



# Lowland Leader Awards and Mountain Skills Course Reading

Notes on:

Mountaineering Ireland's Environmental Policy

Mountaineering Ireland's Access Policy

Mountaineering Ireland's Good Practice Guide

Leave No Trace Ireland

Mountain Rescue Ireland

this document is issued in support of our courses in  
**Lowland Leader Awards and Mountain Skills**  
[www.hiking.ie](http://www.hiking.ie)



## **MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND'S ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

The Irish upland environment is limited in physical extent and very fragile in its nature. Our upland areas are frequently subject to use and development pressures inappropriate to their character. Some protection exists for areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation, Natural Heritage Areas or National Parks, which should be extended where feasible. To promote the protection of all Irish upland areas Mountaineering Ireland has developed policies, agreed with its members, upon which to base responses and action in relation to unwelcome developments.

In recent years the number of participants in hillwalking and mountaineering activities has increased substantially. This in itself can be a source of stress to certain upland environments. Consequently, responsible use of the uplands by recreational visitors is fundamental to our policies. The other key objectives of the policy are the importance of valuing and protecting our upland landscape and ensuring sustainability of local communities. These policies are supported by the practical advice in the LEAVE NO TRACE education program.

The scope of these policies extends to land above 300m and associated 'wilderness' or semi-wild landscapes; crags, quarries and other climbing areas; sea cliffs, hills and other areas frequented by Mountaineering Ireland members, including access to these areas. Only five percent of our island exceeds 300m in elevation and this we define as Uplands. Some one-tenth of the Irish uplands are higher than 500m, in general these are the Mountain areas.

### **The principle aims of these policies are:**

To conserve the areas within our scope and their flora, fauna, archaeology and heritage

To ensure reasonable access for responsible recreational users

To cooperate with reasonable, sustainable and appropriate development in these areas.

Each policy describes one of the principal matters of environmental concern to Mountaineering Ireland and sets out the policies in relation to that issue:

Access

Path Erosion

Organised Events in the Mountains

Agriculture

Forestry

Transport and Off-Road Vehicles

Built Development

Litter, Waste and Illegal Dumping

Download the policies here: [http://www.mountaineering.ie/\\_files/201611491955\\_3a8001a7.pdf](http://www.mountaineering.ie/_files/201611491955_3a8001a7.pdf)

### **Policy Implementation – Mountaineering Ireland will:**

Promote the enjoyment, protection, wise and safe recreational use of the Irish uplands

Lobby for and co-operate with National Policies of amenity area conservation

Consult with club committees in the relevant areas as issues arise

Encourage clubs to publicise and discuss issues

Seek to promote discussion and awareness of issues

Seek to influence public opinion on issues as appropriate

Work towards a management policy for planned areas agreed between all interested parties

Co-operate with appropriate groups in Ireland and abroad to exchange information and work for common aims in keeping with Mountaineering Ireland's policy.



## **MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND'S MOUNTAIN ACCESS POLICY**

The membership of Mountaineering Ireland fully understands that all land in Ireland, North and South, is owned privately or by the State (Republic of Ireland) or the Crown (Northern Ireland). The membership of the Mountaineering Ireland fully recognises that they do not have a legal right of entry to land that is privately owned. Mountaineering Ireland acknowledges that the vast majority of rural landowners have traditionally granted access to upland / mountain areas as well as general countryside areas. This fact has been appreciated by generations of Irish mountaineers. However, this goodwill and access may be withdrawn without notice at any stage. This situation contrasts with most of Europe, where varying degrees of public access to land are formally defined.

### **Mountaineering Ireland's policy on Access**

"We are actively seeking reasonable access to the upland areas and a network of paths allowing for access to these areas for responsible users."

