

## ***September 1, 2008***

After several months of preparation and two solid days of packing the bits and pieces that I've been collecting for months, hauling some 250 gallons of water to sheep and other stock, after filling up feed bins and hauling dog food bags, I was finally ready to leave for the airport. My flight is scheduled for 7:30 pm. So, why must I leave for the airport at 3pm (with the airport only an hour away)? Probably OCD. But I have never shipped dogs over to the UK, even though I've brought plenty over. So I'm envisioning the worst.

Hmm, glad we did leave early. After loading the dogs in the Suburban, loading the giant Sky Kennel 500's (broken down, of course, since they wouldn't fit in the car assembled) and loading my bag, backpack and crook, we were off. I drove to Continental Cargo, walked in and straight to the counter. The attendant there, when I asked her about checking Jen and Jess in, told me I'd have to go to the "satellite" office inside the warehouse. Okay, so off I trudge to the "satellite" office, only to be told that I was in the wrong place, I had to go to Terminal C, the International Departures area. Okay, back in the car and off to Terminal C, the International Departures area (I was told it would be the first door – Quick Pack). Hmm, must have missed it, so around the airport a second time and back, only to miss it again. So, in spite of my nature to never ask directions, I park, go inside and ask. Nope, it's at Terminal C, the DOMESTIC Departures area. Okay, around the airport a third time and I finally find it. Now, I haul out those two GIANT 500's and assemble them right there on the sidewalk, haul them into the counter, unload the dogs and bring them inside. The rest goes very smoothly. I have all the necessary paperwork, I have my microchip scanner to tape to the top of the crate and I pay the bill -- oops, almost twice what I was initially quoted. Oh well, gotta do it. By now, it's past 5pm.

Okay, around the airport AGAIN to get to Terminal C, the International Departures area – for ME. Fortunately, I had pre-checked in on continental.com and had my boarding pass. So, I was ushered to the MUCH shorter line for baggage check-in. Then thru the security check and out to the gate. Got there about a half hour before the plane started boarding. I'm very glad I left when I did.

## ***September 2, 2008***

We arrived at Manchester Airport about a half hour late – not bad. At least I was able to sleep on the plane, so arriving at 8am local time (3am New York time) didn't hurt TOO badly. I had an uneventful pass thru passport control (the officer seemed extremely sympathetic towards this pitiful American about to attempt to compete against his countrymen at the World Trial). Retrieving my luggage was easy, getting to the Avis counter a bit of a struggle, but settling the paperwork quite easy. Ah, now to find the car. It wasn't easy with no markings to indicate rental car agency parking. But I finally found it (after trudging up and down the rows clicking the remote the entire way) and loaded my luggage. Now to learn to drive all over again – standard transmission, me sitting on the right, shifting with my left hand, me trying to remember to drive on the left.

Oh, forgot to mention that a transfer agent was required to pass my dogs thru customs, I wasn't allowed to do it. So, now I have to go to the Manchester cargo area to retrieve my dogs. I had sketchy directions to travel on the M56 (I wasn't told in which direction) and follow the signs for Cargo. Well, I got lucky and headed in the right direction on the M56, but the signs weren't exactly what we're used to here in the states, so it took a lot of concentration, during which I forgot to stay on the left. Okay, I only had three near head-on collisions in route. Finally got there and went into the receiving area. Jen and Jess were standing in the waiting room WAITING for me. The attendant had already released them from their cells. She helped me haul those huge crates out to the car, but asked if I had leashes for them. Sure, but they were buried somewhere in my backpack. I explained that the leashes wouldn't probably be necessary and they weren't. Jen and Jess were so happy to see me that they stuck by my side like glue – while I, once again, disassembled those GIANT crates to fit in the car.

Now, it was hook up my GPS, put in my destination and I was off. Oops, wrong side of the road again. I got onto the M56 and headed into Wales. That was the easy part. As I got off the highway, the roads started to get a bit narrow. At first, it wasn't too bad; at least there was a white line down the middle of the road. Closer yet, and the line disappeared; closer yet and there was barely enough room for two cars to pass; closer yet and it became a single lane cow path, yet meant for two way traffic???? Yikes.

