



A NEW VISION FOR THE DUBLIN
MOUNTAINS

BACKGROUND

The Dublin Mountains Initiative (DMI) was established in July 2006. The aim of the DMI is to initiate and contribute to a process that will result in the creation of an outdoor recreational area in the Dublin Mountains.

The DMI believes that such an area should be developed and managed in a sustainable manner with particular attention being paid to maintaining and improving the integrity and aesthetic value of the mountain environment. It also believes that the creation of such an outdoor recreational area should be made in co-operation and consultation with the existing public and private landowners.

The current membership of the DMI consists of the following organisations:-

- i) The Mountaineering Council of Ireland
- ii) Scouting Ireland
- iii) The Irish Mountain Running Association
- iv) Mountain Biking Ireland
- v) The Irish Orienteering Association
- vi) Slí na Slainte (Associate Member)

As well as representing the views of its member bodies the DMI has also set itself the aim of considering the requirements of the majority of the citizens of Dublin who would use such an area but who are not affiliated to any of our member organisations.

THE VISION

There are few capital cities in the world where the inhabitants and visitors alike have such ready access to a mountain range - it is possible to travel from the centre of Dublin to the mountains and to be looking down on the city from a mountain top in well under an hour. This is a unique asset right on the door of the city and it is one that is severely under-developed from a recreational and amenity perspective. It is also an asset that will be of increasing importance over the next decade and beyond - having been a low level city until recently, Dublin has now changed its planning criteria and is in the process of building up rather than out. This means that people are

living on top of each other and will need a release from the pressure cooker environment in which they live.

The benefits accruing to Dublin from having a recreational area in the Dublin Mountains break down into three principal areas:-

1. Social & Environmental Benefits

As mentioned above, recreational parklands and trails greatly increase the quality of life in an increasingly dense urban environment. They also contribute to community involvement and cohesion in that activities such as walking and cycling are inexpensive and socially inclusive. Finally they act as a hands on environmental and educational classroom.

2. Health Benefits

The Obesity Taskforce reports that two out of three Irish adults are not meeting the minimum requirements of physical activity needed for health gain and that obesity rates are rising by 1% per annum. Research in the USA demonstrated that where walking trails are provided locally people increase their exercise rates by 44% - research here by Slí na Slainte backs up this finding in an Irish context. It is worth mentioning that currently only about 10% of the trails in Ireland are in the Greater Dublin Area. Additionally there are also significant psychological benefits gained from recreating in the outdoors.

3. Economic Benefits

The FitzPatrick Report of 2006 estimated the economic value to the Irish economy of outdoor recreation as follows:-

- i) Non Market Value (the value arising from the factors above) - 190 M
- ii) Domestic Market Value - 675 M
- iii) Tourist Market Value - 140 M

These are national figures but Dublin, with 25% of the countries population and an even higher proportion of the tourist market, would benefit greatly from proper development of the uplands area.

The DMI vision is that ultimately there would be an outdoor Recreational Area in the Dublin mountains with its own management body, world class facilities and a long term sustainable strategy.

Specifically the DMI would like to see the following:-

1. Signage alerting people that they were now entering the area.
2. Provision of sensitively sighted car parking - sensitivity being given a priority over direct access to facilities
3. Greatly upgraded facilities associated with access areas:-
 - toilet facilities
 - provision of water
 - proper signage
4. A ranger programme
5. Multi-use way marked trails
 - trails would include half, one, two and three hour walking loops / cycling trails / educational trails / trails aimed at the disabled
 - trails would be clearly signed and colour coded
6. Specialist trails and designated areas aimed at specific recreational users.
7. A Dublin Way - linking to the Wicklow Way and to the coast.
8. Replacement of the current monoculture with native woodlands in amenity / recreational areas.
9. Incentives for sensitive tourist-orientated economic development of the area including establishment of refreshment facilities (pubs / cafes).
10. Public Transport - for example a shuttle bus the length of the proposed Dublin Way.
11. Proper marketing of the facility in local publications, tourist offices, website etc.
12. Volunteer involvement - members of the DMI organisations would participate in trail maintenance, litter control etc. where appropriate.

These headline objectives will be detailed in the various sections below.

SUBMISSION INTRODUCTION

This submission is designed principally to put forward the views of the constituent members of the DMI. However Article 2.4 of the DMI constitution states that 'As well as representing the views of its member bodies the DMI will also seek to represent non-affiliated participants in these activities' and this document includes suggestions on the provision of facilities for non-specialist recreational users who will form a large proportion of those using the area. It will outline the areas of principal interest to the member organisations - in many cases these overlap with areas of high public usage. We feel that with imaginative planning, strict codes of conduct on shared trails and goodwill from all that the areas involved can comfortably carry both specialist and non-specialist users.

