

environmental policy



The Mountaineering Council · Comhairle Sléibhteoireachta
of Ireland · na hÉireann

PROMOTING THE SAFE, ENJOYABLE AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE IRISH UPLANDS

Mountaineering Council of Ireland

The Mountaineering Council of Ireland (MCI) is the national governing body for the sport of mountaineering in Ireland. The MCI covers the full spectrum of mountaineering activities including hillwalking, rambling, rockclimbing, alpinism and indoor climbing.

The aims of the MCI include:

- ▶ promoting mountaineering activities in Ireland;
- ▶ providing appropriate services to members;
- ▶ promoting safety and training among walkers and climbers
- ▶ encouraging responsible use of the mountain environment.

Membership of the MCI is open to both clubs and individuals (9,000 members comprising of 120 affiliated clubs and 1,200 individual members – July 2005). Membership benefits include civil liability insurance, quarterly members' magazine and a personalised membership card.

The MCI is supported by grant aid from the Irish Sports Council and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland.

As the enjoyment of the outdoors is a fundamental aspect of hill walking and climbing, the MCI has produced these documents to guide the response of its members to issues arising from their use of the countryside and in regard to the conservation of landscape and biodiversity. The policies address the responsibility of our members, where activities impact on the natural environment, and the response of the Council and its members to issues that may affect the quality of the experience we derive from our sport.

These documents are intended in the first instance to be read as guidance to MCI members. In addition we wish to inform other stakeholders in Ireland's uplands and outdoors of the Council's stance in regard to these matters. We trust that they will contribute to the well-being of the Irish upland environment.

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PROMOTING THE SAFE, ENJOYABLE AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE IRISH UPLANDS

Introduction

The Irish upland environment is limited in physical extent and very fragile in its nature. Our upland areas are frequently subject to use and development pressures inappropriate to their character. Some protection exists for areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation, Natural Heritage Areas or National Parks, which should be extended where feasible. To promote the protection of all Irish upland areas the MCI has developed policies, agreed with its members, upon which to base responses and action in relation to unwelcome developments.

In recent years the number of participants in hillwalking and mountaineering activities has increased substantially. This in itself can be a source of stress to certain upland environments. Consequently, responsible use of the uplands by recreational visitors is fundamental to our policies. The other key objectives of the policy are the importance of valuing and protecting our upland landscape and ensuring sustainability of local communities. These policies are supported by the practical advice in the MCI's GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR WALKERS AND CLIMBERS and the LEAVE NO TRACE SKILLS AND ETHICS education programme.

The scope of these policies extends to land above 300m and associated 'wilderness' or semi-wild landscapes; crags, quarries and other climbing areas; sea cliffs, hills and other areas frequented by MCI members, including access to these areas. Only five percent of our island exceeds 300m in elevation and this we define as Uplands. Some one-tenth of the Irish uplands are higher than 500m, in general these are the Mountain areas.

The principle aims of these policies are:

- **To conserve the areas within our scope and their flora, fauna, archaeology and heritage**
- **To ensure reasonable access for responsible recreational users**
- **To cooperate with reasonable, sustainable and appropriate development in these areas.**

Each of the following policy sheets describes one of the principal matters of environmental concern to MCI and sets out the Council's policies in relation to that issue:

1. **Access**
2. **Path Erosion**
3. **Organised Events in the Mountains**
4. **Agriculture**
5. **Forestry**
6. **Transport and Off-Road Vehicles**
7. **Built Development**
8. **Litter, Waste and Illegal Dumping**

Policy Implementation – the MCI will:

- ▶ Promote the enjoyment, protection, wise and safe recreational use of the Irish uplands
- ▶ Lobby for and co-operate with National Policies of amenity area conservation
- ▶ Consult with club committees in the relevant areas as issues arise
- ▶ Encourage clubs to publicise and discuss issues
- ▶ Seek to promote discussion and awareness of issues
- ▶ Seek to influence public opinion on issues as appropriate
- ▶ Work towards a management policy for planned areas agreed between all interested parties
- ▶ Co-operate with appropriate groups in Ireland and abroad to exchange information and work for common aims in keeping with MCI's policy.

