



The Mountaineering Council Comhairle Sléibhteoireachta  
of Ireland na hÉireann

## Annual Report 2004

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## President's Address

The Mountaineering Council of Ireland is undergoing a sustained period of growth and development. In 2003, we produced a new set of Memorandum and Articles of Association which were adopted at the 2004 AGM and which have been implemented since then. As per the new Articles, the Executive that was elected in February 2004 is completing the first year of its two year term of office.

Having restructured the MCI to make it more effective in dealing with the increasing membership and the new issues in our sport, we have set about fleshing out our Development Plan for 2005-2008. The hardworking Development Plan Group has produced a draft document which has been made available to all members and which we hope will be adopted by the 2005 AGM so that we may begin to implement the Plan to the benefit of all our members in the years to come.

One feature of the re-organisation of MCI is this Annual Report which replaces the verbal reports delivered by the officers of the MCI at previous AGMs. We hope that all these changes will deliver a more efficient organisation to better serve our members and to allow us all to spend more time out on the mountains!

**Declan O'Keeffe**  
**18 January 2005.**

## **MCI Executive Committee** (elected February 2004 for 2-year term)

Declan O'Keeffe	President
Rita Connell	Secretary
Patrick O'Sullivan	Treasurer
Colin Gibbon	Chair – Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe
Sé O'Hanlon	Chair – Climbing Committee
John Cunnane	Chair – Environmental Committee
Gerard Mangan	Chair – Hillwalking Committee
Kevin Byrne	Chair – Irish Alpine Association
Vincent McAlinden	Chair – Youth Committee
John Healy	Member
Mary McInerney	Member
Ross Millar	Member
John O'Callaghan	Member

## Secretary's Report

The Elected Executive met four times during the year. These meetings were all held at weekends. A management committee of the President, Treasurer, Secretary and Development Officer met between Executive meetings to deal with the day to day running of the organisation and other issues that arose during the year.

Executive members and members of staff attended meetings on behalf of the MCI with Comhairle na Tuaithe, Irish Uplands Forum, British Mountaineering Council, Mountaineering Council of Scotland, Mountaineering Co-ordination Group, Mountain Leader Training UK and various groups of interest to MCI during the year.

Two working groups were established after the 2004 AGM to look into the area of Access and the new Development Plan. These groups met regularly during the year and will report to this AGM.

A one day Review of Mountain Training in Ireland was held in September at Tollymore Mountain Centre. This was well attended both by MCI members and training providers. A report was written by Helen Lawless, circulated to those who attended and published on the MCI website.

At the end of October the MCI consisted of 9031 members. We had 116 paid-up Clubs with a total of 7,900 members and 1131 Individual Members in addition to this.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the elected Executive, Committees and all voluntary personnel who play an important role in the running of the MCI. Special thanks to Helen Lawless, Mike Dagley, Terry Canavan and Stewart Magill for all their help and support to me during the year.

Rita Connell

## **Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe**

### **Who is BOS?**

Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe (BOS) is the Irish Mountain Training Board. BOS is responsible for the development, administration and monitoring of training schemes for walkers and climbers in the Republic of Ireland. Mountain Leader Training NI (MLTNI) performs a similar function in Northern Ireland. BOS also has a role in promoting training and providing information both to MCI members and the general public. In May 2004 Colin Gibbon took over from Orla Prendergast, who had chaired BOS for the previous three years.

*BOS's achievements during 2004 included:*

### **BOS Awards 2004**

In 2004 15 people gained the BOS Mountain Leader Award, 26 people got their Single Pitch Award, one person got the Multi-pitch Award and 6 people were awarded the new Walking Group Leader Award.

### **Training grants 2004**

The MCI places a high value on training and skills development for walkers and climbers. Recognising that cost can often be a barrier to undertaking training, the MCI (through BOS) administers grant schemes to support members doing formal and informal training. The following clubs benefited from MCI training grants within the last year: Aonach ar Siúl, Beanna Beola Hillwalking Club, Clare Outdoor Club, Dunsany Walking Club, Imaal Walkers, Kilkenny College Hillwalking Club, Mourne Ramblers and Peaks Mountaineering Club. The total amount paid out in training grants in 2004 was: €1,795.

