

## 2014 Back to Back Wool Challenge by the Spinning Knitwits

Held at Tocal Homestead, 8 June.

By Maureen King, Newsletter editor

And they're off ...



And so begins the 2014 Back to Back Wool Challenge by the Spinning Knitwits. As soon as the Trevor the shearer makes the first cut the race against the clock begins.



The fleece is handed around (untreated in any way), as everyone is put to spinning. The beginning pace is frantic, the concentration is fierce as they all spin to get yarn to be plied for the knitting to commence.



Once the assessor says the word, the spun yarn is given to the pleyer who then plys and then winds into a ball and passes the ball to the first knitter to get them on the way. The task then is to get the front and back knitters going as these will take the longest, to build up a supply of

plied yarn ready to go, so that the sleeve knitters can also get going – a massive juggling act.

There is no time to stop and eat or drink. The Assessor helps not only by spurring team members on when the time needs to be picked up, but also cuts up food into mouthful size pieces and goes around feeding the team members as well as providing drinks from time to time. There is no stopping the work until it is finished.



Even this year's sheep didn't want to go back outside into the cold after losing his fleece. It took a few attempts and in the end three people to assist the sheep up on the slippery wooden floor.



Since the beginning of the Wool Challenge, all money raised goes towards Cancer research. To help raise money for the Spinning Knitwits, the Newcastle Spinners and Weavers organise a "trading table" where it is possible to buy all sorts of hand made items – some from hand spun yarn as well as commercial yarns.



There is always an impressive array of items on offer and this year was no different – hats, gloves, jumpers, plants and this year some dolls had been outfitted as well. Downstairs the walls were decorated with quilts done by the Patterson CWA, and upstairs there was a display of art work by Dungog Art Society.

To help pass the time there were several activities which were for the participation of those present. Demonstrations of “yarn” skills was provided by Lacemakers and by one our members, Gayle, who is always willing to show how to use a drop spindle as well as letting visitors have a go.

There was even some activities which allowed kids to make their own “Sheep” using empty juice bottles, paddle pop sticks and fleece.



Activities for the day available for participation included getting people to help in the knitting of a scarf using wool provided. It began with casting on 30 stitches, choosing a colour of wool and what sort of stitches and knitting some rows before passing onto the next person.



It was great to see some young knitters as well as some experienced knitters giving this a go.



We even had a local “celebrity” available to lend a hand – Maree from Pins and Things at Boolaroo (an Aladdin’s cave of goodies for anyone who hasn’t been there). Thank you to all who contributed.

Another activity was a “fastest knitter” competition, which was conducted several times to give spectators a feeling of the pressure the B2B participants were under. Casting on 25 stitches and completing as many rows as possible in 5 or 10 minutes. Winners of each section were able to select a prize from an array available. Many thanks goes to Linda Sherbon for organising this again.



gives visitors a “quick” version of what the B2B team is trying to do. The team consisted of Marley Critcher, Linda Sherbon, Margaret Dorn, Carolyn Bourne and Bettina Dauner.



The finished beanie was auctioned off again this year adding some funds into the donation to the Cancer Council.

A large number of Guild members were on hand to chat, answer questions and generally promote the crafts on display.

Visitors were entertained by a musicians, who performed lots of different styles from instrumental, to group, duets and solos including songs encouraging people to sing along with them.



As an added highlight, there was again a Back to Beanie conducted as well. For this raw wool was brought along, spun and knitted into a beanie as fast as possible. This



Trevor was unable to demonstrate the art of blade shearing later in the day, due to a back injury, but he was able to assist the spinners during the time by

clipping the weathered tips from the fleece before handing it out. This made the spinning go a lot easier.



The event was MC'd by the Guild's vice-president, Kerrie Fagan, who did an excellent job of letting people know what was going on.



The number of spectators had grown during the day until the final moment when the team stood with Trevor wearing the finished garment in 6 hours 6 minutes - nearly half an hour faster than last year!!

Our thanks also go to the Friends of Tocal for catering food and drinks on the day as well as a BBQ and to Tocal for providing a wonderful venue and organisation.

Then, the final countdown. Everyone was trying to hold their breath to see what the time would be.

Getting to the end of the large pieces – front and back and then sewing the pieces together while the final stitches are being knitted.



**The 2014 team with finished jumper**  
L to R: Linda, Eva (back), Kerry, Gayle (back), Karina, Helen, Trevor, Christina and Chris (back)

To celebrate this year's event (10 years of the Knitwits) Tocal kindly presented each team member with a commemorative tea towel which had details of the event's history. Well done everyone!!