

*№ 26 December 2010*

# ***JOURNAL***

**of International Society for Preservation of Primitive  
Aboriginal Dogs**



*To preserve through education.....1*

## *From the Curator....*

**Dear members of PADS and readers of our Journal,**

We send you our seasonal greetings at this holiday time.

Starting from the previous issue - No. 25, we have slightly modified the appearance of our publication, in accordance with suggestions from our members. In this, the 26th and last issue of our Journal in 2010, we publish the fourth part of the article by V. Beregovoy and the second part of the article by R. Vartanyan about aboriginal Ovcharkas of the Northern and Central Caucasus. This article describes some facts, which raise a question about the origins and evolution of these and other aboriginal livestock protecting dogs. Indeed, how could such a "breed" of ancient origin be developed in conditions free of confinement and a semi-wild way of life? Evidently, natural selection directed by the very working conditions of these dogs played a crucial role. Vartanyan describes the environment of these dogs in remarkable detail. Sue Hamilton collected some interesting information about Osman, the lead dog of a team that made an historic trip to the South Pole.

Sincerely yours,

Curator of PADS,

Vladimir Beregovoy

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## **Evolutionary Changes In Domesticated Dogs: The Broken Covenant Of The Wild, Part 4: Preservation**

**Vladimir Beregovoy  
USA**

### **Preservation of hunting, working and primitive aboriginal breeds.**

After domestication of the wolf, evolutionary changes in the dog went through three successive and overlapping time periods: 1) primitive aboriginal dogs, 2) cultured breeds and 3) show-pet dogs. Now, all hunting and working breeds are threatened by genetic pollution and replacement with genetically crippled show-pet dogs.

Conservation of aboriginal breeds is possible only if they are preserved as parts of their natural habitat, including their work and way of life. Unfortunately, people abandon a traditional way of life along with the dogs of their ancestors even in parts of the world remote from industrial centers. In the long run, the future of the majority of primitive aboriginal dogs seems rather bleak. However, there are a few hopeful projects subsidized by governments and charitable funds aimed at preservation of aboriginal dogs within their environment. In Bulgaria, Atila and Sider Sedefchevs are working on the preservation of the whole natural complex of their country, including the Karakachan dog, the Karakachan sheep and the Karakachan horse. The project covers predators as well, such as bears and wolves, without which the work of the Karakachan dog would not be needed. In Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan livestock guarding dogs became recognized as national breeds and they are still used for protection of sheep in open mountain pastures. Sheep guarding dogs were imported to the United States of America from several countries of their origin. Therefore, they represent a mixed stock. Nevertheless, they originated only out of aboriginal dogs of similar functional purpose and now form a healthy population. Interesting work on preservation and restoration of national livestock protecting dogs is being done in Portugal and sled dogs and reindeer herding dogs in Russia.

The same is going on with aboriginal sight hounds. However, some of them are represented by both working and show lines and genetic exchange between the two may ruin the working lines.

Attempts to rescue aboriginal dogs by breeding them in an urban environment with a plan to return them back in their home country when economic situation improves may help, but only as



**Pauloosie Kooneloosie with his dog team after a seal hunt  
on the sea ice north of Qikiqtarjuaq, Nunavut. May 2001**

**Photo: P. Mahoney**

as a temporary measure. There are several pedigreed breeds derived out of aboriginal dogs and adopted by major kennel clubs. Trying to save them this way is as futile as saving Siberian tigers by breeding them in zoos, while their habitats in Siberia are vanishing.

If aboriginal dogs continue to be used and bred for hunting or other traditional service in countries of their origin or elsewhere, they could survive and remain with us indefinitely

Preservation of hunting and other actively performing cultured breeds is more hopeful. There are many good strains used and selected for active performance specific of the breed. Using several strains of one breed for periodic genetic exchange

would be helpful to maintain heterozygosis. A major obstacle in preservation of hunting dogs is the shortage or even absence of land and game for hunting. If we want to save hunting and other physically performing dogs as national heritage of humankind, lands for hunting with dogs are needed. This can be easily done without hurting wildlife communities, because traditional species hunted with dogs are usually abundant in every suitable habitat, are not threatened by extinction and they easily rebound. Even the wolf, if its populations increased to a sustainable level, can be hunted with Borzois, Staghounds and Taigans. It is debated whether or not the Chart Polski and the Hortaya Borzaya, popular among Russian hunters, are different breeds. They are very similar, except in one meaningful in evolutionary sense which is obvious. The Chart Polski is a show-pet

breed, but the Hortaya is a hunting breed. To save the Chart Polski from degeneration its breeders and users have to be hunters. Dog breeds developed for active performance should avoid crossbreeding with show-pet strains to avoid genetic contamination by hereditary ailments. Bad genes do not fade away, do not become absorbed or eliminated except by patient line breeding and culling. To avoid this time consuming work, it is better to stay away from show lines.

Feral populations of dogs founded by cultured breeds also deserve preservation. They are biologically superior over pedigreed strains of show breeds and are valuable for evolutionary studies and as a potential source of healthy and intelligent puppies to be kept as house pets and as service dogs in different capacities.



**Taken in Jordan. Picture donated by Sir Terence Clark**

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## **Caucasian Mountain Dogs (Caucasian Ovcharkas) of The Northern And Central Caucasus Part 2**

**Robert Vartanyan  
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### **Breeding and raising puppies**

I should point at the fact that the populations of Ovcharkas we surveyed were not uniform enough, because of the spontaneity of the breeding process. Approximately 50% of the examined dogs did not have any value for establishing pedigrees. As a matter of course, the chobans never separated dogs by the type of hair and never prevented mating between them. As I mentioned earlier, working qualities, strength, resistance to predators and persistence in dogfights during breeding time were most important.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in many mountain villages the breeders developed their own peculiar lines of Ovcharkas. Over many years the local population of the choban Ovcharkas became increasingly inbred and this fixed local peculiarities of their appearance. Only in some cases did the chobans deliberately breed certain pairs of dogs. However, this happened only when in a particular village an outstanding male proved himself well at work and out of such breeding the chobans started developing and maintaining a new line.



Like their wild relatives, such as wolves and jackals, sheep protecting dogs breed poorly in captivity. In 1982, Vladimir Romanovets brought to the Ukraine a beautiful male of the Garbani type from Arsha village. This male was called Marukh. Unfortunately, he could not obtain any offspring from this male. Possibly stress endured by the dog in the process of changing his way of life was the reason. After living free in the village until the age

of seven years and never having had a collar, Marukh was put in a kennel, where he was not able to adapt well. He had a poor appetite and was depressed for a long time. He mated with several bitches, but there were no puppies from him, although in the village of his origin he left offspring.

We often observed such a psychological infertility among sheep guarding dogs, which went to the cities, especially if they lived in kennels. A similar stress condition occurs also in bitches of

over 3 years of age. Many of them did not have estrus for a year or longer. When they had estrus, there was no discharge and the process of heat was weak. They often did not become pregnant after mating; if they gave birth to puppies, they ate them.

