

The Mattock

Newsletter of Mountain Meitheal Ireland

MM Dublin Wicklow : MM South East : MM West : MM North West

2022

www.pathsavers.org

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Mountain Meitheal North-West Branch gets off to a woolly start



The location of the section on the Leitrim Way designated for repair by MMNW using sheep's wool.

Before After



A group of interested people came together to set up a branch of Mountain Meitheal in the North-West (MMNW) in 2019. A committee was formed and have been active ever since but due to government Covid-19 restrictions they were unable to undertake any outdoor work during 2020. Come 2021 they were ready and without any delay or procrastination they commenced their first project and what a project. MMNW undertook, in partnership with Leitrim Development Company, to trial out an unusual technique using sheep's wool to upgrade a designated 300m of the Leitrim Way, a national waymarked way, which stretches

56km from Manorhamilton to Leitrim Village.

As described in the Autumn issue of the Irish Mountain Log 'The sheep fleece is utilised as the foundation for the path, acting as a barrier between the soft peatland and the stoned surfaced trail, preventing the path from sinking into the peat, effectively "floating" the stone on the bog. The wool allows water to pass through unobstructed. Using wool instead of the more common technique, a plastic membrane, provides a number of advantages. Wool is eco-friendly and abundantly available in our upland areas. The wool needs no treatment whatsoever and can be taken straight off the sheep's back and used immediately in the construction of the walking trail.'

While this method might seem ground-breaking, it is actually a reawakening of an ancient engineering technique developed by the Roman Empire for building roads over waterlogged grounds and peatlands throughout Europe. In recent years, sheep's wool has been used in upland path building in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.'

In the words of Silvia Borbein, MMNW Committee member, 'We are delighted to be the first Mountain Meitheal group using this special path building technique for our inaugural project' and we all will keep a keen eye on how it fairs out over time with footfall and weather exposure.

It was great to be back out on the mountains – 45 workdays completed – the year that was 2021

Once government restrictions on movement were lifted Mountain Meitheal branches did not waste time returning to take up where we left off almost a year earlier. Together all four Mountain Meitheal branches put in 44 work days out and about on our cherished hills and mountain landscapes.

West (MMW)

For us in the West car-pooling plays a key role in getting volunteers to and from site locations. We had to factor into our work plans for 2021 HSE's Covid-19 recommendation of no car-pooling. Starting our work schedule in June MMW undertook

Head Loop (at Gleninagh and Fanore). Repairs included water management and stone pitching. The work of the MMW Branch committee went ahead without interruption hosting eleven meetings in all. The Branch's AGM was held in November 2021. MMW can be contacted by emailing mountainmeithealwest@gmail.com



Winching rocks into place



Working on a stile

the construction of 2 stiles, one at Glenlosh and the second at Glencroff, Co. Galway. Both constructed in partnership with NPWS (National Parks & Wildlife Services) and a local landowner. The support of the landowner was critical to completing this project and it was the landowner who transported the required tools to site using his own quad bike. On completion of the stiles the remainder of the year was devoted to substantial maintenance and repairs to popular trails in Co. Clare in partnership with Coillte at Ballyvaughan Wood Loop and Black

Dublin/Wicklow (MMDW)

MMDW commenced its work schedule in May returning to complete the construction of the trail at Tibbradden woods in the Dublin Mountains that was halted due to restrictions. The now completed track appears on the EastWest Maps (2021) series. Starting in July and in partnership with Wicklow Mountain National Parks (WMNP), DW completed repairs to a 140m stretch of St Kevin's Way at Glendasan, Co Wicklow. This involved delivery of **13 x 0.5 bags** of small boulders by helicopter (2020) along with harvesting stones and gravel from close to the trail. Our current project, started in September, brings us back to Glendalough to carry out repairs to a 700m section of the extremely popular Miner's trail where there is maximal erosion/wear and tear. This project is undertaken in partnership with **WMNP** and here again granite rocks were dropped by helicopter to the site, and these are used in

conjunction with existing rocks to reconfigure and level out the existing trail. The work of the MMDW Branch committee went ahead without interruption hosting five meetings in all. The Branch's AGM was held in November. MMDW can be contacted by emailing mountainmeithealdublinwicklow@gmail.com



