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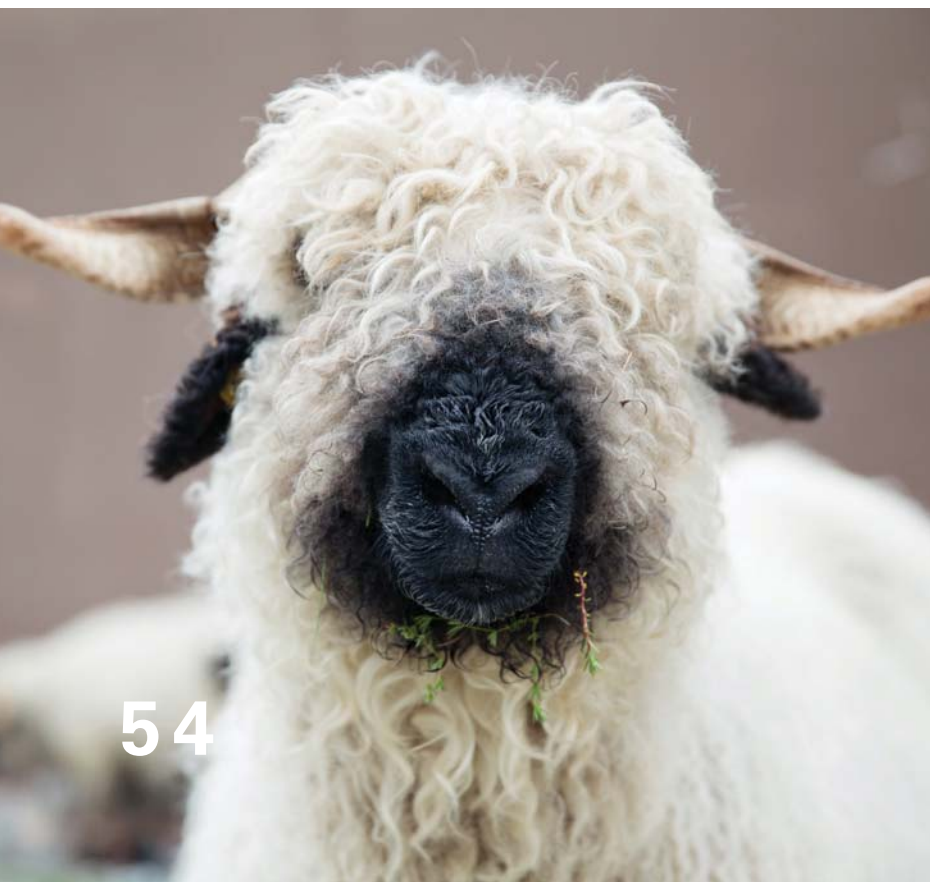


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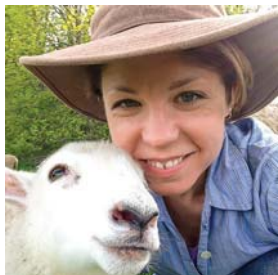
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Editor's Letter



All my life, I have seized any opportunity to pack a bag and head out into the world. The thrill of learning and challenging my perspectives never fades. When I connected with the *Spin Off* community in the early 2000s, I was amazed to meet so many like-minded fiber fellows. Spinners are often deeply curious about flora and fauna, traditions and cultures, creativity and technique. For more than four decades, *Spin Off* has allowed us to explore the confluence of all these things, and I am grateful.

As I write to you about the Woolly Wanderlust issue, I am on a plane, peering down at the Rocky Mountains. My own woolly wanderlust carries me from coast to coast each year as I visit spinning retreats, guilds, and conferences. Forever a textile magpie, I gather yarn, bits of cloth, and (of course) spinning fibers as I move through the world. Creating yarns and fabrics that combine these things is my favorite way to create meaningful work.

The fibers on the cover of this issue are all connected to my journeys and the spinners I met along the way: luscious **Vijay Fibers** red Eri silk I purchased from **Red Stone Glen Fiber Arts Center** in Pennsylvania, Polwarth top dyed the perfect orange from **Neighborhood Fiber Co.** in Maryland, and vibrant handpainted top from **Interlacements** in Michigan. Deciding what to make is the next journey!

In our annual travel issue, you can learn about **Amanda Hannaford's** adventure in Tibet, meet the rare sheep at Colonial Williamsburg with **Amy Ross Manko**, and explore pastures near and far with **Deborah Robson**. (And she'll tell you why you should scrub your shoes, too!) Grab your handcards and explore Donegal-style tweed with **Melissa Weaver Dunning**, and see how to spin flax distaff-free with **Tom Knisely**.

Where will your spinning travels take you next?



Kate started sampling the cover fibers and spun a pair of three-ply yarns: (from left) chain-ply and bubble-crepe.

Photo by Matt Graves

Spin Off®

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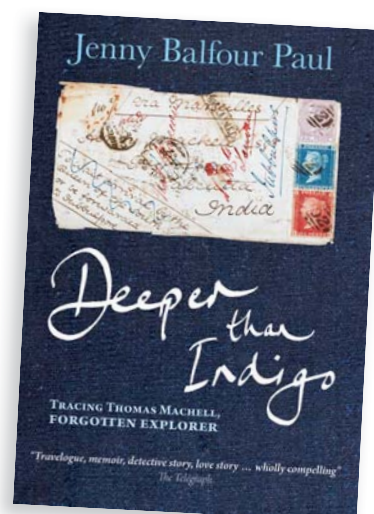
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Deeper Than Indigo: Tracing Thomas Machell, Forgotten Explorer

By Jenny Balfour Paul

Researcher Jenny Balfour Paul transports readers on a journey through time and over land and sea to India and points east in her newest book. The focus of her investigations: indigo. The object of her fascination: a nineteenth-century explorer who recorded his adventures in handwritten journals, which Paul discovered tucked away in a British library. In this illustrated travelogue, she encounters pirates and more as she parallels Thomas Machell's expeditions and embarks on her own trek to uncover more about his fate.

Surbiton, England: Medina Publishing, 2017. Paperback, 326 pages, \$12.99. ISBN: 978-1909339569. www.medinapublishing.com.

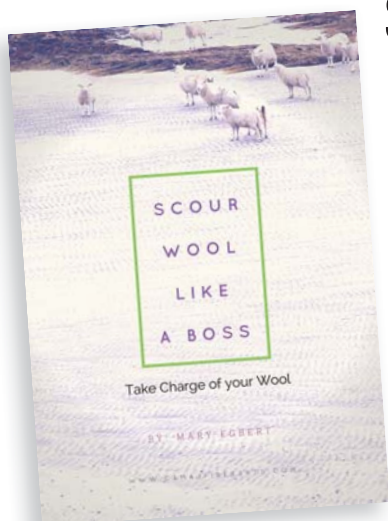


Scour Wool Like a Boss: Take Charge of Your Wool

By Mary Egbert

Mary Egbert of Camaj Fiber Arts has compiled her years of experience washing fleece into an interactive PDF e-book. In addition to step-by-step directions, advice on avoiding (or embracing) felting, and tips for choosing a good fleece from the start, this e-book includes a helpful section explaining water pH and the benefits and drawbacks of common types of washing agents used for scouring. Embedded links allow the reader to navigate directly to further information, videos, and recommended products. Especially helpful are links to video tutorials on washing wool and alpaca in a home kitchen.

Rockledge, Florida: Camaj Fiber Arts, 2016. PDF, 30 pages, \$5.50. www.camajfiberarts.com.



Weaving with Linen

Online Workshop with Tom Knisely

Many handspinnners find preparing and spinning flax intimidating. In order to harvest the strong, spinnable fibers, flax requires a fair amount of processing with frightening-looking tools. Enter weaving guru Tom Knisely. In his new online workshop, *Weaving with Linen*, Tom demonstrates how to turn flax plants into flax fiber with vintage tools, from rippling to remove the seeds (for planting next season) to hackling, plus how to dress a birdcage distaff. One of Tom's most important tips for working with long-line linen: just add water. Whether in spinning or weaving, adding moisture makes working with the inelastic fibers and yarn easier. For the weavers in our midst, Tom explains step-by-step how to lash on a warp for more even tension and why you will want to use a temple. (See page 74.)

Fort Collins, Colorado: Interweave, 2018. Online course, \$29.99. SRN R9598. www.interweave.com.





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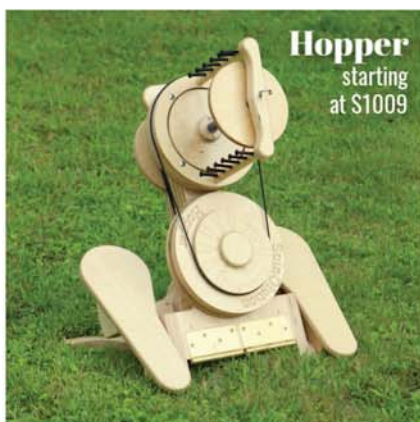
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Abstract Fibers, PO Box 92141, Portland, OR 97292. (971) 772-1165; abstractfiber@gmail.com; www.abstractfiber.com.

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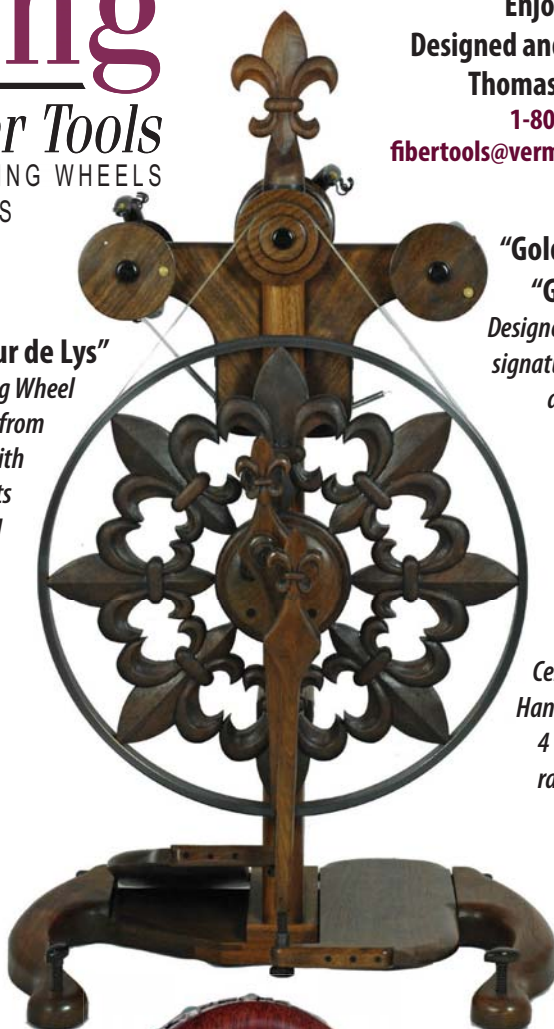
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MAKING THE GRADE

THE UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING'S WOOL-JUDGING TEAM

By Elizabeth Prose



Photo courtesy of University of Wyoming

Meet the University of Wyoming's (UW) resident sheep guy, fleece-judging coach, assistant professor in the Department of Animal Science, and UW Extension Sheep Specialist Whit Stewart. UW hadn't had a fleece-judging team for 16 years, but the team recently competed in the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colorado. One of their teams won the competition, and one team member won overall champion.

Spin Off (SO): How did you get started judging sheep's fleeces? How long have you been judging?

Whit Stewart (WS): I grew up on a cattle and sheep farm in western New York. We specialized in selling lamb. I became involved with wool judging as an extension

Members of the champion University of Wyoming wool-judging team. Standing, from left: assistant coaches Bryce McKenzie and Katie Hazlewood, Wilson Renner, Grace Corrette, Zach Davis, Megan Proctor, Amy Newman, Courtney Newman, and coach Whit Stewart. Seated, from left: Juan Gavette, Dallin Brady, Laurel Rigby, and Dylan Laverell.

educator in northeast Wyoming with University of Wyoming in 2011, where I coached the county 4-H team. When I decided to pursue my PhD in New Mexico, part of my assistantship was to coach their intercollegiate wool-judging team, which I did for two years. I judged both commercial and handspinning competitions at both the New Mexico and Wyoming state fairs. My first faculty position was at Montana State University as state sheep and wool specialist and director of the Montana Wool

Lab, where I oversaw the analysis of wool samples and conducted research. I've judged some other fiber types, but as a sheep scientist, I'm pretty wool-centric given my background and academic training.

SO: Tell us about team competitions: What kinds and how many classes make up a competition? How are teams judged?

WS: The collegiate wool-judging format is a 750-point competition composed of a 300-point grading rail, 300 points for class placings of either three breed or three commercial classes, and 150 points for three classes of oral reasons. [*Editor's note:* Oral reasons are a portion of wool and livestock-judging contests. Participants stand before a judge and, without notes, describe the class they judged and defend their placing choices from memory.]

The grading rail is composed of 15 fleeces of all types. Fleeces range from 19 to 40 microns, range in yield from 38% to 70% clean wool, and are of varying staple lengths. Each student gets two minutes with each fleece and has to estimate the grade/spin count from 10 options; clean yield to within 4% for full points; staple length appropriate for the grade from 3 choices; purity, good or bad, which includes the presence or absence of black fibers and kemp fibers; and character, which includes crimp, color, and condition of fleece and is ranked good, average, or poor. Eight minutes are permitted at the end to go through the 15 fleeces and double-check or reevaluate the grading choices. The closer the answers are to the correct answer, the more points given for each.

The class portion requires competitors to correctly place four fleeces on a table according to clean weight for commercial classes and clean weight and breed character for the breed classes. This not only requires students to estimate the raw weight but also calculate the clean yield, which means estimating which fleece is going to produce more clean wool for the wool buyer and less waste from breaks and tender wool at the textile phase. In breed classes, if there are similar-weight fleeces, students need to understand which ones adhere most closely to breed standards and character so that they can correctly place the class. There are only three breed classes at any one competition, but they can be Merino, Rambouillet, Targhee, Columbia, or Corriedale fleeces.

The oral reasons are taken from three of the six classes, either commercial or breed classes. These are

memorized justifications provided to contest officials by the competitors. Each set of oral reasons has a maximum of 50 points, is scored according to the accuracy of how the competitor placed the class, and requires a very descriptive explanation of each fleece from first to fourth place. The way that fleeces are described and placed varies between commercial and breed classes. In the commercial class, reasons are tailored to the commercial wool industry justification, and breed classes are generally from the sheep-breed perspective.

SO: How can sheep producers support your team?

WS: We need donations of fleece to the wool-judging program at both 4-H and collegiate levels. I'd love to have more wool donated from different operations so that students may see wool representative of the entire industry and from different regions of the United States. We have a pretty extensive collection of wool to practice on at the UW's wool-judging program, but we need more support for events such as NWSS.



Photo courtesy of University of Wyoming

University of Wyoming wool-judging team member Juan Gavette, from Everson, Washington, evaluates a fleece staple.



Wool-judging coach Whit Stewart has worked with both 4-H and college-level wool-judging teams.

SO: Can you describe the best fleece you saw at a recent competition?

WS: I think it's always exciting to see bright white and well-prepared fleeces at the collegiate contests. Since I'm a sheep guy, I really like coming across breed classes that are challenging to judge, because they're all really high quality. I really liked the Corriedale breed class at the NWSS contest this year. The long staple lengths, uniform crimp patterns, and soft handle made that a fun class, although it tripped up some of the competitors.

SO: What do you like most about judging wool and coordinating the team?

WS: I love that sheep are a dual-producing livestock species, meat and fiber, which gives our industry an excellent story to tell. I love sheep and the products they produce for society, both in modern and ancient times. I like coaching the students, which creates both awareness and knowledge about the sheep industry. The decision-making and oral articulation skills developed through 4-H and collegiate-level wool judging are translational to the lives of those who are involved. I also like the university rivalry aspect of competing against larger universities. It's a healthy competition, and it's almost like we are competing for Mountain West sheep producers in addition to those in Wyoming.

SO: What is the most challenging aspect of judging wool?

WS: Having conducted and published studies in the sheep and wool industry, it's sometimes hard to reconcile laboratory results with how the "naked eye" would official a contest. I like the fact that we use laboratory-standardized instruments to tell us what the wool actually is, but that doesn't always allow us to coach students to be 100% accurate. My fellow coaches in collegiate wool judging sometimes find it frustrating that a fleece may officially be a 60s grade but look like a coarser 56s grade, which may lose them points in a competition. But I like those wild cards. The NWSS contest is usually that competition where there are wild cards, and the winning team usually has been trained to know more about wool fiber and the industry.

SO: Have you judged fleeces for handspinning? How is judging a handspinner's fleece different from judging fleece used commercially?

WS: I've judged four or five handpinning-fleece shows and enjoy doing so. However, they're particularly challenging. The criteria aren't as objective as the traditional industry shows (weight, yield, staple length, and purity), but the principles of uniformity and character (crimp, color, and condition) still apply. Handspinners know as well as anyone that cleanliness, the absence of vegetable matter, and overall preparation of the fleece are very important. This can be challenging especially when excessive preparation can reduce the weight of the fleece so dramatically that it becomes too light. These scenarios are fun challenges at the state fair fleece competition but require me to think differently than when I'm coaching our wool team.

SO: What advice do you have for new wool judges?

WS: I think learning objective, laboratory measurements of wool and what they mean is important, as they give us a scientific basis for wool evaluation. Once we learn these, we can then establish the more subjective criteria that make wool judging fun, especially for handspinning applications.

For more information, please visit www.uwyo.edu/anisci/students/judging-teams/wool-judging.

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Left: Madrona offered a wide variety of spinning workshops. Below: Kenneth Moore of Homestead Hobbyist at the Madrona market with fibers and yarns in unique blends and colorways.



Photos by Kate Larson

JOYFUL CONCLUSIONS & NEW BEGINNINGS: 20TH MADRONA WINTER FIBER ARTS RETREAT

By Kate Larson

For 20 years, fiber artists have looked forward to the Madrona Winter Fiber Arts Retreat each February. Organized by Suzanne Pedersen and Cornie Talley, Madrona grew from a gathering of knitters and spinners in Gig Harbor, Washington, to a large event attended by hundreds of fiber artists at Hotel Murano in Tacoma, Washington.

The event was known for top-tier instructors, sold-out classes, and a curated marketplace that was open to the public. Despite the event drawing hundreds of fiber folks from around the country and beyond, it was known for its intimate and welcoming tone.

2019 marked the 20th and final Madrona. Suzanne and Cornie announced the news and their thanks before the finale: “We celebrate all of you as our family, and we are grateful for your loyalty and support. We want you to know that you all have made Madrona your own creation, and your joy in being at Madrona will be held in our hearts.”

Author and instructor Sally Melville, who participated in the very first Madrona, was the keynote speaker, and Vivian Høxbro gave an evening talk about her new book, *Traditional Danish Sweaters: 200 Star Motifs from Historic Sweaters*. Stephanie Pearl-McPhee

hosted the annual (and super-secret) Teacher Talent Show for Charity, raising funds for *Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders*, the Global Fund for Women, and Heifer International.

WHAT'S NEXT? RED ALDER FIBER ARTS RETREAT



Next year—same time, same place—the

Madrona community will welcome a new event: the Red Alder Fiber Arts Retreat. Held the third weekend in February and at the Hotel Murano, Red Alder will feature most of the same instructors, vendors, and event as the Madrona Winter Fiber Arts Retreat.

Quilter and crocheter Becky Edwards and spinner and weaver John Mullarkey are the duo behind Red Alder. Together, they have organized the Shannondale Craft Camp for the past five years, and they look forward to this new venture.

Red Alder Fiber Arts Retreat

February 13–16, 2020

Tacoma, Washington

Learn more at www.redalderfiberarts.com.



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Honest Cloth

SPINNERS ON WEAVING WITH HANDSPUN

By Devin Helmen

Photos by George Boe unless otherwise indicated

Devin's goose-eye twill cloth handspun from variegated roving.

I have always been a spinner, first and foremost—only afterward a knitter and later a weaver. For me, yarn is always the basis and emphasis of any project. It is the very substance we make textiles from, and it is the part of a project that takes the longest to create. I had been spinning for some 20 years before I attempted to weave. Only in the past three or four years have I finally begun to feel more comfortable approaching a loom.

Weavers are often surprised that I choose to use only handspun yarn for everything I make. Most people, and particularly weavers who do not spin, have a belief that handspun yarn is more rustic, less sturdy, or somehow less worthy of being a warp. There are many opinions that float around the community. Probably the most common is that handspun is too weak for weaving—a laughable statement, since up until the Industrial Revolution, all cloth was woven from handspun (or reeled) yarns.

Spinners often are surprised that I take the time to spin for weaving, believing that it will take an unreasonable amount of time to spin for a large woven project. This is a matter of perspective; it does take a certain amount of time to spin enough yarn to weave a shawl or shirt or blanket, but I choose to look upon this as a benefit rather than a disadvantage. I like spinning, and the time I spend spinning is never wasted. If I am spending time doing an activity I enjoy, how can that be a bad thing?

A SPINNER WEAVER

I first chose to use handspun yarn for weaving simply because I was eager to get started, did not want to spend money, and had a stash of handspun yarns with no project earmarked. These yarns had been made

with knitting in mind. For the most part, they were DK-weight, two-ply yarns, and they wove up nicely. I enjoyed playing with them and testing out the loom. I made several scarves, experimenting with weave structure and color. My favorite piece is a scarf woven in twill in which I experimented with plaid. It fullled into a soft, thick, and comforting scarf that blocks the cold Minnesota winds. At the very end of the warp, I played around with various twill structures and loved how the twill really popped out when using a red weft.

Having started my weaving life with handspun yarn, I continued that way. It is a wonderful feeling to make something completely from scratch. For me, this act of creation is incredibly empowering; it is a rare thing in this world to create something from nothing. I also feel that handspun yarn brings genuineness, an inherent honesty, to what I make.

Spinning with a Purpose

I began spinning specifically for weaving. One of the things I enjoyed most was using up some roving that was the result of an experiment with oven dyeing. I had pulled big rounds of roving out of the bag in a loose spiral, placed it in a pot, covered it with water, and then poured dyestock over it. After some time in the oven, I carefully removed the entire doughnut of roving, rinsed it thoroughly but carefully, and then allowed it to dry. The result was an interesting semi-variegated roving that spun up into a rich colored yarn. I knew I wanted to feature this yarn and determined that some gray Corriedale two-ply yarn I had already spun would work as a warp, and I would weave a goose-eye twill. I love the fabric and have plans for a warm vest.

