



# The Ecology of Mountains

*Mountaineering Ireland's Mountain Environment  
Weekend 2019*

Clonbur, Co. Galway, 24-26<sup>th</sup> May 2019



*Photo: Srahnalong Valley, Maumtrasna*

*To coincide with National Biodiversity Week, Mountaineering Ireland is hosting a weekend of learning about Ireland's mountain environment, based at Petersburg OEC, Clonbur, from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2019.*

# THE ECOLOGY OF MOUNTAINS

When we better understand how all the elements of an upland landscape connect and intertwine it leads to a deeper understanding of how this type of ecosystem works. It also helps us as hillwalkers and climbers to understand the fragility and resilience of anything that survives on Irish mountains, and to appreciate how a lack of understanding can disturb the delicate balance within upland environments.

The weekend will open with an introduction to ecology walk in Clonbur Woods, where we will learn about the link between rocks around us and the living world. The theme of ecology and the biodiversity of Ireland's mountains will continue throughout the weekend, with indoor talks and two days of learning out on the mountains, which should provide participants with an understanding of how our upland ecosystems work today.

## ABOUT THIS EVENT

The overall aim of the Mountain Environment weekend is to celebrate what makes Ireland's mountains special, by sharing knowledge of the mountain environment, through illustrated talks, and by spending time exploring the mountains and discussing what we find there.

Mountaineering Ireland's Mountain Environment Weekend 2019 will be based out of Clonbur, Co. Galway which lies between Lough Mask and Lough Corrib. Evening talks and Saturday night dinner will take place in Clonbur village. Hostel accommodation is available at Petersburg Outdoor Education Centre, just outside the village, which will be our gathering point each morning (other options also available, see Booking section below). The main focus of our outdoor activities will be the mountains of Joyce Country to the west, and Maumtrasna to the northwest.

Rather than focusing on a single aspect of the mountain environment such as geology or plants, this weekend will promote a general understanding by involving people from different disciplines such as geology, botany, ornithology, heritage, and geography. We will be meeting people involved in farming and geo-tourism in Joyce Country. Consideration will also be given to how best to protect the special qualities of Ireland's mountains and upland areas.

The event is delivered in conjunction with the Outdoor Education programme at GMT Mayo, Petersburg Outdoor Education Centre, and Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geo Enterprise, with input from additional individuals with expertise on different aspects of the mountain environment.

This event is intended for: Environmental Officers within Mountaineering Ireland clubs; Mountain Training Board Ireland providers; hillwalking club leaders; walking guides and other Mountaineering Ireland members with an interest in learning about the mountain environment and sharing that knowledge with others. To ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to benefit from the learning that will flow from this event it would be preferable not to have more than two people from any one club.

## PROGRAMME

### Friday 24<sup>th</sup> May

#### Introduction to Ecology walk

3.30pm Meet at All Saints Heritage Centre, Clonbur for an *Introduction to Ecology*, a walk in Clonbur Woods where we will see limestone pavement and also visit the Big Island drumlin. The walk will be followed by soup and sandwiches in the All Saints Heritage Centre.

7-8pm Event registration at All Saints Heritage Centre, Clonbur

#### Introductory talks at All Saints Heritage Centre, Clonbur

8pm *Hard Rock - an understanding* (Benjamin Thébaudeau, geologist, Joyce Country & Western Lakes Geo Enterprise)

8.45pm *Ecology of Mountains* (Trish Walsh, Petersburg Outdoor Education Centre).

*The introductory talks at All Saints Heritage Centre are free of charge and open to all.*

### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May

#### 9.15 – 10.00am – Setting the scene - indoor session at Petersburg Outdoor Education Centre

*An introduction to the habitats through which hillwalkers and climbers pass, and some plants to watch out for on Ireland's mountains* (Dr. Rory Hodd)

#### 10.30am – 5.30pm – Exploring Maumtrasna

We will spend most of the day outside exploring the Maumtrasna area. During the hike we will make stops to talk about the different landforms, heritage features, habitats and species we come across, many of which can be found on other mountain areas, particularly in the west of Ireland. We will consider the various pressures affecting the mountain environment and what changes are needed to help these important ecosystems functions better.

Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the areas where we do our activities, as well as countless nuggets of information to share with others.

