



Dry Stone Walls

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Ecology

What is a dry stone wall?

It is a practical yet attractive form of field boundary built without mortar or cement. This allows the wall to settle into the landscape, and gives strength and resilience to survive harsh climates and frosts. In Cheshire they are built of either gritstone or sandstone, this being dependent on the location where they are to be found, the skill lies in making the best use of local materials.



Since we can date walls by the lichen on their surfaces or by the age of artefacts found buried in them, we know that many stone walls are hundreds and even thousands of years old.

Dry stone walls are more than just a field boundary or a barrier for containing stock. They give beauty and character to rural landscapes. They are valuable habitats for wildlife. They tell us about the history of a place and connect us with our past. Yet they are threatened by destruction and decay.

Why are dry stone walls important?

For agriculture, because they:

- contain livestock;
- shelter crops, livestock and buildings on the leeward side up to 8 to 12 times the height of the wall;
- prevent soil erosion;
- provide employment in a skilled craft;
- outlast other types of field boundary many times over and prove more economical in the long run.

For wildlife because they:

- act as corridors for wild mammals moving from one place to another;
- provide nesting and perching sites for birds and roosting holes for bats;



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are germinating sites for plants;
are superb surfaces for mosses and lichens;
harbour insects and reptiles in their holes, nooks and crannies.

For culture and history, because they:
draw on the character of the landscape;
tell us about the history of a place and its people; show us how land was divided and managed in the past; contain archaeological monuments and artefacts

Current status

Dry stone walls are confined to the upland areas to the east of the Cheshire region in the vicinity of Macclesfield and Congleton. The exact extent and status of dry stone walls in the Cheshire region is uncertain.

How are we helping to conserve dry stone walls in the Cheshire region?

- * Agri-Environmental Schemes - Environmental stewardship options are available to land managers and farmers to restore, maintain and protect stone walls in Cheshire.
- * Advice - FWAG and DEFRA employ advisors who can provide farmers with advice on grants available for dry stone wall restoration. Some of this advice is available free of charge to the farmer.
- * Dry stone Walling Association - has 20 branches nationally, of which one is located in Cheshire. The Cheshire branch, which is particularly strong, consists of 58 members, including professional and amateur wall builders. The group's main remit is to train new members in the art of dry stone walling, whilst more advanced classes are held for old hands at which members can learn the art of building on steep slopes and that of artistic dry stone walling.
- * Cheshire Landscape Trust - a member of the DSWA and can offer advice. For the past 10 years CLT has run a number of 'Have A Go' dry stone walling workshops for the general public. It is leading on the Dry stone Wall Survey in the County for which volunteers are required. Survey materials are provided free of charge and workshops held.
- * British Trust for Conservation Volunteers- runs dry stone walling courses etc
- * Local Heritage Initiative- a joint initiative of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Nationwide Building Society and the Countryside Agency- Can consider grants of up to £25000 to cover 60% of the project costs. The remaining 40% may be made up from in-kind donations, volunteer labour, or a mix of these. The grants are for community based projects coming under any one of the following areas: archaeological heritage, built heritage (specifically maintain walls), customs and traditions and industrial heritage.



* Promotion of the importance of walls in terms of biodiversity, shelter, stock proofing and local distinctiveness

Objectives, targets and actions

Objectives, targets and actions to help conserve dry stone walls in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

How to find out more about dry stone walls

Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain, a charitable organisation committed to the preservation of dry stone walls and to the training of people in the craft of dry stone walling - www.dswa.org.uk BTCV Online Handbook on dry stone walling - <http://handbooks.btcv.org.uk/handbooks/index/book/61>

How can you get involved?

The Cheshire Landscape Trust coordinate the Dry Stone Walls LBAP. They are leading on the Dry stone Wall Survey in the County for which volunteers are required. Survey materials are provided free of charge and workshops held.

Contact details

LBAP Chair Katie Lowe, Cheshire Landscape Trust
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References and Glossary

Countryside Commission (1996) The Condition of Englands Dry Stone Walls

