



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

## Fix the Fells Newsletter Summer 2022



*Bessy Boot to Glaramara. Mandy Foulkes*

A new season – Joanne Backshall, Fix the Fells Programme Manager

Welcome to the latest news from our Rangers and Volunteers, who are out in the fells again, busy repairing and maintaining the paths and landscape in the Lake District. I hope you enjoy reading about their exceptionally tough and skilled work looking after the fabulous scenery we enjoy.

We couldn't continue this work without your help so a heartfelt thank you to everyone who supports and donates to our cause. All donations are always welcome and can be made here: [Donate – Fix The Fells](#). Thank you.

South Lakes Ranger Team – Nathan Haley

We're a **different** South Lakes Ranger Team this season with three new members, Chris, Greg and Jono, moulded around the reliable continuity of South Team stalwart Ben Brady. I return to the team to guide them through projects on Helvellyn, Wetherlam, the Old Man of Coniston, Bow Fell and Greenup Edge, in the process realising a personal dream of supervising a Fix the Fells team.



*Ben at work on Swirl Hawse, Wetherlam*

After a steady start of stone bagging, high fell fencing and helicopters, we eventually committed everything to our first project, a broad and dusty erosion scar just above Swirl Hawse on Wetherlam. With steep gradients, bedrock problems, no clearly defined single line and delicate surrounding vegetation, it's proven an excellent training ground. The whole team have worked tirelessly, without a hint of complaint, through a monotony of wet, cold and windy May days to give that small section of fellside a strong and sustainable future.

As supervisor I've continually found myself funnelling the experience of those who've made me; there are bits of Liam and Iain from the West Lakes Ranger Team, Rob and Huw from the Brecon Beacons, the Snowdonia path team, Gary from the Hadrian's Wall path and Joe Bagnall, my predecessor in this role, in that section of Wetherlam fellside. It's a privilege to be able to channel that experience and facilitate the passion of a new generation of upland rangers. Our expertise is niche, and the knowledge embodied within the organisation astounding; Fix the Fells isn't just keeping fells alive, it's also sustaining a rare palette of heritage skills.



*Swirl Hawse before (left) and during (right) work by the South Lakes Ranger team to create a more sustainable path.*

Introducing the Band – Iain Gray, West Lakes Ranger Team

For 2022 the West Lakes upland team have a substantially new line up! Supplementing the one original band member Iain Gray (right, on hand tools and bagpipes) are one of last year's seasonal rangers Jack Hatton (not put off by last year's rain and mud) and three new members - Kevin Brooks (on a life journey from Walthamstow

to Wasdale), Joe Dugdale (home grown international standard fell runner) and Bob Smith (switching from Wasdale Head Campsite Ranger to Upland Ranger).

With a sense of déjà vu, most of this season will be spent continuing the upgrade of the Brown Tongue to Scafell Pike route, in a worksite we prepared last year by flying in 170 bags of stone and constructing a fenced exclusion zone around the site. The latter will enable us to revegetate the erosion scar more effectively while allowing the public to pass by without having to clamber over boulders and avoid muddy holes in the ground. The new path will be wider and straighter than the previous one to encourage a higher level of usage. Hopefully by October we will have another more user-friendly section of path complete and a much greener surrounding hillside.

*Iain Grey, Upland Ranger and piper*



*Left – West Lakes Rangers Kevin, Joe and Bob. Right - the work site on Scafell Pike*

North Lakes Ranger Team – Patrick Cunningham

After joining Fix the Fells last year and completing a season that can only be described as my most unique and rewarding working experience to date, I am delighted to be back for another season to a job I've grown to love.

We've started off this year with a project on Haystacks between Scarth Gap and the summit. Towards the top the old path winds through an area of rocky crags where the pitching takes a sharp left onto long-exposed bedrock. It is here where people have chosen to find another way up that is off the existing path. Over time, this repeated footfall has created a whole new 'bandit' path and consequently made quite a visible scar on the fellside.

To encourage people to stick to the original path, we built a mound formed of large (and I mean large) rocks, soil and turf. Although it was a hard win, I think we left it looking natural and aesthetically pleasing. It's really satisfying to know that the work we do will help prevent upland erosion for many years to come on the Buttermere fells.

It has to be said that for me the most challenging aspect of the job is the rain and the sheer amount of it. There have been more occasions than I can remember when it has been tipping it down with no end in sight, I'm standing in half a foot of water in a hole I've just dug and although the Trust provides us with excellent clothing, I'm wet through!

I really enjoy how every project we do is different and figuring out the solution needed for each one is interesting, but the most rewarding aspect of my job is being part of something that has a direct, honest and positive impact on the environment and the landscape here in the Lake District.



*North Team Rangers Ted, Caroline, Jordan, Patrick and Martin at work on Haystacks*

#### Central & Eastern Lakes Ranger Team – Jonathan Skinn

It has been a very familiar first few months of the fell season for the Central team as we have been continuing work on Loughrigg Fell above Grasmere and on Gowbarrow Fell in the Ullswater Valley. These have been part of our programme over the past two years. We have been ploughing our way through some of the tougher sections of Loughrigg which included two of our team pitching through a deep gully, with long sections of bedrock to break through. Thankfully visitor numbers have dropped off slightly on the path after two bumper years, so it has given us a chance to make more progress. The team also has a new seasonal ranger in the ranks, Josh, who has fitted into the team seamlessly and has shown great enthusiasm and willingness to learn which has led to him quickly picking up the art and nuances of pitching.

