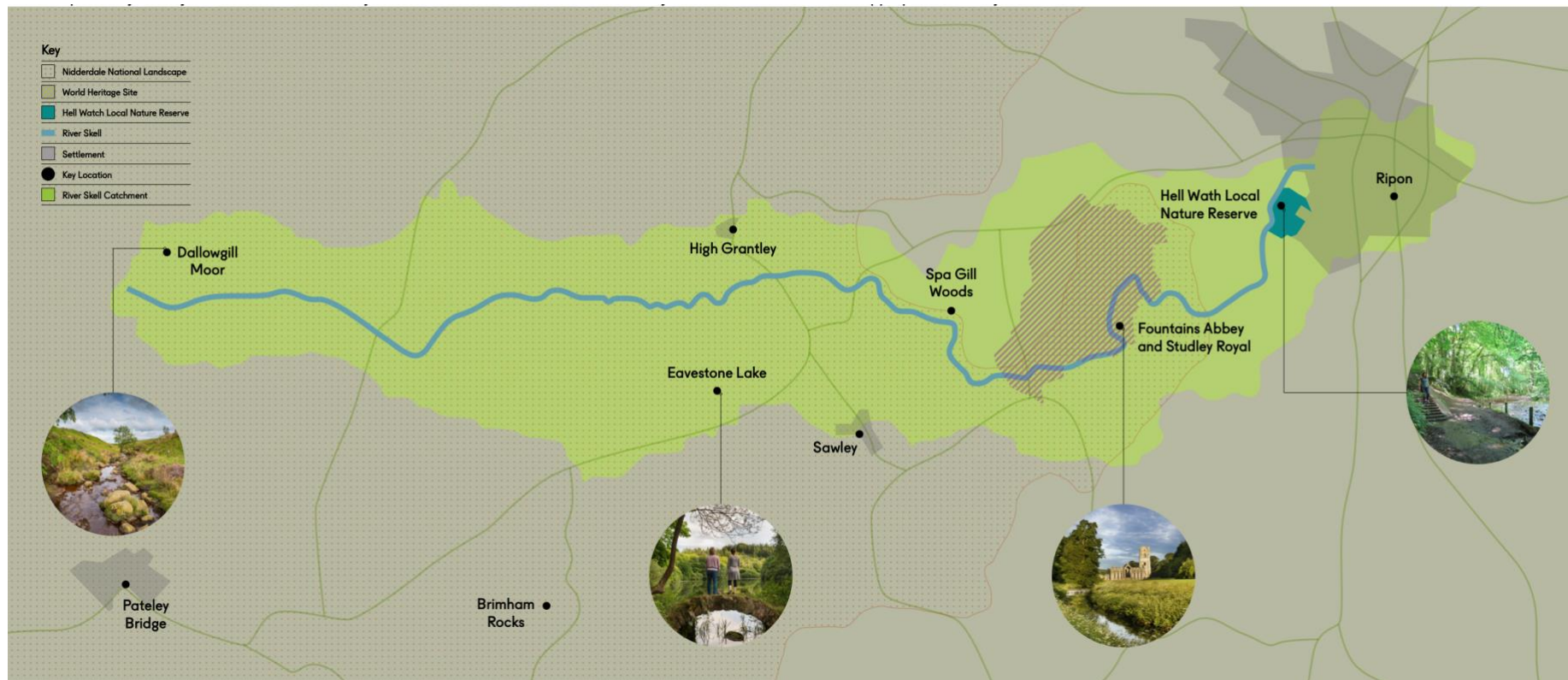


RESILIENT, THRIVING, EMPOWERING and CELEBRATED

An evaluation of the Skell Valley Project



‘Together, we will 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 vision for the Skell Valley Project
(Landscape Conservation Action Plan, September 2020)

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1. The source of the Skell Valley Project

In 2014, consultation on the 2015-21 World Heritage Site Management Plan for Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal (designated a World Heritage Site in 1986) identified flooding and siltation as the greatest threat to the site's Outstanding Universal Value. Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (renamed Nidderdale National Landscape in November 2023) had recently embarked on the Upper Nidderdale Landscape Partnership, a four-year project supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Partnership Programme. Nidderdale National Landscape and the Trust agreed that a similar, partnership approach, collaborating with landowners and farmers on the introduction of natural flood management methods, had the potential to reduce the risk of flooding, for the benefit of the whole valley and specifically Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal.

In September 2018, the Heritage Fund awarded the Skell Valley Project a grant of £128,900 towards an eighteen-month development phase. The Lead Partners were the National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape, with the Trust acting as grant recipient and employer of the Project Team. The development phase provided for a Project Manager and a Community Engagement Officer to facilitate research, public consultation, planning with prospective partners, financial planning and fundraising. The full project proposal was co-authored by the Conservation Manager (now World Heritage Coordinator at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal) supported by the Project Coordinator and by the Manager and the Development Team Leader of Nidderdale AONB.¹ In December 2020, the Heritage Fund approved a grant of £1,373,600 towards a total budget of £2.5m.

In addition to this grant and the in-kind support provided by the National Trust, Nidderdale National Landscape and many of the organisations that would be involved in delivering the Project, the Skell Valley Project was financially supported by the following organisations:

DEFRA (Farming in Protected Landscapes programme)

East of Yorkshire National Trust Association

European Regional Development Fund

Friends of Nidderdale AONB

Harrogate and Dales Association

Harrogate Rotary Club

The Ichthus Charitable Trust

Nidderdale National Landscape

Northern Powerhouse

The Rotary Club of Ripon Rowels

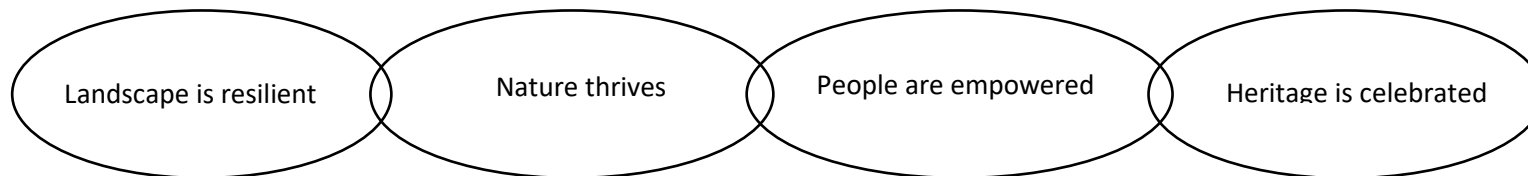
The Royal Oak Foundation

The Wolfson Foundation

¹ Appendix 2: People with a formal role in the Skell Valley Project

2. The design of the Project - four themes, nine Heritage Fund outcomes and fifteen projects

The Project had four themes running through it. The Lead Partners' explanation of each is given below.



Landscape is resilient: 'We'll help tackle the threats of climate change and ensure we play our part in a 'green' recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, making the landscape, its people and the local economy more resilient.'

Nature thrives: 'We'll reverse the decline in nature, conserve ancient trees and woodlands and the wildlife they support and create nature-rich spaces where people live.'

People are empowered: 'We'll empower people to deliver projects for nature, heritage and landscape by supporting them in learning the skills they need and removing current barriers that stop people accessing the outdoors and nature around them.'

Heritage is celebrated: 'We'll save our heritage from the threats of climate change and general neglect. We'll create new and exciting opportunities for people to explore the nature and history of the Skell Valley and be involved in its care.'

Throughout the planning and implementation phases of the Project, the Heritage Fund asked those it funded to help to achieve these nine outcomes:

1. A wider range of people are involved in heritage
2. People have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions
3. People have developed skills
4. People have greater wellbeing
5. Heritage is in better condition
6. Heritage is better identified and better explained
7. The funded organisation is more resilient
8. The local area is a better place to live, work or visit
9. The local economy has been boosted

In the development phase, the Project Manager, the Community Engagement Officer and their National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape colleagues worked with local and regional organisations and with individual consultants and advisors to design fifteen projects that would contribute to the achievement of the Heritage Fund's intended outcomes, which also reflect the four Project themes.

These projects were of various types, scales and duration and involved different public, private and voluntary organisations and individual contractors in their delivery. Chart 1 shows the four themes in the top row and in the box below each, the projects primarily associated with the theme. Most of the projects were relevant to more than one theme, but this structure made it easier to manage the Project as a whole, to keep track of the outputs and outcomes and to make adjustments where necessary.

Chart 1. Four themes and fifteen projects

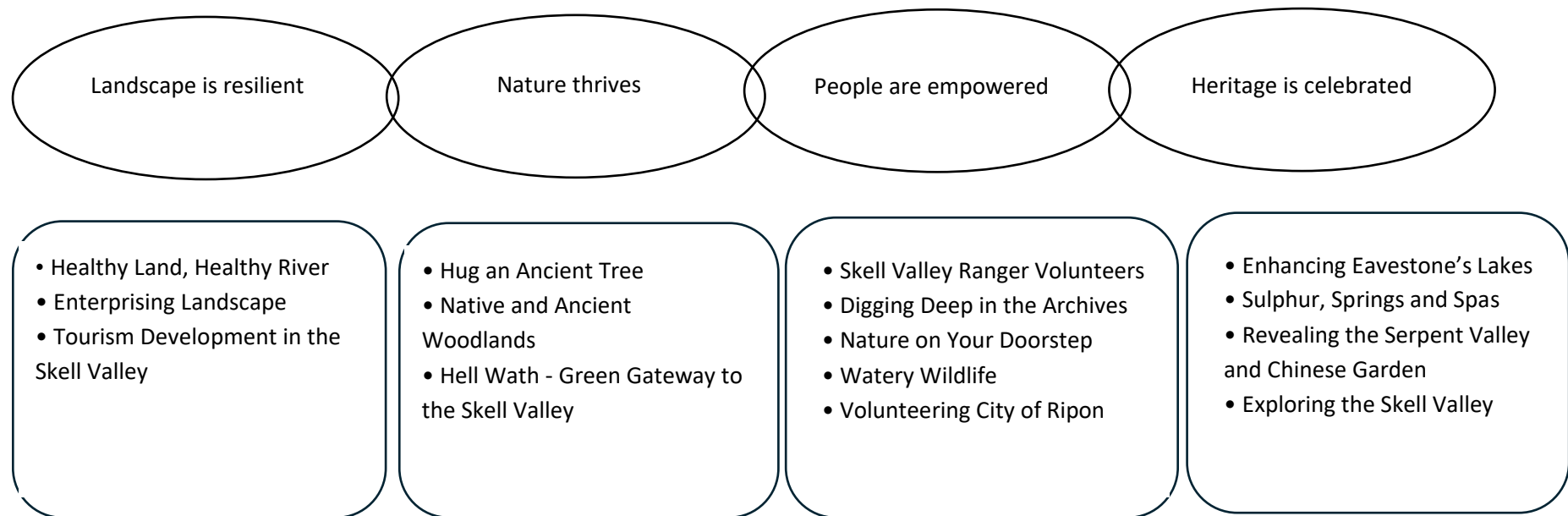


Table 1 shows the Heritage Fund outcomes each project was expected (at the start of the Project) to support. The left-hand column lists each project below its headline theme. The columns numbered 1 – 9 represent the nine intended outcomes, which are listed in full on the right. So, for example, the Healthy Land, Healthy River project was designed to help achieve outcomes 1,2, 3, 5, 8 and 9.

Table 1. The fifteen projects and the Heritage Fund outcomes they were designed to support

15 projects (below) and their intended outcomes (right)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Heritage Fund outcomes
Landscape is resilient										1. A wider range of people are involved in heritage 2. People have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions 3. People have developed skills 4. People have greater wellbeing 5. Heritage is in better condition 6. Heritage is better identified and better explained 7. The funded organisation is more resilient 8. The local area is a better place to live, work or visit 9. The local economy has been boosted
Healthy Land, Healthy River	•	•	•		•			•	•	
Enterprising Landscape	•						•	•	•	
Tourism Development in the Skell Valley	•	•	•				•	•	•	
Nature thrives										
Native and Ancient Woodlands in the Skell Valley	•				•			•	•	
Hug an Ancient Tree	•		•		•	•				
Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell Valley	•	•	•		•			•		
People are empowered										
Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers	•	•	•	•	•			•		
Digging Deep in the Archives	•	•	•	•	•	•				
Nature on Your Doorstep	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	
Volunteering City of Ripon	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	
Watery Wildlife	•	•	•	•		•	•	•		
Heritage is celebrated										
Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes	•		•		•	•		•	•	
Sulphur, Springs and Spas	•		•			•				
Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden	•		•		•	•		•		
Exploring the Skell Valley	•	•		•		•		•		

3. The approved purposes of the Heritage Fund grant

The Heritage Fund grant was for the approved purposes below. All other Skell Valley Project activities were financed by the organisations listed on page 3 or supported in kind by members of the Skell Valley Partnership (page 10).

Some of the numbers in the original approved purposes were adjusted, with Heritage Fund consent, as the project proceeded.

1. Employ a full-time Project Manager, Senior Project Coordinator and Area Ranger, a part-time Heritage Officer and specialist consultants.
2. Deliver and maintain natural flood management measures on privately owned land, incentivise landowners and managers through a trial payment-by-results scheme, establish a hydrological monitoring programme and a Landscape Enterprise Network.
3. Recruit and train 40 volunteers to help deliver land management work.
4. Collaborate with tourism/hospitality businesses and public sector organisations and provide them with an online community, marketing workshops, resources and networking events.
5. Safeguard privately owned Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites through woodland management works and improved management and maintenance strategies. Recruit and train ten volunteers to identify and record 100 ancient trees. Undertake tree surgery on ten ancient trees.
6. Support the Friends of Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve to recruit and train 15 additional volunteers. Deliver 24 training and practical management days for volunteers and 18 community heritage days. Develop interpretation on the reserve.
7. Work with West Yorkshire Archive Service, University of Leeds students and 15 new volunteers to deliver archival research and around 30 oral history interviews and interpret the findings.
8. Establish a Volunteer Development Officer post (0.4) at Harrogate and District Community Action (HADCA) to embed shared approaches throughout the local community and voluntary sector.
9. Work with and equip local groups to improve six 'spaces for nature' across Ripon.
10. Work with Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, schools and 26 volunteers to support river monitoring.

11. Deliver interpretation and access improvements throughout the Skell Valley.

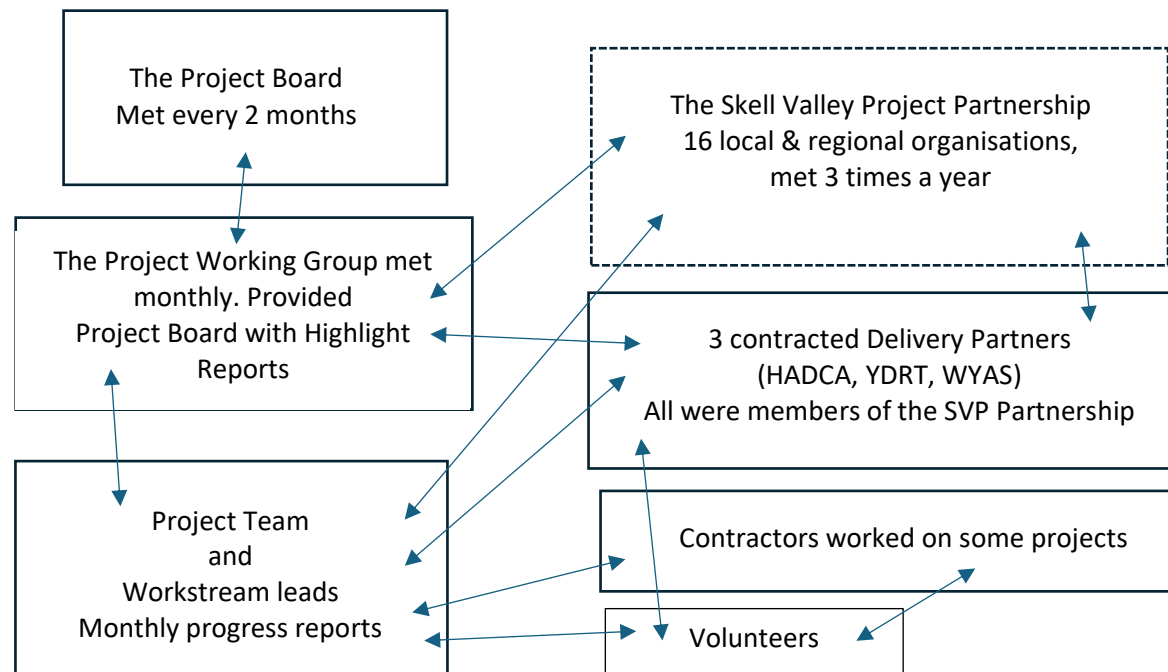
12. Work with archaeologists and volunteers to research and record the Serpent Valley (now known as the Seven Bridges Valley), Chinese Garden and Spa Gill. Conserve four historic structures. Undertake surrounding vegetation management and deliver activities.

