



# Birth of The Ccara Registry

By Bev Henry

**P**ack llama breeders in North America have, for many years, had a very difficult time finding suitable breeding stock. Most of the good lines are related, and many of these have been crossed with heavy wool llamas somewhere along the way.

## THE BREED TYPE IS BEING LOST.

As a result, The North American Ccara Association was formed. Their mission, to seek out, preserve and perpetuate the few remaining athletic, short wool working-type llamas.

The term “Ccara” is a breed type designation used in South America to identify the tall, leggy short wool type of llamas that were used mainly as pack animals. Ccara is used in this context to describe the whole package – coat type in addition to suitability as a working animal.

The group initiating this registry are people with many years of experience –

in some cases entire lifetimes - studying working animals, be it canines, equines, or camelids.

These people have been highly motivated to take themselves and their animals out of their comfort zones in the quest for knowledge. Some members of this group have, for many years, been conducting field studies of the mechanics of motion in the working llama.

One thing became increasingly clear during this quest; the correlation between structure and ability. Power, stamina, (efficiency of movement) and flexibility all appeared to be related to body proportions. Simple principles of basic physics – the fulcrum, the lever, mechanical advantage, and so forth – seemed to be demonstrated by such characteristics as bone lengths and angles, points of balance, and overall body proportions.

Skeletal structure appeared to be the key factor. Although muscles, ligaments and tendons – all the rest – are all crucial to the whole, the skeleton is the main determining factor defining athletic ability. The skeleton is the base, the framework; and the foundation upon which all else is built.

In 2003 four like minded people joined together to discuss these principles. The long-term aim of the group was to develop a system of classifying llamas based not only on fibre type, but on physical characteristics

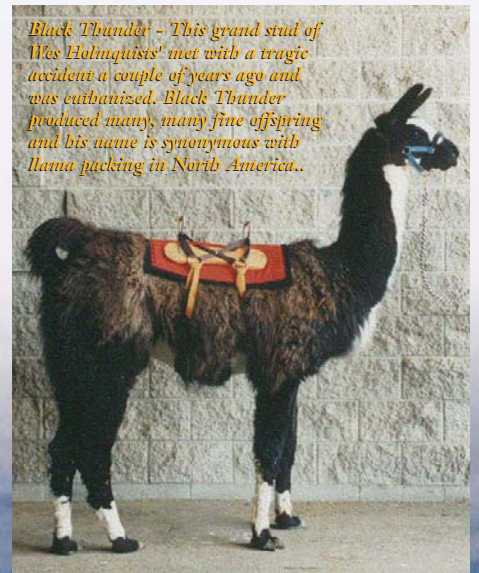
leading to athletic ability. In the group were commercial packers/breeders Wes Holmquist and Bob Schimpf, and recreational packers/breeders Ron Hennig and me.

Wes Holmquist had already done much work on his own identifying athletic structure, and was, in fact, the first known person to publish information relating structure to ability.

In 2004, after endless email discussions of theories and ideas, the group agreed on an initial draft procedure for screening and measuring llamas to assess athletic ability. Wes, Bob and I met at a carting meet in Idaho in the summer of 2004 to test the new system. Ron Hennig had by this time moved on, after making many valuable observations and contributions.

Wes brought nine male llamas to the carting meet and, using this group, Bob Schimpf and I measured and assessed each one on the basis of the new screening score sheet. Neither of us had

*Black Thunder - This grand stud of Wes Holmquist's met with a tragic accident a couple of years ago and was euthanized. Black Thunder produced many, many fine offspring and his name is synonymous with llama packing in North America.*



seen these particular llamas before. Wes was out teaching driving and was not present while his llamas were being assessed. The animal that Bob and I deemed superior, on the basis of structure and movement, was, Wes agreed, his most promising youngster.

The screening procedure was judged to be a cautious success, and worthy of further testing/refinement. The group knew they were on the right track.

