



National
Trust

Fix the Fells

About our upland path and
conservation work in partnership

Autumn 2019

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 repair and prevent further damage to this unique upland landscape and promote understanding and support for its rich heritage. Most of the work is funded by donations, legacies and grants.

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

FTF volunteer lengthsman come from Cumbria and beyond and many different backgrounds. But they all have one thing in common, they love the fells!

The term lengthsman comes from medieval times when men would be paid to walk the length of the parish and repair any roads and unblock ditches.

Volunteers gifted over 2,500 days last year. The upland paths just wouldn't be the same without their care. Our thanks to all involved.

North Lakes – Ted Everitt-Stewart

'Since the last update Mark has left and moved north to a job with the Forestry Commission in Scotland. Now we have Hugo, previously a full-time NT volunteer in the South Lakes but now enjoying being out on the fells and learning the tricks of the trade.

We introduced Hugo to the art of shifting big stones by moving this cobble that had come down in a landslide and was blocking a path drain. It's amazing what is possible to move when you have three bars and the knack of using pivot points! Learning to read the stone is one of the key skills for our job.

So far we've spent most of the fell season completing our project on Long Stile. Last year we spent each day in the clag and rain, wondering if there were beautiful views of the Lake District surrounding us. Thankfully this year has been very different and we've wondered many times if anyone else has a better work site in the country! The ridge line is now revegetating with the scree stabilising, a fitting end to a really rewarding project.

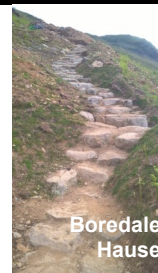
With our bags of stone filled for our projects this year and the helicopter coming soon to lift them to the work sites, we'll be heading up Gillercombe in the depths of Borrowdale to where we've been looking forward to working for years. We're hoping that the midges aren't too bad in that hanging valley!

Although we spend so much time in the fells, I'd never noticed one of the smallest woody plants in the world which is native to Cumbria – the dwarf willow. This plant only grows 5cm big, and was one of the first species to start growing in the barren upland soils after the last ice age. Thanks to a course on upland plant species our eyes have been opened to its presence, and once noticed we were surprised how many there were. Next time you're out on the fells, tear your eyes away from the scenery and have a look down at your boots and see if you can find any of this incredibly small plant.'



South—Joe Bagnall

‘Over halfway through the fell season and we’ve been busy across several areas, having started on Boredale Hause to continue path work that began at the end of last year. Due to all the teams working on projects with suitable stone already on site, there were no helicopter lifts in April. This meant that in March we could get straight on with this project. The weather was surprisingly good and we managed to get the work finished by the end of May.



June was a busy month as we moved back onto Greenup Edge, a section of the Coast-to-Coast walk that we started back in 2017. It took a while to get back into the long walks in, the site is roughly 3.5 miles away from where we park the truck! We had helicopter lifts booked for July so we devoted days to bag filling for various projects, including helping the Basecamp team fill their bags for a two-year project they’ll lead on Wansfell Pike.

We also helped Basecamp with the annual Fix the Fells Blitz weekend, working up on Martcrag Moor with the lengthsmen and visitors from various other organisations that tackle upland erosion around the country. Some of the work was focussed on creating new sections of ‘floating’ path, constructed by digging a tray in the wet peaty ground that is then filled with rolled up sheep fleece and covered in a layer of cobble-sized stone before being topped with glacial till or ‘pinel’. The resulting path is less likely to sink into the wet ground and will hopefully last a long time with only occasional maintenance.

We also tackled repairs on areas where the vegetation had been stripped away and the peat degraded by the impact of many footsteps. We blocked up gullies with rubble and peat clods dug from the new sections of path and then covered them in turf. The idea is that these small leaky dams will stop water from rushing through the gullies causing erosion, and just very gradually create a wetter environment that will encourage vegetation like sphagnum moss to grow. In time it is hoped that the gullies will green over and the sphagnum will begin to create new layers of peat, locking up carbon and storing water on the fell rather than letting it wash down the fell side.

Looking ahead to the rest of the season, the team is still busy on Greenup and likely will be until September. We’ll then move onto Dovedale until the end of the fell season as it is a much lower and more sheltered site.’



Basecamp—Rob Clarke

‘We started our fell work year with the Icelandic Conservation Agency’s annual training week at Basecamp, speaking the international language of path erosion and repair. They use Basecamp for a training week for their new season’s leaders, part of which is coming out with us for a refresher session on path work. With around 25 participants, this year was one of the biggest yet. We were lucky to be able to work on Boredale Hause, a site big enough to keep everyone busy. As ever, it was an interesting week and fascinating to see how other countries are facing similar problems to us.

Now the season is well underway our main work has been continuing with the sheep fleece path over peat bog on Martcrag Moor, a project we started last year. This path is designed to encourage walkers to use one line, not only providing a sustainable path surface that will stand up to the level of use it gets, but also helping protect the delicate surrounding landscape. In addition, as to build these paths we need to dig out a ‘tray’ for the fleece and gravel surface, we’ve been able to use the soil and turfs from this work to landscape the exposed peat hags, preventing further soil run-off and enabling vegetation to re-establish on bare ground.

Sheep fleece paths are a remarkably effect technique but quite laborious, so we’ve been particularly grateful to have lots of help from the South Lakes team, the Fix the Fells volunteers and our National Trust working holiday. With plenty more volunteer groups to come in the rest of the season we’ll be getting more work done here, but it looks like we’ll be returning to this site next year as well. Path work is nothing if not long term...’



