

NATIONAL TREE WEEK 2010



On the 13th March 2010 Mountain Meitheal volunteers planted 1300 trees at Kilmashogue as our contribution to National Tree Week. Forty volunteers including a group from Cheeverstown House completed the task in three hours. The trees were supplied by Coillte and planting instruction was given by Jesper Petersen, Recreational Trail Manager for Coillte. By planting Birch and Scots Pine along the recently upgraded trail it should make a very interesting section in the years to come.

MINISTERIAL VISIT

Mary Hanafin TD, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport visiting the Mountain Meitheal stand at the 'Healthy Forests, Healthy People' exhibition at the Concourse, County Hall, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.



RECORD YEAR

In 2009 our annual total of hours worked broke all records. 128 different volunteers worked a massive 2164 volunteer hours in 25 work days.

BOG BRIDGES & BOARDWALKS

In the last few years Mountain Meitheal has constructed a number of bog bridges in the Dublin/Wicklow area. There is a sample on the demonstration trail at Laragh, a second on the access route in Cruagh Wood and most recently a third at Flags Pass (see next page). The criteria for constructing a bog bridge is based on the poor carrying capacity of bog or wetland and the lack of rock, gravel or fill to construct a more permanent stone treadway. In the past, bog bridges were constructed using recycled railway sleepers, these were saturated with creosote over the years and are now considered environmentally unacceptable as the creosote continues to leech into the fragile ecosystem. On all our projects, Mountain Meitheal used planks of pressure treated larch. Construction is simple, two cross sections or sills are placed into the ground at the appropriate distance and two parallel sleepers (often referred to as 'stringers') are nailed at each end. These are secured with wire strapping held in place by staples. Staples are then hammered into the surface of the sleepers to provide a non-slip surface. By incorporating steps into the construction, the bog bridge fits closely to the aspect of the land. Designing the layout to include curves makes a more interesting result as a continuous straight line can look out of place with the natural surroundings. Within a short time the vegetation around the bog bridge begins to regenerate. In drier areas grass begins to recover, in wetter areas sphagnum moss reappears. The indigenous flora has a chance to survive once it is no longer damaged by human activity. Heather and other woody plants take longer to recover.

There is nothing new in the use of bog bridges in Ireland. There is evidence to suggest that as raised



bogs grew up and spread across the land they prevented travel, communication, interaction and trade between early communities. In order to survive and prosper local communities built wooden trackways or toghers. Over 200 of these structures have been recorded in the Midland raised bog. The most renowned could more accurately be described as a wooden roadway. It was uncovered in a bog at Corlea in Co. Longford in 1985-87. It extended for 2 km and was made of oak planks wide enough to suggest it was used by horse drawn vehicles. It has been estimated that 300 large oak trees were required to complete the Corlea trackway. It has been dated using dendrochronology to 148BC. Two trackways uncovered at Ballykean bog Co. Offaly have been dendro-dated to 1454BC and 1425BC.

Historically Mountain Meitheal is in good company. Our Iron Age ancestors would recognise the need for our work and the reasoning behind it. As numbers of users increase, the impact of human activity continues to damage sensitive areas such as blanket and raised bogs. It is incumbent on all users to minimize their impact. Where tracks exist, use them and avoid making them wider. By walking or cycling in the centre of the track,

the vegetation along the edges will survive holding the peat in place. Wearing appropriate footwear and gaiters and stepping into muddy sections instead of skirting around them, the width of tracks may be kept to a minimum. By cycling with due diligence and taking the conditions into consideration track erosion may be contained. Ideally, tracks should be no more than 1m wide whether constructed or whether they materialise from use. There are sites in the Dublin/Wicklow area where tracks are six to eight times wider than they need to be. Restoration of these sites has become a major and expensive task - way beyond the means of volunteers. They appear as an ugly scar that can be seen for miles. With a little thought and a simple change in behaviour patterns further degradation of a unique resource could be avoided.

