

McNabs

## THAT'S NOT A BORDER COLLIE. . .

## IT'S A McNAB!

Anita Evangelista

*All photos courtesy of Donna Seigmund.*



The dog looks like a smooth-coated Border Collie, black with white markings on collar, feet and tail tip. There's an inquisitive tip to his head, and his pointed upright ears indicate a keen interest in the nearby stock. But as he begins to move toward the animals, it's clear by his manner that he is not a Border Collie.

"They work upright, on their toes", says Alvina Butti, of Anderson, California. "A few dogs show a little eye, but it's really a distinctly different breed."

In fact, the similarity between this rare breed and Border Collies has led to a certain amount of confusion on the part of more than one dog enthusiast. Donna Seigmund, who is considered an authority on the breed, notes that, "The dogs trace back to separate importations from the Grampian Hills of Scotland. The Bruce McKinsey family settled there after moving from northern Scotland, and brought their stock dogs, which were called Fox Shepherds. Alexander McNab was a neighbor, and he began to raise the collies." McNab and family left Scotland in 1868, settled in California in Mendocino County north of the town of Ukiah. The first Fox Collie importation came with the McNab family. Unfortunately, the dog died shortly after arriving.

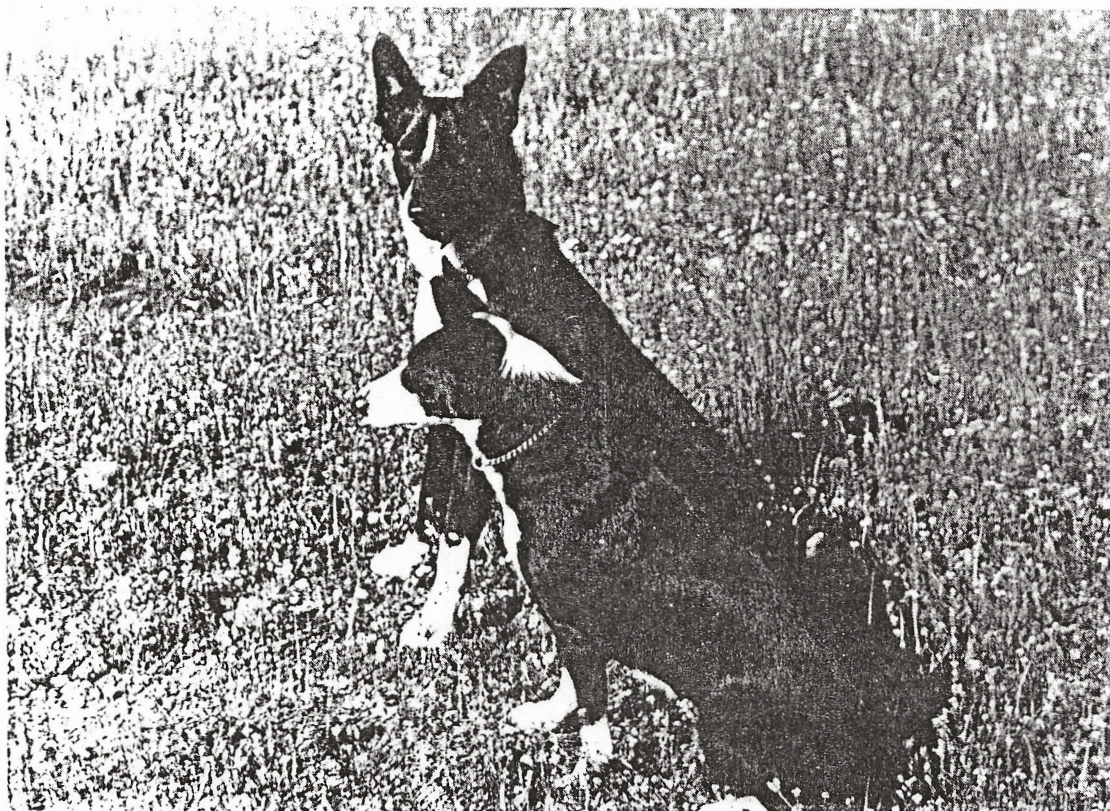
In 1885, McNab returned to Scotland to secure some good working dogs, and returned to California with the second imports, Peter and Fred.

As they continued breeding the animals, the dogs came to carry the rancher's name: McNab.

"It was two males," Donna Seigmund says with emphasis, "So they certainly did not cross." These dogs were then bred on the ranch's own dogs and on "preferred females", which probably included local small, brown, Spanish herding or guarding dogs. In fact, McNabs in the Mendocino area are believed to have acquired their "golden" brown shade markings (when the dogs are tri-colored) from these crossings. In addition to the black/white and tri-coloring of the breed, animals also come in reds and cream colors.

Alexander McNab's son, John L. McNab, made further importations in the early part of this century. In 1906, a Red Fox Shepherd called "Clyde" was brought in, then a second red dog, "Ready", followed. In 1915, a bred bitch was imported, and pups from her litter were purchased by Ed G. Brown. The Brown strain is believed to have not been outcrossed on other breeds of dogs, and represents a true McNab type, according to Myrtle Brown, a long-time breeder.

