COMMON GROUND A JOHN MUIR TRUST PUBLICATION GROUND SUMMER 2019





Welcome to Glenridding Common

In late autumn 2017, following consultation with local and national stakeholders, we were delighted when the Lake District National Park Authority confirmed that the John Muir Trust would take over the management of Glenridding Common, initially on a three-year lease.

For those unfamiliar with our work, the John Muir Trust is a UK-wide conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places. We manage wild land, inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to discover wildness through our John Muir Award initiative,

and campaign to conserve our wildest places.

To be entrusted with managing Glenridding Common – the first time that the Trust has been directly involved in managing land outside Scotland – is a responsibility that we take very seriously. Covering around 1,000 hectares (2,471 acres), this special place includes the horseshoe-shaped ridge that crosses the infamous Striding Edge onto the broad summit of Helvellyn (the third highest peak in England) before curving back along Swirral Edge.

The property also includes other well-known landmarks such as Catstye Cam, Brown Cove and Red Tarn, while on land to the north the Lake District Ski Club runs a ski tow on the flanks of Raise.

As registered common land, Glenridding is farmed using traditional methods by local farmers who have rights of communal grazing. Cumbria contains a third of all the common land in England, with this rich cultural landscape one reason why the Lake District National Park achieved UNESCO World Heritage status.

At Glenridding, we always vouched to commit more resources to the property than had been the case in recent times following the reduction in the National Park Authority's overall budget. To that end, we are extremely grateful to the Patsy Wood Trust, Esmée Fairburn and the ALA Green Charitable Trust for supporting our ongoing work at the property. I was taken on as Property Manager following a 23-year role as area ranger with the National Park Authority, while the employment of Isaac Johnston from Bowness, funded by Ala Green, has enabled a young person to gain a full-time position at the very start of his conservation and land management career.

As you will read in the pages that follow, we have been extremely busy over the past 18 months. Our work has included vital footpath maintenance and repair – again utilising the skills of two local footpath workers – the enhancement of England's most

valuable collection of Arctic-alpine plants (generously aided by the Lake District Foundation), litter collection and tree planting.

We have also carried out extensive survey work to establish base-line information for a variety of species on this nationally important upland site. We continue to be surprised by what we find, with new discoveries such as the green hairstreak butterfly, new species of lichen, rare mosses and a very healthy population of the red-listed, and nationally declining, ring ouzel (or mountain blackbird).

Since the very beginning of our

involvement, the community of Glenridding has been extremely accommodating – from the two farms that graze on the common to the fantastic service we received from the village hall and local caterers when the Trust's AGM was held there in 2018. And then there are the residents who volunteered to grow on cuttings and seeds taken from the rare montane willows and plants found on the crags of Helvellyn in their own gardens!

Now half-way through our initial lease of the property, we genuinely hope that we can be an asset to the area and local community as we continue to work for the benefit and enhancement of this much-loved part of the Lake District.

> Pete Barron Property Manager – Glenridding Common



A view from the **National Park**

The National Park Authority's Helen Lancaster is delighted that the lease and management plan in place with the Trust has proved such a success

An example of partnership working at its very best, our arrangement with the John Muir Trust at Glenridding Common ensures that we have a dedicated and expert team acting as custodians of this very special place.

For us, one major benefit is that we can redeploy the resources we once had at Glenridding to other areas of the National Park where they are needed most, safe in the knowledge that we're leaving this unique area in extremely capable hands.

Helpful, co-operative and enthusiastic, the Trust's team at Glenridding are a pleasure to work with. They have fostered great relationship with the commoners, local community, the ski club and with the many visitors to the area, while the Trust's Basecamp office in Glenridding ensures that they are visible and reinforces our partnership approach.

Some of the Trust's most notable successes to date include helping re-establish populations of rare Arctic-alpine species high on the crags of Helvellyn and furthering the juniper woodland



regeneration in the valley above Greenside.

We have also worked jointly with the Lake District Ski Club to help shape its future plans on Raise, while the Trust has worked collaboratively with Fix the Fells to repair eroding footpaths and identify other areas of concern.

