



# 18th Century Scots Bonnet



This hat is currently called a "tam", but in the 18th century was known as a "Scots Bonnet" (as in Sir Walter Scots's song "All the Blue Bonnets are Over the Border"). It was such a common garment that it became a symbol of Scots, particularly Scottish Highlanders.

This Scots Bonnet, or Tam, pattern is based on the one on p. 4 and 6 of the Shire Booklet *Scottish Knitting* by Helen Bennett, which dates to about 1718. I've omitted the red yarn knots on the brim, since they aren't seen on other examples.

## **Needles:**

5 double-pointed needles, Size 7, 12" long (see instructions below on making your own)  
or 2 sets 8" size 7 dpns  
or 1 set size 7 dpns plus 1 16" circular needle.

Note: for 12" dpns, buy 3/16" dowels, which can usually be found at the crafts store sold in packages already cut 12" long. Sharpen the ends, sand with 220 grit sandpaper, and coat them with a finish – polyurethane or Danish rubbing oil work nicely.

**Yarn:**

2 skeins of

Reynolds Lopi, color 0098, a medium blue

or

Lamb's Pride Worsted (from Brown Sheep Company), Color M-51 Winter Blue (that's the color used in these photos -- a lightish grey-blue)

or

Lamb's Pride Worsted (from Brown Sheep Company), Color M-150 Bulldog Blue

You'll need two skeins each, though you might be able to get away with one, depending on your knitting.

**Swatch:**

Regardless of what kind of yarn you wind up using, knit yourself a swatch, count the stitches and rows, measure it, then throw it in the wash (hot/cold cycle to shock and felt the wool) a couple of times until you get the desired texture. You can also felt it by hand for better control over the rate of shrinkage. If you are using a front-loading washer, you will probably get more shrinkage on the second washing.

Use this swatch to calculate the rate of shrinkage you can expect using the same washing methods. For instance, if your swatch shrinks to 75% of its former size, divide your desired finished dimensions by .75 to get the number of inches you should knit to.

Bonnet outer brim diameter: 12" across

\_\_\_ inches / \_\_\_ % shrinkage (along length of swatch) = \_\_\_ finished diameter

Bonnet headband: approx. 22" circumference

\_\_\_ inches / \_\_\_ % shrinkage (across width of swatch) = \_\_\_ finished circumference

**Knitting:**

Row 1: Cast on 4 stitches.



Row 2: Purl.



Row 3: Knit; after each stitch, pick up a stitch by knitting into the back of the previous row's stitches. You will wind up with 8 stitches.



Distribute these 8 stitches evenly on 4 needles:



Row 4:

Knit the stitches on each needle, picking up a stitch at the end of each needle by knitting into the back of the previous row of the last stitch.



Row 5 onward:

Insert a marker at the end of the fourth needle and randomly increase as you go along, one stitch per needle per round. Increase at the same point on each needle, to avoid inadvertently develop a pattern of increases.



Continue increasing until you reach the measurement indicated by your swatch for a finished diameter of 12 inches.



When top of hat is big enough, start decreasing every row by randomly decreasing one stitch per needle per round, until the circumference of the opening is the measurement you need to fit the wearer's head, allowing for shrinkage.

### **Head band:**

Knit enough rounds, allowing for shrinkage, to have about 2 inches of plain knitting.

This picture shows the bonnet after the hatband has been knitted.



Same thing, but laid out flat.



### **Bind off:**

You can use a two-needle bindoff, but I find that a crochet hook is easier. Fold the band to itself and whip-stitch in place, using self yarn and a yarn needle.



The finished bonnet, before washing:



Wash in hot water followed by a cold rinse, using the same method used to wash your initial swatch. Air dry. This will felt the beret and shrink it to size.

### **Additional notes (3/10/05):**

When I wrote this pattern, I was relying in part on Rutt's [History of Hand Knitting](#) (p. 60), which says that Tudor caps, from which the Scots bonnet descends, could be either knitted from the center outward (as the bonnet is) or from the brim inward. I have recently come across Audrey Henshall's notes on several Scots bonnets in which she states that the bonnets were knitted from the brim inward. I view either method as a valid means of getting the correct shape. Other observations: the outside of some of the bonnets Henshall describes seem to have been shaved after felting, making the outer surface smoother, while the inside is left rough.

#### Also see:

Bennet, Helen. "Scottish Knitting." Shire Publications, Ltd., Album 164, 1986.

Henshall, Audrey S. "Early Textiles Found in Scotland: Part 1 -- Locally Made." In National Museum of Antiquities Publications. Early Textiles Found in Scotland. Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Vols. LXXXVI and LXXXVIII, Sessions 1951-56.

### **Support:**

If you believe you have found an error in this pattern or have problems understanding it, please email the author at [mara@rileyhome.net](mailto:mara@rileyhome.net).

Changes or updates to patterns will be posted at [www.marariley.net/errata.htm](http://www.marariley.net/errata.htm). If you would like a version of the updated pattern, email me at [mara.riley@yahoo.com](mailto:mara.riley@yahoo.com).