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**Working for
and representing
hillwalkers and
climbers**

Mountaineering Ireland Annual Review 2022

Looking back over 2022, most of us will remember it as the year when we returned to a more normal way of living. For Mountaineering Ireland members, of course, that meant thankfully being able to get back out on the hills, crags and climbing walls.

There were also many positives in 2022 from my own perspective as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). It was a year in which the staff team was again able to deliver the full range of benefits and services to the members and Mountaineering Ireland attracted many new members and clubs to join. Membership increased significantly by 16.3% on the 2021 figures, to 15,863, the highest level it has ever been at.

In May 2022, we launched Mountaineering Ireland's new and ambitious **Strategic Plan 2022-2025** at the National Sports Campus. This exciting plan includes an expanded suite of twelve core values and sets out five strategic themes (Transform, Grow, Support, Protect and Achieve), all aimed at moving the organisation forward over the next four years.

Within each strategic theme, we created five key aims which, once completed, will have our organisation in a much-improved position. Much work went into the new strategy, led by a small, committed Working Group, chaired by ex-Board member **Imelda Buckley** and supported by current Board members **Noel Caffrey** and **Colette Mahon**, and staff members. Thanks to them all for their input to the development of this plan, which was approved by the Board.

Our hillwalking members returned to the uplands in high numbers, and our climbing competitions and meets attracted large numbers of attendees. Members also availed of the initiatives on offer to upskill and to learn through our training offerings. As an organisation and a community, we have proved to be extremely resilient.

The input of our members is central to all our efforts within Mountaineering Ireland. I want to say a special thank you to **Patrick O'Sullivan**, Editor of the *Irish Mountain Log*, and his fellow Editorial Team volunteers, **Peter O'Neill**, **Nicky Hore** and **Phil Moore**, who are responsible for producing this highly sought-after publication. I especially also want to thank **Cóilín MacLochlainn**, who is responsible for the design and layout that results in the final, excellent appearance of the magazine. The *Log* is one of our most effective communication channels for reaching our members.

In March 2022, we welcomed **Michael Duffy**, who joined Mountaineering Ireland as our

new **Climbing Development Officer**. Michael has already made a considerable contribution supporting all areas of climbing. I also want to thank **Aron Hegarty** for his service during 2022 as our **Communications Officer**. He moved on in November and I wish him all the very best for the future.

Mountaineering Ireland has lobbied government for years, at both local and national levels, to create a strategy for the outdoors, one that would include our activities and values. The **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy** was finally launched in November 2022 by **Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD**. This is the first time we have had a government strategy with deliverables approved by Cabinet, which has actions for hillwalking and climbing. Mountaineering Ireland's **Access and Conservation Officer, Helen Lawless**, was asked by officials from the Minister's department to act as Vice-chairperson of the working group charged with producing the Strategy. The working group was chaired by **Daithí De Forge**, Head of Recreation in **Coillte**. Thank you to all of those involved in delivering such a comprehensive strategy.

Operationally, during 2022, Mountaineering Ireland allocated record resources to delivering our core activities across hillwalking, climbing and training. In climbing, I want to say a special thank you to **Michael Duffy**, the coaches, the support team volunteers and the **Climbing Committee** for their contributions in 2022.

We saw strong numbers return to our meets and gatherings, from the Fair Head Climbing Meet in County Antrim to our first Autumn Gathering since 2019, held in County Wicklow. Our training team of **Jane Carney** and **Laura Griffin**, supported by **Mountain Training Board Ireland** and our providers,

“ Membership increased significantly by 16.3% on the 2021 figures, to 15,863, the highest level it has ever been at.”

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.



The late Michael Byrne, designer of 'Irish Peaks' and other great works. May he rest in peace

delivered a huge workload during the year. Thank you all very much for such an active year in 2022.

With the generous support of **Sport Ireland**, we were able to offer opportunities for new climbers under the **Get Climbing** programme and to offer training under our **Club Leadership** programme to our hillwalkers and climbers. The hillwalking community availed of this resource in significant numbers. I want to thank **Ruth Whelan**, the **Hillwalking Committee**, the training providers and the club volunteers for their support in 2022.

Access and the environment are areas closely connected to all that we do. Under the watchful eye of **Helen Lawless** and the **Access and Conservation Committee**, with a wonderful support network of volunteers across the island of Ireland, they have yet again delivered on another high-level work plan in 2022.

Youth development is a growth area in Northern Ireland, with the support of **Sport Northern Ireland** and delivered by **Ricky Bell**, who continued to provide a strong programme of events, by offering an extremely impressive schedule of support and services to the hillwalking and climbing clubs, to volunteers and participants alike. I want to also say a special thank you to Ricky for the first quarter of 2022 particularly, as he was doing his own core work and filling the vacuum for the **Climbing Development Officer** position until the appointment of **Michael Duffy**.

