

Volunteer lengthsmen update – a true Cumbria joins our team!



'2019 is certainly shaping up to be another exceptional and potential record-breaking year for Fix the Fells volunteering. So far this year 596 lengthsmen drain runs have been undertaken and 160 work parties have been completed, all of which have helped contribute to our impressive total of 2164 upland days. These numbers put us ahead of where we were at the equivalent point in 2018, so a really great year is certainly on the cards for 2019. However, Fix the Fells volunteering is not about numbers, it is about people enthusiastically and enjoyably contributing to the collective team effort to repair and maintain the fells.

In that respect, volunteer recruitment has also proved successful in 2019 with 30 new recruits inducted into the Fix the Fells lengthsmen ranks and now actively contributing. One particularly keen and hardworking new recruit Graeme has already managed to contribute more than 65 days since starting with us earlier this year. Unlike many of us lengthsmen who are somewhat 'incomers' to this wonderful Lake District area, Graeme comes from tough Cumbrian farming stock and is a real character! We asked Graeme for his thoughts on joining the Fix the Fells volunteer lengthsmen team.

"Growing up and working on my parent's Lakeland sheep farm, I took the surrounding fells, lakes and countryside in general entirely for granted. It was not until I moved away, having then to frequently return to the Lake District as a visitor to get my fell wandering fix, that it really dawned on me that it is such an exceptionally beautiful area.

I first became aware of FTF in early 2008 and remember thinking that this may well be a very worthwhile leisure occupation with which to get involved, but probably not until I retire and am able to move back 'yam' (home/Cumbria). Both of these have now happened, favourably about ten years earlier than anticipated.

Having completed my due diligence on FTF and despite my aversion to admin and classrooms, I duly completed my application form and attended the induction day. Practical training with feet on the fells then followed over the next few months. This was split between the NT Volunteer Development Ranger and experienced lengthsmen. Techniques acquired whilst farming, renovating period properties and as a mechanical engineer served me well in becoming skilled at 'fettlin' (fixing) fell paths.

Other more innate traits that help include not being 'flait' (frightened) of a hard day of physical work in the 'slape clart' (slippery mud) whilst 'clouting clemmies' (hitting stones) and absolutely relishing the spirited banter, crack and 'yatter' (conversation). Fell 'yakkas' (farmers) are more weathered than most and 'owt' (anything) but soft. Not feeling the need to don my waterproofs at the first sign of rain, or indeed at all until it is 'comin' doon yal watter' (raining heavily), saves some faffing, as very often only a few minutes later it will have stopped 'stotting doon' (raining heavily.....yes, funnily enough, we have more than one way of being eloquent about the rain!) and they will be 'tekken' (taken) off again.



Working alongside like-minded volunteers and NT rangers preserving this spectacular landscape is incredibly gratifying and I get to address some of my guilt for once having taken the Lake District for granted."

It is really great having you on board Graeme!

Barry and Graeme
Fix the Fells volunteers
November 2019

FTF visit to Loch Lomond Volunteer Development Ranger update



'In mid-October volunteers and staff hit the road north to spend a weekend with the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), working on footpaths around their Ben Lomond property amidst the stunning scenery of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. These visits are an opportunity to build relationships, share best practice, and hone our skills in other mountain regions of the UK. It also doesn't hurt that the support we provide means we can rely on reciprocal visits when help is needed on some of our own Fix the Fells projects back here in the Lakes!

Our accommodation for the weekend was the NTS bunkhouse by the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond. Just off the famous West Highland Way, which winds for 95 spectacular miles from the outskirts of Glasgow to Fort William in the Highlands, the cosy and very comfy bunkhouse is squeezed between the dark brooding waters of mainland Britain's largest lake and the looming hulk of our 47th highest peak. At 974m Ben Lomond, or 'Beacon Hill', dominates the eastern shore of its namesake loch. On a clear day it can be seen from as far away as Ben Nevis 40 miles to the north, or the mean streets of Glasgow, about the same to the south. It can easily be climbed in a day trip from the city and is often referred to as 'Glasgow's Hill'. No surprise it is one of Scotland's most accessible and popular Munros – mountains over 3000ft.



All this footfall, often people's first tentative steps in the Scottish uplands or the culmination of an odyssey to climb all 282 Munros, inevitably takes its toll. Maintaining and repairing the paths that lead to the summit is a full-time task, and with the limited resources at the disposal of NTS Ranger Alisdair, our regular visits provide much-needed and appreciated assistance. Due to the skills and experience acquired by our dedicated Fix the Fells volunteers, not to mention the (ahem) expert guidance of NT and particularly NTS staff, we are able to make a real contribution to looking after this incredible Highland landscape.

I know I am not alone in voicing how privileged and rewarding it feels to work with like-minded people to help conserve our precious upland landscapes – wherever they may be. Long may we continue to do so.'



Matt Tweed
Volunteer Development Ranger