

California Dreaming 'Cause the free wind is blowing through your hair.

Back in December I could very much be said to be going through the motions, lots to do but no inclination to do it, my 'father-in-law' had just passed away and Christmas was effectively on hold. A couple of emails from the Stone Foundation in America promoting their Japanese stone workshop and stone symposium to be held towards the end of January, had arrived and been binned more or less un-read. I really didn't need reminding about something I just could not afford to do. Then on 18th December an email arrived from Tomos Lipps, director of the stone foundation, we have an occasional correspondence about photos and articles for his magazine (a remarkable work in which I remain frustratingly unpublished). So going through the motions I thought I'd better read it. He'd been trying to phone me but the number he had was wrong, nice comments on "Stonechat 17" and some questions about using my Skellig Michael article. Yeah whatever. Then the bombshell would I like to speak at the symposium on "some aspect of dry stone walling dear to your heart" and maybe compete "in the Dry Stone Walling Competition that is the most prominent feature of the Lithic Olympics", flights and accommodation paid, fees waived.

Blimey a trip to Japan - I had only given the previous bumph a cursory glance and they have staged foreign symposia before. I 'googled' the time in New Mexico where Tomos lived. It was 4 in the morning. Well that would have to wait. What could I talk about? Walling treasures sprung to mind. Check out the symposium on the website, I'm on the list of speakers already! Why had no-one bothered to tell me!! Oh it's in Ventura, California, well I suppose California in January is preferable to Costa del Nant Ffrancan. What's the time now? Still too early. I'd need to find a lot of photos to flesh it out. What's on flickr? Yes it could be achievable with a fair wind. What's the time? Got to pop into Bangor, fortunately driving is good for thinking. What can I call it? What would the overall theme be? What's the time? Come on what's the theme going to be? I know "Inscriptions on the Landscape" a quote about footpaths but one I've always thought applied more to stone. Walls as handwriting, features as punctuation. Cooking with gas - well simmering at least. From going through the motions to 'Duracell Bunny Mode' (as Brenda would have it) in one fell swoop. Back home. What's the time? "Is that Tomos? Hi, it's Sean Adcock here..."

The next few days/weeks were a blur of sorting flights, selecting photos, obtaining permissions, filling gaps, developing the theme. Will they know where I'm talking about, Cornwall, Shetland, the Lake District, Betws y Coed? So an annotated map and handout to cover some of the general info I wouldn't necessarily include. Order, re-order, 113 prompt cards, rehearse. Hi Brenda, Is Sean there? "He's in the bedroom talking to himself - again". Pressure, after all I'm being given a package in effect worth over \$1000 for 45 minutes to an hour of waffle. DON'T PANIC. Will my powerpoint work in US? Windows, Apple, Disc or stick? Tomos has no idea. Suggests I contact John Shaw-Rimington (Canadian DSWA President) who would be attending, he understands these things. DON'T PANIC.

Manchester airport. I hate flying. I hate sitting on the ground for more than an hour waiting for fog to clear in Paris. We're off! Would passengers with connecting flights to ... please contact the transfer desk. 2

people in front of me. 25 minutes later, oh if you'd gone straight away you'd have been alright. AAAAAH. We'll check, oh it's still on the ground. Thank God for delays! Run, xrays, more xrays. US boarding just me and 15 security guards, more xrays, quick. Search. Word of advice, don't take small plastic cube puzzles in your hand luggage if you're in a hurry to get to US. Thank goodness they didn't find the marmite which was absentmindedly packed in my hand rather than hold luggage. I'll swear the doors were shut immediately I stepped aboard. Charles de Gaulle is big and I was sweaty and mightily relieved.



Mr Marmite
courtesy of John Shaw-Rimington

Finally Ventura at 9pm west coast time, sometime in the wee small hours my time. The Anapaca Brew Pub and a pint of Rockknockers Ale brewed especially for the occasion. Anything would have been welcome but it wasn't half bad anyway.

