

DSWA Dorset News

February / March 2024



Many apologies to those expecting a newsletter in February. I was working in Egypt for a few weeks and got really behind with everything DSWA. Yes, alright, I have already run the gauntlet of ‘Oh, what a pity you missed the rain,’ and similar comments, and I will tell you about Egyptian dry stone building. Meanwhile, let me introduce Carlos – one of the friendliest (if not the most sweet smelling) camel I have encountered. Most of the biting camels wear muzzles these days but Carlos is a smiley camel

although I certainly did not venture a ride. You can’t get rid of the smell!

But this is what I come back to. Even the cows won’t walk through the mud on a National Trust farm on South Purbeck. Peter and I walk for the National Trust on Tuesdays, and I don’t hear the end of it when I suggest we take our usual short cut through a field instead of the longer route along a track. Either way the mud comes up and over our boots.



A very slippery slope indeed!



Corton, 4 and 10 February



so this week she wisely left it the other side of the gateway (right).

I spent a bit of time trying to fill in the crater before we took any of the last section down, but I don't think we took any pics of me and the mud. It was very misty and murky. The farmer came up and put out some fence posts and unrolled a roll of netting along the wall that goes down towards Martinstown. He did not reappear before we left (at about 3.45 pm because it started to rain quite hard).



Above left and right shows the section of wall we started which is now up to through height. I built most of that while Karen and Phyllis finished off the top of the previous section and then dug around the end of the wall deciding where we were going to finish and getting out some of the buried stone. It was EXTREMELY muddy!

Sally writes: 'I'm attaching the few photos I've taken at Corton. The farmer has been up with tractors, generally causing a complete mud-bath. They have scraped together stones/concrete blocks and mud and left a big crater in front of the last stretch of remaining wall. The photo left shows the foundations we put in the prepared section on Sunday 4th. We went up again on Sat 10th. I left my car at the top of the chalk track, but Phyllis took the Jiminy on to the usual field to park. Even with her 4WD it took her three attempts to get out



On Sunday it was quite a nice day, and we could actually see the view. When we arrived (it had only just stopped raining) at about 9.30 the fence had been erected. Had the farmer worked during the night or very early morning, either of which would have been during pouring rain - or had the fairies been up there?



Corton, 2-3 March



Sally again: ‘Saturday 2nd March was a bit dull at times but no real rain on us. However, a big cloud came over and there was a lovely rainbow.’



Phyllis, Tim and I spent the day grubbing around in the mire to clear and take down the remaining wall.

By the end of the day it was fairly clear except for one bit still a heap of rubble, a couple of big stones we decided to leave *in situ*, and a couple of big ones we still had to remove. As we drove back into the farmyard a beautiful barn owl flapped slowly across just in front of

us but unfortunately no camera handy.’ (No camera needed Sally – here’s a lovely photo from the internet ...)

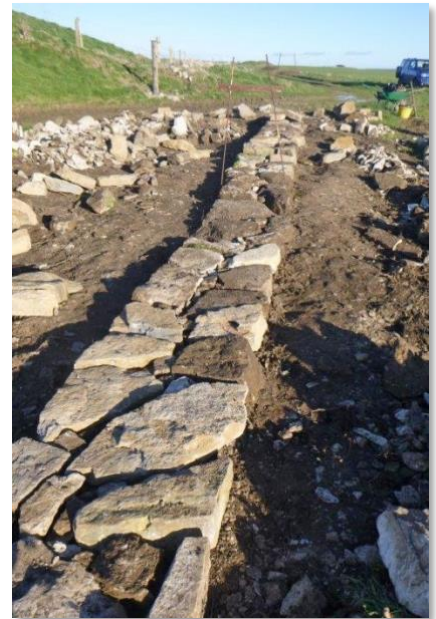
‘Sunday dawned bright and beautiful. We had a brilliant day. Fiona and Rob set-to with a bar and mattock to release the big stones and then we all put in foundations (below left).





