

Miniature Llamas Come to Canada

By Lavinia Stevens

In August 2007 the first breeding herd of registered miniature llamas arrived at our farm in Victoria, B.C. The herd of three males, five females and three cria had travelled from their home farms in Iowa and Minnesota, through U.S. quarantine in Oregon, to their new home in the Westshore area of Victoria. This marked the first known importation of ILR/AMLA-registered miniature llamas into Canada. The quarantine period finally ended in mid-November when Canadian government vets completed their testing and released the animals to mix freely with other resident llamas.



Millstream Llama Farm in Victoria, B.C.

How It All Began

We live on a six acre farm in the Westshore area of Victoria, B.C. and purchased our first llama (Wallace) in 1993, as well as two goats to keep him company.

Our emphasis initially was on pet therapy as well as breeding classic llamas. Fourteen years later Wallace is still our main therapy llama and by now he has visited most of the local hospitals and retirement homes. For the past thirteen years he has also been an active participant in a local church Christmas pageant. In 2000 Wallace took part in a film series called "Healing with Animals", which has been shown repeatedly on the Knowledge Network channel across Canada. As a result of



Mini vs. Large
(Photo Courtesy of Bridgeview Llamas)

that film he was invited to appear live on the Vicki Gabereau show (a daily talk show from Vancouver, B.C.)

We operate a bed and breakfast in our farmhouse and many of our guests choose to stay with us so they have the opportunity to interact with our llamas and alpacas. We had ten standard llamas and three alpacas before downsizing the full-size herd to accommodate the miniature llamas. Our "marital agreement" allows up to twelve animals, with two alpacas being equal to one llama!

We first read about miniature llamas in an article in LlamaLink magazine and thought that they would be a great addition to our farm. Our research started and after studying the American Miniature Llama Association (AMLA) website and the fascinating websites of numerous mini llama farms, we decided to visit the U.S. and see the animals for ourselves. Given the difficulty and expense involved in importing animals into Canada, we wanted to be as sure as possible that our starter herd were true miniatures, and that they would produce miniature offspring. The research involved a lot of website review and email correspondence. The ILR website database proved an extremely useful and convenient source of information. Naturally the fact that animal height data have not been routinely collected in the industry made it difficult to establish whether some animals had true miniature bloodlines.

In April we travelled through Kentucky, Iowa and Minnesota, and purchased three males and five bred females – all with different bloodlines. The transport timing was complicated due to the fact that two

of the selected females had to be confirmed as bred before leaving their home farm, and the other three females were due to give birth at various dates that summer. In the end one cria was born in Minnesota, one in quarantine in Oregon, and the third shortly after arriving at our farm in British Columbia – a truly international herd! To date we have had three beautiful female cria with two more due in spring 2008.

Our herd arrived in British Columbia on August 28th. and remained in quarantine until mid-November. Dealing with two federal governments, the paperwork, U.S. quarantine, Canadian quarantine, and transporting, was a real learning adventure. Special thanks to Stan Jacobs of Upper Highland Llamas in Oregon for handling the transport and U.S. quarantine and for bringing the herd to our farm.

What Are Miniature Llamas?

A miniature llama (mini) is one that is small in size but still retains all the characteristics of a standard llama. Miniature llamas should possess the same correctness of conformation, movement and balance as large llamas. In other words minis are NOT large llamas with short legs or necks. The bone, head size, length of neck, back and leg should remain proportionate and give the impression of a small replica of a large llama.

Why Breed Miniature Llamas?

How often have you heard someone comment that, while they like the characteristics of llamas, they find their overall size intimidating? Quite a few such people go on to purchase alpacas for that very reason. The mini llama overcomes that concern completely. The minis require less pasture, eat less hay, and need less barn space per animal. Despite their small size, minis can still cart, pack, show in halter classes and perform in obstacle courses, just like their bigger brothers and sisters.

Minis also produce the same wonderful fibre as large llamas, and are generally easier to shear because the shearer does not have to reach so high, or struggle to reach over the animal's back. They are particularly well suited for children or smaller adults to work with. Finally, minis are irresistibly cute!

Registration Controls for Minis

Mini llamas are now recognized by the International Llama Registry (ILR) and are registered with the American Miniature Llama Association (AMLA, www.miniaturellamas.com). The AMLA was first formed in 1999 by breeders interested in breeding small llamas, and now sets the standards for mini llamas. The AMLA has an agreement with the ILR to use their registry system. ILR now has a search button for wither height included in their database search. To access the ILR database, you need to be a current ILR member and will need to log on with your owner ID and password.

Miniature Llama Standards

A llama can be registered as a miniature any time after registration with the International Llama Registry. However, final miniature status is granted only to animals three years of age or older. A mini llama may be registered in one of three classifications:

1. **Miniature Llama** Llamas three years of age or older that measure no more than 38 inches at the withers may be registered as miniature llamas.
2. **Miniature Foundation Stock** Only female llamas that are used in a breeding program for producing miniature llamas but exceed the 38 inch height standard for miniatures by no more than two inches or forty inches maximum height may be registered as foundation stock. This standard was set by the Association in recognition of the fact that height is a genetic trait and breeding down is a realistic approach to developing miniature llamas.



