

Walling has many dimensions



Moss on stone - guess where

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Note from the President



Welcome to the first edition of *The Flag Stone* for 2024! A year in which we hope many metres of dry stone wall will be built, surveyed, rescued and enjoyed!

The new year brings reflections on what's been achieved and how we will reach our future aspirations. In our 22nd year we aim to pursue a more national approach, one that encompasses the interests and requirements of an increasingly diverse membership.

Many of the people who established the Association or worked hard to develop it, are still involved today, testament to their passion for dry stone walling and commitment to the protection of Australia's dry stone heritage. In 2024, we want to bring new energy to the small committee, to broaden the skill set that already exists and enable our exciting and extensive renovation into becoming Australia's dry stone trade and heritage peak body. We'll go into more detail about this in the next edition of *The Flag Stone*.

In the meantime, our heritage projects continue to advance, primarily in the form of the app being developed to assist in the surveying of existing walls, and we've just commenced a large body of work aimed at developing and improving the associations online assets. For the next few months however, its mainly going to be about the walling as we look forward to an autumn full of fantastic dry stone events taking place in NSW, South Australia and Tasmania.

Read on to learn more.

Until next time,

Emma

- WORKSHOPS
- COMPETITIONS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- TRADITIONAL STONE SKILLS
- WORLD CLASS CONSTRUCTIONS
- TRAINING & ACCREDITATION

**15TH – 26TH
MARCH 2024**

**FESTIVAL
WELLINGTON N.S.W.**

Working with stone is an ancient and glorious art, but despite this, the ever-present demand and admiration for it, the authentic skills remain at risk of being lost. Australia’s inaugural international stone festival focused on dry stone walling, carving and masonry is about to try to change all that.

Running from 15 -26 March 2024 the festival will take place at the Stone of Arc dry stone training centre in Wellington NSW, as well as prime locations around the town. Organisers hope to see great numbers flock to the region to spectate or participate in public feature constructions, walling, carving and masonry workshops, Stone Olympics, visits to significant sites including the Brewarrina Ngunnhu (fish traps) and an extensive range of other stone and non-stone related activities.



With more than a dozen national and international experts now confirmed, and the inclusion of trade certifica-

tion opportunities in dry stone walling, the festival hopes to re-ignite the trades and expand the custodianship of the ancient techniques by developing a new community of traditional stone enthusiasts and professionals. The event will also leave a lasting mark on the landscape by creating a dry stone trail of permanent structures, with integrated carvings depicting Wiradjuri stories, across the town.

For the first time in Australia, there’ll be several opportunities for aspiring and competent wallers to be examined at all four levels of the Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA) Craftsman Certification Scheme as well as undertake professional training leading to employment. For any trade to be recognised and developed, standards need to be set and maintained and this will be Australia’s first major step towards establishing standards for the trade of dry stone walling.

To assist and encourage existing Australian wallers to have their skills recognised through certification, the Dry Stone Walls Association of Australia (DSWAA) is offering members generous subsidies towards the Exam event fees

Combined with the delivery of the scheme is the need for instructors who are both competent in their craft and in their instructional training. At the end of the festival [DSWA Instructor training](#) will be delivered (for the first time outside of UK/US) by Geoff Duggan (Master waller/Instructor/Examiner) and Emma Knowles (Advanced waller/Instructor) for Level 2 certified wallers, including those certified at the Festival. It has been adapted for the Australian context and developed to improve the number and capacity of qualified DSWA

instructors in Australia, to encourage the teaching of traditional principles, provide increased access to training and improve national training standards.

To assist and encourage Level 2+ wallers to share their knowledge by becoming DSWA Instructors, the DSWAA is offering members generous subsidies towards the Instructor course fees

As Geoff Duggan, Australian Master waller and examiner attested: 'Many dry stone walling organisations around the world have encouraged a resurgence of the trade through advocacy of dry stone walls as culturally significant, promotion of its use for landscaping and sculptural purposes, and recognition of best practice through a craftsman certification scheme.

'It's believed the difference in standard between good and bad dry walling is probably greater than in any other skill. Around the world, experience shows that a certification scheme is a proven way for wallers to demonstrate their level of skill and aspire to even higher standards. Equally, it gives potential clients some certainty when looking to commission work from a professional waller.

'Isolation in relation to the rest of the world and between working wallers wishing to be examined, are factors that have needed resolution here in Australia. What this festival offers people at all levels, are a range of opportunities to share knowledge, learn, network, compete, gain qualifications and have fun while constructing some very interesting designs. After spending many years having to travel to the UK for training/testing and events like this, I hope a good number of people will take advantage of this amazing set of opportunities, relatively on their doorstep.'



As well as all the learning and development opportunities this event will create, there's also a great emphasis on cultural appreciation, enjoyment, and exploration. The

town centre constructions are all being designed by renowned Master waller and designer David Griffiths, from the UK, in partnership with the local Wiradjuri community, to tell their stories of this land. St

Patrick's day falls within the festival, so to honour the great Irish stone festivals and have some fun, a giant pint of Guinness is going to be constructed out of slate and sandstone, outside one of the oldest pubs in Australia.

Throughout the festival the creative teams of amateur and professional wallers, carvers and masons will be able to start their day with yoga, Tai Chi, or a massage. Be entertained by buskers while they work and in their down time have the option to go kayaking, caving, swimming, walking or even fly to Brewarrina to view the 40,000-year-old, Aboriginal-built, Ngunnhu fish traps, the oldest dry stone construction on the planet.