For the same reason, many outstanding Ovcharkas, which came to our kennels, did not produce desirable litters. It was different with puppies and young dogs. With them, there were no problems with breeding.

Bitches, living free with sheep, have their own places for raising puppies. In winter this may be a koshara or hay storage barn. In the warm season in the mountains, on the open slopes, the bitch will always find a cozy place under a rock, or she will dig a den away from sight and here she will give birth to her puppies. The chobans do not interfere. They feed the bitch and then, when the puppies are two weeks old, or older, they move them closer to the camp. If there



**Butuz**

are several bitches with the herd, then a dominant bitch may kill the litter of subordinate bitch. However, such cases are very rare. This happens, when the Ovcharkas are poorly fed. In winter, one bitch gave birth in a koshara, where one corner was reserved especially for her. She gave birth to her puppies quietly, in the presence of the sheep, which did not pay her any attention and did not come closer. Unlike with sheep, the choban never watches a bitch giving birth. Quite the opposite, he does not come close for the first few days, because during the first days, she is nervous and can even attack the choban. The choban Ovcharkas have a strong instinct to protect their puppies.

When the puppies grow a little, their ears are cropped with shears, which are also used for shearing the sheep. The tails are docked less often and only in males. The dewclaws are never removed.

The puppies of choban Ovcharkas are not big when born and do not develop as fast as puppies of cultured breeds of a similar size until the age of one month. Probably this is connected with the natural conditions of their life, when the mother must rely only on herself. Thus, in 1984, during the migration of a herd near Chmi, a pregnant bitch lagged behind. It was time for her to give birth. She gave birth to 12 puppies in a mountain cave. This bitch fed her puppies alone until the age of two months, when villagers discovered her den and took all the puppies to their homes. However, the puppies were skinny. Until the age of one month, nobody would feed the puppies anyway. We tried to feed puppies of aboriginal dogs during their suckling period of life. They became heavier up to one kilogram, but in the body size they did not differ from puppies fed only by the bitch. The average weight of aboriginal puppy at the age of one month is about 3.0-3.5 kg.

*Probably the slow growth of choban Ovcharkas until the age of 1.5-2 months is genetically determined. After the puppies are weaned, they develop and grow fast.*

When puppies are one and a half months old, the mother begins to regurgitate food for them. This happens during the first minutes after the puppies reach for the mother's nipples. At this moment, the bitch sits or stands and, after regurgitating, she walks away. The puppies eat everything clean.

To facilitate the raising of puppies, the chobans leave only one or two puppies in the litter. Most often they spare the males and cull the females, because it is not wise to keep more than one

or two females with the herd. Unfortunately, culling the majority of females results in a lack of good females for the high quality males in the same herd. We often saw females with a sagging back, which certainly was caused by being bred too early. A not completely developed skeleton is not ready to carry the heavy load of puppies and the backbone sags. This defect is not passed on genetically to the offspring.

Under the conditions of keeping dogs in a koshara, raising good puppies is difficult:



**Butuz the 2nd**

because of the lack of proper food, puppies often die of infectious diseases, as they are not vaccinated. Until the 1980s the most common disease was distemper and later parvovirus enteritis appeared, which was formerly not known in this region.

Kazbek chobans try to raise puppies in their homes, where they get better care. In mountain villages, as a rule, infectious diseases are not known, the environment is clean and the food is good. The puppies are fed cow's milk and soup made from corn flour. In the past, people used goat's milk. When puppies are five – six months old, they are fed with whey and unsalted bread. Older puppies are fed with unsalted steamed food. Meat is given very

rarely. At first glance, such a diet seems poor, but we did not see even one skinny puppy, because the food was offered in sufficient amounts. Puppies raised inside receive more love and care. Under conditions with the herd, the chobans do not have enough time for the puppies and adult Ovcharkas are harsh with their puppies. When growing in the herd, the puppy does not develop proper spirit and confidence. When growing in the house, the puppy feels that he is in his home and, at the same time, he is at work, because in every yard people keep big and small livestock animals.

In the summer, the herds leave for the mountains and this is the time when the chobans take 8-12-month- old dogs with them. Their young dogs learn from the old ones how to work against bear and in the fall migration they may be taken to the winter camps.

When we asked the chobans how they determined whether the puppy would grow up as a good sheep guarding dog, we got the following answers. First of all, they expect to see a proud and independent body language in the puppy. At the age of one-two months, the puppy must keep his head and tail high, when a stranger approaches. A puppy, which lowers his head and tail, usually grows up as a mistrustful and weak spirited dog. Size, body structure or length of hair do not concern the chobans. Only a proud carriage, playfulness and desire to move about are considered important. A tail high set or even better curling over the back is a sign of a dog that is active and eager to work.

### **Feeding**

I remember how in my childhood in Azat, Khanlar District, Azerbaijan, I watched chobans feeding their Ovcharkas in the evening and resting after work. With other boys we used to climb trees standing around the place where the sheep herd was. The chobans would dig a hole in the ground, the soil was then compacted with the foot and a boiled flour soup was poured in the hole.

The dogs ate it eagerly and quickly so that it did not percolate into the dirt. However, this is what I saw in Azerbaijan.

Kazbek chobans, during migration, feed their Ovcharkas in the evening with bread. In the winter camps, feeding is done differently. This is a way of life with its rules and laws. In the evening the dogs become excited in anticipation of food. All the dogs gather closer to the feeding place. The chobans put the food in the feeder and leave. The leader comes to eat first. As a rule, he is very aggressive towards the others. They sense this and wait until the leader quenches the first pangs of his hunger. After a few minutes, the bitches come and then the puppies and young dogs join the feast. The leader is tolerant to them. When the leader has eaten enough, he lays down not far from the feeder. Now, from further back the adult males come. They approach the feeder slowly, watching the leader. If he starts growling, they stop where he allowed them to come closer. After a while they, as if inadvertently, make another attempt. This is repeated several times until the leader, having enjoyed his power, finally lets them eat. If one of them violates the system, he will have to deal with the leader, who is merciless. Of course, there is not always enough food for everyone and then some Ovcharkas come to the feeders for the goats and eat a little of their feed.



**Borza**

The dogs are fed with steamed feed or flour soup; and meat is given rarely, usually only when one of the sheep dies. In such case, the sheep is skinned, including the ears with tags. The skin is used for the accounting, but the meat is fed to the dogs. The dogs open the abdomen first and eat the entrails, then they eat the muscle meat and soft bones and the other hard bones are eaten last. If any dog attacks a sheep, such a dog is killed on the spot.

During the migration, Ovcharkas are not fed during the day, because otherwise some of the dogs might lag behind the herd. Only in the evening do the dogs receive a little food.

It is doubtful whether such feeding compensates the dogs' losses of energy. Most likely, the dogs supplement their diet with protein obtained by hunting. Everyone, who has studied the life of sheep guarding dogs, has noticed their persistent hunting instinct. There are known cases, when they have even caught hares.

#### **Behavior of sheep guarding dogs**

The life of Caucasian sheep guarding dogs is hidden from strangers' eyes; they are free, semi-wild dogs and, possibly, this explains their independent character and ability to make their own decisions.