13. At Eavestone Lake, repair key, built heritage features, undertake landscaping works and improve woodland management. Involve ten volunteers in research. Deliver two conservation events for students and apprentices

4. The project management structure

This chart shows how the Project was managed and delivered. Each part of the structure is described overleaf. The arrows describe the two-way communication between the Project Team and every part of the structure.

Chart 2. The project management structure



The Project Board included the two sponsors (the General Manager of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal and the Manager of Nidderdale National Landscape), a Project Working Group and senior local and regional colleagues.

The Project Working Group comprised the two Project clients (Nidderdale National Landscape's Development Team Leader and the Fountains Abbey's Visitor Operations and Experience Manager), the four-person Project Team and two or three other Workstream Leads. Every project had a Workstream Lead, who was either a member of the Project Team or another Trust employee.

The Project Team had four posts: Project Manager, Senior Project Coordinator, Skell Valley Area Ranger and Heritage Officer. In the Project Team and among the Workstream Leads there were some changes in personnel and in roles, over the four years.

The Skell Valley Partnership was established during the development phase. Some of its members represented organisations (or in the case of the Skell Valley farmers, an informal group) that were involved in delivering some of the fifteen projects. Other members, such as the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency, for example, were interested parties who could provide information and advice. Table 2, overleaf, lists the members of the Skell Valley Partnership and the projects in which they were involved. The Project Team convened a meeting of the Partnership three times a year, to share the progress of individual projects and of the Project as a whole. The members consistently provided information and perspectives of value to the Project. This included insights into the priorities and plans of regional and national bodies, information about other projects and contacts. At each meeting there was a presentation by the Project Team and occasionally there were guest speakers. Members discussed their challenges and plans and from 2023 they began to focus on how the achievements of the Project could be sustained. In January 2023, the Partnership took part in a facilitated workshop to begin to talk about the legacy of the Skell Valley Project and the future of the Partnership.²

The delivery of twelve of the fifteen projects was led by members of the Project Team. The other three projects were contracted to **Delivery Partners** with specific expertise. These were: Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, which managed Watery Wildlife; West Yorkshire Archive Service, which managed Digging Deep in the Archives; and Harrogate and District Community Action, which managed Volunteering City of Ripon. The budget for each included staff time and in the case of HADCA, funds for a time-limited, part-time volunteer development post.

Contractors included companies, such as The Creative Core (for the design work on Exploring the Skell Valley) and The Archaeological Practice (for the archaeological elements of three projects), university teams such as the iCASP team in the School of Earth and Environment at the University of Leeds (for the catchment monitoring for Healthy Land, Healthy River and the development of a Payment by Results scheme) and individuals, including oral historian Virginia Arrowsmith (Digging Deep in the Archives: oral history project) and tourism consultant Susan Briggs (Tourism Development in the Skell Valley).

² Skell Valley Project Partnership Discussion Workshop Report, Pete Spriggs, January 2023

Table 2. The Skell Valley Partnership and the projects they helped to deliver

The members of the Skell Valley Partnership	The projects in which they were directly involved
The Project Team	All
The National Trust The Project involved personnel at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal and at the North regional office	Healthy Land, Healthy River; Enterprising Landscape; Digging Deep in the Archives; Native and Ancient Woodlands; Hug an Ancient Tree; Watery Wildlife; Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Gardens; Exploring the Skell Valley; Nature on Your Doorstep (Bat out of Skell); Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers; Enterprising Landscape
Nidderdale National Landscape	Healthy Land, Healthy River; Enterprising Landscape; Native and Ancient Woodlands; Nature on Your Doorstep; Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers; Exploring the Skell Valley
The Skell Valley Farmers	Healthy Land, Healthy River; Native and Ancient Woodlands; Nature on Your Doorstep (Bat out of Skell); Sulphur, Springs and Spas; Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers; Exploring the Skell Valley; Hug an Ancient Tree
Eavestone Estate	Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes; Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers; Native and Ancient Woodlands
Grantley Hall Estate	Healthy Land, Healthy River; Tourism Development in the Skell Valley
Grantley, Sawley, Skelding and Eavestone Parish Council	Nature on Your Doorstep (Picking Gill and Bat out of Skell); Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers; Exploring the Skell Valley
Harrogate and District Community Action	Volunteering City of Ripon
Friends of Hell Wath	Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell Valley; Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers; Nature on Your Doorstep (Bat out of Skell); Watery Wildlife; Exploring the Skell Valley
North Yorkshire Council, formerly North Yorkshire County Council	Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell; Exploring the Skell Valley; Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers; Enterprising Landscape
Ripon Museum Trust	Nature on Your Doorstep; Volunteering City of Ripon
West Yorkshire Archive Service	Digging Deep in the Archives
Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust	Watery Wildlife
The Environment Agency	Healthy Land, Healthy River
The Forestry Commission	
Natural England	
Nidderdale National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee	

5. The 15 projects and their objectives

The Project plan submitted to the Heritage Fund in 2020 described the objectives of the 15 planned projects. The summaries below are based on the original wording, with adjustments agreed with the Heritage Fund, in response to circumstances. The outputs of each project are provided in Appendix 1.

Healthy Land, Healthy River

Healthy Land, Healthy River had two parts: a series of natural flood and land management interventions and the development of a Payment by Results (PbR) scheme. For the first of these, the Project Team would work alongside farmers and landowners introducing measures designed to reduce peak flows, and soil loss into the Skell. The creation of ponds to store silt would provide habitats for insects, amphibians, birds, mammals and plants. Fencing would allow for vegetation to grow and would stop sediment from surface water from passing into the river. The Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Area Solutions Programme (iCASP) team at the University of Leeds was contracted to monitor the impact of these interventions on sediment and water flows and to create a baseline against which their future impact could be measured. The iCASP team was also contracted to work with farmers and the Project Team to develop a Payment by Results framework to incentivise natural flood management within the catchment, in place of the EU-supported Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Enterprising Landscape

The Skell Enterprising Landscape project aimed to explore how businesses in Ripon and along the Skell Valley could come together to invest in landscape outcomes in which they have a common interest such as flood management and silt reduction. This would be trialled using an adapted version of the Landscape Enterprise Network model (LENs). The LENs model is a system for organising the buying and selling of ecosystem functions. In the context of the Skell Valley, it connects the tourism businesses along the valley and in Ripon with the farmers and landowners upstream to improve the resilience of the landscape and local economy.

Tourism Development in the Skell Valley

This project was a response to the loss of tourism as result of the pandemic. Its purpose was to increase collaboration between tourism and related businesses in Ripon and the Skell Valley, to generate and coordinate activity that would result in visitors staying longer in the area, to explore it more thoroughly and spend more in the process. This project was delivered by tourism consultant Susan Briggs and involved the development of a marketing action plan and shared marketing resources.

Native and Ancient Woodlands

The purpose of this project was to work with landowners to restore and enhance habitats for wildlife in semi-natural woodland sites and to plant more native trees. Planting new woodlands to the UK Forestry Standard and supporting better management of existing woodlands would improve conditions for a range of species and increase their resilience to climate change-related threats from pests and diseases.

Hug an Ancient Tree

Hug an Ancient Tree was designed to increase public awareness and understanding of the Skell Valley's ancient and veteran trees, and to involve people in protecting them. This would include recruiting volunteers and running events (including family events) where participants would learn how to identify, record and map the trees. The trees would be logged on the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory.

Hell Wath – Green Gateway to the Skell Valley

This project would improve the natural heritage of Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve in Ripon, encourage more people to value and enjoy the natural heritage and increase the capacity of the Friends of Hell Wath and their volunteers to maintain it. Activities would include scrub clearance, planting, maintenance and repairs; regular public events to identify and record flora and fauna, improved physical access to the reserve and the addition of interpretation and way markers, linking it to the rest of the Skell Valley, through the Exploring the Skell Valley Project.

Skell Valley Task Force - renamed Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers

This was to be a team of volunteers, led by the Skell Valley Area Ranger and trained to undertake practical conservation tasks. They would apply those skills in support of many areas of the Skell Valley Project, for example, in the natural flood and land management interventions, the planting of new woodland, the improvement of green spaces as part of Nature on Your Doorstep, and the creation of walking routes (Exploring the Skell Valley).

Digging Deep in the Archives

This project, led by West Yorkshire Archive Service, had two parts. The first was to research how the landscape of the Skell Valley has changed over time, including river modifications, designed landscapes, built heritage features, and how people have impacted and been impacted by the landscape over the centuries. Volunteers would be trained to read historic handwriting (palaeography) and would be given documents from the archives of the estates of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal to transcribe.

The second part of the project was to recruit and train volunteers to record the oral histories of people who lived and worked in the Skell Valley during the 20th century, a period not well covered by the paper archive. Interviews had the potential to include memories of weather and people's relationship with the land. The recordings would provide exhibition visitors and users of the archive with an alternative way to learn about the history of the Skell Valley. Both parts of Digging Deep in the Archives would be shared in pop-up exhibitions at Fountains Abbey, Ripon and elsewhere and in a longer, final exhibition.

Nature on Your Doorstep

This project, which had six subsidiary projects, was in part a response to the pandemic and emphasised the health benefits of being close to nature. Volunteers would help to create, improve and maintain spaces for nature, mostly in the urban environment of Ripon (at the Workhouse Museum garden, Ripon Walled Garden, Temple Garden and the YMCA) but also at Picking Gill Nature Reserve, managed by Grantley, Sawley, Skelding and Eavestone Parish Council. The sixth project was an acoustic bat-monitoring project involving volunteers, the Skell Valley Area Ranger and a research ecologist from the British Trust for Ornithology.

Volunteering City of Ripon

This was an 18-month project, led by Harrogate and District Community Action (HADCA), to develop a shared approach to volunteer recruitment, training and management, to attract volunteers and create a better, more consistent experience for them and their managers. This project was informed partly by the loss of volunteers following the pandemic and by the need to make local organisations, who rely on volunteers, more inclusive and more sustainable. The project included the appointment, by HADCA, of a part-time Volunteering Development Officer. HADCA members agreed that their priority was the development of the next generation of volunteers, and this led to the creation of a programme for young volunteers called The Power of 10. The job title of the Volunteering Development Officer was then changed to Power of 10 Coordinator.

Watery Wildlife

This project, led by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, would engage school pupils, teachers, families and community groups in learning to identify and monitor river wildlife and to encourage them to use their knowledge and enthusiasm to protect the habitat that 'watery wildlife' needs to thrive. As part of this project two local schools – one upstream in Grewelthorpe and one downstream in Ripon – would have a set of water monitoring equipment for their own use and for lending to other groups. This project would also create a free Watery Wildlife Resource Pack for school, youth and family groups to use independently.

Sulphur, Springs and Spas

The now derelict Aldfield Spa, with its sulphur spring in Spa Gill Wood, opened to visitors in the 1840s. The objectives of this project were for archaeology volunteers to record the remains of the cottage, the spring, the stone well head and Aislabie Bridge. In 2022, the new owner of Spa Gill Woods and Chinese Wood (see below) refused permission for Aldfield Spa to be part of the project, so a revised programme was agreed with the Heritage Fund. The archaeology volunteers would instead record Aislabie Bridge, Rough House and two features (a mound and a stone) in a field to the east of Spa Gill, on land belonging to Spa Ghyll Farm.

Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden

This project was to comprise research into oriental gardening and the Studley Royal Chinese Garden and the recording, by archaeology volunteers, of the Roman Monument, the Chinese Ting plinth and the Chinese Wood gate piers and walls. As noted above, the new owner refused access to the Chinese Wood and Chinese Ting. The recording of an 18th-century river underpass was therefore added to the planned outputs but was later withdrawn due to health and safety considerations. Two more structures were added to the outputs of Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes (below).

Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes

Working with the landowner, this project set out to reveal, record and conserve the designed landscape of Eavestone's Lakes and put it back on the map for people to enjoy. Eavestone was to be on the route of one of the walks created by the Exploring the Skell Valley project (below). Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers would help to clear foliage to improve access to the site and reveal lost views, while community archaeology volunteers would be trained to measure and record four neglected features, the stone boathouse, the bridge at the lake outflow, the cascade and the chasm walk. The boathouse and the bridge would be repaired.

Exploring the Skell Valley

The final project was to create a series of walking trails to encourage people to explore the less well known parts of the Skell Valley. There would be a linear path between Hell Wath Nature Reserve and Fountains Abbey (The Fountains Way), Hell Wath Nature Trail and a circular route (The Skell Valley Explorer) with a shorter and a longer option, encompassing the villages of Sawley and Grantley. There would be interpretation and information boards with a downloadable map at the starting point of each trail and way markers in places.

6. The outcomes and the projects that helped achieve them

Table 1 showed that each project was designed to support the achievement of more than one outcome. Reporting on each project's contribution to each outcome would involve a great deal of repetition. This section therefore illustrates each outcome with a selection of two or three projects. The selected projects are indicated with a diamond in Table 3 below. So, for example, outcome 5. Heritage is in better condition is illustrated with reference to Healthy Land, Healthy River, Native and Ancient Woodlands, and Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes. The black dots in column 5 indicate the other projects that contributed to this outcome. The dashes indicate a potential outcome for which there is not yet enough evidence to report.

Table 3. The outcomes and the projects chosen to illustrate them

The projects (below) and their outcomes (right)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Heritage Fund outcomes
<i>Landscape is resilient</i>										1. A wider range of people are involved in heritage 2. People have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions 3. People have developed skills 4. People have greater wellbeing 5. Heritage is in better condition 6. Heritage is better identified and better explained 7. The funded organisation is more resilient 8. The local area is a better place to live, work or visit 9. The local economy has been boosted
Healthy Land, Healthy River	•	•	•		◆			•	-	
Enterprising Landscape	•							-	-	
Tourism Development in the Skell Valley	•	•	•				-	◆	-	
<i>Nature thrives</i>										
Native and Ancient Woodlands in the Skell Valley	•				◆			•	-	
Hug an Ancient Tree	•		•		•	◆				
Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell Valley	•	•	•		•			◆		

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
<i>People are empowered</i>										
Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers	•	•	◆	•	•		•	•		
Digging Deep in the Archives	•	◆	•	•	•	•				
Nature on Your Doorstep	•	•	•	◆				•	-	
Volunteering City of Ripon	•	•	•	◆	•		•	•	-	
Watery Wildlife	•	◆	•	•		•	•	•		
<i>Heritage is celebrated</i>										
Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes	•		◆		•	•		•	-	1. A wider range of people are involved in heritage
Sulphur, Springs and Spas	•		◆			•				2. People have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions
Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden	•		•		•	◆		•		3. People have developed skills
Exploring the Skell Valley	•	•		•		•		◆		4. People have greater wellbeing
										5. Heritage is in better condition
										6. Heritage is better identified and better explained
										7. The funded organisation is more resilient
										8. The local area is a better place to live, work or visit
										9. The local economy has been boosted

All but three of the summaries of the outcomes show, under the heading, which projects have been chosen to illustrate them and each project description is prefaced by a small number of key points. The three exceptions are outcomes 1, 7 and 9. Almost every project contributed to the achievement of Outcome 1: a wider range of people are involved in heritage, so this summary provides an overview of range of people involved, with reference to several projects. Outcome 7: the funded organisation is more resilient and Outcome 9: the local economy has been boosted cannot be demonstrated in relation to specific projects. The Enterprising Landscapes project does not fit neatly under any of the outcomes but since it is related to economic development it follows Outcome 9.

