



THE MATTOCK

NEW/LETTER OF MOUNTAIN MEITHEAL

JULY 2004

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Meitheal Volunteers working in Glensoulan

ANNUAL REPORT - JUNE 2004

“Get Out, Get dirty, Give back.”

Dear Volunteers and friends,

2003/2004 has been a very busy year for Mountain Meitheal with many interesting projects, which many of you worked on. We've made good progress with our path repair projects and raised the awareness level of many to the issue of upland path conservation and sustainable recreation (see LNT later) and I am glad to report our finances are in a fairly sound state thanks to the support from clubs, state agencies and all the walkers who contribute to our site collections. If you haven't been out to a work-day lately you can read about

some of our projects in this short annual report and hopefully we'll see you soon.

While we have spent over €10,000 on various projects we are sure that we have contributed over €150,000 worth of work on the mountain and this is due to the excellent voluntary work put in by our crews. A square meter of stone steps can cost €120 or more while a water bar can cost €60/70 for installation alone. Path repair work is very labour intensive and therefore costly. No matter what the National Parks and Wildlife Service spend, there will always be more work to be done. Over the last number of years we have mobilized a steady army of trail repair volunteers and delivered much-needed repair work. Already over 3km of trail has been repaired or re-routed. Added to this, we took on a major baseline

study of the mountain paths in County Wicklow, which will serve as a measure of improvement or deterioration over the next decade. We also carried out a feasibility study on the Devils Ladder in Kerry, which we hope will be the beginning of a restoration project on that important route.

We do need volunteers to help otherwise it will fall back on a small group of people who won't be able to sustain the effort. We are encouraging as many outdoors people as possible to join our work and we suggest you give one day in seven to conservation

THE APPRENTICE FARMHAND

How quickly we have lost our sense of community and our connection with the earth and our heritage. The word 'Meitheal' (working party) was mainly used in the context of farmers helping each other during the saving of the hay. A "mini Meitheal" from my club, The *Footleggers*, was organised with a seven per cent club turnout. On a sunny day in September we can claim part of the credit for planting 800 heather plants on that atrociously eroded highway up Loughjouce in Co Wicklow.

On my way up the N11 from Gorey, I could see the Pied Piper's trail up the mountain from afar. Around thirty 'Meitheal-ers' from a variety of clubs and other interested individuals, learned from a horticulturalist and National Park Ranger, all about erosion, the resilience of heather (once given a chance) and how each and every step we take in our cherished hills has a potentially lasting effect on the eco-system. We combined glorious day's walking with a real

work. So if you walk once a week maybe you could give six or seven days a year; walk once a month, give two days - it's that simple. But it's not all hard work. We have great fun on the hills and nearly all our volunteers want to come back for more.

It's not money we need most- it's people so Go on, Get out, Get dirty, Give back!

See you soon,
Bill Murphy, Chairman MM.

connection with the earth, some admittedly backbreaking work, and a realisation that many hands and trowels make light work. *Ni neart go cur le cheile!*

We had the 800 plants planted in record time, so much so that we then set about clearing loose stones on the path built by other 'Meitheal-ers'. How wonderful to know that my work was not out of economic necessity and I had the privilege of being able to enjoy the same hills as a hobby. The young of today and tomorrow will also have that privilege. We get carried away too often with expecting service - what about what we can offer back? What a wonderful world it would be if each and every club in the MCI were to field seven per cent of its members, even once a year, to participate in Mountain Meitheal's work. A quick calculation gives us 518 workdays.

The mountains need your help!

Emer Ni Bhrodaigh (reprinted from *Irish Mountain Log* 67 Autumn 2003)

ADOPT A TRAIL

All trails like the Djouce summit path, which get heavy usage require regular monitoring and maintenance – cleaning drains, repairing the scree walls or clearing water bars. As a trail adopter you will need to commit to inspecting the path three times over a year in spring, summer and autumn.

If you are interested in adopting a path please contact Bill below and we will arrange to allocate a path and provide training.

