

DSWA Dorset News

October 2021



‘Fresh October brings the pheasants, then to gather nuts is pleasant.’ My only experience of gathering nuts in October is when I pick ripe almonds off the trees in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada in southern Spain. In pre-Covid days I was a regular walker in this part of the world where autumn is ripe with tasty almonds, luscious green figs and the sweetest blackberries growing handily along the walking trails. Maybe next year ...

A week ago I was barrowing stone across a field in Purbeck when I saw this amazing cloud formation. Against an almost blue-black sky these thunderheads skimmed the parched grassland overlooking the sea near Dancing Ledge. It was a magical sight.

Winter’s Lane NHS project, 8 October

The project to support the partners of ladies with perinatal depression (see June’s newsletter) will begin again in a couple of weeks. A length of retaining wall along Winter’s Lane, near Portesham, was completed by these dads in midsummer so five of us clear the adjacent site for a new group to extend the wall. It is hard work on a warm day but within a few hours we transform the site from this ...





... into this. You can see in the photo below the already completed section of wall in the background. Peter and I make a start on the foundations for the new section.



This is a really worthwhile project, and we hope the next group enjoys building this wall as much as the previous group.

Langton Herring, 9-10 October



The final push to complete this wall before the winter rains turn the hilly site into a quagmire begins on a misty Saturday morning. Sally and Phyllis look over the remaining stone to ensure there's a suitable supply to build the final stint and finish the coping.

But before we can begin walling, we have a heavy task ahead.



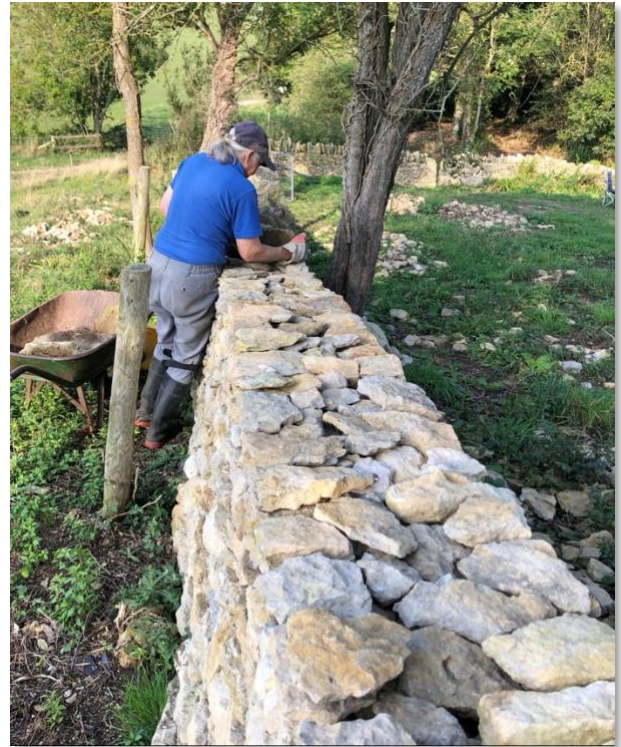
Sally's neighbour has a rockery he wants dismantled and we think the stone will be useful for the next section of wall to be rebuilt. At the moment this wall is in a poor state of disrepair and covered with ivy, bramble and other enchanted forest vegetation. In fact, it's in exactly the same state as was the section we're on the cusp of completing. The rockery proves to be constructed of large boulders – this one being hefted by Sally and Phyllis is by no means the largest. Sally wonders how useful they will be apart from foundation stones.

Sally and Martin load up a trailer with the stones. This has been conveniently placed in a field on the other side of the garden and belongs to John Mowlem who owns the Langton Herring wall. He has agreed to transport the stones to the site. However, we can't locate John and are concerned that one of the trailer wheels seems precarious. Well, the whole trailer has seen better days but we have been assured that it will take a load – and so we load it. When John eventually attempts to move it, the wonky wheel falls off. By that time, we are long gone.





Tim gets to work on the final uphill stint ...
...



... while Sally cracks on with the coping. It's hard to believe the transformation of this site in less than a year. And for those of you who can't recall how overgrown it was, or who have never seen it, here's a reminder (below). Where is the wall?





And here's the restored and completed wall. Branch members will return to Langton Herring next year to begin the next phase. Meanwhile, we suspect that Sally will spend some of her winter days clearing vegetation from the next section of 'lost wall'.

Slopey wall, Purbeck, 16-17 October



We haven't been able to work on this wall for a number of weeks because we needed more stone and the National Trust ranger who organises this was unavailable. However, the farmer who uses these fields for grazing cattle and sheep was keen for us to get on with it, so it was with all round relief that we returned to Purbeck.

This is a beautiful day with the sort of cloud formation that looks as though someone has lit a fire on the horizon. This is the wall as we left it back in mid-August. Mary

and Tim who are new to slopey walling soon get to grips with the technique and away we go!

Lunchtime in this beautiful location. We just wish more members would join us on walling weekends. The annual DSWA subscription is currently £38 but will be raised to £45 in the New Year. If you are able to come walling, why not maximise your subscription by contributing to our environmental and conservation activities. Dorset has always been commended as a very active and innovative branch but we do need and encourage active members.



By late afternoon on Saturday the wall is rising fast and Sally is flat-topping the finished section. The farmer has asked for large flat stones to top and slightly overhang the wall prior to the addition of rubble topping. The overhang will help to prevent sheep from attempting to jump the wall.



We don't think these beauties will make a frontal assault on the wall but they do like a good scratch on a piece of stone.

