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**Working for
and representing
hillwalkers and
climbers**



Mountaineering Ireland Annual Review 2021

As we move closer to normal life with every passing month, 2021 will hopefully be remembered as the year which saw the final significant disruptions caused by the global pandemic of Covid-19 and which saw us move to a level of minimum restrictions in our activities.

Mountaineering Ireland has proven to be an extremely resilient organisation throughout the pandemic, as we have maintained the majority of our membership and remained relevant to our members, even during times when we were not able to enjoy the full reach of our interests. Over this time we have been financially prudent and we have also made significant improvements to our governance and procedures.

That is not to say that we did not face some serious challenges. A small number of our clubs decided not to affiliate due to concerns relating to Covid-19, and we saw some of the places we visit in the outdoors come under greater pressure from an access perspective, due to the higher than normal levels of footfall. Another challenge was maintaining our relevance during this time, when we were unable to have physical connections with our members and the outdoors.

On a positive note, 2021 was a year that represented a huge milestone for the organisation, as we celebrated our **50th Anniversary**. We were unable to provide the physical platform to openly celebrate this occasion with our members. Instead, we worked to offer a special 50th Anniversary edition of the *Irish Mountain Log*, the Winter 2021 edition, delivered by a working group chaired by **Ursula MacPherson**, with **Patrick O'Sullivan, Kevin Higgins, Dawson Stelfox, Ruth Whelan** and myself as members. This edition was a wonderful collage, representing insights, stories and events of significance on our journey over the past five decades towards becoming a National Governing Body. This unique edition was also offered to new individual members upon joining.

We started the year 2021 with increased restrictions, as Covid-19 remained to the forefront after the holiday period. During this time, we requested expressions of interest to bring new volunteers into our **Hillwalking Committee**, and we also undertook to seek new climbers for our **Youth Climbing Team**.

As we moved into February, we continued the excellent work carried out in 2020 by offering a second series of **Zooming Round the Mountains**, which saw 7,300 registrations overall. This was an amazing feat, which demonstrated the importance of having a strong virtual presence during the pandemic, to ensure our members

remained connected, supported and informed. We also focused on promoting positive mental health awareness via the **Minding Your Mental Health** initiative. We then delivered a series of events called **Club Reboot**, with virtual meetings to help prepare clubs to return to normal activities.

With Sport Ireland's support in March, we launched our **Club Membership Retention Scheme**, with €70,000 awarded as a rebate of club members' affiliation fees. In April we commenced the **Gearing Up to Get Moving Again** initiative to ensure our clubs were ready to get back to activities. We also promoted our new **Climbing Development Guidelines**, to ensure best practices are adhered to in the development of climbing areas.

By May 10th, Covid restrictions had, for the greater part, been removed. In June, we promoted the public consultation on the formation of a new **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy**, for our membership to provide feedback. It is due to our position with Comhairle na Tuaithe, Sport Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development that our Access and Conservation Officer, Helen Lawless, was requested to act as Vice-Chair of this extremely important working group, with ultimate responsibility for providing the Government with a new outdoor recreational strategy for the Republic of Ireland, covering a period of five years. I want to thank all members who contributed to the consultation - every contribution received was greatly appreciated. During this time, we actively promoted the key messages of the **Love This Place, Leave No Trace** campaign.

Another highlight of the year was celebrating **sport climbing's** Olympic debut in Tokyo. The standard of the athletics in this new Olympic sport was enthralling and captured the minds and aspirations of many. We will be keen to see it develop further in the next Olympic Games in Paris in 2024.

“ 2021 was a year that represented a huge milestone for Mountaineering Ireland as we celebrated our 50th Anniversary.”

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.



During the second half of the year, we aimed to deliver as many events and programmes as possible. Under the **Women With Altitude** initiative, we held a series of events in August as part of **HER Outdoors Week**. We also continued publicity about the **Happy Hiking** campaign about staying safe on the hills, as the increased numbers enjoying staycations and going hillwalking resulted in a great number of callouts for the mountain rescue services. We launched new individual membership rates and, in September, celebrated **National Walking Day** on the 26th. In October, we offered a series of **Club Committee Support Meetings** ahead of the new season. We also supported the **Fair Head Climbing Meet** and presented the **Mountaineering Ireland Lynam Medal 2021** to **Noel Hanna** following a virtual lecture.