The DMI would like to emphasise that the vision it outlines is intended to be an inclusive one. All moves towards implementation of our ideas should involve extensive local consultation - particularly with local landowners and farmers. Any access to land would have to be with the specific consent of the owner of that land. It would be our hope that the creation of a recreational area in the Dublin Mountains would benefit all and that there would be extensive local economic gains from the implementation of the vision outlined below.

OVERALL MANAGEMENT

The initial impetus behind the setting up of the DMI was the latest round of clearfelling in the forests controlled by Coillte. The DMI recognises that clearfelling is a normal part of commercial forestry operations and that, in many areas, Coillte has inherited a stock of trees that are maturing at the same time. However it is our strong opinion that forests in areas of high amenity usage close to population centres or that are of high aesthetic value need to be managed in a very different manner than has been the case to date.

Under Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) rules Coillte are obliged to give over 15% of their land for Social and Environmental purposes. It is the opinion of the DMI that

Coillte should concentrate the bulk of this biodiversity in areas close to major urban centres.

To drive and promote proper provision of outdoor recreational facilities the State needs to recognise that the benefits outlined above are substantial and real. It then needs to put adequate funding and structures in place so that a vision along the lines we have outlined can be realised. At a minimum this would require the following:-

- i) Compensating Coillte for delayed / more sensitive methods of felling
- ii) Funding Coillte for the provision and ongoing management of recreational facilities.
- iii) A centralised mechanism for funding trail provision as envisaged in the recent Irish Trails Strategy.

In order for the current initiative to be properly and fully realised it is the strong belief of the DMI that the project requires a single strong driver in the form of an independent body charged with the initial implementation and ongoing management of the Recreational Park project. The brief given to this body would include liaison with Coillte, the County Councils, private land owners, service providers and other statutory bodies. It would not need to be a large body and we would suggest that it could be resourced by a combination of central and local government funding. In this context we would mention the template of the Belfast Hills Project.

In the submissions below there are certain areas that are mentioned repeatedly by our member organisations as being of high amenity value - for the most part these are the same areas that are used by the general public. We would suggest that, at a minimum, these 'honeypot' areas be designated by the relevant county councils as being high amenity areas. This should be done without delay as it will have an immediate effect on how forests in these areas are managed.

SPECIFIC SUBMISSIONS

1. General and family users

a) Facilities

The DMI would suggest that consideration be given to the following:-

- i) Provision of toilet facilities and water - these are essential if families are to be attracted to use the area on a regular basis.
- ii) A definite Ranger presence in areas intended for family usage - a feeling of security is essential if families or vulnerable users such as females on their own are to feel comfortable using the park. There should be one or more manned Ranger Stations in high usage areas.
- iii) There should be excellent liaison between the rangers and the Gardaí - with associated backup when required.
- iv) Discreet picnicking areas - we feel that to reflect the unique nature of a mountain park that these should, if possible, be in the form of single / double tables located at secluded locations along specific trails rather than centralised communal areas.
- v) BBQ areas - if this can be done safely.
- vi) Small play areas for children - again possibly individually located rather than a central large play area.
- vii) Look out stations with maps of Dublin and Wicklow.
- viii) That litter bins not be provided - 'Leave no Trace'.
- ix) Twenty minute /half hr / one, two and three hour walking loops - signed as such and some at a gradient suitable for buggies and small children on bicycles. These trails should be colour coded to indicate degree of difficulty / permissible and non-permissible use.
- x) Tracks designed specifically for the disabled - the Irish Wheelchair Association and similar bodies should be consulted as to best practice design.
- xi) Cross Trainer Trails.
- xii) Themed / Educational trails with associated leaflets; these should be designed in consultation with local geography, science and art teachers and

- with reference to the SESE (Social, Environmental, and Scientific Education) Programme.
- xiii) Simple orienteering course for children.
 - xiv) Family cycling trails.
 - xv) Colour coded trails - shared / walker only / bike only etc.
 - xvi) Common sense well flagged rules for shared trails - give way to the smallest / slowest etc.
 - xvii) These rules should be backed up by proper signage and information leaflets.
 - xviii) Proper public information and marketing campaign.
This would include the following:-
 - I. A printed map of the area - available in libraries, tourist offices and schools
 - II. A website - with walk plans, educational areas and downloadable maps
 - III. School programmes
 - xix) Novel outdoor attractions such as:-
 - I. Assault course
 - II. Outdoor Climbing Wall
 - III. Summer Sled Runs
 - IV. Zip Line
 - xx) Consideration of other commercial ventures - bike hire / local experts etc.
 - xxi) Signage on responsible dog ownership
 - xxii) Some dog free areas
 - xxiii) Discreet sponsorship of some of the above facilities - for example a small picnic area could be designed and sponsored by a community group or individual family.
 - xxiv) Programmes to encourage community involvement.
For an ambitious project, such as this, to succeed and to conquer any tendencies towards anti-social behaviour, vandalism etc. there will need to be considerable buy in from local communities and the people of Dublin in general. For this reason we would feel that much thought and effort should go into involving local communities in the project from a very early stage - including public consultation on the design and implementation.

