

Exchanges on Dry Stone Walling Training Techniques and Qualifications and the Development of the Profession

Visit to the Cevennes National Park, France – hosted by ABPS 22-26 October 2012

Sunday 21 October 2012

Arrival at hotel, Florac. Informal introductions and evening meal.

Monday 22 October 2012

A formal introductory meeting was held in the morning at the National Park Offices in Florac to introduce the partners and the participants as well as identify expectations of the project. Approximately 30 people in attendance.



A brief history of the national park was given, highlighting the importance of encouraging people to remain in the area by providing work opportunities whilst still protecting the heritage of the area. The Cevennes National Park is possibly the largest national park in France and was formed in 1970. The National Park works closely with ABPS to ensure the traditional skills of the area are upheld and passed on to new generations of craftsmen. The Cevennes region has three main stone types; schist, granite and limestone.

An overview of the Leonardo Project was given by Cathie O'Neill from ABPS. Following a visit to the UK in 2007, ABPS then successfully developed formal training qualifications in dry stone walling, based on the UK Craftsman Certification Scheme but adapted to suit French requirements. Colleagues from Spain and Italy met up with ABPS members at the International Dry Stone Walling Congress held in Cumbria in 2010, keen to develop similar training qualifications in their respective countries. Work was then undertaken to put together an application to the European Lifelong Learning Programme, under the Leonardo heading, in order to facilitate training opportunities for young wallers to visit other countries and also for more experienced wallers from the different countries to share their knowledge and experience. The application was successful and the project will run for a two year period from 1 August 2012 to 31 July 2014. Each partner had applied for a set number of mobilities (return travel by one person from one partner country to another). Funding for the project is paid in advance in Euros, with the balance of 20% being paid upon successful completion of the project and specifically the correct number of mobilities undertaken.

The key outcomes of the project would be:

- Production of a document (in four languages) that will serve as a common reference tool for the training of dry stone walling techniques in the four countries. There are also plans to include a glossary on the common walling terms used in each country, again in all four languages.
- Production of a film (shot during training wall sessions on the project visits) promoting dry stone walling as a career.
- Creation of an electronic network for professional wallers to communicate with each other and facilitate training opportunities in different countries.

During the life of the project there would be two levels of visit; those for trainees, trainers and coordinators and those for trainers and coordinators, the latter needed in order to discuss progress of the project outcomes and which did not necessarily involve practical walling work.

It was also noted that work was ongoing with UNESCO in applying for the craft of dry stone walling to be added to the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which, if successful, would also raise the profile of dry stone walling across Europe.

A summary of the work undertaken by each partner organisation was then given, highlighting the opportunities the Leonardo Project would offer members.

A brief history of the **DSWA** was given, highlighting the progress of the Association from its early days in Dumfries and Galloway through to the present day structure including the development of the Craftsman Certification Scheme and the variety of projects undertaken by branches throughout the country. The Association was keen to encourage younger wallers to take up the craft as well as offering overseas opportunities to its members.

In **Italy** a lot of effort is put into managing coastal areas but very little input for other areas including the mountainous regions where terraced landscapes are vital. In the Arnasco region, a cooperative was established in 1984 in order to take care of the landscape, including people, plants and place. This organisation has grown over the years and now has over a hundred members. There is a large demand for dry stone walling training courses and Arnasco has become a point of reference for dry stone walling matters. The cooperative already runs courses occasionally and it is hoped that a dry stone walling school can be established in due course.

In the Piedmont region of **Italy** there is a large network of historical trails, stone paths and walls, managed by the National Park although there is a shortage of local people with the necessary skills to maintain these important structures. It is hoped that training opportunities can be established to ensure the transfer of knowledge to younger generations wishing to remain in the area. A new partnership has recently been developed with ABPS to help with this work. Unfortunately, due to administrative and financial setbacks, the park representatives were unable to attend this visit.

In **Spain** a successful grant application enabled colleagues to attend the International Dry Stone Walling Congress held in Cumbria in 2010. The skills and knowledge of dry stone walling in Spain have almost disappeared. In Andalucía work has already started to raise people's awareness of the landscape and to value both material and immaterial aspects of this landscape. The biodiversity of an area is also an important aspect of the work being undertaken. It is hoped that training opportunities similar to those already found in the UK and France can be established in Spain, where the skill of dry stone walling has only recently been recognised among the traditional masonry and quarry skills.

In **France** ABPS was formed in 2002 as a professional, not for profit organisation in order to promote the technique and develop training and qualifications in dry stone walling. All ABPS members are Master Craftsmen who work to a Quality Charter. ABPS has been involved in detailed scientific research into the qualities of retaining walls and was successful in establishing accredited qualifications in dry stone walling, following visits to the UK as previously mentioned. Each year a 14 week full-time course for up to six students (those hoping to become professional wallers) is run, which will see the participants gain the first level of qualification (this sits in between L2 and L3 of the DSWA CCS qualifications). The trainees work on different sites and stone types during the course and there are also theory modules covering geology and the history of walls. Trainees are given help to develop skills such as business management and can continue to benefit from the experience of ABPS members once their training has been completed. The next stage would be to develop a higher level of qualification and the Assessment for Trainers to ensure a consistent approach to future training.