In April, we commenced work with external auditors appointed by Sport Ireland, to review our governance, policies and procedures, and this process was completed in November. The auditors, **KOSI**, produced a report highlighting sixteen findings. By the end of the year, thirteen of their findings had been addressed or were being progressed and we aimed to complete work on the final three after the AGM, scheduled to be held in May 2022. This was a challenging process and one that required strong leadership. I want to thank the Chair of the Board, **Mike Maunsell**, for his direction in this process and **Geoff Thomas**, who took over as Chair in November.

On July 7th, we commenced work on a special project that only comes around every four years, the creation of a new **Strategic Plan**. A Working Group was selected by the Board, chaired by **Imelda Buckley**, facilitated by **Noel Caffrey** and supported by **Colette Mahon** (all Board members) plus staff members **Jane Carney**, **Damien O'Sullivan**, **Ruth Whelan**, **Helen Lawless**, **Jason King** and myself. Both **Mike Maunsell** and **Geoff Thomas** also supported the Working Group during their respective times as Chair of the Board. I would like to thank everyone involved for their time and commitment to this process.

I would especially like to thank the Board members who served the company in 2021. **Trish Kane**, **Clare O'Connor** and **Paul Barron** stepped down from the Board in February and March after many years of service. I thank them all for their time and support for Mountaineering Ireland, particularly Paul Barron who served for many years as a Board member and as Chair of the Board. It was much appreciated. To **Paul Kellagher**, **Kevin O'Callaghan** and **Mike Maunsell**, who stepped down from the Board in October, I want to wish them the very best with their busy professional careers and continued enjoyment of the hills, mountains, crags and walls. Thank you all very much for your service, particularly Paul Kellagher, who was President and National Children's Officer for many years, and Mike Maunsell, who was Chair of the Access and Conservation

Committee for a number of years and, most recently, Chair of the Board. Special thanks go to **Imelda Buckley** for her time, energy and focus over the past four years covering a number of new projects. Thank you very much for your work as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Chair of the Strategic Planning Working Group, as Board member and, more recently, Vice-Chair of the Board. To **Geoff Thomas**, for his many years of service, including during 2021 as both Chair of the Climbing Committee and Chair of the Board of Directors, thank you very much as well.

Thanks are also due to **Gerry Gorman**, our National Children's Officer, for his support and direction, to the members of our five Sub-Committees, to the Strategic Plan Working Group, to our coaching teams in the sport competition sector and to our members and volunteers, who deliver so much toward the successes of Mountaineering Ireland - thank you all very much. To our funders and partners, **Sport Ireland** and **Sport NI**, thank you for your continued support and much appreciated assistance.

Finally, I want to say a special thank you to **Patrick O'Sullivan**, **Peter O'Neill** and **Nicky Hore**, the editorial team behind the *Irish Mountain Log*, and **Cóilín MacLochlainn**, who does the layout. The *Log* is an important asset for Mountaineering Ireland and is highly prized by our members. I commend them in particular for their skilled work in putting the 50th Anniversary edition together.

A warm welcome to **Ricky Bell**, our new Youth Development Officer for Northern Ireland, who started in June 2021. I want to thank **Damien O'Sullivan** for his excellent service over the past eight years, and as our Climbing Officer for many of those years, who moved on in December 2021. I want to wish him all the very best for the future. I also want to thank **Kevin Kilroy** for his service to the company and in driving forward our youth and club structures over the past four years in Northern Ireland, as he completed his four years with us at the end of March.

To our amazing staff team, who all combined to deliver an extremely high standard of work on behalf of Mountaineering Ireland - thank you all very much for your contribution during 2021. I look forward to continuing our work together in 2022.

It has been a pleasure to work and serve with you all in 2021 and I'm looking forward to more positive outcomes in the years ahead.