Poco Rojo (ET)

3. **Immature** A llama under 3 years of age may be registered only if its mother is a registered, mature, mini llama or the mother is registered foundation stock, and the father is a registered mini llama.

Measuring The All-Important Height (As described by the AMLA)

Have your llama stand squarely on a level surface next to a wall. Take a carpenter's level and lay it over the llama's back at the withers (on the shoulders just where the neck joins). Let one end of the level touch the wall and get the bubble in the middle. Then make a mark on the wall under the end of the level. Now you can move the llama out of the way and measure up the wall to the mark. This is a fairly simple way to accurately measure the height of your llama.

Miniature Llamas are Rare

As of November 2007 there were only 125 foundation minis, 194 immature minis and 340 mature miniature llamas registered in the USA and Canada, for a total of only 659 miniature llamas. This compares with a reported 7,000 large llamas in Canada and 160,000 in the U.S.

The internet is by far the best source of easily available information on finding mini llamas, and for researching their backgrounds. Obvious starting points are the AMLA and the ILR websites. The AMLA site contains a complete and up to date listing of all mini llama owners, complete with names, street addresses, email and (often) website addresses.

Breeders' websites listed by the AMLA, plus internet searches, will give enough leads to begin detailed research. Obviously buyers who wish to start their



Hot Shot's Van Gogh

own breeding operations will want to ensure that they purchase llamas whose parents and grandparents are small. The more minis that can be traced in a miniature llamas' background, the more valuable that llama becomes.

A first generation mini is a llama that has remained small, but has large parents. First generation minis are a potential risk because a mini breeder does not know if the offspring will be mini or large. The only way to find out is to breed them and wait. After three years of age the breeder will truly know if the offspring is a mini or not. Some of the more established breeders within the AMLA are now breeding sixth generation minis.

A person who does not want to deal with this long drawn out process of waiting to see if his first generation mini will produce small offspring should go to an AMLA member's farm and look for a multi-generation miniature llama. This llama might cost more but, in the long run, will save a lot of time and possibly money.

Importing Minis Into Canada

Importing miniature llamas into Canada from the U.S. follows the same process as for large llamas. Explaining the process in detail is beyond the scope of this article, but you will need a transporter, a quarantine farm in the U.S. (usually close the U.S./Canada border), and quarantine facilities on a Canadian farm. Setting up an approved quarantine facility on your own farm is not too onerous. Simple fencing and housing for a period of about 60 to 70 days is required, separated from your other animals and from your exterior fencing by at least 30 ft. We used 7ft. steel tee posts driven in, with 4ft. stucco wire as temporary fencing, and simple 10 ft. square lawn gazebo tents as temporary shelters.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) takes the lead role in inspecting and approving your quarantine facilities in Canada and is usually helpful. Probably the biggest headache will occur at the border when you try to bring your animals into Canada. While the CFIA personnel at the border are helpful, dealing with the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) may require some patience!

The CFIA vet will visit your imported animals during the quarantine period and will perform any government-mandated health testing before releasing the animals from quarantine. Currently the testing is limited to a second TB test, carried out 90 days after the first test which is done by the USDA vet at the U.S. quarantine location.

Importing Time and Costs

You should expect to pay about \$1,000 per head for transport, quarantine, CFIA fees and other miscellaneous costs involved in importing animals from the U.S. into Canada. Costs would be higher for a single animal. Don't even try to price your own time; the "cost" would be much, much higher.

Overall time from taking delivery of the animals from a U.S. farm to having them released from Canadian quarantine will be around 3-1/2 to 4-1/2 months.

The Future of Mini Llamas

People involved with mini llamas view the future with excitement and anticipation. Since the beginning of the

AMLA in 1999 there has been a huge growth in membership. With just several hundred registered miniature llamas in the United States and only a handful in Canada, there is still a lot of room for growth. Miniature llamas are making their mark in the performance and halter ring at U.S. shows. Beginning with the Virginia Classic, ALSA is now recording points on all minis that have been entered in the point recording system, so anyone who wins can now have their points recorded and can earn championships.

For the very first time, miniature llama classes were included in the show schedule at Llamafest, which is the largest ALSA show in the U.S. besides Nationals. Llamafest 2007 took place at the Michigan State University Pavilion during Labour Day weekend.

We now look forward to the birth of the remaining cria from our imported minis, and then to spreading the word about miniature llamas in Canada.



About the Author

Lavinia Stevens has been breeding large llamas since 1993 along with her husband Alan in Victoria, British Columbia. Lavinia and Alan have recently made the decision to breed only miniature llamas and have imported the first breeding herd of registered minis from the U.S. They also run a bed & breakfast operation on their farm. Lavinia owned and operated a kitchen & bath boutique store in Victoria for over 20 years and Alan is a recently retired civil engineer.

