

Wicklow Mountain Views



THE NEWSLETTER OF WICKLOW UPLANDS COUNCIL

SUMMER 2019

A Letter from the Chair



There have been a number of exciting developments in the uplands recently, including the announcement of substantial funding for County Wicklow's first Greenway around the stunning setting of the Blessington Lakes.

A footpath linking Trooperstown and the Avonmore Way with the village of Laragh and the nearby Wicklow Way and St. Kevin's Way, has been completed. This welcome news was soon followed by the official opening of the 19 km Miner's Way trail, which takes in the glacier valleys of Glendasan, Glendalough and Glenmalure and visits the historic mining sites found along its route. The commencement of the 183 scheduled bus service between Glendalough and Wicklow Town, makes many of the area's recreational and visitor attractions far more accessible and provides a much-needed link for the upland communities.

Although Wicklow Uplands Council has found itself in the midst of incredibly busy periods many times during its 22-year history, it seems that we have perhaps reached a stage when we should take an honest appraisal of our available resources and how we prioritise them. The scale and diversity of the work we currently undertake is quite immense. It is a very rewarding position to find ourselves in and yet, it's also challenging to keep abreast with the broad range of projects, initiatives and policy developments that require constant attention.

Much of this success would not be possible, if it were not for the wide support the Council enjoys through its partnership and consensus approach. Our role as a collective voice for the communities that live, work and recreate in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands, is an important one. With this in mind, and to ensure the longevity of the Uplands Council, the task of securing sustainable funding sources is extremely important.

We are immensely grateful to our funders and supporters, without whom we would simply not be able to exist as an organisation. Denis O'Brien has been a good friend to the Uplands Council over the years and we also appreciate and acknowledge the continued financial assistance of Wicklow County Council.

The Heritage Council remains our main source of core funding and their commitment and guidance dating back to our formation, has been invaluable. In June, we had the opportunity to welcome Virginia Teehan, the recently appointed Chief Executive of The Heritage Council, to our Roundwood office. Our meeting presented a wonderful occasion to introduce ourselves and to give a brief overview of the wide array of work that the Uplands Council undertakes. We enjoyed an informative conversation exploring the issues facing upland communities, the success of our bottom up approach and the importance of valuing and protecting the heritage that surrounds us.

On behalf of Wicklow Uplands Council, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to Virginia for kindly taking the time to visit us and we look forward to continuing to work closely with the Heritage Council.

It is hard to believe that it was just over a year ago that we announced the opening of the SUAS Pilot Project to applicants seeking to be included in the first round of the project. The scale of the project was always ambitious, and thanks to the operational group that have led the project and especially to Project Manager Declan

Byrne, the first round of participants have all successfully carried out and been remunerated for their activities. We have recently selected more participants to take part in phase 2 of SUAS. It is quite a milestone to reach and I would like to congratulate all involved.

Another large project that we launched last year was the County Wicklow Deer Management Project, which is tasked with establishing new Deer Management Units (DMUs) in the county. I'm delighted to be able to say that it too has made significant progress and four DMU's have now been established to oversee deer management in those localities.

The PURE Project, which the Council administers in conjunction with our statutory partners, has achieved tremendous gains in tackling illegal dumping in the uplands and the involvement of community groups in the Pure Mile Competition has now reached record levels.

In addition to our project involvement, we continue to develop policies and make submissions as opportunities arise. We will be revisiting our 2009 Renewable Energy Policy this year and we are working on a submission on Wicklow County Council's Climate Adaptation Strategy. We will also be submitting to the review of current Dog Control legislation. We are reminded that we need to also consider how we can attract younger parties to become better engaged with the Council.

Finally, in addition to wishing everyone a very pleasant summer season, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our board members, staff, funders, supporters and everyone that contributes to the success of the Uplands Council.

Tom Byrne,
Chair, Wicklow Uplands Council



National Walks Scheme Open for Applications

The National Walks Scheme has opened to applicants for the first time in nearly a decade. The scheme, which is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development, assists in the provision of high-quality walking trails for the benefit of recreational users.

This is achieved by contracting private landholders, or their nominees, to undertake maintenance work on sections of National Waymarked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. The landholders receive payments for maintenance work undertaken, in line with an agreed work plan between the landowner and the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The scheme currently covers 39 trails nationwide, with payments made to approximately 1,900 landholders to maintain those trails. In Wicklow, there are currently over 60 landowners engaged in the scheme, with the majority of those involved on the Wicklow Way.

The Walks Scheme was launched by Minister of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Éamon Ó Cuív, in March 2008 and has since been rolled out to cover 39 trails. The nationwide scheme will now see its annual budget of just under €2 Million double to close to €4 Million in 2019 to accommodate the scheme's expansion. County Wicklow Partnership administers the Walk Scheme for this region through its Recreation Programme and is overseen by the Rural Recreation Officer, Bryan Fennell.

The scheme is now open for new participants to join, provided they reach the criteria set out by the Department.

Qualifying trails will:

- Be available to the public,
- Be of a suitable standard to be included in Sport Ireland's trail register, and
- Have all private landowners along the entire route willing to allow access to the public and to join the scheme.

