

## Machine gives Meitheal a helping hand!

Wicklow Sustainable Trails Network (WSTN) is a partnership between Wicklow Mountains National Park, Coillte, Wicklow County Council, Wicklow Uplands Council and Mountain Meitheal which has secured 50% funding from the National Development Plan for "Tourism Measures" to establish a trail management group in Wicklow to carry out trail upgrading and repair. As part of the upgrading work, Mountain Meitheal, Coillte and WMNP are working on the Wicklow Way above Glensoulan and the Powerscourt Waterfall covering a distance of approximately 600m. This section of the Wicklow Way was badly rutted from erosion with deep ravines, in some cases over 800mm deep.



## Good news for Glensoulan!

Work started in November with a Coillte excavator constructing a "reversal path" (see side bar). Once this was complete Meitheal Volunteers moved in to give the finishing touch to the trail and complete the more delicate tasks. This includes landscaping the edges with sods and the natural placement of large boulders and rocks giving focal points along the new trail. Water management is essential on this section of trail as the slope is greater than ideal and the area was subject to severe erosion in the past. MM Volunteers are constructing water bars using logs and rock and constructing some stone drains at critical points. Already the finished sections of the path look more natural and it is expected the work will blend into the landscape with re-vegetation in the spring. The National Park staff are programmed to install a new bridge over the Glensoulan River, repair the stone walls to discourage usage of bootleg trails and erect new stiles.

This is an exciting new development in trail rehabilitation as machine constructed trails, used for several years in Scotland, are a valuable tool delivering more cost effective trail building, particularly in areas where peat is a problem. The feed back from trail users is already very positive, particularly after the landscaping, even though the site is raw at the time of writing. Watch this space!

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## Reversal Paths

Using a large excavator on a mountain path may not at first appear the most "environmentally sound" solution to our upland path problems. Think again! This method has been used for several years in some of Scotland's most sensitive landscapes - the Cairngorms and the Trossachs - to build sustainable and cost effective trails.

The excavator operator clears the organic layer (peat in Ireland) down to the mineral soil from double the width of the required tread way - say 2m for a 1m tread way. The peat from the clearance is put to one side. The operator then opens a "borrow pit" in half the cleared ground and takes mineral soil from the pit and places it on the other half. The result is mineral piled on mineral which the machine operator then shapes to the required camber. Finally the operator replaces the cleared peat in the open borrow pit and moves on to clear the next section and repeat the process.

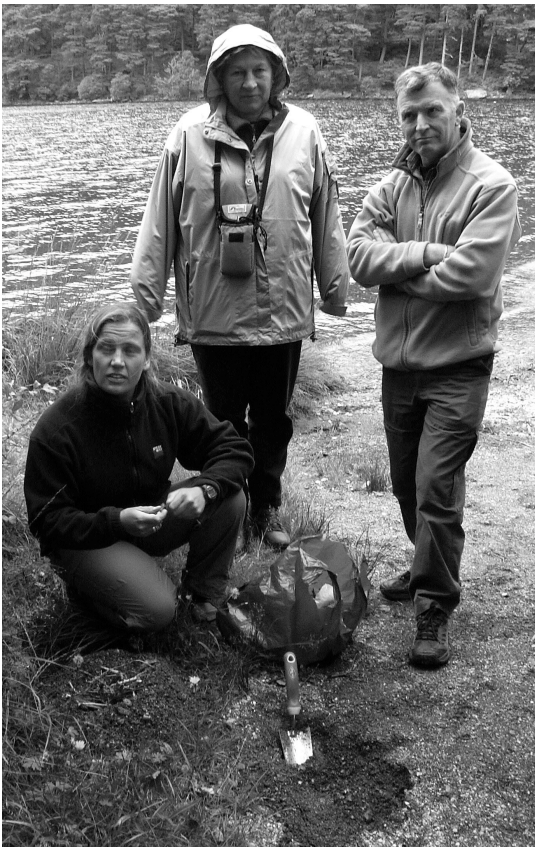
The key to success with this type of trail construction is having operators who understand that they are trying to create the impression of a naturally occurring trail.

# Leave No Trace

By **Barbara Lennon** - Hon. Secretary  
Wayfarers Association

Ann Fitzpatrick gave a workshop on Leave No Trace (LNT) in the Wicklow Mountains National Park Education Centre Glendalough on 17 September. LNT educates us with seven principles to guide us while out and about hiking or camping:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Minimise campfire impacts
4. Respect wildlife
5. Be considerate to other visitors
6. Dispose of waste properly
7. Leave what you find.



I remember learning through Scouting and Guiding to "take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints." At the recent workshop, "Pack it in, Pack it out", updates that particular motto. In 1981 I went backpacking in the American Rockies and was presented with a trowel for this purpose and I had a flashback to this in September 2005 when the trowel raised its head again. But did you know that not only do you Poo in the hole you dig, but you must then use a stick to churn up the evidence to speed up decomposition!!!!!!

