.”

Clamar said she has found that her patients open up much more when Barney is around, and even strangers on the street and on busses stop to talk to her when she is carrying the cat. “People tell me sensational things you would never say to a stranger,” she said. “They tell me about their own pets and their personal problems.”

Clamar thinks that therapy with animals is more socially acceptable now. “There is an acknowledgment of the role of animals in our lives. People are lonelier and animals fill that void for us,” she said.

In spite of their large size and aloof dispositions, trainers say llamas possess certain qualities that are assuring them a small, quiet niche in the world of pet therapy. The small number of llamas, as well as the many dogs, cats and other animals used as
“pet therapists” are registered by the Delta Society, a national nonprofit agency based in Renton, Wash., that is dedicated to studying and promoting the bonds between humans and animals and their positive effects on health and human development.

The Delta Society adheres to strict preparations and screening of the animals it certifies in its Pet Partners program. Animals must go through a rigorous training course to determine if “they will make people happy,” said Dianne Emmons, program coordinator for Delta’s Pet Partners. Potential pet therapists must meet qualifications for obedience, such as sitting for petting by strangers, staying, coming, and personality, such as friendliness and remaining calm under stress. They must be checked by a veterinarian and always be impeccably groomed and washed before each visit.

While the most common critters for this profession have been dogs, cats, rabbits and the like, only recently have llamas made an appearance as therapeutic assistants. The Delta society has officially registered only four llamas in Pet Partners since it began in 1990, said Emmons. However, she said, many llamas who aren’t registered are used widely as companion animals, in nursing homes to entertain homebound elderly, and brighten the day in children’s camps and hospitals. They can pull carts for the physically disabled, or assist them on packing trips by carrying heavy gear.

While no published research yet exists on the effects of therapy with the assistance of llamas, psychologists and therapists say it does not differ much from the use of more traditional animals. The International Llama Association, the nation’s largest authority on information and education of llama use, does not keep track of owners who use their llamas in therapy settings. The American Psychological Association does not list any of its members specifically as those who practice animal assisted therapy, and
certainly none who use llamas. The use of these animals is fairly new and will take some
time to catch on, said Emmons of the Delta Society, due to the relatively expensive cost
and logistics of caring for them compared with cats or dogs.

"I've never heard of anyone who is against pet therapy," said Margaret Strock of
the National Institute of Mental Health, "and that includes any kind of animal."

Strock said that AAT began receiving attention in the early 1970s and is
recognized as a legitimate tool in certain kinds of therapy.

Kari Archibald, a professor who has researched both the physical and social
effects of llamas, sees the benefits of llamas as companion animals, but hesitates to
promote their use in AAT. Archibald is a professor of recreation education at Ricks
College in Idaho and used to own a llama outfitting business. When she began struggling
for time between her teaching, packing business and family, she chose to close down her
llama business, but kept the llamas on as pets.

"They are personally therapeutic," she said. "They are extremely intelligent,
they're huge, have big eyes, are curious and inquisitive. They're very exotic and
peaceful." She likened them to having the soothing effects of watching an aquarium.

Archibald now uses her llamas as teaching tools when she takes her students on
backpacking trips along the West slope of the Teton Mountains in Idaho. She said she
began taking the llamas along for use in an emergency, such as packing out gear if a
student were to be injured, but found that her students related so well to the llamas that
they learned and retained much more on the trips when llamas came along. "They're
(llamas) very alert in the backcountry and to wildlife. They're very calm and other
wildlife don't seem to be distracted by them."
Archibald also takes her llamas into preschools and youth rehabilitation centers, always amazed how these large creatures carefully maneuver through stacks of building blocks, unfazed by children’s yelling, noise, and tugging at their thick coats. “Llamas work well in lessons on taking care of somebody and being responsible,” she said.

She has reservations about using llamas in a more formal therapeutic capacity, however. “They aren’t as good as dogs. They’re fairly aloof and don’t bond as well as other animals do with humans,” she said. “Some owners swear their animals love them, but llamas could take you or leave you. They’ll approach you, nibble on your hair and your ears, but if you raise a hand, they’re gone.”

Most llama owners will agree that their llamas don’t enjoy being hugged and cuddled. They are independent animals that shy away from stroking and petting by humans. But one llama breeder says that given the proper training from birth, many llamas can be conditioned to accept human touching and would be useful as therapy animals for children, since they are safe to be around and do not spook easily.

