



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

Fix the Fells Newsletter Summer 2023



Members of the Fix the Fells North, South and West Ranger teams go for the 'many hands make light work' approach, high on Whiteless Pike (Buttermere) earlier this spring. Photo credit: Ted Everitt-Stewart

Continuity and Change – Isabel Berry, Fix the Fells Partnership Manager

This year Fix the Fells carries on doing what it does the best; repairing upland erosion and maintaining paths across the fells of the Lake District, so that the beautiful and fragile upland habitats are conserved and protected for a sustainable, healthy future. However, 2023 also brings some changes. February saw new Partnership Manager Isabel Berry start with Fix the Fells for a thorough, extended handover with retiring Programme Manager Joanne Backshall.

Joanne’s achievements with Fix the Fells were notable, including helping to substantially raise the profile of the partnership and overseeing the successful delivery of over £1.5m of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded path work. She was treated to heartfelt thanks and a very warm send-off, with a double leaving **do...** First up, a very snowy outing with the National Trust Ranger teams to look at forthcoming Coast to Coast path work. And secondly, a path maintenance day in Langdale followed by tea, speeches and a presentation with Fix the Fells volunteers. We are immensely grateful for the strong position which Joanne passes Fix the Fells forward in.



Taking over the reins, Isabel has been focused on building understanding of the many different aspects of Fix the Fells; spending time with staff, volunteers, our partner organisations and other stakeholders. This will continue over the coming months, to help inform planning for the 2024 season and onwards. Change also comes with the ending of the ERDF grant in June. Fix the Fells moves forward, taking

the very best learnings and practice from ERDF and building on all that ERDF has delivered for Fix the Fells. Ranger teams are implementing responsive work plans and Fix the Fells will develop new funding streams which offer a long term, sustainable funding base. Of course, our work **wouldn’t be possible** without the energy, passion and support of everyone who contributes to Fix the Fells; from our Ranger teams to our volunteers, our funders and donors, our partners and stakeholders, and all those who advocate for, and champion our work. Thank you very much!

Image above: South Lakes Ranger team installing stepping stones on the Levers Water to Swirl Hawse path (Coniston).

South Lakes Ranger Team – Ben Brady



The South Lakes team, despite its name, has historically worked on projects across the whole of the National Park, so for me it is always exciting to get to work on the Coniston fells, which are on the doorstep of our office. One of our main pieces of work this year is the path from Levers Water to Swirl Hawse. The path rises through a dramatic and beautiful valley, with some sensitive areas including peatland and bogs however, some of these habitats

are being eroded. The right of way through the valley is indistinct and is causing walkers to take varying lines which are causing the erosion problems. Our goal is to focus on making the right of way (as seen on maps and apps) more identifiable, walkable and sustainable, in the hope that it will take the foot fall pressure away from the areas we are trying to protect.

Our team line up is currently going through changes so without further ado!... Firstly, we are very excited to welcome Bob who joined us back in May and has unanimously impressed us all. The South team is also looking forward to the return of team member Kevin in July, who has been on secondment to the West team for two years, and will bring plenty of previous upland experience. Assistant Ranger Greg will be leaving us in July to take up a Ranger **position with the National Trust's North Lakes Estate team.** And finally, after an amazing seven years of working for the Fix the Fells, and with a heavy heart, I will be leaving the team on a two-year secondment at the end of June to pursue a different path with the National Trust. I cannot overstate my appreciation for the brilliant and passionate staff and volunteers **that I've had the pleasure of working alongside,** and also what a privilege it has been to contribute to the conservation of Lake District fells.



Images: Top left: Ranger Bob takes shelter during a break from filling heli-bags with stone. Bottom right: Working on stone pitching on the Wythburn path above Thirlmere.

West Lakes Ranger Team - Iain Gray

We Know What We Did Last
Summer...

...and it will be more of the same
for this year's sequel.

Following on from last summer's path building in Hollow Stones [on the main route up Scafell Pike from Wasdale Head] we will be spending the upcoming season continuing with stage two of the project. This will involve connecting the newly widened and straightened path with the existing route above and below it.