1

Access

All land in Ireland is owned, either by private individuals or State bodies. Recreational users do not have a legal right of entry to land. The great majority of rural landowners have for many years made access to the Irish countryside available and this welcome has been long appreciated by generations of Irish mountaineers. However access is at the discretion of the landowner, who may prohibit entry or withdraw consent without prior notice to recreational users. While the public is normally given access to State land including National Parks and Coillte property there is no right of entry to these lands either. This situation contrasts with that which obtains in most other parts of Europe, where varying degrees of public access to land are formally defined.

MCI recommends prior consultation with landowners, but this is not always practical. It is thus difficult for walkers in the Irish uplands to be confident that their entry to private land including commonage will not be challenged. A further difficulty is the scarcity of agreed access pathways or of public rights-of way, which is in particular contrast with the extensive network of rights-of-way in Britain. Division of commonages, intensification of agricultural use and increased private forestry development has made access to the uplands physically more difficult. The Occupiers' Liability issue, an increase in the number of leisure users, and failure by a few recreational visitors to respect the reasonable requests of farmers have all contributed to a change in attitude on the part of a minority of landowners. The MCI welcomes the recent judgement taken by the Supreme Court with regard to Occupiers' Liability which has clarified an aspect of the law that had contributed to access difficulties around the country. This judgement should reassure landowners that their liability is negligible for injuries sustained by recreational users on their land.

MCI is working to reverse the decline in available access through agreement with landowners and rural communities and through bodies such as the Irish Uplands Forum. Any initiative in this regard for the Irish Republic must be founded on the goodwill of landowners. It is an MCI objective that a national code to govern recreational access be agreed between all stakeholders in a spirit of partnership. The role of Local Consultative Forums should be central to the achievement of this objective.

The principal access aim of the MCI is reasonable access for responsible users.

- ▶ The MCI supports the principle that there should be access to open country for the purpose of recreation. The MCI will campaign for agreed access to mountains, crags, the coast and other areas visited by MCI members and other responsible recreational users.
- ▶ When local access problems arise the MCI will, where possible, enter into discussions with the landowners/occupiers. The MCI and its members will at all times seek to develop and maintain good relations with landowners. The assistance of local affiliate Clubs is vital to the achievement of these objectives
- ▶ The MCI will co-operate with landowners and State bodies to provide access routes. We consider that expenses reasonably incurred by landowners in the provision of recreational access should be compensated.
- ▶ The MCI is opposed to further unnecessary fencing of open land, as it hinders access and is obtrusive.
- ▶ Where restrictions on access are required for conservation or other reasons the MCI will work to ensure that a reasonable balance is achieved between access and conservation requirements.
- ▶ The MCI will work to preserve existing rights-of-way and paths.
- ▶ The MCI will maintain a database detailing reported access difficulties.
- ▶ Guidebook writers should ensure that any access route they publish is acceptable to the landowners over whose property it passes.

Path Erosion

Upland path erosion is caused largely, but not exclusively, by hillwalkers. The increasing use of quads, scrambling bikes and mountain bikes makes matters worse. Intensive use of upland areas, especially of peatland, can exceed the carrying capacity of the terrain and progressive deterioration occurs.

Trampling – which is exacerbated by large numbers – is a primary cause of vegetation loss, the early stage of erosion. Erosion can be caused very swiftly, but may take decades to fix. Upland areas within easy reach of large urban populations are most vulnerable, but this is also a worsening problem in less popular areas.

MCI members should take responsibility for conserving upland paths. Active participation in voluntary repair work is strongly recommended to all members.