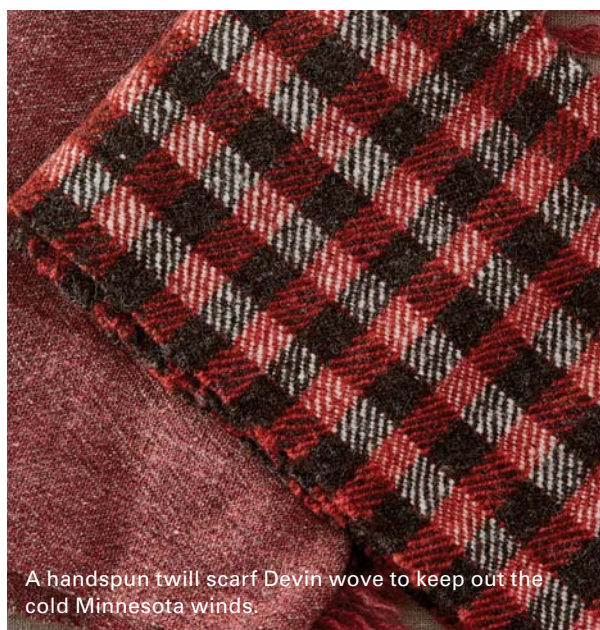
For me, this act of creation is incredibly empowering; it is a rare thing in this world to create something from nothing.

I then began experimenting with finer and finer yarn. A friend sent me several pounds of batts she had carded from wool she had dyed. I spun the batts into a fine two-ply yarn and determined that I would use it to make a shirt. I wanted something simple and plain and so used it to make a plain-weave fabric. The fabric had interesting tracking when wet-finished, so it almost looks like twill. I cut and sewed it into a shirt (of sorts), but the misshapen and puckered-seamed monstrosity is waiting until my sewing and pattern-drafting skills improve enough for me to salvage it.

BUMPS IN THE ROAD

My current goal is to weave finer fabrics that can be easily used for clothing. To do so, I am working to use singles yarn as both warp and weft. My first two experiments in this were failures. The first was a fairly fuzzy Gotland wool singles, and I did not use sizing on the warp. No matter how strong the singles were (and they were strong), the fuzz began to get worse and worse under the abrasion of the reed and heddles. Eventually, each warp thread stuck so determinedly to its neighbor that I had broken warp ends with every change of the shed. I quickly cut off and discarded that sample.

For the next sample, I put on a handspun linen warp that had taken me most of a winter to spin, which I sized. I was confident in this yarn and put on a 22-inch-wide, 8-yard warp, determined that I would finally meet my goal of weaving linen for a shirt or towel. This was hubris; after an inch of weaving, the badly sized linen yarn was fuzzing tremendously, and finally on one shed, I snapped 77 ends. (I counted them after using bad language). I cut the warp off and set it aside. The warp is not one I would tie on again, even if I could keep it organized enough, but it will not be wasted. I will tie the ends together and use it as weft for another piece with a Japanese technique called *zanshi*. I was much inspired after seeing a friend use it.



A handspun twill scarf Devin wove to keep out the cold Minnesota winds.

MOVING FORWARD

I have come to love weaving, though spinning will always be my passion. I encourage spinners who want to experiment with weaving or weavers who spin to use their yarns on their looms. Knowing how much input from other spinners and weavers has been instrumental in my weaving, I asked two questions of three weavers whose work I admire tremendously and who have used handspun yarn in their weaving: What do you think handspun yarn brings to weaving? And what tips do you have for spinners making yarn for weaving?

TRACKING

As plain-weave cloth is wet-finished, it can develop a surface texture that some weavers refer to as tracking. The effect makes the plain-weave cloth look a bit like twill, as diagonal lines appear that can be quite pronounced.



SARA LAMB

Sara Lamb is a textile teacher and mentor who has been fundamental to my success in weaving and spinning for weaving. She literally wrote the book about it.

“We have a subtle visual and tactile understanding of things we handle and use daily. We know a handmade cup the minute we pick it up, as opposed to a machine-made cup with its uniform surface and weight. We see the difference between handwritten calligraphy and machine-generated calligraphy at once. We know handmade jewelry, even as smooth and finished as it can be, from factory made.

“Weaving and spinning are among the earliest crafts that were mechanized in the Industrial Revolution. We have had mechanically spun yarn and mechanically woven fabric for over 200 years, and thus our mental picture of ‘what fabric looks like’ is far removed from truly handmade fabrics. Most people pay little attention to the cloth we use daily, much less distinguish machine-made cloth from handmade; they have to be told when something is handwoven. Further, cloth made of handspun yarn is far removed from common understanding or expectations even among handweavers—people who know handmade cloth! It is so subtle a variation from handwoven cloth of machine-made yarn that we have no words for the difference.

“Linguists tell us that the words we use define the world we see, just as cultural norms are embedded in our language. How many words are there for snow? Depends on which culture you ask. How many words for rain? It depends. Cloth is just as ubiquitous to our daily lives as rain and snow, and yet we have no words for the subtlety of handspun cloth, differentiated from handwoven cloth from commercial yarns, or even from commercial cloth.

“Very little in the natural world is perfectly symmetric, perfectly smooth, or perfectly even. Our eyes are accustomed to uneven and irregular surfaces, which are more intimate and comforting than the uniform and high-tech modern surfaces we are surrounded with in the public world.

“Handspun yarns create a surface that is not perfect, that has variable visual and reflective qualities because of its imperfections: light and shadow play differently on uneven surfaces, much more like light and shadow in nature. Hands that touch handspun cloth can feel that subtle variation, just as eyes can see it.

“Handspun, handwoven cloth shows the hand of the maker, over the perfect repetition of the machine. Our eyes smooth over small imperfections, and our hands feel the slight variations of yarn and fabric. It is human, it is natural, it is comforting.”



Photo by Joe Coca

TRY IT!

Weavers who spin their own yarns have the ability to choose fiber type, method of twist insertion, twist amount and/or direction, finishing methods, and grist. Author Sara Lamb walks you through how each of these elements converge to help you create the cloth you want.

www.interweave.com

Spin to Weave by Sara Lamb (Interweave, 2013)



LAVERNE WADDINGTON

Laverne Waddington is a tremendous weaver and teacher of backstrap weaving. Her work, which she shares generously on her blog, has been an inspiration and joy for me and many others around the globe.

"I bought a big sack of llama fiber from a woman while I was wandering the back roads in highland Bolivia and learning more about spinning back in 2002. The llama was dry, brittle, filthy stuff, but I didn't know any better. It was a struggle to clean and prepare and gave me asthma. I spun and plied it and began weaving. Then I dyed some of it with cochineal and spearmint leaves and wove some more. It was high-energy, gnarly stuff. But I just loved the fact that the fiber from that rough old llama living in those tough, dusty conditions up in the highlands became yarn and then some pretty decent cloth.

"I have found that warp-faced weaving is extremely flattering for one's handspun yarn. I look at things that I have woven with my handspun llama and alpaca fiber and can't believe that the yarn came from my hands. When the threads are placed as close together as they are in warp-faced textiles, differences in girth and twist are no longer apparent; everything looks wonderfully even.

"Traditional warp-faced woven textiles often have a high-twist warp. However, I soon found that yarn does not need to be 'over-twisted' to stand

up to the abrasion of warp-faced weaving. The first time I was given some beautifully prepared alpaca to spin, it slipped through my fingers with buttery smoothness—almost like cheating after that tough llama! I felt it would be a crime to put hard twist into the yarn, so I spun it as a softer, balanced yarn. You do need to know how to operate a backstrap loom well to deal with this. The warp needs to be advanced as often as possible so that the heddles and rods are not sitting on any one spot for too long. You need to use the gentlest possible method to raise the heddles and open sheds. Also, you need to get used to the fact that sheds will not open cleanly; extra-gentle effort is needed to clear them.

"I haven't gone much further with spinning wool or other fibers for my weaving. The process is beautiful, but I never got the same feeling of connection to this land I live in by using beautifully cleaned and prepared fiber that had been given to me by friends or that I have bought at yarn stores or fiber fests. I think that connection is what using handspun brought to my weaving.

"I have recently been weaving with handspun cotton. I learned to spin cotton with weavers in coastal Ecuador in 2007 but never put that skill to use. However, I do find that handspun cotton will be the way to go for particular projects on which I am working. I need fine singles to try to create

~continued

Laverne purchased a rough llama fleece in the Bolivian Highlands. After spinning and dyeing, she wove a wrist cuff with the *nawi awapa* edging.



Photo by Laverne Waddington

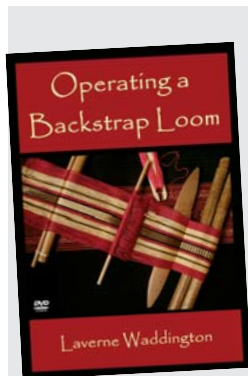
Photo by Laverne Waddington



The texture of handspun cotton is highlighted in this sheer woven cloth.

the kind of sheer fabric that weavers in certain areas of Guatemala weave on their backstrap looms. I was lucky to have brought back a big ball of handspun cotton from Guatemala to work with before attempting to spin my own. I wove with the Guatemalan cotton and was interested to see the extent of its tolerance. The piece I wove with it was quite different from my usual work—not warp-faced, but rather a very open structure. I simply cannot imagine commercially spun cotton creating quite the same awesome rustic effect!

“The open structure that I am currently weaving in cotton is about as far removed from warp-faced as you can possibly get. Using singles in this kind of open structure allows nothing to be hidden! And I think that this is what makes it so attractive to me. All the imperfections and quirks are there to be seen in their glory; that’s what makes the cloth so beautiful and unique.”



TRY IT!

Laverne shows you how to dress the warp and operate the loom for both narrow and wide pieces. www.taprootvideo.com.

Operating a Backstrap Loom, video with Laverne Waddington (Taproot Video, 2017)

KRISTIN MERRITT

I first saw the work of Kristin Merritt on her blog (now closed) and later on Ravelry as Mushinweaving. She makes such honest, skilled cloth from yarn she spins. She has made khadi, the handspun, handwoven cotton cloth famous for its role in Indian independence, which is an unusual project for a Western spinner and weaver.

“When you spin yarn for a weaving project, it has a different quality than machine-spun yarn. It is an outward display of every moment you spend spinning, every breath, including all the flaws and inconsistencies of being human. When you are in a state of enthusiasm or peaceful joy as you work, that energy flows into the finished item, and others will sense that subtle energy and be drawn to it, whether they are aware of it or not. A machine-spun yarn cannot replicate [yarn made by] a human being in that state of awareness. There is also the wonderful satisfaction of making something from scratch, understanding something so primitive and applying those skills.

“For weavers who wish to work with cotton, especially singles, there are a few tips that can smooth your path. I find that cotton is better approached with a sense of faith and patience. It may take longer to learn to spin cotton and to weave with the singles. Most of us learn to spin wool first, and when we begin to spin cotton, we are frustrated, and must let go of preconceived ideas of how a fiber should feel when spun.

“The first requirement is a willingness to allow the cotton to teach you, to guide you to spin it the way it wants to be spun. Like meditation, in the beginning it requires all of your attention and will not tolerate distraction, but eventually it becomes

The goal is not to make the yarn look like machine-spun yarn, but to have a yarn that is balanced and stable enough to survive the weaving process with all its human qualities intact.

effortless; this is the goal. You must be vigilant, and each moment the forming cotton thread reflects your state of awareness. A lapse in attention or a lack of trust in the fiber will create a slub or thin spot, each detrimental in its own way. The goal is not to make the yarn look like machine-spun yarn, but to have a yarn that is balanced and stable enough to survive the weaving process with all its human qualities intact.

“My advice is to spin a lot of singles on different spindles and wheels to discover which works best for the yarn you want to make. Put more twist in the singles than you think [you need], but use your intuition as you spin. Try plying some of your singles yarn into two-, three-, and four-ply yarns and examine them. Then try all the finishing methods you can: boil it, steam it over a kettle, or do nothing with it. Knit and weave some small samples and throw them in the wash; see how they look and respond. Adjust the twist amount in the singles or the ply as needed; spend time exploring your yarns.

“A consistently stable singles is just as important if you intend to ply, although the more plies you have, the more forgiving the yarn tends to be. As long as there are no obvious slubs, you should not have to size a plied warp. A singles cotton warp should be sized. There are many sizing materials to choose from, and I suggest you experiment and find the one that works for you. You can add the sizing in the skein or with a brush while the warp is stretched out under tension, the method common in India. Regardless of the method you choose, you will have to be patient while separating the drying singles. You can also size the weft, which will decrease your draw-in and wear at the edges and eliminate potential pigtails in the cloth. In India, it is common to use a temple while weaving khadi (cotton singles).

“A slightly lower-twist singles will create a fabric that is softer with a bit of a flannel feel, but it will not wear as well. A hard-twist singles will need more space for the extra energy to move, or else the cloth will be too rigid. A slightly wider sett will create a lovely, hard-wearing, crêpe-textured textile that becomes softer over time. Each has its own unique look and feel.”



Photos by Kristin Merritt

Kristin's handspun cotton singles and her handspun, handwoven cotton cloth.

TRY IT!

Cotton, flax, and hemp behave very differently from wool, and special handling is required. Author Stephenie Gaustad offers a detailed overview of each plant, the fiber it produces, and how best to card, prepare, and spin these fibers. www.interweave.com.



The Practical Spinner's Guide: Cotton, Flax, Hemp by Stephenie Gaustad (Interweave, 2014)

Cubicle Monkey by day, Fiber Fanatic by night, **Devin Helmen** has been feeding his fiber obsession since he taught himself to spin at age eight. He spins, knits, and weaves in beautiful Minnesota. His writing has been featured in *Spin Off* and *Ply*, and he teaches at the Weavers Guild of Minnesota. He has a passion for spindles and everyday textiles and blogs intermittently at www.afewgreenfigs.blogspot.com.

Ed Jenkins

SEES THE FOREST THROUGH HIS TREES

By Deborah Held

There are creatives who wander, taking in a journey's scenic landmarks and the ribboned stretches of road before them as their means of artistic inspiration. Then there's Ed Jenkins, the longtime woodworker best known for his iconic miniature Turkish spindles, whose industry-changing designs are born from the natural, renewable resources sourced near his Oregon home.

Ed Jenkins lives and breathes a craft based on sustainably grown, legally harvested local and exotic woods. He has two passions in his life: working with wood and his relationship with his wife, Wanda. It was the pair's devotion to one another, and maybe a fortuitous chance encounter, that led to Ed carving out a career from his modern take on an old-world spindle.



Photo by Wanda Jenkins

Ed Jenkins in his workshop with a stack of spindle blanks in a variety of woods. Over his shoulder, more blanks cure.

THE JENKINS JOURNEY

Ed is a modest man and a person of few words. He enjoys small-town living and staying close to home. For more than 37 years, he has lovingly expressed himself through the distinctive grains of his carefully sourced exotic hardwoods, and he comes alive in discussing them.

His products over the years reflect Wanda's fiber-related pursuits. These tools include knitting needles, crochet hooks, hairpin-lace looms, boat shuttles, and many spindle designs. In 2004, the Jenkins Spindles brand became official, and the pair took their wares on the road—but not too far from home.

Each time Ed introduced new tools, buyers took notice of his craftsmanship, use of exotic and unique domestic woods, and original designs. Ed began experimenting with spindle making but found no joy in turning his treasured woods into top-whorl spindles. Ed always felt that it was important to be challenged by his work and not bored by it. His curiosity was piqued, however, when he happened across some Turkish spindles while on the festival circuit. In 2005, he designed his first Turkish spindle, the standard-sized Swan, and began putting it to market at nearby fiber festivals and on the Jenkins Spindles website.

He—and his customers—were hooked.

Soon he began dreaming of a similar design on a smaller scale, and in 2008, the Jenkins Delight was born. Delight spindles weigh 16 to 31 grams. In an effort to use some of his smallest pieces of wood in his signature design, Ed then created the first truly tiny Turkish spindle to hit the market, the Kuchulu (6 to 14 grams), in 2009. By this point, his mind was racing with design ideas. Soon came the Lark (18 to 23 grams), a standout because of its elegantly curved midwhorl arms. The weights of the spindles vary depending on the density of the wood used.

An excited customer and fellow creative surreptitiously helped Ed create his Aegean—a true cross-armed replica of the old-world spindle—when she brought her genuine version to Black Sheep Gathering



The Bee Hummingbird (left) is currently the smallest in the Jenkins spindle line. The Kuchulu (right) is a bit larger.

Photo by George Boe

in 2010. Dana of Whimsical Ewe had purchased the spindle in Greece in the 1980s. At the time, she had no idea what the item was but found the worn wood and etchings to be charming. Ed was also taken by its charms when Dana asked him to re-create it for her. The Jenkins version got its name thanks to one of Ed and Wanda's blog followers who'd spent considerable time in Greece, Turkey, and Afghanistan. She had seen similar cross-armed spindles and thought that the name "Aegean" covered the region suitably. This spindle differs from other modern Turkish-style spindles in that the smaller arm slides in and out of the larger arm in only one direction, unlike the more typical design of one arm sliding through a keyhole inside its mate.

Other spindle versions, dreamt up by Ed to suit particular whims, needs, or customers' requests, emerged over the years. These have included his Egret (28 to 45 grams, heavier than the Aegean and smaller than the Swan) and the popular Finch (10 to 13 grams, a smaller, speedier Aegean). Each subtle design change, be it the curvature of the arms, the size and weight range of the spindle itself, or the placement of the crossed arms on

the spindle's shaft, has yielded yet another new spinning experience for lovers of the Jenkins brand.

For the past few years, Ed has been working to fill a repeated design request for tiny, lightweight, usable Turkish-spindle earrings, which presented obvious challenges. His solution was released in 2017 and is the very tiniest such spindle to date at only 2 to 6 grams: the Bee Hummingbird. This spindle is so small that it comes with its own tin for safekeeping; a replacement shaft, since a replacement would be nearly impossible to fit in the event of breakage; and yes, a shaft with a silver earring hook attached. "It's mostly for fun," says Wanda. Despite its wee size, the spindle is as meticulously crafted as any other in the Jenkins lineup, and it even spins well, too!

FROM THEIR HANDS TO YOURS

From start to finish, one spindle takes no less than 6 months and upward of 12 months to complete from locally sourced wood. This includes the time it takes to mill (saw into pieces) and then cure the wood in his workspace. "Most people are afraid to cut and mill their wood, as if it's some great secret," Ed marvels.

Photo by Matt Graves



No other hands but his own are involved in the actual process of carving the Jenkins spindles, although Wanda does help with the wood-finishing tasks of buffing and adding signatures. No computers, no jigs . . . just Ed's two hands and the simplest traditional woodworking tools. Although he is not a spinner, he tests each spindle's balance using a hangman's noose itself. Prior to shipping, every spindle is retested by Wanda, who carefully gift wraps, boxes, and mails every one, adorned with its test-spun yarn and a chunk of unspun wool.

No two days in Ed's workshop are exactly the same, but each day revolves around the business of mini Turkish spindles: planning, testing a new design (which can take months to perfect), carving spindle shafts, or sanding arms so small that he abrades the skin of his fingertips as he works on them.

On the rare occasion when he has found an antler or a horn large enough to craft balanced cross arms, he may eke out just one of those highly coveted spindles in a day. "I have to be in the right mood for those," he says of the challenge.

When asked how he knows which woods work best with which spindle designs, he answers that the wood just tells him. Similarly, some of the rarest spindles aren't quite finished until they are whimsically handpainted or wood-burned with a dragonfly, butterfly, dandelion, or other symbol by their maker.

Come nightfall, according to Wanda, Ed often lies awake, tossing and turning, his head still filled with ideas for his spindles.

THE JENKINS PHILOSOPHY

From day one, Ed has incorporated environmentalism and sustainable wood-harvesting practices into his

business philosophy. He is careful in choosing his wood sources, seeking out local tree farmers whose harvesting values align with his own. It's important to him that he knows not just where the wood from which he crafts his spindles was grown but also that it was collected legally and ethically. Therefore, Ed maintains a carefully vetted list of exotic wood dealers he calls on when in need of purchasing rare woods not native to North America, such as Bolivian rosewood, Honduran rosewood, cocobolo, pink ivory, ebony, even snakewood, and more.

Most prized of all woods, however, are the "exotic" hardwoods he's able to find in his own neighborhood, up the street in the neighbor's yard or while walking near his and Wanda's home. Favorites include lilac, elderberry, and Scotch broom. "Anything that's odd, I like to use it," Ed says.

The Pacific Northwest is rife with rare hardwoods for those who know where to look. Some of his best wood finds are castoffs: nearby felled or rotted trees and shrubberies, as well as branch trimmings, from which Ed generates many of his holly, boxwood, and lilac miniature spindles, in addition to a lucky well of crabapple that went into a batch of Aegeans in 2018. "I'm interested in whatever it is," says Ed of such trimmings. "I know I'll be able to use it."

The occasional felled log of hardwood is even donated by a knowledgeable friend or customer, such as the retired duo who spent two entire days in their car driving a "filthy old log" of carob wood from their home in another state to Ed's expert hands. It turned out to be a treasure.

Few share Ed's keen eye for found hardwoods, so although he and Wanda often field generous offers of delivery, these are rarely accepted. Nothing goes to waste, though, and hardwood that doesn't meet his standards for Jenkins Spindles is dried and eventually chopped into firewood.

THE BUSINESS OF SPINDLE MAKING

Spindle making is the couple's sole source of income. Jenkins Spindles began as a direct-to-consumer business. It later temporarily went wholesale to just five accounts, as Wanda, who is also the Jenkins customer support representative, acclimated to her part-time volunteer work as a pastor at a Quaker church near home. As of late 2018, the Jenkinses are back to direct-

to-customer sales via their online website and select fiber festivals.

As anyone who has ever tried to purchase a Jenkins spindle is well aware, the desire for these spindles exceeds their supply—something that's not likely to change. Ed can only create a limited number of spindles per year, each carefully inventoried by Wanda. Together they vend at Black Sheep Gathering and Oregon Flock and Fiber Festival each year. They love the opportunity to meet their very loyal customers (and customers-to-be). Ed starts creating and putting aside the necessary inventories months in advance for each of these shows.