b) Areas

The current areas of highest public amenity usage are The Hellfire Club, Masseys Wood, Ticknock and Carrigollogan. We would imagine that this situation will continue although consideration will have to be given to the difficulty presented by increased numbers of cars accessing some of these areas on narrow roads. Another challenge will be integrating general and family usage with specialist usage - in this context we would like to reiterate that, although the DMI represents its constituent groups and articulates their requirements we recognise and hope that the majority of users of the area will be family orientated - and we seek to speak for them too. We hope that the suggestions we have outlined above emphasises this.

2. Mountaineering Council of Ireland

a) General requirements

- i) MCI policy would not favour the marking of routes across the open hillside, particularly above 300m. Such routes should be kept to the minimum, should be marked discreetly and should adhere to best practice in sustainable trail development. Mountaineering is based on an ethos of personal responsibility.
- ii) MCI members usually walk on routes of three to seven hours duration. These should offer good views, a physical challenge and a sense of quiet contrasting with our normal urban routine.
- iii) Routes should include a high proportion of open upland.
- iv) Areas where there is existing or potential erosion due to high footfall should be considered for anti-erosion measures such as placement of sleepers or flagstones.
- v) A varied return to the start point, rather than 'out and back' routes is the ideal in most cases.
- vi) Interlinking of routes should permit options for walkers of differing levels of fitness - catering for varying length of day or for changing weather conditions.
- vii) Unless other means to access the walks are available, car parking with facilities and supervision will be needed close to start points. A reasonable charge for such facilities would be acceptable.
- viii) MCI Environment and BOS training policy favour smaller groups with competence in leadership skills. In more remote areas such groups should have options to move away from marked or artificial trails. However in busy locations they should use prescribed routes.

- ix) Start or entry points to the routes should have discreet signage to foster the Leave no Trace ethic. Otherwise signs to be kept to a minimum.

b) Local recommendations

- i) The present pathways and trails could be adapted or extended to give looped walks on the ridges round valleys such as Ticknock, Kelly's Glen and the Cruagh to Hellfire Club area.
- ii) Private landowners of some upland portions could be given incentives to allow access pathways rising to open ground.
- iii) A ban on dog walking in areas farmed for sheep might be required to achieve improved access in the area of Larch Hill/Kelly's Glen - this might result in more options for walkers on the ridge going east from Tibbradden.
- iv) The walks in the Massey Estate could be linked to the Cruagh and Tibbradden areas by trails.
- v) A weekend service by small bus would minimise the need for car parking in places such as Tibbradden, which has proved difficult to supervise; or in Glenasmole, where roads are narrow and space is very limited. A circular bus route of this type via Enniskerry, Glencree and Glencullen would offer many options for visitors.
- vi) Severe erosion of the north slope of Seefingan could be stabilised by construction of a stepped track or boardwalk.
- vii) Joining the east and west sides of the Slade River valley will require either a detour round or over Verschoyles Hill or permissive use of the road through Crooksling Hospital lands.
- viii) Southward from Saggart Hill the ridge crests over Cupidstown and Caureen Hill might be incorporated in a route to within two miles of Blessington.
- ix) In the central uplands east of the Military Road the short route walks could include a loop from Cloon

Carpark onto the tors at Knocknagun and back via the ridge and the Wicklow Way.

- x) North of Glencullen/Glendoo it would be of advantage if the former route of the Wicklow Way from Two Rock via a fenced access route to join the road about G.R.170 210 could be reinstated by agreement.

