



Explore 4

WILD CARD Fiber Retreat Fall 2014 featuring **Shetlands!**

with Deb Robson

in Friday Harbor, San Juan Islands, Washington

Retreat 1 (the original): November 9–14, 2014

arrive November 9; four full retreat days, November 10–13; depart November 14

Retreat 2 (the bonus): November 2–7, 2014

arrive November 2; four full retreat days, November 3–6; depart November 7

Questions? E-mail my wonderful assistant

Jess@Drobson.info



Beginning in 2012, at Cat Bordhi's suggestion, I've been putting together a spring fiber retreat at Lakedale Resort, in the San Juan Islands northwest of Seattle, Washington. In our four full days in this special place, the group of wonderful folks who have gathered have had the opportunity to relax and explore a themed and diverse set of fibers.

*In fall 2014, I'm adding another retreat, in the fall, with a wrinkle: the four days will feature a more closely related group of fibers. For this first year, we'll look at **Shetland** wools, which are the focus of my current research.*

I'm spending a lot of time with Shetlands because they have a wide range of fleece types, a fascinating history, and interesting niches (plural) in today's fiber world and wool market. There are fine-fleece Shetlands, double-coated Shetlands, and several qualities in between. That means they offer a lot of creative possibility, welcome a variety of spinning approaches, and can broaden both our skills and our

I made the drawing above of a Shetland ram of whom I am especially fond. Above right: Me in Shetland, checking out a fleece I bought for the fall 2014 Wild Card retreat. Bottom left: Some of the wonderful folks in the 2012 spring group at Lakedale. I can't wait to share the fibers I've collected with the group that will gather in November!

appreciation of the textile crafts. Shetland wools are FUN and they're INTERESTING.

They're also somewhat controversial. My goal isn't to "settle" any of those controversies but to help fiber folk understand the varieties and successfully locate and work with Shetland fleeces that will bring them delight. With that in mind, I've obtained fleeces from Shetland and have (and am obtaining more) fleeces from North American flocks. I'll select those for the retreat that will teach us the most.

The retreats are low-key but experience- and information-rich events, in which I can go into much greater depth than I can in other teaching environments. I love seeing what fibers can do, and I'm especially fond of learning about the history and science that deepen my understanding of what these materials mean for our craft and for the world around us. We talk about these things while we experiment with tools and techniques. When I'm preparing the materials for each day, I consider what the chosen fibers can best teach us that will also illuminate all the other fibers we work with, whether here or elsewhere. I choose the fibers that I present together with the goal of offering contrasting experiences and providing lots of opportunities for learning. I also want them to work as a group to amplify the experience as a whole. You will have time and encouragement and support to explore their potential (and your own).

At the end of the first retreat in 2012, we looked around the great room at Lakedale and came up with the number of people we thought the space



Above: Samples of colors of Shetland wool at the Shetland Textile Museum, Lerwick, Shetland. Below: Two types of Shetland locks.

would optimally accommodate (with tools and working space, of course). We came up with a number that means we'll have a group of a very comfortable size, but small enough that it's quite possible that there will be a waiting list, even though these workshops are publicized mostly by word-of-mouth.

And now to answer your practical questions. . . .



Where?

The San Juan Islands are about 100 miles north of Seattle. San Juan itself is the biggest of the group, and that's where the retreat takes place. The ferry ride between Anacortes and Friday Harbor lasts about an hour and a half. When I ride the ferry, I find myself centering, coming into a mental space where everything seems possible. I love watching the islands as we pass between them, large and small, and seeing if I can spot whales, seals, or eagles. The salt air refreshes me. When I reach the island, I feel like I'm in a little bit of heaven on earth. It's a nature-lover's paradise, and Lakedale, our home base, has *more* than the comforts of home (mine, anyway!).

What do you need to know to participate?

Basic spinning skills are essential, but you need not be a master spinner, or even more than a beginning one. *If you can reliably spin singles and make a two-ply yarn* (from a center-pull ball, or from a couple of bobbins, or by Andean plying or any other technique you choose), you are ready for this retreat. (Lumps are okay!) Once we get launched on the first day, I am happy to offer individual help to get the less experienced members of the group settled in. Several previous participants have been quite new spinners. They felt out of their depth for a short while, but once we all got fibers in our hands they fit right in.

When I started spinning, I had to use fibers straight from the sheep because today's array of prepared

fibers didn't exist yet. I think the earlier you discover the materials at this level, the better!

