



The Natural Fibre Company

News up-date

Autumn

2009

See fleece turn to yarn at nfc's first Open Day

Most of the plans are in place for our first Open Day at the mill in Launceston on Saturday, 31 October.

Visitors will be able to see and buy at a discount Blacker Designs' new range of organic yarns along with other new products for the autumn, have a detailed tour of the mill and attend some master classes or workshops.

The Open Day has been prompted by a greater number of casual visitors and increased interest from the commission spinning customers we speak to on the telephone.

But as we have no idea how many people are likely to come the Open Day is experimental. To cover costs we are charging £5 a visitor, but each ticket will qualify for a £2.50 reduction on any products purchased. This is in addition to special offers available only for the day.

If there is a particular area of the yarn and textile industry that you would like to feature in a workshop or master class please let us know. We will respond, if we can, to the most popular demands.

Should the numbers justify it we will provide refreshment vans and portaloos. Please let us know if you want to come by ringing us or sending an email.

The mill itself is a crowded working area and for safety reasons the numbers per tour are limited to 15 at a cost of £2.50 person making £7.50 for the day as a whole. Again, £2.50 will be deducted from any purchase, so if you spend £7.50 you can get £5 back from what you buy.

We can fit in five tours, at 10, 11, noon, 2 and 3 pm, restricting the total to 75. No children or dogs please. Contact us if you have any special requirements. If you choose to make a weekend of it, we can refer you to local bed and breakfast operations, farmhouses and hotels.



It may look like a case for keeping death off the roads, but in fact it was part of the photoshoot for the Second Edition of the Blacker Designs catalogue now in production.

This edition will have two volumes, one for yarns and patterns the other for textiles.

We now have a small, select band of stockists round the country who will shortly be listed on the website.

The First Edition of the catalogue is completely out of date, both because we have launched and discontinued products and as prices changed.

You can still use the catalogue for ideas, but please use the website for current information.



Organic yarn launched with more free patterns

Blacker Designs' range of yarns now numbers over 100, often available in several versions.

The patterns are also popular and we will double the number available this autumn and make the free ones downloadable via Ravelry.

We have now launched our range of soft organic yarns.

These are made from organic Falklands Islands Corriedale, some of which we have blended with organic Manx Loaghtan, Hebridean and Black Welsh Mountain.

You can buy all of them in DK and 4-ply in the natural versions, but we have also over-dyed organically to make a blue (on the white), a pink (on the Manx), a purple (on the Hebridean) and a turquoise (on the Black Welsh Mountain).

We will be providing some patterns and swatches to suggest a few possibilities.

If they go well we will make more and over-dye all in all colours ... and even add some more colours which we are planning for 2010.



TV camera crews were among our summer visitors including the BBC's Countryfile programme which told farmers how they might add value to their fleece. Managing director Sue Blacker is shown here (right) with Carole Youngs making the Smallholder Series DVDs which are mentioned in our case study, entitled 'Gorgeous flock inspires how-to TV series

Walk with your feet in the clouds!

Yuli Somme walks on clouds, or to be more specific small, slightly dampened clouds of fleece which she puts into her shoes or boots.

She then covers them with a plastic bag before putting on her boots and going out for an hour's walk.

Next to her feet she has used Blue-faced Leicester and then an outer layer of different pure British breeds (some coloured, some local) to create one pair of beautiful, simple, diverse and sustainable felt slippers a week!

If you can help by supplying her with a large handful of fleece, send it to her in a large envelope.

You can contact Yuli direct on 01647 433 148 (evenings) or 432 155 (day) or by email on yulisomme@me.com

As she is planning an exhibition about breeds, please include some details of the sheep, their names and ages with a photograph if possible, location and something about the breed.

Yuli is based in Devon and featured in a previous case study on her business making felt shrouds, Bellacouche.



Blacker Designs' autumn textile range includes Gotland pashmina-style shawls, some pale soft alpaca scarves, textured Southdown throws, a nice multi-stripe 'Heinz' throw using lots of different yarns, more of the Hebridean throws...yum, yum.

All throws can now have matching cushions, pictured above. We have been looking at stuffing cushions with wool which makes them more springy.

We have also introduced a limited range of knitwear, including several different styles of pullover. This is machine-knitted locally by someone hoping to develop her business with us – so all interest is welcome!

Guard against moths' appetite for alpaca

It has always been possible to store fleece for a while with minimum deterioration: less lanolin means it can be stored longer, so alpaca and mohair fare better than wool. BUT, moths love alpaca!

