



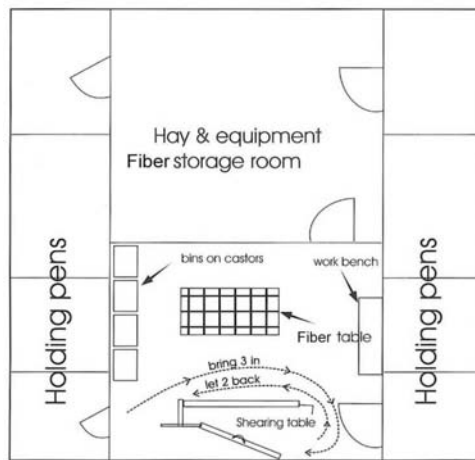
caused by humans, as we control the alpacas' lives. A few examples include not providing enough shelter, shade or feed, being insensitive while handling, or splitting up of groups that have bonded. Remember that alpacas are prey animals and we are a predator.

There are many steps you can take to make shearing a more pleasant experience for both you and your alpacas.

**1.** When holding an alpaca, face him in the opposite direction to that where he would like to escape, e.g., facing into a corner or a blank wall. If he cannot see an escape route, he is much less likely to try to escape. This applies when using a blower or vacuum to remove dirt from the fiber prior to shearing. It is also important that the person holding the alpaca position their body between the blower and the alpaca's head and face, until the alpaca becomes accustomed to the blower.

Shed Diagram 2 shows what I consider a near perfect work area for a shearing shed. The special feature of holding pens at each end of the shearing table allows you to have animals as decoys at one end. This makes it very easy to get an animal into the shearing table with minimum effort. With the shearing table pivoted vertically and the padded side shut, it is good to let your animals get used to walking past the table from one pen to the other, so that once the door is opened against the wall, they will still think they can walk straight through. This is where team work applies; your helper should arrive at the end of the table just as the alpaca thinks it is going to get through the end.

**2.** It is important to establish which direction your alpaca would prefer to move in the shearing shed. The idea is to have the alpaca end up in the place you want to shear him, with him also thinking it is where he



Shed Diagram 2 also shows how to contain one alpaca while letting the others go back to their pen. Because the one cannot get past you and can see an escape route back through the table, that is the way it will try to go. As the alpaca arrives at the far end of the table, your helper should arrive at the same time. This will allow you to turn the animal around and hold it so your helper can close the padded side. With some practice, you will find you are getting your alpacas restrained without any fuss and in a low stress manner.

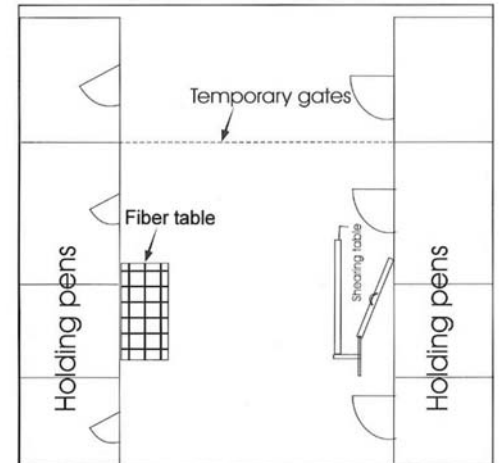
wants to be. Doing this allows your alpaca to think it is escaping, when in fact it is putting itself exactly where you want him to be (See Shed diagram 2.)

**3.** When shearing mothers with cria at foot, we always bring the cria in by the table and show it where its mother is. The mother relaxes once it sees its cria and the cria is also happy, often sitting happily below the table. Of course, by shearing on the table, there is no fiber on the floor, so there is no problem having an alpaca standing by the table watching or even wandering around.

**4.** When shearing weanlings for their first time, they will be very nervous. Groups of weanlings form very close bonds and we find when shearing one of them it is good to allow some of that group to be around the table. This reduces stress dramatically for the one being shorn. If you can manage to shear your weanlings without getting them upset, you have not broken the trust you have established,

so the next time they are to be shorn they will not expect it to be a bad experience.

Shed Diagram 3 shows how to adapt a horse barn with a central lane. Using temporary gates across the lane achieves a suitable sized work area for shearing.



**5.** alpacas' lower legs are very sensitive. When shearing, do not hold their leg between the knee and the foot if possible; holding the foot is okay. If an alpaca struggles while shearing, place a hand on their shoulder or thigh and apply some pressure (not excessive); this will help calm him. Do not grab him by the leg as this will upset him more.

**6.** It is important how the handler holds the alpaca's neck while it is lying on the table. It is better to hold the alpaca by the upper neck just below the cheeks than to hold him by the head or the ears. Although alpacas might stay still when being held by the ears, they hate it. Massaging the neck with your thumbs while holding it has a soothing effect.

**7.** While it might be fun for you to have your friends around to watch the shearing, think of your alpacas. It can be very stressful for them having strangers around while they are being restrained.

