



Winter 2023

# Fix the Fells



Path surveying towards St. Sunday Crag

# Partnership Manager



## **We started the second half of the year by celebrating the successful completion of delivery of our European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) supported project.**

Over five years, ERDF invested £1.5m in Fix the Fells, which supported the improvement of 30km of paths, across 70 routes within the Lake District National Park. A huge thank you to all our rangers and volunteers who have worked incredibly hard to deliver this success.

Between July and October, our ranger teams focused on three key tasks; health-check surveys on their routes; a plethora of smaller repair jobs; and stone collecting for a heli-lift which we held in October. You can read more about these activities within this newsletter.

Volunteers continue to be central to all that Fix the Fells does and this autumn has seen the formal launch of volunteer led work parties, following a thorough and structured piloting phase. We are also gearing up for recruitment of new volunteers in early 2024.

From a funding perspective, we have had success this year, including support from Cotswold Outdoors, Starling Bank and some substantial donations from individuals.

2024 is shaping up well too, with funding lined up from Westmorland and Furness Shared Prosperity Fund, Keswick Mountain Festival, Natural England's Coast to Coast project, and more from Cotswold Outdoors and Starling Bank.

Fix the Fells has played host to

a good number of visitors too. These have included a reporter from the iPaper, a couple of our individual donors, senior staff from the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA), and staff from the National Trust's legacies fundraising team. It has been great to share our work more widely.

Looking forward, 2024 will see our ranger teams and volunteers all involved in work on paths on the Coast to Coast route; a continued focus on fundraising; and preparation of a strategic plan for Fix the Fells for 2025 onwards.

Photos: Left: *Path surveying below Greendale Tarn.* Right: *Peat restoration incorporated into path work at Rigg Head.*

# West team

**Normally the fell fixing season begins with an airlift, the energized skies of April witnessing the arrival of a summer's worth of path building materials scudding across the horizon under the busy flitting of a helicopter.**

This year however the gloomily ominous shrinking vistas of autumn have viewed darkly the sight of Western Rangers stocking up on stone for next year, in the form of 110 heli-bags worth of rock, mostly gathered from the southern flanks of Alfred Wainwright's favourite hill - Haystacks.

Leaving behind the familiar backdrop of Wastwater, we have ventured northwards to the head of Ennerdale, specifically to the cosily concealed gill of Loft Beck, where Wainwright's increasingly popular Coast to Coast route clammers towards Honister after passing the remote Black Sail Youth Hostel.

Sandwiched between storms Babet and Ciaran, and defying blustery conditions, PDG Helicopters managed to fly all our heli-bags either side of Halloween, taking advantage of the fact that very few people venture onto the Coast to Coast route at this time of year, allowing us to deposit all

Heli-bags ready for flying, and being flown into position



the bags with virtually no inconvenience to the public.

After making sure the bags are all secure and stable, we will leave them until spring 2024, when we will be spending a sizeable part of our work programme tackling primarily water damaged sections of the route which Wainwright devised in 1972, soon to be upgraded to National Trail status, alongside such established challenges as the Pennine Way.

We will switch to Western Valleys property-based activities from now until our return to upland projects in April, when we will also be hoping to complete a substantial section of new path through Hollow Stones, en route to Scafell Pike, which has been our prime concern for the past two seasons.

# Central and Eastern team

Before, during and after on Stone Arthur



*Before*

*During*

*After*

**The latter part of the fell season has proven to be a dynamic period for the Central team as we advance our efforts on Stone Arthur and Gowbarrow.**

Significant progress has been achieved in our work on Stone Arthur, with the successful completion of a 40-metre section of pitching, and we are currently on the brink of finishing another 40-metre section. The landscaping efforts in completed areas have yielded positive results, with the seed and turf taking effectively, contributing to the rejuvenation of habitat and vegetation.

We also had visitors during our time on Stone Arthur, with a journalist from inews joining us in August and Hanna Latty, LDNPA Head of Strategy and Rangers, in

September. These occasions presented invaluable opportunities to fortify partnerships, exchange knowledge, and raise awareness about the work Fix the Fells does to a national audience.

A substantial portion of the fell season was also devoted to conducting path surveys. The primary objective behind these surveys was to evaluate and assess the various paths across the Lakes region. The path surveys will help inform our decision-making process, enabling us to prioritize paths and make reasoned decision about our future work for both staff and volunteers. Engaging in these path surveys also gave our team an opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of our paths.

Also, progress on Gowbarrow

has been good, thanks to the tremendous effort invested by our volunteers. We've successfully installed new stone risers and drains, alongside the ongoing work on the new aggregate path. The aggregate path has settled in most sections, and we're actively addressing and refining those areas that present issues. We will continue our efforts on Gowbarrow, with the goal of hopefully bringing it to a conclusion next year.

