

Sherana Sheep Report No 13
“Celia’s Story – Lambs Galore”
Aug 2009.

1. Ekka Time Again

Mother of All Things has had weeks of sleepless nights planning for her annual trip to the Brisbane Exhibition (5th – 16th August). She worries about which ram is quietest to take, which ewes will have baby lambs at just the right time, whether she will have the right bottlies to lead around, and how to get 24 meals prepared and frozen for the useless Rouseabout who will be left in charge at home.

Of course the sheep are on their best behaviour, as the word has got around “If you go to the Ekka, you get really well fed, and have nothing to do except put up with stupid townies saying “Mum, look at the goats”.

2. The Te Kay Girls from Longreach

Some people get excited to preserve species like hairy nosed wombats, fragile frogs and semi-extinct parrots. Wombats are probably good eating, but will never be numerous enough to feed many people. Frogs and parrots won’t feed the family. Come the bad new times of drought and cold and few jobs except those on the Canberra teat, we think some future generation will be happy we preserved a hardy, productive and well adapted sheep that will survive droughts on a big western run, endure the snow or thrive on a small hobby farm. So we are devoted to help preserve one of the world’s oldest sheep breeds with great natural survival instincts and abilities - damara sheep.

We are always on the lookout for new blood, and recently got some from a long term Longreach breeder (whom we call Te Kay). 20 big feisty damara ewes who act like they have rarely been in a yard before. These big girls were told by their mothers, “The way to survive in this world is - Trust no one”, and they learned that lesson well. In a yard they stick together like glue (safety in numbers), watch every moving thing (could be a predator), and rotate around the yard so as to stay as far as possible away from any dangerous human. They are a breeze to move – just move towards them and away from the gate and they are out in a flash, no stragglers (lions eat stragglers). All moves are done at the gallop.

So we started 2 weeks of slow learning. Round and round the yards until that became boring, then meeting shut gates, then crushes. First time into the crush saw 20 sheep trying to fit 2 deep into a crush that usually holds 8 sheep. But eventually they could be split up into smaller mobs without too much injury to Rouseabout or panic in the mob.

Next move was to get them out with one of our civilised mobs of sheep. To deter them from forming a feral mob of their own, we split them into 4 mobs of 5 sheep, to be distributed into our 4 breeder mobs (all of which had pure damara rams with them at the time.) Rouseabout sorted them out and MOAT let them into their mobs.

The first group of Te Kay girls went into the dorper mob. I asked MOAT how they went “Oh, they went fine”, she said “They tore out at top speed, hit a solid wall of fat pregnant dorper ewes and have been moving slowly every since.” The others are all happy too, safe in the middle of the mobs as far away as possible from dangerous humans, roaming white wolves and noisy bikes.

But the average speed of all mobs has increased as the Te Kay girls still believe in only two speeds – dead stopped, looking worried, and flat out, in escape mode.

Rams have taken an interest in the well built new girls, so hopefully we will have 20 new-blood lambs in 4 months or so.

3. The Lamb Epidemic, and the Spring sales.

“Epidemics” are all the rage these days, so Sherana joined the fun with a lamb epidemic - 71 lambs in May, 60 in June and 48 in July (that’s what a bit of rain 5 months earlier will do.)

Only two births had to be assisted, and both were cross bred sheep. Pure bred and line bred sheep are likely to have less birthing problems than cross breeds, especially between two breeds where the father is a fat chunky breed (like dorper), and the mother’s breed is more fleet and agile (like damara) - body shapes of mother and lamb do not correspond properly.

So as soon as Moat gets home from the Ekka holiday (in fact she works hard there), we will be having spring sales - older ewes, some young ewes and rams of all types. First in gets best choice.

