

Pete Entwistle

EVERY SATURDAY EVENING, young Barrow-in-Furness-born Pete Entwistle would help his dad apply dubbin to the family's boots, ready for their next fell adventure – he reckons he'd scaled all of Lakeland's peaks by his eleventh birthday. He has spent the last twenty-five years repairing and future-proofing our upland trails as a member of the Fix the Fells team. As team leader for the Central and East Lakes, he and his team of four – along with 150 volunteers – maintain paths around Langdale, Grasmere, Windermere and Ullswater.

How were you introduced to the fells?

My parents had always been keen fell walkers. As soon as my sister and I were able to stand unsupported we would be taken walking in Lakeland. You could almost call it a religion: every Sunday, regardless of the weather, we would be out in the Lakes somewhere. One of my earliest memories is of building snowmen on the way to summit of Coniston Old Man. It seemed to me as a child that there were several feet of snow on the ground and playing in the snow was more exciting than walking up a hill. I hate to think how long it took us to actually get to the top.



As a keen wildlife photographer, do you take your camera along on work days?

Much as I'd like to, I don't. As any fell walker will understand, I'm obsessed with the weight of my rucksack and anything that's unnecessary for the day's work on the fell won't be getting carried.

Damage caused by Storm Desmond has kept you busy for years. Do you see it as a warning on the environment?

Climate Change is a very emotive subject for many and a very complicated issue. All I can say is that, in the twenty-five years I've worked in the fells, I've noticed we now tend

to get much heavier downpours, more frequently. The amount of material we lose from the fells in the form of soil and stone during these periods is worrying: a single path can lose hundreds of tonnes in a year, which ends up in the rivers and lakes, damaging to those ecosystems.

What led you into the job of Fix the Fells ranger?

Despite doing engineering at university, I was always interested in the outdoors, Nature, wildlife and conservation. A radical rethink of how I wanted to spend my working life led me to volunteer for various conservation organisations which in turn led to obtaining short-term contracts and eventually the job I do now, which combines my love for the fells with working outdoors and conservation work, although there are bad weather days when I'd prefer to be inside.

What meaning do the fells have for you?

It's a way of reconnecting with Nature and putting my life into perspective. It's easy to get lost in the pressures of everyday living, and being outside in the mountains somehow acts as a stress reliever. When I think about natural processes that created the mountains and lakes it helps me to understand what's important in life.

How do you enjoy the outdoors when not at work?

Believe it or not my spare time includes going for walks, though not as much as before I started doing this job. The walks are generally a lot shorter now and not as high. I've also got a keen interest in wildlife and Nature and will visit nature reserves and other places. It's not unknown for me to spend hours looking for a particular plant, or on a fellside looking for mountain ringlets.

What projects are currently keeping you busy?

We're planning to work on Loughrigg, from the Terrace to the Summit, in 2020. Anybody who has walked in this area will know just how popular it can be. As you can imagine, the path up to Loughrigg Summit is one of the busiest in the Lakes and understandably so, for such a small fell the top gives an impressive 360-degree view of the surrounding lakes and fells.

The path has been worked on in the past but with the increase in footfall over the years it needs extensive repairs. This will make it "future proof" and continue to allow the varied users groups good access to the summit and those amazing views.

How do you answer criticism of more heavily engineered paths, such as that on Sale on the Coledale Round?

Path repair work is an emotive subject. All I can say is that, as life-long fell walker and as a path worker for the last twenty-five years, I wouldn't be doing this work if I didn't believe in what I was doing. We're always looking for new ways to repair paths in a sympathetic way and to take into account all the user groups. Sometimes the options are very limited but we'll always do the best we can with the resources we have.

Will our trails ever be robust enough for you to retire early?

I've worked on many paths in the Langdale, Grasmere and Ullswater area that were badly eroded; some were more than twenty metres wide. They are no longer vulnerable to erosion from visitor pressure as long as they are maintained.

I think in the long term, as long as we continue as we are, there will be a point at which many of the busy paths will be robust enough, but they will still need to be maintained by skilled staff. My concern is that if visitor numbers continue to grow the quieter paths will become vulnerable to visitor pressure and ultimately erosion.

Most inspirational book about Lakeland?

I would say the Wainwright books, because I grew up with them. My Dad was always fingering through them, looking for the next walk and reading out loud from them when we were out and about. These days I have a bit of a love-hate relationship with them, as they're partly responsible for the state of erosion on some of the paths.

What personal item in your rucksack are you never without?

Binoculars: you never know what wildlife might cross your path.



Desert Island tune for tramping the fells?

I prefer the peace and quiet, with just the sounds of nature.

Who – living or dead – would you like to share a fell day with?

Ernest Shackleton. The story of how he and his team survived the harsh Antarctic environment is inspirational.

Map and compass, GPS or smartphone app – and why?

I've always embraced new technology if it makes my life easier but I would always choose a map and compass. I guess having grown up using a map and compass I'm fairly confident in using them to navigate. We use GPS in our work but the battery life can be a bit hit and miss, which can be very frustrating. I believe there's no substitute for the ability to navigate with map and compass even if it's a back-up to a GPS or smart phone.

Where do you enjoy a holiday, if not in Lakeland?

Scotland, enjoying walks in the mountains and along the coast.

Do you prefer a tent or a comfy bed (or other)?

A comfy bed – I value my sleep too much.

What is the worst mishap to have befallen you in the fells?

One day, while we were working at Angle Tarn in Langdale in bad weather with the usual wind, rain and bad visibility, we decided to take a shortcut back down. I took the lead as I thought I knew the area well, having taken the route hundreds of times – a cross-country route past Rossett Pike, towards Stake Pass. We had no



map and compass but I was fairly sure that, by using the direction of the wind to navigate, it wouldn't be a problem. After walking for what seemed too long, we reached a path which looked familiar, only to find that we'd done a 180-degree turn and ended up back at Angle Tarn.

Best piece of advice for aspiring fell-walkers?

Enjoy the experience and take your time, don't be in a rush to finish your walk, unless it's starting to get dark or it's wet and cold. 🍷

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