Murrough McDonagh
Chief Executive Officer
Mountaineering Ireland



“ Membership remained roughly the same as last year. The figure on October 31st 2021 was 13,619 (10,976 Club and 2,643 Individual Members). In the circumstances, that is no small achievement. Credit must go to club volunteers, for their steadfast support, and the staff team.”



Supporting and Developing Hillwalking

Last year was a year of two halves. Activities in the first six months were limited by the Covid-19 restrictions, while the second six months was a period of great activity amongst our members and clubs, and in Mountaineering Ireland's initiatives and programmes in general, as the restrictions were eased. Here are some of the highlights.

Zooming Round the Mountains

By popular demand, **Zooming Round the Mountains** came back for a second series to keep everyone entertained and engaged when activities were restricted.

There were lots of topics: a look behind the scenes of mapping with **Barry Dalby**; **Kathryn Fitzpatrick** prepared us for getting back to the hills; and we were able to ask **Paul Kellagher**, an experienced trainer, anything and everything about hillwalking. Other highlights were talks on the Fei Sheehy Challenge, flora of the Irish uplands, and access. **Jane Carney**, Training Officer, introduced the joys of winter hillwalking, covering equipment, navigation and skills.

We ran a series of workshops in March to support clubs and their committees as they started planning to return to the hills.

The Hillwalking Development Officer ran four further **Club Committee Workshops** during October, focusing on (1) committee roles and club AGMs; (2) Mountaineering Ireland's online membership system and GDPR; (3) insurance and accident reporting; and (4) youth in sports. Over eighty-five clubs attended overall.

Club Leadership Programme

A need for informal training in the clubs was identified, as there were significant concerns regarding the limited number of club walk leaders available and the confidence of current walk leaders after their inactivity during the lockdowns. We obtained funding through Sport Ireland to run the **Club Leadership Programme** throughout the summer and autumn. Over 440 club leaders from over 60 hillwalking clubs took part in a full day of skills training with a qualified instructor, tailored to the club's needs, with emphasis on leading groups.

Hiking Skills Day for Parents

Hiking Skills Day for Parents (family support programme) ran over the

month of September, with over 72 parents taking part.

We provided informal training with a qualified instructor with an emphasis on promoting the **Happy Hiking** campaign, with information on basic skills required to keep themselves and their families safe on the hills. The feedback was extremely positive and it was hoped that we could run similar programmes in 2022.

OSi feedback

Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) has recently consolidated all of its digital mapping data across all scales in a single database named Prime2. This enables OSi's map products and



services to be generated and updated with minimal human intervention. OSi sought Mountaineering Ireland's feedback to ensure their maps continued to be relevant to hillwalkers. Over one hundred members engaged in the process, which, with Mountaineering Ireland's continued involvement, will hopefully help OSi enhance their product range for hillwalkers.

Club resources

There is now a **toolkit** of resources available exclusively to our clubs. Administrators can access these resources through the club database to share with their members. There is useful information on running clubs, attracting new members, running club evenings, organising introductory walks and recruiting and supporting walk leaders. There are also key resources in the toolkit, such as the club handbook, GDPR for clubs, Happy Hiking and lots more.

Hillwalking grades

Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking Committee identified a need to provide a standardised system for **hillwalking grades**, to provide a national benchmark for anyone who is selecting routes for club walks, gatherings or events, group walks, etc. This grading system is now up on the hillwalking section of our website and also available in the toolkit for clubs.

Get Ireland Walking

We worked closely with **Get Ireland Walking** to reach the wider community that may be interested in heading into the uplands. We developed a follow-on programme aimed at people who have participated in the active community walking programme, to provide them with the supports and tools they need to head into the hills.

The Hillwalking Development Officer also got to chat with **Linda Sankey** on the **Get Ireland Walking podcast**, an opportunity to reach new people, impart hillwalkers' love for the hills and give useful tips on staying safe in the hills.

Happy Hiking communications on safety continued through online campaigns and hard-copy promotion. Over 1.4 million Facebook and Instagram-targeted groups of people new to the hills were reached.

