



Preserving Britain's heritage

John Wilson gave up the rat race and a 10-year career in Leeds' police force to move to the wild beauty of Cumbria and practice the ancient craft of dry stone walling.

John and his small workforce have recently completed a project restoring one of Britain's ancient treasures.

"While some parts of Hadrian's Wall remain as high as two metres, other sections have been reduced to ground level," commented John. "Fortunately the stretch of wall near Walltown, Haltwhistle featured here, is fairly remote so not so much of the stone has been plundered over the centuries to build farm buildings and other walls.

"Our aim is to preserve what's here as well as rebuild an old dry stone wall that was built on top of the original Hadrian's Wall around 100-150 years ago. Not only do dry stone walls look good, they are low impact and in keeping with their environment. The nooks and crevices within them provide refuge for small creatures, insects and plant life.

"There is tremendous skill in mastering the building of these walls which can withstand a battering from the elements for hundreds of years. It is satisfying work to create something that becomes part of the landscape. It's a very physical job and one of the hardest things to get used to is the weather. You really do need to be hardy."

John, who has over 15 years' experience, now passes on these traditional skills to others.

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In the photograph: John Wilson takes a breather while working on is Louis Wake, who completed his apprenticeship under John last year.

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Louis Wake, aged 19, who completed his apprenticeship with John last year with funding help from the North Pennines Heritage Trust, commented: "Working on Hadrian's Wall is one of the best things we have done. It's amazing to think we were working on something that's thousands of years old. This has been technically a difficult job and has taken several months, but we're near completion."

The work involves removing the old wall, consolidating the original Hadrian's Wall with lime stone mortar, before rebuilding

a new dry stone wall on top. Although all the original loose stone available is used, new stone also needs to be brought in to enable the 800 metre boundary wall to be continuous.

The project is being funded by Natural England, with input from English Heritage, Northumberland National Park, Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd, local architects, archaeologists and the National Trust.

John, based in Cumbria and Northumberland, is a member of the Dry Stone Walling Association, whose patron is Prince Charles

and lists 160 professional workers nationally. John employs three people full-time and two part-time who work on all types of walls and dry stone features in all types of stone. More information about their work can be found at www.drystonewallingcumbria.co.uk



Kevin Thompson, John Wilson and Louis Wake