

A Report on the 2011 Pack Llama Festival by Alexa Metrick and Charlie Hackbarth



About a month ago, eighty-three llama packing enthusiasts gathered in beautiful Silverton, Colorado to talk shop. What a weekend! Old friendships were rekindled, new ones were made, and a dedicated group of people, a group of people who understand the qualities and the value of the working llama, were united. Because all of the participants were so willing to share ideas and knowledge, we were able to make real progress toward re-defining the sport of llama packing.

We measure the success of the 2011 Pack Llama Festival in these terms: fantastic weather and fresh air, absolutely phenomenal mountain scenery, a great group of people, and real discussions. The experts were everything we promised and more; the effective delivery of ideas and the wealth of information given by the wise veterans and impressive young adults completely exceeded our expectations. But it was not just the experts who made this festival so fantastic; all of the attendees, whether beginners or experienced experts in their own right, contributed to the free exchange of opinions, information, and ideas. It was a once-in-a-lifetime gathering, and one we won't soon forget!

The Pack Llama Trials Association played a huge part in the Festival. The result of PLTA's financial sponsorship and hard work in planning and implementing PLTA's activities was evident in the success of the weekend as a whole. We were able to demonstrate safe procedures for training and handling pack llamas and also display the abilities of the working llama first-hand through four outstanding courses, two of which went up the mountain directly from the Festival site.

The Festival website, <http://packllamafestival.rentallama.com>, is now becoming a repository for photos, videos, lecture notes, and camp cook recipes from the weekend. Alexa will be adding things as she gets them processed, so be sure to check the website or Rent-A-Llama.com's facebook page for updates.

There are several concepts that surfaced continually in our discussions throughout the weekend, the most important of which is the idea that regardless of the type of packing we do, we all have something to bring to the table. Many different iterations of the sport were represented this weekend, from performance showing to day hiking, from overnight family camping to commercial outfitting, and a wide range of intensity and experience were displayed in each category. But we all pack with llamas, and a certain level of knowledge about the packing process is required to achieve success at any level. We all have more to learn, but we all contribute something, too.

This also means that if we aren't willing to take the time to educate ourselves, we shouldn't be involved with using, buying, raising and/or selling llamas for packing. It's simply not good for the sport. At the same time, if we do breed, while we should always

strive to breed up to improve our pack stock, we need to recognize that not all llamas will make the top-tier cut. Those that fall short can fill needs at different levels, and this is where being able to match a handler's expectations to a llama's ability (whether renting, buying, or selling) is essential.

We hope to receive more comments about the 2011 Pack Llama Festival from those who attended. Hopefully, the Festival website will become a destination for sharing the knowledge and enthusiasm that was on display September 22-25 in Silverton, Colorado. And, finally, we'd like to again thank all the people and organizations who supported us and helped us cover our costs.

Some are wondering if we are going to do this again in the future. While it may not be organized by the same folks, the seed has been planted, the blueprint is available for anyone to use, and positive ideas are flowing around the country that will result in good things happening in the world of llama packing.