



The Mountaineering Council of Ireland Comhairle Sléibhteoireachta na hÉireann

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The MCI promotes the principles of Leave No Trace



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Access and
Conservation

www.mountaineering.ie

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MCI Access Policy

The membership of the Mountaineering Council of Ireland (MCI) recognises that all land in Ireland, North and South, is owned privately or by the State (Republic of Ireland) or the Crown (Northern Ireland). The membership of the MCI recognises that they do not have a legal right of entry to land that is privately owned. The MCI acknowledges that the vast majority of rural landowners have traditionally granted access to upland / mountain areas as well as general countryside areas. This fact has been appreciated by generations of Irish mountaineers. However, this goodwill and access may be withdrawn without notice at any stage. This situation contrasts with most of Europe, where varying degrees of public access to land are formally defined.

MCI Policy on Access

The MCI's stated policy on access is: "We are actively seeking reasonable access to the upland areas and a network of paths allowing for access to these areas for responsible users."

Reasonable Access

As stated down through the years, the membership of the MCI has no wish to wander through farmyards, walk past farmers' front doors or enter arable or improved agricultural land. The aim of the MCI is for open, unrestricted access on foot to unenclosed hills and mountains, coastal areas and riverines throughout Ireland. This can be best achieved via a footpath network, including paths leading from the public roads and car parks, through or around the enclosed fields out onto the open hillsides / mountainsides.

The MCI understands and respects the current status of landowners' rights and does not seek to change rights of ownership. We do, however, believe that ownership of a national asset brings with it responsibilities to society in general. We believe in cooperation and negotiation, not confrontation, to achieve our aims, on the basis that the validity and reasonableness of our position is recognised and there is a will amongst all the relevant parties to find a negotiated solution to the upland areas of Ireland. The MCI is content to continue to negotiate, at this time, for access within the existing negotiation framework as long as this does not compromise our stated aims.

Responsible Users

Engaging in mountaineering is, for many people, about freedom, overcoming challenges and a deep passion for the outdoors. But enjoyment of these mountain and coastal areas brings with it a responsibility to the environment, to land owners and farmers who work the land and to other users of the land. The MCI endorses and encourages the respectful enjoyment of the countryside by recreational users. The countryside code which the MCI promotes is based on the Leave No Trace Principles of Outdoor Ethics. The MCI works extremely closely with all individual and club members to promote these principles. Further information is available on www.leavenotraceireland.org



We aim to secure continued access to Ireland's uplands for hillwalking and climbing, and to advocate responsible use of the environment.



The Form of Access We Stand For...

- The MCI supports the principle that there should be access to open country for the purpose of recreation. The MCI will continue to campaign for agreed access to mountains, crags and the coastal areas visited by MCI members and other responsible recreational users.
- The MCI will encourage writers of guidebooks on walking routes and trails to consult landowners to determine the status of access on their land prior to including details in published works.
- The MCI will co-operate with landowners and State bodies to provide access routes.
- The MCI and its members will at all times seek to develop and maintain good relations with landowners. The assistance, support and goodwill of local affiliate clubs and individual MCI members are vital to the achievement of these objectives.
- When local access issues arise the MCI will, where possible and practical, enter into discussions with the landowners concerned, making use of local MCI members, insofar as possible, to find a resolution of the issue in a spirit of neighborliness and partnership



- The MCI will work to preserve existing rights-of-way and paths and encourage local authorities to formally record these.
- 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 is opposed to further unnecessary fencing of open land, as it hinders access and is obtrusive.

MCI Support for Comhairle Na Tuaithe

The MCI has been an active partner for over three years on Comhairle na Tuaithe (CNT). The MCI has consistently called for leadership in government to work in partnership with farmers, landowners and the recreational community to implement the following key principles:

- Co-ordination of countryside access to be the responsibility of a representative national structure as set out in the National Countryside Recreation Strategy.
- A legal framework for access to open, unenclosed uplands, coastal and riverine areas. This legal framework will ensure that there is no increase in liability on the landowner for the safety of recreational users.
- A national trail network that provides access from car parks and public roads to the open land as well as providing communities with off-road walking in low lying areas.
- A statutory right of access on foot to all publicly owned lands, except where necessary for environmental or security reasons.

- A system of payments to landowners for maintenance of stiles, signs etc.
- A local authority management system for busy and popular areas, with 'on the ground' wardens to liaise with and support local landowners.
- An education and advisory service to ensure recreational users know where to go and adhere to the principles of 'Leave No Trace'.

MCI support for Access in Northern Ireland

The MCI is concerned at the potential loss of existing access rights to Crown land through the Government's privatisation and public / private partnership (PPP) initiatives. The MCI will continue to lobby for access to all Crown land as a right except where there are understandable and reasonable restrictions which enjoy public support.

The MCI also has concerns relating to the perception of landowners as to the issue of Occupier's liability and feels that Government must do more to address those perceptions. Given this, the MCI will take the lead through coordinating and facilitating an Access Forum in Northern Ireland to consider and progress such matters. It will do so in partnership with other interested and involved groups and will lobby and act in that regard.

The MCI will also continue to actively support the work of the Northern Ireland Countryside Access and Recreation Network (CAAN). The MCI supports both the role of CAAN and the strategic basis on which it operates especially given the lack of ownership of access matters by any Government department in Northern Ireland. The MCI will campaign for the current Countryside Recreation Strategy

to be updated and for CAAN to be properly resourced and recognised in realising this important strategic role. As in the Republic of Ireland, the MCI supports the principle of payment to landowners for works associated with maintaining access and seeks Government funding to be made available to landowners for such works.

Conclusion

It is the desire of the MCI to achieve their goal of reasonable access during the present programmes for government in the Republic of Ireland (2007-2012) and Northern Ireland (2007-2011) through working in partnership with landowners, state bodies, recreational users and any other concerned groups. If however, it becomes apparent, during the present programmes for government, that the goal of the MCI is not being supported, the MCI will review and carefully examine the need for legislation to assist us to achieve our stated goal. At this juncture the MCI calls on all political parties to include in their policies, their stated position on management practices for upland, coastal and riverine areas. The MCI is happy to provide assistance and advice to all parties on a non-party political basis to ensure that these stated positions and policy papers are in line with best international practices.

The full MCI policy on Access can be found at www.mountaineering.ie