Outcome 1. A wider range of people are involved in heritage

- The variety of opportunities for engagement with the Skell Valley's natural, built and cultural heritage, that the Skell Valley Project created, attracted a wide range of volunteers and participants
- Project volunteers included first-timers, existing volunteers for the National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape, and individuals who had volunteered elsewhere and were looking for a new experience
- The hyperlocal focus of some of the projects, particularly in Ripon, appealed to local residents
- Public-facing activities at Fountains Abbey (an international tourist destination) and an online archive research project enabled people from elsewhere in the UK and abroad to contribute to the Project

Thirteen of the fifteen Skell Valley projects depended on volunteers. They turned their hands to landscaping, clearing scrub, planting trees, repairing paths and erecting fences; positioning bat detectors and uploading the data collected, collecting water samples, counting moths; transcribing and indexing historic documents, recording oral histories, undertaking archaeological research, measuring ancient trees, supporting river dipping sessions, testing walking trails and writing directions for trail guides. Volunteers included people of every level of education and some with additional learning needs. Some had volunteered for decades and others never had. They came alone, in couples and in groups, from schools, the Rotary Clubs of Ripon Rowels and Harrogate, from Yorkshire Open Country, Zero Carbon Harrogate and Ripon YMCA. There were also corporate volunteers from, among others, an architectural practice, a bank and a software company.



For volunteer roles needing particular knowledge, or skills, training was provided, and the opportunity to learn was the motivation for many volunteers (see Outcomes 2 and 3 below). For others (and especially in the wake of the pandemic) it was about being outside, in the company of others and doing something different.

'I am enjoy giving something back to the community, working in nature, socialising with a different group of people and doing a physical activity, rather than being in an office.'
(Volunteer, 2023)

(Left) Wolseley UK corporate volunteers

There were opportunities to volunteer on an occasional basis – to ‘bash balsam’ at Hell Wath, for example – or to join a project team, as an archaeology, indexing or oral history volunteer, to complete a specific piece of work over several months. The hands-on landscaping and conservation tasks of the Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers have no end date and volunteers will continue to support the permanent post of Skell Valley Area Ranger (which will have different title once the Project has concluded). The regular volunteers in these roles include people who have retired, work part time, are freelance, studying, or caring for others. They come from a range of backgrounds, some living locally and others travelling from up to an hour away.



Above: Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers birch thinning at Eavestone Lake and above right: clearing scrub at Hell Wath Nature Reserve

Ten of the fifteen projects presented opportunities for the public to enjoy the Skell Valley’s natural, built and cultural heritage through an activity – an exhibition, a bioblitz, measuring a tree, or taking a walk. Most activities were free of charge. The only places for which there was an entry fee, for non-members, were Fountains Abbey and Ripon Museums, both of which have an annual membership scheme and welcome visitors from all over the world. An exhibition of photographs that was enjoyed by visitors to the Workhouse Museum from September 2023 - June 2024 and another by visitors to Fountains Mill in 2024 was subsequently shown in free venues. The 20 winners of the photography competition for people of all ages, *Capturing the Spirit of the River Skell*, organised by Ripon City Photographic Society, with the Ripon Museum Trust and the Skell Valley Project, went on to Ripon Walled Garden and *Skell Valley Voices*, the final exhibition of the Digging Deep in the Archives project, spent two months at Ripon Library, up to the end of the Skell Valley Project in May 2025.



Above: *Capturing the Spirit of the River Skell* at the Workhouse Museum, 2023 and one of the winning entries

'The landscape around the River Skell offers great raw material for taking inspiring photographs – from the wild moorland of Dallowgill at the top of the valley through to rolling farmland in Nidderdale AONB, Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal World Heritage Site, Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve and the historic City of Ripon – it's a photographer's paradise!' Stuart Ward, Ripon City Photographic Society

The Walled Garden, the Workhouse Museum Garden, the YMCA and Temple Gardens in Ripon were four of the sites for **Nature on Your Doorstep**. This hyperlocal project involved volunteers in improving and maintaining precious green spaces in the city. Each location had its own volunteers whose numbers and skills were boosted by Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers to complete the agreed tasks. The Walled Garden is a four-acre site run by Ripon Community Link with adults and young people with learning disabilities and volunteers. The Workhouse Museum Garden has a regular team of volunteers. The Nature on Your Doorstep activities in both locations involved a wide range of people. Temple Gardens, a small former burial ground, has recently (spring 2025) been transformed by a partnership that included the Skell Valley Project, Ripon in Bloom, Ripon Together, Ripon Business Improvement District, North Yorkshire Council and students from Evolve, a post-16 college in Ripon.

Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve is enjoyed mainly by people who live within walking distance. As part of the Skell Valley Project (**Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell**) the Friends of Hell Wath programmed participatory activities at weekends and during the school holidays, welcoming people of all ages to record fungi, butterflies and other flora and fauna. The Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers worked alongside Hell Wath's own volunteers on many occasions to clear scrub and balsam and to repair and improve paths. The Project has made Hell Wath more accessible to people with limited mobility and easier for everyone to find their way around. The **Exploring the Skell Valley** project has provided new interpretation boards, waymarkers and places to sit and the Fountains Way route, between Hell Wath and Fountains Abbey, is accessible to users of mobility scooters, wheelchairs and pushchairs.



Above: Exploring the Skell Valley on the newly accessible trails, 2025

Digging Deep in the Archives created four distinct opportunities for people to engage with the cultural heritage of the Skell Valley. Seventy volunteers (from around the country and abroad) worked remotely, indexing documents from the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal archive. They included teenagers, graduates interested in a career in archives, people who were at work and others who had retired. A team of seven volunteers were trained to collect oral histories from a total of 18 people who had lived and/or worked in the Skell Valley in the 20th century. It is worth noting, too, that all Digging Deep in the Archives exhibitions were family friendly, with activities for children built into them.

Two Skell Valley projects focused on the involvement of younger people – **Watery Wildlife**, delivered by Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust (see Outcome 2) and **Volunteering City of Ripon** (Outcome 4) delivered by HADCA. Watery Wildlife was designed to excite and inform children about their local, natural heritage, largely through school activities, but river dipping and the identification of watery wildlife proved equally popular with adults, when YDRT organised sessions in the Skell at Fountains Abbey.

The Volunteering City of Ripon project resulted in the establishment of a volunteering programme called The Power of Ten. Its purpose is to seed the habit of volunteering from primary school onwards and to create a pipeline of local volunteers to support local organisations, including heritage organisations. Working with local partners including the YMCA and schools, the Power of 10 has attracted a diverse group of young people. (See Outcome 4.)

Outcome 2. People have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions

Featured projects: Digging Deep in the Archives / Watery Wildlife

Digging Deep in the Archives

- West Yorkshire Archive Service has an additional 735 transcribed and indexed documents, searchable by key words, and 16 oral histories of the Skell Valley. This material is freely available to researchers and to the public, some of it online
- 70 indexing volunteers and seven oral history volunteers learned about different aspects of the natural, built and cultural heritage of the Skell Valley
- Visitors were intrigued by the Digging Deep in the Archives pop-up exhibitions shown in a variety of venues during the Project, and in the final multi-media exhibition, *Skell Valley Voices*, in 2024-25
- The contrast between the archival material and the contemporary recordings and photographs brought both to life

Digging Deep in the Archives invited people to learn about the natural, built and cultural heritage of the Skell Valley through historic documents and recent recordings. Delivered by West Yorkshire Archive Service, the project had two strands: the indexing of documents from the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal archive, and the recording of people's stories of living and working in the valley in the past 80 years. The oral history strand, led by consultant Virginia Arrowsmith, was in part a response to the lack of 20th-century content in the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal archive, but it was also an opportunity for volunteers and exhibition audiences to learn about the heritage of the area from a people's history point of view.

Both teams of volunteers received basic training in the skills needed for these tasks. The indexing volunteers had a half-day introduction to palaeography and as the project progressed, they became increasingly fluent in their reading of 18th and 19th-century letters, bills, maps and other documents. They worked on one page at a time and each was reviewed by two volunteers and by WYAS before it was catalogued. The indexing project was to have taken place at WYAS in Leeds but, in September 2021, when it was due to start, social distancing rules were still in place. Space at WYAS was limited and so it was decided that the volunteers would work remotely. It meant that more volunteers could take part and that they could be based anywhere. The response to

the advertisement was faster and larger than anticipated and because of the time needed to select, scan and email individual pages for transcription, the number of volunteers was capped at 70. This was almost five times the intended number and by the end of this part of the project, 735 documents containing 227,917 words had been transcribed and 800 hours volunteered. The joy of learning is captured in this comment from one volunteer.

'Here are the latest batch, about 20 minutes each. Clear handwriting but a few words I had to piece together and Google a bit. Ling, which is heather in thatching, I think. Turbary which seems to be peat cutting rights, and what I think is saying liquor for the Jury! '(Volunteer)

'I do feel that I'm steadily getting more confident with transcribing these letters and adapting to each writer's unique handwriting.' (Volunteer)

The oral history strand of the project ran from January to October 2023 and created opportunities for three groups of people to learn about heritage: the participants who shared their memories and perspectives; the volunteers who interviewed them; and the exhibition visitors (who included most of the participants and volunteers). Oral history consultant Virginia Arrowsmith provided the interviewers with a detailed briefing on best practice in oral history, the importance of preparation, including contextual research, interview techniques and the use of recording equipment. The thoroughness of the training helped to build the confidence of the team. They went on walks together to familiarise themselves with local landmarks and routes and feedback was collected by Virginia Arrowsmith from each of these.³

Interviewees were suggested by local contacts and over 200 hours, they made 16 recordings involving 18 people. None of the participants had previously been interviewed about living and/or working in Ripon and the Skell Valley and a common first response to the invitation was that they had nothing of value to share. Interviews often ran over and a second appointment was made. Sometimes this would include a walk to a location that had been mentioned:

'I really enjoyed my interview with Virginia,' wrote one interviewee. 'The so-called hour interview turned out to be over five hours! Also, a few weeks ago she got in touch and asked me if I would do a walk and talk...from Hell Wath sharing my memories of the River Skell, which I'm looking forward to doing.' (Oral history participant)

The volunteers made site visits to familiarise themselves with the locations that interviewees had referred to:

'Yesterday was very helpful in putting context into what we are learning from our interviewees. I found it especially helpful, for example, to spend time looking over at Skellfield Terrace, having heard so much about it from Roger. Although I grew up in Ripon, I gained a different type of knowledge about the city and the river'. (Volunteer interviewer)

³ An example of a feedback report is provided in Appendix 4



From 2022-24, WYAS created a series of small, pop-up exhibitions for visitors to Fountains Abbey and elsewhere in North Yorkshire. The first pop-up exhibition was at Ripon Library in June 2022. It shared information about the city from letters and accounts, maps and sketches. It attracted 64 visitors and was so well received by visitors and library staff that WYAS was asked back, during National Libraries Week, to run a pop-in palaeography session using documents transcribed by the volunteers. The theme of that week was 'Never Stop Learning'.



The first pop-up exhibition at Fountains Abbey ran for two days in July 2022, in Fountains Hall and illustrated the changes in the valley, from the wilderness of the 12th century when the first monks to the 18th-century pleasure gardens. The exhibition had 422 visitors. In September 2023, there was an exhibition at Fountains Mill called *Walking the Ancient Boundaries*. This brought the two strands of the project together (but without audio). Using the information from tithe maps, visitors learned about the natural features of the valley, its place names and buildings in the early 19th century. They noticed the impact on the Skell Valley of farming and designed landscapes and the heritage features that have not survived. This exhibition welcomed 580 visitors.

From the end of September 2024, visitors to Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal had six weeks to enjoy a multi-media exhibition in Fountains Mill. It incorporated display cases of archival material, a film with soundtrack, photographic portraits by the award-winning photographer Joanne Coates of each oral history participant and an interactive, Projection Augmented Relief Model (PARM) of the Skell Valley designed and built by Gary Priestnall and colleagues at the University of Nottingham. This model pinpointed the location of each story told and played a short extract of the relevant recording. The

form and content of the exhibition delighted visitors who spoke, unprompted, about how much they had learned. In April 2025 the same exhibition was hosted Ripon Library and ran until the end of May 2025.

'It's about the voices of people who wouldn't otherwise be heard.' (Exhibition visitor)

'The stories just give another dimension to it, don't they? They remind you that it's human stories that really matter... they're what we really connect with.' (Exhibition visitor)

'I feel very fortunate that this opportunity arose and that I made contact with the project team. The past can teach us so much...To think that these memories will be available for future generations to read about/view make me feel pleased and privileged.' (Oral history participant)



Above: The Projection Augmented Relief Model developed for Skell Valley Voices, Fountains Mill, 2024. Above right: photographic portraits of the oral history participants, taken by Joanna Coates. Extracts from the oral history recordings were played on a loop

Deeper learning

From 10 – 14 July and from 25-29 September 2023, as part of Digging Deep in the Archives, WYAS ran a week-long Research Volunteer Programme. It covered how archives catalogues work, palaeography, packaging and conservation, research skills, and curating an exhibition to share research findings. The teaching sessions were in the morning and in the afternoon, the volunteers explored the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal archive. The letters these volunteers transcribed, which included references to flooding and severe weather events, building design and plaster work were added to the WYAS catalogue. The volunteers (six in each week) ranged in age from 21 to 66 and the second from 17 to 70. All lived in Yorkshire. They included people with no experience of archives and while three were National Trust volunteers they had not been part of the indexing or oral history projects.

'[There was an] immediate change in my own perception of the importance of preserving memories. Holding paperwork, however mundane, that might have last been examined 250 years ago is moving and quite a humbling experience.' (Course participant)

'As the week progressed, the characters behind the day-to-day operations at Studley Manor began to come to life, and presented all of us, I think, with a more nuanced story of the historic complexities of running an estate, through the eyes, and certainly mouths, of some of its workers.' (Course participant)

'I was fascinated to learn about transcribing old documents. As a history geek it's been great to view original documents and trying to understand what the bigger picture was.' (Course participant)

From the start of the project in 2022, WYAS offered MA students in the School of History at Leeds University the opportunity to undertake research using the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal archive. Six students worked on projects relating to Digging Deep in the Archives and some of their research is already proving useful to the National Trust. For example, the gardening team have been shown a map with annotated references to historic planting plans and there is correspondence that refers to areas of the estate where plants have never thrived, due to water saturation. The National Trust is compiling data that shows the impact that weather events have on the site and historic data from the archive could help them to build a longer-term picture.

As a direct result of their involvement in the Skell Valley Project, Nottingham University, WYAS and North Yorkshire County Record Office have created a four-year PhD opportunity to research Yorkshire place names and use them to reconstruct the historic environment.

Watery Wildlife

- This project was delivered by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust's Education and Engagement Officer and volunteers
- Two primary schools (one upstream, one downstream) were consulted during the development phase and remained involved throughout.
- The number of pupil engagements proposed in the plan was unachievable because of the impact of the pandemic on schools' priorities and capacity, when they reopened
- The project provided each of the two schools with a water monitoring kits for its own use and for loan to local groups
- A Watery Wildlife Resource Pack for families, teachers and youth leaders is freely available online

In November 2019, during the development phase of the Skell Valley Project, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust's Education and Engagement Officer, Catherine Mason, ran a joint workshop for pupils at Grewelthorpe Primary School and Moorside Church of England Primary School in Ripon. The children were shown what lives in the river ('watery wildlife') and how soil running off the land can affect its habitat. The two schools, one upstream and one downstream, were invited to take a special interest in the Skell Valley Project and in Watery Wildlife in particular. Both schools embraced the opportunity and the same two lead teachers (Andrew Breckon at Grewelthorpe and Rachel Moss at Moorside) were involved throughout, creating opportunities for their pupils to learn about natural heritage.

'Our children in Years 4 and 5 had another super opportunity to work with the Rivers Trust on Wednesday with some river dipping in the Skell. The Year 5 children also continued their conservation work with the Skell Project and Friends of Hell Wath following on from their Fountains Abbey tree planting earlier in the year. They have been planting wildflower plants (grown from seeds) in the meadow at Hell Wath. The aim is to bring back native species that have been lost over the years, and to increase the biodiversity in the area. The children are looking forward to checking how their plants are doing when visiting Hell Wath with their families.' (Moorside Primary School newsletter, July 2023)

Each school was offered one free session with YDRT per year for four years and the opportunity for teachers to attend 'train the trainers' events. Each school was provided with a water monitoring kit for their own use and for loan to other local groups. The schools incorporated the Watery Wildlife activities into the curriculum. Rachel Goss is Moorside's Forest School teacher and regularly takes groups to nearby Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve, which includes a short stretch of the Skell. Both schools made use of YDRT's mobile classroom with its 3D rivers table, which shows how a river flows from its source to the sea and demonstrates its impact on the land. Both schools spent half days at Fountains Abbey, sketchin the river, learning about its role in the life of the Abbey, testing its depth and speed and identifying its inhabitants.

