

Gualala: Grating and Creating: Thoughts on the Art of Collaboration (part 1)¹

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*A few years ago I was moved to write "Does setting stones differently, vertical, slanted, putting triangles and seats into it turn it into art? Where does design become art? I really do not have much of an inkling. The purely functional can be aesthetically pleasing but does that make it art? Virtually everything I do is pure farm field walls, there is little scope for art. I have never particularly liked it when someone says that wall's a work of art, or you're an artist. I just build walls."*²

I spend most of my walling life working on field and garden boundaries. In North Wales a lunky is exotic; a stile comes along a fraction of once in a blue moon. I can count the number of dry stone bridges or arches I've found on the fingers of one hand, and allowing for a thumb I'd probably still have room to record another 3 or 4. Walls hereabouts are first and last functional, merely piles of stone separating fields. Some people might even realise they are organised piles. Some might notice they have varying degrees of refinement. Some I'm sure think they've always been there. Some, I wonder if they ever noticed. Until relatively recently I had little experience of much else. I was aware that other types of project existed, after all I had worked in that strange foreign land England more than once, I'd even worked in Northern Scotland a whole 500 miles away, and I had seen photos of DSWA Pinnacle Award winning projects. That type of project however was all another world, possibly another universe, not for the likes of me.

In 2011 things changed, but the seeds had been sown in 2010. At the end of 2009 I was invited by Tomas Lipps to make a presentation at the Stone Foundation's Symposium to be held in January 2010, in Ventura, California (see *Stonechat #20*). I was only there for a week. I did not see many walls but I did see some stonework, I saw a number of presentations, and got my first in depth insights into that other universe. More importantly I met many interesting and skilled people, a number of whom have become very good friends. Little did I suspect that this would be the first of around a dozen transatlantic return trips to date.

North America is not really that big on farm walls, well not these days and not uniformly. Kentucky has a fair few. New England might have thousands of miles, but most have faded into the woodland floor. Here they were a passing fad, arriving with European settlers and in decline for over 100 years when agriculture moved west, largely failing to take the skill of walling with it. On one visit, (further west) to Santa Fe, we discovered a Cultural Museum. When we visited this had a travelling 'Cowboy exhibit' which had a section in it on barbed wire. Barbed wire in a museum? One cannot help but think they are a bit desperate at times when it comes to history! A little unfair perhaps. In terms of the history of the west barbed wire did actually play a pivotal role. Fencing abounded, thousands of miles were needed and it was a little bit more immediate and practical than walls. It's a different culture, in so many ways. There is even a Barbed Wire Museum in LaCrosse, Kansas with over 2400 exhibits and a 'Barbed Wire Hall of Fame' for goodness sake.

This does not mean that there's no stonework, and nothing being built. There most certainly is, but it is a different culture and there tends to be a different emphasis, often far more stone masonry than rustic walling. I have the impression that it is generally embraced for its own sake, to make a statement, to create something. You get the feeling that functionality is often a bonus rather than the be all and end all.



Fractal window within "wave wall" Stinson Beach 15 or so miles north of San Francisco by Marin stonemason Doug Bryant
www.alostartstonework.com

2011 saw me return to Ventura, again at Tomas Lipps invitation, this time to teach and talk. I planned a much longer trip to spend time with some of those friends I'd made the year before. Following the Symposium, at the invitation of John Shaw-Rimington (JSR), I travelled North to San Francisco and then a few hours up the coast to Gualala to the property of Stone Foundation member Peter Mullins.

John (from Port Hope near Toronto Canada)) had met Peter several years before at a Stone Foundation Symposium in Santa Fe and had discussed the potential for creating dry stone features on his property, this was his third visit and he continues to return every January. I shall let John explain how it all began...

