



SOUTH WEST PEAK
LANDSCAPE AT A CROSSROADS



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SOUTH WEST PEAK LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Name of Project	Roaches Gateway
Delivery Partner	Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
Name of Person Completing Report	Jon Rowe
Start Date of Project	April 2017
End Date of Project	February 2022
Date of Report	June 2022



Aims and Objectives of the Project

The iconic towering Roaches is one of the most memorable images of the South West Peak and Staffordshire's gateway to the Partnership area. This stunning rocky area of upland moor covering 395 hectares is visited by some 100,000 people a year and is a real honeypot destination. The visitor pressure has, however, taken its toll. Footpaths were badly eroded, impassable in some places forming large scars cutting into the beautiful landscape. This project aimed to improve key sections of footpath, restore areas currently suffering from erosion and help visitors develop an understanding of the area, its history, its habitats and wildlife and encourage a shared sense of responsibility in wanting to help care for the site for the future.

A detailed survey of footpaths on the Roaches estate commissioned in 2012 and delivered by a consultant with experience designing and maintaining upland footpaths highlighted a number of priority areas for footpath restoration. The Roaches is a well-used site attracting large numbers of visitors each year, adding to the erosion problems. As one section of footpath becomes eroded over time by visitors and weather, the scar is widened by people choosing to walk on the vegetation by the original footpath, which then quickly becomes eroded, thus creating ever-widening scars on a beautiful landscape

This project aimed to repair and improve 1,000 metres of footpath using traditional upland footpath techniques including stone pitching. The wide scars would be landscaped and sown with seed taken from moorland species on the Roaches estate. The intention was that the repair work would be undertaken by experienced contractors who would also deliver training to a team of volunteers in their skills and crafts thus encouraging people to become involved in caring for this area into the future and maintaining the improved pathways.

800 metres of historic dry stone wall boundaries would be restored back to their original glory through a mixture of contractors and volunteer work.

The project also aimed to deliver creative and engaging onsite and off-site interpretation including a site leaflet in keeping with the sensitive landscape of the Roaches. The three key entrance points used by visitors to access the Roaches would be improved. The purpose of the interpretation would be to create a greater understanding of the importance of upland moorland among visitors, encourage responsible behaviour when visiting the Roaches and other upland moorland sites.

Project Delivery

This site-based project was delivered by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust staff, training and supporting regular volunteer work groups with contractors for specialised elements.

Staff resource

The Staff resource for this project was two members of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust staff, whose time was provided as in-kind contributions. This stayed constant throughout the project with the exception of the assistant ranger position which was upgraded from an apprentice role to an assistant officer role. This provided continuity in work flow and more skilled staff to deliver the project.

Budget resource

The initial planned project budget for Roaches gateway was £109,100 which was subdivided as follows, showing planned and actual costs incurred against each NLHF budget heading:

NLHF budget heading	Example items	Intended cost	Actual cost
Purchase price of items or property	Purchase of ATV tipping trailer and road transport trailer	£0	£6,935

Repair and conservation work	Repair of upland footpath and drystone walls	£75,000	£56,891
Equipment & materials (capital)	New onsite interpretation & entrance improvements	£10,000	£485
Professional fees (capital)	Heli-copter lifting plus archaeologist fee	£0	£11,194
Training for volunteers	Training in stone pitching and stone walling	£3,000	£0
Travel and expenses for volunteers		£1,000	£880
Equipment and materials (activity)		£1,000	£1,592
TOTAL		£90,000	£77,977

In addition, the project benefitted from £34,389 worth of in-kind contributions from staff time, and £80,725 worth of volunteer time.

The project was funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund, Natural England and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

Partnership working – team involvement, steering group etc

The project was delivered by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust staff with some input from the SWPLPS apprentices, which provided training for them and additional staff resource. The project did not require a steering group to oversee delivery as it was a site based project with a strong staff and volunteer team already in place.

Volunteers

Volunteer numbers have fluctuated throughout the delivery of the project and volunteering stopped altogether during the lockdowns associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Volunteers have delivered over half of the walling and all of the upland footpath restoration work. During the project we have worked with a number of corporate volunteers including, Siemens, Peak Wildlife Park and UCLAN.

