

Mountaineering Ireland AGM
Delivered online and hosted from Mountaineering Ireland's office at Irish Sport HQ, Dublin
Tuesday 28th May 2024

Present: As per attendance list.

Apologies: Joan Mulloy (Board Member), Nigel Slack (Corrib Ramblers), Alan Lauder (Board Member)

Mountaineering Ireland's Chair, David Pollard, welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Agenda:

1. Adoption of Standing Orders
2. Adoption of Minutes of the 2023 AGM
3. Chairperson's Address
4. Election to Full Membership of Aspirant Clubs
5. Company Secretary's Report
6. Presentation of Financial Statements for 2023
7. Appointment of Auditor for 2024
8. Statements regarding Safeguarding and Anti-Doping
9. Motions
10. Elections to the Board of Mountaineering Ireland

1. Adoption of Standing Orders:

These were adopted by the members present.

(Vote Results were: 76 - Yes / 0 - No / 2 - Abstain).

2. Adoption of Minutes of the last AGM:

These were adopted by the members present.

(Vote Results were: 61 - Yes / 2 - No / 15 - Abstain).

3. Chairperson's address to Mountaineering Ireland AGM, 28th May 2024

Good evening everyone and thank you for attending. It is my pleasure on behalf of the Board, to present you with a summary of some of the key activities and outcomes of our organisation over that last year.

I am firstly going to discuss some broader organisational issues before getting into the specific operational areas of hillwalking and club support, high performance and governance. I would like to start by reflecting on two events, which took place in the latter part of the year. During the Covid years our inability to bring like-minded people together was, I believe, a real loss to the organisation and so it is fantastic to see events such as the Autumn Gathering and the Lynam lecture reach new levels of success in the post-Covid years.

Particular thanks to the Kenmare Walking Club for hosting a very special Autumn Gathering in an absolutely stunning location with a really super range of activities. It was great also to see such a strong turnout for the event - I know additional walks were added at the last minute and these too were fully subscribed. The Lynam lecture continues to grow from strength to strength with over 400 people attending the event last December in Chartered

Accountants' House on Pearse Street, Dublin. It was special to see the award going to Calvin Torrans, who is not only an outstanding mountaineer but has been a trailblazer in outdoor education for second level students.

The steady year on year growth in membership numbers continued in 2023 with our total membership exceeding 16,000 for the first time at the end of October. Participation in our sport is strong across both gender and demographics. 53% of our membership is female and we have very strong rates of participation across a very wide age range. This steady membership growth would not happen without the trojan work of our clubs the length and breadth of the country.

Our Hillwalking Committee is actively working to identify opportunities to develop hillwalking, to support our clubs, and to increase our relevance and value to individual and club members. In response, the Board approved the creation of a second Hillwalking Officer and the process of filling that post has started. We expect to see the impact of that as the year progresses.

For the past three years, Mountaineering Ireland has been running a Club Leadership Programme, offering free training to clubs in order to develop new walk leaders and upskill those already leading walks. In 2023, one or more leaders from approximately 50% of our clubs availed of this programme (a total of 550 club leaders were trained). The programme will be running again in 2024.

For those who are getting started in hillwalking, the Happy Hiking programme has continued to build momentum by providing skills training to new and less experienced hikers in more than 30 locations around the country.

Mountaineering Ireland hosts the Get Ireland Walking programme, which aims to promote a culture of walking throughout the country. The programme is now in its 10th year and launched a new strategy in 2023. During the autumn Get Ireland Walking partnered with the Hillwalking Committee and a Wicklow club to develop the Summit Steps Programme, which sets out a structured and graduated approach to integrate new and younger members into clubs.

Mountaineering Ireland is the national body for mountain training and is responsible for accreditation and validation of training courses and providers. Additionally, Mountaineering Ireland provided 12 skills workshops and two international meets during 2023.

2023 was the first year of the 5-year National Outdoor Recreation Strategy. Mountaineering Ireland played a very active role in shaping and influencing the development of this ambitious strategy, which holds great potential for improvements to all outdoor sports. We will continue to support and monitor its implementation and where necessary we will hold others to account should they fail to deliver.

We have been actively engaged in several projects around the country focussed on improving the condition of upland paths. The Croagh Patrick path is one such project, where Mountaineering Ireland advocacy has been critical in achieving such a successful outcome. The pathway sets a very high benchmark for future projects of this nature. We organised a successful two-day showcase event at Croagh Patrick in May to promote this approach in other mountain areas.

We held our first Mountain Environment weekend post-Covid in Donegal in June and this was followed by four regional environmental awareness days in the autumn.