Participants will be actively encouraged to share their own knowledge and experiences from within their club or work. The intention is to have two separate groups, with the precise routes decided closer to the time depending on weather conditions. Both groups will be walking across rough and boggy ground, and at times will be on steep and rocky terrain where a little scrambling may be required.

**7.00pm – Three-course dinner at Fairhill House Hotel, Clonbur (included in registration fee)**

**8.30pm – Evening talks at All Saints Heritage Centre, Clonbur**

**Working to protect the mountain environment**

Two short presentations followed by questions and answers:

*Examples of Mountaineering Ireland's current work on access and conservation* (Helen Lawless)

*Birds of prey in Ireland's upland areas and the role of an NPWS Conservation Ranger* (Irene O'Brien)

Afterwards participants can relax, chat, and perhaps visit one of the pubs in Clonbur.

## **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May**

**9.15 – 10.15am visit to Joe Joyce, Joyce Country Sheepdogs**

We will visit the farm of Joe Joyce, a working hill sheep farm on the shores of Lough Nafoeey, where we will chat with Joe about his farm enterprise, Joyce Country Sheepdogs, and watch a demonstration of Joe's border collies herding Connemara blackface sheep.

**10.30am – 4.00pm – Further explorations in Joyce Country**

A second learning journey in the mountains. Some of the leaders will switch groups so that participants will get an insight into different aspects of the mountain environment.

We'll consider what actions we can take to ensure that our engagement with the mountain environment is more sustainable and how we can help to make a case for better care of Ireland's mountain landscapes. Participants will also be encouraged to consider how they will incorporate their new-found knowledge into their mountain days and any courses they deliver.

**4.30pm – Wrap-up at Petersburg OEC, including results of photographic competition**

**5.00pm – Event closes**

## **BOOKING**

The fee for the Mountain Environment weekend is €80 (this covers field trips; talks; farm visit and a three-course dinner with tea/coffee at the Fairhill House Hotel on Saturday evening). **Places are limited; tickets can be booked through Eventbrite – <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/the-ecology-of-mountains-mountaineering-irelands-mountain-environment-weekend-2019-tickets-60804776724?aff=ebdssbdestsearch>**

To ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to benefit from this event it would be preferable not to have more than two people from any one club. Subject to availability, it may be possible for people to book onto a single day, however first preference will be given to people booking for the full weekend.

### **Accommodation:**

Hostel accommodation is available at Petersburg, at a special price of €12 per night or €20 for two night. Camping also available at €5 per night per person.

Breakfast at Petersburg is €10 for a cooked breakfast, or €6 for continental.

Packed Lunch (sandwich, snack bar, fruit + water or flask fill) €5

Accommodation can be booked by phoning the office in Petersburg on 094 9546483.

### **Other accommodation options in the area:**

- Fairhill House Hotel\*\*\*, Clonbur, tel: 094 9546176, [www.fairhillhouse.com](http://www.fairhillhouse.com)
- Burkes Bar & Restaurant, Mount Gable House, Clonbur, 0949546175, [www.burkes-clonbur.com](http://www.burkes-clonbur.com)
- Island View House B&B, Dooroy, Clonbur, 094 9546302, islandview clonbur/cong.com
- Ballykine House B&B, Clonbur, 094 9546150, <https://ballykine-bnb.com/>
- Lakeshore House B&B, Ballard, Clonbur, 094 9548311, <https://www.lakeshoreconnemara.com/bandb.htm>

## NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS

- As we will be outdoors for two days, and traversing steep, rocky and exposed terrain, participants should bring hillwalking gear, including suitable footwear, raingear a packed lunch and something to drink.
- Camera, binoculars, a notebook and field guides (if you have them) will all be useful.
- To minimise impact and enable all participants to hear what is said while we're outdoors, group size will be limited.
- Dogs are not permitted on the field trips due to the presence of sheep grazing on the mountains.
- Plans for the field trips may be adjusted on the day depending on weather conditions or the needs and interests of the group.

## JOYCE COUNTRY AND MAUMTRASNA

The underlying geology, the process of mountain building, glaciation and ongoing weathering and erosion create and shape each upland area. The diversity of geological eras and rock types in Joyce Country provide a unique location to study this aspect of the mountain environment.

