Long Distance Walking (LDW) in Ireland:

A Country Study

An Overview

Building on Case Studies of

the Wicklow Way, the Burren Way, and the Kerry Way

by Sam Demas

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# Executive Summary

This is an informal overview written from the perspective of an American amateur.  It is an attempt to pull together widely scattered information to present a coherent overview of how one nation – Ireland -- supports long distance walking.  The intended audience for this work is primarily recreation planners and trail managers in the USA who are interested in learning about how long-distance walking is supported in other nations. My findings are encapsulated in the following components:

* this “Country Overview”,
* “case studies” and “trip reports” on: Burren Way, Kerry Way and Wicklow Way
* “profiles” of a few of the interesting people I met along the way who have strong connections to the trail and/or walking culture of the region.

The case studies, trip reports, and profiles are online and are linked at the end of this Country Overview document. Together these comprise something approaching 100 pages of text. The methodology was to walk the walks, talk with the people who operate the trails and with locals, talk with government officials and others involved with long distance walking, and visit libraries and archives to read relevant sources.

The eleven-page historical sketch outlines how Ireland quickly developed a robust hillwalking culture over the last two to three generations, and set itself up as an international destination for walkers. Since the history of hillwalking in Ireland has not yet been written (an oversight that really should be remedied), this bare-bones outline is the most complete I have seen. This is followed by discussion of how the nation has addressed two major challenges it faces: 1. there is no legal right of access to the Irish countryside and traditional rights of way are not recognized, and 2. fears on the part of private property owners of exposure to claims in cases of accident or injury. Since these challenges are also very concerning in USA, the Irish solutions bear study.

Tourism is a major component of the Irish economy and walking is one of the most frequently cited reasons for visiting Ireland. Working with Failte Ireland data, a rather crude summary of the economic impact of hillwalking is attempted. 23% of domestic tourists participate in walking, and among overseas tourists hiking/walking was by far the most popular active pursuit., exceeding the combined participation in cycling, golfing, angling, and equestrianism. It appears Failte Ireland’s priorities after the recession have drifted away from walking, growth remains robust. The section on Economics is not complete pending information from National Trails Office.

The roles played in supporting long distance walking by 10 governmental organizations and 7 NGO’s are outlined. The conclusion includes a summary of the challenges and opportunities Ireland faces in the hillwalking arena, and lessons the USA might learn from the Irish experience in developing a stronger walking culture. Among the takeaways that bear study for American planners are: the importance of focused NGO’s, like Mountaineering Ireland, a network of walking clubs, and walking festivals; the potential for international tourism with walks development offering greater amenities, including accommodations; the model of Rural Recreation Officers, and the potential of models of independent management councils with missions like those of the Wicklow Uplands Forum, the McGillicuddy Reeks Forum, and the Irish Uplands Forum.

# Introduction

This is a test case for learning what questions to ask and where to seek answers in understanding how a nation supports long distance human powered travelers.  I hope to do write several more of these in future (e.g. New Zealand, Switzerland, Japan, France) and eventually do cross-cultural comparisons as a way of better understanding the situation and outlook in my home country, the USA. The research is for my own enjoyment and edification. The writing is more a long series of notes than a coherent narrative. The audience for the writing is limited: American recreational planners and the small group of enthusiasts who follow my web site. Perhaps someday this work will become part of a larger study with more polish and a larger purpose.

Why start with Ireland?  Essentially it was fortunate happenstance. My wife was in Ireland on a Fulbright for the academic year 2015/16 and I knew I’d be visiting three times for periods of about six weeks.  In addition to family visits and getting to know Ireland as a first-time visitor, this was an opportunity to broaden my horizons by studying long distance walking in a comparatively small nation:

* with ample and varied accommodations, but with no hut systems;
* with a beautiful and storied landscape;
* which has succeeded in developing a robust walking culture in just a few generations; and
* which is developing its own path to a national LDW infrastructure, but doing this in ways very much open to influences from the UK, continental Europe and beyond.

Most of all I wanted to enjoy walking in Ireland, meet interesting people, and experiment with different approaches to how a non-specialist like me could begin to gain a detailed international comparative perspective on the development of long distance walking and accommodations systems to support long distance, human-powered travel.

This has been an experiment in learning to learn. And Ireland was a splendid place to begin!

### Acknowledgements

My methodology was shaped by discussions with the people I met along the way.  Cormac MacDonnell, Head of National Trails office, suggested the approach of studying three Waymarked Ways as case studies that reflect the situation with trails nationally.   The idea is that from the case studies I could build a broader national understanding.  Michael Fewer provided useful historical perspective and pointed me to a marvelous selection of literature, people, pubs, trails and questions.   In an early discussion, Ruairi O’Connor, then CEO of Mountaineering Ireland, presented a clear-eyed overview of the situation and issues around LDW, and pointed me to many interesting topics to pursue as well as people and agencies to consult.  The Rural Recreation Officers opened my eyes to the complex workings of trail communities in Ireland, and introduced me to many wonderful people along the way -- making the walks even more fun and the research all the richer.  I am grateful for opinions, advice and perspective from many people I met in my travels; a few are listed in Appendix 1.

Michael Fewer kindly reviewed the manuscript and provided advice to ensure that I have not made any egregious errors of omission or commission.  However, the work, warts and all, is entirely mine and I take full responsibility for any faults or failings.  Readers’ comments are welcome!

### Methodology

My findings are encapsulated in several components:

* this “Country Overview”,
* “case studies”: Burren Way, Kerry Way and Wicklow Way
* “trip reports” – accounts of my walks on each of the trails for which I wrote case studies, and
* “profiles” of a few of the interesting people I met along the way who have strong connections to the trail and/or walking culture of the region.

I have quoted liberally from the web sites of relevant organizations, letting them describe themselves in their own words.

Overall, I have found the case study and personal interview methodology satisfying and productive.  It provided the opportunity to:

* Meet some of the wise and wonderful people in Ireland who are very knowledgeable in the development and management of long distance walking;
* experience three remarkable National Waymarked Ways by walking them and staying in walker-friendly accommodations,
* get to know many of the folks who operate these trails and to learn about the agencies involved in supporting and promoting them;
* talk with local people (shop-keepers, publicans, B&B owners, national park personnel, farmers, government officials, etc.) and with other walkers about their engagement with the trail,
* spend time in Irish research libraries to see what I could learn, and
* begin to learn what questions to ask and how to go about addressing my formidable learning curve in the arena of understanding how particular nations support and organize long distance walking.

Case studies of the Burren Way, Wicklow Way, and Kerry Way form the backbone of this study, which attempts to provide an overview of how long-distance walking is supported and is developing in the Republic of Ireland.

### Scope, purpose, audience and caveats

Due to time limitations, I narrowed my focus to walking.  Alas, I have ignored interesting developments in Ireland in cycling, travel on waterways, and mountaineering. The focus is further limited to the National Way-marked Ways, which allow for multi-day walks with overnight accommodations along the way.

I have not looked at developments in Northern Ireland.  And I do discuss the rich context of walking in the United Kingdom more broadly, which has deeply influenced the development of long distance walking in Ireland. The depth of my investigation was limited by the amount of time I had to spend on the project: about 8 weeks of my time in Ireland, and perhaps 4 weeks over the past year writing up the results back home.

This is an informal overview written from and the perspective of an American amateur.  It is an attempt to pull together widely scattered information to present a coherent, if sometimes shallow, overview of how one nation supports long distance walking.  It displays my superficial knowledge in some areas and doubtless contains errors of fact and interpretation.  Nevertheless, I hope it proves useful for people interested in gaining a broad overview of how Ireland has managed to develop a remarkable system of National Waymarked Ways in a short time and how it supports long distance walking today.

The intended audience for this work is primarily recreation planners and trail managers in the USA who are interested in learning about how long-distance walking is supported in other nations.

In particular I hope this work will also be of interest to people working with trails communities in the USA.  I believe there are lessons to be learned from Ireland about the development of community management structures that:

* strive to give trail communities voice and agency in determining their future;
* are designed to ensure a careful balance and harmony among the sometimes competing goals of economic development, environmental preservation, and preservation of community values and traditions; and
* can help communities avoid the potential negative impacts of LDW, which is just one (gentle, but growing) tentacle of the monster of mass tourism.

Finally, it's a starting point for further research.  Perhaps others will find my work helpful as they undertake their own, more in-depth research on aspects of walking in Ireland.

# Background to Long Distance Walking

Definitions -  Following are a few terms that may be unfamiliar to Americans:

1. **Hillwalking** is the term used in Ireland and the UK for vigorous walking, usually in upland terrain.  It is roughly synonymous with hiking and rambling.  Unlike backpacking and trekking, hillwalking generally means that you are not carrying all your gear for overnight accommodation and cooking.  Hillwalking can imply both day hikes and long distance hikes/walks.
2. Irish terms for existing walking infrastructure that is often incorporated into long distance paths or other hillwalking trails:

Bohreens – narrow rural lanes.

Green Roads – narrow rural lanes, with a grassed surface, often connecting farms and/or farm fields.

Mass paths – rural pedestrian tracks, traditionally used on Sundays for locals to walk to Sunday mass in the local church.

### Hillwalking in the Republic of Ireland: an historical sketch

These notes on the history of hillwalking are based largely on secondary sources and do not rise to the level of serious historical research. My purpose is far more modest: to provide a bare-bones outline of historical context for my overview study of Long Distance Walking in Ireland today.

Apologies to Irish colleagues for the lack of detail and nuance in my understanding of Irish history and culture, and for my inevitable limitations in accurately interpreting, even at this general level, what I have read and heard.

