

The Final Chapter for PDX/Delta?

The Great Sheep Exchange 4.5

Priscilla Weaver, Saltmarsh Ranch Soay Sheep

Three years and two days ago, June 19, 2005, the first GSE took place at the Delta Cargo Lot at PDX in Portland when four breeders -- Kate Montgomery and Jen Bailey and Steve and I -- met to exchange two dozen sheep at PDX and here and there along the way. Little did the Delta folks realize they were hosting an ovine yard sale. Since then, those of us on the west coast (plus Laura Lane-Unsworth, of course) have enjoyed three annual GSE's near Portland each September. GSE II, III, and IV included gastronomic extravaganzas, fulsome discussions of sheep, and of course the grand transfer of all the bought and sold Soay sheep, not to mention bragging rights on sheep trailers, pies, etc.

Fast forward to June 21, 2008. Steve, his mother Barbara visiting from Arizona, and I, thought we were going to meet just Kate and Elizabeth Price at PDX to swap only two sheep. We should not have been surprised when we drove up to find not only Kate and Elizabeth and John Price, but also Tamara Muldoon and Tom, Jen, and Dave and Michele Owens, surely enough sheep fanatics to warrant the label "GSE 4.5."



I was tempted to name this essay "Soay Beauty Contest Winners Announced," but I knew that would draw immediate and intense dispute, since all of us consider our flocks the most beautiful specimens around. But let me tell you, the half dozen ewes and rams exchanged at GSE 4.5 could serve as poster children for the striking good looks of the breed. Since this is my report, I get to start with Saltmarsh Rosudgeon, a drop-dead gorgeous light phase British ewe. Can you tell Steve is pleased to see her?

And if Rosie is fetching, the little chocolate ram lamb Jen talked Kate out of was Rosie's equal in the eye candy department. I could not have a picture of him hiding in Jen's station wagon, but I'm hoping she will submit photos to the OFP Gallery soon. Then there were the ewes Tamara picked up from Kate. One of them is Blue Mountain Saluki, a rich red-brown ewe, and one other was just as winsome.

Not to be outdone by the ewes, light phase scurred ram Duke was welcomed home with open arms by Elizabeth and John (well, at least John, see below). Duke gets better looking with each passing month. His horns and overall conformation are a walking advertisement for why it makes no sense at all (IMHO) to cull Soay rams with less-than-perfect horns.

I chuckled when downloading my meager three pictures. Look at this gender role-playing, would you? Steve and Tom and John labor to move sheep while Kate and Elizabeth and Jen pose for the girl photographer, yours truly. Have we reverted to the 1950s?



For those of you who remember GSE II, III, and IV fondly in part because of the quality of the cuisine, you will be relieved to know you didn't miss anything at GSE 4.5. Not even one mass-produced egg biscuit or cup of coffee was consumed in the precious few minutes we were together, quite a switch from the group photo of GSE II elsewhere in these reports, with the attendees firmly glued to the benches around the picnic table.

But to prove that every GSE has some link to its predecessors, here is the GSE 4.5 Group Photo (including Rosie the Blue Mountain mascot guarding Kate) in front of the Saltmarsh Ranch pickup. [Ed. note: Notice the license plate on Steve's truck!]



Remember when Kathie Miller drove her pickup to GSE III with her snazzy drop-in sheep container and her website emblazoned on the tailgate? Well, Steve and I have managed for several years to hoodwink Kathie into letting us borrow her Berci Box, the sturdy custom container which brought some of the first British Soay to the U.S. from Athelstan in Canada. It is sitting there in our pickup bed. The Berci Box is not as hi-tech as Kathie's contraption, but it does open at either end so you can choose to address the horns or the rump of the creature(s) inside. The B.B. is just the ticket for transporting rambunctious [sorry] single rams and by golly it has a lot of history in its well-worn wood.

As we reluctantly drove away with only Rosudgeon in the truck rather than the 18 Soay we transported south from GSE I, we could not help but notice the empty cargo loading ramps and the proliferation of weeds overgrowing the cement walkways. Delta obviously has abandoned its facility and in fact there is chain link fence one shove away from locking us out altogether. It appears, alas, that the days of small mid-year GSE's at PDX may be over. I don't know how many years Kate used PDX before her deliveries first were dubbed "Great Sheep Exchanges," but I do know that the three years and two days between GSE I and GSE 4.5 have enriched my life and Steve's life beyond our wildest imaginations about what "retirement" would be like.

Here's to many more happy GSE's – wherever and whenever they happen – in the future! I sure hope the planning committee for GSE V is hard at work for next September's annual gathering.