

Helping the Hills

Summary

Lessons from the Speakers

- **When and on what basis do we intervene?**
- Strive to maintain a balance with nature
- Understand the power of nature and the “science” of erosion
- Decide on the basis and rationale for any works (“Industrial tourism?” – what about the wild places?)
- Any decisions to be based on a Strategic approach involving experienced advisors and wide consultation
- Needs to be a debate on the degree of management in relation to “iconic” peaks
- Techniques must minimise the impact of any works
- Avoid “urban” intrusions
- Importance of using local materials
- Recognise the real needs of the local population and all recreational users
- Establish and maintain good communications

- **Construction and Management**
- Contracts\ contractors need to be ‘expertly’ supervised
- Training for contractors and land managers
- Public procurement processes are currently not helpful
- Machines can be used in appropriate circumstances
- How do you actually manage public use
- The management of “events” is crucial
- Funding needs to be secured for on-going management and maintenance works
- The role of volunteers
- The need for a better understanding of the uplands by all our citizens
- Funding?

- **The Role of Local Forums**
- Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (1 to 5 funding leverage; network of routes; communication and consultation)
- Do we need similar models across Ireland?
- **Questions arising from the Workshops**
- The need for a National Strategy particularly for the honeypot mountains?
- The need for National Specifications?
- More training for Volunteers?
- All users have a responsibility. How do we get visitor payback?
- Who takes the lead?

The Way Forward

- Buy in from all involved.
- Agree the content of draft principles.
- www.helpingthehills.ie to become Ireland's online resource for best practice information and sharing.
- A follow-up conference.

Guiding Principles

- Draft principles to guide the management of path erosion in Ireland's upland areas

- Ireland's mountain areas are our largest expanses of semi-natural habitats, a huge natural asset, which we have a duty to protect for future generations.
- The management of eroded paths in the uplands should be considered holistically by understanding the causes of the erosion, taking a long-term view, asking if intervention is necessary or are there other solutions.
- Management of the path will be informed by consultation with all stakeholders, including landowners, recreational users and the local community.
- All those who go into the mountains have a responsibility to minimise their impact on the upland environment.
- Funding for trail repair and construction in Ireland's upland areas should be contingent on adherence to these principles.

- All communications about upland path work should emphasise that the work is being carried out to protect the mountain environment, that it is not the development of a new trail, nor is it about making the mountains safer.
- Path repair or construction in the uplands should only be carried out when this is necessary to protect the environment and not from the perspective of making it easier or safer to climb the mountain.
- Any work carried out should strive for minimum impact on the essentially wild character of the mountains and the walking experience.

- Upland path work should be of a high standard of design and implementation using indigenous materials, sympathetic in colour and texture to the immediate surrounding area.
- While it may be necessary to bring in workers with relevant expertise from outside the area, it should be an objective in any upland path work to train and up-skill local people.
- A sustained commitment of resources to upland path management will be sought, so that small scale continuous maintenance can become the norm, with the aim of preventing the need for major repairs.

- The more remote or wild the location the less acceptable an obviously engineered path will be.
- The use of waymarks, cairns and other intrusive features, other than those traditionally established on summits and path junctions, will be discouraged.
- Rather than imply that the mountains are being made safer, all communications about upland path repair should emphasise the skills and equipment required for safe enjoyment of the Irish mountains.
- The message of personal and group responsibility when using the hills is paramount to all these principles.