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**Working for
and representing
hillwalkers and
climbers**



Mountaineering Ireland Annual Review 2020

The year 2020 will forever more be etched in our minds as a year which brought about huge change in the way that we did things, in our families, in our communities and across society. It will also be a year in which, I hope, that we have all reflected on what is important to us; things like our health, happiness, wellbeing, friends and family, and our deep respect and love for the mountains, hills, crags and walls. Of course, Covid-19 also brought huge concerns, worry and indeed great sadness and loss to many of us, and continues to do so today. I want to express my best wishes to our members who have been affected by this global pandemic and, to those who have experienced sadness and loss during the year, my sincere condolences.

Last year started as a normal, busy year for Mountaineering Ireland, with our membership growing and targeted to reach 15,000, funding secured, and programmes and plans being put into action. Then March 12th arrived and we were informed that our offices in Irish Sport HQ were closing. This was a time for extreme measures and, against the backdrop of news breaking around the world of the Covid-19 pandemic reaching new countries, we were all very concerned. I want to pay tribute at this early stage to the staff team for their commitment during a period of complete change to the way we worked and operated together.

From March onwards, we increased the communications to our members and the public, who follow us for information. As the weeks passed, we had to adapt our schedule of events. Meets and the Gathering were postponed and/or cancelled and we had to determine the most suitable way to deliver them safely in the new environment. The AGM was our first virtual event and was closely followed by an online Club and Members Support event. We also produced information videos, increased the capacity of the members e-zine and increased our online presence, with registrations for the 'Zooming Round the Mountains' series reaching over 7,300. Credit must be given to the staff team for their inputs and skills in these areas, as they delivered an excellent communications and online service.

During those early days of the global pandemic, I want to state my genuine thanks for the support afforded to me by the Board, who provided the support needed to allow us deliver operationally and to be successful. Our sub-committees were amazing in how they supported the staff and together adapted their plans and schedules to allow us to deliver online events that were received with praise by our members.

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FARC) deserves special credit for the

work achieved in 2020. During these times, when our financial outcomes were uncertain, the support offered by the FARC and its Chairperson, Imelda Buckley, provided the Board and me with the data and direction that allowed us deliver revised budgets to meet the everchanging financial landscape.

I would also like to acknowledge my sincere thanks to Paul Barron (Chair of the Board), who was always available on the phone during 2020 and who was a huge source of strength to me, as we worked through what I can only describe as the most challenging period of my professional career.

One extremely positive event to take place in 2020 was the launch of *Irish Peaks*. I use the word 'launch', but in practice that never happened, and *Irish Peaks* never got the red-carpet opening night a book of its stature deserved. However, as I now reflect on 2020, read the messages of thanks sent by our members upon receiving *Irish Peaks*, and on the number of copies sold to date, fast approaching 5,000, I feel that *Irish Peaks* is somehow quite like Mountaineering Ireland, extremely well informed, able to adapt to sudden changes in its environment and able to have a huge impact, far greater than its actual size. I'm extremely proud to have been in the company, on occasion, of the Project Team who completed this



“ Our membership numbers came in at 13,933 at the end of the 2019/2020 season, which was amazing given the year that was in it.”

Mountaineering Ireland gratefully acknowledges the funding that it receives from Sport Ireland, its Women in Sport programme and the Dormant Accounts Funding, and from Sport Northern Ireland, and from Healthy Ireland for the Get Ireland Walking programme.

beautiful piece of work and to have seen at first hand their ambition and dedication to creating a special book. The Project Team were supported by many hands and, in the true spirit of 2020, when we work together, great things can be achieved.

Irish Peaks will be around for decades to come and will be enjoyed by new generations well into the future, which is in my view a true reflection of how special this book is. The Project Team comprised Margaret and Alan Tees, Helen Lawless and Michael O'Brien (Zest Creative Design). *Irish Peaks* arrived to our doors without fanfare in 2020. I now feel that it didn't need the red-carpet treatment to be a success, as it already was!

Our membership numbers came in at 13,933 at the end of the 2019/2020 season, which was amazing, as at times we were extremely concerned. This was no small achievement, and credit must go to the steadfast support of club volunteers, who continued to work with the staff team and bring in an overall membership figure quite close to the previous year's number.

Our relationships with our key partners continued to strengthen in 2020, most notably with Sport Ireland. At their request, we provided our support with the content of a national communication campaign on being safe and responsible in the outdoors.

The year 2020 saw the launch of the Arderins List of Irish Mountains by Mountaineering Ireland and MountainViews, the presentation of the 2020 Mountaineering Ireland Lynam Medal (via a video link) to Dr Clare O'Leary, the awarding of Honorary Membership to Terry O'Connor for many years of dedicated service to the climbing community, the completion of our Happy Hiking brochure and the successful sourcing of Resilience Funding from Sport Ireland to support our work in 2021, in light of the likely impact of Covid-19.

