

# Black Welsh Mountain Sheep Club Newsletter September 2000

## Mrs. Brain Inspects US Sheep

Here is the letter sent to Mr. Wyman and reproduced with his permission about the inspection of his flock in April by the Breed Chairman, Mrs. Margaret Brain.

Visit to Wye Heights April 20-24, 2000

Having had time to consider all that I saw of the flock, I'd like to make the following observations. Bearing in mind that you cannot just buy replacement/alternate stock, the aim is to eliminate as far as possible any congenital "physical" faults i.e. those in the actual structure of the animals and to tolerate minor faults which will not affect its performance.

I liked your ewe flock very much, in general the ewes were long and deep, and typical size and shape for mountain sheep of this breed, and quite on par with the UK. Except in old and a very few younger, there was hardly any grey wool. The shearlings we handled were very black with no grey running through the fleece and no kemp (hair) either. Excellent mouths and feet, and on the whole quality heads with small ears. There are, in all flocks, a few exceptions, but you scored well in this area. I was, though, a little concerned about the horns or "scurs", as one of the ewes we discarded for this was otherwise, a lovely sheep. However a check through your records may reveal where this comes from. It doesn't affect the sheep, but is a breed point.

Now the ram flock. Whilst not having many major faults (two with turned out front feet and one light around the eyes) the males were not, in my opinion, as good overall as the females. Some did not seem to have quite enough "body" for their age, and I felt they needed a little more length and depth. They had very good mouths and feet, but the horns were a bit large and too heavy compared with UK rams.

All the lambs looked very good, I wondered where and how the discrepancy between the sexes occurred. Having chatted with Gordon about the system, I had a thought. He said that the lambs were weaned quite young. I suggest that the male lambs would benefit by having a bit longer to suckle. This would give them a bit more growing time and there is nothing like milk and grass for this. As weaning half is a nuisance I would leave them all. After all, the ewes might

just as well earn their keep – they have nothing else to do!

With reference to the rams' horns, there has been some work done here on the relation between feeding protein and horn growth. In trials, it was noticeable that high protein feed produced larger and heavier horns, whilst with lower protein, horns remained lighter and thinner. It might be worth investigating.

Apart from any of this, I feel strongly that after so many years, if you could import some well chosen new blood through semen straws, it could only be helpful. I will try to look out for some examples and take photos without obligation, for you to see.

I hope I haven't upset you with any of these comments, but I felt you would probably rather I said what I thought, as I had come out for this purpose. I was impressed by your sheep and indeed saw one or two I wouldn't have minded bringing home with me.

Margaret Brain  
Breed Chairman UK 1997-2000

## Report from the UK Newsletter

Attached is the version of the report on the flock inspection that was published in the UK newsletter.

April 2000 Visit to Wye Heights Flock (179)  
Maryland, USA.

The flock was started some 25 years ago by Mr. Thomas Wyman, with a draft of ewes and 3 rams from Lady Muriel Barclay Harvey. Meticulous records have been kept so the bloodlines can be checked, but the Americans do desperately need new blood. No cloven hoof animals are allowed into the States, but they can now import semen, and this will help them a lot.

Bearing in mind that they cannot just go out, as we can, and buy in a new ram if not happy with what they have, it was a case of checking for congenital physical faults i.e. mouths, feet legs etc., and eliminating these whilst being a bit tolerant of faults which do not actually harm a sheep's performance. Fortunately they seem to have escaped anything too major.

The ewe flock which numbered over 100, with some 30-40 shearlings, was in general, good

and very typical of the Breed here. Medium sized, with length and depth, quality heads with small ears and reasonable wool (this is as valueless in the U.S. as here). The breeding flock all had lambs at foot, mostly March born, with a few to come. Twins were commonest with the odd single and triplet and all looked good. These ewes were turned out in parklands, but easy to see, so I didn't handle them, but the overall impression was excellent.

Some of the shearlings were penned, so these were inspected individually. Conformation wise there was little wrong, except a few had horn buds or scurs. I found no white in the tails or fleeces, and not one bad mouth in any of these or the rams.

