

RESPECT

Responsible **E**njoyment of **S**pecial **P**laces with **E**mpathy, **C**are and **T**rust

Help protect access

Some people living in upland and coastal areas were overwhelmed by visitor numbers last summer. The poor behaviour of a minority of people damaged the goodwill that we all depend on for access to the hills and crags.

As we return to the mountains following the Covid lockdown, you can help improve the perception of walkers and climbers by engaging with the people you meet in rural areas.

In relation to access, it's better to

ask, rather than to assume.

Checking if access is permitted on your intended route will generally get a positive response. It also helps to build trust with the host communities in the places where we walk and climb.

Mountaineering Ireland appeals to all walkers and climbers to respect farm animals and breeding wildlife by not taking dogs onto the hills. When parking, take care not to block access for local residents, large farm vehicles or the



Photograph: Helen Lawless

emergency services.

If you come across any situation where you think access has changed, please email helen@mountaineering.ie.

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Say it with flowers

Wildflowers are announcing spring across Ireland's hills and countryside and in our urban wild spaces. With Covid-19 restricting our travel, many of us are discovering details in our local landscape that we hadn't noticed previously – including the wildflowers that grow there.

In addition to the intricacies of the flower's structure, many flowers have a relationship with certain insect species, or we can observe how they respond to the weather.

A bit of Googling will reveal that

every flower species has its own story, such as how it got its name, its use in traditional medicine, or its value to wildlife. Not to mention how they lift our spirits!

Celebrate the beauty of nature by taking photos of wildflowers you see and sharing these with friends and family or on social media.

► For more on wildflowers and their stories, visit www.wildflowersofireland.net or follow Helen Lawless on Instagram at [helen_lawless_mountains](https://www.instagram.com/helen_lawless_mountains) ■



Common dog-violet, our most common wild violet, found on grassy hedgerows, in woodland and on heaths, from March to May. The flower is just 15-25mm across, the plant has dark green, heart-shaped leaves. 'Dog' in its name refers to its lack of scent compared with the **sweet violet**. The **common dog-violet** is the food plant for the larvae of some of our rarer butterflies. **Photograph:** Helen Lawless



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Many happy returns

This has been a tough year for everyone. Especially tough for those who have lost loved ones, and for those who have lost their jobs. For hillwalkers and climbers, missing the activities we love has been another dimension to a difficult year.

Those who got back to the mountains and crags over the summer experienced the wonderful feeling of returning to their happy place – the sense of space, the air, the views and the physical exertion. The period of absence made

the experience sweeter. We will all get back there again.

When we do, let's extend our appreciation to the landowners and local communities in Ireland's upland and coastal areas. It has been a tough and worrying time for them too. For those in popular locations, add to that the sense of being overwhelmed by visitor numbers, traffic congestion and having to deal with the litter left behind by a minority of people.

When reconnecting with the places you love, try to include a socially distanced chat with someone living there. Listen to how it's been for them and put yourself in their shoes. As cafés and other businesses in upland areas re-open, they will need our support. Take the opportunity to express your gratitude for the enjoyment we get from our time in the mountains. Those conversations will help ensure we all have many happy returns ■

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Nature nurtures

In 2020, many of us have had more time to observe the unfurling of spring, to notice butterflies and bees, to hear the birdsong and to admire the beauty of the wildflowers, which can be discovered in urban and rural areas.

Over the last few months, I've been looking at the wildflowers that grow around where I live in the Wicklow Mountains, photographing them on my phone and posting on Instagram, along with some information about each flower. Here's an example:

Heath spotted orchid - Isn't it amazing that we have such beautiful flowers growing in the hills? This photo was taken in a boggy field; but the flower also grows on heath. The flower spike is about 5cm high on a stem of approximately 15cm (some plants are taller). Flower colour varies from white through shades of pink and mauve. The patterning on the frilly flowers varies too. The 'spotted' in the name refers to the long, pointed leaves, which have dark spots. Orchids grow very slowly, taking several years to flower. They have tiny wind-blown seeds, effectively carrying no food supply, and they partner with a soil fungus which helps the roots of the orchid to access nutrients.