Time had not permitted me to attend the stonework workshop which produced these two imposing ramparts. These employed the ancient Anoh (or Anō – a Japanese family/clan famed for their stonework) method of stonework. I've tried some further research but googling anything I can think of only really produces the workshop itself rather than the tradition. Striking as they were when I saw the work and discussed the construction methods with those present, I had – still have my doubts. But it is a method that has been around for around 1300 years.



Stone Workshop Ramparts at Grant Park Cross Ventura
© Sean Adcock

One of the few pieces google did regurgitate was Kumamoto castle, built in the 17th Century, and from what I could see I'd be more worried about some aspects of this stonework than what I saw at Ventura, so who am I to judge and I



Kumamoto Castle walls, Japan
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kumamoto_Castle_02n3_200.jpg GNU Free Documentation License
(www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html)

have subsequently reflected on what you can be expected to achieve in a short period of time in a confined space albeit with many relatively skilled workers. I also wonder how much was literally lost in translation. The instructor Sumiori Awata gave a (translated) talk at the subsequent symposium which was interesting and illuminating many of my concerns were addressed in some terms in the explanation of the method, which differed in some respects from what had been achieved in the reality of the workshop.

For the interested viewer the curving walls are shallow at their base for strength and become steeper as a form of ninja "repellent", it is also argued that many of the smaller stones and pins are loose deliberately so that they would produce false handholds. I'm not so convinced by this as an argument, which is that it was done deliberately. Translation maybe?

Would they have been unconcerned by stones becoming loose because they would have this side effect and if they did loosen they were relatively unimportant in terms of structural integrity. It must be born in mind that despite all the apparent pins and cosmetic filling stones these walls have often stood for prolonged periods in earthquake zones, so who are we (or more particularly me) to criticise.

There are 3 categories of stonework in Japanese castle building. The stonework at Ventura involved a lot of splitting and shaping a method known as 'impact fit' (as opposed to 'field stone' and 'cut fit joint'- finely processed). Mr Awata made the observation that we should all be aware of and that is "to listen to the voice of the stone". Every stone has its own character, sometimes co-operative, often mischievous, and we shouldn't try to impose our will on them, rather using each stone to suit its own character.



There is a lot of interesting masonry and dry stonework around Santa Barbara at one end of the Ventura Highway (where the “free wind is blowing through your hair” (Dewey Bunnell, America, 1972), covered by an (expensive book) “Stone Architecture in Santa Barbara”. Most of the dry stone work not exactly accessible on foot and finding the rest is needle in haystack time. Here is an impressive entrance to a small park/housing area. Scattered around you find stones alongside the road often with iron rings on their top. Some with recesses in their side which before they were presumably relocated would have formed pairs like this one with a wooden rail - for tying horses.
Both © Sean Adcock

There were a range of interesting talks, covering *inter alia* geology, monumental carving and masonry, masonry around Santa Barbara, and a series of talks on the work of landscape architect Laurence Halprin. There were also a series of 10 minute show and tells which revealed some interesting projects, architecture and use of stone (see for example www.zakzakovi.com), and the idea of building with “urbanite” that is lumps of concrete and other reclaimed materials, which seems quite popular in the States. Nick Aitken the other Brit present (ex-pat Canadian Scots excluded) did 10 minutes on rubble buildings, and I’m told my hour-ish diatribe was good, of course people could have just been being polite.



Creative stonework, Emma Wood State Beach,
Ventura © Sean Adcock

The Lithic Olympics (stone bowls, weight guessing, wheelbarrow races etc) were essentially rained off (only I can avoid Nant Ffrancon with hail, gales, thunderstorms and torrential downpours in California, “Sunshine State” my @%\$£!!). We did meet on the beach to sort of have a walling competition, it was decided that the original site, curving and sections delineated by bollards, and stone (essentially the leftovers from the ramparts) in a heap at one end, was not suitable. People turned up in dribs and drabs and the early arrivals (John Shaw-Rimington and myself) decided we’d rather just be creative rather than competitive (me non-competitive!! Well I had no tools and it wasn’t exactly organised, stints, points, judges – what are they?). I had a go at a dry stone clawdd, John felt that the most suitable structure for

a beach was a “herring”-bone wall, others turned up in dribs and drabs adding small cairns and stone balanced pillars etc., to the impressive cairn 3 or 4 stalwarts had built in an hour or two in the pouring rain earlier in the week (my excuse for staying dry -I was tucked up recovering from jet lag at the time). After an hour or so a warden or someone turned up and threatened us with a ticket if we didn’t give up. Apparently you’re not allowed to do anything without a permit in the US. Mind you this was part of a