### **Environmental Awareness Day**

In May 2004 BOS organised an Environmental Awareness Day for hillwalking leaders in Co. Galway. Well known author Gordon D'Arcy shared his knowledge with the group on the hills, and back at base in Petersburg OEC. A similar event is planned for 7<sup>th</sup> May 2005 at Cappanalea OEC.

### **Review of Mountain Training**

A number of members of BOS assisted with and contributed to the MCI's one-day review of Mountain Training in Ireland held at Tollymore Mountain Centre in September 2004.

### **Discover the Hills**

In September 2004, Tiglin in partnership with the MCI and Wicklow Mountains National Park piloted a new course for hillwalkers - Discover the Hills. Over two days 16 participants did basic and refresher navigation training, enjoyed an inspiring lecture by Frank Nugent and spent a day exploring the hills with a ranger from Wicklow Mountains National Park. Two Discover the Hills weekends have been scheduled for 2005 – 10-12 June and 26-28 August. These weekends are aimed at members of MCI clubs and are offered at a heavily subsidised rate.

### **SPA providers workshop**

In October BOS and MLTNI held a joint workshop at Tollymore Mountain Centre for instructors who work on Single Pitch Award (SPA) courses. The rationale behind these workshops is to keep tutors informed and to ensure parity of standards and compatibility of training and assessment courses throughout Ireland and the UK. A review of the BOS Mountain Skills scheme is underway and a workshop for course providers is being planned for 27-29 November 2005.

### **Expand Your Horizons**

In conjunction with Tiglin, BOS ran 'Expand Your Horizons' slide shows in Waterford, Dundalk and Killarney in the autumn. During these evenings information was provided on the training opportunities for walkers and climbers in Ireland, and more importantly, where that training could take you. Two further 'Expand Your Horizons' events are planned for Letterkenny on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> January and Dublin on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005.

### **The current members of BOS are:**

Tomas Aylward, Jane Carney, Cormac Doran (National Youth Council of Ireland), Colin Gibbon (Chair), Helen Lawless (Secretary), Ronan Lenihan (Irish Mountain Rescue Association), Ursula MacPherson (Outdoor Education Ireland), Charlie McManus (CDVEC), Orla Prendergast (previous Chair), Clive Roberts (Director of Mountaineering Tiglin – Technical Adviser), Calvin Torrans (MCI Climbing Committee), Shay Walsh (MCI Hillwalking Committee).

Helen Lawless

## Climbing Committee

The members of the Climbing Committee this year were selected on the basis of them doing certain jobs for climbing as follows:

Alan Tees who has a project for the recruitment of people to keep a watch on developments on crags around the country, keep an eye out for new routes, changes to routes and need for corrections of guidebooks. *(see p41 of IML72 for further details of the Adopt a Crag project).*

Calvin Torrans for his expertise and long-range view gained through his years of experience.

Dominic Green who was the only person to reply to a request to climbers for participation. He took on the job of writing an article for "Outsider" and Mountain Log on bolting. The purpose of this was to try to stimulate the members of the MCI to look at the existing, outdated, bolting policy and propose a new one. Dominic's submission to Mountain Log has yet to be published. Calvin has agreed to propose a new bolting policy in case nobody else does anything.

Gay Needham because she knows more about guidebooks than anyone else in the MCI.

Moira Creedon who took on the organisation of the MCI meet in Glendalough in September which was intended to stimulate a discussion on bolting and the organisation of further climbing meets. The idea behind the meet was to bring climbers into contact with each other, particularly those outside the main centres, to allow people to climb with people other than their normal climbing partners and hopefully to bring about an improvement in climbing standards generally.

Arising from the Glendalough meet, Colmcille Climbers are hosting a meet in Donegal 30 April – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2005. There is also the possibility of a meet centred in Limerick.

Eoin Fitzgerald as a representative of the Irish Bouldering League; one of the new team that has taken over the organisation of IBL. They have found their feet quickly and are doing an excellent job. We thank them (and those who did so much work in previous years).

