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Fix the Fells – Newsletter Winter 2021



Langdale from The Band - David Brooks

More people and paths than ever before – Joanne Backshall, Fix the Fells Programme Manager

We've had a very productive year with more staff, volunteer work parties, helicopter lifts, machines and paths repaired and maintained than ever before. This is fitting considering the growing numbers of visitors to the Lake District and the increasing recreational pressure we've witnessed over the last two years.

We've worked hard across the Lake District to stabilise the increasing erosion we've seen, caused by the combined effects of people and water on the fells. Our Rangers and Volunteers have worked on paths around Coniston, Grasmere, Langdale, Ullswater, Borrowdale, Wasdale, to name just a few and we hope you enjoy reading here about their adventures.

We were lucky enough to take on 10 new staff this year and they all settled in well and enjoyed their new roles. They learnt the necessary skills quickly, allowing us to repair even more erosion, and brought a new burst of ideas and enthusiasm to us all. We've also undertaken some much-needed work using machines this year, with more planned for next year.

The expansion in our work is thanks to grant funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for which we are very grateful. This currently covers about half of our costs, but we still need to provide the match funding. The grant also ends in June 2023, leaving us with a substantial hole in our funding and a worry for the future of the fells.

It's great that the physical and mental health and well-being benefits of getting out into the countryside are being recognised more and more. However, this comes at a cost to the precious scenery and environment we use and enjoy. With your help, we're working hard to tackle the erosion damage and keep the fells beautiful for all to enjoy now and into the future. 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 – Joe Bagnall

The South Lakes team has had a busy year. Brought up to full strength by the addition of our seasonal Rangers, Caroline, Kevin and Dave, we have been tackling two big projects, Coniston Old Man and Greenup Edge, as well as three small but quite tricky jobs on Bowfell, Seat Sandal and on the Kentmere to Nan Bield Pass path.

We decided to start the season off by breaking our new seasonal staff in gently by doing a few weeks work on Greenup Edge. The site is about a 3.5 mile walk in and the first job was putting in a section of pitched path through a particularly wet section of peat bog. It may have been a shock to the system but the team did really well and already the site has massively improved in condition due to the work, as you can see in the photos.



Boggy section of path on Greenup Edge before and after work by the South Lakes team

As well as the team getting on with our ERDF work programme it has been great to get our supervised work parties for volunteers back up and running after a long break due to the pandemic. Ben has been leading two work parties a month and he and the lengthsman have been putting in some excellent repair work on the Armboth and Goats Water to Goats House paths. We also had the pleasure of working with another year of Kendal college students at Wythburn on the path leading up to Helvellyn. We've worked with the college for a number of years now and it was great to be able to start back up with them again.

North Lakes Ranger Team – Charlie Hawkins

The North Lakes Fix the Fells team expanded this year, with four new National Trust Seasonal Rangers joining supervisors Ted and Jordan. These comprised myself, Charlie, along with Martin, Patrick, and Dave.



season

The season started at the back of Gillercombe, a path that's seen regular maintenance in recent years. This time, a deteriorated 60 metre stretch of pitching needed replacing. The previous steps were made of small stones that had tilted forward from the decades of footfall - anyone who knows Sour Milk Gill and Gillercombe knows that this slanted pitching is treacherous when wet. These were to be replaced with larger stones that we selected, bagged and flew from the scree slope opposite. It was a steep learning curve for the new seasonal staff.

Despite being one of wettest places in England, we enjoyed many dry and sweltering days, requiring regular dips of our heads in the waterfall on the steep walk up the gill. Of course, being the Lake District, there were some torrential days; this caused problems for Martin where any hole he dug out in the lower section would immediately fill with water, and we were very thankful to have a shed to shelter in at lunch time.