The year 2020 also saw our activity in Women In Sport continue to grow under the direction of our dedicated Women In Sport Co-ordinator, Ania Bakiewicz. Get Ireland Walking continued to build and develop its reach during the year, delivered by Linda Sankey, Communications and Administrations Officer, and Jason King, Programme Manager. Last year also saw a change in our staff when, at the end of December, Ania Bakiewicz moved on. I would like to thank Ania for her contribution to the Women In Sport programme and wish her all the best in the future.

During 2020, we also saw some changes in the Board, with Helen Donoghue and Dawson Stelfox respectively stepping down in June and December. Both Helen and Dawson continue to support the Access & Conservation and the Training Committees respectively. Three new Board members joined during 2020: Noel Caffrey in May, David Pollard (Chair of the A&C Committee) in June and Kevin O'Callaghan (Chair of the MTBI Committee) in December. I would like to thank both Helen and Dawson for their support and contribution to Mountaineering Ireland over the years and I welcome Noel, David and Kevin to their roles as Board members and sub-committee Chairs.

I want to note a special thanks to Siobhan Quinn, the first point of contact for many, for her support to our clubs and members, and for offering her expertise in supporting my activities. I also want to give my thanks to Ruth Whelan for her work in supporting hillwalkers, to Damien O'Sullivan in climbing, to Kevin Kilroy in youth and clubs across Northern Ireland, to Jane Carney in training, to Helen Lawless in access and conservation, and to Laura Griffin for delivering training administration support, vetting and communications. I also want to acknowledge the contribution provided to the FAR Committee by IFT Financial Management in providing our accountancy requirements. Thanks also to our National Children's Officer, Gerry Gorman, who works diligently behind the scenes and must be acknowledged. The support offered by both Sport Ireland and Sport NI is also very much appreciated. Thank you all very much.

I'm heartened to know that we have some amazing people working within this wonderful organisation, who will ensure that we can move on from 2020. Finally, I would like to state my sincere gratitude to all our resolute volunteers who support the work of our sub-committees and working groups, to our dedicated staff team and to the members of the Board, who all contribute to and deliver an effort far greater than the sum of its many moving parts. It is a pleasure of mine to serve and lead you, and thank you all very much for your continued support.

Murrough McDonagh
Chief Executive Officer,
Mountaineering Ireland



“ ‘Irish Peaks’ will be around for decades to come and will be enjoyed by new generations well into the future.”



Supporting and Developing Hillwalking

Return to hillwalking and climbing

2020 was a year like no other, posing lots of challenges and restrictions for us all, to the extent that even opportunities to go hillwalking were limited. Our organised lectures with Michael Fewer in March 2020 came to an abrupt halt after one showing in Galway, with the announcement of the first lockdown.

Since then, Mountaineering Ireland has continued to support hillwalkers throughout the various lockdowns, providing guidelines, support and advice. This involved engaging with a high volume of members, partners and stakeholder to develop and update guidelines throughout the pandemic.

Videos and posts for social media were developed to support messaging during the period. As our usual hillwalking events and gatherings continued to be cancelled, we had to adapt quickly to provide supports and find different opportunities to engage with our members.

Online communications

The enforced need to use online platforms to communicate posed its own challenges, but also brought a great opportunity to engage with more members. Our Members' Forum, held in June, offered members the opportunity to discuss the current situation in relation to the Covid-19 crisis, our 'Return to Sport Advice' for hillwalkers and climbers, support for clubs returning to activities, and any other, more

general issues that had arisen during the previous twelve months. Over ninety members participated, including representatives from over fifty clubs.

Additionally, four regional Club Support Meetings were held during the month of September, with representatives from over fifty clubs attending, providing members with a further opportunity to discuss concerns around the return to hillwalking. Other topics discussed included club resources and supports, how to retain and attract members, and training. Actions from the meetings included the circulation of club contact details to those in attendance, to facilitate clubs networking; clarification on our advice on Covid-19 concerns; and publication of advice for clubs on how to run AGMs online.

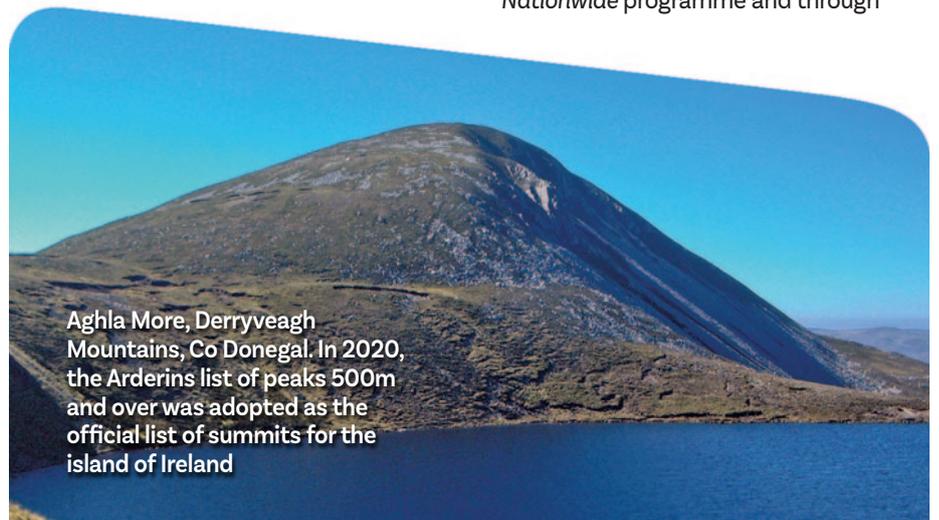
The first series of "Zooming Round the Mountains" was launched in autumn 2020. This saw a number of different talks and workshops delivered online, including

the following, specifically aimed at a hillwalking audience:

- 'I'm a hillwalking leader and trainer: ask me anything'
- Twelve Bens Adventure
- Club Committees Workshop
- An Evening with SEMRA
- Introducing Young People to the Mountains.