“I think that animals are very therapeutic as companions. They are beautiful, spiritual creatures,” said Myra Ducharme, who runs Touchstone Llamas in Florence, Mont., and is also a licensed therapist. Ducharme has never used llamas in her work with troubled children, but is intrigued by their potential. “I believe one really good use of llamas is helping people come to terms with trust and control issues, which we all have varying degrees of,” she said. “Whether you’re haltering, packing a llama or handling it in any way, you have to deal with it. There has to be a mutual trust and self control.”
A sense of self control and responsibility for one's actions is exactly what Mark Lauer wanted to impart to his young clients at the SUWS Adolescent and Youth Programs center in Shoshone, Idaho. Lauer is program director at SUWS, which was a former acronym for School of Urban and Wilderness Survival. He said the letters don't stand for anything, now the emphasis has shifted away from wilderness survival since the program's start in 1981. The center, he said, is an intervention program that has used a wilderness experience to help at-risk youth aged 11 to 18.

The children who come to SUWS aren't bad kids, Lauer said, but have made bad choices. Some come to the center in southern Idaho voluntarily and some are sent there from across the country to get help "before they spiral downward," Lauer said. The center doesn't usually work with adjudicated youth, but does see a wide range of problems, including children who have difficulties with social relationships and authority conflicts, those who suffer with depression, drug and alcohol dependency and attention deficit disorder.

Lauer said SUWS uses a metaphor for treating the children. "It's one of service - stepping beyond yourself and giving of yourself and creating awareness of something outside yourself," he said.

For 15 years, the well-known and one of the country's oldest outdoor-based programs, had been helping hundreds of children each summer and fall to redirect their energies to more productive lifestyles through backpacking and wilderness survival techniques in a group setting. The program started out with older teenagers who packed all their gear for 21-day forays into the Idaho desert, near the Nevada border. When the Youth Program was incorporated a year ago, Lauer said, he realized that 65-pound 11-
year-olds couldn’t possibly carry enough gear for a three-week trek through harsh country. He looked into getting donkeys, but had a chance encounter with a local llama packer, and everything clicked for him.

SUWS became an experiment in using llamas’ healing talents to help children and teenagers with a variety of mental, emotional and behavioral problems. Llamas seem to work well in conjunction with established wilderness programs that teach children responsibility and teamwork.

“You have to work for a relationship with a llama,” he said. “Donkeys will put up with anything you give them. You can abuse them and they’ll still work hard for you, but with llamas, if they’re not treated right, they’ll let you know. There’s a relationship created with a child and a llama that’s incredible. It’s a cause and effect relationship that’s very much a part of what we’re trying to do. Llamas help the children realize there’s a consequence for their actions.”

The llamas served as packers, one to each two children, on their wilderness experience, and the children took care of the llamas’ daily needs. “The llamas need quite a bit of tending,” Lauer said. In a desert climate, the natural browsers need to be fed and watered and watched over to prevent heat stroke from their thick, woolly coats.

Lauer said he has seen a remarkable improvement in the children who make the wilderness journeys with the llamas. “A lot of the kids don’t take responsibility for their actions,” he said. The program strives to create a desire to take responsibility. During the first days of the trip, all the children are made to carry some gear on their backs, until they get to the “homestead,” a set of teepees and canvas tents that serves as a wilderness
base and kitchen. At the homestead, the children begin taking on tasks to learn a sense of accountability. Their reward is being allowed to care for a wonderful animal, Lauer said.

Two students must work together to care for a llama to learn teamwork. For instance, each student is given a pannier to place on the llama. If the weight is uneven, the animal will be uncomfortable and refuse to move until the students learn to balance each side. They must also learn to groom their llamas, ease them through obstacles that may come up along the trail, such as other wildlife or steep terrain, and most importantly, they must learn to treat the animals in a way that will make the llamas trusting of them.

Jane* was a 13-year-old who came to SUWS last year to learn from the llamas. She was a large girl who bullied the other children, teased and pushed around the smaller ones, grabbed what she wanted and dared anyone to challenge her. Jane even tried to strong-arm the llamas to get them to see her way. She screamed, “stupid animals!” in their faces, causing the llamas to run away from her. They were skittish when she came near and tried to avoid her.