- ▶ Clubs are encouraged to strongly advise their members to follow the guidance of the MCI's GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR WALKERS AND CLIMBERS (available on the MCI website or from the MCI office).
- ▶ Clubs and walking groups need to be aware of the excessive impact that large numbers of people can generate and should adopt a responsible approach by minimising group sizes, particularly when walking on peaty uplands. Ideally group size should be less than 10 people, but should not exceed 15.
- ▶ The MCI will actively promote low impact use of the uplands, to members and other users, through appropriate communications programmes.
- ▶ Walking groups are asked to avoid badly eroded routes, particularly following periods of heavy rain.
- ▶ MCI will seek government support for upland trail repair and maintenance.

Recommended measures for the management of upland paths should include:

Restoration: Active maintenance is strongly encouraged for reasons of both conservation and safety. Any work carried out should strive for minimum impact on the essentially wild character of the uplands and the quality of the walking experience.

Use of Alternative Routes: Where paths are very heavily used with resultant damage, paths could be closed for repair and alternative paths indicated.

Minimum Impact: Constructed paths are a last resort, though one which has been reached in certain Irish areas. The materials and route should be in keeping with the nature of the area. Techniques used should pay heed to the conservation needs of an area, be fully informed by best practice and have regard to the visual impact.

Monitoring Erosion: MCI supports ongoing monitoring of tracks and paths in upland areas as a means to better trail management. The MCI will assist its members and voluntary groups such as Mountain Meitheal with path surveys and the development of a database to record findings.

Giving Back: MCI members and clubs are strongly encouraged to participate in low-impact remedial trail maintenance work under competent guidance and to repair erosion damage in areas which they regularly use.

Publications: Where possible, guide book writers should omit mention of routes through eroded areas. Advice on the responsibilities of walkers to reduce their impact on vulnerable terrain should always be included.

3

Organised Events in the Mountains

The MCI recognises the social, community and financial value and increasing popularity of organised walks, walking festivals, charity walks and challenge events in the mountains. The MCI believes the current level of such activities is environmentally unsustainable and recommends that 'best practice' principles are adopted by event organisers.

Where MCI members or affiliated clubs organise such events or are requested to assist in a local or charitable event they should:

- ▶ Examine the environmental impact, particularly erosion, of any route proposed.
- ▶ Take into account the level of use of the area (an area that has little activity throughout the year will recover better from the impact of one large event than an area that is subject to heavy use on a regular basis).
- ▶ Where proposed routes traverse protected areas (SAC, NHA etc.) or National Parks, consult with National Parks & Wildlife Service or the appropriate management body.
- ▶ Take measures to limit the number of participants in the event (e.g. by using pre-booking).
- ▶ Consider alternative event formats with reduced impact on vulnerable terrain.
- ▶ Vary the route e.g. arrange a number of different walks in the area; change the route from year-to-year.
- ▶ Consider scheduling the event for later in the year to avoid damage during the peak growth season.
- ▶ Use the event to increase awareness of environmental issues in the uplands.
- ▶ Promote the MCI's Good Practice Guide for Walkers & Climbers to all participants.
- ▶ Ensure all litter and markers are removed after the event.
- ▶ Afterwards examine the damage caused by the event and seek solutions to minimize this if future events are planned.
- ▶ Aside from environmental concerns, carefully consider all safety aspects involved in bringing participants to remote places. This is particularly important for events involving inexperienced walkers, or where there is a time pressure on participants.

4

Agriculture

For many centuries the predominant use of Ireland's uplands and mountain valleys has been for agricultural purposes. The character of our upland landscape derives from such use. In recent times landowners in Irish upland areas have faced increasing problems in maintaining farm family income. MCI is appreciative of these current difficulties, and also of the necessity of conserving the quality of the upland environment. We consider that the traditional extensive methods of production are deserving of financial support and that community development including appropriate recreational use can be integrated in a sustainable land use policy for upland regions.

The uplands are limited in their capacity for agricultural development. For many years traditional methods of agriculture produced an environmental balance. This was rapidly lost in recent decades when stocking rates were unsustainably increased and urgent remedial actions were then required. Such problems arise when agricultural policies ignore the fragile nature of the uplands. The development of sensitive areas should respect their biological limitations.