We would like to give special thanks to all of the speakers and volunteers who were involved in "Zooming Round the Mountains," without whom it would not have been possible to complete.

Although most engagement with members had to happen online in 2020, there were windows of opportunity to get out on the hills, particularly during the summer months. This also gave members the opportunity to get out and celebrate National Walking Day in their local areas in September, as part of European Week of Sport. The build-up to the day saw our Hillwalking Development Officer, Ruth Whelan, promote the celebration on RTÉ's Nationwide programme and through



Aghla More, Derryveagh Mountains, Co Donegal. In 2020, the Arderins list of peaks 500m and over was adopted as the official list of summits for the island of Ireland

promotional videos from clubs and members. We hope to build on this celebration on an annual basis and endeavour to have more and more of our members involved each year.

Arderins List

This year saw the endorsement by Mountaineering Ireland of the list of the Arderins (developed by MountainViews) as an official list of mountains in Ireland both north and south. The advantage of having an official list available on both the Mountaineering Ireland and MountainViews' websites is that it gives a wider audience direct access to a full list of Arderins nationally and also at a local level per county. Given the restrictions of the past year on travelling, getting to know your local mountains has become a much more attractive option. Maybe you will even discover a few you were not even aware of!

Lynam Lecture

Considering the restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided not to organise a formal presentation of the 2020 Mountaineering Ireland Lynam Lecture and the Lynam Medal. However, it was agreed that the medal be awarded to Dr Clare O'Leary, renowned mountaineer and adventurer, on merit alone. The first Irish woman to summit on Everest (8,848m) in 2004, and the first to climb an 8,000m peak, Clare has continued to push the boundaries ever since then of what has been achieved by Irish mountaineers. Clare was duly presented with the medal in October 2020 by Mike Maunsell, Chair of Mountaineering Ireland's Lynam Lecture Working Group, in her home town of Clonmel.

Happy Hiking Campaign

Another success was the launch of the Happy Hiking Campaign, an initiative to promote safe walking in the hills and countryside. This project was initiated with the intention of refreshing and updating our Walk Safely leaflet, which was out of print. Since the production of that leaflet, however, how we circulate information has evolved and changed, particularly since the



Mike Maunsell, Chair of the Lynam Lecture Working Group, presents the 2020 Lynam Medal to leading Irish mountaineer and adventurer Dr Clare O'Leary

onset of Covid-19. Each time the restrictions were eased, there was an influx of people to the hills, so providing information on how to stay safe when hillwalking became even more important.

Happy Hiking is aimed at all users of trails and the uplands, particularly first-time users, novices and tourists. The material includes advice on planning your walk, what to bring with you, getting a weather forecast, who to call in an emergency, and so on. It is available at www.mountaineering.ie/hillwalking. The information is available digitally for sharing on other platforms and is also available in hard copy.

Club toolkit

A toolkit was developed to provide clubs with a central point for resources, available exclusively to Mountaineering Ireland clubs. Administrators can access these resources through the club database to share with their members. The toolkit has useful information on running your club, how to attract members, running club evenings and introductory walks, and how to encourage members to become walk leaders. There are also key resources such as the club handbook, GDPR for clubs, Happy Hiking and lots more.

Mapping

Two meetings were held with Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) in relation to working with them to improve their 1:25 Adventure map series with input from Mountaineering Ireland clubs. Originally it was proposed to hold workshops around the country, with OSi and Mountaineering Ireland, to get feedback from our members on how best to improve the quality of OSi maps in relation to hiking and walking. However, this was put on hold due to Covid-19. We now hope to run the workshops in 2021.

Safeguarding

As per the Children's First Act 2015, anyone who has access to minors (persons under 18 years of age) in a services, coaching or training capacity must undertake a Safeguarding Level 1 Course. Mountaineering Ireland endeavours to encourage clubs to support youths to enjoy our sport. Two Safeguarding Level 1 workshops were run as a service to our members in 2020. We make this workshop available where there is a demand. All clubs with youths participating in their activities are required to conduct a risk assessment and display their Safeguarding Statement.

Mountaineering Ireland's safeguarding statement and policy can be found at www.mountaineering.ie/membersandclubs/GardaVettinginClubs.

Hillwalking Committee

A lot of the above activity is guided by Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking Committee, whose members in 2020 were: Grainne McLaughlin (Chairperson), Ruth Whelan (Secretary), Margaret Collins, Chris Evans, Veronica Kelly, Russell Mills, Declan Murphy, Louise Nolan, Marian Wallis, Roy Madden.