Snow on the path up Gillercombe in Borrowdale at the start of the



Left - Charlie installing a drain in the Gillercombe path (left) and Dave reseeding the newly pitched path at Gillercombe (right)

From the Seasonal Rangers' perspective, it has been great to improve our stonework skills over the season and learn the techniques that Fix the Fells have established over the last twenty years. I'm sure Ted also appreciated not scurrying up and down the path as much to help us get the next stone in the ground now that we are more experienced.

We also worked on the path low down on Fleetwith Pike, just past the white memorial cross. Here we've been grateful for the shorter walk in and the stunning views across Crummock Water and Buttermere. There's also been views of Tom Cruise filming stunts for the new Mission Impossible film at Gatesgarth Farm, although of course we have been much more focused on the heroics shown by team members on the path.

West Lakes Ranger Team – Iain Gray

York Minster took over 2 centuries to build, generations of stonemasons not living to see its completion. Subsequent generations of pilgrims have been awe struck by its immense size. Jump forward a millennium to another place of pilgrimage and our team of 3 upland rangers began another year of Scafell Pike path repair supplemented by 2 newly appointed Seasonal Rangers Holly and Jack, neither of whom were alive when the project began in 1988. Unlike Norman stonemasons we are confident we will all live to see it completed.

In the months since then a frequently recurring conversation would run:

“When was this section of path originally repaired?”

“About 5 years before you were born.”

Our first target was to fill 230 bags of stone in time for July's helicopter airlift, mostly flown to Hollow Stones where recently the landscape has been deteriorating rapidly.

As well as stone for path building we took delivery of a 5 ton digger flown in several pieces and reassembled on the hillside with the aid of a mobile workshop, part of which had passing pilgrims - I mean walkers - uncertain whether it was a set of goalposts or a symbolic gallows (see picture).

The summer and autumn were spent mostly in the same area, continuing to create a wider, straighter path which will hopefully allow surrounding vegetation to recover.

As both our Seasonal Rangers have expressed willingness to return next year it seems that unlike the frequently exhausted pilgrims to Scafell Pike they haven't been overawed by the experience.



The gantry for rebuilding the digger being flown on to Scafell Pike, Wasdale

West Lakes Seasonal Ranger – Holly Appleby

The West Lakes Fix the Fells team, Liam, Iain and Jon, were joined by two new seasonal members in April: Jack and myself, Holly.

Our season started with an introduction to wath construction, landscaping and path definition. As our confidence and skill sets grew, with help from our very experienced teammates, we were 'let loose' on Broad Crag Col, allowing our creative sides to be explored. This very steep section of loose scree and slippery bedrock is unsuitable for pitching. Therefore we got to work blocking off side routes, shifting cairns and directing people towards the bedrock which will be able to withstand greater volumes of footfall over the long term.

Following this, we were introduced to pitching and pinning on Brown Tongue (see the before and after pictures). It was an extremely busy and hot summer, but the perfect time to gain donations and tell the public all about the important work of Fix the Fells. We widened and straightened the path, created 'passing places' and landscaped the side routes; protecting the natural habitats on Scafell Pike from erosion. This has really prepared us for next year's 200 m of pitching planned on Lingmell Col.

Our work has been very varied, with my highlight being the helicopter rides up Scafell Pike and Coniston Old Man. It has been wonderful to work on so many fells, meeting interesting walkers in questionable attire, being visited by television presenters Simon Reeve and Alex Thomson, working with a very talented team of staff and volunteers, and giving something back to the land that we love.



Brown Tongue path up to Scafell Pike at the head of Wasdale, before (left) and after (right) work by the team to repair erosion damage

Central & Eastern Lakes Ranger Team – Jonny Skinn

The Central and Eastern Lakes team, which had a new addition in our Seasonal Ranger Jimmy, have been out and about this year focusing on two very popular paths in the Lakes.

We started the year on the path from Loughrigg Terrace to Loughrigg Summit in the Grasmere area, continuing the pitching work we started the previous year. Thanks to the addition of Jimmy, who was a quick learner, we were able

to make good progress and remove some old pitching and stone risers that were causing people to avoid the path. We replaced it with some new pitching that is much more suitable for the number of visitors to the path.