To see the success of the Mountain Meitheal bog bridges it is worthwhile to visit them and see how they have improved the environment as well as providing an environmentally sound service for outdoor enthusiasts. The work involved in their construction is far from glamorous or exciting but seeing the end result is very rewarding.

GLENMALURE ZIG ZAGS

After heavy rainfall over a forty eight hour period Glenmalure and Glendalough have been devastated by a number of landslides. Mountain Meitheal's work at Carrawaystick has been badly damaged and access to the zig zag track has to be curtailed for the moment. Despite being battered by a water surge which moved tons of rock and debris

the bridge designed by and constructed under the watchful eye of Gerry Patterson survived intact. The track leading to and the steps beyond the bridge have been washed away. The restored drainage work appears to have held and, given the torrent of water coursing down the



mountain, may have alleviated some of the damage.

FLAG'S PASS PROJECT, 26-27 June 2010

This year it was decided that our mid Summer project would be held in Flag's Pass situated between Glenmalure and Aughavannagh in Wicklow. This project was selected as it entailed the construction of 125 metres of bogbridge through a Coillte forest rideline which is part of the Wicklow Way. The ground conditions on the project site were boggy and wet, therefore a bogbridge was considered the best option. On the first day we gathered at the Glenmalure Lodge before driving up to the site which was easily accessible by car. Bill Murphy was leading. On site to greet us were piles of timber sleepers (140 in total), plus boxes of staples and rolls of wire, all supplied by Coillte. Following the safety talk we set down to work, carrying and laying out sleepers, placing them in position and finally nailing and wiring to secure them in position. This was followed by the continuous sound of the hammering of staples into the boards. At the end of the first



day 8 of us adjourned to the marquee, supplied by Coillte, which had been erected that morning by us. Pauline and Helen had taken on the task of sourcing the food for the barbeque that followed. Bill cleverly designed a picnic table out of some sleepers to provide some comfort and a good time was had by all. Six of us camped overnight and we talked well

into the night. On Sunday we were joined by other volunteers and we completed the bogbridge by the end of the second workday. This was a magnificent achievement and congratulations to all involved for a mighty effort. In all, 20 volunteers, 9 of whom worked both days, put in 151 volunteer hours. The photographs tell their own story of a job well done.

(Robert Grandon)

MAILING LIST – If you wish to have your name added to our e-mailing list or if you know of anyone who might like to have their name added to the list, please forward the e-mail address to shaymwalsh@eircom.net. Also, if your e-mail address has changed don't forget to let us know.

Thanks to Peter Nolan of Rubicon Healthcare for his generous donation of 20 Uriwell (personal toilet kits) to Mountain Meitheal.

FROM THE HUT ON THE HILL

Visitors' Comments

Last year MM erected a Hut on Paddock Hill for the comfort, enjoyment, pleasure and, at times, a shelter from the elements, for all who frequented its environs. The first completed visitor comment book offers an insight into the numbers who have availed of the Hut's welcome. Between the 60 pages of this A5 size notebook there are nearly 300 contributions from walkers from all 7 continents. Comments varied from locals out for a family stroll to the numerous hill walking groups who rested and lunched to admire the breathtaking views. They arrived at the hut as scouts, school trippers, hill walkers, nature lovers, fun seekers and those celebrating and in search of love and romance. All had something to say. The 26 students and teachers visiting from Belgium filled an entire page. Some confined themselves to a one liner while others wrote an essay, some offered jokes, poems and the artists left their mark as sketches and some wrote in native tongue. Their collective contribution represents the wealth of expression that is our human existence from the poetic to the comic, the romantic to the wise crack, but ALL expressing their appreciation and thanks. Here is just a flavour of the warmth of what the visitors had to say. Full names are omitted to protect the innocent!

February 13th, 2010 – The first comment:

Two young French boys doing the Wicklow Way. For the moment we used to camp but it is quite hard in

February. Good luck to all the Walkers. Thanks for the hut. Nice day for vagabonds. Peace! Boris & Pierre

Well done Meitheal! Enjoying the view. 7 regular walkers pausing in the hut. Great idea! (3RD Gorey Scout Group. DA BEST!!)

