



The Mountaineering Council Comhairle Sléibhteoireachta
of Ireland na hÉireann

Good practice guide for hillwalkers & climbers

For many of us, walking and climbing is about enjoyment, recreation, and freedom from structures and regulations. These activities bring us to very special places, but our enjoyment of these areas brings with it a responsibility. We need to be aware of the impact we have on our environment and take responsibility for our own safety. We must respect the interests of others and act as responsible partners in the use and development of the countryside. To ensure continued enjoyment of the hills and the crags, we have to accept some guidelines for our activities.

Preparation ...

- Be properly equipped and fit for the activity concerned
- Have the skills to cope with the chosen route
- Have an up-to-date weather forecast and know the time of dusk
- Be aware of the potential hazards and know what to do if something goes wrong
- Accept the risk that is inherent in hillwalking and climbing, and take responsibility for your own safety

Parking and access ...

- Keep the number of cars used to the minimum; consider hiring a bus for group outings
- Park safely, with particular regard to allowing for entry to property. Many access problems have arisen from inconsiderate parking by recreational visitors. Remember that farmers work at weekends and that farm machinery, and the emergency services, may need a wide space to turn into a gateway.
- All land is owned by somebody and you use that land with the goodwill of the owner, not as a legal right
- Avoid aggravating known problems, use approved routes in these areas
- Be friendly and courteous when you meet landowners and local residents
- Respect private property and do not interfere with machinery, crops or animals
- Make no unnecessary noise, especially when passing near houses
- Be careful not to damage fences, walls or hedges; these are livestock boundaries and expensive to repair
- Use stiles and gates where they exist, leave gates as you find them (open or closed)

Leaders should ...

- Be competent to lead groups and be appropriately equipped to ensure the safety of the group
- Be trained in first aid and carry a small first aid kit
- Know the route and the ability of the group members, and ensure that they are all properly equipped
- Be prepared to alter the route to meet the needs and interests of the group, and the weather conditions
- Show a good example to the group, with regard to conservation issues and relations with landowners
- Ensure everybody in the group knows what to do, what not to do, and why
- Encourage group members to develop their walking and climbing skills

'Pack it in, pack it out'

- Leave no litter behind; even biodegradable items like banana skins and teabags take years to disappear
- Pick up litter when you see it (be cautious when handling waste)
- Take care not to cause any pollution. Human waste should be buried, at least 30m away from watercourses; take home, or carefully burn, used toilet paper and hygiene products

Environmental considerations for walkers

- For environmental and safety reasons keep group numbers small. Ideally group size should be less than 10 people, and should not exceed 15.
- Avoid taking dogs on the hills at any time
- Walk on rock, stones or the most durable surface available, rather than on vegetation or soft ground
- Be imaginative in your route choice, taking care to avoid using eroded paths
- If you must use an eroded route, walk along the centre of the path to avoid widening the damage.
- Wearing gaiters may make it easier to follow a muddy path
- Avoid taking short cuts on zig-zag paths as this creates new lines for run-off of water and increases erosion
- Leave cairns as they are; new cairns can mislead some walkers and old cairns could have archaeological value
- Have respect for all natural things and take care not to disturb plants, birds and animals.



Environmental considerations for climbers and scramblers

- Cliffs are a final refuge for some plants, birds and animals that have become rare, or even extinct elsewhere
- Avoid disturbing nesting birds and adhere to any climbing restrictions during the nesting season
- The removal of vegetation including mosses and lichens (gardening) should be avoided wherever possible
- It is often more pleasant to climb on dry, bare rock which normally has less botanical interest
- Damage can be caused by repeated top-roping of routes or by using a wire brush for cleaning
- Avoid any form of chipping or defacement of the rock; never carve your name in the rock etc
- Abseiling down routes can be harmful to the rock, damage vegetation and inhibit other climbers
- Where abseiling from trees is necessary, use a rope protector; even then this activity could kill the tree
- Climbing on frozen turf, or thin ice, can cause a lot of damage to vegetation

Fixed equipment for climbing

- For all established climbing areas in Ireland, bolting is not permitted. Bolts have been used in a few new climbing areas only (details of these crags can be obtained from the MCI's Climbing Committee).
- Anyone considering placing new fixed equipment or replacing existing equipment should take careful account of local climbing ethics, the environmental sensitivity of the area, potential liability and public safety factors. The use of cliff-top belay stakes should be kept to a minimum, especially in popular or scenic areas where walkers have access to cliff tops.

Advice for climbers developing new crags / doing new routes

- New routing, cleaning and developing new crags can be a sensitive issue with landowners
- Ask other climbers why the crag not been developed, find out if there is a local access problem, etc.
- Is there a nature protection designation on the area; would climbing be harmful?
- Get the landowner's permission to climb there
- Minimise damage to plants and trees and leave as few traces of your climbing as possible
- Be careful about publicising a crag; can it take large numbers or could there be problems with access?

Guidelines for wild camping

- Where possible seek the landowner's permission before wild camping
- To avoid Mountain Rescue being called out unnecessarily inform a nearby resident or the Gardaí / PSNI if you are leaving a car overnight
- Choose unobtrusive sites at least 500m away from roads and buildings
- Keep the group as small and discreet as possible
- Use a stove for cooking; campfires leave their mark and fires in the countryside can be very destructive
- Bury human waste; latrines should be dug at least 30m away from watercourses
- Wash at least 30m away from watercourses; minimise the use of soaps and detergents
- To prevent damage to vegetation, tents should not be left on the same spot for more than two nights
- Leave no litter behind – 'pack it in, pack it out!'
- Ensure that you leave the site as you found it.

Putting something back...

We use the land of the local communities where we walk and climb, in return we should make a conscious effort to contribute to that community. When locals see some benefit from our activities, we will be more welcome. This also shows that we care for the area.

Consider

- using the local shops and filling stations
- eating in a local restaurant, or staying overnight in the area
- stopping for refreshments in a local café or pub after your activities (bearing in mind the drink-drive restrictions)
- using facilities that have been developed for walkers – e.g. car parks
- supporting local events and charities, e.g. tidy towns committees
- taking a walking or climbing holiday in Ireland instead of going abroad
- always asking yourself "If I lived here, how would I feel?"

We can also put something back on another level ...

- Walkers and climbers contribute to erosion; consider spending a day repairing this damage. Organisations like Mountain Meitheal are doing this work and need more volunteers.
- Organise a clean-up event in an area where you regularly walk or climb

This document is not exhaustive. Please adopt the spirit of these guidelines and apply it all of your outdoor activities.