

# Fix the Fells

About our upland path and  
conservation work in partnership

## North Lakes—Ted Everitt-Stewart

‘Sitting down to write another spring update always brings on a reflective mood as another year has passed, our winter work programme in the valleys is coming to an end and again we will soon be looking up to the fells. Writing this at the end of February, the fells have been obscured by rain most of the time recently so I’m casting my mind back to those clear winter days



Moor Farm before



Moor Farm after

The favourite job of the team this winter has been restoring a historic orchard at Moor Farm, Keswick. Originally planted in the 1800s, a number of local variety fruit trees were planted 20 years ago to supplement the older specimens. Unfortunately, over the years a lack of attention has meant that suckering cherry has grown faster and out-competed many of the younger apple trees, and the boundary fence was no longer stock proof. Now however, the trees all have space to grow, and the fence has been replaced with cleft chestnut posts. We had a couple of gloriously sunny days that we will remember forever and we’ll take great pleasure in watching the trees grow and ensuring that their management is planned for the future.

The use of chestnut posts on the orchard boundary instead of standard treated soft wood posts is an important step to reduce environmental impact. The chestnut posts are grown in the UK and not shipped in from Europe, and contain no environmentally damaging chemicals. So not only will they last longer than treated posts but when they’ve done their job they can be left to become dead wood habitat for invertebrate species, which in turn supports whole ecosystems of higher organisms.

Over winter we’ve enjoyed working as part of the wider estate team at North Lakes, together laying over 1000 meters of hedge, one of our favourite winter tasks. Our thoughts are now turning towards the start of the fell season, to working in Borrowdale on Sty Head, Gillercomb, Castle Crag and Calf Cove. They say that time flies when you’re having fun. I can’t believe I’m about to start my fifth fell season. Here’s to it being a fun and productive one!’



Brandlehow in sunlight

## 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.

## Central and East Lakes—Jonathan Skinn

‘Over the wet and storm-filled winter we have been on two main projects, both being fencing jobs. Our first fencing job was replacing a stock fence around a small area of native woodland (mainly beech, birch with sporadic scots pine) at the back of the National Trust High Close Office. The old fence was a derelict fence that had lost all functionality and was allowing sheep access to the woodland. Now that it has been replaced with a fully functioning fence it will allow for some natural regeneration and for woodland flora to bloom in the upcoming spring. During the work we noticed the abundance of nuts, especially beech, on the woodland floor. This is a sign of what is called a ‘mast’ year which is when in a certain year there is an exceptional increase of seed production from the trees and an abundance of nuts. These ‘mast’ years are great for mice and red squirrels and lots of other wildlife.



The other fencing job we have been on has been in Hird Wood, just west of Trout Beck Farm. We have been deer fencing areas within the woodland, which is generally made up of scrub trees like hawthorn but also has some hazel, oak and birch and in wetter areas some alder and willow. The deer fencing will only be temporary (5-10 years) and the purpose of the fence is to allow some natural regeneration to survive within the woodland. This will benefit the woodland as the current age of the trees within are very similar. The natural tree regeneration will give some diversity to the age structure of the woodland and create a greater range of wildlife habitats.



As we come on to spring we'll soon be back out preparing for helicopter lifts for our fell projects on Loughrigg Fell and Gowbarrow. Let's hope for some decent weather.'

## South—Joe Bagnall

‘The start of 2020 has seen several changes to the team, with Luke leaving after eight years to go travelling and Sarah having changed to a part-time role with us after taking on a Ranger role in the North Lakes countryside team. We'll be welcoming a new ranger, Dave Thorp this spring in time to help with bag-filling for the helicopter lifts. Dave is a keen fell runner so he is already well acquainted with the Lakeland fells.

We had a varied workload over winter which was hampered by the weather. An extension of the slate paved area outside the shop at Hilltop ended up taking several weeks as we waited for dry conditions to put the concrete down to set the flags in.

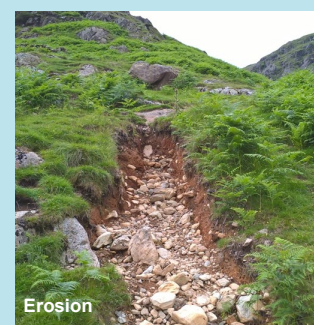


The high winds from numerous storms also proved challenging as we battled to put up some temporary deer fencing on the slopes of Latterbarrow near Hawkshead. The fencing will protect reinstated hedgerows that were planted earlier in the winter but have suffered from grazing by red and roe deer. Heavy rolls of netting, high winds and saturated muddy ground didn't make for a winning combination but hopefully in a few years time the hedges will establish and provide shelter and habitat for wildlife.



Looking ahead, the team started back on the fell in March. We're back in Dovedale finishing off work from last year as the stone is already on site. The incredibly wet winter has taken its toll and some of the eroded gullies are looking a lot deeper and wider than when we last saw them just four months ago, with clear signs that material is being washed further down the fellside in several areas.