We look forward to strengthening and developing our relationship in the future and exploring ways in which we can further enhance Glenridding Common for many generations to come.

> Helen Lancaster is Property Services Manager at the Lake **District National Park Authority**

Common land – a working landscape

As the name suggests, the land above Glenridding village, on the lower slopes of Helvellyn, is a registered common. There is a misconception that common land means we can all do as we please on that land, but that's not the case. A common has an owner and then right holders (sometimes called 'commoners') with the rights on this particular common for grazing sheep.

There are two graziers on Glenridding Common who have a legal right to graze a set number of sheep. This right goes with the farm or as part of a legal agreement with the correct holder to exercise their rights.

The sheep grazed here are mostly northern Cheviot and Swaledales - hardy upland breeds that can thrive in what is often a hostile environment up on the fell. The management of these sheep runs on an annual cycle, from the release of hogs (year-old sheep) in spring, followed by breeding ewes and their lambs.

Gathering for clipping, dosing and other stock management takes place throughout the summer and autumn until the sheep are removed from the fell for the winter around November. The gathering of the sheep sees a communal effort by the families, whose farms are in the valley below, using trained sheep dogs and, of course, the farmers themselves. It is skilled work by all.

Farming on the uplands and particularly in a busy area like Helvellyn presents many challenges. While farmers welcome visitors to the area, and indeed provide various forms of accommodation for holiday makers, they do need walkers to act responsibly when out camping or walking with their dogs.

Sheep worrying by dogs in a remote area is a major concern and a growing problem, so we ask that dogs are kept on leads when near sheep (and all the time if there is any doubt about keeping a dog under control). And if wild camping, please just stay for one night, move on and leave no trace.

Helvellyn basecamp



Locals and visitors alike are invited to step into the Trust's

Glenridding. Dubbed the 'Helvellyn Basecamp', this multi-

Fairbairn Foundation, is used as an office, a hub for local

volunteering activities, and a place for people to drop in to

meet with the Trust's staff, including Glenridding Common

purpose space, funded with support from the Esmée

conservation ranger Isaac Johnston (pictured).

office and visitor space next to the Lake District National Park's Ullswater tourist information centre in the heart of

Pete Barron

A view from Glenridding

Rob Shepherd provides a community view of the Trust's involvement at Glenridding Common

When it was first proposed that the John Muir Trust might take on the lease of Glenridding Common there was some nervousness locally. Rumours abounded of sheep and trail hounds being kept off the fells and sinister tales of a rewilding agenda sent temperatures rising. The parish was still recovering from the ravages of Storm Desmond and the thought of yet more change and upheaval was met with some trepidation.

I'm happy to say however that, 18 months on, our experience has been entirely positive. From the very start, Trust personnel have made a huge effort to engage with the local community. This is in no small part down to the efforts of Pete Barron whom we know, trust and respect of old. He has done a fantastic job in working to maintain the delicate equilibrium between the need to enhance the environmental quality of the common and the needs of the local community.

In addition to the work carried out on footpath restoration and the enhancement of the common's unique flora, the Trust has worked closely with the community on schemes to alleviate flooding further down the valley through clearance of drainage channels and selective planting. Links are also being forged with the local primary school to ensure that all local children have a good understanding of the rich environmental heritage on their doorstep.

We look forward to the continued collaborative efforts of the Trust and sincerely hope that its lease of Glenridding Common extends well beyond the current three-year timeline.

Rob Shepherd is Chairman of Patterdale Parish Council (Editor's note: congratulations to Rob on his recent OBE)





Footpath maintenance heroes

It's been an extremely busy year and a half for Neil Bassett and Ian Unsworth – the Trust's hardy Glenridding footpath maintenance team. Working in all weathers, from sub-zero blizzards to the scorching sun of last summer, their role has been to check on the condition of footpaths and carry out maintenance and repairs where needed.

Given the amount of walker footfall in the area – the main routes to Helvellyn are from Glenridding – it's vitally important work. Between them, Neil and Ian have been busy clearing drains and ditches, digging new ones where required, building new and repairing old stone drains, building new pitching and repairing the old, defining walker path-lines, plus blocking off unwanted ones.