### **Reasonable Access**

As stated down through the years, the membership of Mountaineering Ireland has no wish to wander through farmyards, walk past farmers' front doors or enter arable or improved agricultural land. The aim of Mountaineering Ireland is for open, unrestricted access on foot to unenclosed hills and mountains, coastal areas and rivers throughout Ireland. This to be achieved via a footpath network, including paths leading from the public roads and car parks, through or around the enclosed fields out onto the open hillsides / mountainsides.

Mountaineering Ireland understands the current status of landowners rights and is content to continue to negotiate, at this time, for access within the existing negotiation framework as long as this does not compromise our stated aims.

### **Responsible Users**

Engaging in mountaineering is, for many people, about freedom, overcoming challenges and a deep passion for the outdoors. But enjoyment of these mountain and coastal areas brings with it a responsibility to the environment, to land owners and farmers who work the land and to other users of the land. Mountaineering Ireland endorses and encourages the respectful enjoyment of the countryside by recreational users. The countryside code which Mountaineering Ireland promotes is based on the Leave No Trace Principles of Outdoor Ethics.

Mountaineering Ireland works extremely closely with all individual and club members to promote these principles. Further information on [www.leavenotraceireland.org](http://www.leavenotraceireland.org).

### **The Form of Access We Stand For**

Mountaineering Ireland supports the principle that there should be access to open country for the purpose of recreation. Mountaineering Ireland will continue to campaign for agreed access to mountains, crags and the coastal areas visited by Mountaineering Ireland members and other responsible recreational users.

Mountaineering Ireland will endeavor to do all in its power to ensure that the writers of guidebooks on walking routes and trails consult landowners to determine the status of access on their land prior to including details in published works.

Mountaineering Ireland will co-operate with landowners and State bodies to provide access routes.

Mountaineering Ireland and its members will at all times seek to develop and maintain good relations with landowners. The assistance, support and goodwill of local affiliate clubs and individual Mountaineering Ireland members are vital to the achievement of these objectives.

When local access issues arise Mountaineering Ireland will, where possible and practical, enter into discussions with the landowners/occupiers concerned.

Mountaineering Ireland will maintain a database detailing reported access difficulties and will work with all concerned parties to ensure that difficulties are addressed.



Mountaineering Ireland will work to preserve existing rights-of-way and paths.

We consider that expenses reasonably incurred by landowners in the provision of recreational access should be compensated.

Where restrictions on access are required for conservation or other reasons (sound and reasonable farming/agricultural/wildlife protection/forestry reasons) Mountaineering Ireland will work to ensure that a reasonable balance is achieved between access and conservation requirements.

Mountaineering Ireland is opposed to further unnecessary fencing of open land, as it hinders access and is obtrusive.

### **Mountaineering Ireland support for Comhairle Na Tuaithe**

Mountaineering Ireland has been an active partner for almost a decade on Comhairle na Tuaithe (CNT) established by Minister Éamon Ó Cuív T.D. to prepare a Countryside Recreation Strategy and review access to the countryside. Mountaineering Ireland has consistently called for leadership in government to work in partnership with farmers, landowners and the recreational community to implement the following key principles:

Co-ordination of countryside access to be the responsibility of a representative national structure as set out in the National Countryside Recreation Strategy.

A legal framework for access to open, unenclosed uplands, coastal and riverine areas. This legal framework will ensure that there is no increase in liability on the landowner for the safety of recreational users.

An access path network connecting public roads and car parks to this open land. These could be public rights of way, leased paths or permissive paths agreed with the landowner, with any occupiers liability responsibilities transferred to the local authority.

A national, low level, trail network so that all communities have access to off-road walking.

A statutory right of access on foot to all publicly owned land, except where necessary for environmental or security reasons.

A system of payments to landowners for maintenance of stiles, signs etc.

A local authority management system for busy and popular areas, with 'on the ground' wardens to liaise with and support local landowners.