Key sources for this overview are the writings of and conversations with Michael Fewer, and Paddy O’Leary’s book The Way that We Climbed: a history if Irish hillwalking, climbing and mountaineering (Collins Press, 2015). While largely emphasizing climbing and mountaineering, clearly O’Leary’s primary interests, I found his book useful to an outsider interested in developing a basic understanding the development of hillwalking in Ireland.

From my limited research, it seems clear that someone -- certainly someone better qualified than me -- should write a fuller history of hillwalking in Ireland than is currently available. Someone like Michael Fewer….

The following notes begin to scratch the surface of a rich history. A full and thoughtfully constructed history focused directly on the development of hill walking in Ireland would provide essential background to understanding the remarkable development of a strong national walking culture in Ireland in the last few generations. The early players are dead or getting along in years, now is the time to capture their stories.

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Michael Fewer’s book A Walk in Ireland (Atrium, 2001) -- a delightful anthology of 40 selections from the literature of walking in Ireland – provides a range of perspectives on pedestrian travel from 1783 (Dr. Samuel Johnson in Kildare) – 1995 (rambler Mike Harding in Mayo). This celebration of walking in Ireland over two centuries includes: excerpts from the tradition of gentleman travelers from the continent, walking by the landed gentry, crusading walkers like the remarkable Mrs. Asenath Nicholson of N.Y., letter and poems, and more contemporary tourist/recreational walkers like Eric Newby, Paul Theroux, and Cameron McNeish. This book locates Ireland in the larger continental literature of walking, celebrates many writers, walkers and places, and gives the reader a broader literary and historical context for Irish hillwalking today.

Paddy O’Leary begins his The Way That We Climbed with a personal story of a re-enactment of the escape route from Dublin Castle of Donegal princes Art O’Neill and Hugh O’Donnell. This walk was first retraced from Dublin to Lugnaquilla and back by noted Victorian naturalist and alpinist Henry Chichester Hart. O’Leary and his friends dared to repeat this feat in the 1950’s, and he came away from this experience with a profound sense of how

…the Wicklow Hills – and other ranges as we shall see – did not merely feature in many aspects of Irish life and history, but were knitted closely into the causes and and effects of that history, and of societal trends, in ways more intimate and unexpected than normally applies to between man and the upland landscape ……..What I did not then grasp was that this connectedness of the uplands with politics and a changing society had affected the development of Irish mountaineering and would do so up to recent times. (O’Leary, p. 7)

In my experience this strong sense of connectedness between hillwalking and the long history of a changing society, from Celtic times to the present, is a unique feature of walking in Ireland. Wherever one walks there is a palpable sense of celebration or of somber reflection on the storied Irish landscape and its people. While walking has long been associated with poverty in the countryside, and recreational walking viewed as by rural folk as something they would never choose to do, hillwalking today is rooted in a deep history of which rural folk are nevertheless an important part.

During the 19th century – in addition to the perambulations of the gentry -- much of the scant documented hillwalking occurred in the context of the travels of naturalists and other scientists, and early Irish alpinists. HC Hart, Richard Barrington, and, later, Robert Lloyd Praeger (author of The Way I Went) are notable examples of this strand of the nation’s walking tradition.

O’Leary (p. 13) posits that out of these peregrinations there began to develop (in the late 19th/early 20th centuries) early inclinations towards a more purely recreational approach to hillwalking. These, he suggests, took the form of Barrington’s early sponsorship of the Sugarloaf Race, the popularity of pilgrimage walks, and the development of Field clubs in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. However, he goes on to say that hillwalking as a recreational activity “does not seem to have been widely practiced”. The establishment of the “Most Illustrious Brotherhood of the Lug” in 1903, may have marked the beginning of mountaineering clubs in Ireland.

O’Leary reports that a spate of letters to the Irish times in 1911 indicates that “hill walking had become widely practiced among the city’s [Dublin] middle classes.” (p. 20). The rise in middle class recreational walking seemed to catch on first among academics, professional people and civil servants. O’Leary notes that the economic and living conditions of the unemployed, rural folk, and working class were simply still too “horrific” for folks to contemplate recreational walking. Historically, among rural folk walking has been associated with poverty and was not seen as a desirable activity.

In the early 1930s the “culture of hiking” grew increasingly popular (O’Leary p. 24) and the founding of An Oige in 1933 resulted in the availability of affordable accommodations for young people seeking access to the outdoors. In Fifty Years Young: the history of An Oige (An Oige, 1981, p. 23), Terry Trench notes that the advent of youth hosteling “increasingly attracted apprentices and other industrial workers as well as the white-collar workers with which it had largely started”.

More walking clubs began to develop in Ireland in 1930’s and there were four hiking clubs at University College Dublin in the early 1930’s. By the late 1930’s there developed sufficient readership to encourage writing about walking, notably with the initiation of JB Malone’s column in the Evening Herald in 1938, and the publication of the earliest guide books. Through his 979 articles published between 1938 – 1975 Malone did much to inspire a culture of hill walking and cycling in Ireland. Malone is referred to by Fewer as the “Wainwright of Ireland”. The proximity of the Wicklow Hills to Dublin of Malone’s favorite stomping grounds, the Wicklow Hills, made them the site of many early developments in hillwalking.

During WW II a group of teens began climbing together under the rubric of the Irish Mountaineering Club (IMC). This group was in abeyance in 1943 but was revived in 1948 by an original member Bill Perrott along with Joss Lyman an army buddy. The first meeting attracted 60 people and they chose storied walker and naturalist Lloyd Praeger as the first president of IMC. Initially some in the IMC were uneasy with the acceptance of hillwalker and with members from the working class, but gradually the club enlarged its focus on mountaineering to embrace hillwalking and came to embrace members from all classes. This was part of a larger interest in Ireland in fostering more egalitarian involvement in outdoor recreation. In its current iteration, the estimable Mountaineering Ireland, has become a major player in Irish outdoor recreation. I’ve not seen a history of Mountaineering Ireland, but I suspect one exists.

In the 1950’s automobiles were scarce and public transportation limited. Nonetheless, a culture of walking and climbing continued to develop, with young people hitch-hiking and older folks driving, sometimes beyond the Wicklow hills, to walk and climb. They stayed in farmhouses and barns, and guest houses. The tradition of long-distance hill walks expanded in this period. An Oige was increasingly active in exposing city kids to the joys of walking and climbing. In chapters 3 and 4, O’Leary comments briefly on the “class-stereotyping” and conflict that resulted from an increasing melding of young working-class kids from Dublin and more established members of the mountaineering community. In 1955 the IMC opened a hut at Glendasan in Wicklow region to support overnight stays.

The 1960s ushered in a 50% increase in the standard of living in Ireland, which followed in the 1970’s with a substantial increase in car ownership. Combined with shorter working weeks and changes in school schedules for young people with greater participation in secondary education, opportunities to participate in hillwalking continued to increase. New walking clubs established in the 1970’s. They sponsored more long-distance challenge walks, and gradually hillwalkers began to predominate in this new club culture. At this time long distance walking was growing in popularity all over Europe and in Ireland. In 1980 the RTE (Irish television) televised a series of programs on hillwalking in which JB Malone served as narrator.

Michael Fewer has commented that relatively few politicians have been prepared to tackle problematic issues of walking in Ireland, but he cites Eamon O’Cuiv as a notable exception. However, in an unpublished manuscript, “Politics and Walking” (2010) that he kindly shared with me, Fewer notes that even earlier, in 1977, former Taoiseach John Burton, then junior education minister in the government, began work on a national initiative with the title “Sport for All”. One of his ideas was to establish a long-distance trail in the Republic of Ireland that would connect with the earlier established Ulster Way in Northern Ireland. The Burton initiative took the shape of a government agency called Cospoir, the National Sports Council. Under the auspices of this agency a Long Distance Waking Routes Committee was set up charged with establishing long and short distance walks. This committee was the genesis of the formation of Ireland’s network of National Waymarked Ways.

Before briefly outlining the work of the protean Long Distance Walking Routes Committee, it is important to briefly note some of the larger political context within which the impulse to long distance walking took shape in Ireland. a few quick diversions: One of T.D. Burton’s ideas was to establish and connect a long-distance trail in the Republic of Ireland with the Ulster Way in Northern Ireland. He saw this as a concrete and practical gesture of peace and a cultural connection in the time of troubles. The only article I found that provides some more context on this pan-Ireland perspective is “The Expansion of Long-distance Walking Routes in Ireland” by Peter Wilson (Dept. of Environmental Studies, U of Ulster) in Irish Geography 22 (1989) 48-51. Wilson discusses the coordination of walking routes development north and south of the border by the respective Sports Councils. He indicates that in Northern Ireland the idea of the Ulster Way traversing both parts of Ireland goes back to at least the 1950’s when England was creating the Pennine Way. In the Republic of Ireland he notes, COSPOIR seemed initially focused on a network of paths that circumambulated the island.

As is mentioned below, this long-sought-for dream of a walk round the island was abandoned in favor of starting with the long-held, more practical visions of establishing the Wicklow Way and the Kerry Way. The ideal of walking paths development as a joint North/South enterprise with a clear peace and reconciliation ethos was never realized. But the present Ulster Way and International Appalachian Trail are echoes of that noble impulse.

To me, an interesting sidelight of this notion the connection between trails development and the goals and methods of peace and reconciliation is the fact that Colin Murphy, a specialist in peace studies from Northern Ireland was hired as the first Executive Director of the Wicklow Uplands Council. He had long worked in various capacities at the [Glencree Center for Peace and Reconciliation](http://glencree.ie/about-glencree/) in County Wicklow. Glencree was founded in response to violent conflict in Irish society. While there was some initial concern about how the appointment of a Northern Irelander would be received locally, Mr. Murphy served with distinction until 1997. It was a brilliant appointment! Not surprisingly, the very mission and skills manifest in the work of Glencree were just what the WUC needed: finding ways to promote understanding among people with differing views and interests, moving beyond destructive conflict to develop cooperation in communities, and resolving conflicts and developing a healthy respect for each other.