These are Devon reds or Red Ruby Devons. They are very docile and lovely to have around when walling. They are naturally curious. I see this particular herd quite a lot because I am often walling on Purbeck. The farmer tells me that 'Toro' the bull is also friendly and carries too much

weight to expend energy running after the likes of me. Nevertheless, I always salute him as I walk past and offer my greeting: 'Good morning, Sir'. To date, I have not been molested.



This the wall as we left it at the end of the weekend. Another couple of days should have it completed, and the farmer will be delighted.

Stephen Bartlett's wall



Dorset member and professional waller, Stephen Bartlett, sent me some photos of a 50-metre new build wall that he has just completed. It looks lovely. Stephen had signed up to take his intermediate qualification in September but was unable to do so because we didn't have enough candidates. He won't have any difficulty next year!



Ham Hill Country Park



For members who live in North Dorset, there is usually a Monday walling session at Ham Hill Country Park, South Somerset, with Dorset member Geoff Rowlands.

Here they are restoring the dry stone walls on the Ham Hill plateau using the unique and distinctive honey-coloured hamstone. Ham Hill is a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest as well as a local nature reserve and Iron Age hill fort.

Wallers working at Ham Hill in mid-October. This beautiful stone has been used in the building of houses in the surrounding villages as well as Sherborne Abbey and Montacute House.

If you would like to join Geoff and other members at Ham Hill, please contact Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com)



Montacute House, the Elizabethan mansion considered to be one of the finest stately homes in south-west England. Photo: Mike Searle.

Dartmoor walls



Member, David Fitzjohn, sent us some lovely photos from his recent trip to Devon. He writes: ‘Was on Dartmoor recently where there are some wonderfully eccentric walls which do not seem to follow the same rules as other parts of the country. They look as though they should not stand up but, as the moss-covered ones show, they clearly do, and I believe some are very ancient.’

Sherberton, Dartmoor



The photographs above were taken at Cosdon Hill (left), one of the highest hills on Dartmoor, and Hamel Down (right) at Widecombe in the Moor. Our Dartmoor stone expert, professional waller Martin Stallard, can probably tell us more about the history of the building of these walls.

I’m always delighted to receive images of walls and other dry stone structure seen on your travels so please keep sending them in for inclusion in the newsletter. If you have a query about a stone structure there will always be someone in the branch (or another branch) who can answer it.

Isle of Wight wall



Our chairperson, Wendy, spent last weekend on the Isle of Wight and sent these photos. She says, 'I came across this wall' (well, you could hardly miss it Wendy), 'Look at the size of these stones and number of courses! Mortar at the top and rightly, given what we know about carpark walls.' Must admit, it does look good. Wendy took the photos at St Catherine's Point, the most southerly point on the island and close to St Catherine's Oratory, known as the 'Pepperpot'. Photo: Mypix



Legend has it that in 1313, a ship named the St Mary of Bayonne was blown off-course and ran aground on the treacherous Atherfield Ledge in Chale Bay. Its cargo of white wine, destined for a French monastery, was sold illegally by the sailors to local people. Many barrels found their way into the cellars of Walter de Godeton, Lord of the Manor of Chale. The Pope heard of the incident and, to avoid excommunication, de Godeton was ordered to build an oratory and beacon on Chale Down, now St Catherine's Hill, as penance.

The stone used for building this medieval 'lighthouse' looks very similar to Wendy's wall. Geoff, our stone expert, suggests that this is Monk's Bay Sandstone (Carstone or Ironstone). The Building Stone Atlas mentions that it is used in Blackgang (near St. Catherine's Point) and states: "Where used, the Monk's Bay Sandstone is most commonly employed as large, irregularly coursed, rubblestone blocks".

Winter's Lane, 22 October



The first day back on this project to build a new section of wall to tie in with the stint (in the background) completed earlier in the year. One dad was new to walling but had an affinity with stone from the start. It was a fine day and this is what we achieved in just a few hours.

As I was greeting the first arrival, an elderly man walked past and said to the new waller, 'Ah, you're the boss. I hope she gets on alright'. 'Actually,' I replied, 'I'm the instructor.' The man then dug himself in further by telling us

about a study carried out in a German hospital whereby patients were asked to consult the doctor in a room full of men and women wearing white coats and stethoscopes. Apparently, they all made a beeline for the men. It's a waste of energy to get hot under the collar when confronted with one individual's gleeful misogyny but it does make you realise how much still has to be done to achieve gender equality. Women wallers, check out the Women's International Stone Alliance (<https://www.womenstonealliance.com>)

Slopey wall, Purbeck, 23 October

Four of us arrive to complete this wall and are met once again by the farmer's herd of Red Rubies. This little calf, watched by mum, is particularly curious and accepts a pat on the nose when I'm working on her side of the wall. However, I draw the line when she begins



rummaging in my tool bucket.

It is a fine day if somewhat chillier than last week, but we work hard and the wall begins to



rise. Phyllis and Mary focus on capping the wall with large flat stones while Dave and I complete the tie-in with the old wall.

And by 4 pm we complete the wall. We don't have enough suitable stone to create a rubble top but the wall is very secure because the capping stones are thick and heavy.

Well, fellow wallers, I hope you enjoy reading October's newsletter. It's been a busy month and we've now completed two of our four long-term projects. Next weekend we're back at Tyneham to finish the farm wall. Please contact Phyllis if you plan to be there. And that just leaves the car park wall at Renscombe. We are in the process of lining up several new projects which you'll hear about from Phyllis in her emails.

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

Carole Reeves