



National
Trust

Fix the Fells

About our upland path and
conservation work in partnership

Spring 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.

Central and East Lakes—Jonathan Skinn

'Over the winter we spent a lot of time at High Lickbarrow Farm, installing a new fence line to allow the rare herd of Albion to be kept separate from farmland that is criss-crossed with footpaths. This is important in the spring as despite Albion cattle being known as a docile breed, they can become agitated if people come too close to their calves. The farm and the Albion herd were bequeathed to the Trust in 2015. The pasture they've grazed for many years has retained remarkable biodiversity and is rich with wildflowers. We've been invited back to High Lickbarrow in the summer to help with wildflower surveys, so it will be exciting to see the variety of native species we can discover.

We've also repaired two bridges on St Catherine's estate in Windermere, replacing all the treads and rails. Taking care not to damage any of the beams, we spent a lot of time angle-grinding off rusty nails, screws and bolts! The new treads are much thicker and will allow tractors and forestry vehicles to gain easier access for management of all parts of the estate.

The start of spring brings the start of survey work. The team have been out and about in the fells surveying some of the footpaths that are identified as priorities in the next few years, including Catstycam and Loughrigg Terrace path to the summit. We've also been checking the footpath work we did at Seldom Seen and Stone Arthur. We check these paths every 6-9 months to make sure the grass seed is growing and the landscaping is beginning to stabilise. We're now looking forward to being back in the fells this summer with the hope of some nice sunshine... but not brutally hot like last year!



North—Ted Everitt-Stewart

'Time flies and I can't believe it's that time of the year again when our winter work is drawing to a close. We've had a busy and varied winter, spending a lot of time in the valley woodlands. Our first job after Christmas was to replace the rotten bridge on the popular path between Strandshag Bay and the lngs which gave us the chance to don the waders and hone our woodworking skills. All in all, I think we did a good job!



Team pride

We've spent a large proportion of the last few months with a chainsaw in our hands, opening up woodland to let more light in and allow a greater diversity of plants to thrive. This creates better habitat for all sorts of species including invertebrates and birds. We've enjoyed hedge laying too, knowing the dense tangle of branches created by this ancient technique is perfect for birds to nest and rear young.

Seathwaite is known for two things; being the wettest place in England and having some of the oldest yew trees in the country. The three yew trees are at least 1,500 years old and have stood the test of time much better than the fence around them which protects them from grazing. Instead of replacing the fence like for like, we have more than doubled the size of the enclosure, incorporating two young yew trees which have been grown from seeds of the original three, and increased the height to help keep deer out.



Borrowdale yew

Weather permitting, we're planning on being back up Long Stile by the end of the month (March). We've still got a fair amount of work to do up there to complete the project we started last year. It's looking really smart though, and we're looking forward to finishing the project off and watching the erosion scar revegetate.

We'll also be working up Gillercomb, Scales Tarn and Glaramara. Gillercomb is a project which has been on our wish list for a number of years. The most interesting section of this project will be reinstating the path through a very mobile land slip ... stay tuned for how we get on!



Hedge-laying

West—Iain Gray

'In mid November, with the successfulness of transplanting turf diminished in tandem with the falling mercury, we had to leave our final path repair project of the autumn in a state of hibernation. We resisted the temptation to do likewise, until the renewed warmth of spring brings fresh growth to the currently dormant grassy terrain.

We switched our focus through the winter months to other renewable projects, namely the Netherbeck Hydro scheme which nestles between Middle Fell and Yewbarrow, behind the band of scots pine which shields Bowderdale farm from incoming wintry gusts sweeping across Wastwater. Our main work was to rebuild surrounding dry stone walls, particularly where the laying of a power cable connecting to the main valley supply meant temporary wall gaps had to be created to allow the cable to be laid underground.

The lure of the uplands was not resisted entirely however, for we still managed occasional maintenance days on the fells, including the main route to Scafell Pike which included the spectacular descent of Lingmell nose.

March has seen us hedge planting and fencing in Nether Wasdale. This included wrestling with a large old sandstone gatepost which we think may originally have been hauled from St Bees by pony and cart. It was good strength training for our return to the fells in April.'