The chobans do not interfere with natural selection in favor of high spirited fighters. If you ask a question, what quality a Caucasian Ovcharka should have, the answer will be as follows. First, the Ovcharka must boldly, with hard bites, attack bear; even after being hit by a bear, the Ovcharka should not be afraid it. Second, the Ovcharka should not be big and lazy, because dogs that are too big endure poorly the migrations with the herds, get tired and poorly protect the sheep.

Among the numerous shepherd dogs, living in the area of the Kazbek Mountain, we paid most attention to two subtypes, the Gergeti type and the Garbani type, which were discussed earlier. Numerically, the population of the Gergeti dogs was predominant over the Garbani dogs. This is due to the superior quality of the Gergeti type dogs, which were better for work on bear and displayed moderate aggressiveness to unfamiliar people. The latter is very important during the migrations. At home, these dogs are very aggressive, but on the street, one can be safe side by side with them. It is important not to touch the dog and it will not touch you. The Garbani dogs are more aggressive to unfamiliar people, which is not always convenient during working with sheep herds. Sometimes, during the season, new people are hired to work with the herds and the Garbani Ovcharkas do not always accept them easily. Many of the Garbani Ovcharkas were left at home until next summer season, when



**Boko grandson of Borza**

the sheep return to the mountains. In the mountains, as a rule, there is nobody, but the chobans and their sheep and the Garbani type Ovcharkas can be turned loose for the protection of the sheep.

In a pack of choban dogs, all activities are well adjusted, like in a good mechanism. The entire life of these dogs is harsh, but it is also beautiful, well organized according to the laws of pack predators. The leader of the pack is like a conductor of his orchestra. Everything turns on him: procreation, protection of the sheep herd, home, raising the young dogs and maintaining order among kin. At the camp, the dogs live free of any form of confinement, only some dogs are tethered near kosharas, where the terrain is poorly visible. Free running dogs stay near the homes of the chobans or they escort the herd, when the sheep are grazing. Only the puppies are restless; they either chase each other playfully or fight over a bone. They are always happy, like children.

Relationships among adult Ovcharkas are more complex. Each of them has a certain place in the hierarchy of the pack and each has its own resting place. The leader picks sunlit places, closer to home. As a rule, the bitches are near him and adult males have to choose less valued places. This order is particularly noticeable in winter time. Hay stacks or hay storage sheds are favorite resting and sleeping places of Ovcharkas. By the way, it is hard to call it resting during the night, because the dogs do not stop guarding the territory. As soon as an alarm signal sounds, the resting ends. Alarm barking, as a rule, is started by the bitches or young dogs. Adult dogs start barking rarely. The degree of danger can be determined by the intensity of the barking, which is differentiated. We classify the barking of a guarding dog as follows.

Barking at animals, which can be excited and intensive and indicates a game animal, or it is excited and alarmed, which indicates bear.

Barking at humans is alarmed but without excitement, aggressive, depending on the number of people and the presence of a horse rider.

Periodic barking, which indicates the determination of the status of the dogs' territory and "conversation" with other far off dogs.

Barking as a warning, even with some aggressiveness, but not addressed to any certain danger. The dog sends a message that the territory is protected and everyone, who has still not learned it, may have unpleasant experiences. This barking is usually done during patrolling the territory.

The intensity of the barking varies, depending on the dog's character and distance from the alarming factor.

Experienced dogs perfectly understand this language and do not expend their energy without a good reason. In such situations they are the last to react, but in serious circumstances precisely their intervention is decisive.

The chobans do not teach the Ovcharkas how to protect sheep herds. If the Ovcharka is purebred, this is in its genetic makeup, as the guarding behavioral program is inherited from its ancestors, which is securely passed on for generations in true sheep guarding dogs.

During our study of the Kazbek Ovcharkas, we heard many amazing stories about the intelligence and wit of these dogs, which seemed mythical. However, at a later time, when sheep guarding Ovcharkas appeared in our kennel, we discovered that the working potential and intelligence of these dogs was indeed surprising. There were certain dogs, which surprised us by their actions and earned our respect. I will describe several examples below.

### **Palas**

In 1986, Giya Khulelidze, the son of an hereditary sheep breeder, traded a sheep for a bitch and two of her puppies. One of the chobans of Leningorsk District sold a sheep herd and, because he no longer needed his dogs in Dagestan, he agreed to trade his dogs for sheep. In half an hour in Daryal Gorge, near Nizhny Les, we found a desirable sheep herd. The exchange was done quickly. The choban looked at the sheep with his experienced eye and called an Ovcharka named Palas and put her together with her two puppies in our car.

We returned to the city and brought the young dogs inside the house of Giya. He tethered the bitch in his vegetable garden, on one side of which there was no fence. We examined Palas and it became clear that Giya had made the right choice; she was a purebred looking bitch. Calm in appearance, she laid where she had been tethered, but later on we discovered that her calmness was deceptive. In the morning my friend came to me, the one who had traveled with us to make the deal, and said that the bitch had disappeared with the tethering line.

We traveled to Giya and he met us, asking for help. It turned out that when we were leading the dogs inside, we were watched by a young man, who was also a fancier of this breed. In the evening, after much drinking with his buddies, he recalled the dog and decided to take another look at her. He entered the vegetable garden and saw the dog calmly lying tethered to the fence. The man decided that such a kind Ovcharka would be a beautiful addition to his home. He untied the dog and led her away with a decision to leave her with his nearby living relatives. The relatives, when they knew to whom the dog belonged, asked him to return the dog. However, the abductor decided to do it his way. He simply turned Palas loose, expecting she would return to Giya on her own. However, the dog did not know either of her new owners.

Next morning, the abductor went to Giya to find out if the dog had come back and asked for forgiveness for his action. Giya was happy with such an outcome. He confidently insisted that he would find the bitch with her sheep herd, from where we had picked her up. We did not believe this, because the sheep guarding dog would not be able to find its way in the city and find the sheep herd. During the time she had spent tethered, the sheep herd had moved several tens of kilometers from the site where the exchange had taken place. Moreover, at least ten other sheep herds had passed on the same road.. The tracks were trampled over. However, Giya insisted that a good Ovcharka would find the road to its sheep herd, if not today then in a couple of days.

It was uncomfortable for us to tell him that we would rather start searching for Palas in the city, near dump sites or in neighboring houses, because somebody could have caught her in the morning. The dog was attractive and everyone would like to have such an animal in the house. However, Giya still insisted on looking for her with the sheep herd. We took off at the noon and by evening caught up with the herd in the Tarskoye Gorge at the border with Ingushetia on the left

bank of the Kambileevka River. The herd was prepared for camping overnight. It was turning dark and the chobans were prepared to rest.

Three Ovcharkas ran towards our car. We were surprised to see that one of them was Palas. The chobans told us that on the night of the same day that the exchange took place, the bitch returned to the herd. It took Palas several hours to find her herd. Neither hunger nor attachment to her puppies could stop her. Desire to work with the herd overruled all the rest. It remained a mystery how Palas was able to find her herd so quickly.