The main festival weekend (22-24 March) will include a smoking ceremony and presentations by Wiradjuri (local) and Ngemba (Brewarrina) Traditional Owners, a moonlight dinner, live music and a dance party! Taster workshops will be in progress all weekend in all 3 disciplines, walling and carving competitions will be in action and the first ever stone Olympics will be held by the river, including such events as the Stone and spoon, Stone the crows, the Sisyphus sprint, Stone skimming and kids puzzle wall.

Whether you're a beginner, professional, master, enthusiast or just curious there's going to be something for everyone at the [Great Australian Stone Festival](#). Having never happened before, with no guarantees it'll happen again without a supportive community, this really is the chance of a lifetime for stone lovers everywhere, as well as the traditional stone trades of Australia as a whole, so we hope as many people as possible will get to experience it.

This is a limited capacity event so don't delay, [get your day pass today](#)



SA field day coming up



On a much more modest scale, DSWAA will be holding a field event at Rosebank in the Adelaide Hills on Saturday 13 April.

Rosebank is something special, particularly if you are into dry stone walls. This wonderful historic grazing property was taken up by George Melrose in the 1840s, being at the time about 70,000 acres.

Initially the livestock were managed by shepherds and by access to water. Come the 1860s and many of the shepherds had headed east to the gold fields (and some west to the copper mines) leaving the pastoral runs essentially unfenced. Necessity being the mother of invention, dry stone walling soon became widespread, many miles built across the eastern hills. Fortunately there are still good examples of these impressive walls, but most are under threat from development, general wear and tear, and an absence of time and skill for maintenance.

At this event you will see some special features that have been beautifully maintained for over 150 years, or faithfully repaired using original stone and traditional skills.

Jon Moore has been responsible for restoring a couple of unique dry stone well heads and he will be there to explain the process and the challenges.

There is also 'the cross', a structure built to protect deer from inclement weather from all quarters, and featuring cope-stones up to 30kg.

Finally a 200 metre section of dry stone fence, 120m of which was rebuilt through DSWAA 'workshops'. This is the sort of thing that could go awfully wrong unless built under the supervision and expert teaching of a suitably qualified waller (Jon and before him Wally Carline).

The next SA workshop for beginners will be 6-7 April at Coromandel Valley. Contact [Bruce Munday](#)

When	Saturday 13 April. 1230 until 4.30 PM (NB Daylight saving has ended)
Where	Mt Pleasant, Adelaide Hills
Who	Registration essential as numbers limited. First in best dressed. Children welcome. <u>No dogs</u>
How	Mostly <u>not</u> wheel chair accessible. Some paddock walking
Cost	\$20 adult. This will be refunded to DSWAA members 'at the gate' but is necessary to obviate 'no-shows'. Booking details will be announced early March.



Victorian field day



The DSWAA Victorian field trip last November had again a good mix of historical and modern walls.



Austin's Wines at Sutherland Creek was a logical starting point, Bronte Payne there to discuss the striking entranceway (left) and ser-

pentine wall (above) he built some 10 or so years ago from stone sourced near Kyneton in central Victoria.

From there to Moranghurk on the Moorabool River near She Oaks. The old homestead, built in the 1840s, is of architectural, historical and aesthetic (landscape) significance to the State of Victoria. The construction of vertical timber slabs with cover battens is unknown elsewhere in Victoria, but evocative of the earlier colonial architectural traditions of New South Wales and Tasmania.

The garden is laid out to the east of the house in a squared form, including terraces, stone walls and steps, and is enclosed within a dry stone basalt wall built in the 1920s. The jagged shape of the stones suggests that these were sourced from a nearby quarry.

Marius Yianni commented that this was the highlight of the trip: 'The walls were so well built and intact, and showed the huge amount of stone used to create a Victorian era garden. This was a lesson in good design and working with the lay of the land.'



Boundary wall of 'Moranghurk'

All this stone had to come from somewhere and Nash's Quarry was one of several quarries in the Lethbridge area. Although now closed it was fascinating to see the remains of the buildings including the brick chimney, the collapsed structure where stone was cut, the powder magazine and a quarry face showing the high quality of the stone that was excavated.



Former Noah's quarry face and powder magazine

Field day *(cont.)*



A highlight of the trip was the small village of Lethbridge with its many distinctive walls so well described by Laurie Atkins in *The Flag Stone* #58. As Laurie stated then: 'These fences are strikingly different in appearance to the usual basalt walls seen elsewhere. The stone is aggressively angular with many shapes and sizes.' Well he was right about that! It was really interesting to see these unique walls 'in the flesh'.

Typical wall at Lethbridge

Finally to Artrocks, an event and reception venue with its Open Studio Gallery offering artistic workshops, courses and programs. The estate, set upon 170 acres, boasts 360-degree views of the Barrabool Hills, the Otways and more.

Adele and Bronte Payne clearly invested of huge amounts of time and energy in their project, reflected in the many artistic dry stone features.

All of this was capped off with an excellent early evening dinner.



Entrance to Artrocks

Reflecting, Heather & Daryl Caddy pointed to the broader importance of these events: 'It's always good to meet up with fellow members and to see places that we'd probably never had known existed, such as Nash's Quarry with so much history.

'It was wonderful to finish the day in the Open Studio Gallery at Artrocks with its interesting art works.'

Organiser of the field trip, Jim Holdsworth, commented 'This outing provided the thirty members and friends with another opportunity to enjoy the benefits of being part of the Association and to extend their interest in the history, the craft and the importance of dry stone walls in some of their many roles and environments.'



Bronte firing up the BBQ then dinner at Artrocks





Just an old fence, or is it more than that?