In doing so, they have clocked up some impressive statistics: in all, they have walked more than 200 miles, climbed more than 55,000 feet, dug over 100 metres of new ditches (and cleared many metres more), plus moved well over 20 tonnes of stone for building work.

On top of that, they have eaten (at least) 400 sandwiches, broken one spade and one mattock, badly crushed one finger, pointed dozens of lost walkers in the right direction, and endured endless jokes about digging for gold and requests for an escalator with winning smiles.

A walk on the wild side

Rich Rowe takes a walk with Glenridding Common ranger Isaac Johnston to learn more about the area's wealth of natural and cultural history

Isaac Johnston sets a brisk pace, but that should come as no surprise. Brimming with energy and enthusiasm, he is up and down this track most days, often with a stack of fence posts, tree tubes and other items strapped to his back.

Having met at the Trust's Helvellyn Basecamp office in Glenridding village, we are on route to the crags some 850m up on the north-facing slopes of Helvellyn. Our mission is to find a suitable ledge on which to plant out the pots of water avens that Isaac is carrying in his rucksack. It may seem a long way to go for a spot of upland gardening, but these are no ordinary plants. And this is no ordinary place.

Part of a regeneration project that has seen the Trust, together with local, green-fingered volunteers, propagate seeds collected last autumn, the water avens will help bolster a wider community of rare Arctic-alpine plants that are found almost nowhere else in England (see sidebar, Colouring the crags).

On our way, Isaac has promised to reveal more about the common and the Trust's work there to date, although I'm also interested to learn how – aged just 21 – he came to be part of a team managing 1,000 hectares of one of the best-loved areas of the Lake District.

A local lad from Windermere, Isaac's fascination with the natural world started when he was very young. "I was always the one looking under rocks for bugs and toads," he says.

After school, he opted not to go to university, instead taking up a two-year apprenticeship with the Cumbria Wildlife Trust. It proved an excellent grounding, with his ideas, field knowledge and sheer drive contributing to his appointment as Glenridding

Common ranger, working under the guidance of the Trust's vastly experienced property manager, Pete Barron.

"Wildlife trusts don't manage mountains, they manage nature reserves, so this has been a huge jump," says Isaac. Not that he appears daunted. "My hobby is my job, and my job is my hobby," he smiles. "I'm very lucky to be able to say that."

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

As we clatter up the stony track that leads past Helvellyn Youth Hostel, the old workings of Greenside lead mine come into view. Worked continuously for almost 150 years until its closure in 1962, the mine was one of the largest and most important of its kind. It's only when we walk past what remains of the mining buildings that the true scale of it becomes apparent; above us, vast spoil tips spill out of shafts that extend several miles into the mountainside.

It's a scene that seems at odds with the rugged, natural beauty of Helvellyn itself, but Isaac doesn't see it that way. "It's a big part of the story here, and was a major employer locally," he says. "Glenridding largely exists because of the mine."

As the path steepens, we pass more remnants of the area's industrial past, from lines of stone water leats dug into the hillside to the old dam at Keppel Cove that burst in 1927 after a night of heavy rainfall, causing terrible damage to the village below.

However, it's the story of ecological renewal on the hill that is most compelling today. From the valley above Greenside, a wave of bird song carries from an expanse of juniper woodland where the Trust, helped by local volunteers, has planted aspen, rowan, silver birch and hundreds of willow pegs – literally sticks of willow that are stuck in the ground to take root.

"Trees are immensely important for slowing run off, storing water and consolidating the ground," explains Isaac pointing to areas of slope failure above a nearby beck. As slopes fail, they deposit rock and sediment that then raises water levels, often to dangerous levels during heavy rainfall – a problem that residents of Glenridding are all too familiar with.

Trees, of course, also provide excellent habitat, with the juniper now more alive than ever. As a recent Trust survey revealed, this expanse of woodland is home to stonechat, siskin, redpoll and skylark, while large numbers of ring ouzel also move through the low cover. "Come here early in the morning and it's absolutely bouncing," says Isaac.

