

From haltering and leading, to toenail trimming and shearing, CAMELIDynamics guides alpaca owners to more efficient ways of handling their livestock, resulting in a minimum amount of stress for human and animal alike.

## ■ All Tied Up and Nowhere to Go... Teaching Your Alpaca to Tie

**T**ying an alpaca is undoubtedly a useful thing to be able to do – unfortunately, many alpacas learn about what it means to be tied when they are tied up for the first time. There is a HUGE difference between teaching an alpaca to accept being tied and simply tying him up. Teaching an alpaca to tie by tying him up is the same as teaching a person to swim by throwing him in a pool. The human being thrown into a pool may learn to swim BUT he may hate and fear the water for the rest of his life and perhaps even more importantly... will he ever trust the person who threw him in?

Advocates of the tie ‘em and leave ‘em approach argue that the animal blames the rope and not the person for the unpleasantness of the experience. I believe that even a “not so smart” alpaca can figure out who is responsible for catching him, putting the halter on, and tying him to the fence. The rest of the logic includes a belief that tying an alpaca to a fence teaches him that he cannot escape and somehow that this experience will teach an alpaca not to challenge or attempt to pull on a human. Again, I think that alpacas are smart enough to figure out that a fence is different than a human and in fact I suggest that if an alpaca panics while tied to a fence, that I would prefer that the rope break before his neck is injured.

Human beings frequently run afoul of our fellow man when we operate without properly considering another’s point of view. The same thing is true of training. Consider for a moment your alpaca’s point of view when it comes to being tied up. An alpaca is born depending on his or her ability to run from predators for safety. Not being able to run away is the same thing as being in mortal danger. Combine

that with an often abrupt introduction to a halter that may or may not fit,\* and you have a recipe for a very frightening experience. An alpaca that is haltered and tied and subsequently panics can carry the scars of the experience forever. In fact, the avoidance behavior that these alpacas exhibit is so consistent that I have coined the phrase “drowning victims” to describe them.

### “Drowning victims”

Drowning victims exhibit terror when confronted with a halter and will go to great lengths – sometimes injuring the handler or themselves in an attempt to avoid the halter – which to them represents extreme danger. Ironically, some trainers suggest tying these animals for extended periods of time as a way of fixing the problem.

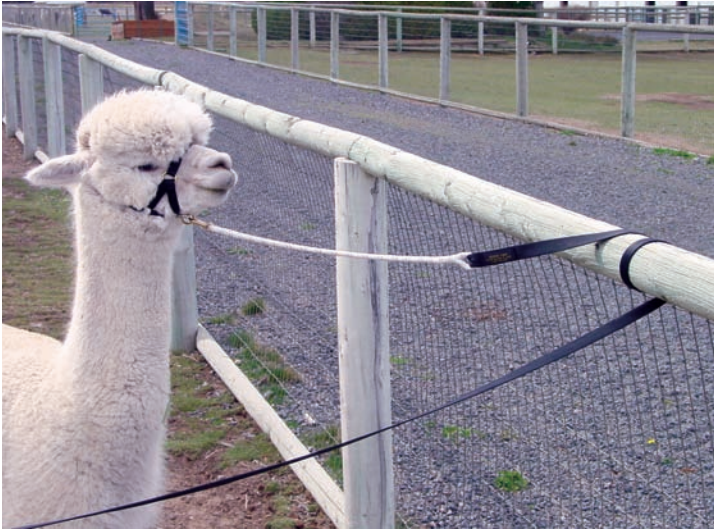
Understandably, this often makes the problem worse. Not all animals that are summarily haltered and tied thrash about violently or become behavioral problems, but for the ones that do, learning to trust a human again is a long, slow way back. I think it is safe to say that it is definitely a problem that is easier to prevent than to fix.

Camelids are anatomically different than many other types of livestock that human beings find the need to tie. Camelids have a very long neck. Tying a long-necked animal by the head is problematic. The extra length in the neck means that regardless of how short you tie the animal, the distance from the point of contact with a fixed object (e.g., the fence) to the center of mass is greater. This gives the weight of the animal’s bucking body more power to injure the neck and spine. Some handlers attempt to mitigate the danger by using an inner tube

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\*I have written extensively on the issue of halter fit and its relationship to behavior problems in camelids. If you are new to camelids, I would suggest reviewing the article “Solving Behavior Problems in 30 Seconds” (*A.M.*, Spring 2002).