A rich facet of the history and ongoing development of walks in Ireland and the study of their impact on uplands natural and human communities is the attendant development of a number of “Uplands Councils”. The mission of the progenitor of this movement, the Wicklow Uplands Council, is:

….an independent, voluntary organisation which represents the shared interests of over 50 member groups and individuals. It takes a partnership approach to sustainable development and promotes projects which bring value to people who live and work in the uplands area and those who use it for recreational purposes.

Building on the antecedent of the Mourne Heritage Trust in Northern Ireland (a model suggested to the group by Prof. Adrian Phillips, Trinity College Dublin), the Wicklow Upland Council has served as a model for a number of organizations designed develop consensus and compromise around local planning issues. These include the Irish Uplands Forum and the Reeks Access Forum. These organizations are themselves worthy topics of comparative study in relation to walks development. Landscape conflicts can reveal and illuminate deep schisms in a community. These uplands forums and the planning of walking paths provide effective mechanisms for reflecting on and eventually resolving differing attitudes towards the landscape and the values of the communities that live in them.

The Long Distance Walking Routes Committee (LDWRC) comprised 16 voluntary representatives of various stake-holders. The representative of An Taisce, a conservation group, was JB Malone, a prodigious walker and influential writer about walking. Joss Lyman was also an original member of the Committee. Several years later Mr. Malone retired from his day job and was hired as the first Field Officer for the Committee, the first paid walking professional. See my separate sections on JB Malone and on the establishment of the Wicklow Way, the first National Waymarked Way in Ireland, completed in 1982.

In his unpublished manuscript Fewer, reports that after Fine Gael lost out in the next election the political will provided by Burton languished in his absence. But the committee persisted in its workJohn Burton’s original initiative charged the LDWRC with:

1. “The survey, recording and mapping of existing footpaths and rights-of-ways,
2. The collection and collation of information on projected work and other proposals which were available from Government Departments and interested agencies.
3. The preparation of a plan for the further provision of long-distance, medium and short-distance footpaths, and public pedestrian rights of way in the country which take account of existing and proposed developments
4. Making recommendations it thinks fit as legal, administrative or other provisions which would facilitate the development and responsible use of footpaths and pedestrian rights-of-way for recreational purposes
5. Suggesting routes for shorter paths which would link the proposed system.”

-- Quoted from M. Fewer unpublished manuscript

The full scope of this ambitious agenda took years to complete and some tasks never were completed. For example, the goal of developing shorter routes was not realized until Failte Ireland got involved some 20 years later in developing a series of looped walks around the nation. In personal correspondence Fewer states that

I introduced the idea of ‘Looped Walks’ and incorporated them in my book on the Wicklow Way (*The Wicklow Way, from Marlay to Glenmalure*, Gill and Macmillan, 1988) because I saw that most people might be more interested in shorter walks, and those who were interested in the long ones wanted to tackle them bit by bit. All this could be achieved if each section could have a return loop to get walkers back to their cars. It was difficult to persuade walks designers of this, but Failte Ireland eventually developed the idea for walks which were not related to long distance routes.

And the survey of existing rights-of-way was never undertaken, which Fewer laments because many of these traditional rights of way have by now been lost or forgotten.

However the committee made great progress in the early years, focusing on the development of long distance paths and fashioning the guidelines, techniques and cooperation necessary to their creation. The committee considered several routes with which to begin its system of National Waymarked Ways. These included (among others): a coastal route circumambulating the island, a Donegal trail that could connect with the Ulster Way, and the realization of JB Malone’s long held dream of and plan for a Wicklow Way. Due to Malone’s long study of the Wicklow hills, his level of preparedness to bring it to fruition, and its proximity to the capital, the Wicklow Way was selected as the first Waymarked Way. Fewer elaborates on this situation as follows (personal correspondence):

When the walks committee was first set up, J B Malone was An Taisce’s representative, and probably one of the few members who knew anything about walking. As he had already done, on his Wicklow Way, much of the considerable amount of ground work that a walking route requires, it was decided to go ahead with Wicklow as the first route. John Bruton’s party was by then out of government, and there was little pressure to prioritise the production of a Donegal Way that would connect with the Ulster Way. It was originally Malone’s dream that the Wicklow Way would be the first of a series of ways that would eventually circle the island, a romantic but not very practical idea.

Reading between the lines of some of Josh Lyman’s papers hint that Malone’s determination and preparation were irresistible and that ceding to his vision was not only practical, but a way of getting is energy applied to the broader purposes of LDWRC. [I could only secure permission to view a very small number of Lyman’s papers; much work remains in mining this trove.] Trail building began in 1980 and the Wicklow Way was opened in 1982. The committee’s forward-looking sense of its conservation role is manifest in a principle of trying to ensure that trails avoided exposed and fragile areas.

In 1983 Cospoir and its Long Distance Walks Committee hosted a two day conference “On the Development of Walking Routes” in Killorgin. County Kerry. About 150 people from round the Republic attended to discuss the development of walking routes in Ireland. The proceedings of the meeting were published and encapsulate a remarkable period in the development of hillwalking. I’ll highlight some of the themes and topics from the conference proceedings:

* The opening address by Mr. D Creed, Minister of State at the Department of Education, stressed the great potential for domestic and international tourism and local businesses, including farm guest houses along the routes. He emphasized the outstanding attractions of Ireland and tied the development of walking routes to environmental protection. He discussed the need educate the public about the countryside and the use of the Country Code, calling for cooperation between differing constituencies, particularly in the uplands (e.g ecologists and sportsmen, mountain dwellers and city dwellers).
* JB Malone, Field Officer, discussed the historical development of paths and motorized transport as a context within which to consider the renewal of old paths as walking routes, and the recreational value to many citizens of walking. He discussed the work of the Long Distance Walking Routes Committee, its reliance on local cooperation, its powers and limitations, and its emphasis on utilizing existing pathways and environmentally sound techniques.
* Sean O Suilleabhain discussed the work of the Kerry Walking Routes Committee and described in detail the proposed route of the Kerry Way, construction of which was underway at that time.
* On the first afternoon there was a visit to an established walking route in the vicinity.
* Prof. D. O’Currain presented remarks on the history of walking paths in Ireland and their importance to Irish history.
* J. Trevelyan of the Ramblers Association spoke about the organization he represented, about long distance paths in England, and presented for consideration a set of guidelines for establishment of routes.
* The appendix of the report presents a succinct set of “Aims, Objectives and Guidelines” for the Long Distance Walking Routes Committee that appear to be the work of JB Malone

The establishment of the Wicklow Way and the fact of bringing folks together for this two day conference had the effect of inspiring communities around Ireland to propose long distance walking paths. Over the next 25 years Ireland established a total of 42 more National Waymarked Trails, at least 27 National Looped Walks, and hundreds of additional trails. The database of Irishtrails.ie contains information about 899 trails. Many of these were developed around existing paths, which often followed a network of excellent stone roads, green roads, mass paths and other ancient infrastructure that early hillwalkers explored and enjoyed.

The Kerry Way, the second Waymarked Way, was opened in 1984 and fully completed in 1989. It seems the folks in Kerry were quite aware of the importance of providing good accommodations along the route and had a keen understanding of their work as a form of economic development. I found no history of the development of that trail, but while writing a Kerry Way Case Study I compiled the following notes on what I learned about its development and some possible sources for future researchers:

* According to Wikipedia, the idea of a Kerry Way was proposed in 1982 by the Laune Mountaineering Club and the Kerry association of An Taisce.
* People have been hiking around the Reeks for years. In the 1960’s and 70s lots of young people backpacked in the area and used the bohreens, etc. that later formed parts of the KW.
* Sheila O’Sullivan opened her B&B in 1967 to cater to these early adopters. Her business gradually expanded as more people started coming from continental Europe.
* Sean O’Suilleabhain was the chair of the founding group and is sometimes cited as the founder. He apparently was inspired to devise the initial concept by a lecture by Father John Hayes on the old roads and paths of the region, which essentially provided infrastructure lying in wait.
* At about this time Ireland was organizing an effort through COSPOIR to develop a series of long distance walking paths.
* A Long Distance Walks Route Committee was established in 1978 and JB Malone was appointed Field Officer soon thereafter.
* The Wicklow Way was selected as the first Long Distance Route to be implemented (1982) and the Kerry Way as the second (1984).
* In 1983 County Kerry Vocational Education Committee and Sports Advisory Board hosted a national conference with COSPOIR “The Development of Walking Routes”, 6-8 October in Killorglin. See conference proceedings.
* Sean O’Suilleabhain of the Kerry Walking Routes Committee presented a talk on the Kerry Way describing the natural and cultural features on a three day walk from Killarney to Glenbeigh.
* Brendan O’Shea, Conservation Officer at Killarneny National Park, and others from Kerry attended the 1983 conference. Brendan has been deeply involved in trail siting, building, and maintenance for many years. And he pioneered the use of railroad ties covered with hardware cloth as materials for boardwalks to protect fragile areas.
* PJ Brouton, a forester, was involved with the development of the KW and is said to have had a good manner with the locals and to be effective in getting local cooperation.
* Originally the KW did not go through the National Park. It was re-routed in the late 1980’s in part to make use of the Old Kenmare Road (dating back to 1770’s). After being closed for 150 years (when the land-owner decided to build a deer park), this old road would later require considerable drainage and road re-building work.
* The full route was completed in 1989 due to the efforts of many individuals, and with construction assistance by workers on the FAS social employment and Rural Social schemes.
* In 2007 Ireland established the positions of Rural Recreation Officers (RRO), which position was intended to work with the Kerry Way Committee.
* Patrick O’Sullivan and Sean O’Donoghue of Black Valley are a few of the many who are currently working on the trail and have knowledge and opinions about its history and future.

