



Louise Hoffman

**Packing for Pennies:** Correspondent Hoffman hikes the high country with his economically and environmentally sensible llama, Sunny.

## Beasts of Burden Llamas: a Light-footed Alternative

Up in the fragile alpine meadows of national parks and other heavily used recreation areas, the signs of pack animals, with their heavy hooves and hefty appetites, are frequently evident. Muddy trails are pocked with platter-sized craters; the ground is sometimes stripped bare in temporary corrals. But there is an environmentally sensible alternative to the mule, the burro, or the horse: the llama.

Llamas tread lightly on padded feet. They browse rather than graze and will settle for just about any form of vegetation—even dry pine needles. Park officials in California are so interested in the llama that they plan to conduct a study comparing llamas and other beasts of burden next spring, when meadows are wettest and traditional pack animals do the most damage.

Though llamas cannot

be ridden, economic considerations make them the animal of choice when lighter loads are being toted. They eat about a quarter as much food as a horse, need less pasture, rarely become ill, do not need shoeing, and can be transported in a small pickup truck, van, or station wagon.

Moreover, llamas can carry up to a hundred pounds over very rough terrain and are at home at any altitude. Extremely sure-footed, they can handle inclines that would send a horse or mule tumbling.

Even with all of these virtues, llamas are hard to find. There are only about three thousand in the United States, and federal law prohibits their importation. But several West Coast breeders are selling them, trained and untrained, and two California pack outfits use llamas exclusively.

—Eric Hoffman

### Ear to the Ground

*"He's Anti-Nuke, like everybody else, but he wishes the movement wasn't so full of earnest California types playing guitars and singing those dreadful Pete Seeger Enlightened Backpacker songs—all those women with snap-around denim skirts and low-heeled shoes and honest calves and their poor wimp husbands with their round eyeglasses and droopy beards and their babies strapped to their chests by some sort of papoose rig and spitting up natural-food mush onto their workshirts."*

—Tom Wolfe, from "The Secret Heart of the New York Culturatus"

## Bush Jackets in Beverly Hills A&F Lives (in Name, at Least)

Like a *très chic* Lazarus, Abercrombie & Fitch has risen from the dead.

The reincarnated A&F, which opened in Beverly Hills last fall, was given its new lease on life by Oshman's, a fast-growing, Texas-based sporting goods chain. Like Avon buying Tiffany's to class up its act, Oshman's bought the respected name and logo after the original A&F went under in 1977, a victim of changing times and tastes.

Spitting distance from Gucci's, the new A&F tries hard to breathe class from every merchandising pore



Jim Frank

**Pith Helmets and Potted Plants:** The obligatory mannequin in safari getup greets customers in the new Beverly Hills A&F.

and generally succeeds. Its gun department, the best in the store, is stocked with gems with price tags in the five-figure realm. The variety and quality of the fishing equipment isn't startling, as in the old days, but merely above average.

The camping section is fully stocked with some of the better brands, and the running, tennis, and golf departments are adequate. As one might expect in Beverly Hills, the clothing departments excel. Gorgeous leather jackets, tweedy shirts and coats, casual clothes, and—of course—Hollywood bush jackets are amply displayed.

Still, the new A&F is no match for the old, which began in New York in 1902 with the partnership of David Abercrombie, a jack-of-all-trades, and Ezra Fitch, a lawyer. In 1907 the store moved to its renowned location on Madison Avenue, where it quickly developed a national reputation.

That reputation rested on the impeccable quality of its merchandise and the diversity of equipment offered. If the bamboo fly rods by Jim Payne or some other master builder weren't exactly right for an angling safari to Botswana, A&F would have Payne make the perfect rod.

At a customer's request they imported the first mah-jongg games. They also dipped into the arcane with such items as a leopard harness, an indoor treadmill for a dog, and a pair of reindeer. They built a one-man submarine for a skindiver and had chain-mail shirts made for a corporate mogul who wanted his South American employees protected from poison arrows.

But by the 1960s the quality of its merchandise had become uneven. The knowledgeable and snotty clerks generally had been replaced by ones who were merely snotty. Low-life fishing tackle was appearing on the shelves. A&F was living on its reputation and none too well. Only the catalog kept the glorious tradition alive until 1977.

Though the new store bears the old name (as will the one being planned for Dallas), somewhere along the line the tradition seems to have been lost. In the words of Matthew Arnold, the new A&F does not have "the virtue of seriousness." Specialists who need gear to take them to the top of Everest or to the ocean floor will have to look elsewhere.

—Harmon Henkin