"I ended up visiting him a year or two later to discuss designing a structure that would somehow allude to the connection of the old stage coach road, sections of which could still be found and walked along on his property. It was a whimsical idea and I liked being given the freedom to imagine and design something not necessarily historically correct, but hopefully give the feeling of oldness and some sort of lingering significance. The most interesting thing for me while I was building it was the way the shapes and sizes of the large red sandstone sticks and schist boulders began to determine the scope and actual design of the project. For instance, one semi cubed shaped boulder we used, which had more of a 75 degree corner, looked like it really needed to be the main cornerstone on the NE edge of the stagecoach house. This meant the site plan shape of the folly structure would end up being a slightly skewed design. This and other unusual shaped larger stones influenced the floor plan and some of the elevations."

John has said *"The ruins have taken on a special meaning for me. They represent a transition from traditional walling to the envisioning and constructing of imaginary garden installations and ultimately to various structural sculptures."*³



The Stagecoach house having been finished the year before, I was about to get swept up in this transition. 2011 saw the start of a project we came to call the "Pyramid", perhaps the highlight of my walling career to date, it's certainly right up there and whilst I might have only been a collaborator it is something of which I am immensely proud, and it's not exactly a functional farm wall.

This project was to be a departure for John too, being more of a design as you go project whereas most of his previous projects had operated within the clients or architects specific design constraints. John says

"the size and scale as well as most of the final were 'discovered'. Though it was in no way a temporary installation the project became more like an extemporization. We added openings and niches the way a sculptor might remove material from a block of wood or stone looking for the 'figure' contained within." This might make it seem a little gung ho. John had a sketch-up of the design, with a vague idea of dimensions, the 45° angling of the stonework, and 90° angle at the apex were givens. There was some concern as to the feasibility and stability. I spent some time doing calculations to show where weaknesses might be how they could be compensated for and what forces were going where. For example the sloping stonework places some force on the quoins, but the mass of the arch and stonework above it more than compensates for this, but not necessarily before the arch itself is complete.⁴



Variations on the theme of a batter frame

it up as we go along. It's all somehow loose and yet defined. It's all about niceties, details and variables, but not yet too many of them, plenty of time for that. Then there was some playing and definitely making it up as we went along as we wanted to use up some of the odds and ends of stone Peter had accumulated over the years in addition to the Sydney Peak schist he had brought in for the build. I left after a week to continue my travels John, David Claman, Akira Inman and Evan Oxland completed the build.

2011 was a flying visit, little did I realise how often I would return. It amazes me how these relationships seem to happen and develop by accident I re-united with John and David again the following January (2012) to complete the project. David self-depreciatingly relates that "I consider my involvement in Peter's projects to be more due to serendipity than skill. I was just in the right place at the right time." Much the same I feel can be said for my involvement (skill not self-depreciatingly notwithstanding). Serendipity indeed.

We were joined by Sean Smyth, christened 'young' Sean to avoid confusion. For some reason, I cannot imagine why, no-one suggested (dared?) calling me 'old' Sean. We were also helped on and off by Rhys Williams a friend of Peter.

As seems to be the norm with Gualala there was much "umming" and "ahhing" at the start. Obviously the next triangle needed to mirror the first, easier said than done. An allowance needed to be made for a drop in ground level so that its apex finished at a true level with the first. This proved to be the least of our problems. A drawback with 'slightly making it up as you go along approach' is that sometimes you do not think of something until after the event and we didn't install any datum points from which we could have calculated the relative positions of the two triangles. This meant a lot of rough reckoning and an hour or so

Then we had to fit it in a space and work out how to set up profiles. It needed to have a doorway that was tall enough to be reasonably practical as a door, but it could not be that tall (and certainly not to accommodate 6'4" of Mullins) as this would have a knock on effect on the height. An extra 6 inches of doorway height would mean far more than 6 inches of overall height if the doorway was not to become too dominant within the whole. There was 'some' adjusting until we agreed the proportions did indeed look right for the space and that a sensible doorway of reasonable dimensions, whatever they were -, can't think that far ahead - would fit. Once the lines are up we can decide on the final dimensions for

the doorway. Looking forward, planning ahead, in order to be in a position to be able to work back. It might seem as if we are making