For more examples, follow [**helen_lawless_mountains**](#) on Instagram ■



Heath spotted orchid

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Controlling your canine companion

Dogs are great company and they help ensure that their owners get plenty of exercise.* However, man's best friend can sometimes be a source of problems. The key to avoiding these problems is choosing an appropriate place to exercise your dog and keeping your dog under control.

The **Wicklow Uplands Council** has recently highlighted that the farming communities of counties Wicklow and Dublin experienced a number of serious incidents involving multiple sheep losses in 2019. While this damage is often caused by dogs which stray from neighbouring properties, the presence of any dog close to farmland or on the hills is a major concern for farmers, and as a result dogs are now not welcome across most upland areas in Ireland.

Mountaineering Ireland asks all dog owners to:

■ Respect and be aware of farm animals and wildlife

Ensure that your dog is under effective control at all times, i.e. they should come at first call. The presence of dogs, even with playful intent, is likely to cause great anxiety to wildlife and farm animals. Pregnant females and very young animals are especially vulnerable. Without successful breeding, our populations of **hares, hedgehogs** and **hen harriers** will only go one way. Consider too that most of our upland birds nest on the ground.

***TILDA (2019)** *Associations of pet ownership with health and wellbeing in community-dwelling adults aged 50 years and over in Ireland*. Download this report as a pdf at www.bit.ly/tildapets.

In **sheep**, anxiety caused by the presence of dogs during the lambing season is the main cause of stillbirths and miscarriages, which can occur two to three days later. The dog's owner can be held liable for the financial losses that result.



■ Observe and respect local signage

Leave dogs at home if accessing land where sheep or other livestock are present or close by. Many landowners forbid dogs entirely, whereas others, including the State, may request the use of leads.

■ Take responsibility for your dog's waste

Dog waste, once bagged, must be disposed of properly. Failure to clean up is a public health concern and an offence under Section 22 of the Litter Pollution Act.

■ Share this advice with others

Enjoy the outdoors responsibly with your dog! See also www.wicklowuplands.ie/guidelines-for-responsible-dog-control-published or go to www.bit.ly/controlyourdog ■

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Five ways to park smarter

More people are enjoying the outdoors, as evidenced by the increased pressure for parking space. With busy days ahead over the Christmas holidays and early in the New Year, what can we do to ease the pressure for parking space?

■ Carpool

This is the big one and many clubs are fantastic at it. Carpooling saves valuable space in car parks. This means less congestion on narrow roads and fewer farmers frustrated by people parking in front of their field gates. Carpooling also reduces carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. CO₂ is one of the greenhouse gases believed to be most responsible for the global warming which is occurring. Transport is by far the largest source of energy-related CO₂ emissions in Ireland.* In 2017, it was responsible for 39% of CO₂ emissions. It is also the sector where CO₂ emissions are growing the fastest.

■ Mind the gap

Make sure space isn't wasted between cars in unmarked car parks by parking close to another vehicle, even if you have to ask people to step aside or to close a car door.

■ Avoid the crowds

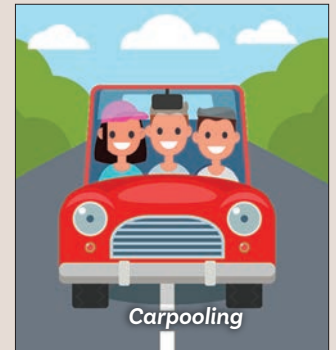
You know the spots that are likely to be busy; so can you approach the same mountain from a different start point or, better still, make a point of exploring quieter areas?

■ Arrange your own parking

Is there a community centre, farm or other premises where your group could get agreement to park? Consider making a donation for parking. This might even inspire the opening of a car park for hikers and climbers.