\*\*More detailed information about teaching an alpaca to lead can be found in “A Tale of Two Handlers” (*A.M.*, Herd Sire 2004)



The lead rope is wrapped once around a smooth pole or rail. Notice that the wrap is such that the lead rope attached to the alpaca comes off the top of the rail not from underneath. Wrapped this way the rope slides more easily.



If the alpaca pulls back wait two or three seconds to allow the alpaca to realize that he is tied. If he doesn't stop pulling offer a bit of slack by allowing the rope to slide just a little bit. If desired the handler can use the wand to prompt the alpaca to come forward by tapping the rear leg.

attached to a fence, rather than tying the animal with a rope alone.

In my opinion, this practice may be more dangerous than using a rope by itself. The stretchiness of the inner tube may give the impression to a panicked animal that fighting is going to produce results and may actually cause a more prolonged and intense battle with the rope. An alpaca bucking wildly at the end of a rope whether it is attached to an inner tube or to the fence itself is still in danger of damaging the neck and spine. It is the weight of the body bucking at the end of the long neck that poses the danger.

A better approach, in my opinion, is to stage the first few tying experiences in such a way that the animal learns to come forward to release the pressure on the rope without panicking. The process of teaching an alpaca to tie must begin with the process of teaching an alpaca to understand, accept, and feel safe in a properly fitting halter.\*

### Leading Comes First

Secondly, tying is something that comes AFTER the animal is trained to lead and NOT before. At the age of 4-6 months, a weanling that is comfortable with the haltering process is ready to learn how to lead. Because teaching an alpaca to lead is so closely related to learning to tie safely, it is useful to spend a bit of time on the subject.

Teaching an alpaca to lead is the process by which the alpaca learns to understand the significance of a signal given to the head. It is very important to give meaningful signals and to persist in giving the signals until your student takes a step. Otherwise, it will be very difficult for your animal to make the connection between the signals on his head and your goal of having him move his feet.\*\*

The first leading lessons should be taught in your training/catch pen. Once your alpaca realizes that his head is no longer free to move about at will and begins to respond to a series of signals on the head by moving his feet, you are ready to leave a small catch pen for a SLIGHTLY larger area that is long and narrow. I use a very long lead for initial lead training (15 feet long). Using a long lead in a small pen means that there is never the need to hold the alpaca by the head. Many handlers make the mistake of leaving a small space for a much larger square area such as a small paddock. A panic reaction when the handler is using a short lead in a large pen means one of two things will happen: the handler holds the rope and the alpaca bucks wildly (no good) or the alpaca pulls the lead rope out of the handler's hand (no good).

Unless you can move sideways and keep your alpaca from running past you, the space is too wide. A space such as a barn aisle or pasture lane no more than 15 feet wide by 30-40 feet long is ideal. In

order to be useful, your leading space must be directly adjacent to the area that you use for halter training. Once your alpaca has gone on a few walks, has negotiated a few easy obstacles, and is responding to a signal to stop consistently you are ready to teach your alpaca to tie.

### Tying for the First Time

The first several tying lessons should happen inside an enclosed area. Panic reactions are much less likely in an enclosed space and if they do occur, they are usually much less violent. Using an 11-15 foot long smooth flat lead line, attach your lead rope to the halter and run it around a smooth pole, using one wrap and hold the end of the line in your hand. Make sure that the line can slide freely around the pole or rail. If the alpaca pulls back, hold the line for a few seconds to allow the alpaca to realize he is tied and settle down. If he begins to panic and

doesn't yield to the lead, allow the line to slide around the rail just a bit and give him some slack.

You can also use a wand or cane to tap the rear legs of the alpaca when he pulls back to help him understand that he should come forward. Once your alpaca learns to come forward and accept the restriction of being tied you can tie him to the rail using a quick release knot (*see sidebar*). Be sure and stay alert and be ready to pull on the release end of the lead rope if your alpaca really begins to lay back on the rope.

In my opinion, it is not a good idea to tie an alpaca without being close at hand. There are also times when alpacas should not be tied:

- NEVER tie an alpaca in a trailer unless you can continually monitor the animal.
- Avoid tying your alpaca when you introduce new things such as a day-pack or a costume. It is much better to work in a catch pen when

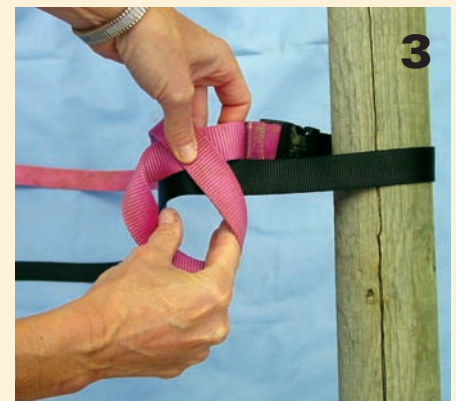
## How to Tie a Quick-Release Knot



1. Take the lead rope and feed it through the ring or around the rail (photo 1).
2. There are two parts of the rope: one that is attached to the animal, and the tail end. (Pink is the tail end and makes the knot, black is attached to the animal).



