

A Guide

For

Planning & Developing

Waymarked Walking Trails in Ireland

Compiled by the

National Waymarked Way Advisory Committee

of the Irish Sports Council

First Edition

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to provide some general information and guidance to any individual, agency, local development group or organisation interested in developing a waymarked walking trail in Ireland. It sets out some of the basic issues that should be considered as part of any walking trail development project and also outlines the approach recommended by the National Waymarked Way Advisory Committee. This document summarises a number of important issues any development group should be aware of at the start of a project and many of these issues will be examined in far greater detail throughout the development process. This guide places many of the issues "*on the table*" and this in turn, ensures informed decision-making can take place.

1.1 Walking Trails - an Overview

The Irish countryside offers tremendous opportunities for walking and hiking. Magnificent scenery with a diversity of landscape and physical features all contribute to an excellent walking landscape.

There are many benefits and reasons for developing recreational trails ranging from the provision of a safe and pleasant trail for local people to walk, for visitors to an area to enjoy, for commuters to use or for daily health minded strollers. Demand in Ireland is growing steadily for shorter walking trails of a varied nature ranging from 30 minutes to a day.

Research would indicate large numbers of Irish people and visitors are looking for good quality, well marked walks that are relatively easily accessible. Themed trails with an historical, bio-diversity or environmental focus also offer some variety and choice to recreational walkers and trail users. Shorter circular walks with start/finish point in the same location (i.e. a village or car park) are popular with many day visitors. Older people and persons that may use a wheelchair should not be forgotten and by incorporating minor modifications to a trail design their needs can often be accommodated.

Overall, walking trails that offer landscape variety, a range of physical challenges with dry underfoot terrain, are relatively easily accessible and have supporting facilities and services usually commensurate good quality walking experiences.

1.2 Guide To Sustainable Trail Development

As a general guide, all waymarked walking trails must be developed with the full consent of all landowners, meet the needs of recreational walkers and be developed to the appropriate standards that seek to minimise erosion and maintenance, protect heritage and landscape and maximise the scenic potential of the countryside in which they are located.

All walking trail development projects will invariably have some positive aspects and some negative features. These features will impact on the ability to firstly develop the trail without too much difficulty, the finished quality and attractiveness of the walk and in the long term its sustainability¹. A good walking trail will have more positive aspects than negatives ones. A great walking trail is one that has many outstanding and very few negative features.

Walking trail development planning is about identifying all the positive and negative features of a proposed development, weighing these up and then making a decision to either proceed with the development or not. The following table details some of the positive features to bear in mind on all walking trail development projects. It also highlights a number of negative features to be mindful of when planning a walking trail development.

Positive Trail Features	Negative Trail Features
Scenic locations Good distant views Exciting and dramatic views Natural routes Appropriate surfaces Varied surroundings Existing paths, tracks Water features Varied terrain Picnic sites Built heritage Natural heritage Good local services (accommodation, food, transport, etc) Easy maintenance Car parking areas Linkage to existing attractions in area Proximity to villages/towns	Roads Easily eroded surfaces Height Lack of features Rough or difficult terrain A lot on forest tracks New or prospective planting Land leased for shooting Cliff edges Long bridges (costly) A lot on beaches (especially high tide danger) Bulls in fields regularly Unfriendly/vicious dogs Trail Features to be treated with care Remoteness Special areas such as for wildlife, nature reserves and rare habitats

Three key issues that require careful consideration are

- 1 **Roads:** Walking trails must **never** be taken along primary or busy/dangerous secondary roads unless there is a wide footpath. In fact roads should be avoided, as much as possible and must **never** exceed 20% of the overall trail length. In this context roads which carry so little traffic that grass grows in the centre are not considered to be roads. If there is any substantial length on roads warning signs to alert motorists should be erected at both ends of the section.

¹ A sustainable walking trail should be enjoyable to walk, meet NWWAC/ISC standards and should always try to avoid easily eroded surfaces, such as bogland.

- 2 **Easily Eroded Surfaces:** An un-surfaced path may be suitable for low or moderate levels of usage depending on the surface. Easily eroded surfaces must be avoided if possible where higher levels of usage are envisaged. Bogland is a good example of a surface that should be avoided – it would need a sleeper track.
- 3 **Height:** Walking trails should not go higher than the 300 m (1000 ft) contour unless there is a compelling reason, or a track, trail, or path exists.

