

Those dry-stone walls

By Charmian Brent, DSWAA Committee Member

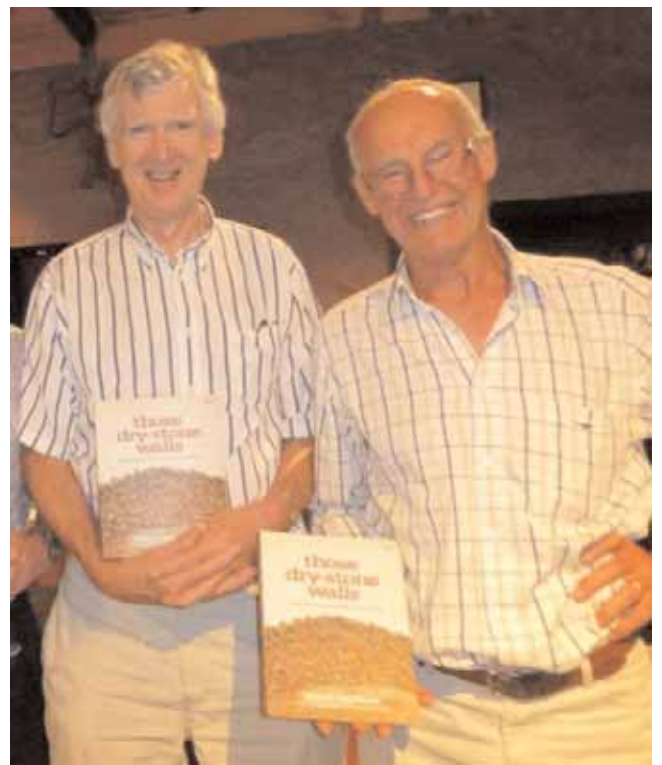


The launch of Bruce Munday's book, 'Those dry-stone walls: stories from South Australia's stone age' took place at Rosebank in the Adelaide Hills. Many in the front row were descendants of Levi Meakins, a renowned waller in the 1860s and 1870s

It is difficult for someone who has been involved with the DSWAA for seven years to write an impartial review of Bruce Munday's (DSWAA Committee Member) recently published book, *Those dry-stone walls: stories from South Australia's stone age* because, from my point of view, it is heaven sent – a whole book, wonderfully illustrated with Kristin Munday's superb photographs, on a subject that is dear to my heart. However, I will do my best to be objective.

I lived in Adelaide for a year in the 1960s and although I travelled around the State on the weekends, after reading this book I realise just how many fascinating places of historical interest I missed and have determined that I simply must make the effort to visit in the next year or so. That's what reading *Those dry-stone walls* does to you – it fills you with enthusiasm about the places, the people and the structures so that you feel you must go and see them for yourself. It's not an impersonal text-book account of South Australia's dry-stone walls, it's a lively personal journey by a wall-builder and his wife, who appreciate the beauty of walls and stone buildings. Bruce talks to people who either build or own walls and are prepared to reveal their history and, if the walls are very old, their owners are willing to speculate on who built them and why and along the way tell many an interesting anecdote. You hear their voices and share their love for the walls they describe.

This is an extremely comprehensive book that examines a particular aspect of South Australia's heritage and breathes excitement and interest into a subject that many would consider mundane. It describes the early history of walls as used by the Indigenous tribes as fish traps and dwellings and then moves on to early European settlement in the 1800s and tells why the need for stone fences grew when the discovery of gold in Victoria and copper in South Australia lured the shepherds away from their flocks to the goldfields. Large flocks of sheep comprising tens of thousands of animals needed containing and protecting and due to the abundance of natural materials lying on the ground, to whit loose stone,



Well-known playwright, David Williamson was on hand to give the book a good send-off (left) with author Bruce Munday (right)

building stone fences was the obvious answer to the problem as many of the early settlers brought the craft of walling with them from Britain, Ireland and Germany.

Bruce's book encompasses South Australia from north to south and treats each of its eight regions separately, spelling out its underlying rock formation, its history and just how the craft of building stone walls grew and flourished over the past 180 years or so. Most of all, it's the personal encounters that set this book apart – the people you meet, the tales that are told. It is elegantly written, lavishly illustrated, a mine of information and not to be missed at any price!

The book retails for \$39.95 (plus \$10 postage) and can be obtained from: Bruce Munday, Box 375, Mt Torrens, SA 5244 or www.storiesbehindstonewalls.com.au