Mountaineering Ireland lobbied successfully for revisions to the Occupiers' Liability Act. The amended legislation, which came into effect last July reduce the exposure of farmers and other landowners to potential claims. It also incorporates in law for the first time the principle of voluntary assumption of risk that has long been central to hillwalking and climbing activities.

We are constantly involved in a long list of initiatives to develop increased access and to ensure continuity of existing access through formal and informal channels and by keeping strong relationships with farmers, landowners and other stakeholders and partner organisations. We participated in the Ploughing Championships in September, which provided a really positive opportunity to network with key stakeholders.

During 2023 Mountaineering Ireland established a High-Performance working group to identify the optimum next steps in supporting high-performance in Irish climbing. In addition to Mountaineering Ireland staff and volunteers, the Working Group included Jon Mackey the Canoeing Ireland High Performance Coordinator, Zoe Spriggins the BMC Competitions Programme Manager and Eimir McSwiggan a World Champion Ice Climber and representative of the UIAA. The working group agreed that establishing, resourcing and developing an effective High-Performance programme and support structure is now an essential step for Mountaineering Ireland.

A trend has been observed in the finance awarded by Sport Ireland to NGBs over the past 10 years. NGBs meeting the requirements to avail of High-Performance funding not only receive ring-fenced performance funds to sustain their High-Performance structure and directly support Irish athletes but the NGB also appears to receive a step change increase to their core grant funding.

Notable achievements on the competition front in 2023 included:

Tom Nickels and Sean Henchion 1st in Junior and Youth A categories respectively at the Junior British Lead Climbing Championships in October;
Rhyna Conroy ranked in European top 10 Junior Female lead climbing;
Caelan Lenahan ranked in top 20 Youth A female lead climbing, also first Irish competitor to make semi-finals at the European Youth Climbing Championships in September.

Irish events included the Irish Bouldering Championships and the Irish Lead Championships with a high turnout of competitors from all across Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. Many thanks to Awesome Walls for hosting and supporting the events.

In January 2023 we appointed our first professional safeguarding officer on a part time basis. (Previously this had been done on a voluntary basis but given the increasing complexity in this area this was no longer considered a sustainable approach.) I think it is fair to say that as an organisation we have made very significant progress over the year with the development of a best in class suite of procedures and supports for clubs.

In 2023 new auditors OSK were appointed. A very successful audit was carried out and OSK were very complimentary of the MI staff engagement in the audit process.

In addition, we were subject to a follow-up governance audit by COSI during 2023 looking at the implementation of the governance recommendations from their earlier audit. Again the outcome of this was very positive.

Our committees continue to play a very active role in supporting the work of the organisation. There are currently 6 committees covering:

- finance and audit
- Access and conservation
- Training
- Hill walking
- Climbing
- Governance

During 2023 we had some changes at CEO level. Our former CEO was on extended sick leave earlier in the year and subsequently left us at the end of November. The Board is extremely thankful to Helen Lawless who stood in as acting CEO on both occasions. I am very happy to tell you that we have now appointed a new permanent CEO Liam Feeley who will take up the post on the 24th of June.

Finally, I would like to thank our staff, our committee members and my fellow board members for their outstanding dedication and commitment throughout 2023.

4. Election to Full Membership of Aspirant Clubs:

Corrib Ramblers was proposed to be granted full membership of the organisation and agreed by members present.

(Vote Results were: 68 - Yes / 0 - No / 8 - Abstain).

5. Report of Company Secretary, Siobhán Quinn

The last Annual General Meeting was held on May 23rd 2023. It was a hybrid meeting hosted at Irish Sport HQ, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 and via Zoom.

There were 7 meetings of the Board of Mountaineering Ireland in 2023.

Mountaineering Ireland declared full compliance with the Sport Ireland Governance Code for Sport.

All legal and procedural requirements have been followed, including reporting and submissions to the Companies Registration Office.

Mountaineering Ireland is a company limited by guarantee and is a sporting organisation supported by both Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. All the directors are extremely focused and clear about their duties to Mountaineering Ireland. The Board of Directors acts at all times in the best interest and to the best of their capability with regard to the Mountaineering Ireland organisation, its members and other stakeholders.

6. Report of the Chairperson of Finance, Audit & Risk Committee, Dave Ayton and Presentation and Approval of Financial Statements for 2023:

The financial statements for 2023 were presented by Board member Dave Ayton showing a net deficit of €66,395 and were approved by the meeting.

