Pack Goats
Mr. Dwite and Mrs. Mary Sharp
Paradise Ranch

Introduction to Dwite and Mary Sharp

Dwite and Mary Sharp have raised and trained pack goats for over 11 years. They own and operate Paradise Ranch in the Flint Hills near the historical town of Council Grove, Kansas. Their family has lived in Morris County for eight generations. Although they grew up in southern California they have returned to the Flint Hills several times to live. The last time they moved to the Flint Hills was in 1997 when they moved from Charlotte, North Carolina; this time to stay.

In 2000 Dwite retired from auto racing where he had been a Design and Fabrication Engineer for over 30 years. Involved with NASCAR’s Winston Cup Division he designed and built cars for Felix Sabotos, Rick Hendricks, Richard Childress and many others.

Mary had been in restaurant management for many years before returning to Kansas and after returning to the Flint Hills she opened her own café. After a year she called it quits and decided to stay home and raise pack goats. Since 1999 Mary has been the working force at Paradise Ranch tending to the chores on a daily basis.

In 2001 Dwite took a job with BNSF Railway in the engineering department, but his true passion now is the creatures of Paradise Ranch. There they raise pack goats, high end Boer goats, Mammoth Donkeys, guineas, and Doberman Pinschers.

Introduction to Goat Packing

Goat packing was first invented in 1972 out of necessity by John Mionczynski, a scientific researcher for the U.S. Forrest Service.

His job was to follow and stay close to a band of Rocky Mountain big horn sheep and to observe and record their food habits and behavior in the wild. The sheep had been fitted with radio collars.

John was on his own and at first he used horses to carry his equipment and supplies. The horses didn’t work very well, they did a good job getting to base camp, but they couldn’t get near the terrain where the sheep lived. There wasn’t enough grass in that country to leave them picketed out for more than a day. He would have to come back once a day to move and water them. This was not going to work.

So the horses went and he started backpacking. Carrying a backpack in that terrain was dangerous enough but after weighing his pack it weighed over one hundred pounds.

He was at a high level of desperation, after a particularly difficult day in the mountains, he imagined a goat packed up like a horse. At first he laughed at the idea, but he was desperate. Several days later he returned home for a few days off. He had several goats, he liked goat milk. One was an eleven year old wether named Wethervane that he harnessed and used to haul water on a travois from a creek to a cabin. He knew Wethervane could haul a couple hundred pounds on a travois using an old upside down horse halter for a harness. He had no idea how he would react to carrying a load on his back. He started slowly using a saddle bag, adding a little weight at a time, leading him around. Wethervane acted as though he was carrying nothing. So John got some bigger bags and loaded them with his gear. He slung them over Wethervane’s back, using a horse saddle pad for padding. It worked, this was becoming exciting. After a day of walking Wethervane around and increasing the weight, it became evident that with a few refinements he could prob-
ably take Wethervane back to the mountains with him. He made the first pack goat saddle out of some 1"x6" boards and cross bucks from a sawed up shovel handle. It became clear that with the saddle to help distribute the load more evenly, Wethervane could easily carry even more weight.

Back in the mountains Wethervane followed faithfully and silently. He was so quiet he let him stay at camp and even at the observation posts. Wethervane’s true test came the day the sheep decided to migrate. Could he keep up? It started before daybreak. The radio signals were clear; they were on the move. Wild sheep can go thirty miles in one move and you have no idea where they will end up. John and Wethervane hiked for several days along escarpments and over mountains. Although Wethervane had a few new things to learn, he performed beautifully. John was ecstatic. You can teach and old goat new tricks!

Each day Wethervane worked and became stronger and could carry more weight. John could see Wethervane’s muscles growing and firming up.

In time John was packing Wethervane, a doe named Jessie (a milk goat), and several kids as trainees.

John’s greatest pleasure came from seeing how healthy, alert, and handsome a goat can look when it’s being worked. Also how much like a wild animal it can act; testing the air for scents, twitching the ears, looking around, curious about every new sound, scent, and movement. They were a different animal entirely from the sloth like, pot bellied barn potatoes.

Several years later Wethervane, the first pack goat, was killed by a hunter in the opening day of deer season.

John went on to run his own goat-centered outfitting/guide service, building and selling custom pack saddles, and raising pack goats. John Mionczynski is known as the father of goat packing.