1.3 Important Issues For Trail Development

All walking Trail Development Committees should be mindful of the following issues.

1.3.1 Consultation

Most walking trail developments require the input, guidance and support of a range of individuals and organisations. It is good practice to involve all key stakeholders early in the development process and throughout the process. A formal "Trail Development Committee" should be established as early as possible in the planning stage of all projects and should engage with all the relevant bodies, individuals and organisations necessary to make the project possible. Some of the agencies include

- **Local Authority**
 - County Manager
 - Director of Services
 - Area Engineer
 - Heritage/Environment Officers
 - County Enterprise Board
- **Local Community Bodies/Organisations**
- **Local Sports Partnership Office**
 - LSP Coordinators
- **Local LEADER/Rural Development Agency/Funding Agencies**
 - Rural Social Scheme Manager
- **Coillte** (if there is Coillte property)
 - District Manager
- **National Parks & Wildlife Service** (if there are protected areas)
 - District Manager/Local Wildlife Ranger/Conservation Officer
- **Local Walking Clubs/Enthusiasts** (and other potential user groups)
 - Contact Mountaineering Council of Ireland for list
- **Local/Regional Tourism Authority**
- **Waterways Ireland** (if canals are involved)
- **Anglers/Fisheries Board** (if river banks are involved)
- **Local Youth organisations**

- An Oige
- Macra na Feirme
- **Farm Organisations including**
 - IFA
 - ICMSA
 - ICSA
- **Mountain Meithail**
- **BirdWatch Ireland**
- **Udaras na Gaeltachta**
- **Irish Heart Foundation** (for advice on Slí na Slainte Scheme)
- **Local Businesses.**

1.3.2 Safety and Risk Management

Every precaution must be taken to ensure that all potential dangers or hazards associated with a walking trail development are recognised and either completely avoided, minimised and/or appropriately managed. All safety issues should be documented at the early stages of the trail planning process.

1.3.3 Landowner Permission/Consent

Where a walking trail development crosses either public or private land, the landowner's permission to do so must always be obtained. The majority of walking trail developments in Ireland are established on a "*permissive*" basis. A permissive walking trail is a trail which people are allowed to use with the agreement of the landowner. A permissive trail differs from a public right of way in that

- no permanent rights of way will be created
- it can only be used in the way the owner has specified and subject to any conditions he or she has agreed
- the owner retains the right to divert or close the trail if he or she so wishes.

Once a possible line of trail is identified it is important to find out all the landowners' names. The Irish Land Registry Office (www.landregistry.ie), and a Local Authority combined with well-informed local knowledge will be helpful in this regard. It is suggested that landowners be asked to sign a renewable fixed term agreement, say between 5 and 10 years. ***On no account should pressure be brought to bear on any landowner. If a landowner is reluctant to grant permission, an alternative line must be found!***

1.3.4 Insurance

Public liability insurance will be required for the Trail Development Committee and eventually for landowners, whose lands are either crossed by or adjoin the proposed development. In addition to this an "Employers Liability Insurance" may be required if persons are directly

employed to carry out trail development work. Trail Development Committees must make arrangements to meet any costs associated with ongoing public liability insurance. In order to secure public liability insurance, most trail developments will require a letter of recognition from NWWAC/ISC stating that the proposed trail development satisfies basic safety and development guidelines.

1.3.5 Protection of Heritage/Wildlife

It is important to consider heritage and wildlife from the outset of planning a walking trail in order to enhance the user's experience, prevent disturbance and damage and avoid inadvertently breaking the law. There are often legal requirements that may affect particular aspects of a walking trail development and of which it is essential that a Committee make themselves aware. Ireland's nature conservation responsibilities under national and European law require all development to respect and protect all habitat and wildlife designations. For all recreational trail developments compliance will be necessary with the legal requirements in relation to Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas and adjoining areas, the resting and breeding places of protected species of animals and birds and the habitat or environment of any protected species of flora.

Negative impacts can be prevented by knowing which sites are too fragile to handle large numbers of visitors, knowing where to place signage, and by not using heavy machinery. The Heritage Officer in a Local Authority or a local Conservation Officer should be consulted with regard to heritage and wildlife issues along the line of a walking trail.

