



Fix the Fells

About our upland path and conservation work in partnership

Late summer 2018

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

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

Volunteers have gifted 1,450 days so far this year. The upland paths just wouldn't be the same without their care. Huge thanks to all.

Central and East Lakes—Pete Entwistle

'Who'd have thought back in March when we were suffering snow, ice and cold winds that come May we would have to endure the exact opposite, with temperatures reaching 30 degrees and weeks in the high twenties. In fact from the start of May we haven't had to use our waterproofs once, which is unprecedented. We've been concentrating on repairing the two public rights of way that lead from Patterdale up on to Boredale Hause. These paths, which are part of the popular Coast to Coast walk, are frequently used by groups from local outdoor centres or doing the Duke of Edinburgh awards and people just out for the day. This heavy use, along with bad weather, takes its toll.

Work began in March to fill 380 bags of stone, weighing just under a tonne each, from two sites in Ullswater. This took about four weeks with nine days helicopter flying that also involved traffic management on the Ullswater main road, to ensure drivers weren't put at risk from stone being flown overhead! We're now focused on repairs to the bridleway which should be completed soon. To date we've done about 100 metres of stone pitching and over ten stone drains, encountering a lot of bedrock close to the surface. This suggests much of the top soil has eroded away and been lost for ever, which is exactly why we need to protect these fragile mountain habitats from further damage.

The hot weather has inevitably slowed progress and there's been a lot of biting insects about from midges to cleggs and horse flies including big ones the size of your thumb! On the upside we've seen lots of golden ringed and common hawker dragonflies and various butterfly species. Meanwhile undeterred, volunteers have been working on Grisedale to Hole in the Wall path, giving a number of new recruits the chance to learn drain building and landscape techniques.'



North Lakes—Ted Everitt-Stewart

‘A new year, new fell season, and we found ourselves back on Cat Bells. This year’s work was on the path from Manesty to Hause Gate and involved multiple sites along the length of the path to futureproof work carried out before the turn of the last century. Due to the large numbers of people walking here the path has widened in places and existing pitching had become eroded to such an extent that the step down/up was too large for many users, leading to side routes around the path undermining it. At these sites the step was pitched up to, and we went to town with the landscaping at the sides to narrow the path back in. You’ll also see a smart new section of pitching leading back down to the terrace path.



Manesty finished

Castle Crag has a long and interesting history, having been inhabited on and off since Neolithic times; the Iron Age earthworks on the top can still clearly be seen. In more recent times the slate was quarried leaving a large scree pile. The only path to the top zig zags through this unstable scree, and over the years teams have built retaining walls to stabilise the loose stone to make the path safe and prevent further slippage. A large section of one of these walls had been undermined and was bowing out, so we started off with two days of stripping the old wall down and removing tonnes of stone from behind. We then started to rebuild the revetment wall at more of an angle so it fits the angle of repose of the scree. As is often the case with many jobs, it evolved as we went along and ended up being quite a mammoth piece of stone work!



Castle Crag

The last few weeks we’ve been over at Boredale Hause giving the Central and Eastern team a hand on the work they’re carrying out over there this year and next. We got the chance to build a couple of waths which we hadn’t built before, which were a good challenge but shaped up alright! Since then we’ve bagged up our stone to be flown up Long Stile. This project is one we’re really looking forward to; with over an hour’s walk-in it will shift the tummies that we’ve started to develop from the short walk-ins over the last couple of years!’

West Lakes—Iain Gray

‘Here in the west the summer season began in a blaze of publicity (mostly metaphorical rather than meteorological).

We began at the beginning of May with the restoration of the Scafell Pike summit cairn, as part of the Great Gift centenary commemoration. Summery weather was slow to arrive on the summit plateau and for much of the time we endured bitterly cold and wintry conditions. This tested the resolve of the various media people who covered the event in the local and national press and TV. Since completing this task we have focussed on the main path routes leading to the top, stabilising and containing the masses of loose debris which threatens to overwhelm the surrounding landscape.

The other focus of our attention has been Scarth Gap in Buttermere, accompanied by a regular weekly work party of up to eight FTF volunteers. Having started in January at the bottom of the pass we have now reached a lofty altitude, repairing and improving drainage features and consolidating other sections of the path, with the volunteers enthusiastically progressing upwards towards Haystacks. The work parties will continue throughout the rest of the summer, hopefully being completed by September.’



