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Dry stone walling contest

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Dry stone walling is one of the most distinctive features of our rural landscape, but did you know it was also a competitive sport? Huw Jenkins explains.



Rhys Humphrys took part in the Snowdonia Society's 25th annual stone walling competition and scooped first prize in the junior section. Aged 13, he and his friend entered the amateur section of the competition alongside full grown men.

The judges were so impressed with their determination, they decided on the spot to create a new category for youngsters and this will become a regular feature of the competition in future years.

The event took place at Dyffryn Mymbyr, the farm near Capel Curig made famous in the book *I Bought a Mountain* and until recently the home of Esmé Kirby, the founder of the Snowdonia Society.

She died in 1999 and bequeathed the farm to the National Trust who organised a plentiful supply of near-to-hand stones for the competitors.

The day began with the draw for sections of the wall. Professionals had stretches six feet long, semi-professionals five feet and amateurs four feet.

Foundation trenches were dug and iron guide bars sunk to give the correct width and angle of the wall as it tapers to the top. With the help of crowbars, huge boulders were put in place at the base and slowly but surely the walls began to rise.

Two judges patrolled the wall, making observations and notes during each stage of the building. It's not just what the wall looks like at the end, but the internal structure and strength that also counts - well-built walls last indefinitely whilst cowboy walls soon look a shambles.

By lunchtime the wall was taking shape and one of the competitors had retired with a bad back. Refreshments were provided by members of the Snowdonia Society who insisted that three baps and a currant bun provided the optimum number of calories for the occasion.

Barry Roberts, one of the two judges, said: "This is mainly granite, tricky random stone. If you can work with this you



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can build a stone wall with just about anything, anywhere."

Onwards and upwards to 3 foot 6 inches and a width of 22 inches, creating a level platform onto which one-foot high coping stones were placed to hold the structure in place.

Prizes were presented by sponsor nPower, with Sean Adcock winner of the professional section for the third year in a row, which means he gets to keep the trophy.

Asked the secret of his success he said: "Most people just build a wall, but I go out of my way to make sure that all the components and elements of the building tick every box. You've got to think like a judge and be scoring points all the way."

As for Rhys Humphrys, the winner of the junior section, he attributes his success to a good breakfast and patience. "You need to take your time. It's not a race," he said.

Looking to the future he has bags of potential and plenty of training opportunities with several miles of walls on the family farm needing attention. *Huw Jenkins*

hand.

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