

Knitting

Jeanine Ash a geochemist from California, arrived on board in Kiel with her fellow scientists and almost immediately started knitting. What caught my eye, being an engineer was a role out case containing an impressive portable set of knitting tools, not dissimilar, but more elaborate, to a canvas role set of spanners.



Within days Jeanine had enticed others with wool, needles and coaching into knitting and various projects were underway. A strange new vocabulary was heard in the lounge, knit 2, pearl 1, selvedge, wips etc. Those in the 'know' embraced this language, those on the periphery, like myself, looked bemused, but impressed how Jeanine had whipped these novices into shape, with completed scarves and snoods being generated almost weekly.



Sharing the operations container with some of these 'newby' knitters, Sophie and Carol, and with Jeanine dropping by to problem solve knitting issues, I was asked, well, maybe challenged to start knitting. At the time, the intensity of setting up this project and getting this drill ship functioning was all consuming, with no time to do anything other than working and

sleeping. However, the thought of learning a new skill and finding out what knitting groups really talk about was too much of an opportunity to miss out on. Spurred on by finding Andy Frazer knitting one day (so this is what drillers are taught at school) I took the challenge and was presented with 2 size four bamboo needles and a ball of the finest American cotton. Casting on was all fingers and thumbs with frequent cries of 'Jeanine I've gone wrong' and passing the needles over to have newly invented knots, (sorry stitches) corrected, resulting in a row of 25 stitches, ready for the next step of learning the 'knit' stitch. Thumbling with 2 needles, cotton, tension to the bit connected to the ball of cotton, let alone actually doing a 'knit' stitch, seemed impossible and although there were few outward signs of emotion, inside I did not know how I was going to get through the 1st row without throwing it across the lounge and storming out. Cries from Sophie and Carol that I was getting much better tuition than they had had did not really help, although constant encouragement from Jeanine and complementary comments (after the initial heckling) from Sophie and Carol got me through the 1st row. Yes a row completed, now what? Well you have to turn it around and start all over again. Another challenge now emerged - the tension was so tight that doing the 2nd row was almost impossible, fingers were going into cramp trying to get the cotton back between the needles to complete the stitch. Then all of a sudden another row completed, then a 3rd and 4th. This was looking good and the feeling of, 'I've cracked it' went surging through me, the emotional euphoria was almost too much. This was soon followed by despair as upon closer inspection the rows looked like a mouse had chewed holes in it and for some inexplicable reason 25 stitches had grown to 29 stitches, how? why? This can't be happening! The creation was once again passed back to Jeanine to 'salvage' (a new term in knitting).



Bit by bit this creation grew in length until about row 15, when the number of stitches had grown once again to 36. This was when the lowest point was reached. Jeanine decided I needed to remove a couple of rows to correct the multitude of mistakes. Watching her undo

the rows it soon became apparent that more than 2 rows were being removed. I sat there in silence thinking, 'when is she going to stop!' As further rows disappeared, I was seeing several days of my life being strewn out over the floor. In the end 3 rows remained. I'm not sure if my disappointment was obvious, but I did feel like, 'no I cannot do this anymore' and the next few rows were purgatory trying to get back to where I had previously finished. However in doing so I could see the quality and speed had actually improved and in the end it was worth it. These are hard lessons to learn in the world of knitting.



The concentration required was total and mono tasking, but this was good for switching off from the problems of the day. However achieving the other incentive to find out the 'knitting chat', commonly known as S&B, was non-existent, as I had entered the deep dark world of moving 2 needles in synchronisation, whilst keeping the tension on this mobile ball of cotton correct. There has to be an engineering solution to this, oh yes it's the knitting machine.

A week later I had finished the ball of cotton and looking along this 'Scarf' you can see a pleasing progression from the early days to the last row. Although I have been officially moved onto the 1st rung of the knitting ladder 'Novice', there is still plenty of room for improvement.



Thinking this maybe the end of the Exp 347 knitting challenge, you can imagine my delight when Jeanine came back from a shopping trip during our very brief port call at Nynashamn, Sweden with a pair of needles, (size 4 ½) and 3 new balls of wool. The current challenge is 'Purl' and 'Purl with 'Knit' in a scientific formula $k2, [p4, k4], p4, k1$, then $p2[k4, p4], k4, p1$ that I have yet to decode..... and there is always the knitting chat to catch up on!