As Jane worked with the counselors on awareness exercises, Lauer said, she began to approach the llamas more calmly and softly until they deemed her safe and allowed her to touch them. From that moment, Lauer said, Jane began treating people with a softer approach as well.

“She wasn’t aware of her cause and effect actions on other people,” Lauer said, until the llamas came along. “For a 13-year-old, a change like that in three weeks is pretty significant.”
Jimmy,* another SUWS client, had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, ADHD. His condition, Lauer said, was dramatically improved through a wilderness experience of caring for a llama. “You can only get an ADHD kid to focus for a short period of time, then they get irritable,” Lauer said. “We structure our time so that we know how long we can do a certain activity before we have to get them to burn some energy.”

In Jimmy’s case, he had a lot of energy to burn. He was constantly trying to engage the counselors’ attention in seeking validation, Lauer said. He could only do schoolwork for about 30 minutes before he would get bored and get into trouble, so, Lauer said, Jimmy’s activities were broken down into half-hour “manageable chunks” with a heavy helping of physical activity such as hiking, grooming or saddling the llamas, or cleaning camp in order to help burn excess energy.

“That’s why public schools have problems with these kids – they don’t accommodate for their neurology. In a wilderness setting there are a lot of unknowns so you can normalize their neurology. They’re on active alert.”

Dealing with unexpected events in the wilderness as well as the personality of his llama helped Jimmy to channel his behavior more productively and focus his attention for longer stretches. The cause and effect relationship with the llama also helped Jimmy to realize a sense of accountability and responsibility for his actions.

He said the use of llamas is still in the experimental stages, since they have only been used for less than a year, but Lauer said he thinks they will remain a permanent part of the SUWS programs. Besides their therapeutic effects on the children, Lauer said,
there’s a certain sense of adventure with llamas. These are mysterious and amazing animals. And they never spit.”

**Adventure Challenge** is probably the longest running llama assisted therapy program in the country. It was started by a husband and wife team in Columbia, S.C., George Appenzeller, who has a master’s degree in social work, and Sarah Meadows, also an MSW. Again, the initial use of llamas happened accidentally. The youngest of the couple’s five children was diagnosed in the first grade with ADHD. Trying to find physically challenging and interesting outdoor activities for their son, they took him and his Boy Scout troop on a llama packing trip. Appenzeller noticed right away how attached his son became to the llamas and how they seemed to calm and relax him, as well as the other boys. “I just saw the way the animals worked with the kids and the kids with the llamas and I thought this would be great for therapy,” he said. He then decided to incorporate the animals into his Adventure Challenge program for troubled children.

The program deals mainly with 8- to 13-year-old victims of abuse, neglect, sexual assault and those with learning disabilities and behavioral disorders. The therapists began using the llamas, whom they affectionately call their “guys,” in 1989 on their wilderness trips through the mountainous terrain of western North Carolina. They found that the llamas worked wonders with the children, no matter what the student’s disorder or condition.

The philosophy at Adventure Challenge, Appenzeller said, is to use the wilderness journeys to teach children with problems how to care about and connect to themselves, others and the world at large. Each child, in a group of six students and at least two
counselors, is each given a llama to care for on the three- to seven-day trip. “The llamas act as a metaphor for teamwork and gentleness,” Appenzeller said. The children aren’t introduced to competitive survival techniques, he said, since they’ve gone through enough of that already in their short lives.

“A wilderness journey with others provides an opportunity to gain wisdom,” Appenzeller said. “In the wilderness, there can be no avoidance of responsibility without immediate, natural consequences.”

Throughout the trips, Appenzeller said, the llamas are employed as role models in teamwork and taking responsibility. Llamas have a strong herd instinct and are very sensitive to one another’s feelings – when one is upset, or there is chaos, the llamas are all anxious and will refuse to move down the trail until they are calmed.

Llamas are respectful of each other’s space. They will defend themselves from dogs and coyotes, and when one llama invades another’s space, he usually gets a face full of spit. This form of defense isn’t harmful, but sends a message, Appenzeller said, and is only directed at other llamas. It serves as another lesson to the children about respect and the correct use of aggression.

