

Heather Pain
Threshold Alpacas, VIC

I'm just a small breeder, one who has toyed with the idea of giving up many times after continual bad luck with crias dying and no female baby in sight. That was until early December 2008 when I found my first baby girl skipping around the paddock. We were elated and thought we had turned the corner. Then Black Saturday happened.

I was caught on the road trying to get to our property after being told there were grass fires there. That was an understatement. Police had blocked roads and there were fire trucks everywhere; there was smoke and fire all around. As I reached the corner where our property is situated another police block wouldn't let me on to the property where my 12 alpacas, 15 horses and 5 goats were. I wasn't allowed onto the property for two more days because of the danger. Many lives were lost on our road and it was designated as a crime scene.

Friends managed to get onto the property on the Sunday morning to check their horses and all my animals. They used whatever was at hand to begin with until they could get some medical supplies.

We had two very badly burnt alpacas which got caught in a fenced dam. Their feet were so bad we thought we would lose them and one had a nasty burn on her side. I found an entire pad in a paddock one day. We also had five very badly burnt goats and scorched ponies. We had the occasional vet visit our property for the first three weeks until we were able to see the vets in Whittlesea who were brilliant, so mostly we cared for our animals on our own with the help of a few amazing friends who have horses agisted with us.

Dressing the feet was the worst thing imaginable and everyone learnt what to do, how to inject and how to avoid the spit. We knew they were getting better when they began to spit. The only things we could do to treat the wounds was disinfect,

apply ointment such as Pottie's White Ointment (before we got that we used any burn creams from the chemist or manuka honey), and keep the wounds moist with saline and very padded dressings. To begin with we changed dressings on the feet twice a day, progressing to every few days as the pain was so great. We kept them on antibiotics and pain killers for about six weeks. The side wound was cleaned with saline and treated with ointments, again Pottie's or Silvadene.

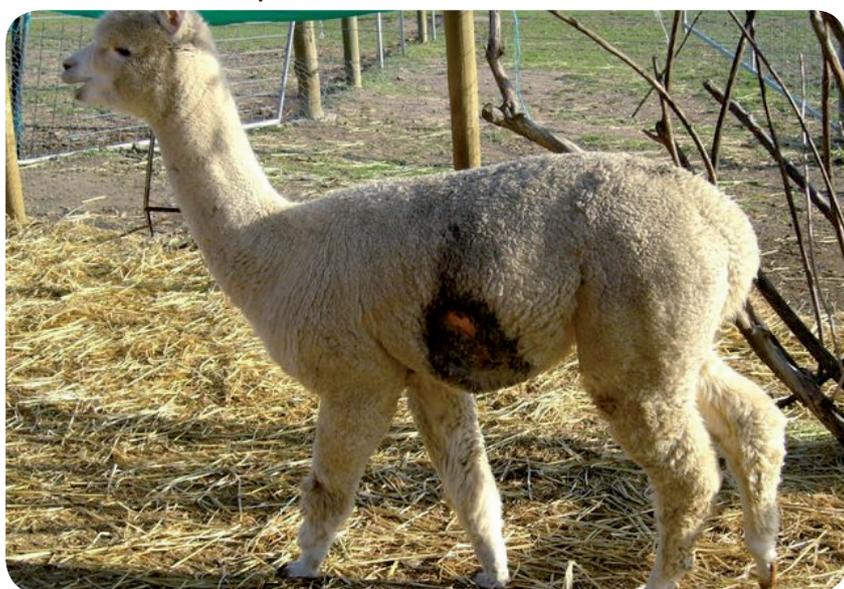
When my husband first moved the alpacas (with the help of the Ranger) into a makeshift yard where they stayed for five months, he had to roll them into horse blankets and carry them. The goats just sat there dazed. A CFA member from Kinglake had actually had to douse the flames on one goat. All have survived and at time of writing, five months later, the alpacas have been released into a paddock to run and skip and frolic and are showing more than a little interest in the boys in another paddock.

We are all weary to our bones but we are alive. We saved the animals and had our second baby girl born a month after the fires. Of course she had to be called *Phoenix Jewel*.

So, who knows, we may be back in the show ring again one day. 🐾

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Burn treated with Pottie's
White Ointment.



Burnt feet pictured four months
after Black Saturday.