3. Using the tail end (pink), form a loop\* in the rope with the tail end of the rope on the top of the loop (photo 2).
4. Put the loop over top of the other section of the rope (black) (also photo 2).



5. Reach your fingers through the pink loop and grasp a portion of the tail end of your rope (pink) and pull it up and through the pink loop as a fold and tighten (photos 3 and 4).



teaching your alpaca to accept new and potentially scary equipment.

- Work in a catch pen when you groom and allow the alpaca to move freely inside a small area.
- When you do use a chute, always use one with a back gate or barrier. Tie the alpaca with a long enough rope so that he reaches the rear barrier BEFORE running out of rope.
- Offer food or hay in the chute to make the process more pleasant.
- ALWAYS use a quick release knot when you tie your alpaca. A break-away device integrated into your tying system is a good safety measure if you must leave your alpaca alone even for a short period of time. I would much rather cope with a loose alpaca than one that is injured.

The fight response is a powerful instinctive response. Take the ability to run away from an alpaca, and he moves to the fight response or freeze

response sometimes moving rapidly between the two. Animals that are in the midst of a panic response have a very hard time processing information, just as we humans have a hard time learning when we are frightened. Tying an alpaca without teaching him to accept the process first is not an efficient way to educate him and can be dangerous. Work with your alpacas in a way that honors their nature and capitalizes on their considerable intelligence and you will be rewarded with an alpaca that truly enjoys his association with humans.

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Marty McGee Bennett's first llama jumped off the back of a pickup truck and into her heart in 1981. Since then, she has devoted her professional life to the well-being of llamas and alpacas and the education of camelid enthusiasts. Marty brings a variety of experience and qualifications to her work, including a B.S. in Animal Behavior. You can contact her at [www.camelidynamics.com](http://www.camelidynamics.com) or [marty@camelidynamics.com](mailto:marty@camelidynamics.com).

**For safe traveling tips, see *Trailer- ing Your Camelid* on the next page.**



6. Your knot should now resemble photo 5.
7. Pull on the rope attached to the animal (black) to snug the rope up to the ring or the rail (also photo #5).

8. To release the knot, just pull on the tail of the rope (pink) (photo 6).

\*The knot is easier to tie if you make the loop up close to the rail or ring that you are tying to.

I suggest tying your animal to a piece of baling twine or other weak link so that if your animal does panic, the weak link will break, thus preventing injury.

# Trailerding Your Camelid

I believe that traveling for an alpaca or llama is much more frightening than we probably realize. From an animal's point of view, getting in a small box and jumping out into a totally new environment must be pretty weird. There is nothing in their lives that would prepare them for the sensations involved in traveling in a trailer, van, or car. There are ways to ease an alpaca's fear and reduce the stress of travel without investing an unrealistic amount of time.

### Traveling Tips

- Ideally, you are hauling your alpaca in a vehicle or trailer that he can stand in (even if he must keep his head down when standing). The good news for us humans is that it is natural for most camelids to lie down when they are traveling. However, when a camelid is lying down, he has a small area on which to balance and little opportunity to create a stable platform. Nature has not designed camelids for balancing while lying down in a moving vehicle. You can help your animal relax more fully while traveling if you consider the issue of balance as you plan for his trip.
- Orienting your animal at an angle to the line of travel will help. Using hay bales or partitions to orient the way your llamas or alpacas position themselves will guide them into lying down in a way that contributes to their ability to balance as well as giving them something to lean against.
- Unnecessary noise and sudden movements will all contribute to a feeling of anxiety. Wrap metal parts that clank and bang with cloth or duct tape and drive with an awareness of your passenger, brake gently, and take corners slowly and smoothly. In order to imagine what it would be like the first few times your camelid is transported, think of yourself being hustled into a new carnival ride – a roller coaster, for example. Now imagine riding it for several hours! Ideally, your camelid's first trip is going to be a very short one up the driveway and back home. First impressions are really important. Your alpaca will learn to relax while traveling if his first few excursions are short and sweet.
- Comfort is obviously important when it comes to your camelid's attitude about traveling. Dense padding is probably the most important factor that will contribute to a comfortable ride. Your animal's legs and under belly are designed to rest on the ground for long periods, however under normal circumstances, the ground wouldn't bounce and shift nor would your animal be denied the opportunity to stand up and shift around. In addition, many trailer floors are much harder than the ground. Thickness is not the same as shock absorption. Density is much more important. A two-inch dense rubber mat will provide more in the way of comfort than a ten-inch piece of non-dense foam. Whatever flooring you use in your conveyance along with any ramps or steps, the surface should provide good footing, even when wet. An old piece of carpet thrown on top of some dense rubber matting works great.
- Wind is another factor to consider. Asking your llama or alpaca to