National Walking Day

The second annual **National Walking Day** took place on Sunday, September 26th, 2021, as part of European Week of Sport. Many of our clubs and members got involved and organised walks locally to celebrate the day.



Women in Sport Programmes

These programmes, run over the summer in conjunction with Local Sports Partnerships, aimed to provide participants with a safe, positive and fun environment to practise skills, and to build their confidence and ability to be independent on the hills.

The **Shed to Summit** programme was run in partnership with **Wicklow Sports Partnership** and **Blessington's Women's Shed**. Participants took part in three initial half-day experiences and two additional training days, which aimed to provide them with key skills to be able to hike self-sufficiently on certain terrain in their local hills. There were two groups, each led by an MTBI Training Provider.

Another programme, **She Summits**, was run in Kilkenny in partnership with the **Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership**, following the same format.

Overall feedback from participants was very positive.

Women With Altitude

Covid restrictions meant that our annual **Women With Altitude** event could not be held in its usual format in 2021, so our enthusiastic team of instructors went to different counties to provide women with an opportunity to expand their hillwalking and climbing experience and skills.

HER Outdoors Week was the first of its kind in Ireland and was a great opportunity for females to try something new. There were eighteen activities organised across ten counties during the week, with around one hundred and thirty women taking part overall, including many new participants.

Lynam Lecture

Due to the restrictions, the **Lynam Lecture** went virtual in December, with 312 members registering for the event. **Noel**



Hanna was the recipient of Mountaineering Ireland's 2021 Lynam Medal in recognition of his remarkable accomplishments in mountaineering. He presented an enthralling lecture filled with adventure.

Hillwalking Committee

A lot of the above activities were guided by Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking Committee. In 2021, the members were: **Grainne McLaughlin** (Chairperson), **Ruth Whelan** (Secretary), **Senan Foley**, **Veronica Kelly**, **Pat Macken**, **Russell Mills**, **Louise Nolan**, **Marian Wallis** and **Gerard Reidy**.

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

At the start of 2021, climbing activities across Ireland were still very limited as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as restrictions were gradually lifted during the year, clubs, which had not had the opportunity to meet during the winter, began planning ahead for the spring and summer. There was an optimistic feel about returning to regular club meets.

Mountaineering Ireland participated in a series of **online seminars** for climbing walls in Ireland. This was developed in cooperation with the **Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC)**, the **British Mountaineering Council (BMC)** and **Climb Scotland**. The use of online platforms also helped members of Mountaineering Ireland to re-engage in their sport through the second instalment of **Zooming Round the Mountains**.

Irish Youth Team members also partook in a series of **online training workshops** led by **Rob Hunter**.

Youth Trad Camps

The Youth Trad Climbing Camps were able to go ahead in 2021. These camps, held at Dalkey, the Burren and Glendalough, were great learning experiences for participants. Social occasions such as these also allowed young climbers from all over the country to reconnect with their peers and to learn again from experienced and passionate outdoor instructors.

Meets

The **Fair Head Climbing Meet** took place in August despite the evolving Covid-19 restrictions. The event was capped for numbers, and ticketed for the first time. The Saturday night event was an outdoor tractor-trailer sofa podcasting comedy gig delivered by the Irish duo **Paddy and Brendan** of the **5.9 podcast**. Many laughs were had and it was a brilliant re-connect for the Irish climbing community at their flagship event. Well done and a big thank you to **Dal Riada** and the **McBride family** for making it possible again.

Competitions

Youth Climbing Series

The **Youth Climbing Series (YCS)** saw a keen and competitive return in the autumn. Young climbers from the age of nine up to seventeen completed four rounds across Ireland, testing their skill in bouldering and route climbing, with the goal of competing in the YCS Grand Final.

A big thank you to all of the volunteers and to the climbing walls, **Boulderworld**, **University of Limerick** and **Dublin Climbing Centre**, for enabling these competitions.

