

# DSWA Dorset News

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October 2024

**Branch AGM, 28 September**



Our AGM was held on Saturday 28 September at Ham Hill Rangers HQ, kindly hosted by Geoff. I was unable to attend because I was on my way to Peru, and I don't yet have the minutes so I can't provide any information about what was said. However, members of the new committee are as follows: Peter Curtis, Chairman, Treasurer and instructor; Phyllis Warren, Secretary (Programme and Minutes); Carole Reeves, Secretary (membership and publicity) and instructor; Geoff Rowland, website and instructor; Karen Bartlett, course coordinator. Dave Rawson, after many years on the committee, tendered his resignation, which was ruefully accepted and his contributions to Dorset DSWA gratefully acknowledged.

After the meeting, Geoff and some of the attendees enjoyed an afternoon's walling at the beautiful site at Ham Hill overlooking the Witcombe Valley. It looks like a supernatural deity is

shining down on Adrian, Sally, Mary and Phyllis. It is a lovely historical site, and I was sorry to miss it.

Geoff says: ‘Paul Greaves drew my attention to this article in *The Times*. See No 6. Ham Hill Country Park! Note the reference to: “...an undulating ramble of honey-stone walls...”

<https://www.thetimes.com/travel/destinations/uk-travel/seven-of-the-loveliest-country-parks-for-an-autumn-walk-w36nwdh70>

Nice to get some national recognition.’

From my personal perspective it is also good to see Craig-y-Nos Country Park, Pen-y-cae, Powys, also feature ed. I have spent a good deal of time here over the past 18 years whilst working on a public history project. This has involved interviewing people who were child patients in Craig-y-nos castle when it was a tuberculosis sanatorium between 1921 and 1959 (photo: Tilly Jaye Horseman).



The book, *The Children of Craig-y-nos: Life in a Welsh Tuberculosis Sanatorium, 1921-1959* is available from Amazon (£9.99) or I can send anyone who contacts me a free pdf version.

## Peruvian dry stone walls



I received no information about Branch walling at Donkey Down while I have been away, so the rest of this newsletter will feature the dry stone walls and other structures that I discovered during my travels through Peru.

Crossing the altiplano or Andean plateau (the most extensive high plateau on earth outside Tibet), the traveller observes groups of llamas, alpacas, vicunas, and the

occasional but hard to spot chinchilla. Most of the large animals are not wild but farmed for their wool, hides and meat. Domesticated llamas like the one above, have coloured wools threaded through their ears – in this case red through the left ear and turquoise through the right. Gigantic volcanic explosions between 33 and 23 million years ago, have left the plateau strewn with volcanic rocks which are used for building.



Right: volcanic dry stone corral with flimsy wooden gate used for penning the animals overnight.



Left: clearly llamas don't jump around much because this corral clearly needed a bit of maintenance. I am sorely tempted to pick up a few stones and do a spot of repair work, but it is feeding time and that proves irresistible.

There's nothing a llama likes more than a bunch of fresh alfalfa.





Dry stone walls separate agricultural fields in this part of Peru – in fact they are everywhere where there is farming. Agriculture is an important industry and employer in Peru although mining for copper, zinc, gold and silver has overtaken agriculture and fishing. Peru is the world’s second largest producer of copper (after Chile).



Above: In a hilly landscape, the creation of field terracing with dry stone retaining walls is generally attributed to the period of the Inca Empire (1438-1533).

Right: Inca terracing in the Colca Canyon, which is one of the deepest canyons in the world, at c. 2000 metres. Access to these terraces is no mean feat.





The Colca Canyon is also home to the Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*), the largest flying landbird in both the Western and Southern Hemispheres. With a wingspan of three metres these giant vultures glide on the thermals – I didn't see any actually flapping their wings.



Taquile Island in Lake Titicaca is a Quechua-speaking community of c. 5000 people. Only a very small area in the south of the island (which measures 7km by 1km), allows tourist boats to dock. The islanders only accepted electricity (the island uses solar panels) during the pandemic because they wanted communication with the outside world. Fishing and terraced farming horticulture is the mainstay of the economy but in 2005 its incredible textiles were recognised by UNESCO as 'Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.' The dry stone wall surrounding the farm above is single-skinned and I didn't see a double-skinned wall anywhere on the island.



