

Much of our work is routine. Some of the tasks we do every day require some thought, of course, but the things we do day after day, week after week, winter after winter, become so ingrained in us that we could nearly do them in our sleep. That is why it seems like a “project” of some kind is both a treat and a way of maintaining focus in a different way. For Runo, a winter project may involve something as simple as fashioning hangers for the water pipe in the barn or as involved as building new sheep feeders or as necessary as cleaning and oiling the Fjord horses’ harness.

For me, it often means something new on the loom. This year is no exception. I thought about what I might do while I was working on another weaving project last winter. It works that way. As soon as I have the warp on the loom and am ready to weave, I can begin thinking about what I might like to do next.

There is no hurry. I have no deadline, no expected “end date.” But, I do try to do something that is a little bit of a challenge.

After Christmas this winter, I sat down with a book of weaving patterns and tried to decide what to weave. That is not an easy task in itself, for there are innumerable patterns and lots of useful and beautiful textiles that can be made from all kinds of fibers. But, I have developed a special interest in linen or cotton/linen blends, and this year, I decided on a pattern called “Quaker Ladies.” I ordered white cotton/linen thread for warp and a color called “slate,” a grayed blue, for the pattern weft.

I had even used this pattern before, but I had used heavier cotton for both warp and weft, making it much less involved.

When I wind warp on the small floor loom here in the cabin, I first must decide how closely I want my warp threads to be. This time, I chose to make cloth that has 24 warp threads to each inch. The loom is the “sectional” type, and I wind a two inch section at a time. So, for each section, I have 48 threads.

Since fine warp threads are not inexpensive—I am using a thread that is 60 per cent organic cotton and 40 per cent linen—I buy large spools and wind the amounts I need for warp on smaller bobbins. They are lined up on a spool rack—48 bobbins—and I wind each section of the loom from them. The table runners I am making this winter are fourteen inches wide, so I need to wind seven sections of the loom. This means a total of 560 threads in the warp of my runners.

Winding the threads on the warp beam of the loom is the easy part. Then comes the process that requires care, precision, and constant self-checking. I have what is called a four-harness loom. This means that there are four frames that are hung with many thin metal strips (heddles) with “eyes.” A warp thread goes through each of these eyes.

This is where the pattern comes in. One must push each warp thread through the proper eye called for in the pattern one chooses. Since each treadle, or pedal, on the loom controls certain frames, many kinds of patterns can be made by varying the way the heddles are threaded. But, if even one thread is misplaced, the pattern suffers. The proper threading is essential if

one is to be satisfied with a weaving project. Threads that have gone through the wrong eyes or in the wrong order ruin a piece of fabric.

So, threading must be perfect. I tape a piece of paper with the threading pattern on the loom and follow it carefully. After each section, I check the threads again. I found a mistake yesterday and had to redo one section—48 threads.

But, even having the threading perfect will not be enough to make the textile look well made. If there is a discernible pattern, that pattern must also be “balanced.” So, I do what is called a “drawdown,” basically a picture of the pattern on graph paper. Then, I can see where the center of the pattern really is, and start my warping from the middle of the loom, going out toward both sides. Then, my pattern will be the same on both edges and will be centered.

After the heddles are threaded, the threads must be slid through the openings in the reed. These are called “dents,” and the reed I used has twelve dents to each inch, so I put two threads through each dent—always careful to keep the same order as through the heddles.

Finally, today, I tied up the warp, wove some heavy threads on the end to stabilize my weave, and started the pattern. I was happy to find that I had been careful enough, that the pattern is balanced and that it has no threading mistakes. I wove just one complete pattern. That involves a certain order of “treadling,” so that the proper frames are drawn up to provide an opening for the weft threads. In order to make one complete pattern of Quaker Ladies, I threw my shuttles back and forth 48 times, using different combinations of pedals that made up the “treadling pattern.” That made an inch and a quarter of fabric.

It is not just the pattern that is centered when one weaves such a piece. The weaver’s mind is also centered, focused and concentrated on the task at hand. While I am weaving, I don’t think about anything else. If I find my mind wandering, I also soon discover that I have made an error and need to “unweave” and figure out what I have done wrong. A little math, a little logic, some determination, and a desire to make something of value and beauty are all necessary when one embarks on a weaving project. And now that I have begun a new piece of work, I can start to think about ideas for the next.