An education and advisory service to ensure recreational users know where to go and adhere to the principles of 'Leave No Trace'

### **Mountaineering Ireland support for Access in Northern Ireland**

Mountaineering Ireland is concerned at the potential loss of existing access rights to Crown land through the Government's privatisation and public / private partnership (PPP) initiatives. Mountaineering Ireland will continue to lobby for access to all Crown land as a right except where there are understandable and reasonable restrictions which enjoy public support.

Mountaineering Ireland also has concerns relating to the perception of landowners as to the issue of Occupier's liability and feels that Government must do more to address those perceptions. Given this, Mountaineering Ireland will take the lead through co-ordinating and facilitating a National Access Forum in Northern Ireland to consider and progress such matters. It will do so in partnership with other interested and involved groups and will lobby and act in that regard.

Mountaineering Ireland will also continue to actively support the work of Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI). Mountaineering Ireland supports both the role of ORNI and the strategic basis on which it operates especially given the lack of ownership of access matters by any Government department in Northern Ireland. Mountaineering Ireland will campaign for the current Countryside Recreation Strategy to be updated and for ORNI to be properly resourced and recognised in realising this important strategic role. As in the Republic of Ireland, Mountaineering Ireland supports the principle of payment to landowners for works associated with maintaining access and seeks Government funding to be made available to landowners for such works.



## **Conclusion**

Mountaineering Ireland will work tirelessly to achieve its goal of “reasonable access to the upland areas and a network of paths allowing for access to these areas for responsible users.” It is the desire of Mountaineering Ireland to have achieved this during the present program for government through working in partnership with landowners, state bodies, recreational users and any other concerned groups. If however, it becomes apparent, during the present program for government, that the goal of Mountaineering Ireland is not being supported by the said parties, Mountaineering Ireland will review and carefully examine the need for legislation to assist us achieve our stated goal. At this juncture Mountaineering Ireland calls on all political parties to include in their policies, their stated position on management practices for upland, coastal and riverine areas. Mountaineering Ireland is happy to provide assistance and advice to all parties on a non-political basis to ensure that these stated positions and policy papers are in line with best International practices.

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE**

For many of us, walking and climbing is about enjoyment, recreation, and freedom from structures and regulations. These activities bring us to very special places, but our enjoyment of these areas brings with it a responsibility. We need to be aware of the impact we have on our environment and take responsibility for our own safety. We must respect the interests of others and act as responsible partners in the use and development of the countryside. To ensure continued enjoyment of the hills and the crags, we have to accept some guidelines for our activities.

### **Preparation ...**

Be properly equipped and fit for the activity concerned

Have the skills to cope with the chosen route

Have an up-to-date weather forecast and know the time of dusk

Be aware of the potential hazards and know what to do if something goes wrong

Accept the risk that is inherent in hillwalking and climbing, and take responsibility for your own safety

### **Parking and access ...**

Keep the number of cars used to the minimum; consider hiring a bus for group outings

Park safely, with particular regard to allowing for entry to property. Many access problems have arisen from inconsiderate parking by recreational visitors. Remember that farmers work at weekends and that farm machinery, and the emergency services, may need a wide space to turn into a gateway.

All land is owned by somebody and you use that land with the goodwill of the owner, not as a legal right

Avoid aggravating known problems, use approved routes in these areas

Be friendly and courteous when you meet landowners and local residents

Respect private property and do not interfere with machinery, crops or animals

Make no unnecessary noise, especially when passing near houses

Be careful not to damage fences, walls or hedges; these are livestock boundaries and expensive to repair

Use stiles and gates where they exist, leave gates as you find them (open or closed) Leaders should ...

Be competent to lead groups and be appropriately equipped to ensure the safety of the group

Be trained in first aid and carry a small first aid kit

Know the route and the ability of the group members, and ensure that they are all properly equipped

Be prepared to alter the route to meet the needs and interests of the group, and the weather conditions

Show a good example to the group, with regard to conservation issues and relations with landowners

Ensure everybody in the group knows what to do, what not to do, and why

Encourage group members to develop their walking and climbing skills

### **‘Pack it in, pack it out’**

Leave no litter behind; even biodegradable items like banana skins and teabags take years to disappear

Pick up litter when you see it (be cautious when handling waste)

Take care not to cause any pollution. Human waste should be buried, at least 30m away from watercourses; take home, or carefully burn, used toilet paper and hygiene products



### **Environmental considerations for walkers**

For environmental and safety reasons keep group numbers small. Ideally group size should be less than 10 people, and should not exceed 15.