The Climbing Committee was involved in an access problem at Hollywood in Co. Wicklow where a new landowner was frightened of the possibility of claims being made against him arising from any accident. He has put up signs saying that climbing is forbidden but with the ambiguity that persons climbing do so at their own risk. A nod is as good as a wink. My opinion is that climbers will not be chased, but people bringing groups of children to the crag are very unwelcome and should be discouraged. Communication is ongoing.

The new edition of the Dalkey Guidebook was delayed but it should be ready within the next couple of months. The revised Wicklow guide is proceeding very slowly with lots of handwriting but should be ready by next season. A reprint of the Mourne guide has been delayed by technical problems which should be resolved soon.

Through IML climbers were asked to send details of new routes to New Climbs Editor, c/o the MCI Office. Judging by the replies there have been no new routes put up this year. Strangely enough I was able to get enough new routes for 2004 to fill 15 A5 pages from climbing.ie and the Colmcille Climbers website.

The Climbing Committee met once only this year and otherwise communicated by email.

Early in the year we circulated all clubs which seemed to have an involvement with climbing and asked them what they wanted to come from the MCI through the Climbing Committee. The same question was asked on the climbing.ie mailing list in an attempt to contact Individual Members who are climbers. The only reply was from Cork with a suggestion that we support participation by members in climbing competitions abroad. Nobody else had any requirements or suggestions. Maybe we should stop trying to be busy and give the people what they want - guidebooks and nothing else.

Sé O'Hanlon

## Environmental Committee

The Environmental Committee (EnvCom) advises the MCI Executive and acts on behalf of the membership in matters of Access and Conservation. This year has seen the formation of the Access Working Group, a temporary committee for research into and action on Access matters.

The Environmental Committee Members are John Cunnane (Chair), Mike Dagley (MCI Office), Milo Kane, Derek Sargent, Marion O'Shea, Paul Scott. The Committee met seven times during 2004.

**The principal activities of the Committee are set out under the various headings below; -**

### **Submissions made in 2004.**

- Wicklow County Council on Wicklow Draft Development Plan (February).
- Wicklow County Council on Draft Heritage Plan (March)
- Wicklow Mountains National Park on Route Classifications (May)
- Soil Association ref Coillte Forestry Stewardship Certification (June)
- Department of Environment on Wind Energy Guidelines (September)

### **Planning Letters in 2004**

- 23/1 - Objection to leisure development in Dublin 18, (Ticknock Tower) – subsequently refused.
- 28/1 - Comments on retail developments, Laragh Co. Wicklow.
- 13/5 - Comments on Knockmealdown wind power station re-application.
- 1/11- EIA consultation on Mullaghareirk Mountains (Co. Cork) wind power station.
- 2/11- Objection to wind monitoring mast on Meenteog Mountain (Co. Kerry).

### **Meetings / Conferences in 2004**

- **Wicklow Mountains National Park** - EnvCom was represented at two meetings with the WMNP (September and November) to discuss links between the two organisations, the impact of recreation in the mountains, wild camping, climbers and peregrines, organised events and possible permits. Also being discussed is a proposal to classify the level of erosion / durability of walking routes in Wicklow using a system of colour-coding. This could provide guidance to Clubs when they are planning their walks. MCI will discuss this further with WMNP in 2005 and also consult with clubs in the Dublin / Wicklow area. EnvCom also continues to liaise with the WMNP and others on quad bikes/off road vehicle use in upland areas. Thanks to Dick Doyle for his input, and those local club members in Wexford and Carlow who have kept MCI informed.
- **Race Against Waste** - Mike Dagley co-represented MCI and Irish Sports Council at first of a series of meetings organised by Race Against Waste on 6 October.

- **Wind Energy Conference** - Mike Dagley represented MCI at the 'Energy from Fresh air' conference in RDS in November. Purpose of involvement was to deepen MCI knowledge and understanding of growing issues surrounding renewable energy developments in uplands, and to maintain link to Guidelines consultative process.

