

Italian job

no.6

After a frantic three years all is now very well here in the deep south of Italy, near to Lake Sirino in Basilicata.

Beautiful Mount Sirino in the Spring



The newly built log cabin

READERS OF THE LAST ARTICLE way back in 2008 will recall we were still trying to organise planning permissions for the improvements to the property. Happily all is now complete and so last year we enjoyed our swimming pool and terrace and visitors were able to enjoy the beautiful view from the log cabin that we have built as a guest suite.

The alpacas are all thriving and business is reasonably brisk after a slow start.

What has become very evident in this society is that initially 'it is not what you know, but who you know'. Many Italians are suspicious of outsiders, even other Italians! The Italian regions have a strong identity and, for example, people in Tuscany cannot understand why anyone could or would live in Calabria. They strongly support their own region and traditions. Hence we have had to invest a great deal of time in building relationships and gaining trust; more than I have ever had to do in England.

We brought a further shipment of our alpacas from England in 2009 but for various reasons too tortuous to recount here we had to bring them through Switzerland. Incorrect advice from the border authorities between France and Switzerland meant they were treated as an export and not as a transit and so they were not allowed to leave Switzerland immediately. After a nightmare journey (five days in the lorry) followed by a quarantine period and extensive blood tests they eventually got into Italy after about ten weeks. Many of them had weight loss, all had ring worm and our suri stud was very stressed and we nearly lost him to a suspected stomach ulcer. After three weeks of veterinary care and careful nursing he recovered. The extra taxes and costs were extraordinary.

However I learned my lesson. Never again shall I try to organise it myself... one incorrect piece of paperwork and the whole European

bureaucratic machinery just swallows you up.

We have now set up a consortium of breeders who have British (BAS) registered quality breeding herds. This is not intended to be a breed society. Rather it is a group of breeders committed to quality and a professional way of doing business and keeping alpacas. All are my clients and all are passionate about their alpacas and about learning how to keep them healthy. All are

Veronica and friends



wishing to develop their businesses both separately and together. Watch this space for more news on our progress!

The distances here in Italy are huge and we find that people are not prepared to travel to go to shows and to visit breeders. Hence we have also now appointed Associate breeders in Marche and Umbria to start with and hopefully two more to follow in the north and west.

In Marche we have El Blanco Alpacas run by Veronica and Gorgio (www.elblancoalpacas.com). They escaped from city life to realise a dream and now have a herd of around sixteen females with more births expected this summer.

In Umbria we have San Gabriel Alpacas run

by David and Chrissie who already have a successfully holiday letting business as you will see from their website:

(www.casasangabriel.com). Their guests love the alpacas and their daughters Elisabetta and Lucia are excellent guides who introduce people to the herd and sell the alpaca products.

Our Associates are very important ambassadors not only for our business but for



the future alpaca industry here. They provide support to local clients and offer venues for me to run my regular training courses including introductory and specialist courses... all in Italian of course.

In addition they sell my alpaca products and will shortly be producing their own. See www.alpacaitalianknitwear.com

The other key achievement for me in the last three years is finding a way to process the fibre. Italy has a strong reputation for quality knitwear but breaking into the manufacturing network was virtually impossible. That is until I came across the town of Biella near Milan which has been the wool centre of Italy for centuries. Now we have a pilot project with

a consortium of processors that are doing my suri fibre processing. If successful, having seen the outstanding quality of their work I have no doubt it will be, we shall be opening this opportunity to suri breeders in UK. In fact by the time you read this article our project may have already been announced. In addition to processing we shall be able to work together on the marketing of products.

The climate here has now returned to what we hope is normal. This last winter was much warmer than the previous two, which, according to the locals, were most unexpected. We have not had the continuous rain and have had meals in the garden regularly since February. However due to the altitude (750 m) the heat of the sun is not uncomfortable and we get gentle afternoon breezes which benefit us and the animals.

We are now considering the next phase of our life here and have decided that for family reasons we need to be able to drive to and from the UK more easily. Hence we are now planning to move to our base in Umbria so at least one day of travelling is eliminated. At present we spend about one week a month there anyway.

As you will see from the advertisement in this edition of Alpaca World we are looking for a buyer for our house in Basilicata... and what a great opportunity for an alpaca breeder from UK. If you have been thinking about Italy why not come and join us here? Bring your alpacas... or have some of ours... or become an Associate breeder.

All local support is set up and the house and grounds are of manageable proportions.

Watch this space for news on all fronts.

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Paolo, Chrissie and Eli



Our House