Category	Irish Youth Climbing Series Overall Winners 2021
Male A (age 16-17)	Sean Brown
Female A (age 16-17)	Faith Blaney
Male B (age 14-15)	Archie Tolland
Female B (age 14-15)	Caelin Lenehan
Male C (age 12-13)	Daniel Shine
Female C (age 12-13)	Lilou Conroy
Male D (age 10-11)	Caleb Shine
Female D (age 10-11)	Ilmur Jonsdottir
Male E (age 8-9)	Samuel Mayer
Female E (age 8-9)	Eve Craig

At the Grand Final in Southampton, a strong Irish representation gave it their all. Particular congratulations have to go to **Caelin Lenehan**, who finished second in Female B, and **Rhyna Conroy**, who came fourth in Female A, with some super performances! It was a fantastic event and it was great to see old friends again and make plenty of new ones along the way.

Climbing developments

Sport climbing development on Inis Mór in the Aran Islands moved forward, with new routes added by **Hugh Hennessy**. In Fermanagh, access improved at Knockmore, thanks to a concerted effort with main developer **Andy Marshall**. At Galboly Crag near Carnlough, Co Antrim, **Lucy Mitchell**, who was in top form, also opened a new 8b, a test piece for the crag. Access and relationships remain positive and we ask the climbing community to respect these.

Get Climbing

The **Get Climbing** programme focuses on working with hard-to-reach youth groups by engaging them in climbing and hillwalking activities, as per the conditions of Sport Ireland funding under the Dormant Account Funding Scheme. The aim of the initiative is to offer participants the basics of indoor climbing so that they can operate independently on climbing walls.

The programme follows the **National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS)** syllabus, but 2021 was a challenging year, with limited access to indoor walls.



Climbing Committee

The **Climbing Committee** continued to meet online throughout 2021. It played a key role in getting the clubs to meet again, improving access, coordinating the **Irish Bouldering League** and creating a more cohesive climbing network in Ireland.

The Mountaineering Ireland Climbing Committee members in 2021 were: **Geoff Thomas** (Chairperson), **John Healy**, **John Harrison**, **Peter Wood**, **Ricky Bell**, **Kelley O'Reilly-Smith**, **Chloe Condron** and **Damien O'Sullivan** (Secretary).

Mountaineering Ireland would like to thank **Damien O'Sullivan**, who stepped down as Climbing Development Officer at the end of 2021. Damien developed the role into what it is today. For over eight years he was a cornerstone for the development of the Irish climbing

community. He played a huge part in its progression, specifically in areas such as sport climbing access, trad climbing camps, competitions and performance youth climbing. It is on these foundations that Irish climbing can now continue to grow.

New Appointment

Youth Development Officer: Ricky Bell

Ricky Bell joined Mountaineering Ireland during the summer of 2021 as the newly appointed Youth Development Officer for Northern Ireland. He took over from **Kevin Kilroy**, who had done brilliant work over the previous four years, supporting and growing the youth clubs and climbing network in Northern Ireland.

Again, Mountaineering Ireland would like to thank Kevin for all his work and the enthusiasm he has shared in introducing young people to climbing.



FIND OUT MORE

If you would like to know more about Mountaineering Ireland's work in climbing, please contact:
Ricky Bell, Youth Development Officer for Northern Ireland, ricky@mountaineering.ie
or **Michael Duffy**, Climbing Development Officer, michael@mountaineering.ie



Training and Skills



Mountaineering Ireland's strategic objective in this area is to promote mountain training and skills development. Its aims are:

- To realise the potential of **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 (MTBI)

Mountain Training Board Ireland's provision of quality assured, internationally recognised mountain training awards and schemes, delivered by qualified and experienced trainers, was at an all-time high by the end of 2021. This was partly due to the aftershock of the Covid-19 lockdowns and the increase in numbers taking to the hills and crags of Ireland. The Training Office and training providers maintained a blended approach to training provision, involving both online and a return to face-to-face training for members and the ever-growing participant audience.

The international meets for winter and summer were unable to go ahead in 2021. Online skills workshops, club training officer workshops and provider meetings took place, helping fend off the inevitable skills fade we all experienced. There remains a suite of training recordings that can be accessed on the Mountaineering Ireland website and YouTube channel.

