

STONework SYMPOSIUM 2010

Ventura, California



This, the ninth annual gathering of our stone tribe, was the first to take place in California and the first to be held in the winter.

Attendance was down a bit from previous Symposiums due to the current economic 'climate.' The majority of attendees at these affairs are stonemasons and landscapers and while many might have been idle due to wintry weather and free to attend, they lacked the funds to do so. Hopefully the economy and folks' personal fortunes will have improved by next year.

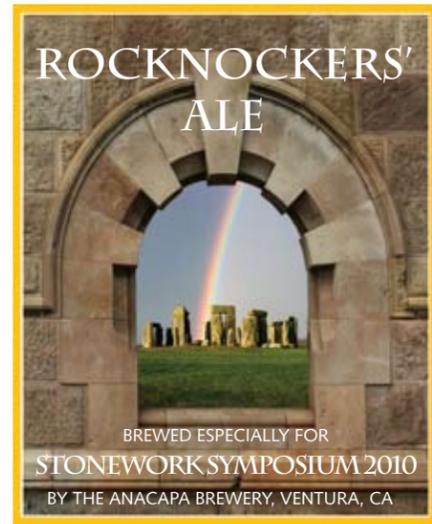
Ventura proved to be a great place to hold the Symposium and the walling and carving workshops. It is both picturesque and pleasant, an interesting variation on the coastal Californian community life style. The historic town center of Ventura, where the Symposium events were focused, is small enough that a car, while a convenience, was not a necessity. All of the activities took place within walking or biking distance of the host hotel, the Crowne Plaza, the tall beach-side building catching the sun in the photograph above.

Ventura was very welcoming to us, due in large part to the well-publicized Japanese Dry Stone Walling Workshop that preceded the Symposium. The project we took on in a popular civic park was well-supported and much appreciated by the community and by the city's officials and staff

The local brewery, Anacapa, did a special batch in our honor called *Rocknockers' Ale*.

Being on the coast was something special for those of us who live inland. The stony beach near the hotel was a playground for stonemasons with idle hands. The building and balancing that went on there was fun for us and a source of interest to the townsfolk and visitors strolling along the beach or the promenade that parallels it.

The Japanese Dry Stone Walling Workshop was blessed with fair weather but rain began to fall as soon as the last stone was put in place—and it continued throughout the Symposium that followed. Five straight days of it put a damper on the outdoor activities that were planned—the so-called 'Lithic Olympics.'



There was no Dry Stone Walling Competition, no Wheelbarrow Steeplechase, no Eye-Balling contests, but the Stone Bowling matches did take place at Art City Studios just after the Symposium when the weather had cleared. Winner and still champion: yours truly. Second place: Paul Lindhard.

If the Symposium had been held a week earlier we would have enjoyed fine weather—in Ventura the first two weeks of the year are usually rainless. That's where and when we're scheduling the next Symposium—*The Return of the Rocknockers*.

And, there might be a 'coda' to the Symposium: the possibility of another cross-cultural project is being explored. US and Canadian stonemasons would work with their Mexican counterparts to build a multifarious stone column in Guanajuato, Mexico. If this actually happens, a day-trip to the magnificent Anthropological Museum in Mexico City will be arranged—stonewise this is one of the best museums in the world. Any developments in this prospect will be reported in the newsletter. ■ T L

THE RAMPARTS PROJECT

Prior Symposiums have been associated with workshops during which building projects were undertaken and completed. At the second Symposium in 2001 in the course of the first-ever dry stone walling competition in the US, a free-standing dry stone wall 90 feet long was built—in a single day. These permanent stonework installations were legacies left to the communities in which our annual gatherings took place.



above: January 5, 2010

below: January 18, 2010



The Japanese Dry Stone Walling Workshop that preceded the Ventura Symposium was a worthy successor to those previous building projects. It was an ambitious undertaking, a remarkable experience and an impressive accomplishment.

The workshop project (designed by me and approved by a CA licensed structural engineer) was a pair of dry stone ramparts flanking a stairway in a popular public park overlooking the city and the coast. Similar in form and style to Japanese castle walls, these ramparts were constructed without mortar, using large stones assembled according to principles that have evolved over centuries.

Mortarless wall construction is the technique best suited for terrain subject to seismic shock, as Japan and California both are. Properly assembled dry stone structures are

flexible and will adjust to earth movements, unlike rigid blocks of masonry which are liable to fracture.

Engineers have finally become aware that Flexibility enables Stability and considerable technological effort has been expended developing masonry systems that do not require skilled labor to install. We were fortunate enough to find a sympathetic engineer and to have skilled labor in plenty—24 stonemasons from the US and Canada came to Ventura to work with their Japanese counterparts and learn what they could.

The support of the local community was remarkable. Equipment was donated, lunches provided, City Hall and the public works department were co-operative (it helped that the mayor of Ventura was a friend of the project). Art City Studios, a local collective of stone artists and artisans,

were collaborators in the project. Paul Lindhard, one of the Art City principals and a Stone Foundation member, was a valuable collaborator, negotiator, facilitator—and rock wrangler.

Sandstone, nearly 400 tons of it, was donated by Larry Mosler of Mosler Rock Products. He operates a stone quarry in Ojai not more than ten miles from the work site that yields both a tan and a grey-blue sandstone. The latter is fine-grained and homogeneous. It splits cleanly and responds well to hand tools. There is a long tradition of stonework based on the local sandstone, particularly in nearby Santa Barbara, but the material has never been used as it was in this project. There were more than a few local stonemasons among the townspeople that gathered each day to witness this ongoing performance of stonework.