

## **LABOUR OF LOVE BY**

## **WALL VOLUNTEERS**

**or**

## **STONE ME! WHAT**

## **AN ACHIEVEMENT**

Dorset volunteers are celebrating after completing a huge five-and-a-half year task to rebuild a long stretch of dry stone wall in a local beauty spot.

The wall extends for 300 metres alongside the public bridleway on Corton Down, part of the historic South Dorset Ridgeway near Martinstown.

Local supporters of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers started work on the massive undertaking in 2011 and when the BTCV closed its Dorset office the team re-formed the following year under the umbrella of the European Conservation Action Network, or EuCAN.

The EuCAN Dorset mid-week volunteers set to work removing and recycling what remained of the original stones, bringing in new material, re-setting the foundations and rebuilding the entire structure.

Funding for the project came from the South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the landowner, Mr Jim Bryce of Rylands Farm.

The volunteers were guided throughout their long labour of love by Sally Fielding from the Dorset Branch of the Dry Stone Walling Association, who praised their achievement. "We now have a broad base of volunteers who are capable of restoring dry stone walls," she said.

"Some of those involved have become so addicted to it that they have joined the local branch of DSWA and come out on other sessions working on other walls in the county. One volunteer has taken her instructors' qualification and two more were inspired to go on to take their level 1 certification."

Over the past five and a half years

- More than 100 pairs of hands have help build sections of the wall at various times
- A regular team of about 20 volunteers includes 10 who were there at the start
- The build has taken almost 900 volunteer days, spread over 68 visits to the site including three training weekends for other organisations
- The contract was for six years but the job was completed in five and a half years
- The wall is approximately 1.4 m high and extends for 300 metres
- Several lorry loads of new Purbeck stone were driven to the remote site from local quarries
- The total weight of stone laid in place by the volunteers is about 600 tonnes.

The EuCAN volunteers' team leader, Dave Searle, said he was proud of their work: "The Dorset Mid-week volunteers have grown and developed because of the friendly and positive attitude of everybody involved. It's a great example of how an unlikely mix of people from a huge range of backgrounds can work together. Our team includes retired professionals, the unemployed, people with learning difficulties and those with special needs. One of our most dedicated members is William Parmiter, who co-writes the Echo's "Our View" column on Tuesdays."

Walkers and riders on the bridleway, which runs from the Hardy Monument westwards towards Bincombe Hill, have stopped to watch the volunteers at work over the years.

The last stones have just been laid at a "topping out" ceremony, with a final large piece marking the year of completion, specially carved by one of the volunteers, Wendy Manning.

But there's no time to rest for the EuCAN volunteers. There's another dry stone wall, further along the Ridgeway, that's in the process of being restored – and it could be several more years before that one is finished.

### **SIDE BAR articles**

**The South Dorset Ridgeway** – "The Land of Bone and Stone" – is one of the most important early Bronze Age landscapes in northern Europe. A recent survey by the SDR Landscape Partnership found that, as fewer people now worked the land, almost half the dry stone walls in this area were in need of repair. The walls were initially built as boundaries and enclosures, using stone that came straight out of the ground in the fields. In other areas, such as chalk landscape where there is no suitable walling stone, landowners planted hedges, so the distribution of walls tells us a story about the geology for which Dorset is renowned. The walls are built without mortar, using shape, technique and gravity to form a solid construction that should last for 100 years or longer.

[www.southdorsetridgeway.org.uk](http://www.southdorsetridgeway.org.uk)

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**The EuCAN Dorset Midweek Volunteers** work to raise the group's practical skill levels, including dry-stone walling, hedge-laying, fencing, removal of invasive species, tree-felling and scrub clearance. It invests in machinery and recognised training courses in skills such as brush cutting and chain-sawing (enabling at least one unemployed volunteer to start his own gardening business.)

This has all served to raise the credibility and profile of the group, but it also has an ethical approach by not doing anything that would deprive anybody of paid employment. "We only do tasks that would not otherwise be done," says Dave Searle, "and that includes a great deal of work with Natural England to help maintain Dorset's Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific interest, and of course with the South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership."

<http://www.eucan.org.uk/uk/dorset/dorset-mid-week-group/>  
email: [eucan.dmv@gmail.com](mailto:eucan.dmv@gmail.com)

## **SUGGESTED PICS**

1. One of the wide views of all the volunteers lined up behind the wall
2. A tighter shot of volunteers working on the final section
3. A close up of the final large 'date' stone with the engraver, Wendy Manning, and EuCAN Volunteer of the Year, Barry Pell.