



Policy and Guidelines
for Organised Events in Ireland's Mountain Areas

Final Version

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Mountaineering Ireland's Policy and Guidelines for Organised Events in Ireland's Mountain Areas

Introduction

While primarily intended for Mountaineering Ireland (MI) members, this policy is relevant to anybody organising, or participating in an event that takes place in Ireland's mountain environment (hills, mountains, forests, bogland, sea cliffs and associated areas). The policy and its accompanying guidelines are aimed at events involving more than 50 people. Examples of such events include: walking festivals; challenge walks; adventure and multi-sport races; mountain marathons; climbing meets; charity challenges and fund-raising hikes.

Ireland's mountain environment has areas of great scenic beauty, forming inspirational landscapes with a sense of wilderness and space. Despite their rugged character, Ireland's mountains include many fragile and sensitive habitats such as blanket bogs and heaths. In recent years there has been a huge growth in recreation and organised events taking place in Ireland's mountain areas, sometimes resulting in damage to the environment and inconvenience for local people. The lack of a management body for most of our upland areas and the absence of any legal right of access are further reasons why there is a need for guidelines for the organised events that take place in the Irish mountains.

Policy

Mountaineering Ireland's (MI's) policy on Organised Events in Ireland's Mountain Areas is based on four pillars – planning, respect, skills and sustainability. The policy is supported by guidelines for event organisers and participants.

Planning

Well planned and well managed outdoor activity events are enjoyable for participants, make a positive contribution to the rural economy and have minimal adverse impact on the natural environment, heritage features, other land users and local residents. Planning well in advance, with a responsible attitude and a commitment to good communications will help ensure successful events. In contrast, poorly planned and managed events may result in injuries to participants, damage to the natural environment and impairment of relations with landowners and land managers.

Respect

Most of our mountains are privately owned land used mainly for grazing livestock. It's important to respect the needs of the people who live and work in these areas. Large areas of Ireland's mountains are protected by EU legislation for the quality of their natural habitat and the plant and wildlife species they support. The physical environment of our mountains is fragile; these areas are subject to a range of pressures including wildfires, dumping, climate change and increased visitor pressure, particularly associated with a growth in outdoor recreation activities. The success of outdoor activity

events depends on maintaining the goodwill of landowners, land managers and the local community.

Skills

The sport of mountaineering, embracing all walking and climbing activities, is based on an ethos of self-reliance, i.e. that participants are responsible for their own actions. Respect for the mountains is inherent to that values system. It follows therefore that MI prefers to see organised events where participants are required to be competent mountain users, or are encouraged to develop their personal skills through participation in the event.

Sustainability

Sustainability is the key principle underpinning this policy. Ireland's hills, mountains, forests, bogland and sea cliffs are special places. All visitors to these areas have a responsibility to use and enjoy the mountain environment in a way that will allow future generations to have similar experiences. Those who organise events in mountain areas bear a greater degree of responsibility. The Leave No Trace programme provides event organisers and participants with a useful framework for understanding and reducing adverse impacts from outdoor activities. The guidelines supporting this policy reflect the Leave No Trace ethos.

Guidelines

The following guidelines set out what MI sees as the main considerations in the organisation of events in the Irish mountains. It is not a manual, or a set of rules, it is intended as guidance for MI members who are involved in, or asked to assist with, organised events. Ballyhoura Fáilte has published a detailed manual on planning and organising walking festivals (*see Further Information section*).

The guidelines are divided into three sections, the first and main one is for event organisers, the second section is for participants and the final section sets out how MI will implement this policy.

Guidelines for event organisers

MI encourages all those organising events that take place in Ireland's mountain areas to follow the guidance offered below.

Before the event

Planning and consultation

- It takes a huge amount of time and effort to organise a successful outdoor activity event. It is best to have a team of people involved.
- Plan well in advance, it can take up to a year's preparation, particularly for a first-time or one-off event. Having time means that plans can be altered if necessary.
- Ensure there is early, and open, consultation with landowners (private and public) and the local community in the area for the event. A licence or permit will often be required for

events on public land. Consultation should also identify any potential impacts that require management.