MTBI is in a unique position, providing and developing both formal and informal training, and consulting with stakeholders to review what is currently provided and determine the way forward. The Board promotes self-reliance and inspires participation and adventure through skills development, thus facilitating enjoyment and supporting safety.

Despite the many restrictions of 2021, it was a positive year for training and training providers, who were innovative in producing blended learning opportunities, developing fresh ideas



on training delivery and maintaining their professional approach in difficult times. This resulted in fewer emissions, less fuel and resource consumption and better participation and attendance at meetings, learning we will continue to apply to the way we operate in the future.

Training for clubs

Club officer meetings, presentations, webinars and workshops were appreciated by over 2,500 participants and supported in-club training. They brought like-minded people together to share ideas, inspired training plans, promoted clubs and encouraged new members and participants. Thank you to the numerous volunteers involved.

The doubled training grant fund continued to support members towards safer enjoyment of the mountains. A post-lockdown focus on training grant promotion via the well-attended online regional meetings prompted a rise in applications to pre-Covid levels. This essential refreshing of training provision and heightened awareness of the availability of training grants helped further improve the training ethos within clubs. The successful role models that emerged will serve to inspire others to follow.



Skills series and training resources

The online **skills videos** have now had over 150,000 views. Videos range from 2-4 minute recaps to taught 60-90 minute sessions, including the Winter Skills Series, the Map Skill Series, the Youth Skills Series and a Poor Visibility webinar. Participant engagement with the existing and new skills videos keeps growing. The Taking a Bearing video still tops the charts with over 60,000 views. There are also several presentations, the members' library and training literature to help participants upskill and refresh: they can be found on the Mountaineering Ireland website (www.mountaineering.ie) in the Training Downloads section. They are being used by clubs, individuals, candidates, providers and participants.

Training providers

The growth in training providers on the island of Ireland has increased the provision and diversity of courses. Providers have been updated and inducted in the new and revised climbing awards. Candidate numbers continued to grow despite the restrictions of the pandemic. Training and assessments were back in high numbers, making up for the ban on courses for several months. Many providers saw an abundance of work, and 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 providers workshops delivered by the Training Officer support high

training standards. The benefits of gathering providers together are many and allow for updates, sharing of learning, development of skills and techniques, discussion of syllabi, teaching and instruction methods, and induction for revised and new 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 address 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 nations' 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 the leadership and camping elements. The collaborative work between all of the training boards across the UK and Ireland has maintained the consistent momentum essential to develop the existing awards and 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 2021.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Registrations for Awards & Schemes							
Mountain Leader Award	94	98	76	124	87	85	59
Hill & Moorland Leader	2	2	6	20	26	10	9
Lowland Leader Award	45	88	77	71	75	74	121
Expedition Module	-	-	48	71	75	74	121
Rock Climbing Instructor	69	122	142	116	95	85	90
Rock Climbing Development Instructor	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0	2
Multi Pitch Award	7	3	2	10	2	5	7
Climbing Wall Instructor	28	34	53	77	97	41	73
Climbing Wall Development Instructor	6	7	2	36	17	4	12
Level 1 Climbing Coach	9	18	2	23	16	0	1
Indoor Climbing Assistant	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	19	15
Mountain Skills Registration*	1,236	1,187	1,089	1,120	574	862	1,162
Rock Skills Registration	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	56	38	66
Total Registrations	1,496	1,559	1,495	1,668	1,094	1,297	1,738
Mountain Skills Participants	1,236	1,187	1,089	1,120	774	891	1,238
Rock Skills Participants	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	43	16	32
Total Participants For All Awards	1,496	1,559	1,497	1,668	1,246	1,211	1,705
FUNdamentals	112	73	90	192	-	-	-

*Mountain Skills participant numbers used 2015-2018, as registration not recorded pre-2019

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, is 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.

During 2021, our work in this area had a strategic focus, with Mountaineering Ireland fulfilling a leadership role in the development of Ireland's new **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy**, and also with input to the development of Mountaineering Ireland's **Strategic Plan for 2022-2025**.