The rams as a bunch were not as good. Nothing really wrong, but the horns were too large and heavy without the curl. The younger rams would not have enough "body" for UK judges, and needed length. Out of about 20 I found one light around the eyes and two with turned out front feet, but back feet, and again mouths, were very good. It puzzled us as to why the ewes and lambs looked better than the rams, as the grass was good. However, talking to the shepherd, we learned they wean rather early. I suggested that they leave the lambs on longer for, as we all know, there is nothing like milk and grass to build bodies.

I hope Mr. Wyman felt the trip was worth while. He had been very worried that the type or size had altered. I was able to reassure him on both points, in fact some flocks here should be proud to have as many sheep so good. I saw several I wouldn't mind shipping home.

## 2000 Wool Pool

We're trying a new mill this year, it's one in Canada and closer for shipping plus the strength of the US dollar against the Canadian dollar makes the prices rather attractive.

The wool is at the mill now and we should be getting yarn back in another month or so. We have requested a thick 5-6 wpi 2 ply yarn suitable for rugs. This will coordinate well with the sportweight we already have for sweaters and other garments.

## Articles Needed

Please send in your news and comments and articles on things related to our sheep.

## Apology for Newsletter Delays

I apologize for the huge delay in getting this newsletter out to everyone. I am still planning on a total of 4 newsletters this year, this is number three and I hope to have the next and final one out in December with officer candidate information and voting data.

## Club Yarn Sales

Response to the small classified ads in Interweave Knits has been good, we have sold enough yarn to cover all the processing costs for Mr. Wyman's fleece donation. We are now starting to receive orders for yarn that will provide income to the club. Again thank you to Mr. Wyman for donating his fleeces.

It looks like we will have all of the club yarn sold by the end of the year.

## Answers to Lorraine Vissering's Letter

Here are two sets of answers to Lorraine's Questions, I'd love to print other people's opinions, just send them to me.

### From Stanley Ward Tilden Little Farm California 94563

#### 1) Personality traits of rams

An. All the BWM rams I have ever come across have always been very vigorous and active especially during the mating season. Although competitive by nature rams will generally only butt heads for the first few hours after meeting each other, then settle down to a dominant order, usually the older stronger males coming out on top. I have yet to come across one that has ever shown any aggression towards any person.

#### 2) Wild or tame

An. Welsh Mountain sheep in Wales are kept under very extensive conditions and roam the hills and valleys at will. Therefore the breed is very wild by nature but very tamable, with much care and attention, when brought into close confinement and handled regularly. My California flock of six BWM ewes and two rams has become very tame in just one year. It is however kept in a confined lowland pasture with much exposure to the public that visit the farm every day.

3) Flocking instinct strong or nonexistent

An. BWM sheep have an innate ability to fan out (over the Mountain) in one's and two's and find the very best of any thing to eat. When confronted by a sheep dog or any other kind of danger, their very strong flocking instinct leads them to group together and become very manageable in groups. They run fast and can cover very rough ground quite naturally with great ease and agility.

4) Crossbreeding with other sheep, which?

An. The color dominance of BWM sheep is very strong. During 10 years of farming in Wales I saw the cross bred progeny of a dozen or more different breed cross matings and always the black color was dominant. The conformation of the crosses varies considerably depending on the size and character of the other breed involved. In Britain it has long been recognized that the quickest way to get a black flock is to use BWM rams for two generations then cross back to another breed as wanted. The final generation always ended up black.

The breeds I have seen crossed with BWM are Llyn, Llanwenog, Clun, Kerry Hill, Hill Radnor, Beulah Speckled-faced, Welsh Halfbred, Scottish Blackface, Cheviot, Jacob, Southdown, Suffolk. In California last year I put one of my BWM rams to two dark gray Shetland (naturally short tailed) ewes, both produced jet black twins with tails almost as long as the pure bred BWM lambs.

In my opinion BWM rams have a great commercial potential for cross breeding for small, high quality, grass feed lamb production. The ewes can produce excellent F1 hybrid lambs from any of the "modern" terminal sire breeds. The ram lambs being slaughtered for meat and the ewe lambs being kept for F2 lamb production.