Facts about Goats

1. Goats are quite picky about what they eat.
2. Goat’s eyesight is seven times better than a human.
3. Goats can smell with their mouth (called the Flehman response), using an organ in the roof of their mouth called the Jacobsens organ. When they curl up their upper lip with their mouth slightly open, they are smelling.
4. Goats can be very social animals making them wonderful companions.
5. Goats will follow with out being led.
6. Goats are the most surefooted animal on the planet.
7. Goats are one of the most intelligent creatures on the planet.
8. Goats are thought to have been domesticated more than 10,000 years ago. 5,000 years before the horse and probably the first wild animal to be domesticated.
9. Goat’s primary diet consists of weeds and brush.
10. Goats are browsers not grazers.
11. Goats can go 3 or 4 days without water. The only animal better is a camel.
12. While in the desert a large wether can carry enough water for you and itself to last a week.
13. Goats can adjust their metabolism as the need arises.
14. An exercising goat has up to 12% heat loss through their horns. (They are like radiators)
15. Generally there is no need to carry feed for goats on a pack trip.
16. Goats are herd animals and should be kept with at least one other goat.
17. Goats have the ability to regain all their natural instincts when taken into the wilderness.
18. Goats have the widest variety of food preferences.
19. When danger approaches pack goats will surround you and face the danger. They will not flee.
20. Horned goats are capable of killing predators, and will if forced to do so.
21. Wildlife has been known to follow and get extremely close to pack goats in the wild. This makes for
great photo opportunities.
22. When given a large selection of plants in a pasture a goat is capable of eating the correct amount of
the right plants to be at optimum health. A nutritionist can not compete with this ability.

Preparing the Facilities for Pack Goats

So as not to get the cart in front of the goat, we must get the facilities in order before bringing the
goats home. Packgoats are no different than other goats as far as their needs.

Their needs are:

1. Goats need housing that will protect them from rain and wind, but is not so tight as to be unventilated.
Goats are susceptible to respiratory problems, because they will urinate and defecate in their living quarters.
Their housing should be well ventilated. A three sided structure will work just fine. Face the opening so the
wind doesn’t blow in. You can even build a wall in front of the opening 3’-4’ out. Leave the eaves under the
roof open so the air can circulate. Use your imagination. There is no set rule as to what the goathouse should
look like, so lots of different buildings will work. If you have one goat that is aggressive you might want to
have an escape door on each end. The size of the house will depend on the number of goats to be housed. A
minimum of 15 square feet per goat is needed and more if you have horned goats.

2. Pens and Pastures; the goat house should have a pen or corral on the side or sides that are open, so you
can contain the goats as needed. I recommend using 2"x4" woven wire or even 2"x4" horse panels. These
two are five feet tall. My reasoning for this is to protect the goats inside the pens from predators. The 2"x4"
openings will not allow the small kids to get their heads through the fence and be grabbed by something
on the other side. This is a very common way for goats to be killed. We have had very bad luck using cattle
panels and woven field wire (sometimes called hog wire) which have 6"x6" openings. Newborns have been
known to crawl through these fences and as they get older and have horns they get their heads stuck in
the fence and then they are at the mercy of what ever is on the outside. The wire with the 6"x6" opening is
cheaper but don’t take the chance! Spend the money at the beginning before you loose something precious
to you! Also don’t use welded wire. The welds will eventually break loose and your fence will come apart.
We use T posts everywhere we use panels. With the woven wire you must have braced, hedge corner posts.
The reason for this is because the wire must be stretched and if they are not cemented and braced the tension
of the wire will pull the posts over. We use 4’-12’ round tubular gates and cover the side the goats are on
with 4’ chain link. You could also use chain link gates. All the materials can be bought at a farm and ranch
store. Remember to put the fence on the side of the post that will be pushed on most. For example, if you
have cows on one side and goats on the other, then the fence should be on the side the cows are on. If you
have nothing on the other side the fence should be on the goat side. Let the post support the fence not the
wire that is holding the fence to the post. When putting the T posts in the ground do not forget to face the T
post the correct way for the side the fence will be on.

Pasture fence can be a real challenge for keeping goats in. No other animal will point out your fence
building short comings faster than a goat. It is said that if you build a 10’ high solid wood wall all the way
around the pasture and then go 3’ inside that wall and build another one just like it. Now fill the 3’ space
between the walls full of cement. After it dries fill the pasture with water all the way to the top of the walls.
If it holds water it might hold a goat!

My experience with goat fencing is vast. I’ve made every mistake I think I could have. I think I finally
have it under control. Goats are brilliant escape artists and eating machines. These two attributes make them
tough to fence. You might think you’ve beat them but you’ll only know for sure when the eating looks better
on the other side of the fence. That is why they will show you your deficiencies in fence building. I have had
way more Boer goats over the years than pack goats but it seems to be the trained pack goats that instigate
the major break outs. These very large goats have escaped through the places I would not have believed if I
had not seen it with my own eyes. They have shorted out electric fences and led one hundred goats into the
neighbor’s bean field. They have done this more than once.

If you have no pasture fencing at all and must start from scratch I recommend not using electric fences.
If you have existing fences and can’t afford to replace all of them electric fences are usually the cheapest
option.