In order for landowners to join the scheme, the relevant management body of the trail must submit an expression of interest to County Wicklow Partnership as soon as possible to be considered. The Rural Recreation Officer will then work with the committee to establish that the trail in question meets the set criteria. Once this confirmation is complete, an application will be made to the Department to seek the relevant trail's inclusion to the National Walks Scheme.

The trail will be open to recreational users under a 'permissive access' arrangement with no possibility of rights of way being established. Under the scheme, participants can leave the scheme at any stage, provided 6 months of notice is given to allow time for alternative arrangements to be made. All participants of the Walks Scheme are covered under the Sports Ireland Trails insurance indemnity scheme.

The Rural Recreation Officer is particularly keen to see more participants join the scheme on existing routes, where it would facilitate removing trails from public roads, such as is the case in the southern section of the Wicklow Way or along western sections of St Kevin's Way.

Walkers are always grateful when allowed to cross farmland/private property to avoid dangerous road sections. The Walks Scheme actively encourages recreational users to participate in the Leave No Trace principles when enjoying countryside walks.

In Wicklow, the average contracted hours per participant for maintenance works on the walks scheme is between 60-80 hours per year, however, this will depend on the level of work required on an individual's property. The maximum allowable hours under the scheme is 200 hours for each participant. Examples of maintenance work include vegetation management, drain clearing, litter picking, painting and so forth.

Additionally, Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring, also announced that the rate of pay for new and current landowners on the scheme will increase from €12.40/hr to €13.50/hr in 2019, with increases to take effect with the next round of payments.

Primarily, the Walks Scheme was designed to ensure Ireland's long-distance walking routes remain open to the public and are maintained to the highest standards. Areas that are rich in quality recreational trails provide welcomed health benefits to local people and offer tourism opportunities to benefit rural communities.

For further information on the scheme, please contact County Wicklow Partnership by email: bfennell@wicklowpartnership.ie or www.wicklowpartnership.ie



Celebrating 10 Years of the Pure Mile Competition

The Pure (Protecting Uplands and Rural Environments) Project was established as a regional environmental project in 2006, to respond to incidents of illegal dumping and flytipping in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands.

One of the huge successes of the project, is the Pure Mile Competition, a community initiative that encourages communities and groups in Wicklow and South Dublin, to adopt a mile, or miles, of rural roadside or other natural settings.

The competition creates a wonderful opportunity for communities and groups to positively contribute to their locality by keeping their chosen area litter free and undertaking research on its natural habitats and local heritage. A large number of communities go further by repairing and painting old traditional gates, trimming hedges, cleaning up entrances, erecting bat and bird boxes and other activities.

Now in its 10th year, the Pure Mile Competition has developed into a very important, environmental, conservation and community initiative. As we celebrate this occasion, we acknowledge that it's the enormous collective effort of each group that ensures that their Pure Mile is something to be extremely proud of.

We would like to congratulate and thank the Pure Project team, the communities, volunteers and everyone who has supported the competition over the last 10 years.

The Pure Mile Competition began in 2009 with 6 community groups each adopting a mile of roadside

2019 marks its 10th year and sees a remarkable 475 miles adopted by over 80 groups and over 2,500 volunteers

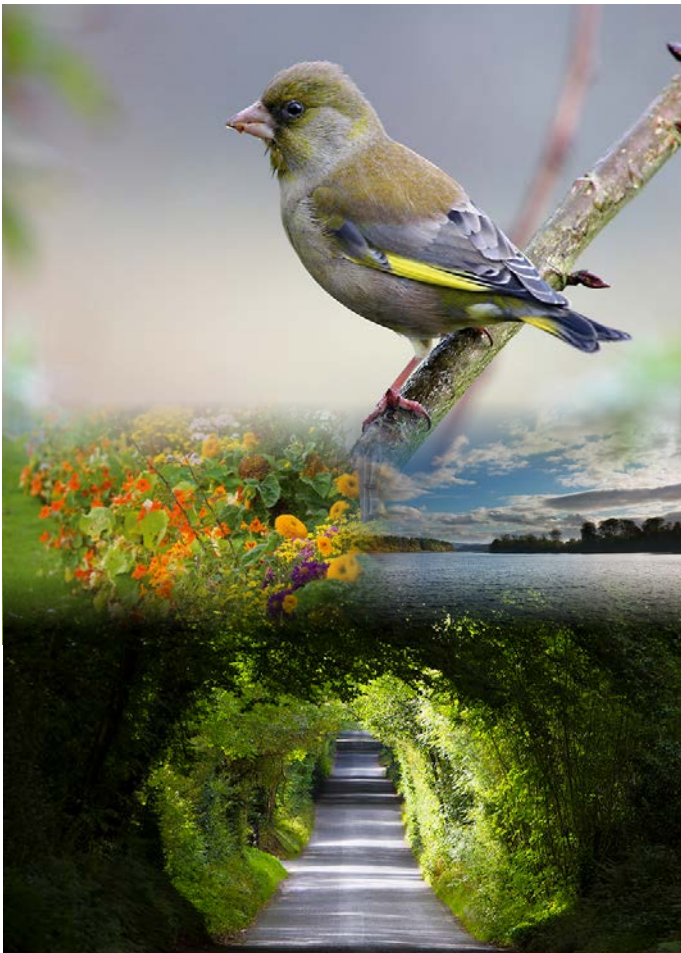
Over 260 groups have taken part in the competition since it commenced

Over 3,000 bags of litter and discarded waste was collected by Pure Mile Volunteers in 2018.

