



Repair of the Devil's Ladder and management of erosion on Carrauntoohil

Statement from the mountaineering community, February 2012

As Ireland's highest mountain, Carrauntoohil is of local and national importance. The Devil's Ladder has for over 100 years been recognised as the 'tourist' route up Carrauntoohil. Increased numbers using this and other routes means that human-induced erosion is resulting in degradation of Carrauntoohil's natural environment.

It is the view of the local mountaineering clubs listed below and Mountaineering Ireland (MI) as the national representative body, that repair work should be carried out, in the near future, on the top section of the Devil's Ladder, to prevent the worsening of erosion and consequent impacts on other parts of Carrauntoohil.

The approach to this work must respect the fact that the mountain is privately owned land and within a Special Area of Conservation. The work proposed is described in Elfyn Jones' report "Options for Erosion Control on Devil's Ladder path, Carrauntoohil" (July 2011).

MI, in conjunction with local members, will:

- Approach the landowners on Carrauntoohil seeking their agreement to work being carried out if funding can be secured;
- Prepare a rough estimate of cost to repair the upper section (based on Elfyn Jones' report);
- Approach Kerry County Council seeking part-funding for the repair of the Devil's Ladder and also to discuss the wider and longer-term issues associated with Carrauntoohil;
- With Kerry County Council, approach Fáilte Ireland seeking part-funding for the work required.

In the above discussions, MI will emphasise that this is not just about repairing the top section of the Ladder, and that based on Elfyn Jones' report, the following should also be considered:

- The need for an ongoing commitment to maintenance and small-scale remedial work;
- An audit or survey of paths / tracks in the Reeks and a process of ongoing monitoring;
- Preparation of a strategic plan for visitor management on the Reeks.

This statement from the mountaineering community is underpinned by the following principles:

- Path repair or construction in the uplands should only be carried out when this is necessary to protect the environment and not from the perspective of making it easier or safer to climb the mountain;
- Any work carried out should strive for minimum impact on the essentially wild character of the mountains and the walking experience;
- Upland path work should be of a high standard of design and implementation using indigenous materials, sympathetic in colour and texture to the immediate surrounding area;
- The use of waymarks, cairns and other intrusive features, other than those traditionally established on summits and path junctions, will be discouraged;
- Rather than imply that the mountains are being made safer, all communications about upland path repair should emphasise the skills and equipment required for safe enjoyment of the Irish mountains;
- While it may be necessary to bring in workers with relevant expertise from outside the area, it should be an objective in any upland path work to train and upskill local people;
- A sustained commitment of resources to upland path management will be sought, so that small scale continuous maintenance can become the norm, with the aim of preventing the need for major repairs.

Context

At a consultation meeting with Mountaineering Ireland (MI) members in Killarney on 16th November 2011, it was agreed that MI would prepare a statement for approval by those clubs that attended.

This statement was initially endorsed by the following clubs:

Killarney Mountaineering Club

Tralee Mountaineering Club

Laune Mountaineering Club

Dingle Hillwalking Club