

Black Welsh Mountain Sheep Club Newsletter May 1999

Club Membership

If this package does not include a ballot then you are not a current paid up Individual Voting Member. If you wish to join please return the enclosed membership application with your \$10.00 check as soon as possible. You will be sent a ballot. To accommodate people who wish to join but have not done so we will hold the membership open until May 31, 1999. Your membership application must be postmarked by the 31st or you cannot vote in this election. You must join if you wish to continue receiving the newsletter.

Club Elections Voting Instructions

The newly formed club is holding the first elections. If you are a paid up Individual Voting member of the club you will find a ballot enclosed. There are two envelopes. After reading the officer information please make your selections on the ballot form. Seal the ballot inside the envelope marked "BALLOT ENCLOSED". Do not make any marks on this ballot envelope. Place the ballot envelope in the stamped addressed envelope and sign your name across the flap when you seal it. Valid ballots must be postmarked by June 19, 1999.

When the ballots are received they will be checked against the paid up members of the club and checked off the list to prevent possible duplicate ballots being sent in. The outer envelope will be opened and the sealed inner envelope will be stored. Ballots will be opened in the third week of June and the votes counted. The Secretary/Treasurer as elected by the membership will send results with a newsletter as soon as possible after that. Your membership dues will also be deposited into the bank account that the Secretary/Treasurer will open.

Write in candidates are allowed but be sure they have agreed to serve. In the event a candidate is elected who has not agreed to serve the candidate with the next highest number of votes will be elected.

Luke Vaughn has been organizing the club. Here are his comments about the current election. "This is our first election! We are just beginning our club so please be patient and together we will work out all the "bugs". I am very confident that our enthusiasm for BWMS will keep our club alive and productive!

If you have nominated someone and their name does not appear on the ballot, it would mean that they were unable to hold this office at this time. We do make mistakes however, so if you know of errors, please let us know."

Officer Candidate Information

President

Thomas Wyman

Mr. Thomas Wyman is the original importer of Black Welsh Mountain sheep to this country. He maintains the largest flock of purebred sheep and his flock is also registered with the UK club. His contributions to the breed are incalculable. Not only did he bring these sheep here; he has meticulously maintained his animals to the high qualities of the original British standard.

There were originally three nominations for President. Both Oogie McGuire and Luke Vaughn were nominated along with Mr. Thomas Wyman. Luke and I feel it is in the best interest of the club for Mr. Wyman to be President of this club. Therefore Oogie McGuire and Luke Vaughn decline the nominations for this office.

Vice President

Luke Vaughn

"I have had BWMS for only about two years now. I feel the most important contribution I can make is that I have the time and energy for this at this point in my life. It is my conviction that the most important thing this club can do is to promote and maintain this breed true to its original qualities. These are wonderful sheep, let's keep them that way."

There were two additional nominations for Vice President. Mary Mondello and Oogie McGuire were both nominated. Mary has declined the nomination for Vice President due to her accepting the nomination for Board of Directors. I have declined the nomination for Vice President due to my acceptance of the nomination for Secretary Treasurer.

Secretary/Treasurer

Oogie McGuire

"About 8 years ago I decided I wanted to eventually have sheep again when I retire. I started a breed search. I also really like woolen cloaks. My sheep requirements were a breed that was rare, that I could devote myself to fully, that had both good wool and tasty meat. After much research with the ALBC and OSU breed info I had a short list of breeds I was considering.

I wrote to all the US and British breed societies for information. When I got the breed info back from the UK about Black Welsh it mentioned they were used in the Middle ages for black wool for cloaks and that the mutton was especially prized and considered very tasty. That's it, that is the breed I want, Never mind that I haven't spun anything on a wheel before, didn't own a spinning wheel, had never woven anything, didn't own a loom, and didn't even really know how the Middle ages cloaks were made. I wanted a traditional black wool cloak made from the proper sheep, the Black Welsh Mountain, that I had raised myself, from yarn I spun myself and wove myself.

I started looking for animals to buy. After 5 years of searching I finally found a flock that was being disbursed and bought the whole flock. So I got started with these sheep just because I wanted a traditional Welsh Cloak. I've had Black Welsh Mountain sheep for three years."

Luke Vaughn was also nominated for Secretary/Treasurer. He has declined the nomination due to his accepting the nomination for Vice President.

