

Antero Llamas FAQ's

1. I have not packed with llamas before; can I do this?

I have new customers, both men and women, ask me this all the time. I have not had a customer who could not learn to do this. My llamas are commercial quality packers. That means they are well trained and used to working with and for strangers. If you have a dog or been around horses and are comfortable with animals you can probably do this. It mostly depends on your confidence level. If you think you can, then you probably can. One new customer told me after a five day trip "gosh they are like trained dogs. They were very easy to handle."

On the other hand, a repeat customer remarked "we have been on six pack trips so far and we think we are starting to get a handle on this". So clearly, there is a learning process that only comes with the experience of actually doing it. Now it's your turn!

2. What do you do with them at night and in camp?

First of all chose a campsite with good grazing nearby and then flat spots for your tents. Once the packs are unloaded, you stake out the llama with a 20 foot long tether attached to a screw in stake in a meadow, or to a bush or tree. If there are bushes or trees in their 20 ft circle they will get tangled and you need to untangle them occasionally so they can reach grass. I also like to put a bell on them at night. It lets me hear how they are doing. By the sounds of the bell I can tell if all is well or not.

3. What do they eat on the trail?

Llamas eat a lot like a deer does. They will graze on grass in a meadow or browse on brush, twigs and leaves. During summer trips they will graze during rest stops in meadows and no additional feed needs to be packed with you. When you stop for lunch or rest breaks choose spots where the llamas can feed. For longer rest breaks, I will attach a 20 foot long stake out line so they have room to graze to fill their bellies. In heavy timber areas or some camp spots there will not be enough grass or plants to feed on. I avoid those places so the packers will be able to eat all they need. You have to consider the needs of the animals first and yours second. I usually send along a gallon ziplock bag of sweet feed as a treat. My customers call it lama granola. The llamas love it and will come to you for a treat.

During late fall trips when snow is possible it is necessary to take along pellets like goat chow. Llamas don't paw under snow so they do have trouble finding enough to eat. Supplemental feed is critical then to meet the animals needs. Once you are out of supplemental feed you have to go home or the llamas will starve and shiver.

4. What about poisonous plants?

Generally when there are good plants to eat, the llamas select only them. They generally instinctively know not to eat poisonous plants. In 25 years of llama packing I had one eat some skunk cabbage. He looked drunk and could not walk well. We had to totally unload him and let the other packers carry his gear back to the truck. The meadow he was in was already

overgrazed by cows and there was nothing for the llama to eat except the poisonous plants. So that was my ignorance and not the llama's fault. If you see nice grass available you will probably not have a problem.

5. How much can they carry?

It depends on many factors, but in general, 65 to 80 pounds is common. Strong, well conditioned, packers can carry loads of 100 pounds. However, I don't recommend people plan on this till they have lots of trail experience and know what the animals are capable of. If you are trying to carry too much weight, a llama will get tired and lay down on you. At that point you are stuck till they can go again. If this happens you need to take some weight off the tired packer and get another to carry it. If you have packed all llamas with maximum loads, you don't have any flexibility and may have to camp for the night in a spot that is not good for pitching tents or with no water or grass for the llamas.

6. Do you ride them?

No! Because of their load weight limits of 60 to 80 pounds only small children are light enough to ride. Families with small children do train their own llamas to pack the kids so they can hike into the back county. My llamas are not experienced in carrying children and for safety's sake it is not allowed.

7. Do they spit?

Yes they do but you probably won't see it. They use it as a form of nonviolent communication to keep order between their herd mates. They generally don't spit at people but you might get in the way, so it could happen. This might happen if you are feeding them some sweet grain and they are jostling to be first for a treat. It is not a big deal!

A miss-behaved llama that spits at people could not be a commercial quality packer. He would not have the personality for the job and I'd have to fire him.

8. Do they bite or kick?

Llamas are very docile. None of my packers are aggressive or mean. I have never seen a llama try to bite someone. They don't have top incisors, only smooth gums in their top jaw so can't really bite.

You might see a kick but it is very uncommon. Compared to a 1200 pound horse kicking which we have all learned about, a 300 lb llama is no real danger to adults. I have been kicked about 4 times in 25 years and it never really hurt. Just pay attention when you are close to their back legs, there is no need to be afraid.