

# Wicklow Mountain Views



The Newsletter of Wicklow Uplands Council

Summer 2016

## A Letter from the Chair



Dear members and supporters, it is now summer season and I want to wish all of you a most enjoyable season in whatever role you play in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands.

I am sure I speak for everyone in extending best wishes to our CEO Cara Heraty and husband John on their extended family, and to our CO Lenka Mulligan and husband Brian on their forthcoming very happy event, may God bless all and keep them well.

In Cara's absence, our care taker CEO Brian Dunne has excelled in holding the fort and keeping the business of Wicklow Uplands Council on schedule and within budget. It has been a whirlwind of events this year. The business of completing and complying with the complex issue of 'corporate governance' and associated regulation that is involved was his first challenge and this was immediately followed with the business of registering our interest in new 'legalisation on lobbying' as a corporate organisation.

In February we organised a workshop on vegetation management and in particular the practice of heather burning in a controlled and effective manner. I wish to thank Teagasc, NPWS, and the Forest Service for the panel of expertise which they provided. The event was attended by 150 farmers and others with an interest in keeping our uplands in good 'agricultural and environmental condition'.

Wicklow Uplands Council has worked with Irish Uplands Forum in organising a conference in Killarney, which took place in May, to establish groups similar to ours and developing methods in supporting and funding a network of such groupings. A number of our board attended and participated in the conference.

On behalf of all our members I extend our prayers and best wishes for a full recovery to Mary Tubridy, Secretary of Irish Uplands Forum and principal organiser of this conference and who has given Wicklow Uplands Council so much support and encouragement since our inception.

In October Wicklow Uplands Council has been invited to prepare a workshop for a conference of the EUROPARC Federation, the representative body of Europe's Protected Areas, in Switzerland. The focus of the workshop will be sustainability in the uplands. This will include a case study on a 'Locally Led Agri-environmental Scheme' and 'Best Practice in Vegetation Management'. The workshop will be presented by Brian Dunne and a number of delegates from our board will also attend. It is promising to be a very exciting project.

Finally, to our members past and present, our board, our staff; Cara, Brian, Margaret and Lenka, and our funders, The Heritage Council, Denis O'Brien, Wicklow Co. Council, South Dublin Co. Council, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co. Council, and everyone who has contributed in any way, my sincere thanks. Without the support of all of you, we could not continue our work.

*Sean Byrne, Chairman, Wicklow Uplands Council*

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



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## PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP

Having your dog licenced, micro-chipped and wearing an ID tag are the first steps in responsible dog ownership. If your dog is in an area where it is allowed to be off lead and which is also safe for the dog, it should still be kept under effectual control at all times. This means your dog is always within sight and will return when called. Keeping your dog away from areas where there are livestock even if on a lead is essential. Sheep and lambs are very vulnerable to dog activity; being chased by a dog causes a very high level of stress among sheep and lambs and can easily result in their death. All cattle, especially bulls and cows with calves, can be very aggressive towards a dog, as they will consider it to be a predator. Walkers with dogs are welcome in County Wicklow but please respect local signage and leave dogs at home if you intend to access land where livestock are present. There are many places that are suitable for dog walking across the county including Coillte forests.

Only about one third of the dogs in Wicklow are properly licenced. Enforcement of dog licensing has the potential to generate a substantial revenue which could be ring-fenced and put back into greater enforcement, education and legislation on dogs. There are calls for a group comprising of landowners, Gardaí and the local authority to be formed to promote responsible dog ownership and for enforcing the existing legislation. The education of dog owners remains a key priority. The **Leave No Trace Ireland guide** and the **Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners' booklet** are useful resources for dog owners and can be downloaded from our website [www.wicklowuplands.ie](http://www.wicklowuplands.ie)

Please report incidents of livestock worrying immediately to **Wicklow County Council Ph: 0404 20236** or Email: [env@wicklowcoco.ie](mailto:env@wicklowcoco.ie). Please report stray dogs immediately to the **ISPCA Dog Warden Service Ph: 0404 44873**.