Trust is another goal Adventure Challenge tries to impart to the children through the llamas. The children learn that the llamas will be faithful to them as long as they can prove that will give affectionate care to the llamas by grooming them, feeding them before the children themselves eat and guiding them safely over the trails. The relationship that builds between child and llama is that of friends, rather than servant and master, Appenzeller said.
After gaining the children’s trust, llamas accept the children into their herd, regardless of the child’s education, clothing or status. They respond only to the way the children treat them. The children then learn to identify with the animals, who stand in for family and friends. Meadows said that she often hears the children talking over their problems with their llamas, telling them jokes and stories. “You can pick up on a lot of things that are happening in that child’s life just by listening to her and the llama,” she said. Each child gets to choose his or her llama after observing them for a day before starting out on the trek, and Meadows said that the children usually pick a llama who shares their same personality – shy, playful, bold or mischievous.

Meadows described the llamas as walking ecology lessons – their softly padded feet have a low impact on trails and their browsing diet prevents excessive destruction of vegetation. She said this teaches the children respect for the environment as well as each other, and they learn to fill the llamas’ panniers with trash they find on the trail as the bags empty of food.

Routes taken on the journeys all have built in challenges that require planning and teamwork, the therapists said. For example, a swiftly flowing stream presents itself on a mountain trail. The children have to get their llamas and themselves safely across. The process develops initiative and teamwork, and increases self-confidence in the children.

Meadows and Appenzeller estimate they have had some 5,000 clients go through an Adventure Challenge program. Considering the cost of the endeavors – a high therapist to client ratio and an intense program costing up to $500 a day – are the llamas working?
"They've done a lot of good for a lot of kids," Appenzeller said. "That's my definition of success."

He said, though, that his outfit does not track the longterm effects on children after they leave Adventure Challenge. He said he can only offer story after story of children who were unable to function in society, go through the llama therapy programs and successfully return to their homes and schools with a new outlook.

**Llamas have** also been used to help children with physical disabilities and serious illnesses. Sally German-Rucker runs Stage Line Llamas in Cripple Creek, Colo. She began expanding her llama breeding and packing business when her children were old enough to join 4-H clubs. Several years ago, German-Rucker started the first 4-H club in Colorado to use llamas. The instant bond she noticed between children and llamas prompted her to bring the animals to camps for children with cancer. The terminally ill children had something fun and unusual to look forward to, she said. She remembered one little girl, Shelby,* who wanted to ride the llamas, which can grow to be 6 feet tall at the head, weigh 350 to 400 pounds and can carry up to 25 percent of their weight on their backs.

Shelby had a muscular condition that prevented her from opening her legs wide enough to sit on the llama. When German-Rucker suggested she sit side-saddle, the Shelby refused. She then began, to her physical therapist's amazement, the excruciating task of forcing her legs to move apart wider and wider, until she was able to get on a small llama and hold on to his neck for a ride.
“Her therapist told me it would’ve taken him three months with physical therapy to get her to do that,” German-Rucker said. “It’s amazing the effect llamas have on children.”

Helen Deshazo, assistant director of the Park View Acres nursing home, where Dick Reichle brings his llamas, speaks enthusiastically of the woolly visitors and laughs when she tells of their exemplary hygiene habits. “We’ve never had an accident. They all go in one place and they go outside,” she said of their unusual propensity to be very discreet about their dung piles. Llama handlers say this may be either a territory marking technique, or a result of thousands of years of domestication.

“They’re so big, you can’t miss them,” Deshazo said. “Some people who don’t respond to anything, they really respond to llamas. Their eyes get big, they smile and laugh and follow them around the halls. They’re good fun.”

The Reichles also bring their llamas to the local middle school where Linda is a teacher, to educate the children about teamwork, friendship and respect. “Therapy with any animal is really good,” Reichle said, “but with a llama it’s different. I don’t know what it is exactly, but I do know when you can help an individual who’s bedridden or put a smile on someone’s face, you can’t put a price on that.”

While many health care workers and llama handlers who promote the use of llamas for therapeutic uses claim that the animals’ “mystique” is sufficient evidence, others say more concrete evidence is needed to convince them.

“More research is definitely needed in the area,” said Kari Archibald, the college instructor who uses llamas in her classes.
Dr. Clamar, while a strong supporter of animals in the therapy arena, questions whether animals the size of llamas would ever stake a foothold in a psychologist’s office, or anywhere other than an outdoor setting.