**The completed triangular Gable
Photo ©John Shaw-Rimmington**

of tweaking (now we had decided it needed to be slightly oblong rather than square so that the width wouldn't detract from the height). Every slight movement of the frame in any of three dimensions threw everything else out by seemingly exponential amounts and what has become a common mantra when I am involved in setting up complicated builds was born... an exasperated cry of "too many variables" frequently rang out. In the end it was "close enough". This is not to say it was particularly inaccurate, those that know me well will probably tell you that my version of close in enough is probably fractions of an inch. Collaboration is, I think, all about individuals bringing different skills and blending them. I am not particularly creative but I think I bring a rigour to calculations and set ups, and foresight of potential problems that enables a project to reach its end goal. Some would say I worry too much, see too many problems, have an approach definitely not "glass half full" not even so much as 'half empty glass' as 'where's it all gone' and 'why didn't I spot the leak earlier'. My approach is to try and be really accurate and fussy at the start



"Too many variables!!!"
Photo ©John Shaw-Rimington

so that you get to a point where you can achieve your end goal. To build so that you are not taken by surprise by a problem that could have been foreseen but has led you up a blind alley which you cannot now get out of and leave a satisfactory end result. I believe you do not always necessarily need to be 100% precise but you need to be close enough towards the end that you can actually achieve your goal with a degree of finessing if necessary. This was the case here, with the triangles rising from the ground it was 'important' that at eye level (which is a range after all) the top lines of the front and back faces of one triangle lined up with the top lines of the mirror triangle. This had to be done by eye, not by strictly adhering to the lines which could not be made to fit because there were just "too many variables". However we did need to be 'close enough' that any finessing did not, throw out batter or detract from crisp lines. In the event one side had to be built an inch or so above the line at the bottom end, and the whole structure is a degree or two off of square, with the the two triangles slightly different lengths and not quite parallel. Almost sounds as if it was disaster? We are talking inches and an errors of a couple of percent, and nothing that can be determined by eye alone. Such is the nature of what I like to think of inexact certitude.



The build nears completion **Photo left © Sean Smyth**

Having completed the two triangles a floor was to be installed between them to pull the whole structure together. Sounds simple. I can't remember quite how the design came about. Some sort of mosaic, maybe just slabs. No that would be boring. John's still keen to use some large slabs, I prefer more geometric designs. Hang on we've got that nice sandstone slab maybe we can put that somewhere?



The 'paths' under construction.
JSR Foreground Young Sean left,
Dave at back
Below JSR fitting yellow sandstone
blocks



Whoaaa its the same width as the doorways. As is often the case with this apparent haphazard approach some things seem just meant to be. Serendipity. Right, obviously in the middle lined up with the doorways then.

I have mentioned Peter has all sorts of bits of stone. These included some short square red granite pillars which seemed obvious edges for a couple of paths to run with and intersect the slab at right angles. Great, simple. No they are varying lengths, right sort them into pairs, details. Good colour match. Nice defined lines.

Now what? Not enough of many of the other bits and pieces to be consistent hang on maybe we can do compartments in the main 'paths' and use the few rounded beach cobbles (and bricks) as short diagonals until they run out. It was even decided that we could cut some of the Sidney Peak and expose the cut surface, making a feature out of a facet (literally and metaphorically) of the shiny smooth 'blue' finish that results. Normally we abhor cut faces, just a detail.

What do we use for the outside edges? Needs to be something substantial to give a good edge to pitch against. Well there's an obvious choice - some of Peter's 'sticks'... the amazing red sandstone from Santa Fe we had used for most of the quoins. We had reluctantly cut them up to fabricate these, but this would

mean virtually burying one of the longest and most regular. Sacrilege, we can't. Okay something else, what? Well the stick would look right, even if most people would miss it completely, details. Agonising.

