



Our year started with snow and lots of it. We had eighty-plus alpacas in every night, with the female herd dancing and humming at the gate by 3.30pm, desperate to get inside for the night.

A good start to The British Alpaca Futurity in February with a 1st place and best hand-woven item in show. Extra-fine two-ply from the Fowberry herd of alpacas was woven on a 10-shaft Countermarch Glimakra loom and the wrap itself is a four by four twill woven on eight shafts.

A Year in the Life of



The first cria of the year was slightly dysmature and we had trouble keeping her warm. Unfortunately Graham had to forgo his sleeveless cashmere sweater to a very hot wash. It was then a perfect size as an additional cosy layer.



We are always happy when our caesarean-girl, Francesca has had her cria and this year, the second time she has given birth after a caesarean, she popped out a 10 kilo baby with the longest legs we have seen on a newborn. Thankfully Francesca is a big rangy girl! Paloma is pictured at 24 hours old. It is 6.5°C mid-day during the middle of May.



In June, Perseus was born at 386 days gestation, to a maiden after a single service last year. We had to tear the birthing sac open as it was leathery and Perseus had stiff legs and a long fleece to show for this extraordinary gestation.



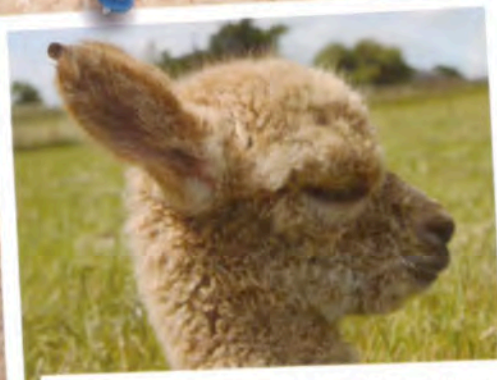
First photo' is Perseus at an hour old and the second photo is at 24 hours old. Some months later and he has grown away well, with the only slight hiccup being a bout of constipation after his Lambivac vaccination.



Some alpacas love to get their fleece off and then there are others who don't...



Iquita is our largest alpaca and like a finely tuned thoroughbred racehorse. Since she was born in 2004, unlike all the rest of our alpacas, she has never relaxed with us and everything is a trial to her - especially shearing!



Babies start to come thick and fast now, as we only have cria until the beginning of July. That way we know that babies are well grown when the weather turns in October and the cria are not making excessive demands on their dams when the goodness is out of the grass. ...Some babies find this birthing lark quite tiring!

Fowberry Alpacas



Every year, India, our least intelligent but sweetest natured girl, always welcomes each cria as if she hasn't seen a cria before in her life. Thankfully her own cria seem to surprise her less.



Graham and I find birthing quite an anxious time. Having instigated the pregnancy, we need to see it through to a happy and healthy outcome. Especially challenging when a cria is born head first in a poo pile like this one! Mum, Claudia is resting out of picture - an old pro, having had seven girls and one boy over the years. Here the maidens are checking out the newborn.



Some cria are difficult to get into a routine if they need to be bottle fed and others are easy. Nina comes from a strong-willed female line and nothing will stop her surviving after her dam dies. She will take a bottle from absolutely anyone, adult or child - or so we thought. Our next-door neighbour arrived to feed Nina and she wasn't having it. In case anybody doubts alpacas' intelligence, Nina had recognised our neighbour from walking her two large old dogs along the road twice a day. She downed her bottle minutes later, but not from our neighbour's hand!



Juliette insists on licking her cria long after they are dry and Naomi looks as if she has had enough.



The warmer weather brings lazy days, with plenty of time for gossip....



...and a move to new pasture.



It's hard work making babies, as Lone and her sister Kassiope will testify.



Pixie is our first black female to be born for four years, by black sire, Miguel. We celebrate, not knowing that like buses, another three black females are on the way.



We were convinced that Persuasion was a true chocolate brown when born, a colour that we have waited years for, but at skin level she's another black and our first Top Account grand daughter!



Although the weather is hot, the cria still make time for a run around in the early evening, while we sit in their field on a bench, with a glass of wine or three.



As the days slip by, we find the hot June weather brings problems. The lack of rain makes deep cracks appear in the ground, one cria sprains a leg and requires physiotherapy from us every day. Graham and I fill the cracks with industrial quantities of John Innes No. 3 and weekly weight gains of cria begin to slow as dams have to work harder to find green grass.



Graham working hard, watching his prospective mums every move.

Our Advanced Alpaca Course isn't all hard work - there is time for good food and drink, but with the morning devoted to birthing, we hope to see the signs of a birthing alpaca in the field. No signs on the course day, but the following morning, we have three cria born in 27 minutes by 11.30 am. We do advise delegates that alpacas can give birth around dawn, but ours always wait for their Camelibra every morning at 9am. Let no man stand between a prospective dam and her breakfast!





With fifteen female cria and six male cria safely born, the birthing season comes to a close. A new field causes great excitement for the females and cria and of course nobody knows who is who.....funny that.



Our vet is an essential part of our year. We include him, whether it is strictly necessary or not. This gives him experience of alpacas on an on-going basis, so that when we have a real problem, he isn't thrown in at the deep end, like the vet that conducted our caesarean, who had never seen an alpaca before and made an incision large enough to get a calf out.



It has been an extraordinary year for cria weights. Every cria is weighed every other day as a newborn and then every week. With cria weights of 40 kilos at five months old, dams are regularly body scored to see how they are coping. We will sometimes wean a cria before six months old, but prefer not to wean under five months. Our relatively newly sown grass has coped well with the June drought and we have been able to move alpacas around the farm according to their needs. Something we didn't have the facilities to do at our last home. Paloma, by Top Account is pictured at 3.5 months and 31.5 kilos. Thank goodness she has grown into those legs. With astonishing organisation in her fleece for a cria so young, she is every inch the superstar her breeding dictates she should be and she is top of the list for the Show Team for 2011.



There are always highlights in every year and during September, we were thrilled to see our range of scarves being woven in Halifax, using only Fowberry alpacas' fleece in the natural colours of the herd. Two hundred and sixty finished scarves are due back shortly in five of our designs.



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During October we assess a new white male for purchase, to take forward our top-end females. It may be a funny way to verify his credentials, but amongst other checks, he should have strength and balance! Our new male and his progeny pass a rigorous test and he is now in six months quarantine in North Yorkshire. Our year finished on a winning note at the largest fleece show in Europe (268 fleeces) with EPC Top Account winning Champion Veteran Fleece in the first class of its kind. We were surprised and delighted Cameron Holt judged him to have 20 out of 20 for fineness and handle.