

DSWA Dorset News

November 2023

Japanese walls and sacred sites



I have been travelling in Japan this month – a wonderful experience if you’re looking for adventure and a new destination. But I was always on the lookout for walls and wasn’t disappointed.

This is an ancient cemetery – some of the graves date to the 16th century – at Mount Koya near Osaka. All of the walls are dry stone. The small statues wearing red bibs and red knitted beanies are monuments to dead children. There were quite a few of these and it appears that whatever the

dates of their monuments they are always kept freshly kitted out.

Dry stone walls surround the 16th century graves of the Toyotomi family, including Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), one of the unifiers of Japan. Not such a great guy because when his son was born late in his life, he forced his nephew and existing heir, Hidetsugu, to commit suicide at nearby Kongobuji Temple and then executed the rest of Hidetsugu’s family.





A very nice ancient cheek end in the cemetery.



The rock garden, Kongobuji Temple. This is the largest rock garden in Japan (2349 metres). The design is of a pair of dragons emerging from a sea of clouds. The dragons are made of 140 pieces of granite brought from the island of Shikoku where there is a huge granite quarry (below left).



The white sand, swept into lines and swirls by Buddhist monks as part of their meditation, comes from Kyoto.

Mount Koya is the sacred site specific to the Shingon School of Buddhism and where Buddhism began in Japan in the 9th century.

I'm really not certain how much of this base wall near Mount Koya is dry stone and whether mortar was used at the back. I couldn't see any obvious mortar, and many of the old temple buildings have been built on dry stone bases. But this is a very large structure and really very beautiful. The workmanship in all the stone work is really something to experience.



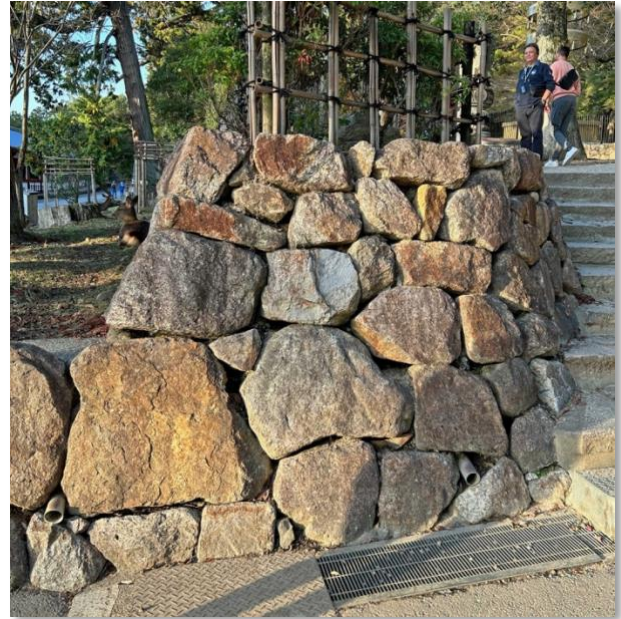


This modest wooden shrine, part of Kimpusenji temple complex in the mountains of Yoshino, is built on great dry stone blocks. Interesting to see that the foundations are a good deal smaller than those several courses higher. There is a nice batter although it looks as though the stones may have been dressed to create the batter. Kimpusenji means the temple of golden peaks and is said to be the original training ground for Shugendo, the way of cultivating spiritual power and harmony with the universe through the sacred realm of nature. I think I am doing this when I'm out walling.



Left: old retaining wall on the walk up the mountain road to Kimpusenji. This has a very steep batter and is definitely dry stone.

Nice dry stone wall in Nara Park. Nara was Japan's 8th century capital and is where Buddhism was institutionalised. The park dates to 1880 and is full of Sika deer which bow to ask to be fed. They are actually a pest and can get aggressive if not fed. Some of the young boys were teasing them with food which didn't seem wise as they can run faster than kids!



Left: Interesting retaining wall and building base at Inuyama Castle, central Japan.



Right: The castle entrance. This is the oldest standing castle in Japan, built in 1537 by Oda Yojirou Nobuyasu, an uncle of Oda Nobunaga, one of Japan's greatest samurai warriors.

Parts of the castle was restored in the 1960s following some destruction by an earthquake and this possibly included the dry stone work. The coursing is interesting because some of it follows the steep angle of the slope and some is level.



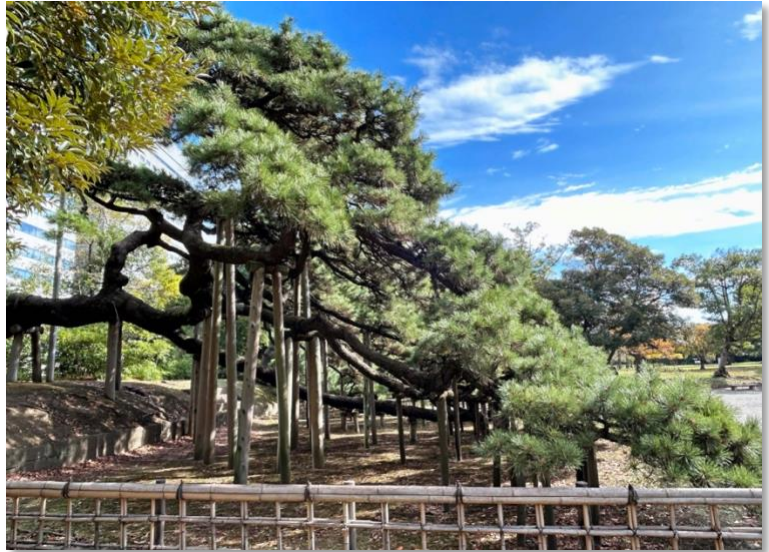
I liked Shimoda, a quiet coastal town near Mishima, central Japan. I'm not sure this canal bank is entirely dry stone as it may be mortared or cemented at the back but this is not obvious. Note the smoot to carry water run-off from the street.



