

DSWA Dorset News

August 2021



‘August brings the sheaves of corn, then the Harvest home is borne.’ A photo taken on a recent walk illustrates the loveliness of this time of year. There are some advantages of a cool summer – the landscape and our gardens still seem fresh and colourful. This month’s walling calendar has been extremely busy and varied, and the weather very mixed. Sadly, however, we have had to cancel the certification day due to take place on 11 September because only two wallers had signed up for the exams. For these to go

ahead, the branch would have been obliged to pay the certification fees of a further four examinees (the minimum number being six), and at a cost of nearly £600, it was felt that this wasn’t feasible.

More on building a Bield

You’ll remember that July’s newsletter featured photos of a stone fox trap in the Lake District National Park. After I’d finished the newsletter I came across an interesting article by Sean Adcock, a well-known Master Craftsman working in Wales. Simply entitled ‘Stone Fox Traps’, it’s well worth a read (<http://www.dry-stone.co.uk/Pages/Books/Articles/Article%20pdfs/General/StoneFoxTraps.pdf>)

Langton Herring, 31 July - 1 August



Four weeks absence from Langton Herring and we had to uncover the wall all over again! Five of us spent an hour or so strimming, lopping and shearing our way through a month's growth of vegetation before we could even glimpse the piles of stone adjacent to the wall. By the time we'd finished it was coffee time; then we tackled the wall.

Mary and Sally work at the cheek end (far right) while Wendy and Phyllis wall further up the sloping field. When I wasn't taking photos, I worked somewhere in the middle. John Mowlem, who owns the field adjacent to one side of the wall, has promised us Belgian buns when we're out on August Bank Holiday. He also made a generous financial contribution to the branch as a token of his gratitude for discovering and restoring this wall. Thanks to Sally for the original discovery.



Course for novice wallers at Corton Down, 7-8 August

The calm before the storm – quite literally! Peter, Phyllis and I, wearing at least four layers of clothing in August, admire the scenery at the top of Corton Down while we await the arrival of eleven novice wallers for the second course of the year. What is it about courses and bad weather? The first course at Spyway the previous month was beset by storms and dismal prospects for a weekend of sunny walling. If anything, the Corton weekend was worse, and the exposed site was very, very windy.





Peter was the instructor while Phyllis and I assisted. Cold, rain and wind notwithstanding, the participants set to with a will to take down a section of the crumbling old wall and dig out the foundations. At this stage, it looks as though the wall was composed mainly of hearting – there was certainly an abundance of small stones.

The foundation trench is cleared and dug out, and Peter demonstrates the art of setting up pins, frames and lines. At this point, we had a hail storm and 40 MPH winds which had us scurrying behind our cars for shelter.



Peter then lines us up like scarecrows to stand back and admire the ... er ... trench?



And then ... into the mud. Foundations go in and the first course goes up.





Phyllis demonstrates the art of measuring to check final wall height – at this stage it hardly seems likely that we'll get to copes. This is the end of the first day and we're a 'little behind', not to put too fine a point on it.



Peter and I arrive at Friar Waddon Farm at eight o'clock on Sunday morning. It rained heavily overnight and the farmer tells us that we won't get up the steep chalk track to Corton Down – or if we get up, we won't get back as the rain has made it treacherously slippery. An hour later the rain stops and we send Phyllis up in her 4-by-4 to check out the track. Cancellation on grounds of safety is a very real possibility. We have already lost two participants – a husband and wife team. He had bought the walling experience as a

'surprise' gift for his wife; evidently not the surprise she welcomed. Phyllis returns safely and informs us that 'we're good to go'. By this time, all the participants have arrived and we follow Phyllis in convoy to the walling site.

And then, miracle of miracles, the sun comes out and we are all happy and productive wallers once again. One participant becomes a big fan of the bolster and makes a good job of splitting stone. I give everyone a new pair of gloves to replace their soggy ones. Does this speed up the walling?



As the day passes, Peter, Phyllis and I chip in (ha, ha) to get the wall up as quickly as possible. Sally, who is working further down the wall with Mary, expresses the view that we won't cope the wall, and that's a challenge we can't resist. There is friendly rivalry between those on the left of the centre frame and those on the right.