5) Wool quality

An. BWM wool should be in the mid range of quality high 40s to low 50s Bradford count\*. Most BWM in Britain produce hard-wearing relatively soft wool that is used for blankets, shawls and hosiery yarn. I still have woolly jumpers made from BWM wool over 20 years ago, from sheep I sheared myself, that are as good as the day they were made. Fleeces from ewes kept on a good diet in lowland conditions should weigh in at 3-4lbs, rams fleeces even as much as 5lb on a good day. From true mountain flocks fleeces tend to be much lighter (from smaller sheep) and have much coarser wool. Average staple length = 3-4in, and should show a good Demi-lustre (the sheen that is visible on the fiber) Colour is

black to faded brown depending on the amount of sun light the fleeces are exposed to when on the sheep's back. In Wales the wool is known as gwlan coch-ddu = red-black wool. Mixed with white wool to varying degrees some lovely shades of gray can be achieved.

\*Bradford count is a scale which denotes the fineness of wool expressed by a number. True mountain breeds have low counts high 20s to low 30s. Shetland wool ranges as high as the low 60s and Merino wool into the 70s. Each value denotes the theoretical number of hanks of yarn which a pound of wool could be spun into. (1 hank = 560 yards). Thus one pound of wool at a Bradford count of 52 could be theoretically spun into a length of yarn  $52 \times 560 \text{ yards} = 29,120 \text{ yd.} = 87,360 \text{ ft.}$  If this is too much to take in just remember fine wool has a high count and coarse wool a low count.

I must confess to being very disappointed with the quality of the fleeces on many American BWM sheep. It varies from poor to low, bordering on medium quality wool, with very low weights. Fortunately my young ram has an excellent high quality fleece and will no doubt much improve the flock next year. Definitely much room for improvement in fleece quality on this side of the country.

6) Getting started with BWM

An. Start small and build up numbers by breeding your own lambs. Decide how much you can afford to spend, then find the best animals you can at that price. Much better to have 3 good ewes and 1 nice ram as a foundation flock, than 12 poor ewes and some old ram that has never been much good. Check that the animals are sound in wind and limb and a full set of teeth. Try and make good friends with an experienced shepherd who will help you with the practical details. And don't forget, livestock breeding has its disappointments, breeding good animals takes many generations and a great deal of patience.

7) Running sheep and goats together.

An. If sheep and goats grow up together from a young age they will mix very well into one flock. Horned goats are sometimes run with sheep flocks in Britain to protect them from marauding dogs. I run a flock of 4 milking goats (2 Alpine and 2 Nubian) they will not mix with the sheep at all and constantly butt heads. I have to run the two flocks in separate corrals and pastures. The animal husbandry for both types of animal is very similar.

8) Line breeding

An. Its a long story. This one will have to wait for

the next newsletter, it is late and my six month old daughter grows impatient.

### From Oogie McGuire

#### 1) Personality traits of rams

An. All the BWM rams I have owned and kept have been real gentlemen. They will discuss dominance but are not fence bashers or generally difficult. In my situation I keep rams in pens adjacent to the ewes and I've not had any problems with them. I have had one ram challenge me, not actually butt but stand up to me. He was butchered immediately as I consider their gentle nature to be a prime breed characteristic. I do not like rams to run up to me unless I call them and then only with their noses high in the air. Rams that come at me heads down are candidates for the freezer.

#### 2) Wild or tame

An. Hard to decide, they are wild if not handled but tame down readily. They are independent but trainable.

#### 3) Flocking instinct strong or nonexistent

An. I do not think they flock at all, I cannot herd them with any success but I can train them to come when called and to move as I require. When pushed or threatened in the manner used to move typical big white sheep the BWMS fan out in all directions and scatter. They do not care to stay with their buddies and are very independent.