Over 980 miles of rural roadsides, forestries, woodlands, upland amenities, mountains, car parks and beaches have been improved and enhanced over the 10 years.

The Pure Mile is open to all types of communities, groups, schools and organisations.

The 'Clean Up The Uplands' Award encourages special interest groups such as scouts, walking and cycling groups, businesses and organisations to adopt an upland area.



For more information on Pure Project and the Pure Mile Competition, please visit www.pureproject.ie

Your Environment - Your Community - Your Heritage

To Report Illegal Dumping LO-CALL 1850 365 121



Members of the EU Delegation from across 22 member states who visited the Wicklow Uplands to learn more about the SUAS Pilot Project.



SUAS Project Building Relationships Across The EU

In April, the team behind the SUAS Project were invited to host a field trip for a visiting delegation consisting of 60 participants from 22 of the EU's member states.

The delegation were in Ireland to attend a three day conference organised by the Standing Committee on Agriculture Research (SCAR) and their Strategic Working Group, Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems (SWP-AKIS). The group which is made up of European Commission staff and representatives from across all Member States, focuses on improvements to knowledge and innovation systems in the EU's Bioeconomy.

The Dublin based conference was organised by the semi-state organisation Teagasc, who are members of the Strategic Working Group and have also played a key role in developing the SUAS Pilot Project with Wicklow Uplands Council.

Travelling by coach, the principle reason for the field trip was to discover more information on the SUAS Project and to observe first-hand, the setting of the Wicklow and Dublin uplands where the project is being implemented and its impact is going to be most felt.

Their visit to Co. Wicklow included a reception and presentation at the Brockagh Resource Centre in Laragh, where SUAS Project Manager, Declan Byrne and Operational Lead, Pat Dunne, shared the objectives of the

project and the considerable progress to date.

As most of the group were involved directly with one of the over 1,000 European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI) Projects currently operating across the EU, there was strong interest in learning how the SUAS Project and its Operational Group (OG) were formed.

As one of only 23 EIP-AGRI projects in operation in Ireland, the SUAS Pilot Project received a funding allocation of €1.95 million in 2018 to implement a 5 year project designed to address the decline in the biodiversity and hill farming activities in the Wicklow and Dublin uplands.



Members of Wicklow Uplands Council (WUC), who developed the project over quite a number of years, were also involved with the hosting of the event with Brian Dunne, Coordinator of WUC, delivering an informative presentation on the origins and need for a project of this type to the region.

Following light refreshments and lots of interesting conversations afterwards, the group made a brief

stop at the 6th century monastic settlement of Glendalough to enjoy one of the region's most popular tourist locations before returning to Dublin.

At the conference setting in the Teagasc Ashtown Food Research Centre in north Dublin, the delegates were given an extensive overview of the current Irish Operational Groups from Dr. Maura Farrell of the National Rural Network and Margaret Murray from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Presentations were also given by Ireland's two large-scale EIP-AGRI Projects, The Hen Harrier Project and the Pearl Mussel Project

The visit was a wonderful opportunity for the SUAS Operational Group to highlight the complex workings of the project and to discover through conversation with the delegates, just how diverse many of the European projects are, which range from enhancing rural development to soil, plant and animal health, sustainable farming and forestry practices and a host of socio-economic considerations.



Shortly after the successful event, Declan Byrne was invited to attend and participate in the Agri Innovation Summit 2019 held at the end of June. With over 400 invited delegates travelling from across the EU to the Normandy town of Lisieux, the three day event offered a number of opportunities for Declan and his colleagues from Teagasc, to continue to build relationships across Europe and to discover the innovative practices that exist within other locally-led projects.

Organised by the French Ministry of Agriculture, the Normandy Region, the European Commission and the EIP-AGRI network, the theme for this year's summit was the Transition to Agroecology – the study of ecological processes applied to agricultural production systems. Participants included representatives from quite a number of the EIP- AGRI projects across Europe, experts and local actors such as farmers, researchers and decision makers.

The busy conference schedule featured a number of events, with a

host of workshops and a choice of field trips exploring a broad collection of issues such as sustainable agricultural practices, socio-economic challenges, farming and forestry innovations and biodiversity awareness.

A key component of the conference was discussion and knowledge sharing using a round table format. It was in this setting, that Declan delivered a scheduled presentation on the significant role that extensive research played in the development of the solutions found in the SUAS Project.



During the presentation, he explained how a key component of SUAS, is the ongoing recording of ecological data

on the eight locations participating in the 5 year project. Declan outlined how the project works with the farmers to make decisions and adopt the farming practices required for the sustainable management of each site.

He also outlined how the project aims to share its experiences with other EIP projects, hill farmers and interested groups to maximise the learning outcomes found during the course of the project. Collectively, the project's reports are also creating a framework that will inform future projects and schemes focused on hill farming.

With over 1,000 EIP operational group projects currently established across the EU, it is anticipated that the number may reach 3,000 by 2021 to coincide with the end of the current CAP period. For the SUAS Project to observe and contribute to the wider discussion at this early stage, marks a very welcome development and offers a significant opportunity to build awareness of the project's importance to Ireland's uplands.

