the Dry Stone Walls association of Australia inc.

The Flag Stone

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Patron: Sir James Gobbo ABN 31 721 856 687 Newsletter Editor: Charmian Brent

Iceland – a lava story

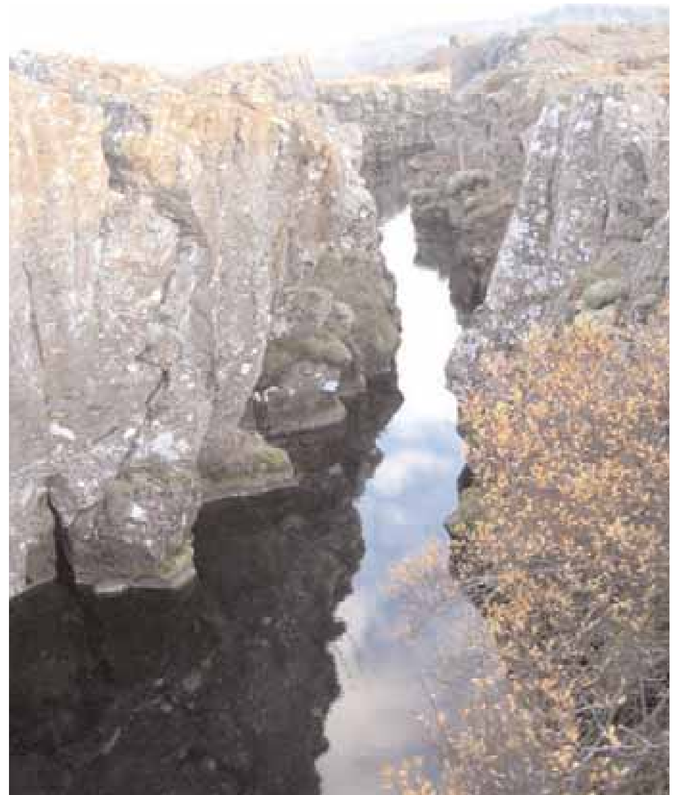
By Kerryn Rudge

Mention Iceland and immediate thoughts are of the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull on 14 April 2010 and the following forced closure of numerous airports across Europe for five days, causing unprecedented air travel disruption.

After a recent visit to Iceland, you realise how pervasive volcanic activity is in the life of Icelanders. The country itself was formed by underwater volcanic eruptions along the junction of the North American and Eurasian plates 17 to 20 million years ago. Now these two massive tectonic plates create a highly active fault line across the centre of Iceland. In addition to the two tectonic plates, Iceland is home to more than 22 active volcanoes, 250 geothermal areas and 780 hot springs. These geographical elements create a landscape that at every turn connects back to the influence of volcanoes in this Arctic 'lunar landscape'.

On the bus transfer from the airport to the capital city of Reykjavik, barren rock-strewn plains devoid of trees lead to ice-capped mountains with distant puffs of steam from the hot natural springs. There is the quirky touch of man in a series of small stone sculptures of large boulders placed atop one another, stone snowmen in a field of rugged desolation. No other evidence of life here.

Iceland is roughly the same size as England, but with a population of only 300,000 scattered around its coast, it is again a stunning contrast to England's 49 million.



Above: North American and Eurasian tectonic plates
Below: dry stone wall

Field Trip and 7th Annual General Meeting

to be held in Camperdown on
Saturday, 18 June 2011 at 1.00 pm

The AGM will be followed by a field trip near to Camperdown, visiting old walls, new walls and a fascinating dry stone wall sculpture by waller, Alistair Tune

Formal AGM notice to be issued shortly

Please direct any queries to: Andrew Miller, Secretary, DSWAA aksdmiller@bidpond.com
mobile 0408 139553

PLEASE PUT THIS DATE IN YOUR DIARY NOW!

The highlight of a three-day stopover was a day trip into the central part of the island. Our transport for the day was by Arctic Truck, an off-road 4WD Toyota specially refitted for the extreme landscape of Iceland.

The low sun gave the landscape a golden glow as we travelled across this stark country and was made all the more eerie by the homegrown music of Sigur Ros on the CD player. We stopped at Pingvellir National Park (23 km from Reykjavik), a place of desolate beauty where a large crystal clear lake is surrounded by gigantic volcanic ridges. It is little wonder that Pingvellir became the site of the country's original biannual gathering and National Assembly – selected for its haunting majesty and because it lies at the crossroads of a huge fish-filled lake and a dramatic landscape. A place to encourage creative vision and thought.

From Pingvellir we travelled further inland, where green pasture was replaced by vast black volcanic lava fields. Below these black fields, hidden from view, caves dating back more than 10,000 years were penetrated with torchlights and a knowing guide, revealing again the layers of lava from repeated volcanic action. As we ventured further, the volcanic plains were covered in ice and snow, creating glaciers of a truly awesome beauty. The volcanic history of Iceland was evidenced everywhere we travelled, from the remains of original homes made of dry stone walls and covered in grass for insulation to the gushing waters raging from the cavities along the ridges of the many rivers and lakes.

A respect and affection for the country's volcanoes by the people of Iceland is clear. Many creative pursuits of the locals result from applying the products of the volcano, that is, elegant jewellery featuring lava stones and distinctive ceramics using lava dust as glaze. In addition, the power for the country is generated by the surplus of superheated steam and hot water from the volcanically created geothermal underground pools. Iceland's use of geothermal power is one of the most innovative in the world. Perhaps the Icelandic ancestors were right; this is a place of creative vision and thought.

