

The Mattock

Newsletter of Mountain Meitheal Ireland

Mountain Meitheal Dublin Wicklow : Mountain Meitheal South East : Mountain Meitheal West

2019

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Wishing all our volunteers and supporters a healthy and outdoor new year

Wicklow Way Reroute at Crossbridge, Tinahely Mountain Meitheal get dug in

The Wicklow Way (WW) is a 127 km designated national waymarked trail. It is one of the busiest of Ireland's National Waymarked Trails and it attracts thousands of international visitors each year. In 2018 Mountain Meitheal (MM) was approached by Bryan Fennell, Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) for Co. Wicklow and Chair of Wicklow Way Partnership (WWP) to undertake a project that diverted the WW off the R747, removing the need for walkers to hike on a dangerous section of road from Tinahely to Crossbridge.

MM volunteers visited the site, and with the permission of the landowner, a specification for the job was drawn up and agreed. Materials were ordered and work began the weekend of 11-12 August.

The materials ordered consisted of 120 timber sleepers (Douglas Fir, grown and supplied from local



Land owner with community on the new rerouted section of the Wicklow Way.

source), 16 (4/2) planks, 12 strainer posts, pencil fence posts and, later in the project, a resupply of posts and 10 ton of '804' grade gravel.

Over the first weekend 19 MM volunteers joined in the project, most of whom camped overnight and great progress was made with the usual good-humoured enthusiasm and dedication. Fun was also had with visits to Tinahely and, for some, a first time visit to the

famous *Dying Cow* pub at Stranakealy Crossroad which is on the Wicklow Way. It took that weekend and another four workdays to complete the re-route.

The new route of approx. 100m is a steep uphill trail along the field boundary of a lovely native woodland plantation. It consists of a sleeper step bogbridge, platforms and rails, a raised platform and steps at the top, gravel backfill log-steps (using strainer posts) and gravel path at the bottom of the trail. A kissing gate was installed later

at the bottom of the trail. All the timber was hand-sawn in the field and carried by the volunteers to the site across the road, thousands of staples and nails were hammered by the crews, and gravel was wheelbarrowed and spread.

The landowner and local Crossbridge Village Community Association were very impressed and pleased with the great work and dedication of the MM crews. The

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Crossbridge community plan to incorporate the new trail into a sustainable PURE Mile route allowing good safe access across this beautiful scenic valley.

Bryan Fennell, RRO, stated that 'projects like these are a verification of a community's good will to visitors to their area. This reroute was made possible by the kind permission of a private landowner, who has allowed us to reroute the Wicklow Way through their lands. This was a result of positive and active engagement with the landowner from the local community group.' He went on to acknowledge the tremendous work by the volunteer group Mountain Meitheal and expressed thanks for the goodwill of all private landowners currently providing



A volunteer at work

recreational access through their lands for hillwalkers in Co. Wicklow.

[This project was coordinated by the Co. Wicklow Partnership (CWP) and supported by the Wicklow Way Partnership (WWP) on which Mountain Meitheal is represented].

MM Branches – Get out, Get dirty and Give back

2018 – Clocking up the Hours

2018 saw Mountain Meitheal volunteers work in counties Dublin, Clare, Galway, Limerick, Tipperary and Wicklow. In a year which saw the formation of a third branch based in Galway, Mountain Meitheal contributed a total of 2039 volunteer hours to construct-ing, repairing and maintaining upland tracks and trails. Although founded in 2002, accurate records of hours worked only started from 2006. The total number of volunteer hours for the period 2006-2018 reached 27,013 hrs which has an estimated economic value of €590,774. The figures above only refer to site hours and do not include the hours involved in administration, committee work or training. Commenting on the figures, the Chair of Mountain Meitheal Ireland thanked those who volunteered in 2018 and emphasised the necessity to prioritise the promotion of membership in each

branch to ensure the continuity of the important contribution of Mountain Meitheal's undertakings to the environment in the coming years.