In order to get the full benefit of our time together, you'll want to be at least a confident beginner in some method of making fabric out of yarn—knitting, crochet, weaving, or whatever pleases you. This isn't essential, but most people who spin (or want to) come from another fiber craft, and you can learn a lot from making small swatches from your yarns. More advanced fiber artists and artisans will find lots of ways to bring their additional interests into play.

What will you experience?

I think you'll have fun, learn a lot, and relax! We'll respond to the fibers we have in hand, and we'll learn what we need to know in order to play with them in ways that teach us skills that broaden all of our future spinning experiences.

My approach to fibers is eclectic, but I like to go deep in my quest for information and in order to achieve results that please me. While I know a huge number of technical approaches to spinning and making cloth, and I do use them in my teaching, my approach to fiber is more intuitive and experiential than mathematical. In addition to learning a lot about specific fibers, I think you will find that this week nurtures your love of your chosen crafts and that it supports and strengthens your existing ability to experiment, to envision, and to create textiles.

Two Shetland rams: left, Charlie from Joshua Farm (California), and, right, a fine fellow on the island of Unst, Shetland.





What will the days be like?

Everyone will arrive Sunday night and will leave Friday morning. Sunday night dinner is either on your own in Friday Harbor, or the group may organize a potluck to be shared as people gather.

On Monday morning, after breakfast provided by the lodge, we will have four full days together, one for each fiber type. Ah!

L will teach every morning, giving you background on the fiber we're focusing on, providing ideas about processing it and using it, and more. This will be both talking and hands-on time: the fibers of the day will be your companions, as much as I will.



Top left: *Shetlands on the island of Unst, Shetland.* Bottom left: *Shetland flock, and friend, in the Rocky Mountains of Montana.*

Each afternoon, after we've visited over our excellent lunch, you are free to continue your explorations of the morning's fibers (not required, but you might be inspired), to explore the island, or to rest. Cat tells me that sometimes the interisland ferry schedule cooperates and retreat participants may choose to spend an afternoon floating among islands, enjoying spectacular scenery while spinning, knitting, and visiting.

There's nearby hiking, shopping (yarn and bead stores in Friday Harbor, as well as the lavender shop that everyone raves about and I need to visit, too!), and The Whale Museum (www.whalemuseum.org). Or you can check out Krystal Acres Alpaca Farm (www.krystalacres.com), relax in the lodge with your fiber or yarn and some fellow adventurers, or . . . take a nap!

One afternoon, we'll probably ask Island Fibers, from nearby Lopez Island, to set up shop in the lobby for us. There are a number of interesting wools grown locally. If you'd like to check out the website or make a special advance request, go to www.islandfibers.com.

Each evening, after we gather again to enjoy a delicious dinner, we can spin (or knit or crochet or weave) more together, and we can review and I'll answer more questions about what we covered in the morning. We'll discover what sorts of insights the afternoon has offered (about fiber or about other activities), I'll offer lots of one-on-one help, and we'll share stories from the fiber world. Sometimes I have located unusual videos related to some of the animals in the collection. I'll note,



Felicity Ford recording sounds at the Shetland ram sale, Lerwick, October 2013.

though, that while I have hours of video of Shetland sheep and people talking about them and their wool, the quality of what I have is good for research but not the sort we'd want to subject ourselves to for long. I may find better options between now and November. I've always got an eye out for things like that to bring to Explore 4, and I'm talking with Felicity Ford about incorporating some of her work with soundscapes in this retreat.

What equipment will you need?

Spinning wheel or spindle, and whatever simple kit of accessories you like to use.

Any fiber preparation tools you would like to bring will be fine, and I will bring some tools for you to try. I believe in low-tech options (I have a range of dog-grooming tools that travel well), while for processing significant quantities of fiber the specialized equipment makes life a lot easier. The items you use need to fit your style, goals, and budget. We can talk about that, too.

You will also want to bring something with which you can make fabric, to try out the yarns you will be making: knitting needles, crochet hooks, a small portable loom (a Weave-It or Weavette or similar), or whatever you enjoy using— something that's quick to set up and use that will get you right into the middle of the yarn experience.

What is the location like?

Lakedale Resort, located a few miles outside of the town of Friday Harbor, is beautiful outside and in. Set on a lake (naturally), in our off-season



Above: *Shetland fine-fleece lamb in Indiana.* Below left: *Shetland.* Below right: *San Juan Island, Washington.*

time it consists of a main lodge, with a welcoming gathering area and dining room in addition to some lodging rooms, along with several cabins, each of which has its own equipped kitchen (although our meals will be prepared for us). You can step outside and take a hike through the woods and by the water. In the high season, there are camping facilities in addition to the sections we'll be using. Visit www.lakedale.com for an idea of the place. It's even better in real life than it looks on a computer screen!