FIND OUT MORE

If you would like to know more about any of the activities mentioned here, please contact Ruth Whelan, Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking Development Officer, on ruth@mountaineering.ie.



Supporting and Developing Climbing

What began as a news report of an outbreak of a new virus in China at the end of 2019 became the dominant factor in all of our lives throughout 2020.

Throughout 2020, Covid-19 had a significant impact on almost all aspects of our lives, and climbing was no different.

The impact of Covid-19 on climbing was evident in all areas of our sport - from the introductory climbing sessions through to expeditions and the Olympic Games.

Climbing

Despite the impact of Covid-19 and the associated restrictions, there were approximately seven months in 2020 when climbing was able to take place relatively unfettered. The first three months of the year were essentially business as normal before the full effects of the pandemic were felt, and the relaxation of the restrictions in the summer months gave us the chance to climb outside again in small groups.

Meets

Despite the best efforts of the organising clubs, none of the scheduled meets was

able to take place in 2020. There is no doubt that these great climbing and social occasions were missed by the climbing community, but there was widespread understanding for the decisions that had to be taken by the organisers.

Youth Climbing

The Climbing Development Squad met for three out of the four scheduled training sessions in the first half of the year. The squad continues to provide an important step in the progression for many young climbers, providing them with input and feedback from experienced coaches on how to improve their climbing performance.



Youth Climbing Series 2020			
Results	First Place	Second Place	Third Place
Female E (age 8-9)	Lucy McClune	Sieve Hoare	Duaa Rejeb
Male E (age 8-9)	Calum O'Connor	Caleb Shine	Eoin Galvin
Female D (age 10-11)	Ilmur Jonsdottir	Olivia Scott	Lilou Conroy
Male D (age 10-11)	Daniel Shine	Maty Petros	Joe Feeney
Female C (age 12-13)	Eve Buckley	Clara-Caterina Mayer	Freya O'Connor
Male C (age 12-13)	Patrick Galvin	Oliver Szelag	Sam Monedero
Female B (age 14-15)	Caelin Lenehan	Rhyna Conroy	Bonita Thurston
Male B (age 14-15)	Reuben Aiken	Daniel Creedon	Sean Brown
Female A (age 16-17)	Faith Blaney	Amy Orr	Amber Burns
Male A (age 16-17)	Dillon McLaughlin	George Lassov	Matthew Bourke

During the summer months, four youth climbing camps took place – in Dalkey, the Burren, the Mournes and on Cruit Island in Donegal. The camps attracted young climbers keen to build on the skills that they had gained through indoor climbing and keen to be able to climb outside on rock independently.

Competitions

Youth Climbing Series

The first three rounds of the Youth Climbing Series took place in January, February and March. Round Four and the Grand Final fell victim to Covid-19. With three rounds completed, enough climbing had been done to award the medals and prizes, which were sponsored by Great Outdoors and Mammut. The results for the 2020 Youth Climbing Series are listed on page xx.

Irish Bouldering League

The stalwart of the competition calendar, the Irish Bouldering League continued to attract climbers of a wide range of ages and abilities to five rounds of competitions. The overall winners of each of the competition categories received prizes thanks to the sponsorship of Rab. The winners are listed below.

Irish Lead Climbing Championship, Irish Bouldering Championship

Unfortunately, neither the Irish Lead Climbing Championship nor the Irish Bouldering Championship could be held in 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Developing a new competition schedule

Working together, Mountaineering Ireland, the BMC and Climb Scotland have



developed a plan to reorganise the entire competition climbing schedule for the UK and Ireland. 2021 should see the introduction of the new schedule. That schedule will see the national lead and bouldering championships taking place in the first half of the year, ahead of the international competitions. The Youth Climbing Series will then take place in the second half of the year.

Youth Climbing Team

Rob Hunter took over the role of coach for the Youth Climbing Team. Training sessions for the members of the Youth Climbing Team were hampered due to Covid-19 restrictions, but nonetheless took place in person, when possible, and as online training sessions, when necessary.

The Youth Climbing Team was unable to attend international climbing competitions due to Covid-19-related travel restrictions.

The former coach of the Youth Climbing Team, Terry O'Connor, was awarded an Honorary Membership by Mountaineering Ireland at the AGM. This

was in recognition of Terry's invaluable input into the development of youth climbing.

Climbing Committee

The Climbing Committee continued to meet throughout 2020, initially at in-person meetings, but moving to online meetings in March. The committee played a key role in the preparation of the Covid-19 advice for climbers as we returned to activity after the first lockdown.

The committee also worked to finalise the Climbing Development Guidelines, which aim to assist climbers in the development of new climbing areas.

The Mountaineering Ireland Climbing Committee members are: Geoff Thomas (Chairperson), John Healy, John Harrison, Peter Wood, Ricky Bell, Kelley O'Reilly-Smith, Chloe Condron, Damien O'Sullivan (Secretary).