It is considered that the creation of Upland Area Partnerships (involving agricultural, statutory, community and recreational representatives) can be the key to the optimum development of these areas. If the potential of sustainable recreation is embraced this can offset reductions in traditional agricultural income. The role of landowners as custodians of the rural heritage should continue to be compensated by measures such as the Rural Environment Protection Scheme. MCI supports reforms to such schemes to ensure the sustainability of rural communities.

- ▶ The MCI will co-operate with upland landowners, government agencies and others involved, to develop sustainable upland uses for the benefit of farmers and rural communities. These may include the provision of appropriate recreational access. Where provision of such access involves loss or expense to landowners MCI considers that appropriate recompense should be allowable. Retention of the character of sensitive landscapes should be an objective of all development. Criteria set for grants and permissions should be appropriate to the capacities of each land area involved. Necessary measures for access, land improvement and enclosure should respect traditional landforms.
- ▶ MCI recognises the special value of plants, animals and cultural artefacts in certain upland areas. Where the preservation of these is important we consider that government agencies should consult with affected landowners and agree fair recompense for any loss of income arising from compliance with EU or national directives.
- ▶ The MCI recognises the right of farmers to erect fences for agricultural purposes. However fencing of traditionally open high areas of rough grazing and the fenced sub-division of private commonage seriously detracts from the quality of the upland environment and should be kept to a minimum. Fences on hill access routes should incorporate stiles to facilitate access and prevent damage.
- ▶ MCI will promote the acceptance and use by all its members of the MCI GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR WALKERS AND CLIMBERS, the IFA FARMLAND CODE OF CONDUCT and the NORTHERN IRELAND COUNTRYSIDE CODE.

5

Forestry

MCI recognises the positive contribution well-managed forests can make to the rural economy. Properly planned and landscaped forests can enhance the amenity value of the landscape and increase opportunities for recreation and access.

Ireland has little remaining natural forest. Most forests are relatively recent plantations. Forestry is set to become an ever larger component of the landscape with national objectives to increase land under trees. Forestry development cannot be based solely on commercial considerations, but must take environmental, amenity and social issues into account. MCI welcomes Coillte's achievement of Forestry Stewardship Council certification as a positive development in recognising these requirements.

Plantation forestry can be visually intrusive, detracting from the wilderness quality of the uplands. Existing wildlife habitat can be affected, and rivers and lakes may suffer acidification from conifer forests. Forestry roads have in the past been insensitively placed, making them monotonous for the walker and detracting from the wilderness nature of some areas.

State forests have traditionally been open to the public; access to private plantations is at the discretion of the landowner. Forests can provide a useful access corridor to the uplands, however trees at certain stages of growth can form impenetrable thickets, while clear felling can leave areas almost impassable for years, making access for walkers difficult. Large amounts of rubbish sometimes remain following forestry work.

- ▶ MCI supports the protection of all remaining natural and semi-natural forest, including adequate measures for the removal of invasive species.
- ▶ The MCI view is that sensitive upland areas – blanket and raised bog, heather moorland – should not be planted.
- ▶ Where forests already exist or are proposed in upland areas and mountain valleys, the MCI recommends a detailed forest plan should be drawn up to ensure they fit in with the surrounding landscape, increase bio-diversity and facilitate recreational use.
- ▶ Forests should be managed in accordance with Sustainable Forest Management principles.
- ▶ Forestry roads should be sensitively designed, with minimal impact. Roads should be designed with due regard to vistas and views for recreational users. The MCI urges forest companies to investigate alternative extraction methods that reduce the need for extensive road networks. Forest roads should be categorised for different types of use. Where roads are no longer needed for harvesting, consideration should be given to 're-classifying' these routes for walking or cycling only, with measures taken to limit vehicular access. 4WDs, all-terrain vehicles and other off-road vehicles sometimes use forest roads to access upland areas. Effective barriers should be erected to keep out unauthorised vehicles.
- ▶ Routes through forests can be a valuable means of access to higher ground. MCI acknowledges the value of such routes and is committed to working with Coillte to identify and maintain popular access routes. Where possible, walking routes through forests should avoid forest roads.
- ▶ Forestry benefits from a high level of public investment, in the form of grant aid and tax breaks and therefore MCI encourages the Forest Service to make the provision of access routes a condition for grant aid to private forestry in the uplands and intervening valleys.
- ▶ Felling licences should take environmental impact into account and impose conditions to minimise environmental degradation. Replanting with native species should be permitted in all felling licences.
- ▶ MCI encourages forest owners to exert more control over contractors (possibly a litter bond) to ensure rubbish is removed when work is completed.