### **Kalli**

My friend Vladimir Slusar gave me Kalli in 1987, as a gift. He got her from some Kazbek chobans. She was a big, well boned, sturdy built bitch. She looked as if she was six-seven years old. As I discovered later, Kalli was much older: she was 10 years old. We asked the choban to show us her teeth. Only stumps of her canines remained, the incisors were worn down to the base and half of them were missing, probably as a result of numerous injuries. Kalli was a pure Gergeti; she was a leader in the herd, which happens rarely. Her character was very tough. She did not tolerate bitches and instigated vicious fights with them; she also beat males, if some were disrespectful to her. Kalli had a slight concussion on the left ear; a bear had hit her with his paw when she was still young. Therefore, when she listened, she tilted her big head. I placed her in my kennel, which was on the territory of wholesale warehouse guarded by my dogs.

In the evening we turned Kalli loose for her protective duty. She did her job well. All night long one could hear Kalli cruising the territory, never remaining in one place. Even when the weather was rainy, she did not remain for long in the shed.

In Troitskaya (Ingushetia) we needed to protect 200 hectares of orchards. Our mobile cabin was in a cherry orchard. Once the villagers did not have time to put away the crop they had harvested that day and left 100 cases with apples at the edge of the orchard. They needed to be guarded for the night and one of us, Sergey, volunteered to stay overnight near the cases. When it turned almost dark, he took one Ovcharka named Turka and left with her. Kalli also left with him. We let her go, because we thought that Sergey would have more help with two dogs. The cherry orchard was not big and our dogs were tethered around its perimeter. At night it started to rain. Suddenly, we heard the voice of Kalli. She came back. I thought the dog was growing too old and wanted to spare herself. Usually, after some barking, she would crawl under our cabin to rest and then she would resume her cruising and return to rest again. That night she did not crawl under the cabin to rest, I heard her barking four or five times. The barking sounded as if she was simply cruising the territory. At 6:00 Sergey came with Kalli. Jokingly, I mentioned that Kalli met him first, as an excuse for leaving him at night alone. Sergey did not answer but took a big slice of white bread from the table and gave it to Kalli. She liked white bread and even preferred it over meat. Sergey smoked a cigarette and told us what happened. The previous evening he tethered Turka near the cases. Kalli was with him and then, barking, she circled around the cases. Then she was silent. Sergey called her, but she did not appear. Sergey thought that she had gone because it was raining, but she returned in about 20-30 minutes. He learned that she was guarding two objects and she did so for the entire night. While Sergey was talking, this hard working bitch was already sleeping under the cabin. She finished her work and now could rest. Kalli lived until she was 13 years old and she worked until her last days. I always remember her as one of the great Ovcharkas.

### **Bobriya**

Two major instincts are the strongest in a good Ovcharka: the instinct to procreate and the instinct to protect its territory. Here is one of the astonishing cases of the instinct to procreate. In 1986, Tamaz and I visited the head of the collective farm Vazhe Geladze in Garbani. He had a beautiful Ovcharka of the Garbani subtype, a dog named Bobria. It was late fall, but Bobria was at home, not in the winter camps. We asked if Bobria was familiar with working with the herd. Vazha smiled and explained that the dog had recently come back from the herd's overwintering lands. Two months previously his relative had asked him to give him the dog to be used with his herd during the winter season. During this time, Vazha had a female on heat and Bobria was busy

with her. However, Vazha agreed and the dog was taken in a car to Kochubei, to the winter camps, which were 400 km from Garbani. He was tethered there, but he was gone the next morning; he had slipped out of his collar and run away. A search did not produce any results.

A month later, the choban traveled to Garbani and came to Vazha to ask for forgiveness for the loss of the valuable dog. He was surprised to find Bobria was at his home. It had taken a little more than two weeks to run 400 km. A year before Bobria had run with the sheep herd on this road across Chechnya, Ingushetia and Ossetia and he had not forgotten it.

However, the life of sheep guarding dogs is unpredictable. Two years later, during the next migration season, in the area of Voznesenovskaya, Chechnya, Bobria was lost. Unfortunately, cases like this are not rare.

### **Ovcharkas, wolves and bears**

The Ovcharkas of the Northern and Central Caucasus and Transcaucasia are rather different from each other in many peculiarities of behavior and they work on predators differently. The Ovcharkas of the York Plateau in Transcaucasia, during guarding work, wore metal cast collars with spikes weighing about 1-1.5 kg. There were collars made out of old shears used for cutting sheep wool. The presence of these metal collars is evidence that the sheep herds are visited by wolves; in winter wolves attack sheep more often, than in summer. There are no bears on the York Plateau and the local Ovcharkas are not familiar with this animal. In the mountains of the Great Caucasian Ridge, there are many bears and the local Ovcharkas are accordingly well familiar with this powerful animal and they work on it. There are no wolves on the alpine pastures. Their favorite habitats are forested areas near mountain foothills and mountains and the dogs wore collars with spikes there. Sometimes, attacks of wolves on sheep in winter were recorded in Dagestan and Stavropol Territory, but they were very few.

Attacks on sheep herds are very rare. The wolf is a very cautious animal. Because of its limited physical capabilities, it rarely takes a chance to attack sheep, because the dogs can injure it severely. If a wolf is attacked by several dogs, it can die. When we asked a choban called Jumber, how often wolves came to the sheep herd, he answered that wolves are essentially thieves. They never attack sheep openly, if they are detected by the dogs. A healthy wolf would not take the risk of approaching the herd where there are good dogs. Only sick predators may try a desperate attempt and, as a rule, die from the teeth of the Ovcharkas. Besides, the presence of Ovcharkas with the herd is a certain psychological obstacle for wolves. Once they have decided to attack sheep, wolves probe to see whether there are people with the herd and what kind of dogs are protecting it. If the dogs are active, do not hide, firmly keep their positions and give warning that the herd is protected by barking aggressively, then the wolves try to frighten or outsmart them. For example, they howl for a long time: some dogs are scared by wolves howling. They try to distract the attention of the dogs on one flank and attack at another. If these attempts do not succeed, it means the sheep are protected by good dogs and the wolves leave.

Wolves eat not only sheep and their diet is diverse. They do not need to risk their lives, because they are successful hunters; and the opinion that wolves are always hungry is incorrect.

I often asked Kazbek sheep owners about wolf attacks. Many chobans were bragging, fabricating myths about a single dog killing a wolf. Later, it became known that it was a lie. If a small herd is allowed to graze on the mountain slope without protection, it is enough for one person to walk along the slope where the sheep are and shout loudly to prevent the wolves approaching the herd. A wolf attacks sheep if it has become weakened by age or is sick and very hungry. Then, it loses its caution and may take a chance. Wolf attacks happen when they have to leave their hunting grounds because of military operations or economic development. Tamaz Samkanashvilli told a story about a wolf, which entered the village Plansheti and tried to take a sheep. The Ovcharkas of Tamaz caught and killed it. It was an average size wolf, about 35 kg. This happened in 1996, when there was a war in Chechnya and probably this wolf came from there.