1.3.6 Trail Furniture

Most trail developments will require a certain amount of trail furnishings including markers, stiles, bridges, signposts, map boards, gates and surfacing. **Non National Network Trails may NOT use the walking man and arrow symbols in yellow.**

1.3.7 Services

The availability of services and facilities within close proximity to a walking trail development are an important consideration. Facilities such as secure car parking, seating areas and toilet facilities may need to be considered.

1.3.8 Accessibility (Car Parking, Public Transport)

When planning a new walking trail development it is important to consider the location of the development and how accessible the trail is. Some questions to consider in this regard

- How will people get to the trailhead (start point)?
- Is the trail located on a public transport link?
- Are there local facilities for food, drink, overnight accommodation, etc?
- Is it located near another visitor attraction, village or town?

1.3.9 Literature (Map Guide, Leaflets, etc)

Depending on the nature, length and type of trail development a map guide publication may need to be developed for the walking trail/s. A brochure or leaflet could be considered for shorter local walks.

1.3.10 Maintenance Planning

Ongoing trail maintenance will be required in order to ensure a walking trail is kept in good order. Issues such as replacement of missing or damaged markers, signposts, repair of damaged bridges, stiles and cutting back vegetation will need to be undertaken each year after a walking trail has been opened. It is strongly recommended that arrangements are made to inspect the walking trail at least every six months and a trail maintenance programme is put in place before the trail is finished.

1.3.11 Cost

All walking trail developments are unique and will almost always differ in terms of landscape settings, expected usage, landownership structure, design requirements and ultimately design specification. As such, the costs associated with every trail development project will vary significantly. The nature of the terrain will be the deciding factor in the amount of trail enhancement works and trail furnishings required on a walking trail. The costs of developing any trail can only be estimated following detailed site surveys from a suitably qualified professional with the necessary knowledge of trail standards, recommended trail construction materials and techniques. The costs associated with sustainable trail development should be considered for three distinct areas

- Trail Planning Costs – *Feasibility Study, Expert Consultations, etc (Pre-Development)*
- Construction Phase Costs – *Building the trail to design specification (Building Stage)*
- Maintenance and Management Costs (*Post Development/Annual*).

Factors that can impact on the complete cost of a project include

1. labour costs
2. material costs
3. insurance costs
4. publication costs.

1.3.12. Trail Management Committee (Post Development)

The Trail Development Committee must make arrangements for a Trail Management Committee to take responsibility for the trail once it has been developed. This group will be necessary to ensure the trail is maintained to a high standard, ensure public liability insurance obligations continue to be met and may also become involved in the promotion of the trail by

running events, etc. Membership of the "Trail Management Committee" should ensure collaboration between the local community, especially all landowners and managers, Local Authority and local tourism/health/sport/recreation promotional bodies.

1.3.13 Funding

Most walking trail development projects will require funding for trail furniture, labour costs, survey and inspections, production of map-guides, provision for ongoing maintenance and insurance. The cost of trail development can range from €1,000 per km to €6,000 per km plus an annual maintenance cost. Funding may be available from a number of Government and EU Agencies in the form of grants. Grant awards are usually based around specific programmes and require compliance to strict guidelines and financial procedures.

1.3.14 Promotion and Marketing

Present as much information as possible, attractively and clearly laying out the advantages of walking your trail/s. Include such items as

- How to access the trail/s
- What services are available
- What special or particular items of interest does the trail/s offer
- What facilities are available
- Map of trail.

Be clear which sectors of the market you are targeting.

Methods to consider

- Local papers and radio
- Lectures in local schools and third level establishments
- Promotional literature available in all local service outlets
- Inform staff in all local service outlets, if possible by taking them out on the walk and pointing out items of interest.

If wishing to attract visitors from outside the area, consider

- The internet, ideally by setting up a website, which could link to other sites
- Have an e-mail address
- Invite a journalist to sample your trail/s and write an article, which could be placed in a specialist publication, on the website, etc
- Articles in specialist magazines with photographs.

1.3.15 Fáilte Ireland Loop Walks

If a walk is to be considered for inclusion in the list of Fáilte Ireland walks certain other criteria will have to be met and these are included in their guidelines (see Appendix 1: *Fáilte Ireland Loop Walks Criteria*).

1.4 Conclusion

Walking trail development requires a good understanding of a range of issues. It requires the input, advice and support of many people at the planning and development stage and also for the on-going management of the trail.