■ Bus it

Could your club hire a bus, even occasionally? Lots of people inside one vehicle makes good sense and it opens up opportunities for linear routes in the mountains. Challenge yourselves to do at least one outing a year using public transport ■



*www.seai.ie

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Watch your footing

Hillwalking and scrambling on steep, damp and rocky terrain sometimes brings us into places where we're delicately balanced; places where nature is delicately balanced too.

Due to their inaccessibility to grazing animals, cliffs, steep slopes and gullies are places that provide a vital refuge for rare plants, which are often small and inconspicuous.

Nature's ability to withstand the impact of footfall is limited by thin soils and the shorter growing season in the mountains. Higher rainfall levels, combined with steeper gradients, means that the erosive action of water is more significant.

An example is the Eisc on Mount Brandon, which holds an important



population of the rare and beautiful **Irish saxifrage** (*Saxifraga rosacea*), more noticeable over the summer when it is in flower.

On fragile terrain like this, where the impact of recreational activity is greater, we have an added responsibility to enjoy the mountains with care.

We can reduce our impact on vulnerable habitats and species by:

- Keeping within the existing path line and not short-cutting on zig-zags;
- Using steep and badly eroded routes in ascent, rather than descent,
- Avoiding these routes when ground conditions are wet;
- Keeping group size small.

Enjoy the mountains responsibly this summer! ■





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Photograph wildlife responsibly

Our encounters with wildlife in the uplands make for some really memorable experiences but, with the breeding season underway, birds and animals are now more vulnerable.

Most species are exposed to additional risk while seeking food for their young. Coping with changeable weather uses up precious energy too, and disturbance by humans could be the tipping point.

Our enthusiasm to get a better view or to capture the perfect picture can disturb and harm wildlife, especially at sensitive times in their life cycle. If a bird or animal reacts to your presence by moving away or calling, you are too close and should back off.

The length of time you spend close to any nest site should be considered as it may interrupt a bird's feeding cycle. All birds of prey, but especially eagles, have excellent long-range vision, so while you may not think you are too close, you possibly are. If lingering to take photographs, it is best to wear clothing that blends with the environment and to use a hide so as to limit intrusion.

Even greater care is required with the use of drones as birds and mammals may stop foraging if there is a drone nearby. Birds of prey have been known to attack drones, presumably because they see them as a threat.

Disturbance of seabird colonies on cliffs and off-shore islands is an escalating problem. Photographers deliberately entering colonies to get the 'ultimate' shot of a puffin or gannet often disturb the adult birds, leaving eggs and chicks vulnerable to predation. The great black-backed gulls and herring gulls are eagerly waiting in the wings for easy pickings!

Due to the potential for disturbance, it is illegal to photograph or film any wild bird, or a protected animal, on or near its breeding place, without a licence.

The key point in photographing wildlife with respect is to prevent disturbance by keeping your distance. We all want to take pictures that we can be proud of; please photograph wildlife sensitively and responsibly ■

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Share your ideas on shared space

Recently, while savouring the view from a popular summit with a friend, a hillwalker arrived and, standing less than two metres from us, released a valley-filling Tarzan call, without the slightest recognition that this could intrude on the experience we were enjoying.

The rarity of such incidents illustrates how the vast majority of recreationists are respectful of the fact that we share our outdoor space with others.

With more people using Ireland's mountains for an increasingly diverse range of activities, the concept of how we share that space is becoming more important. This can present a challenge for walkers, who have traditionally only come across the occasional hill farmer or a forestry worker on the hills.

There are practical things we can do to prevent conflict, like not walking on a mountain bike route (tyre tracks and constructed jumps provide clues to the possible presence of bikes). As well as being a danger to yourself and others you

might be impinging on the enjoyment of mountain bikers using the route.

How can we transmit an awareness of shared space to others? For example, to those who don't realise that unfenced hillsides are privately-owned sheep-grazing areas and, therefore, not a suitable place to let your dog run loose, or that parking your car on a narrow road could prevent access for a local resident or the emergency services.