6

Transport & Off-Road Vehicles

Mountaineers need transport to get to within walking distance of the hills. At present, public transport does not meet needs in remote areas, therefore walkers and climbers must rely largely on private transport. MCI recognises the negative impact of heavy car use in remote areas.

Increasing traffic reduces enjoyment of remote areas and leads to pressure for more car parks and improved roads. Inconsiderate parking by recreational users can block access, causing serious inconvenience for local residents and the emergency services.

The off-road use of motorised vehicles e.g. quads and scramblers has increased greatly. Hill and forest tracks facilitate access for vehicles, which then get used off road in inappropriate places.

The MCI recognises that upland farmers may use such vehicles for necessary agricultural purposes. Off-road use of vehicles damages sensitive environments, leaves scars on the landscape and worsens erosion. Local residents, recreational users and wildlife are affected by disturbance.

In Northern Ireland it is illegal to have a motorised vehicle more than 100 metres from a public road without the landowner's permission. MCI will encourage local authorities in the Republic of Ireland to introduce bye-laws protecting upland areas within their jurisdiction.

- ▶ MCI encourages members to car pool as much as possible to reduce car numbers and parking problems. Member clubs are asked to consider hiring buses as an alternative, however please note the recommendations on maximum group size contained in the Path Erosion policy.
- ▶ MCI is committed to working to resolve traffic and parking problems as they arise e.g. by liaison with landowners and local authorities.
- ▶ The Irish uplands should be protected from excessive or insensitive transport developments.
- ▶ All road works and car parks in upland areas should be constructed to minimise environmental impact.
- ▶ Provision of better public transport in remote areas is supported.
- ▶ MCI will support appropriate park and ride schemes in areas where volume of traffic and / or car parking demand exceed capacity.
- ▶ MCI members are urged to follow MCI's GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR WALKERS AND CLIMBERS with regard to parking etc.
- ▶ Off-road use of vehicles is severely detrimental to the upland environment. The recreational use of vehicles on open uplands should be prohibited. This is best done by use of effective barriers on hill and forest tracks, user education and appropriate bye-laws.
- ▶ Provision of designated reserves for quads and scramblers would take pressure off sensitive landscapes. The MCI will liaise with the relevant user groups, encouraging them to promote responsible use to their members and supporting their efforts to secure appropriate areas designated for their activities.
- ▶ Tracks that facilitate vehicle access should be removed if no longer needed.
- ▶ MCI supports the provision of designated trails for cyclists and will liaise with Cycling Ireland to assist with education of cyclists to minimise damage to upland terrain.

7

Built Development

The MCI Built Development policy covers all development work in upland and relevant coastal areas requiring planning permission (other than those categories of activity specifically dealt with in other sections of this document). Development proposals which will erode the remoteness and natural beauty of our landscapes should be critically examined. The extent of wild country in Ireland is rapidly decreasing and MCI considers itself obliged to assist with its conservation.

The MCI does not oppose all development in upland areas, rather it argues that development should be located where it does not destroy the essential character of the undeveloped landscape of the upland and coast. This itself is an increasingly valuable commercial asset to local communities who can utilise tourism and recreation to replace other declining economic activities. The MCI supports appropriate and sustainable development in or immediately adjoining existing settlement and villages.

The following list indicates the type of development which the MCI considers potentially damaging to the essential landscape qualities of our uplands and coast. Proposed developments in the categories listed should be carefully considered by MCI and its members. Where it appears that particular schemes are inappropriate MCI should oppose them through the planning process.