As with my work on the Kerry Way Case Study, I compiled notes on the history of the Burren Way while doing a Burren Way Case Study:

I was surprised by how little is known in the region about how the Burren Way was developed. However, Mr. Hogan advised I talk with Mr. Gerard Kennedy of Corofin, a long-time community activist and a former employee of Clare Local Development Company responsible for the County Clare EU Leader rural development programs. Mr. Kennedy was very helpful in explaining to me how the Burren Way first came about some forty years ago and how it has developed since. The Burren Way preceded the National Waymarked Ways initiative and the National Trails office.

In the 1970’s The Shannon Development Corporation initiated a range of regional development program for counties Clare and Limerick and parts of two other counties. These included development of the Shannon Airport as an international destination and significant tourism infrastructure in Mid-West of Ireland, including, in the mid-1970’s, development of the first of several iterations of the Burren Way, from Lahinch to Ballyvaughan. Mr. Kennedy points out that there will be much more detailed information available in the archives of the Shannon Development Corporation, wherever these might be located.

Mr. Kennedy was involved with a group that signposted the walk on existing traditional footpaths and on lesser used roads from Ballyvaughan to Lahinch, but which did not have the authority or tools necessary to secure formal permissive access agreements from local landowners. Over time some informal landowner permissions were revoked leaving no choice but to abandon parts of the off-road path and move them onto local roads, including the sections along the Cliffs of Moher. Thus the trail in its initial form was in existence, but not in a wholly satisfactory way.

In 1996, during the time the National Waymarked Ways were being developed nationally, Mr. Kennedy and others involved with Leader Program contacted people in the communities between Ballyvaughan and Corofin about extending the trail. Again, the majority of this new stretch of the trail was confined to roads due to challenges in securing permission from landowners. Around 2000 the initial part of the Burren Way was still managed by Shannon Development Corporation, and the newer section from Ballyvaughan to Corofin was directed by a separate group.

Shannon Development wanted to get out of the business of managing the trail and set up the Burren Way Committee, a legal limited company, to manage both sections of the trail. The Committee includes a County Council representative, representatives of communities along the trail, a Heritage Officer, and others. This group has operated since that time as the oversight committee and the Rural Recreation Officer serves as secretary of the group.

About 2005 when the Walks Scheme was initiatives, County Clare was one of 12 counties in Ireland that secured a Rural Recreation Officer position, occupied by Eimer McCarthy until just a few years ago. Gradually she and the managing group were able to implement the Walks Scheme on the Burren Way and thus move some of the trail from roads to permissive paths on private property, including on parts of the Mullaghmore National Park, and to extend the Walks Scheme to cover Green Roads or Boreen. He emphasized the importance of a few positive land owners bringing others along, particularly in relation to the Cliffs of Moher section.

When asked about the fact many people in the Burren seem to know little about the trail, Mr. Kennedy suggested several factors: the slightly checkered history with land-owners granting then revoking permission, development of the trail over a period of four decades with changes along the way, and a focus by the Burren Way Committee on development of the trail and not on education and promotion among locals and local communities. Altogether this may have resulted in a broad-based uncertainty about the status of the trail, and it may be time for a focus on local education and promotion.

The transcript of a speech by Mr. Kennedy at a GeoPark Symposium contains this excerpt concerning the Burren Way from his talk, which focused largely on other community development topics:

We have witnessed major development of walking trails within the county. This has been greatly accommodated by the appointment of a Rural Recreation Officer for Clare in 2008. I happen to be chairman of The Burren Way which has seen considerable development in recent years. This summer thanks to financial help from Failte Ireland, the tremendous support of Clare County Council and the co-operation of local landowners we have what we consider one of the best and most spectacular sections of public walking trail in Ireland, from Doolin to Hag’s Head via the Cliffs of Moher. Allied to the development of walking trails has been the establishment of walking clubs and the promotion of walking festivals in different locations. A Clare Trails Steering Committee has been in place for a number of years, which was again a first in Ireland. This brings together all of the main stakeholders to plan, develop and promote trails development in the county. Its not all about walking however and currently a canoe trail is being developed on Lough Derg. It’s also worth referring to the Wild Atlantic Way driving route from Donegal to Cork part of which will follow the North and West Clare coastal route. I believe that this is an initiative to be welcomed. It is important however to ensure that it delivers tangible benefits to the communities along and close to the proposed route and that all potential traffic management issues are addressed in advance.

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{At this point in the historical sketch the author has run out of time and energy to continue and deepen his understanding. The following are notes on some of the obvious topics I have failed to explore in any depth.}

Since the opening of the Wicklow Way in 1982 Ireland has developed 43 National Waymarked Ways. These trails were designed to open up a world of walking to a wide range of Irish citizens, as well as to attract walkers from abroad. Detailing the history of each of these is outside the scope of this sketch. It would be great if each Waymarked Way committee commissioned a history of how it came into being and the opportunities, challenges, and characters involved in its development.

It seems the establishment of the Long Distance Walking Routes Committee under CORSPOIR was the political act that empowered, cohered, and catalyzed tremendous national momentum in establishing more trails, clubs, and an even more robust walking culture in the period 1980 to 2010. Some of the organizations, initiatives and ideas that flourished during this rich period in the history of hill walking include:

* Failte Ireland’s involvement in developing Looped Walks around the country, marketing Ireland both domestically and abroad as a destination for walkers, establishing a “Walker Friendly” branding scheme for B&B’s, and tracking data on walking tourism.
* Imaginative thinking about spectacular possibilities for long distance walking in Ireland, for example books such as Michael Fewer’s Walking Across Ireland, and Peter Lynch’s quirky Rambling Round Ireland, which is reminiscent of earlier calls for a circular walk on the Irish coast.
* A revival of interest in Ireland’s rich heritage of pilgrimage walks. John O’Dwyer’s writings on this topic are one example of exploring this vein of historical walks.
* A series of working papers by the Rural Economy Research Centre (Teagasc, Atherny, Galway) include useful background analysis on topics such as: “Understanding preference for walking attributes”, “Public access to the countryside: an exploration of the costs and benefits of farmland walking trails”, “Access to farmland for walking in the Republic of Ireland – The attitude of landowners”, and “Comparisons between Ireland and other developed nations on the provision of public access to the countryside for walking – Are there lessons to be learned?”.
* Eamon O’Cuiv’s understanding of the importance of walking and his role in spurring relevant government initiatives.
* The political development of significant governmental initiatives and strivings:
  + Comhairle na Tuaithe and its performance in implementing the National Countryside Recreation Strategy,
  + Development and implementation of Walks Scheme by CNT
  + Debate/discussions leading to the insurance/occupier’s liability scheme,
  + The establishment of National Trails Office and its work in advancing walking,
  + The Department of the Environment’s establishment of Rural Recreation Officer positions,
  + Ebbs and flows of cooperation among various government agencies in walks development.
* The history and ongoing development of a series of local organizations designed to bring together the stakeholders in uplands communities to address the challenges and opportunities of mountain tourism. These non-governmental entities try to work across traditional jurisdictional and political boundaries build consensus and cohesion in protecting traditional uplands culture and communities, protecting the environment, and also promoting sustainable mountain tourism. These include: Wicklow Uplands Council; McGillicuddy Reeks Mountain Access Program; some as yet unclear combination of BurrenBeo, Burren Life and Burren Geo Park; and the Irish Uplands Forum.

Each of the above bullet points above represent topics that deserving of historical documentation and analysis. There are others that could be added. Taken together they make up the modern history of the development of walking culture in Ireland. Fleshing them out is way beyond the scope of my work at this time..

The economic recession put a halt to expansion of the walks Scheme and expansion of the Rural Recreation Officers model to other counties. It also constrained Failte Ireland’s involvement in promoting walks. And political gridlock in the nation has continued to suppress the full flowering of walking in Ireland. Nevertheless, Ireland has made tremendous progress and continues to move forward even as it awaits a next great phase in nurturing its walking culture.

Notes on sources for those interested in digging deeper:

* The papers of Josh Lyman, Adrian Phillips, and Cospoir are obvious sources. Both Trinity College and NLI have other relevant archival materials I did not have time (or, in some cases, permission) to consult.
* Michael Fewer has some records of the Brotherhood of the Lug, but Tom Barragry is the official keeper of records, which are complete from 1903 to date.
* Mountaineering Ireland and its publications are a treasure trove. MI has a modest library. It is not clear to me where to go to consult materials from its previously disbanded library.
* Between them, the National Library of Ireland and Trinity College Library have complete runs of relevant journals, including: Walking World Ireland, Irish Mountain Log, and Irish Mountaineers and Explorers Historical Society Journal.

### Climate and topography

Ireland is shaped by its environment.  Most notably, with a maritime climate it has a fairly moderate climate overall and high level of rainfall.  This makes it possible to walk the year-round, but requires that the walker be prepared for rapidly changing weather conditions and for walking in the rain.  The almost constant westerly airflow over the Atlantic brings warm, damp air over the country.  These weather fronts sweep across the country regularly bringing rain.  But the storms are often short and punctuated by clear periods in which the landscape gleams with wetness. With good rain gear the walker can navigate this watery landscape with pleasure in any season of the year, though March, April and May are apparently the driest months.  This climate necessitates the provision of shelter from the storm, in the case of Ireland, through B&B’s, hostels and guest houses at regular intervals along long distance trails.  Walker friendly accommodations will provide for drying of wet clothing and gear.

