



National  
Trust

# Fix the Fells

About our upland footpath and  
conservation work in partnership

Autumn 2013

## What is Fix the Fells?

Fix the Fells (FTF) is a long-term partnership now lead by the National Trust, working with the Lake District National Park Authority, Friends of the Lake District, Natural England, Nurture Lakeland and Cumbria County Council.

The partners are committed to helping repair and prevent further damage to this unique upland landscape and promote understanding and support for its rich heritage. Most of the work is funded by donations, legacies and grants.

The National Trust specialist Upland Ranger Teams carry out much of the repair work, usually focussing on a handful of major projects each year.

Our volunteers come from Cumbria and beyond. Some are retired and others work full-time but they all have one thing in common—they love the fells!

There are 81 volunteers (48 male and 33 female) and they are referred to as 'lengthsmen'. This term comes from medieval times when lengthsmen would be paid to walk the length of the parish and repair any roads and unblock ditches.

To date this year, volunteers have gifted over 900 days on mountain and lower level path work at our properties. We couldn't do all this without their enthusiasm and support.

## Basecamp—Rob Clarke, Community Ranger

After the rigours of the tough winter it's been a good summer, with our planned projects proceeding well. Along with the South Lakes path team we've worked on the path from Blea Tarn to the Wrynose Pass, initially with the second year outdoor studies students from Kendal College. This was a little before the good weather started properly but despite some very wet days they learnt an awful lot about the problem of path erosion, ways to tackle it and how to walk responsibly on the fells. Hopefully when they are leading outdoor groups in the future they will pass these messages on to lots of other fell users, making our job easier!

The path is quite accessible and we can work on it with volunteer groups who wouldn't be capable of walking into the uplands, giving them a chance to take part in fixing the fells. One such group came from Brentwood House, a drop-in support centre from Middleton near Manchester. It was very impressive how despite not having tackled something like this before, the group supported each other for the whole day. Everyone was very buoyed up by the experience and what they achieved, feelings they said they'd take back with them to Manchester.



West Runton Scripture Union, a young persons' group, worked here as well. The organisation has been coming to Basecamp since 1969, stays for two weeks and always spends their first week on upland path work. They've worked high up above the Kirkstone Pass for the past seven years so were pleased to have a change of venue this year especially with the shorter walk in... In fact, they enjoyed the work so much they requested an extra day here, the first time that's happened!

Our other job was above Stake Pass with the Fix the Fells lengthsmen. Over three days, a veritable army of these fantastic regular volunteers came out to help us extend the new sustainable path we started last year with our working holidays. It's built on sheep wool to 'float' over the peaty ground and needed lots of digging and moving materials (turf, peat, gravelly subsoil) so we were really grateful for all this help. It was a very social affair and nice to be able to offer Basecamp for the lengthsmen to stay in, which meant those who came from further away could participate for the whole weekend.



We'll soon be back out for our upland camping holiday, when everyone camps for three nights and works during the day. Let's hope this decent weather holds!

## West Lakes, repairing the roof of England—Iain Gray

How many stones do you think there are in this cairn? Actually there aren't any because since this picture was taken during our wild camping working holiday we completely removed this quite unnecessary edifice from the side of Ill Crag on the Scafell ridge route from Esk Hause to the Pike. We did intend to keep a tally of the total number of stones but in all the excitement we forgot, so the idea of making this the question in a prize draw had to be shelved.



The British Mountaineering Council helped to fund this work as they'd identified the abundance of cairns as a cause for concern. Several surplus cairns have been removed, leaving just a small number of navigationally useful ones *in situ*. We also spent some time narrowing the path in places where it was beginning to sprawl across the hillside, recreating the natural rocky terrain by redistributing boulders and smaller debris. The semi-arid nature of the Scafell massif meant our usual techniques of soil and turf redistribution along with reseeding were replaced by rather more lunar landscaping tricks.