Heading towards the glacier

Lava fields

Geothermal power

Water gushing from volcanic cavities in the rivers

How do you kick off an effort to help establish the DSWAA in New South Wales?

By Jim Vandore, Convenor, DSWAA (NSW)

Keen to have a combination of action events and historic visit events in the NSW program for 2011, the first idea which came to fruition was a plan to demonstrate dry stone wall building at Tocal Agricultural College near Maitland, just north-west of Newcastle. Each year, the college hosts the three-day Tocal Field Days, which attracts 15-20,000 visitors and more than 500 exhibitors.

Our approach to the organisers to put on a wall-building demonstration was welcomed as a new attraction for the Field Days and so it was that three of us: Kim Barnfield (Alkira Constructions, Central Coast), James Nicolle (Stone on Stone, Newcastle) and myself arrived on site early in the morning of Friday, 29 April. It wasn't exactly a welcoming sight as the morning was cool and damp and we were confronted with a site bare except for several heaps of newly quarried rocks, many of them quite large. However, we had a new DSWAA banner and the first job was to install this at the front of the site. The next job was to say G'day to our neighbouring exhibitors. On one side we had a guy selling plastic water tanks, some modified to have an interesting combination of veggie garden in the top section and fish growing in the lower section with regular pumping of the water from bottom to the top. The stall on the other side was selling insectivorous plants!

The next job was to roughly sort out the rocks and choose some suitable large ones for the base course. We had a short debate about whether or not we should separate the rocks into the red ones and the grey ones. The rocks had been quarried from a nearby hillside and interestingly, although both were a form of sandstone, were coloured reddish or greyish.

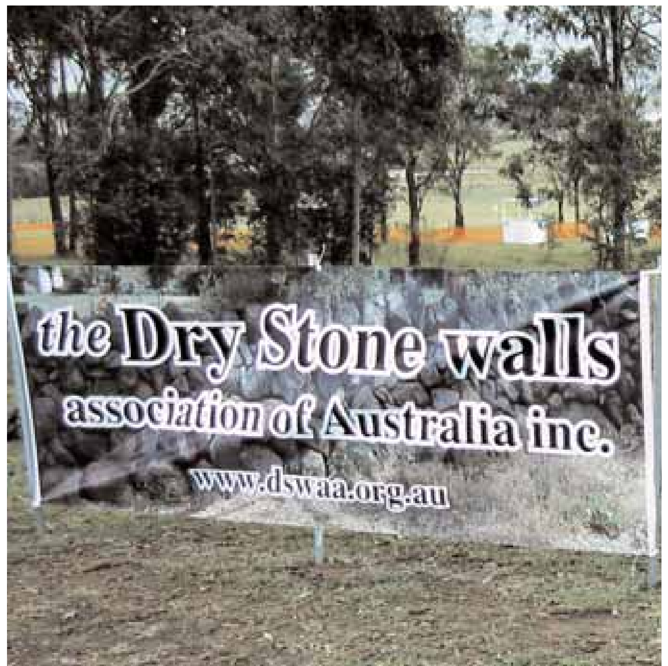
We chose the best big rocks for the base and gradually the semblance of a wall began to emerge. One of the first issues was that as the rocks were larger than we might have preferred, the base course was wider than planned and the consequence was that unless we increased the batter we would end up with a higher wall than we wanted.

Kim was clearly the Director General in this work and James distinguished himself with excellent work on the shaping of really large rocks to meet the needs of the wall builder. The banner proved very useful at this stage because lots of rock trimming was taking place and the banner was preventing stone chips from flying in the direction of our audience. Our stand was situated near a major entry point and we attracted lots of attention with four or five people regularly stopping to observe and to ask questions. We were teased a few times about whether this was convict work and whether or not we had spent time 'inside' to learn this craft!

We had a little table selling packs of DSWAA cards, copies of the booklet, The Craft of Dry Stone Walling, and membership forms. Every now and then we realised that it was raining again and we had to rush and cover the printed material before it was spoiled.

Day one was wet in the morning and late afternoon and Day 2 (Saturday, 30 April) started off similarly, but tended to run to showers regularly through the day. It was becoming very muddy at some exhibits, but was OK at ours. We had additional help on Day 2 when Stuart Read arrived from Sydney. Stuart was able to devote increased time to the selling business and sold a handsome number of the booklets at $5 each.

The site was bare except for several heaps of newly quarried rocks, many of them quite large



The first job was to install a new DSWAA banner at the front of the site

The wall steadily progressed and was about half built and narrowing at the top as had been planned. As the two amateur wall builders, Stuart and I tried our hand at building a competitive curving wall at the front corner of the site using only the grey stones, but it didn't work out very well and we had to acknowledge the superiority of the professionals' wall.

The finished wall proudly displayed by Kim Barnfield, stone mason and DSWAA member, NSW

Later we found that our little wall was to become an excellent training ground for the many kids who wanted to participate, although the dads and mums were more reluctant to join in.

On the third day, Sunday, 1 May, Kim, the general, had become so attached to his wall and was so anxious to see it completed that he added an unscheduled third day to his effort. Although James was unavailable on Sunday, we were fortunate to have the assistance of master craftsman Geoff Williams (Heritage stonemason and carver) and the wall was duly finished by lunchtime. By this time we had removed the banner from in front of the wall so that all passers by could see and admire the wall in its entirety.

In conclusion, it was a big effort by all concerned, but we met a large number of people who now know about the DSWAA and we have renewed their interest in walls through this endeavour. Even though knees and backs were suffering some pain at the end of the weekend, there was, I believe, a feeling of satisfaction that we had all worked well together and the job was well done.