A bear is a very strong animal and it knows its power and immunity, because by existing laws shooting bears without a license is not allowed. The fine is very high. Bears attack at night, often when it is raining. If a bear is shot and injured, it will attack the first human in sight. The

chobans do not shoot bears but only try to drive them away by shooting rather than relying on their Ovcharkas. There were cases when the dogs of a herd were afraid of a bear and it took 30-40 sheep. Such a loss was equal to the earnings of the whole season.

There are many choban Ovcharkas which have never met a wolf in their lives. However, in summer they constantly deal with bears. Fogs are frequent in the evenings and bears use this. Usually a bear approaches the herd from above, using surprise tactics. If a bear enters the herd and grabs its prey, nothing can stop him from carrying it away. If a bear cannot come up close enough so that it can run into the herd and carry away sheep in one strike, it has first to distract the Ovcharkas, which takes too much time.

The Ovcharkas surround the bear, some attack it head on, but do not take a hold, as the bear can kill the dog with one strike of a paw or injure it severely. The better dogs attack the bear frontally, making it easier for the other dogs to attack it from behind. These are the dogs, attacking from behind, that take a hold. Feeling pain, the bear turns back against the attacking dogs and at this moment the dogs exchange their roles. It takes a lot of courage to work so close. The bear is turning around on one place and cannot move towards the sheep. The goal of the dogs is to stop the animal and, at the same time, stay alive. A mistake can cost an Ovcharka its life. One should not make the mistake of thinking that the Caucasian bear is a clumsy animal. It is a very bold and quick animal. Over a short distance it can catch a horse. Its weight can be up to 250 kg. Naturally, an Ovcharka must have a size that allows it to be faster than a bear on the steep mountain slope and at the same time to have an impressive look. Ovcharkas hold the bear until the arrival of the chobans. People shout, shooting in the air, if the dogs are not gun shy. However, most often the bear cannot stand the pressure of the dogs and retreats.

If a bear manages to sneak close to the sheep and the dogs allow it to enter the herd, taking a sheep from a bear is very difficult. It can disappear quickly in the darkness. Bears start attacking sheep in September when it needs protein rich food to prepare for hibernation. Bears know that in September the sheep herds will leave the mountain slopes for the winter.

Bears have not only great physical strength but also a well developed intellect. Sometimes chobans saw some interesting tactics used by bears to deceive the dogs. Bears may throw rocks on one side of the slope. When the dogs run towards the noise made by the falling rocks, the bears attack the sheep from another side. Once in the herd, a bear grabs a sheep and tearing off its fatty tail tries to swallow it on the spot. It then grabs another sheep and finally, after it has injured several sheep, it carries one away. Some chobans tell the story that at night, when a bear sees people, it stands upright, pushes one shoulder forward and hides its paws, so that it becomes similar to a human in a choban's burka. This is how bears deliberately try to deceive people.

Since 1993 Kazbek sheep breeders have stopped grazing their herds in Dagestan and have begun moving them for winter to the York Plateau in Georgia and the mountain foothills of the Great Caucasian Ridge. In these areas, the climate is softer and the sheep can be grazed in winter. In 1996, many Transcaucasian chobans got into a difficult situation when great numbers of bears moved from Chechnya to the southern slopes of the Caucasian Mountain Ridge in Transcaucasia. In that year, there were records of bears attacking sheep. Before the war, such cases were unknown. The Ovcharkas of the Transcaucasian chobans did not have experience of dealing with bears, so they were afraid of these predators and poorly protected the herds. The Transcaucasian chobans came to the Kazbek chobans and asked for dogs to protect their sheep herds.

### **Dogfights**

In the early 1990s, in the North Caucasus the dog fighting abilities of sheep guarding dogs grew in popularity. It was necessary to deal with the situation of such a sensitive subject. This is not as simple as it seems at first glance. If we consider one ingredient of this activity, which is the thrill and excitement heated up by high betting, the strong emotions caused by the fight and the growling of the dogs raising the adrenaline level in the blood of the spectators and the constant dishonest manipulations of the organizers, it becomes clear that this does not have anything in common with improving the dogs.

It is also necessary to remember that sheep guarding dogs live in packs in a semi wild state and to them natural selection is a commonplace. The great majority of herdsmen do not prevent free mating of the dogs, which takes place after vicious, sometimes deadly fights of the males seeking to procreate. The young males of the pack are not yet strong enough to challenge the leader, but other strong males come from far away to the female on heat and then dogfights occur. The strongest male mates with her. I had one surprising case in my kennel. A female in a receptive state did not allow males to mate with her until the excited males tore their chains and fought with each other. Right away after this, she allowed him to mate. She wanted blood!

Thus, if we eliminate this ingredient from the life of sheep guarding dogs, do we then get the real Caucasian Ovcharka, which we are accustomed to see here in the Caucasus, a proud, independent and freedom loving dog? I do not think so. According to my many years' observations, keeping and breeding Ovcharkas in kennels with seemingly good qualities, such as good appearance and good working ability still do not produce desirable results. Something important is missing in the dogs, which is particularly felt in subsequent generations. Ovcharkas, taken away from their natural habitat, have changed. They are missing some fire, some inner power, which makes the dog glow from inside.

Some more about dog fights. To be fair, I should say that the rules of dog fighting (they do exist) require its immediate termination as soon as a weaker dog "surrenders": keeps its tail low, lies down and retreats, showing its teeth. There are no dogfights with a fatal ending. Moreover, males often stop fighting on their own, when one of them shows that he is defeated.

In Ossetia, many former sportsmen, mainly free style wrestlers, are involved with dog fighting. Perhaps, dog fights helped them to relive the atmosphere of the contest, at least in this form. Training classes, physical exercises, psychological preparations, fights with weaker opponents, strengthening the dog's confidence, the skill of introducing the dog to the battle in its best condition are some of the components of this "science".

Dogfights came here from the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. In one decade they developed into a real boom. The rules of dogfights were borrowed from enthusiasts of dog fighting in Central Asia, but later they were modified, taking into account the peculiarities of behavior of Caucasian Ovcharkas. Dogs participating in fights have a special status and the best of the fighters become extraordinarily popular, their names are repeated by fans hardly associated with dogfights.

What are these dogs that are involved in these activities? Initially, sheep guarding dogs obtained from chobans or the offspring of such dogs were used. Fanciers and rule makers of dog fights, such as T. Temirov, A. Temiraev, B. Mamiev, F. Akhpolov and others began breeding sheep guarding dogs in Ossetia in the 1980s. During the first several years, fighting dogs were named according to their historical homeland: Asian Ovcharkas and Caucasian Ovcharkas, or choban dogs. However, at least subconsciously, each dog owner of a fighting dog did not want to identify his dog with those participating in dog shows. Those involved with dog fighting people were mainly urbanites, who did not know about sheep herding and the specifics of working sheep guarding dogs, except for the fact that the dogs protected sheep from wolves. However, city dwellers had a vague idea about how it had been done.