Professional advice and guidance from suitably qualified and experienced Trail Advisors is recommended to ensure that all walking trail developments are developed properly, to certain standards, and are successful and sustainable.

If you decide at any stage not to proceed with the trail development, please inform the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive. This will not preclude you changing your mind later.

2.0 PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A WALKING TRAIL

2.1 Recommended Approach

The Irish Sports Council's National Waymarked Way Advisory Committee (NWWAC/ISC) seeks to ensure that all waymarked walking trail developments are developed with the full consent of all landowners, meet the needs of recreational walkers and are developed to the appropriate standard that minimises erosion and maintenance and protects the heritage and landscape in which they are located.

The following is the recommended approach for Waymarked Walking Trail Development in Ireland.

The cost of all trail advisory assignments will normally be covered by the Trail Development Committee.

If a Loop Walk is proposed the procedures will be as in Appendix 2: *Fáilte Ireland Loop Walks Procedures*.

The procedures below refer to walks originating in a query to NWWAC/ISC.

- Step 1:** Trail advisory requests should be directed to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive in the Irish Sports Council. (Phone 01-8608823, E-mail cmacdonnell@irishsportsCouncil.ie).
- Step 2:** A copy of the NWWAC/ISC *A Guide for Planning & Developing Waymarked Walking Trails in Ireland* and a **Walking Trail Planning Questionnaire** will be sent to the contact person.
- Step 3:** The Trail Development Committee completes the **Questionnaire** and returns it to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive with a request for a recognised Trail Advisor to undertake a trail development consultation. If a trail is at quite an advanced state of readiness on the basis of the completed Questionnaire it may be considered that some of the early steps up to Step 7 are not relevant.
- Step 4:** A list of recognised Trail Advisors is sent to the Trail Development Committee so that they can contact a Trail Advisor. An **Initial Consultation** is scheduled and undertaken in accordance with recommended procedure. A copy of the publication *Guidelines for the Developing and Marking of Waymarked Ways* will be issued to the Trail Development Committee. A copy of the Initial Consultation Report is forwarded to the Trail Development Committee and a copy to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive.

- Step 5:** Upon review of recommendations and feedback following the initial consultation meeting and report, a decision is made on whether to proceed to the next stage of development.
- Step 6:** Following further planning and consultations (as may be required) the Trail Development Committee completes a **Checklist for Request for Preliminary Trail Development Survey** and submits this to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive with an application for a Preliminary Trail Development Survey to be undertaken.
- Step 7:** A **Preliminary Trail Development Survey** is undertaken by a recognised Trail Advisor in accordance with recommended procedure. A copy of the Preliminary Trail Development Survey Report is sent to the Trail Development Committee and two copies to the NWWAC/ISC (one to the Programme Executive and one to the Senior Trail Inspector).
- Step 8:** The Trail Development Committee continues with development works, referring to the *Guidelines for the Developing and Marking of Waymarked Ways* 3.12 Implementation on Page 30 for recommendations.
- Step 9:** When all recommended development work is completed the Trail Development Committee submits an application to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive for a Final Inspection to be undertaken. This will involve the submission of a **Checklist for Final Inspection of Trail** form.
- Step 10:** A **Final Inspection** is undertaken by a NWWAC/ISC Inspector, in accordance with recommended procedure. Copies of the Final Inspection Report are forwarded to the NWWAC/ISC Senior Trail Inspector who will forward them to the Trail Development Committee with NWWAC/ISC's comments and send a copy to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive.
- Step 11:** Following the completion of any outstanding action items, the Trail Development Committee confirms that all development works are complete and seeks recognition from NWWAC/ISC.
- Step 12:** NWWAC/ISC issues a letter of recognition to the Trail Development Committee and a **"Trail Certificate of Achievement"** confirming the walking trail has been developed to the standard and using the approach recommended by the NWWAC/ISC.

2.2 Trail Advisory Service

NWWAC/ISC will establish and update as required a list of recognised Trail Advisors who will be available to undertake trail advisory projects and consultations throughout Ireland. Trail Advisors will be experienced in the area of trail development and will undertake all advisory projects in a professional and independent manner and in accordance with recommended procedure. The cost of all trail advisory assignments will normally be covered by the Trail Development Committee. In some instances a travel expenditure cost may also apply. The Trail Development Committee will be responsible for securing and scheduling all advisory services.