Right: single-skinned wall built of sandstone, the stone of the island.



Left: The soles of somebody's worn out shoes make efficient gate hinges!

Below: Musicians and dancers of Taquile. The people, descendants of the Incas, wear traditional Peruvian dress all year round (not just for tourists but not quite as grand as these



entertainers). There are health downsides to living at an altitude of almost 4000 metres, which manifest as individuals age. They are advised to move to sea level in old age but very few leave the island.



Chincho, in the Sacred Valley of the Incas (the heartland of the Inca Empire), and supposedly the birthplace of the rainbow, has the most stunning walling I saw anywhere in Peru, aside from Machu Picchu. Although there is some restoration, and the site is very well maintained, much of the original Inca stonework survives. The terraces were used for agriculture.



How about this for a corner?

Below: Inca stone masons are renowned for the close fit of their stones. You can't put a piece of paper between them and there is no mortar.

Although Inca masons used stone, bronze or copper tools, usually splitting the stones along natural fracture lines, a common method to cut stone was to hammer a wooden stake into a fracture line,

and top this up with water. When the wood swelled it split the stone. The stone here is granite and there were some sizeable boulders in these walls.

Below: cubby holes in the walls which served as shelters for the workmen and also storage spaces for tools.

The base of many houses are dry stone courses (as seen in this photograph below and below right) topped with a rendered wall.





Before I left for Peru, Peter requested a photo of me wearing an Inca hat with a llama. Well, I did fulfil this up to a point (you'll see this photo when I get to Machu Picchu) but the real Inca hats can be seen on these girls in the Sacred Valley. They really do wear these clothes every day. It gets cold in this part of Peru and they are layered for warmth.



Left: Ollantaytambo in the Sacred Valley is both a site of archaeological ruins and a town. The area was a royal estate and fortress of the Inca ruler, Pachacuti (meaning: 'the turn of the world'), and is also a ceremonial site where Incas resisted Spanish conquest.

Right: On my way to the fortress, I met a lady sitting next to a dry stone retaining wall and weaving; her loom attached to a lamp post. This is not an unusual site in Peru as women tie their looms to railings, fence posts, benches, and any handy immovable structures. All these women are self-employed which in Peru, with little in the way of social services or free healthcare, can be precarious.







Left: Perhaps it's not surprising then that people find space for their ancestors. In the workshop of this house, two skulls of elderly folk sit alongside woven fabrics and other handicrafts. I was told that this is not an uncommon phenomenon. Although officially a Catholic country, the ceremonies and offerings to Pachamama, Mother Earth, are still very much alive; and many processions in honour of the Saints are often

derived from the Andean ceremonies that existed before the arrival of the Spanish and the priests.

In the countryside, the Apus, the protective spirit of the mountains, Inti, the god of the sun, Killa, the moon, continue to be worshipped, weaving links between the world below, the world in between (ours) and the world above.



Right: The sun temple, Ollantaytambo. Monoliths weighing up to 50 tons and rising 4.6 metres high form a six-section wall made of pink granite, transported from the Cachicata quarry 6km away, each stone separated from its neighbour by shim-like inserts.



The seams are unimaginably tight. How were these stones brought here across the 300m deep Urubamba river valley and dressed so beautifully?

Left: tight walling on the way to the Sun Temple. This isn't random walling as the stones are clearly dressed.

Right: terracing at Ollantaytambo with dry stone retaining walls. Compare the scale of the terraces with the people.



Below: View from the Sun Temple onto the town which is still laid out with streets too narrow for modern traffic, and houses built during the Inca period. It is easy to imagine the strategic importance of this site.





And so to Machu Picchu, with the famous mountain, Huayna Picchu (‘Young Mountain’), in the background.



Left: The ruins of this Inca citadel were rediscovered in 1911 by the Yale University professor and explorer, Hiram Bingham (1875-1956). He wrote: ‘Suddenly, I found myself standing before the walls of ruins and houses built with the finest Inca craftsmanship. The walls were difficult to discern, as trees and moss had covered the stones for centuries. But in the bamboo shadow and climbing shrubs, there were visible walls made of precisely cut white granite

blocks. I found brilliant temples, royal houses, a grand plaza, and thousands of houses. It seemed like a dream.’ The National Geographic magazine made the discovery as famous as Howard Carter’s later discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb.