Consultants and contractors

Contractors were only used for the Helicopter lifting and material handling elements associated with the helicopter lifting to transfer heavy materials up onto the site. Contractors were also used for some of the drystone walling.

Community involvement

Community involvement has only been through engagement during the delivery in a face to face manner, all members of the volunteer team are local and are either hill walkers/ramblers, fell runners or climbers wanting to give back to a place they love. Several new members have been recruited directly through their contacts in those fields.

What Has (and has not) Been Achieved

Outputs

List the intended outputs of the project (taken from the project plan), beside these outline what was delivered (be specific over numbers etc), (if they were not delivered, say why). Include agreed changes to outputs.

	Intended Output	Delivered Output
1	1000 metres of restored upland path	1800 m restored, plus 175m of boardwalk installed
2	800m of drystone wall	926m drystone wall
3	4 new kissing gates	11 new pedestrian gates replaced
4	3 Key Entrance Locations Improved	2 new interpretation panels
5	Innovative interpretation/ Leaflet	Face to face interpretation delivered instead

Key Outputs

New interpretation panels were installed at Roaches Gate and Gradbach Carpark, In addition a member of staff was employed specifically to undertake weekend face to face interpretation this was done as a direct result of the pandemic and has been a huge success with an increased visual presence, greater discussion and contact with all site users as well as disruption of antisocial behavior

Training in stone pitching footpath construction and drystone wall construction for 50 volunteers: 50 volunteers including groups have been trained in upland footpath repair techniques, a core 10 volunteers (Roaches Friday Volunteers) are proficient enough to lead small sub groups and help when running corporate or large group volunteering. Only 10 volunteers have been trained in Drystone walling with a core 4 now working un-assisted. Walling is a difficult skill to obtain in a short period of time, some people take to it while others find it frustrating. This is the reason why, although many volunteers have tried volunteering, so few have been trained to a proficient level.

Outcomes

	Intended Outcome	Delivered Outcome
1	The restored footpaths will prevent erosion and damage to the fragile habitats surrounding the busiest parts of the Roaches estate. The resulting more diverse and resilient habitat will enable visitors to see a reduction in off path trampling and bare peat exposed around footpaths. Within 2 years of paths being completed, recovering and establishing Heather, Cotton grasses, other	Improvements in adjacent habitat have been seen during the life of the project, but these habitats are slow to recover and more time is needed to fully assess the outcomes.

	sedges and grasses will be prolific within the erosion zone.	
2	New and existing volunteers will have the opportunity to learn new skills and become connected to the Roaches. They will develop a sense of ownership, protecting and caring for the landscape.	Considerable time was spent training a core team of volunteers who now have gained great skills in path building and wall building – see section below on ‘what made the difference’
3	Increased visitor enjoyment, awareness and understanding of the area they are visiting.	Users have been observed generally keeping to the better defined footpaths and have commented to staff on site about the importance of the works being done.

What Made The Difference

The key factor that made the success of the project and links directly to the legacy of the project was the decision to undertake the whole of the footpath restoration with volunteers alone. This has enabled the delivery of sympathetic restoration by people who know the site - its users. Most importantly we have a team of volunteers that are well trained, practiced and passionate to deliver future works on the Roaches. Volunteers have enabled us to have flexibility in the timing of delivery in the narrow time periods allocated for working on the footpaths, they have worked in all weathers without complaint and turn up week after week to do the same, the pandemic and wildfire drove their determination further, enabling us to be in the position to say that by the end of the project over 1800m of path has been installed.

In addition, we now have a core 4 of our volunteers that have adopted drystone wall maintenance on the Roaches and actively go out in their own time and repair sections of walling on the Roaches and wider area, this will be invaluable in the future and we will continue to encourage and train volunteers to enable this.

Challenges

One of the biggest initial challenges we had to overcome was obtaining appropriate consent from Natural England (NE) to enable us to undertake the works (as this is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area), compromises had to be made on the construction of the path to enable this to happen.