3. Irish Mountain Running Association

a) General requirements

- i) Car Parking.
 - at (or near) race start.
 - either Public or Private area for <100 cars.
 - IMRA parking wardens control where cars are parked
 - if on privately owned land then a parking fee may be collected.
- ii) Start/Finish location.
 - open space for 200+ runners to congregate.
- iii) Water.
 - a local source would avoid the current necessity to transport large amounts to the venue.
- iv) Toilets.
- v) Trail.
 - of a standard that minimises damage from runners
 - most races require up-hill and down-hill sections; both may be by the same route, but a loop option is preferable to avoid collisions between ascending and descending runners.
- vi) A Pub
 - conveniently located with pre-race requirement as car-pooling pickup point.
 - used for prize giving
 - needs to be able to serve food
 - if possible a contiguous space for 100+ people is needed in order not to disturb other patrons during prize giving.

b) Local Areas

The most popular events staged by IMRA are within the Leinster League that is held from April to July in the Dublin Mountains (see www.imra.ie). Locations vary but certain event locations regularly appear in the calendar and particular attention should be paid to these.

- i) Ticknock/3 Rock/Fairy Castle
This mountain area is accessed from the North, West and East sides for Leinster League races. These events are very popular due to their proximity to Dublin and often attract runner numbers in excess of 200.
Primary parking location is at Ticknock; however private space has been utilised at Stepside for one event.
- ii) Hellfire Club
Traditionally one of the early events of the year, this attracts a large number of entrants and cars.
- iii) Scalp/Barnaslingan
Because of poor local parking facilities this event has had to rely on private parking. The opening of the Kiltiernan Sport Hotel may assist at this event in the future.
- iv) Sugarloaf
Parking has been private at Kilmacanogue.

4. Irish Orienteering Association

a) General Requirements

Orienteering requires good mixed terrain with relative ease of transit. Many of the requirements below relate to this.

- i) The establishment of a register of the 8 - 12 forests most suitable for orienteering and other sports. The associated establishment of a steering group to permit a partnership approach to the management of these registered forests.
- ii) A reduction in the level of felling to minimise the obsolescence of maps.
- iii) Greater retention of mature trees to improve access.
- iv) More mixed planting e.g. hardwoods / broadleaves in conjunction with softwoods to improve access and biodiversity.
- v) Where clear felling does take place, an end to immediate intensive replanting with Sitka Spruce.
- vi) If possible the removal of all the brashings left behind after an area is cleared. Currently, they are left behind and make it the ground impassable
- vii) More provision for car parking in certain forests
- viii) Care in the use of mechanised clear felling machines to avoid damage to landscape and heritage features such as old stone walls & earthbanks, ancient dwelling places and animal enclosures.
- ix) A standardisation in the area of permit fees.

b) Local Areas

- i) Carrickgolligan / Leadmines / Barnaslingan
- ii) Three Rock Mountain / Ticknock / Ballyedmonduff
- iii) Kilmashogue / Pine Forest
- iv) Tibbradden / Cruagh
- v) Hellfire Club & Masseys Wood.
- vi) The Scalp
- vii) Saggart Woods

5. Mountain Biking Ireland

a) General Requirements

i) Core Facilities

- o Introductory / Family Routes.
- o Graded loops of differing levels.
- o Long distance off-road routes, spanning the region.
- o Downhill facilities

ii) Key Considerations:

- o Waymarking of trails
- o Grading of trails
- o Maintenance of trails
- o Designation of certain areas & Multiuse Trails

iii) Ancillary Facilities:

- o Adequate Secure Parking, including evenings & nights.
- o Services - Showers / Toilets etc.
- o Eateries, Tea Rooms, Pub, etc.
- o Bike specific services - bike wash, bike hire, bike shop.

b) Local Areas

- i) Barnaslingan / Leadmines / Rathmichael Hill
- ii) Ticknock / Three Rock / Two Rock
- iii) Masseyes Wood / Hellfire
- iv) Tibbradden / Cruagh
- v) Prince Williams Seat
- vi) Cloon Wood
- vii) Saggart Wood
- viii) Seahaun Area
- ix) Butter mountain / Ballinascorney
- x) Djouce Woods
- xi) Sugarloaf

6. Slí na Sláinte route requirements

Slí na Sláinte is a health promotion initiative aimed at encouraging people of all ages and abilities to walk for pleasure and good health. Since its introduction by the Irish Heart Foundation in 1996 it has grown to include a network of almost 150 walking routes around the country.

- i) All Slí na Sláinte routes are between 3km and 10km long - either linear or circular with good underfoot conditions and are easy to follow.
- ii) All routes are marked at kilometer intervals.

A DUBLIN WAY

It is part of the DMIs vision that the Dublin Mountains present an opportunity to create a Walkway similar to others in Ireland and that this East - West way could link to both the Wicklow Way and to the coast. The creation of such a Walkway would act as a headline to the creation of the envisaged recreational area and would be very useful in marketing the park both domestically and internationally. We feel that it would be possible to have part or all of the trail as a shared trail - for walkers, cyclists and possibly those on horse-back.