What will we eat?

Lakedale provides a diverse breakfast buffet, and lunch and dinner will be delightfully prepared from fresh, local ingredients by the super person who takes care of Cat's retreat participants. In my opinion, it's worth the trip for the food. (Okay, so am I really putting all this together again just so I can enjoy more of those memorable meals? Not quite. . . .)



What should you budget?

Retreat: The retreat fee is \$395, not including lodging and meals. The materials fee is \$125, which includes all fibers, printed materials, and shared use of a number of tools that I'll bring along. (I can't transport a drum carder, so if we have one of those it will need to be loaned by a participant who's within driving distance.)

Lodging: We have access to off-season rates at Lakedale. The comfortable lodge rooms, with free wifi (even if it is frequently island-slow), gas fireplaces, Jacuzzi tubs, and balconies or decks overlooking the lake are \$134 per night. Some of the lodge rooms have one bed, and some have two beds; they're all the same rate. Lakedale asks that we fill the lodge in order to use the main room for our meetings. Cabins with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a kitchen are \$199 for two people. There is also one Lake House that is \$299 for up to three people. In the cabins or the Lakehouse, an extra person is \$35/night; capacities vary; also, dogs can be accommodated in

Fleeces from Shetland drying out so they could be shipped back to the U.S.



the cabins and Lakehouse, but not in the lodge. These other buildings are a short walk (two minutes or less, over level ground) from the lodge, which is where we gather for classes and meals.

Food: Breakfast is included in the lodging cost. For our gathered lunches and dinners you will pay our kitchen magician directly; she will also collect information about special needs and accommodate them as much as possible. Those catered lunches and dinners Monday through Thursday will total \$200, plus optional tip (this is also the same pricing as 2012 and 2013—Deb likes working with us as much as we like eating her meals, and that's why the rates are holding so steady!). The food is legendary among Cat's workshop participants (including me!).

Friends and family note: Friends and family capable of entertaining themselves while you're engaged with fiber are welcome to stay with you at Lakedale and to participate in the meal option.

How do we get there?

There are lots of alternatives; see the last page for details. Participants in Cat's workshops often coordinate their travel to share parts of the trip, and that's a possibility here, too.

I hope to see you at the Explore 4 Wild Card Fall Retreat, and to enjoy our time together as we spin, knit, relax, and share a special four days—with GREAT fibers!

—Deb

What next?

If you'd like to come, see the separate *registration form*, which is a Google doc located at <http://bit.ly/1kDBCMJ> (for the bonus retreat; the original retreat is already full).

Special note: I'm allergic to tobacco smoke. If you smoke, you are welcome at the retreat, but I need to know in advance and I apologize now for not being able to sit near you at meals or gatherings. Even residual smoke on clothing can put me in bed—i.e., out of teaching mode! We can talk and spin and relax together, just not side-by-side. Lakedale is smoke-free on all its inside spaces, so you will need to smoke outside and at some distance from the buildings.

Who am I? (in the fiber world)

I've been spinning (and knitting and weaving and crocheting, and so on) since the early 1970s (more than forty years, but include sewing and you'll need to go back to the 1950s). Wow. Already?

From 1988 through early 2000, I edited *Spin-Off* magazine, along with many books for Interweave Press, beginning in 1986 with Rita Buchanan's *A Weaver's Garden* and going up through 2001 and *The Alden Amos Big Book of Handspinning*. Before that, I edited *Shuttle Spindle & Dyeplot* magazine.

More recently, I spent four years spinning every animal-source fiber that co-author Carol Ekarius and I could get our hands on for *The Fleece and Fiber Sourcebook: More than 200 Fibers from Animal to Spun Yarn* (Storey, 2011). Now from the same publisher I've got a portable guide to wools called *The Field Guide to Fleece* (Storey, 2013). In addition I've prepared an instructional DVD set called *Handspinning Rare Wools* (Interweave Press), and developed a free online course for Craftsby.com called "Know Your Wool."

Since 2003 I have been the publisher (and everything else) of Nomad Press, which produces a small number of books on traditional textile crafts, including work by Priscilla Gibson-Roberts (*Knitting in the Old Way; Simple Socks, Plain and Fancy; and Spinning in the Old Way*) and Donna Druchunas (*Arctic Lace; Ethnic Knitting Discovery: The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and The Andes; and Ethnic Knitting Exploration: Lithuania, Iceland, and Ireland*).

