

SKELL VALLEY PROJECT

January 2023

Co-led by



National Trust



Nidderdale
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



A note from the Project Manager

The project started as an idea about five years ago, when local groups and individuals came together to look at opportunities to learn about, care for and celebrate the natural and man-made heritage of this special North Yorkshire river valley.

Thanks to a lot of hard work from various stakeholders and the National Trust and Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty who lead the Partnership, we are very fortunate to have the resources to implement our plans. Special thanks must go to our funders who have made this possible: the National Lottery Heritage Fund, European Regional Development Fund, The Wolfson Foundation, The Royal Oak Foundation, Friends of Nidderdale AONB, Harrogate and Dales Association, Ripon Rowels Rotary Club, East of Yorkshire National Trust Association and generous private donations.

It's quite humbling to look back on what the Partnership has achieved already and this is just the beginning! I hope you enjoy reading about the progress so far.

Nabil Abbas, Skell Valley Project Manager
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“Our vision is to restore the River Skell to the heart of a unique and well-connected landscape where heritage is celebrated, nature thrives, and people are empowered to lead change which ensures the long-term sustainability of the Skell Valley for future generations.”



The Skell Valley Project is comprised of 15 individual projects which all fit together to form a clear and ambitious vision for the river and the landscape.

Find out more about the Skell Valley Project and upcoming events on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#).

Project theme 1: Landscape is resilient

Leaky woody dams installed in the River Skell catchment



So far we have delivered natural flood management measures with local farmers and landowners at fourteen places in the river catchment including Grantley, Eavestone, Sawley, Fountains and Studley.

This includes tree planting to reduce surface water run-off, building woody debris dams that slow the flow of water and creating storage ponds to hold excess water. As well as reducing the risk of flooding, these measures also benefit nature by creating new habitats for wildlife and improving water quality. Local farmers, contractors, project volunteers and community groups have helped to deliver these measures with much more to come over the next couple of years.

To monitor how these natural flood management measures are affecting the river flow and sediment levels, we're working with the University of Leeds integrated Catchment Solutions Programme (iCASP) team to install river monitoring equipment which will help us to gather important data.



Silt sampling in the River Skell at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal

Over the past year we've started delivering a programme of natural flood management measures with farmers in the valley to slow the flow of water into the River Skell and reduce the impacts of flooding and silt on heritage sites and people living downstream.

900

metres of farm track repaired

1.3

kilometres of hedgerow planted

9.4

kilometres of riverside, hedgerow and woodland fencing installed

Project theme 2: Nature thrives



Recording ancient and veteran trees in the Skell Valley

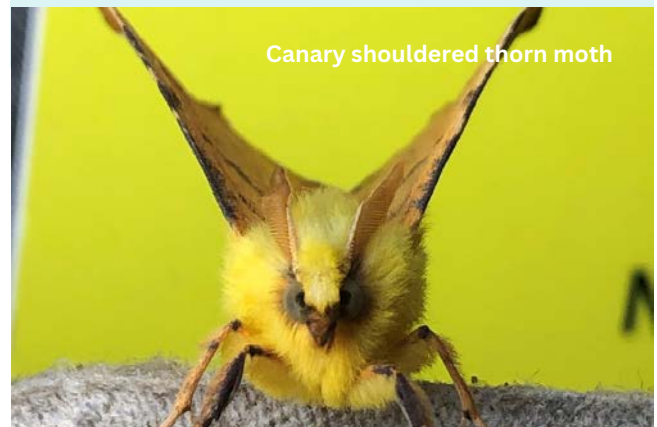
Simply tree-mendous

We've recruited and trained an enthusiastic team of volunteers to record and map special, ancient, veteran and notable trees around the valley with guidance from [The Ancient Tree Inventory citizen science](#) project led by the Woodland Trust. Sites like Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal are important hotspots for such trees and provide an ideal place to learn more about them and how to record them.

