

Bonny Doon

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Sturdy, Friendly Llamas Impressive To Park Officials

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Llamas, according to those who know these four-footed herbivores well, make perfect pets.

At least that's the collective opinion of Eric Hoffman, Cecile Champagne and their 9-year-old boy, Gregory, who reside with eight of the loveable creatures on their Bonny Doon ranch.

With their soft brown eyes, friendly dispositions and tendency to nuzzle a person about the face, it's easy to fall for llamas.

Their advantages over other pets include their small appetites (they eat less than horses) and the ease in which they train and take commands, Hoffmann pointed out.

Llamas have little odor, don't get sick, don't bite (because they have few teeth, being herbivores), don't forget commands once they are taught, and don't have to be shod.

Even the common belief that all llamas spit is largely unfounded, Champagne noted.

"The only offensive thing they do is spit, and pet llamas don't spit. Only the ones in zoos, that have been teased a lot, will wad one on you," she said.

They also make great jogging partners, Hoffmann added, explaining that he jogged three miles a day with an adult llama, Sunny.

"He's a very good jogging partner. He goes right at your pace, slowing down when you do and speeding up when you do."

And Hoffmann also has discovered another advantage to llamas — the use of these hardy creatures as pack animals.

Presently, the National Park Service allows hikers to pack through many national parks with mules. But they recently conducted an experiment with Hoffmann hiking 110 miles with 'Sunny' as his pack animal.

Mules have a tendency to denude meadowlands with their heavy grazing, and to tear up the land with their shod hooves, Hoffman said. The park service wanted to see if llamas had less of an impact on the environment.

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the men hiked 26 miles in the pouring rain.

"We went up Mount Whitney without stopping once. It's the largest mountain in the continental United States and the largest in the northern hemisphere outside Alaska.

"I think we proved our point. The park service doesn't let any other pack animals past 12,000 feet and they let us go all the way up. 'Sunny' had to go through snowfields and through a lot of loose granite," Hoffman explained.

The success of the experiment may not be good news to mule packers, a popular and powerful interest group, Hoffman added. "We didn't get friendly vibes from them. They thought we were bringing in an exotic animal," said Hoffman.

The only disadvantage noted on the trip was that mules spook when they spot a llama, he said.

But, the National Park Ser-

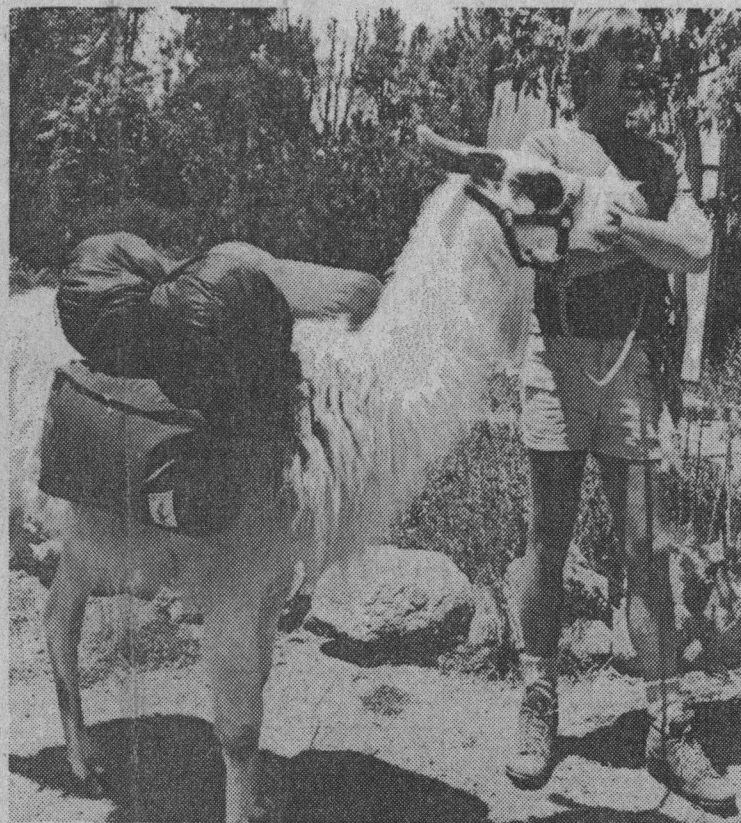
vice apparently was pleased because one of their researchers wants to do a more sophisticated experiment next year on the impact on meadows using llamas compared to using mules.

'Sunny's' endurance came as no surprise, Champagne added. "Llamas have been used as pack animals for 2,000 years in South America."

And they no longer can be considered exotic and imported pets for all the llamas in the United States have been born here. It's been against the law to import them since 1936, Champagne explained.

Breeding llamas, like this Bonny Doon family does, is becoming quite a business. One of the largest llama ranches in the nation, for instance, is in Watsonville.

So for about \$4,000 a pair, maybe the next time you think about getting a pet, you might consider a llama or two.



Eric Hoffman, who packed 110 miles through the Sierra with 'Sunny,' has won a friend.



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Hoffman and 'Sunny' were joined by veterinarian students Rolland Regnery and Bill Arnold in hiking nine days through Sequoia National Park from Mineral King to the 14,450-foot summit of Mount Whitney.

"Llamas have increased in popularity as pets, so we asked the National Park Service if we could take 'Sunny' through Sequoia National Park.

"They (the park service) wanted to watch how he did, what he ate and how he compared with other pack animals," Hoffman said.

According to Hoffman, the trip was a complete success, with 'Sunny' tirelessly carrying 60 pounds of equipment. The last day of the trip, 'Sunny' and



When a llama is made to lie down, one becomes his master, Hoffman demonstrates.



Three of the Bonny Doon family's eight llamas graze and relax on ranch.



'Sunny' poses.