In our office, **Siobhan Quinn** continued her work in administration and financial matters, covering a large range of tasks, while continuing to be the main point of contact for our members, stakeholders and the public. Thanks to Siobhan for all her work in 2022, not least for taking on the role of **Company Secretary**.

Our **Get Ireland Walking** programme, under the direction of **Jason King** and **Linda Sankey**, grew in reach in 2022 after the previous two years, when activities had been severely curtailed. Get Ireland Walking took a lead role in a global initiative called **Walk 21**, helping to host a conference in TU Dublin in September. Five senior government ministers attended during the seven-day event. Get Ireland Walking also worked on its new strategic plan, due to be launched in 2023. Thank you to all involved in Get Ireland Walking, especially the **Department of Health, Sport Ireland** and the network of **Local Sport Partnerships**.

I want to thank **Gerry Gorman** for his service to Mountaineering Ireland over many years as **National Children's Officer (NCO)**. Gerry moved on from this voluntary role in late 2022 and he was replaced in an interim capacity by **Laura Griffin**, until a new National Children's Officer was appointed in 2023.

I want to pay tribute to a close colleague and genuine friend of Mountaineering Ireland who passed away in 2022.

Michael Byrne provided an outstanding service to our organisation over the years through the printed materials he produced and, more recently, with his contribution to our wonderful publication *Irish Peaks*, the second edition of which was published in October. Michael sadly passed away over Christmas 2022 after a short illness. He was a true gentleman who loved the outdoors, be it while walking or cycling. Michael will be remembered for his wonderful smile and his attention to detail. Rest in peace, Michael.

There were changes to the Board during 2022. **David Pollard** took over as Chair in the first quarter. I want to thank **Geoff Thomas**, **Imelda Buckley**, **Colette Mahon** and **Grainne MacLoughlin**, who all stepped down from the Board in 2022, for their service to Mountaineering Ireland. I want to welcome **Christina Petris**, **Mary Lally**, **Joan Mulloy** and **Brian Kennan**, who joined the Board during the year. I want to thank the Board for their support to me in my role, and in particular the Chair, who is a pleasure to work with.

Our five sub-committees continued their work diligently in 2022. I want to thank all involved in those sub-committees, the volunteers, staff and third-party professionals, for all they delivered during the year. The **Finance, Audit and Risk Committee** worked tirelessly to provide guidance and financial expertise to the Board, ensuring that our finances were robust and fit for purpose during 2022. Thanks to **Joe Hore**, **Christine Petris** and the Committee's Chair, **Dave Ayton**, for all their support in 2022. Our accounts are processed monthly by **Integral Finance and Technology Accountants**, and I want to thank **John Slevin** and **Mark Tallon** for their professionalism and service throughout the year.

The staff team's collective work to help us achieve our operational and strategic goals in 2022 was massive, and far beyond what you would expect from a team of that size. Thanks very much to all of them for their contributions. I look forward to continuing to work with them in the years ahead.

From the bottom of my heart, it was a genuine pleasure to work with and serve you during 2022 and I look forward to further positive outcomes in 2023.

Murrough McDonagh
Chief Executive Officer
Mountaineering Ireland



“ This is the first time we have had a government strategy with deliverables approved by Cabinet, which has actions for hillwalking and climbing.”



Supporting and Developing Hillwalking

2022 was an exciting one. Mountaineering Ireland's membership rose to 15,843, with over 190 active clubs, 170 of which were primarily hillwalking clubs. It also saw the launch of our **Strategic Plan** for 2022-2025. Much of Mountaineering Ireland's work on hillwalking fits under two of the high-level priorities in the current strategic plan:

- **GROW** - *Grow and promote responsible participation in all our activities;*
- **SUPPORT** - *Support all those involved in our sports and activities while appreciating the health and wellbeing benefits.*

Happy Hiking

Following on from our **Parents' Hill Skills Days** in 2021, we broadened the scope this year and offered parents, individual members and club members an opportunity to learn more about movement skills, basic navigation, map reading, equipment and key safety considerations. Overall, feedback has been extremely positive. Our **Happy Hiking** programme for 2022 ran from the end of August to mid-October, with 34 days available across 20 locations around the country. There was a total attendance of 269 and a waiting list of over 140.

Club Leadership Programme

In 2021, Mountaineering Ireland created a programme offering our clubs free informal training by qualified instructors. The purpose of the programme was to provide informal training to existing club members to build their confidence to lead,

to increase the numbers of leaders within clubs. The programme was tailored to each club's needs, with a focus on group management, navigation skills, risk assessment and imparting skills to other members.

The programme was rolled out again in 2022 due to demand and its success in achieving its objectives. Since its inception, the programme has seen over 1,100 club leaders trained from 91 different hillwalking clubs. Well done to all existing and 'in training' club leaders, who are stepping up to support their clubs!

National Walking Day

The third annual **National Walking Day** took place on Sunday, September 25th, 2022, as part of **European Week of Sport**. There was a week of activities celebrating the many ways to walk, with many clubs and members involved.