In 1974 we did something we had never done before. We bought a farm. Armed with a brand-new baby, an over-loaded ute and a scary mortgage we arrived as pioneers.

We had bought the farm in the Spring of one of the wettest years of the century, everything green and abundant. Arriving in December it was still abundant but purple. Soon we learned that the seed from Salvation Jane remains viable for 25 years – that was a shock.

New inevitably becomes old and we soon realised that we hadn't bought a new farm, we had bought an old one. The house dated back to 1892 which was okay because we admired the lovely old stone buildings that marked out South Australia. What we didn't like was the bits that had been added on over years as the settler family grew and grew, evidently without a plan. Not aesthetic and barely functional, these add-ons signalled survival – just. Soon everything seemed old. The fences, the plumbing, the wiring, the outdoor dunny and the salt damp. How had we not seen this?

There was also charming old. Our driveway met the gravel road just near an old bridge across Dairy Creek. Four mighty redgum beams, hauled in by horse, sat on hand-built stone abutments and were decked with eight-inch redgum boards, probably off a pit-saw. 'Load limit 6 tons' suggested that the days were numbered for this piece of carriageway, no longer able to support a loaded milk tanker. Within weeks of our arrival Council realigned the road, dropped in anonymous concrete cul-

verts, and replaced 'Load limit 6 tons' with 'Unsafe No Entry'.

That was fine. You don't have to like concrete culverts to appreciate their purpose. But the pact should not require that its precursor, a hand-made structure saying so much about early settlement, should then be demolished. As if in revenge against history, with breathtaking efficiency the council had the deck off and aflame in the dry creek bed. Only a threat to burn down the mayor's house brought a halt to the carnage.

The bridge affair signalled Council's despise for things old and would pit me against them ever more. But the really big old thing had nothing to do with Council, although in retrospect it should.

Our eastern boundary was defined by a kilometre of stone fencing, in generally fair condition, that then marched a further couple of hundred metres through a neighbour's property. It didn't mean much to me, just a fence stock-proofed with a couple of strands of barb. Until one day Graham pushed his section into several heaps with his front-end loader.

'Why are you doing that Graham?' I asked in a neighbourly tone.

'Because it's too old' my neighbour replied.

Graham had grown up on his farm, as had his dad and many of his extended family, so clearly he could pull rank. He knew what was too old. But me being just a

Being old (cont.)

newcomer, less than a generation on the farm, did not mean I could not think.

I started thinking all sorts of things about that stone fence: who built it; when; how long did it take. Digging through the extended memories of other neighbours revealed that this fence was there in 1906 and probably well before. It was not unique in the district, but most others were now in a state of ruination. Our fence and what was once Graham's was considered a stand-out, built to last, at least in the days before tractors.

The more you think the more you dream. I fancied that the fence dated back before the turn of the century, making it in my mind historic. The 1890s was marked by a great economic depression followed by the Federation drought. What must it have been like building something so permanent in a period of great uncertainty? Did they sense they were doing something significant or just building a fence? Would they be remembered for this? Apparently building a good stone fence proceeded at about a chain a day with a team of four. That's about four months to build a mile and a bit.

When the material is free and the labour cheap a stone fence can be a good option. That is the simple equation.

What moves me is that every one of those stones was picked up (at least once) by human hands. And it will never happen again.

The stone fence and the timber bridge tell us something



about a way of life back then. Our mental reconstruction of events might not be wholly accurate, but who cares. The dream is incontestable and deserves respect.

At one time, who knows how far this wall might have stretched



What's in a name?

The problem with common names is that they mean different things in different places. In South Australia we have the widespread SA bluegum (*E. Leucoxylon*) known in Victoria as yellow gum (which makes more sense).

Of more interest here is the naming of stone. In Victoria many of the most notable colonial buildings and roads were built from olivine basalt, an igneous rock widely referred to as 'bluestone', but actually black or dark grey in appearance. South Australia also has a rich architectural history based on 'bluestone', but there it is usually a metamorphic micaceous schist with multiple colours (but barely a hint of blue!).

Bluestone pavers in Melbourne, Geelong and elsewhere in Victoria are commonly referred to as **pitchers**, derived from the traditional process by which they were shaped from quarry stone (mainly by prison labour with hammer and chisel) known as 'pitching'. However, an article in *The Conversation* (2019) starts with 'If we think of the bluestone in Melbourne, we may first think of the famous **cobbled** laneways intersecting the urban grid'.

So are they pitchers or cobbles?

Cobblestones referred originally to rounded field or river stones thrown onto a track to provide a crude all-weather surface. The random nature of this arrangement led to the term 'cobbled together'.

When pitchers were set in a regular array they were indeed then termed 'sets'. The object of the exercise was to make the carriage ride relatively comfortable for passengers and also to provide a more amenable surface for the horses.

So, who cares? The heritage associated with these surfaces, like dry stone walls, tell us quite a bit about European settlement and patterns of development, along with evidence of skills difficult to find today. Perhaps the semantics do matter.

Leftovers



Ever wondered what becomes of the left overs? For the home-builder they often become secondary features such as small steps or the base for a birdbath.

A professional job like the horse arena [above] (built by JRM Stonework entirely from stone unearthed from the cut at Macclesfield in the Adelaide Hills) delivers a serious amount of left-over stone.