Part of an old sheep pen built in the 1860s, Western District, Victoria

Jeju Island, South Korea

By David Moloney, DSWAA member, Victoria

These are traditional style Korean houses built by fishermen on the harbour foreshore. The use of stone is unusual. Mud mortar is used in parts of the houses, and occasionally in some of the surrounding walls

Jeju Island is a volcanic island off South Korea towards Japan. It is a beautiful and interesting place, a favourite with Korean tourists, on which are grown the most magnificent oranges in spite of seasonal snow. Apart from its rich soil, fishing seems to have been important and, as can be seen in these 2004 photos, its volcanic rocks have been used to build (at least partly 'dry' as far as I could work out) seaside fishermen's houses of traditional Korean plan, and even recent seaside buildings. The dry stone walls are of a different construction from ours. Some of the buildings, and perhaps even the walls, do sometimes appear to use a little mud or mortar. I'm sure the wallers would be interested, and I might have had a closer look, but not everyone was quite so excited about such matters. Josephine, my wife, still occasionally mentions the honeymoon where all her husband wanted to do was take photos of dry stone walls. As the photos of modern village streets show, the dry stone tradition is very much alive and well.

A modern local fishing industry building. In contrast to the abundant sea-smoothed heavy foreshore rocks used for most buildings, these rocks look to have come from the sharp reefs on the foreshore, and provide plenty of friction. I could not see any mortar. The roof is also constructed of this same rock, although whether it is corbelled or otherwise structural is unknown

An impressive new stone wall as a symbol of status

Walls with diamond shaped patterns are not seen elsewhere

Extensive use of dry stone walls for fencing in new villages provides a vernacular unity to the streetscape.

President's Message

Jim Holdsworth

Greetings!

The DSWAA's Vision includes the words:

> that governments and the wider community recognise the importance of significant dry stone structures built by indigenous peoples, European explorers, early settlers and modern craftspeople.

The first of these groups has a long and largely unknown history of using stone as a material to build structures of various types. Many non-indigenous Australians believe that the first occupants of this continent were nomadic peoples who built no permanent structures and had no permanent impact on the land they occupied.

We are beginning to realise how wrong this perception is.

One of the richest repositories of indigenous artefacts is to be found in far western Victoria, on the fertile plains and among the fingers of lava that flowed from the volcanoes, which remain as prominent features of the landscape.

In March 2007, the DSWAA held a weekend of field trips to dry stone sites and structures in the area north of Port Fairy. Our tours, under the guidance of local architectural historian Dr Timothy Hubbard, included visits to the summit of Mt Rouse, a prominent volcanic cone just south of Penshurst, to the Byaduk lava flow which emanated from Mt Napier and a visit to the wonderfully impressive Bessiebelle sheepwash, made of stones from the lava flow from nearby Mt Eccles. The impact of the region's former volcanoes on the landscape, heritage and culture of that part of western Victoria is ubiquitous.

To the local Gunditjmara people, the traditional owners and occupiers of this land, Mt Eccles is Budj Bim.

Last year, a fascinating book, ***The People of Budj Bim– engineers of aquaculture, builders of stone house settlements and warriors defending country***, was published. To delve into it will be an eye-opener for anyone who does so. It changes our perceptions of where Australia's traditions of dry stone construction have their origins and at the same time enables us to realise that our Aboriginal predecessors were builders of permanent structures.

In the book are these words:

> The people of Budj Bim had ample supplies of water and had devised fish traps and ponds to ensure a well-stocked food store. Readily available building material was on hand. They could, if they so chose, stay put – which is exactly what they did, living comfortably in circular stone–walled houses with sturdy, weatherproof domed roofs.

The book refers to extracts from the traditional owners' submission to support their successful native title claim in 2007. One extract describes how:

> the modified and engineered wetlands and eel traps provided the economic basis for the development of a settled society with villages. Gunditjmara used stones from the lava flow to create walls of their circular stone houses. Groups of between two and sixteen houses are common along the Tyrendarra lava flow and early European accounts of Gunditjmara describe how they were ruled by hereditary chiefs.

Fish traps and weirs were commonly seen by early European settlers, as were mysterious oval-shaped mound platforms. These mounds were the locations of large structures used as houses, the mounds growing in height as burnt or damaged older structures were used as the base for newer replacements. Some houses were of stone, wood and thick turf, the grass pointing inwards.

In 1841, George Robinson, Chief Aboriginal Protector, while visiting the Tyrendarra area, noted 'stone houses, stone weirs' and near Lake Gorrie, that the people 'had a sort of village, and some of their habitations were of stone'.

The book notes that stone houses are spread throughout the 100 square kilometres of the Budj Bim landscape and that settlement sites are continuing to be discovered wherever the Gunditjmara people and archaeologists take a closer look.

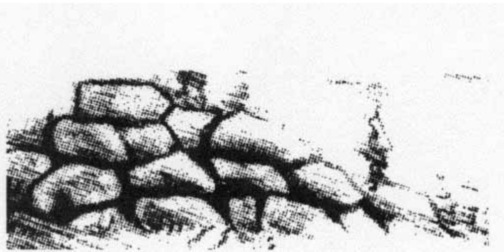
Unfortunately, most of these structures disappeared within a short time after European settlement; a period that reflects poorly on the attitude of many settlers to the original inhabitants. ***The People of Budj Bim*** describes the frequently violent relationships that occurred as white people invaded traditional lands and largely dispossessed the occupiers and custodians.

Across Australia, but probably nowhere as concentrated as in western Victoria, evidence endures of the use of dry stone techniques by indigenous inhabitants for river and estuarine fishing, for hides and shelters while hunting or for houses in permanent settlements. These ancient artefacts represent part of the contribution that dry stone construction makes to our national heritage.