So, I finally made it to the farm at which I am staying. They had a nice lunch waiting for me then a tour of the farm. I took Jen and Jess with me on the tour out into the pastures and around. We came across a flock of the farmer's Welsh Mountain lambs that he had just brought

down from their summer pasture. He suggested that they might be a bit “wild” – surely, I found, an understatement if I’ve ever heard one. They took off at a thousand miles an hour as I sent Jen left and Jess right at a thousand and two miles an hour. I think those sheep got to 600 yards before Jen and Jess got behind them and were able to start them back towards me. Then, at every little gap in the hedge, or pathway down the mountain, someone or someones (lots of someones) would attempt an escape. I had a lot of fun, not sure Jen and Jess shared my enthusiasm. Then, it was back to the house, a light supper, a few glasses of wine (hmm, lots???) and off to bed at 10pm. Not a bad day, actually.

### ***September 3, 2008***

Overslept that morning (6:45 am) after a bit of a fitful night’s sleep. Came downstairs to fresh coffee waiting for me. Lounged around with a couple of cups of coffee and then set out to find some sheep. I didn’t have to go far. There was a flock of about 20 in the small field right next to the house. I started out with Jen, leaving Jess by the gate into the garden. As soon as the sheep saw Jen coming, they took off at TWO thousand miles an hour. Jen hustled out after them out of sight down the hill. Turns out that “little field” by the house drops off into a valley and turns into a rather big hill field, I’d guess about 800 yards. Found that out when it too Jen about five minutes to bring those sheep back to me. So I moved down to where the field dropped off and we worked the sheep down in the valley through and around obstacles and back up to me. As Jen worked the sheep, they became a bit more forgiving, but it wasn’t beyond them to suddenly make a break for a hole in the stone wall or hedgerow. Both Jen and I had to stay alert to be sure we didn’t lose them into some faraway field. I then used Jen to cut the group and left eight behind.

Now, it was Jess’s turn. She was quite good at handling these sheep. I think she believed she was back home in Lancashire. These were her sheep. She anticipated their every move. We gathered, we drove (a little bit faster than I wanted), we shed, and she did it all as she had when I first brought her over almost seven years ago. As I thought back to our walk of the day before, I remembered how alive she acted. She would run ahead, come skipping back and then run ahead again. Whenever I would take her for a walk back in the States, she’d never leave my side, never venture out. Yet, yesterday, she was out investigating every wall, every hedgerow. I do believe she was remembering her home of seven years ago.

So finished with our practicing we came back in, they for their breakfast. Of course, breakfast was set for me, as well. After breakfast, we went into town for a some shopping and a look around. Yikes, the streets were narrow. There was just enough room for two cars to pass. But, there was some street parking allowed, and at those spots one car would have to stop and wait til it was all clear in the other direction. If a bus or truck was coming in the opposite direction, we had to pull way over to the curb.

Then, it was back for lunch. I went out with Jen and Jess again and found a group of about ten in the little field by the house. This time I started with Jess, gathered them at a more pleasant pace this time –only about 500 miles an hour. But Jess hung onto them and slowed them to a very nice pace. Again, we drove them around and thru various obstacles, thru a break in the stone wall into an adjacent field and back into our field. I do have to work on getting her to slow down more on the drive. We then cut the group down to five, letting the rest escape down the hill into another adjacent field. I worked that group of five with Jen, trying to simulate what I might have to contend with in Llandeilo. This time, Jen started to feel these flighty Welsh Mountain lambs and hung on nicely. What fun.

That afternoon, we relaxed and talked sheep and dogs til supper time. After supper, I took the dogs out for another spin on the field. This time the small group of sheep DID escape down the hill and onto another hill field. Poor Jess was exhausted by the time she had retrieved them back to me. Jen worked them for awhile up and down that steep hill til she could barely run anymore. I've decided that three times a day on these steep hills is a bit too much for my old girls.

### ***September 4, 2008***

Well, this cushy life is getting to be quite nice. Woke up at 7:45 and came down to coffee and breakfast. We sat around and chatted for about an hour til I went out to work the dogs. Oops, no sheep in the side field. So, we trudged down the hill and into the next side field – HUGE. Jess and I gathered up a large flock from way up on the hill and brought them down to the bottom. I was able to cut off about 10 to work. So we worked this new set around a couple of outcroppings and up the hill thru a gap in a stone wall, around the end of the wall, back to me and a split to cut off five. Jen and I then worked them around the field. Both dogs are getting quite good at reading these feisty lambs, not getting fooled when one or more splits off running.