- Quarrying, mining and other extractive industry.
- Communication masts, where these are visually or environmentally significant.
- Wind energy developments and hydro-electric schemes, where significant adverse impact occurs.
- Waste disposal by landfill or otherwise.
- The construction of dwellings in upland areas.
- Tourist facilities and visitor centres where environmental impact is severe and where community benefit is minimal.
- Power lines if inappropriately sited.
- Large agricultural or industrial buildings, mountain roads.

Developments of the types listed above can impact on the landscape in a number of ways:

- There is a reduction of the amount of wild land and land remote from human activity and roads. This is exacerbated by the requirement to have road access and services to the development.
- Increased noise.
- Impact on flora and fauna and especially on areas of special ecological or scientific interest.
- Pollution.
- Increased vehicular traffic.
- Landscape impact – visual intrusion of man-made artefacts on natural ecosystems.

The MCI will participate in the planning process through its constituent clubs and at national level. This will include the submission of comments in appropriate cases and the making of appeals or related submissions to An Bord Pleanála. Where issues are localised the preferable procedure is for action to be taken through locally affected member clubs and groups. The MCI Executive may assist affiliated clubs with expenses related to planning matters. The MCI, in consultation with local members, will determine its action on new proposals having regard for:

- ▶ The impact in terms of scale, positioning and design on the landscape in which it is proposed to site it.
- ▶ The quality of that particular landscape and its ability to absorb the development.
- ▶ The usage of the area by climbers, walkers and tourists.
- ▶ The economic, social and environmental value of the scheme.
- ▶ With regard to dwelling houses, favouring those intended for use by families engaged in agriculture.
- ▶ The ecological consequences of the development both in the long term and during construction.
- ▶ The reversibility of the development and its impacts.
- ▶ The reduction in the national stock of undeveloped landscape.

8

Litter, Waste and Illegal Dumping

Some recreational users contribute to litter in the uplands. Non-recreational users, both private individuals and commercial bodies, also use remote areas as free and convenient dumping grounds. MCI members are encouraged to share responsibility for reducing litter in the Irish uplands through personal action and reporting incidences of dumping.

- ▶ The MCI strongly encourages its members to adopt the principle of Pack it In – Pack it Out. Clubs are urged to promote this principle to all their members. MCI members should strive to LEAVE NO TRACE after a visit to the uplands.
- ▶ The MCI encourages members to pick up litter when they see it (always be cautious when handling waste). MCI clubs should consider organising clean-up events.
- ▶ MCI members are encouraged to report incidents of dumping, car wrecks etc. in upland areas to the local authority.
- ▶ The MCI will lobby government and local authorities to address waste issues, clear up illegal dumping and impose litter fines.

Good Practice Guide for Walkers & Climbers

For many of us, walking and climbing is about enjoyment, recreation and freedom from structures and regulations. These activities bring us to very special places, but our enjoyment of these areas brings with it a responsibility. We need to be aware of our impact on the environment and take responsibility for our own safety. We must respect the interests of others and act as responsible partners in the use and development of the countryside. To ensure continued enjoyment of the hills and crags, we have to accept some guidelines for our activities.

Preparation...

- ▶ Be properly equipped and fit for the activity concerned
- ▶ Have the skills to cope with the chosen route
- ▶ Have an up-to-date weather forecast and know the time of dusk
- ▶ Be aware of the potential hazards and know what to do if something goes wrong
- ▶ Accept the risk that is inherent in walking and climbing and take responsibility for your own safety
- ▶ For environmental, social and safety reasons keep group numbers small. Ideally group size should be less than 10 people and should not exceed 15.
- ▶ Avoid taking dogs on the hills at any time

Parking and access...