Regards to you all

Jim Holdsworth

The People of Budj Bim – engineers of aquaculture, builders of stone house settlements and warriors defending country, published by em PRESS Publishing for the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation. Written by the Gundijmara people with Gib Wettenhall, 2010. Orders at www.emPRESSscapes.com



Gathering Stones...

More of master waller, David Long's beautiful work at Qdos Gallery, Lorne in Victoria

In our quest to show you dry stone structures all over the world, here is a shepherd's hut in Patagonia, photographed by our editor's son, Chris Brent, in January 2011

How seldom do we get to peep into the lives of others and to try to imagine what life might have been like in Mount Macedon some hundred years ago when the garden at Forest Glade was first being established. Today Forest Glade is one of Australia's finest private gardens. This magnificent landscaped garden covers fourteen acres (5.6 ha) comprising four distinct sections. The large English section has huge exotic trees and masses of colour. The delightful Japanese section is complete with a bonsai house. The beautiful woodland section displays many shade-loving plants, and there is a cool fern gully. There are many unexpected pleasures in store for dry stone wall aficionados who, when wandering among the garden beds and retaining walls, may happen across plantings and sculptures set against a backdrop of the ancient craft of dry stone walling. The grounds are open to the public; for details visit: www.forestglade.com.au

In retirement John Collier, long-term DSWAA member and benefactor, who has developed Parkinson's Disease, found another outlet for his creative, exploring mind: painting. John was urged to try his hand at painting in November 2007 when several friends saw a pencil sketch of a gazebo style barbecue pit from his North Garfield farm. John enquired about the Bunyip art group and art classes for the Parkinson's Group who happily accepted him as a member. With them he has expanded his joy and discovery of painting and now works from an Art Studio in Malvern. Above are paintings from his recent exhibition 'New Beginnings'.

Drawing stone

The following interesting case (*Boland v Bromfield*) re the construction of dry stone walls was heard in the Colac Court of Requests on 12 October 1857, before Hugh Murray and Alexander Dennis Esquires. The information comes from the *Colac Court of Petty Sessions Register 1849-65*. The case related to 'Refusing to draw stone for a wall fence according to agreement (in writing)'. Defendant (Bromfield) refused to draw the stone because the Plaintiff (Boland) would not assist both to load and unload. Plaintiff was willing to assist in loading but not unloading. There was no evidence before the Court to show what was the custom in similar cases and as the Plaintiff did not wish the case to be remanded, it was dismissed.'

Rob Wuchatsch

Contributions for

The Flag Stone

invited

Pictures of unusual walls/damaged walls

Dry stone wall-related literature

Any item of interest to members of DSWAA

News from overseas

Deadline for the September 2011 issue is 14 August 2011

All material to: chabrent@bigpond.net.au

Gabo Island

By Jim Weatherill (Jim is an active member of the Melbourne Camera Club)

When photography friends suggested that we join them for nine nights on Gabo Island, it sounded like a good idea at the time. However, suggesting it to other photographers, who may have cared to join the group, met with quite negative responses. One looked it up on the internet and remarked four days, yes, but nine days, no thank you.

Before last Christmas, I knew very little about Gabo Island. It was the place mentioned in weather reports and often in relation to gale force winds. However, our nine days were blessed with good weather, plenty of sunshine and no high seas to interfere with our arrival or departure from the island by fishing boat.

Gabo is located 14 km from Mallacoota, at the eastern tip of Victoria, close to the border with NSW. The island is 154 ha and supports significant colonies of seabirds, including the largest colony of little penguins in the world. Seals are regulars, while dolphins and whales can also be sometimes spotted.

The lighthouse was built in 1858–62 using the distinctive pink granite quarried from nearby. Its tower, which is 47 meters high, visually dominates the island. Of interest is the fact that the red porphyritic granite was used in a number of prominent 19th century Melbourne buildings such as the Immigration Museum and the Melbourne General Post Office (GPO). Close by the light are two keeper's cottages – one is used by the lighthouse keeper and the other is available for visitors. It sleeps up to eight in comfortable conditions and bookings can be made through Parks Victoria's Mallacoota Office.

The lighthouse is a beautiful and impressive structure and is complemented by the cottages and dry stone walls that are associated with and surround the island's buildings. We took far too many photographs and although we believed our photography would principally be about nature, we found the lighthouse and its surrounds dominated our images; the colours of the tower in the early morning and evening light had to be seen to be believed.

Doing walls

By Bruce Munday, an excerpt from his upcoming book

'They should be built by some one who understands such work, or they would be liable to totter down.'
Anon (1861) *Australian Settler's Handbook*

Well, anyone can pile up a few rocks and call it a wall. Indeed, many people do! And many of the old walls that have stretched across our landscape for over a hundred years were probably built by people with little more than the everyday skills, casually passed on from one generation to the next. But there were professional wallers, let's call them tradesmen, who generally had superior skills and it is a fair guess that the walls still intact today were largely a product of these skills. As George Melrose of Rosebank commented in 1892: '…there is not one man in a hundred that can build a proper stone wall.' Indeed, stonemasonry was regarded as among the elite trades and no doubt good dry stone wallers were much sought after. But wallers, like cobblers and blacksmiths, are today a rare breed.

Levi Cooper

Levi Cooper (1838–1927) arrived at Robe from the town of Beer in Devon as a seventeen-year-old. Beer is famous for its freestone quarries which provided stone for Winchester and Exeter cathedrals. He is remembered for several historic stone buildings in and around Robe, but his most remarkable achievement is the superb dry-stone walls at The Hermitage.