Details matter! As Perry Paxton's often used quote puts it "*Excellence is in the details. Give attention to the details and excellence will come.*" (A quote oft used but frustratingly never fully attributed, and so it must remain here). I think that it is the case with any wall any of us builds, any project we undertake, that generally "*The difference between something good and something great is attention to detail*"¹⁵ In essence a great design can be ruined by shoddy work, and the average can be lifted by its execution. Niceties and details.

And so back to our stick...possibly the most expensive single stone I had worked with to date (there will be plenty more chances to outstrip this... at Peter's at least) and detail. It is duly partially buried. It would be wrong to say price is no object, but Peter is very amenable when he has faith that the end result will be 'right' and in this respect it has been a great privilege to work for him, and at times also a worry and great responsibility.

A voice calls out, I cannot remember if it is physical or metaphorical. "What about the slabs?", my desire for geometry needs reigning in. Well it was

Right: David, Young Sean and the stick

John's baby so I suppose 'we' agreed to let him



have some. 4 large irregular pieces were selected and positioned one to a quarter, not quite right, a bit lost. Another 4 slightly smaller ones are added, shuffled, rotated. We are happy. The diagonal cobbles are extended but now what? We have some nasty lumps with flat surfaces that can squared off a bit with a saw and there's the nice sidney peak This has good edges, but we only need them to be around 4 to 5 inches deep, the slabs are bigger... do we have enough edges if we don't use cut faces, and its going to be a lot if cutting.

Just after the triangles had been finished the heavens had opened, not a huge problem for the pitching as we were able to rig up a tarpaulin roof. Once the materials were gathered we could remain relatively dry. Fine while we were working on the paths but now for the infilling we needed a lot of stone and a lot of cutting. This is one of the big aspects of collaboration.



**David cutting slabs in the rain
Teamwork!**

random without it becoming completely haphazard. As often seems to be the way John and I seemed to come to the same conclusion at almost the same moment. A strange sort of telepathy. Whenever a slab changes direction we'll change the direction of the pitching, John probably sees it artistically, me more technically – easier to do and to accommodate the stone's irregularities – but both of us aware and tempered by the other aspect. Not so much telepathy probably as just understanding the overall vision, understanding many things in similar ways, and being able to pretty much see the best (perhaps most obvious) way of getting there. In this case geometric randomness. Not only the pattern but our apparent symbiosis. You'll have to decide for yourselves if it worked.

Hindsight probably makes this creative process sound a little more effortless or streamlined than it was.

Someone once said to me something along the lines that this project would only work if I was there and I'd get no credit. Dismissing John's contribution, certainly untrue and I think not fully appreciating or accepting how these things work. Goldsworthy does some stonework, but essentially he designs and being a sensible chap gets some of the best craftsman around to execute. They get a little credit, they certainly do not get the fanfares Goldsworthy enjoys, but they carry on grasping the opportunities presented. Why should any project be different? I like to own what I do but that is very different to demanding



JSR and a slab...

**If its raining and muddy and you want
a slab, you can get it yourself...
Teamwork!**

Someone might design the project, someone else might take the lead in the build, but none of it can be achieved without everyone's contribution. A collaboration is necessarily the sum of its parts, and possibly more. Young Sean, David and John spent hours either sawing or dressing quoins and voussoirs. Young Sean and David spent hours selecting and cutting and delivering Sydney Peak pieces in the pouring rain, to the prima donnas under the tarpaulin sheltering from the rain. I do not have their expertise with a chisel and my travel work insurance conveniently excludes the use of nasty noisy tools. I bring a certain technical expertise and grumpiness which I think they would all agree generally outstrips their own, certainly a 'no contest' in the grumpiness stakes.

Back to the floor, how to do it? Everything on the same diagonal? Maybe parallel to the paths, no this would all be too regimented even to my ocd eye. But how to make it more



Above: The completed Floor
Right: One of the paths
Below : Close encounters of the Gualala kind
L to R: Old Sean, David, Young Sean, JSR



ownership of that which I build. I like doing my bit; I am less comfortable in a team unless my own role/part or contribution is pretty much defined. But what I do is only a part of the whole, it is added to by the contribution of others as it adds to their contribution, and without someone's design what would there be to own? I am no designer. One of the biggest problems of collaborative project is this co-operation, great when there is symbiosis, but so difficult to achieve. Misunderstandings occur. To some degree everyone wants to own 'their' bit it can seem to others as if they are getting possessive. Perhaps designers feel as if others are taking over their project, the builders feel as if others are muscling in on their domain. My idea is best, my ways are right.