What else has changed? As of March 2018, Ed has discontinued making the Lark. Why? Because he just doesn't like making it anymore, he'll tell you. Wanda predicts that it will be back in rotation at some point in time, when another spindle style might fade from Ed's favor.

It's all up to Ed—and of course, whatever the wood tells him to do. ●

RESOURCES

Jenkins Yarn Tools, www.yarntools.com



Photo by Deborah Held

THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

No matter the yarn you have in mind to spin, there's a Jenkins spindle made to support that—from spinning the very finest singles to plying the bulkiest of yarns. Ed and Wanda's Turkish spindles are available in a variety of models, weights, and woods. The spindles shown are a mix of exotic and local woods, including zebrawood, Bolivian and Honduran rosewoods, lilac, pear, and birch. Ed either forages all wood varieties himself or carefully sources them from sustainable tree growers, wood suppliers, and the properties of a few trusted friends.

Deborah Held has been committed to spinsterhood since 2012. She's a freelance writer whose work appears in *Spin Off*, *PLY*, the Schacht Spindle Company blog, and more. She lives in the Atlanta area with a whole lot of wool. Contact her at www.debbieheld.com.



From left: a Finch in Bolivian rosewood; a prototype Delight in figured ash; and today's sleeker Delight made from zebrawood.

Photo by Deborah Held

TREKKING WITH Turkish Spindles

By Amelia Garripoli

When I first started exploring spindles, I was fascinated by the various types and how they differed. “Read” is literally my middle name, so you can be sure that I read all the books I could find on spindle spinning. Back at the turn of the century, there were mostly pamphlets, with a few books on spindles and articles in past issues of *Spin Off*. Top-whorl spindles were the usual topic, but I remember some excellent articles on Navajo and Akha spindles. Information on Turkish spindles, however, was slim.

The most important difference between Turkish spindles and other suspended spindles is the wind-on—the way in which the yarn is wrapped around the spindle. With top-whorl and bottom-whorl spindles, we wind newly spun singles or plied yarn around the shaft, next to the whorl. With Turkish spindles, we wind the yarn around the arms and the shaft together. This technique results in a ball of yarn when the spinning is finished and the spindle shaft and arms are removed, making the Turkish spindle a perfect tool for the traveling spinner.



A pretty pair of Jenkins Turkish spindles.

Photos by George Boe

FINE-TUNE YOUR PRACTICE

The simple act of winding handspun singles or plied yarns onto a Turkish spindle can be fairly straightforward. In fact, the articles and books I found early on that mentioned Turkish spindling just said “wind on” and left how to do it up to the reader. However, there are opportunities to fine-tune your wind-on from beginning to end, including keeping the partly full spindle safe from breaking when traveling.

Good Beginnings Lead to Happy Endings

When starting with an empty spindle, tuck some predrafted fiber into the holes on the arms alongside the shaft and start adding twist by twirling the spindle upside down. This lets you start the initial spin without a leader—one fewer thing to put in your spinning kit. This method gives you a firm attachment of the singles to the spindle. You may decide to leave it there, but beware: it might be difficult to pull the spindle arms apart, as the fiber that was in the hole tends to keep the two arms together. I’ve always been able to give it a strong enough tug to get it to let go, but I also have slung bales of hay for my sheep in the past.

Sometimes that tucked-fiber start magically comes out with the final, bigger arm and presents itself. This

is handy if you want a center-pull, Turkish-wound ball. A better way to ensure that the beginning of the ball emerges with a spindle arm is to start with the tucked-fiber method, make a good length of yarn, then take it off the spindle and tuck it in the hole of the larger arm, rather than in the shaft hole of the combined arms. This does require a Turkish spindle with one arm put into the other rather than the style that has one arm resting above the other. In that case, put the fiber in one arm’s shaft hole but not the other.

Half-Hitch Help

Now that you have a length of handspun on the spindle, you’re ready to get spinning with the spindle suspended. Many Turkish spindles do not have a hook on the spindle tip, so my usual technique is to bring the yarn from the ball on the arms up to the top of the spindle, make a half hitch around the tip of the spindle shaft, and spin from there. A half hitch is a loop with a twist that is wrapped around the spindle shaft. (See www.interweave.com for more information about half-hitch spindle attachments.)

An important part of spindle efficiency is learning not only how to make a half hitch quickly but how to undo it as well. Once I’ve made a new length of yarn, I wrap it around my left hand with the spindle in my



The tucked-fiber start. To add twist, turn the spindle upside down with the other hand. Place on your lap or a table surface if both hands are needed for drafting. Spindle: TurtleMade.



Turkish spindle balls from left: X wind-on; over two, under one wind-on; and meditative mandala wind-on.

right hand. Then I relax the short length between left hand and spindle and use the index finger of my left hand to slip the half hitch off: I put my finger between the shaft and the length leading up to the half hitch and slide my finger toward the top of the spindle. The slack of the new yarn lets the half hitch loosen, and once it slides off the tip, it unties completely. Then, I'm ready to wind on with my left hand as my right hand rotates the spindle to present the arms for the wind-on.

The X Wind-On

When I was first learning about Turkish spindles in the early 2000s, I couldn't find a resource that explained how to wind my singles around the spindle arms. Left to my own devices, I examined pictures of Turkish spindles; those photographed with yarn usually had a fairly round ball around the arms and shaft.

Given that evidence, I approached winding on a Turkish spindle the same way my mother taught me to wind balls of yarn by hand when I was young. We made a small bundle of yarn wound around our fingers, then wrapped and wrapped that bundle, working to make it round and even by following orderly paths around and rotating the ball regularly.

With this approach to winding, the spindle's parts definitely got in the way of winding on. Since my goal

was to make a round ball, I looked at the spindle with an eye to what paths were available: I could wind around two arms on one side of the shaft, then around those same arms on the other side of the shaft in a parallel track. Then I could rotate the spindle a quarter turn and wind following the same path, but on a different pair of arms, creating an X pattern with two lines for each bar of the X. This worked quite well for me and led to quick, round balls coming off my Turkish spindle.

Wanda's Wind-On: Over Two, Under One

Then along came Jenkins Woodworking and the amazing Wanda Jenkins. I saw the Jenkins's booth at Black Sheep Gathering in Eugene, Oregon, in the late 2000s and was entranced at how Wanda was winding singles onto her spindle. As she wound, she said, "over two, under one," completely describing the process of her winding. She was going over two arms of the spindle, then under one, then over two, and under one. She rotated the spindle as she did this, so the wrapping went quite smoothly.

If this pattern strikes you as odd due to the four arms on the Turkish spindle, it's actually quite clever: by using three arms, you won't repeat the pattern until you've completed it four times. This method distributes the yarn evenly around the spindle arms.

Although yarn is evenly distributed around the arms, this method doesn't evenly distribute the growing ball on the shaft. As the pattern is repeated, two-thirds of the ball will form above the arms and one-third forms below the arms, which leads to a wonderful result! The shaft of a Turkish spindle is usually much shorter below the arms than above, so by putting more of the yarn above the arms, you can fit more yarn on your spindle. As the ball grows, it is increasingly round on top and somewhat flat on the bottom. Many spinners lovingly refer to these as "turtles."

Meditative Mandala

As spindle spinners, our usual goal is efficiency in spindling, but we all agree it has a meditative quality as well. You can take this one step further with a Turkish spindle: use the over two, under one wind-on with space-dyed roving or combed top to wind on in tidy rows, starting close to the shaft and carefully placing each wrap next to the previous one. Regularly starting a new row at the shaft and working outward to cover the previous row, you will create the most amazing mandala-like wind-ons. These are not efficient in terms of time because the placement needs to be fairly precise, but they are meditative, as the placement lets you reflect on the care and precision of your wind-on.

Combining Wind-On Methods

Topologically speaking, unlike the X wind-on, the over two, under one wrapping method is piling the yarn in circles on itself, not actually crossing yarns. As such, the center of the ball can tangle easily if the yarn has no reason to hold onto itself. If I am starting with a slippery fiber such as silk or suri alpaca, I will start with an X wind-on to give the center of the ball some stability and then change to the over two, under one wind-on once I have a solid start.

SAFE TRAVELS: BRING A STRAW

When I teach Turkish spindle classes, I ask my students to bring something that seems unusual: a drinking straw. They often wonder all through class why they have that straw, as we can't use it until they have some yarn on their spindles. Sometimes, about halfway through, someone will ask, which is a great lead-in to the straw lesson.





Remove the spindle shaft.

Choose a straw that fits over the length of the shaft and fits tightly on the shaft above the arms. If the straw is snug right at the arms or even an inch above them, that's fine. Once the straw is firmly on the shaft, begin pulling the shaft out of the spindle arms so that the straw comes with it. With the straw completely through the arms, appearing above and below the yarn on the arms, remove the shaft and behold: a Turkish spindle prepared for flat-pack travel while midproject!

The straw can be bent around the whorl to keep it in place, and the shaft is no longer at risk of breaking by being crushed while through the arms.

When you are ready to spin again, straighten out the straw, put the shaft into the bottom of it, and push the shaft up. The shaft pushes the straw up with it once the straw seats on the shaft again. Once the shaft is back in place, remove the straw, and you can start to spin again.

Having broken a few shafts in my day (sigh), I was pleased to “unvent” this straw trick to save my Turkish spindle shafts. I'm sure it didn't originate with me, but

I offer it to you with the hope of making your Turkish spindles portable marvels for you like mine are for me.

Now go dig out your Turkish spindles and create new yarns. Whether you try the X wind-on; the over two, under one wind-on; or go all the way to the meditative mandala, you will have some glorious fiber in your hands and some lovely new yarn as a result. ●

RESOURCES

Garripoli, Amelia. *Spinning on a Turkish Spindle*. Fort Collins, Colorado: Interweave, 2016. DVD and video download.

———. *Productive Spindling*. Port Angeles, Washington: Ask the Bellwether, 2009.

Amelia Garripoli began her blog, www.askthebellwether.com, in 2001 to share her joy of spindles and rare-breed wools. She self-published *Productive Spindling* in 2009 and made two Interweave spindle videos in 2016, including *Supported Spindle Spinning*. Amelia's studio in Poulsbo, Washington, is filled with spindles, spinning wheels, looms, dyes, and fibers—a fiber playground. She enjoys teaching and writing about fiber arts and is tickled to be in this issue of *Spin Off*!

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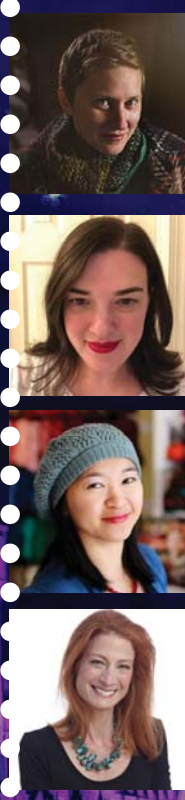
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www.VistaFiberArtsFiesta.com

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www.salidafiberfestival.com

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www.prairiehandspinnersfiberfest.com

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www.njsheep.net/festival

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Fashion show, sales, banquet: Azure—Structured Wired Double Cloth; Buckley—Tapestry Landscape; Crescenzo—Felted Handbag; Diefenderfer—Color Games/Straight Twills; Larson—Crimp Preparing/Spinning Dyed Locks; Wilson—Polychrome Crackle (716) 753-2319

registrar@eglf.org
www.EGLFC.org

WNY Fiber Arts Festival—East Aurora

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www.wnyfiberartsfestival.org

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www.saffsite.org

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www.autumnfiberfestival.com

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www.flockandfiberfestival.com

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Photo by Matt Graves

Donegal Tweed

THE MAGIC OF COLOR

By Melissa Weaver Dunning

After almost 40 years as a spinner and weaver, the things that continue to excite me about working with fiber are simple structures such as stripes, checks, and plaids. I've found that these simple structures woven with traditional yarns offer endless opportunities to explore color!

And then there are tweed fabrics with complex color interactions that begin with the carding and spinning of the yarn. The process begins with fibers often described as “dyed in the wool.” Many colors of dyed fleece are combined prior to spinning to create beautiful shades of heathered yarn. Sometimes flecks of lightly felted wool are added during carding to appear as tiny pops of color. Knitters and spinners may be familiar with tweed as this type of heathered yarn, but the word tweed more commonly refers to a durable wool fabric.

A SHORT HISTORY OF TWEED

Tweed is historically considered a country cloth worn by farmers and hunters: a rough, hairy, weatherproof, and very durable cloth that was ideal for folks who worked outdoors. Patterns known as estate checks came along in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when people from England acquiring estates in Scotland wished to have tweed cloth in a design unique to their estates. These tweeds would be worn for hunting and to clothe groundsmen and stable hands. Even Downton Abbey has a registered estate check!

Tweeds served different purposes. A tweed cloth might contain only colors from the immediate environment to function as a type of camouflage for hunting. Other designs with subtle or highly contrasting colors were the hallmarks of fashionable country life. For more vibrant fabrics, the traditional designs can be endlessly adapted to create something new; beginning with the ubiquitous shepherd check, a simple black and

white houndstooth design, a red line can be added here or a smaller check to contrast with the houndstooth added there. Many of these fabrics are what weavers call color-and-weave patterns, and the interaction of colors when tweed yarns are used can be sublime.

As tweed cloth evolved from that heavy, sturdy outdoor fabric for farmers and sportsmen to a fashion fabric, the grist of the yarn and the hand of the cloth became finer and softer. Most of what is written about tweed in literature or on the internet today comes from the fashion industry, which has fallen in love with tweeds and tartans again and again, beginning in the 1820s during the Victorian era and again in the 1920s with Coco Chanel bringing tweed to high fashion.

Harris Tweed and Donegal Tweed

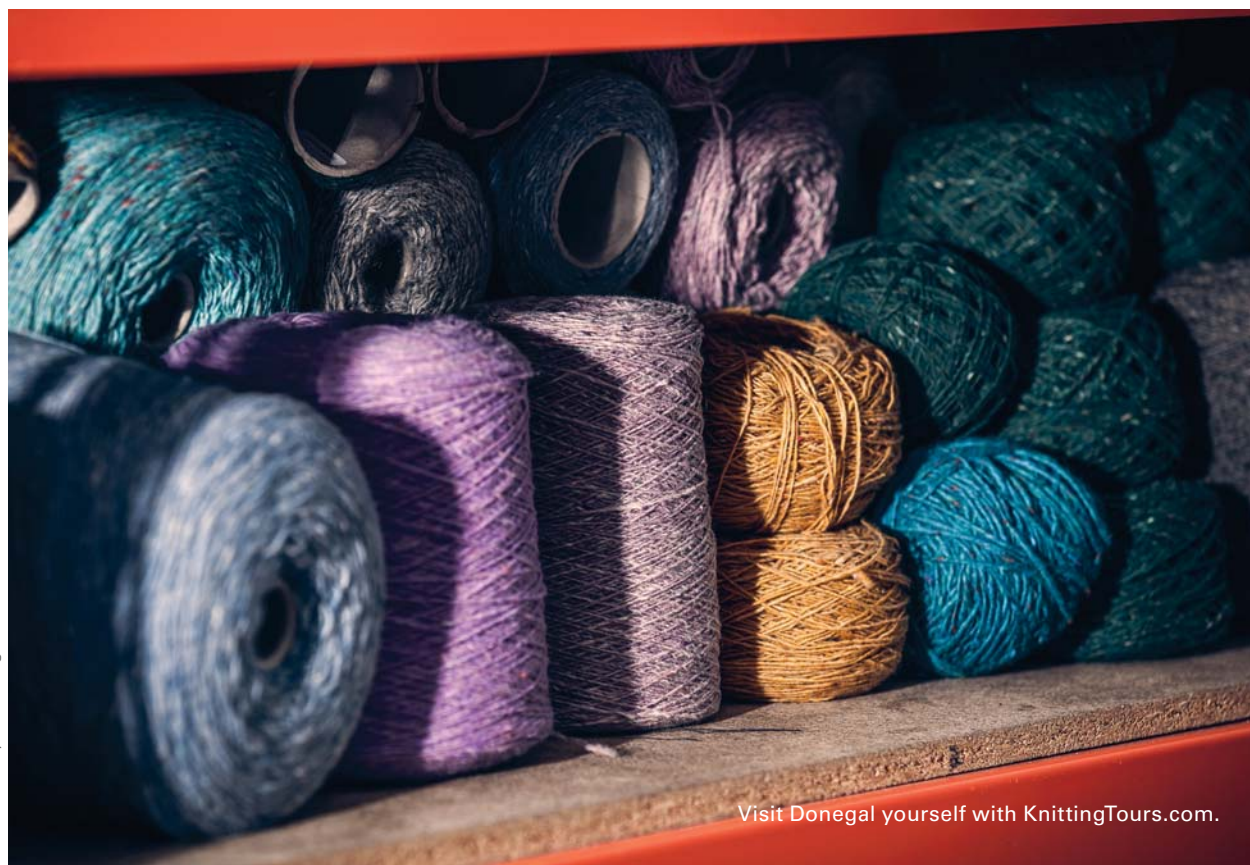
Harris Tweed from the Outer Hebrides of Scotland is arguably the most famous tweed today, but second place clearly goes to tweed from the Irish province of Donegal on Ireland's northwest Atlantic coast. I have studied Harris Tweed for many years and became curious to discover what qualities make Irish Donegal tweeds different from the Scottish tweeds.

Donegal tweed today is woven with a thicker yarn than most Scottish tweeds, and it is primarily plain weave—the most basic interlacement, with the weft thread passing over then under every other warp thread. The nubby, heathered yarn is really the essential ingredient in this fabric. Donegal tweed yarn consists of a unique blend of dyed-in-the-wool colors and contrasting flecks or neps of partially felted colored wool.

JOURNEY TO ÉIRE

My husband and I had a wonderful opportunity to visit Ireland in the fall of 2013. We visited the historic wool town of Ardara, the site of the old Donegal tweed markets and auctions, where we met Eddie Doherty in his brightly painted shop in the center of the village. His shop was filled with bolts of tweed and ready-made garments handwoven by Eddie himself or one of the weavers who work for him.

Eddie, like other weavers and weaving studios in Donegal, still produces tweed on a fly-shuttle loom, pulling a handle above the beater that works a pulley system and sends the shuttle back and forth across the web. The fly shuttle was invented in 1733 to allow



Visit Donegal yourself with KnittingTours.com.

A WEAVER'S WOOLLY START

I began my study of traditional handweaving in 1980 with a six-week course at the Marshfield School of Weaving in Vermont under the tutelage of Norman Kennedy. Originally from Scotland, Norman has helped fiber artists in the British Isles and North America explore the spinning and weaving of tartans and tweeds since the 1970s.

The first tartan class I took with Norman really got me hooked: winding the brightly striped warp, weaving the same color sequence in the weft, and watching the cloth develop. Square by square, bright solid colors appeared, but at the same time, squares of blended colors emerged where two colors crossed. Tartan weaving soon led me to an interest in Scottish tweeds and estate or district checks.

I have continued to spend time with Norman over the years. Eventually, I became a teacher myself, focusing on home-produced textiles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from North America, England, Ireland, and Scotland. My daily interactions with color in the natural world around me and in the fleece and yarns I work with are deeply satisfying and so very inspiring.

A few of Melissa's handwoven tweed and estate check samples.



Photo by George Boe

Donegal tweed yarn consists of a unique blend of dyed-in-the-wool colors and contrasting flecks or neps of partially felted colored wool.



Photo by Getty Images/DigitalVision Vectors

handweavers to work more efficiently. This technology came to the Donegal area in the 1880s.

In nearby Kilcar, we visited Donegal Yarns to see the actual dyeing and spinning of this unique yarn. Donegal Yarns has been operating since the early 1900s. The company provides yarn to most of the tweed weavers and knitting companies in Donegal and around Ireland as well as to individuals and companies around the world such as Tahki Stacy Charles. Most of the Donegal weavers use Donegal Yarns' Soft Donegal singles yarn for tweed weaving or two-ply yarn for blanket weaving.

We toured the huge mechanical factory, contrasting the small traditional weaving studios we had just visited with this large commercial wool mill. We saw dyed wool hydraulically lifted from the pressurized dye baths, run through drying machines, and then moved to the rooms where the colors are mixed with a vacuum blower.

The blending process was incredible to watch: a worker raked dyed fleece and flecks into an opening in the floor, replaced the cover, and switched on the blower. The fleece was blown up a tube to the ceiling of an adjoining room where a fan with two large padded arms helped to break up the clumps. It looked like a rainstorm of colored

fleece! Next, the fleece went to a nearby machine that further dispersed and mixed the colors. The colors are blended just enough but not fully homogenized, as this is part of the depth and beauty of the yarn.

The fleece and flecks are carded and processed into rolls of pencil roving, which is taken to the ring-spinning frames. Once spun, the yarn is skeined or wound on cones as singles, or it is plied and then skeined or coned.

The most inspiring part of our tour was meeting Nora McFadden, who “does the colours” for Donegal Yarns. Nora took us to her studio, where she has a desk with a hutch full of cubbyholes that hold small boxes, each labeled with the color code of the dyed fleece and dyed flecks that are her palette. She gave us a demonstration of her method.

She pulled out and weighed a selection of three to four colors of fleece and flecks, creating a combination that totaled 100 grams, carefully noting the weight of each color component to record the recipe for this particular heathered color.

She roughly mixed the fleece combination with her hands, pulling at the fleece to begin the blending. Nora

then carded the fleece combo and finally added the flecks and gave a few more strokes with the handcards to create a small batt. She spun a short sample off the point of an old mill bobbin winder.

At this point, if she is pleased with the color combination, she will also wet and felt a small sample of the batt. The recipe is written out on a sheet of paper, and the yarn sample and felted sample are attached to the sheet for future reference. This recipe for a 100-gram sample can then be multiplied to produce commercial-size runs of yarn.

A quiet, self-effacing woman, Nora McFadden clearly has a passion for color and is gifted with a natural eye for selecting and blending these shades. She asked us for our favorite color and told us that she loves purple. Nora also showed us a range of yarn colors based on local flowers and plants, illustrating how inspired she is by everything she sees around her in the Donegal landscape.

CREATE YOUR OWN TWEED YARNS

To spin your own Donegal-type tweed yarn, you will need solid-color fleece or prepared fiber in three or four

Students work with locally produced tweeds at the Edel MacBride Studio in Ireland. KnittingTours.com has three Donegal excursions in 2019.

