Westcountry Potters Association - Social Firing Day
Decorating your pots at social firing day

Steps marked * must be done by one of the demonstrators/kiln operators

1. Barrel firing.
Pots for barrel firing need to be "decorated" first as the firing takes all day to complete. Start with a biscuit fired pot which has been burnished or coated with terra sigillata [TS]. Tim Gee will show you how to decorate the surface of your pot using a wide variety of combustible and mineral materials before putting all the pots into the barrel with wood as fuel and setting it alight.

2. Horse hair [&/or feather] decoration. [Strictly not raku but smoked]
This is the easiest & you can get going quickly.
a. Start with a well burnished or TS treated biscuit fired pot.
b. * Heat the pot in the kiln to about 900 degrees [actual temp not critical].
c. * Take pot from kiln with tongs & place on a solid, non-flammable surface.
d. Try also with small feathers or dry plant material, raffia etc.
If you can, bring gardening gloves, long horse hair, feathers etc.
e. Hold horse hair at ends using gloves & hold it against your pot surface. This will give a black pattern. Repeat using your imagination to get the effect you want.

3. Glazed raku.
a. Start with a biscuit fired pot. Burnishing not needed. Apply resist if you wish [see 4. Below]
b. Apply glaze or glazes to the surface of your pot. See glaze list attached which gives you the glazes we will have available and the number of coats recommended. Use your imagination to create patterns if you wish.
c. Dry pot in studio kiln for approx. half an hour.
d. CHECK IT HAS A CLEAN BOTTOM [IE NO GLAZE ON IT]
e. Bring to appropriate table for firing.
f. * After firing to approx. 980 and initial cooling to about 850 put it in sawdust.
g. * Remove from sawdust after approx. ½ hour, cool with water if wished
h. When cool, clean with water using scouring pad & admire.

4. Naked raku
There are more steps to this so start this one first if you are doing it.
a. Start with a well burnished or TS treated biscuit fired pot.
b. Apply resist if you wish [see 5 below].
c. Apply a liberal coating of resist slip [number 8 in the recipes] using a brush . This stops the glaze from adhering to the pot so make sure you cover the whole surface.
d. Dry in kiln for about ½ hour.
e. Apply a liberal coat of Susan Luker Glaze [number 7 on the glaze list] with a brush.
f. Dry in kiln for approx. ½ hour.
g. CHECK IT HAS A CLEAN BOTTOM [IE NO GLAZE OR SLIP ON IT]
h. Bring to appropriate table for firing.
i. *After firing to approx. 900 the pot is lifted out of the kiln and allowed to cool in the air until glaze can be heard starting to crackle. It is then put in sawdust.
j. *Remove from sawdust after approx. ½ hour.
k. Spray or splash with water. The glaze should peel off like eggshell.
l. When cool enough to handle pick the remaining glaze off. CARE – SHARP CUTTING EDGES.
m. Scrub with scouring pad & admire.
n. When dry [probably at home] polish using a clear beeswax based furniture polish & admire still further.

5. Resist

Any areas of pot which do not have glaze on will end up smoked black. If you want controlled black lines or other marks on your pot there are a number of ways of doing this:

Before putting on glaze in 2 or slip & glaze in 3:

a. Make the marks you want using wax resist or latex resist or
b. Mask the areas you want using tape. [I will demonstrate this on the day]

After putting glaze or slip plus glaze on your pot, scratch through the glaze or slip plus glaze with a sharp instrument. Cocktail sticks work well for this. CARE – AVOID BREATHING GLAZE DUST PRODUCED AND DO THIS OVER WATER TO REDUCE DUST.

6. Copper flashing [reduction]

Glazes containing copper [numbers 4, 5 & 6 on the glaze list] can produce attractive copper flashing if they are reduced in the sawdust. This means that the burning sawdust takes away oxygen and "reduces" the copper compounds in the glazes to pure copper. In order for this to happen the pot needs to be put into the sawdust as soon as possible after reaching 980 and quickly covered with a small airtight can.