Financial Statements presented are for the year ending 31st December 2023

- Sport Ireland Core funding was €247,000 (+ €18,000 received Dec 2023)

- Sport Ireland and Healthy Ireland funding for Get Ireland Walking - €285,500
- Women in Sport - €45,000, HER Moves - €18,000
- Covid 19 grant scheme - €145,000 (for Get Climbing - €50,000; IT improvement - €15,000; Club Leadership - €30,000; Covid Recovery Grant – €50,000)
- Sport Northern Ireland funding was c€53,000 for 2023/2024. This fund is specifically for youth engagement and club development initiatives in Northern Ireland.

During 2023 Mountaineering Ireland has continued to operate appropriate financial processes, this included:

- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee's oversight of financial operations and risk
- Meeting the financial reporting requirements of our key funders
- Budgets in place for all programmes
- Advise on revenue and cost income streams to ensure financial sustainability

(Vote Results were: 63 - Yes / 2 - No / 10 - Abstain)

7. Appointment of Auditor for 2024:

OSK was proposed for re-appointment for 2024 and the proposal was agreed.

(Vote Results were: 65 - Yes / 1 - No / 5 - Abstain)

8. Safeguarding Statements

- Mountaineering Ireland's safeguarding policy, the Child Safeguarding Framework, complements the NI Safeguarding Guidance *Keeping Children Safe - Our Duty to Care* and Sport Ireland's *Safeguarding Guidance for Children and Young People in Sport*.
- Mountaineering Ireland affiliated clubs with youth members, and award holders, working and/or volunteering with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults must commit to our values, principles and best practice policies and procedures in order to provide a safe, fun and enjoyable environment.

The Safeguarding Statement was Read and Noted by the AGM.

Anti-Doping Statement

- Mountaineering Ireland fully subscribes to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) procedures and promotes a drug-free sport.
- Mountaineering Ireland references anti-doping in the rules of all national level climbing competitions.
- Mountaineering Ireland provides anti-doping education for members of the Youth Climbing Team, and other climbers who compete at international competitions.
- Mountaineering Ireland includes anti-doping education as part of relevant coach education programs.

The Antidoping Statement was Read and Noted by the AGM.

The position of Anti-Doping Officer was held by Niamh Kavanagh in 2023 and Rob Hunter in 2023 until early 2024. Both were thanked for their contributions. Áine McGuinness took over as Anti-Doping Officer in 2024.

9. Motion 1 proposed by the Board – to increase the subscription for Club Members

The Annual Subscription payable by Club Members in respect of the subscription year beginning on 1st November 2024 and subsequent years (until there is any future amendment) shall be as follows:

Club Member aged 26 years and over - €38.00

Club Member aged under 26 years - €24.00

Where a Club Member aged under 26 years is the daughter or son of a registered member of that Club, a special rate of €8.50 shall apply.

Explanation:

This is an increase of €3 for Club Members, the subscription last increased in 2019.

The proposed increase is necessary to meet increased operating costs (including insurance, website and IT, salaries, and production and distribution costs for the Irish Mountain Log)

The subscription rate for Individual Members can be changed by the Board and was increased from €42 to €55 in April 2024 to restore a situation where Club Members pay approximately two-thirds of the subscription for an Individual Member.

The motion proposed by the Board was presented and approved by the meeting.

(Vote Results were: 57 - Yes / 14 - No / 3 - Abstain).

Motion 2 proposed by the Board - to amend the Constitution of Mountaineering Ireland

To amend Mountaineering Ireland's Constitution, by removing the following line from paragraph 3.h of the Memorandum of Association:

The anti-doping rules of Mountaineering Ireland are the Sport Ireland or the Sport NI Anti-Doping Rules as amended from time to time.

and replacing it with the following:

The anti-doping rules of Mountaineering Ireland are the Irish Anti-Doping Rules as amended from time to time.

Explanation:

This change has been requested by Sport Ireland to align with national policy.

The motion proposed by the Board was presented and approved by the meeting.

(Vote Results were: 70 - Yes / 1 - No / 2 - Abstain).

10. Elections:

The following have been nominated for Election to the Board of Mountaineering Ireland:

David Pollard, nominated by Club Cualann (*elected March 2021 and eligible for re-election*)

Martha Burton, nominated by Dairine Nuttall, Anthea Lacchia and John Crebbin (*co-opted October 2023*)

Jacquelyn Moore, nominated by Ryan Hanvey, James McLaughlin and David Buchanan (*co-opted October 2023*)

(Vote Results were: 65 - Yes / 2 - No / 2 - Abstain).

President, Rita Connell, thanked David Pollard and all the Board members for their time and dedication. She also thanked the staff team and in particular Helen Lawless for their work throughout 2023 and extended a welcome to Liam Feeley as he starts in the role of CEO.

David Pollard closed the meeting and thanked all in attendance.