A non-profit organization was formed under Washington State law – the North American Ccara Association, and at this point the ILR gave tentative approval for the Association to develop and operate a sub-registry under their auspices.

Shortly after the formation of the Ccara Association, two more people were invited to join the registry – breeder Cathrine Featherby from Vancouver Island, and breeder and commercial outfitter and breeder Al Ellis from Wyoming. The group now numbered five.



*The NACA Board of Directors.  
From the left: Al Ellis, Bev Henry,  
Cathrine Featherby, Bob Schimpf and Wes Holmquist.*

Breed criteria were analyzed and further refined, and much discussion ensued regarding various working breeds of animals. Like selecting a Husky for a sled dog, a Border Collie for herding sheep, or a Bloodhound for tracking – working breeds seem to be genetically programmed and designed to perform a specific task. Other breeds have been known to perform these tasks as well, but generally speaking, if one wants an animal to successfully perform a specific function, one selects an animal which has been bred to do the job.

This does not, however, guarantee the animal will perform the stated function. These are living creatures of immense complexity and much is still unknown. Breeder skill and knowledge is a huge part of the picture. Skillful training is an

essential component. But choosing an animal from a breed developed for a specific purpose will certainly increase the chances of success.

With a definite phenotype in mind – ‘phenotype’ meaning how the animal looks, or a set of measurable and observable characteristics – the Board specified that the first three generations seeking entry to this developing breed must be screened. It is hoped that after three generations of careful selection, some degree of uniformity within the breed will begin to emerge. Llamas born from three generations of registered Ccara parents may be registered without screening.



*“Lean and rangy”*



*“Mucular and powerful” - Commander Spock*

Many different body types may qualify, from the muscular and powerful llama with substantial bone – able to pack game over rugged off-trail terrain – to the lean and streamlined long-distance traveler. But they will all have certain attributes in common. In addition to sound basic conformation, the Ccara llama will have:

- Legs at least 2” longer than depth of girth

- Strong and relatively upright pasterns
- Smooth way of going with long free strides
- Minimum height of 43” at the withers.
- Distinct double coat with relatively short wool, and minimal or preferably no wool on face, neck and legs.

After lengthy analysis and discussion of coat types, in particular, the very desirable shedding coat, the Board decided that accurate identification of the shedding coat is simply not possible on one inspection. Although all agree that the shedding-type coat is likely genetic – a heritable factor – whether or not the coat actually does shed regularly is highly dependent on climate.



*The summer photo of Emma (left) shows her after a total body wool molt. She has almost no underwool left at all. The photo of Emma in winter (right) shows her with an exceedingly dense undercoat grown during a particularly bitter winter. Emma does not shed every year; it depends on the weather. This is an important point, as some of our southern U.S. packers insist that undercoats are always sparse and are shed every year.*



Breeders in the more severe climactic zones of North America have discovered that coat density and shedding interval are highly variable factors that are closely tied to climate. A llama exhibiting a

typical shedding coat in a moderate climate may develop a dense undercoat of body wool that does not shed at all if he is moved to an area with severe winters and short cool summers. In such climates the llama may shed only his neck wool with any degree of regularity. Age seems to be a factor as well.

But the look is still unmistakable – the coarse glossy guard hair, the clean legs, neck and face. And the self-cleaning top coat together with the very efficient insulating qualities of the short undercoat give excellent protection in all weather – wonderful attributes for a backcountry traveler.

So, having defined the breed, the Board now needed to further test and refine the screening process.

In the meantime, late in 2007, the ILR gave their formal agreement to taking on the Ccara registry as a sub registry under their auspices. The Ccara Board of Directors paid the ILR the requested fee for changing over software to allow for printing of a new Ccara registration certificate. One stipulation made by the ILR was that any llama seeking entry into the new registry must first be registered with the ILR.

