

DSWA Dorset News

February 2020

A very big thank you to Sally who has produced a regular newsletter for ten years and has now passed the baton to me. Sally intends to step down as branch secretary at the next AGM and such is her volume of work that Phyllis and I as new committee members will be sharing it. The newsletter will also be posted on our website and therefore available to other branch members, potential course trainees, and anyone in the world interested in dry stone walling!

Lunky dory!



Mary discovered a practical use for the lunky (or 'sheep creep' as it's known in Derbyshire), which was built by Sally at Goulds Hill. There are no sheep on this section of the Ridgeway but the lunky now serves as an escape route for wallers avoiding the barbed wire fencing on the field side of the wall. Merrie looked on bemused as Mary, wearing her trademark colourful hat, wriggled through. She was still smiling despite ending up covered in mud.

Tyneham, 11-12 January

This was our first session of the year and our immediate task was to sort twelve of the eighteen tons of stone purchased by the MOD to build a picnic table and benches, as well as a curved wall just inside the farmyard gate. Our excitement at these new long-term projects was tempered somewhat by learning that Lynda Price has resigned from her curatorial role after twenty-five years at



this wonderful historic site. She cited an inability to influence decisions about the future maintenance of the buildings, many of which are now fenced off with signs saying: ‘Danger’, ‘Do Not Enter’, and ‘These Buildings are Dangerous’. It remains to be seen whether this will affect us and how the many visitors to Tyneham will respond.



Over the weekend, eighteen wallers made a start on the curved wall. We welcomed a new member, Peter, who had been on one of our courses, and a visitor, Robert (‘Tush’), from Hay on Wye.



Dave came up with an ingenious method of using stone to insert the words ‘Tyneham Farm’ into the wall, and he and Tush spent hours trimming stone to create the letters which will be stabilized into the wall using concealed lime mortar. Tush and I got chatting to a retired waller who happened to be visiting and who sold us two new Pennine hammers at a knock down price (pardon the pun).



By the end of the weekend we had laid the foundations of the wall and a couple of courses. Sunday proved to be a beautiful day which greatly lifted our spirits. It was left to Merrie to sort the last of the stone on Sunday afternoon as the sun was setting. By that time even she didn’t have the energy to reach into the bags for stones but, instead, climbed in and threw them out.

Goulds Hill, 25 January

At the beginning of December Sally and Phyllis, in extremely muddy conditions, laid the foundations of the next section of wall.



Eight wallers came out on this dull but dry day in January. We welcomed a new member, Giacomo, who comes from Italy but is currently living in Glastonbury. Giacomo did one of our courses last year and then passed his initial exam in Cumbria in October. By coffee time we had made a good start (left photo) and by the end of the day had almost come up to coping level. It was decided to use the roughest stone and boulders in this section of wall in order to leave the best stone for the course here on 25 and 26 April.

Although this was supposed to be a two-day members' practice, the weather forecast for Sunday 26 January was so dismal that it was decided to cancel. However, Sally and Mary braved gales and rain to complete half a day's work on 31 January, bringing us nearer to coping this whole section of wall.

Bere and Skittles, 1 February

A large group of wallers and their partners met at The Royal Oak pub in Bere Regis for a good lunch, followed by a joyful couple of hours playing skittles. It was a rare sunny day, typical when we're inside instead of braving the foul weather that we've been used to over the past four months. At Phyllis's suggestion we played 'killer', a fast game in which everyone takes a turn but if you fail to hit at least one skittle you lose a 'life'. Three lost lives and you're out. It was quite a noisy affair but we didn't think anyone in the bar upstairs would notice as they were all watching Wales play Ireland in the first game of the Six Nations Rugby!



Pete sends a bouncer down the fast lane to demolish the five remaining skittles (left) while Dave keeps a steady hand as he thunders down the alley with steely resolve.



Unfortunately, our proposed walling weekend at Tyneham on 15th and 16th February had to be cancelled due to the ferocity of Storm Dennis (‘the Menace’) which swept in from the North Atlantic bringing yet another spell of very wet and windy weather. This was greatly depressing because we all enjoy being at Tyneham and were keen to continue building the farm wall. Although we have been fortunate in avoiding the devastating floods experienced in other parts of the country this winter, let’s hope that Dennis proves to be the final major storm.

Dry stone walls in Lanzarote

Wherever I travel, in the UK or abroad, I take photos of walls and also ask my friends to send me their pictures. If you do the same and want to share your images of dry stone walling from home and abroad, please send them to me with some background information and I will include them in future newsletters. My friends, Mike and Jill, who are regular visitors to Lanzarote, sent me these photographs.



Dry stone walls on Lanzarote are made from the island’s natural lava rock quarried from a lava field. The splitting of the rock is done by hand using a diamond-tipped blade in an angle grinder to cut small grooves in the stone in which are placed steel wedges. These wedges are hit with a heavy club hammer and the rock

is split. The process is repeated until the desired size of rock is reached.

These semi-circular walls are known as ‘zocos’. Within each zoco grows a single grape vine, sheltered from the wind. The variety is usually the Malvasia Grape which makes a dry or sweet white wine. I’m told that there are many places to taste these excellent wines in Lanzarote.

In 2018, some of the historic dry stone walls of Lanzarote were given protected status by UNESCO.



Dates for forthcoming members’ practices will be: 29 February / 1 March (Tyneham); 21 / 22 March (venue tbc); 4 / 5 April (venue tbc); 17 / 18 April (venue tbc); 25 / 26 April (Goulds Hill).

The next course (and members’ practice) will be 25 / 26 April at Goulds Hill.

It may not be too late to join Sally, Phyllis, Wendy and Carole in North Yorkshire for the Reeth Wallathon 2, which will take place on Saturday 23rd and Sunday 24th May 2020 with the aim of rebuilding 250 metres of dry stone wall destroyed in the August 2019 floods. This weekend in May is also a bank holiday so accommodation is becoming scarce but if you would like to take part let us know and we may be able to help.

Carole Reeves