

# woolfest 2009

celebrating nature's finest fibres

**28 June 2009**

## **Woolfest: "the best yet"**

The fifth Woolfest attracted nearly 5000 visitors to Cockermouth last weekend (26/27 June) and raised over £1100 for charity too.

"The numbers exceeded last year's record," confirmed Marion Woolcott, one of the organisers, "and we had visitors from as far away as North America and Australia as well as plenty of local Cumbrian enthusiasts and knitters, felters, spinners and weavers from across the UK, from Kent to the Orkneys. One visitor, who has been to all five festivals, took the time to come to the information desk and tell us that it was the best yet!"

Everyone had their own highlights of Woolfest 2009, from regular features to new attractions. The auction of woollen crafted sheep raised just over £1000 for Farm Africa and there were several fashion shows featuring unusual Viking-themed designs by young people who are working with Grampus Heritage and Training at Bassenthwaite. A crocheted and felted wedding dress made entirely from Lincoln Longwool was much admired and visitors had a chance to meet Richard and Elizabeth Ashford from New Zealand, who make and export looms and spinning wheels for the growing ranks of modern craft enthusiasts.

### **Local talent**

Among the stalls at this year's Woolfest were several new businesses and plenty of local Cumbrian talent.

Jean Wildish of Tinker Tailors at Penruddock near Penrith had a stall at Woolfest for the first time with her wooden buttons and fastenings, knitted and recycled jewellery and a selection of hand-made rustic knitting needles and crochet hooks.

"I had been to Woolfest in the past as a visitor and knew it would be a great place to do business," said Jean. "There was so much interest in what I've been doing that I was a bit worried I was going to sell out before the end of the second day! As well as sales, I met lots of people and have several new business and media contacts to follow up on after the show."

Sharon Reynolds of Stanwix, Carlisle is a familiar face to students locally as she teaches part time in the University of Cumbria. Her new business, Felt Sew Goods, also drew the crowds with her mix of modern designs and traditional approaches. "There is a big interest in felting," she said, "and visitors to Woolfest were interested in how it's done and new ideas as well as buying finished goods."

The University of Cumbria's Arts Faculty has a stand at Woolfest each year and, as ever, tutor Jan Beadle brought along a fantastic range of student work. "Last year we seemed to have a lot of feltmakers and new ideas for using felt," she said, "but this year it was the weaving that really impressed visitors. Jenni Bircher from Carlisle and Sara Hodgson from Penrith both had work on display that created a lot of interest."

### **Opportunity for a new wool business**

Each year, members of the Wool Clip cooperative, who organise Woolfest, award the Carolyn Rawlinson Memorial Stall to commemorate the work of one of the founders of the event who died in 2007.

This year's award went to Daniela Kloppmann (27) of Woodlesford near Leeds who displayed a huge range of her colourful hand-spun yarns and demonstrated various spinning techniques throughout the event.

"Carolyn was a spinner and dyer herself," explained Cecilia Hewett, who nominated Daniela for the free stand. "She saw Woolfest as a tremendous opportunity to show what can be achieved with natural fibres, imagination, talent and skills so the Memorial Stall is a small way of commemorating her enthusiasm and supporting a new designer or textile business with publicity and exposure at Woolfest."

### **Crafty fundraising**

Three charities benefited from Woolfest this year: Farm Africa, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Great Northern Air Ambulance.

Volunteers from the local air ambulance ran a wool crèche throughout the event so that visitors could leave their purchases, including bulky raw fleeces, in a safe place while they continued to look around and shop.

"The Wool Creche idea proved popular last year," explained Pam Hall, one of the Woolfest organisers, "and it was a good opportunity to raise some money for a local cause while providing a useful service."

A national project called p/hop was exhibiting at Woolfest and aiming to raise money for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) through knitting. "p/hop stands for Pennies per Hour of Pleasure," explained Louise Salkeld of MSF. "Knitters can download free patterns that have been donated by designer supporters and then, once their socks or hat or other garments are complete, they make an online donation via our website."

## Sheep from across the world

Finally, the major fundraiser of the event involved 41 lots from across the world in one of the more unusual sheep auctions to take place at Mitchell's Lakeland Livestock Centre this year. Head Auctioneer, Adam Day, auctioned an unusual "flock" of knitted, crocheted, felted and sewn woollen sheep in aid of Farm Africa on Saturday afternoon and visitors generously paid a total of £1120.

Top prices were paid for an Aran ram, a sheep disguised as the Red Baron, complete with flying goggles, and a beaded sheep made in Zimbabwe by a man called Isaac, which proved to be the star of the show.

"Isaac's sheep really summed up the purpose of the auction," said organiser, Mary Bell. "To have a sheep made in Africa up for auction here in Cockermonth and raising money to support farmers back in Africa seemed very fitting."

**Woolfest 2010** is already booked to take place on Friday 25 and Saturday 26 June next year. Details will be available soon at [www.woolfest.co.uk](http://www.woolfest.co.uk).

The event is organised by members of The Wool Clip cooperative which also has a shop at Priest's Mill in Caldbeck. This is open every day from 11am to 4pm with a wide selection of woollen goods, textile craft materials and inspiring kits, all made by local craftswomen.

Notes: The Wool Clip is a Cumbria-based cooperative of sheep farmers, spinners, dyers, knitters, feltmakers, weavers and other wool workers. It was set up in 2001 to add value to local wool and to market members' skills and products. The Wool Clip established Woolfest in June 2005.

Further information is available at [www.woolclip.com](http://www.woolclip.com) or [www.woolfest.co.uk](http://www.woolfest.co.uk).

Further media information is available from Sally Seed at Stoneleigh Communications on 015396 24732.