Previously fenced off by the National Park Authority as part of an environmental stewardship scheme together with graziers, the juniper has recently been helped further by the graziers who have reduced stocking density by off-wintering sheep. "The whole site is responding really well to the change in management," explains Isaac.



"The whole site is responding really well to the change in management"

CRAG LIFE

Continuing upwards, we pass the broad, rugged flanks of Catstye Cam where Natural England has been extremely busy replanting cuttings taken from downy willow. Another incredibly rare species, this low-branching dwarf tree only grows in three locations in England, two of which are right here on the common.

The Trust has begun to play its part, working with volunteers in the valley on plant propagation to help the process along. Although still very much in its infancy, the project has already seen a good number of cuttings grown on – with the added benefit of helping connect local people with this special habitat.

Higher still, we pass an area of open ground where mountain ringlet – the UK's only montane species of butterfly – feed during their brief summer flight window before we reach a remote spot fringed by crags in the upper reaches of the cove.

Here, in this sheltered bowl, the ground



flora looks very different. With outcrops of rock adding a base richness to the soils, there are clusters of lime-loving plants such as alpine lady's mantle and the vivid green of parsley fern growing from under rocks.

As our eyes follow the flushes of lime, we see patches of purple saxifrage before we are drawn to a section of splintered crags where the ledges are alive with colour. The fleshy leaves and bright yellow flowers of rose root spill from the cracks, while elsewhere there is wood anemone, mossy saxifrage, plus the rich purple of violets and alpine sawort. It's an extraordinary amount of life in what seems such an inhospitable place.

Finding a suitable spot, Isaac moves carefully to a precarious ledge further along the crags and plants out the water avens in their new home – the latest additions to one of England's most precious plant communities.

With that, we turn and begin our long walk back down to Glenridding through a landscape that is gradually being restored and rejuvenated for all to enjoy. "We've seen so many good things happen here in a short space of time," says Isaac. "I'm excited for what the future will bring." Guided tour (clockwise from main): Isaac leads the way; water avens ready for planting; rose root in full bloom; planting out on a suitable ledge; Isaac showing Glenridding Common on the map



Colouring the crags

The Helvellyn to Fairfield ridge rises high above the Ullswater and Thirlmere valleys. The western side drops steadily into Thirlmere, but the eastern side is carved by glaciers into a series of steep coves with cliffs, edges, seepages and tarns.

It is here, on high cliffs and lime-rich gully sides, that the Arctic-alpines grow. Alpine saxifrage adorns moss cushions, while twisted downy willow, never growing more than a metre tall, cling to cliff ledges. Black Alpine-sedge is found in wet flushes, Alpine meadow grass prefers crumbling lime soils high on the headwalls, and Alpine mouse-ear finds dry, lime-rich soil where other plants struggle to thrive.

All these plants grow nowhere else in England, surviving by tolerating the stresses of cold and drought. They were collected by the Victorians, reducing populations to isolated fragments. Heavy sheep grazing since the 1970s has further reduced the plants to steep and inaccessible ground, while climate change now forces them

to higher and colder locations. Since 2007, Natural England has worked to recover these precious populations. On Helvellyn, 1,000 downy willows have been planted, while numbers of Alpine saxifrage have been restored from just 10 plants to 50. The latest phase of this work involves the John Muir Trust working alongside community volunteers to grow new plants and reestablish them on the mountain. It's a welcome boost as we look to create a richer, more colourful Helvellyn. **Simon Webb, Natural England**



Local volunteers sow wild seeds

We are a group of volunteers all living near the Helvellyn range. Over the past year, we have been supported and encouraged to help with the restoration of alpine plants on the higher slopes of Helvellyn.

So far, we have helped propagate a range of willows from cuttings and grow plants such as bladder campion, purple saxifrage, alpine cinquefoil and bitter vetch from seed. None of us have worked with alpines or on such a project before, but we are delighted that our tentative efforts have started to yield results.

Last summer and autumn, we sowed seeds collected from plants growing on the Helvellyn crags. For the most part, they showed little sign of life until the weather warmed up this spring and seedlings started to appear.