Our outdoor activities during the Mountain Environment weekend will be in the mountains of Joyce Country, particularly Maumtrasna. Maumtrasna, with its sprawling plateau, is arguably the largest mountain in Ireland in terms of its physical extent. The glacial period that ended just under 12,000 years ago left Maumtrasna with a number of steep-sided corries and shapely spurs, all of which make this an interesting mountain to explore.

In terms of habitat, sheep grazing has reduced the amount of heather cover on the mountains, resulting in a large-scale change from upland heath to upland grassland. Some of the cliffs on Maumtrasna and other areas with base-rich substrates, have a good variety of arctic/alpine plant species. Maumtrasna is a proposed Natural Heritage Area, Ireland's basic designation for areas considered important for habitats and wildlife.

## JOYCE COUNTRY AND WESTERN LAKES GEO ENTERPRISE

Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geo Enterprise is working towards an application to UNESCO for geopark status for part of counties Mayo and Galway. Geoparks help to tell the fascinating stories of geological, social, cultural and economic history of specific areas. The proposed Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark area covers an area of over than 1000 square kilometres, with a total population of around 15,000. It will primarily include the territory around the villages of Ballintubber, Partry, Tourmakeady, Finny, Leenane,

Recess, Maam, Maam Cross, Kilmilkin, Clochbhreac, Cornamona, Oughterard, Cong, Clonbur and The Neale. Larger centres of population including Westport, Castlebar, Headford and Ballinrobe will act as 'gateways' to the Geopark.

## OUTDOOR EDUCATION GMIT

The Outdoor Education Degree in GMIT Mayo contains an exciting mix of academic work and practical training for instructor-level awards in adventure sports. Students gain an understanding of the developmental role of outdoor education and build experience in designing and running educational programmes. Through fieldtrips and lectures students explore and examine Irish landscape, heritage and ecology and realise the potential of adventure tourism, green exercise and nature therapy. Safety management, first aid and rescue are other core elements. One day a week is spent taking part in adventure sports on the mountains, lakes, rivers and sea. In year 1 the focus is on gaining personal skills in the sports and then on leadership level training in the following years.

## PHOTO COMPETITION

Photographs provide an excellent medium to celebrate what is special about Ireland's natural environment and to bring the mountains to the wider community.

To encourage participants to record and share photographs during the Mountain Environment Weekend weekend we're having a photographic competition with prizes in the following categories:

- People engaging with the mountains
- Flora and fauna
- Geology and landscape
- Connections in the natural world

Photographs taken on Saturday should be submitted on a memory stick on the Saturday evening or emailed to [helen@mountaineering.ie](mailto:helen@mountaineering.ie). **Maximum of 10 photographs per person.** We will have an extra laptop available so that people can view and select their photos.

Some of the photographs will be shown on Saturday night and following the weekend a selection of the photographs will be used to make a short video which celebrates the mountain environment of Joyce Country.

Participants should also consider entering the National Biodiversity week photo competition, where you could be in with a chance to win €500 (<http://biodiversityweek.ie>).



*Lough Nafoeey – a landscape created by fire and ice. Pillow lavas on the valley floor formed under an ocean that no longer exists and during the most recent Ice Age glaciers shaped truncated spurs, a U shaped valley and a ribbon lake.*

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

To give you a sense of the knowledge and passion feeding into this year's Mountain Environment weekend we've gathered brief biographies for some of those who are contributing:

### **RORY HODD**

Dr. Rory Hodd is an ecologist and botanist, dedicated to the conservation of Ireland's habitats and species. Over the past decade, Rory has carried out ecological survey work and research in a wide range of habitats throughout Ireland, but particularly in mountain areas, as a result he has an excellent understanding of upland habitats and conservation issues. Rory feels that it is essential to share his knowledge and passion for upland environments with others, including walkers and climbers who don't have an environmental background.

### **JACKIE HUNT**

Jackie Hunt began working as an ecologist in 1995, when she worked for the state conservation agency, National Parks and Wildlife Service. She was then an employee of BirdWatch Ireland for five years where she assessed development impacts on Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds. Jackie now works as an ecological consultant specialising in bird related projects. Having grown up in Scotland and now based in Mayo, she is also a keen hillwalker.

