

Mountain Meitheal Kicks Off

We have had quite a few people contacting our web site indicating they were interested in joining our work. In an attempt (and successful one at that) to tap into this interest we organised a come and try day in conjunction with Wicklow Uplands Council and the Mountaineering Council of Ireland. Mike Dagley of MCI tells the story below.

Sunday, March 3rd. dawned calm, mild and windless. An easy, late-winter day of unremarkable but pleasant conditions. In all other respects, it was a spectacular day for the fledging volunteer project. This was the first “come and try” Trail Work Day organised by **Coillte Meitheal** and trail enthusiast Bill Murphy. **Thirty-two** yes! thirty-two eager souls duly turned up at the Catholic Church in Laragh. Bill opened the forest access road to the various cars and trailers, and we all gathered around an ominously large pile of gravel. From this, Bill spoke to the masses and orchestrated what would prove to be a brilliant day’s work.

In simple terms, the project was one third of a grand scheme to improve, repair and reroute the Wicklow Way across the floor of lower Glenmacnass Valley. The three elements of the scheme would be: -

Firstly, to move the line of the path that has descended from Paddock Hill off the tarmac of the Military Road, and to construct a section to the point where the route drops to the river. This would remove the danger to pedestrians by having them cross the road directly and minimize the potential for mishaps.

Secondly, to repair the drainage on the short section of path between the road and the footbridge - Coillte Meitheal had already carried out this work last summer installing 10 waterbars to stop water flow and reduce erosion.

Thirdly, and by far the biggest bit if you like, was that attempted by our gang that Sunday. This was to re-route the Wicklow Way from the footbridge and take it through the stand of Scots Pines above the Glenmacnass River for 600 yards to a junction of forest tracks. The purpose of this project was to remove the need for walkers to follow forest roads and it adds another access route to the Brockaghs. This reroute simply improves the quality of the walking and brings the path through permanent woodland as opposed to its former route on a gravel road that lies in an area due for clear felling in the near future.

Not only was it the chunkiest bit of this project- and we completed it that same day bar a small amount of tidying up! - It was also a remarkable exercise in and demonstration of teamwork, hard graft and what volunteers can do. Moreover, that gravel pile is now no more. To top it all no one was looking for payment. Fantastic. What else can I say?

Thank you all very much. I appreciate that not everyone had the opportunity to be there that day. However, fear not, there will be more!! See dates on this Website or Email us to be included on our mailing list.

To summarize what was achieved: -

- Cutting of 600 meters of new pathway approximately 60cms in width and surfacing of c.400 ms with gravel.
- Existing Wicklow Way signs were dug out carried and relocated to indicate the new route.

- Building of steps over steep section by use of cut logs, stones and backfill of gravel
- New handmade, wooden signs erected to indicate the route at the footbridge, and to direct walkers during this section.
- Commemorative wooden sign erected for International Year of the Mountains.
- Drainage ditch cleared and deepened.
- Demolition of derelict shed and clearance of rubbish.
- Construction of bridge over ditch using remains of shed.
- Use of brushing and cut logs to protect/ support path edge.

In conclusion, I can say that this day was a real chance for many individuals to *put something back* into the uplands. Skills were learned, shared and gained that day. I extend my thanks to Bill and his friends in Coillte Meitheal for supervising much of the work and to those Coillte staff who gave of their time and expertise to seal our success.

Now, as this is a newsletter I am afraid that I have to dampen all this bonhomie slightly by reporting that two of our fellow volunteers discovered an act of vandalism on the new section a mere 7 days later. The commemorative sign has been removed/stolen from the viewpoint. Incredible, but unfortunately true.

Mike Dagley,
Administrator, Mountaineering Council of Ireland