Responsible dog ownership makes the outdoors experience better for everyone.

*Lenka Mulligan, Communications Officer, Wicklow Uplands Council*



# Controlled Burning Partnership Established in Wicklow



*Ciaran Nugent demonstrating controlled burning.*

There is a real threat that the overgrown heather which covers large areas of Wicklow Mountains, due in part to the decline in hill farming, could accidentally catch fire in the dryer summer months. This could cause significant destruction to habitats, soil and have a detrimental effect on wildlife, birds, forestry and our dwellings. With the aim to prevent such disaster and to create a plan for the uplands, a workshop on Controlled Burning took place on 12th February last in Roundwood, Co Wicklow. This workshop was arranged following the announcement of proposed pilot measures which would allow landowners to carry out controlled burning of upland vegetation in March under certain conditions.

Over 150 people from across Ireland attended this important event organised by Wicklow Uplands Council and supported by a large number of agencies including; Coillte, Irish Farmers' Association, Irish Uplands Forum, The Fire Service, The Forest Service, Mountaineering Ireland, The National Parks and Wildlife Service, Teagasc and Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners' Association. The workshop began indoors and was followed by a practical demonstration of controlled burning at Powerscourt Paddock on Djouce Mountain.

The indoor session covered presentations from various speakers. Declan Byrne, Teagasc, spoke about controlled burning from an agricultural perspective: "The cheapest, most sustainable and environmentally friendly way to manage hills is through farming". In his view long term management plans (at least 10 years long) for hills and commonages would work best for vegetation control. They should include grazing, controlled burning and cutting / swiping.

Enda Mullen, District Conservation Officer with NPWS, spoke

about negative environmental impacts of uncontrolled wildfires in Wicklow. These include: destruction of rare birds nesting sites; deaths of old famine trees, insects, bird chicks; loss of food for wildlife; smoldering of soil which changes soil function, nutrients and ability to hold water; spread of unwanted plants such as bracken; soil erosion and water pollution. She also talked about the social and human impacts of uncontrolled burning such as damage to property; cost of firefighting, safety, fire fighter fatigue and smoke inhalation.

The Boleybrack Red Grouse Management Project in North Leitrim was the first place in the country where controlled burning took place in a NATURA 2000 Site (Special Area of Conservation) a few years ago. John Carslake, the game keeper in the project, shared his experience with controlled burning for biodiversity. He emphasized that the project has resulted in the presence of an array of wild birds on Boleybrack Mountain.

Ciaran Nugent from the Forest Service shared his experience of prescribed burning in County Kerry. The term 'prescribed burning' describes planned use of fire as a land management tool. The Forest Service and the Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have published the 'Prescribed Burning Code of Practice – Ireland' which outlines all the key steps and equipment needed to carry out a controlled burn.

The outdoor session involved an in depth discussion of the merits and practicalities of heather burning. This was followed by a practical demonstration of a controlled burn. Conservationists, mountaineers, wildlife rangers, scientists, firefighters, farmers, agricultural professionals and journalists discussed the safe and appropriate use of fire in the uplands. Pat Dunne (Wicklow Uplands Council and IFA) stressed to landowners present that the onus is on them to carry out controlled burning responsibly. He highlighted that the proposed introduction of new pilot measures to allow burning into March under certain condition has not yet been introduced and the measures will only proceed if controlled burning is carried out responsibly from now on.

This workshop marks the beginning of a new era with all interested parties working in partnership towards the use of controlled burning as a land management tool and combating wildfire problems, not only in Wicklow but on a national level. The Wicklow Uplands Council's 'Study to Identify Best Management of Upland Habitats in County Wicklow' identified the need for collaboration between stakeholders for best practice in controlled burning and recommends the establishment of small controlled burning groups who would play a vital role in assisting landowners carry out controlled burning. It is also expected that there will soon be a call for applications for a new Locally Led Agri-Environment Scheme for upland areas. Such a scheme will be based on the Burren Farming for Conservation Model whereby farmers would be rewarded for maintaining healthy upland habitats and controlled burning will have an integral role to play in achieving this goal.