# Volunteers: Sourmilk Gill to Easedale Tarn

**The main role of Fix the Fells volunteers is to maintain paths where work has been done, ensuring drains run free and stonework is free from debris.**

However, we also carry out minor repairs and from time to time undertake a larger “mini” project. This year we worked on one of Grasmere’s most popular routes, alongside Sourmilk Gill up to Easedale Tarn. A specification was agreed with Path Team Rangers, and volunteers carried out the work between June to October.

In places the path was quite wet, causing walkers to leave the path, wearing through vegetation and soil at the side, and so erosion scars gradually become wider and wider. What’s the answer? Firstly, the path was improved to provide a sustainable surface, that is good to walk on, with adequate drainage to remove water. Secondly, the eroded areas to the side of the path were landscaped to help recover the vegetation and perhaps more importantly, to encourage walkers to stay on the nice new path.

There were also numerous small repairs required to reinforce work done in the past, where footfall and weather had caused further

Credits: M Oxtoby



erosion, ensuring the path is good for another few years.

This is a very popular path attracting many walkers of all abilities and school groups studying the local geography. We had lots of positive feedback and found that many folks are aware of Fix the Fells and appreciate the work we do. Work was done over 11 work parties, 30 different volunteers took part contributing a total of 113 days.

*Top photo: Path surface being improved before landscaping the erosion on the left*

*Middle photo: Work done for the day, time for tea and cake in Grasmere, perhaps?*

*Bottom photo: Path widened slightly, drainage installed, who wouldn't want to walk on it?*

# South team

**At the end of the summer we said farewell to the Wythburn path, which heads up Helvellyn from the south end of Thirlmere. We had been working here for a couple of years.**

This summer, a large amount of eroded material that had come off the path was moved, moulded, made stronger and covered with turfs to create robust landscaping that will seal up a growing scar that had formed on the path line. A final push was made to link up sections of pitching and to get beyond a “cursed” drain that had been haunting team members’ dreams for several months.

Path surveys have been an ongoing feature of the past few months. These have enabled the team to really get to know the areas and paths that they are responsible for, from the low-lying Blawith Fells at the southern end of Coniston Water up Weatherlam and over to Helvellyn and even Stony Cove Pike in the east. We have marvelled at the definition of “South Lakes”!

The surveys have provided a timely opportunity to review work that has previously been carried out, to identify paths that may need work in the future and to prioritise which

Top: Path surveying; bottom: Completed work at Wythburn



work is most pressing. The surveys have been undertaken using digital tablets with detailed mapping technology which means we can take photos and notes and be able to return to the exact location at a later date to see what change has occurred.

In 2024, the team will be working on two sections of Wainwright’s Coast to Coast route. In preparation for this we spent much of the autumn hunting down suitable rocks

and ensnaring them in heli-bags. Working alongside the helicopter crew, and with the help of various colleagues acting as safety marshals, the bags were flown to the sites we will be working on: Far Easedale, and from Tongue Gill up to Grisedale Tarn. It will be rewarding to work on an internationally known, multi-day route, especially as walkers will have seen our colleagues at work on previous days of their hike.

# Volunteer Development Ranger

**As we move into winter, the Volunteer Development Ranger, along with an army of dedicated volunteers, has got dozens of minor repair jobs completed on paths across the Lakes.**

With our big source of ERDF funding only finishing in June, I have been focussing on completing work started under that scheme, such as Wythburn on Helvellyn, and Far Easedale near Grasmere. It's been great to get some of our external partners and supporters out working with us on the latter, and as it forms part of the Coast to Coast route, which is being upgraded to a National Trail, Far Easedale will also form part of my work programme for 2024.

Work has commenced on next year's volunteer recruitment, where we'll be taking on another cohort of around 30 volunteers with the right mix of practical skills and experience, and dedicated attitude, to help us keep erosion at bay across the Lake District fells. Recruitment and training of volunteers forms a big part of my role, as it's important to ensure we take on the right people from the many that apply. Spending wet, muddy and cold days out on the fells isn't for everyone, however rewarding the work!

Matt showcases a newly completed water bar at Wythburn



As we look forward to the winter and the start of a new year, there's no shortage of work on the horizon. Over the winter I tend to focus on lower level work, for obvious reasons, so I'll be starting jobs on some lower level paths around Grasmere, Borrowdale, and Langdale, to name a few. I'll also be spending time planning for next year's intake of volunteers, reviewing our procedures, and a myriad

other tasks which are required to keep 130 plus volunteers working safely and effectively across the Lake District fells all year round.

# North team



**The latter part of the fell season has seen our North Lakes team finish up work on Rigg Head and complete an interesting project up at Dock Tarn.**

In addition, we've continued with the fantastic work done with the volunteers, where hundreds of metres of path has been secured through much hard work and commitment, so a big thank you to everyone who helped out on projects, such as the section of path from Ashness to Walla crag. It really is bedding in well up there and looking great.