Though the idea of a llama as a cure-all for depression, stress and loneliness appears radical to some, others will say that every new idea is at first hard to swallow. Bill Goslin, a forest ranger in Montana, offered the reminder that when his district first began using llamas for trail crew packing, the practice was met with resistance. Studies conducted since Goslin began using llamas on forest trails in 1990 have shown that not only had llamas become more acceptable faces in the backcountry, they were actually preferred to horses by many backcountry users.

The fact also remains that llamas are endearing themselves to Americans, who continue to breed and buy llamas in increasing numbers, with some 100,000 registered in the country today. As the animals proliferate, more creative uses are emerging. In addition to testing the waters of animal assisted therapy, llama owners are branching out, using the animals in 4-H projects, “llamathons,” where llamas race through backcountry courses, and a somewhat controversial practice – promoting llama meat as a specialty food.

We should also note that llamas have a right to stake out their turf in the United States, said David Cole, a Forest Service research biologist in Missoula, Mont. Llamas are actually indigenous to North America, having roamed the mountainous regions of the continent 40 million years ago. About 2.5 million years ago they migrated to South America, becoming the llamas we know today, while their cousins headed toward the Middle East, becoming today’s camels. Llamas only made a return to this part of the
world as show pieces in zoos during the early 1900s. Maybe now is the time for a full-fledged llama comeback.

-30-
May 21, 1997

Mary S. Creel
Cooking Editor
Cooking Light, The Magazine of Food and Fitness
Southern Living, Inc.
P.O. Box 1748
Birmingham, AL 35201-1681

Dear Ms. Creel:

It’s tasty, it’s lean, it makes a great burger or adds meaty flavor to a healthy casserole, it’s - llama? If you usually picture llamas as those gentle, woolly domesticated pack animals, here’s a new twist. A growing segment of llama breeders in Montana are now promoting llama as a specialty food item, and trying to educate the public as to the meat’s health benefits.

The above would serve as a possible lead-in to a 500- to 750-word article on this new trend in the llama industry. This would make a unique, timely story of interest to readers who are health-conscious as well as appreciative of innovative food ideas. Sponsors of llama meat say it is incredibly lean and has a comparable flavor to beef, making it a versatile and healthy beef alternative. This story would fit well in the magazine’s “Food for Thought” section, since that department covers “What’s in, what’s out and what’s up with food.”

I believe I am well-qualified to write this article. I live in an area that has seen a burgeoning interest in the llama industry and has some of the leaders in novelty uses for the South American animals. I have been following these trends for a while and recently wrote a full-length feature story on the llama industry in Western Montana, which was published in an April edition of the Missoulan newspaper. If you like, I can send a copy of the article.

Sources for the story include one of the first llama breeders in Montana to commercially market llama meat - Maria Young, who runs Northern Lights Llama Company in Frenchtown, Mont. She has been slowly starting to promote the meat, saying, “it’s an excellent meat, very healthy and lean.” However, Young admits it will take a while for the trend to catch on. “It’s not going to compete with beef on a price level,” she said.

Young placed some of her meat for sale at Bronc’s Grocery in Frenchtown and has given much of it away for advertising purposes. I will include quotes from the grocery store’s owners and some other llama breeders in Montana who praise the virtues of llama meat and will provide names and addresses where readers can get more
information. I will also offer the perspective of the International Llama Association on the unwillingness of llama breeders on a broad scale to get involved in marketing their animals for meat, since they are considered foremost to be pets in this country. As an interesting side note - the English word “jerky” comes from a South American native Quechua word “charqui,” which means sun-dried meat in an area where there is an abundance of llamas.

I hope that you’ll agree this will make an informative, interesting article. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Karen Chavez
May 16, 1997

Beverly R. Magley, Editor
Montana Magazine
American Geographic Publishing
P.O. Box 5630
Helena, MT 59604-5630

Dear Ms. Magley:

Montana is securing a new reputation - as a mecca for llama lovers. The woolly South American creatures have made a toehold across the country in recent years, but their many uses are being showcased in Montana.

“People from the East are very interested in our llamas,” said Trudy Green, owner of Tranquility Base Llamas in Frenchtown, Mont. “They’re discovering that Montana’s llamas are excellent stock, bred to be strong packers.”

Soon, Montana’s llamas will have a chance to strut their stuff, and prove if they are the “Dalai Llamas” of the camelid world. The latest events in the llama craze are two new spectator sports - Pack Performance Trials and “llamathons.” Members of the Northern Rockies Llama Association, based in Helena, Mont., are sponsoring the first such set of events in Helena this September at their annual conference.

