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Llamas in the Rockies

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One of the most stimulating parts of my job was stumbling across an "unknown" species of tree or shrub and trying to decipher what it was. It is hard to believe some of the strange things we would find planted in the city parkways. We welcomed these "unknown" species as a nice change of pace from the typical ash, silver maple, and hackberry. These new species also gave us the chance to increase our knowledge, as well as attempt to stump the boss (which we rarely succeeded in doing).

Once we had the street tree inventory behind us, we made the move up the big ladder to the inventory of the city parks and green belt areas along the Des Moines River. This involved plotting trees of each park on a map along with collecting data for each tree. The green belt was inventoried by taking a simple random sample of the areas. Tammi and I managed to take a sample of more than just the tree species present, by getting a nice "feel" for the poison ivy in the area.

The summer experience I got as an urban forester was very good. I saw how forestry is an important aspect of managing city trees. The general exposure to solving unexpected problems that came up and working as a productive team with my partner and the forestry department personnel was also a very beneficial experience. ■

Llamas in the Rockies

by James Daniels

The use of llamas as pack animals in the United States is increasing in popularity. Llamas cause only light ecological impact, climb and jump well, and are easy to work with.

I worked with llamas last summer while doing trail work in the Mount Zirkel wilderness area in northwestern Colorado. The Forest Service rented the llamas on an experimental basis. The cost was 1000 dollars a head for four months. We used two llamas, each carrying 90-100 pounds.

Llamas originally came from the Andes in South America. All that are presently in the United States have been bred here since importation of llamas is banned. In fact, North American llamas have become quite larger because of our superior feed.

They are included in the camel family. Llamas may go for days without water. Their selection of food is broad, they browse on everything from grasses to trees and shrubs. Grain has little nutritional value for them, but is like candy to them. This is very useful for attracting and catching llamas.

The lower jaws of llamas have no teeth to speak of. This means that they must feed by pulling the vegetation (pulling rather than clipping) and the broad range of food makes for minimal vegetation disturbance. This may be important on fragile sites.

The hooves of llamas are small and are equipped with pads on the bottom. These pads are similar to those on a dog's foot. Because of this, trail and soil disturbance is slight. They also have good footing on bare rock.

We transported our llamas in a pickup truck with a stock rack which they could easily jump over. This gives you an idea of how well llamas can jump, they are very sure-footed.

Generally, llamas do not like to sink far in snow or mud. This may be a serious handicap if travel in snow around 1.5-2 feet deep is required. It's best to keep males and females separate in working situations. Llamas may mate anytime of the year and are known for taking advantage of that.

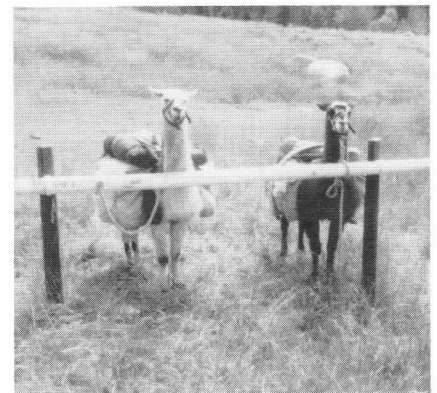
Llamas have the most mild, mellow temperament of any ani-

mal that I can think of. They are very inquisitive and almost never spook. Other people and animals seldom do more than make them curious. However, horses unaccustomed to llamas often become unusually nervous.

Llamas are quite gregarious and have a well established social order. Dominance is established by butting at the opponent's face, kicking at glands low in the hind legs, and spitting. It is best to avoid touching their heads or lower hind legs. Only bottle-fed llamas or very strongly dominant llamas will spit at humans. They never bite and only kick if their hind legs are touched.

On the trail, our llamas were contained by a 10 foot long picket rope. They may get the rope tangled, but they are intelligent enough to unwrap it themselves. If it is badly wrapped, a llama will simply lie down and wait for help. There were a few times when our llamas got loose last summer, but they were easily recaptured by the presence of the other llama and a bit of grain.

I was very pleased with the llamas I used and I became fond of them. I would suggest them for any kind of back country packing except in deep snow. ■



Foresters of the Future?