



# Fix the Fells

About our upland path and  
conservation work in partnership

## North Lakes—Ted Everitt-Stewart

‘It seems like a different age when I last sat down to write an update, with our winter work behind us and looking ahead to the next fell season. However a few weeks in, we found ourselves not walking up the fells and digging in stone, but confined to our homes!

We all found our own ways to keep busy during this time, whether it was playing music, gardening or woodwork. Before we knew it, we were amongst the first teams to be brought back in the middle of June and straight into the grind of heli-bag filling for Calf Cove, Gillercomb, Castle Crag and Sty Head.

We’ve had an interesting mix of jobs, the first being building a revetment wall on the path up along the side of Sourmilk Gill. After passing through a gate in the fell wall, a lovely cascading waterfall soon appears, over-shadowed by ancient twisted oak and rowan. Not to be blamed, people want to walk down to have a closer look at the falls, which has caused the existing pitching to become undermined. We’ve now created steps down to the falls with a retaining wall that will soon disappear from sight under vegetation.



We then continued with our work on the path up to Sty Head Tarn from Stockley Bridge. This is a busy and popular path, being the main route to Scafell Pike from Borrowdale, and has been even more so this year with people on ‘staycation’ and enjoying the clear mind a good day out on the fells gives you, especially after a summer spent cooped up.



The final job of the year has been to build another retaining wall through the screes on Castle Crag and some end-on pitching which was probably my favourite job of the year! Again, another busy route which you see people of all ages and abilities scaling, which makes the job particularly rewarding and highlights the importance of our work.’



## What is Fix the Fells?

Fix the Fells (FTF) is a long-term partnership currently led by the National Trust, working with the Lake District National Park Authority, Friends of the Lake District, Natural England, Lake District Foundation and an army of volunteers.

The partners are committed to helping care for this unique upland landscape and promote understanding and support for its rich heritage.

The National Trust specialist Upland Ranger Teams carry out much of the major repair work, usually focussing on a handful of major projects each year.

The dedicated Fix the Fells volunteers give over 2,500 days every year undertaking vital path maintenance, supporting the ranger teams or taking on their own repair projects.

It is all the people, the rangers and volunteers, the donors and those who leave gifts in wills, that are at the heart of FTF. The fells are here forever, for everyone, and we will be too.

Fix the Fells is currently part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund. Their support for this work is hugely appreciated by all.



## West—Iain Gray

‘After almost 12 weeks of enforced sabbatical we returned to the Brown Tongue path on June 15<sup>th</sup> where we had left off at the end of last year. We continued to widen and improve the route we constructed in a previous century, (1993 to be precise).

The effects of 27 years of erosion as well as the difference in style, specification and quality of stone are evident in these before and after pictures, taken where the path divides between the Lingmell Col and Mickledore options for reaching the summit

We worked continuously on this project with no events to distract us (and no meetings with the usual array of biscuits, alas); as a result by the start of October we had finished the section planned for completion.

As well as being wider, the new path is much more direct, which we hope will allow path-side vegetation to recover where previously it was in serious decline, as evidenced by the pair of photographs below.

During this 16 weeks, once travel restrictions were lifted, we saw a huge upsurge in visitors. We had the added variety of encountering people one would not expect to see climbing England’s highest mountain, from a young person dressed in trainers and bikini who may under normal circumstances, have been on a beach somewhere Mediterranean. To a Three Peaks fundraiser dressed in full deep-sea diving costume – including weighted boots and big metal helmet. Fortunately (for him?) this was in early October, after temperatures had dropped to single figures.

As autumn closed in, we spent the rest of October in more sheltered climes on the lower reaches of the path just above Lingmell beck, attempting to narrow down a wide – braided area into a single sustainable path line. We’re looking forward to a fresh start in 2021.’



Brown Tongue, before...



...and after

## South

‘Badly eroded gullies in the path up Dovedale near Patterdale have kept the team busy this summer. The damage was initially caused by Storm Desmond in December 2015 and the erosion has been getting steadily worse ever since. The repairs were tricky to complete and took a lot of the team’s innovation and experience to create sustainable surfaces across wet, boggy areas and up steep slopes. They were pleased with the end results and look forward to seeing the paths grow over and disappear into the landscape as the surrounding habitats recover.

A long walk each day was needed to repair the path at Far Easedale between the Grasmere and Borrowdale valleys. This route is part of the very popular Coast to Coast path and is extremely wet in places. Again the team needed all their expertise to create a useable route through the numerous streams and wetlands encountered on this high level path.’



Dovedale, Ullswater before...

...and after



## Central and East—Jonny Skinn

'In March, we were beginning to turn our attention back to the fell, specifically the challenges of working on one of the most popular paths in our area, Loughrigg Terrace to the summit of Loughrigg. We knew helicopter lifts would be tricky to organise. Flying with heavy bags of stone suspended directly above the paths along Grasmere lakeshore and terrace, could put people below at risk. That was all until COVID hit. Fast forward to June, and we had to deal with the same risk issues, at a period when the number of visitors to the Lake District had hugely increased. Luckily, we were able to get through the helicopter lifts without any incidents.