They're still pushing a bit too hard on them, not taking slow flanks. Gotta work on that. There is usually one or more sheep in the crowd that make for one of the escape holes in the hedgerow or wall. And they don't do it slowly. They go from 0 to 60 in about a second. It's really fun watching the two dogs getting really good at reading these sheep.

Then it was off to catch some of the runs at the International. We saw some good runs and some not-so-good runs. We saw two of the brace runs, one by Jim Cropper – a really good run. Turns out that Jim won the brace competition with that run. It was Jim from whom I got Jess, so I stopped up to say hello to him and Shirley after his run. He asked about Jess and was quite surprised to hear that I was running her in the World Trial at her age. Met up with Arthur Muhlweny, Jack Knox and Aled Owen as well. Saw Dawn Boyce, Nancy Obernier, and Marie Amodei also. It was off and on rain throughout the whole day there.

So, back to the farm. This time Jen, Jess and I walked up the lane to the far gate and into the upper hill field. I sent Jen out to pick the flock up at the far top of the field, probably a good 6-700 yards. But it wasn't a clean shot, she had to go thru an opening in a stone wall in the middle of the field first and then swing out. She handled it well, but I want to work on outruns with obstacles, expecting the fields at the World Trial to have them in there. Then it was a stampede of about a hundred sheep down the hill, thru the gap in the stone wall and another stampede to my right down the lower hill field. She caught them just before they made it to yet another gap in the stone wall down near the bottom of the hill. She started them back up the hill when a big bunch bolted to her left to get to the little side hill by the house. I made her let them go so we could work with the smaller bunch of about 20. By the time she got them back to me, she was done. I worked Jess on this smaller bunch, cutting off a few at a time. I am getting better at shedding these sheep. I can't get closer than about 20 yards from them. The dogs can get a bit closer, but not by much. So, shedding is a whole lot different here with these sheep than I'm used to at home.

### ***September 5, 2008***

Hit it this morning. Got up at a more normal time of 5:30am and was out the door with the dogs before anyone noticed. It was raining hard, but the dogs loved it. I started in the little side hill by the house, but there were no sheep there. So I went up the lane to the big upper side hill and found sheep about halfway up, but still on the other side of the gap in the stone wall. Sent Jess

for them and she handled it nicely, not letting the wall or trees fool her. I split off a bunch of about 10 and decided to work them in the lower side hill but down instead of up. So we drove them down the hill and thru the gap in the stone wall into the valley field – I'd guess a good 8-900 yards. We drove and cross-drove them all around that valley field. Jess took every whistle. But she's still pushing them a bit too fast. Put her up, left the sheep down in the valley and got Jen. By the time I got back with Jen to the brink of the hill, the sheep seemed to have left the valley field. But, I spotted a bit of white thru the trees on the left, just past the stone wall at the top of the valley field. So, I sent Jen right. She started out quite hesitantly since she couldn't see sheep, but finally believed me and headed down the hill. I had to redirect her to get her to go thru the gap in the stone wall, but as soon as she was thru the gap, she must have seen the sheep, because she cast out nicely and got behind them. She got them thru the gap and brought them up the hill very nicely, tucking in the escapees all the time. We drove them back down the hill and thru the gap in the stone wall. We then did the same exercises I had done with Jess, back and forth across the valley field (at a good 8-900 yards away). It was nice to see both dogs working so nicely at such great distances. If I talk to them, they'll slow down nicely. If I lose my concentration, they push too hard. I'm still working on getting them to take small slow flanks on the drive.

With all the rain, we decided against going to the International. Instead, we took a drive out in the country and up into the mountains. Even in the rain and wind, it was a lovely drive. Back home we had a hot lunch of soup and sandwiches.

