



YABA Newsletter

August 2010

Dear YABA members,

August is shaping up to be exciting with our first official YABA event, Alpacas in Paradise, planned for the 27th and 28th this month. Please get the word out to non-member farms and people who just may be interested in a fun day of seeing a mock alpaca show.

As always, your ideas, suggestions, pictures and input for the newsletter are greatly appreciated. Please forward any contributions of information or writing to us at montanayank@gmail.com.

IMPORTANT! -- Annual YABA Meeting and Board elections to be held Friday, August 27th

The annual meeting will be held following the barbeque on Friday at ALpacas in Paradise. Two Board Member positions will be open. Nominations for the two Board positions are open to YABA Farm Members only.

ALPACAS IN PARADISE Press Releases and Posters Available for You

Let's get the word out about our August event. Contact your local newspapers and have them post the information about the show in their calendar sections. Put posters up in coffee shops, farm stores, and anywhere community bulletin boards are available.

Alpacas in Paradise, a free family event!



Calling all alpaca enthusiasts! The Yellowstone Alpaca Breeders Association invites you to a free educational event where you can meet alpacas and alpaca breeders.

Bring the whole family and learn about owning, raising, and showing alpacas at a demonstration alpaca show, Saturday, August 28, 2010, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Livingston Fairgrounds, Livingston, Montana.

This day-long public event is perfect for anyone who is interested in alpacas. No reservations are required. Visit with alpaca owners, attend free classes about raising alpacas, meet the animals, and learn as the alpaca judge explains what makes a winning alpaca. Watch as the kids get their first alpaca kisses. Feel how soft and silky alpaca fiber is, and find out why it is so desired. Alpaca yarn, apparel, and gifts will be available, as well as alpacas for purchase.

YABA Member Farm Profile:

GREAT NORTHERN RANCH, Columbia Falls, Montana

<http://www.gnllama.com/>

A feature of our newsletters is to profile member farms. If you would like to be highlighted on the website, please drop us an email and attach some pictures.

Great Northern Ranch, 20 minutes south of Glacier National Park is owned by Steve and Sue Rolfing.



Great Northern Ranch features silver, rose grey and black huacayas and statuesque [llamas](#) in all fleece types—a combined herd of 100—on 230 acres in Montana’s Flathead Valley. Animals bearing the Rolfings’ trademark “GNLC” herd identifier have been show ring champions and high sellers at events throughout the United States and Canada for three decades. Great Northern also provides pet, pack and guard llamas, and alpacas for fiber production.

Steve and Sue have 55 Huacayas and have been raising them for 18 years. They also have been raising llamas for over 30 years!

How it started — The Rolfings first bought llamas in 1979 to carry Steve’s timber cruising equipment



for his U.S. Forest Service work in the mountains of northwest Montana. That was the beginning of Great Northern Llama Company, one of America's oldest llama pack trip outfitter and guide services. In 1986 the NBC Today Show featured the Rolfings' business as one "that's allowed them a rather idyllic life raising llamas and children." Their children, [Kate Grenier](#) and [Jamie](#), are now grown and gone, but Steve & Sue are still among the fortunate few for whom raising llamas and alpacas is a full-time occupation.

Steve tells his story like this, "We were already raising llamas, it made sense to have a second "crop" for our ranch and we were already set up for it. I already had the market connections and network and vet experience so it was a logical expansion. A local wheat farmer once told me that every successful farmer always has several crops.

We started with a herd of 8 from Michigan, sold several off and immediately bought 3 more. Bought and sold and "laddered" our way in. We bought several from the first Peruvian importation too, then sold them the next year to focus on grey alpacas to go with our grey llamas. When we sold those Peruvians at auction we actually had the highest selling alpaca ever, for about 15 minutes! We have continued to add specific herdsires in recent years from Snowmass as needed to improve our mostly grey bloodlines.

Alpacas, llamas and our guided llama pack trips are our sole income and have been for 25 years.

We provide stud service to our alpaca herdsires, serving 20 outside females in 2009. We sell guard llamas to alpaca and sheep breeders, fancy alpaca and llama show stock and llama packers as well as guided llama pack trips in the summer. Each year we sell approximately 120 pounds of raw alpaca fleece and 70 pounds of llama fleece.

Raising alpacas is easy, probably the biggest current challenge is marketing them. In past years it was easy but in today's market we must spend more time and utilize our network to the fullest.

