



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

Fix the Fells Newsletter Winter 2022



Surprise View, Borrowdale – picture by David Brooks

A year of tender loving care – Joanne Backshall, Fix the Fells Programme Manager

We've had a successful year in 2022 with our Rangers and Volunteers repairing erosion and maintaining paths all over the Lake District fells. From Scafell in the west to Conistون Old Man in the south and Skiddaw in the north, the fells have really needed their tender loving care. We hope you enjoy reading their stories below and hearing how they look after the fabulous scenery we enjoy. We couldn't continue this work without your help. So a heartfelt thank you from the whole Fix the Fells team to everyone who supports and donates to our cause. Any size of donation is welcome at any time and can be made here: [Donate – Fix The Fells](#). Thank you.



Rangers Nathan (right) and Greg (left) working on the Wythburn path up Helvellyn

South Lakes Ranger Team – Greg Dobrzanski

The South Lakes team have spent much of the season on Helvellyn, stone pitching an eroding section of the popular Wythburn track. It was only once we'd begun the job that myself and the two other new members of the team realised how complicated a skill stone pitching is. With this new understanding of the work and skills required, it quickly dawned on me how much I'd been taking upland paths for granted.

Being new to the role I didn't need long to appreciate the patience required in moving and manoeuvring the stones into their correct position. There are a lot of factors to consider and even when painstakingly selected and measured, a stone might still not prove quite right for that particular section of the path. A hard learnt lesson when it came to removing them from the waterlogged ground.

This year's Wythburn project was only made possible by the hard work put in by Fix the Fells volunteers, who collected and bagged the stone on our behalf. Every stone has served as a reminder of the humbling dedication Fix the Fells volunteers show and the sheer number of people invested in keeping the Lakeland fells robust and healthy.

It feels a genuine privilege to work for Fix the Fells and contribute to a lasting and positive impact on the environment. The scale of what we've achieved amazes me and fuels my heartfelt desire to continue with fell work for many years to come.

North Lakes Ranger Team – Martin Mikkelsen-Barron

The fell season has flown by for me! Most recently we've been working on Whiteless Pike overlooking Buttermere putting in what we call a bench path. We've had the luxury of enlisting the help of the very able National Trust Estate team and some of our Fix the Fells colleagues from the West and South Lakes for a few days. This has been of great help in getting the job completed before the winter and weather rolls in. It's also a great boost to morale, achieving more faster when we're working as a collective.



Erosion on Whiteless Pike above Buttermere before work (left) and the newly created bench path (right)

Before we began work on Whiteless Pike the steep grassy bank was becoming heavily eroded, existing stone pitching either had or was falling out, and something needed to be done. A bench path, which lies across the slope and has a shallower gradient, has been a great way to secure a large metrage of path in a more economical and greener way than stone pitching. To ensure the path gets used and people don't cut corners care has been taken to not make the zig zags too tight or steep and the space between has been carefully landscaped.

A personal record for our team was set with our work at Calf Cove, Borrowdale; our highest ever work site. With the long walk in and changing seasons, the weather windows and time were against us, but we were all up for the

challenge. We managed to get the job done over five twelve-hour long days up there. We had limited rock available and we needed all of it. The pitching was a challenge, to make the best use of the rock available to gain significant height and turn a corner between and over bedrock, whilst leaving ourselves with enough material to create a revetment wall and pin and landscape the path into place.



The path on Calf Cove before (left) and after (right) work

In July a large group of volunteers were met with unusually sun-baked slopes on Sail Fell above Derwent Water, with a challenging walk up through Stonycroft Gill's cauldron of oppressive heat. The polar opposite to the rain and strong winds when we were last up there!

The zig zag machine path on Sail has been largely successful but there are still large numbers of people cutting the corners and creating many separate erosion scars. This means lots of work is needed to correct the problem. With such a strong group of enthusiastic willing volunteers many hands really did make light work - well maybe not light work - but you get the gist! Over the few days we spent there, 300 metres of path were repaired, lots of turf was dug and placed and many trugs of soil were displaced from hollows to make bunds. All this work will hopefully reduce the increasing erosion on the thin soils and vegetation here and help to protect the landscape and its wildlife.

Central & Eastern Lakes Ranger Team – Jonathan Skinn

There have been a lot of wet feet and soggy boots for the Central team since we finished on Loughrigg in June and moved across to Bracken Hause over in Easedale. We've been made significant progress installing over 150m of stone pitching up some relatively steep ground alongside a beck. It had become badly eroded over the years due to footfall and the amount of water that flows down the path from the ridge line above. Like any site it presents its own issues and with Bracken Hause it has been dealing with the exceptionally moist ground. We have been able to curtail the flow of the water down the path by installing regular stone cross drains and a stone ford across the beck.

We've also been continuing with our monthly volunteer work parties on the Gowbarrow path from the Dockray side. We've made good progress installing more aggregate path and stone cross drains above the pitching we installed last year. The volunteers have been key to the progress we have made over the past few years and will continue to be next year as we carry on chipping away at this massive project. The work the volunteers and team have completed, installing such a great path, and the amount effort that has gone into landscaping around it has led to much habitat and vegetation returning to previously eroded areas. It is quite a daunting project that seems to have no end, so it is nice to see the hard work of the Fix the Fells volunteers and staff really paying off.