*Brian Dunne, Co-ordinator, Wicklow Uplands Council*

## The Avonmore Way Walk

The Avonmore Way is a 12km trail which follows a mixture of minor roads, forest roads and tracks. It provides stunning views of the Wicklow Mountains as it skirts around Trooperstown Hill before winding its way through the beautiful Clara Vale Nature Reserve alongside the Avonmore River. The trail is suitable for all fitness levels. There is trail head signage at the beginning of the walk and the route is marked with yellow walking man and arrows on a black background along the way. The walk starts from the Laragh side at Trooperstown Forest car park and from the Rathdrum side at Stump of the Castle Forest Entrance.

The idea for this walk goes back to 1994 when Finian McEvoy, a local resident of Laragh and Coillte employee, did a thesis as part of his Rural Development Diploma studies about 'The Development of the Avonmore Way as a Walking Route'. Finian said: "Walking was growing in popularity and The Avonmore Way ticked all the boxes, the outstanding beauty of the landscape, the diversity of flora and fauna and Clara Vale itself with its beautiful church, old school, and narrow arched bridge over the Avonmore River." In 2013 Finian joined the board of Wicklow Uplands Council to represent Glendalough & District Development Association and the development of the Avonmore Way began.

The development of the trail has been undertaken in partnership with Wicklow County Council, Coillte, NPWS, County Wicklow Partnership, private landowner Lucy Morgan, St. Laurence O'Toole Diocesan Trust, Parish Committee for Clara Vale Church, Glendalough & District Development Association, Laragh/Glendalough Tidy Towns and Rathdrum Tidy Towns Association. All local residents living close to the trail showed great support to the project and helped all the way.

The Avonmore Way is an important and strategic route in Wicklow as it provides a pedestrian link with train and bus services in Rathdrum to Laragh. Due to Wicklow's proximity to Dublin, tourism in the county is dominated by day visitors. The development of this trail will promote independent visitors to the area who can stay longer and boost the local economy. This important link will also enable hikers to join the network of trails in the Wicklow uplands including the Wicklow Way and the St Kevin's Way. Visitors in the Laragh area will have the opportunity to walk to Rathdrum and Avondale House. Therefore, this is a very important link for Wicklow tourism and the local communities.

The Avonmore Way was officially launched by journalist Valerie Cox at the Old School Clara Vale on Saturday 16th April. The local communities walked from either end of the trail and met at Clara Vale for the launch of the walk.

Commenting on the spectacular scenery along the trail and the views across the Wicklow Mountains, Valerie noted at one point along the trail that you can view both up the Glenealo Valley towards The Wicklow Gap and also up the Glenmacnass Valley towards the Sally Gap simultaneously. She commented on the importance of the Avonmore Way for the local communities, and the value of having a trail that is accessible to all.



*Valerie Cox and Finian McEvoy opening the walk.*



*A view from the Avonmore Way.*



*Local community from Laragh at Trooperstown Forest.*



*Local community from Rathdrum at Stump of the Castle.*

Valerie shared a story about a Viking ship that had been excavated in Denmark back in the 60's. It was determined that the oak used in the construction of the ship had come from the surrounding woods in Clara Vale. Due to these origins a reconstruction of the ship was named 'The Sea Stallion of Glendalough'.