Improving Access

Looking across the island of Ireland, there is a general picture of greater pressure on access due to increased numbers taking to the outdoors. From Donegal to Connemara to Kerry, there are more gates with 'private property'-type signs. The reality is that most of the land in upland and coastal areas is privately owned, either by individuals or jointly owned as commonage. Our enjoyment of the mountains and crags is due to the goodwill and tolerance of the owners.

That goodwill can be undermined by the poor behaviour of a small proportion of people, sometimes leaving residents feeling that walkers are invading the place. Mountaineering Ireland (usually in cooperation with local members) has engaged with landowners at a number of locations where issues have arisen recently. However, once goodwill is damaged it is difficult to get it back. Parking in a way that obstructs farm or home access is a recurrent factor in access problems, as is fear amongst some landowners of being sued if someone gets injured on their land. Continued respect and consideration for landowners and other local residents is needed to maintain and protect the access that we depend upon for our activities.

Mountaineering Ireland is also devoting considerable time to working with

policymakers and other recreation bodies, north and south, to improve opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors, including the examples below:

- A key priority was our leading role in the development of a new **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy**. The strategy will guide and support the development of this growing sector, with a focus on making outdoor recreation work well for everyone. Our involvement has provided opportunities to discuss the needs of hillwalkers and climbers, and to build relationships with a wide range of national stakeholders.
- **Mountain Access Project** - an insurance policy has been put in place to provide added protection for landowners in Comhairle na Tuaithe's two pilot Mountain Access Areas - the **MacGillycuddy's Reeks**, Co Kerry, and **Binn Shléibhe** near Clonbur, Co Galway. Mountaineering Ireland is participating in a group formed to review the Mountain Access Project, with the aim of expanding this model of agreed access to a number of other areas.
- Mountaineering Ireland engaged with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on a **review of access legislation in Northern Ireland**, seeking fresh legislation to support the growth in outdoor recreation activities.
- Progress was made on formalising access for climbing at **Moor Hill Quarry**, with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council removing the quarry from its list of assets for disposal and agreeing to lease the quarry to Mountaineering Ireland.



Mountaineering Ireland's credibility in engaging in discussion about access and the management of outdoor recreation is bolstered by the responsible attitudes displayed by Mountaineering Ireland clubs and members, for which we are grateful. A key part of our strategy on access is working in partnership – to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

Mountain Environment

Ireland's mountains inspire, shape and enrich the recreation experiences enjoyed by hillwalkers and climbers. However, the character of the mountain environment is being altered all the time by changes in land use, including changes associated with recreation activity.

Helping the Hills

The greatest impact of recreation on Ireland's hills, mountains and coastal landscapes is the impact of our cumulative footfall, ever more visible through erosion scars along popular lines. The year 2021 saw welcome progress to address upland path erosion in a number of key locations, with much of this guided by the **Helping the Hills** principles instigated by Mountaineering Ireland:

- We continue to support the sustainable access and habitat restoration work on **Croagh Patrick**. The Croagh Patrick project has become a hub for sharing experience and skills in upland path construction, thereby benefitting other upland areas.
- In the **Wicklow Mountains**, we provided input to an upland path condition survey led by the Wicklow Uplands Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), and we maintained regular contact with the National Trust and the Mourne Heritage Trust regarding path work in the **Mourne Mountains**.

Awareness and education

Littering in the outdoors grabbed public attention during Covid-19, and in response Mountaineering Ireland launched **One from the Hills**, a challenge to all walkers and climbers to remove one item of litter from the outdoors each time



they're out. This simple concept was proposed by a Mountaineering Ireland member.

Much of our environmental awareness activity in 2021 was through Zoom events, social media and the *Irish Mountain Log*, though we did manage to hold two Mountain Environment Walks during HER Outdoors Week in September.

Working together

In our work to care for the mountain landscapes, Mountaineering Ireland is engaged with others – a host of interests from individual landowners to government departments. In a year that involved much online work, two in-person events stood out:

In August, the **SUAS Upland Agri-Environment Project** hosted a farm walk at Kilmashoge in the **Dublin Mountains**, to showcase the project's work with farmers to improve habitat condition in the uplands. Looking down on Dublin city while discussing how changes made in farming practice will help protect water quality, it was easy to see how projects like this can benefit everyone in society.

