

11 New Rural Recreation Officers

At the National Ploughing Championships today, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Éamon Ó Cuív T.D., announced that he is to provide funding for the employment of 11 Rural Recreation Officers in areas where there are clusters of suitable, accessible walks. The Rural Recreation Officers will be employed through the relevant LEADER Company in the area on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs and will be funded through the Rural Recreation and Rural Development Schemes subhead.

The role of the Rural Recreation Officers will be to coordinate and oversee the management of trails and assist in the marketing and promotion of trails in the region.

The 11 trails selected and the LEADER companies responsible are:

1. The Bluestack Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Donegal Local Development Company Ltd)
2. The Burren Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Rural Resource Development)
3. The Kerry Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd)
4. Kilkenny Trails and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Barrow Nore Suir Rural Development)
5. The Sheep's Head Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (West Cork Leader Co-operative Society Ltd)
6. Slí Chonamara and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta Teoranta)
7. The Slieve Bloom Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Laois LEADER)
8. The Sligo Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Sligo LEADER Partnership)
9. The Suck Valley Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Mid-South Roscommon Rural Development Co.)
10. The Tochar Valley Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (South West Mayo Development)
11. The Wicklow Way and approved National Looped walking route(s) in the region. (Wicklow Rural Partnership Ltd)

Minister O Cuív said, *"I am delighted to be able to announce the recruitment of the Rural Recreation Officers. The issue of walkways and access has always been very sensitive and it is one, I believe, which can only be solved by dialogue and by the active participation and support of not just farmers and walkers, but also the wider rural community. The Rural Recreation Officer will act as a contact person for walking tourists and will provide a wide range of support and advice as well as liaising regularly with landowners to ensure that goodwill is maintained and concerns are addressed."*

County Clare, 25th Sept 07

Minister of State and Clare T.D., Mr. Tony Killeen today described the announcement regarding the employment of a Rural Recreation Officer along Clare's National Looped walking routes as a significant move towards further improving relationships between landowners and walking enthusiasts.

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Éamon Ó Cuív T.D., announced today that he is to provide funding for the employment of the Officer, who will manage The Burren Way and approved National Looped walking route, currently administered by Rural Resource Development. The Rural Recreation Officers will be employed through Rural Resource Development on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs and will be funded through the Rural Recreation and Rural Development Schemes subhead.

According to Minister Killeen, "The employment of a Rural Recreation Officer along the walking routes concerned will be of great assistance to local communities, landowners and rural enterprises wishing to use the routes as an attracting feature. The Officer will also act as a liaison between landowners and walking tourists so as to ensure locals and tourists alike enjoy the full benefits of the designated walking routes."

He added, "County Clare's designated walking routes take advantage of some of Ireland's most scenic and environmentally sensitive locations. Therefore, it is imperative that every measure is taken to ensure that sustained tourist activity does not impact negatively on the environment or cause undue problems for local landowners."

Minister Killeen acknowledged the continuing efforts of Rural Resource Development, Burrenbeo and the Clare County Council-led Environmental Protection of the Burren through Visitor Management Initiative in managing walking routes in the Burren and elsewhere throughout Clare.

"Walking tourism makes a valuable contribution to the local economy and, therefore, should be managed carefully through measured dialogue and good planning. The issue of walkways and access has always been very sensitive, which is why I am delighted that a Rural Recreation Officer is to be appointed in Clare", concluded Minister Killeen.

Ballycroum Loop

Directions	Starting from the village of Feakle on the R468 between Scarriff and Tulla. Exiting the lower end of the village veer right at the signpost for Limerick. Follow this secondary road for almost 5km, and turn right at a crossroads onto a narrow minor road. The trailhead is located on the right after 2km. [The trailhead is signposted from Feakle.]
Ascent	130m
Distance	9km
Estimated Time	2.5hrs - 3hrs
Grade	Moderate
Trailhead	Ballycroum Forest, Feakle, Co Clare
Map Ref:	OS 58 R527 884
Terrain	Forestry, commonage and old laneways
Theme	Nature
Minimum Gear	Walking boots, raingear, snack and fluids
Services	Feakle Village (3km)

The parish of Feakle in Co. Clare is a translation of the Irish *Paroiste na Fiacaille* which means parish of the tooth! There is a legend that the tooth of the patron saint (Mochonna) fell out at the spot - on which he afterwards erected his church! The village of Feakle was the birthplace of Biddy Early (1798-1874), a famous herbalist who specialised in folk cures. Brian Merriman author of *The Midnight Court* was also a native. Ballycroum is a townland of the parish and is noted for a holy well called *Tobar Ghráinne* (Grania's Well) placed in the middle of a bog, with a large flag over it. This loop passes the well to which large numbers of people still flock for the cure of diseases and, in particular, sore eyes! The loop also incorporates a number of wedge tombs - supposed to be giant's graves, and used for mass during the prevalence of the cruel penal laws. For example, *Altoir Ultach* was said to be named from an Ulster priest who served the mass there in the 18th century.