Right: Much restoration work has taken place over the past century. Typical are the large dry stone lower courses, which is the original Inca stonework, topped by modern walling using smaller stones, and I'm afraid to say, some mortaring. This was disappointing to me, but I suppose, with so many daily visitors (maximum 2500 a day), it makes sense to play safe and also to reduce the need for constant repair.



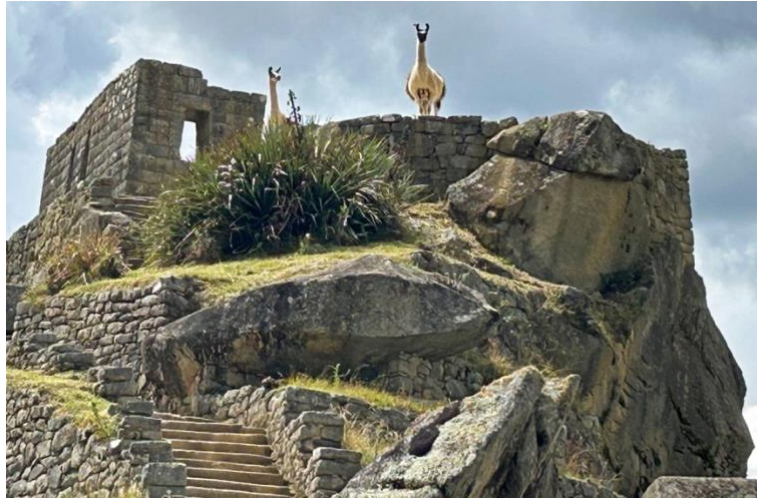
It seems that the Incas didn't have to travel too far for stone because there is a quarry of white granite on site. Perhaps this made the selection of the site attractive to the Incas.

About 500 people would have lived and worked on this site at any one time. It was a fairly impregnable citadel. The regular buses up to the entrance take half an hour. When Hiram Bingham made the journey there was no road.

Right: Remains of a dwelling. The roof would have been thatched.



Left: Me wearing my 'Inca' hat with my pal Larry the Llama.



Left: Llamas rule at Machu Picchu. These guys are kings of the castle.

Below right: Terracing at Machu Picchu with dry stone retaining walls. The main crops grown here would have been potatoes, corn and quinoa, a very important cereal in Peru. There are many varieties of potatoes and corn including black corn, used for making a delicious non-alcoholic beverage and also for dyeing yarn.



Above left: Remains of a temple.



Right: The day after I visited Machu Picchu citadel, I trekked up Machu Picchu mountain. This was a personal goal, and I won't say that it wasn't challenging. You can see the Machu Picchu site far below. I did this on my own as no one else was daft enough to accept the challenge, or they claimed altitude sickness!

The height was 3061.28 metres.





Left: Finally, I want to share this photo of Inkie the baby alpaca and her fetching smile.

Towards the end of my journey through Peru, I stayed in what had once been an Inca Palace in Cuzco (the old Inca capital). In the courtyard, lady weavers are hard at work, and Inkie is their pet. She is also tourist bait as we all fell in love with her. Baby alpaca wool is much prized, and the garments made from it are expensive.

And so I said farewell to Peru, happy in the knowledge that I had discovered more dry stone walls and other structures than I had imagined.

## News from the Stone Trust

Sixteen years after falling in love with stonework, Kim Coggin achieved Master Craftswoman status on October 5, becoming the first female Level 4 Waller in the United States. What a tremendous accomplishment!

For more information on Kim and her work see: <https://www.laurelstoneworks.com>

## Upcoming events

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

Sat 2<sup>nd</sup> November / Sun 3<sup>rd</sup> November - Donkey Down

I can't go any further than this at the moment but Phyllis will be in touch with the details of the forthcoming walling programme.



Please contact Phyllis ([warrenphyllis@rocketmail.com](mailto: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.

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

Carole Reeves