

DSWA Dorset News

April 2024

Corton 23-24 March and into April



After sliding down the steep, churned up chalk track the last time I ventured to muddy old Corton, I decide to leave my car in the farmyard alongside the tractors – which are mostly to blame for messing up the track.

Phyllis kindly gives me a lift to the site in her Jimny although even she is wary of parking too far into the mire of the field.

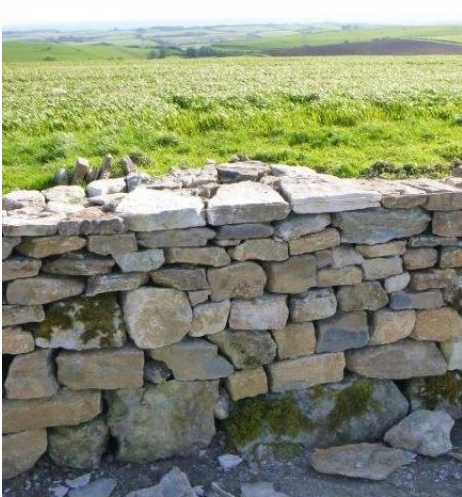
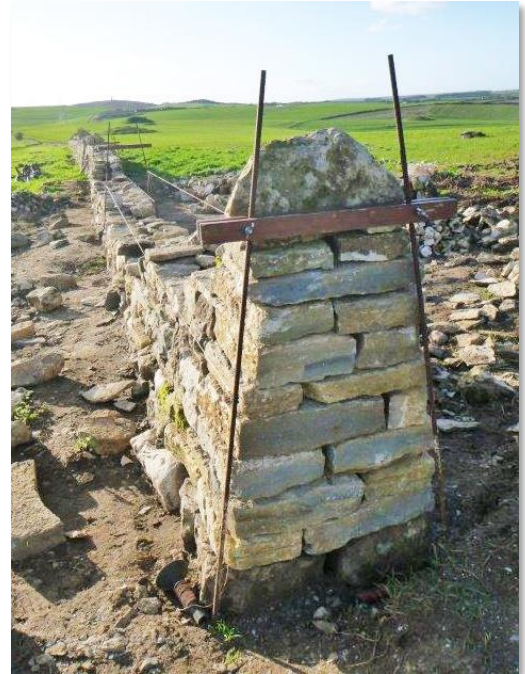
Right: Fiona and I work on one of the final stints.



Sally and Phyllis cope another section although as stone becomes scarce, suitable coping stones are harder to find. Much digging into the mud unearths a few decent lumps. The sun and wind is gradually drying up the site.

After the end of March, the branch has no plans to return to Corton but Sally, Mary and Tim plan to wall here every Friday until the wall is finished.

Sally completes the cheekend and the farmer installs a new gate and wire to fill the gap. The field will no longer be accessible to vehicles apart from farm machinery.



Platform ready for the final date stone. I order a suitable stone from Haysom's quarry in Langton Matravers, onto which Wendy will carve '2024'. She has carved all the date stones for this wall, the first being '2011'.

The size specification is 40 cm x 18 cm. Haysom's tell me that this will take several weeks because Wendy has asked for a sanded face. However, I receive a message the following day saying that a suitable stone has been found and prepared. It turns out to be 50 cm wide which creates something of a headache for Sally but she has prepared the wall.

Finished date stone.



Donkey Down, 6 April

This is our first site of the wall we'll be working on for the next couple of years. The farmer has cleared most of the bramble and other vegetation at this end of the wall but it's a dull, cold, misty, and windy day. We try to imagine what the site will look like in the sunshine and heat of summer ...



Potentially a lovely view over Sutton Poyntz and Weymouth, the site is adjacent to a public footpath in an AONB area (now designated as a Dorset National Landscape).

Six of us start clearing the site. Tim, the farmer, has had a good supply of stone delivered.

The milestone reads 'Borough of Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, 1938'.

The find of the day is a beautifully preserved wild boar's skull which I commandeer for my bone workshop collection.



By the end of the day we have cleared most of the stone for three decent sized stints but decide to cancel walling for Sunday because of the forecast for very strong winds.