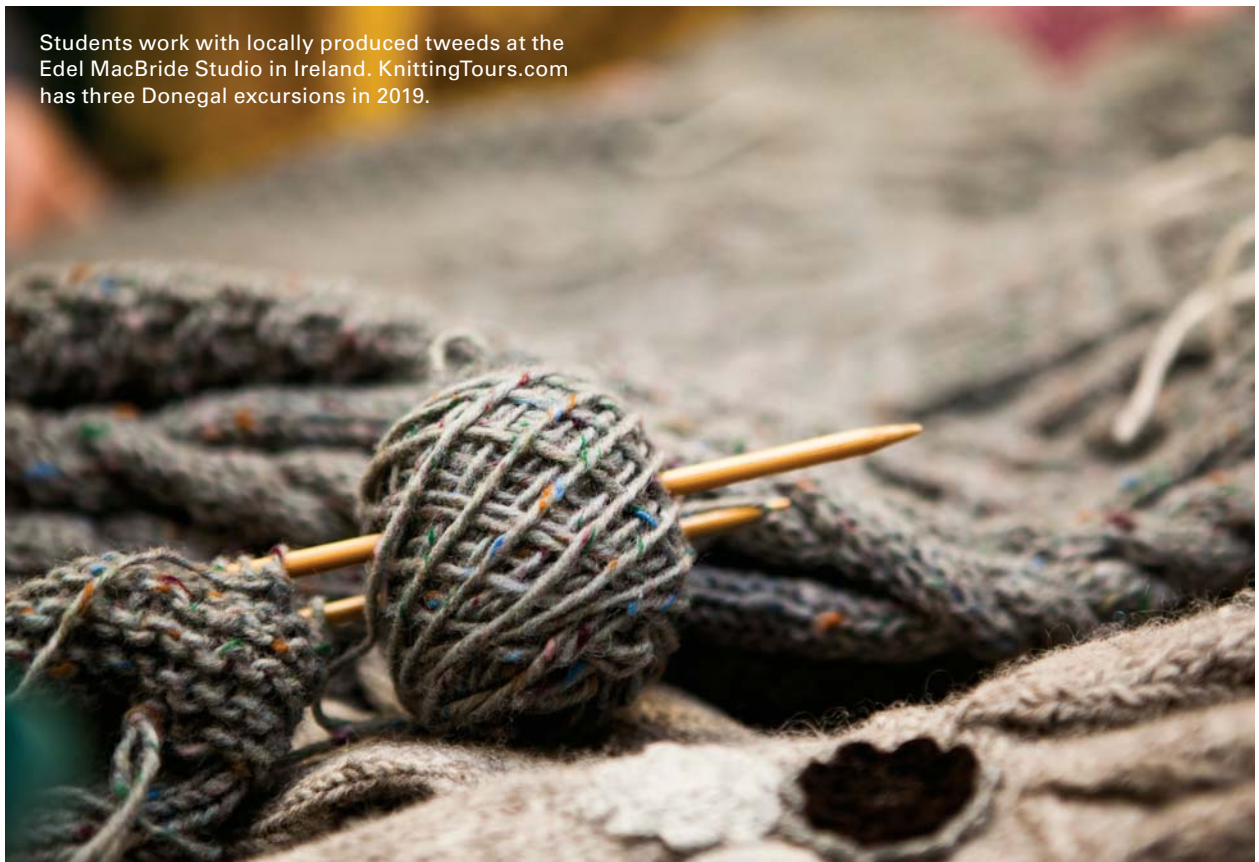


Photo courtesy of KnittingTours.com



Start with strong, bold colors to blend muted tweeds. HipStrings Pre-Newtonian Rainbow Merino Color Pack, with 1 ounce each (from left) of Ultra Violet, Sapphire, Chartreuse, Buttercup, Clementine, and Scarlet.

Photo by Matt Graves

different colors, a yard or two of worsted-weight wool yarn (not superwash) in various contrasting colors for flecks, a pair of handcards or a drumcarder for blending, and a digital scale if you are creating colors you would like to reproduce.

I created five colorways by simply adjusting the three-color combinations, color proportions, and accents. I worked with a HipStrings Rainbow Merino Color Pack, and for flecks, I used many colors of Peace Fleece worsted yarn. Each mix was 10 grams of total fiber, which made three good-sized rolags.

The color wheel is your friend when making color choices. Your blends can be as simple as several tints and shades of one color; a combination of analogous colors from a wedge of the color wheel, such as red, orange, and yellow; or a more adventurous triad selection, as in my purple mix. Choose fleck colors to coordinate or contrast—these can often add the spark that makes your yarn really exciting!

1 Dampen one of the short lengths of yarn and rub it briskly between your hands for about a minute until partially felted. Repeat for additional yarns in the contrast colors you want to use. Allow to fully dry.

2 Cut the lightly felted yarn into short lengths of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch. If your flecks are too long, they won't incorporate as well with the finished yarn.

3 Using a scale, weigh out portions of each color of fleece or select the proportions by eye.

4 Mix the colors by hand for a minute or so, pulling apart the roving or fleece to begin breaking up the colors. Then handcard or drumcard your mixed fleece—not too much, as you don't want the colors to blend completely. When handcarding, I like to card several times, doff (remove) the batt, turn it over, and card again. This helps to mix in the fiber without overcarding.

5 Add cut-yarn flecks into the final carding. You can fold them into the batt to help keep them out of the carding cloth or mix them in by hand before the final carding. Now you're ready to doff your batt, make a rolag, and spin it up!

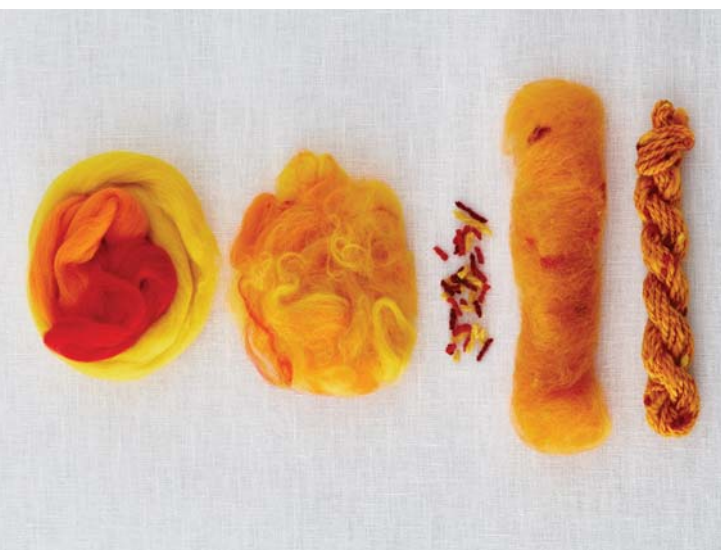
SPINNING NOTES

Donegal Yarns spins a woolen-style yarn for its traditional Soft Donegal. I spun my samples with a woolen long draw. To create two-ply yarns, I wound the singles into a center-pull ball on a nøstepinne and then wound a plying ball on the nøstepinne using the two ends of the first ball. I think of this as a folded ply to distinguish it from a parallel ply, and I use it mostly for sample skeins.

After plying, I soaked my skeins in warm water with wool wash, thwacked them a few times outside, and then rolled them in a towel. The skeins were hung to dry with a light weight with weaving in mind.

You may need to set aside perfectionist tendencies to spin this yarn. The quick carding as well as the lumps of the flecks can result in thick-and-thin drafting, and meanwhile, the flecks can become cocooned in the singles or wave like a little flag or simply fall off. This is all okay! Play with it, be patient, and experiment to find the right amount of color mixing and flecks that create a yarn that pleases you. ●

Melissa Weaver Dunning is a traditional handweaver and spinner who focuses on tartan and eighteenth-century home-produced textiles. She carries on this rich, storied tradition in her own teaching, sharing her passion for wool and linen.



Red Mix: 6 g red, 2 g orange, 1 g yellow, 1 g blue. Flecks: purple, blue, and yellow.

Blue Mix: 8 g blue, 1 g purple, 1 g green. Flecks: red, yellow, and purple.

Purple Mix: 8 g purple, 1 g orange, 1 g green. Flecks: yellow, chartreuse, and periwinkle.

Green Mix: 7 g green, 2 g orange, 1 g red. Flecks: black, green, and yellow.

Yellow Mix: 6 g yellow, 3 g orange, 1 g red. Flecks: yellow, red, and burgundy.

Photos this page by George Boe



Photos by George Boe

Traveler's Secret Pocket Cowl

By Rachel Simmons

Wanderlust n. Strong impulse toward wandering or traveling the world.

Sometimes, especially when we make ourselves conspicuous tourists, we can run into a little travel trouble. One solution is to carry valuables in an unexpected place. Hidden pockets can stash a little extra cash, an important ticket, or a map. Wearables with secret nooks and crannies can ease your mind while your wanderlust takes charge. Also, they can be great projects to spin and weave.

Get inspired! Choose some fibers from the area you are visiting or a meaningful place you have visited in the past. You can also choose patterns or colors that speak to the area you are visiting. This cowl with a hidden pocket is meant to be a travel companion that was made with meaning and love to keep your mind a little less stressed.

SPINNING NOTES

I selected three different fibers to create a tweedy plaid cowl: a batt, a combed top, and a handpainted combed top. You could use fewer or far more colors and textures; this pattern is a template to capture your own traveler's imagination.

I created two-ply yarns using a short forward draft for warp so the yarns could better handle abrasion from the heddle during weaving. My design repeated these yarns for the weft, but you could also incorporate some crazy art yarns or fluffy singles.

For this project, I chose an art batt with different fibers in warm colors to create a faux-tweed look. To accentuate the color palette, I picked a semisolid Merino wool in orange. Finally, to add visual interest to my plaid and a pop of color, I decided to contrast my existing yarns with their complement, blue, to pop against the oranges of my fibers. The length of this cowl is fairly short so that it is worn closer to the neck. You do not want your pocket dangling, lest you lose your secret stash.

MATERIALS

Fiber 4 oz Purple Lamb Fiber Arts art batt blend in Sedona, MC (gold); 1½ oz Schoppel Wolle Filzwolle Ombré Kammzug Merino combed top in Orange Ya Happy, CC1 (orange); 2 oz Ashland Bay multicolor Merino combed top in Denim, CC2 (blue).

Yarns MC: 2-ply; 223 yd (warp: 94 yd, weft: 99 yd); 892 ypp; 12 wpi. CC1: 2-ply; 90 yd (warp: 34 yd, weft: 39 yd); 960 ypp; 14 wpi. CC2: 2-ply; 100 yd (warp: 27 yd, weft: 20 yd); 800 ypp; 12 wpi.

Structure Plain weave.

Equipment Rigid-heddle loom, 13" weaving width; 7.5-dent or 8-dent heddle; 3 stick shuttles.

Warp Length 92 ends 60" long (allows 2" for take-up, 16" for loom waste).

Setts Warp: 7.5 epi. Weft: 10 ppi.

Dimensions Width in the heddle: about 12¼" in 7.5-dent heddle or about 11½" in an 8-dent heddle.

Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 42".

Finished Size After washing, creating pocket and seaming: 10½" wide x 29" circumference.

1 Set up your loom for warping a length of 60", following the color order in Figure 1. (Rachel recommends direct warping as there is less loom waste.) Center for a weaving width of about 12¼" in a 7.5-dent heddle or 11½" in an 8-dent heddle.

2 Spread your warp and weave for about 1" with scrap yarn that is easy to remove. Wind 1 stick shuttle each with MC, CC1, and CC2. Switch to MC and begin weaving, following the weft color order shown in Figure 2.

3 When you have completed the weaving sequence, your piece should measure about 42". Weave a few picks of scrap yarn at the end of the fabric to hold your weaving in place when you remove it from the loom.

4 Sewing the cowl: Use a zigzag stitch to secure the fibers along the lines indicated in Figure 3. (For extra security, Rachel likes to do a straight stitch down the center of the zigzag line.) In addition to lines of stitching

Project

Figure 1

16	6	2	2	2	4	Color C, Denim		
20	4	2	6	6	2	Color B, Orange Ya Happy		
56	8	2	14	20	2	4	6	Color A, Sedona
92 ends total								

Figure 2

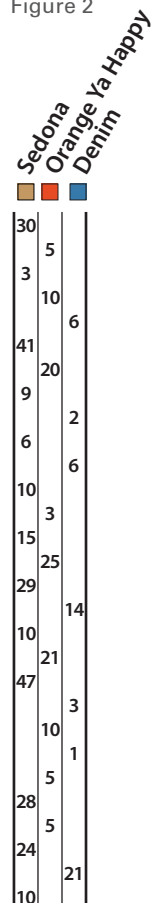
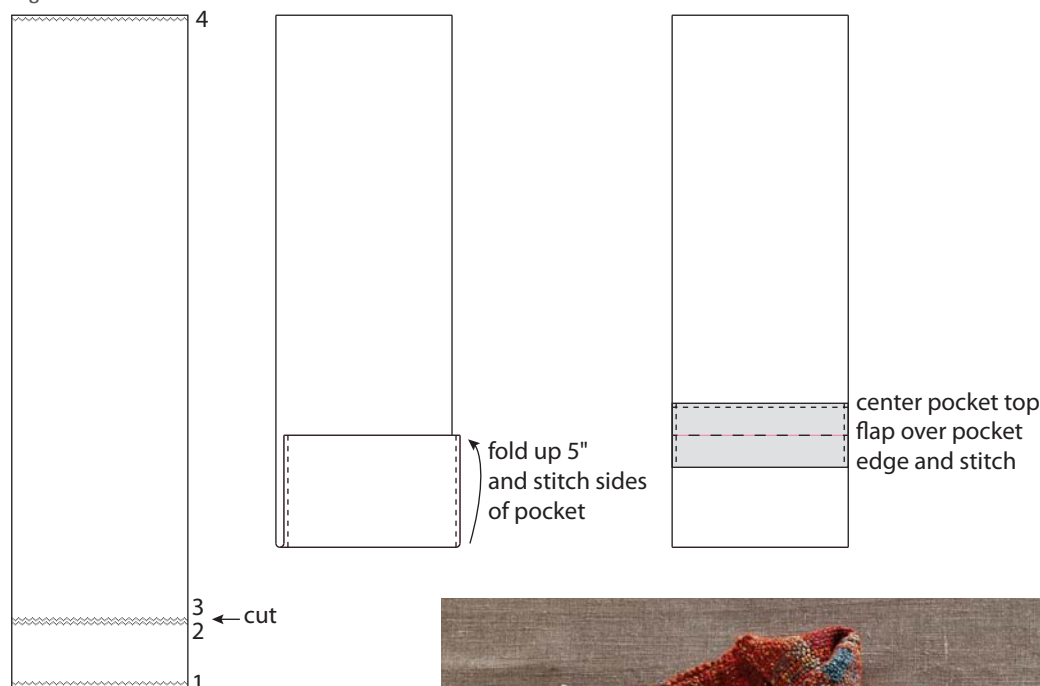


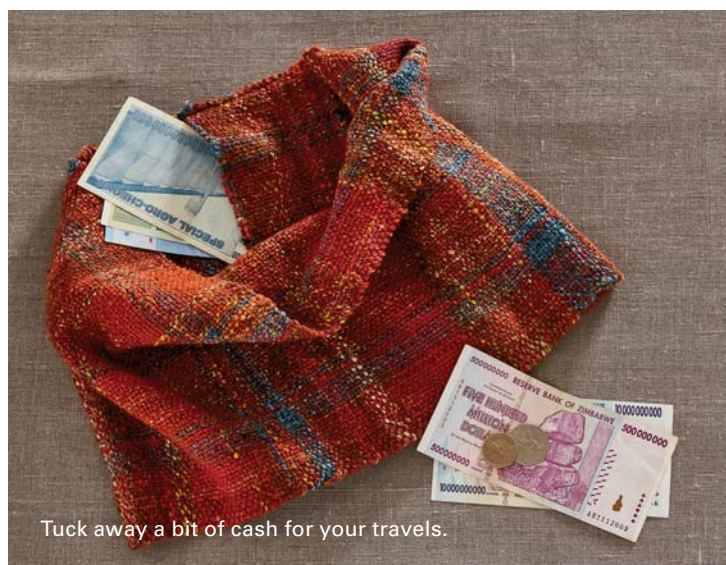
Figure 3



along the top and bottom of your woven cloth, stitch two parallel lines 4" up from the bottom of the cloth as shown in Figure 3. The lines are numbered for clarity. This will allow you to cut the woven cloth without fraying.

5 Trim the excess warp thread, header, and scrap threads. Cut between zigzag lines 2 and 3 and set aside. This 4" piece of fabric will become the top flap of your pocket.

6 Choose the side of your cloth you would like to be folded to the inside of the cowl. Fold the selected edge up 5". Line up the selvages so that the folded flap is completely hidden when you turn your cloth over. Pin the top corners to hold in place. Following Figure 3, sew a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam down each side of the folded flap. You have now formed the base of your



pocket. (*Note:* You may be tempted to hem the edges, but Rachel advises against it. Hemming the edges of the pocket flaps will add a lot of bulk. You want this pocket to rest as flat as possible so that it is both hidden and less likely to come open. Serging the edges is an option.)

7 Place the reserved 4" piece of cloth as shown in Figure 3. It should overlap the bottom flap of your pocket by 2". Pin this cloth in place. Sew using $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam across the top and down the two edges of this

cloth to secure it in place. The pocket should be secure along the edges and open in the center.

8 With the two ends of the cloth and a yard of matching yarn, use a mattress stitch to seam the two ends together. This seam will run along the bottom of your hidden pocket and the raw edge of your woven cloth.

9 Put the cowl in a sink full of cool water with a mild no-rinse, wool-friendly detergent. Gently agitate the cowl and make sure everything is wet, leave for 15 minutes, then remove from the sink. Squeeze excess water out without twisting the cowl, then roll in a towel. Slide a dowel rod through the opening of the cowl and hang it to dry.

10 Enjoy your travels! ●

Rachel Simmons is a fiber enthusiast and stay-at-home mom with three young boys. She maintains a fiber blog at www.yarntyouglad.com.



Rachel spun three different preparations into two-ply yarns for a woven tweed effect.

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TEACHING in Tibet

By Amanda Hannaford

Sangye Dolma learning to knit
on circular needles.

Photos by Dolmakyap

In February 2016, a message was posted to the Online Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers saying that a Tibetan nomad was looking for advice on spinning yak down. I didn't see it, but a friend knew I'd spun yak and passed on the contact details.

I emailed to offer advice, and a friendly message in very good English came straight back. Dolmakyap said that he really needed someone to come to Tibet to teach them how to spin and, as we discussed in further emails, to dye, too.

It was happening again, and I just couldn't believe my luck! The previous year, I'd been invited to Afghanistan to teach Hazara ladies to spin locally grown cashmere. That time, I'd been enticed to go with a promise of a small fee for my services; this time, no enticement was needed. Tibet was a place I'd always fancied visiting.

Chamtsee, which means something like "compassion" in Tibetan, is the very small workshop that Dolmakyap (known to friends worldwide as DK) founded with the intention of providing secure jobs

locally. By doing so, he hoped to help his immediate family, and more nomads in the future, cope with the changing times in Tibet. Families are often torn apart as younger members are forced to migrate to cities in China looking for work, leaving their children behind to be looked after by grandparents. DK's way means that the parents and children can stay together and as a family keep their Tibetan culture alive and thriving.



Only a few minutes after
leaving the airport, I saw
my first yaks.

MAKING PREPARATIONS

Communications were patchy, partly due to poor connections, and not helped by an eight-hour time difference, but we managed to discuss equipment and supplies. We decided that DK should purchase three modern wheels. I recommended Bliss wheels, as we had used in Afghanistan, which have sealed bearings for smooth operation at speed and are reasonably priced. They would be easy to keep clean in a dusty environment and sturdy enough for regular daily use. Another advantage is that the maximum drive ratio of 18:1 is ideal for adding a lot of twist to the very short yak down.

As with cashmere, I recommended carding the down and spinning from rolags as the fastest way to convert short down into yarn; speed is important when you are spinning for your living. Woolen spinning, which I do with an English long draw, is ideal for yak down and also creates loft in yak hair that doesn't have much crimp. They would need handcards, too, and I suggested packing a pair of handcards and carding cloth in my suitcase so that the backs could be replicated locally.

For dyeing, I proposed madder or brazilwood for red and indigo for blue. The obvious choice for yellow was rhubarb, as it grows locally. I suggested lac for red, but being Buddhists, they wouldn't use a dye derived from insects, although lac has been historically used in Tibet and elsewhere in the region (Buckley, 2016).

Translating the names of dyestuffs into Chinese was a little tricky, but in the end, we obtained brazilwood, indigo, and all the associated mordants and chemicals. DK was unsure whether he wanted to use natural dyes alone or in combination with acid dyes, so he bought small amounts of dye powder in six primaries and black. After seeing the results obtained from natural dyes and indigo, he lost all interest in the acid dyes!

While DK was discussing spinning and dyeing with me, he was also in touch with two ladies from a traditional *nambu* workshop in Lhasa. They were going to bring simple looms and teach the traditional Tibetan tightly beaten, weft-faced, narrow-cloth weaving. As I planned my trip, I kept receiving photographs of looms and happy, smiling nomads delighting at being taught how to weave. Until I arrived, their *nambu* was plain white, and I was to teach them how to dye large 250-gram skeins of purchased wool weft.

ON THE GROUND IN LABRANG

What I didn't get much information on, partly because our discussions via Skype were often cut short by dropped connections, was what life was like there and what sort of conditions I could expect when I arrived.

The planned three weeks gradually morphed into four and then five, and I ended up going in mid-July and staying until late August. I don't do heat well, so traveling via Chengdu was rather uncomfortable at that time of year, but luckily it was only an overnight stop. I flew into Xiahe Airport in Gannan province the next morning, and as I stepped off the plane, I was relieved to find the temperature much more comfortable at higher altitude.



Lhamokyi weaving naturally dyed yarns into *nambu* fabric on a traditional narrow loom.

TIBETAN NAMBU CLOTH

The traditional *nambu* is about 12 inches wide and often woven in narrow weft stripes. These can be sewn together to form garments and the ladies' aprons typical of the Lhasa area. The aprons are made from three lengths of *nambu* with the central panel turned 180 degrees to save having slightly mismatched stripes.