HF Walking Club discovered this lovely new facility. Well done MM!

Thanks for this shelter. Very nice place, particularly on such a rainy day! Greetings for all the walkers! Mikotoj (Poland)

Two French girls in the Wicklow Way for 4 days. We have had our lunch here, it was great. Hut was comfortable and useful to cook and boil water. Thank you very much. We hope they will have place for us in Glendalough Youth hostel after one night in our tent in a field it was cold. Our tent froze. Solenne et Colline

'Is mise Kirk agus Sara. We are here from the States studying Irish. We love Ireland and are excited to be on such a great walk on this beautiful day.' Slán agus ádh mór!

'Go raibh maith agat as ucht an teach iontach seo. Beirt buachaillí dána ar an mbealach go dtí ostán Gleann Dá Locha i gcóir cúpla pionta. Slán agus Beannacht.' Nollaig agus Tomás (Night Hike)

'Two old lovers enjoying the fresh air. You could get lazy at a spot like this. Better head back. Well done volunteers.' Pat & Safie

'Thank you MM for providing such a great hut! It provides a real peaceful haven! Peace to all who hike here.' Michael & Margaret

'Aquí pararon 4 bravios 'latin lovers' con la sana intencion de conquistar la Wicklow Way en 4 etapas. Magnifico refugio este en el que por desgracia, no buenos coincido para dormir. Toni, Manolo, Antonio, Farina (Spanish)

'Conor and CoCo the dog walking it to train for Charity Walk of Wicklow Way in April 2010. Good luck to all!' Conor

'Thanks for the water fill up. Wished we knew this was here. Slept in between farmers fields last night. Beautiful Trail. Well done Ireland!' Peter and Laura (Canada).

'Two Tubbers from London and a local Irish lass panting to a halt. Great hut! Will eat our crisps and toast you with our water. Only 1 mile in and a way to go. The scenery is our adrenaline. Let's hope the beauty continues or I'm in trouble.' Cindy, Hugh & Gemma.

Lá Fhéile Phádraig, Taking a break from study, enjoying the view and the weather.'
Signed a shanrock symbol. ♣

'View is class. Gonna start on our trek to Glendalough stopping off at Laragh. Getting some food. Little joke for ya 'what's red and invisible?No tomatoes. Ha!' Anthony.

'Hello people. I'm from Spain. Now it's raining a lot but this place is very nice to sit for a few minutes and see Ireland. I'm travelling alone and for me it is very interesting experience. Kisses for all.' Victor (Spain)

'B Team had a birthday party.
72, 71, 77 years old.'

*'[Hail to thee blithe spirit
Bird thou never wert
That from heaven or near it
Thy pourest out thy heart in
Pure strains of unpremeditated art
(Ode to the Skylark)].* Need we
say more! Well maybe, but we
better get going!' C+P

'Wicklow Way is awesome!
Girl from Germany doing the
way backwards! From
Clonegal till Glendalough
haven't seen other walkers, so
it's cool to be surrounded by
other hikers again! Slí Cualann
Una rocks! Xoxo Daniela
(Germany) PS Yes I'm on my
own. Just me! And it's
fantastic!'

'Conor & Neil walking for the
Billy Murphy Memorial Fund
doing the whole 132K of the
Wicklow Way. Good luck to
ALL.' Neil and Conor

'17 hearty and true Irish
Ramblers passed this way.
Alas Gerry refused to perform
the dance of the 7 veils in this
wonderful venue!' Bernie,
Hazel, Maurice, Deirdre et al

'Anois teacht an Earraigh
Beidh an lá dul chun síneadh
Is tar éis na féile Bríde
Ardóigh mé mo sheol.
Comhghairdeachas Mountain
Meitheal. Feicfidh mé sibh ag
cur na gcrann – i gceann
seachtaine' Tom and Kathleen
(Mayo)