Pack Performance Trials are a set of events that have llamas maneuvering through actual obstacle courses from 3 to 8 miles while carrying packs. There are three categories - Basic, Advanced and Master Packer. Of course, the ultimate goal, said Ken Cottrell, president of the Northern Rockies group, is to become a “Master Packer,” and hold that as a standard in the industry.

Llamathons are the llama equivalent to the Triple Crown. The races, which originated in Durango, Colo., have llamas running at high altitudes, along with a handler who guides them on a lead rope. Races cover distances of up to 15 miles through rocky, treacherous terrain. “They love it,” said one of the llamathon’s original organizers, Wally White. “If they llamas didn’t want to run, they wouldn’t.” The races being proposed in Montana are slightly less strenuous and are more for show than for serious competition, organizers said.

I propose to write a 750- to 1,000-word feature article on these latest events in the llama industry, possibly titled, “Montana Llamas Strut Their Stuff.” I think readers of Montana Magazine would enjoy a piece describing a different perspective on the animals best known for their gentle, unimposing demeanor, making them suitable companions on
backcountry pack trips. These two events have llamas breaking free of their aristocratic, stately confines and racing through mountain passes, dodging downed logs and skimming through streams.

Readers will find this an interesting follow-up to the two-part series recently published in Montana Magazine, “Along the Great Divide: Llama Trekking Montana’s Continental Divide Trail,” by Cindy Ross. The stories brought out the many wonderful qualities llamas demonstrate on the trail: remaining calm through sudden storms, carrying small, easily tired children on their backs, and alerting their human companions to otherwise well-hidden wildlife lurking in the woods.

The article I’m proposing would serve to complement Cindy Ross’ stories by giving readers yet another way llamas are used - to provide entertainment as show-offs, while at the same time working to attain a national standard to which breeders can train their llamas. Organizers of the event in Helena this fall hope to attract spectators to show what their llamas can do, and to get more people interested in raising llamas.

I have just received a master’s degree in journalism from the University of Montana in Missoula and have written numerous articles on the environment and resource-related topics for daily and weekly newspapers across Montana. I have been following the trends in Montana’s llama industry for the past year and most recently published a feature story on llamas used as packers, pets and sheep protectors in Montana in an April edition of the Missoulian newspaper.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my article. If needed, I can provide color photos of llamas on the trail. I can be reached at the above address and phone number and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Karen Chavez
May 16, 1997

Kathy Pohl, Managing Editor
Country Woman
Reiman Publications
P.O. Box 643
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Dear Ms. Pohl:

Women have finally found a “home” on the range. More and more women are finding a niche for themselves in the livestock industry by working with a relative newcomer to the American ranch scene - the llama.

These woolly-coated cousins to the camel have been stealing the show in the livestock arena, making themselves useful as packers, wool producers, show animals and pets. And the hottest area for women getting involved with these cuddly-looking creatures is in 4-H projects. The “pioneers” of introducing llamas to children across the country have all been women, according to the International Llama Association, based in Denver, Colo. The use of llamas has become the fastest growing 4-H club in the country.

“It’s a natural,” said Barbara Coffman-Flinn, one of the leaders of the pack, so to speak. “Women are great with llamas and llamas are great with kids.”

In a unique melding of talents then, women are using their livestock breeding and training savvy to teach young children and teens, and especially girls, how to raise large livestock in a safer and calmer environment than is usually found with the traditional 4-H animals such as horses and cattle. Llamas can grow to be 6 feet tall and weigh about 350 pounds, but are extremely safe to have around children. They don’t kick or spit, contrary to popular belief, and are tranquil, patient, intelligent and rarely “spook,” as horses do. Another of the many unique characteristics of using llamas in 4-H projects is the end product - llamas go on to buyers for use as packers or show animals, not to market as do cattle and sheep.