In October, **Blackstairs Nature**, a small group of volunteers concerned for the future of biodiversity in the **Blackstairs**, brought together a panel of high-profile speakers for a really stimulating event. The discussion examined Ireland's upland environment through the lens of the Blackstairs, with a good balance between reality and positivity. The event was live-streamed and is available on the Blackstairs Nature YouTube channel.

Mountaineering Ireland also participated in a range of consultations including: the review of NPWS; the development of a Masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park; Coillte's draft strategic plans for its forests; Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan; and Northern Ireland's draft Environment Strategy.

The submissions mentioned above can be found on Mountaineering Ireland's website

at: www.mountaineering.ie/accessandenvironment/Downloads/default.aspx.

Collective Effort

All this activity is guided by Mountaineering Ireland's **Access and Conservation Committee**. Our committee members in 2021 were: David Pollard (Chairperson), Noel Caffrey, Fiona Gallagher, Ursula MacPherson, Vincent McAlinden, Aine McGirl, Orla Prendergast and Helen Lawless (Secretary).

Mountaineering Ireland extends thanks to the members of our 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.



Get Ireland Walking Initiative



The year 2021 was a challenging but rewarding one for the Get Ireland Walking programme. Not having the opportunity to engage physically, as we should, with partners was the biggest challenge. Most of our work from January to September was online, utilising technology and communication platforms to carry the Get Ireland Walking message and implement our work.

From campaigns to new programmes, we continued to strive to meet the needs of all of the groups and stakeholders whom we engaged with, either physically or virtually. Through creative and innovative thinking and planning across the Get Ireland Walking team, and with and through stakeholders, we are very proud of our work in this difficult year.

With our partners and stakeholders, we continued to place walking as a key attribute or tool to maintain positive mental and physical health and showcase the activity as a social tool to address isolation and sedentary habits. We did this through campaigns, where everyone played a part and contributed. And we identified new programmes to meet the needs of special populations.

Get Ireland Walking would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Steering Group for their support throughout the year: **Paul Brosnan** and **Fiona Mansergh** from Healthy Ireland, **Ciara Munnely** from Sport Ireland Outdoors, and **Murrough McDonagh** of Mountaineering Ireland. A special thank you also to our outgoing Chair, **Emma Jane Clarke** of Sport Ireland, who has guided and directed our work over the past four years. We welcome Emma Jane's replacement as Chair, **Louise Burke** of Sport Ireland.

'Keep Walking, Keep Well' walking campaign

In partnership with Sport Ireland and Get Ireland Walking, the GAA, FAI, IRFU, Hockey Ireland, Athletics Ireland and Cricket Ireland opened up community walking routes in their clubs' grounds to allow people of all ages and abilities to have safe spaces to walk during the restrictions. An app was developed by Get Ireland Walking specifically to allow management of walking slots.

Participating clubs had specific allocated days and times detailed on the app. Walkers registered for their walking slots on this app for both public health and insurance purposes. The app facilitated booking of a slot for an individual or family pod, ensuring all were kept separate.

National Walking Day 2021

The second annual National Walking Day took place on Sunday, September 26th, as part of European Week of Sport. Before that, we had a week of

celebrations of walking, including a Ways to Walk Day, an Accessibility and Inclusivity Day, a #HappyOut Mental Health Day, and a Walk to Work Day.

Our ambassadors this year were **Minister of State at the Department of Health, Frank Feighan TD**, adaptive adventurer **Nikki Bradley**, Olympian racewalker **Olive Loughnane** and leading mental wellbeing expert, clinical psychologist **Eddie Murphy**. They joined us in celebrating a wonderful week.

We asked people to #WalkHikeRunPushRoll on National Walking Day. We were featured on the RTÉ 1 television programme *Nationwide* and our four-week social media campaign reached over two million people.

We couldn't have made National Walking Day such a success without the help of our amazing partners, including Mountaineering Ireland, Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland, Mental Health Ireland, Coillte, Waterways Ireland, the GAA and the Local Sports Partnerships.