Above top: Yak fiber ready for dyeing. Author Jenny Dean was very helpful before and during the trip, suggesting dyes that might be found locally and offering advice. Dolmakyap insisted I leave the recipe book behind, so I had to get myself another copy. Above: We assembled the Bliss spinning wheels. Right: Yellow Hat Buddhist monks at a winter festival in Labrang Monastery.

From the airport it was about an hour's journey into Labrang, where I was to live for the next few weeks. About 15 minutes from the airport I spotted my first yaks, and we stopped for photographs and a closer look. Nearby, the female yaks (*dri*, also the word for the delicious sour yak yoghurt) were tethered for milking. A nomad woman walked among them with a long-handled spade, collecting dung and tossing it into a huge basket strapped to her back. In summer camps and

smaller villages, this is still the only fuel. The long rows of stacked dung drying in the sun looked like sculptures.

Next, we visited Labrang Monastery, one of the largest and most impressive in the region. I was introduced to DK's uncles and aunt, who are monks and a nun from the order of Yellow Hat Buddhists. They wear beautiful flowing burgundy-red robes with cerise pink shawls and, of course, the yellow plumed hat for special occasions. We toured the larger temples, and for a textile enthusiast, they were an amazing sight with walls hung with richly embroidered silk, thick carpets on the floor, and coarse yak-hair curtains hung in doorways.

We continued into town to the workshop, which was on the ground floor of an old apartment block; my accommodation was a fourth-floor apartment a couple of blocks away. I was introduced to my students, five married couples in their late twenties or early thirties. I was to teach the women to card and spin, and DK's sister Rinchenkyi and brother-in-law Dolmakyab would learn dyeing, too. The other husbands would continue weaving and change to multistriped weft as soon as we had some dyed skeins.

GETTING SPINNING

Because we only had three wheels, we had the idea of trying to get a spindle wheel made locally. I explained how one worked and drew a very rough sketch. We spent a fascinating morning touring all the metal workshops in town, trying to explain the idea and find someone who could translate the sketch into a





Amanda demonstrating the squeaky but perfectly functional charkha that was made in a Labrang workshop.

working model. A few days later, one appeared in the workshop, rather bulky and squeaking like mad. With some fine-tuning they got it working, and at a ratio of around 15:1, it was ideal to learn on. DK's eldest sister, Sangye Dolma, really took to this style of spinning and produced cop after cop of beautifully even yak yarn. Before I left, DK had ordered her a box charkha.

I found that just about all women from their generation could spin on a drop spindle. I wasn't so much teaching them to spin as how to use a wheel to put in enough twist to hold the short down together. We hoped to be able to work with the raw yak, washing and processing it by hand. However, because it is collected as the yaks shed in the summer when it is very dusty, the down is extremely dirty and difficult to wash without felting. Dorjetso, Dolmakyap's cousin, tried the traditional way of beating it with sticks before washing, but it took ages, she got sore hands, and it wasn't really any better for it. We were forced to switch to the mill-prepared carded down that DK had bought in both white and natural brown.

DK wondered if the yak yarn could be used for weaving, but we decided it wasn't really suited to the heavy beat and rigorous finishing of the traditional

nambu fabric. Instead we started producing a beautiful knitting yarn with singles at around 20 wraps per inch and then three-plyed it into a thickish Aran-weight yarn at 10 to 11 wraps per inch. I was tasked with coming up with ideas for things to knit and sell, and we decided on simple beanies and a cowl-style scarf that would let the qualities of the yarn shine through. DK had mentioned knitting or crochet as an option before I'd left, so I'd packed some spare circular needles and suggested a set of wooden hooks I'd found on a Chinese e-commerce website.

Again, I wasn't teaching the women to knit; they all knew how to cast on and make simple rectangles, but they had no access to information or patterns, and they didn't know how to shape knitting with increases and decreases. I think circular needles were new to them, and there was quite a bit of hilarity over trying to cast on in the round.

As we got to the knitting and crochet, my time was starting to run out. Therefore, we decided to concentrate on teaching Sangye Dolma because she had proved to be a very confident knitter—she could read her knitting, notice if she'd dropped a stitch, and rescue it. We chose a simple pattern for a baby



Above top: Dolmakyab making cushion covers from *nambu* fabric. Above: Rinchenkyi carries on the natural dyeing on weft yarn after I leave.

jacket and inexpensive acrylic yarn to practice on, then worked right through the pattern, teaching her all the stitches and increases and decreases needed. It turned out wonderfully, and I even showed her how to make Yorkshire buttons (a type of traditional yarn button) to finish it off. I only showed her how to make one button before going off with DK to sort out something else; when I got back, she had a whole set done and had even replaced her first attempt, which she thought wasn't neat enough! She also tried both ordinary and Tunisian crochet and picked those up just as quickly.

Toward the end of my stay, I started to miss fresh vegetables; the local food is very tasty, but their diet is a lot more carbohydrate-heavy than I'm used to. There were plenty of handy greengrocers, so I would pop out

for salad. On one of these forays, I found the owner of the local corner shop sitting outside hulling walnuts. I rushed back and announced to DK that there was abundant free dyestuff right on his doorstep. He took a little persuading but went with me and asked for the waste hulls. We soaked them in cold water overnight and then left a small wool sample soaking for a few hours. The result was a rich ginger brown, and DK pronounced it the best color we'd achieved so far.

By my last few days, DK had become really busy; a couple had arrived from London to show the men how to make felt hats and needed him to translate for them. He also disappeared for large chunks of the day to participate in negotiations to buy a parcel of land in a nearby village, with the aim of creating a purpose-built, traditional-style workshop and gallery space with living accommodations above. I found his absence didn't matter much because my students and I knew each other so well that we could manage with sign language. They are wonderful people, calm, gentle, and happy, and the children are adorable. The five weeks just flew by, and I was very sad to leave, but DK promised to keep in touch.

PROGRESS CONTINUES

I get regular updates; I heard that the box charkha finally arrived, but Sangye Dolma couldn't work it out. I got photos of the brand-new sewing machine bought to make the *nambu* fabric into bags and cushion covers, and I heard how Dolmakyab was sent to a tailoring class to give him the confidence to use it. It turns out DK's Auntie Ani (the nun) is a whiz on her antique treadle machine and helped them with the designs for the bags. I also heard about the big new looms that arrived from India, along with an Indian master to show them how to build them. I get a chance to say hello to everyone when DK calls me on Skype and then passes the phone around the workshop.

I have seen the new workshop in Amchok village take shape from a patch of bare, muddy earth to a smart two-story building that rivals any in the monastery. This summer I went back again for three weeks, traveling with Malcolm, a weaver from Devon. He was able to explain Western-style weaving, teach them how to calculate sett, read weaving drafts, and set up the new looms. Meanwhile, I got Sangye Dolma going on the charkha, introduced a few more dyestuffs, and taught them how to dye yak down without felting it.



Everyone in their best clothes for the blessing ceremony for the new workshop.

I have set up and run a Facebook page for Chamtsee, and DK and I jointly run an Etsy shop. I don't know if I'll get the chance to go again, but I can keep track of what is happening via the internet. I'm looking forward to seeing this little enterprise grow and flourish!

RESOURCES

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Hong Kong: Torana Asian Art Ltd, 2016. PDF version.

www.chamtsee.com

www.chamtsee.etsy.com

Amanda Hannaford has been spinning for around 35 years and dyeing for nearly as long. She has taught popular classes at the last few Summer School events organized by the Association of Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers. After international experiences in Afghanistan and Tibet, Amanda has now proved herself capable of teaching abroad with the help of a translator. Find her at www.mandacrafts.co.uk.



Sangye Dolma with a batch of hats she made after my second visit.



Sheep on the Move

WHY CAN'T WE HAVE VALAIS BLACKNOSE RIGHT NOW?

By Deborah Robson

Photo by Getty Images/Sandra Dombrovsky

It seems so simple from the outside: photos of utterly charming Valais Blacknose sheep circulate on the internet, with people exclaiming that they are so cute they can't be real. "I want some!" comes next, and then the question is, "Why can't someone put a small flock on a ship or a cargo plane and import them to the United States?" In past times, all our ancestors had to do was figure out how to keep sheep content in a small boat while navigating treacherous waters. Our issues are different.

Biosecurity concerns govern the pathways through which breeds can change territories in the modern world. Some of these concerns affect our ability to send fleeces from one location to another, as well as our smooth sailing through customs when we've been crossing borders and visiting farms, ranches, or other livestock habitat. In all of these cases, a little knowledge can help us go a long way, safely for all, in our journey with sheep and wool in the twenty-first century.

THE LONG AND WOOLLY ROAD

Fundamental issues complicate the movement of sheep from one environment to another: changes in weather conditions, diet, mineral availability, and types of diseases and parasites all challenge relocated animals, whether they're changing pastures or continents. In addition to these important factors, which every shepherd must manage, there are significant hurdles involved in getting an entire breed established in a new area.

There are two primary methods of moving a breed from one country to another: by taking the animals on the hoof or by importing *germ plasm*, which is to say semen, or less commonly, eggs or embryos. Each country has its own regulations, and they change often enough to keep everyone involved alert to what is and isn't possible at a given time.

In the past, it was easier to introduce a breed to a new country, although even then it was both complicated and expensive. In some cases, the movement of sheep breeds has resulted in the introduction of diseases that have been difficult to eradicate. While some purebred sheep, such as Soay and Icelandic sheep, have been successfully introduced to the United States on the hoof (as live animals), Karakuls have been more complicated. When Karakuls were introduced to Iceland, the country had to contend with several new diseases that didn't show up immediately. When they came to the United States, efforts to maintain a healthy population produced a newly designated breed, the American Karakul. For the Valais Blacknose, on-the-hoof transfers have taken place from Switzerland to the United Kingdom. But how would we get them into the United States?

As I write, it's possible to bring live sheep, embryos, and semen into the United States, but in all cases, complex restrictions govern how importations can be carried out.

- **Live sheep** may only be brought into the United States under specific conditions from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Months of quarantine at both ends of the trip are required. The Canadian protocols are currently too restrictive to allow the importation path that in earlier decades permitted new breeds to be introduced to the United States. For example, a breed might have been moved from England or Iceland to Canada and then (often a generation or so later) into the United States.
- **Embryos** may only be imported from Australia and New Zealand.
- **Semen** may be imported from more places—but still only Australia, Canada, Iceland, and New Zealand, plus 21 European countries.

Not too long after their photos began to be shared, Valais Blacknose sheep were transferred from continental Europe to the British Isles—at great expense, with their journey facilitated by European Union connections. However, in the United States, we're currently limited to another method of approximating the breed, known as upgrading. There are other options on the horizon as well, specifically the potential for embryo transfer from New Zealand.

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS A FOMITE? WHY DO WE CARE?

If you're crossing a border into a different country, the customs officer may ask if you've been on a farm or ranch or otherwise had contact with animals (other than pets), especially livestock. After a transatlantic flight, it's tempting to say "no." A yes will get you referred to another line for an agricultural screening, which may seem like an unnecessary delay and is also a big unknown. If the answer is yes, please say "yes." It's not a big deal, and a no may put your favorite sheep at risk of disease.

Fomites is a weird word that refers to contaminated objects or materials that are likely to carry infection, such as clothes, utensils, vehicles, and furniture. Foot-and-mouth disease is just one of the serious illnesses that can be transferred by these items.

The first process in guaranteeing safety is getting rid of any dirt or manure. Next is general cleanliness. If it's at all possible to do so before crossing a boundary, launder all clothing worn around livestock (or sequester it for cleaning as soon as you get home), take a shower, wash your hair, clean your fingernails, and (not kidding) blow your nose.

The most likely fomites involved in your travel are your shoes. I scrub my hiking boots thoroughly after I've been around animals. When you go through agricultural screening at customs, the agent will ask you when and where you were hanging out with critters; he or she may take a look at your shoes and then might take your footwear to a special sink nearby for disinfecting before sending you on your way.

The first time I came through U.S. Customs after having been on several farms in England and Scotland, I was asked how long ago I'd been around animals and what I'd been doing since. My answers were "five days" and "walking around Glasgow." They waved me through. Later reentries have been similarly uncomplicated—and respectful of the animals we love.

Biosecurity concerns govern the pathways through which breeds can change territories in the modern world.

HOW DID THEY ARRIVE?

Here are a few examples of sheep that have been moved from one place to another and how that worked out. Karakuls coming into North America produced a distinct new breed. Karakuls imported to Iceland nearly destroyed the established sheep population. The introduction of Soay into North America resulted in two separate lineages. Icelandic sheep required nearly superhuman dedication, leading to a success story. Purebred Awassi sheep arrived as embryos, rather than four-feet-on-the-ground. Valais Blacknose went to the United Kingdom on the hoof, then the United States through upgrading—but may ultimately be able to have a purebred presence through embryo transfer after traveling around the world.

Let's see how all these scenarios have played out.



Karakul lambs are known for their silky curls.

Photo by Country, Farm and Garden

Karakul to North America

When: 1908–1936

Arrival: On the hoof

Karakuls came to North America because a Russian living in the United States wanted to start producing pelts. In 1908, Dr. C. C. Young imported 15 Karakuls from his homeland; permission for them to enter the country required the intervention of President Roosevelt. Additional sheep were imported in 1913 and 1914, some to the United States and some to Canada. In 1916, 24 animals—the only ones that passed quarantine and inspection—were taken to the New York farm of F. E. Dawley. More animals came from Germany in 1929 and from the U.S.S.R. in 1936. In all, about 200 animals were brought into North America,

and fewer than 100 of those form the foundation of the flocks in the United States today.

To broaden the gene pool, improve the animals' health, and increase the numbers for the potential pelt industry, other breeds' genetics came into play, with primary contributions from Lincoln, Navajo-Churro, and Cotswold. The pelt project dwindled, and pedigree information has been lost several times over the decades. Currently, we have several "styles" of Karakuls in the United States, all with a consistent set of core characteristics, such as the fat tail, the color genetics, and the quality of the fleeces. We call the breed American Karakul because of its unique makeup and connection to this continent.

Karakul to Iceland

When: 1933

Arrival: On the hoof

Sometimes an importation, even undertaken with the best current knowledge, threatens the entire sheep population of its new country. This occurred when 20 Karakuls were taken to Iceland in 1933 in the interest of pelt production.

University of Iceland researcher Gudmundur Pétursson stated, "These sheep were certified free of known infectious diseases according to standard procedures at that time. They were kept in quarantine for two months and then distributed to 16 farms around Iceland. Instead of bringing prosperity to the farmers this import came close to wiping out sheep farming in this country. These sheep brought with them several infectious diseases previously unknown in Iceland. . . . The Icelandic sheep were extremely susceptible to the new diseases."

Diseases introduced included John's disease or paratuberculosis, the first case of which was not diagnosed until five years after the new sheep arrived; pulmonary adenomatosis or *jaagsiekte*, a peculiar lung tumor; *maedi*, a slowly progressive pneumonia, initially confused with pulmonary adenomatosis; and *visna*, characterized by neurological symptoms, which research later showed is closely related to *maedi*. The sheep who were imported did not show any sign of illness, yet they spread diseases to the Icelandic sheep.

Today, strict biosecurity measures in Iceland prohibit importing any sheep and also control—and in almost all cases, totally prevent—the movement of

animals from one part of the country to another. In the majority of flocks, breeding takes place through artificial insemination.



British Soay.

Photo by Getty Images/Sandra Standbridge

Soay to Canada and then the United States

When: 1974–2000

Arrival: On the hoof

Soay sheep are associated with St Kilda, a set of islands in the North Atlantic Ocean west of Scotland's Outer Hebrides. Some Soay have been transferred to other locations in the British Isles and to North America.

The North American experience exemplifies how sheep change environments and how breed consistency can be either disrupted or maintained. Two importations of Soay sheep into Canada took place and resulted in two genetic groups. In 1974, four lambs arrived in Winnipeg. Several breeders ended up with flocks, and a few sheep were sold into the United States. Pedigree records were lost, and there was likely some crossbreeding. The sheep from this lineage are known as American Soay. The second group arrived in Canada in 1990, consisting of a half dozen Soay registered with the United Kingdom's Rare Breeds Survival Trust. Between 1998 and 2000, a number of animals from this lineage were transferred to the United States. These are known as British Soay; careful pedigree records are kept, no crossbreeding has occurred, and the gene pool has been refreshed through imported semen.

Icelandic to Canada and then the United States

When: 1985–1995

Arrival: On the hoof

Icelandic sheep arrived in North America because of a human immigrant to Canada who missed the sheep she grew up with. Her efforts verge on the heroic, involving significant financial investment, quick wits when she encountered bureaucratic roadblocks, and emotional fortitude.

Stefania Sveinbjarnardottir-Dignum moved to Canada in 1973. By 1985, having worked with several locally available breeds of sheep, she had a yearning for the personalities and colors of Icelandic sheep. Despite licensing and regulatory hurdles, she and her husband, Roy Dignum, arranged to airlift in a dozen at a total cost of \$25,000 (about \$59,000 in 2019 dollars). Most of the sheep that made the journey to Yeoman Farm ended up with ovine progressive pneumonia (OPP) because of the animals previously raised on the farm—an infection whose presence had been unknown. Stefania brought in another 73 sheep in 1990 at a cost of \$71,188 (about \$138,000 in 2019 dollars).

Susan Briggs, who also came to raise Icelandics, wrote, "Because of Stefania's experience with OPP, Yeoman Farm became one of the first to adopt biosecurity measures. No one got into the sheep area without wearing new or disinfected boots and clean clothes. She had her vet trained to carry disinfecting fluid to treat his boots before each visit. There was a collection of rubber boots in many sizes available for guests to use. You could use your own boots only after scrubbing them in the bathroom and then dipping in



An Icelandic ram at Djúpvogur, eastern Iceland.

Photo by Getty Images/Feifei Cui-Paoluzzo

disinfectant under Stefania's strict supervision. Because of Stef's vigilance, Icelandic sheep got a clean start in North America."

None of the Canadian sheep that came from Iceland were allowed to be exported to the United States. However, five years later, some of these animals' descendants did make that transition. Additional genetic variation was introduced through semen importations from Iceland starting in 1998.

Awassi to the United States

When: 2011–2012

Arrival: Embryo transfer

The Awassi is a multipurpose breed from the Middle East, desirable in North America as a highly productive dairy animal. Awassi sheep came to the United States

by way of embryos imported from Australia in 2011 and 2012. The first lambs were born in March 2012 and spring 2013; their surrogate mothers were East Friesian and Karakul ewes.



Photo by iStock/Getty Images Plus/akspphoto

Awassi is a prevalent sheep breed in the Middle East.

IMPORTING FLEECES

Bringing fleeces into the United States, whether in the grease or clean, can be straightforward as long as you know a few basic guidelines relating to (1) the source country's foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) status and (2) the presence of bloodstains and/or manure or dung locks (sweat locks are fine).

- **YES:** Fleeces that are **free of bloodstains** and come from an **FMD-free country** can be immediately released through customs.
- **YES:** Fleeces that come from a country that is **affected by FMD** and are **free from bloodstains** and **free from manure or dung locks** can be immediately released.
- **MAYBE/TAKE CARE:** If fleeces come from a country that is **affected by FMD** and are **contaminated with manure or dung locks**, they need to be certified or accompanied by a declaration that the fiber is sheep body wool, and in some cases must be consigned to an approved establishment.

The list of FMD-free countries is included online in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) "Animal Health Status of Regions." In short, the overwhelming majority of countries from which North American spinners frequently want to import fleeces are FMD-free, including Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Australia, New Zealand, and most countries in continental Europe.

Wool, Hair, and Bristles

Table 3-10-12 Wool, Hair, and Bristles

If the source of wool, ¹ hair, or bristles is:	And the articles are:	And the country or region of export is:	And the articles:	Then:
◆ Ruminant (e.g., alpaca, bison, camel, cow, deer, goat, sheep, vicuna, or yak) ◆ Swine (e.g., boar, peccary, or pig)	Free of blood stains	Free of FMD	→	RELEASE
		Affected with FMD	Have been scoured, thoroughly washed, or dyed	SEE Table 3-10-13
	Bloodstained		Have not been scoured, thoroughly washed, or dyed	
			Are consigned to an approved establishment	AUTHORIZE shipment under seal with VS Form 16-78 (SEE Appendix J to complete form)
			Are not consigned to an approved establishment	1. DO NOT RELEASE the HOLD 2. PROVIDE the importer with the appropriate options (SEE Table 2-2-10)
Other than above			→	RELEASE

1 Wool comes **only** from ruminants such as alpaca, goat, or sheep.

I always suggest that the sender put a copy of the appropriate page from the USDA *Animal Product Manual* inside the package in case it's opened. I send the appropriate page to the prospective sender in PDF form. I don't envision that every customs officer will be familiar with the regulations with regard to wool; it's not a product that passes through the system routinely. The most recent edition of the manual comes from 2014 and can be found at the link listed in Resources.

Can you import a fleece? From the USDA Animal Product Manual, Table 3-10-12. For additional information see Tables 3-10-13 and 3-10-14.

Valais Blacknose to Britain

When: 2014

Arrival: On the hoof

Valais Blacknose sheep are native to the Valais region in southern Switzerland, where perhaps the best-known town is Zermatt and a familiar landmark is the Matterhorn. In German, the sheep are *Walliser Schwarznasenschaf* (Valais Blacknose sheep) or simply *Walliser Schwarznasen* (Valais Blacknose). Several clusters now exist in the British Isles. One example is a flock in Scotland, initiated in 2014. According to the *Daily Record's Scotland Now*, “Raymond Irvine paid an estimated £55,000 for 11 Valais Blacknose sheep,” which at the time was in excess of \$86,000 U.S. dollars, plus the transportation and veterinary expenses. Raymond and his partner made the news by installing closed-circuit television and guard dogs to protect their valuable animals.