Competition

We're keen to gather top tips on how different recreational users of Ireland's upland areas can co-exist without conflict. Send your ideas, or examples of things you have seen or done, to helen@mountaineering.ie before January 31st 2019. All submissions will be considered by three members of Mountaineering Ireland's Access & Conservation Committee and a selection will be published in the Spring 2019 issue of the *Irish Mountain Log* ■

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Smart parking

Your club arrives at your designated start point to find the car park already full; what to do?

Many places where we walk and climb have limited parking space. With increasing numbers enjoying the outdoors, congestion has become an issue in popular locations including Connemara, the Burren, the Mourne and the Wicklow Mountains.

It is tempting to park on a verge, in front of a forestry barrier, or at the side of a gateway, but doing so could block access for larger vehicles such as an ambulance or a tractor with a trailer. Attendees at a Mountaineering Ireland meeting in Galway in early May heard how badly-parked cars recently prevented a lorry with a fodder delivery getting into a farm in the Maumturks. Situations like that could easily result in landowners closing off access.

Rather than saying 'the Council should provide more parking space,' let's look at how we can take some responsibility ourselves. The Galway discussion generated lots of ideas for how groups of all sizes can help ease the pressure for parking:

- Park carefully - avoid wasting space between vehicles when parking in an unmarked car park.
- Commit to car-pooling - it saves money and reduces emissions too.
- Apps like What's App are useful for arranging lift shares.
- Be flexible about changing your route and starting elsewhere.
- Park at a suitably large area close to the hills and hire a local bus or car-pool.



- Use public transport where it's available.
- Avoid parking in front of field gates; remember that many farmers move livestock at the weekend.
- Park a little further back from the hill or crag and walk in.
- Ask permission to park outside a house, farm or other premises.
- Steer clear of honeypots; make a point of exploring quieter areas.
- Share your walks calendar with other clubs in the area to avoid two big groups being in the same area on the same day.
- Where there's an honesty box in a car park, make sure to contribute.

If you have other ideas in relation to parking and responsible access to the areas where we walk and climb, please email

helen@mountaineering.ie ■

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Celebrate and share our upland heritage

Ireland's mountains and upland areas are rich in reminders of how previous generations have interacted with the landscapes where we walk and climb. Visible reminders include standing stones, the walls of old houses, lazy-beds and disused mines, while place-names sometimes provide invisible evidence of historic events or settlement. Yet Ireland's mountains and upland areas are living landscapes, too, where the interactions between people and the landscape continue to evolve, contributing to our shared cultural heritage.

2018 is the **European Year of Cultural Heritage**. Cultural heritage is diverse; embracing landscape, wildlife and farming practices, as well as literature, art, music, food and folklore. The knowledge of hillwalkers and climbers, and the passion that we have for Ireland's mountains, also form part of our cultural heritage.

The theme for European Year of Cultural Heritage this year in Ireland is **'Make a Connection'**. This theme aims to deepen the connection between people and heritage, and build a legacy of greater public engagement.

Mountaineering Ireland is encouraging all clubs and individual members to tap into the cultural heritage of the places where we walk and climb, and to celebrate and share our upland heritage, for example through guided walks or a photographic exhibition. Doing so in conjunction with an upland community group could make for a mutually beneficial exchange. You could find out more about the mountains where you're active, and it would help to

build understanding within host communities of what interests recreational visitors.

Deepening our connection with the places where we walk and climb will give us more confidence that we're welcome. It will also help us to see how we can enjoy our activities without imposing, and how we can bring greater benefit to the area.

Learn more about the European Year of Cultural Heritage on www.eych2018.com ■



The isolated ruins of Ned Curran's cottage in Coumtoy in the Comeraghs, believed to have been a 'safe house' in the Civil War.



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Challenge yourself in 2018

With the season of New Year's resolutions almost upon us, here are twelve suggestions for how you could make a positive difference in Ireland's mountains and upland areas. Challenge yourself, and others, to do one or two things differently when you walk and climb in 2018.

