



National
Trust

Fix the Fells

About our upland path and
conservation work in partnership

Winter 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.

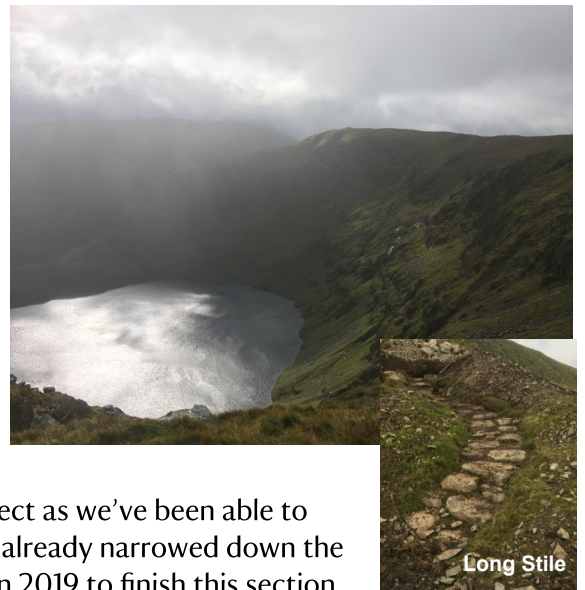
FTF volunteer lengthsman come from Cumbria and beyond and many different backgrounds. But they all have one thing in common, they love the fells!

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 have gifted 2,150 days so far this year. The upland paths just wouldn't be the same without their care. Huge thanks to all involved.

North Lakes—Ted Everitt-Stewart

'Our work site this past few months is at the top of Long Stile ridge above Haweswater, where a large area of loose scree created by the effects of weather and footfall gets wider each year. The Wainwright Society kindly supported this work. We spent most of the time in claggy weather so really appreciated the odd day with clear views to Blea Water below.



It has been a really satisfying project as we've been able to choose the line to pitch and have already narrowed down the erosion scar. We'll be back here in 2019 to finish this section.

Over 20 years ago Borrowdale Ranger, Roy, built four exclosures up on Armboth Fell to demonstrate the effect of removing grazing on the vegetation within. We've helped to replace the old fences and as a result of the bedrock, soon became experts at doing 'box strainers'. Quad biking materials up the fell was a bit of an adventure. We rated the hour and a half trip up, a four out of five for route technicality!

With another fell season over, we've got some really good projects in the winter work plan. We're looking forward to getting stuck in to them. There's over 800 meters of hedge to lay between Buttermere and Ennerdale and a lot of boundary work to do in Borrowdale. This work will help to keep our woodlands stock proof and protect their special qualities. A buffer zone between the fence and tree line allows light into the woodland floor and reduces the risk of timber falling on the fence, which could allow stock to get in. We know how canny sheep can be, when the grass is greener on the other side!



Central and East Lakes—Pete Entwistle

'In mid August we started work on a new work site, the path leading to Stone Arthur from Grasmere. This is a popular path for a short stroll and for others starting a much longer trek leading to the summit of Fairfield and beyond. This was the last in the series of projects to repair flood damage caused by the December 2015 storms.

A section of the path had been completely washed away leaving a steep and tricky area of bedrock for walkers to navigate, with problems added to by people seeking alternative routes leading to further erosion and landslips. It proved to be a challenging and technically difficult project: finding a route across an unstable fell side, building through bedrock and the difficulty of 'keying' the path so it wouldn't slide off, the constant flow of water in areas and trying to undertake repairs whilst allowing access for walkers to enjoy their day out. We even had problems getting materials to the site as the helicopter couldn't place bags of stone on the steep ground where we needed them. This meant five days for our team of four rangers, moving stone 50m across a steep slope, before we could even begin work. I think it's safe to say that we've not had a job with this number of difficulties for quite a few years

Solutions to the problems were found, with sections of bedrock chipped to create a channel for the path and extra drains added to cope with water. Now completed, anybody using the new path would be unaware of the underlying difficulties we've overcome. It should be robust enough, fingers crossed, to withstand similar floods in the future.

Looking ahead to next year, we have three planned projects, Grisedale to Hole in the Wall, Boredale Hause and a revisit to Gowbarrow where we last worked in 2016. All of the paths are located in Ullswater, which is a valley that seems to have suffered more than most from water damage.'



Stone Arthur, before



Pitching

Basecamp—Rob Clarke

'After the summer blitz on Martcrag Moor, we still had a lot of work to do on the sheep fleece path. Not having built one for a while, we had forgotten quite how much work is involved using this technique – it certainly isn't an easy option! So most of our work parties with the Fix the Fells volunteers were, for the rest of the year, directed to this site. With the help of our second working holiday, we managed to complete the stretch we were working on and leave it in a good state to weather the winter. The path we've built is settling in nicely now and we'll be back up there to continue with other sections next year.

Basecamp groups also worked on a much lower path, at Glenamara Park above Ullswater, quite a steep route which required a more traditional job of pitching and drain building. Having spent a couple of days with the sheep fleece, our working holiday certainly enjoyed this contrast. It was good to be able to show them how our path repair techniques change, depending on the circumstances.