The next working holiday two weeks later saw us return to the gentler slopes of the Burnmoor bridleway for a couple of days of drain building along with two days of exploring local riding routes. The path here was restored a few years ago using a machine. Although it has proved very popular with walkers and mountain bikers we have noticed some water damage occurring which if left unchecked, could undermine it's long-term future.

So with the aid of eight keen mountain-biking volunteers we set about adding extra drainage in the form of bike-friendly 'waths' – broad and shallow open cross channels which turn water without making cyclists fall off. A total of five waths were built despite the intense heat—yes even in Wasdale! Occasionally we use specialist tools such as this



corner spade... Seriously, we don't break tools all that often! Simon the holiday leader provided some very well-received lemon drizzle cake along with ice cream from a cool box to make the hot weather more tolerable, as well as joining in the drain building. A very intense period of work outside the hottest part of each day resulted in some excellent drains being built which should shed water effectively.



In between these events we found time for another week of joint work with the South Lakes team on Fairfield as well as continuing sporadically our Yewbarrow project."

## Update from the Programme Manager—Tanya Oliver

Summer is always our busiest time of year and the teams have been working hard to complete the various projects we have underway. Fairfield, Yewbarrow, Gowbarrow, Ore Gap, Martcrag Moor, Swirral Edge and Blea Tarn Moss to name just a few have seen our Rangers and volunteers repairing and maintaining the paths. We continue with our work on the Coast to Coast path on the Grasmere to Patterdale stretch. This work is being led by volunteers with special thanks to financial support from the Linley Shaw Foundation.

With regard to funding, the British Mountaineering Council contributed to some work on Scafell Pike this year and recently we've been very fortunate to receive a donation from Walking With The Wounded, a charity that ran a challenge event which took in an ascent of Helvellyn. We appreciate that many groups use the Lake District to run challenge events to benefit their particular causes, so we are delighted when they also choose to give support to Fix the Fells. By helping to look after the landscape today they are playing their part to ensure the Lakes will be just as special when they return again. We'd love to see more challenge event groups following this generous example.

The National Trust has chosen Fix the Fells as one of its key projects to raise funds for this year and September will see the start of a large publicity and fundraising appeal campaign. This is excellent news and we are hoping to raise £300,000 to continue our work for a further two years.

As always, we could not do this work without the support of volunteers and everyone who donates to Fix the Fells. Thank you once again and do have a look at our website [www.fixthefells.co.uk](http://www.fixthefells.co.uk) for regular updates.



Tanya at the helm of Gondola on Coniston Water

## Central and East Lakes—Nic Fish

“At long last a summer where there has been more sunshine than showers. Although none of us mind working in the rain (it’s all part of the job), we do appreciate a bit of sunshine every now and again. We find that comments from walkers change from ‘you must be mad working in this weather’ to ‘aren’t you lucky to have a job like this?’ It hasn’t been all sunshine however, it wasn’t until May that we could finally say goodbye to winter.

Other brands are available...



The team have a number of projects this year: Esk Hause – repairing and replacing old pitching; Red Tarn – incorporating drains into a digger path; Miresbeck – re-directing a small section of path; Gowbarrow – laying a hard surface of gravel on a boggy section of path. All the projects are moving on extremely well, in particular the Gowbarrow project. This is in part thanks to the number of extra volunteer days we have been able to utilise there.

As well as our hard-working and dedicated Fix the Fells volunteers who managed to complete over 100m of path in two days, we’ve also had volunteers from the Environment Agency pictured here. Each year they have a chance to volunteer with a charity, and this year they chose us.

We had help from a fantastic young group of school children that were working with the Field Studies Council. They showed real enthusiasm and energy for the task at hand and learnt a little along the way.

In August the team also have their yearly Acorn Camp, a National Trust working holiday, where a dozen volunteers will work alongside the team for a week. They will be assisting in the completion of Gowbarrow.

Volunteers play a huge part in helping the National Trust maintain their exceptionally high standards of conservation work. So far this year the Fix the Fells volunteers alone have contributed over 900 days work. We are extremely grateful for all the hard work and dedication that these people bring to the job of looking after this unique upland landscape.