Limestone wall by Levi Cooper at The Hermitage

Cooper served on the Robe District Council and was Chairman in 1894. Nonetheless, Kathleen Bermingham describes him as taciturn, and as 'the silent mason'. What then to make of Bermingham's romantic claim that Cooper had 'wooed and lost' Maggie Park, who at age seventeen married Adam Lindsay Gordon. Unlikely as it seems, the story goes that Cooper every evening visited the Caledonian Inn where Maggie had worked, there to dwell in memory of his shattered romance. He remained faithful to Maggie, a lamenting bachelor to the end.

Cooper's gravestone is unmarked, however the Robe Historical Group has erected a memorial plaque at the gate to the cemetery, the wall of which he built for £239.

Levi Meakins

Levi Meakins (1851–1923), the son of a master waller by the same name from Northants (UK), started his working life as a nine-yearold on his father's bullock team. He can claim credit for much of the wonderful walling in the eastern Mount Lofties district from Mount Pleasant to Keyneton, working with another man and a couple of boys. Commencing as a teenager, he worked almost full-time building walls for Joseph Keynes, AB Murray and George Melrose until 1882 when he left to work as a boundary rider for Melrose at Rosebank. Meakins eventually became overseer at Rosebank until 1914 when the position passed to his son Jimmie.

Above left: Levi Meakins, doyen of stone wallers in the eastern Mount Lofty Ranges. (Courtesy B. Wright)

We might never know just how many miles of stone wall across the eastern ranges we should attribute to Levi Meakins, but we can be quite confident in crediting him with the best of them.

In 1890 Meakins' first son, William Levi, drowned in a farm dam on Rosebank.

Patrick O'Grady

The name O'Grady (1838–1906) keeps cropping up in the context of mid-north stone walls. He is variously referred to as Peter and as Patrick, but the latter is almost certainly correct as it appears thus on a headstone in the Jamestown cemetery and in a 1928 obituary to his wife in *The Agriculturalist and Review*.

Wall built by Patrick O'Grady on Munduney Station – the new and the old

O'Grady was a waller on Bundaleer Station and later had a contract for stone walling on Canowie Station. He is remembered in a handwritten note from one Joe Gerke 'as a little old man with long ringlets who always wore green ribbon in his coat'. The sobriquet 'old' seems misplaced, as this he would not have been when building the Camel's Hump walls in the 1860s. Much of his walling was undertaken with Nathaniel Robinson and with a man known simply as O'Donoghue.

O'Grady is buried with his wife Annie at Jamestown Cemetery, but as local photographer Mary-Anne Young commented: 'for someone who created such magnificent stone work, it is a disappointing grave.'

George Sara

George Sara was born in Cornwall (1813) and began an apprenticeship in the mines at the tender age of nine. There he learned stonemasonry, a skill he brought with him to Australia in 1848. Sara worked in Willunga and established George Sara & Sons, hugely productive quality builders with stone.

Aside from Willunga, there are stone monuments to Sara & Sons from the Currency Creek viaduct on the Fleurieu Peninsula right up through the Mid-North, including Roseworthy College, all the railway stations from Riverton to Burra, Burra School, and Gladstone Gaol to name a few.

Sara was still chopping his own firewood at age one hundred and one and left sixty-two direct descendants when he died unexpectedly, apparently choking on a plum at breakfast. One of those descendants is his great, great, great granddaughter Sally, the inveterate ABC reporter who spends her working life in the most dangerous places on the planet.

It is difficult to find dry stone walls attributable to George Sara, but fortunately his grandson John married Emma Tiver, daughter of James, who built the delightfully restored Tiver's Row Cottages in Burra. These cottages are complemented by an exquisite modern dry stone wall built by local stonemason Chris Kelly, going by the name 'The Stone Avenger'. So, at last, there is a case, however tenuous, for George appearing in this book.

George Sara on his 96th birthday (Courtesy State Library of SA B 55417/161)

A preamble to the International Congress paper

By Raelene Marshall, DSWAA member, Victoria

In the previous issue of *The Flagstone,* readers were introduced to the field trips that were an integral part of the 12th International Dry Stone Walling Congress hosted by the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain in the Lakes District in September 2010. These hands-on (or should I say feet-on!) activities, however, were only a small part of the dry stone adventures that were in store for the international delegates as they assembled on the Friday afternoon in the lecture theatre at the University of Cumbria in Ambleside.

Today, thanks to the miracles of modern visual presentation technology, just like Peter Pan, we can now be transported across the world and peep into the windows of other cultures to experience just how they manage, care for and preserve their dry stone constructions for future generations.

Throughout the Congress, the multilingual chatter was incessant and gestures and smiles made up for the lack of understanding of other languages as the palpable and universal feeling and passion for this craft was diagnosed, dissected and discussed. Indeed, language barriers were almost nonexistent, as the skill of the interpreters enabled the audience to grasp the nuances, humour and technical details of each of the 33 papers, which were presented over the period of three days. More about some of these presentations these will be discussed in future issues of *The Flagstone*.

The topics covered ranged from the: History and Origins of Dry Stone Walling; Conservation, including urban/industrial heritage; Training and Building Techniques; Classification and Recording; Biodiversity of Walls and, lastly, Dry Stone Walling as Art. Australia was represented twice: 'The Melton Dry Stone Walls Study' and a paper which I also delivered with the rather long title 'Dry Stone Art in the Australian Landscape: from the artisan skills of the early settlers to the influence of Andy Goldsworthy on contemporary dry stone sculpture in Australia'.