Early in 2008, the Board decided to plan a screening tour to the farms of its five members. This joint tour was necessary, it was decided, for group practice to ensure a high degree of consistency in the screening process. It was now time to put ideas into practice.

The board members were all keenly enthusiastic to get started and more than a little excited at seeing their dream finally coming true. But it would have to be a low-budget tour as there were no funds in the coffers of this fledgling registry.

### ***The First Screenings***

The first screening session for the new Ccara registry took place at our farm, Valiente Working Llamas, in Barriere, B.C. on March 11th 2008, using eleven llamas we had selected from our herd. Screeners were Ccara breeders and commercial packers Wes Holmquist from the Spokane area, and Al Ellis from Highline Trails in Wyoming.

Al designed slick measuring tools for measuring height and girth depth, which worked very well with minimal stress on the llamas. Each animal was measured for



*(Left) Al demonstrated measuring girth depth with his calipers. Both these tools are interchangeable. Al gave the rest of us "assemble it yourself" kits to put together at home. (On theRight) Al and Cathy display Al's invention for measuring wither height.*



wither height, hip height, and girth depth. Each was scored using a three-page screening score sheet. On this trip the screeners were able to finally meet and assess some of the grand old sires, the first being our Monashee Bonanza, now 20.

Screeners Al (together with son Bill) and Wes and I left Barriere in the early afternoon of Mar. 11th, heading for Vancouver Island and Woodsend Llamas - the Featherby's herd. The group caught the last ferry, arriving in Victoria late in the evening. Al and Wes and I began screening llamas (including the handsome and impressive Forest Green Tobias - "Toby") the morning of Mar. 12th. Cathy's lunch of hot and savory bean soup made our day. Screening was going smoothly, with the only question being the amount of wool allowable.



*Neelix striking a pose in the rainforest.*

From Featherby's we caught the Coho ferry to Port Angeles, Washington, then south to Schimpf's farm – Middle Earth

Llamas - down the scenic Olympic Peninsula near Montesano. Bob and Janet welcomed us with a marvelous salmon and steelhead feast. March 13th was spent screening llamas and thus far all was going well. Schimpf's herd was comprised largely of very typical, tall and elegant Ccaras. Bob's stud Neelix posed impressively for us, on a giant stump from the west coast rainforest.

From Montesano, the group car pooled to Spokane on March 14th. We spent the night in Wes' newly completed shop just out of Spokane. Cathy and I shared the back of a travel trailer parked in the shop while Bob occupied the front. Al, Bill and Wes found a spot on the shop floor, spread out their camping gear around the barrel heater, and were soon snoring in perfect harmony.

The next morning, after a rib-warming breakfast prepared by Wes on the camp stove, we began screening his males. All went well until we came to a fine stud llama - Woodsend Kazam. He possessed impressive muscling, stride and stature and a wonderful way of going, but he had more wool that we had deemed to be ideal. Jan and Dar Wassink, of the ILR, had joined our group for our first face-to-face meeting, and witnessed the screening procedure for this llama.

From the very beginning, wool had been the point of contention: How much to allow? What coat type? This big boy was obviously a powerful and competent pack llama. As an unrelated Canadian outcross, we felt that eliminating him

from the registry would be a mistake. What to do? In the end we reserved judgment on the wool and gave the llama top marks in all other categories.

After another night in Wes' shop, a grand tour of their new home, which was still under construction, and we were off for Wyoming on March 16th. A lunch stop in St. Regis, Montana provided the opportunity for a visit and chat with the new Backcountry Llama editor Dick Williams, who lived nearby. We spent a most entertaining hour or two with Dick. We were all beginning to wilt from the intense concentration and lack of sleep so we travelled only got as far as Missoula, MT

Al had suffered a severe injury to his leg a few days before the beginning of the trip but was determined not to let that interfere with the plan. Strict doctor's orders required a rest and a stretch every few hours and Bill, Al's son, made sure this happened. We all wondered if we should believe Al's assurances that his leg was "fine, just fine!" I shudder to think of the agonies he endured; hours standing in icy winds and drafty barns, determined

not to let the injury interfere with this long-awaited tour.