Ireland is blessed with sufficient low elevation mountain ranges to provide varied terrain for walking and some wonderful opportunities for walking in that magical zone where mountains meet the ocean.  Simon Stewart, creator of the remarkable website [MountainViews.ie](http://mountainviews.ie/summit/?PHPSESSID=mdp67u0odkajmcbcj58lu5q846), has worked with hundreds of mountaineers and hillwalkers around the nation to develop lists and databases cataloging Irish mountains and mountain walks.  He lists 282 Munros (a term used by the Scottish Mountaineering Club to denote a summit over 3,000 feet) in Ireland.  Stewart and his fellow walkers celebrate the joys and interest of walking the 538 summits of the smaller mountains of less than 400 meters that are scattered all over the island, as well as the 464 peaks over 500 meters (1,640 feet).   Taken together this plethora of peaks offers walkers a wide range of challenge, variety and history for long and short walks the year-round.

While the highest concentrations of trails seem to cluster in the upland areas, there are ample opportunities to walk in lower lying areas such as Connemara and in unique landscapes such as Burren, to name some I visited.

### Land-owners property rights and access to trails

The Irish people suffered long and hard before acquiring the right to own their own property.  Farmers own much of the rural land and hold their property rights very dear.  The culture is that land is to be passed down to heirs.  You never sell your land; and a farmer who sells his land is considered a failure.  I’m told the 1990 Irish film “The Field” accurately depicts some of the fierce, even primal attachment to land ownership and rights in rural Irish communities.

There is no legal right of access to the Irish countryside.  Traditional rights of way for walkers are not generally recognized in Irish law, which appears to be based on outdated English laws that were put in place in Ireland before independence.  The antecedents for these Irish laws have long since been updated in England, Scotland and Wales.  The burden of proof for asserting the existence public rights-of-way in Ireland is set extremely high and such claims often fail in the courts.

Consequently those who walk on and build trails on private land rely must on permissive access from land-owners.  Securing permission to access private land is hard and it can be withdrawn at any time.  While many farmers are happy to allow access without any payment, many want to be paid for access to their land, which process has begun with the Walks Scheme. While there have been cases of path diversions due to withdrawal of permissive access, the numbers overall are apparently not great.

Interestingly, the Irish system of property rights is similar to the model in USA, where a private land-owner can foreclose all rights of way simply by posting a “no trespassing” sign.  But the critical difference between the USA and Ireland is that the federal and state governments in USA own more than 25% of the nation’s land and make it accessible to the people with trails and other recreational amenities.  By contrast, there is very little publicly owned land in Ireland.

This very brief overview of property rights in Ireland is admittedly over-simplified.  For a more detailed explication suitable for the lay person, see the leaflet published by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government [**“Recreation in the Irish Countryside: property rights, obligations and responsibilities**](http://www.mountaineering.ie/_files/AccessLiability-finalproof-29Aug2013.pdf)**”.**

The establishment of the Walks Scheme (discussed below) in 2008 was a major step forward in developing the national system of Waymarked Ways.  However, due to the recession of the late 2000’s it is closed to further participants.

The missions of several entities -- notably Mountaineering Ireland, the National Trails Office, Comhairle na Tuaithe, and Keep Ireland Open -- include finding new approaches to responsible recreational access to the countryside.  A few related initiatives, such as the Reeks Access Forum, are discussed below.  However, the situation is that farmers are a very strong political force and there is not currently the political will in Ireland to address this seemingly intractable limiting factor on the development of long distance walking routes.

### Liability/insurance situation

Another strong concern of landowners when they consider providing permissive access is their exposure to claims in case of accident or injury.   The “Occupiers Liability Act of 1995” was designed to clarify and limit the conditions under which a landowner might be liable to such claims.  The law is based on the principle that recreational users are aware of the risks of their activity and responsible for their actions.

Briefly, the 1995 Law defines three categories of “entrants” to private land (recreational users, trespassers, and visitors), and describes the duty of the occupier (land owner) to avoid liability.  Walkers on a trail are defined as “recreational users”.  For a landowner to avoid liability for claims by recreational users, the landowner must *“not intentionally injure the person or damage the property of the person, nor act with reckless disregard for the person or property of the person”*.   In other words, only reckless disregard or intentional injury on the part of the landowner would make them liable to damage claims in case of accident or injury.  This applies to any landowner providing permissive access, whether part of the Walks Scheme or not.  Case law has upheld and strengthened the protections this law provides to property owners.

Further, if a landowner providing permissive access for a Waymarked Trail is listed on the National Register of trails (maintained by National Trails Office) as part of the Walks Scheme, he/she is provided indemnity insurance through the Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance.

Despite these legal protections, there is unfortunately still (willful?) confusion on the part of some landowners who cite potential liability as a reason for refusing permissive access.  Note: the recent case of a hillwalker injured on the Wicklow Way and awarded damages [was finally overturned by a high court](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/high-court/damages-award-to-hillwalker-who-tripped-on-wicklow-way-is-overturned-1.2979242), clearly affirming the protections accorded to property owners and trail managers by the Occupiers Liability Act of 1995.

Members of walking clubs affiliated with Mountaineering Ireland, the clubs themselves, and individual members of MI are insured through Mountaineering Ireland as part of their membership.  This includes public liability insurance (€13,000,000) and limited personal accident.  [**Insurance Scheme details**](http://www.mountaineering.ie/membersandclubs/Insurance/default.aspx) are available on Mountaineering Ireland website.

# Tourism and economic impact

My analysis of the economic impact of long distance walking is shallow and incomplete.  I was unable to meet with anyone from Failte Ireland and while it has a good deal of data on its website, I found it difficult to gain any sense of confidence in my understanding of the economic contribution of hillwalking to the Irish economy. I am including many of the key data here so the reader can draw his/her own conclusions.  This is the best I can do with the time and resources available.

Tourism overall is an important part of the economy in the Republic of Ireland, accounting for about 4% of [GNP](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_national_product).

[Overview of Tourism Industry by Department of Tourism Transport and Sport:](http://www.dttas.ie/tourism)

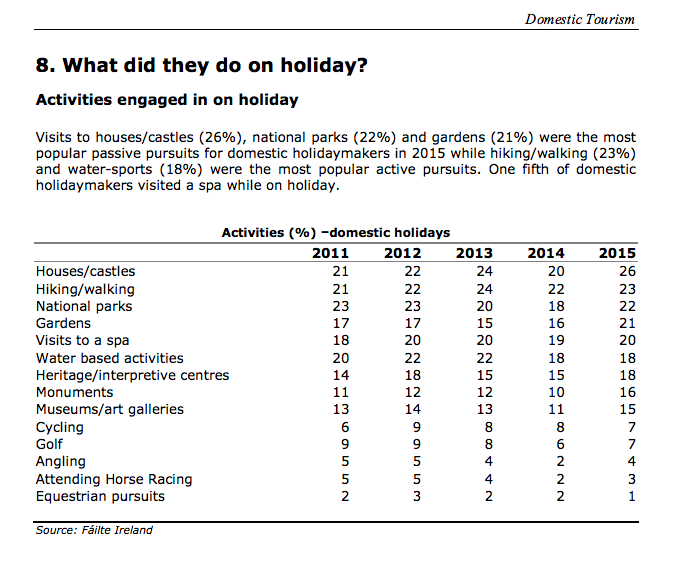
“Tourism is one of Ireland's most important economic sectors and has significant potential to play a further role in Ireland's economic renewal. In 2015, tourism was responsible for overseas earnings of €4.208 billion (excluding carrier receipts – airfares and ferry costs). Combining the data from the domestic market and international visitors, total tourism revenue for the economy in 2015 was around €7.0609 billion. The tourism sector supports 143,500 jobs in the accommodation and food sector alone, and overall employment in tourism is estimated to be in the region of 205,000. Tourism also shapes Ireland’s image and attractiveness as a place to live, work and invest.

Data from the Central Statistics Office for 2015 show that overall visits to Ireland in 2015 rose by 13.7% (8.645 million trips). Core tourism visits grew strongly with holiday trips up 20.4% and business trips up 12.3%. Visits to friends and relatives in Ireland rose by 4%. Spending by visitors to Ireland also increased in 2015, with total tourism and travel earnings from overseas visitors (incl. fares) growing by 17.3% to €5.530 billion.”

According to Failte Ireland, 2016 was a record year for overseas visitors.  Both domestic and international tourism in Ireland are increasing

Within the tourism sector, hiking/walking are major sectors of the tourist economy.  The popularity of cycling tourism in Ireland is rising quickly both domestically and internationally.

The two tables below (from Failte Ireland statistical reports) show that 23% of domestic tourists participate in walking, and among overseas tourists hiking/walking was by far the most popular active pursuit.  While it is not clear how much of this walking is long distance walking utilizing national long-distance trails and how much is day hiking, walking is nevertheless a major tourism component for Ireland.