## **HELEN LAWLESS**

Helen Lawless is in the lucky position of being able to combine her passion for the mountains with her role as Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking, Access & Conservation Officer. Helen works across the island of Ireland, aiming to protect Ireland's mountains, coastline and crags, to secure access and to encourage responsible enjoyment of these places. Helen lives in the Wicklow Mountains; her spare time is divided between enjoying the mountains and volunteering in her local community.

## **IRENE O'BRIEN**

Irene O'Brien has worked as a Conservation Ranger with National Parks and Wildlife for the last twelve years, she is currently the ranger for north west Mayo having previously worked in Wicklow Mountains National Park as a ranger and an education guide. While interested in all aspects of wildlife, her special interest is birds of prey and she is currently the secretary of the Irish Raptor Study Group. Irene played a large part in organising the National Peregrine Survey in 2017 and in the first Merlin survey, which is on-going in 2018. Irene is also the current training officer for the Mayo Mountain Rescue Team and was previously a member of the Glen of Imaal Mountain Rescue Team in Co. Wicklow. When spare time allows, her pastimes are hillwalking and climbing, particularly in Connemara, Mayo and Wicklow.

## **KEVIN O'CALLAGHAN**

Kevin O'Callaghan has been involved in the outdoors for quite a while.... This involvement has ranged from mountaineering, orienteering through to kayaking, sailing and adventure racing. Initially qualifying as a geologist his work become more involved in looking at and investigating landscapes, inevitably he gravitated back into the outdoors and other adventures. Kevin currently works as a lecturer in Outdoor Education in GMIT's Mayo Campus in Castlebar, where he lectures in Earth Processes and Environment Management and Sustainability, in addition to leading groups on various adventures.

## **FERGAL O'DOWD**

Fergal is a lecturer at the GMIT Mayo Campus and teaches mainly on the Heritage Studies and Outdoor Education Programmes. A graduate of NUIM and NUIG Fergal's background is in Environmental Geography and the Irish Language, and he has a particular interest in natural resource management and using the outdoors as a framework for cultivating a connection to community and the natural world. He is an advocate of environmental education and is a keen surfer, cyclist, walker and kayaker spending as much time as possible outdoors.

## **ORLA PRENDERGAST**

Orla Prendergast teaches on the degree in Outdoor Education at GMIT Mayo Campus and delivers modules in the natural and cultural environment, and ecology. Orla also runs a

range of Mountaineering Ireland courses such as Mountain Skills and Mountain Leader and is a member of Mountaineering Ireland's Access and Conservation Committee. Orla's passion both at work and in her spare time is being out in the mountains, climbing and walking and exploring and sharing her love of wild places with others.

### **BENJAMIN THÉBAUDEAU**

Benjamin has an MSc in Geophysics and a PhD in Geology from Trinity College Dublin (2013). Worked as a consultant geologist and postdoctoral fellow in the Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) for 2.5 years, then as Senior Technical Officer in Geographic Information System (GIS) in the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) for 1.5 years. Experienced in research, budgeting, education course design and delivery, archaeology / heritage. Is secretary of the Irish Quaternary Association (IQUA), including managing the social media and new website, development of outreach and education material and the running of annual events including the organisation of field trips (with associated published guide books) and symposia. Also involved in the organisation of the upcoming International Quaternary Congress (INQUA) in Dublin 2019 which will be the biggest geoscience event ever hosted in Ireland.

### **TRISH WALSH**

Trish Walsh has been Director of Petersburg Outdoor Education and Training Centre since 1989 and has introduced thousands of young people to the benefits of the outdoors. Trish is a Mountain Leader and has recently completed a Masters in a Historical Landscape Study of Binn Shléibhe (Mount Gable) in Clonbur Co. Galway. Studying a hill is an unusual undertaking but perhaps explains the diverse range of research interests of its author, including geology, geography, ecology, archaeology, local history and the impact of people on the landscape. She is very involved with her local community and has played a key role in the promotion of Joyce Country and the Western Lakes GeoEnterprise Project. This project seeks to attain the UNESCO Global Geopark designation for the area with the belief that local communities can benefit from creating economic growth, employment and a greater social cohesion through geo-tourism development. This involves changing the mind-set that heritage conservation is a negative thing - instead of seeing it as an obstacle, it can be a tool for local development.