We have only recently started back on Gowbarrow Fell with the volunteers to carry on the aggregate path from the Dockray side. This will be our third year of working on this route and the aggregate path we created over the past two years has settled down well. The volunteers put significant work into the landscaping around the path, to repair large areas of erosion, and this has begun to vegetate and green over well.

Our next job in the work programme will be starting soon and is a short hop from Loughrigg over to Bracken Hause in Easedale above Grasmere. We have about 150 bags of stone to fill for the next helicopter lift in July, to add to 40 we flew in advance last year, and then we will be cracking on with pitching the lower sections of the path.



*Left - Section of new pitching which has replaced some old sloped stone work. Right - Stone risers through a gully.*



*Loughrigg Fell, Grasmere – During (2021) and after (2022) work by the Rangers*

A varied half year with Fix the Fells – Alan Tyldesley, Fix the Fells Volunteer

I've been volunteering with FtF since 2015, but the last few months have been a particularly varied range of activities I'd like to tell you about.

The year started with one of the softest of path maintenance days, suitable for a short winter's day, from the Glen Mary car park on the A593 up to the outlet of Tarn Hows. Mostly we sweep loose stone off built paths but this route was heavily covered with wet leaves. Certainly slippery enough to be tricky for some of the less confident users. It's quite short and two of us were finished by 11 am.

In February with a bigger group we undertook path maintenance on the route from Wrynose, past Red Tarn, and up towards Crinkle Crag. This has lots of sections of constructed path and 50 drainage features between Red Tarn and the first Crinkle. It was a cold windy day and the group decided it was not wise to get to the last few drains; these would have to wait for another time. **Safety in the hills matters, don't take unnecessary risks.**

I have never undertaken bag filling before but signed up to help with this most energetic of activities up near Three Tarns in March, so the bags could be moved ready for path building in April still higher up. I had not anticipated the need for each of us to carry the heli bags up - **4 big bags don't fit in my rucksack.** Strong winds

made the work particularly tricky, moving stones too big to pick up. All were glad to complete the task by 1 pm and we had icy bits blowing past us on the way down The Band.

My holiday cottage looks out across the Duddon Estuary at Black Combe, so I was pleased to do an observation walk up this outlying whale-shaped hill. The route from Witcham is heavily walked and in plenty of places has multiple parallel paths. Taking lots of pictures, we can monitor how it changes over the years, but it is not actively maintained by Fix the Fells at the moment.



*Alan Tyldesley on the summit of Helvellyn*

April saw me heading up Helvellyn from Wythburn with two new volunteer recruits. There's plenty of drainage features to maintain, a long way up the mountain, but not right to the top. All agreed we should visit the summit and pose for pictures (above).



In May it was back to the Band, with visitors from the Georgia National Trust (Eastern Europe not USA), joining in and learning some of the techniques we use, and how much volunteers can do.

This week I was out marshalling while contractors were path building with heavy machinery on the path up Helvellyn from Glenridding. I spoke to many of the 60+ people who came by, all seemed interested in our work and intrigued to know how you get an excavator up the mountain (below).

*Machine working on the path from Glenridding to Red Tarn*

ERDF Volunteer Co-ordinator – Rob Clarke

For the first few months of 2022 the Fix the Fells volunteers and I have been working on the lower slopes of Wansfell. This choice of site coupled with judicious monitoring of the weather forecast and conditions on the day meant we haven't had to cancel any work parties but with some of the storms we've had it has been touch and go at times ...!

A very popular round walk leads up from Ambleside and over the summit of Wansfell, descending the eastern flanks where we were working. This has always been a busy route, but in the last couple of years it has seen a big rise in visitor numbers. For many of these visitors this is their first experience of a fell walk and it can be these walkers that present us with particular challenges.



More inexperienced fell users on paths like Wansfell generally need an easier and more obvious route to follow than we might build in the higher fells. It's a tricky balance to achieve but our primary purpose is erosion repair and this is not going to be effective if no one uses the path! So, in multiple areas our work on Wansfell focussed on widening and clarifying the path and easing people's progress over tricky sections. This has been coupled with repairing and landscaping the many side routes that had started to appear, thereby protecting this wider landscape.

We also had a break from this job for a couple of weeks to fill helicopter bags with stone. Around half of this stone is for use on my volunteer work parties but the other half is for jobs to be undertaken by the South Lakes upland path team. With secondments, paternity leave and new recruits not having started yet, the team were going to struggle to fill their bags in time so it was brilliant to be able to help out like this – a great example of Fix the Fells partnership working at its best!