Avoid taking dogs on the hills at any time

Walk on rock, stones or the most durable surface available, rather than on vegetation or soft ground

Be imaginative in your route choice, taking care to avoid using eroded paths

If you must use an eroded route, walk along the center of the path to avoid widening the damage.

Wearing gaiters may make it easier to follow a muddy path

Avoid taking short cuts on zig-zag paths as this creates new lines for run-off of water and increases erosion

Leave cairns as they are; new cairns can mislead some walkers and old cairns could have archaeological value

Have respect for all natural things and take care not to disturb plants, birds and animals.

### **Environmental considerations for climbers and scramblers**

Cliffs are a final refuge for some plants, birds and animals that have become rare, or even extinct elsewhere

Avoid disturbing nesting birds and adhere to any climbing restrictions during the nesting season

The removal of vegetation including mosses and lichens (gardening) should be avoided wherever possible

It is often more pleasant to climb on dry, bare rock which normally has less botanical interest

Damage can be caused by repeated top-roping of routes or by using a wire brush for cleaning

Avoid any form of chipping or defacement of the rock; never carve your name in the rock etc

Abseiling down routes can be harmful to the rock, damage vegetation and inhibit other climbers

Where abseiling from trees is necessary, use a rope protector; even then this activity could kill the tree

Climbing on frozen turf, or thin ice, can cause a lot of damage to vegetation

### **Fixed equipment for climbing**

For all established climbing areas in Ireland, bolting is not permitted. Bolts have been used in a few climbing areas only (i.e. Ballykeeffe Quarry). Anyone considering placing new fixed equipment or replacing existing equipment should take careful account of local climbing ethics, the environmental sensitivity of the area, potential liability and public safety factors. The use of cliff-top belay stakes should be kept to a minimum, especially in popular or scenic areas where walkers have access to cliff tops.

Advice for climbers developing new crags / doing new routes

New routing, cleaning and developing new crags can be a sensitive issue with landowners

Ask other climbers why the crag not been developed, find out if there is a local access problem, etc.

Is there a nature protection designation on the area; would climbing be harmful?

Get the landowner's permission to climb there

Minimise damage to plants and trees and leave as few traces of your climbing as possible

Be careful about publicising a crag; can it take large numbers or could there be problems with access?

### **Guidelines for wild camping**

Where possible seek the landowner's permission before wild camping

To avoid Mountain Rescue being called out unnecessarily inform a nearby resident or the Gardaí / PSNI if you are leaving a car overnight

Choose unobtrusive sites at least 500m away from roads and buildings

Keep the group as small and discreet as possible

Use a stove for cooking; campfires leave their mark and fires in the countryside can be very destructive

Bury human waste; latrines should be dug at least 30m away from watercourses

Wash at least 30m away from watercourses; minimise the use of soaps and detergents

To prevent damage to vegetation, tents should not be left on the same spot for more than two nights

Leave no litter behind – 'pack it in, pack it out!'

Ensure that you leave the site as you found it.



### **Putting something back...**

We use the land of the local communities where we walk and climb, in return we should make a conscious effort to contribute to that community. When locals see some benefit from our activities, we will be more welcome. This also shows that we care for the area.

Consider

using the local shops and filling stations

eating in a local restaurant, or staying overnight in the area

stopping for refreshments in a local café or pub after your activities (bearing in mind the drink-drive restrictions)

using facilities that have been developed for walkers – e.g. car parks

supporting local events and charities, e.g. tidy towns committees

taking a walking or climbing holiday in Ireland instead of going abroad

always asking yourself “If I lived here, how would I feel?”