Donkey Down, 20-21 April

What a difference the sun makes! A fabulous view down to Portland





Heads down in the search for foundation stones. Adrian and Tush pick up stone while Sally makes a start on the cheek end.

By mid-afternoon on Saturday the foundations have been laid and we've made a start on the first course. Not bad going for just five of us.

Geoff arrives with a bundle of freshly printed branch leaflets for our course at Tyneham next weekend. Looks like someone has been leaning on the batter frame.



Only three people arrive at Donkey Down on Sunday (Peter and I are at Tyneham tidying the site for next weekend's course – the first of the year).

Rob is making good headway on the stint I was working on yesterday. It's amazing how much can be achieved with only a few people. Although we like to see a good turnout, sometimes it's more satisfying to work alone on a decent sized stint.

The wall at the end of the weekend. Sally isn't very happy with the top stones on her cheek end and will find more appropriate ones when we return to this lovely site on the weekend of 4-5 May.



Sea Spray, 13-14 April



There's still mud underfoot at Sea Spray but the aim this weekend is to finish the cheek end section and fill a remaining gap in another wall. Peter, Sally, and I are the only branch members out on Saturday, and we work hard to bring the stint to height.

We have a curious audience of Devon Reds, most of whom are in calf or are yearling steers. While we are building, a heavily pregnant cow gallops through the gap in the wall and into an adjacent field. We reckon that we'll see a new calf before the day is out.



And here's mum with her new baby wandering back to re-join the herd.



Finished cheek end. We rubble-filled the section next to the old wall which as you can see will shortly collapse. Rubble filling is a temporary fix which will prevent the collapsing wall taking our new section with it. We will keep an eye on the precarious section

and repair when necessary.

Peter and I repair a gap in the wall. My side is boring, using straight courses while Peter's (below) is slopy walling. Why two different styles on the same stint, you may ask. Answer: because that's how we found the original wall – what was left of it.



We now say farewell to Sea Spray. We can't do anything else until we are able to get a stone delivery, and the field is still too wet and muddy for a trailer.

Ham Hill



A 'new' wall to be restored on the edge of Butchers Hill overlooking the Witcombe Valley, once the site of a medieval village. Geoff says: 'I managed to strim around the wall during the week so it should be easier to see any remaining dislodged stone.'



Above left: site of the medieval village in Witcombe Valley. Artist's impression of the village (above right) based on the remains of building footings. The village (also known as Widcombe) was still in existence in 1566, with twelve poor tenants, but was mostly deserted by 1614, though there was at least one house there in 1671.



Left: Old high boundary wall hidden in the nearby fenced off quarry.



Right: Digging out the remaining fallen stone.



Blasted wallers! Disturbing my warm winter quarters and no, the sleeve of a woolly jumper is not a substitute for a hibernating toad house.

Right: Toad in the hole. Back in the ground where I belong until the weather warms up a bit.



The Stone Trust Waller of the Month



Ben Sandri (*Massachusetts*) — I work mostly in western Massachusetts but grew up building with lumpy fieldstone in New Hampshire. A high school teacher and part-time waller, I love getting to bring both my professions together as an instructor.

Above: A lunky as an additional part of a certification wall. The stones I used in the side walls of this lunky were cut from boulders, and the lintel came from Peterborough Marble and Granite, which I then cut to match the batter.

Right: This 5-ft high curved wall was built from fieldstone harvested in southwest New Hampshire. It was built as part of a certification project and will have flowering vines growing up and over it eventually.



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 May are as follows:

Saturday 4th / Sunday 5th May – Donkey Down

Saturday 11th May / Sunday 12th May – TBC but probably Donkey Down

Saturday 18th May / Sunday 19th May – Donkey Down

Sunday 26th May – Preparation for the Sherborne Castle Country Fair

Monday 27th May – Sherborne Fair

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

It would be good to have an imposing DSWA presence at the Sherborne Fair. It's a Bank Holiday Monday so you might think about bringing your family and just spending a couple of hours on our pitch where, as usual, we'll be building a show wall. Please let us know if you plan to attend or help set up on the Sunday because we need to organise tickets.

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

Carole Reeves