*Stone being lifted to The Band in Langdale by helicopter, April 2022*



*Wansfell path before and after; more steps installed, path widened, drain installed at top to stop water running down path and side route landscaped out.*

#### Volunteer Development Ranger - Matt Tweed

The first few months of the year have been a hive of activity for me, particularly with the long-awaited return of new recruits into the Fix the Fells volunteer programme. After a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, interest was extremely high, so we were able to be quite discerning in who we offered places to and will hopefully reap the benefits of a really committed cohort of new lengthsmen. **It's still early days, but it's been fantastic meeting** them all on some of their training days and at induction, and it will be richly rewarding helping them develop their skills and experience, and to support their integration into the scheme in the coming months.

Another welcome return has been that of corporate and community groups, who help to support our work through financial donations and days assisting us on practical fell work. In April we welcomed an enthusiastic team from Buckman Chemicals, who cheerfully worked with us to block off shortcuts on the busy Stake Pass route in quite challenging conditions. Further ahead in the summer we look forward to welcoming groups from



the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government, a financial services company, a mental health charity and a local business group. The invaluable assistance provided by these supporters, not to mention the opportunity to engage and spread our message to new audiences, is massively appreciated.

*Team from Buckman Chemicals volunteering on path repair work on Stake Pass*

## Machines in the fells in 2022

Machines are used to restore upland paths in certain locations, for example where the gradient is shallow and the erosion is too extensive to repair by hand. The technique is called sub-soiling or soil-inversion and uses material from around the path to create a hard-wearing surface. This helps to keep people on the path and allows the surrounding vegetation to recover. Drains are installed to direct water off the path and prevent further erosion damage.

This year we're using two machines on a long section of the path from Glenridding to Red Tarn. This route is one of the most popular access points to Helvellyn. It was the first path to be repaired by machine in the Lake District in 1996. Only small sections have needed remedial work since then (in 2002 and again in 2010) and now another section is receiving some further attention.

We'll also be using machines on the paths leading to Angle Tarn in the Ullswater Valley and on the Barf to Lord's Seat route overlooking Bassenthwaite. Below Conistone Old Man a machine will be working on sections of path at Walna Scar and Stephenson Ground.

On the Greenup Edge section of the popular Coast to Coast route, where it passes over very boggy high ground between Borrowdale and Grasmere, a machine will repair badly damaged peatland. We'll use a mixture of stone flags and sub-soiling to create a much better path for the many enjoying this superb long-distance route.



*Coast to Coast route over Greenup Edge where a stone-flagged and aggregate path will be created to help restore the eroding peatland*



## European Regional Development Fund ending

We are very grateful for our current funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Our existing ERDF-funded project totals £2,513,936 over five years (1 April 2019 - 30 June 2023). The grant funding rate is 60%, meaning a total of £1,508,362 can be claimed from ERDF by the end of the project, if we fulfil all the project requirements and targets.



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The main focus of this funding is protecting and restoring the internationally important biodiversity of the Lake District fells, by repairing the access-related erosion and enhancing the upland path network. We have achieved a great deal so far within this project, thanks to all the hard work of our Rangers and Volunteers, and **we're currently on target to complete the project successfully.**

The ERDF-funded project ends at the end of June 2023 and we have a significant funding gap to fill at that time. Our typical annual spend is £550,000 and the ERDF funding has met about half of it each year. We have to **fundraise for 100% of the money we need, so we're looking for a variety of new funding mechanisms and sources to enable us to continue our vital activities.**

Without the work of the Fix the Fells Rangers and Volunteers, we fear the Lake District will return to the appalling erosion scars of the past, illustrated so well by our many amazing "Before and After" photos. Some examples are included below and many more astonishing images can be seen on our [Video and Photo Gallery – Fix The Fells](#) and also our Flickr feed: [Before & Afters \(merged\) | Flickr](#)



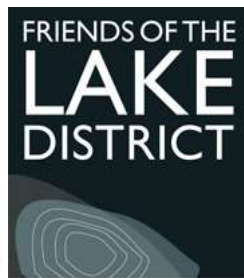
*Garburn to Yoke – Before (2001) and after (2019) work by Fix the Fells*



*Thornthwaite Beacon, Kentmere - Before (2005) and after (2019) work by Fix the Fells*

## Fix the Fells Facts and Figures

Activity	2021
Total number of upland paths overseen by Fix the Fells	737
Number of paths actively repaired, maintained and monitored	399
Length of path actively repaired, maintained and monitored	666 km, 410 miles
Length of path repaired	10.62 km
Number of staff	27
Number of volunteers	110
Number of volunteer days	2,277
Number of paths maintained (many are visited several times a year on an agreed schedule)	818
Number of volunteer work parties	198
Number of heli-bags of stone (each filled by hand with 900 kg of stone, flown by helicopter, emptied by hand and the stone dug into the ground)	700
Number of heli-bags of stone required	1 to 2/m of path
Helicopter costs	£20/min - £1,200/hour - £60,000/year
Cost of heli-bag, staff time to fill it and heli-lift	£80/bag
Length of stone pitching installed by staff by hand	1 to 2 m/day
Cost of a Fix the Fells Ranger	£170/day
Cost of path repairs by hand	£150/m
Total Fix the Fells expenditure	£550,000/year
Total Fix the Fells expenditure 2001-2021 is £10 million	



*Crummock Shore Path. David Brooks.*