

English Goat Breeders Association - Jo Tavernor, Temp Editor writes

Julie and I for Davies joined the English Goat Breeders Association in 2021 to get on the waiting list (which at the time was very long) for a female English Goat. Their patience paid off, and in 2022 they finally got to choose their first English goat when Julie came to see me in Suffolk. That journey was a big deal to Julie at the time; which made me realize she wasn't normally impulsive and prepared to travel so far without her husband. Since then, they've brought Eda back for Gambit to serve and James and Bond (named because their tag numbers are 007 and 008) duly arrived in May.

I invited them to write about their journey into goat keeping as their life has changed beyond all recognition over the past four years, and it is goats that have been central to it all. Editor

Julie writes:



Well, this is just the acronym we had to use. Our journey into goat keeping, and to be asked to write an article about it, Wow!

We bought our land 23 years ago so that I could fulfil my childhood dream of owning my very own horse, which I achieved at the age of 40, and along with my daughter we shared this hobby for twenty years, until a freaky accident involving a deer put a sudden stop to it all.

So, what to do next? Without horses, and with just a small flock of Shetland sheep, we decided to retire early, sell up and go to live in Crete with friends. Had the buyer quickly

signed on the dotted line, we would have been long gone, but she started to find fault with all sorts of weird and wonderful things, causing delay.

Not a real issue, until Covid started to rear its ugly head, and I for (my husband) said "We are not going anywhere," so we pulled out, I for lived in our caravan on site whilst we lambed, and I carried on working throughout the pandemic.

So, now what? As everything was rapidly becoming overgrown and very wild, there was one creature that just ticked all the boxes: a goat! And, you just can't have just one can you? So, Clover and Flora duly arrived, of no particular breed, and they were terrified of us. What had we done?

We spent time befriending them, teaching them to come to call, touching them, and we soon realized how clever and inquisitive they were, and it wasn't long before we had them wearing halters, and quite happily walking with us. Hooked! I started doing some research, and came across the English Goat, loved the look of them, and the fact they were dual purpose, as we really did need to try and at least find a way to cover the cost of the feed bills, and become more self-sufficient. Contact made, and our names added to a waiting list as there were none currently available.

Four Boers were next to arrive, another huge learning curve, I had read about the screaming goat and thought what are people going on about? I found out very quickly, much to my husband's amusement! We were unloading them from the trailer, and one decided to go in the opposite

direction, so I grabbed it, and it yelled, and I jumped 6 feet, and let it go! I for laughed so much, the rest also made a bid for freedom. I had found the screaming goats!

I also enquired about a Golden Guernsey, and the person also said she had a waiting list, so I quite happily asked to have my name put on it. Two years down the line I was still waiting, so I thought to give her a nudge. Her reply took me aback! "I do have several, but don't know which one to sell, so I have decided to keep them all." Not the reply I was expecting. (I do have a Golden Guernsey cross now, but that's another story).

So, with some trepidation, I thought I would contact the English Goat Breeder's Association again, "Oh I haven't forgotten you, in fact I think I have something that might interest you! Would you like to come and look?" For some reason, my husband was busy, and I just said to him, "I'm going to Bury St Edmunds". "Whatever for?" "A goat." "Oh, if you must", and off I went, on my own. Normally I am not the least adventurous, but I didn't even hesitate.

It was a beautiful sunny day, and despite a slight detour, I didn't get too lost. I ended up going along a little track, which opened into some beautiful allotments, and right at the end was Jo and Marks smallholding. I was shown several goats, and eventually came to Eda and her kid Eddie, who happily sauntered across, and accepted a treat and a scratch! And that was it; she was the goat for me! So, deal done, I headed home to break the news to the other half. Little did I know that this little goat was to become his blue-eyed goat, and to this day, it still makes me smile when I hear him talk to the others, "Don't you do that to Eda, that's not very nice. There's enough for everyone!"

As total novices we learnt to milk quickly, and thankfully we had Clover and Flora with kids. Whether there's a right or a wrong way, we learnt the hard way! Eda who is so placid in every other way, is not impressed, and wriggles and jiggles, gains extra legs, and even sits down, so it's a case of quick, lots of food, and get milking. One day I put the jug down, out of the way, only to hear lapping, and to discover our dog helping himself to our hard-earned bounty!

On Facebook one day I noticed that our village was advertising an Artisan and farmer's market. My daughter saw it at the same time and tagged me in. I made enquiries, and Vicky, the organizer, was really enthusiastic and keen for us to bring some goats. She said she had to wait until the next parish council meeting to get it approved. "Well, that's the end of that", I thought!

I was to find out later I was completely wrong. After a few questions, which thankfully we could answer, we were heading our way to Ruskington to do a market. We were blown away with the response, and the seed of Walkabout Goats was sown, and slowly but surely it grew and blossomed: "Come and meet the goats and walk with them". One particular lady, Zoe, said "We know nothing about you, you need to tell more people about what you are doing. Would you like me to get the word out there?". I looked at I for as I thought that we were doing OK, but I for said "Of course", as I am not good with social media! Well, that was it!

Ping! Ping, Ping, frantic messages to my daughter, "I know there's messages and I can't open them", so several lessons later I have learnt to navigate my way round. And Walkabout Goats evolved, and we have been able to share our little corner of paradise with many, many people who simply love goats. We run a basic format which is adapted to the clientele on the day. We start by signing everyone in and explaining the "housekeeping rules", after which we then call the goats in.

Everyone is fascinated by the way they come running into their own respective stalls. Obviously, we know that's because they know they get fed there and they love the routine, but it is impressive to people who have no idea how easy it is to train a goat. Because we have many different types of goats, I then run through the different breeds we have, highlight their differences, and explain the uses they have been bred for. We then halter up (using dog halti-collars) and head off round our wildflower meadows. This is when Ifor takes over the narrative, explaining to our visitors how the goats help maintain the hedgerows, and the sheep maintain the pasture. So, as well as enjoying the peace and serenity of our little piece of paradise, we aim for our visitors to leave a little better educated about goats and the natural environment.

The television programme, The Country Showdown, was on one afternoon, and it was all about Heckington Show. I have been in the past as a visitor, but never as an exhibitor. I made enquiries and was told they love to champion anything to do with rare breeds, as it's what they are all about. So, the rest as they say is history, we had a brilliant weekend showcasing The English Goat. Eda as always took it in her stride, and her two kids, James and Bond had their first outing and learnt very quickly that people = food!

So, watch this space, the world is our oyster? Maybe learn to show a goat, be involved in getting the English goat off the RBST Priority list? Produce our own A grade English Goat? If you'd have told me or my husband that we would have goats ten years ago, I would have laughed, but here we are having the Greatest Of All Time. Seriously!

Julie and Ifor Davies, Walkabout Goats, Rural Lincolnshire

Email walkaboutgoats@gmail.com

www.walkaboutgoats.co.uk