### Current Activities

- **Devil's Ladder** – Following site survey by Mountain Meitheal, MCI agreed to pledge €2000 from the Environmental Defence Fund should the project go ahead and require support. Proposal currently with Kerry County Council. *EnvCom maintains a watching brief.*
- **Access & Conservation Grants** – EnvCom welcomes applications from clubs for grant aid for Access & Conservation initiatives. To date, successful projects include:  
**BOS** Environmental Education Day.  
**Dal Riada** Hut works (no grant required as responsibility taken on by National Trust).  
**Hillwalking Committee** Glensoulan path restoration – ongoing and 500 volunteer hours delivered.  
**Tullow MC** Access clearance in Scullogue Gap.  
**Tyndall MC** New Bolts and Abseil points for Ballykeeffe Quarry.
- **Leave No Trace** – MCI has participated with other organisations including Coillte, Parks & Wildlife Service, Countryside Access & Activities Network, Gaisce and Irish Uplands Forum in an ad-hoc working group that is looking at adapting the Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics Programme for Ireland. *Work on this is ongoing.*
- **Environmental Policy** - EnvCom completed work policy revisions in 2003, policy has been typeset and should be printed early in 2005.
- **Good Practice Guide & Litter Leaflet** - EnvCom will work with Hillwalking Committee (HWC) on review of Good practice Guide and preparation of proposed letter leaflet.

### Future?

EnvCom is looking to recruit more members to guarantee a broader and more representative input, and to be more pro-active. 2004 has been an effective year despite slow progress on some issues. We see 2005 as a time to move beyond just policy production, and a time for delivery by means of education, closer links to members and generation of meaningful environmental awareness. Making a difference on the ground (literally!) is essential. Close liaison with Executive, other MCI committees, member clubs and other organisations will be necessary to make the message cohesive.

John Cunnane

## **Hillwalking Committee**

The following is a brief outline of the Hillwalking Committee, its make-up, role and function. I would like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely all the members of the Committee who assisted me in my role as chairman.

### **Roles and Function of the Hillwalking Committee.**

- To support and promote the interests of hillwalkers within the MCI
- To represent the MCI on the Way-Marked Ways Committee.
- To represent the Hillwalking Committee on BOS,
- To liaise with the European Ramblers Association on behalf of the MCI.
- To identify and develop good practice in hillwalking.
- Assistance to all MCI Clubs especially Aspirant Cubs.
- Liaise with other MCI groups on hillwalking issues.
- Advise FSG regarding lectures, articles and events of interest to walkers
- To advise Ordnance Survey Office

### **Committee Membership**

The members of Committee are: Gerard Mangan (Chair), Barbara Gill, Loretto Coyle, Nicky Connell (Secretary), Shay Walsh (BOS Rep.) and Ronnie Carser. A special mention to Irene Cauley who ably substituted for Loretto, when she was unavailable for a short while. The Committee have meet on four occasions with many "discussions" by email!

### **Committee Activity**

Committee members have attended at various MCI organised events. Shay Walsh represents the Committee on BOS and Access Working Group, Chair attends the National Waymarked Ways Committee and at all Executive meetings.

The Committee helped organise the last Spring Meet in Clonmel. Special thanks to Shay, Nicky and Barbara for all their hard work.

The Committee have worked on a safety rucksack label, litter leaflet and made submissions on other matters raised during the year. The Committee have also started a programme in where each Aspirant Club is sent a letter offering information on the MCI, assistance in organising hill walks and in general offering a helping hand where needed. As we understand that it may be a daunting experience for a club to join a long established organisation, such as the MCI we would like to help with the process where possible.

In the year ahead the committee intends to look at the criteria for organised events on the Irish hills. We would also like to hear from our fellow uplands users on issues that they feel the Hillwalking Committee should become involved with.

I would like to thank all members of both the Hillwalking Committee and the Executive for their assistance during the year. We look forward to a busy year ahead.

Gerard Mangan

## **Irish Alpine Association**

The role of the Irish Alpine Association (IAA) is to promote climbing and expeditions in the Alps and the Greater Ranges through assistance with funding and training.