Loughrigg Terrace path before (left) and after (right) removing the old path and installing the new path

Around July we moved over to the Ullswater valley and on to the path to Gowbarrow Fell from near Dockray to do some much needed sections of pitching on some steeper parts of the path. It has been challenging for the team due to running into multiple sections of bedrock on the path line, but it has come together well and has significantly improved the route for the high number of visitors on the path.



Gowbarrow before (left) and after (right) landscaping and installing new pitching

The volunteers have also been out monthly with us this year on Gowbarrow Fell. They have helped us install stone cross drains and large sections of aggregate path where the route was heavily eroded due to the lack of a clearly defined path line. The volunteers have been of great assistance in improving large sections of the path and were a big miss last year when their activities were restricted by the pandemic.



Rangers and Volunteers working on the path on Gowbarrow Fell (left) and the finished section of path (right)

Is There No Stopping Them? Volunteer update by David Brooks

Fix the Fells volunteers returned to the fells post lock down at the end of March for a much shortened fell fixing season. What impact would we make with so much lost time? Could we make up the time let alone lost work?

Er, yes is most certainly the answer.

Even with volunteers still concerned about the impact of Covid **97** volunteers have so far been out on the fells in all weathers gifting **1692 days of upland path work**. Each volunteer offers to give at least 12 days a year so it is remarkable that **51** have already met or exceeded that “target” with **17** having gifted **30** days or more each plus one volunteer in particular gifting over **110** days.

Whilst the core business is path maintenance days (PMD`s) where we clear out drains and sweep the pitched paths (stone steps) – yes, we really do sweep the paths! We have worked on **591 routes** which is a new record at this time of year.

Volunteers have also carried out and attended some **153 work parties** (WP`s) again a new record both supervised by National Trust Rangers and unsupervised led by suitably qualified volunteers.

Working smarter and being guided by our path administration team we have made up for lost time **completing more PMD`s and WP`s than ever before** in 10 weeks less time – no mean feat.

A remarkable achievement considering all by volunteers, not paid staff. It is going to be another great year of hard graft, a little bit of fun and a whole lot of laughs whilst doing so in all weathers with hopefully more record work to follow.



Left - Volunteers Alan and Richard start building a new drain on Side Pike, Langdale (left) and the finished product (right)



The upland path on Bursting Knott Wasdale (left) – spot the drain? There is one here! After much shovelling and sweeping, as if by magic, a drain appears (right).

Volunteer Co-ordinator – Rob Clarke

Our first job this year was a return to Martcrag Moor to finish the path built on sheep fleece across peat bog – a job I started working on with the Fix the Fells volunteers through my last role at the National Trust’s volunteer centre High Wray Basecamp, now mothballed after the pandemic. It was lovely to see so many familiar faces from the lengthsman community returning to help complete this job after around 3 years work.

On the Wythburn path up Helvellyn we continued with the work started by the South Lakes team and Kendal college, constructing a ‘roman’ style path. This involved regrading all the material to end up with a layered path with bigger

stones at the bottom and a fine surface on top. Coupled with a sloping camber towards a substantial side drain we hope this path will stand the test of time and also demonstrate construction possibilities when it's not practical to fly stone.



Wythburn path before (left) and after (right) constructing a "roman" style path

Higher on the same path we also worked to landscape out multiple shortcuts between zig zags on the machine-built section. On a number of visits, including a big 3 day weekend work party, we had many helping hands for this quite laborious job. By shutting off the shortcuts we hope to have preserved the work here, preventing the need for greater expenditure on this path in the future.



A shortcut on the path up to Helvellyn from Wythburn – before work (left) and during landscaping work by volunteers to hide the eroding line and encourage people to stay on the path (right).

Moving into winter, my focus is identifying volunteer jobs it is practical to continue working on right through the season. I know there's great interest in doing this, but we need to make sure there are plenty of low level options!