We also nurtured our willow 'mother' plants through winter into

spring, before nervously taking our first set of cuttings. It was not long before green leaves burst from the seemingly lifeless twigs.

With so many of the plants now established, the next step is to return them to their 'proper' homes high on the crags. With luck, some will flourish and, gradually, areas that have become empty and bleak will once again look as they should.

We've been surprised by how enjoyable it has been trying to grow difficult plants and how very pleasing it is when the results are so positive. With two of us also serving as volunteer guided walk leaders for the National Park, we have enjoyed sharing our enthusiasm for the project with visitors who come on the walks.

Tricia Browne, Anne Clarke, Margaret Boothroyd, Judith Cooke – the volunteer plant propagator team





Caring for the Lake District's fragile fells

The Lake District fells may appear robust and everlasting, but the soils and vegetation can be incredibly fragile. While generally resilient to normal rainfall, repeated trampling by many feet causes vegetation to die off and the soil structure to be damaged, making it more susceptible to being washed away during periods of heavy rain.

With so many visitors to the fells, paths can erode and widen and so need regular maintenance to limit the damage. Maybe surprisingly, there is no statutory funding for this essential work.

Fix the Fells is a partnership organisation that was formed to tackle these issues across the Lake District. Using traditional techniques, locally occurring natural materials, and with all resources paid for by fundraising, many paths have been stabilised and restored.

Regular maintenance is carried out by a band of volunteers, who between them put in 2,500 days of work last year alone.

On Helvellyn, we work in partnership with the John Muir Trust, and over the coming years have a variety of path problems that we will address together.

Richard Fox, Fix the Fells Ranger

Climb with care

A new winter conditions monitoring system has been set up on the Red Tarn Face of Helvellyn, providing hourly temperature data for air and turf to help winter climbers assess likely conditions before arriving at the crag.

Such a system has been a high priority due to the popularity of winter climbing on the massif and the fact that it provides a real haven for some exceptionally rare plants that are easily damaged if climbed on when the turf is not frozen solid.

The British Mountaineering Council (BMC) has worked in collaboration with Natural England, the John Muir Trust and the National Park Authority to make this project a reality.

Placing axes and crampons into solidly frozen turf does virtually no damage to the habitats these plants depend on. The worst possible scenario, however, is a winter climber in marginal conditions tearing unfrozen turf off the crag and removing the habitat needed for these plants to take root and survive. It takes many years for the depth of soil to develop on ledges and in cracks, so removing it can be disastrous.

> Rob Dyer, Access and Conservation Officer, BMC (England)

John Muir Award in Cumbria

Rare lichen discoveries

Instructors from the Outward

Bound Trust, a long-time

on Glenridding Common

John Muir Award provider

During a lichen survey undertaken last year, a total of 192 species were discovered in and around Brown Cove and Red Tarn, including many that are extremely rare indeed. One recently described species was new to the northern hemisphere, while another undescribed species was new to Great Britain. The presence of such rarities is another reason why the ecology of Glenridding Common is so special and worthy of investment and protection. The image (left) shows one of the more common lichens found on the property.

Greenside grant

to a project led by Tim Clarke of Patterdale Parish Council which is exploring the potential development of the dilapidated for the communities of Glenridding and Patterdale.

Graham Watson, John Muir Award Cumbria manager, highlights how the environmental award scheme continues to play a major role in the area – including at Glenridding

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places throughout the UK. Here in Cumbria, where the Award has been active since 2004, activities include schools, both local and on residential visits, exploring the area and getting involved in caring for the Lake District National Park.

Participants tackle all sorts of tasks, including clearing footpath drains, removing invasive species, picking up litter and undertaking survey work.

Although the focus is set by teachers and outdoor leaders for their own groups, we inform and train leaders about local themes for them to incorporate. For example, we encourage them to consider what's special about the landscape and the National Park, as well as the benefits of wild places for people and nature to thrive together - a theme that is really valued by those working with health challenges.

We're currently involved in a project that highlights the role played by commons not just in terms of supporting traditional 'commoning', but also their capacity to increase biodiversity, water quality, flood resilience and carbon capture to mitigate against climate change.