To increase the impact of the project, the Skell Valley Project paid for the production of the Watery Wildlife Resource, a free, online pack for parents, youth leaders and teachers. Andrew Breckon and Rachel Goss advised on the curriculum-related elements. The pack was published in April 2024 and can be downloaded from Nidderdale National Landscape's website. A small number of paper copies were printed, one of which is in Ripon Library. (<https://nidderdale-nl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Watery-Wildlife-Resource-Pack.pdf>)



Above: a paper copy of the Watery Wildlife Resource Pack, which is freely available online. Above right: a school group identifies the wildlife in the tray

River dipping days at Fountains Abbey delivered throughout the Project created opportunities for family groups to learn more about the life of rivers. The adults in these groups frequently commented that they had not had an experience like it since they were children, if at all. The large number of visitors meant that for reasons of safety and to protect the wildlife, participants were not allowed into the river. The number of visitors depended on the weather, but it averaged between 200 and 300 people per day. They enjoyed identifying the creatures that had been netted by the YDRT team. Trays, tables, magnifiers, microscopes and ID charts were provided and most visitors stayed for between five and thirty minutes.

'You can tell that the river is very clean because of the many species like mayfly nymphs living there.' (Child, 2024)

'I enjoyed the trays. It brought back memories of stream dipping here when very small.' (Adult, 2024)

Outcome 3. People have developed skills

Featured projects: Archaeology volunteers – Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden, Sulphur, Springs and Spas, Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes / Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers

The Skell Valley Project has created numerous opportunities for people to learn, in different ways and at different levels, about the natural, built and cultural heritage of the Skell Valley. It has also supported the development of skills in palaeography, oral history interviewing and recording (see Outcome 2, above), in archaeological surveying and recording, and in the identification of flora and fauna. The extensive practical conservation and land management skills developed by the Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers (digging, clearing, planting, constructing) have been used across the Project. This section looks at the skills acquired by the archaeology volunteers and the Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers.

Archaeological skills

- Archaeology volunteers received initial training in some essential archaeological skills and applied them to three projects: Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden, Sulphur, Springs and Spas and Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes
- The skills training was well received although volunteers with some previous experience hoped to learn more.

The Archaeological Practice Ltd, led by Richard Carlton and assisted by Marc Johnstone, Kennis Yip and Peter Ryder, started work on the Skell Valley Project in January 2023 and finished in April 2024. The brief was to 'reconnect communities with their unexplored heritage by facilitating the survey, investigation and recording of historic and archaeological features within the project area'. Twenty-three volunteers signed up for this opportunity. Some were existing Trust volunteers and a few had some previous archaeological experience. Each of the three projects involved nine or ten volunteers.

Through in-person and online sessions they learned about desk-based research, historic building recording, topographical survey, and the interpretation of aerial photography and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) maps. They were shown how to write archaeological reports and during site visits, they learned about the practical techniques of recording, including measured survey drawing of plans and elevations, photography and 3D modelling. They also visited North Yorkshire Records Office in Northallerton. Different aspects of the training interested different volunteers:

'...the introduction to historic building recording...and the range of historical records available at NYCRO.' (Archaeology volunteer, 2022)

'...the site visit to Rough House and the Aislabie bridge, because it enabled me to visualise what is involved in recording a building.' (Archaeology volunteer, 2023)

For **Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden**, volunteers were involved in researching and recording specific sites, under supervision. For context, they were given a presentation on the connection between the Chinese Garden and the history of oriental gardening in Britain. The list of sites in the Serpent Valley was based on National Trust Archaeologist Mark Newman's research and volunteers revisited them to check - and in some cases add to - the record.

They applied the same research and recording skills to **Sulphur, Springs and Spas** although, here, three of the four intended sites had to be exchanged for others when landowner permission was withheld. The sites they did research were Aislabie Bridge and Rough House, and a large, decorated stone and an earthwork on farmland, making an interesting contrast with the built heritage of the Serpent Valley. These activities enabled volunteers to develop skills in archaeological survey and recording techniques.



These were needed again for the third project in this group, **Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes**. Mark Newman had previously researched the site and volunteers walked the area with him, corroborating and adding to his findings. They also recorded two structures - the stone boathouse and the bridge. They took multiple photographs using standard and 3D photography, supervised by former Newcastle City Archaeologist David Heslop (Two other, more hazardous, features were photographed by The Archaeological Practice team.) The volunteers' work is described and illustrated in full in the Archaeological Practice's project report.⁴

'The archaeology has been an eyeopener which I thoroughly enjoyed – tramping round fields and measuring bridges.' (Archaeology volunteer, 2024)

Practical conservation skills - Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers

⁴ *Skell Valley Project, Archaeological Survey and Historic Building Record, Report AP23/40, The Archaeological Practice Ltd, June 2024*

The role of the Skell Valley Ranger (described on page 17) required training and practice in multiple skills. These included tree and hedge planting, hedging, scything, dry stone walling, peat sampling, fungi identification and biosecurity. Those involved in the Bat Out of Skell project learned how to set up bat detectors and some learned how to take river samples for iCASP's catchment monitoring programme. While skills development was not a primary motivation for most the Ranger Volunteers, everyone has been able to cite skills they have acquired or enhanced as a result of their involvement.

'Dead hedging, fence and stile making, peat analysis, tree and hedge planting, and use of associated tools.'

'I've learned how to record veteran trees. I know more about the area I live in, and I know how to do green hay spreading and peat sampling.'

'I've gained a greater knowledge of trees, both ancient and natural. I've gained skills in tree planting, hedge laying, ditch drainage management and the use of a number of tools.'



Above: Skell Valley Ranger volunteers learning how to make their own scythes, 2023



Above: Water monitoring



Above: Repairing drystone walls

Outcome 4. People have greater wellbeing

Featured projects: Volunteering City of Ripon / Nature on Your Doorstep

Volunteering City of Ripon – The Power of 10

- The Power of 10 has increased the wellbeing of young people, by enabling them to volunteer and recognising their contribution
- The project is generating good news stories about young people in Ripon and the surrounding area
- HADCA members, whose organisation delivered this project, is proud of what has been achieved

Harrogate and District Community Action was one of the Skell Valley Project's Delivery Partners. Its 18-month project was called Volunteering City of Ripon and included the appointment of a part-time Volunteering Development Officer. This job title was changed to Power of 10 Coordinator to match the name of the scheme that the project created.

The impetus for the Power of 10 was the need, identified by HADCA members, to build a pipeline of future volunteers for Ripon and the surrounding area. The Power of 10 invites young people from primary school age to eighteen to consider volunteering for an organisation or a cause that interests them or

that they already care about. Every volunteer is given a volunteering passport in which to record their hours. When they achieve their first ten hours, they are thanked and celebrated with a certificate and a badge. In addition to a certificate, at 20 hours they receive a Power of 10 folder, at 50 a Power of 10 t shirt and at 100 hours, a gift voucher (provided mostly by local businesses) and a personal reflection workshop. The scheme has already made a significant impact on the wellbeing of local young people locally and has increased the capacity of the organisations for which they are volunteering. The steering group included a member of staff each from Ripon YMCA, Ripon Library, Ripon Cathedral and New Beginnings Peer Support.

H&DCA
Harrogate and District
Community Action

RIPON SCHOOLS
POWER OF 10
H&DCA
VOLUNTEER

"ANYONE CAN GET INVOLVED
FROM
PRIMARY SCHOOL -18
AS AN INDIVIDUAL OR A GROUP"

WOULD YOU LIKE TO

- GAIN VALUABLE WORK EXPERIENCE
- LEARN NEW SKILLS
- HAVE FUN
- BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE
- MEET NEW PEOPLE
- IMPROVE YOUR WELLBEING

Become a community helper today!
Volunteer 10 -100 hours at a time and place to suit you, and you will receive your Power of 10 awards and rewards

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or simply visit your chosen voluntary organisation and ask if you can help them. They will be delighted you asked.

The Power of 10
powerof10@hadca.org.uk

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

LEVELLING UP

At an early stage HADCA established a partnership with Picture News, which supplies teachers with resources to support the teaching of current affairs. Picture News designed a pack for primary and another for secondary schools to increase children and young people's understanding of what volunteering is, why society needs volunteers, who volunteers and why. HADCA members were provided with free online training in how to work with young volunteers (most had never done so). The training was provided by the Charity Learning Consortium and could be done at any time.

In 2023, the Power of 10 attracted 60 volunteers. It had its official launch in March 2004 and that year recruited a further 100 young people. Until December 2024, when Outwood Primary Academy Greystone became a partner, most of the volunteers were teenagers. A spin-off project designed to engage 14-30 year olds in monthly outdoor volunteering (with the Skell Valley Area Ranger) did not attract enough people to make it viable. The plan now to offer family-friends projects of a day or two, during the school holidays, which could potentially lead to the establishment of a regular Saturday group.

By the end of 2024, four volunteers who had completed more than 100 hours were invited to become Power of 10 Volunteer Ambassadors. This role provides them with experience of communicating beyond their peer group and of public speaking. The Power of 10 is changing the way young people in Ripon and the Skell Valley are seen and the way they see themselves. Three volunteers have won the St Wilfrid's Award for Individual Young Person. This is a community awards programme, with a ceremony at Ripon Cathedral, that recognises the achievements of local organisations and individuals. In 2023 the Individual Young Person Award went to Harry Wilkinson and in 2024 it was shared by Bethany Murphy and Zoe Ingham. The Power of 10 Coordinator, Jo Thackway, also won the Individual Supporter of Youth Award in 2024.

'Volunteering gave me something to focus on and work towards. It made me feel better about myself. Doing activities with children and having a positive influence on them is one of the most rewarding feelings. I've achieved things I never imagined I would be able to. I did what made me happy and it has opened up amazing opportunities.' (Bethany)

'Through volunteering I have been able to help many people, and this has brought a sense of pride.' (Zoe)

The project has enjoyed a strong partnership with the YMCA and in March 2025 they launched the first Ripon Youth Council creating more opportunities for young people to become active citizens, to share their ideas and develop their leadership skills through youth-led projects.

Nature on Your Doorstep (see page 18)

- The Ripon-based projects have promoted pride in and responsibility for green urban spaces
- Each Nature on Your Doorstep project has increased the capacity of the people managing the site to maintain it
- The organisations have got to know each other better and are more likely to collaborate
- The bat recording programme (see outcome 6) was an expected source of interest and joy

'I retired last year and wanted to make contribution towards conservation and nature. I wanted to do something outdoors that was different from my previous career.' (Volunteer 2023)

'I'm enjoying giving something back to the community, working in nature, socialising with a different group of people and doing a physical activity rather than being in an office.'

'I enjoy being busy and the sense of community. I'm interested in history and conservation, and it's fun!'

'I love gardening and wildlife and being outdoors and I'm interested in improving the environment, so this was ideal!'

Outcome 5. Heritage is in better condition

Featured project: Healthy Land, Healthy River

For reasons of space, this section focuses on the natural heritage, but it is important to note that the Project left parts of the Skell Valley's built heritage in better condition too. Repair and conservation work was undertaken at Hell Wath Nature Reserve, Eavestone Lake and at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal (see paragraphs 6 and 8 below).

Healthy Land, Healthy River

- Working with farmers and landowners, the Project introduced natural flood and land management measures on 20 farms. It is recognised that many more interventions will be needed but the need to take action has been recognised by those already involved.
- iCASP's monitoring of waterflow and sediment in the catchment has enabled it to establish baselines (plural) for the continued measurement of water flow in different weather conditions. It is keen to continue
- The draft Payment by Results scheme, based on information provided by Skell Valley farmers, is informing thinking more widely

During the development phase that the AONB (now Nidderdale National Landscape)'s Land Management Team Leader and Skell Valley Project Manager laid the foundations for this project by visiting 16 farms to explain what the project was aiming to achieve and to talk about possible natural flood management interventions. The measures taken during delivery phase included restoring river meanders, building leaky dams (using partially submerged wood brash), digging ponds, planting trees and hedges, redirecting surface water run-off and changing land management practices. Most of the tree and hedge planting work was done by volunteers - Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers, corporate volunteers and members of local voluntary groups.



Skell Valley Volunteers placing fence posts and unrolling the wire for a new fence at Hind House Farm (right), July 2023

The Skell Ranger Volunteers and Open Country have been hard at work throughout the valley. They've finished planting 2500 hedge trees at a farm near Grantley which will slow the flow of water off the farmland to the river and connect the surrounding woodlands with wildlife corridors and have installed about 280m of fencing along the banks of the river; creating another buffer for water and more riverside habitat for wildlife.
(Skell Valley Project Team newsletter, Spring 2022)



New hedging and fence, Hill House Farm, 2025



A cross drain at Skell Gill, 2022

'The farmers at Gowbusk Farm said how pleased they were with all the fencing and tree planting that we had done on the farm for them, and how easy it was for them, in that the project sorted it all out for them e.g. organising the contractors and the volunteers for planting.'
(Skell Valley Area Ranger, 2024)

This work was funded partly by the European Regional Development Fund. A summative assessment of the outcomes of the ERDF grant, by Amion Consulting, found that the approaches chosen had been informed by research, and by consultation with the landowners, thereby ensuring that they would be appropriate and would have local support. The report concluded that the interventions had improved the conservation status of 30 hectares of habitat and provided enhanced protection from flooding for 93 businesses in Ripon.



Above: the silted river.



Above right: Silt survey at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, 2022

The Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Area Solutions Programme (iCASP) team at the University of Leeds as a key player in this project. It had two briefs. One was to monitor sediment and water flows at catchment scale and to establish baselines from which to measure the impact of these interventions. The other was to work with the landowners and farmers to design a Payment by Results scheme, to support capital interventions and changes in land management approaches that would benefit both the local catchment and homes and businesses downstream. The draft Payment by Results Manual ⁵ and iCASP's report on the catchment scale monitoring ⁶ provide a comprehensive description of each project and deserve to be read in full. With reference to the intended

⁵ Bond, S., Brown, H., Klarr, M., Hodgson, D., Keevil, G. and Naz, F. (2025) Payment by Results. Manual for implementation in the Skell Valley, North Yorkshire. Healthy Land, Healthy River Project. University of Leeds and Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme

⁶ Brown, H., Keevil, G., and Hodgson, D.M. (2025) Final Report: Skell Valley Catchment Scale Monitoring. University of Leeds and Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme

outcome, **Heritage is in better condition**, the following three conclusions of the catchment scale monitoring report are of particular interest. These are taken directly from the report. Supplementary, explanatory comments are made in [brackets].

What evidence is there that the Skell is flashy?

The Skell is a flashy catchment [i.e. the river rises and falls quickly after rain] with short response times between rainfall events and increase in river level and sediment load. The increase in high flow peaks shown in the river level data without concurrent increase in peaks in rainfall data suggest that the river Skell is flashy and becoming flashier. Both the intensity and frequency of large flow events are increasing in the River Skell since 2012. There is no evidence of increases in large rainfall event frequency and only limited evidence of rainfall intensity increasing. The observed increase in the flashiness of the river Skell is attributed to changes in land use throughout the catchment that have led to reductions in infiltration and storage capacity, and increase in overland flow, and other external drivers which have increased the amount of water draining into the river. [Climate change is increasing the intensity of rainfall events.] Therefore, the installation of NFM interventions is timely.

Does NFM/NBS make a difference?

The Skell Valley is a heterogeneous catchment with complex interlinked parameters. The timescale of this project has established a time series over an unusually long period but has been revealed to be too short to establish and quantify the impact of the natural flood management/nature-based solutions. Most of the NFM in the Skell Valley, especially trees and hedgerows, are not mature enough to provide NFM benefits. On an intervention scale, it has been possible to show positive impacts. However, understanding these benefits on a catchment scale will require a longer period of monitoring. This will help understanding of the role of pre-cursor events and seasonal land use change, and the natural variability in annual weather patterns. Even when mature, the NFM/NBS will not prevent flooding in the Skell Valley. However, a longer-term monitoring will be able to use similar weather patterns from previous data to demonstrate how the interventions can both reduce and extend the flood peak, and therefore reduce the associated damage to the heritage landscape.