Club Committee Workshops

Over 120 representatives from 38 clubs attended our four workshops for club committees. The workshops were aimed at club committee members who were new to their committees and at those who just wanted to refresh their skills or learn something new.

Each of the four workshops covered different topics, including Club Committee Roles and AGMs; Insurance and Accident Reporting; Membership Systems; and GDPR Toolkit for clubs. This was a great opportunity for club committee members to engage and ask

any questions that they had on the specific topics to help support committees to run a club effectively.

Autumn Gathering

Hosted by **The Wayfarers**, this long-awaited gathering took place on October 7-9th, 2022, based in the Glenview Hotel, Glen of the Downs, Co Wicklow. Eighty-four members attended, the majority of whom went out and explored the hills and crags on the Saturday. The Wayfarers' club leaders led some fantastic walks and even managed to get the sun to shine, affording participants some beautiful views. Walks were from 8 to 25 kilometres in length with height gains from 550-1,150m. On the Sunday morning there was a variety of



workshops, including on emergency prevention and management with **Glen of Imaal Mountain Rescue**, as well as an environmental walk and training.

Lynam Lecture

Mountaineering Ireland's **Lynam Lecture and Award 2022** took place in Dublin on December 8th, with over 300 people in attendance, including members of the Lynam family. There was a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the lecture hall for **Leo Houlding**, who gave an excellent talk and was a worthy recipient of the Lynam Award, established in 2011 in memory of **Joss Lynam**. Leo entertained the audience with accounts of his outstanding achievements in mountaineering over the years.

Women With Altitude

Mountaineering Ireland has a strategic goal to increase the proportion of female leaders, instructors and role models in our sport. After a two-year sabbatical, we did something totally different and it paid off. The **Women With Altitude 2022** event saw over 110 females arrive at Cronin's Yard at the foot of Carrauntoohil with their tents and camper vans, and the right attitude, despite the dubious weather forecast.

Although there were a few familiar faces, most attendees were new to this event. Female hillwalkers and rock climbers of all levels came from all over the country, even from as far as Donegal and Down. The pure breadth of age, knowledge and experience on display throughout the weekend was amazing to see. The keynote speaker, **Clare Sheridan**, was truly inspirational and motivating, and the attendees all contributed to a wonderfully positive atmosphere, which was electric from beginning to end, helped by the beautiful backdrop of the Kerry mountains.

Summit Sisters

Summit Sisters was a pilot programme, which involved bringing teenage girls' individuality and creativity out to the hills. The programme ran over three weeks. Each day brought the girls to a different location where different themes were introduced, including art, music, photography, flora, fauna and geology, wellbeing, navigation and key hill skills, which were tailored to the group's main interests.

The girls then chose the creative activity that took their interest the most, such as taking a photo, writing a song or poem or painting a picture. On the final day, they brought their finished pieces with them to share with the group.



The highlights for the girls were being immersed in the mountains and being allowed to explore their creative side, while building a greater bond with each other through their shared outdoor experience.

This pilot provided an opportunity to evaluate the programme to ensure that it met its objectives with a view to scaling it up for nationwide delivery. Additional funding was secured in late 2022 to roll out the programme on a wider scale, which is exciting news for 2023.

HER Outdoors

HER Outdoors Week ran from August 8th to 14th. It was a fantastic opportunity to re-ignite and reintroduce females to the outdoors. It was focused on Finding Your Outdoors and aimed to inspire, educate and encourage more females to get out into the great outdoors. By all accounts it met its objectives!

Mountaineering Ireland, working collaboratively with **Sport Ireland** and **Local Sports Partnerships**, saw this as a great opportunity to build on the Women With Altitude event held earlier in the year and to provide women with another opportunity to build their confidence on the hills and link in with peers and instructors in their local area.

Twelve hillwalking-based activities took place in ten different locations around the country, with 85 women in attendance. The aim of the week was to encourage women to embrace the elements, immerse themselves in nature and, most importantly, have fun!

She Summits

In partnership with **Kilkenny Recreation and Sports Partnership**, the **She Summits** programme ran over a number of weeks and throughout HER Outdoors Week. It gave women with little experience of hillwalking an opportunity to develop their hill skills.



Hillwalking Committee

A lot of the work done by Mountaineering Ireland for hillwalkers is guided by Mountaineering Ireland's **Hillwalking Committee**. In 2022, the committee members were: **Gráinne McLaughlin** (Chairperson Jan-September), **Brian Kennan** (Chair September to present), **Ruth Whelan** (Secretary), **Veronica Kelly**, **Pat Macken**, **Russell Mills**, **Louise Nolan**, **Marian Wallis**, **Gerard Reidy**, **Claire Brennan**, **Jim McHale**, **Peter Wright** and **Elaine Nic Réamoinn**.