As part of this, Patterdale School visited Glenridding Common to explore the area's biodiversity and to survey peat bogs and their vegetation. Similarly, we are training local outdoor centre instructors, raising awareness of the shared stewardship of the common, considering the perspectives of graziers, landowners, managers and public recreation.

We are very proud of what is now a long association with Cumbria and our ongoing partnership with the Lake District National Park Authority. Today, around 3,000 people achieve their John Muir Award through this partnership every year, with each spending four days or more enjoying, understanding and caring for nature.

Such involvement often has a profound effect on participants - and particularly for those people who rarely have an opportunity to spend time in such places. johnmuiraward.org



A useful job to do, good company and a glorious setting ... what more could you ask for? On my first day, the rain was tipping down, but that honestly made no difference to the enjoyment and sense of satisfaction. Other days have brought clear skies, with all the colours of the fellside in bright spring light over Glenridding Common.

The jobs are practical and straightforward: staking and planting trees (birch, rowan, aspen, willow); checking whether existing trees need replacing; securing loose tree tubes; and repairing fences. And, of course, carrying tools to and from the site.

I have walked the fells for most of my life, but this brings something different – the unexpected pleasure of being on one patch of hill all day long, instead of journeying through. Of watching the changing patterns of light over the same landscape while doing the job. It's an opportunity to put something back, in the company of other volunteers with an unspoken connection of shared values.

What have I learned from this? In fact, a great deal about the trees, plants and birds of the common. But also something more subtle about seeing the landscape in a different way, through the eyes of those who work for the Trust with their experience and understanding of what it requires. I'll be happy to carry on while I can still lace my boots ...

Raymond, John Muir Trust volunteer, Glenridding Common

Surveying our upland landscapes

Young people across the country are collecting valuable data on some of the UK's most important habitats as part of the Moorland Indicators for Climate Change Initiative.

Founded by the Moors for the Future Partnership, the initiative encourages young people to connect with upland landscapes and gain experience in survey techniques, plant identification skills and generally learn more about the cultural heritage of their area. For our part, the Trust plans to work with local school groups on surveying parts of Glenridding Common. The groups will record everything from water ph to peat depth and wildlife sightings to help build a picture of the condition of UK moorlands and any changes over time.

With young people equipped with the skills to look after such wild places, the landscape and their communities can continue to flourish.

How you can help

Becoming a member of the John Muir Trust is a great way to help care for Glenridding Common and all the wild places you love now and in the future. You can get a 25 per cent discount when joining online using the promotional code: 'HELVELLYN'. Find out more and sign-up to help the UK's leading conservation charity dedicated to the experience, protection and repair of wild places at **johnmuirtrust.org/join**

Memories of Helvellyn

The wind was lashing rain onto my face as well as billowing up my plastic cycle cape, almost dragging me off the ridge. This was my first experience of Helvellyn, scrambling along Striding Edge as a 15-year-old schoolboy in classic windy, rainy, summer weather conditions. I did not have any modern equipment or waterproof jacket – just my trusty cycle cape that I would normally use on my paper round or bike ride to school if it was raining.

The inclement weather and slippery rock did not put me off. I relished every minute of my first challenging Helvellyn experience and it felt like a real mountain. Physical geography and geology are two of my favourite subjects and I revelled in the stark, glacial features of rocky arêtes and the tarn-filled corrie.

Striding Edge and Swirral Edge embrace Red Tarn as a classic post-glacial topographic feature, just like an open-air geography textbook. I was stimulated and wanted more: Helvellyn had opened my senses to the mountain world.

Even today, Helvellyn continues to stimulate and challenge me. I climb it many times each year, in all weather. Most years, I manage to ascend it in a heatwave and enjoy a shirtless summer day on the summit. Sometimes, I descend to the icy cold spring just below the summit to literally chill out.

Some of my best experiences, however, have been in winter – climbing snow and ice routes on the north face above Red Tarn. It truly is a versatile and satisfying mountain.

> Alan Hinkes OBE is one of the UK's most celebrated mountaineers



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