Irish Bouldering League 2020			
Results	First Place	Second Place	Third Place
Senior Male (age over 18)	Michael O'Neill	Ciaran Scanlon	Mark Scanlon
Senior Female (age over 18)	Nina Zhoie	Sarah Hoare	Anna Weidmann
Masters Male (age over 45)	Ricky Young	Tom O'Neill	Viv Van Der Holst
Masters Female (age over 45)	Caroline Murray	Lynn Crampton	Mari Gleeson
Male Youth A (age 16-17)	Sean O'Connor	Jude McInerney	Cillian Jennings
Female Youth A (age 16-17)	Jessica McGarry	Ella Brown	
Male Youth B (age 14-15)	Eoin McLoughlin	George Lassov	Joshua Hoare
Female Youth B (age 14-15)	Rhyna Conroy	Sarah O'Mahony	Faith Blaney

FIND OUT MORE

If you would like to know more about Mountaineering Ireland's work in climbing, please contact Damien O'Sullivan, Mountaineering Ireland's Climbing Officer, on damien@mountaineering.ie.



Training and Skills



Mountaineering Ireland's strategic objective is to promote mountain training and skills development. It aims:

- to realise the potential of the new Mountain Training Board Ireland (MTBI)
- to promote a range of courses, awards and training pathways and to support informal training to meet the needs of hillwalkers and climbers
- to support our training providers in ensuring training awards and courses offered are of the highest standard
- to be a reliable source of advice and information in relation to safety and good practice in mountaineering.

Mountain Training Board Ireland

In 2020, Mountain Training Board Ireland's usual provision of quality-assured, internationally-recognised mountain training awards and schemes, delivered by qualified and experienced trainers who had undergone regular moderation and met CPD requirements, was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Training Office moved to an online provision of selected offerings for members and the wider participant audience. The first quarter events and the international Winter Meet went ahead, with the Summer Alpine Meet

being postponed, along with all other face-to-face events.

Online versions of the skills workshops, Club Training Officer workshops and provider meetings took place, with a suite of recordings being made, which can be accessed on the Mountaineering Ireland website and YouTube channel.

MTBI is in the unique position of providing and developing both formal and informal training and it consults with stakeholders to review current provision and determine the way forward.

We promote self-reliance and inspire participation and adventure through skills development, thus facilitating enjoyment and safety.

Despite the many restrictions of 2020, it was a year of innovation, producing blended learning opportunities and fresh ideas on training delivery and meeting management. It resulted in fewer emissions, less fuel and resource

consumption, and better participation and attendance at meetings. We hope to continue this efficient way of operating into the future.

Training for clubs

Club officer meetings, presentations, webinars and workshops were appreciated by over 2,000 participants and supported in-club training, brought like-minded people together to share ideas, inspired training plans and promoted clubs and encouraged new members and participants. Thank you to the numerous volunteers involved.

The doubled training grant fund prompted more applications and was promoted at the regional meetings, leading to more training provision and an improved training ethos within clubs. The successful role models who emerged served to inspire others to follow.

Skills series and training resources

Online resources increased to now include the Winter Skills Series, Map Skill Series, Youth Skills Series and Poor visibility webinar. Participant engagement with the existing and new skills videos was high, with over 55,000 views for one of the skills videos alone.



There are a number of presentations, the members' library and training literature to help participants up-skill and refresh. These can be found on mountaineering.ie, in the training downloads section, and are beneficial to clubs, individuals, candidates and providers.

Training Providers

An increase in training providers covering the island of Ireland has increased provision and diversity of courses. Providers have been updated and inducted in the new and revised climbing awards. Candidate numbers continued to grow during the year, despite the restrictions of the pandemic.

Whilst training and assessments were prevented for a number of months, providers continued to work extremely hard to meet the demand for courses. The new cohort of participants are seeking skills training and leadership training to support their newfound interest in the outdoors.

Annual provider workshops support high training standards and are delivered by the Training Officer. The benefits of gathering providers together are many and allow for updates; sharing of learnings; development of skills and techniques; discussion of syllabi, teaching and instruction methods; and induction for revised awards.

Continued professional development (CPD) events are essential to not only meet association and training board requirements, but also to feed the desire for knowledge and to appeal to the enquiring mind.

Links with Other Organisations

Mountain Training UK and Ireland

The DLOG system, which runs in parallel with the Mountain Training UK and Ireland Candidate Management System,

continued to evolve and increase functionality for our organisation. Communication between the two systems allows for transparency within the home nation's training boards and transferability for candidates of UK and Ireland shared awards.

Mountaineering Ireland and Mountain Training Board Ireland continued as full voting members of Mountain Training UK and Ireland.

The Mountain Training Walking Scheme review is ongoing and focusing on leadership and camping elements.

The collaborative work between all the training boards across the UK and Ireland has maintained the consistent momentum essential to developing the existing awards and to add new schemes and awards to the suite of shared awards already on offer.

Sport Ireland Coaching

Mountaineering Ireland has four awards on the Sport Ireland Coaching Adventure Sports Framework and one award on the Sport Ireland Coaching Framework. Work continued throughout 2020.

