



SOUTH DOWN YARN

A Natural Fibre Company case study



Preserving 19th century tradition

ALTHOUGH South Downs Yarn is based in West Sussex, it works with flocks in and around the South Downs from Hampshire to East Sussex, notably with shepherds who have pedigree Southdown flocks that live and graze in the area, and who share the company's vision and values.

Louise Spong is the driving force behind the company, but she is the first to admit that it wouldn't exist without the support of the shepherds and flocks she works with and whose fleeces she showcases.

'Neither would I would be able to run the business without my husband Andrew who is always on hand to provide practical support and encouragement as well as much needed pragmatism' says Louise.

'The company is breed and geography specific, meaning that every skein we produce can be traced back to the flock it hails from.

'Being able to demonstrate the provenance of our wool is the entire reason I started the company and remains my guiding principle.

'Each skein of yarn can be traced back to the flock and year of shearing, and its provenance is stated on the yarn labels.

'I absolutely love the fact that many of today's flocks, thanks to the Southdown Sheep Society's annual records, can be traced back to those in the late nineteenth century.

'It's not just about being nostalgic and while I enjoy celebrating the breed's history, I'm just as interested in the present flocks and how we can utilise their wonderful wool, both now and in the future.'

In 2012, Louise approached David Burden, a smallholder based in Duncton with a flock of pedigree Southdowns. They worked together and two years later South Down Yarn exhibited at the Findon Sheep Fair with its first batch of geo-traceable Southdown yarn named 'Duncton.'

The Southdown Sheep Society has always been supportive and this brought in more shepherds.

Early on Louise was approached by Jenny Dean and collaborates with her on the natural dyeing and patterns South Downs Yarn produces.

'We currently sell two-fold, woollen spun, single-flock Southdown wool, both in its natural state, which we call "Chalk Path", and in a range of plant-based dyed colour collections.'

Historically, Southdown's short staple meant it was woollen spun. By working with the Natural Fibre company (www.thenaturalfibre.co.uk), Louise is able to continue this tradition.



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