'A feast for the eyes – such a
view! And our legs are lapping
up the comfort of this sitting
in this shelter. Nothing as
romantic and evocative as the
sound of pouring rain on a
roof top. We left Knockree
hostel this morning – aiming
for the culinary calling of the
best rhubarb crumble ever –
only 4 Km away in the
Glendalough Fayne. Today we

celebrate twenty years together,
and have walked the Sussex
Downs, the Cornish coastal paths,
Scottish hills, and many other
miles together. I feel so lucky to
be happy in the rain, with soggy
boots and numb fingers, and the
simplicity of the weather, the hills
and learning to accept the stillness
within us. So not only is this
shelter for ramblers who walk, but
also for rambling writers! So
here's wishing you Meitheal folks
a big hug and thanks for your
vision and enthusiasm! And also
here's to another 20 years with my
walking companion and all his
fussing about, zipping my hood
up when I prefer the feel of good
misty rain on my head!! All my
love to Ben!'

'Hi everyone! We are from
Denmark. We are sitting and
enjoying the view' C Ya!!'

'From the USA, only in Ireland
for a week doing the Wicklow
Way for 50 miles. We're (4 of us)
are taking summer vacation in the
UK were all went to school.
Cheers'.

'Lost! Cold! not sure which way is
up? We had time to collect our
thoughts, sit at a table feel like
human beings again. Shower
facilities were a little poor. Pls
build more.' James, Seán, William

'One slightly crazy Australian is
seeing the sun set from this
amazing shelter. Excellent spot
for some dinner. Many thanks to
those involved for getting this hut
up!' Cheers, Liam

'2 Irish, 1 Czech, 1 Welsh and 2
Brazilians on the way from
Roundwood to Glendalough. A
scorcher of a day. Nice Shelter! +
2 Germans who passed us by and
asked us to sign this for them.'

'15 Irish Ramblers led by Enid
Hughes and regaled by Jim Power.
Creative use of space, Great
facility. Let's have more!'

'Just passing by with 26
students/teachers in two
groups. The 3rd day for us.
Great but very cloudy and
foggy.' Calo, Netherlands

'Today's 35 Km trek from
Enniskerry to Glendalough is
some form of finale to my solo
journey of self-exploration in
the Alps + Ireland. I've just
seen some beautiful deer on the
trail. To the amazing, lovely
person who installed a drinking
tap for thirsty hikers like me –
thanks a million! It was the
show of traditional Irish
generosity that I was waiting
for. Happy adventuring!
Aisling, Nova Scotia, Canada.

'Seán here looking for love. I
come highly recommended.
Please ring 086-336067'.

'If you see a boy here, about 6
or 7, don't worry, he is
harmless. We have left him here
due to his whingeing and
complaining. Do not feed him!
He has a look of mischief so
beware of his tricks.'

'Texas doesn't have hills like
these.' Luke

'This is better than any gym. It's
a pity people wouldn't put their
€600 gym membership on
conserving the Wicklow Way!!!
Thanks.' EH

'Laragh to Lough Tay and back
to Laragh. Great to have this
building. Should be more! Great
idea! My beautiful Wicklow as
always!' Steven (disabled) from
Wicklow

July 5th, 2010

On the last page of this visitor
book the aptly closing comment
from Joe and George says

*Great Shelter – keep up the
good work Mountain
Meitheal.*

LEAVE NO TRACE

On behalf of Leave No Trace Ireland Board of Directors I would like to thank you for Mountain Meitheal's contribution to the Leave No Trace Ireland DVD. Chris and Shay have worked tirelessly to ensure the new DVD is to the highest standard and those who have seen it, including the Board, think it is great. This will be a great asset to Leave No Trace Ireland especially for training purposes.

