

Weaving with Llama

Have you ever wanted to weave something with your llama yarns? Of course you have, or you wouldn't be reading this article!

I just finished my very first handspun, hand woven piece, and I'd like to share it with you with the hopes that my story will help inspire you to weave something yourself. I have been spinning llama fleece into yarn for over 12 years, and I am a novice knitter and weaver. This is my 3rd woven project.

Harmony Scarves

I started out with one of my yearling llama fleeces. It had a very long staple length, between 6-8 inches, and it had a multitude of colors in various fawns, silver, taupe and white. I had shown this fleece several times in the double-coat class of numerous fleece shows, and it had always been placed in the double coat division. It won a Grand and Reserve Grand in 2008.

In processing it, I realized that it was almost more of a single coat fleece with just the slightest wave to the fiber. There was a small amount of guard hair in some of the locks, but it was extremely consistent in diameter. I realized that this fleece should be strong enough to make a decent warp on a loom, especially with the long staple length it had.



Since the fleece was so colorful, I decided to separate all of the different shades of color into groups. Combining like colors, I then put them through a wonderful Pat Green drum carder with a fine cloth for exotics. I laid them in gently and lengthwise, being careful not to tear the fibers. The resulting batts of fiber were 8" wide, and they were beautiful. I couldn't wait to spin them!

Like a woman with a mission, I sat down and spun them on my Louet S76 double treadle spinning wheel. With such a long staple length, the fiber batts were very easy to spin. Over the course of 12 days, I spun, plied and skeined the yarns, then washed and set the twist immediately as each color was finished. I spun the roving into a 2-ply yarn since I was planning on weaving with it and did not want any breakage issues with the warp.



The finished yarns were beautiful, and I hung them proudly on the back beam of my loom once they dried. I had 8 shades overall in 3 different colors. You can get an idea of the color ratio from the picture. This was going to be a colorful project!

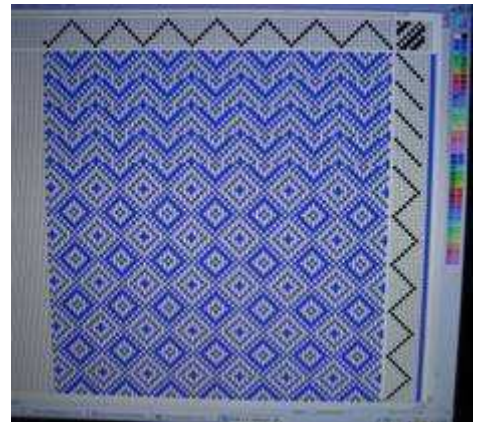


Here I had to make a decision - what was I going to make with this? I had about 850 yards total, so I broke out my warp and weft calculation sheet. I didn't think I had enough for a shawl, but I had plenty for a scarf. Adjust the warp length, and I had just enough for two scarves! I planned on 60" long x 9" wide finished, which translated into 69" long x 10" wide on the loom with shrinkage and take-up.



Now I had 8 colors to work with and another decision to make: What colors would I use where? This is as far as I usually get with a fleece since I just cannot get past the first several decisions. There are so many variables with weaving - you must decide on a yarn, colors, patterns, sizes, add for shrinkage, etc, and it gets mind-boggling and overwhelming. I discussed this with a friend of mine who is a wonderful weaver, and she suggested that I try using a weaving software program.

The program she suggested is called Fiberworks PCW. I downloaded the free demo of their Bronze version from their website, which allowed me to play with patterns and colors but not to save or print (without purchasing the program). The accompanying Bronze manual was very helpful, and I was inputting threading and treadling sequences from one of my weaving pattern books in no time at all.



After playing around with several different tie-ups, I found a few that I thought would be very pretty on a scarf (above right). It's a very simple threading and treadling sequence, and it looked like a scarf to me! I decided to use all 8 colors in the warp in order to really highlight the sheer quantity of color variations throughout the fabric. I used white twice in the sequence, giving me a total of 9 warp stripes on a 9" wide scarf. I rearranged the yarns on the back beam until I was satisfied with the color sequence.