In 2004, four candidates were selected for the Advanced Alpine Course in Chamonix and two for the Ice Climbing festival in Argentiere le Besseé in January 2004. The MCI also subsidised two climbers to accept invitations to an international rock-climbing meet in Plas-y-Brenin. All participants in these events were very pleased with the opportunities they provided to gain new skills and experiences. All opportunities for Irish climbers to meet and interact with climbers from other countries are to be welcomed and supported. At the time of writing applications are being sought from climbers to attend a BMC Winter climbing meet in Glenmore Lodge in Scotland in February 2005.

Grants were awarded to just one expedition – to Torssukatak in Greenland. Two Irish climbers, Ronan Browner and Donie O’Sullivan in the company of two UK climbers had a very successful trip completing a number of hard technical rock-climbs on the Baron and the Baroness, two impressive rock spires near the southern tip of Greenland.

Climbing activity in the Greater ranges continued in 2004 but it seems that trips were mainly confined to established venues and objectives. This trend is not unique to Ireland but seems to be a universal phenomenon. Relatively little exploration is taking place compared to the large numbers visiting remote areas. While it is heartening to see so many climbers venturing to the greater ranges, it would be good to see this accompanied by an upsurge in exploration. Cheap travel and good information available on the internet has made it feasible to travel to most if not all established mountain ranges in the world. Peaks like Kilimanjaro, Aconcagua, Elbrus, Island Peak and others now see regular ascents by Irish climbers. The first and second Irish women to summit Everest did so in May 2004 when Clare O’Leary and Samantha Carroll achieved their aim. Less than 100 women have ever climbed Everest so this was a significant achievement in its own right as well as being a first and second Irish ascent.

The 2004 season in the Alps was relatively poor weather-wise. This could be due to global warming or some other cause, but whatever the reason, recent Summers have produced mixed, unpredictable and certainly unreliable weather in the Alps. Despite the poor conditions, the level of activity in the Alps by Irish climbers seems to have been as high as ever. A small number of active Irish Alpinists continue to record significant ascents. Many Irish climbers are now also visiting the popular rockclimbing areas. Bolted climbing and bouldering have seen a surge in popularity. No statistics are available on the overall level and pattern of activity in alpine and other European destinations. Hence these comments are purely observational.

Kevin Byrne

## Youth Committee Report

Members of MCI Youth Steering Group (NI): Vincent McAlinden (Chair), Helen Lawless, Stephen Ferris, Trevor Fisher, Ian Luney, Dawson Stelfox.

The first complete year in post of our part time Youth Development Officer in NI - Stewart Magill, has naturally seen most of the energies of this committee directed northward. This whilst unfortunate, may be a good thing, as it reinforces the need for further volunteers to take an interest in leading youth development in the rest of the isle.

The continued focus of our work is the development of skills and independence within young people who partake in our activities. This is accurately reflected in the new development plan Goal 4 – ‘To promote responsible participation in hillwalking and climbing by young people’.

September saw the Mountain Training review in Tollymore Mountain Centre. This produced a healthy discussion of issues surrounding young people and mountaineering. The use of indoor walls as an alternative sport for the young is rising fast and the MCI need to find our place in its future. The potential creation of a climbing wall supervisors award north and south will make bringing a group to a wall more accessible to interested adults. However linking this to the Fundamental / Level 1 coaching award can potentially turn the visit into a fun and progressive learning experience. A second strong message that needs reinforced is that mountain instructors both freelance and centre-based are able and keen to deliver tailor-made courses for young people. All it takes is for those with a need to contact them, both Tiglin and Tollymore would be an obvious first port of call.

On 13<sup>th</sup> November approximately 50 people attended the youth workshop in Sport HQ. Whilst the full proceedings are awaiting to be published the energy and knowledge generated has already resulted in a number of new clubs and organisations to facilitate youth mountaineering. Some of the work that day produced a set of actions for future youth development and they have fed into the MCI's Development Plan. Indeed one of the first actions of this plan is to create a pool of volunteers to produce a national youth strategy by the end of 2005. This should include representation from relevant youth organizations. If you, or someone you know, has some time and energy to spare then let the MCI office know soon.