The up-to-date list of recognised Trail Advisors is available from NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive.

3.0 WALKING TRAIL PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE

NWWAC/ISC request the following questionnaire is completed by the Trail Development Committee prior to scheduling an Initial Consultation.

This questionnaire is available by e-mail: Contact cmacdonnell@irishsportsCouncil.ie.

This questionnaire should be returned to the NWWAC Programme Executive, Irish Sports Council, Top Floor Block A, West End Office Park, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.

Name of Proposed Trail Development: _____

Contact Person for Project: Name, Address, Tel, e-mail.

Q1. What is the purpose of the waymarked trail? (Max 100 words)?

e.g Tourist amenity, local recreation amenity/resource, to protect/promote heritage, etc.

Q2. Who would be the main users of the walking trail?

i.e. local people, tourists and visitors to the area, experienced hill walkers, recreational walkers, younger people, families, day walkers, weekend visitors, etc.

Q3. What evidence would suggest a strong demand/requirement for the proposed trail?

Q4. Please provide details of the location of the trail (refer to relevant OSI Discovery Series 1:50,000 map).

Q5. What features of the trail stand out i.e scenery, physical features, heritage sites, etc?

Q6. What is the approx. length of the trail (km.)?

Q7. What is the approx length on road (km)? Please give detail of the type of roads being used throughout.

Q8. Is it a loop (circular) trail or a linear (point to point) trail?

Q9. Is the development suitable for wheelchair users?

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Q10. Is there a Trail Development Committee established for this project? If so, what bodies are represented?

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Q11. How will the project be financed and who will complete the development works?

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Q12. Any additional information you would like to include.

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Signed:	Dated:
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4.0 THE INITIAL CONSULTATION

Format

The Consultation will normally take the following shape:

- A "Theory" meeting with a small group of those interested
- A "Practical Session" looking at the trail/s, probably mainly by car. A representative of the Trail Development Committee who is familiar with the route of the trail must accompany the Trail Advisor.

Please note: The Trail Advisor will not enter private property unless the landowner/occupier has given permission.

Report

A report is issued by the Trail Advisor and sent to the Trail Development Committee and a copy to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive. The report will include general observations and recommendations for further action.

5.0 PRELIMINARY TRAIL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

A **Checklist for Request for Preliminary Trail Development Survey** form must be completed and returned to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive when the Trail Development Committee have agreed the line of the trail and are ready to have a Preliminary Trail Development Survey undertaken by a recognised NWWAC/ISC Trail Advisor. The NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive must receive the completed form before the Preliminary Trail Development Survey takes place. The completed form must contain sufficient information for this Survey to proceed and must be accompanied by a marked-up copy of the relevant OS Discovery Series 1:50,000 map or maps showing the line of the trail.

Before the Preliminary Trail Development Survey is carried out the line of the proposed trail should be agreed and permission obtained for access to the property both public and private that it crosses. Permission must be obtained for the Trail Advisor to cross private property, whether or not permission has been requested/granted to use the land as part of the proposed trail. Trail Advisors recognised by NWWAC/ISC must not enter land unless permission has been obtained for them to do so.

The Preliminary Trail Development Survey will

- Survey the entire proposed trail
- Assess the trail
- Detail the amount and type of trail furniture required
- Detail the location of the trail furniture
- Discuss the possibilities of route changes.

A representative of the Trail Development Committee who is familiar with the route of the trail must accompany the Trail Advisor.

The Trail Advisor will be prepared to meet with the Trail Development Committee after this survey is completed to discuss his/her findings, recommended changes and explain the next stage and to answer any questions the Trail Development Committee may have.

Report

A report is issued by the Trail Advisor and sent to the Trail Development Committee and two copies to the NWWAC/ISC. The report will include assessment of suitability of proposed trail/s and any alternatives which could be investigated. It will also include details of recommendations for the placement of trail furniture as well as relevant general guidelines as to how to proceed with the next stage.

6.0 FINAL INSPECTION

A Final Inspection is required in order to assess the completed trail and report any outstanding items that may need to be undertaken. It may be required in order to arrange insurance for a trail or to draw down grant monies.

