

DSWA Dorset News

August 2022

Came Down, 31 July



Peter, Sally and Phyllis complete the section of wall that we began under our 'bedouin tent' earlier in the month when temperatures soared to the mid-30s. It wasn't quite as hot on this Sunday but fairly stifling nonetheless. The photo was taken by our chairperson Wendy who came out for the first time since her knee surgery in mid-June. A great recovery!



That same weekend I was participating in the final event in the week-long Festival of Archaeology run by the Council for British Archaeology. This great event was hosted by the National Trust at Corfe Castle for anyone interested in the history of the castle, the village that grew up around it, and Corfe Common where the remains of 4,000 year

old Bronze Age burial mounds are still highly visible.

Came Down, 13-14 August

Four go camping! Another heatwave and we string a tarpaulin between Phyllis's car and mine. It's so hot that we have hourly water breaks and it's difficult to remember the days when we froze to the marrow at this site which is open to the elements with no shelter.



Despite the arid conditions I spot a pretty convolvulus blooming between the stones – a cheerful sight.



Sally, Mary and I bring this section of wall up to height while Phyllis clears the vegetation around the final section further up the field. Once this stint has been completed, our walling at Came Down will be finished.





By Sunday the wall has been coped, and congratulations to Mary, Phyllis and Tim for walling through another blistering hot day. I bottled out and opted to clean my house instead – not, as it turned out, a cooler option. I always prefer to be outside than inside but when the dirt looks the same you know it's time to dig out the mop and bucket!

Crack Lane, 6-7 August

This site, near Langton Matravers, is a new location for the Branch although Peter, Merrie and I have been working here since March 2021. The wall separates a field owned by Trev Haysom, patriarch of Haysom's quarry, and Talbot Woods, owned by the National Trust. Trev reckons the wall dates to the medieval period but we're sure there



have been later repairs. Much of the stone is waste from nearby Crack Lane Quarry, a Purbeck marble and burr quarry which was worked in the Roman and medieval period and is now a Dorset Important Geological Site.

Preparing the foundation trench (top) and (left), Sally and Mary take a break while Peter sets up the pins and lines.



Check out Crack Lane Quarry (<https://dorsetrugs.org/southeastrugs/cracklanequarry/>). Purbeck marble is great for creating exquisite interior decoration – many of Britain’s important churches and cathedrals are full of it – but used outside it becomes very friable over many years and crumbles to heaving. We are incorporating the most usable pieces in the wall and also using it for rubble topping (the client’s preference to traditional coping), but we are relying on ‘new’ Purbeck limestone from Haysoms for the main build. Peter and Sally lay the first cheek end stones (top).



Mary, Phyllis and I start work on the foundations (right), although Peter, as gang master, likes to quality control our work (left)! Phyllis is amused.



Towards the end of the weekend and between the five of us we build six courses and make a fine start on the cheek end.



Bygone Burton Bradstock



Russell sent me these lovely photos of walling in Burton Bradstock. My guess is that they were taken in the 1920s or 1930s. I don't know Burton Bradstock very well but if anyone recognises the exact location I'd love to hear from you. Perhaps these walls are still standing or one of these wallers is a relative. It would be great to have more information.



If you have any family photos showing walling or old walls, please do send them in and I'll feature them in a forthcoming newsletter.

Orkney archaeology revisited



Following Sally and Martin’s trip to Orkney (see July’s newsletter) and their tour of the Ness of Brodgar excavation – a Neolithic village and ceremonial site dating back to 3000 BCE but abandoned around 2200 BCE – they sent me details of the latest work uncovered after they left the island. ‘Uncovered’ means that archaeologists remove the heavy plastic weighted down with old tyres that protects the site when it’s not being excavated.