We can also put something back on another level ...

Walkers and climbers contribute to erosion; consider spending a day repairing this damage. Organisations like Mountain Meitheal are doing this work and need more volunteers.

Organise a clean-up event in an area where you regularly walk or climb

This is not exhaustive. Please adopt the spirit of these guidelines and apply it all of your outdoor activities.



## LEAVE NO TRACE IRELAND

Leave No Trace Ireland aims to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships. Leave No Trace Ireland began in 2004 as a concerted effort across a range of recreational and land-managing bodies to address the increasing burden of negative impacts on the mountains. Today, Leave No Trace Ireland exists as a not-for-profit company run by volunteers and employing one part-time person.

At the heart of Leave No Trace is an educational message that encourages us as recreational users to understand the consequences of our actions, and challenges us to make good choices when we do our activities in the outdoors. The Leave No Trace programme uses a framework of seven principles to guide us towards better choices:

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Be Considerate of Others
- Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Leave What You Find
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Minimise the Effects of Fire

Mountaineering Ireland endorses the Leave No Trace message, we aim to adhere to Leave No Trace during all Mountaineering Ireland events and we have incorporated Leave No Trace into our various training schemes.

Mountaineering Ireland has also developed guidelines for the organisers of walking festivals and similar events, based on Mountaineering Ireland's environmental policy and the Leave No Trace principles.

To learn more about the Leave No Trace programme, visit:

<http://www.leavenotraceireland.org/>

Get the booklet here:

[http://www.mountaineering.ie/\\_files/2016428163128\\_9a17c68e.pdf](http://www.mountaineering.ie/_files/2016428163128_9a17c68e.pdf)





## MOUNTAIN RESCUE IRELAND

**Any request for emergency assistance in the upland and mountainous areas on the island of Ireland is met by a volunteer response from one of the 12 mountain rescue teams that compose Mountain Rescue Ireland (M.R.I.). These teams are on stand by 24/7/365 to respond to requests for assistance are tasked through the 999/112 emergency phone system.**

### **How do I call mountain rescue?**

Mountain rescues are initiated by ringing the emergency number, 999/112 and asking for Mountain Rescue. This will lead to an interaction with a Garda Station (in the South) or the Coastguard (in the North) who will take details from you and then alert the local team.

Do not try to ring the rescue team directly as the call must go through the 999/112 system!

### **What happens next?**

The local team will contact you to get the incident details and other relevant details.

Team members will proceed to the incident location.

The Team will determine the most effective response.

### **How does this happen?**

Mountain rescue is a service maintained entirely through volunteer effort.

Each volunteer absorbs the cost of their own contribution in terms of time, sustenance and other costs such as transportation.

Rescue teams also have to fundraise to attempt to maintain the service they provide.

### **How does M.R.I. support this effort?**

M.R.I. is the representative body composed of the individual teams and seeks to represent the teams at an all-island level.

### **What can you do?**

Mountain rescue sustains itself through the commitment of its volunteers and teams regularly recruit new members. If being a mountain rescuer interests you the please contact your local team.

Mountain rescue teams face financial challenges to sustain themselves and support for fundraising activities is greatly appreciated.





## MOUNTAIN RESCUE IRELAND TEAMS

There are twelve volunteer mountain rescue teams (MRTs) serving the public in this island and members of MRI:

- Donegal MRT (covering the mountains of County Donegal ie Slieve League, Bluestack Mountains, Errigal, Muckish, Derryveagh Mountains and the Inishowen Peninsula)
- North West MRT (covering the mountains of the north-west of Northern Ireland)
- Mourne MRT (covering the Mourne Mountains)
- Dublin & Wicklow MRT (covering the mountains of Counties Dublin and Wicklow)
- Glen of Imaal MRT (covering the mountains of south Co. Dublin, Co. Wicklow, East Co. Kildare and north Co. Wexford)
- South-Eastern Mountain Rescue Association (covering the mountains of the south-east (including the Galtee Mountains, the Blackstairs, the Comeraghs, the Knockmealdowns and the Slieve Blooms)
- Tramore Cliff and Mountain Rescue Team (covering the cliffs along the southern coast)
- Kerry MRT (covering the mountainous areas of Counties Cork and Kerry, primarily the peninsulas of Beara, Iveragh and Dingle)
- Galway MRT (covering the mountainous areas of counties Galway and Clare)
- Mayo MRT (covering the mountainous areas of County Mayo)
- Sligo/Leitrim MRT (covering the mountainous areas of counties Sligo and Leitrim)
- Search and Rescue Dogs Association (This association is organised on a national basis to provide the additional resource of trained search dog teams throughout the country)

### Notes:

- Another MRT is maintained by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It covers the mountainous areas of Northern Ireland.
- Each team has long-standing arrangements whereby it can be called out by a neighbouring team to assist them when required.
- Some teams have more developed arrangements whereby call-outs in particular areas are dealt with by the teams on a joint or allocated basis. This has developed in areas of high call-out rates such as the Dublin/Wicklow mountains which are close to areas of high population density.
- MRI is working to develop experience and knowledge of multi-team operations. Examples of this are our National Operation at Croagh Patrick pilgrimage in July when thousands of pilgrims climb the mountain on Reek Sunday and our Regional Exercises where all the teams come together to deal with an emergency scenario.



## MOUNTAIN SKILLS COURSE NOTES

### Advice From The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

[www.mcofs.org.uk](http://www.mcofs.org.uk)

### Emergency Procedures In the event of an incident

Stay calm. Take time to assess the situation and decide what to do.

What should be done immediately to safeguard the group?

If anyone is injured, remember ABC – airway, breathing and circulation (signs of life/blood loss)

Treat any injuries (remember the first principle ‘do no harm’)

Insulate casualty from the ground, add extra clothing. Place any unconscious casualties in the ‘recovery position’.

Determine your exact position on the map and consider the options for:

(a) Descent to safety. What will the terrain be like? How far to reach safety? Are you sure you can carry the casualty? Will the casualty’s injuries be made worse by travelling?

(b) Finding shelter. Don’t use up valuable time & energy unless you are sure about finding shelter.

(c) Staying put. Will your situation be resolved if you stay where you are?

(d) Seeking help (remember that even when a rescue team has been alerted, help might not arrive for several hours).

If you decide you need help and you are calling from a mobile phone –

Phone 999/112 and ask for MOUNTAIN RESCUE

Try to conserve battery life by having all the details to hand before phoning. A list of the details needed is shown below.

If there is no mobile coverage at your location, consider whether it might be worth moving to another location to phone from.

Check who else in your party has a mobile phone (and coverage) and evaluate the amount of battery life available in the event of additional calls being necessary.

If mobile reception is poor and you are unsuccessful dialing 999, try the alternative emergency no of 112. If this fails, try sending a text to a friend.

When connected provide:

(a) Location of the incident (grid reference, map sheet number, name of mountain area and description of the terrain).

(b) Number and names of people in the party and their condition.

(c) Any injuries and names of casualties.

Be ready to provide the following additional information:

Telephone number of the phone you are using and any other phones in the group.

The nature and time of the incident – what happened?

Weather conditions including wind speed and visibility at the accident site.

Equipment which is at the accident site (warm clothing, group shelter etc)

Any distinguishing feature/marker/colour at the accident site.

Location of where you are phoning from – if different from accident site.

If going for help on foot:

Remember to take all the details shown above. Write them down if possible.

If possible, leave at least one person with the casualty.

If possible, send two or more people for help.

Make the casualty’s location easily seen by search parties.

EMERGENCY SIGNAL: SIX BLASTS ON THE WHISTLE or SIX TORCH FLASHES repeated every minute.