Putting the finishing touches to the track in Glendalough

South-East (SE)

MMSE commenced its work schedule in May. The first undertaking was to revisit where we had left off at Galtee Castle track that borders Co. Limerick and Co. Tipperary to assess winter damage to the track. Fallen trees had previously been removed by Coillte. Drains and culverts full of autumn leaves were cleared and debris raked and removed from the track. We had to pull back from our plans to commence a new project in June in the same area due to unforeseen circumstances. Much needed maintenance on the north side of the Galtees was carried out to the Lough



Sorting the tools

Curra short-cut area. Debris cleared, gravel backfilled, new side drains included, and a water bar added at the top of the track close to the stile which leads out onto open land. The Branch AGM was held on 21st November. MMSE can be contacted by emailing mountainmeithealsoutheast@gmail.com



A busy day in the South-East

North-West (NW)

Despite all the setbacks MMNW commenced its first project on 24 July and worked through till late November. Despite this being its



Laying a track over wool



inaugural project, MMNW set itself a challenging but exciting undertaking to repair 300m of bog trail on the Leitrim Way near Manorhamilton using a technique untried by Mountain Meitheal before. The repairs to the trail involved a process of using sheep's wool, followed by layering of three types of different stones to create what is hoped will be a sustainable track on bog land soil. The project required the agreement of a community led Local Development Company and the support of local farmers who supplied the wool. Under the mentorship of Frank McMahon and facilitated by Shay Walsh, both experienced members of MMSE branch and MMDW branch respectively, MMNW have brought new energy to the work of Mountain Meitheal. The approach generated wide public interest and was covered by RTÉ television News at 6pm. MMNW's ambition to try out a different approach may well throw new light on future MM endeavours. MMNW can be contacted by emailing mountainmeithealnorthwest@gmail.com

The Year AHEAD – 2022

Branch committees are working on their schedules for the coming year and so far are optimistic that there will be no restrictions on returning to the outdoors come spring. Heading up branch committees having been elected at branch AGMs in November are:



MMW

John
Smyth



MMSE

Jim
O'Neill



MMDW

Emer
Cunningham



MMNW

Gerry
Bambrick

Mountain Meitheal – 20 year celebration plans

Mountain Meitheal (MM) as a concept dates back to the year 2000. The formation of MM was inspired by the work of volunteers on the Appalachian Trail in the USA. The idea to do something similar here in Ireland took a number of forms before in 2002 it opened membership to the wider public, registered itself as Mountain Meitheal (MM) and held its first workday undertaking repairs on the Wicklow Way. Fast forward 20 years and Mountain Meitheal (MMI) Ireland currently consists of four branches in Dublin Wicklow (MMDW), in the South-East (MMSE), in the North-West (MMNW) and in the West (MMW). MM was set up by volunteers and MMI remains a 100% volunteer organisation with a membership base.

Discussions are underway as to how best to mark and celebrate the 20 year benchmark. There are lots of ideas floating about. There is the idea of a big jamboree whereby all branch members could come together and share and celebrate – wouldn't that be something to look forward to after all the lockdowns and restrictions over the last two years. There is talk of the construction of a new hut on the Wicklow Way where it all began and that is just for starters. Once we get the green light to go ahead and firm up plans, the details will be circulated, so make sure to keep some space in the diary and if you have ideas/suggestions send them on to the MMI Committee at mountainmeithealireland@gmail.com

A big thank you to ALL our Supporters

Mountain Meitheal could not exist without its members, its volunteers and their dedication. Volunteers are the engine that drives MM. The support of the public and donations from the hill walking community assist MM with its environmental endeavours.

To all of our supporters we offer our many, many thanks and appreciation for your contributions and on-going backing. We wish you a safe and healthy new year and look forward to seeing you out and about come spring.

**Get out, get dirty and
give back!**

*We're looking forward to
getting out again in 2022*

*Full calendar of dates
available at*

www.mountainmeitheal.ie