Registrations	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Award						
Mountain Leader Award	94	98	76	124	87	85
Hill & Moorland Leader	2	2	6	20	26	10
Lowland Leader Award	45	88	77	71	75	74
Expedition Module	-	-	48	71	75	74
Rock Climbing Instructor (Single Pitch Award)	69	122	142	116	95	85
Rock Climbing Development Instructor	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0
Multi Pitch Award	7	3	2	10	2	5
Climbing Wall Instructor	28	34	53	77	97	41
Abseil Module	-	-	-	-	-	41
Climbing Wall Development Instructor	6	7	2	36	17	4
Level 1 Climbing Coach	9	18	2	23	16	0
Indoor Climbing Assistant	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	19
Mountain Skills Registration	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	574*	862*
Rock Skills Registration	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	56*	38*
Mountain Skills Participation	1,236	1,187	1,089	1,120	712	871
Rock Skills Participation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	43	16
Total Registrations + MS Participants	1,496	1,559	1,497	1,668	1,246	1,325
Total registrations only	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,121	1,338
FUNDamentals	112	73	90	192	-	-

*Not included in the total



FIND OUT MORE

For more information on any aspect of training, please contact Jane Carney, Mountaineering Ireland's Training Officer, on jane@mountaineering.ie.



Improving Access and Protecting the Mountain Environment

The mountain, crag and coastal environment, and access to these places, are fundamental to hillwalking and climbing, and to the quality of the experiences we enjoy. Mountaineering Ireland's Access and Conservation work concentrates on two strategic objectives:

- To strive for improved and assured access for responsible hillwalkers and climbers.
- To be a voice for the protection of mountain landscapes.

Covid-19 brought both these objectives into focus. While on one level it was fantastic to see more people discovering the beauty of Ireland's outdoors, pressure of numbers and poor behaviour by a minority caused visitor management issues at popular locations - in relation to parking, and littering, as well as impacts on local residents and the natural environment.

Throughout 2020, Mountaineering Ireland was actively engaged with local members, individual landowners and other organisations, in developing and communicating good practice advice to support responsible enjoyment of the outdoors.

Improving Access

Most of the land in Ireland's uplands and coastal areas is privately owned, either individually, or jointly as commonage. In most places public enjoyment of this land is possible, mainly due to the goodwill and tolerance of private landowners. In contrast with developed and managed trails, most access for hillwalking and climbing is not underpinned by any formal agreement with the landowners. The upsurge in outdoor recreation activities during Covid-19 has exerted greater pressure on this largely unmanaged situation. In addition to working to protect access at local level, Mountaineering Ireland is engaged with this issue at national level.

Comhairle na Tuaithe

Comhairle na Tuaithe was established by the Department of Rural and Community Development to advise the Minister on the sustainable development of outdoor recreation. It includes representatives from farming organisations, recreational

users and state bodies with a responsibility or interest in the countryside.

Mountaineering Ireland has been a member of Comhairle na Tuaithe since its inception in 2004.

In 2020, Comhairle na Tuaithe commenced work on the development of a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, which will provide an overarching framework to support the growth and development of Ireland's outdoor recreation sector. Mountaineering Ireland co-chairs the working group for this key project.

Towards the end of the year it was agreed that Comhairle na Tuaithe would establish a new Sustainable Upland Recreation sub-group, to review Comhairle's Mountain Access Programme and facilitate its expansion to other areas. The Mountain Access Project was introduced to provide clarity regarding recreational access, based on the voluntary agreement of landowners in a defined mountain area.

Mountaineering Ireland maintained pressure in 2020 for an insurance or indemnity arrangement promised for the two pilot Mountain Access Areas - the MacGillycuddy Reeks and Binn Shléibhe near Clonbur, Co Galway - and it seems progress is being made.

Review of access in Northern Ireland

Mountaineering Ireland continued to input to the review of Northern Ireland's access legislation, led by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Along with other members of the National Outdoor Recreation Forum, Mountaineering Ireland is proposing the introduction of an Outdoor Recreation Bill for Northern Ireland, to provide a comprehensive legislative framework to support the continued development of outdoor recreation. Submissions have been made setting out how the proposed bill would address the concerns of landowners and improve the quality of people's recreation experiences.

Active at national and local level

Recreational access in Ireland is an evolving situation. Mountaineering Ireland is an active player in discussions, north and south. Mountaineering Ireland's input to national-level discussions on access is strengthened by knowledge of local issues

and by solutions being found at local level. Local and national action must continue to support each other as we actively consider options for managing recreational activity and securing access for the decades ahead.

Mountain Environment

Ireland's mountains inspire, shape and enrich the recreation experiences enjoyed by hillwalkers and climbers. The character of the mountain environment is being altered all the time by changes in land use, including changes associated with recreation activity. Mountaineering Ireland's vision for the future of Ireland's mountains, agreed by members in 2017, is that Ireland's mountain landscapes will be valued and protected as environmental, cultural and recreational assets.