- Car-pool whenever you can – it reduces emissions and saves on parking space.
- Support the areas where you walk and climb by using shops, cafés, pubs and other services.
- Do a five-minute litter-pick around the area where you're parked before you head off for your activity.
- If you come across a farmer on the hills, stop and have a chat.
- Reduce the spread of erosion by keeping to the centre of paths.
- Carry a bag to pick up litter that you come across in the outdoors.
- Get the **Biodiversity Data Capture** app and make one biodiversity report from each day out.
- Spend a day volunteering with **Mountain Meitheal** or the **Mourne Heritage Trust**.
- Report dumping by phoning **1850 365 121** or using the '**See It, Say It**' app. In Northern Ireland call **028 9056 9453**.
- Share the beauty of Ireland's natural environment with others through social media.
- Cut down on flights by booking a holiday in Ireland.
- Organise a club walk using public transport ■

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Become a Guppy Friend

Why is there a picture of an exotic fish in the *Irish Mountain Log*?

The fish is a **guppy**, one of the world's mostly widely distributed tropical fish and also a popular aquarium species.

Awareness has grown globally of the impact that plastic packaging and microplastic beads (often from cosmetics and toothpaste) can have on fish and sea birds. Microplastic waste also includes microfibres (less than 5mm long) which detach from acrylic, nylon and polyester fabrics during washing. As much of this waste slips through water treatment plants, the microfibres find their way into the ocean, where fish mistake them for plankton. This is detrimental to the health of the fish and also means that the microfibres may find their way into the human food chain.

In 2015, outdoor clothing company **Patagonia** commissioned research, which showed that a city of 100,000 inhabitants releases a volume of wash-related microfibres equivalent to 15,000 plastic bags every day. That makes a shocking 176,000 bags from

Dublin city and its suburbs, every day. As walkers and climbers, we're contributing to this problem as most of us have a number of fleece and synthetic garments.

The **Guppy Friend** is a solution to help prevent these fibres entering rivers and

oceans, created by the two German surfers who launched the **STOP! MICRO WASTE** manifesto, with financial assistance from Patagonia and a Kickstarter crowd-funding campaign. It's a synthetic bag that you can use to wash fleece and other synthetic clothing in a washing machine. The bag acts as a filter, trapping the tiny synthetic fibres. Using a **Guppy Friend** also means that fewer fibres break off during washing, thus extending the lifespan of your clothing. The bag is being sold at the cost of manufacture and shipping – €20.

Buy a **Guppy Friend bag**, to trap your own microfibre waste, from the **Patagonia** shop in Exchequer Street, Dublin, or online at eu.patagonia.com ■



PIXABAY.COM

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Nature is for everybody

Since Richard Louv introduced the phrase 'nature-deficit disorder' in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, there have been many articles published about the consequences of children spending less time outdoors and being alienated from nature.

An expanding body of scientific evidence suggests that nature-deficit disorder contributes to attention difficulties, the development of obesity and higher rates of mental and physical illnesses.

A few years ago, the National Trust in the UK launched a cleverly titled campaign, "50 things to do before you're 11¾." It was successful in providing a structure that encouraged parents to spend adventurous time outdoors with their children. Most of the fifty activities would also work well for those aged 3¾ or 8¾, e.g. going birdwatching, walking barefoot, tracking wild animals or picking blackberries in the wild.

The theme for this year's **Heritage Week** (taking place on August 19-27th) is "Nature and People." Why not use Heritage Week as an occasion to share the delights of Ireland's hills, coast and countryside with friends or family? Bring people of any age outdoors and help them start, or renew, a relationship with nature.

Take a walk, pause and listen for the sounds of nature. Get down close to look at the detail in a wildflower, or watch an insect probing for nectar. You don't need to know the names of flowers or butterflies to point out their beauty. By getting people out touching, smelling and tasting nature you can give them a sense of

the life that's in the outdoors.

Nature supports human life, by providing us with food, pollinating many of our crops, providing us with building materials, recycling much of our waste and filtering our water. Biodiversity underpins our economy, and our health and well-being.