Undertaking work in the bird breeding season may have disturbed the breeding bird assemblage for which the site is notified, so NE would only let us work on the path outside the bird breeding season which meant we had to deliver all of the work into a shorter period of time per year (autumn, winter) and sometimes find ourselves working in less than ideal conditions (snow, frost, driving wind and rain), several tasks were cancelled due to not being able to reach the work site due to snow.

This also affected the project spending, meaning that there were periods with little or no spending due to no works being undertaken because of the restrictions.

Another major challenge was the fire in 2018 which burnt 60ha of land and took a whole month to extinguish fully. This was a huge drain on staff resources and caused a delay in works on the ground. The fire also destroyed all vegetation next to significant sections of the path network, opening up a greater area for people to walk on and making landscaping more difficult.

The pandemic created a degree of uncertainty around the project and further complicated the delivery as we couldn't have volunteers for a significant part of the project time. As well as this the visitor pressure on the site increased putting huge pressure on all infrastructure across the site including restored and due to be restored sections of the Roaches Gateway Project. In some areas we have had to install emergency rope and post fencing to guide people onto the correct paths

Legacy

What legacy has been secured by your project and how, be specific and explain what you mean – avoid acronyms that only make sense to you, include the following:

Skills/knowledge/experience

The biggest legacy the project will have going forward is that we now have a team of volunteers who are capable of delivering professional upland footpath restoration with little or no supervision, footpaths on the Roaches are in safe hands going forward from the project as we can continue the good work on other areas of the estate as well as having a programme of repairs and maintenance on repaired sections.

Similarly, the drystone walls are also in safe hands with 4 volunteers adopting walling and undertaking volunteering in their own time to help repair and maintain walls across the site.

To make this even better all our volunteers are regular users of the site and now trained they cannot help but see any issues or repairs making quick repairs where possible or reporting back to us to get it on the works calendar.

Habitat/species improvements

Keeping people on the footpaths especially the ridge path will save hundreds of square metres of upland peat and blanket bog from being trampled every year, as well as preventing disturbance to ground nesting birds and all wildlife by limiting wandering from the path network.

Capital Works

Works undertaken to drystone walls and footpaths will continue to prosper into the future with a regime of maintenance built in to our estate work to make sure they last as long as possible. This will include boundary surveys to check the condition of all walls twice a year and fortnightly path drain emptying (more frequent when needed).

All drains installed are just or over a spade width making long term maintenance easier, all water bars, cross drains and stone lets have a base of stone to make emptying easier. All drystone wall repairs any surplus stone is left on site so as to be there if repairs are needed in the future and we keep a stock of stone to be shaped into coping stones as and when needed so that repairs can be done as quickly as possible saving walls from decay.

Using our volunteers to deliver the project capital items means that we have a knowledgeable team of site users that will make repairs or document damages while using the site for leisure, as well as being skilled to enable us to make repairs as a team quickly and efficiently before further damage can be done

Equipment

Several pieces of equipment were purchased as part of this project, we have an all-terrain low ground pressure tipping trailer which we use for moving gravel, stone and timber for footpath construction, we have a flatbed trailer for towing equipment to the site. Spades, wheelbarrows and hand tools have all been purchased. These tools and equipment will be maintained by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and available for ongoing works on this site.

Lessons Learned

I would stand by my decision to deliver the footpath works with volunteers alone as it has been a pleasure to see them develop and gain confidence in the work they are now delivering without any assistance.

If I had my time again I would look to argue the case for delivering the project year round on the footpath networks not just limiting the work to the autumn and winter, this could involve a trial area with monitoring.

The projects elements of walling, footpaths and interpretation lacked some cohesion and if I was to do the project again I would look to add in elements to link the project more. I think there was a missed opportunity to add additional benefit and focus on working on changing site user's perception of the site from being a space for just leisure and to see the Roaches as an important nature reserve, wild space and cultural landscape.

The Big Headline

The biggest headline is that nearly double the footpath restoration has been achieved despite many factors interrupting the continuity of this element of the project.