



SOUTHERN OREGON
SOAY SHEEP FARMS
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Viewpoint

FROM THE PREMIER BREEDER OF BRITISH REGISTERED SOAY SHEEP

Adaptability

by Kathie Miller

I leaned over from my window seat just as they closed the door and there was Heather standing in the aisle.

To get to the Midwest from Oregon I had to change planes in Denver, so Heather (who lives there) and I had agreed to meet on the plane. I only had 30 minutes between connections so I was cutting it close. But our plan had worked and we both made it.

The reason for our trip was to attend the first Midwest Gathering of Soay Sheep Breeders in Monroe, Wisconsin. We began our

weeklong adventure on Friday at the Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival. Sheep shows are a treasure trove of information and ideas that you will find nowhere else. Different catalog companies attend different regional shows. If you are visiting an area outside of your own, a show is a good place to find new online resources. At this show I found a loose salt container that my rams cannot knock over or destroy—much to their chagrin.

The Midwest Gathering was hosted by Kathy and Alan Comeau at Narnia Farm outside Monroe. It was

a wonderful opportunity for breeders to get acquainted, put email names to faces, and exchange ideas about caring for sheep.

Coming from Southern Oregon where my winters are relatively mild and I have little snow, I was amazed by the stories of severe Midwest winters. My barn would do nothing more than serve as a storage shed for snow if it was located in Wisconsin. Picking everyone's brains about these problems became my mission for the rest of the week.

Alan and Kathy have a large barn with sliding doors at each end that are closed in harsh weather to keep out the snow. A cupola in the center of the roof and vents that run along the top of the walls the full length of the building provide the all-important

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Comeau barn

A find and a loss

by Kathie Miller

As soon as I arrived home from my Midwest adventure I had to change gears.

The vet was coming in two days to do health certificates and all my sheep were running loose in the pastures. I had sent her office all of the details before my trip, but I still had a lot to do.

First, I had to catch the sheep and sort out the ones that were departing at the end of the month. Then, I had to mark each one so I could tell who was going where.

My great find in the UK this summer was a striped electrical tape to add to my collection. Each buyer was assigned a color and each lamb was marked with the corresponding tape on its horns. To make it easier for the vet, I penned the lambs separately by color.

After the vet left, my little "rainbow" flock had free run within the confines of the barn, isolated from my other sheep. They stayed for almost two weeks to adjust to tight quarters to prepare for their



Lambs sorted for inspection

long ride in Ron's trailer. (See November 2008 *Viewpoint*).

I became quite attached to these little fellows. When I loaded them on the truck I felt excited for their new owners, but a bit sad for myself.

October Calendar

- ❑ Put rams to ewes beginning in late October to December.
- ❑ October 31st is the closing date for the Combined Flock Book of the RBST. Any entries made after that date will not appear in the published flock book. December 31st is the final closing date for birth notification. If not birth notified by that date, lambs will not be eligible for later registration.
- ❑ Complete the online census survey (through Grassroots) confirming the number of living animals in your flock. This will be published in the printed version of the Combined Flock Book of the RBST that comes out at the end of the year.

If you want to go really crazy with colored tape, check out Tape Brothers at <http://www.tapebrothers.com/Electrical-tapes/172.htm>.

Health Certificates

For a list of State Animal Health Officers, check out <http://www.usaha.org/StateAnimalHealthOfficials.pdf>.

Each state has different requirements for importing ruminants. Make sure you research those regulations and arrange for your health certificate in time that blood can be drawn if necessary and tested by YOUR state veterinarian's office so that the Health Certificate can reflect those results.

Health certificates are generally valid for only 30 days and must be valid while the animal is traveling if it is crossing state lines.

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All advice in this newsletter has been used successfully on our farm. It is important to remember that every animal and situation is different. Before you try any of our suggestions, we urge you to consult your veterinarian.

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Adaptability *continued from page one*

ventilation. The walls are 12 feet tall (originally designed for Clydesdale horses), which also helps with air circulation. On inclement days, the animals are confined to their stalls. On sunny ones, the doors are opened to the pasture.

When the pad was graded for the building, a trench was dug for plumbing and electricity. A frostproof yard hydrant was installed inside. This device has a shutoff valve that drains the water below the frost line into the ground, so it doesn't freeze in the pipes. No matter how low the temperature, they always have running water.

Kathy has altered her sheep's breeding season due to the weather. Her pens are a distance from the barn, and during her first season she found the sheep stranded out in the deep snow. She broke up the pairs early and brought them back to the safety of the barn. Kathy now puts the rams in earlier in the fall so she can be assured the ewes have been serviced by the time she moves all of the sheep back to the barn before severe weather hits.

After a great weekend in Wisconsin, Heather and I flew back to Denver. Unlike Kathy and Alan who live in woodland surrounded by rolling fields of corn, Heather lives out on the open prairie east of the Rockies at 7,500 feet elevation. She, too, has snow, but her biggest problem is

the wind that sweeps out of the mountains and across her farm. Kathy's barn would have blown away at Heather's



Heather's barn

place, where creating wind resistance is paramount. Heather's buildings are as low as possible with roofs as secure as she could make them. She has to bolt the barn doors shut to keep them from blowing off their hinges. The smaller, lower sheds, with a deep bed of straw, also stay warmer in the intense cold.

On the third day, Heather took me high into the Rockies to make one last stop

on my trek. We were treated to a wonderful dinner at Roy's Last Shot, my friends' laid-back, well-loved mountain eatery that is the hub of a very small community.

Roy and Barb had put off getting Soay sheep until they moved from Las Vegas—with its extreme heat—to Colorado where, at 8,500 feet, they deal with very low temperatures and deep, blowing snow drifts instead. The deep drifts block the sliding door to the barn and they must shovel their way from the house every morning.

They plan to build a covered breezeway between the two buildings. Their barn is on the side of a mountain where it is somewhat protected. It is very heavily insulated, with thermal pane windows. Because they have cement floors they can use electric, oil-filled space heaters (away from bedding and secured against tipping over) when the cold is especially brutal.

The one problem they have not overcome, however, is water: it must be carried daily from the house. Because their farm is built on solid bedrock, getting plumbing to the barn below the frost line is not possible, so they will have to continue to carry heated water from the house.

When I got home I looked around at my place and appreciated just how specific all of our situations are to our locations. Seeing other Soay keepers' challenges was an eye opener. It reminded me of how useful it is to visit other farms and see how other shepherds adapt to their circumstances.



Roy and Barb's barn

Tip of the Month

Use Marksman for Sheep and Lambs (a specially-formulated spray paint) for marking individual sheep.