We have about 50 bags to fill with stone for our April lifts, which is scattered across three different sites, Bowfell, Seat Sandal and Kentmere. It will be a nice opportunity to be able to stretch our legs on more fells than we usually do at this time of year.'





## Basecamp—Rob Clarke

‘January this year saw us take a visit to the Langstrath side of Stake Pass, the path that runs from Langdale to Borrowdale. Built as a raised subsoil path around 10 years ago, we’d received reports that water was starting to erode it quite badly. As it took around two fell seasons to build we were keen to nip this in the bud before too much damage was done. Thankfully, the situation wasn’t too bad and a day with Volunteer Development Ranger Matt and the Fix the Fells volunteers has stopped the developing problem. There’s more to do, but this goes to show how our work is never done, paths need regular attention to keep them in good condition.

On this theme, it can be difficult for us as a volunteer centre to predict how long a job will take to finish due to the vagaries of group size and capabilities, the end of a season can leave us with partially finished jobs. So this year we won’t be taking on new projects, but will be wrapping up three different jobs. We’ll be returning to Martcrag Moor for the third year to hopefully finish the sheep fleece path. A recent visit showed the last two years’ work to be holding up well, so we’re looking forward to completing this job—for the time being at least!

We’ll also be heading up onto Wansfell near Ambleside for the second year to continue bolstering up the very popular path there; also a path needing ‘aftercare’ as the existing work was completed around 11 years ago.

Lastly, we’ll be working in Langdale Coombe, near to Stake Pass and Martcrag Moor, on part of the Cumbria Way. Technically a job from last year, but with the difficulty of predicting how long things take, we ran out of time. We did rebuild some failing stepping stones as a sturdy causeway, but most of the work will be worked this year. It will make for an interesting and varied year and it will be good to be consolidating work, while also keeping an eye on the jobs we’ll be tackling in 2021. The eternal wheel of path work rolls on!’



Causeway before



Causeway stepping stones rebuilt

## West—Iain Gray

‘Either side of the midwinter break we were busy cutting our way through swathes of Rhododendron Ponticum in Birks Wood, Nether Wasdale. At the start of the year this was hampered by persistent wet weather which turned parts of the site into a hazardous swamp.

Our other major project of the winter has been rebuilding a dry-stone wall alongside the Whillan Beck Hydro scheme construction site above Gill Bank farm in Eskdale. An underground pipeline has been laid from an intake point half a mile or so upstream to the ‘powerhouse’ where water propelled by gravity alone generates electricity via a small turbine. The powerhouse has been modelled on the nearby Boot Bank peat huts which were used by local farmers and other residents, in some cases until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for storing cut peat ready for use in winter. The one departure from complete authenticity is the addition of a flat, soil covered roof which when grassed over will render the facility almost invisible to the casual observer.

The wall rebuild, which also subtly echoes local vernacular architectural style, is part of the tidying up process around the construction area where, after the usual stormy and wet weather, grass will start to grow.



Whillan Beck Powerhouse

In preparation for the Fell Fixing season, we have been busy recruiting a new seasonal team member who will join us soon. The team will return to Fell Fixing in mid-March beginning on the lower sections of the Scafell Pike route.

Looking ahead, on Friday May 8th we’re planning to take part in an event to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE day. Bagpipers will play on each of the UK nations’ highest peaks - Beinn Nibheis (Ben Nevis), Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), Scafell Pike and Sliabh Donairt (Slieve Donard). On Scafell Pike a bugler will play ‘The Last Post’ followed by ‘The Nation’s Toast To The Heroes Of World War Two’, with no alcohol of course. I’ll be one of the pipers who will then play ‘The Battles’ O’er’ and a new tune composed specially for this anniversary.’



Iain Gray

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## Programme update—Covid-19

'We hope this newsletter finds you and your loved ones well and that you are managing to cope with the challenging Covid-19 situation.

As you can tell, the teams wrote their updates just before the impact of the Corona virus became widespread. The current lock down and social distancing requirements have now stopped our Rangers and volunteers from being able to work in the fells for the foreseeable future. Although we're all allowed to do some exercise each day, travelling to and visiting the fells is discouraged by the police and mountain rescue teams, who don't want people to congregate in car parks or cause emergency services to be distracted.

As the situation is changing rapidly at the moment, we're keeping in regular contact with our Rangers and volunteers to discuss developments and plan ahead. With everyone confined to home, we're all developing new ways of working and video conferencing is becoming the new norm!

The whole Fix the Fells team is keen to get back to repairing the upland paths and landscape as soon as possible. It will be interesting to see whether lower numbers of people in the fells allows some paths to recover, or whether the lack of repair and maintenance by our Rangers and volunteers results in increased damage – I suspect we will see both, depending on the location, and a huge increase in use when life returns to normal again.

In the meantime, we're very grateful to everyone who continues to support us and look forward to working with and for you again in the fells 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 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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[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/thelakes](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/thelakes)



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If you would like this newsletter in a different format call Liz on 015394 63806 or email [liz.guest@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:liz.guest@nationaltrust.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.