We held a discovery day in October where Ancient Tree Advisor Brian Muelaner revealed the ecology and history of some of the oldest trees in Britain to members of the public. We also hosted a book talk in partnership with The Little Ripon Bookshop featuring authors Simon Toomer and Max Adams who gave inspiring talks on the history and importance of trees in the landscape.

Helping hands at Hell Wath

The project team is supporting [Friends of Hell Wath](#) to carry out habitat restoration work and ecological recording at the local nature reserve in Ripon. This has included setting up a butterfly transect which is a set route walked weekly by volunteers, during which they count and record the number of butterflies they see. We've also trained volunteers to survey grassland fungi and run a number of wildlife identification workshops on mammals, dragonflies, damselflies and wildflowers.



Canary shouldered thorn moth

Our volunteer moth trappers have identified a whopping 270 moth species in the Skell Valley so far. The information we've collected means we can advise landowners on how to undertake habitat improvements to help populations of less common species which might be under threat elsewhere in the region.

Project theme 3: People are empowered



School pupils eager to use their new river dipping equipment

"Our dedicated team of ranger volunteers continue to go out every fortnight with me come rain, hail, or shine. So far, they've given an incredible 1123 hours of their time to carry out all sorts of conservation tasks throughout the valley including hedge coppicing and fencing at local farms, Himalayan balsam bashing at Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve and path clearance and woodland work to improve access to the bird hide at Ripon Walled Garden."

Gabby Crisp,
Skell Valley Area Ranger



Ranger volunteers hedge-planting at a local farm

Exploring the river's watery wildlife

Last academic year we ran hands-on river dipping sessions on the River Skell for our partnership schools Moorside Primary School in Ripon and Grewelthorpe C of E Primary School, followed by a visit from the Rivers2U mobile classroom to Moorside so the children could learn about the geography of rivers. If you know of a school in the area who you think would like a free visit by the Rivers2U mobile classroom, please get in touch.

In the summer term we ran further practical sessions with Grewelthorpe School, this time using the river dipping equipment and identification keys that the project has provided for use by both schools and the wider community.

Following the success of our first two training sessions on identifying freshwater invertebrates we're planning another for May 2023. Contact me if you're interested in attending!

Catherine Mason, Education and Engagement Officer, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust
education@ydrdt.co.uk

Project theme 3: People are empowered

Working in partnership with Harrogate and District Community Action, we recruited Jo Thackwray as Volunteering City of Ripon Project Co-ordinator to look at developing and strengthening volunteering in and around Ripon.

"I'm excited to be working with the wonderful collective of volunteer managers in the Ripon area to explore ways we can provide exemplary volunteer experiences and motivate a diverse range of people to give their time. I've been working with the wonderful team at [Ripon YMCA](#), [Ripon Library](#), [Ripon Cathedral](#) and many more.

Following the first workshop for Ripon's volunteer organisations last June, we discovered that there was a desire to encourage more young people to volunteer. We've launched a new initiative in partnership with [Picture News](#) called the 'Power of 10' which we've rolled out across all of Ripon's Primary and Secondary schools. It encourages young people to complete 10 hours of volunteering in the community in a way which suits them and I'm really pleased to say we have had our first recipients of the award from the Ripon YMCA's Young Leaders group.

We're currently planning a young person's volunteer recruitment fair on Wednesday 15th February at Ripon Library to enable young people, aged 14-18, to explore the wonderful opportunities our community has to offer. If you would like to book a stand at this event or want to know more about the work we're doing, please feel free to get in touch. You can also follow this project's progress on [Facebook](#)."

Jo Thackwray, Volunteering City of Ripon Project Co-ordinator
JoanneT@hadca.org.uk



Young people getting stuck into a Forest Schools activity at Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve

So far...

4341 people have participated in Skell events

We've involved **1324** volunteers with different activities

Volunteers have given **8630** hours of their time

We've distributed **500** packets of wildflower seeds to the community

Project theme 4: Heritage is celebrated

As part of the 'Digging Deep in the Archives' project, the Skell Valley Project is working in partnership with West Yorkshire Archive Service to involve local community members, special interest groups and students in archive research and oral history, uncovering secrets of the Skell Valley from the Vyner archive.

