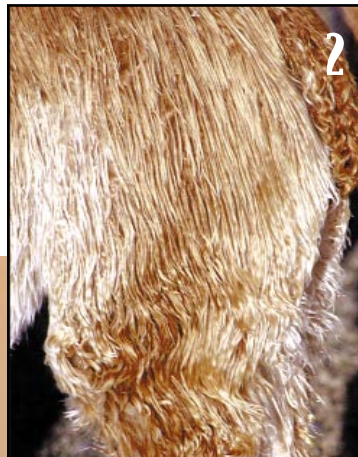
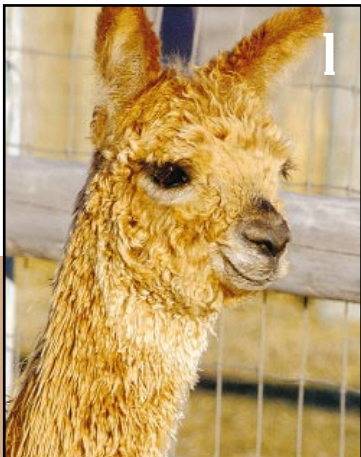


Suri appears to be a noun or adjective from the Aymara language, one of two Native American language groups in the Andes Mountains. In pre-Colonial times, the Aymaras were known as weavers and herdsman. Their range included Southern Peru near Lake Titicaca, all of present day Bolivia, and Northern Chile. According to the Aymara-speaking herdsman Cheryl and I worked with in Bolivia, suri means “straight” in their language. The feathers of the South American rhea are suri. A hard rain that falls straight down is suri, and the straight Andean pan pipes are suri. Suri does not mean lock or luster, but the use of suri in conjunction with the pan pipes does suggest the lock formation of the suri alpaca.

When visitors come to my farm, they are often unsure what a good suri looks like. I have compiled a field guide to help my customers identify suri character.

# IDENTIFYING Suri CHARACTERISTICS

by Andy Tillman

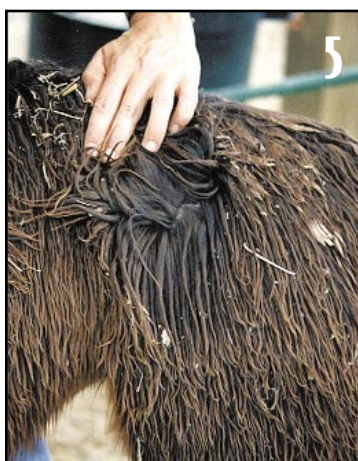




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1. Suri character can be identified in even the youngest of babies. This cria's well defined neck wool, high luster, and locked cheek wool all indicate she will be a show-quality suri. Notice the connection of the cheek wool to the topknot.

2. Uniformity of suri character throughout the fleece is evident in this young cria's hip, tail, and even the middle of her rear leg. When Cheryl and I worked in Bolivia, breeding the alpacas that we would eventually export to the United States in 1996, the head wool sorter at our partner's woolen mill, EXIMBOL in La Paz, was Miguel Azucena. Miguel said that when a suri had good suri character in its tail and topknot, that everything else in between would be suri too. Miguel supervised 40 wool sorters, and taught us a lot about selecting suris.



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3. By about six months of age, you can see a connection of the topknot, cheek wool, and neck wool in a baby suri. This wool should hang straight down and show some lock formation.

4. Suri character in the neck wool is also evident at this age.

5. This is what most people think of as "suri character." Well-defined pencil locks with luster and the presence of locks throughout the depth of the fleece, not just on the surface of the fleece. This female is about nine months of age. When customers are evaluating a suri, they often squeeze the blanket and comment on the fleece's "density." They may not be feeling density, but rather, the presence of lock formation throughout the depth of the fleece. Judges often use the same language to describe what is really good lock formation.



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6. It is difficult to achieve this kind of front leg wool coverage on a suri. The leg wool does not have any huacaya characteristics. It has lock formation rather than an upright fleece.

7. A dense fleece may give up a little bit of suri character like the "over mature" fiber of this adult, but this fleece is still well-locked and indicative of what you can expect from a dense fleece with heavy coverage.

8. A well-covered rear leg in a baby. Note the luster in this virgin fleece.

9. A distinct part down the back of the neck is a sure sign of good suri character. The definition of lock formation in this suri's blanket and top line is often seen in conjunction with a distinct part down the back of the neck.



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**10.** About 50% of the suris in the United States are white. This group of young colored suris includes fawn, true black, and maroon.

**11.** “Density” is a term that is probably over used when discussing suri alpacas, and may even be a huacaya characteristic. This young suri has a very narrow profile in his neck. The fleece in this picture may not look very dense, but in reality, it will probably yield about three or four pounds of fiber on the blanket, plus another three to four pounds on the neck, belly and legs. Suri fiber is heavier for a given volume than that of the huacaya. An upright fleece may have more hair follicles per square inch but usually lacks suri character.

**12.** Luster is probably the single most important characteristic of suri fiber. This is the primary reason that the textile industry purchases 250,000 - 300,000 kilograms (≈550,000 - 660,000 pounds – or about 300 tons!) of suri fleece each year. Suri fiber is often blended with merino wool or a blend of suri and cashmere to add luster to the world’s finest sheep’s wool. I will never forget the first time I saw 500 kilograms (1,100 pounds) of suri fiber heaped into the bin of a 16-foot-wide drum carder for processing at EXIMBOL, the largest woolen mill in Bolivia. You could not see lock structure in any of the fleeces due to the sorting process, and the fact so many fleeces had been

blended together, but you could tell from 100 yards away it was a pile of suri fiber by the luster! Breeders and judges should always remember that luster is what makes suri unique in the animal world.



Trust your eyes! Suri character can be seen even in a shorn suri. In cold climates, you may see suris which are shorn every other year, or with a one-year clip on the barrel and neck and every other year on the legs.

The Suri Network recognizes five different lock types in the suri alpaca. These include: straight, twisted, curled, flat, and fan-shaped locks. A straight fleece will often have very high luster.

A twisted lock is also called a “pencil lock” in the United States and may be slightly smaller or larger in diameter than a lead pencil (about ¼ of an inch).

The curled lock is wider in diameter than a twisted lock and will give the suri more of a rounded appearance when viewed from the front or rear.

A flat lock and fan-shaped lock usually lack luster compared to the other suri fleece types. They have more of a “chalky” color, which is especially noticeable in a white suri. A fan-shaped lock narrows down into a tip like a paintbrush.

The “handle” of a suri fleece may not always correlate closely with its Average Fiber Diameter (AFD). Many of the best suri fleeces are in the mid-to high-20 micron range. Trust your subjective judgement when evaluating fineness of a suri fleece. An exceptional fleece will feel cool to the touch and smooth as silk. If it feels fine, it’s suri!

#### **About the Author**

*Andy and Cheryl Tillman, D.V.M., raise 130 suri alpacas in Bend, Oregon. Breeding alpacas and llamas has been the Tillmans’ primary business for 26 years. They bred the Bolivian national champion suri in 1995, and imported the influential Bolivian suris and huacayas in 1996. The Tillmans initiated the tradition of donating an alpaca to the AOBA auction in 1996, and donated again in 1999. Cheryl reviews medical research proposals for Morris Animal Foundation. Andy is a former member of the AOBA Long Range Planning Committee and was co-editor of the Suri Network’s Purely Suri magazine.*

