

Carnew-knitters' giant wool map earns Guinness record

Incredible creation has gained international attention and is to be showcased at Dublin's 'Gifted'

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What began as a creative challenge among a group of knitters at Carnew Community Care has officially put Wicklow on the world stage, after the team's enormous wool map of Ireland was confirmed by Guinness World Records as the largest knitted diorama ever created. The achievement has drawn recognition from home and abroad — including a visit from Tánaiste Simon Harris and delegations from Japan and Canada.

Measuring nearly 16 square metres and capturing landmarks, mountains and coastlines from every province in intricate wool detail, the colossal map was created entirely by members of Carnew's Creative Crafters group.

Taking years of patient work, thread by thread, to make the ambitious concept a reality, the close-knit team behind the project met weekly at the day centre, where the idea first took hold in 2019.

When they began work on the map, the ladies had no intention of chasing records, describing the project as simply a labour of love that kept growing and growing.

"We didn't set out to break a record at all — it was just the challenge of doing it," group member Liz Butler said.

"When we got the national and international media attention after we officially unveiled the map in July 2024, and it went kind of viral, Guinness obviously picked up on it.

"They reached out to us as a group and said that they'd definitely be interested in featuring it if we could prove it was a record."

The request from Guinness set off another round of work for the ladies to prove the merits of their claim, taking measurements, arranging witnesses and documenting the process.

"We had to make the claim, which gave the background and the dimensions of the map, categorised under 'largest knitted

diorama," Liz said.

"We also had to prove what we were claiming, for which we needed two independent witnesses, someone with a qualification to calculate it accurately, which my husband, who is an engineer, did, and we had to videotape it.

"We sent all that in, and within 24 hours, we had an email back saying congratulations, you're the new official holders of a world record. We have the official certificate and have it framed in the centre."

When the confirmation arrived, the group's sense of pride was immediate — and well justified.

"Once we started the verification process, I'd say we were all quite confident that it could be a record, because we were thinking, there can't be anything out there bigger than this," she said. "And when they wrote back to us, they said that the previous record held was six square metres, and ours is just shy of 16 — so we blasted it!"

News of the achievement has continued to spread. The map, which had already attracted thousands of social-media views when it first went viral last year, has since drawn further attention for its sheer scale and detail, with visitors travelling from around the country to see it on display at the Carnew centre, where it remains open to the public each weekday from 10am to 4pm.

The group's ongoing search for a permanent home for the map recently had a welcome boost, with plans now in place to showcase it at the 'Gifted' fair in the RDS in December.

"Design & Crafts Council Ireland is taking it on board for us, and they're going to come up on December 1 to get the map, and they're going to display it in the 'Gifted' craft and design fair, starting December 3," Liz said. "They're going to be promoting it first and trying to find a permanent home as well. "It was hard work, and it



Visitors from the Wa-wa-wa-no-kai community care initiative and Chiba University in Japan with Coláiste Bhríde students and parents at Carnew Community Care. Photo: Eamon Doran



Tánaiste Simon Harris visits the record breaking wool map of Ireland at Carnew Community Care. Photo: Sabrina Ffrench



Tánaiste Simon Harris joining in the exercise at Carnew Community Care. Photo: Sabrina Ffrench

wasn't easy. It's nice to have that validated."

Validation of the group's work and that of Carnew Community Care extends far beyond Guinness' recognition, with the Tánaiste among a series of governmental visitors to the Carnew centre in recent weeks.

Attending the official opening of the centre's newly refurbished kitchen and taking time to view the record-holding map, the Tánaiste met long-serving members of the Carnew Community Care team, residents and volunteers, and saw first-hand the range of activities supported at the facility — from Meals on Wheels and exercise classes to the popular Creative Crafters sessions that produced the map.

The Tánaiste toured the centre's upgraded kitchen, which received funding from the HSE National Lottery Grants and the Meals on Wheels Community Refurbishment Grant 2024, and joined residents for tea and refreshments. Demonstrations from the exercise and pole-walking groups, led by physiotherapists Maire Doran and Vanda Dowse,

showcased the day centre's focus on wellbeing and inclusion.

The milestone occasion was an important moment for everyone involved.

"The event highlighted CCC's commitment to promoting active ageing in place, fostering community spirit, and driving innovation in care and support for older adults," said entre manager Anne Kavanagh. "The Tánaiste's visit celebrated both the achievements of the centre and its ongoing mission to improve the lives of all service users and residents."

For Liz Butler and her fellow crafters, the Tánaiste's visit was another sign that their creation (and the centre) had truly reached beyond what they imagined when the project began.

"There were probably eight to ten of us there for his visit, and it was a great acknowledgement for the centre," she said. "It was great to have the Tánaiste see the map, and we all got a bit of a buzz out of it."

International guests have also shared in that buzz.

In late October, the centre host-

ed a delegation of Japanese academics and community-care specialists as part of an Ireland-Japan knowledge exchange on intergenerational and creative approaches to ageing in place.

The visitors, representing the Wa-wa-wa-no-kai community initiative and Chiba University, travelled to Carnew following a seminar at University College Dublin alongside researchers from UCD, Maynooth and Trinity. Their day in Carnew included tours, home visits, nurse-led knowledge exchange and participation in Maire Doran's exercise class.

The Japanese guests also joined the Creative Crafters and sewing groups for a hands-on social session, where the Irish hosts shared stories of the map's creation and the visitors demonstrated origami techniques, presenting paper cranes as a gesture of friendship.

Part of a growing dialogue between Irish and Japanese community-care groups, recognising the shared challenges of supporting older populations in rural areas, the visit concluded with an Irish-music seisiún by students from Coláiste Bhríde —

an exchange described as the beginning of a new partnership in shared learning.

Carnew Community Care honorary secretary Pat Brennan said: "We were delighted to be the hosts of the event — the cultural and knowledge exchange was an invaluable shared learning experience for all involved."

That spirit of connection was apparent at a visit from Canadian Ambassador Denis King, who toured the centre recently alongside TD Malcolm Byrne, spending time with residents and volunteers before viewing the awe-inspiring map.

Deeply impressed by its scale and craftsmanship, Mr King said it "had to be seen to be fully appreciated."

He congratulated Mary Blake and the Creative Crafters on their achievement and remarked that places like Carnew Community Care show how creativity and inclusion builds stronger communities — a sentiment shared by all who have seen what the talented group of knitters has achieved, one stitch, one thread, and one county at a time.