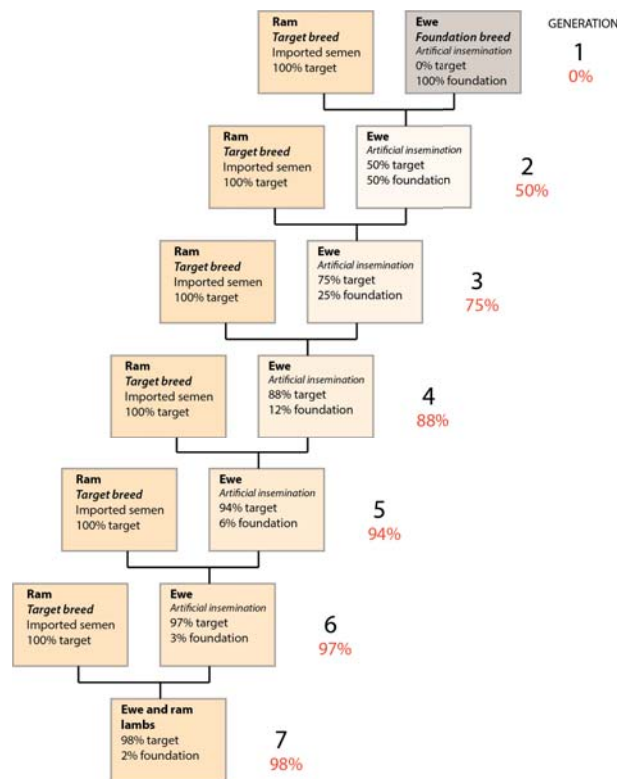
Valais Blacknose to the United States

When: 2016–present

Arrival: Artificial insemination (AI)

Getting Valais Blacknose to the United States has involved more convoluted, although similarly cash-heavy, methods. At present, the only way to import anything resembling a Valais Blacknose sheep is by way of semen, which involves the upgrading process. In upgrading, foundation ewes of established breeds are chosen and artificially inseminated with the semen from the target breed (generation 1). The resulting ewe lambs, which carry about 50 percent target genetics, are in turn bred with imported semen, producing lambs that are about 75 percent target. By generation 7, the lambs are about 98 percent target. Upgrading never reaches 100 percent; there’s always some contribution of the foundation breed. As you can see, it requires six rounds of expensive artificial insemination to get to 98 percent and seven or eight years before that 98 percent crop of ewes is ready to be bred. Some breeds that have been or are being introduced to the United States this way include Teeswater, Wensleydale, Gotland, Kerry Hill, Zwartbles, Racka, and Herdwick.

Between 2010 and 2016 there was a ban on semen transfer from the United Kingdom to the United States because of disagreement between the countries’ agencies on definitions of sheep health measures. Valais



Upgrading is a method of approximating a breed in a new location by mating crossbred and purebred livestock over a series of generations.

Blacknose aficionados started to eye the breed in about 2014, and when the ban was lifted, they were ready with their flocks of foundation ewes.

Choosing a foundation requires a focus on goals. Which aspects of the target breed are most important to develop first? Looks? Wool quality? Prolificacy? Or something else? The Valais Blacknose Sheep Society USA has this to say regarding foundation genetics: “You can dedicate lifetimes to learning all about genomes and still be surprised, and in the case of the Valais Blacknose, we’ve never worked with anything like this, and haven’t a clue how it[’]s all going to work out. So where exactly does that leave us—with a whole lot of guesses and not a lot of solid information.”

After listing some criteria to track, the Society continues: “We will forget the cost part of the equation for the time being as imports by definition are ridiculously expensive. . . . It[’]s a labor of love—or maybe a love of labor. . . .” Foundation ewes for the Valais Blacknose are being selected from a variety of breeds: Scottish Blackface, Teeswater, Shetland, Dorper, Gotland, Babydoll Southdown, and some crosses.



Valais Blacknose sheep herd with green grass cover mountain at Zermatt, Switzerland.

Photo by Getty Images/Maartz26

Yet there's another interesting movement afoot. You'll remember that it's possible to import embryos from New Zealand into the United States. This was the method used, with Australian sourcing, to get Awassi sheep into the country. In 2015 and 2016, a coalition of New Zealanders arranged to transport Valais Blacknose semen and embryos from the United Kingdom to New Zealand. The surrogate mothers were native Romney ewes, with the first lambs on the ground in 2017. When the females from this group reach breeding age, the semen will be used, resulting in more purebred animals, with the ultimate goal of introducing Valais Blacknose embryos to the United States.

A SPINNER'S WOOLLY WANDERLUST

Why might we want Valais Blacknose sheep here, other than because they're exceptionally cute? I keep reading that the wool is "carpet quality," with the implication that it's less than desirable. In my opinion, it combines the qualities of, say, Cotswold and Cheviot with the length and wave of the former and a hand more like the latter. We don't have anything exactly like this wool here, and it's fun to spin and potentially very useful. Even if the sheep weren't irresistible, their fleeces, assuming the quality is as I've experienced in Scotland, would make me want to have the breed closer to hand. ●

Find additional resources for this article on our website, www.interweave.com.

Deborah Robson is the fiber author of *The Fleece and Fiber Sourcebook* and *The Field Guide to Fleece*, and is a former editor of *Spin Off*. The information here is excerpted from research for some of her *Fiber Guidebooks*. She has a website at www.independentstitch.com and is on Instagram @independentstitch.

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Leicester Longwool sheep grazing
at Colonial Williamsburg.

Photos courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation unless otherwise indicated

Colonial Williamsburg

GIVING A HISTORIC SHEEP BREED A BRIGHT FUTURE

By Amy Ross Manko

Over 25 years ago, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation became a premier authority in preserving and understanding rare-breed sheep in the United States. This work began in the 1980s with the decision to add Leicester Longwool sheep to the historic Colonial Williamsburg site. Little did they know, the Leicester Longwool project would eventually span three continents and establish flocks totaling nearly 1,500 of these rare-breed beauties across the globe. This was the beginning of a fiber journey for the Foundation staff, my family, and possibly even you!

TO FOUND A FLOCK

Colonial Williamsburg, the historic town known for interpreting eighteenth-century life in Virginia, has invested tremendous resources in featuring period-appropriate livestock. Coach and Livestock Manager Elaine Shirley has been with Colonial Williamsburg for more than 33 years and has participated in growing the livestock program throughout her tenure. She says, “Historically, Colonial Williamsburg had crossbred

Horned Dorset and Wiltshire Horn sheep before someone put us on a path for more correct livestock to be shown. [Leicester Longwools] were not common, but they were around. We made the decision in the late 1980s to show livestock with a purpose, to help with the conservation of these genetics.”

After much research in historical documents and journals, the staff determined that Leicester Longwools would be perfect for the work of interpreting life in colonial America. The hunt was on for foundation breeding stock. There was just one problem: the breed was virtually extinct in North America. To found a flock at Colonial Williamsburg, the breed would have to be reimported into the United States.

The Leicester Longwool breeding program began at Colonial Williamsburg in 1990. Elaine has had the pleasure of being there through the entire process, beginning with contacting breeders across the globe and receiving the first animals imported from Tasmania after their quarantine in Canada. Once the imported flock was settled at Colonial Williamsburg,

Elaine worked closely with genetics expert Dr. Phil Sponenberg to appropriately steward the animals entrusted to her. She worked tirelessly to create the next generation of Leicester sheep in the United States and make a plan to sustain them into the future.

As the imported flock grew, Elaine enlisted a group of knowledgeable shepherds to take up the mantle of these special animals. This would help prevent the flock from becoming extinct again. These shepherds added some of the Colonial Williamsburg sheep to their own flocks, creating satellite flocks. With additional animals off-site, the Foundation could recall the satellite animals and restart their breeding program should the need arise.

Elaine stresses that as a historian, she's very much aware that "our ancestors worked hard to give us a large variety of livestock and it's shortsighted to eliminate them, as well as being a disservice to the ancestors who gave them to us. We are robbing our children of diversity and the opportunity to have diversity in what they see and work with."

FLEECE AT WORK

More than 30 years ago, Elaine convinced her friend Karen Clancy to enter the fiber arts field and take a job with the foundation as an interpreter. Karen began spinning, weaving, and dyeing and has built a career at Colonial Williamsburg, becoming the Master Dyer and Weaver. Karen served the traditional apprentice and journeyman periods to earn her title and is now the leader of the traditional handcrafts programming at Colonial Williamsburg. She teaches spinning, weaving, and dyeing across the country.



Elaine Shirley and Allison Harcourt pose with Boadicea, an English Leicester ewe, and her 11 pounds of wool after shearing.

THE IMPROVED LEICESTER



Leicesters are classified as luster longwools and have crimp patterns that range from elongated waves to tight curls.

Leicester Longwool sheep were developed in the eighteenth century by Sir Robert Bakewell of Dishley Grange in Leicestershire, England. Bakewell's work in livestock improvement was well-known and influenced the works of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel. His work to develop what he called the Improved Leicester focused on improving livestock performance and hardiness through genetics and made them desirable around the world.

Leicester Longwools were created to be a dual-purpose breed. Having a large, meaty carcass and long, lustrous wool, they were the ideal sheep of their day. They were famous for passing these traits to offspring even when crossed with other breeds. Eventually, the Leicester Longwool breed was used to create or improve over 200 additional breeds of sheep, including Bluefaced Leicester, Border Leicester, Romney, and Corriedale.

Bakewell sent his sheep to the American colonies, where they ended up in the flocks of the Founding Fathers, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. These sheep spread quickly across the colonies upon their introduction to North America because of their ability to produce a 10- to 15-pound fleece, grow quickly to market weight, and perform well on pasture without much supplementation.

The popularity of Leicester Longwools continued for nearly 200 years, until the era of man-made fibers such as nylon, rayon, and polyester. The rise of man-made fibers, particularly in the second half of the last century, made heavily woolled sheep breeds like Leicesters nearly obsolete. Many shepherds in the United States moved toward commercially popular meat-production breeds, such as Suffolk, Hampshire, and Dorset. The Leicester Longwool found itself without a job and on its way to near extinction.

Karen stresses that her job is demonstration-based, using eighteenth-century dyeing recipes and processes. The interpreters spin the Leicester Longwool fleece produced by the sheep kept on-site and weave it to provide fabrics for use by the tailor and milliner interpreters—truly garment-quality stuff!

The staff creates a range of textiles, many of which are woven overshot, for exhibition in the historical area. Karen dearly loves working with the Leicester Longwool fleeces Elaine produces. “Leicester lambswool is really nice next to skin. When we work with a fleece, we use all of it. What we can’t use for spinning and weaving ends up stuffing saddles at the harness maker or as wadding for the ink ball at the printer’s cottage.” Her favorite things about the wool are how lustrous it is. “This stuff glows in your hands! It’s simply stunning!”

Karen enjoys combing Leicester Longwool and says it lends itself well to that process, a traditional preparation for English longwools. “It spins like butter and stays very smooth in the fulling process, making it ideal to be glazed for calamanco,” which she describes as a thin fabric of worsted wool yarn that could come in a number of weaves including plain weave, satin, and damask, and could have been brocaded in floral, striped, and checked designs. The surface was glazed or calendered (pressed through hot rollers) and would have been fashionable during the period shown in Colonial Williamsburg.

MEET THE FLOCK!

Colonial Williamsburg’s Leicester Longwool flock plays an important role at the historic site today. Elaine and the Coach and Livestock Department keep the sheep in pastures around the historic town, shear the sheep by hand in public while answering spectators’ questions, and sell yarn made from their fleeces in the shops. The flock also provides fleece and yarn to the spinners and weavers at Colonial Williamsburg who demonstrate their craft.

In addition to her daily demonstrations in the Weaver’s Cottage on Duke of Gloucester Street in Colonial Williamsburg, Karen has also been tasked with creating a curriculum of sorts for educating the public on traditional handcrafts such as spinning, weaving, and natural dyeing.



Weaver Karen Clancy winds skeins of yarn dyed buttery yellow with annatto seeds into hanks.

LEICESTER LONGWOOLS AT THE ROSS FARM

In the past decade, I’ve learned so much about these sheep and their fiber. When I purchased my first Leicesters, I was shepherd to a flock of Cheviot ewes I had taken over from my aged and ill granduncle in 1991. I had spent many years with my sweet girls, and the wool market wasn’t good. My dual-purpose sheep weren’t producing the kind of income we needed to make shepherding pay for itself on the farm; it was a losing proposition. We needed to work smarter, not harder, and find sheep that had more valuable wool while still producing a marketable lamb.

In 2008, as my own fiber journey was beginning, I researched which breeds of sheep I would like to raise



Leicester Longwools at Ross Farm.

Photo by Scott Manko

on my historic farm that would be easy to handle, large enough to yield a good-sized fleece, and produce fiber prized by handspinners. I purchased a couple of Jacob and Tunis ewes from a friend who had been raising rare-breed sheep for handspinning fleeces and started looking for a ram to crossbreed that might create an interesting fleece in the offspring. At this point, my dad said, “You like Williamsburg so much, why don’t you call them up and get one of those sheep they have down there?” This was the beginning of my flock of Leicester Longwools. The moment I saw my original ram, CW 05-26, affectionately known to our family for the rest of his life as Mr. Jefferson, I knew that the Leicester Longwool was the sheep for me.

Our flock has grown to about 50 purebred Leicester Longwool rams and ewes, plus a vast array of interesting crossbred fiber animals with gorgeous fleeces. The Leicester does actually “improve” almost any sheep you cross with it. The fleece traits I love, such as the luster, length, and lock structure of the Leicester, seem to be prepotent and dominate the breed they are crossed onto, creating some of the most gorgeous fleeces I’ve ever seen. I’m particularly fond of the Shetland/Leicester and Jacob/Leicester cross, as those produce a Leicester-like fleece in Shetland colors or a deep, rich, pure black when a Jacob ewe is used.

After stockpiling fleeces and sending them to a mill, my family started a fiber company in 2012. The fleece of the Leicester Longwool is considered “strong” or “coarse” and generally has a micron count greater than 30, which makes it ideal for hard-wearing sweaters, socks, and outerwear. The fibers produced by our flock resist pilling and wear because of the long staple, which can reach 12 to 18 inches in 12-month fleeces. Even fleeces sheared twice a year produce staples in excess of six inches, perfect for creating that strong, lustrous yarn handspinners prize! The sheep are traditionally white, as you see in Williamsburg, but also occur naturally in a rich black, a brown-gray, and a stunning coloration called English Blue, which can produce a variation of as many as five distinct shades of silver in one fleece ranging from platinum to charcoal. They are truly spectacular and a joy to spin!

BUILDING BRIDGES

Karen Clancy shared a final thought with me: “What we do here is about connection. These sheep and these

FIBER ARTS AT COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

The historic site regularly offers workshops in drop-spindle spinning, basic and intermediate weaving, and natural dyeing utilizing materials used in the eighteenth-century such as cochineal, weld, and indigo. In February, a new workshop series of three-day intensives was launched by the staff weavers and milliners. Participants weave cloth, dye the threads, and embroider a piece in the eighteenth-century method and style. Visit www.colonialwilliamsburg.com for more information about current workshops.



traditional crafts are bigger than us. Our preservation efforts have fed my soul for a long time.” I couldn’t agree more. The sheep are beautiful. The wool is lovely to work with and the community is warm, but the realization that what we’re doing here is bigger than us is what feeds our souls. By raising the sheep, spinning the wool, and making the finished objects, we’re connecting to our ancestors and our descendants; we’re honoring the past and providing for the future. ●

RESOURCES

Livestock Conservancy, www.livestockconservancy.org
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation,
www.colonialwilliamsburg.com

Amy Ross Manko raises 11 breeds of heritage- and rare-breed sheep on her farm in southwestern Pennsylvania that has been in her family for over 100 years. Amy operates The Ross Farm with her husband, Scooterpie (Scott), and son, Drew. In addition to her work to preserve rare sheep breeds, she also hoards spinning and weaving equipment, having taken over one of the farm outbuildings as a studio and repository for homeless fiber and tools. She enjoys writing, teaching, and meeting fiber enthusiasts at festivals across the United States and beyond.



Photos by George Boe

Melton Vale Mitts

By Amy Ross Manko

These hard-wearing mitts are knitted using handspun Leicester Longwool in two natural shades. I like to make handcoverings from this particular breed because of the durability of the fiber as well as the warmth and crisp stitch definition it provides. The stranded knitting and cable design was inspired by windows I saw on an evening tour at Colonial Williamsburg. I was struck by the way the dark interior receded and the crisp white window frames popped.

“Melton Vale” is an homage to Ivan Heazlewood’s flock of Leicester Longwools in Tasmania, where the original animals that reestablished the breed in the United States were sourced. Mr. Heazlewood was instrumental in procuring the 10 sheep that were sent to Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia as well as providing technical support for the American flock throughout the rest of his life. Without Melton Vale, there would be no American Leicester Longwool sheep from which to make these lovely mitts.

SPINNING NOTES

When sending my own Leicester Longwool fleeces to the mill, I usually have them processed into pin-drafted roving. The extremely long staple length is organized and condensed during pin-drafting, creating an almost-worsted preparation. This allows me to spin slick, smooth, and shiny singles with lots of strength and resilience, which I can then ply or knit as a singles yarn. It’s not a true worsted preparation like combing produces, but it’s a good substitute!

MATERIALS

Fiber 5 oz of Ross Farm Fibers Leicester Longwool pin-drafted roving in two natural colors: white (MC, 3 oz) and gray (CC, 2 oz).

Yarn 3-ply; 120 yd MC, 80 yd CC; 600 ypp; 11 wpi; worsted weight.

Needles U.S. size 6 (4 mm) and U.S. size 8 (5 mm): set of double-pointed (dpn). Adjust needle size if necessary to obtain the correct gauge.

Notions Marker (m); cable needle (cn); stitch holder; tapestry needle.

Gauge 20 sts and 23 rnds = 4" in patt on larger needles.

Finished Size 8½" hand circumference and 7½" tall.

Visit www.interweave.com/interweave-knitting-glossary for terms you don't know.

NOTES

- These mitts are worked in the round from the cuff up with a thumb gusset.
- The cables can be reversed for the second mitt by holding the cable needle in back rather than in front.

STITCH GUIDE

2/2 LSC: Sl 2 sts onto cn, hold in front, sl 2 sts to right needle, sl 2 sts from cn to right needle.

MITTS

Cuff

With MC and smaller needles, CO 42 sts. Place marker (pm) and join in the rnd. Work 5 rnds in k1, p1 rib. Change to larger needles. Knit 1 rnd.

Lower hand

Rnd 1 With MC, *2/2 LSC (see Stitch Guide), k3; rep from * to end.

Rnd 2 With MC, *sl 4 pwise with yarn in back (wyb), k3; rep from * to end.

Rnds 3–7 *K4 with MC, k3 with CC; rep from * to end.

Rnd 8 With MC, *2/2 LSC, k3; rep from * to end.

Rnd 9 With MC, *sl 4 pwise wyb, k3; rep from * to end.

Rnd 10 *K4 with MC, k3 with CC; rep from * to end.

Thumb gusset

Rnd 11 With MC, k4, with CC, k1, M1L, k1, M1R, k1, *k4 with MC, k3 with CC; rep from * to end—44 sts.

Rnd 12 K4 with MC, k5 with CC, *k4 with MC, k3 with CC; rep from * to end.

Rnd 13 With MC, k4, with CC, k1, M1L, k3, M1R, k1, *k4 with MC, k3 with CC; rep from * to end—46 sts.

Rnd 14 K4 with MC, k7 with CC, *k4 with MC, k3 with CC; rep from * to end.

Project

Hit the road with these toasty mitts.



Rnd 15 With MC, 2/2 LSC, place 7 CC sts on holder for thumb gusset, using the backward-loop method, CO 3 sts, *2/2 LSC, k3; rep from * to end—42 sts rem.

Upper hand

Rnd 16 With MC, *sl 4 pwise wyb, k3; rep from * to end.

Work Rnds 3–9 two times. Break CC.

Change to smaller needles. With MC, knit 1 rnd.

Work 5 rnds in k1, p1 rib.

BO all sts in patt.

Thumb

Return 7 sts to smaller needles. With CC, pick up and knit 3 sts along side of thumb hole, 4 sts along CO edge (pm at center of these 4 sts for beg of rnd), and 3 sts along other side of thumb hole—17 sts total. Join in the rnd. Knit to beg of rnd, then knit 4 rnds.

Next rnd K1, ssk, knit to last 3 sts, k2tog, k1—15 sts rem.

BO all sts.

FINISHING

Weave in ends. Block to measurements. ●

Amy Ross Manko and her family work to preserve rare sheep breeds at The Ross Farm. She also hoards spinning and weaving equipment, having taken over one of the farm outbuildings as a studio and repository for homeless fiber and tools. She enjoys writing, teaching, and meeting fiber enthusiasts at festivals across the United States and beyond.

Amy used two natural colors of Leicester Longwool. Nøstepinne: Kromski North America.



DISCOVER

*a new knitting tradition with
Galina Khmeleva*



For over 300 years, the elegant lace shawls from Orenburg, Russia beguiled knitters and collectors alike. While many lace knitters may be acquainted with the delicate “gossamer webs” for which Orenburg is famous, in this online workshop **Galina Khmeleva** focuses on the “warm shawl,” a much sturdier, yet more luxurious cousin seldom found outside the region.



Through a series of instructional videos, interview segments, and archival photographs, this online workshop will cover a brief history, tools and materials, 10 basic motifs, the unique construction of the warm shawl, how to wash, block, and finish your shawl, and so much more.

Plus, this online workshop also features downloadable charts and 2 full patterns for an Orenburg warm shawl.