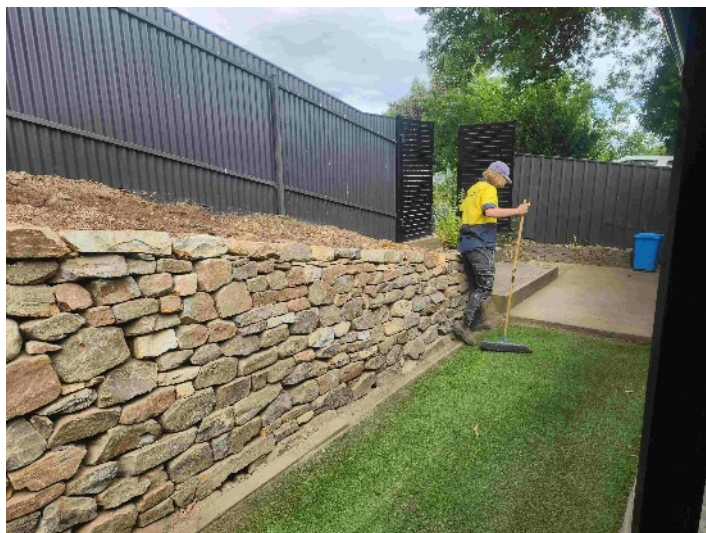
If the owner has no further use then this can be taken away to the builder's yard [left].



These left overs will eventually find their way into another job.

An example is the small, damaged revetment [left] that was rebuilt as a retaining wall from the original stone along with mica schist, Stoneyfell quartzite and Carey Gully sandstone [below].

The best pickings were used in the face, the less attractive in the backwall.





What is it about stones? Why are we drawn to collect them, wear them, play with them, study, carve, dig and build with them, and be mesmerised by them as inherent elements of the landscapes they form?

Several years ago, whilst holidaying in the English landscape two highly acclaimed American authors, Lucy Lippard and M. Scott Peck, would each experience a new trajectory in their professional fields to ultimately write new books about the profound impact stones had had during their holidaying adventures. Experiences that challenged their thinking and had changing influences upon both of their careers. Lucy whilst hiking on Dartmoor in England's south and M. Scott Peck, during a three-week adventure through the countrysides of Wales, England and Scotland.



For the British, standing stones, stone circles and other strange stone formations have always been there.

Part of their everyday life, a labyrinth of walls that hug the roadsides and snake across the fells. But for visitors it is another world. A world that raises as many questions as it answers, a timeless landscape with a beauty and mystery that knows no boundaries.

In *Overlay Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* published in 1983, Lippard speaks about tripping over a small standing stone and making a connection with the land that she didn't fully understand, but one which drew her to examine the overlay with new art and her fascination with the very ancient sites. Then on a second level of that overlay to explore further the social messages from past to present and the meaning and function of art, as revealed by tensions between two such distant and disparate times.

Among her many achievements, Lippard had already played a key role in the development of Conceptual Art in New York in the 1960s and 1970s, however, those new-found holiday experiences became for her an exercise in breaking away from her previous conventional ways of looking at the visual arts.

Today *Overlay* is viewed by critics, artists, art historians, and students as the essential text on how prehistoric images have been 'overlayed' onto contemporary art by

Survival (Cont.)

today's artists and is recommended for anyone interested in the possibility of reintegrating art into the fabric of society as a whole, just as in prehistoric times.

A practising psychiatrist Scott Peck's book *The Road Less Travelled* is described as a timeless classic in personal development, a landmark work that has inspired millions. Drawing on the experiences of his career he takes the reader through the difficult, painful times in life by showing them how to confront problems through examining key principles of discipline, love and grace.

On the surface *In Search of Stones* is a three-week story that Peck and his wife Lily took looking simply for an unplanned adventure. But fate had other ideas. Thanks to the generosity of a kind 'we're lost' farmer, whose land was home to a megalithic monument the search for ancient megalithic stones became their travel obsession. A search for meaning and mystery, a daily diary in which each day Peck discusses the many and broad related realms of human experience. The book speaks of reason, addiction, holiness, space, romance and adventure. Parenthood at Long Meg and her Daughter and art depicted as adornment in the carvings of the many standing stones they encountered along the way.

Long before the formation of the DSWAA my own first inkling of dry stone walls as art happened whilst photographing in a walled farmland district in Victoria's Western district. There within the scope of the eye, were two beautifully crafted walls on opposite sides of the road. Geologically the landscape was the same yet each wall was different in style, stone size and structure. Both equally superb, and although built for a purpose, each had been made with fine hand of only an artisan maker whose sense of pride, design and function was clearly evident. So, I too became obsessed.



Surely these were artworks, 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.

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'.



These days we consciously place dry stone structures in sculpture parks, by the sea, in forests on islands and in botanic gardens. We call them sculptures. Yet, as Lippard, Peck and others not mentioned here, have demonstrated, through that very same gaze, history's stone circles, megaliths, burial tombs, *muragghi*, bridges, cairns, bories and many more can also be appreciated as site specific landscape art. An experience that evokes wonder and awe which constantly draws the viewer into the range of evocative layers of the stories and uses of times gone by. But, also more broadly from both an audience and an artist-practitioner's perspective, to delve into, consider landscape and examine the notion of cultural landscape as museum or gallery.

The use of landscape for this purpose 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 United States 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 were not placed in the landscape, but rather the landscape was the means and inspiration for and of their creations.

At that time Land Art was understood as an artistic protest against the perceived artificiality and ruthless com-

Survival (Cont.)

mercialization of art. 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.

But the irony neither begins nor ends here. Those 1960s artists who had chosen to reject the notion of the traditional 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 a place to display their art. The variant here being that of the audience with respect to visitation, intent, involvement or participation. No longer the flavour of the day, drinks, canapes and trendy clothes were out, and outdoor recreational gear was in. An audience who came to see and be seen, or those who came and saw... and saw when they came!