John I think sums up how we have worked:

"All these features though often conceived by Peter and then designed by me, end up being creative collaborations in their final execution. Waller's egos merge and surface and disappear again during construction. Styles are agreed upon and maintained by keeping our minds and attitude and the lines of communication open.

The projects themselves take precedence over everything and hopefully the individuals who work on it fade into the back ground".

We combine, we compliment, we grate, and we create. Take one element away would it be better or worse? Who knows, it would be different... probably. Take any one of us away and something, perhaps indefinable, would be missing.

Next up 2012, and David was busy becoming a blacksmith or something, we had to settle for Patrick McAfee, the Irish 'Pontiff', as a replacement. ⁶

We had a 50m retaining wall to build on or about what was then the property line (although as it turned out Peter was to purchase the adjacent land not long after). We started with our usual umming and ahing. Apart from the usual bits and bobs around the property, we had two lots of material in bulk, both from Sydney Peak. Apart from the slabs there were a lot of what John has described as "french-bread-shaped 'guillotined' stones"⁷, normally used in thin 4 inch cladding/veneer-work, and traced (long axis along the wall). The year before John and I had experimented on how best to lay these...

Argggghhh.

We had considered the possibility of this wall and toyed with ideas such as using the stone to form pillars (since



Patrick McAfee joins the team adding a new, ermmm, dynamic.



Ask and it shall be given.

A substantial wooden beam awaits our arrival

Photo ©John Shaw-Rimington

in some respects the stones resembled mini quoins), compartmentalising the wall and then building something interesting between these. 2 problems with this - what to do in between, especially given the material to hand; and it was really horrible to work with and looked tatty and somehow wrong. It wasn't going to work but what would? The combined brain power and imagination of Adcock Shaw Rimington was getting us nowhere quickly. Patrick suggested using it in a form of wedge wall, similar to a construction method common in his native Ireland. Pah, new boy, what does he know? More thinking, in ever decreasing circles. Eureka, a wedge wall. Sometimes you just have to admit someone else is right. 2 hours in and he was already proving an asset, who'd have thought?

First order of the day however was to install a beam to span the 'pyro-mid', joining the twin

apexes. The year before we had planned to have a timber joining the two, and had initially thought something like a thin ridge board would be authentic. Something along those lines held up the tarpaulin. It just looked wrong and after some discussions we agreed something more substantial was required. Ideally around 12"x12" and a bit over 20 feet long so we could cut it to length. Hardly a standard size. Not giving it too much more thought, we should have known that there would be something suitable waiting for us when we returned. Installing something like this at Peter's turns out not to be as much of a challenge as you might expect from the outside. Peter has his own 'Gradall' (tele-handler), is an experienced, adept operator, and gets obvious pleasure from manoeuvring it and big stones. It could be described as useful, it (and Peter) seem to be able to get material wherever we want it, even if it weighs a ton or two and we need it eight or nine feet up in the air. Rarely in life are we spoilt as workers, but Gualala is just that sort of place. However much we like to take credit for what emerges none of it would happen without Peter's actual physical contribution or that of his ever willing factotum Jerry Shields.



Above: Peter, his Gradall and a stone.

Back to the wall... 50m of 'wedge wall', whilst interesting in its own way and certainly out of the ordinary in California, does not necessarily make much of a statement, it's all about context. Walls at Peter's cannot be mundane. John/Peter's concept was to include some seating... something toward the middle and something at each end. It was agreed the 'towards the middle' should actually, line up exactly with the pyramid, and that the largest of the New Mexico sandstone would be ideal to form the seats. Once installed (and after Patrick had had his nap) the wall was begun, but something more was still needed. It was still essentially a plain field wall, not what any of us had come to do and not really what Peter would want (even if he didn't know it).

