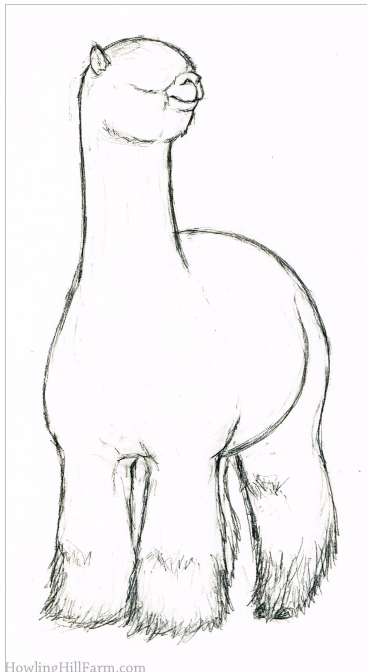


Cheshire Alpaca Standard of Perfection



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The breed standard for the Cheshire Alpaca was developed by Howling Hill Farm to better define our breeding goals for our Huacaya alpacas. Like all breed standards, the below describes an ideal animal, the archetypical Cheshire Alpaca. Unlike the standards for most domesticated breeds, however, this standard describes an animal that is still developing. Many animals on our farm and others come very close to meeting this standard in many ways – some in nearly every defined trait. However, the majority fall short in some fashion, and this is to be expected, as development of the breed has only recently been undertaken. For this reason, many more faults are allowable than would be expected in a traditional breed standard, though the ideals are always described and noted in the preceding text. Over time, as the breed develops and more individuals are produced that meet the standard in its entirety, many faults will likely be moved from the category of “Major” to “Disqualifying.”

The precise definitions of faults are as follows:

Minor fault – A minor fault is one that is discriminated against, but is not serious enough to disqualify a *female* from breeding. It may not disqualify a male *if he is otherwise exceptional*; however, a male with too many minor faults should be culled from breeding. Minor faults should be selected against when choosing matings for females.

Major fault – A major fault is one that is seriously discriminated against, but is not so severe to disqualify a *female* from breeding, *provided she is otherwise exceptional*. *A male should not be used if he displays a major fault*, unless he is otherwise so exceptional as to justify the potential propagation of this trait. *If a male displaying a major fault must be used*, it should be with the aim of replacing him with a son of like quality who does *not* display this fault as soon as it is possible to do so. A male with more than one major fault should never be used, and a female with more than one major fault should be used only with caution.

Disqualifying fault – A disqualifying fault is one that is so severe that it disqualifies any animal, male or female, from breeding.

This standard is illustrated, and all of the alpacas in the illustrations are pictured in full fleece unless otherwise noted. Although it is easier to appreciate the conformation and proportions of an animal that is shorn, alpaca fleece regrows quickly, and this is not always possible. In addition, alpacas are very often shown and photographed in full fleece. For these reasons, it is critical to be able to evaluate an animal in full fleece, although it is more difficult. The true conformation and build of an animal can be appreciated even more readily when shorn.

The breed is named after the county in New Hampshire in which its standard originated.

Introduction: The primary purpose of the Cheshire Alpaca is the production of a luxury fleece, suitable for sale to high-end commercial markets and to discerning handspinners, or for the production of high-end yarns for resale. Thus, although the physical attributes of the breed are emphasized in this

standard, the fleece qualities are paramount. Its secondary purpose is to provide enjoyment to its owner. Thus, its manageable, compact size, pleasing appearance, and easygoing temperament are also of very high importance. This is a breed intended for the small farmer for whom enjoyment of his or her charges is as important as their production yield.

Overall: The Cheshire Alpaca is a compact, yet solid-framed animal. It is heavily built, with a wide chest, deep body, great spring of rib, and heavy substance of bone. Its proportions are square and balanced, with a graceful presence and athletic carriage. It is beautiful to behold, with an appealing head and body style. Its disposition is gentle, outgoing and curious, and it is compliant and easily handled. It is a hearty, thrifty creature, an easy keeper that breeds, conceives, and births easily. It produces an abundance of exquisite, fine Huacaya fleece with a slick, buttery handle and glowing brightness.