Dry stone walls are a creative endeavour made in nature, of nature. Surely then, albeit made as a practical agrarian craft, rather than for more esoteric reasons, all this had been done before? Centuries earlier, artisan wallers across the world had also by desire, design and or default used the landscape as the setting to display works of their artistic endeavour. For them, despite the primary circumstance that very same landscape was, and still today remains, their museum or gallery.



So, were those 1960s Land Art artists at the cutting edge of a new movement or were they simply reinventing and artistically reinterpreting an innate, intuitive human process?

Australia's history takes us back much further. Early dry stone constructions built by Dutch and French maritime explorers can be traced to the days prior to the arrival of

Captain Cook in 1770. But thousands of years prior, our indigenous peoples, 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, fish and eel traps can still be found in places such as Lake Condah in southwest Victoria and at Brewarrina in New South Wales. Built low with rectangular or circular walls the shelters are constructs of common and universal symbols found in both art and architecture.



For our early settlers' their styles, shapes and designs vary considerably from place to place and region to region and are testament not only to their personal artistic skills but the techniques they brought with them from their countries of origin. Traditional walls, terraced walls, pig-pens, sheep dips, a web of dry stone intrigue and a landscape where their walls have now merged so well with the land it is hard to believe they were once not there.

In conclusion in discussing the notion of cultural landscape as museum and gallery and the debate about art and or craft. I was heartened some years ago to read this following question posted by Mandy Jean 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?'

On the outskirts of Scottsdale in NE Tasmania, there is an ODD building: A metal, glass and timber building whose appearance falls somewhere between a crashed alien spacecraft and a modern office, partially sunk by an earthquake. This is the Forestry Ecocentre.



Old technology meets new

Currently unoccupied, it was built in 2001 under the guidance of the architectural firm Robert Morris-Nunn & Associates and incorporates many interesting materials, functions and energy efficiency attributes that are quite experimental.

The Ecocentre is in effect two buildings, one inside the other. The inner building comprises multi-level timber framed office spaces (formerly for Forestry Tasmania employees) with an outer conservatory-style layer that housed a café and an interpretation centre open to the public.

The use of glazing and asymmetric conical design captures solar heat which is cleverly directed and dispersed by a central fan at the buildings peak. During summer, the fan is reversed to draw cool air inside.

Whilst timber, metal and polycarbonate are all in abundance, stone is incorporated in several ways including random stone paving, a curved dry stone wall and a cobble “riverbed”.



Cheek end of dolerite dry stone wall

The thirty metre curved dry stone wall was built by local wallers George Kerr and Bill Coates, using dolerite “blue-stone”, a tough crystalline rock that is rarely seen outside of the island state.*



Sympathetic use of river cobbles for stormwater drainage

This award-winning, taxpayer funded, architectural curiosity currently sits un-used but is likely to become part of a new accommodation development being constructed next door. Stay tuned!

* Dolerite is the stone that caps many of Tasmania’s iconic peaks including Cradle Mountain, Walls of Jerusalem and the Organ Pipes on Mt Wellington.



Originally built as barriers between fields and farms, the region's abandoned farmstead walls have since become the binding threads of its cultural fabric

The Flag Stone regularly features historic dry stone walls from across the world. Hardly surprising as stone is such a widespread basic building material. Recently the [Smithsonian Magazine](#) (14 Nov. 2023) carried a lead article by **Robert Thorson**, Professor of Earth Sciences at the University of Connecticut: *How Stone Walls Became a Signature Landform of New England*. This signature is quite a standout, given the estimated six linear miles of wall per square mile of countryside.



Thorson approaches his subject both as a geologist and through the words of the eminent US poet, Robert Frost, who had a small New Hampshire farm in the early nineteen hundreds.

'The most famous stone wall in the United States is a knee-high, tumbled-down, lichen-crusting stack of boulders, slabs and cobbles that inspired one of America's most enduring poems, Frost's "[Mending Wall](#)". When published in 1914, the poem immediately drew attention to the barriers that divide us from one another and to the unseen forces of nature that undo what we have done:

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.*

'The fieldstone walls of Frost's New England farm are typical of those throughout the region because they emerged from the same cascade of natural and human processes. Glaciers scatter uncrushed rock. People cut down old-growth forests to create an agrarian society. Stone appears in fields and pastures. Farmers scuttle and dump that waste to wooden fence lines and eventually stack that stone into crude walls to maximize arable space, mark property boundaries and help with fencing. During this slow, multigenerational process, walls became formidable barriers between adjacent fields and neighbouring farms.'

In the background is nature wearing those walls down. The usual culprits such as livestock wild and domestic, falling limbs, emerging saplings, and (particularly in NE) vines and brambles all part of the villainy. Thorson goes further: '...the crystal-by-crystal disintegration of every single stone by the physical and chemical weathering taking place beneath the blotchy, colourful patina of lichens, moss, fungi and microbes. Weathered stones poised on the tipping point of balance can be knocked loose by the weight of a fox, a gust of wind, the rumble of a truck, the rare seismic rattle or the leaching of a single molecule.'

New England (cont.)



Single tiered, coursed, abandoned, moss-covered, waist-high, double wall composed mainly of glacially milled slabs and tablets of local gneiss and schist.

So there we have the inevitable tension between good neighbours building good dry stone fences to preserve good relationships, and nature working relentlessly to wear them down.

Thorson believes that Frost ‘wanted New England’s walls *down* as barriers between neighbours but *up* as artifacts to be enjoyed and venerated as touchstones to a simpler past, a time when our culture was more connected to the land’. He argues that ‘the fieldstone walls that were once barriers at the scale of farms have become binding threads for rural New England’s regional cultural identity. The landscape would simply not be the same without them’.