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

Mountaineering Ireland's work to support and develop climbing concentrates on three of our strategic priorities:

- **ACHIEVE** – *Support all those involved in our activities and sports to achieve their potential;*
- **GROW** – *Grow and promote responsible participation in all our activities;*
- **SUPPORT** – *Support all those involved in our sports and activities while appreciating the health and wellbeing benefits.*

Youth climbing camps

Over the course of June and July, forty young climbers from all over Ireland were given the opportunity to experience all that is good about rock climbing in Ireland. Held in two venues, Dalkey Quarry, Co Dublin and Ailladie, Co Clare, the camps were fun, informative and a great success. Mountaineering Ireland would like to thank **Ambrose Flynn** of **Hike and Climb** and **Damien O'Sullivan** of **Anabatic** for delivering the camps.

Climbing meets

Outdoor climbing meets continue to connect the community as Irish and international climbers come together to share knowledge, skills, stories and a love for our mountains and crags.

The **Fair Head Climbing Meet**, hosted by **Dal Riada Climbing Club**, continued its success. Dal Riada secured another

professional climber, **Sonnie Trotter**, to speak to over two hundred people in the humble cow shed at the **McBride family farm**. The impact of these keynote speakers is not only that they inspire our community but also that the narrative filters across the wider climbing community that Ireland has world-class climbing.

The **Donegal Climbfest** and the **Mourne Climbfest** grew in traction, and the newest meet, the **Women's Rockfest**, was also an outstanding success, bringing together shared learning, high energy and good weather to the cliffs of Ailladie. Congratulations to the organisers, **Nastia Strizakova**, **Freya Shannon** and **Aly Coyle**.

Competitions and High-performance Climbing

Numerous national climbing competitions were held during 2022, including the **Irish Bouldering League (IBL)**, the **Youth Climbing Series (YCS)** and the **Irish Boulder Championships / Four Nations Series**.

A first this year was the introduction of the **Four Nations Series**, with Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales coming together in a collaborative boulder and lead climbing series, with each nation

hosting a round of the series. By combining the boulder series with the Irish Boulder Championships, Ireland saw a healthy increase in competitors coming from across the water, providing a wider circle of competitors to compete against one another.

A big thank you to all of the climbing walls – **Awesome Walls, Boulderworld, Dublin Climbing Centre, Gravity, SUAS** and **University of Limerick** – for hosting and supporting the competitions. Thanks also to all of the volunteers, judges and belayers for their support throughout the events. Mountaineering Ireland would especially like to thank **Eléonore Conroy**, who has been a key figure in the running of the competitions. Sadly, this is the last year for Eléonore with the YCS, but **Stephanie O'Connor** has been learning the ropes. We are delighted to have Stephanie on our support team.

In line with our Strategic Plan's 'Achieve' pillar, the **Irish Youth Squad** was established in 2022 to further develop our high-performance athletes. The aim of the squad is to develop young athletes' skills for potential selection for the Irish Youth and Senior Teams and for entry into International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) competitions. The Irish Youth Squad consists of twelve members, coached by our high-performance coaches eight times per year and at the YCS competitions.

Finally, well done to all our Youth and Senior competitors, who represented Ireland throughout 2022.

Climbing development and publications

Sport climbing development continues in Ireland, with increasing popularity at Knockmore, Co Fermanagh, on Inis Mór in the Aran Islands and on Galboly Crag, Co Antrim. Access and relationships remain positive, and we ask the climbing community to respect these relationships and Mountaineering Ireland's climbing development guidelines, as well as parking sensibly and taking note of honesty boxes where they are installed.

In late 2022, we saw the eagerly awaited publication of the new **Dalkey Quarry guidebook**, by **Conor McGovern** and **Howard Hebblethwaite**. This new edition provides an excellent and comprehensive guide to one of the most popular rock climbing locations in Ireland. Brimming with new photos, topos and information, the new guide is a 'must have' for any Irish or visiting trad climber.

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 the **Sport Ireland** funding under the Dormant Account Funding Scheme. The aim of the initiative is primarily to offer participants the basics of indoor climbing so that they can operate independently on climbing walls. The last year saw many young participants take part in the programme, being successfully introduced to a whole new world of climbing and the social interactions that go with it.

Climbing Committee

The year 2022 saw a change-over to a new **Climbing Committee**. Mountaineering



Ireland would like to thank all of the members of the 2021 committee for their dedication and input to every facet of Irish climbing. The members were **Geoff Thomas** (Chairperson), **John Healy**, **John Harrison**, **Peter Wood**, **Ricky Bell**, **Kelley O'Reilly-Smith**, **Chloe Condon** and **Damien O'Sullivan** (Secretary).

By mid-2022, the new Climbing Committee had been established, with **Alistair Wilson** (Chairperson), **Ian Lawler** (Board member), **Rob Brown**, **Angela Carlin**, **Eléonore Conroy**, **Oona Frawley**, **Rob Hunter** and **Michael Duffy** (Secretary). Mountaineering Ireland would like to welcome and thank the new Climbing Committee members for joining our team. We look forward to working with you.

