

GEOLOGIC TIME EXPRESSED AS A SINGLE YEAR

TO HELP PLACE HUMAN HISTORY IN PERSPECTIVE, THE SPAN OF GEOLOGIC TIME CAN BE LIKENED TO THE PASSAGE OF ONE YEAR:

January 1:	Planet Earth is formed.
January:	The Precambrian Time
February:	Precambrian
March:	Precambrian
April:	Precambrian
May:	Precambrian
June:	Precambrian
July:	Precambrian
August:	Precambrian
September:	Precambrian
October:	Precambrian
November:	Late this month, the Precambrian ends.
December 11:	The continents assemble into super-continent Pangaea.
December 15:	Pangaea breaks apart.
December 31:	The great Ice Ages begin. The most recent of these will disappear from Connecticut two minutes before midnight. But just before that, Homo sapiens appears.
December 31:	23:00 hours; 59 minutes; 59 and ½ seconds: our lifetime.

All told, the human species has witnessed ONE HOUR of the geologic year.

The Face Of Connecticut

Michael Bell

p. 173

An Act relating to, and for the ascertaining the Bounds of Towns,
and the Lands of particular Persons

*For as much as the Bounds of Towns, and the Lands of particular
Persons are and ought carefully to be Maintained, Kept up, and
rendred [sic] Manifest and Certain.*

Therefore,

Be it Enacted by the Governour, Council and Representatives, in General
Court Assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That every Town in
this Colony shall procure their Bounds to be set out; which shall be done
by such Marks, and Boundaries, as may be a plain direction for the future:
Which Marks, and Boundaries shall be a great heap of Stones, or a Ditch
of Six Feet long, and Two Feet and Half wide, of ordinary depth, at every
Corner of the Township: And in the Lines drawn, or running from Corner
to Corner, one such Mark, (at least) in every Eighty Rods.

And when their Bounds are carefully set out, as aforesaid, Two or more
Persons shall by the Select-Man of each Town, be appointed to Renew the
Bounds between their Towns, at least Once in every Year, either in the
Month of *March*, or *April*, upon Penalty of *Four Pounds* Forfeiture;
to be incurred by every Town, who shall neglect the same

*Acts and Laws
Passed by the General Court or Assembly
of
His MAJESTY's English Colony
of
Connecticut in New-England
in America*

New London, 1750

BECK

Not the beck only,
Not just the water -
The stones flow also,
Slow
As continental drift,
As the growth of coral,
As the climb
Of a stalagmite.
Motionless to the eye,
Wide cataracts of rock
Pour off the fellside,
Throw up a spume
Of gravel and scree
To eddy and sink
In the blink of a lifetime.
The water abrades,
Erodes; dissolves
Limestones and chlorides;
Organizes its haulage -
Every drop loaded
With a millionth of a
 milligramme of fell.
The falling water
Hangs steady as stone;
But the solid rock
Is a whirlpool of commotion,
As the fluid strata
Crest the curl of time,
And top-heavy boulders

Tip over headlong,
An inch in a thousand years.
A Niagara of chock-stones,
Bucketing from the crags,
Spouts down the gullies.
Slate and sandstone
Flake and deliquesce,
And in a grey
Alluvial sweat
Ingleborough and Helvellyn
Waste daily away.
The pith of the pikes
Oozes to the marshes,
Slides along the sykes,
Trickles through ditch and dub,
Enters the endless
Chain of water,
The pull of the earth's center -
An irresistible momentum,
Never to be reversed,
Never to be halted,
Till the tallest fell
Runs level with the lowland,
And scree lies flat as shingle,
And every valley is exalted,
Every mountain and hill
Flows slow.

Norman Nicholson

BECK: A brook; from the Middle English, still in use.

THE BIRTHPLACE

Here further up the mountain slope
Than there was ever any hope,
My father built, enclosed a spring,
Strung chains of walls round everything,
Subdued the growth of earth to grass,
And brought our various lives to pass.
A dozen girls and boys we were.

The mountain seemed to like the stir,
And made of us a little while -
With always something in her smile.
Today she wouldn't know our name.
(No girl's, of course, has stayed the same.)
The mountain pushed us off her knees.
And now her lap is full of trees.

Robert Frost
1874 - 1963

Henry David Thoreau said in what is arguably his most famous quote, "In wildness is the preservation of the world." Thoreau did not use the word "wilderness," a geographic place untouched by human hand, but "wildness," which connotes a condition in which nature has the winning hand. It is here, in the semantic gulf between the two words "wildness" and "wilderness" that stone walls become especially evocative.

The wilderness of New England was lost when the first humans arrived more than twelve thousand years ago, probably from Asia, across the Bering Strait. But the wildness of the place continues. Given enough time, wildness will reduce the greatest human effort to rubble, then to soil, then to sediment, then to aqueous solutions, sending them back to the sea where they will be reconstituted once again, into rock.

Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. These evocative phrases might more accurately include a middle phrase like "ashes to trees to ashes" or "dust to stones to dust."

Stone By Stone

Robert M. Thorson

2002

Literally or Metaphorically:

Place every stone. Developing this habit calls for a little self-discipline. Many beginning builders spend disproportionate care on face stones and pay much less attention to the wall's interior structure, hurriedly dropping or even tossing their [interior stone] into position so that they can get on with the next course of facing material. This would be a perfectly adequate approach if stones were helpful and proactive creatures with a desire to assist impatient wall builders. But stones do not desire to assist. They desire to rest, as completely and stably as possible, and in a dry stone wall they will migrate ceaselessly, if slowly, from one resting place to another until they encounter resistance that stops them for good. The unstable fits and consequent gaps created by careless internal placements allow stones the freedom to follow their anarchic bliss and open the way to eventual interior collapse. As the center of a badly filled wall reorders and compresses itself, it sinks. Upper sections of the wall's face are then gradually deprived of their supporting [internal] mass, and they sag inward, while increasing pressure ratchets up behind the face stones at or near the base of the wall. These stones may then begin to work their way out of the face and sooner or later release themselves, causing what we call a *blowout*.

The Granite Kiss

Kevin Gardner

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