

Back to Back Wool Challenge

The modern story begins in 1992 with Richard Snow – a keen young spinner at the Scottish Wool Centre – who developed thyroid cancer. His desire TO RAISE FUNDS FOR CANCER RESEARCH sparked off the FIRST BACK TO BACK WOOL CHALLENGE competition.

The aim was to hand spin and knit a seater/jumper from the sheeps' back to a mans' back – without eating the sheep.

The first years' display developed into a race against the clock the second year and then involvement with the Guinness Book of Records.

The event created enormous interest in the UK in the way it combined the PROMOTION OF WOOL with FUND RAISING FOR CANCER RESEARCH.

The same year, Australia held its own contest, where individual teams of blade shearers, hand spinners and knitters, representing football teams from Geelong in Victoria and the West Coast Eagle in Western Australia competed in a race to create a football scarf. The Australian Trophy was created for this competition.

Australian Wool Showcase member, Wendy Dennis took part in the Fourth Wool Congress on Coloured Sheep in the UK in 1994. Wendy visited the Scottish Wool Centre in Aberfoyle and it was there that plans were made to develop an INTERNATIONAL competition.

An INTERNATIONAL SET OF RULES was developed around a team of 8 people, consisting of a blade shearer, seven hand spinners and knitters with spinning wheels and ONE SHEEP. The time limit was set at 8 hours. Timekeepers and assessors monitor each team. The venues are generally closely linked to the wool industry.

In 1995, the first International Wool Challenge was held with eight teams from Australia, England, Scotland and the Shetland Isles competing against each other. The team from the SHETLAND ISLES set a blistering time of 5 hours 57 minutes 58 seconds.

The Guild's first involvement with the Back to Back Wool Competition began in 2001, following a visit by several members to the Merriwa event in 2000. A demonstration of "back to back" using beanies was held at Tocal in July 2000, and the call went out to members who were interested in rising to the challenge led by Margaret Dorn.

The Maitland Knitwits were born to take the place of a team from Armidale who were retiring from the competition. The group was assembled at the last moment and consisted of – Margaret Dorn, Carolyn Bourne, Lyn Grigor, Ruth Saunders, Kaye Lippis, Marley Critcher, and Fran Griffiths with Myra Key as the Assessor and Trevor Pyke wielding the blade shears. They joined the Werriwa Jumbucks and the Morisset Crafty Crafters spinning in Merriwa so teams had competition on the day.

In this first experience, the team managed to finish 11th out of 36 contestants

worldwide with a time of 8 hours 4 minutes and 16 seconds and helped in the raising of almost \$4000 for the nominated charity.

For those interested in testing themselves for knitting – test yourself with 96 stitches and 10 rows of stocking stitch. If you can complete 10 rows of knitting in under 25 minutes you could be useful in a team (keeping in mind that the yarn being knitted is unwashed).

Since 2005, the group has joined with Tocal Homestead and participates on the Queen's birthday long weekend (Sunday) at the Tocal Homestead venue. The group has been made of members from the Guild or associated with the Guild. In 2009 they became the World champions with a time of 6 hours 3 minutes 20 seconds.

International Back to Back Wool Challenge Rules

Objective: to complete the sweater/jumper, following the identical International Wool Challenge pattern exactly, within eight hours:

1. A team consists of eight (8) members. One blade shearer and seven (7) hand spinners & hand knitters with up to seven (7) non electric spinning wheels. One (1) sheep, any colour or breed but must not be housed or coated for two (2) months prior to shearing.
2. With the exception of the shearer, team members shall be allowed to perform whichever function is required within the team, eg a member may start as a spinner and become a knitter, knitters or spinners may wind wool, members of the team may exchange roles with one another.
3. The time starts when the shearer, holding the sheep, begins shearing. Shearing can begin from any part of the sheep.
4. An independent timekeeper and assessor are required to verify the time and that the pattern has been complied with.
5. Spinners may start spinning as soon as the wool is available.
6. Only team members may touch the wool.
7. Scissors, handcarders, flickers or combs are not permitted.
8. A HAND ball winder tool may be used.
9. Two wool singles are plyed for a 'double knit' of approximately 8 ply yarn.
10. Use oversew stitch in wool to sew up the sweater.
11. Time ends when the completed sweater is handed to the timekeeper.

The winning team shall be the one which produces the finished sweater in the best recorded time.

ALLTASKS TO BE CARRIED OUT BY HAND OPERATION ONLY!!

International Back to Back Wool Challenge – Additional Notes

- a. Use any public venue central to team members. Access to phone, refreshments, toilet facilities etc essential. Free entry for the public.
- b. Charity fundraising, especially for Cancer Research is encouraged.

- c. A submission for inclusion in the Guinness Book of Records is being considered.
- d. Trophies for:
 - Fastest team with the correct pattern donated by the Scottish Wool Centre.
 - Fastest Australian team with the correct pattern donated by the City of Geelong.
 - The greatest donation to Cancer Research donated by Haldane of Fife, spinning wheel makers, Scotland.

Sweater/Jumper Pattern

Each team will follow this International Wool Challenge pattern exactly as it is written. On completion, the team assessor is responsible for counting the stitches and rows.

Yarn – To be equivalent to Double Knit

BACK AND FRONT (Both the same)

Using one pair of size US #3 (10 or 3.25mm) needles cast on 96 stitches.

Work 16 rows in k1, p1 rib.

Change to one pair of size US #6 (8 or 4mm) needles and knit 1 row plain and 1 row purl (stocking stitch).

Continue until 134 rows have been completed from 16 rows of rib. (Total from cast on edge, 150 rows).

Change to k1, p1 rib (still using the size US #6 (8 or 4mm) needles) work 12 rows.

Cast off loosely in rib.

SLEEVES (make 2 alike)

Using one pair of size US #3 (10 or 3.25mm) needles cast on 46 stitches.

Work 16 rows in k1, p1 rib.

Change to one pair of size US #6 (8 or 4mm) needles and knit 1 row plain and 1 row purl (stocking stitch).

Increasing 1 stitch at each end of first and every following 4th row until 96 stitches.

Continue without further increase until 100 rows have been completed from 16 cuff rib. (Total from cast on edge, 116 rows).

Cast off loosely.

MAKING UP

Join Back and Front at shoulder edge (quarter of the way from the sleeve edge – leaving half of the top edge as neck opening).

Sew in Sleeves.

Join Sleeve and Side seams.

Sew in any loose wool ends.