On the accompanying map we have drawn a suggested route for such a walkway from close to Brittas to the M 50. This route is designed to fit the following criteria:-

- i) Minimal use of public roads
- ii) Maximal use of public land.
- iii) Relatively low level and hence accessible to moderately well prepared walkers.
- iv) Use of areas that present an opportunity to appreciate the outdoor environment and views of both the land and seascapes.
- v) Highlighting of areas of heritage interest.

The outlined route is aspirational and we recognise that there may be local reasons why portions of it may need to be altered. We have also not suggested a route from the M50 to the coast as we feel that Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Co. would be better qualified to suggest such a route.

There is also the possibility for an East - West route at the Southern extremity of the study area. However we do not feel that this would be a suitable area for the creation of a walkway for the following reasons:-

- i) The terrain is at a higher altitude and less sheltered and hence requires a higher level of experience and preparedness.
- ii) The walkers who use such areas prefer to navigate themselves rather than to use a marked trail.

The following features are marked on the suggested Dublin Way route as it moves from West to East (refer to the 1 / 20,000 map):-

- 1. Megalithic Tomb
- 2. Megalithic Features
- 3. Megalithic Tomb
- 4. Famine Cross
- 5. Reservoir views
- 6. Reservoir walkway
- 7. Reservoir views
- 8. Hellfire Club
- 9. Masseys Wood - Neighbour Wood Scheme
- 10. Viewing Points
- 11. Fairy Castle
- 12. The Scalp
- 13. The Lead Mines
- 14. Rathmichael Woods

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

1. Littering

Litter and unauthorised dumping is a major problem in Irish forests, especially those close to urban areas. Burnt out cars are a near-permanent eyesore in many forests. It is often a source of great embarrassment to our member organisations when they organise an international event and expose foreign visitors to the amount of litter in our rural environment. The Recreational Park envisaged would also lead to increased visitor numbers and the littering pressure this brings.

We would suggest the following:

- i) Active monitoring of areas of high usage - possibly including the use of CCTV.
- ii) Non - provision of litter bins or 'No Dumping' Signs
- iii) Rather an ethos of 'Leave No Trace' be actively promoted - we would suggest contacting the 'Leave No Trace' Organisation for input.
- iv) Aggressive prosecution of perpetrators as a deterrent.
- v) Involvement by local communities and members of our organisations in anti-litter programmes and clean-ups.

2. Use of scramblers and off road vehicles

Due to the increasing levels of affluence in Ireland the use of scramblers, quads and other off road vehicles in forest and upland areas is an ever increasing problem. Almost all the recreational areas listed above suffer from unauthorised use by these vehicles with the attendant problems of noise pollution, erosion and danger to others in the area.

A central part of the forest and mountain environment experience is the feeling of being close to nature and away from city life - it is from this that much of the psychological benefits stem. Relative silence is a quintessential part of this experience. For this reason it is the strong opinion of the DMI that the use of motorised off road vehicles and particularly scramblers must not be permitted within the central bounds of the envisaged area.

However the DMI recognises that it is not sufficient to simply ban a recreational user group from an area - alternatives and education must be provided. We would suggest the following:-

- i) Full consultation with the MCUI and similar bodies.
- ii) Consideration of lowland areas for the provision of motor cycling facilities; areas for consideration include:-
 - i. The partly forested area round Knockannvea to the north west of the Bohernabreena/ Brittas road
 - ii. The Coillte lands west of Killakee
 - iii. Disused quarry lands
- iii) Formation of a club by volunteers in one or more of these areas to provide a track for non-competitive riding (see CRN 13 no. 2 pg. 7)
- iv) User Education
 - a. Local Signage - 'No entry to Scramblers - for where you can use your bike contact'
 - b. Posters and leaflets in filling stations and bike dealers - these should mention the illegality / noise / damage and hazard they present
- v) Institution of local by-laws prohibiting motor cycle and quad usage in the forests - this is already in hand but needs to be prioritised.
- vi) Ranger Patrolling and CCTV
- vii) Backup from a Garda hotline - the existence of which is well advertised.
- viii) Prosecutions and public crushing of bikes - as a last resort.

CONCLUSION

The DMI hopes that this document comprehensively demonstrates the potential that a proper development of the Dublin Mountains has to benefit the city that they adjoin. Informed opinion is of the view that Ireland is nearly two decades behind other countries in the provision of outdoor recreational facilities. We view the current process as being a massive opportunity to set this right - initially in the Dublin area and then as a template to roll out nationwide. For this to succeed it is our firm opinion that strong leadership and a radical

change in the manner in which the mountains and forests are viewed and managed will be required.