



## MOUNTAINEERING IRLEANDS 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 However, this goodwill and access may be withdrawn without notice at any stage.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 riverines 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 endeavour 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 publically 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 programme 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 programme 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.

