

On Course with Upskilling



National Trust Volunteers carrying out repairs on Slieve Donard

GLEN RIVER PATH

SLIEVE DONARD

NEWCASTLE

NORTHERN IRELAND

Developing an upland path work training course for practitioners and managers

The delivery of an upland path work training course became a more significant feature in the ASCENT project than initially envisaged. The project's Teacher-Learner principle was primarily being implemented through the living laboratory study visits, where the sharing of knowledge and skills was enhanced through one body, Mourne Heritage Trust (MHT), making prolonged visits to all partners' sites; thus enabling a more thorough understanding to develop.

Learning was very much reciprocal in the Living Laboratory visits, but it also highlighted an appetite for training, which sat well with MHT to coordinate, given its role. The idea was that a training course conceived within the broad context of the ASCENT project would have a good chance of meeting a wide range of requirements; being formulated in an international experience, while making it specific to local needs.

Course planning was informed by

findings of the ASCENT workshop in November 2017; *Upland Path Repair = are Good Principles Enough?*, which saw the need to improve effective networking across land managers and practitioners that enabled easy and quick access to information, advice, skills, and training. Therefore, the training course needed to be easily accessible and flexible.

MHT were already documenting upland path techniques and living laboratory study visits with video as an

accessible and flexible information tool (see New educational and upskilling resources in T2.2), and these were utilised for the path training course.

The ASCENT Path Team developed the course content and format in liaison with stakeholders and clients, and benchmarked it against the path skills training course run by the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland through the Scottish Vocational Qualification scheme.

Outcome

The ASCENT course had the following format:

Day 1 – Classroom or webinar session giving a broad overview of upland path work ethics and principles (including Helping the Hills), and issues/theory for managers and practitioners (trends, planning, drainage, landscaping, building/repair techniques etc.), Videos were used to show examples of site issues and repair techniques (as detailed in T2.2).

Day 2 - Site visit to inspect issues and techniques highlighted in the theory session

Days 3-5 - Hands on work trying out techniques illustrated in the theory session

Three courses were run in 2017 and 2018:

1. November 2017. National Trust (NT) – a landowner on Slieve Donard, which includes the main access route to the summit. Course participants included NT staff and volunteers and the site visit and hands on work were carried out on the Glen River path on Slieve Donard.
2. October 2018. Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust – an ASCENT Associated Partner. Course participants were representatives from local stakeholders including district councils, NGOs and volunteers and involved managers & field staff. The diversity of participants and distance of the Causeway site (Fairhead, Ballycastle) to the Mournes (100 miles) meant that the theory session was delivered via a webinar, allowing participants to drop in and out where time pressures were tight and catch up with a listen again facility; providing the required flexibility. A site visit was made to Slieve Donard, and then two x three day hands on training sessions were carried out at the Fairhead site.
3. March 2019. Dunlewey Community Representatives – a key stakeholder group involved in the Mount Errigal project facilitated by Donegal County Council (Lead ASCENT Partner). Participants travelled to the Mournes for the course including a site visit and hands on work at the Glen River. Plans are in place for the ASCENT Path Team to visit Errigal to continue training with the participants on their site.



Key Findings & Learning Points

Feedback from participants has been very good, and while the course is currently internally certified, the aim is to have it formally accredited through LANTRA (a UK and Ireland awarding body) before ASCENT finishes.

There is currently a request to run an upland path training webinar for the Countryside Recreation Network (UK/Ireland based network) in 2019, interest from Icelandic & Finnish partners for training courses in 2020, and plans for further alignment with Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland in course format.

Training videos are available to view on the ASCENT YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVuBF9qQ14vBUoEfhDSn0cw/videos?view=0&sort=dd&shelf_id=1 and on the ASCENT website <https://www.ascent-project.eu>



Causeway Coast and Glens stakeholders training at Fairhead

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact details: Matthew Bushby
Countryside Services Manager
Mourne Heritage Trust

e-mail: matthew.bushby@mourne.co.uk
mobile: +44 77 12 877 733

www.ascent-project.eu