

UPAG Site visit 22/09/11 to Langdale in the Lake District.

Hosted by John Aktinson – National Trust “Fix the Fells project manager” and Richard Fox – Lake District National Park projects manager.

In Attendance: National Trust for Scotland’s in house footpath team and Charles Gameson from the BMC.

Location: Meeting point National Trust car park by the Old Dungeon Ghyll hotel in Great Langdale (NY206861)

Vehicles were used to drive along the farmers track to Mickleden, from here the group walked up an old shepherds path towards Martcrag moor passing a site of archaeological interest, the Stone Age axe factory on “Pike of Stickle”. Headed over open moorland for 200m or so and joined ridge path running over the Langdale Pikes, and headed left in the direction of Stake Pass.

Site1. Sheep’s fleece based path. A rather boggy section of marshland in between much harder sections of path had become extensively trampled and braided, maybe as much as 10m or so wide in places. So the NT footpath team’s decided to use local hill sheep’s fleeces as a way of “floating” the path above the wet ground therefore keeping it high and dry. Other manmade materials are available to do the same job (e.g. Terram) but this natural way seems to be very effective indeed. A lot of fleeces were needed and when aggregate was added these compressed/sunk and in fact more material had to be sourced from nearby drumlins to bring up the levels. The path is holding up well, damaged vegetation is starting to recover and braiding has apparently ceased to be a problem. It should be noted as this area is of important archaeological interest (Stone Age axe factory) care was taken in the construction of the path to allow for future excavation works.

Site 2. The group continued along the ridge a little further in the direction of Langstrath, (Cumbria Way unofficial long distance route) to see a recent and ongoing project to reinstate/improve the old path line zig-zagging down to the valley. The route here is fairly steep and there had been erosion scars caused from braiding. So the NT path teams have gone about reinstating the original line which takes a less direct route to the top but does so by taking an easier gradient. The long winding corners needed to be heavily built with stone revetments and were very time consuming, so it was decided to eventually make the corners slightly more abrupt to save time and money. The site is well drained and all materials sourced on site (“sub-soil” path). A very impressive piece of work, again no apparent braiding and highlights the fact that stone pitching is not always necessary.

The group then retraced their footsteps back to the ridge, heading through Langdale Combe and Black Craggs back down to the starting point. Along the way casually looking/discussing some of the old and new path work, a mixture of pitching and aggregate surfacing and steps.

For further information and pictures please refer to the Fix the Fells web site <http://www.fixthefells.co.uk/> . Well worth a visit!

Ben Farrington NTS footpath team