Okay, still raining. I need some work on shedding these sheep. Hmm, so do the dogs. So, there was a group of about 30 in the hay field at the top of the lane. Tied up Jen and took Jess out the gate. Of course, they all took off running as soon as they saw her. I sent her out; they broke thru a gap in the center of the wall. Smart old girl, she went thru the gap on the far right of the wall and cut them off before they could escape out to the big upper side hill. She brought them back smartly to the hay field. All I did was to head the bunch away from the upper side hill and peel off one or two at a time and push them thru the gap in the center of the wall so that they could escape up the hill. I wanted her to see a purpose behind this shedding exercise. Kept that up til I only had about 20 left; then changed her out for Jen. I did the same exercises until I was down to 10 or 12. Then split the group so that I had 6 left. Shed off one at a time from that group til I was down to 3. Then, quit for the day.

It's off for fish and chips tonight and a bit of "real Welsh Ale." I've been invited to stay up here as long as I want. So, do I go to Llandeilo on Sunday and try to run in a couple of trials on Monday and Tuesday, or do I stay up here til Tuesday and keep working these squirrely Welsh Mountain lambs? More tomorrow.

### ***September 6, 2008***

Heavy rains during the night. I could hear it on the roof at 4:45am. So, I waited til 6 am to venture out. Maybe it was NOT such a good idea to skip the International yesterday in favor of today. Oh well, the weather here changes so often, who knows what the rest of the day will bring. Besides, today is the double-lift Finals.

I took the dogs to the side field and found only three sheep there. That's okay, let's work just the three. I started with Jess and drove them down into the valley field. One of the sheep was a grown ewe, another a grown ram and a lamb. The ewe and the ram were smart, trying to escape at every opening. The lamb just followed. As an exercise, again I drove the sheep back and forth across the valley field. Jess was pushing too hard, way too hard for these sheep. So, I had to yell at her to slow down, quite a task at 800 yards away. Finally, she settled down and moved the sheep along the valley at a nice steady pace. We need to work on more of this before Thursday.

Called her back and got Jen. I sent Jen on her outrun to the right. This time she had the lay of the land and went out with gusto, hitting the gap in the center of the stone wall on the fly and then cast out nicely to her right and around the three. Of course, as she tried to gather them up the hill, that ewe and ram tried to break. She was quite good at keeping them together. I'm expecting the fields at the WT to have natural obstacles in them. I want the dogs to be able to deal with trees or shrubs in the field and still not lose sight of where they're going on their outrun.

Okay, back to the house to get ready to head out to the International. We parked down at the bottom of the hill, expecting mud in the parking lot. Yep, the mud was ankle deep. Cars were being pulled out by tractor. The trial field was on a hill, so that wasn't all that bad, but the tent area with all the vendors was like a soup. I was glad to have my boots. There was no rain, but the wind and dampness was bone-chilling. We stayed for the young handlers and three runs afterwards in the double lift. But that was all we could stand. Back to the farm.

That evening, I decided to duplicate the shedding exercises of the evening before, They're getting better at reading where to be and how to come in from so far away. Me too. I'm getting better at working these sheep from far out.

### ***September 7, 2008***

No rain this morning. But the news last night warned about traveling if not necessary. The roads are still being cleaned and repaired. Thousands have had their homes flooded and everything in them ruined. One 17-year old girl was killed when the family's SUV slipped off the road into a swollen river and was tipped over, trapping them inside. The other two members of the family are recovering.

I spoke with a family from Llandeilo. They've had horrible rain and flooding. They are wondering if the trials will get canceled. The fields are filled with water. That made my decision easy. I'm heading for Llandeilo on Wednesday morning, hoping that the weather improves.

I took the dogs up on top of the big upper hill. It's the first time we've been up there. Beyond the top is yet another set of fields, the one I'm in sloping gently down then a steeper drop-off. Off to my left is a second field bordered by a hedgerow. It slopes down to my left, separated from my field by that hedgerow with a gap in the center. The field I'm in has about 30 sheep in it; the field on my left has a good 20 or more.

I tied Jen to a post and started with Jess. I picked up all 30 sheep from my field, sending Jess to my left. As they came closer (they still would come no closer than about 30 yards), I let them go between Jess and me, cutting off the last 6-7. I worked that lot down the field, using trees and thistle plants as obstacles. I'm still working on getting Jess to slow down a bit more on these sheep. Judging at the trials will be on how controlled the dogs can keep the sheep, no quick starts or stops. If I hold her back, she's good. But, if I lose my concentration, she starts to push and that gets the sheep to running. I'm doing a lot of driving and cross-driving just to give the dogs a chance to feel these sheep (oh, for me too).