- ▶ Keep the number of cars used to the minimum; consider hiring a bus for group outings
- ▶ Park safely, with particular regard to allowing for entry to property. Many access problems have arisen from inconsiderate parking by recreational visitors. Remember that farmers work at weekends and that farm machinery, and the emergency services, may need a wide space to turn into a field or gateway.
- ▶ All land is owned by somebody and you use that land with the goodwill of the owner, not as a legal right
- ▶ Avoid aggravating known problems, use approved routes in these areas
- ▶ Be friendly and courteous when you meet landowners and local residents
- ▶ Respect private property and do not interfere with machinery, crops or animals
- ▶ Make no unnecessary noise, especially when passing near houses
- ▶ Be careful not to damage fences, walls or hedges; these are livestock boundaries and expensive to repair
- ▶ Use stiles and gates where they exist, leave gates as we find them (open or closed)

Environmental considerations for walkers

- ▶ Have respect for all natural things and take care not to disturb plants, birds and animals.

- ▶ Walk on rock, stones or the most durable surface available, rather than on vegetation or soft ground:
In heavily used areas, walk single file in the middle of the path, even if its wet and muddy (wearing gaiters will help to keep your feet dry). This helps reduce soil erosion and minimises path widening.
In more remote areas, disperse use to prevent the creation of new tracks and campsites and try to avoid places where impacts are just beginning to show.
- ▶ Avoid taking short cuts on zig zag paths as this creates new lines for run-off of water and increases erosion
- ▶ Leave cairns as they are; old cairns could have archaeological value. New ones detract from the wild character of the hills and can mislead some walkers.
- ▶ 'Pack it in, pack it out'. Leave no litter behind; even biodegradable items like banana skins and teabags take years to disappear
- ▶ Pick up litter when you see it (be cautious when handling waste)
- ▶ Take care not to cause any pollution. Human waste should be buried, at least 30m away from watercourses; take home, or carefully burn, used toilet paper and hygiene products

Leaders of groups should...

- ▶ Be competent to lead groups and be appropriately equipped to ensure the safety of the group
 - ▶ Be trained in first aid and carry a small first aid kit
 - ▶ Know the route, the ability of the group members and ensure that they are all properly equipped
 - ▶ Be prepared to alter the route to meet the needs and interests of the group, and the weather conditions
 - ▶ Show a good example to the group, with regard to conservation issues and relations with landowners
 - ▶ Ensure everybody in the group knows what to do, what not to do, and why
 - ▶ Encourage group members to develop their walking and climbing skills
-

Good Practice Guide for Walkers & Climbers

Environmental considerations for climbers and scramblers

- ▶ Cliffs are a final refuge for some plants, birds and animals that have become rare, or even extinct elsewhere
- ▶ Avoid disturbing nesting birds and adhere to any climbing restrictions during the nesting season
- ▶ The removal of vegetation including mosses and lichens (gardening) should be avoided wherever possible
- ▶ It is often more pleasant to climb on dry, bare rock which normally has less botanical interest
- ▶ Damage can be caused by repeated top-roping of routes or by using a wire brush for cleaning
- ▶ Avoid any form of chipping or defacement of the rock, never carve your name in the rock etc
- ▶ Abseiling down routes can be harmful to the rock, damage vegetation and inhibit other climbers
- ▶ Where abseiling from trees is necessary, use a rope protector, even then this activity could kill the tree
- ▶ Climbing on frozen turf, or thin ice, can cause a lot of damage to vegetation
- ▶ 'Pack it in, pack it out'. Leave no litter behind; even biodegradable items like banana skins and teabags take years to disappear
- ▶ Pick up litter when you see it (be cautious when handling waste)
- ▶ Take care not to cause any pollution. Human waste should be buried, at least 30m away from watercourses; take home, or carefully burn, used toilet paper and hygiene products

Fixed equipment for climbing

- ▶ For all established climbing areas in Ireland, bolting is not permitted. Bolts have been used in a few new climbing areas only (details of these crags can be obtained from the Irish Rock Climbing Committee - IRCC).
- ▶ Anyone considering placing new fixed equipment or replacing existing equipment should take careful account of local climbing ethics, the environmental sensitivity of the area, potential liability and public safety factors. The use of cliff-top belay stakes should be kept to a minimum, especially in popular or scenic areas where walkers have access to cliff tops.

