

NASSA

2003 Annual General Meeting

Our Visit to Oregon and the 2003 NASSA Annual General Meeting

By Roving Reporter Heather Ludlam

The 2003 NASSA Annual General Meeting was an amazingly organized educational extravaganza! Marybeth Bullington and her AGM committee took on the challenge of hosting the NASSA AGM in conjunction with the Black Sheep Gathering in Eugene Oregon. Not only did they rise to the challenge, they set a whole new standard for future AGMs to meet!

I came to this AGM with my husband Mike, and this was our first AGM without sheep and children along! We decided to make this our own little vacation, having never been to Oregon or anywhere in the Pacific Northwest. As it always seems to happen, we were putting our first cutting of hay in the barn right up until the day before we left Michigan, so things were a little frantic as we headed out!

Mike and I arrived in Eugene Thursday evening after a long day in various airports. We went straight to the fairgrounds and we were happy to see many familiar faces and old Shetland friends, and we immediately began making many wonderful new Shetland friends as well. I cannot say enough about the friendliness and graciousness of our Shetland breeders!

Friday morning brought the Shetland Sheep Show at the Black Sheep Gathering. I was impressed by the large number of entries in the show, and the high quality of the animals in the show ring! The judge did a very good job while faced with a very difficult task, he seemed to be very consistent, and seemed to appreciate our Shetland sheep and their fleeces.

Friday afternoon the education began. We had lectures on the Classic and Modern Shetland from Jean Curtis of the UK, the physiology of the fleece from Lenice Bell of the UK, and a discussion of the Primitive/Double-Coated Shetland by Shannon Fletcher of Oklahoma. Tracy Junge of Oregon gave an excellent talk about the importance of getting children involved with Shetlands.

Friday evening we were treated to a wonderful meal in a beautiful outdoor setting at Hendrick's park. Terry Bullington created an amazing barbecue out of two five year old rams- hopefully he will be publishing his recipe in the NASSA News. We had a very informal NASSA business meeting after dinner, lead by our Vice President Alan Bias. We discussed and received overwhelming support for an on-line registry and searchable database. We also discussed a new advertising campaign for NASSA, the lowering of all

ram registration fees to \$10.00, and the transfer of the membership duties to our registrar. In general, the membership in attendance were happy with the job the registrar has been doing for NASSA.

Saturday morning brought the Shetland Wool Show at the Black Sheep Gathering. Martin Dally judged the fleeces and offered lots of constructive criticism! Mike and I were both intrigued by the portable micron-testing unit that Martin had at the fleece show. Samples were tested while we watched and results were available within minutes. This was a very informative educational tool to have available- absolutely fascinating to try to correlate handle with micron test results. After the fleece judging, Jean, Lenice, and Shannon offered their insights into the Shetland fleeces.

I must confess that at this point in the weekend Mike and I disappeared for our own adventure up the Pacific Coast. I did hear that the Saturday morning and afternoon seminars on intensifying color, inheritability of patterns, and scrapie genetics were well done. I also heard that the hands-on evaluations of breeding stock were excellent and amusing at times. Mike and I did get back in time for the Black Sheep Potluck Saturday evening and the Shetland Costume Parade during the Spinner's Lead Competition. This was the moment that I found myself thinking, "the kids would have LOVED this!"

Sunday morning George Benedict presented us with the history of the Sheep of Shetland. I loved George's analogy of the Shetland as a genetic river running through time, and it was an interesting journey from the ancient Soay sheep to the modern Shetland, with contributions from many different genetic sources along the way. I also loved the tongue-in-cheek reference to the Shetland gene pool as a genetic cesspool- I for one really do treasure this cesspool and feel that it gives the Shetland much of its strength, health and hardiness. George led us in a discussion of the diversity of the Shetland sheep. I think we all agreed that our breed standard was written broadly enough to allow us our diversity, and that the breed standard should be our goal or center-point when considering the multitude of traits that make up our very own Shetland sheep.

Sunday afternoon Marybeth gave an amusing and informative talk about dealing with rams- using common sense and ram psychology! General discussions were then wrapped up and the AGM drew to a close. We said many good-byes Sunday to all of our old and new friends, and also said lots of "come to Michigan"s.

Mike and I were lucky enough to have one more day to spend in Oregon, and we were treated to a day at King Estate Winery and farm-touring with Marybeth and Terry. What a nice, relaxing day after a busy weekend. After one last set of good-byes, we headed back to Michigan Tuesday morning.

Since I have been home, everyone has been asking me "so, what did the sheep look like out there?" I really think they look exactly the same as they look here in the Midwest! There is a wonderful variety of colors and patterns, and a diversity of fleece types on the West Coast- just like at home. Individual breeders preferred certain traits- just like at home. Some flocks were more uniform, some flocks very diverse- just like at home!

Again, I am home from an AGM, looking at my sheep through many new sets of eyes, and I still like what I see!

Shetland Show Results:Black Sheep Gathering 2003

Champion Shetland Ram: Shady Oaks

Reserve Champion Shetland Ram: Cedar Haven Farm

Champion Shetland Ewe: White Oak Shetland Ranch

Reserve Champion Shetland Ewe: Misty View Farm

Northwest Breeder's Trophy (Breeder's Young Flock): Williams Family