Following lunch, a site visit to Sainte Enemie was undertaken. Here ABPS has been working on a community project, which is organised in conjunction with the local commune (administrative division of the French Republic – no direct equivalent in UK, although parishes is perhaps the closest comparison). The commune collaborates with the ABPS to define the appropriate site and finances approximately half the ABPS costs. The commune also provides the midday meal for the participants and arranges and pays for the stone to be delivered to the site. Students, who come from all over France, pay a small fee for the 5 day course (200€) and also pay for their accommodation costs.

The courses are organised centrally by ABPS but can take place in any location. There are twelve students and two trainers on the course and several of these courses are run every year for the general public. ABPS also arranges courses for professionals such as farmers and builders who can benefit from their “life-long training” insurance fund to finance the course. Again these are run in conjunction with local communes



who pay for the stone and the site-preparation costs.



A visit was also made to one of the limestone quarries in the region, originally worked for roof tiles but which also supplies walling stone to the ABPS training site and other building projects.

Tuesday 23 October 2012

The group arrived at the ABPS work site at Relais d'Espinas. ABPS has secured the use of an old building at the site which will be converted to office and meeting room space along with areas for exhibitions and displays. The building is owned by the local commune and plans for the restoration and conversion have been drawn up by the National Park in conjunction with ABPS. It is hoped this work would be completed in 2014 – a challenge as the building is currently in a ruinous state.

Time was then spent on the work site, learning about the qualifications developed by ABPS and the requirements of the professional qualifications in France (CQP). It was noted that more and more public bodies were now seeking to engage workers holding accredited qualifications as a way of ensuring quality. The site has sections of wall for trainees to work on and there are also areas where wallers can build small test pieces of wall using different stone types. There are also a number of historical terraced walls on the site.



Work then commenced on the construction of a new retaining wall that would eventually form part of the car park for the new office. Following a brief explanation of what was to be built and the techniques to be employed, wallers were divided into small groups, each with an ABPS member to oversee the work and ensure the quality of work was maintained throughout the build. Other professional wallers were also able to assist with quality control as well as taking part in the building work. The practical work continued throughout the afternoon, during which time there was a Coordinators' meeting to discuss the production of the film.

Late afternoon saw a visit to the schist walls of the Moulin de Bonijols plus the workshop of Roland Mousques, where there were some very interesting walls and sculptures.

Coordinators' Meeting – Production of the Project Film

Present: Cathie O'Neill (France), Donatella Murtas (Italy), Alberto Munoz Santos (Spain), Alison Shaw (UK), Julian Rocha (Technical Assistant – Film (Spain)).

One of the outcomes of the project was to produce a film promoting dry stone walling as a viable career opportunity for younger wallers that could be used in colleges and at training events.

Initial discussions focussed on whether Julian would be willing/able to produce the film and what additional costs might be involved in terms of equipment, etc. A clear detail of costs would be needed in order to identify a sum of money that each partner would be willing to contribute from the grant received.

The discussion then moved to try and identify what was required for the film and style of production. The following points were noted.

- An introduction about walls and the importance of maintaining them including, historical and cultural references, should be included for each country.
- The film should include images of wallers at work and also pictures of high quality work, both functional and creative.
- The film should focus on younger people training in the craft and enjoying their work.
- The opportunities available to wallers should be included as well as information on the lifestyle of wallers, although it was acknowledged this was not easy to summarise.
- The film should portray the emotional/passionate side of walling as well as technical knowledge; material already exists to demonstrate the practical skills required and how to build walls.
- The importance of good quality training should be highlighted, stressing the need for a strong understanding of the technical skills required.
- Subtitles for the film would be created by each of the partners.

Further thought/work was needed on this aspect of the project in order to identify a clear brief for the maker. It is envisaged that each partner would contribute a sum from their Leonardo funding (possibly 1000€) to the Andalusia partner to cover the film costs (camera, camera man, time for editing, etc).

Wednesday 24 October 2012

Following a site talk about the quality of work undertaken the previous day, work continued on the walling project for the trainees and trainers for most of the day. There was a Coordinator's meeting to discuss the benchmark reference system in relation to training. Late afternoon was a visit to Cortes to look at recent restoration/rebuild work of large retaining walls and garden features carried out by ABPS members, working with the local schist stone.