4. Damaras, Dorpers and Eagles

We had reason to visit Goondiwindi a while back, so took the opportunity to visit Dudley Leitch’s large damara operations. Dudley has about 50,000 sheep, several properties, 2 abattoirs and 4 butcher shops. His sheep include pure damara, damara merino, and damara dorper crosses. His current plans are to keep a good pure damara flock, and develop a hardy Meatmaster breed from Damara and Dorper.

Damara are definitely different to other sheep, but Dudley and his staff understand them and know how to handle them in order to produce superb meat from them.

One interesting story from our visit. When we walked up to the house we were greeted enthusiastically by 11 small dorper lambs, obviously bottle fed orphans. All had seen their dorper mothers killed by wedge-tail eagles over that weekend. For some reason the eagles recognised the dorpers as easier to catch or kill. One of Dudley’s shepherds saw 2 eagles working a dorper ewe who was trying to hide from them in a bit of scrub. One eagle hopping along the ground, pushed the ewe into the open where the other airborne eagle could swoop onto her and sink his talons in. Surprisingly they were not taking the lambs. Maybe the mothers were slower?

Our Canadian sheep breeding friend says that eagles there seem to recognise sheep with horns and avoid them.

5. Newsletter Feedback and Some good words about Dorpers

*Viv,
Thanks for your recent newsletter which I know was partly designed to stir dorper owners from their complacent slumber. (It is easy to become complacent after making a brilliant decision such as going into dorpers.)*

You have mentioned how damaras form circles of safety.

My wife quickly noticed what she called wagon wheels with our dorpers when they were new here (2 years ago). Whenever she had to drive through or near the mob on her way out to the main road, they would quickly form a wagon wheel with the lambs inside.

Later this modified to just putting themselves between her and the lambs. Now they take little notice. Similarly, when they were new here it was out of the question to have dogs in the yards with them due to their explosive surging which threatened to knock over sections of yarding. I described this to a local metal merchant, saying that they were a bit like a cross between wombats and ball bearings. His eyes went big and round, he said "what, they dig their way out"? Not quite what I had in mind but the image is amusing. Dogs now work with the dorpers and help pack the race with no problems or drama. The dorpers seem to have worked out that they are safe.

*Hopefully you saw the brilliant article in the July 08 Dorper society newsletter about tail docking and how its absence is linked to the absence of prolapse. We stopped docking after our 1st lamb marking when my wife saw that we were still doing it. Why? she asked. Somehow the answer that "that's what you do when you mark lambs" did not seem so clever. I think it is probably necessary with most F2s and a few F3s but it has no place with F4s. I suspect I have lost a few sales of adult sheep because of the tails. I look forward to that changing soon. I imagine that once the mulesing issue is over, the next item on the list will be tail docking. "Bring it on". **(We agree with Guy here)***

The main difference between dorpers and merinos is the absence of the merino death wish. I think once the lambs' feet touch the ground, all they want to do is live. As you would know, the merino spends the rest of its life trying to find ways to die. I live east of Goulburn in very marginal country (good for fine wool- and what good is that?). Despite drought and poor country I have a very strong sense that the dorpers are on my side and will do their utmost to not just survive but also thrive. The African non shearing sheep have to be the way of the future for Australia. It is always amusing to read your perspective.

Regards, Guy

6. Celia's Story

After a lot of thought, MOAT has selected "Celia" to be the Sherana Damara Ewe that gets to go to the Ekka – she is quiet, has a nice lamb and is a good smooth well shed ewe.

Celia was a slow starter because she had a very bad start in life. She was one of twins, and for some reason got separated from her mother who forgot she had had twins. Celia was found next day lost under a vehicle. Mother-of-all-Things rescued her and tried to feed her for two days but she would not suck the bottle and just got weaker. At 3pm on the second day, with the baby getting weaker and weaker, MOAT said "I'll give her one last chance at 5pm, and if that fails, we will have to dispose of her ('we' means "Rouseabout" in this context). At 5pm, she suddenly got the hang of the bottle and started sucking vigorously and did not look back. (Now we have learned a bit more and would have used a small drench gun to give her enough milk to get her strength up.)