New Appointment

Climbing Development Officer: Michael Duffy

Michael Duffy joined Mountaineering Ireland in March 2022 as the newly appointed **Climbing Development Officer**.

He took over from **Damien O'Sullivan**, who had played a huge role in the development of Irish climbing. Michael has been part of the Irish climbing community for nearly thirty years now and is highly motivated to seeing Irish climbing continues to grow.

Northern Irish Youth Development Programme

Youth

In 2022, new cohorts of young climbers within Mountaineering Ireland clubs were supported, as families and volunteers worked together to give them opportunities to participate in indoor and outdoor climbing. The **Feel Good Factor Club** established a new youth climbing section. Mountaineering Ireland supported new-to-climbing parents with a series of indoor climbing sessions to build the climbing and belaying skills necessary to safely manage their young climbers at indoor climbing walls. We did this in collaboration with **Tollymore National Outdoor Centre** and their trainee programme to increase connectivity and skill sharing.

We continued to support **youth climbing clubs** in Northern Ireland by organising outdoor meets where young people could experience the natural resources on their doorstep. The numbers and level of experience of volunteers continued to grow across the youth climbing clubs. Clubs such as **Gilford Youth Climbing Club**, **North Coast Integrated Climbers** and **Hanging Rockers** have been tremendous hubs for giving young people opportunities to climb in their home areas.

During the summer months, we ran 'taster' events for non-affiliated clubs interested in climbing. **Sport NI's Altnadue Sport Climbing Quarry** has



been a great asset for this type of event. That, combined with enthusiastic and experienced support from Mountaineering Ireland instructors, gave many young people an introduction to the incredible world of rock climbing during the year.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

New relationships have been developed at council level in Northern Ireland to facilitate inclusive climbing opportunities.

Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Borough Council and **Belfast City Council** have worked to create events using Mountaineering Ireland instructors trained in the **Climbing For All** syllabus. These initiatives will open up future opportunities for all to participate in our activities.

We initiated the **Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison Climbing Club** for a spectrum of young males and females. This is the first club of its kind in the UK justice system, with scope to provide opportunities to change lives through climbing. The club's objective is to promote the enjoyment of indoor climbing and recognise the contribution it makes to the physical and mental health of participants. We assisted young people in building trust and confidence. Climbing has the ability to remove cultural stigmas, allow people to connect and rehabilitate through a deeply focused movement sport. This has been a rewarding and successful programme for all.



Inter-varsity Climbing Competition

The **Irish Inter-varsity Climbing Competition** saw teams from fourteen universities competing in bouldering and sport climbing events.

Ultimately, it was a very successful competition weekend, with over two hundred and fifty young people competing in a fun and safe environment. The competition catered for novice climbers, who had recently joined their university climbing clubs, right through to high performance athletes on the Irish Climbing Team.

The Irish Inter-varsity Climbing Competition will now continue its tour around Irish climbing walls, hosted by a different university each year.

For the local climbing community, this was an opportunity to collaborate with our partners, add value and strength to our relationships with local facilities and share understanding across our activities to achieve benefits for all.

Awards and accreditation

This year, our aim was to support younger youth club members to take their first steps onto the awards pathway by delivering the **Indoor Climbing Assistant Award** to secure their enthusiasm and motivation for club activities going forward.

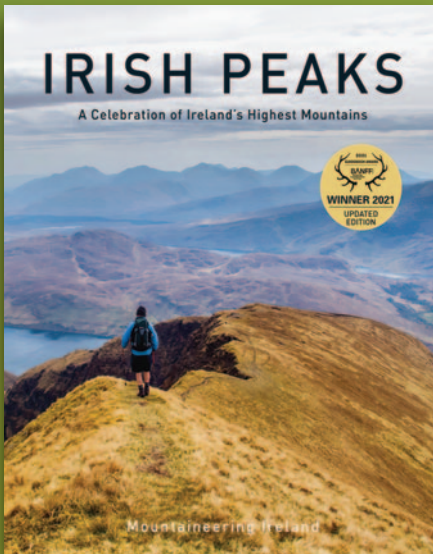
We also supported key volunteers to increase their capacity to support their clubs by facilitating safeguarding and first aid training. We also offered training for higher climbing awards, including the Climbing Wall Instructor and Rock Climbing Instructor Awards.



FIND OUT MORE

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

The Ideal Gift!