Coordinators' Meeting – Benchmark Reference Guide for Training in Dry Stone Walling

Presentations were given by DSWA and ABPS outlining the training programmes each organisation currently has and how they fit within the national qualification framework of each country. The way courses were costed was also discussed. ABPS has a much greater involvement with partners who help fund the training courses which are carried out on public sites as permanent pieces of work. These courses are also an important funding stream for ABPS with almost 1/3 of the income diverted to ABPS in order for it to continue its work and existence. The DSWA depends more heavily on the local branch network to deliver beginner training and often on a training site with walls that are not necessarily permanent. These courses are usually for a weekend only. Some colleges and organisations in the UK do offer longer courses structured in a way that students would work towards one of the accredited qualifications, either Level 1 or Level 2 but this is quite an ad hoc approach at present. The local DSWA branch would receive payment in terms of course booking fees but there is no funding directly to the national office. DSWA does, however, have overall responsibility for arranging the assessment days that colleges and branches have requested and a small amount of the test fee paid per person is allocated towards the administration involved in preparing the necessary paperwork.

Discussions then took place about the requirements of Italy and Spain. The Arnasco Cooperative already runs four or five training courses although these are not currently accredited in any way.

Spain has a long way to go in terms of developing qualifications and courses but there is an organisation in Mallorca who has already run many courses. Consideration was also needed in respect of identifying a suitable education partner with which to work and develop future funding and training opportunities.

It was agreed that each partner would try to identify what courses it needed to offer and how to implement these actions and to report back to the meeting in Arnasco in 2013. A possible example for Britain, Italy and Spain would be a 5 day training course as run by the ABPS organisation. Meanwhile ABPS could set up a standardisation procedure using the DSWA as a model.

Thursday 25 October 2012

A further site talk was given at the start of the day prior to work continuing on the retaining wall, which was making good progress. A start had also been made on compiling a glossary of dry stone walling words (printable ones!) in all four languages. The glossary would continue to be added to during the project. A meeting was held for Coordinators to discuss the development of the electronic network tool. Mid-afternoon work stopped on the wall and there followed a debrief on what had been achieved, which ABPS members were very pleased with especially given the varying skill level of participants, the language barriers, the unfamiliar stone and style of building.



Coordinators' Meeting – Development of Electronic Network

The idea of this tool would so that professional wallers to keep in contact with each other and also to act as a notice board where opportunities in training and/or work experience between the partner organisations could be posted. It was suggested that a simple website page could be created for this purpose, which Cathie agreed to pursue. It was agreed that the information should be in French and English initially.

Discussions also took place about the general communication methods for the Coordinators during the project. Email is an obvious option and it was also suggested that Skype could be used. A demonstration of this would be given in Arnasco in 2013.

It was agreed that all partners should use the Leonardo Lifelong Learning logo on documents relating to the project, available from the Leonardo websites. It was also agreed that "Sharing Dry Stone Walling" was an appropriate working title for the project and was slightly shorter than the formal grant application title.

Each of the host countries would be required to check with its national agency what paperwork should be retained as part of the project. As well as the overall report, each partner would also be required to submit reports to its national agency together with receipts and/or boarding passes. **Each partner would check its own national agency requirements.**

Attendance certificates are also required for each visit but templates are available on the Leonardo website. **These would be produced by the host partner at each visit.**

Thursday 25 October 2012 – Debrief meeting

This meeting took place in the Eco Museum at Pont de Montvert. Light refreshments had been supplied by each of the partner organisations which were enjoyed by all. A short questionnaire was handed out for everyone to complete. **The details would be summarised by ABPS and circulated in due course.** It was agreed that the same document would be used for each of the future visits to ensure a common and consistent recording system for the project. A lively discussion then followed with participants asked to give a brief summary of what they had enjoyed/learnt from the visit. The following highlight some of the main comments.

- Very interesting to have an opportunity to work on unfamiliar stone and learn new techniques.
- Good to work with wallers from different countries.
- The opportunity to work on different stone types during the visit would have been good.
- It is important to encourage younger people, particularly females (!), to make a career in dry stone walling.
- The willingness of wallers to share their knowledge and experience is humbling but much appreciated and makes people feel proud to be working in such a profession.
- The opportunity to see unusual projects and high quality work is inspiring.

A SWOT analysis form will be produced by ABPS for each of the partners to complete and return to ABPS in order to help identify if the objectives of the project had been met during the visit. Similar documents would be used for each of the subsequent visits to ensure consistency in reporting.

Conclusion

A vote of thanks was extended to all ABPS members, in particular Cathie and Lawrence, for their hard work in arranging such an interesting visit to begin the project.



Friday 26 October 2012

A short morning visit took place to visit a new stone bridge that had recently been built by ABPS members. This was the first new road bridge to be built in France using schist in over eighty years. The building work was monitored by scientists working on a research project (reports on sustainability, cost comparative studies, etc).



Depart for home.

Date of Next Event

This will take place in April 2013, hosted by DSWA in Cumbria.

The participants in the Leonardo project are:

Country	Partner	Participants
France	Artisans Bâtisseurs en Pierres Sèches (ABPS)	30
Italy	Cooperativa Olivicola di Arnasco	5
Italy	Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime	3
Spain	Asociación andaluza para el fomento y conservación de la piedra seca	6
United Kingdom	Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain (DSWA)	6

Alison Shaw
DSWA Coordinator
November 2012

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