A **Final Inspection of Trail Checklist** form must be completed and returned to the NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive when all the recommended development work is completed and the Trail Development Committee are ready to have a Final Inspection carried out by a NWWAC/ISC Inspector. The NWWAC/ISC Programme Executive must receive the completed form before the Final Inspection takes place. The completed form must contain sufficient information for this Inspection to proceed and must be accompanied by a map showing the line of the trail.

Permission must be obtained for the Inspector to cross private property. NWWAC/ISC Inspectors must not enter land unless permission has been obtained for them to do so.

A Final Inspection will

- Look at the completed trail
- Check the trail furniture to ensure it is correctly placed, aligned and secured
- Detail the location of any trail furniture requiring attention and recommend action
- Detail any outstanding items requiring attention and recommend action
- Discuss with the person accompanying any problems which have arisen and possible solutions.

A representative of the Trail Development Committee who is familiar with the route of the trail must accompany the Inspector.

The Inspector will be prepared to meet with the Trail Development Committee after this inspection is completed to discuss his/her findings, recommended changes and explain the next stage and to answer any questions the Trail Development Committee may have.

Upon receiving confirmation that all outstanding items contained in the Final Inspection Report have been completed, a notification letter and **Trail Certificate of Achievement** will be issued from NWWAC/ISC to the Trail Development Committee confirming that their development is completed to the standards required by NWWAC/ISC.

Report

A report is issued by the NWWAC/ISC Senior Trail Inspector and sent to the Trail Development Committee. The report will include an overall comment/assessment/recommendation for

recognition, highlight any items which may expose walkers to possible injury, make any further comments or suggestions and include recommendations for further action the inspector may consider necessary.

APPENDIX 1: FÁILTE IRELAND LOOP WALKS KEY CRITERIA (DRAFT)

Guidelines

The following loop development guidelines are firmly based on the outcomes of research into the interests and preferences of the *occasional walker* from Ireland and abroad.

- 1.** The loop must start from and finish at an appropriate **trailhead** which provides, at a minimum;
 - ample, safe car parking facilities;
 - a mapboard with details of the trail (see Mapboard in Loop Furniture).

Other desirable elements of a trailhead include;

- services such as shops, pubs, restaurants;
- toilet facilities;
- changing/showering facilities;

Close proximity to public transport links and accommodation outlets is a bonus.

- 2.** The loop should be of 1.5hrs to 4.5hrs **duration** for the average walker. As the fitness levels and walking speeds of walkers vary considerably, a distance range is estimated at 8km/5ml to 12km/8mls - but this will depend on the level of ascent and difficulty of terrain.

- 3.** A **mapguide** specific to the loop, and clearly outlining the trailhead, direction of travel, and key features must be easily available.

- 4.** The loop should be as **natural** as possible. Physical development should only be undertaken where it is advised in a technical appraisal carried out by an approved inspector, and where;
 - the walker's *safety* would be compromised by not doing so.(e.g. erecting a footbridge at a stream crossing, clearance of vegetation to allow safe access to an old laneway);
 - the *sustainability* of the loop would be compromised by not doing so (e.g. developing a section of stone pathway to prevent erosion).

- 5. The loop should be off-road and not use any trafficked roads or tarred surfaces.**

Exceptions may be made in certain circumstances, for example;

- where roadway is used to take the walker from the trailhead in an urban settings onto (or off) the loop;
- where a short section of road is used to link two sections of the loop because no other possibility exists.

Even in these exceptional circumstances, however;

- a loop should never use National or Regional Roads (i.e. roads with N or R in the number) unless it proceeds on a purpose-built footpath.
- a speed limit of 50kms per hour must be in force on all roads which are included as part of the loop.

- 6.** The trail must provide **assured access** to the walker. In this regard, the route should be clearly waymarked (with the exception of Level 3 loops) using a consistent standard scheme throughout (see Loop Furniture) and the walker must be able to complete the loop without meeting any physical obstructions or challenges from property owners.

- 7.** The loop should provide the walker with a **memorable experience**. In this regard, key considerations include;

- a variety of terrain (e.g. open country, bogland, riverbank, green road);
- a range of on-route sites of interest (e.g. architecture, archaeology, biology, heritage);
- quality scenery and good viewing points.

- 8.** The loop should avoid;

- areas which endanger the walker in any way. This might include crags or cliffs, steep slopes, deep water, military ranges or game reserves, etc
- special areas such as wildlife reserves or heritage sites.
- environmentally sensitive areas or easily eroded surfaces (e.g. bogland)
- overuse of one type of terrain for example, planted forestry which can be limited in scenic value; or beaches where heavy sand challenges less fit walkers.

