

OUR PEOPLE

Marion spins balaclava yarn at

Mawson's hut

SPINNING wool outside Sir Douglas Mawson's hut in Antarctica might seem crazy to some but for Melbourne weaver Marion Wheatland, it fulfilled a life-long dream and was a way of giving back to the community. *Stock Journal's* MIRANDA KENNY found out more about her icy adventure.

PRACTISING to spin wool in a minus-18-degree freezer was only the start of Marion Wheatland's Antarctica adventure – she was acclimatising herself to icy conditions before her trip to the continent.

It's been a life-long dream for Marion, who lives in Melbourne, to head to Antarctica. But guilty that she was going away on such an expensive journey, she decided to 'give something back' as well.

With her visit including a trip to Mawson's Hut, Cape Denison, and with the 100th anniversary of Sir Douglas Mawson setting off on his Australasian Antarctic Expedition looming, she thought it would be appropriate to spin some wool on the ice outside the hut and use it to knit a balaclava similar to the one he wore on his ill-fated journey on December 1911.

Marion plans to donate the item to the Mawson's Huts Foundation so they can auction it off at their special centenary anniversary dinner in December, in Hobart, Tasmania. She has spun all the wool required to knit the balaclava but is yet to begin making the headgear as she plans to create several practice items first.

Marion has always been interested in history and Antarctica. Her family emigrated to Australia from Canada when she was a teenager so winter snow and ice were not unfamiliar.

And she certainly got used to icy conditions in the months preceding her trip as she practised spinning wool at Mount Hotham in minus-5 degrees, in a

minus-18-degree freezer set for two hours and finally, in minus-10-degrees at the Chill On Ice Lounge and Ski Lodge in Melbourne.

After testing her craft in such chilly environments, Marion was pleased to find Antarctica relatively warm.

"God blessed me with two days of perfect weather at zero degrees," she said.

"I didn't even have to wear gloves to spin although I had them close by in case I needed them."

The wool took six hours to spin and was completed over two days.

Marion was confident the Majacraft double-treadle Little Gem nicknamed 'Mawson', with polymer drive band, would survive the extreme cold. Just in case, she had an extra band tucked in her clothing.

"The drive band was guaranteed to work up until minus-30 degrees," she said.

"I rang up the manufacturers to check the equipment before I left and they said it should be fine but advised me to take a few spares.

"When I left the machine for 10 minutes to take a break, it did get very brittle but held up to the conditions very well."

Marion was keen to wear her mother's kuletuk, a blue Eskimo parka with arctic fox fur around the hood, but had to get special permission to wear the blue jacket as travellers are usually required to wear bright red jackets on the ice for safety reasons.

Luckily for Marion, Orion Expedition Cruises, the company she travelled with, decided to grant her this wish.

Marion said her Antarctic experience

was one she would never forget.

"It was amazing to go to Antarctica and step inside Mawson's Hut," she said.

"It is all preserved as they left it, with sledging clothes left up on the pole, glass-slide chemicals from the photographers and crates of unopened food.

"The huts themselves are made of baltic pine which has become very brittle as it's buffeted by winds whirling at 200 kilometres an hour.

"When I was there, they had put a replacement roof on one of the huts, which basically went over the top of the original roof."

Marion said the cost to upkeep the huts was about \$600,000 a year, and included the expense of sending a team down to Antarctica to look after the buildings.

"Mawson's Hut represents one of man's greatest challenges," she said.

"Going into the hut and being there was an amazing experience. By doing this trip, I became a part of it for a little while.

"The smells from inside the hut were fabulous, and reminded me of when I was a little girl up in my grandmother's attic. But then there were also smells of smoky blubber and other things that were so foreign."

Marion was in Adelaide recently to see the Mawson Gallery in the South Australian Museum and address the Handweavers and Spinners Guild of South Australia.

"It's been a great trip," she told her audience.

So, was Marion the first person to spin wool at Mawson's Hut in Antarctica?

She said she doubted it as she had spotted a spinning wheel in the corner of the hut!