The overland flow and sediment erosion risk maps for the catchment scale monitoring were not ground truthed.⁶ When this step was undertaken at a farm scale with the land holder it was invaluable and ensured that NFM were placed in the most effective possible location. As the models do not include field drains, small springs or elevation under 5m, it can misappropriate flood and erosion risk, resulting in a less effective NFM type being chosen or location used. For example, leaky woody dams are better suited to tributaries rather than main channel locations with steep sided banks.

What makes a good monitoring strategy?

A good monitoring strategy needs to balance [the] upfront cost of equipment with [the] on-going cost of maintenance, site visits to download data, data storage, and data analysis by experts. In-river, high frequency, time series instruments are invaluable for identifying trends. These instruments also allow for continual monitoring, and as such can monitor high flow events without endangering staff, unlike the volunteer sampling protocol. The downside is that their deployment creates large data files over the course of a project and require expertise to install, set up and process the data collected. Nonetheless, we

⁶ Ground truthed, i.e. checked against in-situ observations

found that pairing river level and turbidity sensors were an ideal way to monitor responses to precipitation, and that multiple pairs can help to track flood waves. Volunteer sampling proved to be a great way to obtain a lot of information about a catchment during 'normal' flow conditions. An added benefit is that volunteer sampling helps to engage the local community with the wider aims of the project. The wide range of parameters tested each month allowed for a catchment-wide picture which would have been prohibitively expensive to have replicated with in-river probes. These data helped to inform the optimum location of in-river monitoring probes, identifying areas of interest and possible sources of sediment.

This extract from the Skell Valley Catchment Scale Monitoring report finishes here.

Outcome 6. Heritage is better identified and better explained

Featured projects: Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden / Hug an Ancient Tree / Bat out of Skell (Nature on Your Doorstep)

The archive strand of Digging Deep in the Archives (described under outcome 2, above) helped to identify and explain parts of the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Archive. Hug an Ancient Tree invited volunteers to identify and record this aspect of the Skell Valley's natural heritage. The bat survey undertaken in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology has added to the body of knowledge about bats in the valley.

The main focus of the three archaeological projects (outcome 3, above) was engage volunteers in the heritage of the Skell Valley and parts of that heritage were better identified and explained in the process. *The Archaeological Survey and Building Record* compiled by The Archaeological Practice, which draws on the work of National Trust Archaeologist Mark Newman, The Archaeological Practice and the archaeology volunteers, provides a comprehensive and accessible description in words and images. It includes an inventory of structures in the Serpent Valley (a distance of 1.2km between the east end of the main lake and the Green Man gate) and at Eavestone Lakes (the stone boathouse, the stone, arched bridge and revetted lakeside walkway by the outflow of Scale Beck) and Aldfield (Rough House, Aislabie Bridge, the earth work and decorated stone at Spa Ghyll Farm).

Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Gardens

- The Roman Monument was the subject of extensive study by specialists prior to its conservation and repair
- The Serpent Valley and Chinese Gardens are better understood ...

The Roman Monument (also known locally as the Devil's Chimney) is a Grade II-listed, single-storey, mid-18th century, stone folly on a cliff above the Serpent Valley. The decision to conserve and repair it as part of the Skell Valley Project required an extensive amount of preparatory examination and reporting, as a result of which this feature of the Serpent Valley is better identified and better explained.

In 2021, National Trust archaeologist Mark Newman wrote a background report on the building, Mason Clark Associates undertook a structural condition assessment and Woodhall Planning and Conservation produced an architectural assessment to inform the specification of conservation works required. In 2022 a Level 3 historic building survey was completed by Ecus and the conservation and repair work was undertaken by Andrew Osguthorpe Limited.

On a Heritage Open Day, 17 September 2022, while the work was underway, visitors to Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal were invited to stop at the Roman Monument hub to find out more about the conservation work that was taking place. There was also the opportunity to join a walk and talk that day.

The Roman Monument has been ‘better identified and better explained’ as a result of this project, but volunteers were not as closely involved in the process as envisaged. The reasons for this were deadlines and health and safety considerations.



The Skell Valley Project’s Heritage Officer was appointed in July 2022 (nine months later than planned, owing to a lack of applicants) and the partnership funding deadline for the completion of this work was just three months later, at the end of October. Archaeology volunteers took part in an initial training day on historic building recording and in a subsequent session with members of the team from Ecus. This included a visit to the Roman Monument and an opportunity to practice recording on site, but the necessity to work at pace to meet the funding deadline combined with health and safety considerations curtailed the volunteers’ involvement.

Hug an Ancient Tree

- Hug an Ancient Tree resulted in 85 new records being added to the Woodland Trust’s Ancient Tree Inventory
- There is greater awareness among the project’s volunteers and public participants in related events of the importance of these trees

The designed landscape of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal and the wider Skell Valley are home to many ancient and veteran trees. The Skell Valley Project created an opportunity to identify, record and map previously unidentified trees and to highlight their importance to the Valley’s natural heritage.

Volunteers were trained to undertake the work, which included uploading them to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory and they were supported in this by a local Ancient Tree Inventory Verifier.



This project included a small number of public events. They included an ancient tree discovery day during October half term in 2022 when one of the National Trust's ancient tree advisors, Brian Muelaner, gave a talk, followed by a guided walk. That same week, the Skell Valley Project and Little Ripon Bookshop co-hosted A Landscape of Trees, a talk by authors Simon Toomer and Max Adams, which was attended by at least 60 people. Visitors to Fountains Abbey can now enjoy a self-guided, two-and-a-half mile, ancient tree trail.

The Skell Valley's ancient tree population includes oak, sweet chestnut and ash, some of which have been affected by ash dieback. The identification of these trees as part of the Skell Valley Project is already informing plans for future planting.



Hugging an ancient tree, October 2022

'My daughter and I loved learning about the ancient trees on the estate and particularly enjoyed walking to look at some of the specific examples that had been mentioned in the talk. I had no idea that the oldest cherry tree in the UK was there even though I must have walked past it many times. We will pay much more attention to the variety and ages of trees next time we're at Fountains!' (October 2022)

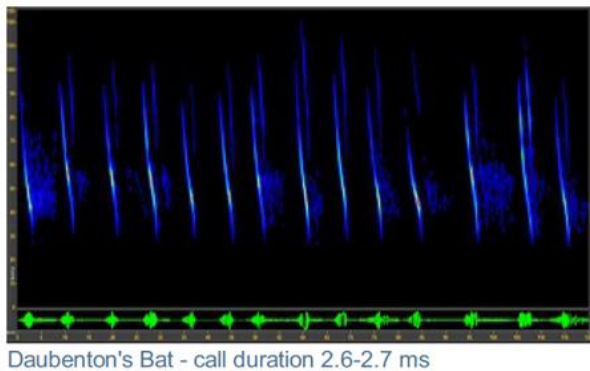
Bat out of Skell

This project, which was funded partly funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) programme, was one of the Nature on Your Doorstep projects. Its objectives were:

- to provide baseline data on the distribution and activity of the different bat species that occur in the Skell Valley catchment
- to improve understanding of the status, distribution and timing of occurrence of bats and small mammal species that occur in the Skell Valley.
- to involve and inspire a section of the wider community to connect and engage with an aspect of nature that is poorly known and understood.
- to help develop a community awareness of what bats do for us, what they require, and why it is important to conserve them.

Between April and mid-August 2024, a team of ten volunteers took responsibility for positioning one of five National Trust bat detectors in agreed locations for a minimum of four consecutive nights. The survey covered 155 nights in 66 locations.

The data was uploaded, by a volunteer or the Skell Valley Area Ranger, to the BTO Acoustic Pipeline where 'an initial automated analysis was carried out to identify the species present'. Altogether, there were 228,254 recordings. They included 130,460 bat recordings of seven different species, 202 recordings of four small terrestrial mammals, and two audible moths. The project report provides a species-by species breakdown of spatial, seasonal, and through-the-night activity.



The project report,⁷ which is co-authored by the Skell Valley Area Ranger, concludes: 'The Skell Valley Bat Project capitalises on the interest and enthusiasm of volunteers to participate in biodiversity monitoring to systematically collect bat distribution and activity data across the Skell Valley... This has resulted in a robust dataset, which has increased knowledge and understanding of bat distribution and activity across the Skell Valley.'

⁷ Bat distribution and activity in the Skell Valley catchment, 2024. Stuart Newson, Senior Research Ecologist and Gabby Crisp, Skell Valley Area Ranger
British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)

Outcome 7. The funded organisations – the National Trust at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal and Nidderdale National Landscape – are more resilient

The Lead Partners – the National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape – have worked hand in hand to deliver the Skell Valley Project. The experience of working together has made both organisations more resilient. They have identified areas of common interest and shared their knowledge and skills. They have a better understanding of each other's priorities, needs and strengths and this is likely to inform the future plans of both organisations.

The Trust's improved understanding of the dynamics of the Skell makes Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal more resilient from a conservation perspective. It can now reduce the frequency with which it removes silt from the water course. It has introduced cost effective ways of reducing the impact of flooding, and the work undertaken by the iCASP team at the University of Leeds is enabling the Trust to target its work in a more focussed way.

The Skell Valley Project has had a positive impact on how the National Trust is viewed by local organisations. It is much more likely to be seen as a good neighbour, with a greater openness to working in partnership. The continuation of the Area Ranger post created by the Project will help to maintain relationships with farmers in the Skell Valley. The Project has also enabled the National Trust at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal to build relationships with statutory funding agencies which may lead to funding opportunities at some point in the future.

Outcome 8. The local area is a better place to live, work or visit

Featured projects: Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell, Tourism Development in the Skell Valley, Exploring the Skell Valley,

Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell

- The Friends of Hell Wath, a local group that helps North Yorkshire Council to care for Hell Wath, an important nature and heritage site on the edge of Ripon, has worked with the Skell Valley Project Team to conserve, protect and improve the site.
- The visitor experience at Hell Wath has been significantly enhanced by participatory activities (butterfly surveys, fungi forays), improvements to the landscape and paths, the repair of a Grade II-listed marker stone and the introduction of information boards, waymarking and seating.
- The Project has helped the Friends of to increase their capacity by attracting trustees and volunteers with specialist knowledge and skills, adopting a woodland management plan, and establishing a partnership with Plantlife.

Hell Wath, the 21.9 acre green space on the south-west edge of Ripon, includes a designated local nature reserve that enfolds the Skell on its way to join the Rivers Laver and Ure. Historically, Hell Wath has served many purposes. These included pasture for grazing in the 18th century, Ripon Race Course in the late 19th century, and one of the largest army camps in Britain during the First World War. Today, two well kept playing fields and a club house back on to

the wilder part of the reserve designated as a Local Nature Reserve. There has been a walking route between Hell Wath and Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal for years but neither it nor the reserve have been as widely known or appreciated as they could be.

The Friends of Hell Wath started life as a litter-picking group, helping Harrogate Borough Council (which was replaced by North Yorkshire Council in April 2023) to care for the site. During the development phase of the Skell Valley Project, the Friends worked with an ecologist to identify the priorities for the area and these informed both their first management plan and the objectives of their Skell Valley project, Hell Wath – green gateway to the Skell. The Skell Valley Project chose Hell Wath as the location for its official launch in September 2021. The early stage of the project involved contractors clearing the scrub that had encroached on to the grassland and was limiting the supply of nectar for invertebrates. Hawthorn and blackthorn bushes and some trees were cut down and a silted-up, spring-fed pond was drained, so that it could be restored. A few of Hell Wath's regular visitors were shocked by these interventions and in February 2022 called a public meeting to express their objections and ask for reassurance that the spirit of the place would not be destroyed.



Scrub clearance and pond fencing - Improvements at Hell Wath

'The evidence of change made subsequent work much less contentious,' says Carol Leo, a trustee of the Friends of Hell Wath. As the wildflowers began to flourish, people could see the benefits of clearing the scrub. A lesson learned from that early experience was that every phase of the project would need to be explained in writing, on publicly accessible noticeboards, on site. It was not enough to communicate through social media alone and from then on, the Skell Valley Project paid for eye-catching, professionally designed and printed notices at each of the main entrances to the reserve. The Skell Valley Ranger

Volunteers were often to be found at Hell Wath, working alongside the Friends of Hell Wath and sometimes with other volunteers. In October 2023, volunteers from Open Country Yorkshire and Wolseley UK helped to resurface paths in the nature reserve. The Friends of asked all-comers to join the Ranger Volunteers for a few hours of balsam bashing or hand cutting scrub. They invited local groups to deliver family-friendly activities during the school holidays. Since August 2022, they have hosted a day of free Forest School activities as part of the FunFest organised by Ripon Together and Ripon BID.

The day includes river dipping, den building, mud kitchens and drumming. Jeremy Dunford, Secretary of the Friends of Hell Wath reflected: *'It was encouraging to see so many families coming to enjoy the natural resources that Hell Wath has to offer - from woodland to water and wide-open spaces.'* Throughout the Skell Valley Project they organised bioblitzes, butterfly surveys, wildflower identification days and fungi forays. *'I have reached my maximum for adventuring today. Thank you. The puffballs were my favourite.'* (A young participant with special educational needs at the Fungi Foray, at Hell Wath, in December 2023. His parents asked for more information about similarly accessible outdoor activities.)

'The project has changed our focus a bit and attracted expertise,' says Carol Leo. 'It has increased our capacity to achieve our objectives.' The Friends of Hell Wath became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2021 and its Board of Trustees now includes individuals with directly relevant knowledge and skills. Other interested individuals have become volunteers. A member of the local bat group is now conducting regular bat surveys of Hell Wath, for example.



Identifying watery wildlife, fungi and moths at Hell Wath

Hell Wath has become physically and intellectually more accessible. While North Yorkshire Council has continued to maintain its public footpaths, the Project resurfaced what was often a muddy track from Hell Wath Cottage to the top of the meadow, making it much easier for users of pushchairs and wheelchairs to negotiate. There is a new Hell Wath Nature Trail with interpretation boards and illustrated seating and the route between Hell Wath and Fountains Abbey (Fountains Way) is now wheelchair accessible.



As a result of these improvements people are enjoying the site and with new housing being built on nearby West Lane, the number of immediate neighbours continues to grow. Visitors see that Hell Wath is looked after and are treating it well. There is less litter and less casual damage. The new interpretation emphasises the designated status of the reserve and the importance of caring for it.

'The Hell Wath Nature Trail is a little gem — peaceful, scenic, and full of chances for kids to explore, paddle, and play. With no set loop and multiple ways to explore, it's easy to come back again and again and enjoy it from a new angle each time. We'll definitely be back!' (<https://yorkshiretots.com/>)

Next steps

The Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers and Skell Valley Area Ranger will continue to support the Friends of Hell Wath in carrying out their work.

In May 2024, the Friends of Hell Wath became one of the six Yorkshire organisations taking part in Plantlife's Growing Community Connections Project. Plantlife is providing training and a small amount of funding for the creation of community-led woodmeadows,

to promote botanical diversity. A grant of £1k from has been used to install rabbit-proof fencing around the wildflower meadow that has grown where scrub used to be. A grant from Ripon City Council has paid for a tree survey and the Skell Valley Area Ranger has facilitated the drafting of a woodland management plan. Once agreed with North Yorkshire Council, the Friends of Hell Wath will no longer have to apply for multiple permissions. Newly planted trees are now overseen by volunteer tree guardians.

The repair of the so-called Fairy Steps that date back to Hell Wath's time as an army camp are still in need of repair and on the strength of what they have achieved with the Skell Valley Project, the Friends of are planning to apply to the Heritage Fund in support of the project.

Tourism Development in the Skell Valley

- This project was strengthened by the collaborative approach of the Skell Valley Project, its tourism development consultant and the newly created Ripon Business Improvement District (BID)
- The 34 businesses that engaged with the project had access to discussions and workshops, shared marketing content, a marketing action plan and advice from the tourism consultant
- There are few tourism businesses in the Skell Valley beyond Ripon and in most cases their capacity (staff and time) to take part in projects such as this one is limited by their small size and work schedules.

This project, led by tourism consultant Susan Briggs, set out to increase collaboration between tourism and tourism-related businesses, with the long-term objective of persuading visitors to Ripon and the Skell Valley to stay longer and explore further. The STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) Economic Assessment for North Yorkshire for 2023 (published by Visit North Yorkshire in 2024) provides a baseline against which change in visitor numbers, the length of stay and spending in Ripon, at least, can be measured. In 2023 584,000 visitors spent an average of 1.7 days in Ripon.