Poor weather on Scafell Pike summit cairn



Scarth Gap Buttermere

Basecamp—Rob Clarke

'Wouldn't you know it – the three biggest volunteer days of the year happened to coincide with just about the only wet weather we've had for months... In mid June the annual upland 'blitz' saw us up on Martcrag Moor starting work on the sheep fleece path across peat bog. A good turnout of Fix the Fells volunteers plus visitors from Ben Nevis and Ben Lomond along with the Snowdonia upland team meant we had the numbers to get stuck into a huge amount of work despite wet conditions. With this mix of experienced upland workers and volunteers the rain didn't slow us down and the evening BBQ proved the usual fertile ground for swapping ideas and stories. The Welsh team is even thinking of running a similar event themselves next year.



Annual Blitz group

We've been a lot luckier with glorious weather for our first upland working holiday, seeing us return to St Raven's Edge. Good weather really helps with these holidays as everyone attending is generally new to path work and it is much easier to explain concepts and discuss solutions when you're not being pounded by wind and rain. People can go away with a bigger picture of the work of Fix the Fells. This more rounded view helps their understanding, which should hopefully help build support in the future. The downside of fair weather is that it can be difficult to persuade everyone to get going again after lunch, when they're basking in the warm sunshine!

Matt is now a few months in to his new role as FTF volunteer development ranger and is starting to put together a programme of training days for new volunteers. These are proving popular and will help to grow the team of volunteers who tackle the huge list of small projects and support the rangers in the ongoing battle to look after our precious upland paths and landscape.'



June working holiday

South Lakes—Joe Bagnall

'This year we've been working alongside the Central and Eastern team on Boredale Hause, a bridleway and footpath that is a part of the Coast to Coast heading east from Patterdale. After lots of bag filling days work on the bridleway, the upper of the two parallel routes got underway just at the start of the long spell of dry and hot weather. Being more used to traditional rainy Lakeland summers this not only proved challenging for us, it has also made it harder for turfs and grass seed put down to retain the spoil, to get established. The landscaping is not looking as green as it normally would by now, but it should soon change when we finally get some rain.

We took a brief break from the mega project to help the Basecamp team organise and run the annual Fix the Fells Blitz, which this year took place on Martcrag Moor in Great Langdale, where sections of pitching and longer stretches of sheep fleece path were built to continue work done in previous years and define a clear path line.

To prepare for the Blitz, the South Lakes team roped in members of the Fell Pony Society, Cumbria Bridleways Association and other fell pony owners to help carry the sheep fleece from the valley up onto site. For several of the six ponies and owners that turned up, this was their first time doing traditional packhorse work. The day was a great success, all the ponies (and the people) made it to the work site, transporting around sixty fleeces. This is a low impact way of transporting materials onto the fell and also provides owners with an opportunity to use their ponies for the sort of traditional work they were originally bred for. Our thanks go to everyone who kindly gave up their Saturday to help out.

We're now focusing on finishing our main projects, together with completing work started last year at Glenamara and tackling a small project with a working holiday group at Stephenson Ground bridleway.'



Sheep fleece path



Fell Pony Society member Vyv with her pony Micky



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Update from Joanne Backshall, Project Manager

'The largest task this summer involves our Rangers in repairing the bridleway and footpath to Boredale Hause near Patterdale, Ullswater. This beautiful location is part of the busy Wainwright Coast to Coast route which is so popular with locals and visitors alike. Other path repair projects underway include the paths at Castle Crag and Manesty in Borrowdale and Scarth Gap near Buttermere. We are also continuing our annual work on Scafell Pike to address the on-going erosion there.

Over the summer the volunteers are assisting the Rangers with these large projects and also completing their own path repair projects across the Lakes. This includes work on Wansfell near Ambleside and Grains Gill in Borrowdale.

The volunteers are being extremely active this year as always, clearing fell path drains, undertaking work parties, mentoring new volunteers, organising litter picks, carrying out fundraising and assisting with publicity. A large event in June involved over 50 volunteers building a path out of sheep fleece on Martcrag Moor in Langdale. This technique is used in wet areas where the fleece helps to 'float' the path across the peat.

If you come across the volunteers and Rangers out on the fells in all weathers, please do stop for a chat and show them your appreciation.

We would not be able to continue repairing and maintaining the fell paths and landscape without your help and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your support for Fix the Fells.'



Boredale Hause

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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