If you are putting up a completely new fence I would use goat and sheep woven wire. There are two
kinds of this wire. The best is the one with 4”x4” openings. The other has 6”x12” openings. The 4”x4” wire
will actually keep the goats heads on your side of the fence. The 6”x12” wire will allow the goats to put there
heads through the fence but the opening is large enough to allow them to remove their heads easily. The 4’x4’
wire is my first choice but because it has so much more wire, it is also more expensive. I use the 48” width.
Both of these products are manufactured by Oklahoma Wire and Steel and come in 330’ rolls.

I space the T post 10’ to 15’ apart and use cemented braced hedge posts on the corners. If the fence goes
down into a low spot and then back up, you will probably need to cement a hedge post on both sides of the low
areas to keep the tension of the fence from pulling the T post out of the ground (specially when it rains).

If you have an existing fence and you need to goat proof it you have several options. If it is barbed wire
you can add more wires to the fence. Goats almost always go under the fence so adding wires to the bottom
will help. Then stretch a wire (it can be the barbless wire) about 3” to 4” off the ground. Space it so they are
closer together at the bottom and a little wider as they go up. If the wires are stretched tightly and spaced
correctly, seven wires will work.

The next option is to install an electric fence on the inside of the existing fence. I’ve had a lot of experi-
ence with this. The first thing to do is select the fence charger. I highly recommend using a low impedance
charger. Although the testers for electric fences test in volts, it is not the voltage that shocks. It is the amps
that shock. A low impedance charger turns up the amperage (makes it hotter) as the fence is contacted by
vegetation or wet grass. If you tested it with a tester it would show the voltage has dropped but, actually the
fence is very hot. With the non low impedance fence charger the fence would have been colder. Low imped-
ance chargers use joules to measure the power. I suggest at least 6 joules for goats. To get this you will need
a charger that is rated for about 100 miles of fence. Battery operated fence chargers will not be hot enough.
The lesser ones will work for a while and then the pack goats will figure it out and they will escape. I use
a 100 mile low impedance Zareba fence charger. Orschlins and Tractor Supply sell them. My pastures are
only about 25 acres total.

We attempted to place insulators on the same T posts that the existing barbed wire was on. This failed
miserably. The pack goats went between the fence posts. They seemed to be able to tell when the fence
surged. In between the surges they used their horns to push the hot wire over and hooked it on the barbwire.
This shorts the fence out. They then kneel down and push their nose under the bottom wire of the barbed
wire fence, which is about 6” off the ground, and they escaped. Once again there were one hundred goats
in the bean field! All of this took about 30 seconds. I counter attacked! I bought ½” rebar and cut it into 4’
lengths. I placed the rebar 20’ to 25’ apart and 1’ inside the barbed wire fence. I then placed one 14 gage
galvanized steel wire about 8” to 10” above the ground and another one 16” above the first. I stretched the
wire as tight as a banjo string. I then released the goats from the corral. As they approached the new electric fence they skidded to a halt, looked up and down the new fence, and then
turned and walked away. That was about six years ago and I haven’t had a goat out since.
The bad part about electric fences is that they need constant attention. You must walk the fence to make sure that the insulators haven’t broken and fallen off, or moved up or down the rebar. We have learned to use ceramic corner insulators. The plastic ones pull through and short out in time, killing the fence. Tree branches fall on the hot wires and push the fence to the ground stretching the wire. We have had our Anatolian Shepherd chase coyotes through the fence, damaging it. So if you can fence your goats with less maintenance you will make it easier on yourself.

Choosing Your Pack Goats

Not everyone who would like the benefits of a pack goat should actually own one. If your short on patience and aren’t a big fan of Mother Nature, then goat packing will not be for you. To find out how you feel about pack goats you might want to rent one for a small outing and see how it goes.

If you decide you would like to own a pack goat you need to get at least two. Goats are herd animals and need at least one other goat in their life to be emotionally healthy.

You can buy an experienced pack goat from a breeder/outfitter. If you do you will miss out on all the fun and experiences of seeing these wonderful creatures mature and blossom with your interaction.

The majority of our pack goats started bonding with us at birth or within the first week. A few of our pack goats were actually purchased and restructured into pack goats at a much older age. Four of them were actually two years old before becoming pack goats. I would not recommend this for the beginner. Two of these four were completely wild animals and quite dangerous. These two have turned out quite well but the amount of time required was immense. I would be willing to say that we will probably not do that again.

If you don’t have a lot of experience caring for baby goats you may opt to purchase you pack goat pre-trained at about six months of age. This way he has a head start in the right direction (That is if you purchase him from a good pack goat breeder; they are not all equal). You can continue his training and learn together.