The Cheshire Alpaca is not a large-framed animal. When in good flesh, the females weigh between 115-140 pounds, while the males weigh between 130-170 pounds.

Major faults: Large frame score (weight greater than 180 pounds when in ideal body condition); flighty, nervous disposition.

Disqualifying faults: Aggressive, unpleasant disposition (when not explicitly hormonal); ill-thrift.

Head: The head of the Cheshire Alpaca is a major aspect of its breed type, and thus, significant emphasis is placed on head-style. The defining characteristic of the head is that it is a domesticated mirror of the head of its wild cousin, the vicuna, with a more extensive fleece covering. It is roughly mesaticephalic, with the length of the head being neither particularly short, nor overly long, relative to its width. In full-fleece, this gives the illusion of a “short” muzzle. The nasal planum is broad and flat, with wide, forward-facing nostrils, and the muzzle is broad and deep, allowing for excellent air exchange. The wool cap (topknot) is large and thick, and extends perpendicular to the level of the eyes. The face may

or may not have wool growing rostral to the cheeks, and preference is not given for “woolly” over “clean” faces. The bite is level, with sound occlusion.

The eyes are large, bright and clear. Blue eyes are acceptable.

The ears are small and spear-shaped. Ideal ears are woolly or possessed of tassels (*papillion* ears), although this is a minor consideration.

Minor faults: Large or curved ears; slightly long muzzle.

Major faults: Slight overbite, slight underbite, or high-maintenance dental angulation; very long muzzle; narrow or “pinched” muzzle; poor topknot.

Disqualifying faults: Severe under or overbite; wryface; entropion; ectropion; gopher (fused or absent) ears.



Illustration 2: Head of a guanaco. Note the long, narrow muzzle relative to the size of its cranium. Many alpacas have a head of this shape. It is not ideal.

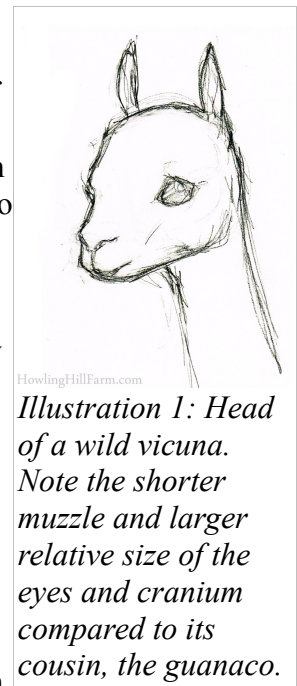
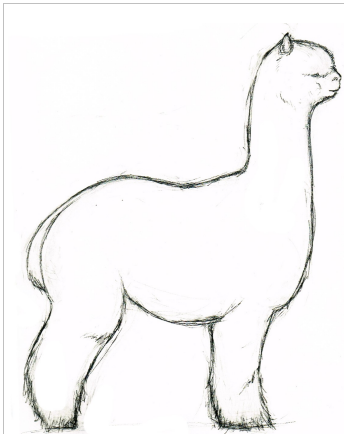


Illustration 1: Head of a wild vicuna. Note the shorter muzzle and larger relative size of the eyes and cranium compared to its cousin, the guanaco.



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Illustration 3: Two ideal heads. The animal on the left has a woolly face. The animal on the right is clean-faced, with no fiber on the cheeks, but both have a large wool cap. Note the similarity in head shape to the drawing of the vicuna.



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Illustration 4: An ideal, balanced Cheshire Alpaca, viewed from the side

Body: The body substance and proportions are a major defining feature of the breed. The Cheshire Alpaca is a cobby, stout animal, compact, yet massive of substance and bone. The body is stocky, balanced and square, with a short back and level topline. When viewed in profile, the ideal animal can be divided into two sets of perfect thirds. The neck, the body, and the legs form perfect thirds from bottom to top. From front to back, the forelimb, from the point of the shoulder to just behind the withers forms the first third; the body, from just behind to withers to just behind the last rib, at the point of the hip, forms the second third; and the leg from the point of the hip to the point of the buttock forms the last third. From the bottoms of its feet to the top of the poll, when it is standing erect, the animal is taller than it is long through the body. Regardless of how it is standing, the animal should appear balanced in its proportions and build.