Kindest regards
Beverley Pierson
Leave No Trace Ireland
Project Officer

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

This year like previous years has been a very busy time for Mountain Meitheal. We remain very dependant on the generosity and support of walking clubs and other organisations when it comes to providing the financial help so we can build and repair tracks and trails. This support enables us to continue to operate effectively, but without it we are much reduced in what we can commit to. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all the organisations and clubs that have supported us in the past and continue to do so. This is greatly appreciated by all the Volunteers.

Regards,
Robert Grandon (Chairperson)



MEMBERSHIP / RENEWAL APPLICATION FORM

Please return this form with the requested details with your subscription to Clóna Ní Bhréartúin, 12 Beechview, Edmondstown Rd, Dublin 16.

Surname: _____ Forename: _____

Postal Address: _____

Phone (home): _____ (work): _____

Phone (mobile): _____

Email: _____ Age (if under 18 years): _____

For insurance purposes, are you a member of Mountaineering Ireland?
Yes No

If so, are you an **individual** member or a **club** member ?
If you are in a **club** please specify which one? _____

Can you bring any relevant experience to *Mountain Meitheal* (e.g. engineer, forester, farmer, previous voluntary trail maintenance experience, etc.)? _____

I wish to apply for/renew my membership of *Mountain Meitheal* and enclose my subscription of €20 (cash, PO or cheque) and agree to support the aims and objectives of the club.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

DEVIL'S LADDER

We are reliably informed that the Mountain Meitheal 'Feasibility Study for the Repair of the Devil's Ladder Access Route to Corrán Tuathail' which we produced in 2003 with the financial support of the Heritage Council has been used as the basis of a submission for funding to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Although the project did not proceed in 2003 and so many years have elapsed since the necessary repairs were highlighted we are pleased to see our efforts may not have been in vain. Mountain Meitheal has agreed to assist in any way we can should the project now go ahead.

ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL – TALES FROM BEAR MOUNTAIN

Bill Murphy

The Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian Trail (AT) is one of the oldest and most popular long distance trails in North America. It runs 2160 miles from Springer Mountain in Georgia to Kathadin in Maine. The AT was conceived in the 1920s by Benton Mac Kaye, a forester and regional planner, as a path through the wilderness. He hoped the path would bind together a community who would enjoy and work in the outdoors. While his original idea of community did not come fully to fruition as he envisioned, it is now maintained almost entirely by volunteer effort – a fantastic community of clubs and individuals working for the trail. The AT's popularity has grown since it was fully opened in the 1934. Now thousands of day hikers, section hikers (those hiking parts of the trail over days and weeks) and 'thru hikers' (the few that walk the entire trail in one season) hike the trail each year. In places the trail is so popular that it takes a terrible pounding from feet.

Bear Mountain

Bear Mountain is about 60 miles north of New York City at the end of the Palisades Parkway, a linear park created in the early 1900s along the Hudson River to link the city to the mountains and provide much needed outdoor recreation. The first section of Mc Kaye's AT was opened in 1921 in Bear Mountain making the section between Hessian Lake and the summit one of the most historic sections of the AT – worth a 'pilgrimage' in itself. In

July this year I traveled to New York for a family wedding. Not being a city type, I was anxious to head upstate to see some of their trails, state parks, mountains and forests. A few weeks before I left, a colleague, knowing my interest in trails, gave me an article from the New York Times reporting on a major rebuild of the Bear Mountain section of the AT. This I had to see. Guess where we were heading when we left JFK airport?

After a rather fraught drive across New York City we got on to the Palisades Parkway and about 75 minutes later we arrived at Bear Mountain State Park and Overlook Lodge. Early next morning Bairbre (my understanding wife) and I set off up the trail to see the work and hopefully meet the trail crew. My earlier contacts with the New York/Jersey Trail Conference (NY/NJTC) told me the crew would be on site when I was there.



Stone stops, many a ton in weight, weave their way through large boulders on the AT near Hessian Lake.