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### Overseas tourism data from 2015 from Failte Ireland:

1. What activities did they engage in? Overseas Participants (000s)

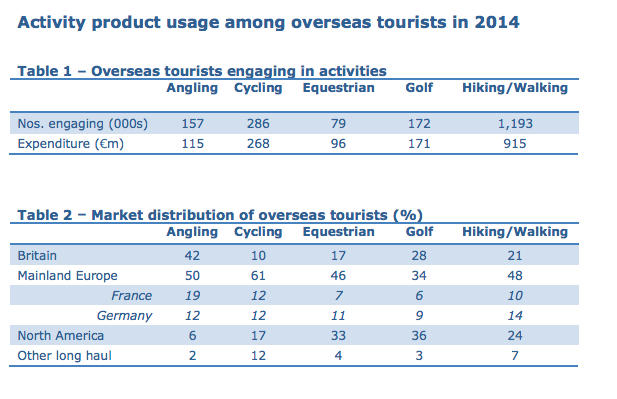
* Hiking/cross country walking 1,674
* Cycling 355
* Golf 198
* Angling 163
* Equestrian 75

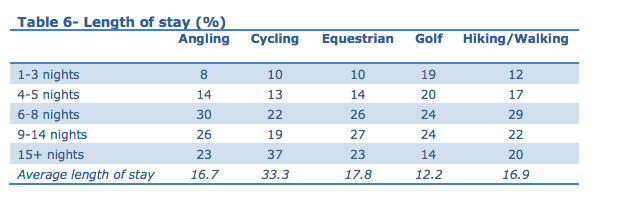
A 2013 Failte Ireland Market Research Report on Walking highlighted these facts:

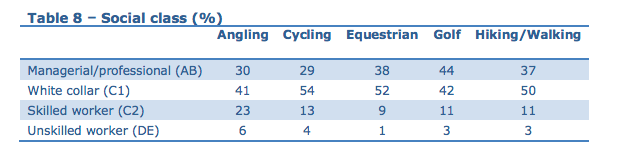
* In 2011 740,000 overseas visitors claim to have gone hiking/cross country walking, spending approximately Euro 649,000,000. [note: compare that with the number of overseas participants participating in walking in 2015: 1,674,000.  Has it really doubled in 4 years!?];
* The greatest potential for increased walkers from abroad is in Germany, France, Britain and the Netherlands (in that order);
* Walking offers the highest potential of any activity for Ireland for both domestic and overseas markets;
* Among those who are aware, Ireland’s walking offering is well rated, as all attributes attract high proportions of “excellent” or “good”;
* What can be seen across all activities is that beautiful landscape is the main reason for coming to Ireland;
* Activity-doers on the whole appear to think destination first and then consider whether it would be good to do a particular activity there.

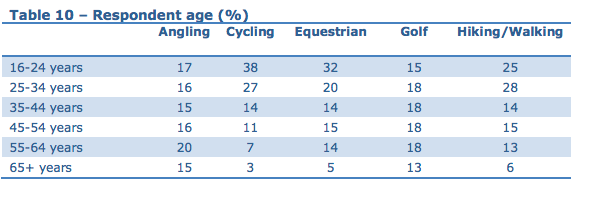
This last point does not ring true to me as a walker.  Serious walkers tend to prepare and to seek walks that they can be sure will be able to provide them a quality experience.  This statement seems to reinforce my perception that the majority of the walking tourists counted by Failte Ireland are casual day hikers and not long distance walkers.

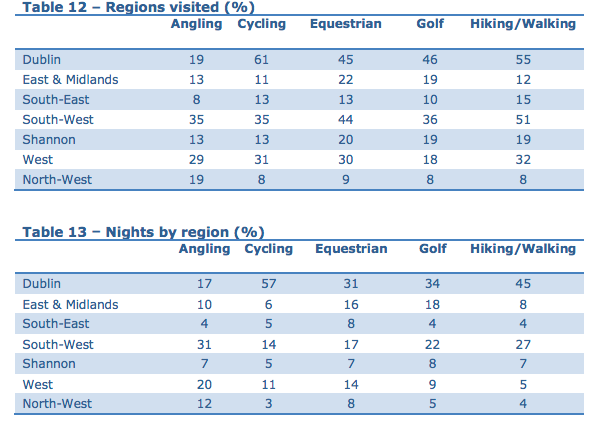
Failte Ireland’s March 2016 report “Activity product usage among overseas tourists in 2014”  provides 26 tables depicting the demographic profile of overseas tourists.  Below are some of the key tables from this report:

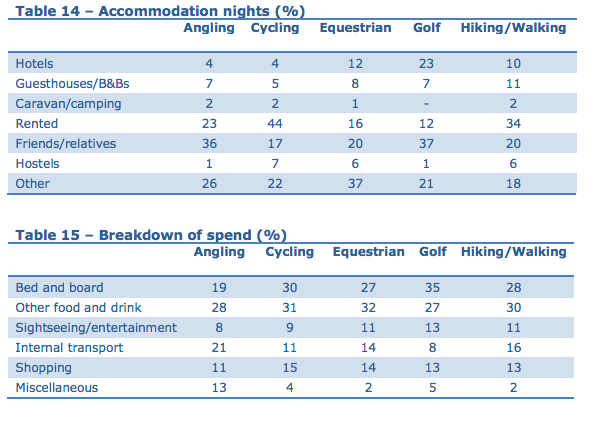












With my lack of knowledge of the tourism industry, I do not know how to interpret these data.  And again, the picture is complicated by the fact that the definition of Walking/Hiking appears to include everything from walking for an hour on a trail near a cultural site to a week-long hillwalking holiday on one of the National Waymarked Ways.  However, the approach of Failte Ireland in developing “honeypot trail networks” (locations where the tourist may choose among a number of trials of differing duration and skill levels) makes sense in that tourist tastes and abilities are so various in the walking arena.  “Something for everyone” appears to be a good trails formula in a nation with such a big tourism sector.

The following quote from the Executive Summary of a consultant’s report for Coillte Ireland titled “Economic Value of Trails and Forest Recreation” (2005) offers another perspective on economic impact, this from before the recession:

**Economic Value of Trails and Forest Recreation**

The direct economic expenditure by Irish trail users on items such as food, drink, accommodation and trail equipment was found to be €307 mn annually, while the non-market value of trails was found to be €95 mn. The direct economic impact of forest recreation by Irish residents is estimated to be €268 mn, while the non-market value of forest recreation is estimated at €97 mn Given that about 50% of all off-road National Waymarked Ways are on Coillte property it is evident that there would be some overlap in the value generated by forest recreation and trails and the two therefore cannot be added to provide a total combined value. Developed recreational trails and forest infrastructure are an integral part of the walking tourism product in Ireland. Fáilte Ireland data indicate that overseas visitors who engaged in walking in Ireland in 2003, spent an average of €673 while here. This study’s on-site survey validated this information and found that overseas walking visitors expected to spend €787 during their visit to Ireland in 2005. Fáilte Ireland estimate that about 260,000 overseas tourists engaged in hiking/hillwalking in Ireland in 2004. Total expenditure by these visitors was just under €138 mn1 . Fáilte Ireland data also show that cycling tourism is worth about €80 mn annually to the Irish economy

From all accounts it seems the forecast is for increased popularity in the walking tourism sector. Ireland has tremendous assets in developing its walking tourism sector.  These include:

* a beautiful and varied landscape,
* good trail infrastructure, with trails of various types
* a large number of B&B’s, pubs, restaurants, and guest houses, many of which are proximate to established walking trails,
* friendly people and a tradition of hospitality, and
* proximity to continental Europe where people are crazy about walking.

I wish I had better insight into the economic impact of walking tourism, but the bottom line is that it is clearly recognized as a major tourism sector.  Many people I spoke with expressed the opinion that the tourism potential is greater than is currently being realized.  Several Irish walkers expressed concern that Failte Ireland’s promotion of walking is getting out ahead of the nation’s ability to maintain its infrastructure and improve its offerings to meet increased demand.  Perhaps improvement in the economy will allow Ireland to return to investing in walking infrastructure as a means of increasing tourist revenues from this very strong sector.

# Contemporary walking culture in Ireland

Historically walking was associated in Ireland with poverty and not something folks would choose to do for fun.  Recreational walking developed rather rapidly beginning in the 1960’s.  The slow spread of a modest level of prosperity and financial security finally gave the average person some time off from work on the weekends, enough disposable income to get away for a day or a weekend, and gradually, the means to purchase a car and explore the countryside more widely.  Slowly, rural to urban emigration began to loosen the deep association in Irish culture of walking with poverty.

Today hillwalking is an important “sport” in Ireland.   Mountaineering Ireland, part of the Irish Sports Council, is a robust non-governmental organization with a membership of 1,500 citizens and another 10,000 + members through 184 affiliated walking clubs nationwide.  Their quarterly magazine *Mountain Log*, received by members of all hillwalking clubs, is a terrific resource for walkers.

These clubs form the nucleus of a distributed national culture of hillwalking.  They range in size from very small to up to 700 members.  Mountaineering Ireland provides a range of support for hillwalkers, including insurance, publications, educational programs, a [“Club Handbook to support club growth and development, best practice and governance](http://www.mountaineering.ie/_files/20151113124444_9e4c20de.pdf)”.   These clubs conduct regular, well organized walks, often on Sunday mornings.  Hillwalking clubs are both vibrant social organizations and also strong voices for environmental protection.  Many clubs participate in sponsoring walking festivals, of which there are about 70 each year in Ireland.  The National Trails Office produced a guide to [**“Planning and Organizing Walking Festivals in Ireland”**](http://www.irishtrails.ie/Sport_Ireland_Trails/Publications/Trail_Development/) and Mountaineering Ireland has developed [**“Policy and Guidelines for Organised Events in Ireland’s Mountain Areas”**](http://www.mountaineering.ie/_files/MIEventsPolicy.pdf) to ensure these event are safe and environmentally sensitive.

Hillwalking in Ireland appears to me to be more of a club-based culture and a social opportunity than in the USA, where solitary and friend-group backpacking and hiking prevail.

The Irish focus on walking extends to health benefits through pedestrianism programs such as [Sli na Slainte](https://irishheart.ie/your-health/our-health-programmes/healthy-communities/slainte/) the Irish Heart Foundation, which has developed trails near or in population centers to promote walking for health benefits, and [Get Ireland Walking](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie/), which views walking as a continuum of opportunities ranging from walking the dog to scaling peaks and everything in between.