The latest news and photographs from the dig, entitled ‘Surely the most beautiful Neolithic stone wall anywhere!’, is really worth reading and seeing (<https://www.nessofbrodgar.co.uk/dig-diary-surely-the-most-beautiful-neolithic-stone-wall-anywhere/>) What a fabulous place to build a settlement. The Ness of Brodgar runs north-west to south-east and is therefore naturally (and roughly) aligned to the midwinter rising sun and midsummer sunset. Its name derives from the Old Norse *nes* – headland; *brúar* – bridge, and *garðr* – farm, and translates roughly as the “headland of the bridge farm”.

For those of you who want to know more, see this 2018 article in Current Archaeology (<https://archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/the-ness-of-brodgar.htm>)



Montezuma oropendola

May shun your sunflower seeds but likes bananas

Ok, it’s not walling but I happened to be listening to ‘Tweet of the Day’ on Radio 4 one morning when this bird was featured. I remember seeing and hearing it in Costa Rica and thought I’d share this crazy bird’s antics with you (photo: Mason Maron). The male

sounds rather like a turkey but looks like a trapeze artist when vocalising – an action called bowing which is a mating ritual. The female builds complex hanging nests woven of fibres and vines before laying two eggs, but usually only one chick fledges (photo: Juan Miguel Artigas Azas).



Oropendolas breed in colonies and you can often see a dozen or more of these nests hanging from one tall tree. Often, a single dominant male has fathered all the fledglings in the colony.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mz0t05hKVTM>

Crack Lane, 20-21 August



We return to this shady site near Langton Matravers. Peter and I had taken delivery of three truckloads of stone on the Friday although having been promised ten tonnes, it was something of a disappointment and we hoped that this relatively small amount would see us through the weekend. With six of us walling we knew the wall would go up fairly quickly.



While Dave, Sally, Phyllis and Mary bring the wall to height, I lay the foundation stones for the next section. We are hoping that the beauty of the wall will shame the parish council into replacing the rotten stile next to our lovely standing stone. If plans to put grazing animals in the field go ahead, something will need to be done about the stile.

Sally's cheek end is looking super (right) although Peter and I must take some credit because we visited the quarry to choose pieces of right-angled stone!



Phyllis and Dave (left) ensure the curve and batter are maintained (there can be a tendency on inside curves to lose the batter) while Peter and Sally (below) ponder the

style of endstone to place on top of the cheek end.





By the end of the weekend we have brought this section to height apart from the flat topping and rubble copes. A good start has been made on the next stint. We'll return to Crack Lane on the weekend of 3-4 September – going into autumn.



The cheek end looks great topped with two huge chunks of mossy burr.

Curiosity Corner – Dave sent in this photo of his 'Clammonite' a huge ammonite to which he has added razor clam shells across the lime mortar support. He says, 'It gives quite a good effect when the light catches it right, a bit like the lettering at Tyneham.'



The Melplash Show, 24-25 August



Geoff, Phyllis, Sally, Stephen, Mary and I turn up bright and early at the Melplash showground on 24 August to set up our pitch for the show the following day. The morning starts dull and drizzly but Mary's spirits lift when the sun burns off the murk – and when she spots the gin stand right opposite our pitch!

As ever, Sherborne Stone have given us (free of charge) four tonnes of Forest Marble in dumpy bags to build a good wall, plus a pallet of Inferior Oolite (building stone) to advertise its company. The Sherborne Stone banner is rather large compared with our more modest banners and we hope visitors don't confuse the DSWA with the stone supplier.



Stephen, one of our professional wallers, sets up his own advertising board.

Once we've pitched the gazebo, unloaded our vehicles and moved them off the pitch, we stack the stone ready to build our wall. Stephen lays the foundation stones, and we decide to leave the rest until the following day.

Four of us repair to the nearby garden centre restaurant for a well-earned brunch.

The day of the show, and Phyllis and I arrive just after 7.30 am to find that it has rained heavily overnight, and our gazebo isn't waterproof! Neither of us has thought to bring mopping-up cloths but Phyllis has a spare cotton shirt which does the job. Fortunately, the sun soon appears, and it becomes very hot. In fact, the day is perfect for attracting thousands of visitors.