## South Lakes, a journey home—Ian Griffiths



“The footpath team's main project of the year has been on the side of Fairfield and as walks home from the work site go, it's pretty special. Setting off from high on the ridge we look down on to Grisedale Tarn which is apparently 110 feet deep and holds perch, brown trout and eels. Legend has it that King Dunmail's crown rests at the bottom of it. Dunmail was supposedly the last King of Cumberland but in 945AD when he and his army were defeated in a valley battle between Grasmere and Thirlmere (hence the reason it's now called Dunmail Raise) he lost his life. Survivors of the battle carried his crown to



Grisedale Tarn and threw it into the depths hoping he would ‘rise up again’. After walking around the side of the tarn we continue our homeward journey downhill via Raise Beck. It's a steep walk along a terraced path that traverses along waterfalls and pools. Most of the path is man-made but it's difficult to tell as it sits on top of revetment walls which are hidden from view, some of which the team have repaired in previous years.

The Raise Beck path has some interesting vegetation that grows to the side. Sundew is a carnivorous plant that grows in wet flushes. It coaxes insects in by producing a sticky mucilage that they find irresistible and once they've landed on the leaves they can't get away. The mucilage then begins to breakdown the insect and the resulting 'soup' is taken in by the plant. Another killer that lurks on the path is the Butterwort (picture above). It grows on the damp bedrock and attracts insects in by forming visible droplets on the leaves. Once the insect has landed on the leaf and begins to struggle, more mucilage is produced by the plant, encasing and killing the insect. The plant flowers May to July when a purple flower is formed on a very long stem. The reason why the stem is so long is that it hopefully prevents would-be pollinators from getting caught in its leaves, really quite clever!

The final part of our commute takes us back to the base past Coniston Water. We sometimes wonder, is this the best commute in the country? Probably...





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## Why do we need to fundraise?

The National Trust is currently leading the Fix the Fells partnership. With much of the footpath work carried out by our teams, every pound we receive through donations and legacies is vital and will directly support this work, now and into the future.

We are a registered charity with no government funding for our core work. Membership income covers only a third of our costs. The National Trust will always be here in the Lake District. We are committed to maintaining this unique landscape and heritage for ever, for everyone.

The support of people like you, our members and our volunteers, enables vital conservation work to continue in this place, free for all to visit and enjoy. Talk to any of our passionate and committed Ranger teams and volunteers in the Lakes and they'll tell you, all gifts make a real difference and enable us to do so much more.

## How to donate

Simply post a cheque or CAF cheque payable to the National Trust to Liz, details below. (Or pop into the office if you are here). All donors are personally thanked.

Please tell us if there is a particular footpath or area that is special to you, and we'll direct your gift to our work there. If you are interested in supporting a wider range of conservation work in the Lakes including at our built properties, we can allocate your gift to The Lakes Appeal fund too.

And you can make your donation worth 25% more. To qualify for Gift Aid what you pay in income tax or capital gains tax must be at least equal to the amount we will claim in the tax year. Just mention it when you send your gift.



## Get in touch

To find out more about Fix the Fells, how to become a volunteer or how you can leave a legacy to the National Trust to support this area of work, please feel free to contact us. All enquiries will be treated confidentially.



**Liz Guest, Fundraising Coordinator, National Trust, The Hollens, Grasmere, Ambleside, LA22 9QZ**  
**Direct tel: 015394 63806 Email: [liz.guest@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:liz.guest@nationaltrust.org.uk)**

More info online at: [www.fixthefells.org.uk](http://www.fixthefells.org.uk)  
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## Extra bits

We have an outstanding range of places in our care in the wider North West region, from Paul McCartney's council house to stately homes, beaches to mountain tops, valleys and now a pub in the Lakes too. To find out more talk to Liz or visit the website [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk). Look out for us on Twitter and Facebook too.

To minimise costs this newsletter is produced and printed here at the Grasmere office. We can also email it to you.

If you would like this newsletter in a different format call Liz on 015394 63806 or email [liz.guest@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:liz.guest@nationaltrust.org.uk)