A-B. Starting from the car park follow the purple National Loop arrow across the stile and into forestry. You are also on the East Clare Way – a long distance walking route marked with yellow arrows and the familiar trekking man logo. Follow the forestry road for almost 1km to reach a forestry track on your left. Turn left here following the purple (and yellow) arrow.

B-C. The loop emerges from the forestry shortly afterwards and follows a well-worn track across open ground. Watch out for the wedge tombs on your right.

C-D. Continue to follow the track as it takes a wide sweep left - but then crosses a stile perched high on a dry ditch on your right. After crossing the stile the loop descends through a field to join an old laneway. Turn left here.

D-E. Enjoy the walk along the laneway as it takes you past reminders of times past - ruins of farmhouses and outhouses that were typical of homes in this rural area. Eventually, the laneway zig-zags it's way to a conclusion at a gateway onto a tarred road. Exit via the stile and turn left.

E-F. After only 200m the loop leaves the tarred road - crossing a stile on the right and entering a field. Follow the field boundary, pass through a gap, and cross the Maghera River via a footbridge. Shortly after crossing the river you join another old laneway where you turn left into the townland of Clonnagro. Again, enjoy the trip down memory lane as the hedged laneway twists you to a 3-way junction where the East Clare Way turns right but you turn left onto a tarred roadway.

F-A. You now follow a straight section - continuing straight at a 3-way junction - and eventually reach another footbridge which, in previous times, was a ford crossing. After crossing the footbridge you join a narrow laneway which ends at a T-junction with a tarred road. Turn left at the junction and enjoy the 300m back to the trailhead.

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Dromore Wood Loop

Directions Start from the village of Ruan (10km northwest of Ennis town which is on the N18 between Galway and Limerick). Dromore Woods is only 2km away and is signposted from the centre of the village – there are also signposts marked National Loop Trailhead.

Ascent	30m
Distance	6km
Estimated Time	1hr 30mins - 2hrs
Grade	Easy
Trailhead	Dromore Wood, Ruan, Co Clare
Map Ref:	OS 58 R353863
Terrain	Laneways, lakeshore and wooded tracks
Theme	Nature
Minimum Gear	Walking boots, raingear and fluid
Services	Ruan Village (2km) Ennis (10km)

Situated in the southeastern extremity of the Burren region of Co. Clare, Dromore Woodland Nature Reserve is an area of approximately 400 hectares. It is owned by the Irish State and was established as a nature reserve in 1985 because of the diversity and richness of its flora and fauna. This richness comes from the fact that it has many different habitat types including a river, lakes, turloughs, callows (flooded meadows), limestone pavement, fen peat, reed beds and rich woodland species. The reserve has historical and archaeological aspects - the 17th century O'Brien Castle is still standing by the lake edge. There is also the site of Cahermacrea Castle, the site of Killakee Church, two ring forts and a lime kiln. Two self guiding nature trails of approximately 1hr exist within the woodland and a section of the 140km Mid-Clare Way also passes through. This loop overlaps on part of the Castle Nature Trail and the Mid-Clare Way. The loop starts at the main car park - an Information Centre opens from June to September.

A-B. Starting from the car park follow the purple National Loop arrow along the tarred roadway back in the direction of the main vehicle entrance. You will be also following the Mid-Clare Way (marked with yellow arrows and the familiar trekking man logo). After 300m the loop swings right into woodland and by the ruins of Killakee Church.

B-C. Emerging onto the main roadway again, the loop veers right continuing in the direction of the entrance before turning left into woodland just before the exit. You will leave the Mid-Clare way here. After meandering through woodland - running parallel to the boundary wall – you exit the woodland and join a sandy laneway where you turn left.

C-D. Shortly afterwards, the loop rejoins the Mid-Clare Way and wanders along the wooded edge of the reserve for almost 1km. The loop then leaves the Mid Clare Way again to follow the Castle Nature Trail (one of two established loop walks in the reserve).

D-E. This 1km section of the loop takes you onto the shore of Lough Garr and Dromore Lough - at the end of which you rejoin the Mid-Clare Way for the final section back to the trailhead.

E-A. The final 400m of the loop passes by the imposing O'Brien Castle and along a boardwalk to reach the trailhead.

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