Volunteer Co-ordinator – Matt Tweed

In the absence of volunteers, who weren't able to resume work parties due to covid restrictions, the first part of the year was taken up with preparations, and with practically the whole of 2020 lost to the pandemic, there were a lot of paths to get reacquainted with! Many had deteriorated in our absence, which meant that we could use that time to reprioritise accordingly.



Repairing a badly gullied section of the Coast to Coast at Tongue Ghyll, Grasmere – during (left) and after work (right)

It was extremely gratifying to welcome volunteers back on to work parties in March, although I must confess to feeling a little nervous after a twelve month hiatus! It was fantastic however, to see familiar faces again, and, although we were all no doubt a little rusty, we soon got back into our stride and were able to make proper inroads into addressing the work schedule. Furthermore, the earlier planning meant that we could hit the ground running with volunteer unsupervised work parties, which have really magnified the scope of what we have been able to achieve. As the year progressed it was great also to welcome back the Young Rangers to FtF, who work with us once a month, and to see the return of corporate and community groups offering their much appreciated practical, as well as financial, support.

As we head into winter the work parties continue unabated, albeit at lower levels, (the top of Helvellyn in January may be a bridge too far, even for our hardy volunteers!), and there are always plenty of paths to visit in preparation for next year.

Matt's year in numbers:

Work Parties with volunteers	57
Volunteer days on Work Parties	281
Individual Volunteers on Work Parties	69
Drains repaired or built	26
Stone pitching repaired or built	58 m
Landscaping in conjunction with path repairs	85 m
Other works completed to repair or arrest erosion	100 m
Number of paths work on	16



Rebuilding the Borrowdale megadrain on the Rigghead Quarries path!

2021 Reflections – Annie Duckworth, Lake District National Park Fix the Fells Ranger

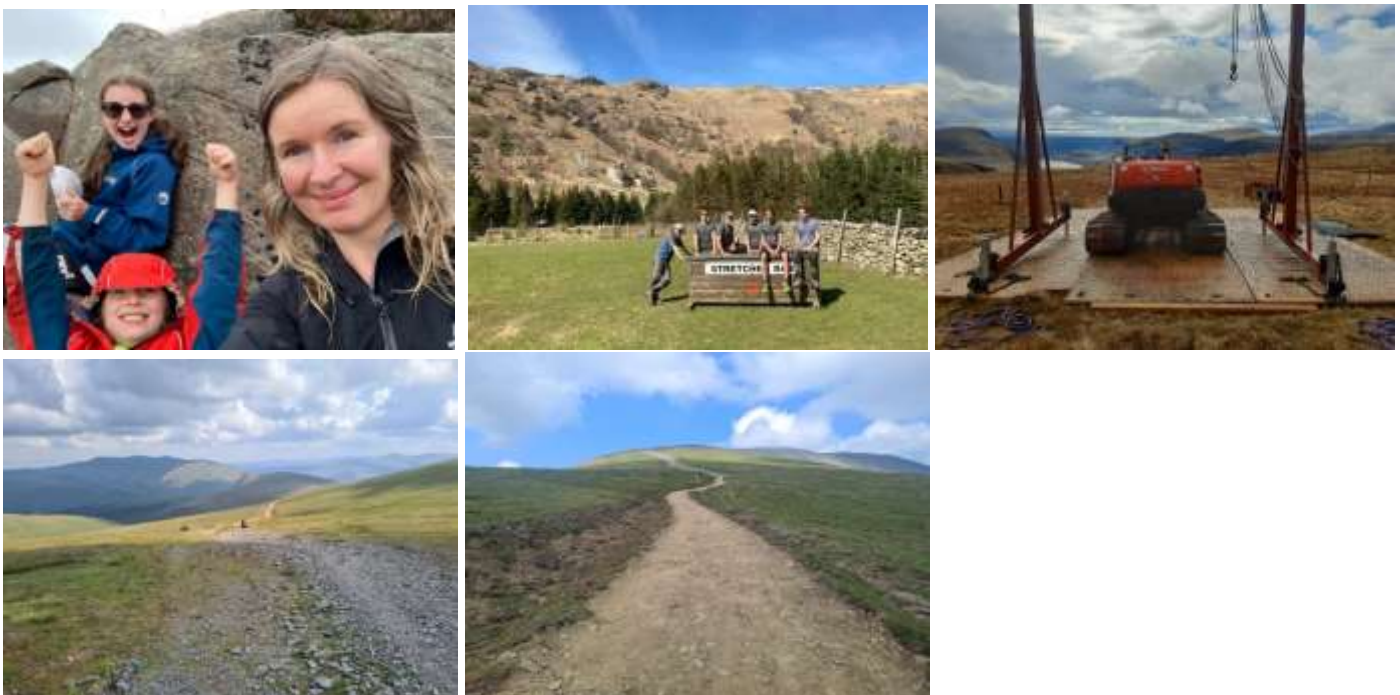
When I think back to this time last year, I was still deciding whether or not to apply for the role of Fix the Fells Ranger. Could I do it was uppermost in my mind. How could I possibly contemplate stepping into the shoes of someone who had done the job so well for so long.....