The tourism development project was designed before the establishment of the Ripon Business Improvement District (BID) in June 2021. The BID extends as far up the Skell Valley as Grantley Hall and its remit includes business support and marketing. The BID also now coordinates Visit Ripon, which exists to promote the city and surrounding area. The collaborative mindset of the small Ripon BID staff team, Susan Briggs and the Skell Valley Project team minimised the risk of duplication. For the Skell Valley Project Susan Briggs ran a series of free, small-scale events for any business that wished to attend. These took place in Ripon or online. They included open-ended discussion of issues and more structured sessions on specific topics, such as social media and group travel. These were chosen in response to what businesses said they were interested in and needed.

The objective was to work with 20 businesses across the project and this number was exceeded. Of the 34 businesses that attended one of the five events that took place in 2023-24, ten were tourist attractions (including Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, Ripon Cathedral, Newby Hall and the Himalayan Garden and Sculpture Park), eight were hospitality businesses, seven were retailers (who count tourism businesses and tourists among their customers), four were public sector organisations, three were service providers (including marketing and photography) and two were voluntary sector organisations. Six of the 34 participants were based in the Skell Valley beyond Ripon. Twenty-five were not part of any other tourism network.

The project highlighted the fact that small businesses in the Skell Valley may lack the capacity to take part in projects of this kind. If they are seasonal businesses, the owner may have a second job. In season they are likely to be working long days, with little spare time to drive to Ripon for an event of uncertain value. If the value of the event is not obvious, they are unlikely to prioritise it.

Skell Valley businesses naturally direct their customers to Ripon. As a result of this project it is thought, by those involved, that Ripon businesses are likely to be encouraging their customers to explore the Skell Valley, its well known attractions and its new walking trails.

The project plan envisaged the establishment of an online tourism business community for Ripon and the Skell Valley, but there are too few businesses to sustain it. Instead, Susan Briggs created a website <https://www.riponskellvalley.co.uk/about> where users could find the marketing action plan, shared marketing content and sustainable tourism information that she had produced for them. During the project this site was also used to provide details of the events described above.

Find out how you can get involved and benefit your business



In 2023, the *Daily Telegraph* travel writer Helen Pickles was persuaded to spend a few days in Ripon and the Skell Valley and she wrote an enthusiastic article. Apart from Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal its focus was Ripon, but this was a positive start and the article was reissued, with updates in 2025.

'If you can get an external endorsement people are more likely to feel positive about the place.' Susan Briggs

In 2025 Ripon was included in the *Sunday Times* list of the seven best places to live in the North and North East. The Skell Valley Project has attracted local, regional and national media coverage. Between October 2023 and March 2024, the National Trust recorded 31 mentions, 22 of which were articles in North and North East newspapers. Visit Ripon has a page on Substack, the newsletter platform widely used by journalists and does sometimes refer to Ripon and the Skell Valley

Exploring the Skell Valley

- The new signposted and interpreted trails that include Ripon, Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, Eavestone Lake, Grantley and Sawley are new opportunities for local residents and visitors to explore the Skell Valley for free
- the route between Ripon and Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal is now accessible to mobility vehicles and pushchairs

This was the last of the fifteen projects to be completed and one of the most publicly visible and promoted. The creation of the three trails involved extensive research, consultation, planning and negotiation involving multiple stakeholders, the result of which was a shared sense of purpose, to promote the Skell Valley and the surrounding area as a place for people to enjoy. Concerns about the likely increase in walkers crossing land, leaving gates open and letting dogs off the lead had to be addressed. Public footpaths and bridleways were resurfaced and improved, gates and bridges were repaired and upgraded and waymarkers and seating installed. The designers, Creative Core, produced designs for the information and interpretation boards, printed and online guides, waymarkers and the seating in Seven Bridges Valley and at Hell Wath, and managed the production of all elements. Volunteers walked the trails and informed the content of the guides and some went on to lead guided walks.



Exploring the Skell Valley at Eavestone and Studley Royal

The trails promise to reveal the Skell Valley in a new way. Hell Wath has a family-friendly nature trail. The Fountains Way between Ripon City Centre and Fountains Abbey, via Hell Wath has a wheelchair and pushchair-accessible option. The Skell Valley Explorer has two loops, one longer than the other. Grantley, Sawley, Skelding and Eavestone Parish Council warmly welcomed the inclusion of their villages in the project and the installation of high-quality interpretation in Grantley and Sawley.



Above: the interpretation board on Sawley Village Green



New seating on Fountains Way at Studley Royal

The stakeholders included landowners across the Skell catchment, rights of way officers, the Friends of Hell Wath, Ripon City Council, Ripon BID, Ripon Disability Forum, Ripon Rowel, Ripon Civic Society, Ripon Museums Trust, the Ripon Inn, Transdev, Grantley Hall, Grantley, Sawley, Eavestone and Skelding Parish Council, Studley Roger Parish Council, North Yorkshire Council, Nidderdale National Landscape and the National Trust.

By the end of May 2025, the 40-second promotional video of the trails had had 10,000 views on the National Trust Yorkshire Facebook page and more than 1,000 each on the Instagram pages of National Trust Yorkshire and Visit North Yorkshire. Instagram is also carrying. Individual influencers are also helping to spread the word.

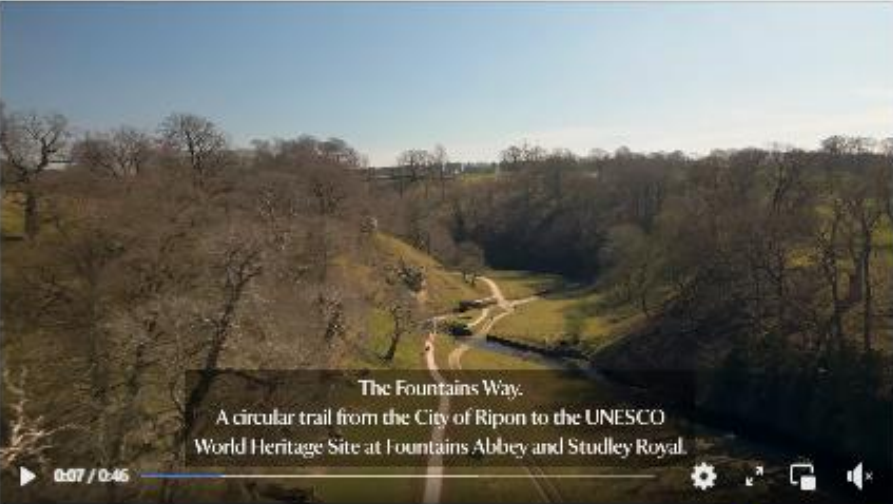
Skell Valley Project
Published by Rachel Savage

9 May at 19:00 · 🌐

We're excited to share this video of the new walking trails. This shows the variety of the valley and these walks will allow you to immerse yourself in the nature and history of the Skell Valley.

The Fountains Way 📍 <https://bit.ly/4iWQwkH>
 Skell Valley Explorer Trail 📍 <https://bit.ly/4iVMCsi>
 Hell Wath Nature Trail 📍 <https://bit.ly/3RRGcPK>

The National Lottery Heritage Fund Yorkshire's Great Houses, Castles & Gardens Nidderdale National Landscape Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal, National Trust Friends of Hell Wath Visit Ripon



The Fountains Way.
A circular trail from the City of Ripon to the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal.

0:07 / 0:46

See insights and ads

Boost post

Skell Valley Project
Published by Rachel Savage

6 May at 11:40 · 🌐

Its great to see people are enjoying the Hell Wath Nature Trail



the Skell Valley.

It's National Walking Month which means it's the perfect opportunity to head out and discover the nature on your doorstep.
 Three new walking trails h... See more

Wag RUN DMC - Wal

Skell Valley Project
Published by Rachel Savage

12 May at 10:33 · 🌐

Thank you [Yorkshire Tots to Teens](#) for this great review of our Hell Wath Nature Trail. It's great to see their smiling faces 😊... See more



Yorkshire Tots to Teens
11 May at 19:47 · 🌐

NEW WALK ALERT!

After Lily and I enjoyed the scenic Fountains Way walk to [Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal, National Trust](#) last week, our writer Georgina took on the shorter, little-leg-friendly Hell Wath Nature Trail in Ripon with her family – and it's a beauty! 🍷🌿

Read all about it here - <https://yorkshiretots.com/a-glorious-family-walk-on-the-/>

- ✓ Totally free to visit
- ✓ Great paddle spots along the river
- ✓ Perfect for little legs and big imaginations – with sticks to collect, dens to build, and even a bit of history to spot
- ✓ Dog-friendly with shady woodland trails and cooling river dip

👉 Read the full guide here: <https://yorkshiretots.com/a-glorious-family-walk-on-the-/>

[Nidderdale National Landscape](#)

Ripon Disability-Forum
3 May at 21:58 · 🌐

Compo and Cleggy (no fog in sight) try out the new accessible route from Hell Wath to Studley, and into the Deer Park.

Accessible in this instance means that the gates and surface have been improved so they can be accessed on wheels. Gates are still needed because live stock access to the area.

Individuals disabilities and/or equipment might make this is harder for some and some assistance might still be needed.

RDF believes in sharing the information and allow people to make their own decisions whilst still working to remove as many barriers as is possible/feasible.

There a few photographs and videos so you can see if the gates will work for you.

The two new gates can be opened from both sides and swing both ways.

Only you can see if they will work for you or whether you would need someone to come along and help with the gates.

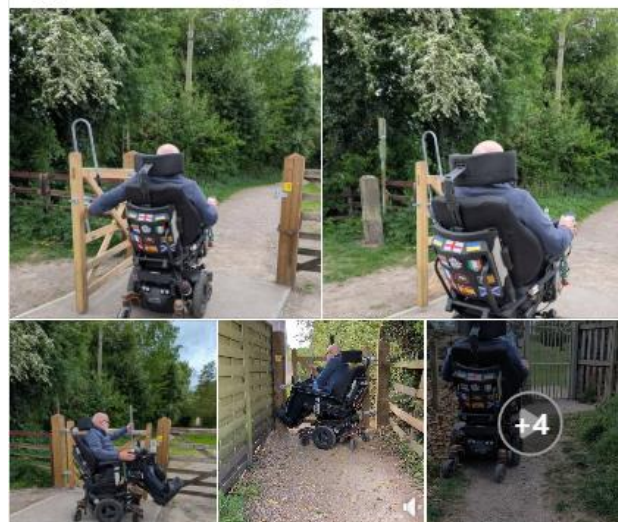
The side gate into the deer park is heavy but the latch can be reached from both sides and a power chair can push it easily. Hand pushed chair users might find this a little harder if on their own. The same applies to the big gate at the main pedestrian entrance/exit.

For us, we got there and back with charge left on the chairs (phew). We went in through the side path that connects to the Hell Wath footpath but came out through the main entrance (pedestrian side gates).

We also did a full circuit on both sides of the Fountains Abbey part of the estate.

Needless to say cake and a coffee was involved as well.

Thank you to the Skell Valley Project for the development of this route and their willingness to engage with us, and others, in the planning of it.



You and 54 others

22 comments 13 shares

Like

Comment

Share

View more comments



Tim Tribe

Huge progress well done all involved...

3w

Like

Reply



Outcome 9. The local economy has been boosted

Excluding salaries, £512,531 was spent directly by the Skell Valley Project on goods and services bought from suppliers in Ripon and the Skell Valley and in the surrounding area as far south as Harrogate (12 miles away).

There has been no estimate of local spending by businesses and individual contractors while working in the Skell Valley but this may include food, fuel and accommodation.

There is potential for the local economy to be boosted, in future, by increased visitor spending, as a result of increased visitor numbers or longer stays or both.

For a variety of reasons, the **Enterprising Landscape** project did not achieve its objectives. These are explored, by Sarah France, in her report ⁸ which is included in Appendix 3. This summary is taken directly from her report, which should be read in full.

The Enterprising Landscape project was designed to explore how businesses in Ripon and along the Skell Valley could come together to invest in landscape outcomes in which they have a common interest. It would be trialled using an adapted version of the Landscape Enterprise Network model (LENs). The LENs model is a system for organising the buying and selling of ecosystem functions. The Skell LENs was identified as a pilot project first by the LEP strategy in 2018 and then the Defra Local Investment in Natural Capital (LINC) programme in 2023. The project was finally delivered, in part, under the North Yorkshire Council LINC programme which ran from October 2023 to March 2025.

The LENs model has some key stages in its implementation. First the business community along the Skell Valley must come together to agree key landscape outcomes of interest to their businesses. These would be captured in business cases which set out the financial benefits of investing in the landscape. This then sets the demand side of the model. The farmers would then be engaged as suppliers of the landscape outcomes which could include natural flood management (NFM) measures to reduce flooding downstream or works to benefit nature. An initial trade would then be brokered. This is a complex process involving auditing options and requirements, agreeing how budgets and outcomes are split between businesses, establishing a platform for the trade and then conducting the trade and formalising agreements between the businesses and farmers. A budget was included in the project to pump-prime the first trade.

⁸ France, S. (2025) Evaluation Report for the Skell Enterprising Landscape Project. Produced by Sarah France, World Heritage Coordinator

The project was not delivered in full. The trading part of the LENS model was not implemented and this meant that the model was not fully tested. However, there were some key learnings from the pilot:

The LENS model was a complex concept for the project team to understand and there was a lack of capacity and experience within the team of delivering a LENS model or other green finance initiatives. Specialist consultancy support was costed into the project budget, but this was hard to commission due to procurement requirements around National Lottery Heritage Fund grant funding. During the development phase it was anticipated that 3Keel, the owners of the LENS model, would tender for the work but they advised the available budget was no longer sufficient for them to support delivery of the project.

The structure of the local economy in Ripon and along the Skell Valley was identified as a challenge during the development phase of the project. The local economy is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) who had been hit hard financially by the Covid pandemic, cost of living crises and high energy prices. Funding was built into the project plan to pump-prime the first trade to overcome this. Even with this pump-priming there are still challenges around what is known as demand aggregation when working with small businesses. This is developing a set of shared outcomes agreed by all businesses such as flood mitigation works or improvements to water quality. These shared outcomes then become the basis for the trade with the suppliers, which is a fundamental element of the LENS model. The interviews with 11 local businesses suggested that they would only be willing to put in small amounts of funding and would expect other partners and the local community to also contribute.

This business engagement around landscape outcomes and the role of the landscape in the success of their businesses was one of the most valuable outcomes of the pilot project. It raised awareness among the 11 local businesses interviewed of the ecosystem services provided by the local landscape, such as flood mitigation. The businesses were also open in sharing their views on the concepts behind the LENS model such as the value placed on landscape outcomes and ecosystem services. The key findings from the business engagement were:

- Recognising the value of natural capital requires a shift in attitude from the traditional concept of ownership.
- Education and engagement are vital if this change in mindset is to be addressed.
- With suitable engagement, businesses could be persuaded to contribute small amounts for flood mitigation.
- There is a need for communication and co-operation between landowners who manage sections of the river course.
- Engagement with the community at large will enhance engagement with the business community.

It was decided by the project team not to engage with the landowners and farmers, the main suppliers of the ecosystem services, until the engagement work had been done with businesses to look at demand and a trade was imminent. The project team felt they already had a good understanding of land use in the valley. The Opportunity Mapping undertaken for the Payment by Results (PbR) scheme had mapped the opportunities for future natural flood management work. It also set out a methodology for assessing land holdings within the catchment for NFM opportunities and the project team felt that the LENS trade would be a chance to test this methodology. However, because of staff capacity and timescales for delivery of PbR, the key stage in the

LENs model of connecting businesses with farmers never took place. The results from the business engagement work had also indicated that businesses would only be willing to make a small contribution to LENs so a trade was not likely to take place.

The model had proposed using the pilot PbR scheme as a method for measuring the impact of the NFM measures delivered by the farmers. This would help the buyers, in this case the local businesses, understand the service they were paying for. The PbR scheme was developed alongside the Skell LENs. It sets out three different levels of monitoring available to determine the impact of any NFM measures installed by farmers as part of the LENs trade. It was felt important to determine the level of monitoring necessary and set a baseline before the trade took place and account for the associated costs.

Development of the project did lead to some good partnership working and workshop discussions around concepts like ecosystem services. A project narrative was agreed by the partners setting out the costs of the work along the valley which now sits on the Defra Projects for Nature website which aims to connect businesses with nature recovery. The partners also discussed options for taking forward the LENs with the idea of the National Trust as anchor organisation. In many ways this is challenging for the Fountains Abbey estate which is itself a SME with a small property team and a relatively small annual turnover when compared with organisations such as Nestle Purina and Diageo which anchor the Yorkshire LENs.