1) Members of the SUAS Operational Group and Wicklow Uplands Council with Inge Van Oost, a policy officer in the Directorate General Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) of the European Commission during the EU Delegation visit to the Wicklow Uplands. **2)** SUAS participant, Denis Halpin and Arno Krause from Germany at the Brockagh Resource Centre. **3)** Inge van Oost, Declan Byrne, SUAS Project Manager and Barry Caslin, Teagasc at the Agri Innovation Summit in Lisieux.

SUAS Demonstration in West Wicklow

A demonstration event which includes a site visit to a nearby commonage, has been organised by the SUAS Pilot Project to take place during the National Heritage Week on Tuesday, the 20th of August.

Beginning at 11am, the event will commence in the Hollywood Community Centre where Declan Byrne, Project Manager of the SUAS Project and a number of other speakers, will give an overview of the project and the positive impact it is having to upland commonages. An exhibition from the National Rural Network on the EIP AGRI projects in Ireland will also be on display for all to enjoy.

The assembled group will then travel by bus to the nearby Granamore Commonage, which is one of the locations that was included in the first round of the SUAS Project.

The lands which are now within the boundaries of the Wicklow Mountains National Park, were formerly part of Lord Waterford's Estate in County Wicklow and contain a number of interesting features such as old turf cutting banks, a small hill of blanket bog, a Mass rock, and the Douglas River and other water systems. The commonage area is being managed by ten shareholders, participating in the SUAS Project through a formal commonage group structure.

Those attending the event will be guided to four stops on the site to observe demonstrations related to the land management activities being undertaken as part of the project. Presentations and discussion will include topics such as commonage management, roadway and culvert repair, gully planting and streamside vegetation, and vegetation management practices such as controlled burning and cutting.

A number of speakers will contribute to the visit including representatives from NPWS, the UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science and a number of the local farmers.

The free event is open to all interested parties and includes refreshments and the transfer to Granamore by bus. Appropriate clothing and footwear will be required for the site visit and due to transport logistics, advance booking is required. Please RSVP by the 15th of August on 01-2818406 or info@wicklowuplands.ie

For further information on the event, please visit: www.wicklowuplands.ie/suasproject



Blessington E-Greenway Gets The Go Ahead

Wicklow County Council has been allocated €5 million in funding from the National and Regional Greenway Fund. This is in respect of a new E-Greenway which will cover 42.4kms of walking and cycling trail through forest, woodlands and the spectacular scenery adjacent to the shoreline of Poulaphouca Reservoir – more commonly referred to as the Blessington Lakes.

The new E-Greenway encircles a major sustainable source of electricity generation. It will have E Bikes as a major attraction with charging points along the route and solar powered charging points also for other electric vehicles. This will then link in with a wider countywide project for E Cycling. The E-Greenway will be designed, constructed and operated with Excellence, Exercise, Energy, Environment, Ecology, Exploration and Ease of Access considerations to the fore at all times. Blessington E-Greenway will become Ireland's first E-Destination.

Blessington E-Greenway is in complete alignment with the National Greenway Strategy. It 'ticks all the boxes' as required in the national strategy document.

- It is ideally located to link in to the multitude of walking and cycling routes that currently exist in Wicklow. It will be a 'flagship project' for all that is great about 'Wicklow Outdoors'.
- At 42kms length in an area of outstanding natural beauty and in close proximity to Dublin City, Dublin Airport and Port and Rosslare Harbour, Blessington E-Greenway will quickly become a major international tourism attraction.
- It will also serve to meet the growing need among the local Irish community for access to the great outdoors as envisaged in programmes such as Healthy Ireland.
- Blessington E-Greenway is substantially "off-road" and traverses some magnificent scenery along the shores of the Blessington Lakes, which sits against the backdrop of the beautiful Wicklow Mountains.



- The Lakes area encompasses a range of opportunities for recreation and leisure such as Avon Ri Lakeshore Activity Resort, Tulfarris Hotel and Golf Resort and the internationally renowned Russborough House and Gardens.
- It will be fully accessible by people with disabilities at all access points.
- Blessington E-Greenway has evolved over almost 10 years using one of the most comprehensive stakeholder consultation processes that is possible to achieve. It has widespread community support and only one principal landowner involved - the ESB - and that organisation has been hugely supportive to the project which, importantly, has full planning permission in place.

The success of Greenways in other areas such as Mayo and Waterford, has provided clear evidence of the potential that such Greenways provide for development in areas in which they are sited. The objective of completing Blessington E-Greenway, in short, is to deliver a world-class sustainable experience for visitors which will make a valuable contribution to the economy of Wicklow and also to the realisation of the vision and values set out for 'Ireland's Ancient East' brand proposition.

John Horan
Chairperson, Blessington Town Team

John Horan, Chairperson, Blessington Town Team; Frank Curran, CEO, Wicklow County Council; Simon Harris TD, Minister for Health; Pat Fenlon, Director of Finance, ESB at the announcement of the allocation of funding to Blessington E-Greenway.



Ecotrail Wicklow

The uplands regularly see cycling, trail and adventure race events happening throughout the year. The varied, natural setting and proximity to Dublin and other urban centres, are of course some of the reasons the area is popular, however, the quality of the trails and the challenge that the inclines offer are also part of the appeal.

A new arrival to the calendar this year, is Ecotrail Wicklow, a trail running event which takes place on Saturday, September the 28th.