Having spent all of last summer working within a fenced exclusion zone to protect the path-side landscaping, this year we will be removing parts of the fence to allow us to complete stage two. This will allow the public to walk along the newly completed section for the first time. For the official opening ceremony, when we will be cutting the fence, we managed to source some red



tape and a pair of scissors but were unable to buy a magnum of champagne on the National Trust expense account, so we will make do with a more informal, low-key event!

Stage three will involve removing the original path stonework. We will then aim to restore the whole area around the new route to something resembling a natural landscape. This will include a naturalised rocky channel to

contain an occasional storm spring, which after heavy rain spurts huge amounts of water like an ornamental fountain down the hillside. This could spill over into next year, so the overall project will have occupied three years... though we will be completed long before HS2.

Images: Top right: The top of the new section of pitching, ready for tying into the existing path above it. Bottom left: Looking down the new pitching; landscaping and tidying up works still to be completed.

Central and East Ranger Team – Jonny Skinn

The first few months of the fell season for the Central team have had a reflective feel... **We** worked on Stone Arthur (Grasmere) in 2018, and Gowbarrow (Ullswater) in 2019, and we have returned this year to do more work. The work we had done on Stone Arthur previously has worked well, but on other parts of the path we are putting in 80 metres of pitching on some eroded sections of the path. Work has progressed well, in part due to a break from the usual ground profile of bedrock to a softer ground to dig. We also had an enthusiastic helper for a day, Isabel our new Partnership Manager, who came to learn about the nuances of footpath work and how we work as a team.



The first courses of pitching on Stone Arthur (left). 10 metre section of pitching on Stone Arthur (right).

We are now into our fourth year installing the new aggregate path on the Dockray side of Gowbarrow with the Fix the Fells volunteers. The path has settled well in most sections, vegetation has returned well and work continues extending the path further. However, improvements are to **be done on some of the lower sections of the path that haven't worked as well**. Stone risers are being installed in the steeper sections of the path to stabilise the aggregate, and landscaping stones will be dug in to keep people on the path. Also, stone and turf drains will be put in to reduce water damage to the path.

As a team, I think we are aware and proud of the difference we have made over the past few years on these paths but are cognisant that the paths in the Lakes will need to be maintained and improved to protect them **from further erosion. That's why Fix the Fells is such an important** partnership, and we will do our bit as a team.

North Lakes – Martin Mikkelsen-Barron



The fell season kicked off with work up on Rigg Head Quarries (Upper Borrowdale). The path lower down is taking a lot of water causing a big gully to form. To combat this, several cross drains have been installed using end-on slate techniques, that will **flow into a “mega drain”** *see photo left.*

Above Rigg Head Quarry and below Dalehead Tarn, an area of peat had been drying up *see photo below left.* To combat this, it has been a very satisfying job to put in several leaky

dams using the bags of stones pictured, combined with soil and turf. This has really helped to retain water within the peatland, creating pools *see photo below right:*



Fix the Fells is entirely funded by donations and we couldn't do what we do without the generous support of our partner organisations, volunteers and donors. Every donation is needed and every donation makes a difference. You can support us in so many different ways... If you'd like to make a donation today, you can do so [here: Donate – Fix The Fells](#) . You can also support us by sharing what Fix the Fells does with others; talking to friends and family about how to tread lightly in the fells; or if you'd like to leave a gift in your will to Fix the Fells, please contact Isabel: Isabel.berry@nationaltrust.org.uk to find out more.

After the success of the bench path last year on Whiteless Pike (Buttermere), armed with the services of some of the South Lakes and West Lakes teams, and the Northern estates team, more than 100 metres of bench path were recently put in on the steep, upper slopes over a couple of days. *See photo right.*



Catbells (Derwentwater) is a very well used and challenging hill to work on, but this also makes it rewarding to try and make a **difference. Whilst we won't win all the battles**, to win some is a success. Our aim on Catbells has been to define a line and shut off other routes with various landscaping techniques, thus helping to prevent the path from widening further and saving what grass there is left. We must say a huge thanks to our fantastic and ever enthusiastic group of volunteers, without whom such large-scale landscaping would have been a daunting task with our small ranger team.

Volunteer Development Ranger – Matt Tweed

The past few months have been a busy period, with some exciting progress in key areas, in addition to the continuation and completion of various volunteer path repairs in Borrowdale, Far Easedale, and around Grasmere.