This is an apt description for the walls-rich precincts in Australia, and a strong case for protecting them.

A first step in protecting dry stone walls is to objectively describe them – a project led in Australia for DSWAA by Laurie Atkins.

Getting the language right

In New England (USA) Professor Robert Thorson has studied and defended stone walls for years, while writing books, giving talks, and leading hikes surrounding the subject. Now, in a paper published in [Historical Archaeology](#), he is leading the effort to rethink how we view these landforms and establish the science of stone walls to assist their preservation. The following paragraphs are taken from the Abstract and the Introduction to this paper, **Taxonomy and Nomenclature for the Stone Domain in New England**.

The European settlement of rural New England created an agro-ecosystem of fenced fields and pastures linked to human settlements and hydro-powered village industry. The most salient archaeological result was the “stone domain,” a massive, sprawling constellation of stone features surviving as mainly undocumented ruins within reforested, closed canopy woodlands. We present a rigorous taxonomy for this stone domain based on objective field criteria that is rendered user-friendly by correlating it to vernacular typologies and functional interpretations. The domain’s most salient class of features are stone walls, here defined as objects meeting five inclusive criteria: material, granularity, elongation, continuity, and height. We also offer a nomenclature and descriptive protocol for archaeological field documentation of wall stones (size, shape, arrangement, lithology) and wall structures (courses, lines, tiers, segments, contacts, terminations, and junctions). Our methodological tools complement recent computationally intensive mapping tools of light detection and ranging (LiDAR), drone-imaging, and machine learning.

Despite this great range in form and origin, mapping and inventory projects using remote-sensing imagery (e.g. LiDAR and GIS) applications, treat the entire population of linear stone features (walls and lines) as a single undifferentiated entity and ignore the abundance of related but nonlinear features. Though such investigations demonstrate quantitatively how the presence or absence of stone walls varies with specific landscape attributes (location, elevation, slope, land use, proximity, roads, soil type, etc.) they do not address the more interesting cultural research question of how different types of walls and related objects vary over the landscape. To facilitate this research objective, we offer a field-based objective taxonomy for all stone features, a recommended nomenclature, and a protocol for routine description. Our methodological report draws no cultural conclusions. Rather, we offer a visual field tool analogous to a Munsell soil colour chart that can standardize the descriptions and classifications needed for comparative analysis. In our case, the concern is not whether a dish can also be a platter, plate, or saucer, but whether a stone wall can also be a fence or a cairn or a mere pile.

I am grateful to Professor Thorson for his assistance with this piece and encourage readers to download the original Smithsonian article and a complementary piece in [The Conversation](#).



DSW below the terrace of the main drive and front entrance, possibly the oldest location at Glenburn but with probably not much nineteenth century walling surviving and mortared joints at the very top.

Dr Timothy Hubbard is a heritage architect and planner and a longstanding member, and now vice-president, of the DSWAA. Familiar with the traditional dry stone walls of the UK and Europe he was keen to search for dry stone walls during a recent trip to India. He found extensive and diverse examples at Glenburn Tea Estate, near Darjeeling and on the south bank of the Rangeet River, the border between Sikkim and West Bengal.

The tradition of dry stone walling in West Bengal is alive and well at Glenburn Tea Estate. West Bengal is the Indian state far to the northeast of the country which borders Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Bangladesh (formerly East Bengal) and which embraces the south-eastern foothills of the Himalayas. The Darjeeling Tea Region is the smallest in that part of India and is tiny compared with the neighbouring state of Assam, the largest tea growing area in the world.

The steep slopes of Glenburn use dry stone walls to create the necessary terraces. These mortarless walls complement the terrain's excellent natural drainage. They are also used as retaining walls and revetments, along the estate's roads and tracks, and in the extensive homestead garden.

The East India Company had long enjoyed a trade monopoly in tea from China until the early nineteenth century, when the British government began growing tea commercially in Assam. This was successful and the British began to develop tea plantations in the Darjeeling

region in the mid-nineteenth century. Dr. Archibald Campbell, a Scottish civil servant in the Company's Indian Medical Service, was appointed Superintendent of the region.

Glenburn was established as a tea plantation or 'garden' by a Scottish tea company in 1859. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was managed by a German family headed by Andrew Wernicke. One of India's pioneering tea planting families, the Kolkata based Prakash family, has now owned Glenburn for four generations. It continues to produce excellent tea and provides a mountain retreat inspired by the vineyards of Europe and other parts of the world. It comprises 1,600 acres including 1000 acres of private forest.

The plantation's focus was always the manager's residence, a homestead which took the form of a 'burra' bungalow situated on high ground overlooking the vast and deep Rangili Valley. The date of its construction is not certain, but probably starting about 1860. The structure has been modified, extended, and restored

Darjeeling (cont.)

over the years, most recently in 2002 for its conversion into a boutique hotel. The dwelling is now surrounded by gardens with associated buildings located on terraces below, the most important being the mid-twentieth century tea 'factory'. The terraces are supported by substantial dry stone retaining walls built from several types of field stone. These walls are traditionally British and appear to have been built, extended, and repaired over many years. Those which create the principal terrace may date from the 1860s but others, associated with the boutique hotel conversion are only about 20 years old. The quality of the walling ranges from mediocre to poor, judging by the inferior coursing, the irregularity of the bedding, running joints, and the mixture of stone sizes, types and shapes. While presenting a sense of well-informed surveying and engineering, the diverse walling quality suggests European oversight but local labour.