I have not located data on the numbers/percentage of Irish participating in hillwalking, nor on the demographic profile of hillwalkers, though I’m sure the data are available somewhere.  Anecdotally, several B&B owners I’ve talked with tell me they get far more international visitors than Irish walkers along the National Waymarked Ways.   It is not clear to me how popular long-distance walking (e.g. B&B to B&B) is among the Irish, compared with rates of participation in day-long hill walks.  Questions of affordability enter into this equation, particularly as the number of youth hostels in rural areas has diminished and as camping opportunities are comparatively limited.

# Support of long distance trails in Ireland: key players

This section identifies the organizations and businesses that play important roles in supporting and administering long distance walking in Ireland. The focus here is primarily on the operation of the 43 National Waymarked Ways.  Other categories of Irish trails are discussed in a subsequent section.

The agencies most directly with supporting the National Waymarked Ways are described in the following three sections, covering national (federal) agencies, international agencies, and local governmental and non-governmental entities.  A summary of the economics of the system of National Waymarked Ways is attempted in a subsequent section of this report.

National statutory and international support for long distance walking (LDW**)**

**State (i.e. Federal) government agencies**

### National Trails Office (NTO)

The [**National Trails Office**](http://www.irishtrails.ie) was created “to create a world-class trails network in Ireland” according to Minister John O’Donoghue, Minister for Arts, Spot and Tourism at the time of its launch.  The remit of the NTO is outlined on their website as follows:

The National Trails Office was established in 2007 by the Irish Sports Council to coordinate and drive the implementation of an Irish Trails Strategy, and to promote the use of recreational trails in Ireland.  National Trails Office maintains a [**National Trails Register**](http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/National_Trails_Register/) in conjunction with a number of partner agencies and bodies, promotes standards and good practice for trail development, supports new trail initiatives and also undertakes promotional work aimed at increasing the awareness and usage of recreational trails in Ireland.

Funded through the Irish Sports Council, the NTO has a staff of xx and performs the following core functions:

* Maintains active partnerships in trails planning, management and development with a organizations such as: Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Department of environment, Community and Local Government, Coillte – the Irish State Forestry Company, Failte Ireland – the Irish Tourism Development Authority, Waterways Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and Irish Local Development Network.
* Maintains the National Trails Register denoting over 785 trails at 5 different levels of development.
* Inspects walking and cycling trails annually (through a network of trained contractors) to certify their qualification for listing on the National Trails Register, and, in the case of National Waymarked Ways, their qualification to continue in the Walks Scheme.
* Develops a series of practical publications of interest to those planning and managing walking, cycling, and waterway trails.  These publications, along with criteria and registration materials for the National Trails Register, are included on their website: [**http://www.irishtrails.ie/National\_Trails\_Office/Publications/Trail\_Development/**](http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development/)
* The [**National Trails Advisory Committee**](http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/National_Trails_Advisory_Committee_NTAC_/) comprises representatives from a number of organizations and meets regularly to oversee the implementation of the [**Irish Trails Strategy**](http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Irish_Trails_Strategy/), advise NTO, and “harmonize certain elements of trail provision”.
* Offers a series of short courses on trails development, management and promotion.
* Promotion of walking and trails through a variety of activities, including cooperating in the health promotion campaign “Get Ireland Walking”, and maintaining an App and Facebook page with news and information.   “[**Irish Trails App**](http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Irish%20Trails%20App/)” provides locational, wayfinding, and other information on about 600 trails nationally.

**Observations on NTO:** The NTO’s Irish Trails Strategy was launched just before the recession and now it seems the optimism, political support, and energy that precipitated its 2007 launch has not yet been regained in the wake of devastating economic retrenchment and a gradual recovery.  The NTO continues to perform its basic functions, to operate credibly as the nation’s trails leader, and to cooperate widely in trail development and promotion.  But its strategic plan is out of date and its capacity is diminished.

Great progress has been made under strained circumstances since 2007, and Ireland is holding its own in trail development.  However, it may be that a renewed vision, an energetic and optimistic new era of trail development, and expanded capacity, may have to await the muster of a new round of political will and renewed inter-agency coordination and cooperation to fulfill Ireland’s 2007 dream of a world-class trails system.

### Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

This agency is the primary source of funding for management and operation of National Waymarked Ways and other priority trails approved by the National Trails Office.  It provides funds for payments to landowners (primarily farmers) through the[**Walks Scheme**](http://www.environ.ie/community/rural-development/walks-scheme/walks-scheme) and it funds for the salaries of nation’s twelve Rural Recreation Officers.

***The*** [***Walks Scheme***](http://www.environ.ie/community/rural-development/walks-scheme/walks-scheme) was launched in 2008 by Eamon O Cuiv, TD, and Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.  Mr. Cuiv’s vision was for development and maintenance of a world-class trail system through a high level of cooperation among the National Trails Office (Irish Sports Council), Failte Ireland, and the Local Development Companies in each county.  Through payments to landowners for permissive access to their property, the scheme aimed to break the logjam of property rights laws and attitudes preventing Ireland from advancing a program of long distance walking trails to stimulate domestic and international tourism development.

The scheme provides payments for trail maintenance and development by landowners on private lands that are formally part of National Waymarked Ways and priority walks (looped walking routes and heritage walks).

On its website, the Department of the Environment provides an excellent [**brochure on the walks scheme**](http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/Community/RuralDevelopment/FileDownLoad%2C27110%2Cen.pdf).  This brochure is included as Schedule B in the “Contract for Maintenance of Walking Route”, the formal agreement between the landowner and the relevant local development partnership.  The 11 page contract spells out the purposes, expectations, payment schedule and plan of work, and requirements specific to the portion of the trail.  Each year the Rural Recreation Officer and the landowner develop an annual 5 page work plan that includes a map of the trail on the property, characteristics of the terrain and the stock along the section, specific tasks to be performed and the number of hours on each, and a total number of hours and total payment, based on the Dept. of Agriculture Food and Marine’s “Own Labour Rate” of 12.40 Euro per hour, for a maximum of 200 hours per year. Average annual payment under the walks scheme nationally, across the 1,819 landowners, is reported to be 1,110 Euros per year.  Payment is made after inspection and can be withheld for non-performance.

Annual expenditures on Walks Scheme nationally are xxxxxxx

John Carney of the Rural Recreation Section of the Dept. of Environment reports that there has been nearly 100% renewal of Walks Scheme contracts, occasioning little trail-rerouting on the Waymarked Ways.  There are few reported problems with non-performance.  The regular communication between the RRO’s and the farmers through the program is said to have produced greater understanding and cooperation in meeting the aims of trail and tourism development.  Both farmers and RRO’s commented that some farmers in the scheme have become “trail ambassadors”, interacting with walkers and relating information about the farm, the region, and its traditions and lore.

**Observations on the Walks Scheme:**  A few people commented that agreeing to payments for rights of way through this program has put the nation on a slippery slope and has reinforced the “selfish” attitudes of farmers about property rights.  However most people I spoke with strongly support the program and view it as highly successful.  It was certainly key to establishing 43 National Waymarked Ways 46 Looped Walks, and 32 Heritage Walks. Since the Walks Scheme was closed to new trails in 2010 due to the economic recession, trail development has slowed considerably.  The closing of the Walks Scheme in 2010 leaves Ireland scrambling to find new ways to incentivize farmers to allow trails to pass through their land.

The Rural Recreation Officers (RRO) are central to the administration and success of the Walks Scheme and the system of National Waymarked Ways.  The RRO positions established in 2007 and in place today were intended to be the first twelve in an initiative to place one RRO in each county.  The responsibilities of the twelve RROs include (modified slightly from Department of Environment website):

* The implementation of the [National Countryside Recreation Strategy (NCRS) (pdf, 1,195kb)](http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Community/RuralDevelopment/FileDownLoad%2C27107%2Cen.pdf)
* The work associated with the National Walks Scheme, including managing relations with landowners, coordinating trail maintenance, way-marking, and assisting in local conservation efforts.
* Overseeing work on the maintenance, upgrade and re-routing of trails.
* Assisting Fáilte Ireland and localities in the development, marketing and promotion of trails and key walking destinations.
* Work with local communities in developing trails and assisting in organising walking festivals and other events.
* Implementation of the ‘Leave No Trace’ principles in trail use. .

Collectively the RROs have negotiated contracts with about 1,900 landowners.  A key part of their jobs is to maintain good working relationships with the landowners and with the communities through which the trails pass.   The economic development spinoff from this activity over nearly a decade is significant.  The Dept. of Environment’s web site lists the following impacts from the work of the RROs:

* The leveraging of additional jobs in the accommodation sector.
* The development of new business ventures such as bike hire and coffee shops, including additional employment in the supply of outdoor recreational equipment and services.
* A marked growth in registered walking clubs.
* A significant increase in the number and duration of walking festivals which generate additional bed nights in small villages and the wider rural area.
* Maintenance payments to landholders for trail development, generating an income stream for rural communities of some 5.4m euro over a 4 year period.
* An injection of some 0.6m euro into the local economy, over the same period, as a result of expenditure on materials for the maintenance of trails.