The following trails are available for adoption:-

Djouce Summit path (allocated)
Dough Dan access route
Wicklow Way at Laragh
Glensoulan
Maulin to Wicklow Way

Bill Murphy at: murphy_w@coillte or at 01 2873603



LINKS FORGED WITH THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB

Mountain Meitheal has been busy forging links with the Appalachian Mountain Club. The AMC is North America's oldest outdoor mountain and conservation club and operates in the New England area managing many miles of mountain paths and backcountry facilities.

Last September, Andrew Norkin AMC's Trails Manager, accompanied by his wife Catherine who works as an interpretative specialist for the US National Forest Service, came to Ireland as guests of Mountain Meitheal. During their busy visit, Andrew and Catherine spent several days working with us and Mike Dales, Access and Conservation Officer with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, on the Devil's Ladder on Carrantouhill in Kerry. His advice and expertise were a key part of the feasibility report and cost estimate for this project that is now with Kerry County Council.

Andrew was also one of the keynote speakers at the Wicklow National Park's Upland Trails Seminar where he spoke of the vital role of the AMC and its volunteers in path maintenance and repair. Andrew and Catherine also delivered an inspiring talk to members of the Mountaineering Council of Ireland on Leave No Trace – the internationally acknowledged outdoor ethics message. Subsequently, they invited Mountain Meitheal to send a participant to a LNT master trainer's course in the USA. Mountain Meitheal were delighted to nominate Ann Fitzpatrick, a Wicklow National park ranger, and the Appalachian Mountain Club paid all her tuition and course fees. Ann is now Ireland's first trainer in Leave No Trace principals, which are gaining acceptance with Countryside Access and Activities Network in Northern Ireland, The National Parks and Wildlife Service, Scouting Ireland, the Heritage Council and several others.

AN ALTERNATIVE BREAK!

Gay Needham of Mountain Meitheal. After a meeting in Lynam's pub in Laragh, the recently completed successful visit was under way.



MSU students with Mountain Meitheal volunteers

Putting something back" into what we enjoy most is a grand way to satisfy our love for the great outdoors says Richard Paulsen, the 2003 ESB/CVI award winning group of trail conservation volunteers. Last month, fourteen students and two supervisors from Michigan State University (MSU) came over to lend them a hand in remaking a section of the St Kevin's Way at Annalecka Bridge near Glendalough in County Wicklow.

Dr Richard Paulsen of the MSU's "Alternative Break Program" is always looking for quality service opportunities for the university's students. Last summer, he asked Carlos Fuentes, an Assistant Director at MSU, to look into possible volunteer opportunities while on his annual family holiday to Ireland. Carlos' father in law, Billy Browne of Arklow, directed him to Bill Murphy and

Dr Paulsen explains: "to work on a trail maintenance project helps students develop an understanding of sustainability and volunteerism and they are able to apply these concepts to actual projects, which provide students with an opportunity to serve others. On St. Kevin's Way, by enhancing the trail they helped reduce environmental degradation and improved hiking conditions."

Describing their Wicklow experience Richard Paulsen says: "we enjoyed completing the project! It was physically demanding and very rewarding. We were able to watch a trail take shape. Our students had a variety of other experiences: gaining an appreciation for the monastic history of Ireland in Glendalough, completing many invigorating hikes, and enjoying the beautiful scenery. Also, we sailed on the Irish Sea with Arklow Sailing Club and learned how to set dance! Many people enabled our MSU class to be successful and we are indebted to Gerry Patterson for his patient leadership and guidance both on and off the trail."

