

From the  
Premier Breeder  
of British Registered  
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

# Viewpoint

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

## Travelers' Tales

by Christine Williams and Kathie Miller

**"I opened the gate to drive out of the barnyard and the ewe flew past me and ran away into the mountains."**

It was a very distressing email indeed. It went on, "we chased her for three and a half hours and now she is two miles from home and I will never get her back." "She does not know these clever little sheep," I thought, and wrote her the following two stories.

"AWOL" was not his given name. He was an undersized castrate who was always browsing and had a habit of standing on tip-toe to reach any hedgerow foliage. We had a VERY high muck heap he climbed to reach tasty leaves.

One very foggy and dark November evening, I had a

phone call from my neighbour to say that one of my sheep was on the main road and had been hit by a car! I said, "No way." I am well-

fenced and my sheep do not get out. He said that if it was not mine it was very similar to my sheep. This was 10 o'clock at night. We went to the main road with torches (flashlights) and in the fog just managed to see a SOAY running along the road. We tried to head him off but he disappeared.

In the morning I took a count and realised the little castrate was not there. We then realised that he had got over the fence where the muck heap was so high. I went everywhere in



AWOL

the car looking for him and was told that he had been seen two miles away in a valley in a big field. Over the next few days there were other sightings and I also saw him. Although he had always been the first to come to a bucket of food, he was so traumatised now that he bolted when I approached. Food did not interest him in strange surroundings. Then, there was no sign of him at all.

Two weeks later there was a phone call from another neighbour to say that a sheep was along the road near our lane. I got to the top of the lane just as he was walking towards me. I stood in his way so he went down our track (driveway), turned into the yard and waited by the gate to the field that he had escaped from.

See "Travelers" page 2



AWOL is out there... but where?

## An Early Lesson

by Kathie Miller

**To a Soay, a gap in the fence or a gate that is open just a crack is an open invitation.**

It's an escape route, no matter how small and no matter what is in the way. If it is you, that is a problem.

I learned this the hard way on my first visit to a sheep farm. Standing in the doorway of a small shed I was listening intently to what the shepherd inside had to say. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed a very small ewe that

seemed to be eying the space between me and the door jamb, so I positioned myself to block her.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, Soay can jump like fleas. Before I knew what had happened, the ewe had hit me full force in the chest, plowed me over and knocked the wind out of me. To add insult to injury, she kicked me in the head as she went over. I lay on the ground with my friends laughing, my pride more wounded than my body,

wondering just what had happened. After all, I weighed four times more than she did.

Whenever I open a gate I recall this incident. In those instances when I cannot get out of the way, I make sure my knees are turned away from the sheep so they don't get banged by horns going by. I have nearly had this same scenario happen to my visitors and so this story is usually the first one I tell them. ☺

## RESOURCES

### Database Software

*Breeders Assistant Generic* is a software package from the UK that you can purchase online. It is very easy to use and its features include pedigrees, open data access, genetics, inbreeding, database, trial pedigrees, reverse pedigrees and much more. It is a marvelous tool for managing your flock and for planning your breeding program. It is also useful in helping you determine which lambs will make the best combinations for starter flocks for your buyers.

Pricing:  
Breeders Assistant Generic  
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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.

## Travelers *continued from page 1*

From that day onwards he has been called AWOL, and although due to go for slaughter, has remained with us. He is six years old now and never left home again.

Across the pond a year or two later Val was forced to evacuate the flock from her farm because of repeated cougar predation. “We will find them new homes by tonight” I promised. My friend Corinne was scheduled to get a starter flock the following summer, but she lived fairly close to me so I called her on the chance that she might be able to re-home four wethers on short notice. Although her shelters were not ready, her fencing was and she agreed to take them. At 5:00 I pulled into her driveway. We turned them loose in her field and I headed home exhausted. She was so excited. That night the worst electrical storm in memory struck a little after dark. When it had passed, Corinne went to check her new arrivals only to find the field empty. There wasn’t a trace of them anywhere. In their terror, and unfamiliar

with their new home, they must have jumped the fence and run away.

For two days she put food and water outside the back gate and her daughter laid a trail of treats up the mountainside behind the house,



Tamarack back at home  
Photo by Corinne Fitzpatrick

hoping they would follow it home. On the third day, they were surprised to see two sheep standing at the back fence, waiting to be let in. This had been their home for less than 24 hours, but still, somehow, they knew. Two were still missing, however, and as the days passed hope faded that they would return. The nearby forest was full of predators—coyotes, cougars and bears—and in a huge wilderness they could easily get lost. Resigned to their fate, Corinne concentrated

her energies on making “Tamarack” and “Retama” comfortable in their new home.

Early one morning, while looking out the window to her field below, she was upset to see one of the boys was loose again, running outside the fence along the road. Suddenly, she realized the sheep were both in the field where they belonged. Somehow “Madrone” had survived and found his way back three weeks after the storm. With the help of the neighbors, he was herded into a pen across the street where he could be caught and returned to the pasture with his brothers. “Elm” never returned, but against all odds, three of the four had found their way home.

Winter is coming to the mountains where my email friend lives. The ewe has been spotted two miles away again, and I just bet one morning she will wake up to see her waiting outside the barnyard gate. Never underestimate the resourcefulness of these little Soay sheep, and never chase them. 🐑

## SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

- ❑ With cooler weather and shorter days, the rut is fast approaching. Make repairs to fences and breeding pens, correct problem areas from last year.
- ❑ Continue barnyard clean up.
- ❑ Start preparing for winter. Put up gutters or clean out the ones you have.
- ❑ Begin planning fall breeding groups. Consider purchasing database software.

## TIP OF THE MONTH

**When your garden is overflowing with zucchini (courgettes), throw them to the sheep. They love them.**