The majority of city people think that wolves live in big packs, hungry and skinny, roaming in the mountains in search of sheep herds to attack. This necessarily ends with fights between wolves and sheep guarding dogs and they wish the dogs to be stronger. Just like gladiators in the arena of the Coliseum, both the dogs and the wolves should fight to the victorious end, until the last wolf was killed or forced to run away. Dog fighting stimulates the imagination of participants and onlookers, especially when it is seen for the first time. Almost everyone thinks that the outstanding fighter would be able to kill a wolf. In the beginning timidly and then louder, people spelled the word "Volkodav" – wolf killer, which quickly became a name for the "breed". In a few years literally all or almost all fanciers of dog fights confidently said that the breed they were involved with was called "Volkodav". However, such a breed does not exist among sheep protecting dogs; it had been invented by urbanites. The title "Volkodav" was awarded only to those dogs which

were able to catch and kill a wolf but in reality almost in every case, the dogs caught sick or geriatric wolves.

Initially, the dogs participating in fights did not differ from sheep guarding dogs either in size or in character. However, after several years, dogs of mixed origin began entering the clan of sheep guarding dogs. Sheep guarding dogs were crossed with Great Danes, Saint Bernards and other large breeds, which proven themselves well enough in dog fights and, because of their imposing appearance, became well known. The majority of people involved with dog fights are not interested in breeding dogs of pure origin; they are interested only in their fighting qualities. However, mixing the breeds for the purpose of enhancement of only one trait is a form of dead end selection.

Without preserving the original purebred dogs of well known origins, “breeders” of fighting dogs degraded the sheep guarding dogs by mixing them with Asian Ovcharkas and, worst of all with dogs of mixed origin for the sake of obtaining the best dog fighters. Out of such parents, it is impossible to obtain a population of dogs with a stable appearance and other qualities, including the fighting ability. They achieved only an increase in body size and weight, but they weakened the strength of the ligaments, quick movement, correct hind legs and balanced nervous system. The duration of dog fights increased, but the technique became worse. The dogs had a loose body structure. Pure Ovcharkas fought with a greater persistence, retaining the physical and physical potential for a longer part of their lives. Mixes did not show consistent results in dog fights, which confused their breeders. The preservation of pure strains and the development of the necessary qualities require knowledge, patience and talent, which not everyone has.

*Owners of fighting dogs should not take pleasure from the thought that they are breeding “Volkodavs”. They are simply breeding dogs that fight each other.*

It is impossible to predict how such fighters would prove themselves. Such dogs are not needed with a sheep herd, because the dogs work as a well adjusted collective, a pack, in which there is no place for a dog that instigates fights. The instinct of procreation is above fighting qualities that have been developed artificially. There are many examples in favor of this. Vitaly Karaev, owner of the best fighting dogs in Ossetia told the following story. He obtained a pure sheep guarding dog male of Leningorsk bloodstock, named Samson, for a dog fighting career. Physically, it was a perfect male, but it did not meet the expectations of Vitaly. Attempts to open its fighting potential were not successful: Samson did not make his opponents afraid but he also did not want to fight them. In such a case, the opponent also does not want to fight. After several attempts, Vitaly transferred this male to his brother Totraz for work with a sheep herd. At the same time, Vitaly had another male named Albars, which was one of the five best fighting dogs of the Caucasus. In Totraz’s koshara a bitch was on heat and he decided to mate her with Albars, which was brought there and turned loose with the bitch. However, Samson was also there. The males fought and, at last, Samson proved himself. When it became clear that Albars had no chance to win the fight, the dogs were separated. Samson was wiser than his rival and he knew when it was necessary to use force.

*Aggression in fighting dogs on any territory is a result of the loss of the most valuable qualities of sheep guarding dogs, which is the protection of their territory and loyal behavior on neutral land.*

Contemporary fighting dogs are on average higher than 72-75 cm at the withers and weigh sometimes over 60-65 kg. Good fighting qualities are in dogs of medium size. Only they show consistently in fights both good technique and dynamism.

*The bigger the dog, the more they have health problems and the shorter the period of their working ability.*

### **Investigation of sheep guarding Ovcharkas**

In early the 1970s, sheep guarding dogs of the Caucasus were not considered a promising breed and were not registered in clubs of working dogs. Moreover, they were considered primitive and inconvenient in a city environment. Sheep guarding dogs were labeled as stubborn and ugly.

Since the 1980s, dog breeders of the entire USSR expressed interest in aboriginal dogs. First of the enthusiasts was Vladimir Romanovets from Kiev. For several years we studied dogs together in Kazbek District. Dogs of Transcaucasia were surveyed in part due to his work. Vladimir quit his job in Kiev and moved to the York Plateau, bordering Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. At that time, there was no problem to move there and find a job as a choban, because it was one country - the USSR. In the Caucasus he was viewed as eccentric, who had nothing to do but stare at dogs. Vladimir lived there for half a year, from late March to October. During this time he was in such sheep breeding regions as Tsiteli-Tskaro, Tetri-Tskaro and Udabno of Signakhski District. He investigated Caucasian Ovcharkas of Georgia and Azerbaijan and took many pictures.

According to the words of Vladimir, the population of dogs of Transcaucasia on the York Plateau was of inferior quality compared to dogs of the Kazbek Mountain. In the regions that he surveyed, dogs with intermediate length of hair were predominant. The majority of the dogs were agouti gray; there were many brindle and brown dogs; spotted colors were rare and even rarer were white and pale cream Ovcharkas, which were more similar to Ovcharkas of the Kazbek Mountain. They were slightly smaller, than Kazbek dogs, but they were not as good in the bone, muscles and especially in the shape of head. The population of Ovcharkas of Azerbaijan was more uniform than the Ovcharkas of Georgia. This is how it was in the early 1980s. Possibly the picture has changed now.

Since the early 1990s, when Georgia became an independent state, some chobans of Dusheti, Tianeti, Leningorsk and Kazbek districts began to migrate with their sheep herds to the York Plateau. I guess that this resulted in the mixing of Kazbek and Transcaucasian Ovcharkas. Unfortunately, V. Romanovets could not export quality dogs from the Caucasus at that time. A Russian proverb says: "It is better to see once than to hear a hundred times". All his stories about aboriginal dogs of the Caucasus and their pictures could not create a true picture of the life of choban Ovcharkas. A standard for aboriginal Ovcharkas did not exist and everybody, who was not familiar with dogs of the Caucasus, told Vladimir that they were all mixes with Central Asian Ovcharkas. Vladimir gradually lost his enthusiasm.

The next researchers of dogs in the Caucasus were Lidia Vasilyevna Morozova and Anatoli Kostyukov. L. Morozova is an expert and fancier of Caucasian Ovcharkas and she wanted to add the blood of aboriginal Ovcharkas to her purebred ones. They both bought five dogs and several bitches and brought them to Leningrad. Only one of these dogs produced good offspring with one of the purebred bitches. The improvement was limited to only the first generation; in subsequent generations the quality of the purebred dogs declined. This attempt did not pay. The difference between the aboriginal and purebred Ovcharkas is obvious. Now, they are different breeds, although the purebred Caucasian Ovcharka has its roots in aboriginal stock.