Dublin Wicklow (MMDW)

The 2018 Season commenced on the Fairy Castle trail in the Dublin Mountains in February. Discussions with Clodagh Duffy, manager of Dublin Mountain Partnership, saw us return to this very busy trail which MMDW had worked on back in 2009-10. Apart from the 6-day re-routing of the WW section (article on front page), MMDW spent the remainder of the season repairing this trail. This involved a lot of locating, shifting and carrying of rocks for rip-rap beside the stone-pitched path. This was necessary because side trails had developed over the previous 8-9 years due to the high level of usage.

In addition, MMDW stone-pitched extra sections of the trail, and repaired and re-gravelled the lower section of the trail. MMDW repaired and built new water bars on the original trail, and a side trail, to move water off the trail and reduce damage to it. Cross drains on 100 metres approx. of the trail above the stone-pitched section were re-gravelled and repaired. All of this was coordinated being mindful of the restrictions that applied in the vicinity of the lower section of the trail, because a National Monument is located there. One day was lost because of Storm Emma and the Beast from the East dumped a large amount of snow on the Dublin/Wicklow Mountains in March. This added to erosion damage, especially on the lower section of the trail, when the snow meltwater run-off commenced. MM re-gravelled this whole section and repaired water bars. MMDW will return to the Fairy Castle trail in 2019 to complete repairs and upon completion move to work on repairing a nearby section of the WW.



MMDW on the Fairy Castle trail

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MountainMeithealDW/

South East (MMSE)

MMSE started a month earlier than previous years (February 2018) continuing the repair of the old track running from Kings Yard to Galtee Castle on the south side of the Galtees. MMSE has been working on the restoration of this

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860m long track for a few years. The heavily overgrown track, with many drains no longer visible, has had to be cleared and dug out. Many of the traditional culverts were located and the growth removed in order to clear these, so waters from the upper areas can now run freely through the culverts and out into the river, keeping the track clear of mud. 2018 work saw the team move many wheelbarrow-loads of hardcore and the placement of large stone/boulders which act as stepping stones, helping to revive the track underneath.

MMSE held an open day in March as part of the Mountaineering Ireland Spring Meet in the Glen of Aherlow, sponsored by Limerick Climbing Club, which gave MM an opportunity to show case its work to the participants. In May, MMSE had the privilege of being joined by two American volunteers - Sean Sullivan and his son Patrick who were holidaying in Ireland and spotted MMSE on Facebook and wanted to put in a day's volunteering work. Fair play!

In September we had our annual maintenance and BBQ weekend. Like-minded people from Cahir Social and Historical Society joined MMSE on our last workday in November, interested in how MM approach projects and tools of the trade for the various tasks.



MMW volunteers taking a rest on a work day

In total, the year brought us up to our highest annual hours to date, **691.**

2019 will start with a January meeting with the new Coillte contact for the South East. In mid-February 9 volunteers will travel to Wicklow to undertake an MMI course to brush up on leading and refresher training skills.

A big 'go raibh maith agat' to all our Volunteers who joined in on workdays.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/mountainmeithealsoutheast/

West (MMW)

The recently formed Mountain Meitheal group of volunteers in the West made a very impressive start to their first year as a new Branch (MMW). They formed a Branch committee, appointed a Branch Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. MMW agreed their first work project which they started on their first workday on 3 May. They agreed the project with their local RRO, Eoin Hogan, who provided them with the necessary tools and supplies. In all they organised 7 workdays in 2018 and completed their first project on the Blackhead Loop Walk, Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare. An impressive 18 volunteers turned up on MMW first work day and they were not daunted by the 1.6 km walk to the site. They were also joined on their first day by a team of 4 experience MM volunteers who travelled from Dublin to join them. Work involved removing organic material, opening up drains and putting in stone pitching. The Branch was designated an experienced volunteer who travelled to every work day as a mentor and this mentoring will continue into next year. Their last work day was on 24 November where they visited the



MMSE volunteers in Kings Yard

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work site of their new project at Maumeen in the Maumturk Mountains and where they will re-commence the project in 2019.