I left that lot down at the far end of the field; changed Jess out for Jen. I know I need to work on Jen's left side; it's always been her worst. So, I've sent her left for the lot down at the end of my

field. Ah, smart girl – as she passes the gap in the hedgerow to the field on my left, she looks down and sees that bunch. Off she goes into the left field and brings back that flock, with a bit of difficulty because there's a blind one amongst them that doesn't know how to move away from her. She won't leave it but it finally hears one of the other lambs and comes up with the rest. Then she continues on for the 6-7 I've left in my field putting the entire group back together. Once again, I let the whole flock go between me and Jen and cut off 5-6 of the back ones.

I drove that lot around the field aiming at specific obstacles; again looking for the dog to exercise some of its own control over the sheep, not relying on my commands. I want to hone my own understanding of these slippery lambs as well as to get the dogs to learn how to handle them more on their own. By aiming for specific obstacles, I'm not letting either of us get too sloppy. I'm trying to simulate trial conditions, but working on specific parts of the trial course where I know I and the dogs need work.

In the evening, I want to go back to the hay field and work on shedding. Jen is doing well and always has. It's Jess I worry about. When I first brought Jess over, she was a shedding machine. But lately she's slipped. Must have been something I've done.

There are a good 30-40 sheep in the hay field. I point the sheep away from their exit up the big upper hill and peel off one or two at a time, pushing them away thru the stone wall up the hill. Jen is doing well, easily willing to come into any gap I can get from as far away as she needs to be to keep the sheep calm. I have to remain calm as well. I can't move fast, unlike home sheep. They'll split easy enough as long as I move slowly and I get the dogs to move slowly. Once I have a gap, then is when the dog has to move in quickly. They're off from the sheep a good 20 or more yards, so any hesitation and the gap closes. So, that's it for today. I'll work them pretty hard tomorrow, Monday, then a light workout for Tuesday, then we travel to Llandeilo on Wednesday and they get to rest. Hope we are all ready for the preliminary round to start on Thursday. It's Jen on field 2, running 18th on Thursday; Jess on field 1, running 13th on Friday (I'm not usually superstitious, but ...).

### ***September 8, 2008***

Today, I worked both morning and evening shifts in the lower side hill. I wanted to give the dogs a good bit of running up and down these hills, just as a last chance to get a good workout.

Also, I wanted to give them some major control exercises in that lower valley field. I started each session by splitting off 5 or 6 lambs and driving them down into the valley field. In the morning I started with Jess and in the evening with Jen. In the morning it was Jess doing the sorting, drive the sheep down thru the gap in the center of the hedgerow then called her back for an outrun. In the evening it was Jen's turn for that same exercise. Both dogs now know how to do that outrun, so it's no big challenge.

Down in the valley field, I'm trying to get both dogs to stay off their sheep on cross-drive after cross-drive. I want to be able to set a line and have the dog keep that line with few commands from me. Of course, there's pretty heavy pressure for the lambs to bolt towards me, so the dog needs to stay low in order to hold that line. Ah, with one exception. For some reason, as we're driving right to left, the pressure changes towards the end of the valley field and the lambs want to bolt away from me. Then, the dogs have to take a quick flank away from me in order to hold the line.

In our evening session we had four rams and a ewe lamb. It was an interesting mix I've not noticed before. The ewe lamb kept trying to break away from the rest, requiring both dogs to flank out to catch her. Then, towards the end of our session, the ram lambs decided that they'd had enough. They tried to stand the dogs down, both Jen and Jess. I asked them both in each of their sessions to flurry at the lambs and that was enough of a conversation so that the lambs showed a bit more respect. At the end of each dogs' session, both in the morning and evening, we did more shedding exercises. I love working these Welsh Mountain lambs.

My feeling is that the dogs are as good as they're going to get. They're fit, they can read these sheep as well as anything I saw at the International and they are ready. Now, it's up to me and them to prove it on Thursday and Friday. Tomorrow, Tuesday will be a light workout and a rest on Wednesday. Jen runs on Thursday, so Jess gets an extra day of rest.