Although I enjoy many things in life, researching and experimenting with fibers is on my shortest short list—that and doing what I can to increase the likelihood that the animals and plants that provide those fibers remain a healthy, thriving part of our living planetary community. My current research centers on Shetland sheep and wool: they're complicated and they tell the entire history of sheep-and-humans in microcosm.

Who am I?

(otherwise)

I have a freelance business editing many types of manuscripts, both nonfiction and fiction, and doing some book design. My background includes a lot of experience in scholarly and literary writing and publishing, in addition to the general trade work I've done. As one example of my other editorial work, check out Tom Wolff's *The Power of Collaborative Solutions* (Jossey-Bass).

At home, I'd rather be on my bike than in my car, so I use two wheels for almost all errands. That said, as someone who grew up in the '50s and '60s with a family that spent its vacations on four wheels, I really like my car and enjoy road trips, especially on two-lane highways.

I live in a household that includes other characters, such as a daughter who has a master's degree in issues of gender as they relate to computer gaming, one rescue Border collie, and a rescue Australian shepherd (possibly crossed with Border collie). Sometimes we have a cat or two (the most recent one lived to be 21). None of these fellow residents seems to mind when I play music on acoustic instruments. To help myself stay grounded, I also I sing shape-note and do yoga. And, of course, spin, knit, crochet, and weave as much as possible.

—*Deb Robson*

Blog: independentstitch.typepad.com

Personal website: www.DRobson.info

Nomad's website: www.nomad-press.com

What some friends are doing to help my research:
DreamingofShetland.com



Photo by Kristi Schueler, @fiberfool, also a fine knitting designer whose work has been featured in Spin-Off and Jane Austen Knits.

Traveling to Friday Harbor, San Juan Island

Thanks to Cat Bordhi for all the details!

Washington State Ferries

Current schedule for Anacortes-San Juan ferry: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/ferries/>

A few notes about the ferries: Fares are collected only on the way to the island. Coming back, no money is required. Fares are significantly lower off-season, and the retreat will be in the off-season window. Some ferry runs take longer than others, because they stop at more islands on the way from Anacortes to Friday Harbor. If people want to spend an afternoon on the interisland ferry, for passengers only (no vehicle) that ferry is free!

Island Airporter

A Friday Harbor-based shuttle runs directly between SeaTac (Seattle-Tacoma Airport) and Friday Harbor once daily (except Sundays). If your schedule can match it, you won't need to carry your luggage on the ferry (it will be in the van). For an extra fee, owner John Nash will deliver you right to Lakedale. Current schedules and rates can be found at www.islandairporter.com or by calling (360) 378-7438.

Bellair Charters Airporter Shuttle

This service offers 12 round-trips daily between SeaTac (Seattle-Tacoma Airport) and the Anacortes Ferry Terminal. It brings you to the terminal on the Anacortes side and you walk onto the ferry (plan to carry your luggage) and need to arrange transportation to Lakedale on the other side. The trip is lengthened by additional stops en route. These shuttles operate more frequently than the other services and the base cost is lower. Current schedules and rates are available at www.airporter.com/shuttle. Make sure to allow at least 45 minutes between the scheduled arrival time of the shuttle at Anacortes and the ferry's departure, in case the shuttle runs into traffic.

Rental Cars

SeaTac Airport has many rental car services. If you drive to the Anacortes Ferry Terminal, it is a good idea to arrive at least 1 hour before your scheduled sailing, because ferries sometimes run out of room for vehicles. This isn't common in the off-season, but it does happen. (There is always room for walk-on passengers, but then you have to leave the car on the Anacortes side.) It takes about 2 hours to drive directly from the airport to Anacortes. Cat tells me that if you are using a GPS, you need to type in Anacortes (Ferry Terminal Road), not Friday Harbor, or the GPS will send you on an insane route via Whidbey Island and a second ferry.

Kenmore Air

For those who prefer to fly (and to see beautiful sights!), Kenmore Air offers both land- and sea-plane services. Those traveling by land-plane are shuttled between SeaTac (Seattle-Tacoma Airport) and Boeing Field. Those traveling by sea-plane are shuttled from SeaTac to Lake Union and land in the Friday Harbor Marina. Current schedules as well as reservation information can be found at www.kenmoreair.com. Before making reservations, make sure to coordinate your arrival and departure from SeaTac with Kenmore's schedule, allowing enough time to collect your baggage.