By the end of the day we were very pleased to have finished the foundations (below) and sorted out a lot of the stone. The cheek-end stones are all ready to go and we've found a few more copes. You missed a lovely day.'

Hopefully, the mud will have dried out a lot by the time we are next at Corton on the 23-24 March. And the evenings will be lighter. Hooray!



Ham Hill



The carved 2023 date stone from Harvey Stone is now in place near the walkers' gate at the north end of Strouds Meadow. Its purchase and carving was supported by Ham Hill Country Park, Somerset Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is testament to the hard work and dedication of the volunteer wallers who spend every Monday working on this site.



In late February, Geoff wrote: 'This week, we will continue with restoring the c.400-year-old parish boundary wall in the rampart ditch. Given that we have 50 metres of copes on order, and the wall up the ramparts is c.15 m, we can aim to get about 35 m of boundary wall up to height. It should be a bright day, if a little chilly and claggy underfoot (understatement Geoff although it looks a lot drier at Ham Hill than it does at Corton or Purbeck.)

On Friday, I managed to remove the small trees in the wall corner - without bringing down the wall or chain-sawing too much Ham stone (right).'



Building Egypt



This atmospheric photograph of the pyramids at Giza in the early morning (yes, Carlos and his chums get a look-in too) belies the fact that there are almost as many theories about how they were built and of what materials as there are stones. Only yesterday I learned from someone delivering my garden compost that they were built by aliens.



Left: the blocks at the base of the Great Pyramid of Khufu, built c.2600 BCE are of granite (from Aswan) and limestone quarried locally from the Giza plateau. Some mortar was used on the outside layers, but the main build is dry stone. When finished the pyramids were cased in smooth white limestone, long since worn away.

How did the Egyptian builders maintain the stability of the blocks?

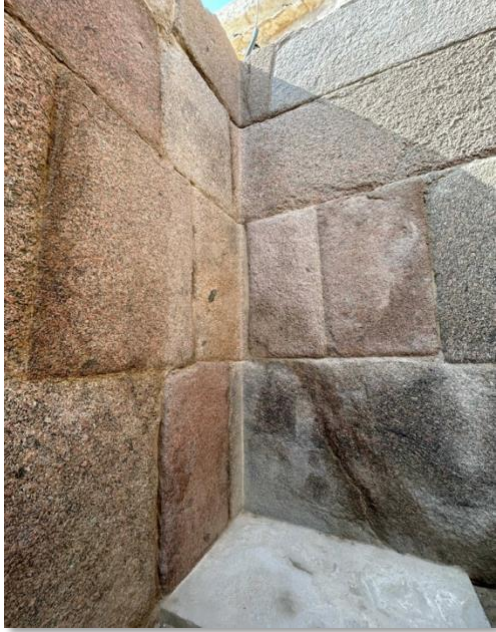
One clue can be found at the Temple of Kom Ombo in the Aswan Governate, Upper Egypt. It was constructed during the Ptolemaic era (180-47 BCE) of local ‘Nubian’ sandstone – you can still see the quarries at Gebel el-Silsila on a cruise along the Nile.



On the top of the wall in the foreground can be found chiselled, bow-shaped indentations where two stones join. In one of these a piece of sycamore wood still remains (left). Egyptian sycamore (*Ficus sycomorus*) was fairly widely available throughout Egypt and remains stable even under water. Although it rarely rains in Egypt, Nile flooding in ancient times, and before the Aswan High Dam was built, was very common. Sycamore was also frequently used for making ancient Egyptian coffins.

Right and below: These bow-shaped cuts between large stones on a course above the foundations at Kom Ombo would have held similar sycamore (and sometimes copper) dowels to keep the stones in place without using mortar.





Another example of the Egyptian mason's skill can be seen at Khafre's Valley Temple at Giza (left). Khafre (or Chephren) was pharaoh c.2540 and responsible for the second largest pyramid at Giza.

The large stones which make up the corner of this building have been cut at right angles to go around the corner in one piece. This can be appreciated when you feel the stonework rather than see it in a photograph.