In the spring months, a large part of the focus has been on the recruitment, training and induction of a new cohort of volunteers. Once again interest has been fantastic, and we are refining our process to make best advantage of the enthusiasm and popularity of the lengthsman scheme. This has included pre-recruitment taster days, more involvement from existing volunteers, and a reserve list to replace anyone dropping out in

the initial stages. It is hoped that these measures will lead to greater retention and involvement from new volunteers and I look forward to helping facilitate the transition from new recruit to skilled and experienced lengthsman.

Image above: Young trees starting to grow on Helvellyn. Recent inspections have revealed a pleasingly high survival rate of the saplings planted in small enclosures over the winter, to block shortcuts and prevent erosion, as well as for nature gains.

In addition, I have been working closely with colleagues and experienced volunteers to improve our systems and practices around Volunteer-Led Work Parties. These are work parties with no staff presence, and while we have always maintained good practice, we felt that more accountability and recording would help us to maximise the potential of this presently expanding area of Fix the Fells.

In March and April, I helped to coordinate the gathering and lifting of stone by helicopter onto four separate sites: The Band in Langdale; Wythburn on the Thirlmere side of Helvellyn; Greenside Mines on the Glenridding side of Helvellyn; and Far Easedale near Grasmere. These sites, along with minor repairs across the whole of the Lakes, will form the bulk of volunteer work as we go into the summer months and beyond.

A warm **'farewell for now'** to Rob Clarke



The end of June sees the end of **an era for one of Fix the Fells'** most well-known Rangers. Rob Clarke has been working on upland paths in the Lakes for a decade and a half in various guises, including through Basecamp working holidays and most recently, specifically employed to Fix the Fells through part of the ERDF funding package. His wide-ranging experience and path-work knowledge, as well as his pragmatic and engaging manner

with Fix the Fells staff, volunteers, working holiday groups and many more, have made him well-liked and respected. We are hugely appreciative of all that he has done for Fix the Fells and he will be greatly missed. With the ERDF funding **for Rob's position ending**, we say farewell for now and wish Rob a fantastic time on his travels this summer. We look forward to seeing Rob back with us to volunteer as soon as he is ready!

Image above: Rob at work on the bridlepath between Ashness Bridge and Walla Crag (Borrowdale).

Volunteer Activity – Jon Whiteley, Volunteer Representative to the Fix the Fells Board

Fix the Fells volunteers have been busy as usual, monitoring the condition of upland paths, clearing the paths and drains of debris, and carrying out minor repairs. After the recent hot and sunny weather, can you remember the bad weather in January and March? That curtailed some activities, but even so volunteers have maintained 300 paths and carried out 87 minor repair work parties in the year to May. In total this amounts to 1,184 days dedicated to practical work on the upland fells.



The annual recruitment of 30 new volunteers was held in February and once again we were oversubscribed. It is great to see that 26 of our new recruits have completed initial training days and are out and about playing their part in Fixing the Fells. In total there are about 120 Fix the Fells volunteers across the Lake District and every day there will be at least one group out somewhere.

After a hard day's work in Langdale recently, a group of thirsty volunteers stopped at the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel for well-earned refreshments. They were surprised to receive a box of knitted hats (see photo above) which had been left for the volunteers by a lady who holidays at the Hotel each year and has seen volunteers out in all weather. We've never met the lady, but thank you, much appreciated!

Machines in the Fells in 2023

This year we've used diggers to repair erosion in several locations. Specialist contractors Terra Firma Environmental have worked on the Greenup Edge section of the popular Coast to Coast route, where it passes over very boggy, high ground between Borrowdale and Grasmere. The digger has laid stone flags (see picture right) over badly damaged peatland to



create a better path surface and allow the surrounding habitat to recover. Terra Firma also completed a section of machine path on Barf (Bassenthwaite) to create a single, sustainable route through the peaty soil, which was being badly damaged with ever-widening paths. The technique of sub-soil inversion was used. Here, the digger digs down to reach the subsoil under



the peat and then turns it all upside-down, so the peat is underneath. The subsoil is then packed down to form a sustainable surface on top, which protects the peat and has the added benefit of creating a durable walking surface, all using nothing but the materials on site. Similar machine work was also completed at Stephenson Ground (Coniston).

Image above: Stone flags laid on Greenup Edge.

