



## A celebration of Ireland's mountain environment

Achill Island, 25-27 May 2018



*Photo: Croaghnaun, Achill, by Orla Prendergast*

*To coincide with European Year of Cultural Heritage and National Biodiversity Week, Mountaineering Ireland is hosting a weekend celebration of Ireland's mountain environment, based on Achill Island, Co. Mayo from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2018.*

## ABOUT THIS EVENT

The overall aim of the Mountain Environment weekend is to celebrate what makes Ireland's mountains special, by sharing knowledge of the mountain environment and its associated cultural heritage, through illustrated talks, and by spending time exploring the mountains and discussing what we see and hear.

Rather than focusing on a single aspect of the mountain environment such as geology or plants, this weekend will promote understanding of environment and heritage by involving people from different disciplines such as botany, ornithology, heritage, geography and geology. We will be meeting people involved in farming and nature conservation on Achill Island. Consideration will also be given to how best to protect the special qualities of Ireland's mountains and upland areas.

The event is delivered in conjunction with the Outdoor Education programme GMIT Mayo Campus with input from additional individuals with expertise on different aspects of the mountain environment.

This event is intended for: Environmental Officers within Mountaineering Ireland clubs; Mountain Training Board Ireland providers; hillwalking club leaders; walking guides and other Mountaineering Ireland members with an interest in learning about the mountain environment and sharing that knowledge with others.

## ACHILL ISLAND AND CORRAUN

There seem to be differing accounts of the meaning of Achill (Acaill meaning eagle – Praeger) or Achla, a form of Aichill, meaning 'a look-out point or prospect' Tempan), but there is no doubt that the landscape of Achill is outstanding.

In his 1937 book, *The Way that I Went* Robert Lloyd Praeger introduced his section on Achill with the following: '*Achill, wind-swept and bare, heavily peat-covered, with great gaunt brown mountains rising here and there, and a wild coast hammered by the Atlantic waves on all sides but the east, has a strange charm which everyone feels, but none can fully explain*'.

Participants in Mountaineering Ireland's Mountain Environment weekend will gain an understanding of Achill's charm by exploring the higher parts of the island and possibly nearby Corraun Hill.

The mountains of Croaghnaun (668m) and Slievemore (671m) on Achill are designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), for their excellent quality heaths and rocky habitats, which support a range of rare species of vascular plants and bryophytes (mosses and liverworts). The area is also home to a diversity of nesting birds, including chough. The underlying geology

is pre-Cambrian schists and gneisses at Slievemore and quartzite at Croaghnaun. From the high cliffs around Croaghnaun towards the northern cliff edge is a group of five cirques perched at various levels above the sea.

The Corraun Plateau SAC is a relatively small upland SAC, located on the Corraun Peninsula, south-east of Achill Island. The main peaks are an un-named summit on the plateau (alt. 541 m) and Corraun Hill (alt. 524 m). The Corraun Plateau SAC has extensive areas of wet heath and montane heath habitats. The geology is varied but is predominantly composed of Dalradian schist and quartzite. There are several corries on the northern side of the massif containing a number of lakes.

## OUTDOOR EDUCATION GMIT

The Outdoor Education Degree in GMIT Mayo contains an exciting mix of academic work and practical training for instructor-level awards in adventure sports. Students gain an understanding of the developmental role of outdoor education and build experience in designing and running educational programmes. Through fieldtrips and lectures students explore and examine Irish landscape, heritage and ecology and realise the potential of adventure tourism, green exercise and nature therapy. Safety management, first aid and rescue are other core elements. One day a week is spent taking part in adventure sports on the mountains, lakes, rivers and sea. In year 1 the focus is on gaining personal skills in the sports and then on leadership level training in the following years.

## EUROPEAN YEAR OF CULTURAL HERITAGE 2018

2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage, a year of events, activities and celebrations all around Europe to get people interested and involved in cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage is diverse; embracing landscape, wildlife, and farming practices as well as literature, art, music, food and folklore. The knowledge of hillwalkers and climbers, and the passion we have for Ireland's mountains also form part of our cultural heritage.

The theme for the European Year of Cultural Heritage in Ireland is 'Make a Connection'. In keeping with this theme, Mountaineering Ireland's Mountain Environment weekend on Achill will seek to strengthen the link between hillwalkers and climbers and the places where we do our activities.

Find out more about the European Year of Cultural Heritage on <https://www.eych2018.com>.

# PROGRAMME

## Friday 25<sup>th</sup> May

**Registration** 6.30 – 7.30pm at Pure Magic, Slievemore Road, Dugort, Achill Island, see <http://puremagic.ie/achill>

**Opening talk** 8.00pm at St Thomas's Church, Dugort

### ***Eagle Country* – Séan Lysaght**

Landscape writer, heritage specialist and poet Séan Lysaght will share the story of a quest in the wild places of Mayo and the west of Ireland for eagles, past and present, which has culminated in the publication of his most recent book – Eagle Country.