The tailset may be high or low, although preference is given to a low tailset. The animal has an excellent spring of rib, with a great depth of body, and the chest is substantial in width. The hips are wide, to facilitate easy, unassisted birthing of cria, and to accommodate ample musculature. The hips are always wider than the width of the shoulders.

The neck is thick and powerful, even thicker at its base. It ties into the shoulder in a graceful, flowing manner, at roughly the center of the shoulder when viewed from the side.

The shoulder, loin, and rear musculature is ample and well-developed. In ideal body condition, the animal's topline is rounded over the withers and nearly flat over the loin.

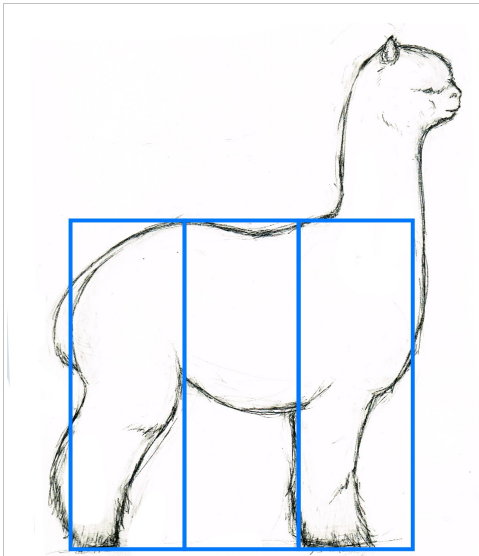


Illustration 5: The ideal may be divided into thirds from front to back ...

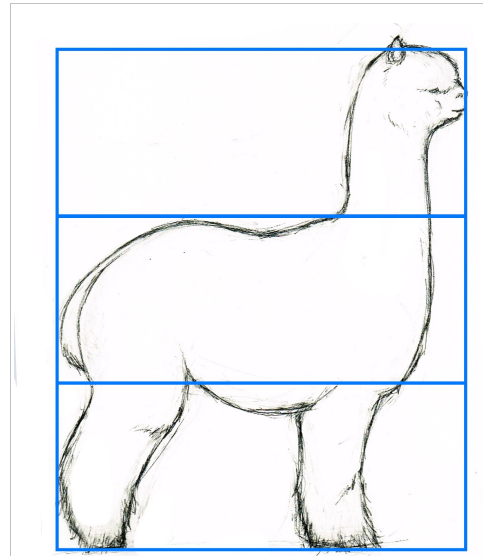


Illustration 6: ... And from top to bottom.

Minor faults: Moderately long body; short legs; long legs; peaked topline (poor lumbar muscling) when in ideal body condition; short neck; high or unbalanced tie of the neck and shoulder; slight lordosis (swayback); slight unbalance of proportions.

Major faults: Narrow chest; overly long body; slight khyphosis (hunchback / rounded topline); moderate lordosis (swayback); moderate unbalance of proportions.

Disqualifying faults: Narrow hips; severe khyphosis or lordosis; severe unbalance of proportions; congenital kinked tail.

Legs: The forelimbs and hindlimbs are straight when viewed from directly in front of or directly behind the animal. Very slight toe-out is permissible. The ideal conformation is such that the animal moves gracefully and effortlessly, appearing to glide over the ground when it walks or runs. The substance of bone is massive, with large feet that are as wide as they are long.

The legs are clear of wrinkles. The fiber on the legs is long, thick, and abundant, extending well below the knee. The ideal animal has fiber covering its toes, such that the claws cannot be seen without lifting the fiber.

Major faults: Slight carpus valgus (knock-knees); slight carpus varus (bowlegs); slight cowhocks; slight sickle hocks; post legged rear conformation; slightly dropped fetlock; poor substance of bone; poor fiber coverage below the knee.