Board of Directors – Four to be Elected

Directors shall serve for a period of two years. To provide the continuity desired there will be two board members elected each year. Because this is the first election the two people with the highest number of votes shall serve two-year terms and the two with the lowest number of votes shall serve one-year terms. In the event of a tie the two-year and one-year terms shall be decided by random selection.

Mary Mondello

"I started in sheep seriously when my daughter took a market lamb project in 4-H in the 6th grade. The neighbor had an extensive flock of registered Suffolks and gave LoreLei a ram lamb

that came complete with double pneumonia and matted eyes! We nursed him through that and he took Grand Champion Market Lamb at the Wood County Fair and on to placing second, I believe at the Ohio State Fair but not as her project. A senior boy bought Buster and took him there as his project. We were living in Fostoria, Ohio and she had sheep (we had a small flock of Suffolks due to the 4-H projects) until she left for college in 1983. I kept working with them and also for our veterinarian until I left Fostoria and moved to Columbus in 1986. I thought I was finished with large animals until I met my present husband. I had moved to the West Coast and was living a "city" life when Joe discovered my knowledge of farm animals and promptly purchased a 40 acre ranch on the Central Coast. That was in 1992. I have been raising all manner of rare and endangered farm animals (and some not) ever since. My first Black Welsh Mountain Sheep was a ram lamb we purchased in San Juan Capistrano on Easter Sunday in 1991. We took him home to West Los Angeles and kept him in the "back yard" for about six weeks until the closing on the ranch. I had to tell the neighbors that the strange sounds were from the wild parrots that inhabited the area!

Since living in San Miguel, California I have had a fullblown breeding operation going. Going from Bojangles (who now lives at the Cincinnati Zoo) to 34 Black Welsh as been a great joy and lots of hard work building the proper pens, barn and breeding houses for the critters.

At one point I had 467 miniature goats, 354 miniature sheep, llamas, mini donkeys, zebu cattle (2, they didn't stay long), and various fowl along with 36 silver, black and red pinto pot bellied pigs.

I am since cutting back, in fact selling out due to permanent back, knee and hip injuries. I have done all this virtually by myself for seven years. At the age of 52 I would like to rest and let younger, stronger folks do the hands on work while I take the roll of advisor for a while."

Patricia Mazarella

"Our Black Welsh Mountain sheep came to us from David Baker who has developed and kept this flock for ten years. We took approximately half of his sheep after we first saw them. It was love at first sight -- their appearance, their color, their hardiness, their undocked tails, their independent friendliness, and the fact that David had raised them naturally. Since we are a VT NOFA certified organic farm, it was important that our initial flock be one that could be transitioned to organic. The seven ewes and one

ram are now in transition, and the six lambs born in March are all organically raised. Two ewes, the ram, and two ewe lambs are purebred while the other ewes are mixed with border leicester in percentages from 1/4 to 15/16 border leicester. We are planning to acquire another ram and more purebred ewes this summer.

Our farm is Apple Blossom Organic Farm. Besides sheep we raise chickens and grow apples, berries, vegetables, and herbs. As we have an interest in rare breeds, we are participating in a project to restore the original hardiness genetics to Aracauna chickens through their jungle fowl ancestors. One of our most pressing projects is the building of a tree house on 12-foot poles for their summer and winter use. Amazingly, they are, like our Black Welsh Mountain sheep, winter hardy.

As for us, my daughter Christine and I are developing and running our farm as business partners. I am a retired professor of philosophy (ethics) and my daughter's background is psychology. Her three children who are home schooled are also very active with us as farmers. We began our farm almost two years ago on property that was mostly undeveloped. With hard work and daily pleasure in the projects we are making strides we couldn't have imagined. We have put up fences, built buildings, cleared land, made progress on repairing an older house, and found markets for some of our produce. We have many requests for lamb, but are still developing our flock. The wool we will use in felting products for our store. We would welcome for sale BWM handspun or knitted items from other sheep farmers.

What else can I tell you except that we are most happy as BWM shepherds. We had planned to develop a cheesemaking business with another breed but have found that we are satisfied with our present direction and our beautiful flock."

