



Briefing note regarding Mountaineering Ireland representation on the MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Forum

22nd January 2014

Arising from consultation on the formation of a management structure to deliver the MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Project, it is proposed to establish a MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Forum based on a shared vision for the sustainable development of the Reeks. A Steering Group is to be formed to guide the Forum. The Steering Group will include a number of landowners, as well as representatives from the local community, local businesses, South Kerry Development Partnership, Fáilte Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Service and Kerry County Council.

The knowledge, passion and insight of recreational users will be essential to the success of the MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Forum. At a meeting of project stakeholders on 15th January it was proposed that Mountaineering Ireland would consult with members who regularly use the Reeks to identify two people to participate in the Steering Group.

The Steering Group will require a broad range of skills to deliver its vision. **The key requirements for Mountaineering Ireland's representatives are to have a good knowledge of the MacGillycuddy Reeks, a commitment to protecting the mountains, and respect for the landowners and other stakeholders in the area.** Based on Mountaineering Ireland's experience of similar groups in other parts of the country some of the following would also be valuable: an understanding of farming; environmental knowledge; experience of being part of a voluntary committee and good communication skills.

Representatives to other organisations are nominated by the Board of Mountaineering Ireland. Should more than two members be interested in this role, the Board will select its two nominees based on the above requirements. As the Forum and its work evolve, there may be scope for other Mountaineering Ireland members to contribute to working groups.

The first meeting of the MacGillycuddy Reeks steering Group has been tentatively set for 8pm on Monday 10th February. As the Steering Group has yet to be formed, it is difficult to say what degree of commitment will be required of Steering Group members. See page 3 for a summary of Mountaineering Ireland's expectations of representatives to other groups, and what in turn representatives can expect from Mountaineering Ireland.

Mountaineering Ireland believes that through partnership working between diverse interests, Mountain Forum groups can be instrumental in ensuring the sustainable management of Ireland's upland areas. While a number of Forum groups have been established in recent years, their structure, purpose and achievements vary. The Wicklow Uplands Council, which has been in existence since the late 1990s, is probably the best example (www.wicklowuplands.ie). Strong leadership, a commitment to a shared vision underpinned by clear guiding principles, and modest ongoing funding, appear to be the key ingredients for an effective Forum. The development of a group like this takes time. It is Mountaineering Ireland's view that the initial focus in the Reeks should be on completing the Mountain Access Project so as to build confidence in, and within, the Forum.

Managing recreation in upland areas

(article from page 52 of Irish Mountain Log Autumn 2013 (issue 107))

Over the last couple of months Mountaineering Ireland members have participated in meetings about the management of recreational activity in two key upland areas: Leenane, taking in the hills of south Mayo and Connemara; and the MacGillycuddy Reeks in Co. Kerry. While looking at the same issue, the discussions arose from separate projects.

In Leenane, the local development association commissioned a feasibility study to examine the potential for developing Leenane as a hub for land and water-based adventure activities. Following completion of the study in May, Leenane Development Association (LDA) decided to form a working group to take forward some of the recommendations, particularly around trail development and mountain access. In conjunction with LDA, Mountaineering Ireland hosted a meeting in July to update local clubs and members on the proposals.

The meeting had an attendance of almost 30, with one member travelling from Limerick. At the meeting, local farmer and community activist, Martin Gavin presented the proposals on behalf of LDA and sought two nominees from Mountaineering Ireland to join the working group.

This invitation was extended to local clubs that hadn't been able to send a representative to the meeting. A number of people expressed interest in the role and the Board of Mountaineering Ireland subsequently nominated Elizabeth Gosling (Na Beanna Beola Walking Club) and Paddy O'Leary (Galway-based member of the Irish Mountaineering Club) to represent Mountaineering Ireland in the group. It is likely that the working group will meet in October.

Two pilot areas

As reported in IML96 (pp56-57) Carrauntoohil is one of two pilot areas for Comhairle na Tuaithe's Mountain Access project. Progress on this has been frustratingly slow, but in June of this year South Kerry Development Partnership appointed SLR Consulting to advise on the establishment of an appropriate management structure to guide the MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Project and to ensure its long term viability. Consultation with landowners and other interested parties took place over the summer and is ongoing. As part of the process, a meeting for Mountaineering Ireland

clubs and training providers was held on 9th September in Killarney. The project also includes research into upland flora and management models already in place in other parts of Ireland and Britain.

Addressing issues at a local level

Mountaineering Ireland welcomes both these projects. As noted in the report of last year's Helping the Hills conference (IML104, p9), with the continued growth in outdoor recreation there is a need for some structure at local level to address the issues that arise, such as demand for parking, path erosion and control of dogs. Projects such as the ones in the Leenane area and the MacGillycuddy Reeks often arise from a desire to generate local economic benefit from recreational activity. While this is needed, the vulnerability of our mountains to increased recreation activity is clearly evident from the erosion scars on Carrauntoohil and other popular mountains.

Having Mountaineering Ireland representatives on local upland management groups can help ensure that the integrity of the mountain environment is protected; that the host community is aware of the services that hillwalkers and climbers are most likely to avail of; and that these projects are informed by experience in other areas.

If you or your club would be interested in knowing more about how the Leenane and MacGillycuddy Reeks projects evolve, please contact helen@mountaineering.ie. We will also be providing updates at future Club Environmental Officer workshops.

What Mountaineering Ireland expects from representatives on other organisations:

- To make a good effort to prepare for and attend all meetings of the group;
- To promote understanding of the views and concerns of Mountaineering Ireland within the group;
- To provide feedback to Mountaineering Ireland and advise of any issues which require a response or action;
- To keep up to date with relevant developments locally and within Mountaineering Ireland;
- To act in the best interests of the mountains and the mountaineering community;
- To uphold the values and policies of Mountaineering Ireland.

What representatives to other groups can expect from Mountaineering Ireland:

- An induction meeting and relevant background information;
- To receive ongoing support and guidance from Mountaineering Ireland;
- To be advised of relevant developments;
- That any concerns will be dealt with promptly and fairly;
- That your contribution will be recognised;
- Reimbursement of vouched out of pocket expenses.