7. The success factors

7.1. The plan for the Skell Valley Project (set out in the Landscape Conservation Action Plan, September 2020) was developed over five years. The planning process began before the UK voted to leave the European Union in 2016 and was finalised during the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic. The changes made to the plan during its four-year implementation phase were small, confirming that the plan did reflect what its many stakeholders had requested and recommended.

7.2. The Project was a collective effort characterised by a generous, can-do attitude. There was an appetite for sharing ideas. The knowledge and skills of the members of the Skell Valley Partnership (including the Lead Partners), the Project Team and volunteers meant that when someone had a question or a problem, there would be a helpful response. The Partnership meetings were well attended and there was a strong sense of mutual interest and support.

7.3. There were multiple, accessible opportunities for volunteers to get involved, to share and gain knowledge and skills and to become part of the project community. The energy and commitment of volunteers (transcribers, oral historians, landscapers, labourers, water monitors, archaeologists, guides etc.) were fundamental to the delivery of individual projects and to the success of the Project overall.

7.4. This was a large and resource intensive Project. The Project Team invested significant physical and mental energy in building relationships with individual farmers, with members of the Partnership, with other local organisations and with volunteers, to increase the likelihood that the fifteen projects, and the Skell Valley Project as a whole, would achieve their objectives.

7.5. Nidderdale National Landscape's good relationships with landowners and farmers in the valley was essential to the Project Team's ability to deliver the farm-based projects (Healthy Land, Healthy River; Native and Ancient Woodlands; Hug an Ancient Tree; Exploring the Skell Valley). Nidderdale National Landscape introduced Project Team members to farmers, greatly increasing the efficiency with which activity could get underway.

7.6. The Project Team incorporated a small amount of social activity into the programme and relationships were strengthened as a result. There were pie and peas suppers for farmers; Skell Valley Partnership meetings included refreshments; and the annual day for volunteers usually involved a site visit.

7.7. The informal sharing of knowledge and skill among Project Team members, contractors and volunteers (some of whom had relevant knowledge and skills) was a positive experience for those involved and was a motivation for some volunteers to continue.

7.8. The Project Team had the same Project Manager for the first three years. It adapted well to the temporary and permanent changes in staff that are common in longer projects. The administration of the project, including the tracking of outputs and reporting, by the two Senior Project Coordinators was meticulous.



7.9. As the Project progressed and achieved more, opportunities to share and celebrate its achievements increased the confidence of the Project Team and the Skell Valley Partnership. There was local recognition in the form of awards, and Project Team members were invited to speak and write about different aspects of the Project. In 2024 there were awards from Ripon Civic Society, Ripon in Bloom and St Wilfrid's Stars.

Ripon Civic Society, 2024

The Helen Whitehead Award for Best Project Overall and the Sustainability Award Citation: *'The Skell Valley Project has brought together sixteen collaborative organisations to help create a sustainable future for the 12-mile long Skell Valley...The judges were impressed by the range of its ambition and its successes, working not only with environmental professionals but also farmers, landowners, community groups and schools.'*

St Wilfrid's Stars, 2024

Environment Award Citation:

'Our winners have energised a wide range of volunteers in several organisations as well as their own taskforce. They have helped improve the Skell, Hell Wath, community gardens and supported local schools. The impact on the physical environment, biodiversity, flood management and many other aspects of the environment throughout the catchment is marked and hopefully long-lasting.'

Pictured above: Skell Valley Senior Project Coordinator Rachel Savage on the right, with Power of 10 Coordinator Jo Thackray

8. The main challenges

Organisational scale and style

8.1. The Lead Partners are very different in their scale and working practices and while a governance and team structure, a collaboration agreement and terms of reference were all agreed during the development phase, it took a few months for the partnership arrangement to establish itself.

8.2. It was agreed that the National Trust would employ the Project Team and use its project management system to run the project. The Trust's policies and practices apply nationally but, at a local project level, they sometimes felt to the Project Team like an obstacle to progress. Although it was of benefit to the Project that the Trust had an established volunteer management system, all project volunteers had to be registered and trained as National Trust volunteers. This applied even if they were already volunteering for the Trust's partner, Nidderdale National Landscape. They had to take part in the Trust's e-learning programme and use the which was a challenge for some and especially for those who are less familiar with technology.

For the first year of the Project, the team's only social media outlet was the Fountains Abbey website. It posted a short news piece about the Project every two weeks and promoted its public activities on the events page. These were effective methods of reaching Trust members and Fountains Abbey visitors, but the Project was aiming for a much wider audience. Fountains Abbey and members of the Skell Valley Partnership, including Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, the Friends of Hell Wath, WYAS, HADCA and Ripon Museum, all posted stories on Instagram, but it would be more than a year before the Project Team had permission to set up its own Facebook page and this platform had limited reach. The Project Sponsors and Project Team agreed that the Project would have benefited from a dedicated marketing and communications strategy from the outset.

Roles and recruitment

8.3. The delivery phase of the Skell Valley Project began as the country was emerging from the pandemic. The General Manager and his team at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal were reopening the property, with the new provisions for social distancing. There had been some redundancies and staff changes and the team was having to adapt. It was a challenging time to be launching a four-year, partnership project and recruiting a Project Team.

8.4. When three members of the four-person Project Team (the Project Manager, Skell Valley Area Ranger and Senior Project Coordinator) were appointed in April 2021, the project workstreams, project reporting system, branding and communications plans were not yet in place. The Project Manager had not worked for the National Trust before and had to familiarise himself with its structure and processes. He was greatly helped in this by the Senior Project Coordinator, who was an existing member of the Fountains Abbey team, had helped to write the successful bid to the Heritage Fund and had worked with some of the partner organisations and individual advisers during the development phase. The Skell Valley Area Ranger had worked for the Trust elsewhere and was able to draw on the local knowledge and introductions provided by colleagues at Nidderdale National Landscape.

8.5. Since the Project was being managed by the National Trust and the Project Team were its employees, the roles were based on its standard role descriptions. These were not always an exact fit. The role of Heritage Officer was advertised as Senior Volunteering and Community Officer (heritage research) and the Project Manager thought that this may have been one of the reasons why it did not attract any suitable applicants when first advertised and remained vacant until July 2022 (nine months behind schedule). Other factors may have been that it was a part-time, temporary post and for anyone not already living in the area, housing costs may have been prohibitive. The Project Manager also thought that the role profile for the Skell Valley Area Ranger (that of a National Trust Area Ranger) did not communicate the wider range of responsibilities and activities the Project would involve. The original postholder applied for another job, within the Trust, after 12 months. Her successor and the Heritage Officer were both appointed in July 2022. The Project was behind schedule at the end of its first year but once the Project Team was at full strength it quickly began to make up ground.

8.6. There were further changes of personnel in 2023 and 2024. The Heritage Officer took maternity leave from July 2023, returning in July 2024. A member of Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal staff was seconded to that role, supported by the Senior Project Coordinator, but stepped down in September, for health reasons. The Senior Project Coordinator then took on the role full time and another Project Coordinator was seconded from within the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal team until May 2025. The Project Manager left in May 2024. A successor was appointed in July but was unable to continue beyond October, for family reasons. The hiatus before the appointment of a Project Manager to see the Project through to its conclusion, was a challenging time for the team, with decisions needing to be made. The appointment of a senior Project Manager from within the Trust, in November, ensured that no more momentum was lost.

8.7. The lack of opportunity for handovers between departing and arriving staff has been a challenge for the new staff. The lack of handover between the development phase Project Manager and his successor at the start of the delivery phase was highlighted in the summative assessment of the spending of the ERDF grant as part of Healthy Land, Healthy Rivers. There was no handover between the first and second Skell Valley Area Ranger, which left the Project Manager and Senior Project Coordinator to bridge the gap.

Line management

8.8. The first Project Manager had three line managers in eighteen months and his own management responsibilities changed during this period. The impact of these changes was that additional time had to be spent building relationships and explaining a complex project. The first line manager was the General Manager of Fountains Abbey, who was also one of the Project Sponsors. The Trust's project management framework advises against a sponsor being line manager so, in September 2022, responsibility was transferred to a National Trust Consultancy Manager. She was very supportive but had no experience of landscape partnerships such as the Skell Valley Project. Responsibility then passed to a Consultancy Manager in the Trust's Land and Nature Team and this arrangement worked well. Once part of the regional team, Project Team members were permitted to work remotely as well as from the office.

8.9. Of the four Project Team roles, three were temporary. The role of Skell Valley Area Ranger was permanent (although it would have a different title once the Project had concluded.) In anticipation of this, the postholder attended the weekly meetings of the Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal Ranger team from the start and when the line management of the Project Team moved across to the region (as described in 8.8.) it was agreed that the Skell Valley Area Ranger would be managed by the Lead Ranger. The strength of the Project Team, as a unit, ensured that these different management arrangements made no impact on the delivery of the Project.

The Project Team's capacity

8.10. This was a complex, four-year project involving multiple stakeholders, relationships, different types of activity and funding sources. The Senior Project Coordinator was responsible for reporting to the Heritage Fund and to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for the European Regional Development Fund grant to Healthy Land, Healthy River. The reporting on the ERDF grant was much more onerous than anticipated. The Senior Project Coordinator estimated that, until summer 2023, when the ERDF outputs had all been delivered, reporting to funders took 60% of her time and this reduced her capacity to support the delivery of individual projects.

8.11. As a result of the social and economic upheaval caused by the pandemic, some of the contacts made during the development phase of the Project were lost. Local connections had to be rebuilt and conversations restarted, in order to deliver the fifteen projects. Members of the Project Team concluded that the Project would have benefited from some dedicated time from a marketing and communications officer and a learning officer, neither of which Fountains Abbey nor Nidderdale National Landscape could provide from their own staff. The view was that with access to these additional skills, the Project would have reached a larger number and wider range of participants and supporters.

Permissions, changes of plan and budgets

8.12. When the National Trust bought Studley Royal Park from West Riding County Council in 1983, the adjoining land (including the Chinese Wood and Spa Gill) was in private ownership. The relationship between the Trust and the neighbouring landowner is managed at a senior level. When the owner died, in 2022, his heir refused permission to undertake the archaeological work in the Chinese Wood and around Aldfield Spa in Spa Gill, which had been planned as part of Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden, and Sulphur, Springs and Spas respectively. The owner also had to be consulted about access to the Roman Monument, which is on National Trust land, but close to the boundary. This added to the time needed to deliver the project.

8.13. The work on the Roman Monument was partly funded by the Wolfson Foundation and the grant had to be spent by the end of October 2022. The Heritage Officer was appointed in July 2022. The professional contracts to survey and conserve the building had been issued and planning permission applied for, but there was too little time to recruit, train and involve volunteers in this project in the way that had been envisaged, simply because of the deadline for spending the grant.

8.14. In some cases, the project budgets were lower than partners had expected but they and the individual contractors working on these projects were generous with their in-kind contributions of resources (time, space, equipment, refreshments). Before the pandemic, Fountains Abbey could occasionally make the case for using its reserves to meet a financial shortfall. It might have been able to provide a boost to a promising initiative, but the impact of the pandemic on the Trust's income, nationally, meant this was no longer an option and each project had to remain within budget or cover additional costs from other sources.

8.16. The plan had been that Project Team members would divide their time between Fountains Abbey and Nidderdale National Landscape's office in Pateley Bridge. The practice of remote working and the frequent use of online meetings made this less necessary and less practical. Project Team members knew they could use the Pateley Bridge office when they needed to and they attended meetings there when their Nidderdale National Landscape colleagues were in the office but, otherwise, when not remote working, they used Fountains Abbey their base.

9. Conclusion

9.1. The Skell Valley Project was conceived ten years ago. The issues identified then and the approaches it proposed have become more prominent – natural flood and land management, citizen science, green finance, green tourism and a youth volunteer pipeline among them. As a result, the experience of this very local project has been of interest to practitioner and observers further afield.

9.2. The impact of the flood and land management interventions made between 2021 and 2025 are unlikely to be evident for many years and the Lead Partners, farmers and landowners acknowledge that many more interventions will be needed, but there are now baselines from which their impact can be measured. In what has been defined by the iCASP team as a ‘flashy’ catchment, there need to be different baselines for different conditions. iCASP’s interest in a continuing relationship with the Skell Valley confirms the Project’s value to a wider audience of people interested in demonstrating the benefits of natural flood management and nature-based solutions.

9.3. The nascent Payment by Results (PbR) framework, which could be defined as a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) scheme, has been critiqued both by the Skell Valley farmers, whose insights and information helped iCASP to shape it, and by a professional peer group. This work may yet influence policy and/or practice. While the Enterprising Landscape project did not provide a solution to the financing of such a scheme (the local business being too small) the principle of closer collaboration between farming and other businesses in the area has been more openly discussed.

9.4. In the process of delivering elements of the Skell Valley Project, university teams (including iCASP) have been able to test tools and approaches and to collect data in support of their own research. Two new PhD research opportunities have been advertised as a direct result of two of the projects (Digging Deep in the Archives and Healthy Land, Healthy River).

9.5. The Skell Valley Project has increased the volume of publicly accessible information about the natural, built and cultural heritage of the Skell Valley. There are new interpretation boards at Fountains Abbey, Grantley, Sawley, Hell Wath and at Ripon Bus Station. West Yorkshire Archive Service has a significantly larger archive of transcriptions of 18th and 19th-century archival material relating to the Skell Valley and a collection of oral histories and photographic portraits relating to life in the valley in the 20th century. There is a new archaeological survey and historic building record of three locations in the Skell Valley, which builds on the work of National Trust archaeology consultant Mark Newman.

9.6. The Project has stimulated and facilitated relationships between organisations and individuals, the exchange of knowledge and skills and the creation of tangible resources. In addition to supporting the achievement of the Project outcomes, it has promoted a culture of sharing and created a momentum that most of the local partners are now working to maintain. In the final year of the project, new groups (the Uredale Community Partnership) asked (or were invited) to attend Skell Valley Partnership meetings to learn from the Partnership’s experience and to invite its members to get involved in new initiatives.

9.7. Members of the Skell Valley Partnership have secured support for their projects. North Yorkshire Council credits its involvement in the Project with strengthening its bid to become one of four national pilots, researching private sources of ecosystem investment. HADCA secured funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (through North Yorkshire Council) to retain its Project Officer through 2024 and Ripon's first Youth Forum has been one of the outcomes. The Friends of Hell Wath have a new partner in Plantlife. While the funded activities of the Skell Valley Project have come to an end, the organisations that supported it now have a larger, stronger network to sustain them.

9.8. Nidderdale National Landscape and the National Trust at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal learned how to work together effectively. The National Trust at Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal has, in the view of the General Manager, become more aware of its role as a good neighbour. The Project has made it a more relatable and accessible organisation and has increased the likelihood that organisations will want to work with it in future, for the benefit of the area's natural, built and cultural heritage.



Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers

Appendix 1 The fifteen projects and their outputs

Healthy Land, Healthy River: Natural flood and land management interventions

1.87 km of farming and forestry tracks repaired and improved

19 gateways stoned

7 ponds created and 3 ponds restored

An additional 3 ponds created by Nidderdale National Landscape with Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) funds

2.12 ha of broadleaved woodland planting

Tree planting in Studley Royal Deer Park

29 leaky dams constructed

6 river crossing points completed

4.09km of hedgerow planted or rejuvenated (with 6.2km of fencing)

6.55km of riverside fencing installed

1 hydrological monitoring programme, measuring flow and sediment, delivered by the Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Area Solutions Programme (iCASP) team at the University of Leeds

6 volunteers trained to collect water samples

Note: One of the planned outputs, involving the restoration of 50ha of blanket bog on Dallowgill Moor, through grip blocking, hydrological restoration and sphagnum inoculation, was completed by the landowner in February 2022, but the land manager did not agree to the work being used as an in-kind match for the Skell Valley Project. Some alternative outputs were agreed with the Heritage Fund.