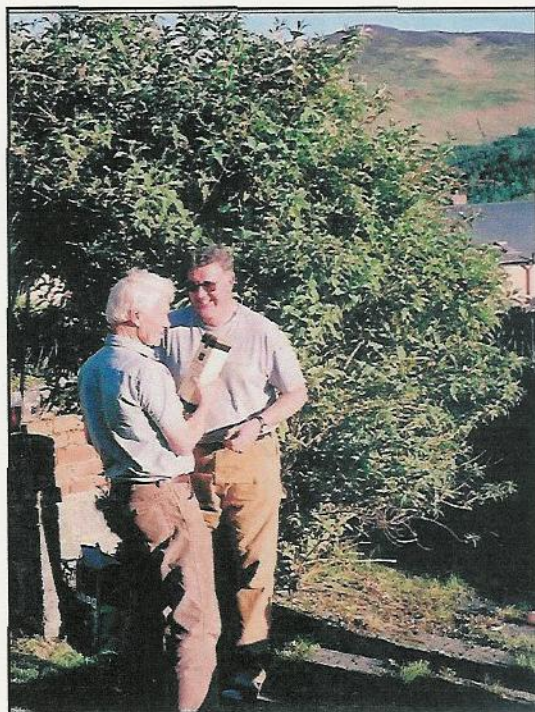


Carlos Fuentes explains: "All the right pieces were available in making our first European and summer Alternative Break project available to students. We want students to become engaged in the communities of which they are or will be part of later in life. We instill within the student volunteers the importance of giving back to society, whether this be local, statewide, national or international."

Student trail team leader, Megan Ann Bell, sums it all up: "I was ecstatic when I found out the Alternative Break program was going to Ireland. I love the outdoors, and trail building, so this trip was ideal and this was a wonderful opportunity to give back to the community while exploring!

Megan says: "I can honestly say that this was the best trip I have ever taken in my life. It was the perfect combination of volunteer work. I loved interacting with the volunteers and getting to know them as individuals. The work was very satisfying. The group enjoyed seeing our progress from start to finish. Everyone got a lot out of the trip and commented on how they wished we could stay longer and do more for it. I would go back in a heartbeat!"

The Irish Sports Council's National Waymarked Ways Committee arranged a farewell barbecue at Glenmalure Lodge for the students. Their work on part of St Kevin's Way went well, during which the students uncovered a lovely pool adjacent to Abhainn Ri and dubbed it with a sign to "St Kevin's Pool".



Bill Murphy presents a 'wee dram' to Gerry Patterson

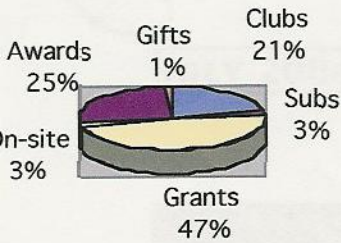
MOUNTAIN MEITHEAL AGM

At a well supported AGM, held in Dundrum, Dublin on 13 July 2004, the committee was elected as follows: -

Chair:	Bill Murphy
Secretary:	Laurence Lynch
Treasurer:	Frances Hannon
Committee:	Colm O'Callaghan Shay Walsh Mike Dagley Chris Avison Gay Needham

The meeting agreed the annual subscription remains at €20 per year for 2004/5 and that we make every effort to increase the numbers of volunteers needed to work on some excellent projects.

Money in



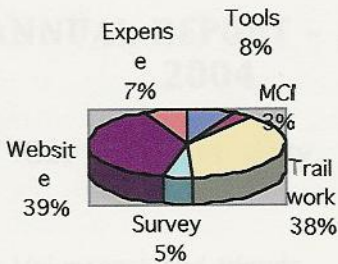
Devils Ladder study, the Wicklow upland path survey and the St Kevin's Way project. A major element of expenditure was the development of our web site, which was funded from the ESB/CVI prize fund received for the Djouce project.

Every little cent counts..... but remember we really need labour and volunteers much more than cash.

Anyone wishing to join in with this enjoyable work should send their subscription payment of €20 to Chris Avison, Membership Secretary Mountain Meitheal, Brandon, 6 Upper Churchtown Road, Dublin 14

☎ 01 2986085
 avison@eircom.net

Money out



LOUGH DAN ACCESS STILES ERECTED

Stiles at each end of Mr Ronnie Petrie's access path near Oldbridge, leading over his land to Lough Dan in Wicklow, were installed during Mountain Meitheal's mid-summer work camp and BBQ on the last sunny weekend in June.

The BBQ was kindly arranged by local farmer, Mr Sean Byrne, who was also entertaining like-minded outdoors people and farmers from Northern Ireland.

Mountain Meitheal's voluntary repair and upgrading work has assisted Mr Petrie to continue providing access for walkers to this beautiful lake. A very good example of local outdoors volunteers co-operating with local landowners for a common purpose.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM AND GO TO.....

Over the last year we have spent a considerable amount of money on our projects. In total we have taken in over 15,900 ranging from individual contributions from walkers to our site collections to grants from the Heritage Council for specific projects.

We have spent over €14,700 supporting major projects such as the