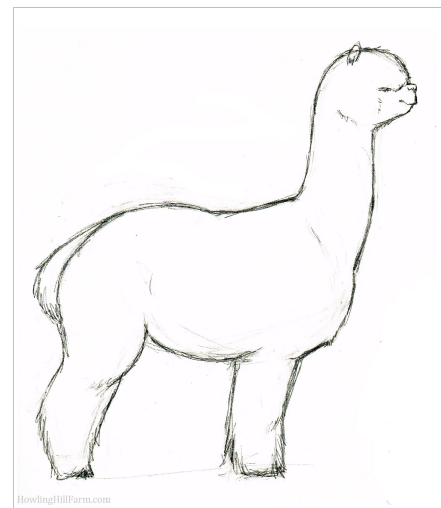
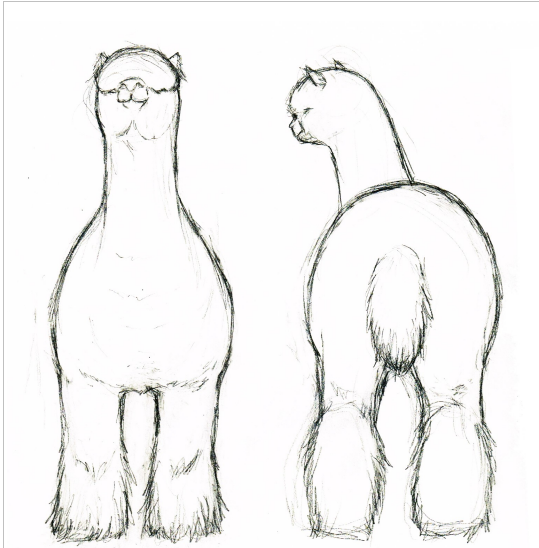


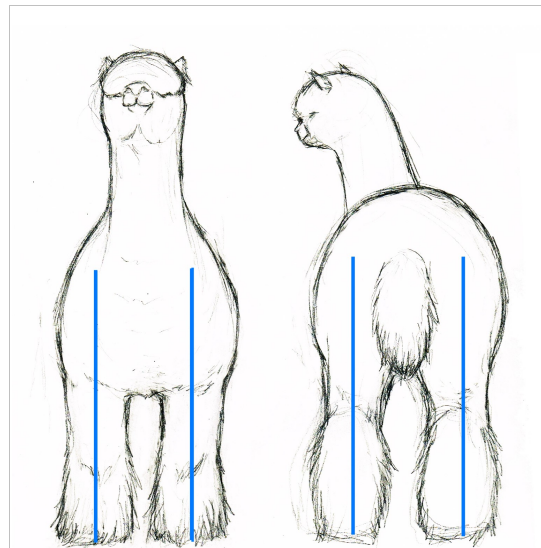
Illustration 7: Example of unbalance. This is an otherwise nice alpaca with an unbalanced tie of his neck and shoulder. His humorous is also overlong, resulting in a forelimb that is set too far back. This is a very common set of faults that often go together.

Disqualifying faults: Syndactyly (fused toes); polydactyly (more than two toes per foot); moderate to severe carpus valgus, carpus varus, cowhocks, or sickle hocks; totally dropped fetlock; extremely poor substance of bone (“pencil legs”); total lack of fiber below the knee; congenital luxating patella.



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Illustration 8: Even in full-fleece, with extensively woolly legs, the conformation should still appear straight. Note that the hips are slightly wider than the shoulders.



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Illustration 9: A plumb line drawn from the point of the shoulder to the bottom of the foot will perfectly bisect the leg. Likewise for a line drawn from the point of the hip to the foot.

Reproductive: The Cheshire Alpaca breeds, conceives and births easily. Males possess two large, firm testicles of even size and consistency. Females possess an adequately sized vulva that is not tipped, and develop a large udder with ample milk once a cria has been delivered. Male libido and female mothering ability are excellent.

Major faults:

Males – Poor libido in an animal that is otherwise healthy, strong, fertile and robust; moderately sized, yet otherwise firm and symmetrical testicles in a male that readily and easily sires offspring; failure to sire offspring by 36 months of age.