To enable all this activity to happen in a safe environment, for both the young people and the adults looking after them, the MCI has been rolling out its Children's Policy (this is available online or by request from the office). For a fuller brief of why this is a good idea see IML73. Needless to say some good progress has been made with quite a few clubs producing club children's officers and an increase in those accepting U18's. However the uptake for training has been slow. Last weeks heavily advertised course in Dublin had 12 attendees, 2 of whom travelled from Carlow, so the will is strong by some, but for many the spirit seems to be weak. Belfast had 9 attendees and Tollymore 11 (MCI volunteers). From April 2005 it will be a prerequisite of all

NGB's and clubs receiving support from the Sports Council of NI to provide training for all those involved with young people. This will inevitably be replicated in the whole of the country soon. If you would like to find out more about this 3hr course please email or phone the office.

Last year's Scotland winter skills week was a resounding success with some of those taking part going back to the highlands last spring and on to the Alps in the summer. The only mishap being a ferry being missed on the way back! The 2005 selection weekend happened in late December with a full quota of applicants from all corners of the country turning up. The level of enthusiasm and willingness to learn shown by those who attended was a pleasure to be amongst, contributed to by both the full-on winter conditions in the Mourne's that weekend and the generosity of the largely volunteer staff. The 12 lucky ones are off to Scotland in a couple of weeks.

Volunteer support: The Hotrock programme now has a list of approx 30 qualified volunteers. The MCI NI grant has enabled bursaries for winter ML, SPA, ML, MIA and also mini-bus training for 15 of these volunteers.

Youth Boulder Comp – Tollymore Autumn 2004 - another successful event with over 40 participants.

Youth Programme based at Tollymore:

Hotrock Club 14yrs +	130 person days
Pebbles 10-14yrs	120 person days

Belfast based activity:

Pebbles	(only 1 month old) 30 person days
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School climbing club support:

Approx. 100 person sessions

Derry outreach to potential volunteers was only partially successful. A route-setting workshop was successfully run in December, followed by a lecture by Niall Grimes.

Finally, Is there a wish for an Irish Junior Climbing team?

Vincent McAlinden

## Financial Strategy Group

### The current members of the Financial Strategy Group (FSG) are:

Patrick O'Sullivan (Chair)	Declan O'Keeffe
Mary McInerney	Helen Lawless
Dawson Stelfox	Sé O'Hanlon

### Functions of FSG:

1. To assist Treasurer with financial planning and the overseeing of MCI's accounts.
2. To prepare grant applications.
3. To advise MCI on fundraising, marketing and in the identification of other sources of income, as necessary.
4. To devise and develop the systems necessary to administer MCI's finances.
5. To negotiate and oversee MCI's insurance arrangements with the brokers.
6. To oversee all matters relating to MCI's paid staff.
7. To advise MCI on its financial strategy.

In 2004, the FSG met formally twice during the year, though there were many informal meetings and much ongoing work throughout the year on various issues related to MCI's finances.

The issues considered during the year included rationalising MCI's bank accounts as recommended by the Auditor, the Mountain Log's finances and management, the costings for various other publications, the finances of the lectures, financial support for the various workshops, meetings and events held throughout the year, approving grants agreed by various Committees, the financial consequences of the MCI office move, finalising the MCI Expenses Policy for volunteers and staff, setting membership fees for the coming year, reviewing BOS registration fees and reviewing the projections for MCI's income and expenditure throughout the year. The FSG prepared the Irish Sports Council (ISC) grant application in December, an important part of our annual income.

### Future plans:

- Finalise the Expenses Policy and Lecture Expenses Policy;
- Monitor the Mountain Log's finances;
- Support publication of various policy documents and guide books;
- Review position re need for additional staff and necessary funding in the light of the response by ISC to grant application;
- Work with Development Plan Implementation Group to advise re budgeting.

The audited accounts for the financial year 1/11/03 to 31/10/04 are attached as a separate document (Appendix 2).