A stone bank alongside a lake in Hamarikyū Gardens, Tokyo. The skyscrapers of Shiodome business hub towering above the park offer a stark contrast with its traditional aspect. The park was designed in the 17th century and has been designated a Special Place of Scenic Beauty by the Japanese Ministry of Culture.

Hamarikyu Gardens also contains this 300-year-old pine tree (right), believed to have been planted by the 6th shogun, Tokugawa Ienobu, during major renovations of the garden in 1709.

Note the attractive bamboo fencing, seen across many parks and open spaces across Japan.



This is Hashima, a rocky island off the coast of Nagasaki, also known as Gunkan Jima or Battleship Island because of its resemblance to a warship. It was once the site of the Mitsubishi Mining Company's main seabed coal mine and was inhabited by miners and their families from 1891 to 1974. At its peak, this rock measuring 480 metres along its length, was home to over 5000 people, making it the most densely populated place in Japan.



It's a spooky old place of rotting concrete and has been the location for a number of



films including the James Bond movie, Skyfall (2012).



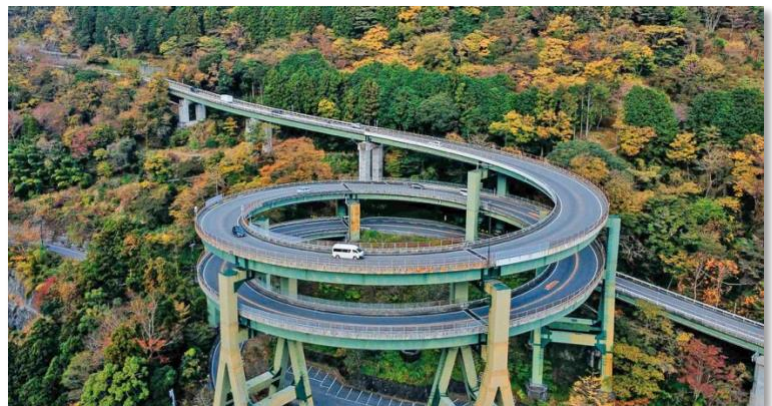
Hashima is now a World Heritage Site, one of the reasons being the sea wall. As the island was expanded between 1868 and 1912, sea walls of stacked stone were widely built using an



adhesive called 'amakawa' which was made of red clay and caustic lime. These retaining walls survive all around the island and contribute to Hashima's unique scenery.

Finally, although not dry stone, I thought you would like to see a photo of the Kawazu-Nanataki spiral bridge which we drove around on our journey from Mishima to Shimoda.

National Route 414 once used hairpin bends along the mountainside, but the road and half the mountain collapsed in an earthquake of 1978. This



alternative road was opened in 1981 and in the same year won the Tanaka Award from the Japan Society of Civil Engineers.

Corton



Sally sent me this photograph when I was in Japan. It was taken on Sunday 5 November. She wrote: 'After a very wet day yesterday, when I forgot the camera, today was largely bright and sunny. A chap came by whom I vaguely know through Geocaching (goes under the name of 'Helicopter Repairman'). He has this beautiful Golden Retriever called Tigs that is a rescue dog.

He asked if he could take a pic as he is keeping a record of the dog's life for the first year it is with him - all the places he goes and people he meets. He thought we were sufficiently interesting to include. He then couldn't find my e-mail address but hunted me down via the geocaching message board and sent on this fabulous photo for us for the newsletter.'



Left: The weather was clearly changeable as a rainbow appeared next to Peter's campervan.

Ham Hill



It seems like Ham Hill is the place to be at the moment. On 5 November Geoff wrote: ‘Over recent weeks, the wall has certainly done its job keeping the sheep in. They have now been moved to Butcher's Hill, on the other side of the road.’

‘There have been a mixture of tasks: finding and placing the remaining copes, preparing for the date stone, and clearing a work area for the final section, beyond the gate (right) that drops over the hillfort ramparts to join with the old (~1600) parish boundary wall.

We proceeded carefully here (below), to expose and document the existing wall before starting any restoration.



We all noticed that this section was 'out of line' with the rest of the wall. However, the kink has always existed. It is clearly shown on the 1886 First Edition OS map.’



Walling on the rampart section and restoring the wall junction on the ramparts.

Geoff runs a Monday walling group at Ham Hill. If you fancy joining this group, please contact him directly:

rowland.geoff@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/hamhillcountrypark/>

Lanzarote



Dry stone walls are a feature of this windswept island, and I have previously included photos sent by my friends Mike and Jill who spend a good deal of time here. The stone is excavated from a natural lava field and the walls are protected by Unesco.

These walls protect crops, shield delicate plants such as grapevines, act as field boundaries, and line all the roadsides.



Above and right: walls built using small stones directly from the quarry. All lava extraction is overseen by the local authorities as it is prohibited to remove volcanic lava from the countryside.



This type of dry stone wall is called Piedra Cortada (cut stone). Rock approximately 1-2 metres cubed is removed from the quarry. 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 are then hit with a heavy club hammer until the rock is split. The process is repeated until the desired size of rock is reached.



Plants protected by circular dry stone walls called zocos. Photo: Lucija Ažman Momirski.

Upcoming events

To keep up with Branch events please visit our website: <https://dorsetdswa.org.uk/events/> and get the dates in your diary.

Currently, the walling dates for the remainder of this year are as follows:

Saturday 2nd & Sunday 3rd December – Corton
Saturday 16th & Sunday 17th December – Corton

Please contact Phyllis if you require maps / directions to this site. If anything changes Phyllis will send out the relevant information.

As ever, I welcome contributions from all members.

Carole Reeves