

Workshop on Ethics, Standards & Guiding Principles

ASCENT - Apply Skills and Conserve our Environment with New Tools
Promoting Sustainable Access to Uplands & Natural Environments

Comhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST
Caring for Mourne

Where are ASCENT's sites located?

ASCENT brings together Local and Environmental Authorities to collectively address the environmental challenges facing 7 Northern European upland areas in the 5 partner regions of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Iceland, Finland and Norway.
ASCENT is funded by the *Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014-2020* [click](#)

1 Slieve Donard, Northern Ireland
2 Erviga Mountain, Ireland
3 Trolltunga, Norway
4 Slieve Gullion, Northern Ireland
5 Ústafell Mountain, Iceland
6 Hossa Region, Finland
7 Geosite Eldraun, Iceland

T1.2

Guiding Principles and Policy Development for Upland Path Management



by Newry Mourne and Down District Council and Mourne Heritage Trust and researcher, Marc Vinas, Ecologist

Thematic Workshop on Ethics, Standards & Guiding Principles: Managing Upland Paths – Are Good Principles Enough?

22 & 23 November, 2017

This report delivers on ASCENT Output T1.2 contributing to the assessment of ethics, standards and best practice and developing a partner consensus approach with stakeholder engagement




The aim of the workshop (Figure 1) was to Review Upland Path Principles And Their Applicability For Land Managers, Practitioners And Local Communities, Who Are Responding To Increased Erosion In Environmentally Sensitive Landscapes. Key themes included common challenges, shared experience, innovation and policy development.



ASCENT Workshop

MANAGING UPLAND PATHS – ARE GOOD PRINCIPLES ENOUGH?

Thursday 23rd November 2017
Tollymore National Outdoor Centre
9.15am – 3.45pm



Site visit to Glen River and Slieve Donard, Co Down, 22 November, 2017

On Wednesday, 22 November, 2017 there was a guided site visit to the Glen River and Slieve Donard, Co Down; the busiest route in the Mourne (Plate 2). The day included opportunities to discuss path maintenance; tools and techniques; and reviewing past, current and future work. The participants split into two groups: one walking on towards the summit to look at a wider range of issues and challenges, while the other remained just below the tree line to help repair a section of the Glen River path, working with the MHT Upland Path Volunteer Team that come out on a weekly basis, whatever the weather, to protect the mountains. This was a great opportunity to focus thinking to take into the main workshop in Tollymore National Outdoor Centre on the Thursday. It also provided an opportunity to garner advice from a number of path experts from Scotland and England, who had travelled over for the two-day session.



Plate 1 Icelandic participants at the Glen River in Donard Forest



Plate 2 Pausing before lunch and hands on pathwork with ASCENT Path Team Leader Phil Savage



Plate 3 Path Experts from Scotland and the Lake District suggest repair options



Plate 4 The views from Slieve Donard to the Devil's Coach road as the clouds briefly part

Plate 5 Participants from the Lake District and Sligo County Council



The main workshop on Thursday, 23 November, 2017 at Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, Newcastle, Co Down



Plate 6 Welcome address in the auditorium at Tollymore National Outdoor Centre

The welcome address was given by Vice Chair of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Councillor Willie Clarke (who had worked previously in an upland path repair team) and was followed by presentations on:

- Overview of the ASCENT project. Rosita Mahony, ASCENT Project Co-ordinator, Donegal County Council
- Cuilcagh Boardwalk: Problems and Solutions. Simon Grey, Marble Arch Caves, UNESCO Global Geopark
- MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum: Engaging Multi-Stakeholder Groups. Patricia Deane, South Kerry Development Partnership
- The Scottish Experience; upskilling and recent trends. Keith Mackey, Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland
- International Overview of Principles and Techniques for Upland Path Work. Marc Vinas Alcon, Ecologist (N.B., the presentation was based on this report)
- Helping the Hills: Principles & Shaping the Future of Ireland's Uplands. Helen Lawless, Mountaineering Ireland
- Capacity Building in Ireland's Upland Groups. Frank Nugent & Mary Mulvey, Irish Uplands Forum

Delegates attended two workshops to discuss relevant issues and identify key learning points to provide a focus for developing agreed priorities. The key points are summarised as follows:

Workshop 1

What are the factors causing upland path erosion in environmentally sensitive landscapes and what trends may add to the problem in the future?

- There is an increasing number of users and a broader range of people; particularly within social media, tourism, events and health and well-being agendas as main drivers of this changing pattern
- There is a lack of a strategic approach and joined up management with limited resources for maintenance in particular
- Climate change and related disturbances are making sensitive landscapes more vulnerable to the above pressures



Plate 7 Workshop groups

Summary of Workshop 2

Are principles like Helping the Hills useful in addressing the problems or are there broader tools and resources that need to be developed?

- Helping the Hills (see 5.3 (6) page 27) was generally viewed to be a good set of principles, albeit that some re-working could make it more accessible to land managers and practitioners
- There is a need to improve effective networking across land managers and practitioners that enables easy and quick access to information, advice, skills, and training and helps develop group funding bids etc. A good model is the UK Upland Path Advisory Group, and the Irish Uplands Forum could play a key role in facilitating initial networking across the island of Ireland
- Remote sensitive landscapes should be valued much more. This could be achieved through education programmes for users and practitioners and an advisory set of guiding principles (Helping the Hills or a derived shortened version) that land managers should be required to pay attention to when planning activities in these sites. Government leadership and the role of local authorities would be key
- There were opportunities to introduce measures for income generation to manage the paths e.g. planning gain, tax incentives, car parking charges and targeted fundraising campaigns

Plate 8 ASCENT partners and workshop speakers



Summary and recommendations

The November 2017 ASCENT Workshop provided an opportunity to bring a range of experienced and interested stakeholders together to make site visits and carry out path work to help focus thinking on the above issues and then capture ideas through the presentations and two workshop sessions.

This proved to be a very effective activity in developing a consensus approach, albeit the challenges of balancing the opportunity for natural landscapes to provide a hook on which to develop rural, economic and health and well-being initiatives, against the need to preserve their inherent natural and wilderness value were recognised as becoming an increasingly greater dilemma. This was highlighted by the observation that user patterns can now dramatically increase due to social media: a game changer in many ways.

Participants were keen for follow-up activity to be progressed, including networking to develop shared knowledge and skills.

The Helping the Hills principles (that cover the geographical area of the island of Ireland) were shown as being a further development of previous standards, where it introduced, in particular, specific guidance for the different stages in approaching path work including planning and consultation, as well as techniques. Overall, there was a general feeling that the Helping the Hills principles were a good basis for an agreed approach, albeit with some suggested amendments.

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