Healthy Land, Healthy River: Payment by Results (PbR) framework

1 meeting (at Grantley Village Hall) with landowners, farmers and the iCASP team to discuss the idea

6 landowners and farmers involved in opportunity mapping

7 landowners and farmers involved in drafting the manual

Practitioner workshop to look at the proposed PbR framework

Draft PbR manual delivered by the iCASP team

4 social events for farmers

1 young farmers' event

1 visit with farmers to the North York Moors National Park project, Ryevitalise

2 events for heritage professionals (National Trust's North regional team, February 2023; Historical Perspectives workshop, June 2023)

Enterprising Landscape

- 1 workshop to agree amended project scope and resourcing
- 11 businesses interviewed by Next Step and report produced
- 1 options appraisal workshop to agree a way forward for the LINC Skell Valley Pilot Project

Tourism Development in the Skell Valley

- 4 networking events in 2023 and in 2024
- 3 marketing workshops in 2022 and in 2023
- 2 workshops in 2024 and a monthly newsletter from tourism consultant Susan Briggs
- Strategic marketing action plan completed
- An online hub with free resources, including the action plan www.riponskellvalley.co.uk/ and marketing action plan
- 25 businesses that were not part of an existing tourism group engaged with this project
- Regular communication with businesses about the project, and regional tourism landscape

Native and Ancient Woodlands

- Woodland management plans for Eavestone Lake, Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal and Hell Wath Local Nature Reserve
- 11.4ha of planted ancient woodland sites and/or ancient semi-natural woodland improved
- 600m of track installed at Eavestone (Fishpond Wood)
- 17.11ha of woodland managed, of which 15ha at Eavestone Lakes (Himalayan balsam control, Bria rhododendron clearance and birch thinning), 1.42ha at Fountains Abbey visitor centre car park and 0.69ha at Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal Bird Hide woodlands

Hug an Ancient Tree

- 14 volunteers were trained to record and map trees
- 10 trees in need of surgery were managed, of which 5 qualify as ancient
- 85 ancient, veteran or notable trees been identified and recorded on the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI)
- Invertebrate presence and fungi recorded on the ATI
- 1 ancient tree discovery afternoon with advisor Brian Muelaner
- 3 family tree trails at Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal in 2022-23
- This project also aimed to promote trees in the arts and in literature. Outputs included:
 - 1 book talk
- As part of the annual Winter Trail at Fountains Abbey in 2024, Fountains Mill was transformed into a pine forest and offered family storytelling activities
- In 2024-25 Sawley Arts Group ran workshops on creating work, in different media, inspired by veteran and ancient trees

Hell Wath – Green Gateway to the Skell Valley

1 ha of scrub cleared from an area of 7.7 ha of grassland and has remained clear

275m of footpaths restored and 80m of new paths created, accessible to users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters, pushchairs and prams.

20 heritage days with activities such as wildflower, butterfly, mammal and fungi ID, dawn chorus, a tree walk, forest school days and a mountain trike day

26 practical days, including scrub clearance, balsam bashing, grassland cutting and raking, path works and pond works (with a contractor). Participants included Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers, corporate volunteers, volunteers from Open Country and youth groups.

New interpretation and way markers as part of Exploring the Skell Valley.

Marker stone repaired

A condition report on the Fairy Steps, with restoration options and recommendations, by Mason Clark Associates

Restoration proposals prepared by Harrogate Borough Council

Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers

Skell Valley Ranger Volunteers were originally called the Skell Valley Task Force. The team was established to maintain a range of natural flood and natural sedimentation management works, along the project catchment

Volunteers have acquired and enhanced their skills in tree planting, hedging, scything, dry stone walling, peat sampling, fungi identification and biosecurity

Using public rights of way, volunteers have mapped the valley's Himalayan Balsam population, to inform targeting strategy

Volunteering opportunities have been promoted by Nidderdale National Landscape, Ripon Walled Garden, Ripon Museum Trust and others. BioBlitz and Fungi Forays at Hell Wath Nature Reserve have attracted volunteers on the day.

Around 20 regular volunteers continue to meet on a Thursday and a small group on a Saturday. In partnership with the YMCA, the Skell Valley Ranger is running a monthly 'Give it a go' session, on Saturdays, for volunteers aged 14-30. Other groups, including corporate volunteers, volunteered on a short-term or one-off basis.

Digging Deep in the Archives – archive research project

20 boxes of material were cleaned by WYAS, ready to be scanned, and sent to volunteers for transcription

70 remote volunteers were recruited and trained, online, in palaeography

780 hours were spent transcribing 735 documents

Archive descriptions in the WYAS catalogue were updated and enhanced, making it easier for researchers to find material

Between June 2022 and May 2025 there were eight pop-up exhibitions and two exhibitions of several weeks

2 volunteer weeks at WYAS involving 6 volunteers each

There were 10 exhibitions featuring the results of this strand of the project - 7 pop-ups, one of 18 days and two of 6-8 weeks

From At least half of these also included findings from the Digging Deep in the Archives oral history project (see below). Exhibition venues included Fountains Hall and Fountains Mill, Ripon Library, Nidderdale Show, Nidderdale Plus, Skipton Library and North Yorkshire County Record Office

Digging Deep in the Archives – oral history project

7 volunteers were trained in how to collect oral histories, using interview techniques and technology

Most of the interviews were undertaken by 4 volunteers, mostly with the oral history consultant present

They spent 193 hours making 16 recordings of 18 people

1 volunteer, with a professional background in sound recording, edited the recordings

2 volunteers focused on research, transcription and indexing

Volunteers made local site visits and visited WYAS and North Yorkshire County Records Office

The oral history project featured in 8 of the 10 Digging Deep in the Archives exhibitions listed above and in one pop-up about the oral history project only.

The story of the project and its place in the Skell Valley Project, together with the recordings, are now part of the WYAS collection.

<https://wyascatablogue.wordpress.com/skell-valley-voices-words-from-the-past-voices-of-the-present-stories-for-the-future/>

Volunteering City of Ripon

An 18-month project delivered by Harrogate & District Council Community Action (HADCA).

1 consultation workshop on the future of volunteering, completed by HADCA, followed by interviews with 18 partner organisations and analysis survey responses from 15 voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) and 30 volunteers.

1 Volunteer Development Officer was recruited by HADCA to lead this project and build the capacity of VCOs to work with young volunteers

2 training workshops for VCOs: (i) Are you ready to recruit young people and (ii) Safeguarding

1 training workshop for young volunteers, Preparing for Volunteering

Online training was provided through the Charity Learning Consortium e-learning package

Free access to the Charity Learning Consortium's e-learning package available to VCOs for one year.

At the end of the Project-funded period of 18 months, the Power of 10 was supported through 2024 by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund through North Yorkshire Council. In 2024, a further 100 young people joined the programme.

31 March 2025 the launch of Ripon Youth Council, supported by Ripon YMCA

Nature on Your Doorstep

Projects delivered with Ripon Museum Trust, Ripon Walled Garden, Ripon YMCA, Picking Gill Nature Reserve and Ripon in Bloom at Temple Gardens.

With Heritage Fund approval, a bio-acoustic bat recording programme (Bat out of Skell) was added to this project in 2024

A library of free gardening tools for loan to volunteers is housed by Ripon Walled Garden

500 seed packs, with instructions, were distributed in Ripon and at Fountains Abbey at Easter 2022

Plug plants were distributed at Nidderdale Show 2023

An acoustic bat monitoring project, 2004. This was part-funded by FIPL from funds that had been earmarked for work on Dallowgill Moor, as part of Healthy Land, Healthy River.

Eco Action Ripon, a group for young adult volunteers, set up in 2024. Inspired by the Power of 10 and supported by Ripon YMCA and the Skell Valley Ranger

Watery Wildlife

One river dipping kit was given to Moorside School in Ripon and another to Grewelthorpe School for their use and for lending to other groups
565 school pupils took part in activities over four years. This was 82% of the target number of 684. The impact of the pandemic on schools' plans and priorities could not have been anticipated

9 Watery Wildlife volunteers recruited

5 train the trainers events (including ones for volunteers, teachers and Open Country)

1 demonstration of a Watery Wildlife session to the Ryevitalise team

An annual family drop-in at Fountains Abbey

The Watery Wildlife Resource Pack was compiled and published on the Nidderdale National Landscape website. Free to download or borrow, in hard copy, from Ripon Library

Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes

4 historic structures and features were recorded - the stone boat house, the bridge at the lake outflow, the cascade and the chasm walk

2 historic structures (the boat house and bridge) repaired and conserved

27 features were recorded (see report by The Archaeological Practice)

5 sections of the historic stone-edged footpath around the lake cleared and repaired

A dilapidated bridge was removed and minor access improvements made

2 conservation-in-action events involved a total of 12 volunteers: 8 took part in an archaeological recording day and 4 in a photogrammetry recording day

Note: Birch thinning and rhododendron removal were stopped, following a statutory plant health notice. With the Heritage Fund's agreement, the budget was reallocated to the planting of hedgerows at adjacent locations on Smaden Head Farm and Low Skelding Farm. These have been included under Healthy Land, Healthy River, above.

Sulphur, Springs and Spas

The owners of three of the four sites and features that were to have been the focus of this project would not allow them to be recorded.

The Aislabie Bridge was recorded, as planned, together with Rough House and a possible burial mound and possible prehistoric rock at Spa Ghyll Farm.

1 historic building recording workshop with 10 volunteers

1 topographical recording day with 9 volunteers

1 recording day at Spa Ghyll Farm with 5 volunteers

1 recording day at Aislabie Bridge with 6 volunteers

Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden

1 historic structure (the Roman Monument) recorded and conserved and the desire line to it removed
The Roman Monument is included in the guide to the Fountains Way (the trail between Hell Wath and Fountains Abbey)
10 volunteers had an opportunity to try out their historic building recording skills on the Roman Monument
1 section of historic river wall in Seven Bridges Valley repaired
7 volunteers helped to compile an inventory of archaeological features in the Serpent Valley
12 volunteers attended a talk on the Chinese Garden
12 volunteers took part in a LiDAR and aerial photography training session

Exploring the Skell Valley

3 trails developed: the Fountains Way, Hell Wath Nature Trail, Skell Valley Explorer (incorporating a shorter and longer route)
Resurfacing works at Fountains Abbey and St Mary's Church, Studley Royal
2.2km of paths were resurfaced between Hell Wath and Fountains Abbey and other sections around the valley.
2 kissing gates replaced with 2-way accessible gates.
Flagstones at Studley Lodges
Installation of interpretation at Fountains Visitor Centre, Sawley Village Green and Grantley Bus shelter
15 volunteers trained to lead 3 walks. 8 of these helped to create the 3 walk guides.
Volunteers from Ripon Civic Society and Sawley Parish Council and individual local historians helped to create the content for the interpretation panels
Interpretation and waymarking for Fountains Way, Hell Wath Nature Trail and Skell Valley Explorer, at Hell Wath, the Water Rat, the Deer Park, Fountains Visitor Centre, Sawley Village Green, Grantley bus shelter, Eavestone Lakes and Hind House Farm
Online trail guides (including downloadable versions) for the three trails uploaded to the National Trust and Nidderdale National Landscape websites
Artwork on benches at Hell Wath
9 metal cut-out birds installed in trees around Hell Wath
Benches installed in Seven Bridges Valley
Spa Gill Woods works to bridge, with North Yorkshire Council
Interpretation at Ripon Bus Station
Programme of guided walks

Appendix 2. People with a formal role in the Project

The people below had a formal role in the Skell Valley Project. Many others were involved as paid employees and as volunteers in its successful delivery.

Project Sponsors

Justin Scully, National Trust and Iain Mann, Nidderdale National Landscape

Project Clients

Bec Evans, National Trust (preceded by Sarah France, National Trust) and Sarah Kettlewell, Nidderdale National Landscape

The project plan was written by Sarah France, National Trust and Paul Burgess, Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now Nidderdale) National Landscape, supported by their colleagues Josie Campbell and Sarah Kettlewell, respectively.

Project Team

Skell Valley Project Manager

Nabil Abbas April 2021-May 2024

Rachael Baldwin Gledhill, July – October 2024

Dan Chaplin, November 2024 – February 2025

Skell Valley Project Officer

Josie Campbell, February – May 2025

Skell Valley Senior Project Coordinator

Josie Campbell, May 2021- September 2023

Rachel Savage, October 2023- May 2025

Skell Valley Area Ranger

Jess Darwin, April 2021-May 2022

Gabby Crisp, July 2022-2025

Skell Valley Heritage Officer

Karen Appleton, July 2022-May 2025

Liz Baddaley, maternity cover July – September 2023

Josie Campbell, maternity cover September 2023- January 2025

Delivery partners

West Yorkshire Archive Service, Vicky Grindrod and Harriet Harmer
Harrogate & District Community Action, Karen Weaver and Jo Thackwray
Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, Catherine Mason and Charlotte Simons

Skell Valley Partnership members, listed by organisation (in addition to all those listed above)

Eavestone, Tom Sterne
Environment Agency, Simon Stokes and Duncan Fyfe
Forestry Commission, Jim Smith and Kevin Heppel
Friends of Hell Wath, Carol Leo
Grantley Hall, Chris Newton and Colin Davison
Grantley, Sawley, Skelding and Eavestone Parish Council, David Taylor and James Wiggington
Natural England, Esther Smith and Lindsay Robinson
North Yorkshire Council, Hugh Clear Hill, Matt Millington and John Wainwright
Ripon Civic Society, Mandy Whitehead
Ripon Museum Trust, Catherine Baxter and Alexa Vernon
Skell Valley farmer, Julia Watson

Consultants

Archaeology: Richard Carlton and Kennis Yip, The Archaeological Practice
Exploring Skell Valley (designers): The Creative Core
Healthy Land, Healthy River: David Hodgson and his team, Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Area Solutions Programme (iCASP), School of Earth and Environment, University of Leeds
Oral history: Virginia Arrowsmith
Tourism Development: Susan Briggs

National Trust Consultants

Archaeology: Mark Newman
Community and Participation: Simon Coates
Water Adviser: Duncan Wishart

Appendix 3: Reports and publications (Provided in a separate folder)

Healthy Land, Healthy River

Amion Consulting (2023) Summative Assessment of the Skell Valley Flood Resilience Project. An unpublished report for the National Trust

Bond, S., Brown, H., Klarr, M., Hodgson, D., Keevil, G. and Naz, F. *Payment by Results. Manual for implementation in the Skell Valley, North Yorkshire Healthy Land, Healthy River Project*. University of Leeds and Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme, 2025

Bond, S., Brown, H., Klaar, M., Hodgson, D., Keevil, G. *Narrative Report. Healthy Lands, Healthy Rivers Project*. University of Leeds and Yorkshire Integrated Catchment Solutions Programme. 2025. (This is the narrative report on the Payment by Results project)

Brown, H., Keevil, G., and Hodgson, D.M. (2025) Final Report: Skell Valley Catchment Scale Monitoring

Enterprising Landscape

France, S. (2025) Evaluation Report for the Skell Enterprising Landscape Project. Produced by Sarah France, World Heritage Coordinator

Nature on Your Doorstep

Newson, S.E. & Crisp, G. Bat distribution and activity in the Skell Valley catchment, 2024 report, BTO Research Report 776, BTO, Thetford

Revealing the Serpent Valley and Chinese Garden, Enhancing Eavestone's Lakes and Sulphur, Springs and Spas

Carlton, R., Johnstone, M., Yip, K. & Ryder, P. (2024) Skell Valley Project, Ripon, North Yorkshire: Archaeological Survey and Historic Building Record

Chapman, K., Ecus Ltd (2022) Studley Royal Roman Monument: Historic Building Recording for Skell Valley Project

Newman, M. (2021) The Roman Monument, Studley Royal. Research and Analysis. Archive report MMNTYR206

The Skell Valley Partnership

Spriggs, P. (2023) Skell Valley Project Partnership Discussion Workshop Report/ Taking stock, planning for the future, 23 January 2023

Tourism development in the Skell Valley

Briggs, S. (2023) Strategic Marketing Action Plan for the Skell Valley Project and Visit Ripon

Watery Wildlife

Watery Wildlife Resource Pack (2024), Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, National Trust, Nidderdale National Landscape

Appendix 4: Documents mentioned in the report (Provided in a separate folder)

Project Team role profiles (Project Manager, Senior Project Coordinator, Area Ranger, Heritage Officer (Senior Volunteering & Community Officer),

Sample volunteer role profiles: archaeology and oral history

Sample short report from oral history volunteers walk

Sample Hell Wath public notice

Three examples of promotion from the Power of 10

Skell Valley media report, October 2023 – February 2025



One of the winning entries in the Skell Valley Photography Competition 2023