Seán's talk will have a focus on the Achill area, especially Croaghaun, where there are literary and eagle associations. See <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/searching-for-eagles-in-mayo-and-beyond-1.3393224>.

*This talk is free of charge and open to all.*

## Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> May

### **9.15 – 10.00am – Setting the scene - indoor session at Pure Magic**

An introduction to the geology and landscape of Achill Island and Corraun (Kevin O'Callaghan)

### **10.15 – 11.00am – farming on Achill – past, present and future**

We will meet with local hillfarmer Tom Fadian, who farms on Slievemore and lives close to the Deserted Village. Tom will share a few stories with us about farming traditions on Achill, the changes he has seen in hillfarming, and what he hopes to see for the future.

### **11.30am – 6.00pm – Exploring Achill and Corraun**

We will spend most of the day outside exploring the Achill area. During the hike we will make stops to talk about the different landforms, heritage features, habitats and species we come across, many of which can be found on other mountain areas, particularly in the west of Ireland. Conservation issues and threats to our natural and cultural heritage will also be discussed. Participants will gain an understanding of the areas where we do our activities as well as countless nuggets of information to share with others.

Participants will be actively encouraged to share their own knowledge and experiences from within their club or work. The intention is to have two separate groups, with the precise

routes decided closer to the time depending on weather conditions. Both groups will at times be off paths and on steep and rocky terrain where a little scrambling may be required.

**7.00pm – three-course dinner at Pure Magic (included in registration fee)**

**8.30pm – learning more about the mountain environment**

Two short presentations followed by questions and answers:

Examples of Mountaineering Ireland's current work on access and conservation (Helen Lawless)

The habitats through which hillwalkers and climbers pass, and some plants to watch out for on Ireland's mountains (Dr. Rory Hodd)

Afterwards participants can again relax over a glass of wine, share a poem a story, or a song, all in the spirit of celebrating Ireland's mountains. We will also display some of the photographs taken during the day.

## **Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May**

**9.15am – 4.00pm – Further explorations in the Achill area**

A second learning journey in the mountains. Leaders will switch groups so that participants will get an insight into different aspects of heritage and the mountain environment.

We'll consider what actions we can take to ensure that our engagement with the mountain environment is more sustainable and how we can help to protect these special places. Participants will also be encouraged to consider how they will incorporate their new-found knowledge into their mountain days and any courses they deliver.

**4.30pm Wrap-up at Pure Magic**

**5.00pm – Event closes**

## PHOTO COMPETITION

Photographs provide an excellent medium to celebrate what is special about Ireland's natural and cultural heritage and to bring the mountains to the wider community.

To encourage participants to record and share photographs during this weekend we're having a photographic competition with prizes in the following categories:

- People engaging with the mountains
- Colour in nature
- Flora and fauna
- Geology and landscape
- Cultural heritage

Photographs taken on Saturday should be submitted on a memory stick on the Saturday evening or emailed to [helen@mountaineering.ie](mailto:helen@mountaineering.ie). **Maximum of 10 photographs per person.** We will have an extra laptop available so that people can view and select their photos.

Some of the photographs will be shown on Saturday night and following the weekend a selection of the photographs will be used to make a short video which celebrates the natural and cultural heritage of the Achill area.

Participants should also consider entering the National Biodiversity week photo competition, where you could be in with a chance to win €500 (<http://biodiversityweek.ie>).

## BOOKING

The fee for the Mountain Environment weekend is €75 (this covers talks, field trips and dinner at Pure Magic on Saturday evening). **Places are limited; tickets can be booked through Eventbrite** <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/a-celebration-of-irelands-mountain-environment-tickets-45189294396?ref=ebtn>

Accommodation is available at Pure Magic, with a special package price of €90 for two nights' accommodation, two breakfasts, and two packed lunches (see <http://puremagic.ie/achill/>). Accommodation (which is in shared rooms) can be reserved with Mountaineering Ireland by emailing [helen@mountaineering.ie](mailto:helen@mountaineering.ie) and paid to Pure Magic on the weekend.

To ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to benefit from this event it would be preferable not to have more than two people from any one club. Subject to availability it may be possible for people to book onto a single day, however first preference will be given to people booking for the full weekend.



## NOTES FOR PARTICIPANTS

- As we will be outdoors for two days, and traversing steep, rocky and exposed terrain, participants should bring hillwalking gear, including suitable footwear, raingear a packed lunch and something to drink.
- Camera, binoculars, a notebook and field guides (if you have them) will all be useful.
- To minimise impact and enable all participants to hear what is said while we're outdoors, group size will be limited.
- Participants may find it useful to have a copy of the detailed 1:25,000 EastWest Map of Achill and Corraun <http://www.eastwestmapping.ie/product/achill-corraun-clare-island/>.
- Dogs are not permitted on the field trips due to the presence of sheep grazing on the mountains.
- Plans for the field trips may be adjusted on the day depending on weather conditions or the needs and interests of the group.