9. There must be clear evidence of plans for the **sustainable development** of the loop and, in particular, ongoing maintenance and marketing. This may be taken on by one organisation (e.g. Local Authority), or may involve a partnership between community organisations, public agencies, and/or private bodies.

10. Loops should fit into one or more of the following themes, with a designated dominant theme:

- Heritage
- Nature
- Mountain
- Coastal
- Island

Occasional Walker

The loop concept has been developed to cater to the needs of the *occasional walker* - broadly defined as a person that;

- walks for more than 2hrs on average less than twice a month;
- has limited though variable fitness levels;
- has limited navigation or emergency procedures skills;
- has limited knowledge of access issues
- is unlikely to have done any research on the loop prior to arrival.

Level of Difficulty

All loops will be assigned a 'level of difficulty' ranging in value from Easy to Moderate and Hard.

Loop Furniture

Loop furniture should be of high quality design and in keeping with the landscape. The core items of furniture for a loop walk include;

1. Mapboard

A mapboard, reflecting the design of the mapguide, should be placed at the trailhead and should ;

- clearly display loop(s);
- identify the trailhead;
- identify points of interest on route;
- outline level of difficulty and suggest duration of walk;

Key physical considerations include;

- smaller rather than large (A3-size is adequate)
- weatherproof in design;
- vandalism resistant.

Ensure that the erection of the mapboard complies with local planning regulations.

2. Waymarkers

Recycled plastic markers have proven to be most effective in terms of longevity and clarity.

In some situations, however, it may be inappropriate to use such markers including;

- sensitive areas (e.g. bogland);
- areas of high scenic value;
- large sections of open ground.

In these situations it may be more appropriate to use waymarkers that are, for example, lower than recommended or made of wood or stone.

3. Directional Arrows

Directional arrows should be affixed to the waymarkers to guide the walker along the route. It is strongly recommended that;

- circular plates (see pic) are used. These can be rotated and fixed to reflect accurately the direction of travel.

4. Gates/Stiles

Gates or stiles will be required to give access through field boundaries, fences, walls, etc.

Gates are preferable to stiles (which are challenging for some people) - they should remain unlocked and be easy to open and close. All gates should bear a sign requesting the walker to leave it as found. Stiles when used should be sturdy, slip-resistant and safe.

5. Footbridges

Appropriate footbridges should be used to give access across waterways (such as rivers, streams, drains and ditches). The safety of the walker should be protected by ensuring that the footbridge is sturdy and slip-resistant.

APPENDIX 2: FÁILTE IRELAND LOOP WALKS PROCEDURES (DRAFT)

Procedure Where There Is Already A Kind Of Walk In Existence.

- 1.** Approach to Fáilte Ireland to create Loop Walk
- 2.** Appraisal by Fáilte Ireland-appointed Advisor (on NWWAC recommended list).
- 3.** Advisor makes recommendations to Fáilte Ireland, NWWAC
- 4.** If agreed, Advisor sends out Loop Walks Questionnaire to Walk Contact, Fáilte Ireland criteria and NWWAC Guidelines enclosed
- 5.** Questionnaire is returned to Advisor
- 6.** Advisor checks Questionnaire is properly completed and if necessary checks with Walk Contact to clarify
- 7.** Advisor forwards Questionnaire to Fáilte Ireland/NWWAC with recommendations
- 8.** If agreed (**Stage 1**), Advisor visits Walk, prepares Report on requirements, and passes it to Fáilte Ireland, NWWAC
- 9.** If agreed (**Stage 2**), Advisor sends Report to Walk Committee
- 10.** Walk Committee carries out the work prescribed by the Advisor, completes Final Check List and returns it to Advisor who, if satisfied, sends it to Fáilte Ireland, NWWAC
- 11.** NWWAC Inspector makes Final Inspection and reports defects to Walks Committee, Advisor, Fáilte Ireland, NWWAC
- 12.** Walks Committee remedies defects, certifies completion to Advisor, Fáilte Ireland, NWWAC
- 13.** Result: a LOOP WALK to both Fáilte Ireland's and NWWAC's criteria.

Note: If Final Inspection shows up major defects, it may have to be repeated.

Draft 15 August 2006