Starting and finishing at Bray Seafront, participants have the choice of four different trail distances - 18km, 28km, 45km or 80km - to suit novices through to ultra-trail runners. Each of the routes ascend into the uplands and include well known natural landmarks such as Bray Head, Great Sugar Loaf, Powerscourt Waterfall, Vartry Reservoir and Lough Tay.

County Wicklow is now the 10th European destination to host an Ecotrail event and it's expected that it will attract considerable European and international interest.

More information can be found by visiting www.wicklow.ecotrail.com



Want to do more hiking this summer?

Brilliant! Keep reading!

Hiking is a fantastic sport, but it has its dangers too. Following these basic guidelines will reduce the risk factors and add to your enjoyment.

1. Love your feet

Having the right footwear is possibly the most important factor in determining your hiking happiness.

Choose the right boot for the terrain you are walking on – fabric boots are good for trail walking, for rugged mountain terrain you will need a more durable boot.

Invest in quality hiking socks.

When buying new boots, go to a reputable retailer, have your feet measured and try boots from different manufacturers.

2. Dress for success

Layering your clothing gives flexibility and allows for better temperature regulation.

A good layering system should comprise an outer layer, an insulating mid-layer and a base layer.

Jeans and cotton shirts should be avoided as they have poor heat retention when damp.

3. Bring the right gear

Waterproof jacket and trousers - literally a life-saver in Irish mountain weather, get the best you can afford.

Hat and gloves

Detailed map

Compass

Spare warm layer(s)

First aid kit

Headtorch

Bivvy bag in case of emergency

Rucksack of around 25 litres to put it all in

4. Check the weather forecast

Get a forecast for your hiking area on www.met.ie or other sites like www.yr.no

A combination of low temperature, rain and wind will produce a wind-chill effect, and can lead to hypothermia, so be prepared.

After heavy rain, mountain streams can become very difficult to cross, avoid crossing water if possible.

On a brighter note, don't forget your sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat in hot sunny weather!

5. Choose the right path

If you haven't yet got the skills to find your own way in the hills, follow a waymarked trail, see www.irishtrails.ie

Walk with others if you can. Mountaineering Ireland has about 50 affiliated clubs in the east coast area that

hike regularly in Wicklow, details on www.mountaineering.ie

If hiking by yourself, let someone know what route you are taking and how long you expect to be out. If nothing else, you will make them jealous!

6. Park with care

Parking space is limited in many parts of the Wicklow uplands, if hiking with others, car-pool if possible and take care not to waste space between parked cars.

Avoid blocking gateways or narrow roads.

Make sure not to leave valuables in parked vehicles.

7. Stay fuelled and hydrated

Fuel up at the start of the day with a hearty breakfast.

For lunch, refuel with slow energy release food such as oatcakes, bananas and peanut butter sandwiches. Chocolate and jelly babies make great treats too!

It is essential to drink plenty of fluids, especially in warm weather (2 litres a day is recommended, but this varies with individuals, the weather and the duration of the walk).

8. Step lightly

As well as providing a livelihood for many farmers and landowners, the hills are home for people and for wildlife too.

We have a responsibility to respect other people and their property and to protect the natural environment.

Avoid taking dogs on the hills, or into any area where livestock may be grazing.

Many popular routes in Wicklow have become eroded through repeated footfall, you can prevent this damage worsening by walking within the existing path line (wearing gaiters makes this easier).

9. Learn to navigate

Learn how to use a map and compass. Get a proficient friend to teach you, or better still, enrol on a Mountain Skills course, a fun weekend that will improve your confidence and independence - see www.mountaineering.ie

GPS technology can be a useful navigational aid but should not be relied upon as signal or batteries may fail, or your device may get wet. If using technology on the hills carry a portable power bank.

10. Remember to smile (it's fun after all).

Hillwalking might seem tough at first, however, the more you walk the easier it gets, and the rewards are many, including experiencing stunning mountain views, increased fitness and the company of friendly and likeminded people.

Compiled by Russell Mills and Mags Collins, members of Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking Committee. Russell also provides guided hikes in the Wicklow Mountains and Mountain Skills courses.



Responding to Climate Change

The Earth's climate is changing. This change is due to an increase in the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere as a result of human activities. Over the past number of years, we have encountered the effects of climate change in Ireland. In line with the all climate predictions, destructive windstorms, snowstorms, flooding and drought are becoming a more common feature of our weather system. These abnormal weather conditions are having an increasing impact on the environment, biodiversity, economies and our health.

There is growing public concern to climate change, and in response, many countries have now declared a 'Climate and Biodiversity Emergency'. On May 2nd, Wicklow County Council was the first local authority in the country to declare an emergency, a week before the Dáil. The Council have recently put to public consultation, their Climate Change Adaption Strategy, which sets out how they will support local communities throughout the county and deliver their services in response to climate change. Wicklow Uplands Council has made a submission on the strategy.

The Government has also published their long anticipated Climate Action 2019 Plan. The plan has been welcomed cautiously by many, especially by those in rural areas. While

there is a general acceptance of the need to reduce our carbon emissions, there is a fear that those living in rural communities may be impacted disproportionately. The rise in carbon taxes, the equalisation of fuel prices for petrol and diesel, and the move towards electric vehicles (EV's) will be felt harder in rural areas. Oil-fired burners, which are to be banned by 2030, are currently the only affordable option for many households, while a lack of charging facilities will need to be addressed before the transition to EV's. The government is also aiming to increase renewable energy production to 70% by 2030. This will surely mean a large increase in the number of wind turbines around the country and rural and upland areas will certainly be the target for onshore wind developments.

