

DSWA Dorset News

July 2024

The Gang at Donkey Down



Our lovely site at Donkey Down on a warm sunny day with Branch regular wallers. This photo was taken by Jill Hearing who is *Reconnecting the Landscape Project Officer* at Dorset National Landscape Partnership. She has been our champion for many years and it is through her that we have walled on sites on the South Dorset Ridgeway – Goulds Hill, Came Down, Corton, and now Donkey Down. She has also been bringing us welcome ice lollies on hot days.



Donkey Down course, 29-30 June



Saturday 29 June dawned bright and sunny when seventeen novice wallers arrived for the first course we have organised on Donkey Down. They came from all over the south, south-west, and south-east, including London.

Geoff and I were instructors, ably assisted by Phyllis and Steve. What remained of the old wall, full of crumbling cement, was soon dismantled and the stone stacked.

Dusty work but we have bottles of water, hot drinks and snacks tucked under the gazebo.

Right: The first foundations are laid down ...



... and (left) Steve makes sure the stones are straight and level with the guide string.



The first lift is well underway by early afternoon as Geoff checks his string levels.

I am smug because it looks my group are forging ahead of Geoff and Phyllis's team. However, it soon becomes clear that we have a shorter stint, and that the other group have prepared a significantly longer foundation trench.

By the end of the day, Geoff decides to shorten his team's stint. We always assess the situation at the end of the first day, knowing that the groups have to cope their stints by close of play on Sunday.





Unfortunately, Sunday starts off wet, cold and windy – not unusual for Donkey Down. It’s a very exposed site and the wind whips across the ridgeway. Not all of our participants have the wet weather clothing we suggest they bring, but some are just hardy like the lady at right. We have erected our small gazebo so it serves as a useful shelter during the worst of the showers.



Gradually, the weather clears up, the sun appears, and the waterproofs are discarded.

The walls are looking pretty good, and everyone seems to be enjoying the build. I lose two wallers during the morning who need to get back to London.



It's back to full sun now and the second lift is well underway. Through stones have been placed into the wall at regular intervals. At Corton, we tended to keep the stints separate but building a complete wall by both teams makes for a much nicer finish and more interest for the participants.



A very accomplished and well coursed stint by Carole and Steve's team.



And an equally good finish by Geoff and Phyllis's group. To see more photos go to our Flickr site at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/192778251@N07/albums/72177720318388931/>

Donkey Down members, 29-30 June



While the course is underway, Branch members are busy working on a new stint further along the wall. Sally and Rob wall on Saturday and he and Peter work on Sunday. This means that along with the ten metres or so completed by the course participants, a further five metres will soon be up to height.

Stoborough Village Fair, 6 July



Peter and I opt to attend the fair as we live nearest to Stoborough. The organisers have been asking the DSWA for the past couple of years, but we have always been busy with other events. No excuses in 2024!

It turns out to be not quite what we expected. We have always been told that this is a village fair but in fact it is a school fete and not something we would choose to do as a Branch. But we are here now so let's get on with it.

It is so windy that we tie our display boards onto the sides of the gazebo and weight the strings with our water bottles. Despite this, when we get back from lunch we find that everything has been blown off the table and we start all over again.

And then it starts raining ...



We are placed next to the hog roast which is being rotated by hand – for eight hours. At this point in the day, it has been roasting for half that time. The Salt Pig is in charge of all the meaty food – hot dogs, bacon rolls etc. Plus, the poor critter on the spit. But we enjoy afternoon tea and chocolate cake.

It being a school event, there are loads of kids, and we give out a record 26 certificates to children who successfully (with a bit of help) build our wall.

Some of the parents want to watch the football in the school and leave their children with us. I guess we are the nearest thing to a creche as there isn't very much entertainment for the youngest children (photo used with permission from the parents.)

There are two really good bands which make the event very pleasant, and the sun comes out.

By six o'clock the hog is ready for eating and Peter queues up for our baps (yes, I succumb) while I get the beers. We don't really get away until nearly eight, which makes for a long day.



Ham Hill (straight after the Hog Roast!)



After the Donkey Down course, Geoff runs one for ten Yeovilton volunteers (above). This is a team-building day and dry stone walling is becoming increasingly popular for such events. The late John Holt, an advanced waller and great teacher, who founded the London School of Dry Stone Walling, used to run dry stone walling hen parties. Could be interesting ...

The photo above was taken at Geoff's new walling site overlooking the lovely historic Witcombe Valley.