*Dwarf willow (Salix herbacea), is Ireland's smallest tree, this tiny round-leaved member of the willow family is one of Ireland's 'Arctic-Alpine' species, found on the summits in the Croaghnaun/Slievemore Special Area of Conservation*

## BIOGRAPHIES

To give you a sense of the knowledge and passion feeding into this year's Mountain Environment weekend we've gathered brief biographies for some of those who are contributing:

### RORY HODD

Dr. Rory Hodd is an ecologist and botanist, with a passion for liverworts, mosses and mountains. For the last eight years Rory has carried out ecological survey work in a wide range of habitats throughout Ireland, but particularly in mountain areas, as a result he has an excellent understanding of upland habitats and conservation issues. Perhaps the best bit is that Rory enjoys sharing his knowledge with others, including walkers and climbers who don't have an environmental background.

### JACKIE HUNT

Jackie Hunt began working as an ecologist in 1995, when she worked for the state conservation agency, National Parks and Wildlife Service. She was then an employee of BirdWatch Ireland for five years where she assessed development impacts on Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds. Jackie now works as an ecological consultant specialising in bird related projects. Having grown up in Scotland and now based in Mayo, she is also a keen hillwalker.

### HELEN LAWLESS

Helen Lawless is in the lucky position of being able to combine her passion for the mountains with her role as Mountaineering Ireland's Hillwalking, Access & Conservation Officer. Helen works across the island of Ireland, aiming to protect Ireland's mountains, coastline and crags, to secure access and to encourage responsible enjoyment of these places. Helen lives in the Wicklow Mountains; her spare time is divided between enjoying the mountains and volunteering in her local community.

### SEÁN LYSAGHT

Seán Lysaght has published six volumes of poems, including *The Clare Island Survey* (1991), *Scarecrow* (1998), *The Mouth of a River* (2007) and *Carnival Masks* (2014), all from Gallery Press. Seán has also published a highly regarded biography of Robert Lloyd Praeger – *The Life of a Naturalist* (1999), a translation of Goethe's *Venetian Epigrams* (Gallery, 2008), a verse narrative of the life of Edmund Spenser, and, most recently, a prose work, *Eagle Country* (Little Toller, 2018). Seán won the Lawrence O'Shaughnessy Poetry Award in 2007 and his *Selected Poems* appeared from Gallery in 2010. He lives in Westport, County Mayo.

### MICHAEL MAUNSELL

Michael Maunsell is a Lecturer in Conservation & Biodiversity Management, with a research interest specifically in mountain environments and has established Mountain Research Ireland in order to promote cooperation and research on mountain environments in Ireland.



Michael has over 30 years' experience of working as a climber and researcher in mountain environments throughout the world. Michael is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, a former chairperson of Mountaineering Ireland's Access and Conservation Committee and represents Mountaineering Ireland on the UIAA Mountain Protection Commission.

#### **IRENE O'BRIEN**

Irene O'Brien has worked as a Conservation Ranger with National Parks and Wildlife for the last twelve years, she is currently the ranger for north west Mayo having previously worked in Wicklow Mountains National Park as a ranger and an education guide. While interested in all aspects of wildlife, her special interest is birds of prey and she is currently the secretary of the Irish Raptor Study Group. Irene played a large part in organising the National Peregrine Survey in 2017 and in the first Merlin survey, which is on-going in 2018. Irene is also the current training officer for the Mayo Mountain Rescue Team and was previously a member of the Glen of Imaal Mountain Rescue Team in Co. Wicklow. When spare time allows, her past times are hillwalking and climbing, particularly in Connemara, Mayo and Wicklow.

#### **KEVIN O'CALLAGHAN**

Kevin O'Callaghan has been involved in the outdoors for quite a while.... This involvement has ranged from mountaineering, orienteering through to kayaking, sailing and adventure racing. Initially qualifying as a geologist his work become more involved in looking at and investigating landscapes, inevitably he gravitated back into the outdoors and other adventures. Kevin currently works as a lecturer in Outdoor Education in GMIT's Mayo Campus in Castlebar, where he lectures in Earth Processes and Environment Management and Sustainability, in addition to leading groups on various adventures.

#### **FERGAL O'DOWD**

Fergal is a lecturer at the GMIT Mayo Campus and teaches mainly on the Heritage Studies and Outdoor Education Programmes. A graduate of NUIM and NUIG Fergal's background is in Environmental Geography and the Irish Language, and he has a particular interest in natural resource management and using the outdoors as a framework for cultivating a connection to community and the natural world. He is an advocate of environmental education and is a keen surfer, cyclist, walker and kayaker spending as much time as possible outdoors.

#### **ORLA PRENDERGAST**

Orla Prendergast teaches on the degree in Outdoor Education at GMIT Mayo Campus and delivers modules in the natural and cultural environment, and ecology. Orla also runs a range of Mountaineering Ireland courses such as Mountain Skills and Mountain Leader and is a member of Mountaineering Ireland's Access and Conservation Committee. Orla's passion both at work and in her spare time is being out in the mountains, climbing and walking and exploring and sharing her love of wild places with others.