On Monday, March 17th we arrived at Al and Sondra Ellis' spectacular ranch at the base of the Wind River Range near Boulder Wyoming. Sondra, and Maggie the Border collie, greeted us warmly. We enjoyed fantastic meals and accommodation in their magnificent log home with its panoramic view of the high desert and mountains. This lovely setting is the home base for Highline Trails pack trips.

Although, at over 7000' elevation, the Ellis's ranch was still firmly in winter's grip, the brilliant blue skies and intense sunlight were a welcome change from stormy weather we had encountered along the way.

The well designed setup of alleyways, barns, holding areas and chutes made llama handling easy. We finished screening Ellis's llamas on Tuesday March 18th. This was where my learning experience really began. Al and Sondra had several boys of a type that was quite different from my ideal. These boys were BIG!



Llama handling facilities at Highline Trails Ranch made the job easy.



There were many fine studs on this ranch, including the tall and rangy Sir Canad. But when Al led out the impressive Commander Spock, I had to look twice. A tall, compact-bodied, well muscled fellow with substantial bone but with remarkable athleticism; the long

**CHUTE!** Everybody needs a little help once in a while - especially while handling the critters.

Take some stress out of your life and make your vet happy too.

**GET THE CHUTE!**

**ALSO:** Incredible Crates, Marvellous Mats and Perfect Galvanized Catch Panels!

**BUCK HOLLOW LLAMAS INC**

**Carol Reigh**  
409 Buck Hollow Rd., Birdsboro, PA 19508  
carol@buckhollowllamas.com  
**(610) 582-9051**  
[www.buckhollowllamas.com](http://www.buckhollowllamas.com)

The Chute (above) Double powder coated, Sturdy/no tip feature, Diverse and portable, Folds for easy storage, Completely disassembles, Easy access to animals, Indoor/Outdoor use.

**The Ultimate Llama Pack**

Recognized for innovative design and llama comfort ...since 1978, the first commercial llama product and still the best.

The "Larrabee"

Panniers 22 x 14 x 10  
Four end pockets 8 x 12 x 2  
Two stuff bags 22 x 8 x 8  
Total weight 9 lbs.

- Soft saddle offers superior spinal support, durable reinforced construction, and metal frame for stability in toughest terrain. 4 inch shaped foam on each side keeps pack well above spine
- Panniers offer increased capacity, heavy duty reinforced stitching, and attach to saddle using four heavy duty side release buckles
- Recommended and used by serious packers

"My wife and I just wanted to tell you how happy we are with our Larrabee packs. The old owners are totally amazed. We took two across a river into our remote hunting area on Mt. Adirondack, New York, with 55 lbs of gear and the packs stayed on perfectly. Their fiber was matted down evenly throughout their backs and no rub marks whatsoever" - Mark and Laurel St. Onge, Northville, NY

Get your Larrabee Llama pack at:  
**Quality Llama Products, Inc.**  
Real People Serving Real Needs Since 1979  
[www.llamaproducts.com](http://www.llamaproducts.com) **800-638-4689**  
Our Products are More Than Useful, They're Essential!

For detailed information about the Larrabee Llama pack: visit [www.llamapacks.com](http://www.llamapacks.com)

upper leg bones, short and powerful cannons, excellent angulation with long firm strides. I couldn't help but admire this camelid powerhouse (over 400 lbs) as I watched him being led up and down the screening area.

Al frequently packs 120 lbs on some of these boys during his fall off-trail elk hunts, he says, so they need to be fairly substantial. Most of these boys were carrying a little more wool, with very dense undercoats.