The race is on! Phyllis and I periodically leave the wall to barrow up copes from further along the wall. Sally eyes us quizzically but still maintains that we won't finish.





And yes, we nail it! The participants line up with copes and Peter places them on the wall.

A final cope is hammered home ... and the finished photo is taken. It is five o'clock, later than we would have expected to complete the wall but everyone is happy, and their families arrive to take additional pictures. All's well that ends well although we hope the course scheduled for the 25 and 26 September (also at Corton Down) sees us enjoy lovely autumn weather.



Slopey wall, Purbeck, 14-15 August



This was Phyllis's first time out at Purbeck. She looks like she's having fun but looks can be deceiving!

On Saturday, the farmer, Paul Loudon, stopped by for a chat. He told us that he'd repaired a few slopey walls and wants us to place large flat stones on top of the wall beneath the rubble copes. The flat stones are to overhang the wall, creating a 'lip', which he says will deter sheep from attempting to jump the wall.

This was a productive weekend despite the changeable weather. I hadn't been out since we started the wall and laid some foundations and I wasn't particularly confident that I'd get to grips with this type of walling. It was clear from the beginning that Sally had the knack.

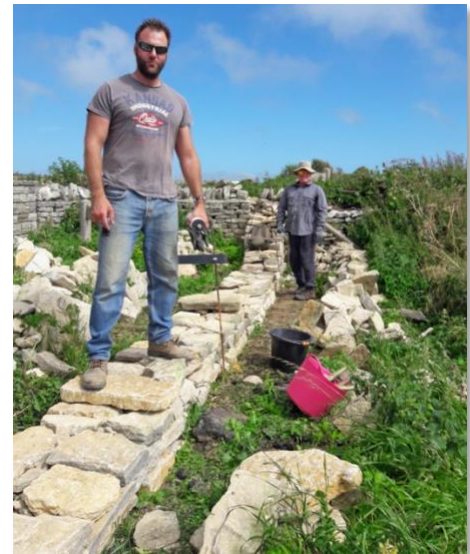
However, to my surprise, the walling technique 'clicked' and I thoroughly enjoyed the weekend.



Renscombe, 14 August



While four of us were beavering away on the slopy wall, another group was at Rempstone, building another section of wall in the car park. This is one of our busiest sites, and on sunny days the car park is packed. The track to Chapman's Pool is dry at least. We welcomed Kevin (below) as a new member, out for the first time since taking the beginners' course at Spyway in July.



Stone delivery, Tyneham



Lovell Stone Group has delivered six bags of stone to our walling site at Tyneham, which means we can complete the curved farm wall and perhaps the other projects that were originally discussed. The stone is part of the original consignment which we'd put on hold during lockdown but which was paid for by the MOD. Thanks to Phyllis for taking delivery of the stone.

‘Patio’, Dancing Ledge



In January 2020, a small group of National Trust volunteers were asked to lay a ‘patio’ at Dancing Ledge, which is one of the most popular visitor and walker attractions on Purbeck. However, in all seasons except high summer the site is muddy because water runs down the steep slope to the site.

We were able to abut most of the stones successfully but as I was the only waller in the group I did manage to dress the few that

needed a touch of the hammer. The finished ‘patio’ received mixed reviews with some people arguing that putting a pavement down on a section of coast path was like building a runway on a coral reef.

However, over eighteen months the stones have settled into the landscape remarkably well, with lots of grass and wild flowers growing up between the cracks. Walking friends took this recent photo of me staking my claim to be a patio paver. It *was* hard work though, and little did we guess in January 2020 that in six weeks or so we would be locked down in a very different world.



Langton Herring, 21-22 August

This weekend's walling was meant to be at Tyneham but a new cess pit was being installed adjacent to the toilets, so it was back to Langton Herring. Sally reaches the top of her section of wall and we welcome Tush (below) to this lovely site. We don't see Tush very often because he lives far away from Dorset on the Welsh borders and walls with a number of branches, particularly in Yorkshire.