The revised and updated second edition of Mountaineering Ireland's award-winning *Irish Peaks* book is now available through www.irishpeaks.ie and from selected bookshops and outdoor stores – see list on www.mountaineering.ie



This beautifully illustrated, large-format guide to Ireland's Highest Hundred Mountains makes a lovely gift and will inspire hiking trips to all our main mountain areas

Irish Peaks retails at €39.95. Mountaineering Ireland members get a substantially reduced rate of €29.95 when purchasing online through www.irishpeaks.ie (plus packaging and delivery charges of €9.95 for the island of Ireland, additional elsewhere)



This second edition has:

- Over 50 new photographs
- Latest MountainViews Highest Hundred list
- Minor changes to ten routes
- Additional route in Wicklow: Seefingan
- Updated safety advice
- New section on landscape change after glaciation





Training and Skills



Promoting mountain training and skills development is a key part of Mountaineering Ireland's work programme, contributing towards all our strategic priorities, particularly:

- **ACHIEVE** – *Support all those involved in our activities and sports to achieve their potential;*
- **SUPPORT** – *Support all those involved in our sports and activities while appreciating the health and wellbeing benefits.*

Mountain Training Board Ireland (MTBI)

Mountain Training Board Ireland is a sub-committee of Mountaineering Ireland. In 2022, Mountain Training Board Ireland's provision of quality assured, internationally recognised mountain training awards and schemes, delivered by qualified and experienced trainers, grew in strength, topping the previous all-time high of 2021. This was due to an increased awareness of the health benefits of our sport and a need for the development of personal skills and instructional competence.

With participation in our sport rising, the demand for training has increased. The Training Office and training providers have benefited from the learnings and adaptations forced upon us when social distancing was essential by maintaining a blended approach to training and utilising online and face-to-face training to maximise candidate learning.

The **international meets** in winter and summer went ahead, each with record numbers attending. It was particularly notable that each had significant youth participation. **Online skills workshops, club training officer workshops and provider meetings** continued, along with increased use of the suite of **training videos** and resources accessible to all on the Mountaineering Ireland website and YouTube channel. Mountain Training Board Ireland is in a unique position, providing and developing both formal and informal training across the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. We promote self-reliance and inspire participation and adventure through skills development, thus facilitating enjoyment and supporting safety.

It was another positive year for **training and training providers**, whose innovation has produced blended learning opportunities, developed fresh ideas on training delivery and maintained a professional approach in very difficult times. The benefits of this overall approach have included fewer emissions, less fuel and resource consumption, and improved attendance at meetings. We will continue to apply our lockdown learnings to the way we operate now and on into the future.

The members of MTBI in 2022 were: **Dawson Stelfox** (Interim Chair), **Alan Fairweather**, **Alan Mordaunt**, **John O'Brien**, **Jonny Parr**, **Kate Thompson**, **Lorcan**

McDonnell, **Natasza Berlowska**, **Stephen Creber**, **John Cousins** (Observer & Technical Advisor), **Kieran O'Hara** (Observer & Technical Advisor), **Laura Griffin** (Training Administrator & MTBI support), **Jane Carney** (Training Officer & MTBI Secretary).

Training for clubs

Training webinars, skills workshops and training resources continued to support clubs in 2022. The **Club Leadership** programme also helped develop leadership skills in clubs. Thank you to the numerous volunteers involved.

Training grant funding continued to support members towards safer enjoyment of the mountains. This focus on training provision increases awareness of the need for personal proficiency and promotes a self-reliance ethos in our sport.

The **Women in Sport funding** was used to increase the numbers of women providers and of women taking on higher awards; to increase the number of female youth members; and to support Ireland's ice climbing athlete, **Eimir McSwiggan**, in the European Championship and World Cup competition. As a role model, Eimir McSwiggan's performance and success provide inspiration to the next generation.

Skills series and training resources

The **online skills videos** have now had over 270,000 views. The videos available range from short 2 to 4-minute recaps to taught 60 to 90-minute sessions including the Winter Skills Series, the Map Skill Series, the Youth Skills Series and the 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 71,000 views. There are also several presentations, the members library and training literature to help participants upskill and refresh. These can be found on the Mountaineering Ireland website, in the Training Resource section. They are being used by clubs, individuals, candidates, providers and participants.

Training providers

An increase in the number of training providers covering the island of Ireland increased the provision and diversity of courses available during the year. Providers were updated and inducted in the new and revised climbing awards. Candidate registrations and training and assessment of participants increased. Providers remained busy and the demand was consistent.

The new **Indoor Climbing Assistant** and **Camping Leader** awards are becoming established and cater to those in the earlier stages of their leadership roles. They provide variety for trainers and entry-level learners, and encourage younger participants into the training pathway.



Our Providers Workshops

supported high training standards and were delivered by the Training Officer and other specialists. 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 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 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, has 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.

The Mountain Training Walking Scheme review is complete, resulting in developed leadership components and a new Camping Leader Award. Maintaining the collaborative work between all the training boards across the UK and Ireland is essential for the continued development of the existing awards and so that new schemes and awards can be added to the suite of shared awards already on offer.

UIAA

The Training Officer, **Jane Carney**, is now Chair of the Youth Innovation Panel and a member of the UIAA (Union of International Alpine Association) Youth Commission. She helped develop a strategy for international youth participation and training for 2022-2025.

Sport Ireland Coaching

Mountaineering Ireland has four awards on the Sport Ireland Coaching Adventure Sports Framework and one on the Sport Ireland Coaching Framework. Two Skills Schemes and two Leadership Qualifications sit on the **Quality Qualification Ireland Framework**.