In recent decades, human impacts on biodiversity have accelerated and resulted in increased damage to habitats, loss of species and degradation of our air, water and soils. We need to respect and protect Ireland's natural environment. That can start with helping people to connect with nature and to understand how vital it is to human well-being.

The Heritage Week website has 100 different ideas for events to engage people with nature. Browse the list and make your plan today:

www.heritageweek.ie ■

HELEN LAWLESS



The sticky leaves of the greater butterwort plant are very effective at trapping insects, which the plant breaks down over a few days to compensate for the lack of nutrients in the damp, acidic areas where it grows.

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Dump the dumpers

The beauty of Ireland's natural environment plays a big part in what makes our outdoor experiences special. So it is not surprising that we are sad or angry when we come across dumping in the mountains or elsewhere in the countryside. You can make a difference by reporting the problem; and it's easy to do so.

In the **Republic of Ireland**, dumping should be reported through the Environmental Protection Agency's 24-hour national environmental complaints line – **1850 365 121**.

To make it even easier, download the EPA's free **'See It, Say It'** smartphone app. Using the app, you can take a photograph of a pollution incident, whether it be littering, backyard burning, fly-tipping

or water pollution, add a quick description and your contact details, and send the message with automatic GPS location coordinates for follow-up by the relevant authority.

In **Northern Ireland**, phone the Environmental Crime Unit at **028 9056 9453** or email **environmentalcrime@daera-ni.gov.uk**.

By downloading the app or saving the numbers into your phone, you'll be able to respond *immediately* the next time you come across dumping. Early reporting of dumping can help prevent further dumping. It will also reduce costs, if rubbish bags can be removed before they are torn open by animals.

Many Mountaineering Ireland clubs do a clean-up or litter-pick as part of the **National Springclean**. These events are good fun and hugely satisfying. For more information, visit **www.nationalspringclean.org** or take a look at Mountaineering Ireland's tips on **Organising a Club Clean-up** at **<https://tinyurl.com/z4ks9bl>**.

Helping to keep the areas where we walk and climb litter-free could start with carrying a plastic bag to take home your own litter and other items that you come across during the day. Don't think of it as picking up other people's rubbish; you're demonstrating your respect for the environment and helping to ensure that you and others have positive recreation experiences ■

HELEN LAWLESS



Fly-tipping in the Wicklow Mountains.

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15,000 choices a day – let's make good ones

A quick calculation shows that a 12km hike in the mountains probably involves taking more than 15,000 steps (65 double paces per 100m = 1,300 steps per kilometre). With every step, we make a choice about where to place our foot, so that's roughly 15,600 choices before we add in all the decisions about stopping to eat, taking on and off hats, talking to people, etc.

Few could argue that the worn and muddy path lines across the slopes, ridges and summits of Ireland's mountains are not the most noticeable impact of increased recreation activity in the uplands. By making our 15,000+ choices consciously, we can help to mitigate the spread of erosion. We can do that by keeping to the centre of paths wherever they exist and by choosing to walk on

robust surfaces like rock, or on vegetation and soil that has already been damaged by footfall.

The impact of trampling is less obvious but still visible on well-drained summits, where the small bits of green between the rocks in those places may be rare or

threatened mosses and plants such as **Alpine Clubmoss**, pictured below. Clubmosses are very ancient plants; their fossil records go back over 400 million years. This species was recorded for the first time on the Comeragh Plateau in 2010, even though its predecessors

are likely to have been growing there for centuries.

Ireland has relatively little of the montane heath habitat that supports plants like Alpine Clubmoss. It is all on the high ground, which hillwalkers and climbers are drawn towards. It may not appear as fragile as blanket bog, but thin soils, high winds and low temperatures mean that life on the summit plateau is precarious – even before we arrive. It is just as important, therefore, that we protect summit vegetation by choosing to walk within established path lines, rather than widening the damage.