However, there are also opportunities for rural communities in the plan. The provision for microgeneration is very welcome and will allow those who can produce electricity to sell energy back into the grid. There may well be prospects for local groups to set up co-op arrangements to produce electricity. Some local groups have already established as Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) and are exploring how they can make their communities more energy efficient and are investigating the potential for microgeneration opportunities in their localities.

We are undoubtedly in a time of change and Wicklow Uplands Council is also revisiting its 'Renewable Energy Policy', which was first developed back in 2009 when wind energy developments in the county were in their infancy. A subcommittee is being formed to develop an updated policy in the coming months.

Litter Pick Of The Sally Gap

The Wicklow Uplands Council's annual litter pick event took place in April and saw a sizable team of volunteers tackle a 7km stretch of the scenic Sally Gap Road. Splitting up into smaller groups along the route, they found everything from exhausts, speakers, carpets and an array of domestic rubbish scattered along the roadside, drains and adjacent lands.

Organised in conjunction with Pure Project, An Taisce National Spring Clean and the National Parks & Wildlife Service, the group extensively cleaned the section that runs past the Coronation Plantation till reaching the well-known Sally Gap crossroads. In total over 60 bags were filled during the evening event.

The uplands are a very popular destination for visitors

and recreational users, who are attracted to the region's stunning landscape and ample choice of activities, however, unfortunately roadside litter is a major challenge.

Wicklow Uplands Council promotes the simple message - *Please enjoy the uplands responsibly, respectfully and follow the Leave No Trace Principles.* www.leavenotraceireland.org



Wind Energy In the Uplands

Wicklow must be smart in addressing climate change and protecting its priceless landscape. Climate change is real, it is happening, and humanities rapid industrialisation and reliance on fossil fuels over the last 200 years is having a dramatic negative effect on our planet and the flora and fauna that live on it. This is a fact, it cannot be disputed, and all of us living in Wicklow must play a part in addressing it.

It is the proposed matrix of solutions that must be studied in depth. Kneejerk and the temptation to reach for the "easiest" response, will produce counterproductive results and will also ensure that climate change adaptation and mitigation policies are rejected by local communities in Wicklow.

The Wicklow and Dublin uplands is a spectacular landscape and is a unique resource in terms of biodiversity, exceptional rural topography and an educational and outdoor recreational environment on the east coast of Ireland. As a native of this landscape, I am conscious of the caretaker role we have to protect the Wicklow Hills and the communities that have lived there for generations. Local farmers, landowners and villages have worked in partnership with this landscape and have ensured that this priceless environmental resource is protected.

Renewable energy is a significant part of every county's response to climate change. All of us in Wicklow must play our part. However, to concentrate on excessive industrial onshore windfarming at the expense of a broad portfolio of renewables located Countywide, will serve to only pollute our upland environment instead of protecting it. Rural South Wicklow is the only location at present where industrial onshore windfarming takes place.

There are plans to develop additional industrial onshore windfarming in this area. These plans have been totally rejected by local communities and indeed by Wicklow County Council on two occasions. The developments have divided local communities and created discord and climate change denial amongst people who have protected and farmed this landscape for generations.

To turn a rural upland landscape into an industrialised landscape is not the way to address our commitment to a renewable energy future. To turn local communities against climate change measures is a serious mistake and is counterproductive to our need to build a greener Wicklow.

Offshore Windfarming and Photovoltaic (solar) energy are viable alternatives to onshore industrial wind. Wicklow needs to be flexible and smart in its commitment to renewable energy provision. Both offshore windfarming and solar generation are far less impactful on the unique biodiversity of the Wicklow uplands than the current drive for industrial onshore turbines.

The battle to address man-made climate change will involve a response from every man, woman and child in Wicklow. We need the active support and involvement of every community, landowner, farmer, business and visitor in order to respond to the climate emergency. We will not do that by railroading measures through that benefit the few over the needs of the many.

Micro-generation in wind and solar throughout Wicklow is an alternative model of renewable energy generation that will provide community buy-in with minimal to no environmental impact. The proposed offshore Windfarm between Arklow and Wicklow Towns could generate a response greater than several counties alone.

We cannot destroy our precious landscape in order to provide quick-fix solutions. Wicklow can be a model of environmental and climate change protection measures, if we are smart, if we work together, and if we have a broad portfolio of responses that all can be involved in. The technologies and variety of renewable energy generation are changing rapidly in response to the nature of the climate change crisis and the innovation inherent amongst our scientific and engineering communities.

The next County Development Plan which will begin a consultation process shortly, must take cognisance of the mistakes that have been made so far in our climate change response. The plan must stand up to powerful vested interests to ensure that the unique partnership between local communities and the Wicklow landscape that we all love and want to protect, is handed to the next generation intact and contributes to a greener Wicklow for all who live, work and visit here.