Sandie McDonald

"I've been crossbreeding Black Welsh Mountain Sheep for approximately 6 years. I first discovered the breed in an exotic animal show in 1990, and it took me three years to locate a ram for sale. I initially was going to establish a purebred flock when financially feasible. The first year here on the windy (100 mph Plus!) and rainy (144 in. per year) Oregon coast convinced me otherwise. Black Welsh Mountain sheep do not do well under our very local extreme weather conditions even with a lovely warm barn, plenty of fresh graze and all the alfalfa pellets they can eat. The sheep itself stayed healthy, the wool was a total loss. It came off the sheep in a solid

cotted rug, which I was unable to pull even a single staple lock from. This has happened every year. I can't experiment with coats; our farm is old and covered with hidden barbed wire fences. A sheep in a coat would be akin to a canary in a mineshaft.

Hence, crossbreeding with purebred colored Romney ewes became my only option. The half bloods (to steal an archaic Merino term) do wonderfully. I'd be glad to supply samples of their intensely black, fine long wool to anyone with a SASE. Three-quarter bloods react as if purebred. This means I need a new BWM ram every three years, as finding intensely black Romney ewes is difficult. I love the breed, they are born "tame". They flock beautifully, are easy keepers, and have very little trouble lambing. The smaller carcass weights of my half bloods have not been noticed by the local meat packers. I have a ready, highly lucrative market for the intensely black fleece. The wool spins nicely, even the purebred (I obtained samples from another breeder as mine is unworkable). It knits into very resilient garments which hold their shape beautifully."

Niki B. Sawyer

"Three years ago, I learned how to spin. I already knew how to knit and crochet. I wanted to have my own spinning flock. I started reading sheep books. Then I became really discouraged. Somewhere there had to be a breed that I wouldn't kill through incompetence, before I became a proficient shepherdess. Finally, I found an obscure reference to Black Welsh Mountain sheep. After researching this breed, I found a breeder and purchased her flock of 9.

This is my second lambing season. I love this breed, and I am having so much fun with them. I currently have two spinning wheels and my husband presented me with an 8 harness loom for Yule. I am breeding to improve fleece quality. This is a wonderful breed. We are fortunate to have them."

Breed Description from Old Book

I am on an e-mail list for Shetlands and one of the members posted some information from this book; "British Sheep", published by The National Sheep Breeders Association (Revised Edition 1968) originally printed in 1933. I asked if she would mind typing in the breed description of Black Welsh Mountain sheep. She was kind enough to comply so here it is.

"The formation of Black Welsh Mountain flocks probably began as long as 80 or 100 years ago,

and many of the present registered flocks date back for a great number of years. These sheep originated from the Welsh mountain sheep famous for their mutton. In past years black lambs were born in the flocks and by selecting these for perhaps a century a separate strain of Black Welsh sheep has been built up, which has now had its own Flock Book since 1922.

It has a small head, masculine, wedge shape, tapering towards the nose, and the rams are horned. It has a black, broad muzzle and forehead, free from wool, horns fairly strong and well curved not too close at roots. The eyes are bright and prominent, the ears small and thin, obliquely set. The scrag is strong and thick, the throat short and well defined; brisket wide and prominent. The shoulders are nicely rounded, level with back, the ribs well sprung, deep in region of the heart. The back is straight with strong loins and the hindquarters thick and well let down, and it has a long tail covered in wool. The legs are comparatively short and it has a straight underline. Curly wool is only desirable between the horns. The skin is blue.

The breed produces small joints of meat free from wasteful fat, the grain is close and the bone is light. A large proportion of the weight of the carcass is found in the more valuable joint. The liveweight at 20 months is 140-150 lbs. and lambs at 8 months reach about 100 lbs. The carcass weight of yearling and two-year olds ranges from 35 to 40 lbs.

The black, short, thick wool is firm to handle, and does not require dyeing. In the Middle Ages the black wool of the Welsh mountain sheep, known as "Cochddu," was much sought after, and at the present day, the wool is a most valuable commodity, making up as it does either pure or in combination with a good quality white wool, into a most pleasing cloth of attractive checks and patterns. The average wool clip is 4 lbs. per fleece, and 1 lb. of first quality wool will make 1 yard of cloth. It grades at 54/46 demi-lustre.

The sheep lamb down in the open and mortality is very low; dropping when running on fresh ground doubles and sometimes trebles. They lamb from the end of January to March; the ewes are very deep in milking and lambs average about 1 1/2 per ewe throughout the flock. The sheep are very sound on feet as they do not suffer with foot rot, and flies seem to trouble them very little during the summer.