Then there is the troublesome Catbells! An intimidating prospect due to the scale of the task, but over the last year or so with continued belief that a difference could be made with the right approach,

and a big collective push, the work we have done is making a real visible difference. Many, many side paths have been shut off and new sustainable, defined lines created.

In the last update work on Rigg Head was still in progress. I'm pleased to say we have now completed the project and we are all extremely proud and pleased of the work we have done, using varying footpath techniques, with an innovative approach. Much kudos must go to Ted for this with his excellent vision. As a big bonus to the work, not only has a sustainable path been created, drastically reducing loss of vegetation and soil, we have also restored an area peat bog that was drastically drying out.

An area close to my heart is up

at Dock Tarn. I have run or walked the route countless times. As of late I had noticed a trend for people to stray way off the path and through a particularly wet and sensitive area. Creating quite a nasty cut in the hillside, this needed to be stopped!

A wall of bedrock was our challenge here, as it was what was deterring people from following the actual path. So it was decided to create a new subsoil path - pitching up to the bedrock would have been troublesome for a few reasons.

Photos, clockwise from top left: *Work in progress at Rigg Head; finished path; vegetation damage at Dock Tarn, new subsoil path; bedrock deterring users from staying on path.*



# Reflections on 2023: LDNPA Ranger



## By Annie Duckwork, Lake District National Park Authority Fix the Fells Ranger

Fix the Fells is a fantastic project to work on. Three years in and I still enjoy it more than any job I have done before.

It is a hugely varied and interesting job that above all, requires excellent organisation, plus an ability to spin an entire crockery cupboard of plates at once. Here is a flavour of the range and breadth of my work this year...

**January:** Work to begin a 600m path restoration project began up on Greenup Edge. Securing the necessary permissions and consents from stakeholders to allow all works to proceed is a key part of my job. This involves engaging with landowners, statutory bodies,

local user groups and various other key people and organisations. That is before all the logistics need to be coordinated... How do you get a digger up onto a 600m plateau?!

**February and March:** The government announced that the Coast to Coast route was to be upgraded to a National Trail, and Fix the Fells was approached to undertake some of the required work in the Lake District. The involvement of multiple agencies added complexity to the request and the short planning and delivery timescale (all works to be completed by 2025) added pressure.

**April:** Heli-lift of 300 bags of stone, a couple of bridges and several bundles of fencing. I have to appoint a suitable contractor to undertake the

Procurement, and contracting arrangements are lengthy. I also have to review and coordinate all the risk assessments for the operation, organise road closures if needed, ensure all relevant stakeholders have been informed, find sites for the helicopter to land and generally ensure everything is in order as we swing into action.

We also had a whole staff visit to Borrowdale with Natural England, to discuss the environmental assent process, to share ideas and learn from one another. We have a comprehensive environmental risk assessment.

**May to July:** Site surveys and visits: With support from the LDNPA's GIS team, our rangers trialled new tough tablets to survey our paths.

This project to digitally survey all our paths has been quite time consuming, with careful planning required to get it set up well, and as a result, I am certain that it will now reap enormous benefits going forward.

**August:** I spent much of the summer producing maps and writing letters to landowners to advise about the Fix the Fells work planned for 2024.

I also dealt with a complaint about an empty heli-bag filled with rubbish; just one of the many enquiries from the public which Isabel (Partnership Manager) and I receive through the year. This year alone, I have been asked about horses, mountain bikes, stone sources, boardwalks, signage, peat, birds, geology, memorials, and everything in between.

**September and October:** It was great to join the volunteers at their annual 'sock day' path maintenance and social gathering. It's a real privilege to have such a committed group of volunteers, who are always willing to help out and they are hugely valued and appreciated.

It is this time of year that Matt (Volunteer Development Ranger) and I begin to plan the next year's volunteer recruitment. An exciting time to invite new faces to join us, but it requires significant time to plan so that the process runs smoothly for all involved.

A great deal of work has been happening behind the scenes this year to ensure our volunteer programme continues to run with an

exemplary safety record. Thank you to everyone involved in making this happen.

**November and December:** Usually a quieter time of year for Fix the Fells, but not in 2023! Weather got the better of us for our October heli-lift, but we finally completed the remaining lifts on Friday 10 November; a huge relief for all.

Visits from the Cumbria Geology Group and Cumbria Bridleways Society have taken place, plans are afoot to start to move all our path records for the last 20 years onto the LDNPA's GIS system, various site visits are planned to showcase our work to different groups, volunteer recruitment taster days are being planned and I am looking forward to another great volunteer Christmas gathering in the Newlands Valley.

This is just a snapshot of the range and breadth of my work. It's a remarkable range of duties and responsibilities, working with a fantastic group of people – staff and volunteers-, in a really beautiful and special part of the country.

Photos (previous page) left to right: *Rangers Bob, Nathan and Matt ready to fly to heli-lift site; digger at work on Greenup Edge in January; Rangers Matt and Rob on a rainy outing to review a path specification.*

# Credits

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