

The Making of The Wall

by Penny Armitage



Living on a farm in North Devon, surrounded by the dry stone walls that border most fields and lanes, I've long been inspired to design a quilt using their wonderful range of textures and colours. This finally became a group quilt challenge for our regional CQ group, Exe Valley – except I didn't design it. I just issued the challenge to this wonderfully talented group of quilters and waited for their blocks to arrive!

The most difficult decision with group quilts, I've discovered, is establishing a uniform size and finish for each block that allows for individual creativity, yet can easily be stitched together without restricting quilters too much. This time, I asked for 15 x 10" landscape blocks, featuring one, two or several stones using a grey base fabric, quilted and embellished on a black background, then finished with a black zig-zag stitch. I could then zig-zag the blocks together without an obvious join! Each stone could be painted, embroidered, beaded, distressed and embellished with any natural geological effects, lichens, mosses and wild plants. I also needed half stones for the alternate ends of the wall and narrower top ends of stones to finish the top of the wall and someone donated a ball of textured green wool which was used on many of the blocks.

This challenge was issued at our October 2018 meeting, practical time allowed at our February 2019 meeting, and the blocks collected in at our April meeting or posted to me. This allowed me time to arrange and re-arrange the blocks, so that I would know the size in time to enter it for the Festival of Quilts (image on front cover).

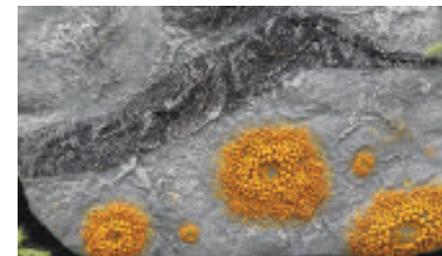
We are a very widespread group and not everyone can get to all meetings, members live in the far reaches of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset but I have learned that they respond brilliantly and enthusiastically to challenges. We meet in South Devon, near the A30 and M5, so most members can reach meetings in one to two hours.

Twenty-one members responded to this challenge, making 24 whole blocks, six half blocks and 19 top stones, using every conceivable technique and material: from painting and printing, hand and machine embroidery, texture using Xpandaprint, to appliqué, beading, cording and felting. I spent several weeks deciding on the arrangement, eventually graduating the stones from the darkest at the bottom to the lightest at the top, then stitched them together in rows. I made a plain grey quilted strip as a background for the top stones, attaching a sleeve to the back from which to hang the rest of the wall.

I was absolutely delighted with the standard that Exe Valley members achieved, in their imagination and observation as well as in creativity, variety of techniques and materials, and especially in their skill! We were so pleased to be awarded 3rd prize in the Groups section at the Festival of Quilts in August 2019. The number of positive comments from so many people that championed it as a 'proper' group quilt delighted us.

Some of the members comment on the making of their blocks:

Barbara Janssen: The stone that I completed featured several clumps of the commonly seen lichen, *Xanthoria parietina*, with its characteristic orangey-yellow leafy body and fruiting heads. I chose to feature the lichen with rows of orange beads arranged in slightly irregular, concentric circles but, when I had finished these, I was concerned that the overall effect was too bright and considered dumbing them down with paint. However, when the stone was placed in the wall, the effect was less 'in your face' thanks to Penny's careful arrangement of the neighbouring rocks. The stone is also criss-crossed with a vein of quartz, containing crystals of iron pyrites made out of black shiny rectangular beads. I made several spare stones for the topping using painted and heat distressed Lutradur and free machine stitching.



Delyse Upton: The stones for my block were inspired by grey Dartmoor granite. Years of weathering have added moss, algae and lichens. Many wild animals live on Dartmoor, including a beast which I wanted to suggest with a mild threat! I decided to use just an eye and found some bright faux eyes which were perfect, so one was secured behind a slit in black felt

and sewn into the gap between stones and partly hidden by fussy cut ferns. Granite is comprised of quartz, feldspar and mica, and the grains are very visible, so my colouring and textures were created with dark red Golden Garnet Gel for the feldspar and grey Coarse Pumice Gel for the quartz; the reflective sparkle in this gel suggested the mica. I used Inktense blocks for the shadows and the moss was hand felted in appropriate areas.

Jan Allchurch: My block was taken from the old Devon wall at the bottom of my garden. I traced the outline, noted the vegetation around it and the texture of the stone. I painted the cotton fabric grey with acrylics and water based dyes, used a fine toothbrush to flick Xpandaprint giving the white spotty limestone type markings, and again used a sponge to dab Xpandaprint on to form the lichen which I painted using water based dyes. I hand stitched little creases in the rock face to give added texture. The ivy leaves were cut from fabric and stitched then wired onto tea-dyed Kozo paper; ferns and plants were free machine stitched onto water soluble film; this was then dissolved, leaving some stiffness in the leaves, and applied by hand. Moss was hand felted into the crevices using wool and some frayed scrim.