Well I hope I have given it my best shot and I really have loved (nearly) every minute of it. It is far bigger and far more complex than I could ever have imagined but it's also been more enjoyable and interesting than expected and the team of people I have as colleagues within Fix the Fells are definitely a special bunch. Thank you staff and volunteer colleagues.

So what have I actually achieved this year? Here are some of the highlights:

- Managed two Heli Lifts that flew about 800 tonnes of material including 700 tonnes of stone, a dismantled digger on to Scafell Pike and then off again, a new Mountain Rescue Team stretcher box, two bridges and various other materials required for our operations.

- Overseen the successful completion (including all the logistical negotiations around access and permissions plus regular monitoring) of four machine paths on Armbboth Fell, Scafell Pike, Skiddaw and Askham Fell.
- Prepared the initial specifications for the machine path work planned for 2022 which includes work on Barf, Stephenson Ground, Red Tarn, Angle Tarn and Goats Hawse.
- Visited all of the Ranger teams on a fairly regular basis to see the range and breadth of their work. Collectively staff have worked on an incredible 30 paths this year not to mention all the essential monitoring and maintenance work that our volunteer lengthsmen undertake.
- Started to piece together and understand all the amazing work that goes on behind the scenes to keep Fix the Fells funded and functioning – fundraising, accounting, administration of the calendar to name but a few!
- Acquired my own giant paper copy of the lengthsmen's map, overlain with the boundaries of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest and important archaeological sites.
- Developed relationships with various stakeholders and partners through meetings and fieldtrips to showcase our work.
- Developed and trialed a new system for recording and evidencing our work – an essential requirement for our funders.
- Asked lots of questions and learnt lots about various aspects of Rights of Way management including negotiating the complex tiers of interaction that exist in a National Park.
- Realised that I made absolutely the right decision in applying for the job and hope that sentiment is reciprocated.



Annie and her children, the Ranger team moving the stretcher box for the Mountain Rescue, the gantry on Scafell Pike used to assemble and dis-assemble the digger on the mountain, the machine path on Skiddaw before and after work

Marking 20 years of Fix the Fells

This year Fix the Fells marked its 20th anniversary and we looked back at some of the changes we've seen during that time. You can read more about this and other news on our website here: [Fix the Fells Twentieth Anniversary – Fix The Fells](#). This includes some remarkable “Before and After” images illustrating the recovery made possible by our work, for example in the Langdale valley shown below.

This is all thanks to your fantastic help and we couldn't achieve it without you. We thank you most sincerely because together we're tackling erosion in the Lake District fells and protecting the scenery and environment for future generations to enjoy.



Stickle Ghyll, Langdale before (1985 – left) and after (2021 – right) work by Fix the Fells



A panorama over Crummock Water from House Point – David Brooks