There are many stories springing up across the country of girls, some as young as 5 years old, who are getting their start in ranching by participating in women-run 4-H clubs. These include children who had never handled animals and are afraid of them, then are won over after handling llamas, to youngsters with disabilities, such as attention deficit disorder, whose conditions are greatly improved after joining a 4-H llama group.
"These girls have done miracles with the baby llamas," said Trudy Green, who runs a 4-H club in Montana. Stories like these, I think, would be of great interest to your readers, a diverse group of women who enjoy country living and a rural lifestyle. Tales of women who run 4-H projects would be interesting as well as entertaining for readers across the country who cherish strong family values as well as role models for young girls. This article may even tempt some readers to investigate llama breeding as a hobby or lead them into a new career.

I propose to write a 1,000-word article outlining the above items, and introducing three women who were all the first to start 4-H llama clubs in their homes states: Barbara Coffman-Flinn, in Story, Wyo.; Trudy Green, in Frenchtown, Mont.; and Sally German-Rucker, in Cripple Creek, Colo. Incidentally, all three women have daughters who participate in their 4-H projects. They learn it all, from toenail-trimming to llama first aid to training the animals to accept halters and navigate a backcountry hiking trail with gear on their backs.

This is an exciting new field for women, children and llamas. The International Llama Association started a new Youth Committee, largely to deal with the 4-H programs, and puts out a newsletter for children called, "Camelid Kids." Staffers say they are having difficulty keeping up with the many requests for 4-H project information and educational packets.

I hope you find the theme of this article will fit in with the "Country Woman" mission and will be of interest to your readers. I can provide color photographs of a variety of scenes relating to the story, including pictures of young girls working with llamas and the women who run the projects.

I have just received a master's degree in journalism from the University of Montana in Missoula and have written numerous articles on the environment and resource-related topics for daily and weekly newspapers across Montana. In April I wrote a feature story about the llama industry in Western Montana that was published in the Missoulian newspaper.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my article. I can be reached at the above address and phone number and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Karen Chavez
Bibliography

BOOKS


REPORTS


MAGAZINES, NEWSLETTERS and NEWSPAPERS


**INTERVIEWS**

Kari Archibald, Department of Recreation Education, Ricks College, Ricksburg, Idaho.

George Appenzeller, Adventure Challenge, Columbia, S.C.

Paulette Bethel, InterMountain Therapy Animals, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Dale Blahna, Forest Resources Department, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

Cheryl Buckna, International Llama Association, Denver, Colo.

Aphrodite Clamar, Ph.D., New York, N.Y.

Michelle Cobey, Delta Society, Renton, Wash.

Barbara Coffman-Flinn, Cloud Peak Llamas, Story, Wyo.

David Cole, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, U.S. Forest Service, Missoula, Mont.

Ken Cottrell, Northern Rockies Llama Association, Helena, Mont.

Helen Deshazo, Pine View Acres Nursing Home, Dillon, Mont.

Myra Ducharme, Touchstone Llamas, Florence, Mont.

Larry Eddy, Painted Sky Llama Ranch, Columbia Falls, Mont.

Dianne Emmons, Delta Society, Renton, Wash.

Sally German-Rucker, Stage Line Llamas, Cripple Creek, Colo.

Glenn Green, Bronc’s Grocery, Frenchtown, Mont.

Trudy Green, Tranquility Base Llamas, Frenchtown, Mont.

Bill Goslin, U.S. Forest Service, Bitterroot District, Stevensville, Mont.

Dave Harmon, Ecollama, Missoula, Mont.

Billy Hennefeld, American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.

Mark Lauer, SUWS Adolescent and Youth Program, Shoshone, Idaho.

Sarah Meadows, Adventure Challenge, Columbia, S.C.
Marty McGee, Cutting Edge Clinic for Llamas and Alpacas Featuring Team Training, Santa Fe, N.M.
Dick Reichle, Ollie Llamas, Dillon, Mont.
Steve and Sue Rolfing, Great Northern Llama Co., Columbia Falls, Mont.
Alan Schmaultz, International Lama Registry, Kalispell, Mont.
Kathryn Shannonhouse, SUWS Adolescent and Youth Program, Shoshone, Idaho.
Dick Sheehan, Clear Creek Llamas, Meridian, Idaho.
Chuck Sperry, Touchstone Llamas, Florence, Mont.
John Stahl, Rancher, Missoula, Mont.
Tina Stone, Llamas magazine, Herald, Calif.
Margaret Strock, National Institute of Mental Health, Washington, D.C.
Wally White, Stage Line Llamas, Durango, Colo.
Maria Young, Northern Lights Llamas, Frenchtown, Mont.

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