**Below: The Beam is lifted into position
Photo ©John Shaw-Rimington**

It was Patrick to the rescue once more. He suggested we built a series of triangular niches into the wall, reflecting its proximity to the 'pyro-mid' triangles. He's allowed the odd nap, all this thinking takes it out of you! Whilst the loaves of bread made for an interesting wall they did not particularly want to co-operate when it came to creating a secure cope, so some smaller pieces of the "Sydney Peak" were used as the primary material for this.



John then suggested the 2 end seats could be triangular in plan with 2 seats to a slab, creating a zigzag in the line of the wall. Inspired. They could have been so mundane, the zig zag creates 2 reasonably functional seats that do not point you anywhere in particular, you sit and they work wherever you want to look. And they look different, they could so easily have been square and blocky, probably would have been if John had not taken the triangular theme and run with it. It was agreed that they would be built with flat

Patrick applies the finishing touch to a section of wedge wall, complete with triangular niches.

laid Sydney peak to make a more formal structure and smoother back (and to make the technical bits - all corners getting in the way of each other, something to have a good moan and grumble at but somewhat more achievable. I don't think it was the intention that I would do all of the seat work.

Sean Smyth relates:

"[we] struggled mightily to do the work, [I learned much from your approach]. I don't remember exactly how you phrased it- something to the effect of bending the rules when necessary, but not bending them often or near each other in the wall. It translates in different ways- of course there is innate skill and skill obtained through decades of work... but beyond who is the best or better mason lies the realm of margin of error. Your corners, angles, joints were right, and right within a certain range in which you were more comfortable than the rest of us. Seeing courses ahead, remembering specific stones below- seeing "the fuzzy picture" as Matt and Kyle [two others who have worked on the site and were responsible for the Grand Canyon Project seen in Stonechat 29] are fond of saying."



**Looking along the wedge wall, to the
Greenhouse/Pyro-mid, seat in foreground**

Inexact certitude in a nutshell

Sean says the most valuable lesson he has learned from working with the various craftsman in Gualala is to "understand the appropriate margin of error and work accordingly... [to ask] 'What is the margin of error here?' and 'To what does this particular material best lend itself?' ". I (old Sean) can almost hear myself moaning, perhaps muttering, "it's not a wrist watch". Anyway the whole thing was technical and a chance to grumble, right up my street. .

I don't think everyone sees working as part of a team quite the way I do. Whilst as part of a team everyone has to muck in to get some things done, I still prefer to be doing my own thing as part of the whole. I also think that whilst there is necessarily an element of everyone mucking in, there is also a risk that you can dilute a skill set, and the sum can become less than the sum of its parts. As a result I suspect that sometimes I might seem insular, and I get grumpy, especially when I am trying to concentrate on dealing with a particularly technical aspect. However it is definitely not about creaming of the best bits or not working on the mundane, from my view it's all about adding value where I hope I can make the biggest difference. I like to think as much as I 'wanted' to work on the seats rather than the wedge wall, everyone settled into mutually acceptable roles and it ended up with me taking control of them. Oh and it's also about maintaining a degree of arrogance. There is a fine line between confidence and taking possession of (an aspect of) a job, I cannot claim to never cross it.



The centre seat's design/evolution is all a bit of a blur. Somewhere along the line the concept evolved into a mini amphitheatre/tiered seat, this seat had a focus- the pyro-mid- unlike the seats at either end. The most suitable blocks were however not as long, then another eureka moment a slightly shorter one and then a much shorter one would give the whole seat a triangular aspect keeping the theme without having to zigzag. I do not have a wide experience of art, design and collaboration and wonder if serendipity plays as much of a role as it seems to at times in Gualala. I then find myself wondering how much is fortuitous how much is having the confidence to take a concept and run

with it having faith in your own ability (and appreciation of your own abilities and limits). Somehow grasping the whole picture, having a pretty good idea of what the end result will be even if the components or steps to get there are a little hazy. I'd say it was probably just blind faith and optimism, although those that know me would suggest I do not usually tend towards optimism.