Hardiness is an outstanding characteristic of the breed, its chief asset being the fact that it is a good scavenger, fending for itself, and will fatten well on poor and medium quality land. When

kept on low ground the sheep naturally attain a greater size and give a heavier fleece of wool. They require no hand-feeding, and graze on mountain lands. Some flockmasters run their sheep with a herd of deer and in winter they disappear into the woods, chiefly living on ground ivy, and emerge with the deer fat and sleek in the spring.

Flocks of this breed thrive in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and have obtained excellent results when exported."

The chart in the back lists the following characteristics of the Black Welsh Mountain wool. Bradford Count of 44 to 50. Average fleece weight 3 pounds. Average length of staple 3 to 4 inches. Wool is listed as Demi. The yarn is used for specialty or black and brown yarns.

Interesting to compare with what we have currently here. I have noticed that the sunburned fleece turns reddish brown at the ends and I believe that is what they are calling the brown of this sheep as no true brown exists in this breed.

Yarn Samples

One of my customers who bought a raw fleece from me sent me samples of the yarn she spun from it. The fleece was from a 6 year old ram and while relatively fine is not the finest or the coarsest of the fleeces I have. She sent me samples that are 4 ply cabled yarn (two 2 ply pieces plied together) that is fingering weight or smaller. It's amazing stuff, very springy and looks like lovely knitting yarn. I will be scanning the samples and putting a web page up showing what you can do with Black Welsh Mountain Sheep wool. If you have examples of things you have made and wish them added to the pages let me know.

Scrapie Testing of UK Rams

I now have more results of the scrapie gene testing for the UK rams. Hounsley Harry is QR at codon 171 and AV at codon 136. Hounsley Jack is QR at codon 171. His codon 136 tests are still being run.

UK Flock Books

I purchased a copy of as many back issues of the UK Flock book as were available. I now have a complete set from 1979 to present. I will not loan them out but if you have specific questions or want me to look something up I'd be glad to do so. If you come visit you are welcome to read them here.

One of the most interesting things to me are the pictures. The type and looks of the animals pictured in the flock book are very consistent from the earliest ones to the latest issue. The rams have both spread and tightly curled horn types and the ewes are very uniform. I think it's most interesting to see the consistent quality of the UK animals.

Breed Standards

I still have copies of the UK breed flyer that has the breed standard in it. If you want a copy let me know.

Wool Pool

We still need people with Black Welsh Mountain sheep to join in the wool pool to have some commercial yarn made. I have been evaluating wool mills and Blackberry Ridge Woolen Mill in WI seems to be the most reasonable. They also have experience with Black Welsh Mountain wool in yarn blends. They require 100 pounds of raw, well-skirted, minimal vegetable matter contamination wool to make yarn without an extra setup charge. I got a yarn capabilities card and it looks to me like sport weight, 1500 yards per pound, is about what the Lands' End BWMS sweaters are made of. Another nice weight is the medium at 1000 yards per pound.

My current plan is if and when we have enough raw wool to do it we each weigh our raw wool and send it off to the mill. I would be willing to cover the full cost of scouring, carding and spinning the yarn. The finished yarn would be split among the breeders according to the percentage of raw wool they provided. You can either keep your yarn yourself or I'd be glad to store it here and sell it and send you money as the yarn sells. I'm open to other suggestions so if you want to participate please contact me with your ideas.

UK Wool

I have a request in to a major UK breeder to see if she has any raw fleeces for sale. I'm asking for

a superior, an average quality and a poor quality fleece. The breeder I am asking is a member of the Breed Council and a judge. My plan is if I get these fleeces I'd sell sets of samples to other interested persons. My goal is to compare our wool quality with that from animals in the UK.

Web Pages

I have not been updating my web site with info on the breeders and members. After the elections I will get the current membership list. All members will be listed unless you specifically tell me you do not wish to be included. If you have e-mail or a web site and provide that information I will make the appropriate links.

Breeders Listing

This newsletter does not include a breeders listing. After the elections are done if you do not wish to be included in a list of breeders then you must let me know. I plan to have the breeders listing available to send to anyone who inquires about these sheep. In addition to your address and phone numbers I'd also like to get a listing of your flock, number of ewes, number of rams, ewe lambs or rams lambs and any that are for sale. If you wish to I will include prices on the for sale animals.

Editors Notes

As I write this I still have 6 Black Welsh ewes to lamb. The lambs so far are looking very good. I'd love to hear about your lambing so send in your news.

That's it for now, take care and please, SEND ME STUFF FOR THE NEWSLETTER!

Oogie McGuire – Acting Editor

E-Mail oogiem@dsrtweyr.com