The collaborative work progressed throughout 2022, resulting in the addition of the **Lowland Leader Award** to the Quality Qualification Framework.

Awards & Schemes	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Mountain Leader Award	94	98	76	124	87	85	59	87
Hill & Moorland Leader	2	2	6	20	26	10	9	37
Lowland Leader Award	45	88	77	71	75	74	121	116
Expedition Module	-	-	48	71	75	74	121	-
Camping Leader	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	32
Rock Climbing Instructor	69	122	142	116	95	85	90	71
Rock Climbing Development Instructor	-	-	-	-	1	0	2	4
Multi Pitch Award	7	3	2	10	2	5	7	1
Climbing Wall Instructor	28	34	53	77	97	41	73	79
Climbing Wall Development Instructor	6	7	2	36	17	4	12	7
Level 1 Climbing Coach	9	18	2	23	16	0	1	1
Indoor Climbing Assistant	-	-	-	-	-	19	15	11
Mountain Skills Registration*	1,236	1,187	1,089	1,120	574	862	1,162	1,308
Rock Skills Registration	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	56	38	66	41
Total Registrations	1,496	1,559	1,495	1,668	1,094	1,297	1,738	1,795
Mountain Skills Participants	1,236	1,187	1,089	1,120	774	891	1,238	1,412
Rock Skills Participants	-	-	-	-	43	16	32	36
Total Participants For All Awards	1,496	1,559	1,497	1,668	1,246	1,211	1,705	1,820
FUNDamentals	112	73	90	192	-	-	-	-

*Mountain Skills participant numbers used 2015-2018, as registration was 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, are fundamental to hillwalking and climbing, and to the quality of our recreation experiences.

Mountaineering Ireland's Access & Conservation work addresses most of our high-level strategic priorities, but is mainly focused on:

- **PROTECT** – *Improve access and care for the mountain environment;*
- **SUPPORT** – *Support all those involved in our sports and activities, while appreciating the health and wellbeing benefits.*

Improving Access

With most land in Ireland's upland and coastal areas being privately owned, either by individuals or jointly as commonage, the activities of hillwalking and climbing here are largely dependent on the goodwill of private landowners.

It is widely acknowledged that the surge in outdoor activities during the Covid-19 period caused problems in a number of rural areas. Consequently, some landowners remain fearful or uneasy about recreational activity. Continued respect and consideration for landowners and other local residents is needed to restore trust and to protect and maintain the access that we need for our activities.

During 2022, Mountaineering Ireland devoted considerable time to working with policymakers and other recreation bodies, to address access and the management of outdoor recreation activity, including the examples below:

- November saw the launch by the **Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD**, of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, Ireland's new **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy**. This was the culmination of a two-year collaborative process, in which Mountaineering Ireland's Access & Conservation Officer played a leading role. *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* maps out an ambitious plan, with a total of ninety-five actions. These address many issues relevant to Mountaineering Ireland

members, including creating greater opportunities for people to engage in outdoor recreation, improving access, protecting the environment and encouraging responsible recreation.

- As part of **Comhairle na Tuaithe's** new Sustainable Upland Recreation Subgroup, Mountaineering Ireland visited the two pilot **Mountain Access Areas** to capture learnings from these areas with a view towards expanding this model of agreed access to other upland areas.
- Mountaineering Ireland is part of the **Visitor Safety Group (VSG)**, a UK and Ireland-wide network of organisations with a role in visitor management. **Vincent McAlinden** represents Mountaineering Ireland on the VSG management group. In September, Mountaineering Ireland played a key role in a VSG workshop at the Cliffs of Moher.
- During 2022, the **Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD**, published proposals to amend Ireland's **Occupiers' Liability** legislation, which deals with the legal responsibility of landowners for people who enter onto their land. Mountaineering Ireland made a detailed submission to the Minister, welcoming the proposals and urging further consideration in relation to the landowner's higher duty of care regarding structures for recreational users. Such structures include boardwalks, stiles, etc, but could also include a series of bolts for sport climbing.



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 routes. The year of 2022 brought further progress in addressing upland path erosion in a number of key locations, with much of this guided by the **Helping the Hills** principles instigated by Mountaineering Ireland:

- The **Croagh Patrick Sustainable Access and Habitat Restoration project** continued, with huge progress made on the challenging summit cone section of the pilgrim path. A volunteer programme commenced early in 2022, with a small group of committed Mountaineering Ireland volunteers now joining the path team once a week.
- **Donegal County Council** engaged Scottish contractors to deliver the long-awaited work to counter the erosion on Errigal, along the route from the car park to the summit.
- The **Wicklow Mountains Path Condition Survey** was completed, and Mountaineering Ireland hosted an online presentation on it in the autumn, which can be viewed on Mountaineering Ireland's YouTube channel.



- Mountaineering Ireland participated in a visit by the **Scottish Upland Path Advisory Group** to the Mournes in September to see and provide feedback on work carried out by the **National Trust** and the **Mourne Heritage Trust**.