I entertained some of the Wayfarers recently on discussions and demonstrations held at the LNT workshop on how to dispose of human waste. How many times have you chosen to relieve yourself in an attractive section of woodland only to discover that many others have left evidence of their similar practice? Toilet paper does not quickly biodegrade and hiding it under rocks invariably leaves a bit peeping out. Do you know that even throwing out crusts and waste food (to feed the birds) can attract rats etc., which can disrupt the local wildlife. And after all that we learned how to make a fire and Leave No Trace of it.

Mountain Meitheal Vice Chair, Shay Walsh organised this master class given by Ann Fitzpatrick to an enthralled audience. Thanks to all who gave this most interactive and informative workshop. For more information on this exciting topic you can access [www.LNT.org](http://www.LNT.org).

## AGM 2005

Mountain Meitheal's Annual General Meeting was held in October. Chair, Bill Murphy reported on the previous 12 months activities and Hon. Treasurer Frances Hannon confirmed our finances are secure and in order. Thanks to Derek Davy for auditing the accounts. Mountain Meitheal needs more volunteers' muscles behind the work than loads of money but we are always glad to receive it! Special thanks to the following groups and organisations for their very generous financial support: Holiday Fellowship Hiking Club; Irish

Mountain Runners Association; Glenwalk and the Wayfarers Association.

Following elections the Committee of Mountain Meitheal for next year is: Bill Murphy Chair; Shay Walsh Vice Chair; Laurence Lynch Honorary Secretary; Frances Hannon Honorary Treasurer; Chris Avison and Gay Needham.

The Committee has drawn up its Work Plan for 2006.

These  
are  
some  
actual  
comments  
left  
on  
U.S.



**Forest Service registration sheets and comment cards by hikers completing wilderness camping trips.**

A small deer came into my camp and stole my bag of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed?

Trails need to be wider so people can walk while holding hands

Ban walking sticks in wilderness. Hikers that use walking sticks are more likely to chase animals

Found a smoldering cigarette left by a horse

Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill

Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the area of these pests

Chairlifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them

The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals

Reflectors need to be placed on trees every 50 feet so people can hike at night with flashlights

The places where trails do not exist are not well marked

Need more signs to keep area pristine

## “End of Season” letter

### Dear Volunteers

As Christmas approaches we finish another season of good work and leave the hills with some reluctance.



**2005** was another busy year for Mountain Meitheal volunteers. The bulk of our work was around the busy Glensoulan, Djouce and Maulin areas. Often several hundred people passed our work crews at weekends. Its no wonder the paths in this area need the work and thanks to you, the repaired trail in Glensoulan is now getting established and the vegetation is recovering.

We've learnt a lot about rugged **stone step** construction, **check dams** and **bench cut paths** on the project which was ably managed by Shay Walsh and supported by the MCI through a small grant. The summit of Djouce remains a challenge; while most users are staying on the path, vegetation on the upper slopes is very slow to recover. This year we added **grykes** to slow the peat washing down the slope and plan to assist re-vegetation next spring with a **grass nurse crop** with the agreement of the National Park management.

**Leave No Trace** moves closer to promoting better use through a national outdoor ethic with the establishment of **Leave No Trace Ireland**. Mountain Meitheal is a founding member and one of the first organisations to pledge financial support. We also became a partner in the Wicklow Sustainable Trails Network and are very actively involved in an exciting new trail repair development (see report on page 1.)

**2006** presents yet more challenges. Luckily I'm supported by a very committed and hard working committee eagerly working for the mountains. We have agreed a draft Work Plan for 2006 seeing us take on new and exciting projects, improving our project management skills, and promoting sustainable trails and better stewardship of the mountains. We are setting targets to encourage more

volunteers, particularly younger members and hopefully from mountain bikers. We wish to establish an **“adopt a trail”** programme.

Thanks to all our volunteers and supporters for their work during the year. The work of Mountain Meitheal only happens when you, the volunteers, take part in a work day, lead a work crew, promote the Leave No Trace message or encourage a friend or your club to turn out and help. We get valuable support from walking clubs, and others, with funds and while these are very welcome we can actually do much more with your labour.

Enjoy your well earned break, I look forward to seeing you all again in the spring when another year of work stretches before us. Next time - Bring a friend!

Wishing you a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year,

**Bill Murphy,**  
Chair, Mountain Meitheal

**Your Invitation to Meitheal Leaders' Workshop on Saturday 18 February 2006**  
Enhance your outdoors experience adding to all those skills you already use out on a meitheal:

- Tools and manual handling
- Group dynamics
- Project management
- First Aid

For further details contact:

Shay Walsh 01 821 7216 or 087 238 2581 or e-mail: shaymwalsh@eircom.net

## Volunteering - an American experience with The Appalachian Trail Conference

Everyone who's read "A Walk in the Woods" by Bill Bryson knows of the "political" struggles involved in creating this over two thousand mile long trail.