**8.** Once you have shorn your alpaca, it is important to remember they



may require extra shelter and food to counter the energy loss through cold or wet weather, or shade to protect them from sunburn.

**9.** Pregnant females close to giving birth may need to be shorn because of heat stress. It is important to assess how quiet/calm she is. If you are concerned that she may become very upset, you would be much better to put her in a pen with two other alpaca mates and shear her there. The pen needs to be approximately 1.8m x 1.5m (6ft x 5ft). This will allow you to shear fiber from her back and part of her sides just by moving around with her and not holding onto her. The other two alpacas help block her escape route, rather than you. After she has given birth she can be restrained and shorn properly.

**10.** If you wish to shear a newly pregnant female, remember that any stress in the first two months of pregnancy may cause the female to abort by reabsorption. Unless you are sure she will not get upset by handling or shearing, it is much better to wait.

## Using the Alpaca Shearing Table

Shearing using the Alpaca Shearing Table requires two people, one to hold the alpaca's head, plus the shearer. A third person to take away the fiber, take fiber samples, trim toenails, inoculate, etc. is an advantage.

- The table is pivoted to a vertical position and the padded door opened.
- Walk the alpaca in and turn it around.
- Close the padded door firmly against the alpaca.
- Pivot the table to a horizontal position.
- The handler must remain holding the neck at all times.
- Attach leg ropes and tension.

The unique design of the turning over mechanism on the table means it is unnecessary to stretch the alpacas out tightly. Inspect the alpaca's fiber quality and establish where any guard hair joins the fleece. This is where you should separate the fleece from the different grades of fiber on the alpaca. (See diagram).

**Note:** I have developed this sequence of strokes to allow easy separation of the different grades of the

fiber as you are shearing the alpaca.

- Shear the first side of the alpaca and remove fiber, placing the different grades of fiber into the relevant containers.
- Roll the alpaca over using the unique rolling over device.
- Shear the last side and remove the fiber.
- Lower the pad gently onto the alpaca.
- This is a good opportunity to trim toenails, fighting teeth, inoculations, etc.
- Release the alpaca by pivoting the table and opening the padded door, allowing the alpaca to walk away quietly.
- Repeat the process for each subsequent alpaca until all have been sheared, inoculated, etc.

## Sorting Fiber as you Shear

The shearer should take responsibility for his part in sorting the fiber properly. The shearer has an advantage over the fiber sorter as he knows where the different qualities of fiber are located on the alpaca, as well as being able to see where the guard hair is. The shearer is also able to assess the fiber fineness by feel while he is shearing. This means the shearer should identify and help separate the fiber as he or she shears (e.g., belly and apron from fleece, neck from apron and fleece) and also take samples from the correct location. By following the diagrams you will find that the sequence of shearing blows (strokes) has been designed recognizing how the fiber needs to be separated.

