

The Peaky Wallers

The Story of a Wall (*Part Deux*)

Our U3A walling group have spent the better part of a couple of years at North Lees Campsite, near Hathersage. During that period we have repaired a number of dry stone walls which form the boundaries of the site or a backdrop to the new camping pods that have been built. We have been working closely with Peak Park Rangers Bill Gordon and Tom Lewis, to whom we are indebted for their patience, humour and skill in instructing us amateurs in the dark arts of dry stone walling. This is the story of the longest wall we repaired - a 60 metre length of collapsed wall which was not actually a boundary, but was nevertheless an important part of the woodland. Much of the stone had become buried in leaf mould over the years and we faced many other challenges throughout its repair.



Bill Gordon



Where we Started



Tom Lewis

This particular area of woodland was on a slope and not easily accessible. There were a number of underground streams, two of them under the existing wall and this meant some bridging work! Since the wall was originally built (some time in the 1800s) trees had matured (causing the wall to collapse). Despite the fact that the area had been thinned to 40% of the canopy to allow more light in (so bluebells could grow), there were still several trees in our way. Going around the first tree gave us more practice in curved walls!



Taking Down The Old Wall



Footings for the Curve



Building Around the Tree

We only meet once a month, but we manage to achieve quite a lot each session. The personnel changed each month because of people's commitments. We welcomed new members and others dropped out for a variety of reasons. We have learnt the importance of using lines, and we now understand how to wall on a slope (although there is no photographic evidence of the famous 'teapot' method of ensuring the wall is level along its length!)

Once we had rounded the tree we had a good opportunity of putting the above skills into practice on a long 'straight' section. Even though the wall was not a public boundary, Tom impressed on us the importance of the aesthetic appearance of the wall which was not easy as the stone we had to work with was extremely rough (Tom used a highly technical term for this - "Rubbish").



Using 'A' Frame and Lines



Keeping it Straight!



Tidying the Coping Stones

The situation of the second tree meant we were unable to round it, so it was decided to utilise two 'Cheek Ends' either side. This provided good experience, especially for new members of the group who had not had the chance to build these before. Although there is obviously a gap between the cheek end and the tree, this is not critical in this particular wall as it is not a boundary and not used for stock control. However, once again, the poor selection of stone made the task more difficult.



The Second Tree



Working on the Cheek End



Completed Cheek End

From the tree we were struggling to find suitable stone. It did look as though the wall would not be able to span the entire length to join the existing corner of the further wall. At this point, Bill made an interesting discovery - the route of an ancient 'hollow way' that crossed the site. After research, it became clear that the wall adjacent to the one we were repairing had been built across the route, and that one of two large gate stones was built into this wall. It was decided to restore this route through the woodland and a section of wall was taken down. This had the dual effect of restoring the hollow way and providing us with some much needed stone. Enough, in fact to complete the wall.



Footings For the Extension



Joining to the Existing Wall



Restoring the Hollow Way

We completed the Wall in December. This was our final repair job at North Lees. It is a wonderful setting, and we have been privileged to work there through all seasons. The surrounding scenery and wildlife is wonderful and we have seen the campsite itself benefit from the addition of the camping pods and refurbished shower and toilet facilities. Our walls are only a small part of this, but it is a wonderful thought that the walls we have repaired contribute to the environment and that they will hopefully be appreciated for years to come.



The Finished Wall - 60 Metres



Happy Days!