You need to learn about good pack goat conformation. This will be beneficial in selecting a goat with good potential. Don’t think that all Dairy goat breeders know about good pack goat conformation, because this is not likely. They breed for milk production, utter attachment, etc. They do not breed for pack goat conformation. If you are going to spend all the time, effort, and money on a quality pack goat let a reputable pack goat breeder help you get started.

It is possible to get good pack goat kids from outside the pack goat industry but without the knowledge it’s difficult to make an accurate choice.

We do sell pack goat kids, but only in advance. Meaning we discuss what you want and then we breed the kid, to be delivered a few days after birth or at six months. We take our responsibility seriously.

Training

Training is something that is best if it begins shortly after birth. It’s best for the bonding with humans aspect if the human becomes mom right away. That is not to say a good pack goat can’t be achieved later. Removing the kid immediately after birth has a negative impact on the mental well being of the doe. Also the kids seem to learn about eating hay, grain, and minerals better with their mother. Mom really does know best. The sooner the kids start eating hay, grain, etc., the better they will grow. When you remove the kids from the doe you become their mother; you have to teach them the most important thing in a goat’s life, EATING! Sometimes it can be a real struggle to get them to eat enough. We have had bottle babies that at three months were eating very little grain. We feared they would starve if we weaned them. You must spend a lot of time with the kids and teach them by placing the grain in their mouth over and over again. You must do this before giving them their bottle. This seems sometimes like they aren’t going to figure it out and then
one day they finally get it. When you cut back the number of times a day they get a bottle they will think a little bit more about eating grain, hay, etc…

So why don’t you just let the doe raise the kid? After all letting the doe raise the kid would be much easier. You would not have to get up in the middle of the night, get dressed, heat up the milk, go out in the cold, and feed the kids. When the doe does the work the kids tend to become wild goats and are not dependent on you. You want your pack goats to be completely dependent on you for food, water, and emotional support. Oh yes you have to become a goat!

You should spend a lot of time with the kids besides the feeding time. Go in to the pen, sit on a milk crate, talk to them, call them by name, pick them up, and hold them as long as you can. Soon they will be too large for this so do it while you can. For the first few weeks it is okay to let them jump on you. After a few weeks do not allow the goats to even put their front feet on the fence. Now start teaching them that it is not okay to jump on you, the gate, the fence, the car, or anything else. The word “down” should be taught at a young age.

Goats don’t tolerate violence. Don’t make the mistake of loosing your patience and yelling at or striking them. You will go from the top of the hill to the bottom, in their eyes. It could take weeks to regain their trust. Goats have a good memory and will get even. It may not be today or even tomorrow, but it will happen.

After a couple weeks you can put a small collar and leash on them. Let them get used to this slowly. Do not try to lead them until they are comfortable being tied (held by you). NEVER, NEVER, leave the collar on unless you are right there. Goats can strangle quickly. In time the goat and you will learn to deal with the safety issues of collars and horned goats.

1st Hour
1. “All Wether Marching Band” arrives.
2. Paradise Ranch introduction.
3. Introduction to the “Boys”.
5. Packgoat confirmation.
6. Horns: yes or no?

2nd Hour
1. Choosing a Packgoat.
2. Packgoat facilities, housing, fencing, and pens.
3. Training.
4. How to tie goats out safely.
5. Vaccinations.
6. Parasite.

3rd Hour
1. Hoof trimming.
3. Saddles, pannier bags, and how to pack them.
4. Questions and answers.
This would not be possible without the members of the “All Wether Marching Band“. (The Horn Section)

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Books

“The Pack Goat”  
by John Mionczynski  
Published by Pruett Publishing Co., Boulder, Colorado

“Goat Medicine”  
by Mary C. Smith & David M. Sherman  
Published by Lea & Febiger

“Meat Goat Production Handbook”  
Available from Langston University  
www.luresext.edu/GOATS/mgph.html

“Practical Goat Packing”  
by Carolyn Eddy for $17.95  
“Diet for Wethers” by Carolyn Eddy for $14.95  
Shipping for one or both for $3.50

Order from: Eagle Creek Pack Goats  
PO BOX 755  
Estacada, Oregon, 93023

“Field First Aid for Goats” $24.95  
by Carolyn Eddy & Alice Beberness  
“Packable Guide for First Aid for Goats” $16.95 by Carolyn Eddy & Alice Beberness

Order from: Alice Beberness  
PO BOX 4  
Alvadore, Oregon 97409

Check, money order, or pay pal ID # Carolyn@goattracks.com

Magazine

“Goat Tracks Journal of the Working Goat”  
558 Park Ave  
Logan, Utah 84321  
E-mail Shannon @ www.GoatTracksMagazine.com

To become a member of the “North American Pack Goat Association”  
Log on to www.napga.org