Wicklow Uplands Council plans to develop further links from the ends of the trail with the local towns. The long term vision for the Avonmore Way is to realise a route that will link Kilmacanogue to Woodenbridge creating an 'Eastern Greenway'. For more information about the walk, please visit [www.wicklowuplands.ie](http://www.wicklowuplands.ie)

*Lenka Mulligan, Communications Officer, Wicklow Uplands Council*

## 10 Years of PURE Project



The PURE project, a unique environmental partnership in Ireland which incorporates statutory and non-statutory organisations, has had an extremely busy start this year. In January alone it has removed over 90 tons of illegal dumping. Commenting on recent dumping incidents, Ian Davis, the manager of PURE stated,

“We have received a huge number of reports of illegal dumping and this looks like it will be one of the busiest years for the project since we started 10 years ago. One incident alone filled the entire PURE truck and consisted of mattresses, beds, floor boards, couches, and a considerable amount of domestic waste, with close to 4 tonnes of household rubbish dumped at the site. We are appealing to householders not to hand over their waste to unauthorised waste collectors. They need to check that these collectors have a legitimate waste collection permit because, if it is dumped in the mountains, the householder is also held responsible”.

The PURE Truck collected over 1000 sites in 2015 and removed over 235 tonnes of illegal dumping. All dumping incidents are

recorded on a GPS/GIS database system and from this PURE has built up a baseline data on dumping patterns and locations. If you were to put all the rubbish that PURE has collected into standard household rubbish bags you would fill over 370,000 bags and they would stretch the same distance as a journey from Glendalough to Dingle in County Kerry.

PURE believe that the fast removal of illegal dumping/fly-tipping from the landscape reduces further dumping at a site. Some people think that it is acceptable to dump – dumping attracts dumping. Prior to the removal of dumping, all incidents are investigated by the relevant local authority's Environmental Enforcement Officers. In 2015 Wicklow County Council had a number of successful prosecutions in the courts. In some cases, offenders were fined over €3,000 and they were also made pay for the legal fees (over €2,000).

The PURE Mile community initiative proves to be very successful. Through the PURE Mile competition communities keep a mile stretch of road (approx. 1.6 km) rubbish free. The competition has developed into a very important part of conserving our regional and national environmental heritage. For more info visit [www.pureproject.ie/the-pure-mile](http://www.pureproject.ie/the-pure-mile).

The project is due to finish at the end of this year but PURE are optimistic that they will receive further funding from The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government to continue the fight against illegal dumping in the Wicklow/Dublin Uplands.

*Ian Davis, PURE Project Manager*

**Further information on PURE can be found on [www.pureproject.ie](http://www.pureproject.ie)**

**Please continue reporting illegal dumping in the Dublin/Wicklow Uplands on 1850 365 121.**

## Tourism Ambassadors Initiative in Wicklow

The need for this initiative was identified at the Joint Policing Committee Meetings in co-operation with Gardaí, NPWS, Wicklow Tourism, community organisation's, Wicklow County Council, Wicklow Uplands Council, Mountaineering Ireland and Rural Recreation Scheme. The County Wicklow Partnership was ideally placed to roll out the Tourism Ambassadors initiative through the Tús Programme and it is in operation since July 2014. The project employs over 21 participants who work part time as Tourism Ambassadors in various car parks at tourist hot spots across the County.

The role of the Tourism Ambassadors is to offer support and guidance to tourists and locals and to act as security or deterrent but in the form of a tourist information officer. They also provide visitors with maps and offer advice on walking routes, proper clothing required and vehicle security. They can notify the relevant authorities of suspicious activities in an area.

Tourism Ambassadors have accredited security training, manual



handling and occupational first aid training and they completed site specific training in tourism. They are easy to recognise as they wear a uniform.

This project is an excellent example of multi-agency approach to address a countywide issue and is very welcome among recreational users with a very positive impact on tourism in County Wicklow.

*Eddie Cullen, Tús Supervisor, County Wicklow Partnership*

*Photographs were contributed by: Helen Mulvey, Jim Fitzsimons, Jim Sheehan, Albert Webster, Ian Davis and Eddie Cullen.*



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