

DSWA Dorset News

July 2022



Corton Course, 2-3 July

The month got off to a flying start with the second course of the year at Corton Down on the South Dorset Ridgeway. There were 19 novice wallers, taught in two groups by Peter and Geoff, with Mary, Tim, Paul and Phyllis assisting. You can see from the dramatic sky that the weather was rather unsettled although Sunday was the better of the two days.

This is a lovely AONB site and the teams soon begin to enjoy the challenge and build very impressive walls with good level courses. Everyone seems to enjoy the weekend.





There is a fair bit of wildlife scurrying around the site including voles evicted from their stoney homes, and this common lizard basking in the warmish sun.



Day two and second lift. These wallers are fast learners and seem to have an affinity for the stone. But of course, they are being well taught!



Geoff's team adding their coping stones (left) ...



... closely followed by Peter's wallers (right). The sun is shining and everyone expresses their gratitude and enthusiasm for a productive and enjoyable weekend.



Really good efforts by both teams. If you'd like to see all the photos taken during this weekend go to our Flickr page:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/192778251@N07/albums/72177720300338508>

The final course of the year will again be at Corton, on the weekend of 24-25 September. It is fully booked but cancellations do occur so if you know anyone who would be interested in learning our craft, here's the link: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/events/>

Portesham community wall, 9 July



On a boiling hot day it's good to be under the shadey trees of Portesham to continue the stretch of wall that has now been mortared.

Phyllis, Mary and I join the local wallers to dry stone the next courses and try to cope as much of the wall as possible.

However, the first task of the day is to sort through the dumpy bags for stones of a specific thickness, most of which are (as ever) at the bottom of the bags.

We are rewarded, not with stone, but chocolate brownies! Maureen, a lovely lady who lives opposite the wall, keeps us regularly supplied with hot and cold drinks, and tasty treats. No wonder we enjoy walling here.



Mick makes good use of the hefty stones we've trawled from the bags. He is one of the Portesham wallers who has expressed an interest in walling with the branch. They have certainly had plenty of challenging walling on this project.



Phyllis and Mary cope a completed section of wall.



By the time we leave, which is quite early because of the heat and other commitments by the local group, a further three courses have been completed, and a good section of wall coped.

This wall will be finished next Saturday and there will be a break until September before the final section is dismantled and rebuilt.

Orkney walls and buildings

Sally and Martin have recently returned from Orkney (with Covid, but that's another story) and wanted to share a few of its features and ancient walls.

Sally says: 'One of our friends gave us a guided tour of the Ness of Brogdar, a Neolithic archaeological site where he regularly spends his Summers digging. They have found an outer wall which is about 10m wide and dates to the Stone Age - 3,300 BCE. It consists of a double skin on each side but the infill is a mixture of 'midden' which was a very valuable resource –

basically compost made from the decomposing bones / shells etc of their largely fish-based diet. A dwelling wall (right) which was built inside this wall dates to the Bronze Age.

There are many Historic Scotland sites, all of which are fascinating, well-cared for and explained with clear signs or booklets. They come in two versions – those you have to book and pay for (English Heritage members get in free); and others – mostly chambered cairns – that you explore yourself.



A torch in a box at the entrance is provided and you can crawl in through the entry passage and look for yourselves (left).

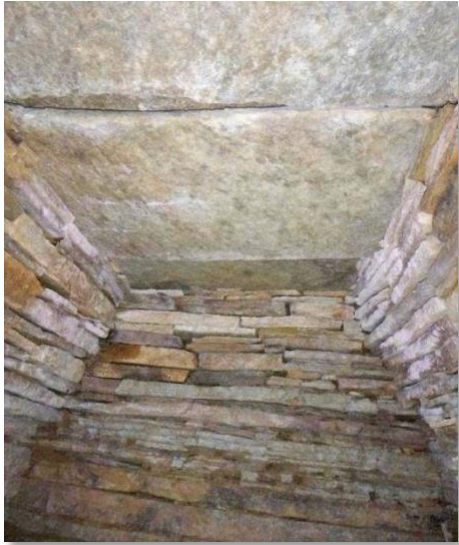
This gives you a very real sense of how it might have been when the original people used them (Carole's note: these people were a lot smaller than us!)

In addition to standing stones and stone circles, there are three main types of structure: brochs, dwellings, and cairns. The oldest are the brochs which were round towers built to demonstrate prestige and to be defensive. The Broch of Gurness (right) was constructed in the Iron Age and then gradually over the years settlements built up around them.



They were added to by Picts who, very typically, added orthostats – tall thin stones set vertically into the ground to make rudimentary divisions of the space. Left: internal space at the Broch of Gurness.

The dwellings were built as a circular structure around a central hearth. Over time extra features were added such as cubby holes or 'dressers' to store or display things such as in this dwelling at Skara Brae built around 2500 BCE. Again, sub-divided by orthostats.



The cairns are chambers – usually round or oval with a narrow passage for access and a corbelled roof. Cuween Cairn (left), 5000 years old, shows corbelling and huge roof slabs. The early cairns had small, low chambers off the large one, but later cairns were sub-divided with orthostats and varied in size from those for two people to large structures with up to 28 sub-divisions.

The most important is Maes Howe (right), a huge circular cairn 35m across and 7m high, built around 5000 years ago and visible for many miles. The stone structure is covered with clay and grass. It is very well constructed and there are some huge stones lining the entrance tunnel, which is aligned to receive the sun at the mid-winter solstice.

