



MUSK OX WOOL PELATUK—Laura Bergt wears a pelatuk knitted by Nancy Edwards of Mekoryuk on Nunivak Island, as she admires a scarf

knitted by Emily Bodfish of Wainwright on the Arctic Slope.

—Photo by UNIVERSITY RELATIONS, U.A.

Misunderstood Animal—

Musk Ox Wool Rich, Delicate, Extremely Warm

By PAUL WILKINSON

('Oomingmak' — the domesticated musk ox, Part 4)

The program of textile training associated with the development of the domesticated musk ox and the qiviut industry began in December, 1968, when Mrs. Ann Schell of the Musk Ox Project visited Mekoryuk, Nunivak Island.

Mrs. Schell's first training session was preceded by a short, illustrated talk about the purposes of the Project and the proposed knitting method.

Because of the delicacy of qiviut and its extreme warmth, it was felt that an open, lacy style of knitting would be most appropriate, which, incidentally, would help to make a little wool go a long way.

Secondly, the written instructions traditionally used for knitting patterns were to be replaced with a symbolic stitch-notation devised by Mrs. Dorothy Reade of Oregon.

This system has many advantages over other methods, especially that finished garments can be checked easily and simply by comparing them with the diagram of instructions.

After explaining the system of knitting, Mrs. Schell asked each interested knitter to complete a small pattern in sheep's wool, to make certain that she understood the use of the symbols.

After this, each knitter repeated the same pattern in qiviut to acquire the feel of the new fibre. After this, brief training, the women were ready to begin knitting garments for payment.

Because the first class had to be held near Christmas, when many women were busy, the attendance was small, but the number of knitters in Mekoryuk has now grown to some 35.

Similar workshops have been held in Goodnews Bay, Shishmaref, Wainwright, Barrow, Point Hope, and St. Mary's. Further workshops are planned for later this year, and villages which would like to participate are invited to write to the Musk Ox Project at the University of Alaska.

If individuals rather than entire villages are interested, they should also write, and they can be taught by mail if it is impossible for a Project member to

visit the village.

In 1970, the framework of a Musk Ox Producers' Cooperative was legally established in Alaska. Ultimately, the Cooperative will supervise the herds of musk oxen in the villages and will direct the textile industry, but this will require some time. At present, it is acting in collaboration with the Musk Ox Project chiefly as a marketing agent.

The qiviut collected from the animals at College is processed on the East Coast, since Alaska does not have the appropriate facilities. The spun yarn is returned to Fairbanks, from here it is sent out either to villages or to individual knitters in small lots.

Each knitter works at home in her spare time, and she is thus free to do as much knitting as she wishes, depending on the time of year and her other work.

Finished textiles are returned to Fairbanks, from where they are either sold directly to the general public by the Cooperative or are distributed to retail outlets by the Cooperative.

Knitters are paid as soon as finished garments are received from them, provided that there are no mistakes in them (which rarely happens anyway).

Under this system, knitters do not have to wait for their garments to be sold in order to be paid, for the Cooperative assumes this responsibility.

Knitters receive between 65% to 75% of the wholesale price of each completed garment, depending on whether or not they also prepare it for sale by processing and packaging it.

The remainder of the wholesale price goes to the Cooperative to cover the various costs involved. As with all cooperatives the profits will eventually be distributed between the shareholders, namely, the knitters, herders, and all others involved in the musk ox industry.

The Musk Ox Project itself does not receive any profit from the venture, but is supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the University of Alaska, and the Institute of Northern Agricultural Research.

Four principal types of garments are produced at present. The most popular of these is a lacy scarf about 4 ft. long, for which the knitter receives \$25-\$27. Longer stoles in a similar style are also produced, for

which knitters receive \$40.00

Two types of cowl or hood are also produced, the closely fitting 'nachaq', and the looser 'pelatuk'. Knitters are paid \$17.00 and \$24.50 respectively for these items by the Producers' Cooperative.

Most customers prefer the ashy-brown color of natural, undyed qiviut, but garments can be dyed to most shades. Qiviut ski-caps will soon be available, and most types of garment can be made on request.

In all cases, the price paid to the knitter is calculated on the number of stitches involved, so that the price paid directly reflects the amount of work done, and prices for special items are also assessed in this way.

Sales of qiviut textiles have been very encouraging indeed, and they seem to sell equally well to Alaskans and non-Alaskans alike. The sales situation has been helped indirectly by the growth of the conservation movement, for many women no longer wish to wear furs obtained by slaughtering animals.

Nonetheless, these same women often continue to want a luxury garment of equivalent quality and prestige. Qiviut fills this role nicely, for it is rare, exotic, and very high quality, yet it can be obtained without harming the animals concerned.

In the concluding article of this series, I want to look to the future of the domesticated musk ox in Alaska and other parts of the Arctic.

Pot Luck Dinner

A pot luck dinner will be held at the Fairbanks Native Community Center, 102 Lacey Street, Friday, October 1, 1971 at 6:00 p.m.

All natives in the area are invited to attend. If anyone is able to bring something it will be greatly appreciated.



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