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Pagosa Photography

endure four hours of a 50-mile per hour wind in his face is a bit much. A windscreen is a fairly easy addition to most conveyances. Wind blowing around inside an open sided stock trailer is a very good reason to avoid bedding with hay or straw. Chaff blowing around inside a trailer is no good for your animal's fleece or his eyes.

- Your animal will do his level best not to go potty in a van or trailer so visit the dung pile before you load. Otherwise, your camelid may spend hours in discomfort trying not to go to the bathroom. Before leaving home, pick up a bit of poop in a small airtight container and take it with you. That way when you stop at a rest stop you can off load your animals open up the poop container and the urge to go will hit.
- Camelids feel safer with another llama or alpaca around. When possible take at least two animals. Take two animals to a show if at all possible. Ideally one will be an experienced traveler and can transmit his calm attitude to his more inexperienced traveling companions.
- Your llama or alpaca will be using new muscles to keep his balance while traveling and might very well be sore the next day. If you are traveling to a show it might be smart and kind to take a nice walk to help loosen up the kinks before settling your animal into his small show stall.
- Many people feel it is safer to leave a halter the animal during transport. If you decide to leave a halter on, it is very important to make sure that it fits properly. NEVER TIE YOUR ALPACA OR LLAMA

IN THE TRAILER WHILE BEING TRANSPORTED. MANY CAMELIDS HAVE MET THEIR DEATH THIS WAY. CAMELID NECKS ARE TOO LONG TO LEAVE AN UNATTENDED ANIMAL TIED, especially in a moving vehicle.

### What to do if your animal doesn't want to load

If you find yourself loading a reluctant animal, try this:

First work your way close to the trailer or van. Get inside, getting as far into the vehicle and as far away from the animal as you can. Use your lead rope only to keep the animal's nose and attention oriented toward the vehicle. Aside from insisting that your animal look directly at the vehicle in question, offer NO pressure on the head. No pressure means that the hook attached to the halter is dangling freely.

Often handlers don't think they are pulling on the head when in fact they are. Look at the hook attached to the halter. If the hook is not pointing at the ground, you have not taken all pressure off of the lead rope. If the animal tries to back up, set your hand and resist. Tell him with the signals from your hand, "I am not going to pull you into the trailer but... no backing up!"

When the alpaca tries to back up, use intermittent signals on the lead rope and do your best to transfer the animal's weight from the rear end back to the front end. As soon as possible, put slack in the line again – and check that hook to make sure you are not putting any pressure on the lead!

Look at your watch and wait a full two minutes before giving any signals

to the head. BE QUIET. Your animal student needs time and quiet to think about the trailer. Every time you let loose with "Come on Teddy! Come on, Come on, you can do it. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. Load up. Come on. Come on. Come on. You can do it. Come on. Come on. Come on. Come on. Its okay," you distract your animal from the issue at hand. Be totally quiet.

Each time you give a signal on the lead, you distract your animal from inspecting the trailer and making the decision to try getting in. Just be still and quiet and look at your watch. Each time the animal takes a step forward, your timer is reset and you must wait a full two minutes before giving signals on the lead. Alpacas hate a vacuum and they are very uncomfortable standing still and doing nothing. Your animal wants to move. As long as you don't let your animal either lean backwards on the lead or back away from the vehicle he will move, and the only way is forward into the vehicle.

I have used this method when loading animals when it is time to go home after a clinic, and it works very reliably and quickly. I have very seldom waited more than 5-10 minutes for an animal to figure out how to load himself. This is not very long when you think about it. Using this technique rather than picking your animal up will make subsequent loading a breeze. Your 15-minute investment will give your alpaca a chance to actually figure out how to load.

Happy travels!