Detail of modern wall with weep hole

An interesting use of field stone at Glenburn is a steep winding road that leads from the manager's bungalow to a riparian flat beside the Rangeet River. Its length is perhaps 5 kms, its descent precipitous and its hairpin bends innumerable. Little of the original pavement survives close to the bungalow but quite long, straight sections are intact and, curiously, the pavement survives best at the hairpin bends. It is cobbled with remarkable precision. There are two tracks, edged on both sides by flat stones with a bed in-between, a gutter on the 'up' side and, depending on the slope, a retaining wall or revetment on the 'down' side. The tracks are filled with flat stones set on edge across the tracks. The central bed and gutter are filled with rounded stones. Because access to and from the river and the bungalow would have been critical from the beginning, it is reasonable to date this road to the foundation of Glenburn in 1859.



The cobble stone road from Glenburn homestead to the 'Campsite' beside the Rangeet River

It is interesting that freestanding dry stone walls are rare in tea gardens. Monica Luengo in *Tea Landscapes of Asia*, states that 'traditional tea field landscapes are continuous in form because fields are not individually divided by stone walls or fences.' She mentions special ancient trees 'entitled the *Mengding Seven*, were enclosed with stone fences at Ganlu Temple and given the name of the Royal Tea Garden' and provided tea to the imperial court. So, it is not possible to compare Indian walling with, say, Scottish or even German freestanding walls which generally use foundation stones, a double skin, through stones and coping stones.

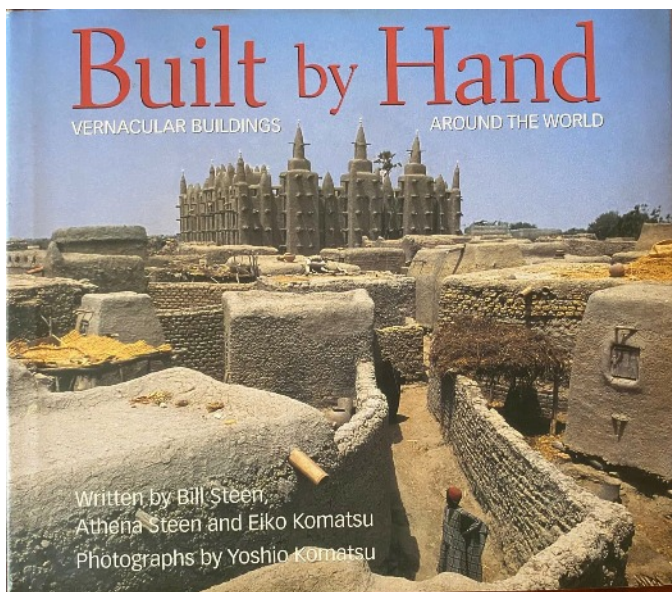
The vast majority of the dry stone walls that I saw in north-east India recently were roadside retaining walls or revetments. I could not help comparing the landscape I passed through with western Victoria, where many hundreds of kilometres of dry stone walls survive, criss-crossing the landscape. It was the same period, the same mix of mainly Scottish pioneers, the same pursuit of an excellent product (tea and wool respectively), the same alienation of land into vast estates, and the same imperial economy but producing from such very different landscapes.

A future article in *The Flag Stone* about Turuk Kothi Estate, Rinchenpong, Sikkim will extend this comparison.

A fortnight before Timothy Hubbard visited Darjeeling, I too was in this highland retreat. Here a few shots of the biodiversity along the north-facing dry stone revetment on Observatory Hill. The wall extends for several hundred metres, up to about four metres high



Many of the dry stone (and the mortared) walls in Darjeeling are 'decorated' with dozens of iron pipes reticulating water to the residents



Built by Hand

Vernacular buildings around the world

Written by Bill Steen, Athena Steen & Eiko Komatsu

Photographs by Yoshio Kamatsu

Published by Gibbs Smith

I came across this wonderful book (published 20 years ago!), loaned by a friend who thought I might find it interesting.

I did.

For starters, the photography by Yoshio Komatsu is technically superb, enhanced by locations truly exotic. Many would argue that there has never been a photographer of buildings quite like Komatsu. He has travelled all around the world, north, south, east and west photographing hand made buildings. But this is far more than just another coffee table book.

In almost 500 pages it devotes a mere 30 explicitly to stone buildings and some of these are muddled, however stone also appears elsewhere along with other media. The reader is taken through earth, wood, bamboo (grasses and other plants), and thatch along with, of course, stone. Then we are introduced to different environments, functions, context and adornments.

But the real appeal, the compelling point of interest, is as the title says, all about structures built by hand. Isn't that what we marvel at when we see an old dry stone wall stretching out across a field – every one of those stones was picked up by a person and placed in that wall. This point is driven home by the many photos that show artisans at their work – many probably with little formal

education and working with the simplest tools. As the flyleaf says: 'Komatsu's photographs tell the story of a disappearing world of buildings that have been constructed by ordinary people who, as builders and homesteaders have given artistic, modest, and sensible form to their daily needs and dreams.'

The text is minimal yet meaningful. The authors express the hope that their book will 'bring to light the need for a modern vernacular. Not the type that seeks to duplicate and imitate the examples in this book, but rather one that is inspired by a responsive and sensitive balance between the know-how and wisdom of the past and that which is sustainable and modern'. They end saying: 'the revival and creation of that which is built by hand can serve not only to enrich our increasingly standardised lives but also to bring us back in touch with the joy that comes from people working together.'

As I marvelled my way through this tome I had in the background the daily news of other humans hurling missiles at buildings and of course at thousands of human beings. If only we could focus more attention on wonderful creations and less on wanton destruction.