Two things are most rewarding, number one has to be a happy, satisfied customer. We sold a female at the AOBA auction last year that went to a family from Oklahoma with a 13 year old son. They were so happy, and he spent the next two days proudly parading that alpaca around the show, we exchange e-mails with our families and yesterday I got a recent photo of the alpaca they purchased. They couldn't be happier. People are what this is all about and I

especially enjoy new folks. The relationships and friends that we have made over the years are a highlight of my life. The other reward, and we can all relate, is that awesome baby that hits the ground in May after a year's anticipation. And then making an even better one the next year. Always improving and anticipating."

Great Northern Ranch has been featured on *Dirty Jobs* on Discovery Channel, *Trailside* on PBS, *NBC Today Show*, CNN, NPR, *Outside Magazine*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Sunset Magazine*, *Outdoor Life*, *NY Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *LA Times*.

Steve, a member of the YABA Board of Directors has also served on the board of the International Llama Registry and the International Llama Association, with two terms as president. On six trips to Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Argentina, he has studied alpacas, llamas, guanacos and vicunas with native herdsman, importers and university researchers. Through Heifer Project International, the Rolfings have also visited and assisted remote alpaca and llama-raising communities high in the Andes Mountains.

Steve's advice to newcomers? "Boy, there is so much it's hard to know where to begin. I would say bottom line is "keep it fun". Communicate, don't hesitate to call other alpaca owners and learn, they really enjoy sharing, believe me. Have a plan in mind, decide if this a hobby, business or somewhere in between and then make an outline for that business. Sell a few as soon as you can and start building your own network and knowledge of how the biz works quickly, it will be your lifeline in tougher markets. Avoid buying on payments if possible, and if you must purchase that way keep it short and have a plan. I guess these thoughts are important for all of us to keep in mind, new or old alpaca hands."



In recognition for their commitment to the industry, Celebrity Sales' Tom Simmons and Janet and Mike Wilkins present Steve and Sue with the 2008 Craig Wilkins Memorial Showmanship Award.

Thank you, Steve and Sue for giving us a peek at Great Northern Ranch!

Support YABA and Put Your Farm in the Spotlight!

Did you know that contributing items to YABA's first silent auction is an excellent way to promote your farm? How much is **recognition throughout the Alpacas in Paradise event** worth to your farm's marketing budget? If you've got great products, services, or valuable items, donate to support YABA, and let us shine the spotlight on your farm in return!

Have you got any of the following items to donate?

- Alpaca fiber products, especially handmade or unique items
- Artwork, especially with a farming or alpaca theme
- Services, especially alpaca-related items, such as transportation, shearing, photography, website development, fiber processing, etc.
- Fine Jewelry
- Software, such as herd management or farm finance programs
- Vacation packages, such as time-shares, cruises, or hunting guide services
- Guardian animals, such as livestock guard dogs or llamas
- Farm equipment, such as chutes, panels, or ATVs
- Supplies, such as alpaca feed supplements, mineral mixes, halters and leads, toenail clippers, or cria coats
- Herdsire services (Note: we will accept only a limited selection of breedings. Please contact Deb for more info on criteria.)
- Alpacas

If you would like to donate to the Alpacas in Paradise Silent Auction, to be held August 28, 2010, in Livingston, MT, please contact Deb Hill, Silent Auction Coordinator, at (406) 538-3177 or by email: clouddancer@infomagic.net

Thank you for your support of YABA!

2010 National Alpaca Farm Days - Sept. 25 & 26

Save the date! Committee members Deb Hill and Debbie Jesse have prepared some useful guidelines for making the most of National Alpaca Farm Day. We welcome any input or suggestions you wish to share with your fellow members.

YABA Membership Committee Report

Welcome new members:

- Kim & Mike Queensberry with Dancing Elk Alpacas, Livingston, MT
- Bob & Eva Dixon, Spanish Peaks Alpacas, Manhattan MT
- Bruce & Luanna Mazuranich, Bridger Mountain Alpacas, Belgrade, MT.

TWINS!

Linda Atkinson with Sage Ridge Mill & Critters had twin female crias born at the end of June! What a nice bonus!

Call for articles and pictures

Anything new or interesting happening on your ranch? Let your fellow YABA members know. Send any news or photos to us for future newsletters at montanayank@gmail.com.