Re-building wall gaps



Lingmell

South—Joe Bagnall

'We've had a pretty mild winter in the South Lakes, not that we're complaining of course! Despite our best efforts to have a break from fell work, January saw us on the slopes of Birk Fell and at the head of Greenburn valley, building 5m by 5m stock exclusion plots. These plots will allow the effects of removing sheep grazing from different habitats to be monitored, and shape future decisions around stocking levels and land management. We've also been busy fencing other areas to protect naturally regenerating woodland species.

It's been a winter of firsts for the team. We were asked to assist the Hawkshead rangers with a slate fence, a feature unique to that area of South Lakes, that they were resetting outside the entrance to Wray Castle. None of the team had ever done this before but after a few hours of brushing up on our slate dressing skills, we helped complete the section of interlocking slabs.

Another first was to install a new flagstone path around the vegetable garden at Hill Top. Understandably it is one of the busiest NT locations in the Lakes and the garden sees a lot of footfall. To lessen their impact we took slate from the new quarry at Guards Wood, colour matched to the existing slate at Hill Top, dressed and laid the new flagstones. Given a bit of time, the pressure of thousands of footsteps will wear the fresh look of the slate away and the path will look as if it has always been there.

Looking ahead to the summer, the team are returning to Boredale Hause and Greenup Edge to continue works started under the Rural Payments Agency funded flood recovery works. We will also be starting a new project in Dovedale later in the summer dealing with some deep erosion gullies.'



Greenburn valley



Flagstone fence



Hill Top

Basecamp—Rob Clarke

'Once more Basecamp was honoured to host the Fix the Fells volunteers' annual Christmas work party in late December. Now a firmly established part of the Fix the Fells calendar we're always pleased to see this important end of year celebration held at our volunteer centre. This winter's was the busiest yet with around 50 folk crammed into Basecamp's main room.



Volunteers Xmas

Since then we've had a quiet couple of months of planning and low level work parties, but will be heading back out on to the fells in late March with the Icelandic Conservation Agency. They'll be using Basecamp for a training week for their leaders, part of which will involve them working with us on Boredale Hause near Ullswater, learning and practicing upland path repair techniques ahead of their summer season.

In conjunction with volunteer development ranger Matt we've also been working with the National Park Authority to help develop the 'Young Ranger' initiative, a fantastic scheme to help young people get hands-on experience with practical conservation work, to look after both our uplands and lower level countryside.

A lot of Matt's focus over winter has been on planning as well, with many days out in all weathers surveying upland paths. These surveys feed into a 2019 work programme, with an emphasis on smaller jobs that can be tackled with the dedicated Fix the Fells volunteers, catching problems before they become major issues for the path teams. He's also spent some time reviewing the volunteer health and safety procedures, not the most glamorous of jobs but one that is very important to keep up to date.

With careful planning though, Matt's been able to continue with repair work throughout winter on lower level paths around Langdale, Grasmere and Ullswater. Although it can be a challenge dealing with the vagaries of the Cumbrian winter, he feels that to be out and about in the Lake District fells has got to be just about the best job in the world on sunny days!'



Ullswater and Helvellyn



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Update from Joanne Backshall, Project Manager

'As we look forward to the nicer weather we know the Lakes will be attracting more visitors and outdoor pursuits than ever before, so there is still much to do that needs your support.

During 2019 our Rangers and volunteers will be monitoring, maintaining and repairing 350 paths covering over 400 miles across the Lakes. They will be working on popular routes in the Ullswater, Borrowdale, Haweswater, Langdale and Wasdale valleys, on Scafell Pike, Helvellyn and Blencathra, around Ambleside and Coniston, and on the busy Wainwright Coast to Coast path. I take my hat off to all our dedicated Rangers whose constant, hard physical work in the fells in all weathers protects the landscape and wildlife of the Lakes for us all to enjoy.

The aim is always to repair erosion damage and create surfaces able to withstand the increasing numbers of people enjoying the fells and the severe weather events. Plenty of drainage features are created to disperse water and help avoid future erosion.

The volunteer Lengthsmen continue to exceed all expectations, with another record breaking year in 2018. A total of 110 different volunteers contributed 2,500 days, completing 645 'drain runs' and 175 'work parties'. We have just recruited another 36 volunteers to join this incredibly active and enthusiastic group who really enjoy giving something back to the landscape they love.

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



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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