Bracken Haise - The general experience for most of the team on Bracken Haise (left) A bird's eye view of the finished sections of pitching, landscaping, stone ford and drains (right)

West Lakes Ranger Team – Staying on the Straight and (Not so) Narrow - Iain Gray

Once again we concentrated on the main route to Scafell Pike from Wasdale Head – by far the most popular walk in the Western valleys. Specifically, a section of eroded hillside where a narrow winding path was being ignored in favour of a more direct “desire line”, which was turning a grassy hillside into a bare scree slope.

Our solution was to pitch a wider, straighter path up the preferred route then remove and re-landscape the original line. So with 200 bags of stone placed along the route we aimed to build 150 metres of new path.

We focussed unswervingly on this single course laid out before us. Scorning deviations, diversions, distractions, dalliances or detours (and certainly no U-turns!) we ploughed a metaphorical furrow up the new line.

A frequent query from passers-by confused by the sight of a new path being built parallel with the existing one often prompted the response: “No, we aren’t upgrading to dual carriageway, nor are we adding an overtaking lane.”

A new feature this year was the enclosure fence between the work area and the original path - to a certain extent a safety fence but also a means of protecting the partly landscaped path edges from trampling before they become firmly rooted and established.

Once the new path is complete next year’s task will be to remove the old pitching and restore the area to natural looking mountainside.



Looking back at what we achieved this summer on the main route up Scafell Pike, Wasdale

ERDF Volunteer Co-ordinator – Rob Clarke

With their regular walking of the Lake District upland paths for minor maintenance, the Fix the Fells Volunteers are essential to noticing and reporting on developing erosion issues. This enables the partnership to keep on top of problems and deal with them before they become much bigger.

This year a few of my jobs came via this route. A collapsing ‘revetment’ wall (a wall that runs under and supports the path) at the top of The Band and a badly damaged older stretch of path built on sheep fleece on Martcrag Moor were both reported by the volunteers and then quickly dealt with by volunteer work parties – often attended by the same people that reported them. For the work on Martcrag Moor we were also joined by volunteers from Friends of the Lake District (FOLD) as part of their ‘Great Landscapes’ festival.



Langdale Coombe: Left picture – old path leading to bog, reeds and ground to the right trampled by walkers seeking drier line. Right picture – old path closed, new line and ‘high and dry’ causeway installed

All of this partnership work is Fix the Fells' greatest strength. Being able to react quickly to reported problems saves us much more work in the long run and working with other organisations helps us spread understanding and grow support.

But it's not all just reactive, planned projects have also continued this year. Amongst other things we've completed many more sections of work on The Band, constructed a lovely causeway across a badly trampled wet flush on Langdale Coombe, shored up and protected existing 'on end' pitching on The Yoke and repaired stepping-stones on St Raven's Edge. With winter now upon us volunteer work parties will continue, but we'll look to jobs that are lower and more accessible.

Volunteer Development Ranger – Matt Tweed

Progress continues apace, with dozens of minor repair jobs completed on paths across the Lakes. With responsibility across the whole of the National Park, my work programme is dictated somewhat by the reporting of the dedicated volunteer path maintenance programme, which acts as an 'early warning system' of erosion. With much of our funding coming from the European Regional Development Fund until June 2023 there has been a particular emphasis on those paths, such as around Helvellyn, Grasmere, and Borrowdale, which fall under this remit.



Volunteers descending from Sergeant Man above Stickle Tarn (left) and building a drain on Coniston Old Man (right)

Together with NT path team supervisors and experienced lengthsman I have expanded the unsupervised works programme, affording those volunteers with the requisite skills and experience to tackle repair jobs on their own. Thanks to their fantastic commitment, we are making real inroads into the seemingly endless job list, and it is expected that this approach will continue to evolve in the years ahead.

In the spring we welcomed, after a two year hiatus, a fresh intake of volunteers. It has been a pleasure to see new faces out and about, particularly after the enforced break due to the pandemic. The fantastic mentoring system allows new members to integrate seamlessly into Fix the Fells, reflected in the high retention rate and prodigious attendance of many of these newbies. Work has already commenced on next year's volunteer recruitment, with our approach fine-tuned to make the process more streamlined than ever and to ensure we can take on the right people from the many that apply. Spending wet, muddy, and cold days out on the fells isn't for everyone, however rewarding the work!

As we look forward to the winter and the start of a new year, there's no shortage of work on the horizon. Over the winter I tend to focus on lower level work, for obvious reasons, so I'll be starting jobs at Watendlath in Borrowdale

and near Langdale, as well as an exciting project to build mini tree enclosures to encourage walkers to stay on designated paths, and to help improve tree cover and biodiversity on the fells. A new approach for Fix the Fells, but just one of the many ways that we are striving to always do what we can to tackle erosion issues across the Lake District landscape.