"Some people believe McNabs are cousins to the Border Collie," Alvina states. The breed may be somewhat related, as may many of the other herding



Foundation stock owned by Donna Seigmund. Note the prick ears and pointed muzzles.

breeds. Actually, the name "Border Collie" was developed by J.A. Reid, former secretary of the I.S.D.S. (1915-1948), and only came into general use after World War II. Prior to that time, the dogs we now know as Border Collies were simply called the "Working Collie", according to Sheila Grew, writing in **Key Dogs From the Border Collie Family** (Payn Essex Printers, Ltd., Suffolk, U.K., 1981). Grew recognizes four distinct strains of Border Collies, which she identifies by physical type into "Northumbrian", "Wiston Cap", "Nap", and "Herdman's Tommy" types. The "Nap" type is similar in build and coat to modern Kelpies, being prick-eared and short haired -- and bears a passing resemblance to McNabs. Grew also mentions that "Some smaller sharp-faced collies are so fox-like in their looks and behaviour I often wonder if there has been some fox blood introduced at some time in the past, but perhaps this is just a type that throws back to its jackal ancestors." Whether this is a reference to the strain of collie called Fox Shepherd is unknown. As with some other breeds of working dogs, the complete history of the breed may be shrouded in time, leaving only tantalizing bits and facts available to modern researchers.

In personality and style, McNabs are also different from other stock dogs. "They are extremely loyal and aggressive -- and harder headed than most Border Collies. They're very protective of family and home," Donna indicates. "Where an individual Border Collie will work for many people, a stranger couldn't lay a hand on a McNab. About sixty to seventy percent of the dogs will both head and heel, with the remainder preferring either head or heel. They're natural low-heelers, as well -- and really get in the face of livestock."

In addition to use as a stock dog, McNabs were locally favored for deer and squirrel hunting. Donna continues, "They're not gun or lightening shy. They will circle a patch for you, with a very good nose, and they watch the tree tops for squirrels." When wild pigs were residents of the coast, McNabs were similarly used in hunting the porcines. McNabs also have excelled at some kinds of obedience work: "They love to go up and down ladders and through tunnels."

"They tend to be kept in families," Alvina says. "My family's had them for a long time. Lev Bebe in Cloverdale raised one of the first lines, and the Balcini and Benedetti families kept two other lines going. A lady named Myrtle Brown had McNabs seventy-four or seventy-five years ago -- and when she saw my old dog, she said, 'This is what they were then'."

That there have been changes in the breed during the last century is probably inevitable, but today there is so much crossing of McNabs and Border Collies that pure McNabs are not easy to find, particularly of the old type to which Mrs. Brown referred.

Hank Pritchard, a cattle rancher from Manton, California, uses McNab/Border Collie crosses in his work. "There are two things I don't like about the Border Collies," he says. "They're not rough enough for range cattle, and too many of them are long-haired -- they get tangled up with stickers and brambles. The McNab crosses are much more aggressive, sharp-eared, short-haired, and bob-tailed." Alvina and Donna point out that coastal cattlemen prefer a dock-tailed dog, although it really makes no difference in their working ability.

Pritchard keeps about a dozen dogs, additional pups, and both sells and

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trains working dogs. He's had McNabs for about fifteen years. "We work in fields -- about 5,000 acre fields -- and need the dogs to stop cattle so you can catch them." His operation is at the northern end of the state, about 150 miles north of Sacramento, the state capitol, in the foothills of the Sierra Mountains. "When I was a kid, we had heeling dogs. We'd drive the cattle from summer to winter pastures. Now the cattle are trucked instead, but we still have to move them." The range extends from his area up into Southern Oregon. "Driving isn't used as much as it used to be, but we do want a dog to head strongly. In order to stop a bunch of moving cattle, the dog needs force. We try to stay away from a really strong-eyed dog. And we don't want a dog to go to the head and lay down. They have to get up and bite noses. That's the main thing -- we need them to get around and stop cattle."

Pritchard trains dogs constantly, for his own use and for other ranchers. The training method is the same as used on Border Collies. "There's two commands a cattle rancher wants his dogs to know: 'get ahead', and 'come back'," he says with a laugh. For a time, he tried to rely on someone else to produce the kind of dogs he wanted, but found that he could more easily raise and train them himself.

Both Donna and Alvina have registered their individual lines through the National Stockdog Registry. "There are only six pure McNab breeders in the state," Donna says, "And only four register their dogs." Neither woman would speculate on numbers of the breed. "We just don't know how many there are."

Although Donna and Alvina live in different towns, they have tried to make pups available to buyers at about the same time. "We won't cross our lines," Donna says. "That way, if people want to breed, they can get an unrelated pair." They breed their own dogs when buyers are already lined up; a recent breeding produced less pups than they had buyers. Eight week old puppies go for about \$250.

Puppies have been sold to interested parties in Pennsylvania, Kansas, Alaska, Wyoming, and Idaho by the two ladies; Pritchard has received calls on the dogs from Texas, Colorado, and Wyoming. Donna says that thirty to forty percent of



Note the bobbed tail on this McNab.

her puppy sales are to repeat buyers -- a sure indication of customer satisfaction. At the annual Red Bluff cattle sale, McNab/Border Collie crosses have sold at good rates: in both 1990 and 1991, crossbred dogs fetched thousands of dollars each.

There is a certain amount of concern over the future of the breed. While outcrossing has proven useful in the short run, it may significantly reduce the numbers of pure McNabs to below a maintenance level. But, for the time being, McNabs continue to do the work they have always done, ever since they arrived in California nearly a century and a half ago.