So Celia had a hard start in life, and was unusually old before she had her first lamb. But she has made up for it. The rest of her history is recorded below:

Celia's Story



Celia is a pure bred damara ewe. She was born on 4th July 2004 (one of a set of twins). She got lost at birth, and had a slow hard start in life, but has made up for it since.

She is 5 years old in August 2009. These are the lambs she has had:

- 1st lambing 11th April 2006 1 lamb
- 2nd lambing 12 Nov 2006 1 lamb
- 3rd lambing 3rd July 2007 1 lamb
- 4th lambing 17th Feb 2008 triplets
- 5th lambing 29th Sept 2008 twins
- 6th lambing 9th June 2009 1 lamb

Total Lambs in 5 years 9 lambs

All lambs were live and healthy and grew into nice sheep. No births needed assistance.

Celia's mother has had 11 lambs by age 6.7 years (including just one set of twins).

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7. The Goat Adventure.

We now have 5 British Alpine Goats - 2 Ewes (they call them Nannies), one Ram and two young ewes (they call them "kids", I'm told incessantly).

These are milking goats, and we have had oodles of milk from just two milkers - even raised an orphan lamb and feed the dog.

But they are different to damaras. Differences include:

- These goats are very pampered – they do not eat common grass – only lucerne hay will do, fresh leaves from the tipuana tree, bark of any handy trees and steam flaked barley.
- The Billy is a nuisance – smells bad and has to be kept apart from the nannies.
- The goats are very observant, calculating and intelligent. And they remember who did what to them.
- They can open gates.
- They are very agile and can climb onto or jump onto many things sheep would never attempt. One even mounted MOAT's quad and looked for the starter key.
- They can be likeable (except the smell of the billy). We now like our goats, and their healthy non-homogenised, non-pasteurised, full fat milk.

When they come in season, both male and female become very excited and strong padded cells are needed to keep them apart. (We are expecting two goat births in 3 months or so.

Lest we Forget:
"All Sheep are Green".



See: <http://damaras.com/newsletters/200805.pdf>

8. The Senepols

For those interested in cattle, we have had our best crop of weaners ever. All Senepol-Braford or pure Senepol. Much quieter than our usual weaner crop and far more poll cattle. We will have bulls for sale later.

By the way, if you are interested in what Big Nanny has in store for agriculture see:
<http://carbon-sense.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/emissions-and-agriculture.pdf>

Just another Rouseabout

A grizzled old cowboy sat down at the coffee shop and ordered a cup of coffee. As he sat sipping his coffee, an attractive young woman sat down next to him.

She turned to the cowboy and asked, 'Are you a real cowboy?'

He replied, 'Well, I've spent my whole life breaking colts, working cows, going to rodeos, fixing fences, pulling calves, bailing hay, doctoring calves, cleaning my barn, fixing flats, working on tractors, and feeding my dogs. So I reckon I am a cowboy'

She said, 'Well, I'm a lesbian. I spend my whole day thinking about women. As soon as I get up in the morning, I think about women. When I shower, I think about women. When I watch TV, I think about women. I even think about women when I eat. It seems that everything makes me think of women.'

The two sat sipping in silence.

A few minutes later a man sat down on the other side of the old cowboy and inquired, 'Are you a real cowboy?'

He replied, 'I always thought I was, but I just found out that I'm a lesbian.'

That's all for now. Drop in and see Judy, Celia and company in the Sheep and Wool pavilion. She will also have a pure Damara ram, a Dorper ewe with Meatmaster lamb, and two bottle fed lambs (Damara and Meatmaster).



Sherana Lamb practicing to be a Te Kay?

Best wishes from us all at Sherana - Mother-of-All-Things, Fixit, Damaras, Dorpers, Meatmasters, Senepols and Senefords, the Te Kay girls, all in the goat palace, Sheba the White Wolf and Rouseabout.

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