

2009 Backcountry Llama Association Rendezvous

The annual Backcountry Llama Rendezvous organized by Rattlesnake Ridge Ranch has come and gone for 2009. This year saw a number of changes from previous years. To provide a change of scenery and different travel options for attendees, the location was moved from Emigrant Springs, Oregon where it was held the past two years, to Ensign Ranch in Cle Elum, Washington. Changing to this location required a change in timing from Spring to Fall, post Labor Day. The second weekend of September provided excellent weather – sunny, calm and warm with daytime highs in the 80F degree range.



Ensign Ranch paved paths

The setting was forest land with lots of trails, creeks, lakes, dirt roads, and paved paths for non-motorized travel. It was a perfect setting for driving llamas but unfortunately no llama carts showed up this year.

Organizers Scott and Gayle Noga arrived on Wednesday afternoon to prepare the grounds for the activities. Valued helpers from Exotic Animal Rescue in Hermiston, Oregon, arrived on Thursday to assist. Reinstated this year was an official Pack Llama Trial Association (PLTA) pack trial in Basic, Advanced and Master classes. Scott spent all day Thursday mapping and marking the Advanced and Master courses on the opposite side of the nearby Yakima River, while course stewards mapped and marked the Basic course on the Ensign Ranch grounds. Friday was spent laying out course obstacles and certifying the courses with PLTA

course certifier, Lisa Wolf. GPS Treasure Hunt flags were also planted around the grounds providing opportunity to hone GPS skills while gaining playing cards to build a poker hand for prizes.

Friday afternoon and into evening participants arrived to set up camp near the Yakima River, stake out llamas, and sit down around the campfire to a meal of homemade sloppy joes (which Gayle prepared from fresh organic garden vegetables – not from the can – in both meat and vegan), and homemade root beer, with many side dishes to choose from. Following introductions and other preliminaries, attendees gathered at the outdoor amphitheater for a showing of a documentary on the annual “[Running of the Llamas](http://www.runningllamas.com/)” held in Hammond, Wisconsin. See <http://www.runningllamas.com/> for details and a video trailer. This annual event has similarities to the PLTA pack trials, with beginner and seasoned llamas paired with handlers to test their mettle on an established course, drawing competitors from across the country vying for achievement and award, though purely for entertainment purposes.



Llamas meet Horses

Saturday morning was greeted with a hot breakfast of Gayle's homemade Pumpkin Pecan pancakes with wild huckleberry whole fruit syrup, made fresh that morning, served with sausage patties, bacon, eggs-to-order and hash browns. Varied fruits and juices were also available. A build-your-own sack lunch was provided for the day's activities. As usual, there was no shortage of good food and good company.

Anne Sheeter provided a great basic llama packing seminar as PLTA pack trial participants prepared to hit the trail. Master level set out first, followed by Advanced and then Basic level. Non-PLTA participants were then free to run the Basic course as a poker run. All who mastered the course obstacles, PLTA or not, earned playing cards.

Obstacles were varied and challenging, mostly set in shady and scenic forest, with the usual step-overs and bushwhacking supplemented with negotiating a low dark culvert underneath a noisy freeway, squishy mud, primitive shelters, and water obstacles that included forging the broad and swift Yakima river. Llamas also ventured into teepees and crossed bridges of various types.



Part of the Master pack trial course



Joyce and Ida emerge from the river crossing

As trials were concluding a group of about 60 special needs adults and assistants visited camp for about two hours, taking lots of pictures and video as they interacted with the llamas, hosted by the Exotic Animal Rescue folks and their rescued PR llamas, which included one llama youngster, Bob. The group rented the camp lodge this same weekend and the visit with the llamas was an unexpected highlight of their stay.

A variety of informational seminars were provided following the trials and poker run. Debra Langley-Boyer taught wilderness survival techniques should one get lost or caught in unexpected conditions, followed by a get connected llama training introductory seminar taught by Jim Krowka, and a pack llama performance seminar taught by Gwen Ingram. A build-your-own

As usual a tremendous amount of valuable information was conveyed.

Saturday dinner was potluck, with lots of great and varied food and beverage prepared by many hands and company enjoyed around the campfire, followed by the awards ceremony at the Lockamora amphitheater. As in previous years playing cards combined from the poker run and GPS treasure hunts built hands that determined the order participants got to choose their prize from the available selection.

Sunday breakfast included oatmeal, along with pancakes, huckleberry syrup, eggs, sausage, bacon fruit and juice, with most folks soon thereafter pulling up stakes to head home. A small group stayed all day Sunday to help with tear-down and clean-up. With much of this work completed by afternoon, people got



Leaping Llamas

the itch to cool off in the clear water of the Yakima River and headed to the Lockamora swimming hole. While playing in the water, a sighting of the legendary Lockamora Monster occurred, just as described in late night campfire stories in the Lockamora campsite over the many years of girls and boys camp! Only it wasn't one monster that was sighted, but two! Squeals erupted among the swimmers as they marveled at this rare and surprising sight among them, which quickly drew people from both sides of the river from far and wide as word spread like wildfire when a nearby fisherman who happened upon the scene ran to the camp officials to alert them of the spectacle. Afterwards, the soggy coiffures of Pharaoh and Sno revealed the pranksters for what they were, a pair of llamas paddling around the swimming hole among their human counterparts, with only their long necks and heads exposed above the waterline.

I should mention that Pharaoh started packing with us only last year, where I discovered he was so concerned about water and getting his feet wet that he would leap across creeks (the same guy that jumps our fences like they aren't there) rather than walk through them. It took some work just to get him to try it. Now this year he's swimming and playing in the water. Llamas can be remarkably adaptable at any age, as intelligent as they are.

The post-rendezvous pack trip got underway on Monday with a drive to nearby Pete Lake trail head in the Alpine Lakes region of the Cascades. The group enjoyed great weather, the mosquitoes were virtually nonexistent, and the lake was unpopulated which provided free choice of campsites. Grass was tall, green and plentiful for the llamas, as were the abundant and tasty berry bushes. An inflatable raft was included in the packed goods for relaxing lake excursions and a day hike made to nearby waterfalls.



The Lockamora Monster

All-in-all, the rendezvous was an enjoyable opportunity for varied activities with our working llamas! The crowd was again smaller this year, with about 35 total participants. Planning is already underway for next year. Send your comments, suggestions and any offers of assistance to Rattlesnake Ridge Ranch. Only together can we make this a sustainable event.

Scott & Gayle Noga

See <http://www.rattlesnakeridgeranch.com/rendezvous09.htm> for more details and lots of pictures.