Helping the Hills

With increasing footfall on Ireland's mountains, trampling and path erosion are ever more evident. This is a concern for Mountaineering Ireland members, both in terms of damage to the mountain environment and in how erosion detracts from the quality of our recreation experiences. As hillwalkers and climbers, we contribute to this problem and we also need to be part of the solution.

Mountaineering Ireland started the Helping the Hills initiative in 2012 to raise awareness of upland path erosion and to highlight the need for skills and investment in this area (see www.helpingthehills.ie). Since then, Mountaineering Ireland has participated in a number of initiatives to address upland path erosion. Considerable progress was made in 2020, with funding being allocated by the Department of Rural and Community Development, to address erosion at both Croagh Patrick and Errigal. Path work also continued in the Mourne and at Cuilcagh, where significant visitor management issues were experienced in spring and summer.

In autumn 2020, Mountaineering Ireland assisted the Croagh Patrick Stakeholders



Group in the recruitment of an experienced upland path manager and a team of four trainees to implement a plan for sustainable access and habitat restoration on Croagh Patrick. It is intended that the Croagh Patrick project will become a hub for the sharing of experiences and skills in upland path construction, thereby benefitting other upland areas.

Upland management

In spring 2020, Mountaineering Ireland engaged with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) following fires in the Wicklow Mountains, the Blackstairs and the Comeraghs. Mountaineering Ireland also liaised with the NPWS, the Mourne Heritage Trust and local members regarding damage to upland habitats caused by off-road vehicle activity in the Mourne, Wicklow Mountains, Galtees and the Blackstairs.

Mountaineering Ireland responded to a draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland, and also contributed to a Green Recovery Plan published by the RSPB, both seeking recognition of the host of ecosystem services provided by healthy upland environments, including the mitigation of climate change and supporting human well-being.

In July, following consultation with local clubs, Mountaineering Ireland made a submission in response to a planning application for developments at Connemara National Park, emphasising the need for a management plan for the park. In October, Mountaineering Ireland responded to an application for a windfarm at Gruggandoo in the western Mourne. Mountaineering Ireland's involvement helped to change the debate around this application, highlighting the shortcomings in the developer's landscape and visual impact assessment and questioning the appropriateness of an industrial development in a protected landscape.

The submissions mentioned above can be found on Mountaineering Ireland's website: see www.bit.ly/Msubmissions.

Collective Effort

All this activity is guided by Mountaineering Ireland's Access and Conservation Committee. In June 2020 we had a change of Committee Chairperson, with David Pollard taking over from Helen Donoghue, who is remaining as a committee member. The other committee members in 2020 were: Jack Bergin (resigned November); Noel Caffrey; Fíona Gallagher; Ursula MacPherson; Vincent McAlinden; Aine McGirl; Orla Prendergast and Helen Lawless (Secretary).

Mountaineering Ireland is grateful to the members of the Access and Conservation Committee, and the many other members who contribute to our Access and Conservation work, as Club Environmental Officers, as Mountaineering Ireland representatives on other organisations and, importantly, through personal action to protect access and the mountain environment. This collective effort is vital if Mountaineering Ireland is to deliver on its strategic objectives.



FIND OUT MORE

If you would like to know more about any of the activities mentioned here, please contact Mountaineering Ireland's Access and Conservation Officer, Helen Lawless, on helen@mountaineering.ie.

Club Development Programme Northern Ireland, Get Climbing Initiative and Women In Sport

The Club Development Programme in Northern Ireland has continued to grow since it was launched in May 2017. It supports youth climbing clubs, adult climbing clubs and hillwalking clubs in the North, as part of a focused development strategy delivered by Mountaineering Ireland and supported by Sport NI. The fourth and final year of this programme came to its natural end on March 31st, 2021. Its aim was to support and develop all Mountaineering Ireland clubs in Northern Ireland. In 2020, the programme was delivered by Kevin Kilroy, our Youth Development Officer, who was based at Tollymore National Outdoor Centre in County Down.

The year 2020 saw much progress made within the programme, with support provided to twelve hillwalking clubs and six youth/climbing clubs, with three new clubs aiming to join the programme. However, Covid-19 caused serious disruptions, particularly in working with new club volunteers, and it is intended to have further engagement with all of these club as things open up again in 2021. The support being offered to date has varied on a club-by-club basis, covering everything from workshops on injury prevention, to route-setting and climbing wall maintenance courses, to traditional rock climbing and hillwalking skills courses.

Mountaineering Ireland offers its sincere thanks Sport NI and to everyone who played an active role during 2020 in

helping to develop the club support programme for Northern Ireland.

Get Climbing

The Get Climbing programme is focused on engaging with hard-to-reach youth population groups through climbing and hillwalking activities, as per the funding conditions of Sport Ireland under the Dormant Account Funding (DAF) scheme.

The year 2020 saw eight-week blocks of programmes being offered, where those participating learned the basics of climbing so that they could operate independently on climbing walls. Participants worked through the National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS) syllabus, with the aim of achieving NICAS Level 1. This is an entry-level award aimed at novices that recognises their ability to climb safely under supervision.