We started work replacing sections of old pitching that walkers were bypassing. But the number of visitors, combined with the need to socially distance from them, definitely slowed our rate of work. However it did give us an opportunity to engage with many new visitors to Lakes who usually go abroad, and tell them about the work we do and why we do it. It has been really fulfilling to see the difference we have made on the path. A lot of walkers, especially older people, told us how thankful they were for the improvements we were making. The repaired path is easier to walk and allows more people to enjoy the great views of Grasmere from the summit.

We continued along this route, at times having to work very hard to dig through large swathes of bedrock. This and other things slowed our progress, but they were all foreseeable and expected. However the lost months during the COVID lockdown were not accounted for, and this has taken away much that could have been achieved, not only by us but by all the footpaths teams and the Fix the Fells volunteers. With so many visitors to the upland fells, our work to repair and maintain the paths and reduce landscape erosion feels even more important than ever.'



Loughrigg, new pitching



Grasmere, viewed from Loughrigg

## Fix the Fells volunteers—David Brooks

'What a year 2020 has been! After our record breaking year of 2019, our army of enthusiastic volunteers began work in January with great enthusiasm. That was until lockdown began in mid March. It was with much sadness and fear we retreated to our home bunkers, battened down the hatches and hoped forlornly for a quick resolution to the Covid crisis.

Our Volunteer Management Group put forward a plan for a Covid-safe return to volunteering which, with minor adjustments, was accepted by the Lake District National Park and National Trust. It was agreed we could return to the fells on the 29<sup>th</sup> June. With great excitement and glee we were allowed back out to play, the pent-up frustration of being locked-down released like a coiled spring. The volunteers returned with gusto, albeit for path maintenance days only. Sadly no big work parties with rangers. Working in the new Covid-safe way, means smaller groups up to a maximum of six. Although we can do more frequent, multiple 'events' on any day.

Our original schedule to have the paths maintained to an 80% target had gone out of the window and dropped as low as 46%. But due to the efforts of the volunteers it was clawed back over the months of July, August, September and October to a healthy high 98%. Wow!

In all weathers, just since first lockdown ended, we have been out on over 146 events. We have maintained some 463 upland path routes, gifting over 750 volunteer days, taking the total so far to over 1300 days. Due to such a high number of days given, we find ourselves having maintained more paths so far this year, than at the same point last year!

Will we create a new record of volunteering this year? Most likely not, as we are now in the second lockdown. But we are giving it a very good try. We hope to fit into 8 months, what is normally achieved in 12.'



Volunteer Patricia on Black Sail Pass



Volunteer Jane, on a cold misty day on Blencathra

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## 2020 Update—Joanne Backshall

'We're now in our second lockdown of 2020 due to coronavirus. In the first lockdown all our Rangers were unable to work in the fells for 9 weeks. The volunteers were similarly prevented from looking after the upland paths and landscape for three months.

Once back at work in June, everyone worked with renewed energy to make up for lost time on major path repairs and to catch up on overdue maintenance work. As a result, great progress was made on the paths to Sty Head Tarn, Castle Crag, Calf Cove, Gillercombe and Greenup Edge in the north Lakes, as well as on the very popular route up Loughrigg in the central Lakes. In the west, work has been on-going on Brown Tongue, Hollowstones and Scafell Pike summit paths, as well as on Lingmell Breast, Scarth Gap and various other Wasdale crags. An eroded section of path in Dovedale, Ullswater was repaired and further work undertaken at Far Easedale and Stephenson Ground in the south Lakes.

When restrictions eased, the increase in visitor numbers in the fells was significant, as people made the most of their local area and holidayed in the UK. We hope the Lake District fells have provided you with joy and inspiration during this difficult year.

Now it's the winter season and the conditions are too harsh for our Rangers to work in the high fells. So they will be carrying out nature conservation tasks such as hedge-laying at lower levels. The volunteers continue to clear the drains and keep the paths in good order in all weathers throughout the year.

We are really grateful to everyone who continues to support us in any way, large or small, and look forward to working with and for you again soon.'

**Joanne Backshall**  
Fix the Fells Programme Manager

## Your support

To find out more about Fix the Fells, how to become a volunteer or how you can support this partnership project with a donation or legacy to the National Trust, please do contact us directly. All enquiries will be treated confidentially.

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Future team updates and all the latest news from Fix the Fells will be online at:  
[www.fixthefells.org.uk](http://www.fixthefells.org.uk)

## Funding

Fix the Fells is currently part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and supported in many ways by all the partners.

The National Trust is committed to looking after the Lake District uplands and is the main long-term funder.

As a registered charity, we rely on people to support this vital work with gifts and legacies. Additional fundraising and a visitor payback scheme for local business, is led by the Lake District Foundation.



Joanne, Buttermere



To find out more about the National Trust in the Lake District, visit the website [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/thelakes](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/thelakes). Look out for NT on Twitter and Facebook too.