Volunteer activity in 2022

To the end of October 2022 the Fix the Fells Volunteers had contributed an amazing 2,200 days of work. This is more than in the whole 2019 pre-pandemic year!

Rangers and volunteers actively work on and maintain 209 paths, totalling over 400 miles or 666 km of path. These are all visited on a regular basis every two, three, four, six or 12 months, with the frequency being determined by their level of use and the amount of erosion. By the end of October, volunteers had walked a total of 679 paths, some of them many times, in order to clear the drains and the stone pitching and to identify and report any issues. They had also undertaken an incredible 203 work parties to carry out repairs to eroded paths.

The volunteers monitor a further 195 paths annually or bi-annually and are also surveying another 327 paths. We couldn't continue to look after the upland network without their fantastic commitment and we're so grateful for all their help.



Fix the Fells volunteers on the fells above Grasmere – ©National Trust Images/Paul Harris

Tales from a Before and After Crafter – Mark Dakin, Fix the Fells Volunteer

I started volunteering with FtF in 2016 after I retired from my job as an accountant. Living in Sheffield and with young(ish) family, I couldn't get up to the Lakes that often but wanted to contribute in other ways, as I had plenty of time and enthusiasm to commit. With a very amateur interest in photography, I offered to develop the project's Flickr feed, which had 6,000 photos on it. However, with no underlying album structure, it was just a jumble of photos filed in chronological order. As part of this project, we asked all the Ranger teams for their photos, to build up a central record of the paths. Richard Fox, who had been the FtF Ranger in LDNP for nearly twenty years, admitted to having collected over 30,000 photos in his time, a mixture of slides, prints and digital images. He softened the impact of this confession by offering me the use of a professional scanner that he had borrowed from a friend.

As I was uploading the photos from the teams onto Flickr, I came across a few examples of Before & After photos. There weren't many of them and most of the Afters had been taken immediately after the work had been finished, before the team moved on to the next job. It was a great idea to do Before & Afters but I felt those early examples did not show our work off to best effect.



Wansfell above Ambleside 2001 vs 2019

When I was ploughing through the "Fox archives", I suddenly realised that I had found a goldmine of Befores that were just crying out for Afters. Richard gave me a list of the paths where work had been done and I started visiting them.

I have now got Before & Afters of around 40 paths and have learned a few lessons. Firstly, a good Before will have some prominent features and preferably a sky-line in it to help you find the right location. This also helps viewers to appreciate that both photos are taken from the same point. Secondly, it's important to think laterally when taking an After. Trees, rocks, even walls and paths, can all move over time, making it difficult to line up the same shot. Also, I never quite worked out which side of a slide to scan so it's a 50/50 chance that the resulting print is back to front. This can be quite a challenge when out on the path. Thank goodness for the "Flip" function on Photo software.



Redacre Gill in Langdale 2000 vs 2019

So, which are my personal favourites? I've a soft spot for Wansfell, as it was one of the first ones I did and it proved that the exercise was worth doing – a "proof of concept" if you like. Another favourite is Redacre Gill in Langdale. This scar was visible for miles around and the vegetation has recovered really well.



Yoke to Ill Bell above Kentmere 2001 vs 2019

The photo of Yoke to Ill Bell shows the path constructed by machine has protected the peat, allowing it to revegetate. Finally, I like the one of the Wythburn path as both photos were taken on a beautiful day – it’s just a shame that I didn’t get the water levels in Thirlmere quite right. If you have any old photos showing the state of the paths, I would be delighted to see them. Please e-mail them, if possible with a description of where they are, to mark.dakin1@nationaltrust.org.uk.



Wythburn, Helvellyn 1994 vs 2019

Machines in the Fells in 2022

This year we’ve used diggers to repair erosion in several locations. Specialist contractors Terra Firma Environmental have worked on a long section of the path from Glenridding to Red Tarn on the way up to Helvellyn from Glenridding. They have also been at work on the paths leading to Angle Tarn from Patterdale in the Ullswater Valley. Their next project for us is 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 will lay stone flags over badly damaged peatland to create a better path surface and allow the surrounding habitat to recover. On some sections they will be “sub-soiling” which involves finding and using material on site to create a better surface for the many enjoying this long-distance path.



Coast to Coast path over Greenup Edge (left) and stone flags ready to be flown by helicopte to create a path (right)

Fix the Fells wins Park Protector Award

Fix the Fells is delighted and honoured to win this year’s Park Protector Award in recognition of its on-going work to protect the Cumbrian landscape. The award, run by Campaign for National Parks and sponsored by WWF-UK, recognises and rewards the efforts of those protecting and improving National Parks in England and Wales. The award was announced in July at a ceremony in the Houses of Parliament which was attended by MPs, Lords and leading civil servants. It is a wonderful acknowledgment of the hard work of all those involved in Fix the Fells for the last 21 years, who have contributed so much to looking after the Lake District’s upland environment.

European Regional Development Fund ending

We’re 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.

The ERDF-funded project ends at the end of June 2023 and we’ll have a significant funding gap to fill. 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 income sources to enable us to continue.



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