

# walking with Llamas

**Di Bowerman** meets Maggie Jee, founder of Peak Hill Llamas, and finds out what inspired her to start up her business.

**T**ake a walk along Sidmouth's Jurassic Coast at Peak Hill and do a double-take as you see a trail of llamas on the skyline. Rufus, Jones, Guy, Blitzen, Ben, Mac, Golly and Ollie are the eight male llamas that make up Peak Hill Llamas, which, for the past year, has been offering guided llama walks along the coast - cream teas included.

It is the brainchild of Maggie Jee, who always seems to have

a menagerie of animals to care for, wherever she goes. "I have always been fascinated by llamas, said Maggie, who became hooked on the idea of running walks with them after seeing an advert promoting llama walks at Castle Drogo. Maggie trained in farming at Bicton College and was, for a time, married to a farmer. "I've always been involved with animals. Not children, just animals," she said. She moved to Guernsey 1990 and worked for an animal shelter there, then ran an animal petting farm for children

called Petland where children could feed lambs and cuddle guinea pigs.

When she and her Guernsey-born partner Paul Ferbrache decided to move back to England in 2001, most of the animals came with her.

"I couldn't sell my animals so I hired a large van and brought them, including goats and pot-bellied pigs." When her horse Jaffa died, Maggie couldn't bear the thought of getting another, so decided instead to buy her first two llamas - Rufus and Jones - to keep as pets.

Fate took a hand in 2006 when she saw an advert for six trekking llamas being sold by a woman emigrating to New Zealand.

"I thought it would be nice to get a set together. I thought about it, borrowed a lot of money and bought them. I'm not impulsive but I go for things, after thinking about it first."

Maggie did a lot of research into the llama trekking business and opened up last April, basing her animals at a farm near Peak Hill.

In a year, Maggie has seen her business take off, getting more and more people contacting her for walks, some for birthday treats or group outings.

She has a website up and running, and good relations with South West Tourism, and interest from all age groups.

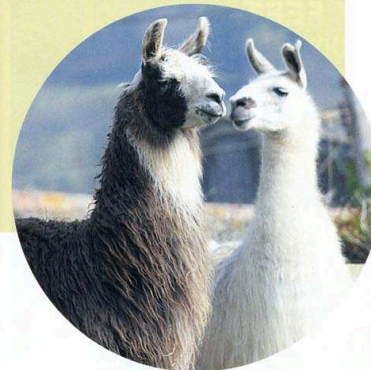
"Most people like animals. Some have never handled bigger animals. A group of teachers were very firm with the llamas; they took no nonsense from them."

Llama walks are booked by people wanting to give a birthday treat or just to have a family day out. She has access to around 530 acres, including land near Mutters Moor as well as the South West Coast Path.

"The most I take out at a time is six and I will only go out with a minimum of two. I don't go out if it is miserable but if it is showers I can take people back to the farm where I keep the llamas, for food under cover."

The llamas carry up to 25 kilo, which includes picnic chairs and cream teas.

"I even get stopped by people and asked to take a



Above: Maggie Jee with one of her Llamas.

picture because their friend will not believe them when they say they saw llamas."

Maggie has no idea llamas liked kissing until Blitzen decided he liked kissing men.

"We were going along the coast path and he saw a man in front and decided he wanted to kiss the man, who was minding his own business. He is not like any llama I have come across. Normally, they will not come into your personal space but he is not the same because he will stand in your face and nibble your ear."

"I love llamas and it is lovely to be working with them. They are really entertaining, so funny. They hum at people and make little noises. They hum in people's ears, just a lovely noise. Everyone I have had on walks so far has really enjoyed it. It is nice to be able to do it and brighten up someone's day."

