



## **Progress Report – Fix the Fells Partnership Project, Lake District Foundation**

Funding from the Nineveh Charitable Trust has supported the delivery of our volunteer Fix the Fells Volunteer Programme during our 19/20 project year (and into our 20/21 project year), enabling us to add a significant amount of additional capacity to the work of the Fix the Fells partnership and enabling us to improve more sites across the Lake District National Park.

131 local volunteers directly benefited from the project, supported by funding from the Nineveh Charitable Trust which helped to fund volunteers expenses, kit and tools. Tens of thousands of recreational users of the Lake District's mountains (e.g. hikers, runners, tourists) also benefited from the work, and the improvements made to our footpaths.

In 19/20 our volunteers:

- Took part in 725 drain clearance runs
- Completed 182 repair works parties
- Completed an equivalent to a total of 2,767 workdays out on the fells (180 more than in 2018).
- Our volunteers contribute their time freely and volunteer for at least 12 days annually, however many of them contribute much more - with 13 of them out on the fells for over 50 days last year and two exceptionally enthusiastic individuals turned out on more than 100 days.
- A recruitment drive was launched on 1st March this year and recruited a further 20 volunteers for what we had expected to be one of our busiest seasons out on the fells.

Through the use of skilled and trained volunteers, we are able to add a significant amount of additional capacity to our work, and can reach and support more paths than our small team of paid rangers would ever be able to do alone.

Fix the Fells has 351 high priority paths which it is working to protect (each graded red, amber or green) and which are each checked and maintained up to four times a year in a constant battle against erosion. More extensive works are also carried out on stretches that are particularly badly damaged and in need of rebuilding or repair in the region, now a World Heritage Site.

This work has a range of benefits. The work plays an important - but often overlooked - role in the conservation of fragile upland habitats on the mountain's slopes, and which are home to endangered mountain species such as parsley fern and woolly hair moss. Our work helps to reduce erosion which can quickly escalate once walkers leave damaged footpaths. Erosion can contribute to sediment being swept into becks, tarns, rivers and lakes, changing water acidity levels and negatively impacting fish and plant life.

Our work also protects vital peat bogs which provide important carbon sinks. Left alone, erosion scars can grow as wide as a motorway, wiping out vegetation, disturbing local habitats and

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hydrology, and even destroying terrain features such as mountain tarns. Our ongoing work helps to reduce the risk and severity of footpath erosion, and protect this environment.

As outlined above, the project successfully supported us to reach our target of number of volunteer days and volume of activity that we had hoped for in 2019/20. Their work will contribute towards our longer-term environmental outcomes.

### **Corona Virus Outbreak Impact:**

Due to the corona virus outbreak our practical work was suspended in March. This has had significant impact on our plans for the year ahead, as well as all work ceasing until our rangers and volunteers can safely get back out on the fells this has also has significant impact on our ability to raise funds.

Our work is traditionally well supported by the local community, walkers, and visitors to the area. A significant amount of the costs of our volunteer programme are funded through individual donations and community fundraising. However, we have lost one of our most valuable fundraising seasons – with thousands of tourist visiting during the spring and summer months - and fear we will struggle to secure our normal level of community donations during this time (for example collection boxes out in the community in pubs and cafes, and a substantial number of individual donations are made by people completing fundraising events for us or by visitors to the area during the spring and summer months). All of this is fundraising is now paused, and the income now lost.

We are hopeful of getting back out on the fells later in the year and are continuing our efforts to fundraise for this work so that we can be ready to go, and are exploring other sources of funding to replace our lost community fundraising such as approaching more charitable trusts. We are also keen to assess the impact of the reduction in footfall over the past few months. We have also been exploring what we can learn from this time, and people's connection to the outdoors and the value that they place on it. We ran a short survey about peoples access to green spaces during the pandemic, receiving over 220 responses, and which highlighted some useful information which will inform our future work. Some insights include:

- Peoples opportunity to access green or natural spaces during this time has been impacted both positively and negatively, with around 1/3rd having more access to green space, and a 1/3rd having less access to green space than before.
- Most people (66%) reported discovering new spaces, footpaths and routes near to where they lived, and many expressed a desire to visit green and natural spaces more local to them once restrictions are lifted.
- Footpaths and rights of way (27%) and woodlands (23%) were the most visited spaces, followed by streets and local parks. Highlighting the value of projects such as Fix the Fells which work to maintain and repair these.



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- The main positive benefits reported from having access to natural spaces were improvements to mental (30%) and physical health (25%) and in providing an activity to do (26%).
- People recognised that not everyone had equal access to green and natural spaces and were keen to explore how this could best be tackled.
- People reported concerns about 'other people's' lack of knowledge or education around safely and considerately accessing the countryside or natural spaces (e.g. knowledge of Countryside Code etc), generally this was with reference to people that they assumed to be visitors to the area. This is an area we will be exploring further.

Below is an extract from a spring report by one of our Rangers about his work across the 'Basecamp' patch of the park that he is responsible for, and his work with our volunteer teams and which gives a flavour of the types of activities that they are involved with.

*'January this year saw us take a visit to the Langstrath side of Stake Pass, the path that runs from Langdale to Borrowdale. Built as a raised subsoil path around 10 years ago, we'd received reports that water was starting to erode it quite badly.*

*As it took around two fell seasons to build we were keen to nip this in the bud before too much damage was done. Thankfully, the situation wasn't too bad and a day with Volunteer Development Ranger Matt and the Fix the Fells volunteers has stopped the developing problem.*

*There's more to do, but this goes to show how our work is never done, paths need regular attention to keep them in good condition. On this theme, it can be difficult for us as a volunteer centre to predict how long a job will take to finish due to the vagaries of group size and capabilities, the end of a season can leave us with partially finished jobs. So this year we won't be taking on new projects, but will be wrapping up three different jobs.*

*We'll be returning to Martcrag Moor for the third year to hopefully finish the sheep fleece path. A recent visit showed the last two years' work to be holding up well, so we're looking forward to completing this job—for the time being at least! We'll also be heading up onto Wansfell near Ambleside for the second year to continue bolstering up the very popular path there; also a path needing 'aftercare' as the existing work was completed around 11 years ago.*

*Lastly, we'll be working in Langdale Coombe, near to Stake Pass and Martcrag Moor, on part of the Cumbria Way. Technically a job from last year, but with the difficulty of predicting how long things take, we ran out of time. We did rebuild some failing stepping stones as a sturdy causeway, but most of the work will be worked this year.*

*It will make for an interesting and varied year and it will be good to be consolidating work, while also keeping an eye on the jobs we'll be tackling in 2021. The eternal wheel of path work rolls on!'*