Then, there was a pilgrimage of fanciers of Caucasian Ovcharkas from the entire Soviet Union territory, including Ukraine, Belorussia, Estonia and many big cities of the country to the Kazbek Mount region. Great numbers of puppies and adult dogs were taken. However, these dogs became diluted in the purebred strains of Caucasian Ovcharkas. Nobody listened to our suggestion to keep the aboriginal Ovcharkas from Kazbek pure. By the mid of the 1980s, purebred Caucasian Ovcharkas started to suffer locomotion problems and it seemed that the addition of aboriginal blood should help to solve the problem, However, it was not as simple as that, because the purebred show Caucasian Ovcharkas had a fixed type and interbreeding with aboriginal dogs resulted in the separation of types of coat color, hair length and, naturally, physique. Interest in aboriginal dogs gradually disappeared.

Late in the 1980s-early 1990s was the time of several international problems, which were especially acute in the Caucasus. The visits of enthusiasts of Caucasian Ovcharkas were reduced to a minimum. Andrey Tikhomirov was the only man, who continued studying the behavior of Kazbek dogs seriously and whom I remember with respect and warm feelings. He is a citizen of Estonia. Since 1988, he traveled to Vladikavkaz several times a year, where he studied aboriginal Caucasian dogs with us. He understood that the Kazbek type of Ovcharka should be kept pure and then much can be accomplished. Gradually, our cooperation grew into a strong friendship. Over

two years, A. Tikhomirov organized a small kennel in Kiviily, Estonia. Later, his friend talked him into moving the kennel to Shchelkovo, Moscow Province. The population of dogs in his kennel grew and the kennel was named “Ares Lashi”.

Unfortunately, the economic crisis in Russia in the 1990s had its impact on A. Tikomirov’s business. The kennel was impossible to keep, the dogs were given away to friends and he moved to Estonia. Naturally, the majority of these dogs fell into the hands of people who were not real enthusiasts of the breed; they fell into “good hands” to guard homes. Tatyana Pravkina saved several dogs; several bitches went to Sergey Komichev, who later on returned them to their historical homeland to Tamerlan Dzutsev, Chmi, Ossetia.

For twenty years a sufficient number of aboriginal Ovcharkas from Kazbek went to new owners in the former Soviet Union. These dogs ignited hot debates among “specialists”. Some of them insisted that those were mixed dogs, mongrels, there were no pure Ovcharkas left in the Caucasus, and the best dogs were in 1945-1950 for guarding military objects. “Specialists” thought that sheep guarding dog should be not smaller than a donkey, with long hair, a mane like in lion, and a body weight of about 100 kg. It must be longhaired! Dogs with short hair and intermediate hair must be mongrels. There were “specialists” who insisted that these dogs were mixes with sheep guarding dogs of Central Asia and they became so as a result of the migration of Caucasian Ovcharkas to the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea via Kalmykia, where they had mixed with Central Asian Ovcharkas; hence the short haired type emerged. If so, how to explain why Central Asian Ovcharkas remained pure, while Caucasian Ovcharkas became mixed?

*Caucasian Ovcharkas are differentiated not only by type of hair but also by other characteristics and the existence of each type is justified. This is a result of the work of herdsmen over many centuries, which we can destroy, through our ignorance.*

Even at the present time, there is sheep management and there are sheep guarding dogs, but they are diverse and they should not be put together based on guesswork and discussions about which should exist and which should be eliminated. I am sure that in several years’ time the former Central Asian republics of the USSR, which are now independent states, will breed their own types of Ovcharkas with different standards and different names. This is what should happen. This is just. Then, everything will take its own place and there will be material and goals to develop.

The Caucasus is a multi-national region and each people breeds its own type of choban Ovcharka, which is suited for work there. All these types should be studied, the specifics of their use should be understood and this will require the efforts of many specialists.

## **The Mystery of Osman, the Dog from Siberia**

**by Sue Hamilton\***

**with contributions by Peter Gibbs and Michael Harvey**

I am friends with a wonderful group of men who served in Antarctica during the continent’s heroic age of exploration. That era began in the first half of the 20th century. Prior to mechanization, the use of dog power, largely the primitive aboriginal Inuit Sled Dog (ISD), was the only other means of transportation of men and supplies up steep ice ramps and on to the often treacherous plateau where centuries of accumulated ice and snow hid fields of seemingly bottomless crevasses that sometimes swallowed up men and dogs... forever.

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Harwinton, Connecticut, USA

My friends are keen not only on their own history, from around the 1940s onward, but that of their predecessors long since dead. These predecessors are not only famous explorers such as Robert Falcon Scott who lost the race to Roald Amundsen to become the first person to reach the South Pole. My friends also remember and pay homage to the fine dogs without which travel in Antarctica would be too dangerous and indeed impossible.

One such fondly remembered dog was "Osman". British Antarctic Survey veteran Peter Gibbs spoke about Osman in a September 2002 presentation in Paphos, Cyprus. This presentation was published in the March 2003 issue of *The Fan Hitch*, Journal of the Inuit Sled Dog International (<http://homepage.mac.com/puggiq/V5N2/V5N2Exploration.html>). In Gibbs' talk entitled "The Contribution of Dogs to Exploration in Antarctica" he said, "The contribution of the huskies lasted some ninety-six years, from the first expedition in 1898 under Borgevink to 1994 when the last dog team...was flown out... Intruders we were but we traveled with reverence for the scenery, understanding for its dangers, a great partnership between us and our dog teams." In speaking of Osman, Gibbs further described, "Frank Debenham, Scott's young geologist, tells some interesting tales [In the Antarctic: Stories of Scott's Last Expedition, Debenham, F.; 1952] of two remarkable dogs, Osman and Stareek, who were strong, old and experienced lead dogs in the Russian postal service. And the story of Osman reveals Scott's courage and passionate character towards dogs. All twelve dogs except Osman the lead dog fell through a crevasse and Osman, strong that he was, valiantly held them while Scott abseiled on a rope." Gibbs also describes how "Osman had been washed overboard from the Terra Nova during the storm that nearly sank the ship a couple of days out of Lyttleton. But Providence be praised, thinking of this episode, he was washed back on deck again! Debenham also recalls the time Osman took charge of a young scratch team and one day did all he possibly could to help Debenham prevent this young team from chasing some penguins and causing mayhem. "Here indeed was a dog of dogs, enduring beyond belief and worthy of a small niche in the temple of canine fame." Stareek was described as "similar to Osman with a fine head and more of an Inuit dog look."