Advice for climbers developing new crags / doing new routes

- ▶ New routing, cleaning and developing new crags can be a sensitive issue with landowners
- ▶ Ask other climbers why the crag has not been developed, find out if there is a local access problem, etc.
- ▶ Is there a nature protection designation on the area; would climbing be harmful?
- ▶ Get the landowner's permission to climb there
- ▶ Minimise damage to plants and trees and leave as few traces of your climbing as possible
- ▶ Be careful about publicising a crag; can it take large numbers or could there be problems with access?

Guidelines for wild camping

- ▶ Where possible seek the landowner's permission before wild camping
- ▶ To avoid Mountain Rescue being called out unnecessarily inform a nearby resident or the Gardaí / PSNI if you are leaving a car overnight
- ▶ Choose unobtrusive sites at least 500m away from roads and buildings
- ▶ Keep the group as small and discreet as possible
- ▶ Use a stove for cooking; campfires leave their mark and fires in the countryside can be very destructive
- ▶ Bury human waste; latrines should be dug at least 30m away from watercourses
- ▶ Wash at least 15m away from watercourses; minimise the use of soaps and detergents
- ▶ To prevent damage to vegetation, tents should not be left on the same spot for more than two nights
- ▶ Leave no litter behind – 'pack it in, pack it out!'
- ▶ Ensure that you leave the site as you found it.

This document is not exhaustive. Please adopt the spirit of these guidelines and apply it to your own activities.

Mountaineering Council of Ireland, May 2003.

Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme

Kathmandu Declaration on Mountain Activities

The Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme (UIAA) General Assembly has resolved to adopt the following principles and guidelines as a programme for concrete action to be henceforth called the Kathmandu Declaration on Mountain Activities:

Articles of the Declaration

1. There is an urgent need for effective protection of the mountain environment and landscape.
2. The flora, fauna and natural resources of all kinds need immediate attention, care and concern.
3. Actions designed to reduce the negative impact of man's activities on mountains should be encouraged.
4. The cultural heritage and the dignity of the local population are inviolable.
5. All activities designed to restore and rehabilitate the mountain world need to be encouraged.
6. Contacts between mountaineers of different regions and countries should be increasingly encouraged in the spirit of friendship, mutual respect and peace.
7. Information and education for improving the relationship between man and his environment should be available for wider and wider sections of society.
8. The use of appropriate technology for energy needs and the proper disposal of waste in the mountain areas are matters of immediate concern.
9. The need for more international support - governmental as well as non-governmental - to the developing mountain countries, for instance, in matters of ecological conservation.
10. The need for widening access to mountain areas in order to promote their appreciation and study should be unfettered by political considerations.

Kathmandu, October 1982

Mountaineering Council of Ireland

Summit Charter for 2002 UN International Year of the Mountains

Mountaineering federations internationally responded to UN International Year of the Mountains by agreeing a Summit Charter which was launched in Austria on 14th October 2001. The Charter is to remind everyone (but in particular Governments and international organisations) why walking and climbing are valuable and worthwhile activities with many health, social, educational and economic benefits

The MCI has adopted the following Charter.

The Mountaineering Council of Ireland, represents Hillwalkers, Climbers and Ramblers who...

- ▶ Value the freedom to enjoy the natural environment of mountains and cliffs with responsible access
- ▶ Practice their sport in a way that's compatible with conservation and sustainability of nature
- ▶ Believe that their activities contribute to personal development and renew the human spirit
- ▶ Accept personal responsibility supported by codes of good practice
- ▶ Protect the wilderness of mountains and cliffs recognising their environmental value and fragility
- ▶ Contribute to sustainable growth of mountain tourism
- ▶ Do not claim liability of landowners for natural hazards

The MCI summit charter is based on one issued by the UIAA (international federation of mountaineering organisations)

Dublin, January 2002