Central and East—Jonathan Skinn

'The arrival of the fell season began with a return to the familiar site of the two paths from Side Farm up to Boredale Hause. Most of the work on the bridleway had been finished last year, thanks to the South Lakes team lending a hand with some of the work. This year was concentrated on the footpath, which didn't include as many bags of rock as the bridleway. Luckily for the teams, the digging wasn't as tough going as the bridleway as there wasn't as much bedrock near ground level, so we were able to power on and finish the footpath by early June. The hard work that has been put in will save the precious mountain vegetation and hopefully regenerate further now that improved access has been created. With the weather being quite nice there was plenty of wildlife to see at the site, including some sightings of ring ouzels, tree pipits, swifts and small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies.



Boredale Hause

We were also out at Lanty's Tarn with the volunteers for a weekend in May, doing some important repairs to the path including fixing of some pitching that had been falling out, widening the path using landscaping stones and putting in new cross drains to improve drainage. We had a special visit during the weekend activities from the local MP for the area and also a former conservative leadership candidate Rory Stewart. It was a great time to be out on this site as there was a mass of bluebells in full bloom. The work wasn't fully completed over the weekend so the volunteers have continued the work at Lanty's Tarn this July.

With the path work now finished at Boredale Hause we have moved on to completing some pitching at Hole in the Wall which we started in 2017. We'll also continue gravelling and pitching at Gowbarrow along the Ullswater Way. Hopefully we will continue to enjoy some decent weather over the next few months.'



Bluebells on the path to Lanty's Tarn

West—Iain Gray

'Inevitably our main task through the summer has been to continue the upgrade of the main Scafell Pike route via Brown Tongue. This centres around the installation of 170 helibags of stone which were flown in last year.

The original path was relatively narrow and slightly meandering, sadly now apparently considered unsuitable by the modern peak bagger in need of a super highway to the summit and back again.

Lower down Lingmell Gill we also carried out a bit of emergency repair on a section of narrow terraced path on steeply sloping ground. By shoring up the downhill side and filling in an eroded cavity on the path surface, we have pre-empted what would have potentially become a much larger problem in the future.

One indication of how the surrounding landscape is suffering is the gradual retreat on either side of the path of the otherwise blanket covering of bilberry (or blaeberry to those of Caledonian heritage).

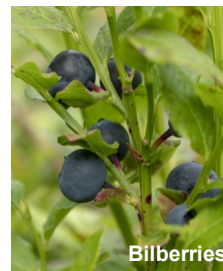
There is still enough close by however, to provide a tasty snack of foraged berries when hunger calls. One has to bear in mind Wainwright's crucial warning not to confuse them with sheep droppings!

One extra role we have begun this year is to help out with wildlife monitoring, (both flora and fauna), where this overlaps with our usual upland peregrinations. So far this has included logging sightings of mountain ringlet butterflies, dwarf willow and prostrate juniper shrubs - the latter two being found on Kirk Fell in plentiful quantities while on path maintenance trips over Black Sail Pass.

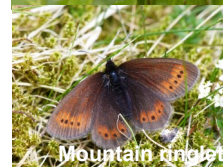
Our current theatre of path repair gives us a handy location from which to monitor the presence of nearby ring ouzels, (more often heard rather than seen), so we have been regularly taking note of the occasional short bursts of metronomic chiming from nearby crags.'



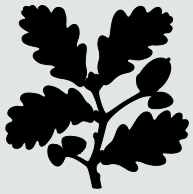
Scafell path before work starts



Bilberries



Mountain ringlet



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Update from Joanne Backshall, Project Manager

'Our Rangers and volunteers are making great progress with the path repairs planned for this year. They are working all over the Lakes on paths in Langdale, Borrowdale and Wasdale, and around Ullswater, Ambleside and Coniston.

A helicopter has delivered 400 bags of stone to the eroded paths. Each bag is filled by hand and all the stone comes from as close to the path as possible. It costs £100 to fly each bag which weighs one tonne and each bag of stone helps to repair about one metre of path. The stone is skilfully built into the path by the hands of our Upland Rangers and volunteers to create a resilient surface. Below is a good example of how paths often look before and after our repairs.

We all love this wonderful landscape and getting out for a walk on the upland fells. But our enjoyment takes its toll on the thin, fragile vegetation and soils. Without the work of Fix the Fells, erosion scars would be widespread and the amazing recovery shown in the pictures would not be possible. We are really grateful to everyone who supports us in any way, large or small, to repair and maintain the Lake District's upland paths and landscape.

But Rob Clarke's final comment in the Basecamp update says it all. This is ongoing, long-term work and we'll always be seeking to raise funds to mitigate people's impact in this precious environment.

This year even our regional Fundraising Consultant is doing his own personal bit to help protect the paths he walks and runs regularly.'

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/ross-mackintosh1



Funding for Fix the Fells

The National Trust is the main long-term funder of Fix the Fells. As a registered charity, we rely on people to support this vital work with donations and legacies. Fix the Fells is supported in many ways, by all the partners. Additional fundraising activity and a visitor payback scheme for local business, is led by Lake District Foundation.

Get in touch

To find out more about Fix the Fells, how to become a volunteer or how you can support this 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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