



DUNNET FORESTRY TRUST

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Drystone Dyke Building Course

21st & 22nd April 2013



This event is part of the CWA Knowledge and Skill Development Training Programme, funded by the Scottish Government Skills Development Scheme and the Robertson Trust.

Introduction

Dunnet Forestry Trust manages a 257 acre forest in the Far North of the Scottish Highlands. As part of our woodland management plan we provide a range of woodfuel for our regular log sales. DFT has organised a number of community based events to encourage local people to become involved with the forest, and courses in skills such as wood turning, log scribing, orienteering, green woodworking and chainsaw instruction have been provided recently. Thanks to funding from CWA we were able to offer a two day drystone wall building course for up to twelve local people and CWA members from further afield.

Ten candidates attended the two day course in Dunnet Forest under the instruction of George Gunn, DSWA Master Craftsman/Instructor.

Why did we do this?

The course aimed to give local people and other members of CWA a chance to learn a skill under the instruction of an expert and also provide the Forest with a low boundary wall, suitable for use as seating, as a finishing touch to the Log Shelter that was built last year. All participants were treated to plenty of hot drinks and homemade cakes throughout the two days!



Drystone Wall Building

The technique of drystone wall building was explained and demonstrated by George Gunn and then the candidates were set to the real hands-on experience of this craft. They were supervised and instructed at all times and within a short time were selecting stone and building confidently. Many of the candidates had expressed a need to learn this skill as many have walls and stone buildings that require maintenance and repair.

The objectives of the course are –

1. To provide trainees with practical training in drystone dyking under the instruction of a Master Craftsman.
2. To provide a drystone wall across the front boundary of the recently completed DFT Woodland Shelter Project, thus providing permanent seating and a natural boundary.

Event trainer: George Gunn

George Gunn has been wall building for many years and is keen to pass on his skill and keep the craft alive for future generations <http://www.spanglefish.com/GeorgeGunnWalling/>.

List of course participants

Louise Senior (F)	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Nick Brierley (M)	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Rory Lowe	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Peter Nichol	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Anne Marks	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Janet Cowin	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Stuart Ellis	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Sandy Bennie	Dunnet Forestry Trust
John Paul Mackenzie	Dunnet Forestry Trust
Rob Kinghorn	Dunnet Forestry Trust



Course content

Day1.

Prior to the start of the course, volunteers from DFT had marked out and prepared the building area so that it was reasonably level. Ten participants arrived and George Gunn explained and demonstrated the building technique required to form the base level for the wall. The students were then set to work to select suitable sized stone and were each shown how to lay the stone in place and reshape it if necessary. At regular intervals the builders were asked to step back and view the entire wall to gain a better idea of how it was shaping up and check that it was level. George moved amongst the builders to supervise their progress and correct any mistakes if they occurred. By lunchtime all the builders were growing in confidence and the wall was just growing! It continued to grow steadily during the afternoon and it was noticed that the participants were beginning to help each other and not just asking for guidance from George.

Day2.

We were fortunate to have a second day of fine weather and all those involved arrived bright and early to continue with the building. Many of the participants thought that the second day would be far easier than the first but they were proved wrong! The higher the wall became the thinner and smaller the pieces of stone needed to be and a few struggled to select just the right size and shape to fit. This process required a higher degree of skill and patience and those who confessed they enjoyed working with jigsaw puzzles found this task much easier! The progress was slower than on the first day but the end result was excellent.

Day3.

During the weekend the main, straight section of the wall was completed and just needed the top coping stones to be cemented in place. The two end curved sections of the wall had not been built so it was decided to hold a further training day for any of the participants who wished to return to learn how this was achieved. George Gunn returned and as well as continuing to instruct the builders also did much of the building himself as this needed far more demonstration to produce neat, even curves and straight ends. Overall everyone seemed to enjoy learning this new skill and felt confident to tackle repairs to their own walls at home.