

Fix the Fells

About our upland path and
conservation work in partnership

Winter 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 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 2,000 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.

South Lakes – Joe Bagnall

‘With the change of the clocks and the shortening days the South Lakes team started winding down our fell work. We finished up our work for the year on Greenup Edge at the start of October and moved over to the Eastern Lakes for our last month on the fell. Work started on the Dovedale path near Brothers Water, a much lower down site with a far shorter walk in than we have been used to over the past few months.

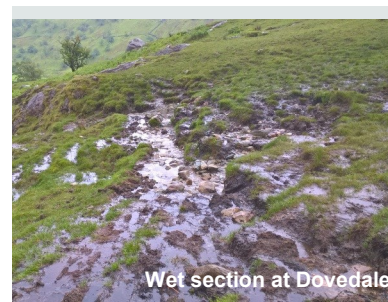
The work here is aimed at tackling some very wet sections of path that are either badly gullyng out or quickly turning into quagmires as wet weather sets in. The job is to be split between this autumn and the 2020 season, so we started with putting in drainage that will hopefully limit further damage to the path over winter. When we return we’ll start on the longer stretches of pitching that need doing.

The first full week of November marked the end of our fell season and the start of our winter work on the South Lakes portfolio. Funnily enough we were soon back on the fell, to build a stock enclosure on Wetherlam.

The enclosure’s purpose is to allow us to monitor changes to the vegetation over the coming years once grazing pressure is removed. This information can then be used for future planning of how our land is managed. Fortunately, the weather stayed fine for the two days we were up there and we had some spectacular views over the central fells and south over Morecambe Bay.

The rest of the winter will be spent between the Hawkshead and Coniston sides of the property. We have a lot of hedge laying to do similar to previous years that all seems to have come about at once due to hedge reinstatement work that was done 15 to 20 years ago.

We’ll also be a man down over the winter as Ben has been drafted to the Woodland team for the duration. This is due to the increasing presence of phytophthora ramorum pathogen that is infecting our woodlands. Our larch plantations have been hard hit, which has resulted in a large amount of work for the woodland team on top of their existing program. Ben’s previous experience in forestry will be really helpful to them.’



Wet section at Dovedale



Building the enclosure at Wetherlam

Basecamp – Rob Clarke

'Towards the end of this fell season we'd got as far as we could with the sheep fleece path on Martcrag Moor and needed to leave the site in a good condition for the winter period, which included closing down the 'borrow pits'. These are the holes we've dug through the peat to get to the tilth left by the glaciers, which we extract to use as the path surface. They can look rather stark when in use, but I'm always amazed by how well they blend back into the hillside with a few hours work. It's always a tough day doing this and not just for the obvious physical reasons; as we'll be back on this site next year we know we will need to open some more pits, knowledge we tried not to dwell on as we closed this year's ones ...!

We've also worked this season on Wansfell, on a path that is part of a popular round walk from Ambleside that we'd worked on around 10 years ago with volunteer groups. That work is still holding up well, but more stretches of the path had now become very mucky. 10 years ago these bits didn't need doing but were now getting to the point that people were diverting off to both sides to avoid the mud – a fine example of how the condition of a path is rarely something that doesn't change over time.

As we did with Martcrag Moor, we have a final day on Wansfell scheduled to leave the site tidy and organised for winter. With our upland landscapes being so precious to so many people this tidying up is an important aspect of fell work. It is something that we and all the teams do as we go along, but leaving a site looking organised and with (as much as possible) any sections of work completed can make a big difference to a fell user's perception of path work. It is a visually evident way of showing that we care about these places and while we're not there can act as a silent spokesperson for the continuing work that goes into looking after them.'



Muddy path on Wansfell



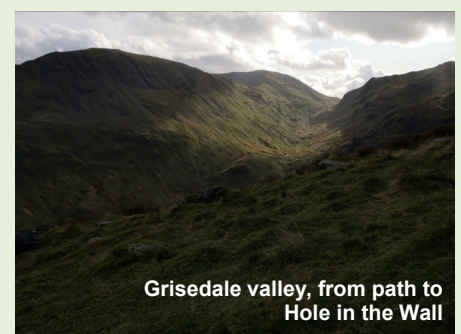
New stepping stones

Central and East Lakes – Jonathan Skinn

'Hole in the Wall has been our setting for the changing of the seasons this year. We arrived in the peak of summer and are rounding out as the clocks go back so we have seen colours of the heather and trees change, the departure of summer birds (e.g. swifts, ring ouzels) and the return of winter birds (e.g. fieldfare, redwing). Despite the weather turning cold and the days shortening, it can make for some nice photographs of the sun shining through the valley. We came back to Hole in the Wall to finish off a large-scale pitching project that spanned over 200m. Progress has varied as the digging for some of the team has been tough going with more rock and rubble than soil and the increased width of path to accommodate the high number who use the route. However the work has been finished and based on previous projects from 2017, it should settle in well and create swathes of new vegetation and wildlife habitat, where it was once heavily eroded.