This was where the wool question was resolved in my mind. All along, I had wanted to eliminate all llamas lacking the 'true' Ccara coat. But here were some world-class packers – the high-end boys - with a little more wool. How could we possibly justify eliminating these grand animals from the already severely restricted gene pool? Almost every line of typical Ccara llama we had encountered so far seemed related in some way to all the other bloodlines.

Was this wool really genetic? Or was it environmental?

This is where it really hit home that the gene pool for these good athletic packers is severely depleted. And this is where, after many late nights of intense

discussion, we decided we must allow these grand animals in the registry as foundation stock. We can tighten up on wool characteristics in subsequent generations, but eliminating these fine animals from the Ccara registry would be a terrible mistake.

Al also emphasized the severity of the winters at that elevation, frequently with temperatures at 20 below and sometimes as cold as 50 below. Coupled with the bitter winds of the high desert, the need for dense undercoats was very apparent.

So, with our ideas somewhat shaken, we headed to the last stop, the Redman Ranch in Albion, Idaho where Wes' partner, Odeen Redman, runs the female herd. We again saw some lovely females here; tall, sleek and elegant creatures, girls that moved like the wind over prairie grass. We also got to meet another grand old stud, Hector Connection.

How sad that we never got to meet Black Thunder, sire of so many of today's top pack animals. Thunder was euthanized after a severe leg fracture in 2005.

On Thursday March 20th, we had our last informal meeting over breakfast in the charming little town of Albion, ID.

Al and Bill headed home, Wes went to join his wife Ann at their old place near Burley, ID while Bob, Cathy and I headed north. We traveled through southern Idaho, where I saw my first pronghorn antelope, then northwest to the rodeo town of Pendleton, OR.

The next day we traveled along the Oregon/Washington border, following the spectacular Columbia Gorge. Cathy and I said our goodbyes to Bob and Janet in Montesano the morning of March 22nd then drove back to Port Angeles, to catch the ferry for Victoria.

After a brief visit with my own family on the Island, I headed home to Barry and our llamas. After two long weeks on the road, many hundreds of miles, great people and spectacular llamas, I was travel weary and mentally drained.

This was the trip of a lifetime and a fantastic learning experience. We were all unceremoniously dragged out of our comfort zones, forced to confront new ideas, and broaden our parameters for this new registry. Family and farm schedules were disrupted and lives rearranged for a time to make this happen, giving evidence to a remarkable degree of commitment all around.

Although convinced we are on the right track for preserving the old-style working llama, we know we have a long way to go yet. But it has begun. We have a formal and official registry for the working llama.

**Note:** *Screening applications will be accepted by the NACA in the summer of 2008. While the NACA website is still under construction, screening score sheets for llamas seeking entry into the registry, the accompanying explanations, and names of screeners, may be obtained from NACA secretary Bev Henry. Llamas being screened for the Ccara registry must already be registered with the ILR, and be at least three years of age.*

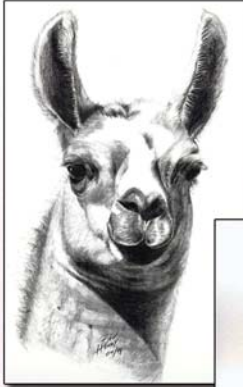

**CQ**

**About the Author:**

*Bev Henry has been involved with pack llamas since 1997 and is now breeding athletic pack stock along with husband Barry in Barrier, British Columbia, Canada. Bev and Barry are focusing on preserving the old style Ccara llamas. Bev comes from a background of a lifetime training and riding performance horses, is an amateur outdoor photographer and an artist who interprets her images in pencil and watercolor.*

## Your Favorite Llama in Pencil or Watercolour

*...and trekking too!*

### Valiente Working Llamas

*"Back to the Basics"*  
Breeding tall, athletic llamas for form and function

Bev & Barry Henry  
Barriere, BC, Canada

email: [bbhenry@telus.net](mailto:bbhenry@telus.net)  
Ph/fax: 250-672-0181

[www.valiente.ca](http://www.valiente.ca)