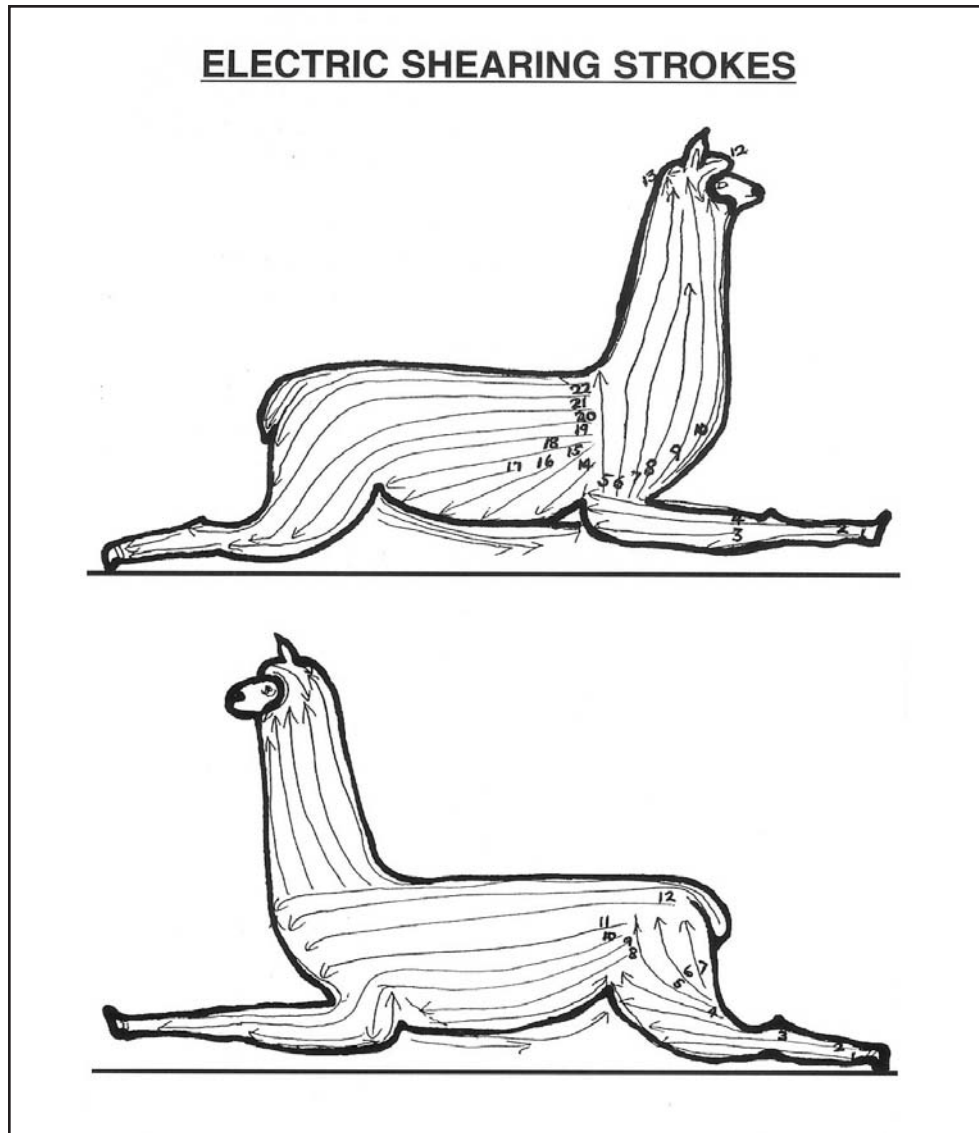
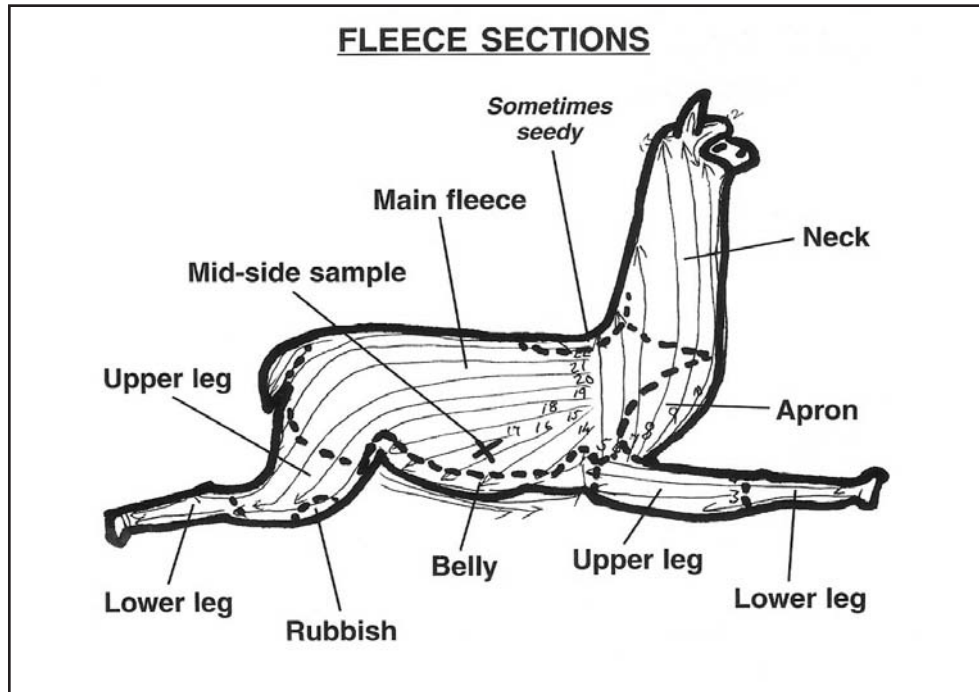
Starting on the front leg and opening up over the shoulder allows the shearer to part the fleece from the apron along the guard hair line. Next the neck fiber will be shorn and will automatically fall onto the table on each side of the neck allowing the fiber sorter to quickly and efficiently

remove and place it in the appropriate container.

The shearer then opens up along the edge of the belly, after first deter-

mining the location of the guard hair line on the side of the alpaca. The belly fiber drops down in front of the belly and the sorter removes it from the table, while the fleece is laid back onto the table over the back of the alpaca. This means half of the fleece is ready to place onto the Fiber Handling Table for final classing. If you prefer to keep your fleece in one piece, it can be rolled carefully and held against the back of the alpaca as the alpaca is rolled over. However, none of the fiber judges with whom I have spoken deduct points from a show fleece because it is in two parts.

The shearer moves around to the other side of the table and shears the head. The alpaca is rolled over and the other side is sheared. Shearing should start at the back leg and follow as per the diagram, i.e., shear up the back leg, then along the side of the belly again, separating the fleece from the belly, apron and neck fiber, etc.



### *In Summary*

The instructions provided in this and the previous article give all the basics you need to successfully shear your alpacas in a low stress environment. With practice and patience, you and your alpacas can become pros at doing this while maintaining mutual respect for one another.

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