#### 4) Crossbreeding with other sheep, which?

An. I have done crossing with Shetland, Barbados and Southdown. All produced nice black lambs. I also have some crosses of Scottish Blackface with the BWMS. To prevent any problems with crossbred animals entering the purebred ranks I automatically dock the tails of all crossbreds. They are good eating but not as tasty as the purebred animals. Wool quality on the Shetland crosses is much finer.

#### 5) Wool quality and Uses

An. BWMS wool is supposed to be medium with micron sizes of 33-26. However I find that all of the animals in the US have poor to average fleece quality. We have lost the softness and length of fiber that seems to be standard in the UK. We also have many kempy fleeces here in the US. I have not yet sent in any fleece samples for micron testing but plan to do so in the next few years to see where we really stand. Micron testing is only valid on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and later shearings.

I have used the wool for felting, knitting and have just started weaving. It makes sturdy warm

durable outer garments but I would not want it next to my skin. It is a dense dark black with reddish highlights.

#### 6) Breeding for preservation

An. First there is no real way to do that unless you have a basic knowledge of Mendelian genetics and a willingness to document and track individual animals very carefully. To calculate which "lines" your animals are in you must first calculate the inbreeding coefficient of each animal. Then you must use that to calculate the relatedness of each animal to all others in your flock. Group the most related animals together as a line and go from there. Once you have assigned bloodline groups to each animal you then use that to plan matings for your flock. The goal is to alternate between line breeding and line crossing to maintain as much genetic diversity as you can while not increasing inbreeding coefficients too badly at each generation. It takes a minimum of 3 lines with at least 10 females in each line and at least 6 males, 2 of each line to have a sustainable population for the long term.

The best description for the lay person of conservation breeding is in the "Conservation Breeding Handbook" put out by the American Livestock Breed Conservancy. I suggest that everyone with BWMS sheep purchase this informative book.

Conventional wisdom says that you should keep inbreeding coefficients in the entire flock to less than 5-6%. There are significant known deleterious effects from increased inbreeding. However, in the US Black Welsh population those animals I have calculated the inbreeding on have ranged from a low of 5% up as high as 45%. I do not have complete and accurate pedigree data on the animals with low inbreeding so I suspect the figures are completely inaccurate for those animals. Clearly it will take special care to prevent the inbreeding from increasing to the point the breed loses viability.

Define your breeding goals and then pick animals that will enable you to reach those goals. There are wide ranges in quality of animals and their prices. Learn the bloodlines available in the US and buy the best you can afford within the bloodlines that meet your goals. Forge relationships with other breeders who share similar goals so you can trade animals back and forth and have a place to go for outcross blood.

My personal goal is to produce true dual-purpose sheep with easygoing temperaments that possess enough genetic diversity to be a

sustainable breeding population. So, I am blending flocks that were selected for wool quality with those selected for meatiness and those selected for pets to get what I want. Other people will have different goals.

If you have not yet defined your goals then it is high time to do so. Breeding animals without a clear goal in mind is a sure recipe for disappointment. There are enough problems in animal breeding even with a clear goal and a plan to get there, don't handicap yourself by neglecting this most important first step.

7) Who has the oldest BWM ewe out there?  
An. The oldest ewe I own is 13. I got her last year and she did not lamb this year but was in poor condition when I got her. She will get another chance this fall. If she does not conceive then she will be butchered. I had several 10 yr. old ewes give birth to both singles and twins this year. Fecundity seems poor, one consequence of inbreeding, as most BWMS ewes give birth to singles and most are either not put to a ram as lambs or don't breed as lambs. Most of the ewes I have bought have never twinned before I got them yet I got many twins this year. Proper feeding and flushing seems to increase the twinning rates considerably.

8) Running sheep and goats together.  
An. I have done it in the past but not recently. When I did this I always kept the polled animals with other polled animals and the horned animals with other horned animals.

Anyone else want to comment on these questions from their experience please do so and I'll print the answers in the next newsletter.

### **Officer Candidates Needed**

As we near the end of the year we need people to run for all the major offices in the club. In addition to the President, Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer we have a great need for board members. Please either nominate yourself or find someone willing to serve and send in your notes about yourself to the Club PO Box for inclusion in the next newsletter.