The final dimensions of the seat's back wall were determined by setting lines and standing back, looking primarily from the centre of the 'pyro-mid' and then from angles tweaking until the proportions looked right. You can put a design or a concept on paper, getting it to work and look right in-situ is another matter. Of course by and large we dispensed with the paper at least on this project.



The central tiered seat and the Growhouse/Pyromid

The tiered seat was completed during an open day, arranged for the mid-point of the project. I was a little stressed and grumpier than normal, trying to get things completed to a deadline (however relatively unimportant) does not always sit well, under the public gaze is worse still. One visitor to the site once observed *"...At the time, I asked myself what the problem was with this uptight bloke..."*⁸. It is also possible that the art of collaboration itself does not always sit that well with all those involved. We all have our moments. Some of us probably more than others. Grate, create, great.

This was the point at which the 'growhouse'-cum-'pyramid' became known as the "pyro-mid". Amanda Stinson had been employed by Peter to look after us useless men, providing sumptuous feasts to fuel the



workforce including one grumpy vegetarian (guess who). One of Amanda's many talents is fire dancing and along with her troupe the open day was to be concluded with a show using the pyramid as a stage.

Festivities over the wall continued beyond the amphitheatre seat and we were thankfully running out of loaves of bread. I had completed another seat to bookend the wall but we didn't have a suitable stone similar to the one I had used at the other end, to finish the seat/wall. Someone then suggested that there was always Peter's 'piece of quartz', a little something he'd picked up when visiting a quarry. I can't remember who suggested it but I was left to work out how it could be used/orientated, and to sort out the rigging of an irregular 5 tonne lump and digging a hole sculpted to its base. Trees were felled and a crane hired... this stone was beyond even Peter and his Gradall. A lot of crossed fingers later with Jerry and Peter applying the finishing touch to positioning; it dropped into place like a dream. The stone is literally dazzling. It was rigged perfectly, sat snugly in its hole. Skill, maybe; blind faith and optimism almost certainly!



Above: Miraculously I have rigged Peter's "Piece of quartz" correctly.

Below: (Left) Jerry and Peter make the final adjustments.

(Right) A finished seat butts against the quartz.



John decided some of the flat "Sydney Peak" should be used to make up the shortfall of the 'loaves of bread', still incorporating triangular niches, and providing a contrast to the rough stacked nature of the cropped stone, something John has likened to looking like stacked firewood⁹. I wonder again about serendipity. Does this wall work partly because its similarity to stacked wood helps the stone to blend into a woodland setting, softening it? The shorter Sydney Peak length curves away from the main wall, less visible trees and shrubs breaking sight lines. In its own way this way looks very attractive and as we shall see had unknowingly started a theme to be continued the next year in the "Wing- wall". It was tempting to build the bulk of the wall with this rather than trying to use the relatively rubbish loaves of bread, the odd piece was incorporated but we made a conscious effort to use up the loaves and not very many slabs. Had we had a free choice at the start rather than needing to utilise the loaves I'm sure we would have all preferred the Sydney Peak. The end result would have been different, probably starker and I suspect not as good. The wedge wall somehow fits built as it is. Of course without the nasty loaves 'we' might never had come up with a wedge wall at all. A lot of luck, but I think in many ways with this type of work you make your own luck- by making the right, or at least good, decisions at the outset. Sean Smyth adds *"In California we work in that nebulous realm where traditional form-following-function stone masonry meets garden folly rule bending application. Design boundaries and implementation are directly tied to the questions of 'What is the margin of error here?' and 'To what does this particular material best lend itself?'"*

Seats completed, one final detail was to find something for me to do. I suggested building a large flat laid triangle at the transition from loaves to slabs. John agreed, probably just to shut me up, and suggested that it incorporate a niche, and - I suspect jokingly- suggested this should be upside down. He later came to light heartedly describe the end result as *"Sean A showing off towards the end of the project"* ¹⁰. Astute man. I didn't do much of the wedge wall, but I own that bit! However it would look really, really, stupid sad on its own, so it cannot be entirely mine.