• Details: www.spinningayarn.com.au

Out and about

with FIONA WARWICK



Chop in the block

IAM often bemused when I trundle past the meat freezers in the supermarkets. Meat is something we are fortunate enough to not worry about buying, as I am sure most farm or station residents are.

Occasionally mum decides we need 'variation' in the diet and reluctantly, we end up with Apricot Chicken or Tuna Mornay (the latter of course being traditionally tinned Tuna, usually added to the menu when the cook is tired of asking for freezer top-up. The rations are generally in within 24 hours of this episode).

On the rare occasion we get to 'dine out' should be when we try these 'variations', but how often do you just end up ordering a beef snitzchel rather than the King Whiting?

Despite these blimps, more often than not, the core component of our dinner plate is red meat straight from the paddock to plate.

The process of how we get it there is something that I am certain breaks every OH&S rule under the sun, and all food hygiene morals.

Our killing block is set picturesquely under a Mallee tree where the bull ants and magpie poo form a perfect outline of the gallows. The process is usually attacked as the sun is setting, somewhere in between the wave of flies and mosquitoes, often completed with the headlights and torches whereby of course the cuts can be made flawlessly.

The carcass then matures, hanging for sometime tenderising, before it is distributed between the plastic boxes – one ready for freezer bagging and the second working dog food pile, which includes the shanks.

Osso Bucco tonight Scooby-Doo? Scrumptious.

Whenever we do some beef, the story gets ever better. No gallows, just the forks on the tractor. Limited knife work, just the chainsaw. Flavouring. Horrified? Don't deny me your set-up isn't something similar?

What I love about it all is that when it hits the kitchen arena, it is all gloves and washed, colour-coordinated cutting boards, keep it cold but thaw it thoroughly.

If only mum knew what we did with it before that!

I am sure this is why I missed out on the bad common flus and colds at boarding school – I was brought up with a super-charged immune system.

Of course, not everyone can have this experience. We as producers as well as a society need a hygienic commercial meat industry that is trustworthy. One with a reputation for producing assured quality every time.

In the process, though, the consumer should not miss out on all the perks of home-grown meat nor fail to interpret correctly what they might be buying.

Earlier in the year, there was discussion about hormones in beef following a substantial campaign based around the idea. Whether the marketed message portrayed to consumers was realistic is your opinion – I'd compare it to the difference in our mutton chops to some packaged lamb chops I'll see in those freezers.

A fair attempt made to get the story but the final ending was, well, just not much chop.

As long as people keep eating red meat, so we can keep doing what we do out here, I'll be happy.

But I'm sure, considering what I have unravelled in your mind by now, the next time you are at the neighbours for tea, you won't be too fussed if Tuna Mornay hits the menu for just one night.

What's On

Your guide to events from around the State

WHAT: 27th Oodnadatta OZ Minerals Bronco Branding and Campdraft

WHEN: July 16

WHERE: Oodnadatta

CONTACT: www.broncobrandingsa.com

WHAT: Wisanger Football Club Centenary Celebrations

WHEN: July 22-24

WHERE: Wisanger, Kangaroo Island

CONTACT: Christine Sampson 0429 385 536 or www.wisanger.org.au

WHAT: Caravan, Camping and Off-road Sale

WHEN: July 28-31

WHERE: Adelaide Showgrounds, Wayville

CONTACT: 08 8260 4488

WHAT: Women in Agriculture & Business State Conference

WHEN: July 29-30

WHERE: Adelaide Sailing Club, West Beach

CONTACT: Adair Dunsford 08 8756 7037

WHAT: Birdsville Races

WHEN: September 2-3

WHERE: Birdsville

CONTACT: 1300 794 257 or www.birdsvillerraces.com

WHAT: A Brush With Art

WHEN: September 10-October 10

WHERE: Throughout Flinders Ranges

CONTACT: 1800 633 060

WHAT: City of Whyalla Art Prize

WHEN: Entries close September 30

WHERE: Whyalla

CONTACT: Kirsty Connor 8644 7309 or kirsty.connor@countryarts.org.au



STOPPING BY: Marion was greeted by a curious penguin outside Sir Douglas Mawson's Hut in Antarctica.