John Mullen,
WUC Board Member



THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF THE UPLANDS

The hills and the valleys of the Wicklow Uplands have a timeless beauty. They look as if they have been like this forever. But the landscape has changed dramatically over the centuries. The great forests of oak are almost completely gone from the valleys. The birch, holly and hazel woods are small remnants of what they once were. But many of the big landscape changes are much more recent. Indeed, some of our most beautiful landscape features are less than two hundred years old.



The Vartry Reservoir first came into being in the 1860's. The Bohernabreena Reservoirs in the Dublin Uplands date from the 1880's. The Poulaphuca Lakes began to fill in 1940. And Turlough Hill dates from the early 1970's. They now fit so well into the landscape that they seem to be natural features and there from time immemorial. Well, apart from Turlough Hill, that is.

The Vartry Lakes add the beauty of water to an already beautiful landscape. And the Victorian architecture adds a romantic touch here and there. From the dam road, the filter beds have settled in so well that they resemble a garden feature.

Before 1860, Dublin had taken its water supply from the canals and the lower reaches of streams like the Dodder and the Poddle. There were frequent problems with contaminated water, water-borne illnesses and low water pressure. The decision of Dublin Corporation to finally tackle the problem was spear-headed by Sir John Gray, an eminent physician, politician and proprietor of The Freeman's Journal.

The idea of damming the Vartry and piping the water all the way from Roundwood to Dublin, was a typically ambitious engineering scheme of the period. Fearing that there would be speculation on the land if word got out, Sir John quietly bought the land himself. Then after the project became public knowledge, he sold it to the Corporation for the price he had paid for it. No wonder his statue still graces O'Connell Street.

Work began in the 1860's. The water was channelled through a four-kilometre tunnel to Callowhill and then through forty kilometres of mains piping to Dublin. The project proved very successful and was improved and extended on several occasions up to the 1920's. The Vartry has not only supplied drinking water to the people of Dublin and Wicklow for a century and a half, but the lakes have become a major recreational destination with the development of the Vartry Reservoir Trails.



The Rathmines Township local authority decided not to throw in its lot with Dublin Corporation's Vartry scheme. They regarded the water as too expensive for one thing. So, in the 1880's they developed the Bohernabreena (or Glenasmole) Reservoirs. There was more than one purpose here. Clean drinking water was certainly needed. But the River Dodder was also prone to both drought and flooding from time to time. To solve both problems two reservoirs were constructed. The upper one collected the clear water from the sides of Glenasmole Valley for use as the domestic water supply. The brown, peaty water from the hills around Kippure was channelled past the drinking water reservoir to a lower reservoir where it was used to regulate the flow down to the mills which were in operation lower down the river. There was at this point, between forty and fifty mills in operation on the Dodder, all using the sustainable energy harvested from the flowing water.

Glenasmole is a beautiful valley with a very strong and ancient association with Fionn MacCumhaill and Na Fianna. The hills surrounding the valley have recently been incorporated into the Dublin and Wicklow National Park. Here too we now have excellent walking trails along the reservoirs, including part of the Dublin Mountains Way.



From Church Hill or Moanbane, the view of the Poulaphuca (or Poulaphouca) Reservoir, also often called the Blessington Lakes, is spectacular. The waters look like a totally natural part of the countryside. It is now hard to believe that beneath those calm waters lie the remnants of farms, roads, bridges, village, church, graveyard and even a famous holy well. Yet here there was a vibrant, living landscape only eighty years ago. Until the waters built up behind the new Poulaphuca Dam in 1940, this was home to the Cullens, the Mileys, the Byrnes, the Twyfords, the Quinns, the Hanlons and many, many more.

The valley did have a lake before of course - a meltwater lake towards the end of the last Ice Age. But this was different, there was a community living in the valley. So the little village of Ballinahown was submerged. The burials from the graveyard of Burgage were reinterred. Saint Bodin's Well in Lacken, with its two magical fishes, disappeared beneath the water. That is until it re-appeared briefly during the drought in 1978.

The idea of a dam at Poulaphuca Falls was not new. A Government commission in 1919 had already proposed the area as suitable for a reservoir and power-station. But it was the water shortage in the mid-1930s that really gave life to the scheme. And the Falls at Poulaphuca could be harnessed to provide a second, and of course, highly sustainable, energy source to augment the great Ardnacrusha Electricity Scheme on the Shannon. The ESB, Dublin Corporation and other local authorities, with strong Government support, took on the project. A total of about 5,000 acres were flooded, the largest area ever lost to a single development in the State.

There was certainly some local resentment and a number of 'protest' meetings were held in the area during 1938 and 1939. The main focus of the resentment was the level of compensation being paid to householders and landowners. And looking back through the records now, it is clear that they were not treated anything like as fairly as they might have been. The removal of the remains from the old graveyard was also a cause of concern. But otherwise there seems to have been general public support for the scheme. An interesting speculation would be to consider what the reaction to a scheme of this scale would be today. [Chris Corlett's wonderful illustrated book 'Beneath the Poulaphuca

Reservoir' gives a vast amount of information on the area before the waters came.]

The Poulaphuca Waterfall, which was such a tourist attraction at the end of the old tramline, is no more. But we will soon have another recreational gem in the form of a 42 kilometre Greenway around the reservoir.

Turlough Hill was completed in 1974. There was no community here to re-locate. A storage reservoir was built right on top of the hill. At periods during the twenty-four hours, when demand is low and there is surplus electricity generation, the water is pumped up from Lough Nahanagan into the storage reservoir. Then at times of peak demand the water flows down into the lake again through generating turbines hidden within the mountain.