Some of the restoration work being carried out in temple precincts such as Karnak in Luxor (and there has been a great deal since I was last here in 2019), uses traditional adobe bricks made of mud, straw, sand and gravel (right).



Teams of brick makers are daily at work on the site and each batch of bricks is stamped with the manufacturer's name and date the bricks were made. Some of these bricks (left) are six years old.

Extensive new mud-brick wall at the Temple of Hathor at Dendera which mostly dates from the Ptolemaic era. Most buildings in Ancient Egypt were built using mud bricks, even royal palaces. Stone was only used to build temples and funerary monuments.





These temples were traditionally built with a decent batter, which is what we would expect from dry stone construction. This is a good example at Dendera (above) and at Edfu (below).



Sea Spray, 16-17 March



Another very muddy site. We walked through two waterlogged fields to get here, made worse by the trampling of Devon Reds. We welcome a new member, James, who participated on a course last year and this turns out to be a very mucky introduction to the craft of dry stone walling.

We begin by clearing a collapsed cheek end – it's Andy's job to

build this as he plans to take his level 2 qualification this year, but we allow Peter to crawl in the mud as he demonstrates to James the principle of laying foundation stones.



Sally and Phyllis decide to move to another, marginally less muddy site to close a gap which has become a cow lane.

The cheek end site becomes so slippery and unsafe that we reluctantly leave it until our next visit when we hope the ground will have dried out a bit. We aren't too worried about the farmer's reaction to our paltry weekend's work because he's not able to get his vehicles to the site!





Off to another collapsed stint and Andy begins stacking stone.

Andy and I work on this side of the wall, building straight courses, while Peter on the other side is following the existing slopy walling (below). Nicely done Peter!



Above left: By the end of Sunday, Andy and I are well on the way to height, while Phyllis and Sally complete their stint. At last, the mist has cleared, and the sun is shining. However, we realise that it will be nigh on impossible to run the April beginners' course at this site and we'll

need to find an alternative. The field is just too wet, and the National Trust won't be able to deliver stone to the site. It was marginally drier last year, and their trailer still got stuck a few hundred metres from the wall and we weren't able to use the stone – remember this photo from the April 2023 newsletter?



Our new gazebo



We have just ordered this smart new branded gazebo which is waterproof and measures 3 x 4.5 metres. We'll be having a presence at five shows this year and want to show off a bit (pardon the pun)!

Training Dorset Wildlife interns

Peter and I have been asked by the National Trust on South Purbeck to give walling experience to countryside trainees. Our first day, on Monday 18 March (very cool and blustery), was with a small group training as wardens for Dorset Wildlife Trust.

We have previously run taster sessions for National Trust staff on this wall, and as you can see, it hasn't seen much in the way of a straight line ...



News from The Stone Trust



California.

<https://thestonetrust.org/march-waller-of-the-month-ehren-woyt-2/>

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 next couple of months are as follows:

Saturday 6th / Sunday 7th April – Donkey Down, Sutton Poyntz
Saturday 13th / Sunday 14th April – Sea Spray, South Purbeck
Saturday 20th / Sunday 21st April – Donkey Down
Saturday 27th / Sunday 28th April – Beginners course & members walling Purbeck
Saturday 4th / Sunday 5th May – Donkey Down
Saturday 11th May / Sunday 12th May – Sea Spray

Please contact Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com) if you require maps / directions to these sites. If anything changes Phyllis will send out the relevant information.

As ever, I welcome contributions from all members, particularly if you have been travelling and seen some interesting structures.

Carole Reeves

A couple of months ago I signed up for the monthly newsletter of The Stone Trust, the US equivalent of the DSWA.

If you're interested in what our colleagues across the pond are building and the stone they're using, it makes for an interesting and enjoyable read. You can sign up on The Stone Trust's website.

I thought you'd like to see the wall built by March's waller of the month, Ehren Woyt, in Big Sur,