After the Yeovilton volunteers had put in the foundations, Geoff's regular Monday wallers began the build with this nice chunky cheek end.

Then Shauna decided she wanted to pose prettily beside it. If there's one thing sheep like more than sheep nuts it's the challenge of a newly built wall to destroy. Here she is waiting for Geoff to turn his back.



Donkey Down 13-14 July



Another section of wall rapidly coming to height at this lovely location. A further significant stint needs to be cleared of vegetation before we can progress any further, but progress is fairly rapid and we still have another beginners' course here in September. Phyllis took delivery of another drop of Purbeck stone from Suttles Quarry on Friday 19 July.

Interestingly, I happened to be walking along a bridleway next to Suttles Quarry on Purbeck last week when I saw an earthmover driven by one of the quarry workers. He told me that they were building a metal bridge between their existing quarry and a new quarry site which they hoped to be working for the next fifty years. Probably just as well because he reckoned the bridge will cost about £20 million. He assured me that it would be painted green to blend in with the surrounding countryside but it's going to be a fair old size to carry all their machinery.

Tyneham, 20 July



Another practice day at Tyneham for wallers to hone their skills. Martin and Karen attempt cheek ends. Martin passed his level one last year and is working towards level two. Karen just wants to build a cheek end because it's a technique she hasn't previously tried. Both are only able to devote one day to upskilling so they only take down half a section of wall.



Unfortunately, it begins to rain heavily, and we get very wet. Karen finishes her cheek end and heads for home while Martin copes his stint. I feel guilty sheltering in the barn while he's getting soaked, so I collect a couple of buckets of hearting. We feel sorry that he's driving back to Barnstable wearing very wet clothing. But well done to both for great efforts in horrible weather conditions.

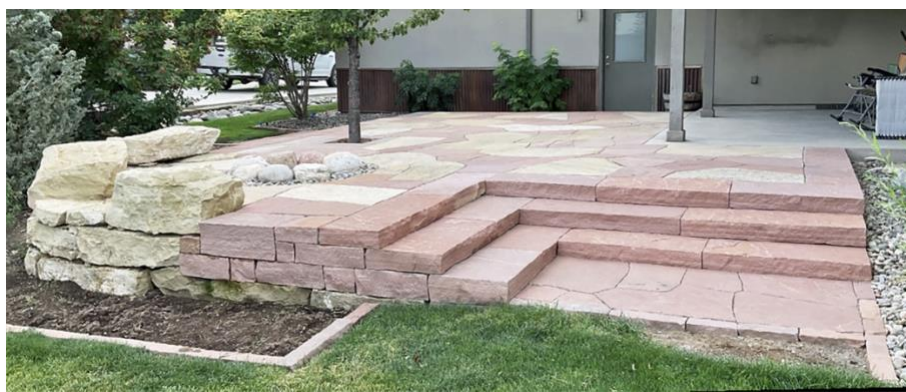


Ham Hill Green Flag Award



Congratulations to Geoff and all the rangers and volunteers at Ham Hill for achieving the Green Flag Award for 2024/25. Although this isn't the first time the Country Park has been recognised for this award, it demonstrates the ongoing commitment by everyone who contributes to maintaining this lovely environment. The Green Flag Award scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world. To find out more visit <https://www.greenflagaward.org>

The Stone Trust Waller of the Month



Sam Johnson of Colorado says: 'Terrace constructed with two custom staircases, rustic glacial till fire pit, and boulder corner accent with integrated seating. Patio in two tones: Colorado rose

and New Mexico buff. Staircase slabs and perimeter.’ Below: drone view of the build.



Read more at: <https://thestonetrust.org/july-waller-of-the-month-sam-johnson/>

Upcoming events

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

Saturday 27 July – Portesham Millennium Celebration. Anyone who would like to help Portesham celebrate its 1000th year please contact Phyllis.

August 3-4 – upskilling weekend at Tynham.

August 3-4 – ground preparation at Chickerell for storage container.

August 10-11 – Donkey Down - continuing with the restoration/ rebuild of the parish boundary wall.

August 17 – Donkey Down - continuing with the restoration/ rebuild of the parish boundary wall.

Please contact Phyllis (warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com) if you plan to come to any of the walling sessions above and / or require maps / directions to these sites. If anything changes Phyllis will send out the relevant information.

Melplash Show 22 August (set-up 21 August)

Oak Fair 24-25 August (set-up 23 August)

Please let Phyllis know if you would like to help on the day(s), either for set-up or the shows themselves. All help would be very gratefully received.

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

Carole Reeves