Stone complex in Drogen village, Mali

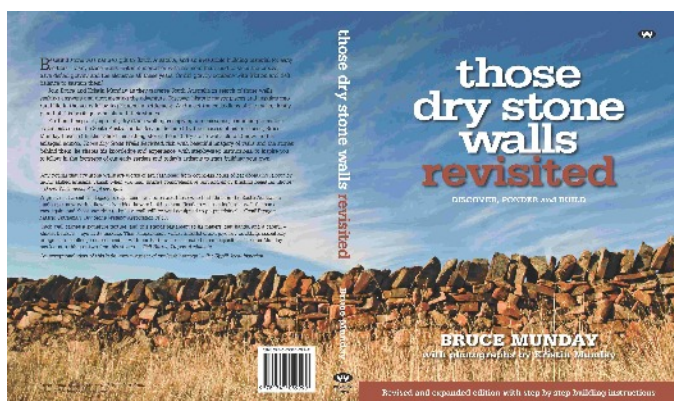
See if you can find this wonderful book in your library. Either that or a friend with a copy.

You will read a more extensive but equally enthusiastic review [here](#).

An old book revisited

It seems a lifetime ago, but some readers will be aware of my book *Those Dry-Stone Walls – Stories from South Australia's Stone Age*, published in 2012. As if to prove that there will always be an audience out there for even the most obscure subject, that book was reprinted three times. Thank you dear reader.

In 2020, with the last copy now a collector's item, the big decision beckoned. Another reprint or a new edition. It seemed that there was plenty of new material (including historic old walls), the author had some fresh perspectives, and there was scope for some how-to instruction.



This edition has taken longer than it should, so I don't doubt that many of the enquiries have now forgotten me or moved on to a new hobby. But finally I can say that I have now seen the new edition and held a copy in my trembling hand. Unless the printer burns down or the ship sinks in the Taiwan Strait it should be here in February – let's just say March.

So what's inside the cover? Well, a lot more from SA's pastoral land where one has to travel considerable distances between significant walls and their stories. Also, walls from the inside country that I missed first time around, and modern work from some of our talented professional wallers.

Perhaps the most noticeable addition is a how-to chapter for beginners – something I largely avoided in the first edition, feeling unqualified to dispense this sort of knowledge: 'Would a real waller be scandalised by this?'. A decade on I'm quite comfortable handing out limited advice. I've met and watched many wallers far more experienced and gifted than me. I have written or at least edited many articles about wallers and walling for *The Flag Stone*. I have even built quite a few walls and follies, gradually accumulating skills. Most important, I have assisted Wally Carline and Jon Moore run hands-on workshops for about 350 beginners. That is 350 case studies where I have been privileged to witness the way people learn, the questions they ask, the mistakes they make, and their range of ambitions. I've often felt that people who struggle to learn can become good teachers – as good in a different way as the gifted souls to whom it all comes naturally.

So, this is shameless self-promotion by the editor of *The Flag Stone*. Perhaps in the next edition someone would like to review it.



The Association's vision is that dry stone walls and dry stone structures (dsw&dss) are widely accepted for their unique place in the history, and culture of the nation and for the legacy they represent.

Our goals are:

- To inform and educate the nation about the cultural significance of dsw&dss in Australia and their associations and meanings for past, present and future generations.*
- To document dsw&dss and draw on historical records in order to encourage appreciation, conservation, maintenance, repair and interpretation of those of cultural significance.*
- To establish disciplines and certification systems that can contribute to the care and construction of dsw&dss.*
- To assist in ensuring that new construction, demolition, intrusions and other changes do not adversely affect the cultural significance of dsw&dss and that modern uses of them are compatible.*
- To respect Indigenous heritage places and cultural values, and, in particular, to assist in the conservation of those associated with dsw&dss.*

Splui

Richard Tufnell

Richard Tufnell, who has 'worked and travelled quite a bit in Switzerland', admires the Verzasca and Bavona Valleys as a wonderful and very picturesque treasure trove of dry stone wonders.



Splui are a particular form of shelter from Switzerland that remind one of hobbit houses. They are found in the south near the Italian border, in the region that projects down to Lake Magiore. The area is outstandingly beautiful with innumerable examples of interesting dry stone. About a quarter of the 400 splui are on the valley floor of Val Bavona.

Splui are formed by adding dry stone walls to secure a space under massive boulders, or where two such boulders have rested against each other. They are usually found at the foot of scree, where the largest boulders tend to have ended up, and their mass makes them proof against most future falls. It is a wise precaution – I have witnessed a landslide in the Alps. There is a massive explosive noise which lasts for several seconds, followed by a very large cloud of dust.

The walls have openings, sometimes with doors and windows fitted. Because every boulder and setting will be different, there is a great variety of forms. They are practical rural structures, used to shelter people, livestock of all kinds and for general storage. They were not occupied year round but seasonally. They enabled farming to take place in a precarious and dangerous setting.



Who's who in DSWAA

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Membership

Annual membership fee

- Single \$30 (\$80 for 3 years)
- Couple \$50 (\$130 for 3 years)

Cheque: DSWAA Inc. and posted to DSWAA Membership, 87 Esplanade West, Port Melbourne 3207; **or**

Bank Deposit at any branch of the ANZ Bank **or EFT:** BSB 013 373, Ac. no. 4997 47356

Clearly indicate membership identity of payer

New members

Complete the online membership form on our [website](#): Alternatively email or post name, address, phone number/s, and area of interest (eg waller, farmer, heritage, etc) to the membership secretary (above).

Renewals

Annual fees are due May 31 after the first full year of membership. We send renewal notices prior to this.

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