Awareness and education

In keeping with our aim to promote wider appreciation of the beauty, fragility, uniqueness and value of Ireland's mountain environment, Mountaineering Ireland undertook a number of awareness activities in 2022:

- A highlight was an **environmental awareness day** in the Slieve Blooms in April, which was attended by the **Minister for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan TD**. With NPWS staff, Mountaineering Ireland clubs and local walkers, we considered how to balance recreation with protection of the **hen harrier**, a rare ground-nesting bird of prey.
- Two **Mountain Environment Walks** took place during the **Women With Altitude** event in the MacGillycuddy Reeks, with a further two environmental walks in Wicklow during **HER Outdoors** week.
- Our **Autumn Gathering** in Wicklow included a wonderful day of learning at Luggala Estate, where we got to see some of the conservation initiatives being taken in this iconic mountain landscape.
- In conjunction with the **Comeragh Upland Communities EIP Project**, we published a *Walking With Wildlife* guide to the animals, plants and habitats of the Comeragh Mountains.
- As part of our response to the climate emergency, Mountaineering Ireland initiated a volunteer programme to help out with a **pilot bog restoration project** led by Wicklow Mountains National Park.

Collective Effort

All this activity is guided by Mountaineering Ireland's **Access and Conservation Committee**. During 2022, **Séan Convery, James O'Farrell** and **Alan Lauder** joined the committee, with Alan succeeding **David Pollard** as Chairperson.

The other members of the committee were: **Noel Caffrey; Helen Donoghue; Fíona Gallagher; Vincent McAlinden; Áine McGirl; Orla Prendergast** and **Helen Lawless** (Secretary).

Mountaineering Ireland extends thanks to the members of our Access and Conservation Committee, and the many other volunteers who contribute to our Access and Conservation work, by representing Mountaineering Ireland on other organisations, as Club Environmental Officers, 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 priorities.



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 Get Ireland Walking team would like to take this opportunity to thank their stakeholders, **Mountaineering Ireland**, **Sport Ireland** and **Healthy Ireland**, for all of their support during 2022.

Programmes

The **Woodlands for Health** programme, in partnership with **Coillte**, **Mental Health Ireland** and **Maynooth University**, was scaled up this year, with an incredible 32 programmes now running across Ireland. Three new Working Groups were established: for Communications, Evaluation and Programming. This year, the Woodlands for Health programme also hired its first dedicated employee, **Niamh Ní Chonghaile**, who is the National Woodlands and Nature Project Lead with Mental Health Ireland. A new logo and a suite of programme support materials and branded merchandise also have been developed.

National Walking Day 2022

This year, the third **National Walking Day** had a full week of celebrations supporting the work and themes of the **Walk21 Conference**. Our goal this year

was for all people across Ireland to get outdoors, #WalkHikeRunPushRoll.

We shared videos and content featuring a range of researchers, policymakers, community groups and real walkers across a range of social media channels. As part of our celebrations, with our partner, Mental Health Ireland, we also launched a podcast, **A Guided Walking Meditation**, with media and meditation expert **Dermot Whelan**. By the end of the week over a million people had been walking!

Walk21 Ireland

A variety of speakers from across the world came together in Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) from September 19th to 23rd, 2022, to celebrate walking, by sharing international expertise and knowledge of research and practice, at Walk21 Ireland.

Dr Úna May, CEO of **Sport Ireland**, gave an overview of **Get Ireland Walking** as part of the open plenary session. It was both complimentary and welcoming of the efforts of the Get Ireland Walking initiative to be a key contributor to the promotion and development of walking in Ireland.

The Get Ireland Walking team also contributed, with Programme Manager **Jason King** talking about the work of the Programme Review Committee Advisory Council, and **Niamh Ní Chonghaile** presenting an overview of the Woodlands for Health programme. Get Ireland's Walking's Research Officer, **Dylan Power**, also presented on local and national level walking systems in Ireland and his research in Cork.

Research

The four-year research programme implemented by Get Ireland Walking and the **South East Technological University**, which began in 2019, is drawing to a close. We have learned a lot about the complex nature of walking in Ireland with respect to the policies which govern walking, the organisations which have roles to play in its promotion and the types of data that are available to monitor walking and its impacts. The global message is clear in relation to promoting physical activity – more of the same is not enough. This body of work aimed to push beyond the status quo by using systems approaches to improve the work of Get Ireland Walking.

New pilots and projects

With the **Local Sports Partnerships** and **Social Prescribing Teams** from **Waterford** and **Kilkenny**, Get Ireland Walking launched a walking prescription programme and Walking The Talk with the Men's Development Programme in 2022. Get Ireland Walking also launched the Social Walking Prescription Programme.



FIND OUT MORE

To find out more about Get Ireland Walking's programmes, visit the website www.getirelandwalking.ie, contact the team on (01) 625 1109 or email Linda Sankey, Get Ireland Walking's Communications Officer, at info@getirelandwalking.ie.