



The National Trust makes a French connection to talk 'Fix the Fells' at Borrowdale

French environment officers visited Borrowdale, near Keswick with Oliver Maurice, former regional director of the National Trust - who now lives in the La Drome region of France. The Frenchmen spoke to the National Trust, Fix the Fell path teams about learning a technique of path repair known as 'pitching', which in turn will be used in the mountainous region of La Drome.

The French team were in the Lake District for two days from the 1-2 October, staying at the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel, Great Langdale. The French officers come from La Drome, part of the Rhone-Alps region, where they have experienced serious erosion of some of their paths, leading one popular route to be closed altogether..

Stone pitching is a traditional lakeland technique used to provide a sustainable surface for steep sections of path and has been used for hundreds of years to repair the mountain passes.. The technique basically involves 'setting' large stones into the surface of the path to create a firm sustainable surface. More recently the technique has been adapted for the modern user and the stones are not placed in a regular order so the effect is more natural and less obtrusive than steps, and can be built using irregular stone.

Philippe Lloret, French Environment Officer said: "Some of the finest examples of pitching in Europe are here in the Lake District and so I think we have come to the right place to learn from the National Trust path teams. Previously, we have used concrete to fix our footpaths which looks rather unsightly, so we are keen to see the pitching technique in action. Pitched paths will also help to make our paths more distinct, easier to follow and therefore safer. We are looking forward to going back to France to put some of these ideas into practise on our own paths."

Oliver Maurice, director of the International National Trusts Organisation and former regional Director for the National Trust said: "I have a love of mountainous regions, having lived and worked in the Lake District for 10 years (1992-2002), as North West

regional director - and 32 years in total working for the National Trust. I made the decision to move to La Drome following my retirement, as the landscape is similar, but we sometimes have the advantage of warmer weather! Unfortunately, some of the paths in the mountains of La Drome have had to be closed, as they have become unsafe. With my background, I knew the National Trust in the Lake District would be able to help the French team with some hands-on training in path repair”

Jane Watson, National Trust Communications & Marketing Manager said:”Access and freedom to enjoy the Lake District Fells are important issues for us and our path teams work hard to make sure our paths are kept in good order. We were delighted to invite the French team over to the Lake District fells, which rivals the beauty of the mountains of La Drome, to see how we can help them improve their own paths back at home.”

The hope in the near future is to set up a training exchange similar to that we have recently undertaken with the Northumberland National Park, where wallers from the La Drome region can come over and work with the National Trust teams to learn the skills required to undertake this work.

Fix the Fells is a partnership that works together to prevent further erosion of upland paths, through work carried out on them by contactors, staff and a large volunteer force. The partnership is run by the Lake District National Park Authority, the National Trust and Natural England – and is further supported by Friends of the Lake District, The Tourism and Conservation Partnership and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

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Editors Notes:

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- The National Trust owns and manages a quarter of the central fell in the Lake District. www.nationaltrustorg.uk.
- Fix the Fells is a five-year partnership project (2007-2011) run by the Lake District National Park Authority, the National Trust and Natural England. Support and funding is provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Friends of the Lake District, Tourism and Conservation Partnership. www.fixthefells.co.uk