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UistWool

By Dana MacPhee
Uist Wool Director

Uist Wool is a spinning mill located on the island of Grimsay, part of the Outer Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland. The environment is dominated by the extremes of North Atlantic weather.





Many people living in the Outer Hebrides have small-holdings called 'crofts' and breed sheep to maintain the working landscape of the islands. The wool is clipped annually but there is no commercial value in it today.



Yet there was a time when local wool was used productively and the skill of hand-spinning was passed on to the next generation.

Traditionally, handspun yarn was also dyed using plants & lichens and woven into cloth for use locally and for selling to visitors to the islands.



The cylinder or pirn = Eimachan
solid rod = Dealg. (Gaelic)
The wool is dyed with croftle from
lichen or rocks.
The axle or Dealg. is made from
the quill of a wild goose.





There is still a keen interest in the 21st Century to maintain these traditions and continue the craft of making using local wool.



At one time, people did wear more wool but with the advent of artificial fibre there has been a massive reduction in the global market for wool.



Scottish Wool has a distinctive character to it and is very hard-wearing.



These qualities make it ideal for spinning into yarn for many practical purposes.

The idea behind building a new Mill was to try and create a use for local wool which was viewed as having little or no value.





We spent two years running community events and doing our research about setting up a new wool spinning mill.

Construction of the Mill started in 2012. There were three main elements in the project – building the Mill, purchasing the machinery & training people.



The Mill & Wool Centre as it is today. The Wool Shed and stone-built Wash House can be seen behind the Mill along with the two wind turbines that help supply renewable energy to Uist Wool.






The Mill was opened in 2013 by Lachie MacDonald, the last Harris Tweed weaver on the island of Grimsay.

Lachie was still weaving cloth in his mid 90's and always claimed it kept him fit and healthy!



Our machinery is classed as 'heritage' and had a working life in at least three other locations before we bought it in 2012 – pictured here being moved from its previous home for shipping to Uist Wool.

A photograph of two people, a woman on the left and a man on the right, both wearing dark blue work jumpsuits, standing in a workshop. They are positioned in front of a large, complex, green-painted spinning frame. The machine has multiple horizontal spindles and bobbins. The floor is covered with a green mat and is cluttered with crumpled newspapers and other debris. The background shows wooden walls and various tools and equipment.

The spinning frame (made in 1959) had to be stripped down, repaired & cleaned before we could start testing and creating yarn from local wool.



Our restored spinning frame now working away with regular maintenance and a lot of machine oil.



Wool grading is the start of our production process. Every fleece we buy is carefully examined for quality.

Special wool-washing machines are used to clean the greasy wool. Once washed the fibre is air dried on racks to retain the natural feel of the wool.





Wool on the feed-in sheet going into the first stage of carding.

The machinery has over 100 different oiling points which must be topped up before starting the equipment in the morning.



Uist Wool blends only naturally coloured wools together to get different shades of yarn.



The Mill & Wool Centre shop as it is today. It is open to the public all year and tours can be arranged for visitors or specialist groups.

Uist Wool also commissions local designers to create patterns for our yarns.

The 'Seawrack' sweater designed by Inner Wild is shown here in a yarn called 'Reothart' in Scottish Gaelic.

All our yarns are named in Gaelic using words that describe our land & location.



It is important for Uist Wool to support independent weavers in the Outer Hebrides by commissioning them to weave Harris Tweed for us.





From the 'croft' to craft - 100% Made in the Outer Hebrides

Thank you for spending a few minutes watching our short presentation and sorry we can't be in Viet Nam to tell you in person. Enjoy the event and please come and visit us one day?
Moran Taing! / Thank You!





www.uistwool.com