We cannot risk introducing these vermin into the mill, so we reserve the right to destroy any fibre coming to us with moths and to charge for any moth treatment we are forced to undertake (see our terms and conditions – it's always been there).

If moths arrive with fibre we planned to purchase, then sorry, but it will not be purchased and there may be a disposal bill.

Mice can flatten themselves almost completely and slide into very small spaces to spread disease (rats are more hygienic in this regard!). So to store your fibre take care to avoid moths, mice, rats, builders' dust, birds, hay and anything else which could reduce its value.

Before storing pick it over and remove all the rubbish. Once you've sorted and graded your fleece, make a note of the quantity and quality from individual animals and store each colour together rather than retaining them in individual sacks.

Put the fibre into air permeable sacks, but without any holes which the vermin will use as an entrance. Then store it in a dry, cool and draughty area – a barn or garage is often ideal.

Also store them off the ground, preferably hanging from a rafter in something like an old duvet cover.

The fibre will absorb moisture so it must be kept dry. Alpaca can be stored in plastic bags, but these must be well sealed and make sure the fibre is dry.

As the flies have not been encouraged by three successive poor summers, you may have avoided treating for fly-strike.

We have no recent comments on flytraps, but would be interested to hear about your experiences which we can pass on in the next newsletter.

Although the govern-

ment-funded Scrapie Scheme has ended, Genotyping for sheep remains important.

Some breed societies have been able to negotiate decent discounts for scrapie gene assessment from Innovis.

It is sad to hear that, although so rare as to be virtually non-existent in

sheep, TB is affecting alpacas. The only real solution will be a mixture of spread prevention (which raises the controversial badger issue) and building up immune systems.

We would like to hear about your experiences with trace elements and minerals as these play an important role in animal nutrition.

DEFRA working on textile road map

A UK Sustainable Roadmap and Action Plan. No, we hadn't heard of it either.

Apparently DEFRA and around 300 textile retailers and manufacturers have been at it for a while.

With help from researchers at the Central Science Laboratory and Leeds and De Montfort Universities, they have analysed the impact of various textiles and created a matrix to evaluate and compare different fibres, for instance cotton and wool with hemp, acrylic or re-cycled fibres.

As well as consumer atti-

tudes they have looked at fibre and fabric production, chemical processing, garment make-up, domestic use and disposal.

Wool inevitably comes out quite well!

We're not sure whether they believe that something that lasts a long time is better than a disposable item.

This is a great opportunity!

Look at the information, join the groups and start commenting.

Start with this link:
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2009/090220a.htm>

Dates for the 2010 diary

We've enjoyed meeting our customers at the shows we've attended this year. In a few months we'll be starting all over again!

Although things may change we are hoping to be at the following:

- **Unravel**, The Maltings, Bridge Square, Farnham, Surrey GU9 7QR, 27-28 February
 - **WonderWool Wales** at the Royal Welsh Showground, Llanelwedd, Builth Wells, Powys LD2 3SY, 24-25 April;
 - **The Smallholders Country Fayre and Farmers' Market** at Pencarrow House, Washaway, Bodmin, PL30 3AG, late May;
 - **Woolfest** at the Lakeland Agricultural Centre, Cockermouth, Cumbria CA13 0QQ, 25-26 June;
 - **Fibrefest** at Coldharbour Mill, Uffculme, Devon EX15 3EE, late August;
 - **iKnit** at the Royal Horticultural Halls & Conference Centre, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE, early September;
 - **Sherborne Castle Country Fair** at Sherborne Castle, Sherborne, Dorset DT9, probably late May;
 - **Royal Cornwall Show**, 10-12 June;
 - **UK Ravelry Knit Camp** and day at Stirling University, 9-14 August.
- For those that don't know, Ravelry is an on-line, international community of knitters.

Prices latest

As foreshadowed in the spring, we have raised nfc's processing prices. We are sorry to do this, but we really need to make the heavy investment we have made on your behalf pay off!

We are looking into whether or not it would be fairer to provide an annual discount arrangement for those customers who send regular small batches, rather than just the simple volume discounts we have for larger batches.

Let us know what you think.

Information sheet

We have prepared an information sheet on small order processing – **please request one if you wish.**

It includes details of the mini mills, where we know them, and also some general points on how to choose a spinning service.

As there are gaps in many of the excellent on-line or published versions, we are trying to create a definitive (!) guide to yarn specifications and needles.

So for all those proof-readers and technical experts out there, now's your chance! We are anticipating plenty of comments....

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