"We've been blown away by the number of people volunteering their time to help us with the 'Digging Deep in the Archives' project. Over 60 transcription volunteers have been working their way through 18th century estate correspondence and they've transcribed over 108,000 words! We've been working on a bundle of letters between head gardener William Hallot and landowner John Aislabe which detail the planting of trees, flooding and flood prevention and the names of local residents working on the land around the Studley estate. There have been stories of mad dogs running loose, cases of small pox in the area and masses of building works giving a fantastic insight into Skell Valley life.

Pop-up exhibitions of archives highlighting the findings of the volunteers will take place throughout the remainder of the project. To find out more keep an eye on the Skell Valley Project Facebook page or take a look at the [West Yorkshire Archive Service blog](#)."

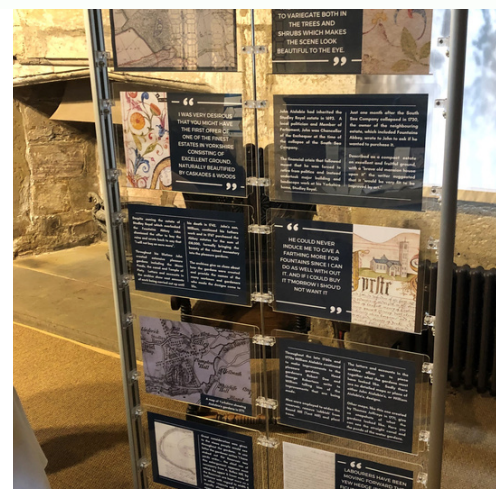
Vicky Grindod, Archivist, West Yorkshire Archive Service



Pop up exhibition at Fountains Hall

"I've loved having a glimpse of the past like this. I bet, when the individuals were writing ledgers and letters, they never thought they'd be getting studied 200 or 300 years later!"

**Digging Deep in the Archives
Project Volunteer**



Project theme 4: Heritage is celebrated



The Seven Bridges Valley in Studley Royal Deer Park

Restoring the Roman Monument

The Roman Monument is part of the Studley Royal designed landscape, created by John Aislaby and his son William between 1718 and 1781. Believed to have been built in the mid 18th century, it was modelled on the tomb of the Horatii and Curiatii on the Appian Way near Rome. It stands on a steep cliff above the River Skell and can be viewed from the valley floor as you walk through the Seven Bridges Valley in Studley Royal deer park.

At the end of last year, we completed repair and conservation works on the Roman Monument. Thanks to funding from The Wolfson Foundation and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, we've repaired the roof and walls to make the building watertight, put back a floor in the building, repaired the ironwork door and window bars and redecorated with a limewash.

Following this work, we hope to restore the four 'cippi' (pinnacles) to the roof and re-instate a gentle path up to the monument along a tree-lined avenue, which will improve access. We will also replace the eroded desire-line path below the monument where the National Trust rangers will be restoring the important magnesian limestone grassland.

"There's still lots to uncover about this fascinating landscape and we're eager to reveal more stories the Skell Valley has to tell. Over the next year we'll be researching and recording some archaeological features in the valley such as the lost Chinese Garden at Studley Royal. We'll work with volunteers in our new oral history and community archaeology projects and have both face-to-face and remote online opportunities to make it as accessible as possible for people."

Karen Collins,
Skell Valley Heritage Officer



The Roman Monument

The Skell Valley on the world stage

Last year I was approached by the UK Commission for UNESCO who thought the Skell Valley Project would be a perfect case study in a new report demonstrating how World Heritage Sites like Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal are at the forefront of developing sustainable solutions to global challenges.