MMI Wilderness 1st Aid Course

MM provides training to volunteers who take on the role of leaders on MM work days. Over the weekend of 1-2 September MMI ran a Wilderness First Aid Training Course in Laragh and its environs. The course was delivered by Mary Mullins of Remote Emergency Care, over the weekend of 1-2 September in Laragh and its

environs. The 12 MM volunteers who attended and participated in the course received their Certificate in Remote Emergency Care (Level 3), valid up to September 2021. It was a very in-depth course and feedback from MM participants rated the course as excellent.

Wicklow Way Partnership

MM continued its role on the WWP Committee. Bryan Fennell, Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) for Co. Wicklow, took over Chair of WWP. MM attended an event coordinated and arranged by Bryan in Glendalough at which Chris York from Scotland presented.

From this event Chris developed an App to assist in trail inspection for Wicklow. A try-out of the App was carried out in August on a section of the Wicklow Way in Glendalough at which representatives from NPWS, Coillte, MM and RRO Bryan Fennell were in attendance. The WWP also did a survey of a possible reroute of the WW over the Spink-Lugduff Spur in Glendalough. Funding and resources for this has been sought. Trailhead signs on the WW are due to be updated and replaced by the WWP.

Trail Talk: Conservation Volunteers from Manchester visit MM

A blisteringly warm May bank holiday was backdrop to a wonderful one-off visit by 9 eager volunteers from Sale and Altrincham Conservation Volunteers (SACV) to the heights of Wicklow. A late-night chat after the fifteenth anniversary party found former Mountain Meitheal member Mike Dagley and Shay Walsh agree to the notion of a joint meitheal between our two groups. Once a meitheal-er, always a meitheal-er shall I say! The plan was to have some craic on the trails, a bit of a hike and a good celebration of our shared passion for the outdoors.

Slightly bleary from an early start, the gang: Dave, Elaine, Gary, Helen, Ian, Julian, Mike, Paula and Rob from Blighty squeezed through the outrageous Dublin traffic to enjoy the breezy bliss of an airy stroll across the gnarly tops of Bray Head. The wondrous views up Glencree, our home for the night, whet the appetite. We settled in to the hostel at Knockree, tired but expectant.

Three Rock was the plan for Saturday. There was a big turnout

and a buzz of efficient organisation. Shay and Robert greeted us warmly, and, introductions over, the groups merged into *t'meitheal*. Tooltalk complete, we split into small gangs and tackled the battered old trail that heads up to Three Rock itself. Boulders were carefully cranked out of the ground, rolled and cajoled into place, water bars were dug-in where we tried to imagine water flowing across the parched mineral soil and much H₂O was glugged. A big jar of *Uncle Joe's* Mint Balls – northwestern England's famous gob-stopper – was presented to Mountain Meitheal to help keep them working happily. Parched throats were further eased at 'Lamb Doyle's' before SACV explored the 'Powerscourt Arms' for a great meal.

A glorious Sunday morning, with wispy mists rolling across the Great Sugar Loaf, diamond light bathing the woodlands of the Glen and chance to breakfast *al fresco* made for a delightful start. The English meitheal-ers thence departed up and over the mighty Military Road to

soak up Wicklow's vast upland space before gliding down into the already welcome shade of Glendalough's conifers. Today, Shay and Robert had agreed kindly to guide us along the popular circuit of 'The Spink to inspect/admire(!) the superb graft of MM through the Miners' village, up the zigzags and to the sturdy footbridge at the foot of the upper Glen. A quick foot bathe was delicious as we munched lunch. Yet more evidence of MM's dedicated pathwork on the descent to Glendalough impressed our group and happily we returned to the valley for a few pots of tea at the hostel where we were to stay.

As part of our thanks to MM, SACV invited Robert and Shay to eat with us at the Wicklow Heather which they had well recommended. It was a happy, somewhat merry night!

Finally, may I thank Shay and Robert very much and the good folk of MM for their warm welcome and generous support. Totally Brilliant.

Mike Dagley