Females – Small, tipped, or otherwise abnormal vulva in a female who readily conceives and births offspring; inability to conceive without minor human intervention (eg, hormonal treatment or uterine flush).

Disqualifying faults:

Males – Small, uneven, or cryptorchid testicles; failure to sire offspring by 48 months of age.

Females – Ultrasound confirmed ovarian asymmetry; inadequate milk production to nourish cria; poor mothering skills.

Fiber: Its fleece is the final, critical defining feature of this breed. The Cheshire Alpaca is a luxury fiber animal, and thus, the defining feature of its fleece is its exquisite handle. To achieve this handle, three things must be present: fineness, uniformity, and brightness. The primary fibers do not extend beyond the blanket, and they are indistinguishable from the secondary fibers in terms of micron and character. The standard deviation of fleece must be below 4, but lower is preferred, with the ideal SD being below 1. The Cheshire Alpaca is very fine, with an AFD of below 22 microns; the ideal AFD is 17 microns or lower. Above all else, the hand must be excellent, with a silky, buttery feel. The ideal fleece is lustrous, with brightness so great that it appears to glow.

The production of great amounts of luxurious fleece is a key trait of this breed. The ideal Cheshire Alpaca is possessed of a great follicular density, and will shear a minimum of a 3 pound blanket (AFD 20 microns or below), preferably much more – 5-7 pounds is ideal, and more is even better. Its staple length is excellent, with a minimum staple of 4” at its 2nd shearing; longer staple lengths are strongly preferred. The fineness, uniformity, and character of the fleece extend far below the level of the blanket, down to the belly.

The crimp style of the Cheshire Alpaca is less important than that the crimp is uniform in style, as this is a trait valued by processors. *All things being equal*, higher curvature fleece is preferred over a lower curvature one, with the goal of gradually increasing the curvature to that closer to Merino wool (80 – 100 dg/mm) to improve the memory of the finished garment. However, the crimp style *should not* take precedence over *any* of the other aspects of fleece quality.

The final key fleece trait of the Cheshire Alpaca is that it maintains its fineness, uniformity, and staple length into adulthood. Ideally, the fleece character (crimp and brightness) is maintained as well. The Cheshire Alpaca represents a long-term investment for its owner, and thus, the maintenance of luxury fiber traits well into adulthood is of paramount importance.

All colors and patterns are permissible. Solid colors (including gray) are as uniform in color as possible.

Major faults: AFD of fiber between 20-22 microns at 2nd shearing; standard deviation of fiber between 4 - 5 microns at 2nd shearing; primary fibers that extend beyond the secondaries in the blanket, but are extremely close in micron to the secondary fibers, and display character, at 2nd shearing; poorly defined crimp structure; blanket weight < 3 lb at 2nd shearing; staple length <4” at 2nd shearing; poor brightness.

Disqualifying faults: AFD of fiber > 22 microns at 2nd shearing; standard deviation of fiber > 5 microns at 2nd shearing; primary fibers that are straight and/or substantially stronger in micron than the secondary fibers by 2nd shearing; blanket weight < 2 lb at 2nd shearing; staple length < 3” at one-year regrowth shearing.

Note that the cutoffs for degeneration of fiber quality over time are difficult to dictate. Because pragmatism, as well as the desire to test reproductive soundness, dictates that animals be bred before three years of age, it is impossible to consider any age-related fiber trait to be a strictly disqualifying fault, because the animal will likely have been bred before the fiber began to degrade in quality. Nevertheless, certain metrics can be used to determine whether a breeding animal may be of above-average worth based on its maintenance of fleece quality over time, and thus, its breeding schedule may be adjusted accordingly.

Minor faults for adult breeding animals: AFD of fiber > 22 microns at 5th shearing; SD of fiber > 4 microns at 5th shearing; staple length < 4" at 5th shearing.

Major faults for adult breeding animals: AFD of fiber > 25 microns at 5th shearing; SD of fiber > 5 microns at 5th shearing; staple length < 3" at 5th shearing; primary fibers that that are straight and/or substantially stronger in micron than the secondary fibers by the 5th shearing.

Written by: Dr. HK Hollister, 2015