- If there are fences across the route that cannot be avoided, discuss with landowners about the possibility of providing stiles, so as to prevent damage*.
- Consider scheduling the event for a time of year when damage is less likely. The mountains are more vulnerable in months with high rainfall, and in winter when the ground tends to be wetter and there isn't any re-growth.
- Check NPWS / NIEA online maps (*see Further Information section*) to discover if proposed routes traverse protected areas such as SAC, NHA, ASSI etc. This will give an early indication of the sensitivity of terrain; consult with the local ranger to ensure the event will not compromise the protected area. In some cases the assessment process may be complex, so make contact a minimum of six months before the event.
- Prevent congestion in villages and on rural roads by providing sufficient parking. For large events you will need to liaise with the Gardaí / PSNI regarding traffic management. Some events will attract spectators / supporters; make sure to factor them into your parking and traffic management plans.
- Carefully consider all safety aspects involved in bringing participants to remote places. This is particularly important for events involving inexperienced walkers, or where there is a time pressure on participants.
- Carry out a full risk assessment for the event. This process is about understanding the risks associated with your event and where necessary taking action to reduce the level of risk. Guidance on Health and Safety and Risk Management is available in the Ballyhoura Fáilte manual on walking festivals (*see Further Information section*).
- Have a bad weather plan or warn participants the event may be cancelled if weather is bad on the day, or ground conditions are not suitable.
- If the event is open to participants aged under 18, ensure that you follow the Good Practice advice contained in MI's Safeguarding Policy (*see Further Information section*).
- Make sure that you have adequate insurance cover for the event. Events organised by MI-affiliated clubs that comply with this policy and guidelines are covered under MI's civil liability insurance.

Route choice

- Choose the most robust route available, as firm well-drained surfaces can carry large groups with very little impact. Where there is not a robust route, limit numbers and concentrate people along routes where there is some evidence of a path. It is better to use damaged lines than undamaged areas.
- Charity fund-raisers and other events that are likely to attract inexperienced participants, should for safety reasons and to show care for the environment, use low-level routes with defined paths that are maintained. The best examples of such routes are likely to be waymarked trails, however it should be noted that many of these trails are also vulnerable to erosion if used by large numbers (*see Further Information section*).
- Be creative in devising your event, avoid the obvious 'highest peaks' approach. With annual events consider changing the route from year-to-year.
- Offer different options or levels, using different routes, that way you will spread the load from the event and participants can choose what best suits them.

- Identify any sensitive points (e.g. intact blanket bog, areas with ground-nesting birds etc.) along the route and if possible avoid these, The National Parks & Wildlife Service or Northern Ireland Environment Agency may be able to assist in identifying such points. Examine sensitive areas before and after the event and record any adverse impacts using digital photos with GPS co-ordinates.
- Care should be taken to avoid damage to archaeological sites and cultural heritage features such as stone walls. This can be achieved through route choice and/or briefing participants.

** It is important to ensure that any stiles put in place are fit for purpose and maintained in a safe condition. Contact MI Office for further advice.*

The event itself

- Provide detailed information on the nature of the event in advance, e.g. terrain, possible weather conditions, plus the skills and equipment participants should have. This could be done through a website or leaflet for the event.
- Ensure that participants register in advance; this allows you to control numbers and provide information to participants beforehand. Limiting participant numbers will reduce environmental impacts and logistical problems to do with parking, safety, transport etc. Email will work well for smaller events, and there are online registration tools (e.g. Eventbrite).
- Use the event to increase participants' awareness of access and conservation issues in the uplands (on the day and through event literature and website). For example:
 - explain that you have got landowners' permission for the event;
 - make participants aware if the area is protected and why;
 - ensure that participants are aware they each have responsibilities;
 - provide participants with information on the Leave No Trace programme;
 - include an historical or environmental themed walk in the programme.
- Provide litter bins at the start of the event, with separate bins for recyclables. Ensure that all litter is removed after the event.
- Encourage participants to use a toilet before going onto the mountains. Arrange access to local facilities or hire portable toilets.
- Ensure there is a clear briefing for participants, back this up with reminders at key points, e.g. if giving out bananas at a checkpoint remind participants not to drop the peels on the mountains.
- For night-time events, be particularly mindful of noise and disruption to local residents.
- Advise participants on how to behave around any livestock they may encounter on the route. A 'no dogs' policy is advisable for organised events in mountain areas, many waymarked trails also have a 'no dogs' policy.
- Use the event to promote skills development to participants (e.g. have a self-guided event, provide information on Mountain Skills courses etc).
- The use of markers should be kept to a minimum, e.g. to channel participants at key points, see *Mourne Event Waymarking Protocol* in *Further Information* section.
- Walk the entire route after the event to remove any litter or markers and check for any damage. This can inform planning for future events.
- Speak with people in the area immediately after the event to thank them and check if they are happy with how the event went.