The volunteers have been helping us out over the past few months at Gowbarrow. We have started a new aggregate path, with some short sections of pitching on the lower parts of the path up to the summit of Gowbarrow from the Dockray side. This is to stem the levels of erosion and path deterioration caused by the increased footfall since the inception of Ullswater Way after Storm Desmond in 2015. Because of the high numbers of volunteers we have had, the amount of work achieved has been great. We look forward to continuing work with the volunteers in the new year.

As we transition out of the fell season we will still be out and about doing path surveys on Stythwaite Steps to Easedale Tarn and Sticklebarn to Loft Crag whilst also doing some checks on recent projects at Boredale Hause, Seldom Seen and Stone Arthur.'



Grisedale valley, from path to Hole in the Wall



Gowbarrow, start of aggregate path

West – Iain Gray

'As the gathering swallows twittered in the skies we saw out October by closing down our latest phase of the Scafell Pike path restoration – having now reached the junction which divides the Lingmell Col and Mickledore path routes. There will be plenty more to occupy us when we return next spring, both above and below the latest completed section, with more stone due to be flown in next summer.

Our first winter project was already waiting for us to join in with seamlessly. Having signed up to help fight the war against the invading *Rhododendron Ponticum*, we marched straight into the ongoing conflict at the start of November. The current field of battle is Birks Wood in Nether Wasdale where the birch is currently being choked by the dreaded ornamental interloper. As with the path to Scafell Pike this is a large-scale, long-term project, the *Rhododendron* having gradually overwhelmed much of the valley's woodland over many years.

Once we emerge from the depths of winter and seek out the songs of spring we intend to return to path repair in the lower reaches of Lingmell Gill, possibly in late February when we will be working on specific path sections where short stretches of steep ground are in need of stabilisation.

We already have stone waiting for this mini-project, helibags having been dropped as part of last year's July airlift. We had the services of a highly skilled helicopter pilot who managed to delicately place helibags accurately between the surrounding trees, always a difficult task where a path passes through wooded areas. Using a longer cable allows the helicopter to stay safely above the trees, although the subsequent potential for the load to swing across a greater distance explains why in this picture no-one is anywhere near the drop site as the bag approaches!'



North Lakes – Ted Everitt-Stewart

'We've had a busy second half of the fell season on our projects up Gillercomb, Glaramara and Blencathra, as the stone was flown to these sites at the start of August. Seathwaite has the reputation of being the wettest place in England with over three metres of rain every year, and it certainly lived up to the reputation during our time up Gillercomb. Working hard to keep warm against the wind and rain has its benefits though and we rattled through over 150 metres of landscaping and built a revetment–drain–wath through a section of path that runs through some unstable scree and was being eroded by a beck. Thanks for the help from the South Lakes team on this project.



The National Trust in Northern Ireland has recently set up a path team in the Mourne, working on their tallest mountain Slieve Donard. We had a great trip there working with their team, and met with 30 Northern Ireland rangers out on a Ranger Day. It was interesting to work with loads of granite which was right next to the path!

Our final project of the year was on Blencathra, on the section of pitching that was falling out just below Scales Tarn. This was an interesting section due to the sloping bedrock and steep bank down to the beck on the side, and we are really pleased with the results! Finishing the season with a bracing swim (more like a jump in and out) of Scales Tarn at the end of October left us feeling cold and tired, but invigorated and really appreciating the connection that you form with the fells whilst doing this job.

Last week we came down off the fell and the team celebrated with the first mince pies of the year. We always enjoy using the variety of skills required during our winter work and we've got hedges to lay, fences to build and trees to plant to mention but a few of the jobs. I'm particularly looking forward to spending time in the woodlands of Borrowdale, carrying out tree safety inspections and boundary work whilst admiring the surrounding autumnal colours. However, I'm sure that it will feel like no time at all before I am writing to you saying our bags are filled and we are back on the fell!'



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Update from Joanne Backshall, Project Manager

'We've been looking back at old pictures of eroded paths and retaking them now, to see how well the areas have recovered after repair and maintenance by our rangers and volunteers. We've already gathered over 200 examples of the terrible scars which blighted the fells around 20 years ago and what they look like now – for example, the pictures below of Redacre Gill in Langdale from before 2000 and 2019. It is hard to imagine how much worse these areas would be without our efforts.



The growing variety of recreational activities and events, and an emphasis on the benefits of the outdoors for our health and well-being, mean that the fells offer so much to so many people. We are experiencing and enjoying the beauty of the Lakes more and more, but this comes at a price.

The significant environmental impact and economic value of recreation has been acknowledged by recent confirmation of funding towards our work from the England European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020. But these funds only cover part of all we do. Your support, in any way, large or small, will enable us to look after the Lake District's upland paths and landscape for the future'

Established by the European Union ERDF funds help local areas stimulate their economic development by investing in projects which will support innovation, businesses, create jobs and local community regenerations. For more information visit www.gov.uk/european-growth-funding



Funding for Fix the Fells

Fix the Fells is currently part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

Fix the Fells is supported in many ways by all 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 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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More info online at: www.fixthefells.org.uk
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/thelakes



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