We take it in turns to build the wall. Geoff and Mary start us off.



Our children's wall proves popular, and this little girl gets it built in less than five minutes. We have certificates for the child wallers (permission to use photo given by child's mother).



This cute mutt cycles around the show ground ‘talking’ to everyone. He and I have quite a conversation. I have a soft spot for dogs. Eventually he moves off into the crowd followed at a distance by his ‘minder’ – a man with an earpiece listening to people’s comments and responding through the puppet.

A really clever little animatronics dog. Later, a furry yellow dog does the rounds of the show. Unfortunately, we don’t have much time to wander around the show ground because we spend a lot of time talking to visitors, offering advice on walling projects (Stephen collects a fistful of contacts), and giving information about our walling courses.



Stephen, Phyllis, Sally and Geoff behind our finished wall. Unfortunately, it had to be dismantled and re-bagged immediately after this photo was taken. We all enjoyed the day, the weather was fantastic, the visitors friendly and enthusiastic, and it seemed to be a very worthwhile event for the Branch.

Dartmoor wall, July

David FitzJohn sent us these photos of a granite wall near Fernworthy Reservoir, in Dartmoor National Park. He says, ‘You can see through the gaps between stones, some of which are enormous. It is just one stone thick; almost like a long vertical jigsaw!’



Some of the walls on Dartmoor were constructed around 1450-700 BCE during the Bronze Age to mark the territories of farms as homesteaders adapted to the challenges of agricultural societies.

This wall at Grimspound, Dartmoor, is part of a Bronze Age settlement where the remains of 24 stone roundhouses survive within a massive boundary wall about 150 metres in diameter (photo: English Heritage).



Corton Down, 27-28 August



We should have been at Came Down for the last weekend in August but the farmer opened the ‘wall’ field to campers, and one tent is pitched a metre from our building site. He doesn’t want the campers moved so we are obliged to find an alternative wall.

Phyllis negotiates for us to work at Corton Down which is always a lovely peaceful AONB site. The weekend is sunny although dark clouds hover overhead threatening rain which never materialises. While Mary, Phyllis and I stop for afternoon tea, Sally continues chipping away at a stone, enabling me to capture her against this lovely sky.

I leave the site a bit earlier than usual on Saturday –

a big mistake as it turns out because I hit a large stone on the way down and slash my front offside tyre wide open. Fortunately, three lovely farm folk hoist my spare wheel out of the boot and I am on my careful way home within 40 minutes.



Fortunately, Protyre at Poole is open on Bank Holiday Monday, and I turn up at 9 am with the usual sob story. I don’t know how many tyres I’ve had replaced on my five-year-old car but punctures seem to be a hazard (for me at least) of the walling terrain.



The photo (left) taken on Sunday by Wendy, depicts the usual wallers – Tim, Mary and Phyllis – but also a new Branch member, Robert. He’s the one presenting his rear end although there’s a head in there somewhere! Welcome Rob.

Cumbria Corner



Jill and Mike said, ‘What looks like an ordinary wall is alongside the Ravenglass and Eskdale railway – also known as La’al Ratty – which means ‘Little Railway’ in Cumbrian dialect.’

La’al Ratty was opened in 1875 to bring iron ore from Eskdale to the Furness Railway at Ravenglass. It is one of the UK's longest narrow gauge steam train journeys, taking passengers on an 8-mile ride through the glacier-carved Eskdale Valley in the Western Lake District. Photo: Skarloey.





Two track-side photos showing features of the wall.

Wallers - that's August's news wrapped up, and it's goodbye to summer as we wall into the mellow months of September and October. I'm not standing for re-election to the Branch committee at our AGM (Phyllis will send out details of the date and location) but I have been 'persuaded' by Branch members and by Alison Shaw at Head Office to continue with the newsletter as well as the copy for the Waller & Dyker.

As ever, I welcome news and images from all members but until next month, enjoy the warm weather and your walling.

Carole Reeves