*Learn more about the
Orenburg Warm Shawl at
Interweave.com*



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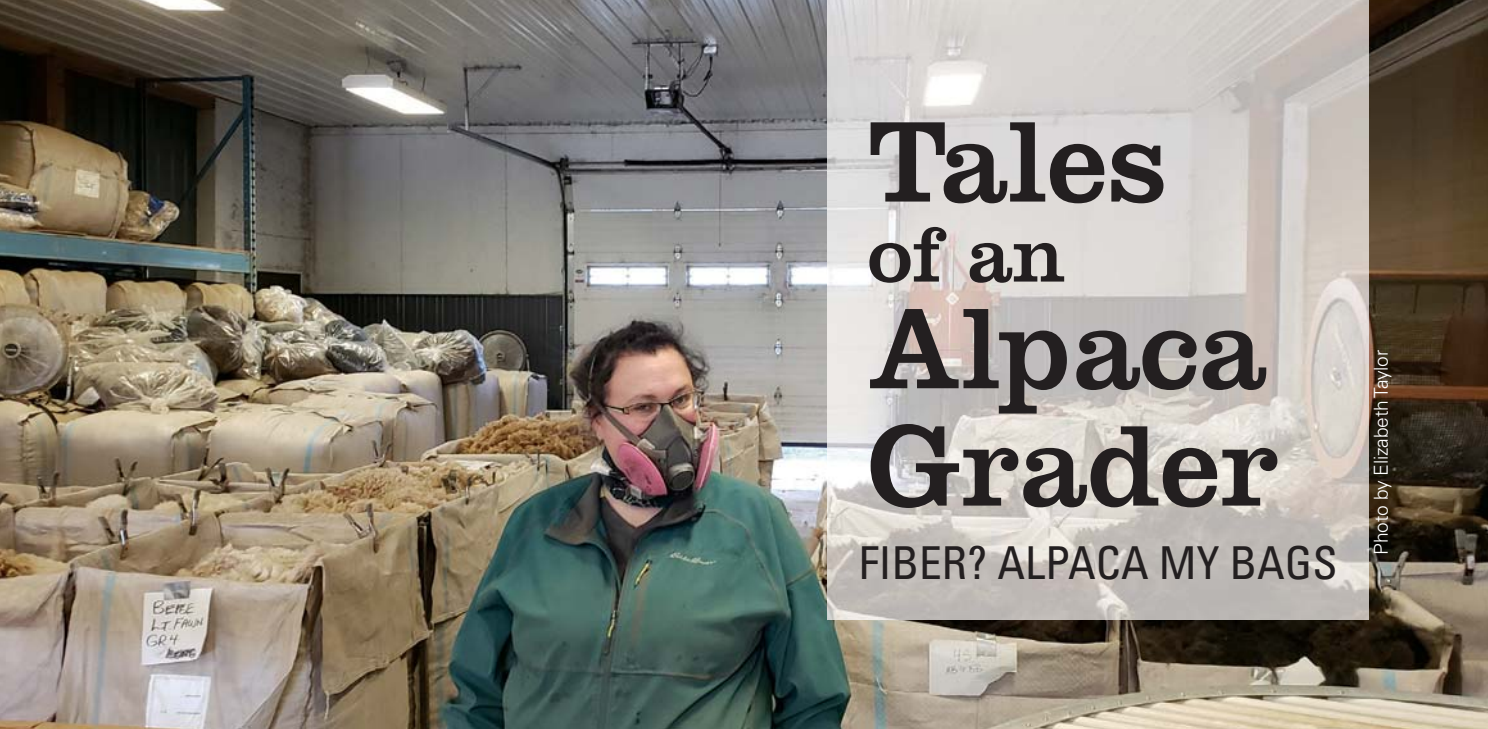


Photo by Elizabeth Taylor

Tales of an Alpaca Grader

FIBER? ALPACA MY BAGS

By Elizabeth Taylor

Elizabeth Taylor wears a respirator when sorting to prevent inhalation of fine hairs and dirt.

My husband and I started keeping alpacas in 2011 after we saw a magazine that said, “Alpacas, the investment you can hug.” We started out with four fiber males. At the time, all I understood about fleece was that it felt either soft or scratchy.

After visiting a few fiber festivals, I quickly learned that not all alpaca fleece is created equal. Eight years later, after learning more about alpaca fiber, our standards for fleece changed, as have the animals that we keep on our farm.

I got started in fleece sorting when I invited Ruth Elvestad, who formerly managed the Natural Fibre Testing Laboratory at Olds College in Alberta, Canada, to teach beginner and advanced sorting classes at a farm I worked with in Ohio. Ruth developed the standard for camelid-fiber sorting in North America. In the beginning, I sat in on the class because I was the host, not because I really thought that sorting was important. After the class, though, I realized that sorting was the key to making a high-end, repeatable, quality product.

I eventually went on to become certified and became a Master Classer. My certification has led to jobs across the United States sorting alpaca fleece and even helping to judge yak fiber at a yak show. I was also invited to assist as a grader with the National Alpaca Fleece Collection Initiative, which was organized by the Alpaca Coalition of America (ACOA). Some of the fleece that I graded was used in knitwear created for the

last winter Olympics. I felt honored to have been a part of getting that fiber into production.

BREEDING GOALS

Alpacas were not imported into the United States until 1984, and the emphasis on producing commercial-grade fleece only began about 10 years ago. The North American alpaca industry is many years behind sheep in breeding for fleece production, and there are several things to consider when looking at an alpaca fleece.

One of the biggest factors that affects the end product is consistency. Alpaca breeders are currently selecting for fleeces that have both secondary (fine coat) and primary (outer coat) fibers of the same micron count. When all the fibers in a fleece are similar, they can be drafted consistently and produce a smooth yarn. When there are differences between the fiber types or lots of strong primary fibers, the longer and coarser fibers can stick out of the finished yarn. The result is a prickly factor, which makes some people think they are allergic to alpaca. Almost all alpaca fiber would benefit from going through a fiber separator (dehairer) to remove these strong fibers.

It has been interesting to see the quality of fleeces submitted to the commercial fiber collection—and to see how much some owners don’t know about their fleeces. Some fleeces come in so covered in debris that they are not usable; others have moths. Some

come in with histograms that claimed the fleece was 18 microns, yet they had left in extremely coarse hair that grows where the legs meets the animal's body. It's also surprising what you can find in a fleece. Toenails, beans (poop), and hay debris are very common, but this past year when reaching into a fleece, I felt a hard object. Separating the fiber from the object, I found a desiccated lizard, which gave me a bit of a surprise. You never know what you will find!

A DAY IN THE LIFE

I travel the United States to help large farms manage their fiber harvest as it comes off the animals when they shear. I advise the owners on what fleeces should be sold and where to get the highest price for their harvest. I take detailed notes on each animal's fleece to help the owners assess their fiber.

After an animal is shorn, its fleece and its neck fiber are put on a skirting table. I skirt off the hairy edges or any areas of extreme debris, then pull samples from multiple sections across the fleece to evaluate it for consistency. I evaluate each fleece and sort it by visually assessing micron count, length, color, and the amount of strong primary fibers in the fleece. This sorting makes for uniform large batches that can then be sold commercially.

When judging a fleece, I look at individual staple groups from across the blanket on both black and white paper to see how much variation in micron count there is within a fleece. Ideally, all the individual fibers should be the same diameter; thicker, straighter fibers are likely guard hairs or strong primaries. These hairs will snap back straight when bent and are what stick out of yarn to make you itch. A similar example is in a dual-coated sheep breed such as Icelandic. Icelandic sheep have soft, downy undercoats and waterproof, coarse outercoats.



Photo by George Boe

Placing sample staples from a fleece on both white and black backgrounds will help to identify darker or lighter primary fibers within the fleece.

When separated into the two components, you have two very different yarns, but when they are combined, you get a very rustic and scratchy yarn.

In 2018, my travels took me to Kentucky, Idaho, Oregon, and Colorado to sort fleeces. I saw more than 1,800 alpacas during those trips, some of which were top winners in the National Alpaca Show. It's always exciting to see what the fleece looks like as it comes off the animal. Really dense, organized fleeces roll off younger alpacas, similar to a Merino sheep fleece, while fleeces from older animals tends to come off in handfuls. I've seen some exceptional animals that are still producing sub-20-micron fleece into their teenage years, which is amazing. An average alpaca tends to have a 23-25 micron fleece although some may have 30+ micron fleece.

Grade	Micron Count	Characteristics	Uses
1	< 20	Great for next-to-skin softness. May lack durability.	Delicate shawls
2	20–22.9	Good for next-to-skin wear. Better durability than Grade 1.	Mittens, sweaters, hats
3	23–25.9	Best combination of softness and durability. Holds up to abrasion.	Socks and outerwear
4	26–28.9	Good combination of softness and durability.	Socks and outerwear
5	29–31.9	Begins to feel prickly.	Rugs and felted items
6	>32	Feels prickly.	Rugs and felted items



Piles of alpaca fleece separated by staple length and micron count.

Photo by Stacie Chavez, Imperial Yarn

MAKING THE GRADE

A grader evaluates a fleece as a whole and groups it with the grade classification that it fits with best. A fleece that includes several grades of fiber is graded to the highest micron measurement, because you don't want to contaminate the finer batches with coarser fleece. Alpaca is commonly graded into six grades; you can see these grades on page 71.

Although micron measurement is an important part of grading a fleece, several other factors play a part when assembling a large batch of fiber. Length tolerance can vary from mill to mill, but commercial mills can usually handle from two to three inches or from three to six inches. For a mill to spin a consistent even yarn, a difference of more than one to two inches in a fleece will cause inconsistent drafting. A three- to six-inch fleece is more suited for worsted-style spinning, and two- to three-inch fleece is better in a woolen-style yarn. Longer or shorter fiber is difficult for a mill

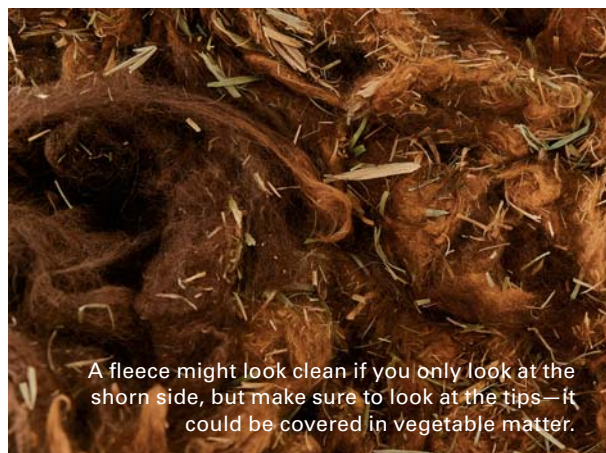
to spin and needs to be sent elsewhere for specialized processing. For example, very short fleece can be used in felting or as a corespun yarn. Very long fleece is typically used by handspinners or doll makers.

Color is also important. When manufacturers want white yarn, they mean white, not cream. The same goes with black. A lot of black animals have sunburnt tips that are brown, or there may be very fine white fibers throughout the fleece. One white fiber in a true black batch will stick out like a sore thumb. This is why it is important to look at fiber on both white and black backgrounds. It is common to find darker-colored primaries in a white fleece from an animal that had colored parents. As a result, that fleece is no longer considered white and gets sorted into the color of the primaries. Commercially, colors are sorted into true white, beige/light fawn, medium fawn/light brown, medium brown/bay black, silver gray/black with white fibers, and true black. Rose gray gets thrown into either the fawn or brown batches because it is commonly a mixture of brown, white, and black fibers. Normally, I recommend selling high-quality rose gray fleeces to handspinners who will appreciate its color. (For more about the many shades of alpaca, see *Spin Off* Summer 2018.)

When the fibers are of consistent grade, a fleece may feel one to two grades softer.

ALPACA OPINIONS

Misconceptions about alpaca fleece seem to be everywhere, and they turn some people off from spinning alpaca. One prevalent opinion is that you can spin alpaca fleece dirty. Just because you can doesn't mean you should.



A fleece might look clean if you only look at the shorn side, but make sure to look at the tips—it could be covered in vegetable matter.



A fleece with extreme brightness and organization.

Photos by George Boe

Alpacas take dust baths on a regular basis to help fluff up their coats, and as a result, a lot of fine, gritty dirt gets trapped in the fleece. Some farms vacuum their animals at shearing, which helps limit dirt in the fleece, but not all do. If you spin a dirty fleece, the fine grit can become trapped in the fiber, which makes it harder to get fully clean and can affect its final handle. Some very fine alpacas also have a waxy coating on their fibers similar to lanolin; combined with dirt, this can make drafting difficult.

An easy way to wash fiber is to use warm water in a bucket with some soap. I use Unicorn Fibre Power Scour due to its low sudsing and great efficiency at cleaning. I pre-fluff and tease the locks apart to help the water fully penetrate the fleece. I push the fiber to the bottom of the water bucket until it stays down. After soaking for about 10 minutes, I use my fingers to rake the fleece apart while keeping it in the water to further open the fleece. I then remove the fleece, use a salad spinner to get all the dirty water out, and dump the fiber back in the bucket of water that is the same temperature as the initial soak or hotter. I rinse until clear, then lay the fiber out to dry.

Another common worry is that people are allergic to alpaca. There is a small percentage of people with a true allergy, but most people who think they are allergic have likely only been exposed to alpaca of lower quality in terms of the type of grading I do. If you go into your local big-box store and pick up a skein of alpaca-blend yarn, it is likely Grade 6 prickly guard hair mixed in with acrylic. You may also buy yarn from smaller producers who don't dehair fleeces containing guard hair before making yarn. This can make for itchy yarn that will make you think you have an alpaca allergy. (Remember the prickle factor?)

Alpaca production in the United States has vastly changed from what was produced even five years ago. The fleece industry is moving at speed to improve on fleece characteristics and make a better product.

I've been lucky; as a sorter, I've had my hands on some of the top alpacas in the industry, which few fiber artists ever get to see. Truly top-quality alpaca fleece is lustrous, soft, lofty, and exquisite to work with. I invite you to go to an alpaca show or visit a farm and see what is out there. The Alpaca Owners Association, our national organization, holds shows across the United States and has a farm finder on its website.

Strike up a relationship with your local farm and see how your experience in crafting can help benefit its fiber production. When I started raising alpacas, we lived near a farm that offered fiber classes. When looking at a fleece, their motto was "When in doubt, throw it out." Work with fiber you enjoy. ●

RESOURCES

Alpaca Owners Association, www.alpacainfo.com

Elizabeth Taylor teaches fiber prep classes, vends at festivals, and sorts fleece across the United States. She also hosts the Fiber Circus Podcast on YouTube and raises alpacas, llamas, a Teeswater sheep, and a Pygora goat at her farm, Spotted Circus. Find her online at www.spottedcircus.com.



Photo by Joy Reyneke Photography

FLEECE EDUCATION

- Fiber Sorting, Grading, Classing certification is currently offered through the State University of New York (SUNY) Cobleskill Professional and Continuing Education. www.sortgradecclass.com
- The American Sheep Industry Association offers programs in wool classing and handling around the country. www.sheepusa.org

Spinning Flax

(NO DISTAFF REQUIRED)



By Tom Knisely

Flax comes prepared for spinning in two main formats: line flax in stricks (at top) and roving, which can be bleached (lower left) or natural (lower right).

Photo by George Boe

When I think back over the decades that I have been a spinner, it makes me wonder how many yards of thread I have spun. I bought my first spinning wheel, which was sold to me as a flax wheel, when I was just 14 years old. At the time, I wanted the wheel simply as an antique. I didn't know that the wheel was in working condition—it was a common textile tool that was put into retirement, brought out more than a hundred years later, and now found itself in my care.

True to its name, the Saxony-style wheel had a cage distaff for holding line flax. The arms and cage distaff extended like the raised arm of Lady Liberty from the end of the spinning wheel's table. I remember going to The Mannings Handweaving School on the recommendation of the antiques dealer who sold me the wheel. I bought wool, flax stricks, and a copy of Elsie Davenport's *Your Handspinning*. I carefully followed the directions for dressing a distaff, and through lots of patience and practice, I learned to spin flax into linen thread.

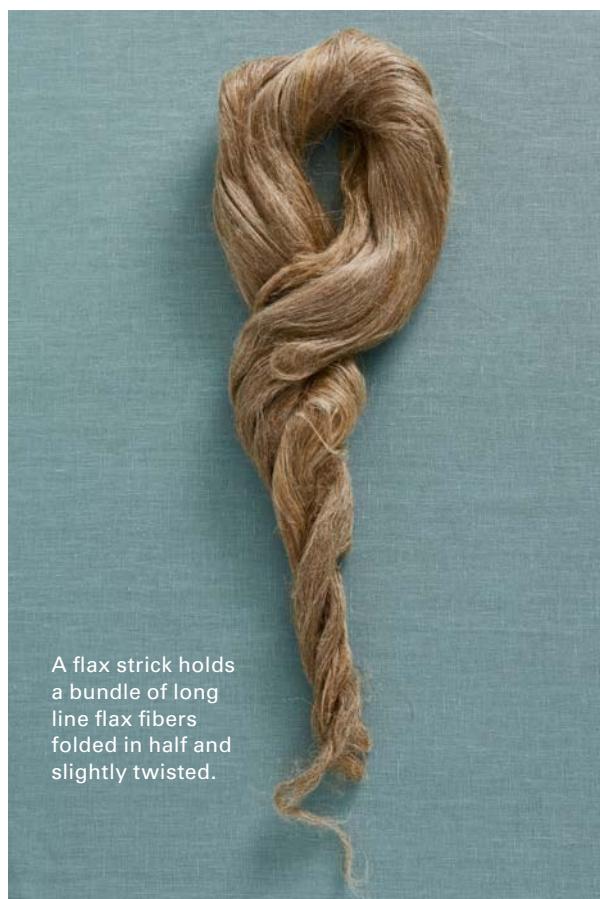
There are a few of us who love spinning flax, and I want to share my experience and the joys I've found spinning this ancient fiber.

Now, I have to admit that I have a healthy curiosity. When I take on a new interest, I have to fully understand all aspects of it, so I just had to know everything there is to know about flax and linen, from seed to finished fabric. Over the years, I have collected the tools needed to go from seed to thread. But if you are not able to or don't wish to go through all these steps, you can simply buy flax fiber in a number of different forms. And what if you spin on a modern wheel and don't have a distaff like the ones on antique wheels? Don't despair.

SPIN PREPARED FLAX

Flax sliver is available in two forms, roving and long line flax. Roving can be either natural or bleached. These fibers are shorter, 3 to 5 inches in length, which is ideal for processors to card and turn into roving. Flax roving can be spun quite easily using one of two methods. First, you can break off a short length, 10 to 12 inches long, and then tear it lengthwise in two or three sections and spin the roving straight on using a short draw (in the same manner as spinning wool roving). Second, you might like spinning the roving from the fold. Simply break off a short length of sliver, 5 to 6 inches long, and fold it over the index finger of your fiber hand, then tuck the wispy ends back into your palm. I like to extend my index finger straight out and point it toward the orifice.

Now let's talk about spinning line flax without a distaff. I have to warn you that it's not always easy to find line flax, especially in recent years. Line flax fibers come folded in half and slightly twisted into a neat package called a strick. (You may sometimes find line flax sold as hackled flax, which may or may not be in a neatly twisted strick.) If you are fortunate to have a stash of stricks or can get your hands on some,



A flax strick holds a bundle of long line flax fibers folded in half and slightly twisted.

Photo by George Boe



You can spin flax roving with a short draw, just as you would wool roving.



To spin flax from the fold, pull off a length of 5 to 6 inches of flax sliver and fold it over your index finger to spin it easily.



To spin a strick without a distaff, hold it in your lap wrapped in a towel.

Photos courtesy of Tom Knisely

WET-SPUN AND DRY-SPUN LINEN

I spin flax with damp fingertips. A cup of water sits right beside me, and I dip the fingers of my left hand into the water to wet them, holding the fiber source in my right hand. I use these damp fingers to draft the fibers out and toward the orifice, then guide my damp fingers over the length of the newly spun thread to smooth it out. This is known as wet spinning, and the result is a finely spun and smooth thread. If you spin it as is, it's known as dry-spun linen, and it tends to be hairy and coarser. Linen likes being damp, and so spinning it with wet fingers results in a superior thread, in my opinion.

Damp thread winds onto the flyer's bobbin very tightly, making it easy to work with later. Dry-spun linen is wirier and doesn't wind onto the bobbin as smoothly. Dry-spun linen thread is often prized by weavers who enjoy weaving transparency and other gauze-like fabrics. The hairy nature of the threads helps to bind and hold loosely woven fabrics together more easily than wet-spun linen. By contrast, the more refined and smoother appearance of wet-spun linen is better suited for twills and satin fabrics such as damask.

prepare to spin them by first untwisting the strick and gently whacking the tip ends on a counter or other hard surface to loosen them up. If you don't have a distaff, place the untwisted strick in a towel on your lap with the folded part of the strick exposed at the edge of the towel. The towel will keep the flax in a neat bundle and prevent tangling. Stricks can come in different sizes; if you think it may be easier to work with a smaller amount, you can separate the strick in the middle and gently pull it apart, being careful not to disturb the carefully aligned fibers too much.

This natural-colored flax has a beautiful golden appearance. After spinning, the thread can be bleached to lighten its color quickly, but the natural color will become lighter on its own with repeated washing and exposure to sunlight.

THE SINGLES THREAD

You can ply linen thread as you might any other thread, but very often I like to use it as singles. I have studied hundreds of examples of antique linen fabric, and most are woven with singles in both the warp and weft. The singles linen snuggles into the woven structure,

resulting in a smooth finish to the fabric. A two- or three-ply thread is undoubtedly strong, and it weaves into a lovely but different-looking finish to the fabric. These plied linen yarns might be better suited for all of you who knit or crochet.

I like weaving with singles linen and often wind my thread onto storage bobbins. When I want to weave some towels or table linens, I often use my spun thread as weft on a warp of 8/2 or 10/2 cotton. If I want pure linen, I find that a warp of 16/2 or 20/2 linen is perfect. Why do I choose to use millspun thread for warp? That's an easy answer: I hate to think about my handspun thread becoming loom waste. When I've had an intimate relationship with this thread and know every inch of it, well, I just can't bring myself to lose any of it to waste. If the situation arises that I use my handspun for warp, I use a dummy warp, tie my precious threads to the dummy, and wind it onto the warp beam.

THE SOFTER SIDE OF LINEN

Linen can be wiry and lacks the elasticity of other threads and yarns. One way to help soften the thread is to simmer it in hot water with mild soap and washing soda. After I have spun my singles or plied my thread, I wind it into a skein secured with several figure-eight ties and drop it into a stockpot of hot water with a squirt of dish soap and a handful of Arm and Hammer Super Washing Soda. The washing soda helps to soften the water and let the soap do its job,

FLAXSEED SOLUTION

Spinning with plain, clear water is easy to do, but sometimes it's fun to spin with a special concoction made from flaxseeds and water. I love using this with line flax fiber. It puts a shiny finish on the thread and makes even the thinnest-weight thread very strong. To make this potion, put a few tablespoons of food-grade flaxseeds in a saucepan with a couple of cups of water and bring it to a boil. When the water boils, remove the pan from the heat, let it cool down, and strain out the flaxseeds. You will see that it has a slimy feel to it when you dip your fingers into the pot. This can be used like water during spinning and will keep in the refrigerator for several days. You should be able to get food-grade flaxseed at your local grocery store, in the aisle with flour and baking items.



Photos by George Boe

softening and taking the stiffness out of the thread. This might take an hour of bubbling away on the back of the stove. Be careful not to let it boil over. Remove the skeins after about an hour, rinse in hot, clear water, and hang to dry.

