

Resource 4: Pip Woolf and *Woollenline* (2009-2015)

In 2009, the Artist Pip Woolf set off on journey to repair a mountain, after discovering the black scar on the high mountain top of Pen Trumau, in the Black Mountains of the Brecon Beacon National Park. The mountain had been burnt in a fierce fire during the hot summer of 1976, and the special plants that originally grew on the black peat soil had never managed to return

It takes 1000 years for a metre of peat to form. This is approximately how much peat that had already been lost across the 70,000 square metre area on Pen Trumau

Where there is no vegetation, the exposed peat is very vulnerable. In dry weather, the peat blows away... and in wet weather, it easily washes away. This constant movement of the top layers of the peat make it hard for plants to settle and grow.

Pip wondered...

- Could white wool from sheep grazing on the mountain return the black scar to green
- Could a lot of people working together and making small efforts, heal the mountain?

The British Wool Marketing Board agreed to give Pip 350 kg of washed wool. Working with volunteers through the winter of 2010, Pip made the wool into felt and, as an experiment added heather seeds to see if they would grow. Pip and the volunteers made enough felt to create a line 300 metres long. In March it was all carried up onto the mountain and pegged in place, linking the small areas of vegetation that had survived the fire.

Later that same year, Pip came up with the idea to make wool sausages - nets stuffed with wool that could be placed in the small streams crossing her first line. The idea was that the sausages would help slow any water that was causing more peat to be washed away (erosion).

Making felt by hand had taken a lot of work, so in the following years, Pip managed to get funding to buy machine-made felt from The Woolly Shepherd a company who specialize in finding a good use for 'waste' (wool) .

Using horses to carry the very large load of wool, Pip and the volunteers climbed up the mountain and pegged the felt and more wool sausages into place.

They followed the first line of felt, using it as a guide for the new lines that were added in 2011 and 2012. However, in 2013, on area with absolutely no vegetation Pip decided to create a spiralling line.

From 2009 to 2015, over a thousand people have helped . They included farmers, walkers, bird watchers and artists. There have been lots of conversations amongst people who graze their animals on the land, conservationists, artists, families, students and horse people. Pip took photographs, wrote a blog, worked with schools and other artists who had been interested in the mountain, created exhibitions and finally made a filmed drawing of some of the many people that had helped create *Woollenline*.

The *Woollenline* today

Pip is no longer adding to the wool on the mountain. Instead she has planted cuttings of mountain plants in places where they are protected by the wool. She will be continuing to visit Pen Trumau at least once a year to see how the scar is changing.

Before she started, the mountain top had been black for 30 years. It is likely to take a long time for it to be healed. But as time goes on, the white lines of wool are disappearing. Plant life, protected by the wool, is now growing back on the once bare ground.

Artists have a long history of responding to landscape. Pip Woolf's work invites us to think about our connection with the land and to ask ourselves what we value.

Further information:

Pip's blog - <http://woollenline.wordpress.com/>

When Pip was at school, she didn't like maths very much. But during the years of the project she had to do so many calculations to help make it possible, that she even started to dream about mathematics....