Boulders

The terrain of the park is extremely rugged with rock outcrops and car and bus sized boulders strewn across the steep mountain side uphill from Hessian Lake. The area is covered with beautiful mixed hardwood forests – maple, oak – typical of the uplands of New York. The soils are shallow and fragile and because of their slope are prone to erosion. The underlying geology of this outlier of the Appalachian Mountains is granite giving the trail workers a fantastic material to work with – no need to look too hard for rock here – oh that Three Rock was the same!

The project

An estimated half-million people yearly hike from Hessian Lake up to the Perkins Memorial Tower (on the summit of Bear Mountain) necessitating frequent relocations to keep the route usable; however it was a constant battle against gravity and water. The rebuilding project was designed to establish a long term sustainable solution for this important historic trail. In 2000, planning began for a heavy-duty route that would stand up to the constant use. In 2006, the first of 700 volunteers, trained by a full time professional crew, started work on the trail. On national trails day this year (June in the US) they opened phase one of the route. This is over 1 mile long with over 800 one-ton, 4-foot-wide, 8-inch-high stone steps, hundreds of metres of buttress walls, stone drains, a bridge tied into a rock outcrop and trail rehabilitation. The new

trail weaves between, around, and over gigantic boulders, almost effortlessly easing you up and down the mountainside.

The project is managed by the New York New Jersey Trail Conference (a non-government organization) in conjunction with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the NY state parks.



An example of buttress walls and steps clinging close to a large boulder.

Funding and training

What makes this project interesting is the fact that not only is it funded under President Obama's stimulus programme, which has allocated **\$1 million dollars** to this historic section of the AT, but also that the NY/NJTC has recruited over 700 volunteers to work alongside the professional crew to build this superb trail. The volunteers work with and were trained in special workshops by the professional crews and learnt and later undertook all sorts of trail work from rock splitting to step construction. Stone cut and split during these workshops was used to construct the four foot wide steps that wind between bus-sized boulders and under dramatic rock outcrops.



Volunteer Joe drilling rock before splitting with wedges and feathers. Joe gives two days a month to the trail, travelling up to 100 miles from his home for the weekend.

Trail Crew

Near the summit we met the first of the crew working on the trail – he was Joe, a volunteer who travels over 100 miles about twice a month for two days work on the trail. He told me he just has become fascinated with the AT and its 'culture' and wanted to be involved and give something back. Joe was using a drill with wedges and feathers to split rock for steps which the rest of the crew would later move onto site. Joe brought me down to meet Ed Walsh the trail designer and construction manager. Ed has worked extensively on trails throughout New York and New England and the evidence of his skill is clear to see in this project. It is a master piece.



Project Manager and trail designer Ed Walsh uses an overhead cable system to move cut rock up the mountain into position as steps.

Ed was busy overseeing the hauling of rock by a cable system to their final resting place below the summit so after a good chat we bid him farewell. Rain was starting when we left Ed to head for the summit.

About an hour later on our return we saw the crew breaking for lunch and sheltering under a makeshift shelter. The banter was great – I was sure I heard some one like Robert Farrelly laughing and joking about jaffa cakes – trail workers are the same everywhere.

A real trail community

While chatting to Ed about trails it turned out he had worked in his early days for an old friend of Meitheal's, Andrew Norkin, trail manager with the Appalachian Mountain Club. Small world and trail enthusiasts are a small community. Maybe Benton Mac Kaye's idea of a trail community is a reality and it now stretches to Three Rock on the Dublin Mountains.

If you are near Bear Mountain – visit the trail – you'll be amazed.

THREE ROCK

On 09th October 2010 Mountain Meitheal completed the project on Three Rock Mountain. The project began in October 2009 and involved the construction of 250m of stone pitched treadway and 139m of raised treadway. The work was completed in 19 work days and a total of 1832 volunteer hours was clocked up by 126 individual volunteers. Many thanks to all who volunteered to those hunted for materials, hauled rock, carried sand, dug drains and cut brushing. The trail recently featured on RTÉ's programme *Tracks and Trails*. If the reaction from the general public, passing by while we were working on site, is anything to go by then Mountain Meitheal have a great success to add to our portfolio.