

Drystane Dykes, or Dry Stone Walls, are an important but often overlooked feature in the Galloway countryside. Take a closer look though, and you will see that they reveal evidence of the local geology, the ingenuity of rural peoples, and evidence of a landscape that is always changing.



WHY BOTHER WITH A WALL?

The short answer is beef! About 300 years ago, the Galloway countryside in south west Scotland was much more open than today. Enclosures (walled fields) were few and far apart. Instead, children would herd cows and sheep to keep them away from the crops. Beef fetched a good price in England and so landowners began to gather cattle, often imported from Ireland, in order to sell them at southern markets. To do this more cost-effectively, they started creating enclosures to contain the cattle.

RURAL REBELLION

These enclosures changed the traditional way the land was managed. To make the new fields, people who had farmed the land for generations were turned out of their homes and had nowhere to live or work. In 1724, these 'clearances' caused the uprising of the Galloway Levellers or 'Dykebreakers'. Armed gangs of men, women and children roamed the countryside pulling down the dykes and sometimes killing the imported cattle. The gangs were well organised and desperate, and eventually government troops had to be brought in to stop them. This rural rebellion did however change the way landowners behaved, and although land continued to be enclosed, the pace of change slowed and alternative places to live and work were developed.

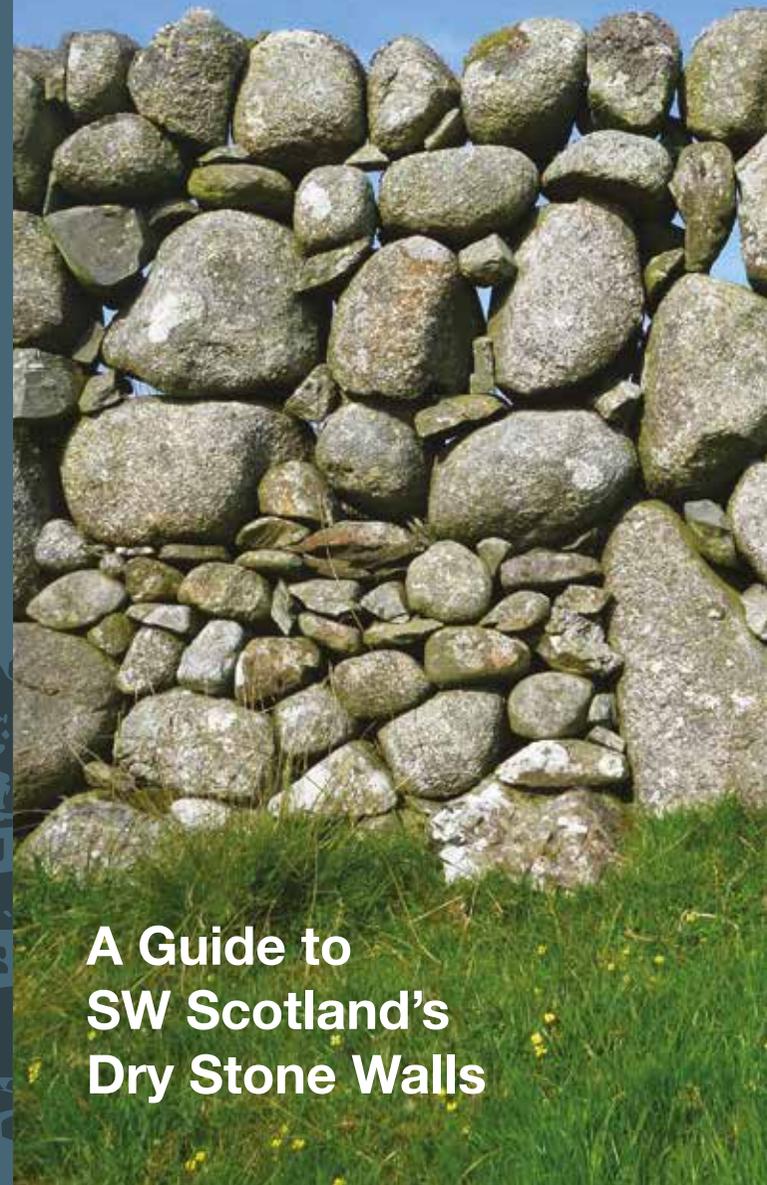
KELTON HILL

The Leveller's Revolt of 1724 was planned at Kelton Hill Fair. To mark this important element of local history, a drystone dyke has been built at a viewpoint on Kelton Hill within the National Trust for Scotland's Threave Estate. This fantastic example of rural workmanship showcases many different styles of drystone dyking, some unique to this part of SW Scotland. It was created by members from Scottish branches of the Dry Stone Walling Association, with welcome support from Threave staff and volunteers.

View the QR code with your Smartphone camera to see a video about the design and construction of the new Kelton Hill dyke.



DRYSTANE DYKES



A Guide to
SW Scotland's
Dry Stone Walls



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DYKE STYLES

Building a sound drystone dyke involves more than simply placing one stone on top of another. It in fact requires a great deal of skill, stamina and an understanding of the rules of successful dyking. However, once the rules are understood, there is a great deal of flexibility in how the available stone is used. In Galloway, every dyke is different but distinct styles can be picked out.



SINGLE DYKE (above) Where large irregular stones are abundant, the dyke is built such that single stones create both faces of the wall. Where large rounded stones are used, it is usually then called a Boulder Dyke. This style of building often has noticeable gaps between the stones and is most common in upland areas.

DOUBLE DYKE (right) Where small stones are predominant, the dyke is built with two faces and the core is infilled with smaller stones or 'Hearting'. Long stones called 'Through bands' and 'Cover bands' are used to 'tie' the dyke together and give it structural stability. This style of building produces a solid structure and is the most common style in lowland areas.



GALLOWAY DYKE (above) Also known as a 'half and half' dyke. This style of dyke is built with a double dyke at the bottom and a single dyke above. Common in sheep farming areas, the solid base provides shelter from the weather for the animals, while the 'tottering' appearance of the top half reduces the temptation of sheep to jump on or over it.



A CRAFT WORTH PRESERVING

By the 1930s, post and wire fencing was fast becoming the economic alternative to drystone dykes and it was feared that the craft of dyke building was disappearing. On the initiative of Colonel Rainsford Hannay, the Stewartry Drystone Dyking Committee was created in 1938 to raise funds and organise competitions to promote dyking skills.

In 1968, the Stewartry Drystone Dyking Committee formed the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain, a charity which continues to work to advance education in the craft and heritage of dry stone walling for the public benefit. Today, there is a renewed enthusiasm for drystone dyking with an upsurge in interest in this fascinating rural craft. Local drystone dyking competitions still take place, and the SW Scotland Branch of the Dry Stone Walling Association holds regular training courses. Find out more at www.dswa.org.uk.