As a personal note, I would be honored to continue to serve as the Secretary/Treasurer and will be running for that office. But I'd love competition in the voting! So, send in your nominations.

Nominations must be received by November 15 in order to be included in the December newsletter. Nominations can be sent to either Club Post Box.

### **Club Dues**

Our club has dues payable at the beginning of the year. Only current paid members will get a ballot to vote for officers. As I plan to send out officer information and voting in December in compliance with our bylaws it would be helpful for members to send in membership renewals soon.

### **Club Donors**

I keep an ongoing list of members who have graciously donated extra to help the club. No new entries this month but previous donations are gratefully acknowledged.

### **Club Post Office Box**

I will be moving to Colorado later this fall. To accommodate the move I have already arranged for a new Club Post Office Box in my new location. The new address will be:

North American Black Welsh Mountain Sheep Club  
P.O. Box 534  
Paonia, CO 81428-0534

It is open now and club business can be sent to either location as I have a way of collecting mail there when I am in California and vice versa. At this time we anticipate that the Club post box here in California will be closed the end of October. I will put in a forwarding order so items sent after that date should still reach us in Colorado.

This move is a direct result of my personal situation. The club has not incurred any additional expenses as a result of this change as I will personally pay for the extra expense involved.

### **Comment on Ewes with Scurs**

**Oogie McGuire** sent a letter to both Mrs. Brain and Mr. Wyman regarding the scurs on ewes. The concern is that while scurs are a severe breed fault, and need to be discouraged, unfortunately in all the sheep she has tested for scrapie resistance at codon 171 the ewes who are resistant are invariably the ones with scurs. A concern in any breed with such a small gene pool is the selection for or against any one trait can inadvertently lead to the loss of other important traits. This could happen if we move to eliminate the ewes' scurs too quickly. She urged the testing of potential culls for scurs so we don't

lose the rare R allele in our zeal to eliminate the scurs.

## Pedigree Data

**Tom Wyman** has provided me with additional pedigree data. If you have any of these animals in the background of your sheep you may wish to add this to your pedigree papers.

0000N92E179 (S) 30 April 1984  
(0000M115R179 (TW) x 0000H43E179 (S))

0000N64E179 (S) 1 April 1984 (0000K107R179 (TW) x 0000L76E179 (TW))

## Member News

**Oogie McGuire** reports that the new flock arrived from VA and looks good. In particular some of the fleeces were better than the average in the US west coast animals. The 2 UK semen sired lambs are grown and maintain their excellent conformation and especially much improved fleece quality. We will be breeding them this fall. Her flock is currently at over 100 ewes and 30 rams.

## Un-Classified Ads

If you wish to offer something for sale or wanted send it to me and I'll put it in the next newsletter. For now no charge to members to list animals, yarn, hides or other products from BWMS sheep. We may change this if the list gets too large. All ads will also be posted on the [www.blackwelsh.com](http://www.blackwelsh.com) web site.

### Oogie McGuire - Wanted

Transport for 5 ewes plus 5 lambs from Ramona CA to Berkeley CA. Transport for 1 ewe

and 1 lamb to Washington State. If you are going north and have room let me know.

**NA BWMS Club** - 2 ply sportweight yarn  
\$2.00/oz full cones sizes vary or  
\$2.25/oz partial cones

### Oogie McGuire

1 prepared skull with horn caps \$75  
12 ewes and ewe lambs \$100-275 ea.  
2 QR ram lambs \$250 each  
11 QQ ram lambs \$75 each  
2 tanned hides from purebreds

That's all the ads I have right now.

## Secretary/Treasurer Notes

Club bank balance is currently at \$516.99 before taking out the costs of publication for this newsletter.

At this time we have 21 Individual Voting members and one Individual Associate member.

I will be moving later this fall to Colorado. Because the club address and bank account will have to be transferred so I can maintain them and because it is due to my personal situation not anything the club has requested I personally will cover all extra costs incurred as a result of this move.

## Editors Notes

Please send articles, we need them.

Send info to [oogiem@dsrtweyr.com](mailto:oogiem@dsrtweyr.com)