For readers unfamiliar with Andy Goldsworthy's work, a quick Google will bring up some 659,000 websites! I had been privileged to spend some time with Andy during his award-winning Northern Arts Grant, 'Cumbria year of the Arts 1996 Sheepfolds commission; one hundred sheepfolds across the nation by the year 2000'. The first sculpture and fold restoration were installed at Redmire Farm, Mungrisedale, just south of Penrith in northern England.

To this day, my time spent living day-to-day among the dry stone walls of northern England has a profound influence on my thinking about the craft, or is it the 'art', of dry stone walling. To that end, my paper reproduced and slightly edited below, was one of two on the topic Dry Stone Walling as Art, a proposition that caused much discussion among delegates who were either perplexed, unsure, surprised, and or, agreed somewhat or wholeheartedly. So, in an attempt to settle the debate, at the final Congress luncheon, the DSWA President Richard Love asked for a show of hands, an activity that resulted in a 50/50 divide! So, so much for my theory on the international stage! More feedback from DSWAA members here in Australia would be much appreciated!!!

Dry stone Art in the Australian Landscape: from the artisan skills of the early settlers to the influence of Andy Goldsworthy on contemporary dry stone sculpture

A paper given by Raelene Marshall to the 12th International Dry Stone Walling Congress, hosted by the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain in the Lakes District in September 2010

A typical dry stone wall in the landscape of Victoria's Western District

The *Compact Oxford Dictionary* describes Art as 'the expression of a creative skill in a visual form' and the Arts as 'creative activities' and or 'subjects of studies concerned with human culture'.

Long before we put public art on street corners, Australia's indigenous and immigrant artisans were influencing and creating and works of dry stone art that would change the face of the landscape for centuries to come. Although the years have seen many changes, today's modern-day walls and sculptures made by equally dedicated artisans add to that genre and carry on the essence of this ancient craft in new and exciting ways.

So why, where and how did an idea of exploring and interpreting this ancient and universal craft as an art form emerge? To try to provide some answers I'd like to use this time to briefly explore some personal experiences that led me to this way of thinking. But also more broadly, from both an audience and an artist-practioner's perspective, to delve into the notion of the use of the cultural landscape as a museum or gallery.

The use of landscape as museum or gallery is not new. Artists such as the late American Robert Smithson, and a short while later, others including Britain's Richard Harris and Andy Goldsworthy are practitioners in a Land art Earthworks art movement that emerged in the USA in the late 1960s. The key elements of this movement are about the landscape and the work of art being inextricably linked. Made using natural materials such as soil, rock, organic media and water, the sculptures are not placed in the landscape, but rather the landscape is the means of their creation.

Land art is understood as an artistic protest against the perceived artificiality and ruthless commercialisation of art at the end of the 1960s. Ironically, the movement came about as a rejection of the traditional museum or gallery as the setting of artistic activity. Its genre was about developing monumental landscape projects that were beyond the reach of traditional transportable sculpture and the commercial art market and aimed to reach a different audience.

Andy Goldsworthy's sculpture 'Taking a Wall for a Walk' *image from internet vis http://public-art.shu.ac.uk/other/grizedale/fi/00000011.htm*

But the irony neither begins nor ends here. Those 1960s artists who had chosen to reject the notion of the museum or gallery to display their artworks, had, by desire design and or default, chosen the landscape as a gallery for that very same purpose. That is the landscape became 'the place' to display their art. The major difference however in these scenarios was that of the artwork viewer or audience. In other words the audience was not the normal gallery visitor but rather the average recreating person who with respect to their visitation intent or perhaps happenstance could choose the level of their involvement and or participation with the art, or not.

Those of us familiar with the craft stone are well aware that dry stone walls are a creative endeavour made in nature, of nature. Albeit that early walls were constructed as a practical agrarian craft rather than for more esoteric reasons, surely all this had been done before? That is, that centuries earlier, artisan wallers from across the world had also by desire, design and or default chosen the landscape as a place to construct and display works of artistic endeavour.

Walls that merge so seamlessly into the landscape with a belongingness that defies interpretation, the landscape their museum or gallery. So, the question arises, were the 1960s Land Art artists at the cutting edge of a new movement or were they simply reinventing and more consciously reinterpreting an innate, intuitive and creative human process?

My first inkling of this thinking happened some years ago whilst photographing in Kolora, the walled farmland area in Victoria's Western District. There, within the scope of the eye, were two beautifully crafted walls on opposite sides of the road each made with the fine hand of an artisan maker. Both were equally superb, geologically the landscape was the same, yet each wall was quite different in style, stone size and structure. Although very different, each of these walls were artworks in their own right, manmade imprints on the natural landscape constrained not within the walls of a museum or gallery but juxtaposed against the pale blue-sky of the open plains?

Just who made them, where did the settler-wallers come from, what were their stories, and why had they chosen to interpret the landscape and build walls in such a variety of styles?

To find some of these answers we need to look into a small window of Australia's history. Across Australia, dry stone styles, shapes and designs vary considerably from place to place and region to region. Traditional walls, terraced walls, pig-pens, sheep dips, an illusive web of dry stone intrigue. The mid-1800s were, culturally and socially, a unique period of time. The ancient landscape was experiencing major change. During this period Anglo Celtic and European immigrants were forcefully displacing native Aboriginals from their tribal precincts. The need for survival and shelter was ever present. Some came to claim large areas of rural land whilst thousands of others arrived to seek their fortunes in the richest alluvial gold fields the world had ever known.

However, prior the arrival of Captain Cook in 1770, the history of European construction of dry stone walls in Australia can be traced further back to structures built respectively by Dutch maritime explorers on West Wallabi island off the coast of Western Australia and the French on land that abuts Recherche Bay in Tasmania.