Patrick O'Sullivan

## Appendix 1

### Access Working Group – Interim Report

Following a motion adopted at the AGM in February 2004, an ‘Access Working Group’ was established in March to ‘engage in broad consultation with the membership and produce a paper for further consideration’.

Participants in the Access Working Group are: Ross Millar (Chair), Danny McElhinney (Vice-Chair), John Cunnane, Gay Needham, Sean Quinn, Simon Stewart, Mick Wall and Shay Walsh. Helen Lawless, Patrick O’Sullivan and Declan O’Keeffe have attended as observers.

The Group has agreed to working to produce a paper, complete with a series of recommendations, for presentation at the AGM in February 2005. This being the case, this report is only an update for the Membership.

The Group, which reflects a broad range of those with an interest in access issues, have met on four occasions: March, May, November and December.

At the March meeting, the Group considered some of the current issues and legalities concerning access to the hills, such access being fundamental to the interests of all our membership. It was agreed that we needed to produce an information article or booklet for members and give detailed thought to the content of the consultation questionnaire.

At the May meeting, a proposed Mountain Log article and associated questionnaire were considered in detail and these subsequently went to print in the summer edition of the Log, inviting member feedback by the 30<sup>th</sup> September. The consultation was considered to have three purposes:

- Informing – through the Mountain Log article
- Building a true picture of what was actually happening on the ground
- Getting feedback from Members particularly on the role and stance of the MCI and its current policy.

As it transpired, a considerable number of replies were still being received in late September and early October and a discussion on some of the issues also informally took place at a workshop with those Members present at the October meet in Sligo. Consequently, the 126 replies were only analysed at the end of October and the findings reported in detail to the November meeting of the Group.

In summary, the consultation showed that:

- 50% of the respondents felt that their ability to obtain access had changed with over 90% of these stating it had got worse
- 30 respondents quoted specific examples of problems although many of these related to a small number of well-known cases
- Over 90% of respondents agreed with the MCI’s existing Access Policy.
- However, over a quarter of this group stated that the MCI needed to more proactive in pursuing that policy

- Around 90% of respondents felt that the consultative approach with landowners was appropriate to the circumstances prevailing in Ireland and should remain the basis of the MCI's future strategy
- However, a quarter of these also felt that there needed to be legislative changes to remove liability from landowners and/ or create a 'right to roam'
- Over 80% of respondents said that the MCI should consider a legal challenge if an important access issue arose although there was no consistent feedback as to what such an issue might be or on how we might fund the costs.
- Two thirds of those responding also said they would be in favour of the MCI appointing an 'Access Officer' and that they would be willing to pay a small increase in subscription (€5) to help cover the costs of this post.

Armed with this survey material, the November meeting of the Working Group discussed in detail the issues raised and determined that three clear areas of action emerged, namely:

- A proactive role on giving information to and facilitating the actions of our membership;
- A proactive role in lobbying at a Government and strategic level for policy change or for changes that enhance access (such as agricultural reform), and
- A clearer understanding of and agreement on as to what might be a legal issue fundamental to our organisation and further consideration as to how we might (if desired) resource action in this regard.

The Working Group is now considering these matters in detail and their thinking on each of the three action areas is being pulled together by different members of the Group. It is anticipated that a series of recommendations or proposals will then emerge in the form of a paper that will be put to the AGM in February in line with the original motion.