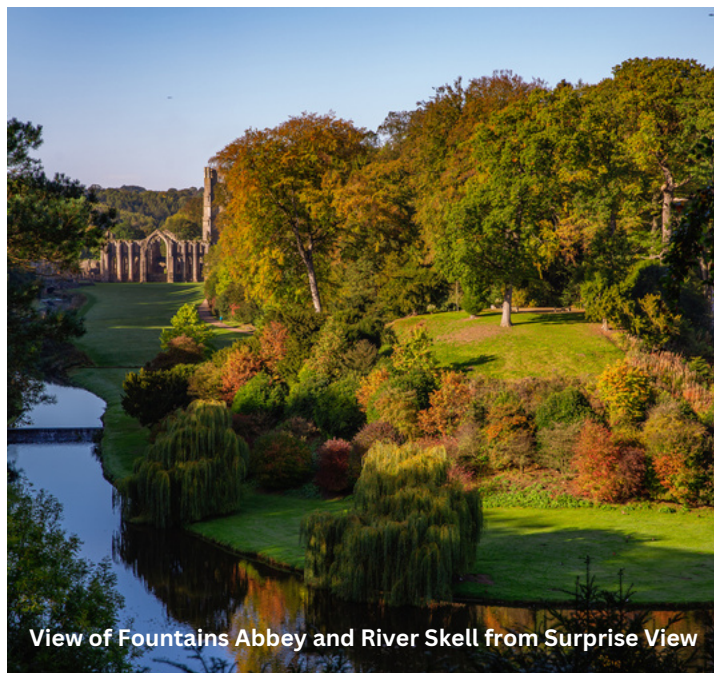
As part of this they created a short film which was shown to ambassadors and representatives of 193 member states at a UNESCO reception at the Élysée Palace in Paris and shared on Twitter by the UK Ambassador to UNESCO. The film features some familiar faces from a few of our partner organisations Nidderdale AONB, HADCA and Friends of Hell Wath.

Globally, many sites are facing threats from the effects of climate change and we're so proud that the Skell Valley Project has been used as an example for bringing different organisations together to protect the World Heritage Site and benefit the local community.

Apparently, the film went down a storm and representatives from Luxembourg, Romania, Bulgaria, Norway and South Korea are interested in how the partnership approach we used for this project could be applied to their World Heritage Sites.

To watch the film and read the report visit [The Skell Valley Project page on the UNESCO Website](#).

Sarah France,
World Heritage Co-ordinator, National Trust,
Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal



View of Fountains Abbey and River Skell from Surprise View

A big thank you to all our partners

The Skell Valley Project is a great example of successful partnership working: 16 different groups and organisations have come together to develop a shared vision for the future of this unique valley.

The Partnership includes representatives from government bodies, local authorities, the farming community, NGOs and local businesses, bringing together a broad range of knowledge, ideas and expertise to help steer and deliver this ambitious project.

The strength and breadth of the Partnership are key to the success of the project, so we'd like to personally thank all the project partners, volunteers and other stakeholders for their support and energy, which together have enabled us to make a great start on safeguarding the future of the Skell Valley.

Justin Scully, General Manager at
Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal and
Iain Mann, Nidderdale AONB Manager

Thank you to all our supporters and partners

The Wolfson
Foundation



ROYAL OAK
FOUNDATION



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



H&DCA
Harrogate and District
Community Action

Ripon
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Rowels



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Harrogate
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Forestry Commission

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WOODLAND
TRUST



RIPON
CIVIC
SOCIETY

NATURAL
ENGLAND



RIPON MUSEUMS



North Yorkshire
County Council



Ripon
Community Link

YMCA
We believe in young people

...including the Harrogate and Dales National Trust Association, East Yorkshire National Trust Association and Grantley, Sawley, Skelding and Eavestone Parish Council.



"Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our first newsletter - it's been great putting it together and reflecting on all the project has achieved so far. If you'd like to get in touch with us about anything relating to the project you can reach us by e-mail at skellvalleyprojectteam@nationaltrust.org.uk or via [Facebook](#)."

Josie Campbell
Skell Valley Senior Project Co-ordinator