Using the software to figure out how many threads of each color I needed for my warp made the process much simpler for me. At the top of the software screen, there are inches marked out, and these set automatically based on the number of ends per inch (e.p.i.) of your yarn. I had counted 10 ends per inch for my yarn on a wooden ruler.

Since my woven width was going to be 10" (9" + shrinkage and take-up), I needed 100 ends total (10" x 10 e.p.i.). Then I was able to mess around with the color sequence in the warp. I wasn't able to use the exact colors of my yarn since I was only using the demo, but you can custom make colors to an extent with this program. I wrote down how many ends of each color I needed, and got out my warping board.

Tying every 10 threads, I counted out each color and was able to fit the whole warp on the board at once. This was my first real glimpse of what the scarves were going to look like.

Taking my warp to the loom, I warped it using the back to front method since I was familiar with this method. After some frustrations with a loose warp, I ended up utilizing my husband's help to re-tighten my warp on the loom, so I technically did a back to front variation. Then the warp was on the loom, and my tension was consistent! (The 3rd time *was* the charm.) I threaded my metal heddles in the simple threading pattern I'd chosen, making sure to tie my ends into simple knots in groups of 10. Then I put my 10 dent reed into my beater bar and threaded the reed, one end per slot.



After taking out my shuttles, I grabbed my bobbin winder and loaded up some bobbins with yarn. I had enough bobbins for each color, which is convenient when you are changing colors in the warp frequently. I figured how much yarn I had for the weft based on the yarn totals minus what I knew I had used on the warp. On the first scarf, I decided to alternate 3" bands of two colors and white as the weft pattern.

I tied up my harnesses according to the tie-up chart for the pattern I'd made, and it was time to start weaving! I have a 36" Harrisville Designs floor loom. It is a jack loom with 8 harnesses and 10 treadles.

I utilized several rows of a cotton yarn to start with, changing sheds several times before beating, in order to quickly even out the warp coming out of the bunches. That was a tip from my friend, and it worked very well to save on wasted yarn.

Another tip she gave me was to change sheds with the beater bar (reed) forward. Since this fleece was a straight fiber without crimp, the warp yarn was sticking to its neighbors, making it very difficult to pack the weft in easily. By opening up each shed and then moving the beater bar back, this cleared the fibers from sticking together. This is a wonderful tip!



Changing bobbins on the shuttle every three inches or so, the weaving went very quickly. I was forwarding my warp in no time at all, keeping track of the colors I'd used, in what sequence, and how many inches I'd woven.

On the second scarf, I decided to do a slightly different color sequence. I calculated how much yarn I had left of each color and laid out a sequence that I thought would look nice. I had three shades of fawn, and I wanted to break them up with the silver, the taupes and the white that I had. I also changed my tie-up sequence for scarf #2, just for kicks, to create another nice scarf pattern. These patterns allowed for a nice diamond pattern when treadled one way, and a nice twill when treadled another. (See the differences in the patterns in the photos below?)



Harmony Scarf #2

After taking the pieces off of the loom, I tied simple knots for the fringe, then cut it to my desired length. I hand washed both pieces. When they were dry, I re-measured the lengths and found that I had very little shrinkage with this llama yarn. My woven 69" scarf ended up 67" finished, instead of the 60" I had figured. I learned that llama does not have the same shrinkage as other yarns such as cotton.

In the end, I have two beautiful, 100% llama, handspun, hand woven scarves to wear and to show people "what I can do with a llama". They are both one-of-a-kind.

If you are thinking that you, too, would like to weave something with the beautiful fleece your llamas produce for you, I will give you one piece of advice: You can do this!

Submitted by Pamela Tait
ILR-SD Fleece Committee



Harmony Scarf #1