

on your feet:



*Building  
beautiful*

# BOUNDARIES

Roving reporter **Arveen Bajaj** returns from her rambles and contemplates whittling a wall.

Anyone who watched the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* series, set in the sumptuous countryside of early 1800s England, may not have noticed the beautifully crafted dry-stone walls that criss-cross the hills and fields, probably having been (understandably) distracted by the lovely Mr Darcy popping out of a lake.

According to The Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain (DSWA-GB), dry stone walls are found in many parts of Britain and overseas – wherever field, mountain or quarried stone is plentiful. The DSWA-GB is a charitable organisation committed to the preservation of dry stone walls and the training of people in the craft of dry stone walling. Its Patron is HRH Prince Charles, who is known for his keen interest in all countryside related matters.

Walls can be built of most types of stone – the skill is in making the best use of what is available. There are regional variations, but the same building principles apply.

DSWA-GB's Deputy Chairman Emeritus Professor Chris Stephens believes they are a

practical form of boundary representing more than a conservation matter as they enhance the landscape and are part of Britain's heritage.

He adds that with the global push towards ecological sustainability and carbon reduction, a dry stone wall is the perfect solution to countryside boundary building as although initially more costly, a dry stone wall will outlast a wire fence many times over. Given timely maintenance, they will prove more economical in the long term. Professor Stephens explains, 'A well built wall with minor maintenance will last 100-150 years. It makes good long term economic and ecological sense to rebuild them.'

Dry stone walls are built without mortar or cement and this reduces cost and allows the wall to settle safely and to survive frosts. They also provide a valuable habitat for plants, animals and insects in exposed areas. Walls offer shelter and shade, they are fire and rot proof, can be built on rocky ground where fence posts cannot be driven and often improve land by using surface stone.

'One metre of wall a metre high contains about one ton of stone. A good waller can

rebuild three metres a day. That means he [or she] has to move six tons of stone a day. It is hard work!' he says.

Unfortunately, 40% of UK dry stone walls have been lost since the Second World War and the passage of time causes decay. Theft, livestock pushing against well built layers and people climbing over walls and dislodging top stones can all lead to deterioration.

However, the 1,200 members of the DSWA-GB are ensuring that the craft has a thriving future. They organise a range of activities including training courses open to all and practice meets for their members. The Association also encourages surveys of walls and promotes its Pinnacle Award for projects of excellence.

It is certainly an unusual yet worthy activity or indeed profession, as some of the DSWA-GB's members have made it. Professor Stephens has a novel answer as to its attraction: 'Why rebuild dry stone walls? It's just as satisfying to undertake as dental treatment, but dry stone walls last a lot longer than your patients.'

*For more information about dry stone walling including events, courses and competitions, visit [www.dswa.org.uk](http://www.dswa.org.uk).*