- The organising team should meet shortly afterwards to review the event and identify lessons learnt. MI encourages all event organisers to commit to a process of continuous improvement in the organisation of their events.
- MI would welcome feedback from event organisers so that ideas on good practice can be shared.

Putting something back

- Aim to maximise the local economic benefit from the event, ensure there is good local awareness of what is happening and that there is minimal inconvenience to local residents.
- Avoid clashing with another event in the area.
- Use local companies for signs, transport, catering, hire of portable toilets etc.
- Actively encourage event participants to support the local area by providing details of accommodation and other local services on event literature / website.
- Consider starting or ending the event in or near local facilities and encouraging people to eat, drink or stay there. Your event will deliver more local benefit and run more smoothly if you work closely with local service providers. All of this helps to earn a welcome in the area.
- Encourage participants to acknowledge landowners, farmers and local people they meet during the event.
- Consider adding something to each participant's fee (even €1/£1) so that you can make a donation to mountain rescue, the local community, the management committee for the waymarked trail you are using, or organisations who do practical work to alleviate the impact of recreation on the natural environment.
- Accept responsibility for any damage caused and ensure that it is promptly rectified. Repair work should only be undertaken with the landowner's agreement.

Guidelines for event participants

- Events like challenge walks, walking festivals and adventure races give you something to aim for and can be very rewarding, however some events can have an adverse impact on the mountain environment and the local community. As a participant you share in the responsibility for this impact.
- Before you sign up for an event, ensure that it is being managed responsibly. Check the event website for evidence that the organisers are adhering to good practice (e.g. Is there information on the website about the skills and equipment required for the event? Are the organisers promoting the Leave No Trace message? Will the local community benefit from this event?)
- Minimise your impact by being well prepared for the event. Ensure that you have the necessary skills, fitness and equipment to participate. On the day, take responsibility for your actions and make choices that will reduce negative impacts, e.g by sharing transport, keeping to paths, not dropping litter etc.
- Make a conscious effort to use services and spend money in the area where the event is taking place.
- If there is any aspect of the event you are not happy with, let the organisers know.

Implementing MI's Policy and Guidelines for Organised Events in Ireland's Mountain Areas

Policy implementation

- Where opportunities arise, MI will **engage positively** with event organisers, and use MI's event policy and guidelines as the basis to promoting best practice in the planning and management of events that take place in Ireland's mountain areas.
- MI will actively encourage its **member clubs** to play their part in implementing this policy by adhering to the policy and its accompanying guidelines.
- Within the constraints of limited staff capacity, MI will use its events policy and guidelines as the basis for proactive engagement with **external organisations** that have a role in the organisation, funding or management of events taking place in Ireland's mountain areas.
- Through its work with other organisations, MI will advocate the development of comprehensive **national guidelines** for the planning and management of organised events that take place in Ireland's countryside and mountain areas.
- In its engagement with government and other organisations, MI will highlight the need for **management of recreation** in Ireland's upland areas, and allied to this, the need for investment in infrastructure, so that outdoor recreation can fulfil its potential to deliver benefits for participants and rural communities, without negative environmental, economic or social impacts.
- MI will continue to **promote skills development and safe practice** amongst those who walk and climb in Ireland's mountain areas.
- Implementation of this policy will be **monitored by MI's Board** of Directors and the policy itself shall be reviewed in 2017, if not before.