However what is generally less known, is that even earlier Australia's indigenous people, known primarily as a hunter-gatherer society had also built dry stone structures for habitation and aquaculture in areas where abundant food resources were available. Today ruined remains of their dry stone shelters and fish and eel traps can still be found in places such as Lake Condah in southwest Victoria and at

Although not entirely proven, these stone circles on the Everett property near Pomborneit, Vic. are thought to be remnants of early stone structures built by Australia's indigenous peoples

Brewarrina in New South Wales. Built low with rectangular or circular walls, the shapes of their shelters are archetypal constructs of common and universal symbols found in art and architecture. Practical interpretations of an innate, intuitive human process.

Let me transport you now to this side of the world (England). In late 1995, I was privileged to spend a five-month Australia Council professional development residency living and working in the Rusland Valley right here in the Lake District National Park. Such was the fame of the area's dry stone walls and the dry

Tri Spheres 002 are by Alistair Tune in the garden of 'Caringal' in Camperdown, Victoria

stone sculptures in the nearby Grizedale Forest Sculpture Park, that even in those pre-internet days, the word about Andy Goldsworthy's sculpture *Taking a Wall for a Walk* and others had spread to the arts community in Australia.

Indeed it was my experiences here that began to shape my thinking about the esoteric qualities of landscape as museum or gallery in a slightly more structured way. Driving each day to Grizedale as the kaleidoscope of the seasons' colours slowly changed from autumn to winter I quickly came to love and understand the beauty and intimacy of this ancient landscape. To this day I can still feel the daily anticipation of rounding a corner to see what had become familiar sections of wall, shrouded in icicles, snow, or a palette of fallen leaves. It is no wonder that this cultural landscape over the years has inspired poets, writers and artists to interpret it in their own unique way.

In Grizedale, the award winning Ridding Wood Trail offers easy access and provides an exciting introduction to the visual arts. But it is much deeper in the forest, where the natural extension of the ancient craft of walling is reinterpreted in a contemporary context, for a contemporary audience. The place where Andy Goldsworthy's site-specific dry stone sculpture *Taking a Wall for a Walk* sited among the scrub and bracken, snakes in and out of the edge of the woodland and challenges the notion of cultural landscape as museum or gallery.

I like to think of this particular work as the quintessential metaphor for the craft of dry stone walling as an art form in its own right. *Taking a Wall for a Walk* joins fragmented remnant sections of an ancient agrarian wall with a modern day piece of sculpture. For me it raises as many questions as it answers. Where does history end and modernity begin? Where does the dry stone craft end and the dry stone art begin? Who is the artist? Andy for his artistic vision and design of the work, or the professional wallers who built the wall with and under his guidance? Perhaps it's both?

Today in Australia, in both the sculptural and artistic fraternities, Andy Goldsworthy has become a household name. Oldtimer descendants who learned the dry stone craft from their ancestors' ancestors have died out, and despite the growing awareness and need for formalisation of the craft, there is no qualification training in either the tertiary or landscape sectors.

The handful of talented wallers we do have, have mostly undertaken their training and qualifications under the auspice of our hosts the Dry Stone Walls Association of Great Britain. Our highest qualified waller is Geoff Duggan, a Mount Annan Botanic Gardens landscaper, who conducts regular workshops and is the accredited examiner for our professional wallers on their behalf.

Although one or two local studies had earlier been undertaken, the resurgent interest in dry stone walls really took off during and after the development and touring phases of an exhibition about the history and heritage of Australia's dry stone walls for which I received funding from Federal Government in1999 and 2002

The cogs of bureaucracy turn slowly. The Victorian-based, eight-year-old Dry Stone Walls Association of Australia, now has branches in three other states. As a not-for-profit organisation it is run by a small group of volunteers, who, despite their best efforts have been unable to bring about formal training for professional wallers. So, by international standards Australia is still surely lagging.

Cone is by Andy Goldsworthy and is on Herring Island in the Yarra River, Melbourne, Victoria

However rather than let that paucity of wallers diminish the profile of the craft, the groundswell has been quite the opposite. In fact our best-known dry stone artisans Geoff Duggan, Alistair Tune and David Long, are booked in advance for a year or even more. In part, this is due to the overall upsurge in awareness for the craft and high quality of their traditional walling workmanship. But, more likely, I would like to think it is because each of them are also producing sculptures that have taken the craft to a whole new, and artistically savvy, audience.

It is hard to pinpoint how and when this groundswell really took off, or indeed what, if any influence, Andy Goldsworthy's works made in 1997 on Herring Island as part of the Melbourne Festival have had on the thinking of the broader arts community. However it is fair to say that ten years later, David Long's circular dry stone piece entitled ***Revolution – Whatever Happened?*** took out the $15,000 first prize in the inaugural Victorian Great Ocean Road Sculpture Awards in Lorne Victoria.

David's work focuses on the world around us and climate change, sustainability and finite resources all play key roles. In this piece the perimeter markings represent rising sea levels and

the aperture to the future peers into a giant boulder that symbolises the degeneration of the globe.

He believes that engineering qualities, simplicity of construction, intricacy and aesthetics will be seen in the future as he sees it that is the salvation of the craft in an artistic format. And of Andy Goldsworthy's influence, David's thoughts are that Andy's work has taken 'the use of stone and landscape in the environment to a heightened level, which, along with a very good publicity machine, all artists have to manage if they are to have a greater public profile.'