The scheme has proved highly successful in balancing the demand for electric power between the periods of high demand and surplus generation. Another example of a more sustainable approach to electric power. But the effects on the landscape are hardly positive. The hill-top storage reservoir stands out as an artificial feature from most viewpoints in the surrounding hills. And what was a little gem of a corrie lake, Lough Nahanagan, now always seems to be only half-full. A more curved profile on the storage reservoir would fit in better with the surrounding hills. But it is most unlikely that anything can be done to make the half empty lake, with its water monster, look natural again.

The value contributed to our society by the Uplands and the Communities who live there, is easy to under-estimate. Where would our capital city be without fresh water from the hills? And we have two highly sustainable forms of electricity generation as well. Few cities are as lucky as Dublin to have an area of such natural beauty on their doorstep. The Vartry, Bohernabreena and Poulaphuca Reservoirs, in addition to their primary purposes, are now priceless areas of recreation. They are developments that are not only highly successful in their own right but are providing a valuable resource to their communities and to visitors alike. Change is not always for the worse.

Louis O'Byrne,
WUC Board Member.



1) The stone-built 'valve' or 'draw off' tower on the lower Vartry Reservoir, constructed c.1865. **2)** The upper Bohernabreena Reservoir constructed in the 1880's to provide a clean drinking water supply. Also in the photo is the outlet tower and spillway. **3)** The Vallemount Bridge across the Poulaphuca Reservoir which was constructed following the flooding of the valley in 1940. **4)** An aerial view of Turlough Hill's storage reservoir.

The theme for this year's National Heritage Week is 'Pastimes, Past Times' and will see over 2,000 events happen across the country from the 17th – 25th of August.

To celebrate the event, Wicklow Uplands Council are organising a guided walk with well-known local Donie Anderson around parts of the Glenasmole Valley on the evening of Wednesday the 21st.

Shaped by glacier activity and the River Dodder, the picturesque setting serves as the backdrop for this free event. It is open to everyone and promises to be a fun and enjoyable experience with plenty of stories and anecdotes shared along the route.

This area of the Dublin uplands, has a deep history going back to the mythologies of Fionn MacCumhaill and his band of Irish warriors, Na Fianna. Many of the old traditions and hill farming practices that were once a common sight in the valley, will be explored during the walk and it will also include a visit to the Bog Road to take in the full vista of Dublin Bay and its capital city.

Participants should meet beforehand at 6.45pm outside the Old Mill in Tallaght. Due to a bus service being organised to accommodate the group, advance booking is essential. Please email info@wicklowuplands.ie or phone 01-2818406.

New Bus Service Introduced

A new bus service connecting Wicklow Town to a number of upland villages and visitor attractions in the area, was introduced in April and is proving to be a popular choice.

The Local Link 183 service offers an essential link for the local communities and provides great accessibility to visitor attractions such as the 6th century monastic site of Glendalough, The Wicklow Mountains National Park and trails such as the Wicklow Way, Avonmore Way, St. Kevin's Way and the Vartry Reservoir Trails.

The timetable also facilitates public transport links such as the train station in Wicklow Town and national bus services offered by Bus Éireann and Wexford Bus.

There are up to 4 daily services scheduled from Sunday to Thursday and 6 on Fridays and Saturdays.

The bus stops at the following locations:

- Wicklow Town
- Rathnew
- Ashford
- Roundwood
- Annamoe
- Laragh
- Glendalough



Fares: Free Travel Pass holders travel free.
Children up to 5 years of age travel free.
Under 18/students €2.
Adult Single €3.

For more information on the 183 bus service including timetables, please visit www.ringalink.ie or **LoCall 1890-424141**.

Directors Of Wicklow Uplands Council 2019/20

Farmers and Property Owners Panel

Declan O'Neill Farmer
Pat Dunne Wicklow County IFA
Thomas Broe Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association
Joe Morrissey Wicklow County IFA
Owen Brady Farmer (Vice Chair)
Sean Malone Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association
Denis Halpin Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association

Environmental and Recreational Panel

Carmel Kealy Motor Cycle Union of Ireland
Jim Sheehan Mountaineering Ireland
Louis O'Byrne Individual Member
Pearse Foley An Óige

Community Panel

Finian McEvoy Glendalough & District Development Association
Hilda Hall County Wicklow Farm Family Group
Garvan Hickey Individual Member (Treasurer)
Claire Chambers Roundwood & District Community Council

Economic and Tourism Panel

Eugene Stephens Ashford Self Catering Cottages
Dairine Nuttall Wicklow Nordic Walking & Ireland Tour Guide (Secretary)
Geoffrey Seymour Roundwood & District Community Council
Sean Byrne Lough Dan House B & B

CO Options

Tom Byrne Wicklow IFA (Chair)
John Medlycott Individual Member
Donal Anderson Dublin IFA
Daniel Molloy Individual Member
Ellen Durkin Individual Member

Further Nominations Pending

Wicklow Uplands Council Team

Brian Dunne Coordinator
Margaret Murphy Administration Officer
Conor Hipwell Communications Officer
Pat Mellon Deer Management Project Manager

The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Wicklow Uplands Council.

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