Promoting events

- There are so many events taking place in the Irish mountains that MI could not publicise them all through its website, e-zine and the Irish Mountain Log. Therefore, MI will only publicise MI events, and events that are organised by, or in conjunction with, MI member clubs (where the club is named on event publicity and information is provided to MI by the club) or by Mountain Rescue Ireland or one of its constituent teams.
- Member clubs (or mountain rescue organisations) that wish to promote their events through these channels will be required to make a commitment through an online form (see Appendix 1) that their event will be planned and managed in accordance with MI's Policy and Guidelines for Organised Events in Ireland's Mountain Areas.
- Advertising and promotional information for events in Ireland's mountain areas that are organised by external bodies may not be carried in the Irish Mountain Log, or MI's other communication channels.

Further information

Happy Hiking – basic safety advice for those who are new to walking in the Irish hills and countryside, published by Mountaineering Ireland -

<https://www.mountaineering.ie/hillwalking/HowToStart/default.aspx>

The source for responsible and sustainable outdoor challenge event planning in **Northern Ireland**-

<http://www.outdooreventplanning.com/>

Wicklow – Guidelines for outdoor activity events in Wicklow’s Outdoor Recreation Areas -

<https://www.wicklowuplands.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Guidelines-for-Organised-Events-in-Wicklow-Outdoor-Recreation-Areas-Apr-2019.pdf>

Ballyhoura Fáilte - Planning and Organising Walking Festivals in Ireland -

https://www.mountaineering.ie/files/202211116502_1f7ca0fe.pdf

Mourne Event Waymarking Protocol -

<https://www.mountaineering.ie/accessandenvironment/Downloads/default.aspx>

Institute of Fundraising Code of Practice for Outdoor UK Challenge Events including the Three Peaks - [https://egwt.s3.eu-west-](https://egwt.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads/institute_of_fundraising_outdoor_challenge_events_code_0.pdf)

[2.amazonaws.com/uploads/institute_of_fundraising_outdoor_challenge_events_code_0.pdf](https://egwt.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads/institute_of_fundraising_outdoor_challenge_events_code_0.pdf)

Leave No Trace Ireland - guidance on how you can apply a Leave No Trace approach in the planning of your event, good practice advice for event participants - www.leavenotraceireland.org

Mountain Meitheal - volunteers who undertake trail repair and construction with aim of protecting the environment and promoting sustainable outdoor recreation - www.pathsavers.org

Mountaineering Ireland’s Safeguarding Policy – good practice advice for events that involve participants aged under 18 - https://www.mountaineering.ie/files/20201023161410_5d09c2a0.pdf

National Parks & Wildlife Service – maps and other information regarding Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and other areas in the Republic of Ireland designated for nature conservation. Choose the NPWS Protected Sites map-viewer, then select an area on the map, or search by county and townland to identify if an area is designated -

<https://www.npws.ie/maps-and-data>

Northern Ireland Natural Environment Map Viewer – choose the ‘Protected Areas’ tab for information on areas in Northern Ireland that are protected for nature conservation. A detailed map viewer is available on <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/natural-environment-map-viewer>

Sport Ireland – information on marked trails in the Republic of Ireland -

<https://www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/find-your-trails>

Walk NI - information on marked trails in Northern Ireland - <https://walkni.com/>

Appendix 1

Form for club events to be promoted through Mountaineering Ireland

Event Commitment Statement

Name of event:	
MI Club name(s):	
Person submitting information:	
Email address & phone number:	
Role within the club:	
On behalf of <i>Insert Club Name</i> I confirm that:	Please ✓
We are committed to running an event that is positive for participants, the environment and the local community;	
We have used MI's Policy and Guidelines for Organised Events in Ireland's Mountain Areas in the planning of this event;	
We have consulted with landowners, land managers, relevant statutory bodies and the local community;	
We have examined the potential risks associated with this event and have plans in place to avoid or manage these risks;	
Through participation in this event, people will improve their skills and their appreciation of the mountain environment;	
We will review the event afterwards and make a written record of learnings to assist in the planning of future events;	
We will share ideas on good practice with MI and other clubs.	
Signed:	Date:
Please post completed form to: Mountaineering Ireland, Irish Sport HQ, National Sports Campus, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15.	
Event Details	
Please send a description of your event (120 - 150 words) with one or two photos, which could be posted on the MI website, by email to info@mountaineering.ie . Make sure to include location, date, a brief description of the event (including skills and equipment required) and website and/or contact details for further information.	