We're now looking towards next season. We've had visits to St Ravens's Edge and Wansfell East, to update the pathwork specification for these sites, and have another visit booked in with the South Lakes path team and Volunteer Development Ranger, Matt, to look at the path up Stake Pass from Langdale.

This last one is likely to be tackled with a combination of Basecamp and Matt's groups. As his role develops, Matt is starting to work with the Fix the Fells volunteers, to tackle some of the jobs they have been highlighting. Having walked on this route most of this year to access Martcrag Moor, it is one area they are particularly keen to get cracking on!



Martcrag Moor, after 3 months wearing in



Working holiday on Glenamara

South Lakes—Joe Bagnall

‘The winter months announced themselves in true Lake District fashion, with a couple of heavy downpours and some stormy weather in late October. Whilst the wet and wild was an unpleasant change from the glorious weather we enjoyed this summer, it gave us an opportunity to see how our stone work and landscaping held up on the Boredale bridleway. Thankfully the path handled the weather well, with only some turf needing replacing.

Looking ahead, we’re preparing for our four months of winter work across the NT South Lakes portfolio, covering Coniston, Little Langdale and Hawkshead. This winter, as part of the ongoing Sustainable Land Management initiative, we will be laying plenty of hedgerows as well as planting new ones in the Hawkshead and Coniston areas. This creates a variety of habitat across our land and establishes corridors for wildlife to move around in.

Several of our woodlands have been hit with the disease *Phytophthora ramorum* this year and the main casualty has been our larch plantations. If an infected tree is found, it, and every larch tree within 100m, has to be felled to prevent the disease spreading. With several tons of trees now felled and large areas of woodland opened up, we’ll be spending some time erecting deer fencing to protect these areas from grazing animals to allow for natural regeneration. Some sites will be replanted with native broadleaf species which will help to increase biodiversity and stabilise soils.

As we are an uplands team, it wouldn’t be right to not venture into the fells at all over winter. We’ll be creating some five metre square, stock-proof fenced enclosures on the fells above Greenburn mine, to monitor the habitat inside and see how it changes once freed from grazing pressure. There are also several old mineshafts left over from the Lakes industrial past that need safety fences building or replacing, to ensure no one falls down them.’



West Lakes—Iain Gray

‘As the days shortened and the verdant summer shades of Buttermere’s rich foliage seeped away to an insipid brown backdrop, Scarth Gap was the scene of a race against time to complete the last flood repair project. It was also our seasonal team member Nathan Haley’s “prentice piece” so to speak. Having joined us as a volunteer the previous year and completed a section of pitching on Scafell Pike under close guidance, he was ‘let loose’ on a section of his own at the top of the pass, where the most severe damage had occurred.

With his contract expiring on October 31st, our schedule neatly fitted, and a rocky mess was transformed into a nicely graded route towards Haystacks. Immediately after leaving us, Nathan headed to patrol the Hadrian’s Wall path for the Northumberland National Park.

We also spent some time this autumn, defining and stabilising two routes to Great Gable summit. This included reducing the untidy and excessive series of stone piles, into a clearer line of route marker cairns, to help guide people safely to the summit.

By visiting the area in both clear and misty conditions, we were able to ascertain the distance required between cairns, discovering in the process how much more effectively a well-built cairn stands out against a misty background than just a random heap of stones.

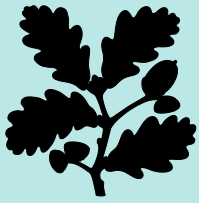
The remainder of autumn was spent on the lower slopes of Lingmell, in a sort of limbo between upland and lowland work, trying out an experiment in making a roughly cobbled section of path reminiscent of some of the older packhorse tracks which survive in places such as the Borrowdale side of Styhead. Time will tell whether this technique will be used more often in the future.’



Nathan’s section before and after



A tasteful cairn



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Update from Joanne Backshall, Project Manager

'We may have reached the end of a two year phase of work that has focused on repairing Storm Desmond damage, but there is much more to do that needs your support.

During 2017-18 our Rangers and volunteers have worked hard repairing large sections of 13 different fell routes. We have also used machines to repair extensive erosion damage on nine other paths. These routes have been in the Ullswater, Borrowdale and Buttermere valleys, around and above Grasmere and on Helvellyn and Blencathra. In 2019 we will be continuing work in many of these areas, as well as on Scafell Pike, Blencathra, in the Langdale Valley and on the popular Wainwright Coast to Coast route.

The routes are being made more resilient, to withstand the increasing numbers of people enjoying the fells and the severe weather events, with plenty of drainage features created to disperse water and help avoid future erosion.

The volunteer Lengthsmen have again been recognised for their fantastic dedication and contribution to environmental sustainability, as finalists in the 'Groundwork Community Awards'. The winners of these awards will be announced at a special event in the Houses of Parliament in November. Reaching the final three in a nation-wide selection of community projects is already a win for the Lengthsmen!

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 all 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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