



Access & Conservation



Martin Keating, Chairperson of Croagh Patrick Stakeholders Group, with the Path Manager, Matt McConway, looking at the path on the cone at Croagh Patrick. The path is made by clearing loose stones from a two-metre-wide line, gathering stones from the mountain to create the path, and carefully positioning every stone so that it is solid and so that it works with its neighbouring stones to provide a stable footing. The path is made up of shallow and higher steps, designed to suit people of different abilities and to blend into the landscape. The path is strengthened by revetments on either side.

Progress at Croagh Patrick

Work underway to address path erosion



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Work to repair the erosion along the pilgrim path at **Croagh Patrick** recommenced in May with the easing of the Covid-19 restrictions. The team of four trainees working on the mountain, led by experienced upland path builder **Matt McConway**, is doing a super job. Some work has been done lower down but, in the longer days of summer, their main focus has been on the steep upper section of the mountain known as the cone.

The path work on the cone is a complex process, using a bespoke stone-pitching technique, with all the work being done by hand. The skill and effort required to complete every single metre is phenomenal. The path offers a stable footing and blends into the landscape, providing a solution that protects the mountain from continuing erosion, without the intrusion of an obviously constructed path.

On other sections of the route the focus is on stabilising eroding slopes, reducing path braiding and directing the flow of water off the path. All this work is being done with the aim of healing the erosion scar on Croagh Patrick, and protecting Ireland's holy mountain from the impact of high visitor numbers by making a sustainable path along the Pilgrim Route.

If you're climbing Croagh Patrick and

the team is on the mountain, pause to have a word with them, they would welcome your feedback. Don't expect the path to be finished – the work on Croagh Patrick is expected to continue for at least another eighteen months.

In addition to protecting Croagh Patrick's environment, landscape and heritage, it is intended that this project will become a hub for sharing skills and knowledge regarding the management

of upland path erosion. The team hosted the **National Trust's Mourne Rangers** for a week in August, the start of a series of 'workshop' experiences to share good practices about mountain path repairs.

➡ The **Croagh Patrick Sustainable Access and Habitat Restoration Project** is an initiative of the **Croagh Patrick Stakeholders Group**, funded by the **Department of Rural and Community Development** and **Mayo County Council** ■



Close-up image showing the structure of the path on the cone at Croagh Patrick



Some of the participants in the Women With Altitude Environmental Walk on Knocknacloghoge: Annija Lace, Helen O'Reilly, Ann McPartland, Carol O'Brady and Valeria Arenas



Farm Manager Michael Keegan speaking with the Women With Altitude group at Luggala Estate

‘Women With Altitude’ walk at Luggala

As part of Mountaineering Ireland’s **Women With Altitude week** in August, I led an enthusiastic group of women on an environmental walk at **Luggala Estate** in the Wicklow Mountains. Even though there was rain at times, it didn’t dampen the spirits of the eight participants, who were delighted to briefly meet with Luggala Farm Manager **Michael Keegan** and to hear about the conservation work being undertaken on the estate, before heading towards Knocknacloghoge’s rocky summit.

The group, which included club walkers, girl guide leaders and a couple of people who are relatively new to hiking, soaked up information about the history of Luggala Estate, appreciating the beauty of the place and spotting small details in the landscape – everything from frogs and flowers to ferns.

➡ The day concluded with a group commitment to the **3Cs** – to **Connect** with nature, **Care** for nature, and **Communicate** the importance of our natural environment ■

Outdoor Recreation Strategy being developed

Mountaineering Ireland playing a key role

Some readers will be amongst the 2,000+ people (and organisations) who responded to a public consultation process in June to feed into the development of a new **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy** for Ireland. The high level of interest in this consultation may reflect increased participation in outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, paddlesports and wild swimming, and a greater awareness of the benefits that these and other outdoor recreation activities provide.

The themes that have emerged from analysis of the consultation responses include:

- Leadership, coordination and funding;
- Planning and environment;
- Communications, education and promotion;
- Participation and inclusion;
- Land access.

The National Outdoor Recreation Strategy is being developed through a collaborative process, led by **Comhairle na Tuaithe**, the national advisory body on outdoor recreation, in conjunction with the **Department of Rural and Community Development**. It is intended that this strategy will provide a vision and an overarching framework for the growth and development of outdoor recreation in Ireland, creating a shared approach for the many strategies, programmes, agencies and elements in Ireland’s outdoor recreation sector.

The **Strategy Working Group** is chaired by **Daithi de Forge**, Coillte’s Head of Recreation, with myself from Mountaineering Ireland as vice-chair. In addition to strengthening relationships with other organisations that have an interest in outdoor recreation, our involvement in this strategy represents a significant opportunity for Mountaineering Ireland to seek

support for hillwalking and climbing, as well as improvements in access and protection of the mountain environment.

Work on the strategy is currently at an intense stage, with a series of sub-groups focused on developing and proposing actions under the headings listed above. This will be followed by negotiations with the various bodies that could have a role in the delivery of these actions, with the Department of Rural and Community Development leading the discussions with other departments.

The second phase of public consultation on the draft strategy should take place early in 2022, after which the finished strategy will go before Cabinet for approval as Government policy ■

New Sperrins Partnership

A new partnership has been formed by the four local councils that have responsibility for parts of the **Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (AONB), to preserve, enhance and manage the natural, built and cultural heritage of the Sperrins area.

The creation of the **Sperrins Partnership** is a follow-up to a conference held in 2017 to consider how the potential of the Sperrins area could be achieved. A Project Officer has been appointed, and a new website has been created – www.sperrinspartnershipproject.com.

Mountaineering Ireland has requested a meeting with the Project Officer, along with representatives from local walking groups, to learn a bit more about the plans of the Sperrins Partnership, and to communicate our key concerns and hopes in relation to the future of the Sperrins ■