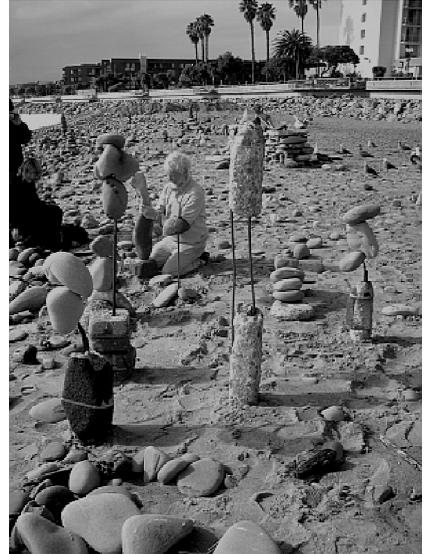
National park, and no-one had thought to clear the activities! It was annoying and I did toy with carrying on and becoming the first person to be deported from the US for dry stone walling. Would have been something to dine out on, but I would probably have only got a hefty fine so sense prevailed. On reflection you might get away with one or two people doing something similar here but not 20 or 30 denuding the beach anywhere let alone in a National park.



Playing with stone, Ventura Beach.
My effort above. Right and front cover John Shaw-Rimmington President of DSWA Canada proves that gravity is merely a figment of our imagination. All © Sean Adcock

balancing. I extended my wall with an arch (without former) and then I could resist no longer. Some very amateurish balancing and a bit of a hotch potch (which from certain angles at one point looked a bit like a deer) ensued. I'm not quite addicted but it was great fun, and I am something of a convert. The true skill however I feel lies with John's speciality of balancing impossible shapes on top of each other, sometimes the stones seem to be either clinging on or somehow virtually floating. Truly amazing.

Anyway back at the hotel I adjourned to the beach where others had been stone balancing on and off all week. Never having been interested in stone balancing I started off by building a miniature Galloway dyke. I was then joined by a few other hardy souls (Nick and John mostly) who started stone



Other highlights of Ventura included a visit to Art City, sponsors of the Workshop, where there are lumps of stone to die for and over 20 sculptors producing all sorts from fine works to installations. You can get a flavour for the place at www.artcitystudios.com.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the symposium both the lectures and the social side. As I wasn't paying I'm not

A light come water feature and an amazingly colourful sculpted stone – in black and white. I'll give a talk one day until then its imagination only.

Both © Sean Adcock



sure I'm in a position to complain about much, but I did feel that the fees were a little high, and I would have to think more than twice about attending again if I had to dip into my own pocket. The Stone Foundation's symposia do have a bit of a reputation for being on going "train crashes" and the organisation can be described as a little haphazard at times. Had I been paying I would not have been too impressed. That said I know that Tomos does most of the work himself and if I was doing the same here it would be a bigger crash!

I stayed on a couple of days after the conference and apart from my trek around Santa Barbara went on a boat trip around the Channel Islands National park whale watching (a couple of spouts, a possible shadow and several dolphin) and strolled up and down Hollywood Boulevard. No-one mistook me for Brad Pitt, somewhat surprisingly I thought. Finally I got to appear in Hollywood but no-one signed me up and unlike



Elvis, Jimi, John and Janis I discovered that my name is absent from Sunset Boulevard's "Rockwalk". And so I returned to North Wales and Nant Ffrancon where the wind definitely blows through my hair, what there is of it these days.

Thanks to Tomos, Dave, John, Nick and Nikki for taking me under their collective wings and making this a trip to remember.

The title title of this article is borrowed from the lyrics of Mamas and Papas, and America.

Sean Adcock