What's less well known is that Volunteers built the Appalachian Trail, and volunteers keep it alive and flourishing today. More than 4,500 men and women contribute more than 182,000 hours of their time each year to trail work, and maintaining clubs can always use more hands.

Volunteer programs are designed to appeal to people with diverse talents, interests and experience levels. Trail crews, for instance, spend a week or more living in the back-country and accomplishing the hard work of relocations, bridge building and footpath rehabilitation.

Environmental monitors gather information about air and water quality, wildlife habitat and forest health. Appalachian Trail Conference administrative offices have a variety of needs - from working with visitors during the peak hiking season to building membership packets. And, trail maintenance clubs are where the real day-to-day trail work takes place, from Maine to Georgia.

### Some useful trail repair-volunteers' websites: - Why not have a look?

**Appalachian Mountain Club**  
[www.outdoors.org](http://www.outdoors.org)

**Washington Trails Association**  
[www.wta.org](http://www.wta.org)

**British Conservation Volunteers**  
[www.btcv.org](http://www.btcv.org)

**Leave No Trace** [www.LNT.org](http://www.LNT.org)

**Sierra Club** [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

# What's it all about?

**Clodagh de Brun, Julie Horton and Darach O Murchu all got involved with our trail repair programme during the past year or so. Here's what they say about being a Mountain Meitheal volunteer:**



**Clodagh:** "At first I thought "grand no problem, I'll write a line or two on Mountain Meitheal" but now, sitting here thinking about it, I find it very difficult to define my thoughts on it. It is such a wonderful concept and I truly love being involved in it. I suppose the obvious purpose of joining a work day is to give something back, which of course you are, but I constantly feel I gain a hell of a lot by being there."

Having finished a day's work on Djouce a few weeks back I looked towards Glensoulan and the work that has been completed - on a personal level I felt really proud of how well it looked and how the vegetation was already hugging in around the "path" - it felt terrific to see that the work of the spring and summer months of sometimes torrential rain, sometimes glorious sunshine and sometimes midge ridden days had paid off so well and I was and am so happy to have been a part of that. I adore being in the hills, and a day spent with MM is so rewarding.

A few of my friends have joined me on and off over the past year and that's wonderful but to see a project through is magic. I actually find the aching muscles and exhaustion at the end of a work day quite delicious and you finish your day loaded with information from the 'top' lads, who are always willing to spend time and explain what and why something is being done. All I can say is that I'm so glad I stumbled across Mountain Meitheal - it has been and continues to be an education, I love it!"

**Darach:** "What do I think of Mountain Meitheal? - Its great fun and laid back, a different way to enjoy the mountains - its an opportunity to meet like minded

people - very important and vital work gets done - one of the best workplaces in the world.

What I get from MM? - a chance to give back a little for all the "free" use I get from the mountains - a great feeling of empathy and satisfaction after a days work and a sense of community spirit."

**Julie:** "What prompted me to get involved with Mountain Meitheal - it was initially a desire to get involved with voluntary work. After looking at the

options, I realised that MM fitted in perfectly with my love of the outdoors, and my need to get physical (apartment living was taking its toll and I was missing not getting dirt under the fingernails!)

Being surrounded by stunning scenery, keeping fit, gaining knowledge, being part of a team - and having a lot of fun, are all the great by-products I experience, when essentially I am taking care of the environment in my own small way."

**(Pictured: Clodagh (left) and Julie (right) - apologies to Darach who was working on his house overlooking Smerwick Harbour in Kerry at the time!)**

## "Stop Press" The Devil's Ladder

Mountain Meitheal conducted a feasibility study for repair work to "The Devil's Ladder", the very popular and now dangerously eroded path leading to the summit of Carrauntoohill, Ireland's highest mountain. MM enlisted the expertise of Andrew Norkin, a trails manager with The Appalachian Mountain Club in the USA. The project was financed by The Heritage Council. The study was submitted to Kerry County Council as part of a wider project for the immediate locality and Planning Permission has now very recently been granted in respect of the necessary trail work. It is envisaged that most of the required work on "The Devil's Ladder" can be carried out when suitable financial support becomes available.



[www.pathsavers.org](http://www.pathsavers.org)

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Any queries 'phone 01 2986085 or  
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**'Phone Nos:**

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(Mobile)

**E-mail address:** (if any)

**Age:** (if under 18 years)

For **insurance purposes** are you a member of The Mountaineering Council of Ireland?

If so, are you an **individual** member/**club** member?

If in a **club**, please specify which one?

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

**Signed:**