

LIFESTYLE

# Take a stroll with a real difference

What could possibly make a walk over the Downs on a sunny day even nicer? **JO ROTHERY** meets some furry friends who do just that

**M**agical – that was my reaction as I walked along a sun-dappled woodland path on the South Downs, leading a handsome young alpaca called Alfie.

This charming creature is one of three stud males who live at Adsdlean, near Funtington, with owners Bruce and Peta Ives, and who are only too happy to set out for a stroll with visitors.

In all, there were 38 Dunreyth Alpacas for me to meet when I called in to see them, with another 12 babies, called crias, due to arrive any day.

Before setting out for our walk, Bruce and Peta took me to the field where the females and their youngsters, one just a day old, were grazing. I was able to stand just feet away from these lovely, gentle

creatures. Several of them came even closer to inquisitively nuzzle my hand and say hello.

With their placid, biddable natures, the alpacas are completely at home in their lush green meadow, bordered by trees, and they look so much part of the Sussex landscape you tend to forget they originate from South America, primarily Peru.

The highlight of my visit, though, was going for a walk with Alfie, accompanied by Bruce and Peta with Baron, another of the stud males and a real character.

Alfie holds a very special place in Bruce and Peta's hearts as they started their herd in 2006 with two pregnant females and he was the first-born of the Dunreyth Alpacas.

The couple's dramatic change of lifestyle came about when they were both made redundant from their posts as nurses. They did a great deal of research into alpacas before embarking on their new venture and it has proved as successful and personally satisfying as they had hoped.

Initially they concentrated on breeding, using the alpaca fleeces and taking their animals to meet the public at local shows, schools and residential homes, but knowing that walking with llamas was already well-established in various parts of the country, they began to wonder about introducing alpaca walks.

Although alpacas come from the same camel 'family' as llamas, no-one at that stage had attempted going down the same route with them – in fact Bruce and Peta were told it would be impossible.



However, they persevered and it quickly became clear their highly-intelligent animals – smaller, gentler and decidedly prettier than their llama cousins, were just as well suited to this particular activity.

The Ives believe there are still only two other places in Britain where alpaca walking is available and just 15 months after Alfie and Baron and several of the other Dunreyth herd

began sharing their strolls, they now have many regular visitors from all over the

south of England and even further afield.

Walking through the woods with Alfie trotting happily at my side, it was clear to see why people enjoy the

experience so much and come back again and again. It was wonderful to stroke the silky cream coat on his elegant neck and shoulders, and to see him respond to my voice and the woodland surroundings.

The alpacas have marvellous temperaments, an ideal combination of being placid and friendly, yet extremely intelligent, alert and interested in all that's going on around them. These are not domesticated, tame pets, so it seems a real privilege they are so happy to let you enjoy their companionship for a couple of hours.

It's such an exhilarating yet relaxing experience, you don't want the walk to ever come to an end, yet as you part with your newfound friend as he returns to his field, you go away with a sense of having communed not just with nature, but with a very special animal.

## BEING FLEECED

■ The alpacas are shorn once a year – their luxuriant fleeces in shades of fawn, brown and black grow to around five or six inches in length.

■ When Bruce and Peta send off the fleeces to a mill to be spun, each one goes in a separate packet with a label bearing the name of the individual alpaca from which it has come.

■ The wool returns with the same label and after it has been knitted up, a special label with the name and photograph of the individual animal is attached to each garment so the buyer has the

pleasure of knowing just which adorable alpaca it originated from – a unique and delightful touch.

■ For more details call 07766 252310 or visit: [www.dunreythalpacas.co.uk](http://www.dunreythalpacas.co.uk)



## TAKE A WALK

■ For £20 per alpaca you can have an hour-long walk and then a stroll around the 13-acre property to see the other alpacas and their babies. There is also a shop on-site selling unique handmade alpaca products.

■ You and your alpaca can even enjoy a drink at a beautiful old country pub during your stroll, as the Barley Mow in Walderton welcomes the animals. This adventure, new this year, takes slightly longer and costs £30 per alpaca. There is also a woodland walk.

■ Up to six alpacas at a time take part in these strolls, and each walk is accompanied by two experienced handlers.



## LIVING ON BORROWED TIME

BY MATT JOHNSON



The days are full of fun but they give way to nights of sadness

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