As already mentioned, Geoff Duggan is employed as a landscaper with the recently established Mount Annan, Botanic Gardens in New South Wales. Historically, in the development of botanic gardens outdoor sculptures and monuments are an accepted elemental feature of interest for interpretation and here Geoff has been able to bring together his love of the 'dry stone craft' for both its practical and aesthetic amenity. His win win approach was quite creative, the Gardens needed retaining walls and Geoff wanted to teach the craft in making this happen the wider community participated in workshops over several years that culminated at the opening of the Grevillia Garden in May 2008.

Today the Gardens are home to several of Geoff's sculptural works such as the *Wedding Knot* and *Door to the Sun.* Initially, Geoff was drawn to the 'dry stone craft as a sculptural medium' however, he quickly became 'interested in the building technique as it was used in the construction of shelters, sheepfolds, bridges and ancient structures throughout the world.' He sees the craft as an 'artistic expression of beauty and curiosity, a meeting of old and new' and is influenced not only by 'Andy Goldsworthy but by others such as Hugh Drysdale, Charles Jencks, Chris Drury, and David Wilson.'

Kurtonitj near Tyrendarra south-western Victoria is the location of a dry stone sculpture inspired by the ruined remains of fish and eel traps built many years ago by Australia's indigenous people. The sculpture is a collaborative work between artisan waller Alistair Tune and artists Vicki Couzen,s a Keerang Wurrong Gundjitmara woman, and Carmel Wallace.

The work was built as part of a statewide initiative project entitled, *Fresh and Salty*, initiated by Regional Arts Victoria to involve Victorian communities severely impacted by drought. It enabled artists to collaborate or team up with mentors to extend their practice and demonstrated the role for art and artists in allowing communities to gain a better understanding of how the environment influenced and supported their way of life.

In this case, Vicki and Carmen's dry stone sculpture has artistic references to the traditional use of water by indigenous and European people. It maps out the different ways European settlers and indigenous cultures impacted on the land and utilised water for their livelihoods.

I first met Alistair Tune as a young man on the brink of his new career during the development my touring exhibition *A Stone Upon A Stone* some 11 years ago.

Today, much of his work is gained restoring walls throughout his childhood home area in Western Victoria, in particular, the Stony Rises.

Of his work, Alistair says it is primarily influenced by landscape and the core principles of dry stone walling – principles that have remained unchanged for many hundreds of years. Al likes to challenge himself by pushing the core basic principles of the craft without disregarding them. His challenges are especially evident in areas where many walls undulate and weave across a very rugged terrain the fact that wall styles constructed by the immigrant wallers each wall vary sometimes considerably and sometimes subtly from maker to maker.

Drawing by Andy Godsworthy associated with his '100 Sheepfolds for Cumbria' project, spanning the period from 1996–2000.
Drawing reproduced courtesy of Adult and Cultural Services, Directorate, Cumbria County Council, UK

In response to my question about the influence of Andy Goldsworthy, Alistair offered the following observation. 'My work is heavily influenced by the traditional craftsmen whose walls and structures, which were originally purpose-built, are now seen as works of art. I think being a dry stone sculptor it's very easy for people to label or compare your work to the works of Andy Goldsworthy, mainly because being a dry stone sculptor the core basic principles of the craft heavily influence each piece. A wall built 150 years ago, weaving its way through the Australian bush, could easily fit among the pages of Andy Goldsworthy's latest book.'

In conclusion in discussing the notion of cultural landscape as museum and gallery and the debate about art and craft. I was heartened recently to read this following question posted on Heritage Chat an Internet forum set up for Heritage Advisors and Planners in Victoria to discuss significant matters of heritage.

'Can art theories and artists influence the way we assess landscape more than say the Burra Charter for example? Isn't landscape assessment just another form of looking for something; the production of a vision; communicating a desire, an exchange, an engagement? What do you think?'

So, in conclusion, the question I would like to leave you with is this. If you were to land from Mars at the site of Andy Goldsworthy's *Taking a Wall for a Walk* in the Grizedale Forest, what would 'you' think? Is it art, craft, history or modernity and where does each begin and end?

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_art
Mandy Jean, *Heritage Chat*, August 2010
The Burra Charter provides guidance for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance (cultural heritage places) www.nationaltrust.com.au/burracharter.html
Taking a Wall for a Walk image: http://public-art.shu.ac.uk/other/grizedale/fi/00000011.htm

SA: Hi! from the Wacky Wallers

By Ian and Val Carline, DSWAA members, SA

Sorry we have been quiet this past 12 months. We bought 10 acres with an old 1892 settlers' cottage on it and revamped it from scratch (hadn't been lived in for nearly 50 years). We have built lots of dry stone walls for people around the Flinders Ranges in South Australia and have just finished one around our cottage. The cottage is now up for sale. Below are pics of our wall and one of the inside of cottage just to show the style of it. We are off to Tassie in a few weeks to look at walls over there – and take lots of pics.

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Please complete (or photocopy) and **either** post to OR email to: DSWAA Membership, c/o Sandra Fitzgerald at 2 Officer Court, Warrnambool, Vic. 3280 or fitzgeralds@westvic.com.au

Payment: monies can be deposited in the Association's bank account 013 274 4997 47356 at any ANZ Bank **or** send a cheque payable to: The Dry Stone Walls Association of Australia Inc. at the above address.
(*Please indicate payment method below.)

The Dry Stone Walls Association of Australia Inc.
No. A004473S. ABN 31 721 856 687
Application for Membership

Professional (voting rights)	$50.00
Individual (voting rights)	$30.00 (1 year) $80 (3 years)
Corporate (voting rights)	$80.00
Family (voting rights)	$50.00

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Name
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Area of interest, for example, farmer, heritage, etc.

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