Wedge wall transforms from stacked wood to vertical slabs either side of yet another triangle.

Photo ©John Shaw-Rimington

This is I think the case with each element of this wall, the seats, the niches, the amphitheatre, the change of style. Each element contrasts with, yet compliments and enhances the others. The seating looks better than it is because it sits alongside the wedge wall, whilst the flatwork frames, and (I think) enhances, the wedge wall. And it all compliments and becomes part of the pyro-mid.

Having mentioned we had more or less dispensed with the paper here, at least as far as design was concerned, there is a danger that at times we got pretty close to making it up as we went along. Perhaps we actually did at times however much we like to think our decisions were reasoned and thought out. Our apparently hap-hazard, semi-spontaneous, approach potentially teeters on disaster. There is a danger that you might just go too far and I think we nearly lost it with a certain style of stile. Peter wanted some way of getting onto the land above the wall. This was slightly before the amphitheatre and its 'natural' steps were conceived. The obvious solution would be a stile, and Sydney Peak lends itself to steps. A staircase projecting from the wall or built into the bank would have detracted from the line, so a cantilevered step stile was decided upon. This

in itself didn't seem quite right and so grasping the triangular theme I suggested two flights

Too much stile?

(Left) Alan Ash texturing the stile's top stone.

(Right) Patrick uses the stile whilst hammering in the top of wedge wall.



forming a triangle with a single step at the top. This idea was adopted and it was decided to run it either side of a niche. It sort of works, I still cannot think of how we could do it better but it still jars a little to my eye it detracts from the niche and the two do not quite gel. Setting it between 2 niches would have broken the stacked log look, one set of steps would have lacked symmetry within the overall symmetry of the layout. It just about works but it grates; creating something else might have been far worse, whatever we could have done was probably an element too far. We shall probably never know. Do we ever know exactly how much better or worse something might have been if we had done it differently? No, we just choose to decide that what we have done is plenty good enough.



Towards the end of the 2012 project we finally got around to starting to replace an incomplete bridge on the site.

The bulk of the original was demolished but reluctant to destroy the well constructed piers it was decided to dimension off of these. Under Patrick's expert tutelage a former was constructed between the extant piers by means of rough forming a barrel of stone and finishing it with a skim of cement to give the shape of the form.

Voussoirs were fashioned from the trusty New Mexico sandstone and the barrel formed. The rest would have to wait for another year ...as will the rest of this article. Would this project prove to be our nemesis? A bridge too far....



Above Left: The original unfinished bridge
Below Left and Middle: Forming the former
Right: The completed barrel © Sean Smyth

NOTES

All refs extracted March 2017

¹ Inspired by a few ideas I first aired through Thinking With My Hands Tuesday, April 1, 2014 On the theme of Art and Collaboration. <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/sean-adcock-on-theme-of-art-and.html>

2 ibid

3 <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/the-wall-lala-stagecoach-house.html>

4 My musings on this can be found at <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/lending-hand.html>

5 Charles Swindoll. "Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life".

6 Patrick is something of an expert on Bridges and Pontifex literally translates as bridge builder

7 <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/triangular-theme-wall-at-wall-lala.html>

8 <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/stone-art-wall-in-and-waffen-by-sean.html>

9 <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/triangular-theme-wall-at-wall-lala.html>

10 <https://thinking-stoneman.blogspot.co.uk/2013/04/2013-california-project.html>



Above : 2012 Cast and Crew

l to r...Jerry, Sean snr, John, Patrick, Alan Ash, Sean jnr.

Alan had driven down form Eugene Oregon(500 miles) to pick me up and had joined us for a few days of work,

Photo © John Shaw-Rimington

Below: A freshly washed and completed Pyro-mid

Photo © Sean Smyth