If you find that the surface of the thread has become slightly hairy after simmering, you might want to rewind it. Place the wet skein on an umbrella swift and rewind it onto a niddy-noddy or reel. As the thread passes through your hand and fingers, it gives you the opportunity to pinch it slightly, which presses the hairy fibers down. Let it dry on the reel or niddy-noddy. You will be amazed at the transformation. I

Left: Two-ply yarns spun from bleached and natural flax roving. Right: At left, a two-ply linen yarn spun from bleached roving. At right, a two-ply linen yarn composed of one ply natural and one ply bleached flax roving.

do the same with any linen fabric I have woven. I will simmer it for an hour or so and then wash it in the washing machine to help take out the stiffness of the newly woven fabric. Linen seems to get only better with repeated washing.

If you've been reluctant, I hope you will give flax a chance. Commit to a project and see it through. The more you stay with it, the easier it will become. Imagine the thrill of saying that you spun the linen

for this knitted bag and or that woven towel. Just because you lack a pretty distaff doesn't mean you can't spin flax into linen thread. I hope that you fall in love with flax. ●

Tom Knisely is the resident weaving and spinning instructor for Red Stone Glen Fiber Arts Center, the weaving school and studio operated by his daughter, Sara Bixler. Tom is a regular contributor to *Handwoven* and has created several instructional weaving courses and videos. He has written three books; his third book, published in 2017, is *Handwoven Table Linens* (Stackpole). Tom enjoys collecting antique and ethnic textiles for teaching and inspiration.

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 Flax stricks: Glimåkra USA, www.glimakrausa.com



Bleached and natural flax roving.

WEAVING WITH LINEN ONLINE COURSE

Tom shares his love for working with flax in a recent online course, *Weaving with Linen*, now available at www.interweave.com. In addition to spinning and weaving, Tom demonstrates how he grows and processes flax from seed using his collection of antique equipment. See our review on page 9.



Rippling removes remaining seed from the flax plants.



To release the long flax fiber, Tom uses an antique flax brake to crush the woody stalks.

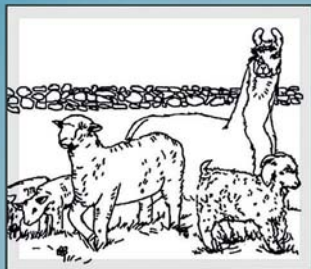


Tom demonstrates hackling flax.



Tom holding processed flax ready for spinning.

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Nålbinding

A SHORT HISTORY OF AN ANCIENT CRAFT

By Penelope Hemingway

Unna from Draicraeft
nålbinding a hat during
the reenactment of the
Vikings at Whitby Abbey
in 2018.

Photos by Nathaniel Hunt unless otherwise indicated

Nålbinding is one of the oldest textile arts. It's so old, in fact, that the specifics of its origins are unknown. It is seemingly universal, crossing cultures and continents. Extant textiles created with this single-needle looping technique have been found by archaeologists the world over. Needles made of bone and horn that could have been used for nålbinding have also been located in archaeological sites, but none with a piece of nålbinding still attached.

Evidence of nålbinding is found in many parts of the world, but the textile fragment that led to my interest in this technique lies close to my home in the north of England and is one of only two extant pieces of nålbinding found in the United Kingdom. The Viking-age sock found in Coppergate, York, dates from around the mid-tenth century. Made from natural white and madder-dyed red wool, it was created using a stitch only found in that one artifact, which is now called York stitch. Today at the Danelaw Centre for Living History near York, we wear items made using this stitch and teach nålbinding classes to bring this craft full circle.

LOOPING AROUND THE GLOBE

One of the earliest known nålbound items, a textile fragment dating from 10,000 years ago, was found in a cave in Nahal Hemar, Israel. Researchers found that the fragment was made from plant fibers and human hair. Another early example of nålbinding is a fragment found at Friesack, Germany, dating to around 7,750

SOTO SPEAK

Nålbinding, typically pronounced *noll-bin-ding*, means “needle binding” or “needle linking” in Norwegian. Sometimes spelled nalbinding, it is also the name commonly used for this technique in English.

“Nålbinding is the Norwegian word for a technique that is seen widely across the continents, centuries, and stages of technological development. The *knudløst* net of Denmark is the same as *schlingentechnik* in Germany. Names and variations are found worldwide. In addition to variations caused by language there are descriptive names used to classify the technique. Anthropologists and textile researchers use names such as knotless netting, needle looping, coiling, and looped needle netting.”

—Dr. Kate Martinson,
“Scandinavian Nålbinding: Needle-Looped Fabric,” *Weaver’s Journal* 12, 2, Issue 45 (Fall 1987).

NORWEGIAN NÅLBINDING

STRAINER

Date 1830–1870

Place of Origin Fåvang, Gubrandsdal, Norway

Creator Unknown

This nålbound strainer made from handspun cow hair, originally used for straining milk, was sent to Vesterheim Museum in 1927 by the Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer, Norway. It was part of a group of gifts from Norwegian museums sent in honor of 100 years of immigration to the United States.

Materials Cow hair

Dimensions width: 14¼ inches

Identifier / Source LC1558 - Gift of De Sandvigske Samlinger / Maihaugen



Courtesy of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa

BCE. Close inspection shows that the two-ply yarn used was bast fiber spun S (left) and plied Z (right). Several other Stone Age looped finds are from Denmark.

From the Bronze and Iron Age, there are extant items of nålbound clothing such as the famous beret-shaped hat from the Tarim Basin in China found with the Charchen Man mummy. The Roman era yields a famous pair of socks found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. The red Coptic-stitch socks were misidentified by early textile researchers as having been knitted, as the Coptic stitch bears a strong resemblance to stocking (or stockinette) stitch. The socks dated from the third to the fifth centuries CE and were found on the site of a Greek colony. Other Roman-era finds hail from elsewhere in Egypt and Syria.



Above: Spinning and nålbinding display at at Whitby Abbey during the Viking reenactment. Left: Nålbinding by Unna of Draicraeft. Lower left: Unna from Draicraeft nålbinding a hat during the reenactment of the Vikings at Whitby Abbey in 2018.

From medieval times, some of the best-documented items are Scandinavian. Mittens were found in Mammen, Denmark (from which we now have the Mammen stitch), and others in Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Poland. Medieval nålbinding is often found in ecclesiastical grave goods. Two German examples are the cap of Saint Simeon (wool, eleventh century) and the cashmere cap of Saint Bernard (twelfth century).

Archaeologists have located nålbound textiles throughout the Middle East, Europe, North and South America, and beyond. In the Pacific Islands, the indigenous people of Papua New Guinea make *bilums*, bags from bast fiber that are used to carry anything from firewood to babies. Nålbinding is found on almost every continent and was used by numerous cultures to solve many of life's daily challenges.

ANCIENT CRAFT AND MODERN TIMES

In seventeenth-century Scandinavia, items were still nålbound, such as the famous Åsle mitten, which has a

stitch named after it that is still in use today. Nålbinding continued in remoter areas of northern Europe well into the twentieth century. However, the technique faded as the faster art of knitting gained in popularity. There is some evidence that nålbinding was also carried to the United States, particularly in Scandinavian communities. An item made in the twentieth century was the toothbrush rug, a rag rug made from odds and ends of fabric combined using a nålbinding technique.

Nålbinding Today

Today, nålbinding is a craft in resurgence in Europe. At events such as the annual Jorvik Viking Festival, traders from across Europe make, sell, and buy nålbound items. In addition to the interesting history of this ancient technique, nålbinding and looping techniques have some advantages over knitting: the fabric doesn't ladder (as for a dropped stitch) and can be harder-wearing,

thicker, and warmer than knitted fabric. Many of the stitches nålbinders use today are named after extant finds, such as the York, Oslo, Åsle, Mammen, and Korgen stitches. This thread links our hands to many cultures and deep into our shared past. ●

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Claßen-Büttner, Ulrike. *Nalbinding: What in the World Is That?: History and Technique of an Almost Forgotten Handcraft*. Wiehl, Germany: Books on Demand, 2015.

Penelope Hemingway is a genealogist and historian who writes about material culture and textile history. She is a relative of the inventor of magenta dye and descends from a long line of Yorkshire wool weavers. She currently demonstrates spinning on a great wheel, bandweaving, and nålbinding at shows and for guilds across the north of England. She is the author of *River Ganseys*, and her latest book, *Their Darkest Materials*, is due out in 2019.

Textiles made with nålbinding techniques often have a surface that resembles woven herring-bone fabric.



Photos by George Boe

Project



Two-ply yarns spun with a semiworsted draw (from left): Border Leicester from the Doulton Flock, Boreray wool dyed with alder buckthorn, Derbyshire Gritstone dyed with indigo and logwood, and British shortwool dyed with cochineal.

Photos by George Boe unless otherwise noted

NÅLBINDING BASICS

Oslo Stitch

By Penelope Hemingway

Nålbinding is the craft of making a textile from loops of yarn; it is a craft for mavericks. Learn it and you'll be forever free from the tyranny of patterns and rules. My best advice to someone trying nålbinding for the first time is to be patient with yourself while learning and to persist. Can't start in the round? Crochet your first round! Can't do the spit-splice joins? Let ends dangle and weave in later. Persist, keep going, and all will be well with more practice.

A pouch worked in the round (page 87) is a good project to learn nålbinding basics. And you'll need a pouch for those nålbinding needles you will somehow start collecting!

HANDSPINNING FOR NÅLBINDING

You can nålbind with many types of yarn, and to prove it, I made pouches from yarns that were in my handspun oddments basket. Nålbinding is ideal for using up leftover yarn from other projects and loom waste. It is great for keen dyers who have smaller lengths of random colors and no reasonable way of using them.

It's wise to start with a thicker grist yarn, something between aran weight (8–10 wpi) and chunky weight (7–8 wpi), when first exploring nålbinding. Various nålbinding stitches can show off the qualities of singles and novelty yarns very well, but it's easier to learn with a

smooth, balanced, two-ply aran-weight yarn or similar. Choose a light color so you can more easily see the stitches and analyze mistakes if they occur.

Historically, all sorts of fibers have been used for nålbinding: various types of wool, flax and other bast fiber, and even human hair! (See page 80 for more examples of nålbinding.) My preference for nålbinding fiber is a Down-type shortwool spun with a semiworsted drafting technique. Breeds such as the rare Boreray and Derbyshire Gritstone make a nice nålbinded fabric. Other shortwool breeds include Dorset, Southdown, and Suffolk.

Remember: the only nålbinding rule is that there are no rules!

NÅLBINDING TECHNIQUES

While nålbinding is often compared to knitting, the technique is quite different. For starters, nålbinding cannot be made from a continuous length of yarn. The fabric is worked with one needle and short pieces of yarn rather than a continuous length. While nålbinding, you work with lengths of yarn that are about as long as your arm-span, then you splice (join) the yarn as you go.

Oslo Stitch

There are hundreds of nålbinding stitches and generally no patterns for nålbinded items. Patterns like those used for knitting or crochet don't work, as no two thumbs or needles are precisely the same; gauge is not even a concept. The steps below are only one way of working. Once you get the hang of it, you may prefer not to tension using your thumb and can explore other methods, but this is a good one for beginners.

TIPSTO TRY

- Nålbinding with silk and other non-felting fibers is more challenging when you are learning because they are difficult to join. However, blends such as silk/wool work well for beginners.
- Nålbinding with energized singles or thick-and-thin yarns makes for unique fabrics with loads of character—give it a try!
- Nålbinders have varying opinions on whether they prefer to spin singles Z (right) and ply S (left) or vice versa. Try both and see which you prefer.
- When you set work aside, you can save your thumb loop by putting a stitch marker through it.

Project

Make a Chain

To start, thread your needle with about 1½ yards of yarn. (Pull yarn to break it; don't cut it, because you need a fluffy end to join later.)

1. Make a slipknot, but do not tighten. Place knot over the thumb of your left hand with the “halo” on the pad of your thumb, pressed between thumb and index finger. Place the remaining loop of the slipknot over the thumbnail. The following stitch is worked with the rear loop (RL) and the thumb loop (TL). When looking at the thumbnail side, the working yarn (WY) is to the left of your thumb and hangs in front of your hand. When making a new stitch, WY must always be to the left and in front.

2. Insert needle into RL from front to back. (Do not pull needle through.)

3. Rotate needle and insert it into TL from back to front and under WY.

4. Pull the thumb out of TL, pinching it against the needle. Then pull needle and working yarn to the left and through all loops. The working yarn tightens to form a new TL.

Practice making chains just to get into the rhythm of nålbinding and to perfect your tension.

Connecting Stitches

The most straightforward connecting stitch is called the F1 stitch. This is done by working through one chain stitch from front to the back. To work in the round, you will be working into one chain stitch, from front to back, and then working Steps 2–4 above.

A Nice Splice

Because nålbinding uses short lengths of yarn rather than a continuous yarn as in knitting or crochet, the working yarn is spliced, or joined, to the beginning of the next piece. Often called “spit splicing,” this technique uses moisture and friction to slightly felt the yarn tails together. I use a plant sprayer, but in the past these were called spit splices for a reason.

- Make joins over the final one or two inches of the yarn ends. Fluff out the ends of both yarns. If working with a two-ply yarn, pull off the last inch of one ply of each yarn so your join will be the same grist as the rest of the yarn.
- Wet yarn, overlap yarn ends, and rub vigorously between your hands until you have felted the two lengths together.
- Proceed with nålbinding with a little caution until you have worked past the join. When using this joining technique, avoid superwash and other fibers that won't felt readily.

If you have trouble with joins, don't worry. Try needlefelting the ends together or simply leave several inches of yarn tails dangling and weave in later.

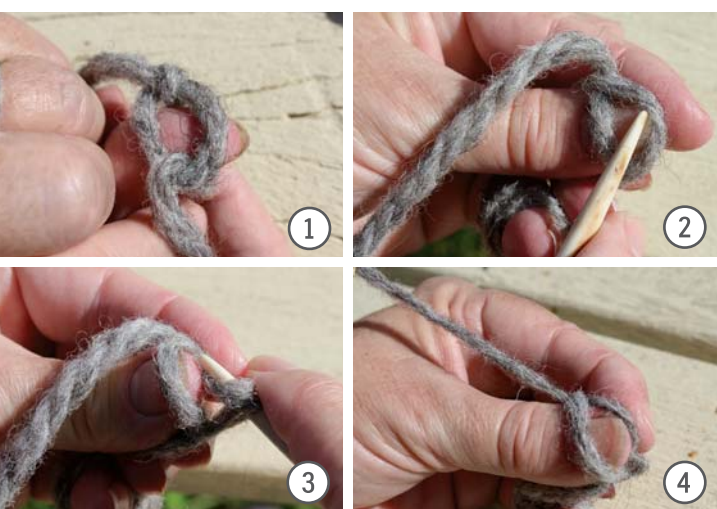
Work into the same stitch to create an increase (as shown below) or work into the next stitch to the right to continue on the same number of stitches.

Increases

Make 2 stitches in one old stitch from the last round.

Decreases

Make 1 stitch in one old stitch, then skip one old stitch from the last round (as in crochet).



Increase by working two new stitches into the same old stitch.

Photos this page by Nathaniel Hunt

Needle Pouch—Working In the Round

NOTES

- You will always be working on the right side of the fabric, and work proceeds from left to right. The most recent loop can be found by pulling on working yarn.
- Mark the start of your rounds by using a piece of waste yarn or locking stitch marker.

STITCH GUIDE

WY Working Yarn

TL Thumb Loop

RL Rear Loop

TOOLS

Nålbinding needle; locking stitch marker or waste yarn.

Chain 8 sts. Join in the round, making sure chain is not twisted, as follows: Insert needle from front to back through first chain stitch, then work Steps 2–4 above.

Rnd 1 Work rnd in F1 stitch, increase by nålbinding twice into every stitch—16 sts.

Rnd 2 *F1 1, inc 1; rep from * to end.

Rnd 3 *F1 2, inc 1, rep from * to end.

Rnd 4 *F1 3, inc 1 rep from * to end.

Continue in this way, increasing regularly and on each round until you have completed Rnd 18.

Work even without increases until pouch is desired height.

Drawstring

*Skip 2 stitches, F1 2, repeat from * to end of rnd.

Braid a drawstring and pass through loops at top of pouch.

Finishing

Pull yarn through last stitch until tight. Weave in ends. ●

This white pouch with shots of different colors (below right) is an easy way to learn to nålbind. The smooth, white surface was the perfect background for small amounts of shortwool yarns dyed with madder (orange), logwood (purple), woad (blue), and cochineal (red). With more experience, try creating pouches with flaps (left).



RESOURCES

Boast, Emma "Bruni." *Nålbinding for Beginners*. Self-published, 2018.

Neulakintaat video tutorials: www.en.neulakintaat.fi/79

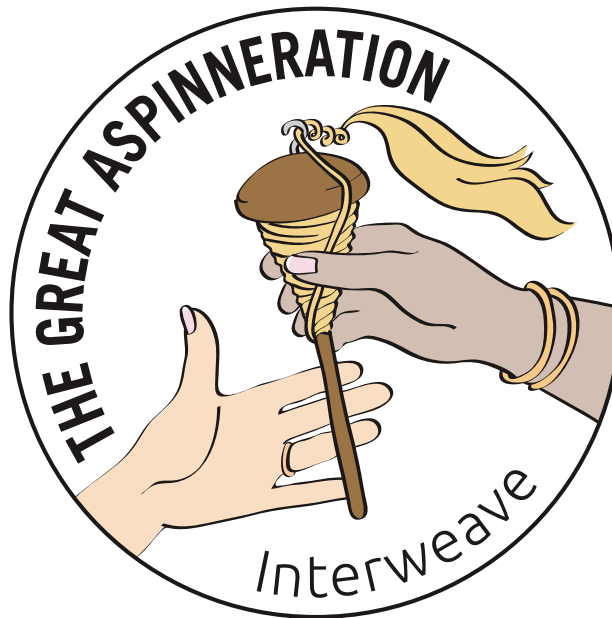
Penelope Hemingway is a genealogist and historian who writes about material culture and textile history. She is the author of *River Ganseys*, and her latest book, *Their Darkest Materials*, is due out later this year.

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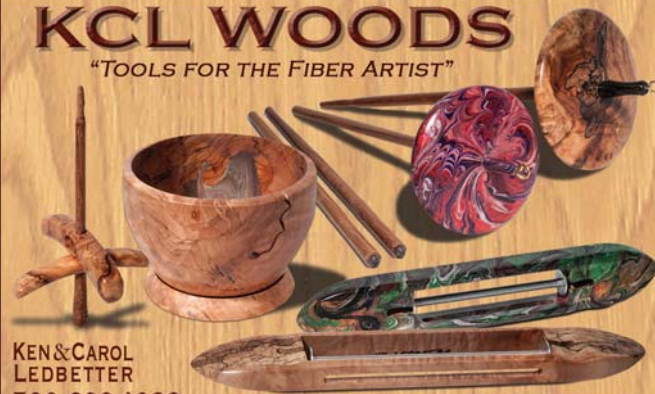


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ALEXANDRIA WARE

Project Manager for Planetary Spacecraft

Tell us about your day job.

I manage data centers for planetary spacecraft. This means that I coordinate the design, development, and operation of the computer systems that process and distribute science data from missions to other planets. So far, I've mostly worked on Mars missions like NASA's MAVEN and the upcoming Emirates Mars Mission, which launches in 2020. I've also been involved with the upcoming Europa Clipper mission, and I'm working on a project involving very small Earth-orbiting satellites. All of this fun stuff happens at the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics (LASP) at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

How did you become a spinner?

In 2006, I moved to Colorado and started going to the local knitting group, where I met Interweave staffer Anne Merrow and Kate Gagnon Osborn of Kelbourne Woolens. One evening, Kate threw a party at her house, and she was just learning to spin. It looked interesting, so Anne and I signed up for Maggie Casey's introduction to spinning class at Shuttles, Spindles & Skeins. At the end of the course, I bought my Lendrum and that was that!

Do your job and your hobbies ever overlap?

No, although I am currently knitting a Honey Cowl in the Blue Moon Fiber Arts colorway Space Dust; my senior thesis in college was all about space dust.

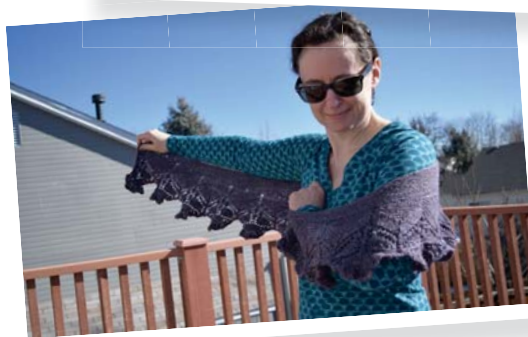
What is your favorite thing about spinning?

I love how tactile it is, and how instantly productive it is, although it usually takes me forever to actually spin enough to knit with. All of my work is done on a computer, so I find it really gratifying to sit in front of this lovely wooden machine and see how all the parts work together to create something tangible.

Can you tell us what a typical day at the office is like?

Mostly meetings! While I have a very technical job, I spend most of my time coordinating and documenting designs and plans. This means talking to people and making sure that the scientists and engineers and programmers are all in agreement about how the data from our spacecraft will be processed and delivered.

A fun fact about LASP is that we frequently celebrate anniversaries of spacecraft: 3 years since



Photos by Julian DeWolfe

Top: Alexandria spinning on her Lendrum. Above: Alexandria's handspun version of the Stellaria shawl by Susanna IC knitted with handspun Merino-silk from Ashland Bay.

MAVEN launched and 40 years since Voyager flew by Jupiter. And we always have cake, usually with a picture of the spacecraft on it.

Do you have a fun fact about space dust?

One of the instruments on the New Horizons spacecraft, which recently flew past Pluto, is a dust counter that counts particles of space dust. It's called the Student Dust Counter, because it was entirely designed, built, tested, and operated by University of Colorado students working at LASP. ●



Photo by Alexandria Ware

One of LASP's spacecraft anniversary cakes, this one celebrating the first artificial Earth satellite in 1957.

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE whom we should feature in "I Am a Spinner"?

We're especially interested in spinners with unusual careers, locations, and perspectives. Drop us a line at spinoff@interweave.com. If we use your suggestion, we'll send you a treat from our stash of fiber goodies! Because of the volume of submissions we receive for this feature, we will only notify you if your nomination is selected.



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