Unfortunately, you are not allowed to take photos inside. The cairn was broken into in 1153 by Norsemen sheltering from the snow. They left Runic 'graffiti' which refers to treasure being hidden there but no evidence has been found. It's the largest collection of runic inscriptions to survive outside Scandinavia – and a reminder that Orkney was under Norwegian rule until 1469.





The more modern field walls varied widely over the island with no particularly obvious style. There were quite a lot with a top covering band under the copes. We saw a very blocky modern sandstone wall (left) whilst others were more as you'd see in Dorset with well-coursed thinner stone.

A wall near Birsay (right) was copped with what were obviously pebbles from the beach. The Orkney air is extremely fresh and clean so the lichen growth is wonderful (below).



We came across a very interesting structure (above right) with a beautiful egg-shaped internal aspect (left). It turned out to be a dry stone kiln for drying grain, probably built around the late 1700's.

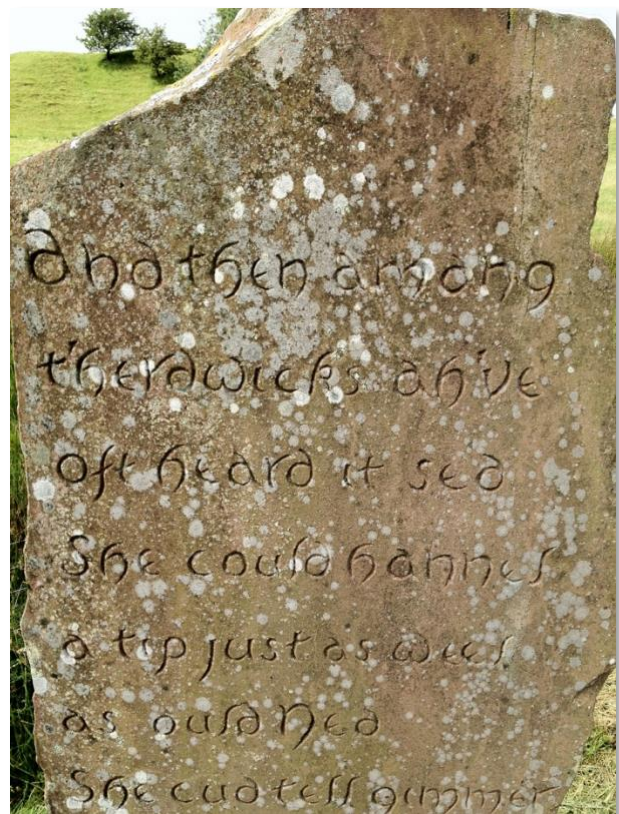
Cumbria corner

Mike and Jill took a gentle stroll along an old railway line that runs from Rowrah to Whitehaven (the Rowrah and Kelton Fell Railway). This is part of the C2C (coast to coast) for bikes but it's also good for walkers.

They walked between these lovely retaining walls before coming across an unusual stone seat (below).



The text reads: '... and then among t'herdwicks ah've oft heard it sed she could hannel a tip just as weel as owld Ned. She culd tell gimmer ...'



As far as I can tell from looking at a glossary of Lakeland words, this translates as: 'Among the herdwick's I've often heard it said she could handle a tup just as well as old Ned. She could tell a female lamb (or yearling sheep in other glossaries) ...' The Norse language influenced Cumbrian dialect.

Came Down, 16 July



The heatwave weekend in this very exposed site. Mary and Phyllis had taken down this section of wall last Sunday but there was more to do and foundations to be laid. If Sally joins us, she'll bring the branch gazebo so fingers crossed that she'll have recovered enough from Covid to test negative.

Fortunately, she does, and we set up the awning over the walling site – well, over as much of it as possible. Digging over the foundations and removing embedded stone is undoubtedly the most arduous task of the day so this gives us some respite from the burning heat.

Unfortunately, Mary and Ian don't get the benefit of the shelter as they rebuild their stints (below) while harvesting goes on around us.





We feel like desert nomads but it's a fantastic shelter and makes walling possible in locations with no shelter whatsoever.



Came Down, 24 July

What a difference a week makes! Here we are wearing jumpers and jackets. The temperature has dropped to 19 C and there's a fairly stiff breeze. There are only three of us today and we make good progress on the section of wall that was a blank canvas last weekend.



Cornish Hedge, St Mawes



On her recent trip to Cornwall, Merrie spotted this recently built Cornish hedge. The stones are laid herringbone when thin (less than 75mm) shales and slates are used. If you are interested in Cornish hedges there's a good document at: <http://www.cornishhedges.co.uk/PDF/building.pdf>



Dry stone waterfall, Somerset

Peter visited The Newt near Bruton and saw this lovely dry stone waterfall cascading into a limpid pool. Or was it Loch Ness?



Waller's - that's July's news wrapped up. I'm sending the newsletter out a bit earlier than usual but I shall be at Corfe Castle next weekend volunteering at the Festival of Archaeology organised by the Council for British Archaeology. Saturday is a skills and training day, but Sunday is a family day with guided tours, story tellers and talks. If you're looking for somewhere different to take the kids, take a look at: <https://www.archaeologyuk.org/festival/festival-event-listing/festival-of-archaeology-closing-weekend-family-day-at-corfe-castle.html>

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

Carole Reeves