Get out and enjoy Ireland's mountains responsibly over the winter months, make good choices when you place your feet and, if you come across Alpine Clubmoss, report your find through www.biodiversityireland.ie ■

HELEN LAWLESS



Alpine Clubmoss on Corrigasleggaun above Kelly's Lough in the Wicklow Mountains. Other locations in Wicklow where this species is vulnerable to trampling, particularly if groups spread out, include just north of the summit of Tonelagee and north of Mullaghcleevaun East Top.

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Time to get engaged

‘There are places where it doesn’t feel like it’s ours anymore, as if the guests have taken over the guesthouse.’ So writes Lake District farmer James Rebanks in his 2015 autobiography *The Shepherd’s Life*. Similar sentiments have been expressed by Irish hillfarmers.

James Rebanks’ book is a captivating read, even for those without an affinity with farming or the Lake District. His evolution from school dropout to sustainable tourism consultant is interwoven with honest descriptions of farm life. He conveys the passion that hill sheep farmers have for their work and their landscape, and he lets us see recreational activities from the farmer’s perspective.

Ireland doesn’t have the visitor traffic of the Lake District, but all those active in the outdoors for more than a few years will have observed a marked increase in the numbers engaging in outdoor recreation activities here. That increase is visible through crowded car parks and more eroded paths on our hills. What is less visible is the strain those increased numbers are exerting on the goodwill of the landowners, who we depend upon for access, and on businesses and other local residents in the areas where we conduct our activities.

Responsible enjoyment of Ireland’s mountains is about more than having the technical skills to complete your route and not leaving banana skins behind. To ensure that our activities do not intrude on those who live and work in upland areas, we need to understand the place we are in.

The easiest way to do that is by talking with people. Find out



Neil Salway (Blackstairs Ramblers), Martin Shannon (Chairman, Blackstairs Farming Group) and Mick Monahan (Tullow Mountaineering Club) on Shannon’s Lane in the Blackstairs at the end of Mountaineering Ireland’s Mountain Environment Day in June. Photograph: Helen Lawless

what’s going on in the area; ask who owns the land or what’s the best way to go. A chat with locals in the pub afterwards could give you some more information about the place you’ve just been to, and it helps to build understanding within host communities of what interests recreational visitors.

Deepening our connection with the places where we walk and climb will give us more confidence that we’re welcome; it will also help us to see how we can enjoy our activities without imposing, and how we can bring some benefit to the area. You might even encourage an Irish hillfarmer to write his story ■

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Help protect peregrines

There are still late clutches of peregrine falcons at some crags as we write, and continued co-operation is needed from climbers so that these birds can rear their young successfully. As disturbance places unnecessary stress on the birds and interrupts their ability to hunt and supply their chicks adequately, Mountaineering Ireland is calling on climbers to withdraw as soon as possible if a bird reacts to your presence (e.g. by screeching, circling or dive-bombing). This is a critical stage in the breeding cycle for peregrines and they should be given a wide berth until the chicks are fully fledged and able to fly properly.

The peregrine, which is protected under European and national legislation, is the fastest creature on the planet, and can dive at speeds of up to 320km/h to strike its prey. When not attacking, the peregrine flies with a series of short wing-beats and alternating glides, tilting to show its pale under-feathers and broad pointed wings.

Peregrines prey on smaller birds such as duck or pigeon, and have at times been subject to persecution. National Parks and Wildlife Service Conservation Rangers, who have responsibility for wildlife protection in the Republic of Ireland, have acknowledged the role that climbers play in protecting peregrines and other cliff-nesting birds. This support is greatly appreciated as the service is currently under-staffed.



Peregrine
Photo: Anthony McGeehan

► Continued vigilance and responsible behaviour by all climbers will allow these and other birds to breed successfully. If you see human disturbance or suspicious activity at a nest, contact the local NPWS Conservation Ranger (email nature.conservation@ahg.gov.ie or see www.npws.ie/contact-us) or in Northern Ireland report it to the PSNI on 101 and ask for a C&C reference number ■