Ross Millar

## **AGM Report on the 'Access Working Group'**

1. Following a motion adopted at the AGM in February 2004, the 'Access Working Group' was established by the Executive Committee in March. The Working Group's initial terms of reference were to 'engage in broad consultation with the membership and produce a paper for further consideration'. The MCI Executive Committee, at its meeting of 22 May 2004, finalised the Group's operating terms of reference. (\*A full list of these terms of reference is included at the end of this document)
2. Based on these full terms of reference, the Chair, with the agreement of the Executive, produced a draft job description for an Access/ Conservation Officer and circulated it to various potential funding bodies for feedback. This was largely negative with the possible exception of the Heritage Council. Thus the Working Group, and subsequently the Executive, considered that the consultation process, slightly modified from that agreed at the 2004 AGM, needed to be completed before the other elements of the Terms of Reference could be formally addressed.
3. It was also felt by the Executive that the potential funding of an 'Access Officer' post by the membership needed to be considered as part of this consultation.
4. The Working Group met on 4 occasions: March, May, November and December 2004. A full account of the activities of the Group for the period March/ November is included in the Annual Report presented to the AGM.
5. It is reasonable to state that the activities of the Working Group were adversely impacted on by the logistics of meetings and the fact that there was no appointed secretary and resulting minutes.
6. There thus arose some differences of interpretation as to what was required to bring the activities of the Working Group to fruition for a report to the AGM.
7. At the December meeting, discussion was curtailed by both a lack of time and inadequate prior circulation of members thinking on the action areas identified. The papers presented on the 3 action areas previously agreed were detailed and on two of the subjects contained detailed options where the Group's thinking needed to be further refined. Those present thus felt another meeting in January 2005 would have been useful but this proved difficult to organise and did not take place.
8. This current report is thus presented as an attempt to move matters forward through reporting to the AGM as scheduled although it is has been authored by the Chair/ Vice Chair in the absence of such further meetings. Given the key issues that have been agreed, we feel new mechanisms need to be considered by the Executive to move matters forward. Whilst we accept that this report does not cover all the Working Group's Terms of Reference and that it does not comply with the letter of the motion agreed at last year's AGM, it is a sincere

attempt to move matters forward not least given the logistical and indeed interpretation issues outlined above, issues which remain.

9. Thus for the purposes of the AGM, the Chair and Vice Chair have outlined a number of recommendations that we feel should be presented. We feel this is necessary to create closure on the Working Group's activities and to fulfil the essence of Point 3 of the Group's Terms of Reference.
10. We would like to thank all those who were part of the Working Group for their input and assistance on these matters. Despite a lack of closure on all the issues, it was an informative exercise.

Ross Millar, Chair

Danny McElhinney, Vice Chair

### **Recommendations of the Chair/ Vice Chair for presentation to the AGM**

- 1 That the existing access policy remains as is. There is no evidence of any widespread desire for change.
- 2 That said, that the MCI adopt a more proactive role on access issues by seeking to improve both external and internal communications and in facilitating its membership in this regard.
- 3 That the thinking on these matters needs to be more refined. In this context, it is recommended that a form of 'advisory group' on access issues is considered. This may be considered an appropriate role for one of the existing Committees but in whatever form, its main purpose will be to compliment and guide the work of our main recommendation as detailed in 4 below.
- 4 It is clear to us that matters will not and cannot progress in an effective manner and that the MCI will not be truly proactive with regard to access matters given current (and indeed proposed) staffing levels. **It is thus considered fundamental to progress that our membership embrace the appointment of an Access/ Conservation Officer through a modest rise in membership fees, utilising existing funds and following up on external funding sources.** We recommend that this appointment is formally addressed by the Executive as a matter of priority. It is clear to us that whilst the access 'champion' role may not be that an important issue to our members individually, it is of crucial importance to the MCI as an organisation and that we are currently seen as lacking in this regard.
- 5 It is our opinion that the need for the MCI to take a 'stance' on a major legal issue is kept under review but that there are no current issues necessitating the establishment of a 'fighting fund' or similar reserve.

## **Terms of Reference of Access Working Group**

The following was agreed at the Executive Meeting held on 22nd May 2004  
(Prioritised as numbered)

1. Develop a job description for an Access Officer.
2. Develop a funding strategy for dealing with access issues including the appointment of an Access Officer.
3. Carry out a consultation process on access as per the motion to the MCI's 2004 AGM. Compare the results with the current access policy. Present an interim report to the November 2004 Executive Meeting and also report to the 2005 AGM.
4. Update list of MCI representatives on upland partnership groups, liaise with these and MCI representatives on Comhairle na Tuaithe, and keep in touch with other such initiatives to improve the access situation.
5. Develop a research proposal to investigate the legal aspects of existing access.