A total of 243 climbing opportunities were delivered to participants during the year. When the climbing walls were closed and travel restrictions put in place, a series of fourteen free online classes and six Female Master Classes were offered as support to Get Climbing participants. Mountaineering Ireland greatly appreciates the support offered from Sport Ireland to Get Climbing.

Women In Sport

The year 2020 saw advancements in the reach and impact of the Women In Sport (WIS) initiative. The initiative covers four key pillars, as per the Sport Ireland objectives: Coaching and Officiating, Active Participation, Leadership and Governance, and Visibility.

Last year, Ania Bakiewicz was hired as the WIS Co-ordinator. Some of the developments in the initiative included Mountaineering Ireland's support for the 20x20 National Campaign, research into a strategy for female participation, updating of WIS content on our website, increased online presence on Facebook and Instagram, and support for the Women With Altitude working group. A new event, the 'Women Rock Festival,' focused on women rock climbing, was scheduled for June in the Burren, with



fifty-six participants due to attend. It had to be cancelled due to Covid-19.

Notable successes during 2020 were the Women Hillwalking, Women Rock Climbing and Women Trail Running events held during the European Week of Sport, September 23-30th, 2020, which saw 140 women participate in these activities. Twenty-four skills sessions were delivered by fifteen female skills providers across twelve counties in nineteen different locations.

The online Female Master Classes were very well received by those attending. Aimed at promoting and increasing the visibility of women in our sport, influential and accomplished Irish women, who have shaped the modern Irish mountaineering scene, were interviewed online. A series of online webinars and classes was also delivered, resulting in another busy year for the Women In Sport programme. Mountaineering Ireland greatly appreciated the support received from Sport Ireland under the DAF scheme in delivering the WIS initiative.



FIND OUT MORE

For more information contact
Mountaineering Ireland on
info@mountaineering.ie



Get Ireland Walking Initiative



In February 2020, we hosted our National Stakeholder Forum with our partners at Technological University Dublin (TUD). Excited about the year ahead, we aimed to collate all the ideas and suggestions from our partners on the day and use this knowledge to develop a new Strategy and Action Plan for the initiative to commence in January 2021.

A few short weeks after the Stakeholder Forum, Covid-19 infections started to present in Ireland. Significant public health interventions were implemented by the government to ensure that the health and wellbeing of the population was protected. A framework was introduced that would provide a roadmap to living with the disease and managing its transmission. Movements were restricted across the country and workers moved from working in their place of work to working from home. Exercise was restricted, initially to within 2km of a person's home but over time these restrictions varied from 5 to 10, or 20km countywide, based on what level of the framework society was at, relative to case numbers and hospitalisations.

Physical activity, particularly walking, within these restrictions was embraced by a significant percentage of the population. A survey carried out on behalf of Sport Ireland showed that over 3.1 million people were regularly engaging in walking during the lockdown from April onwards. New habits were formed. A fondness for the outdoors and recreational amenities was embraced and shared by walkers and those new to recreational walking alike, a welcome and noticeably positive change in the physical activity habits of the population.

An important question we asked ourselves early on was: "How can we support this behaviour change

throughout the year and beyond?" Get Ireland Walking (GIW) adapted to the needs of our audience. We utilised technology and media platforms, designed campaigns and supported our partners during those challenging times. Through Zoom, we planned and strategised. With current and new partners, we identified mechanisms to engage walkers and bring them together virtually, through amenities and developing campaigns and assets to support more walking, more often.

GIW brought together key partner organisations to develop the first National Walking Day for Ireland. We did it virtually, encouraging walking within local areas and towns. Over a ten-week period, GIW coordinated the implementation of a shared operational plan that would utilise paid social media as a mechanism to reach a large audience. Sporting icons and partner organisations, national celebrities, including an RTÉ Nationwide TV show (220,000 viewers) promoted the campaign throughout Ireland. The total social media reach of the campaign was: Impressions 4,512,705, Reach 1,268,076, Click thru' 48,640. On National Walking Day itself we trended with two hashtags: #NWD2020 and #NationalWalkingDay.

Research

The researcher is on track with the original research plan set out at the beginning of the PhD. Input and some analysis of GIW's Active Community Walking Programme data was conducted between July and September 2019, but has since ceased. The use of systems maps as a method of gathering stakeholders together and identifying interventions was something that was not included in the original research plan. However, systems mapping workshops

and semi-structured interviews were hosted online in June, with stakeholders in Cork, to gain an understanding of walking and its various systems from a holistic perspective at a county level.

Major achievement

The development of a digital app for Android and IOS devices that support the promotion of walking was a major achievement in 2020.

Other successes

1,958 registered walking groups and clubs including: 633 community walking groups; 400 GAA clubs; 850 schools; 75 Men's Sheds.

GIW Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023

Draft circulated to the Steering Group.

Communications Strategy Outline 2021-2023

Draft circulated to the Steering Group.

Thank you

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank our stakeholders, Mountaineering Ireland, Sport Ireland and Healthy Ireland, for all of their support throughout this challenging year.

FIND OUT MORE

For more information on the Get Ireland Walking Initiative, please contact Linda Sankey, the Communications Officer with Get Ireland Walking, on info@getirelandwalking.ie.