Recently I heard from Michael Harvey, who lives in New Zealand. He ran across Gibbs' article in *The Fan Hitch* and said that his great-grandfather and grandmother (15 years old at the time) ended up with Osman for a short period before the dog was sent to spend the rest of his days at the Wellington Zoo (to the age of 21 it is said - a little hard to believe - but apparently substantiated by the Zoo's newspaper advertisements still featuring Osman along with Oscar - a surviving Shackleton expeditionary dog - in Jan 1926). Harvey has done a commendable amount of digging for historical details about Osman. Now he, Gibbs and I are all trying to figure out just what breed of dog Osman was. What little we know is: "SCOTT ...eventually sent CECIL MEARES, an expert dog enthusiast, to Siberia to obtain dogs for the expedition. MEARES succeeded in collecting a team of 33 Siberian dogs plus 2 Eskimaux dogs and 1 collie bitch to accompany the Antarctic expedition." And, "The Dogs that RF SCOTT took to the Antarctic consisted of thirty-three sled dogs and a collie bitch, "Lassie". The thirty-three, all Siberian dogs excepting the Esquimaux "Peary" and "Borup", were collected by CECIL MEARES, who drove them across Siberia to Vladivostok with the help of dog-driver DEMETRI GEROF, whom he had



**Osman after his return from Antarctica but before being sent to live in the Wellington Zoo in New Zealand; ca. 1915. Courtesy of the Harvey family**

Osman for a short period before the dog was sent to spend the rest of his days at the Wellington Zoo (to the age of 21 it is said - a little hard to believe - but apparently substantiated by the Zoo's newspaper advertisements still featuring Osman along with Oscar - a surviving Shackleton expeditionary dog - in Jan 1926). Harvey has done a commendable amount of digging for historical details about Osman. Now he, Gibbs and I are all trying to figure out just what breed of dog Osman was. What little we know is: "SCOTT ...eventually sent CECIL MEARES, an expert dog enthusiast, to Siberia to obtain dogs for the expedition. MEARES succeeded in collecting a team of 33 Siberian dogs plus 2 Eskimaux dogs and 1 collie bitch to accompany the Antarctic expedition." And, "The Dogs that RF SCOTT took to the Antarctic consisted of thirty-three sled dogs and a collie bitch, "Lassie". The thirty-three, all Siberian dogs excepting the Esquimaux "Peary" and "Borup", were collected by CECIL MEARES, who drove them across Siberia to Vladivostok with the help of dog-driver DEMETRI GEROF, whom he had

engaged for the expedition." Uncredited source posted on a Siberian Husky website <http://www.salazka.co.uk>

"The dog Osman was partly wild and one of the most savage in the pack during his stay in Lyttelton. before going to Antarctica. But he developed in to a first-class sledge dog...Scott refers to him as "our best sledge dog and our splendid leader". from an article in the Christchurch Press Saturday November 22, 1975, possibly attributed to Harold Stemmer



**Osman and Dimitri Gerof (age 22) on board the Terra Nova, heading to Antarctica, November 1910. Screen shot from film *90 degrees South* by Herbert Ponting (1933)**

"...of one of the pack dogs used by Captain Scott on his last South Pole expedition, 1910-13 ...Osman was the head dog of the pack; and, unlike many of his subordinates - some of which would snarl at everyone except their

drivers, who were ready to sink their teeth in anyone they took a dislike to - he was gentle and good natured. Osman was the dog that had been washed overboard in the gale in the Sixties, and saved by one of the seaman when carried aboard again on the crest of the next wave. He had been the fiercest dog of all, when in New Zealand; but that adventure seemed to have a sobering effect on him. Henceforth he regarded us all as friends. He was now a sociable, docile animal, and exhibited obvious pleasure when anyone exchanged a few friendly words with him. With his massive build and magnificent head, he looked every inch the chief he was; and his great strength and wonderful reasoning powers qualified him for the most important part he took in our adventure..." from *The Great White South* (1923) by Herbert Ponting

"Osman is not a big dog, but has sturdy limbs, is very quick and intelligent, and is in very good condition. He is of Siberian breed... Mr. George Frost (chairman of the Reserves Committee), who, with Mr. Crewes, was at the wharf when Osman was landed, thanked the latter gentleman on behalf of Reserves Committee for the keen interest he had taken in the procuring of the dog for the Zoo. ' [He was received by the zoo in August 1916] Mr. Frost assured Mr. Crewes that the greatest care will be taken of Osman, who should prove of much interest to the public." from the *Evening Post*, August 10, 1916 (New Zealand)

"Osman"...was one of the thirty-one Siberian Dogs procured for the last expedition of the late Captain Scott to Antarctica. The dogs were driven across Siberia to Vladivostock, whence they were taken by steamer to Sydney, and thence to Lyttelton, where they were placed on board the expeditionary ship "Terra Nova". His ship met with such rough and tempestuous weather that the dogs had a very bad time, and "Osman", drenched by the icy water and almost frozen, seemed to be on the verge of collapse. However, after being almost buried in hay for twenty-four hours, although very weak and unable to eat or drink, the dog gradually recovered. In the discharge of his difficult and dangerous work on ice and snow, "Osman" so distinguished himself that he was selected as leader of the Expedition's principal dog-team. He displayed great sagacity, strength, and a kind of prescience almost marvellous. Some of "Osman's" many experiences (and few dogs have had more) are noted in the report "Scott's Last Expedition," "Osman's" name being

honourably mentioned several times. After the return from the Antarctic regions, "Osman" was cared for by a Russian friend, who has since gone to the War. Through the kind offices of Messrs. R.C. Fowler and A. R. Perston, "Osman" was brought under the notice of Messrs. Crewes and Castle of the Wellington Zoological Society, and upon their applications was presented to the municipal zoo by Mr. T Charters of Christchurch." from the Wellington City Council Yearbook 1916-1917

The comment "The thirty-three, all Siberian dogs excepting the Esquimaux "Peary" and "Borup", were collected by CECIL MEARES, who drove them across Siberia to Vladivostok with the help of dog-driver DEMETRI GEROF, " is especially curious. Can this observation of a distinction between an "Esquimaux" and a "Siberian dog" apparently coming from the same region be trusted to be accurate, or is it a case of a range of phenotypic expression one would expect from a landrace (if it is even reasonable to assume that the dogs collected could be considered a landrace in the early 20th century Siberia) that the observer did not understand or appreciate? Because Osman was described as coming from Siberia and referred to early on as a "Siberian dog", many have assumed that Osman was a Siberian Husky. However, according to the description of the dog's strength and his photographs, Osman doesn't even look like the early dogs brought to North America by Norwegian dog driver and racer Leonhard Seppala let alone the current breed club registered Siberian Huskies.

Peter Gibbs, Michael Harvey and I are hoping that by publishing this story, in the PADS Newsletter, we might be able to solve the mystery of Osman's genetic and geographic origins. Readers of the PADS Newsletter who may have some information to share about Osman and Demetri Gerof are encouraged to contact me, Sue Hamilton, at [qimmiq@snet.net](mailto:qimmiq@snet.net) or write to me at 55 Town Line Road, Harwinton, CT 06791, U.S.A. I am sorry, but I do not speak or read Russian.



C. H. MEARES AND 'OSMAN,' THE LEADER OF THE DOGS

**Cecil Meares and Osman, the leader of the dogs, August 25th 1911 Photo by Herbert Ponting; from *Scott's Last Expedition* published by Smith Elder and Co (1913)**

# Primitive Aboriginal Dogs Society

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