Tim (right) brings his stint up to height while Sally and Martin's dog, Button, helps Wendy place hearting into the wall. Looks like he's



burying himself in it.

'Dog's head' discovered in wall!

I discovered this stone 'head' while working on a National Trust wall in Purbeck. Did it belong to another mutt who fell in with the hearting?



Walling at Ham Hill, South Somerset



For those members who live in North Dorset / South Somerset, there may be walling opportunities on Mondays to join Geoff Rowland at Ham Hill Country Park. Please contact Phyllis initially (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com) if you'd be interested in this opportunity.

Ham Hill is the only place in the world where you can find hamstone, the beautiful golden rock that makes up the top of the hill. Hamstone is a Jurassic Shelley limestone comprised of crushed fragments of shells and other sea creatures, cemented together by calcium carbonate. The fossils found in the rock include ammonites, so the stone is about 170 million years old. Hamstone has been quarried for centuries but reached its heyday in Victorian times. All of the villages around the hill are built of hamstone and it gives the area its unique character. Notable buildings both near and far have incorporated hamstone; Montacute House, Exeter Cathedral, Sherborne Castle and even the Houses of Parliament use this beautiful stone. Nowadays, hamstone is exported all over the world. For more information, visit: <https://www.southsomersetcountryside.com/ham-hill/>

Dry stone walling course in South Devon

Martin Stallard, a Level 3 (Advanced Certificate) waller who creates beautiful stone work in Devon, is running this 5-day beginners and enthusiasts course in South Devon.

For more information call Martin on 07773 276125 or email: Martinstallard69@gmail.com

www.martinstallardstonework.co.uk

A poster for a 5-day Dry Stone Walling Course. The background is a photograph of a dry stone wall on a grassy hill overlooking the sea. The text on the poster is as follows:

**5-DAY
DRY STONE WALLING COURSE**
WITH PROFESSIONAL WALLER AND EXPERIENCED TEACHER
MARTIN STALLARD (DSWA ACCREDITED)
28TH SEPT - 1ST OCT 2021

SUITED TO BEGINNERS & ENTHUSIASTS
THE COURSE WILL COVER ALL BASIC ASPECTS OF DRY STONE WALL CONSTRUCTION, RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF THIS CRAFT.

THE COURSE WILL BE ON A FARM, IN A STUNNING COASTAL LOCATION IN SOUTH DEVON, OVERLOOKING BURGH ISLAND AND THE AVON ESTUARY.

£100 PER PERSON
INCLUDES COMMUNAL ACCOMMODATION IN THE FULLY EQUIPPED BIGBURY CAMPING BARN

LIMITED AVAILABILITY
(ON A FIRST COME FIRST SERVE BASIS)

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT
MARTIN STALLARD: 07773 276125
MARTINSTALLARD69@GMAIL.COM

FOR EXAMPLES OF WALLING WORK VISIT:
www.martinstallardstonework.co.uk



This stunning retaining wall with round quoin end was recently completed by Martin at Bigbury-on-Sea.

Langton Herring, 28-29 August

Another weekend at this AONB site. Despite it being a Bank Holiday, it was totally peaceful. True to his word, John Mowelm, brought out Belgian buns for the four wallers out on Saturday (unfortunately, I wasn't one of them). According to Phyllis, these were massive and very tasty!



By the end of Saturday, a significant section of the wall had been coped from the cheek end, which left Phyllis, Mary and I to get as much finished as possible by the end of Sunday. Amazingly, we coped over half the wall (photo below) and brought most of the remaining stints up to height. There is only one stint to finish before we shut down this site for the winter and clear the dense vegetation further up the field, which is hiding what remains of the rest of the wall.



At the end of a long day we have to climb over the farm gate because it's nigh on impossible to open. Apparently, only Sally has the 'knack' – and presumably also the farmer.



Well, fellow wallers, I hope you enjoy reading August's newsletter. Our forthcoming course will be held at Corton Down, West Dorset, on 25-26 September. If you know anyone who would enjoy learning our craft, please direct them to the relevant page on our website:

<https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/events/>

You can book online for the course at: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/courses/online-course-booking/>

I look forward to seeing you on a wall very soon.

Carole Reeves