Annual expenditures on the RROs……

**Observations on Rural Recreation Officers:**

* The concept of RRO was apparently borrowed from Scotland.
* I was fortunate to talk with four RROs, including 3 of the longest-serving RROs in Ireland.  They were the best source of local, on-the-ground information and perspective on long distance walking in Ireland.  More than anyone else involved with LDW, they are the folks make the trails successful and that integrate trails into the communities through which they pass.
* They do this by working hands-on, day-to-day with a wide range of local individuals and organizations.  The RROs I met appear to be trusted individuals in their communities and to have developed strong rapport locally.  Their jobs are highly public, complex and multi-faceted, and require remarkable tact and diplomacy as well as practical skills.
* They are grateful to be located in the non-political Local Development Companies, and not under the County Councils, as the LDC’s do not carry the political baggage of the Council’s and are viewed as neutral entities by citizens.
* One of the challenges is to help communities strike the right balance between economic development and conservation of the natural environment and other essential qualities that draw tourists.
* The remit of the RROs is continually growing as they become involved with new initiatives including cycling paths or greenways, water trails or blue-ways, and an ever-increasing range of community engagement, conservation initiatives, and tourism promotion activities.
* Helen Lawless has published interviews of some of the RROs in *Irish Mountain Log*.

### Comhairle na Tuaithe (CNT)

Established in 2004 by Eamonn O Cuiv, this “quango” (Wikipedia: “a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation is an organisation to which a government has devolved power”) was established to address three priority areas in guiding the development of rural tourism:

* access to the countryside (i.e. issues around public rights of way, liability insurance, etc.)
* developing a countryside code, and
* developing a countryside recreation strategy

CNT operates within the Department of the Environment, Community, and Local Government, and its work is related to and supported by the Rural Recreation Section (see above), which administers the Walks Scheme and funds the RROs.  Its 2006 [National Countryside Recreation Strategy](http://www.environ.ie/community/rural-development/national-countryside-recreation-strategy/national-countryside) puts forward a set of submissions received and an ambitious, if vague, set of objectives to implement the strategy.

In relation to walking tourism, CNT’s “Strategy” document was developed at the time when the NTO was developing its strategic plan, Failte Ireland was deeply involved in promoting walking tourism, and the Irish economy was booming.   Since that time the momentum has waned around the work in developing infrastructure and policy/legal structures to support LDW.

A number of people I talked with were critical of CNT for its lack of significant progress in advancing the work of access to the countryside and implementing their recreation strategy. CNT’s attempts to cohere a consensus approach on access issues have not been successful in the eyes of the walking community.  Some feel the distributed nature of the CNT enterprise and the strong influence of farming organizations has resulted in gridlock and maintenance of a demoralizing status quo.  The often strident but ever cogent Roger Garland of Keep Ireland Open, feels, for example that CNT has taken much too long in its efforts to develop new approaches to recreational access and has failed to initiate ideas for much-needed legislative reform.  Apparently CNT is currently under review and it is possible a renewed initiative to advance the aims of countryside recreational development will emerge from this review process.

Nevertheless, CNT’s Mountain Access Scheme is a commendable initiative.  One impetus for establishment of CNT was ongoing conflict regarding conservation and rights of access for walkers in certain key uplands areas.   To address this challenge CNT developed its Mountain Access Scheme, which has pilots in two regions, Mount Brandon and the MacGillicuddy Reeks (the latter is discussed in more detail later in this report).

Mountaineering Ireland has been active with CNT and in particular with its efforts regarding its Mountain Access Scheme. MI’s website provides a succinct summary of the program and its potential:

By formally agreeing access with the landowners on a mountain, producing a map showing designated access points, indemnifying the landowners, providing parking and any infrastructure required to sustain recreational use, the Mountain Access Scheme sets out to manage recreational enjoyment of mountain areas in a way that minimises inconvenience for landowners and local residents, and means that use of the area can be promoted with clarity and confidence.

The Mountain Access Scheme is a different proposition to a waymarked walking route. The scheme should not involve the development or marking of trails on the mountain, other than where trail repair or construction is required to avoid environmental damage.  As these are mountain areas, recreational users are expected to be appropriately skilled and equipped to look after themselves……….

Comhairle na Tuaithe’s Mountain Access Scheme potentially provides a mechanism to acknowledge land ownership, and to prevent frustrations growing into problems, while at the same time meeting the reasonable expectations of walkers with regard to access. One of MI’s priorities in our engagement with Comhairle is the successful completion of these pilots and extension of the scheme to other mountain areas.

The goal of developing new approaches to landowners and access rights, outside the closed Walks Scheme, is certainly commendable.  And the focus on natural areas that do not have waymarked trails is useful.

### Failte Ireland

The national tourism department has been involved for over a decade in actively promoting Ireland as an international tourism destination for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities, including walking.

Before the recession Failte Ireland’s *National Looped Walks Initiative* cooperated with NTO, Department of the Environment (CNT, RROs), Coillte, local groups, and landowners to develop over 200 national looped walks by 2010.  These are sited in every county in Ireland.  These circular walks are aimed at “occasional walkers” – domestic and international tourists – whose vacation is not necessarily a full-on walking vacation.  As part of their touring, many tourists enjoy walking forays of 1.5 – 4.5 hours to enjoy the landscape and heritage.   The program is outlined in Failte Ireland’s publication [**Looped Walks Key Criteria**](http://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Your_Business/3_Marketing_Toolkit/6_Food_Tourism/7_Hiking_Walking/Loop-Walks-Key-Criteria.pdf).  FI also developed a “Walkers Welcome” program to certify and brand B&B’s as walker friendly.  Both these program are currently inactive.

Since the recession Failte Ireland has been less directly involved with the development of walking trails and with the tourism infrastructure specifically around walking.  But FI continues to actively promote walking tourism through its web sites and a range of maps and brochures, and conducts valuable work in data gathering and analysis.

The [**Research-Insights**](http://www.failteireland.ie/Research-Insights.aspx) portion of the FI website is a trove of statistical reports, sector analyses, briefing papers, etc. on all aspects of tourism in Ireland and its international context.  Careful searching of this site yields some useful data on walking tourism, but the precise meaning of these data is, to me, often ambiguous (i.e. the nature and extent of the walking experience is unclear, with visits that included a day hike seemingly lumped in with walking vacations).  Nevertheless this is an invaluable service to folks involved in the rural recreation sector.  For example most of the data used in the section above on Tourism and Economic Impact was derived from FI research.

Many people expressed concern that there was no provision made for trail maintenance on the National Looped Walks and many of these trails are now in need of substantial work.  Indeed, several people opined that FI’s promotion of walking, especially internationally, is now way ahead of the reality on the ground in Ireland, setting tourists up for some confusion and disappointment.

My phone calls and emails to contacts in FI regarding walking were unanswered.  As a result, beyond what I could gather from published sources and comments by others, I have limited understanding of FI’s current and future plans and involvement in walking tourism.

### Heritage Council

The Irish Heritage Council’s mission is to "engage, educate and advocate to develop a wider understanding of the vital contribution that our heritage makes to our social, environmental and economic well-being."  The connection to trails and walking of this government funded but independently operated watchdog group is not entirely clear to me.  However, they do seem to get involved with trails development and historical interpretation projects,, as well as landscape strategy projects that might involve trails.  They are a grant-giving organization and some communities work with them in cultural/historical aspects of trails development.

### Coillte Ireland

This state operated forestry business, apparently the largest land owner in Ireland, and is an active player in recreation, as its website states:

We are the leading provider of outdoor recreation in Ireland with more than 3000 kilometres of trails, 260 recreation sites and 12 forest parks across the country.   We also have orienteering courses, aerial trails and tree-tops walks, set in some of the most stunning parts of the country.

Most of our facilities are open to the public free of charge.  There is a car-parking fee, which helps us to maintain picnic areas, trails and playgrounds, at some forest parks.

Coillte’s [recreation map](http://www.coillte.ie/our-forests/recreation-map/?activity=walking-trails) shows the location of its dozens of forest trails.   While this forestry business agency comes under fire from many Irish citizens for an ecologically insensitive approach to the commercialization of forest resources, Coillte appears to have a sincere interest in recreational use of the nation’s forests.  It cooperates with the National Trails Office, Failte Ireland, and many other organizations, and produces some useful publications and activities for walkers.  I did not meet with anyone from Coillte Ireland and do not have insight into their overall role in supporting long distance walking in Ireland.

## International agencies/organizations

Involvement of international agencies in LDW in Ireland seems to include the following players:

European Union funding through the *LEADER Programme* is targeted to support locally initiated rural development projects designed for job creation and revitalization of rural communities.   LEADER operates through local organizations; in Ireland these appear to be primarily the Local Development Councils operating at the county level.  LEADER funding in Ireland related to LDW has been significant aid in new trails development, walking tourism-related training and activity, and conservation initiatives.  The Rural Recreation Officers often work with community organizations to secure LEADER grants to advance local LDW-related aims.  How do I determine the extent of funding that has been applied to LDW in Ireland?

EU funding through *Interreg* is used to support cross-border cooperation among national, regional and local entities within the EU.  I am not clear about whether *Interreg* funding has been used for walking-related tourism or other activity in Ireland.

European Ramblers Association is responsible for the international E8 trail, which extends from Ireland to Istanbul.  The Irish portion incorporates a number of the National Waymarked Ways, including parts of the Wicklow Way, South Leinster Way, Munster Way, Blackwater Way, Kerry Way, and Beara Way.  The cooperation between European Ramblers Association and Ireland is through the NTO.

[World Trails Network](http://worldtrailsnetwork.org/)is a nascent international organization of trails professionals.  RRO Eoin Hogan is working with trail developers in Greece to effect an Ireland/Greece trails partnership through the WTN’s program of [**Friendship Trails**](http://worldtrailsnetwork.org/trails/friendship-trails/).  It seems to me there is great potential for Ireland to partner with other world-class trail systems as both a form of marketing/promotion, and professional engagement internationally.

[International Appalachian Trail](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Appalachian_Trail)is under development to eventually traverse the remains of the former Central Pangean Mountains, which broke apart with the supercontinent of Pangea more than 250,000,000 million years ago.  The portion through Ireland runs from Slieve League in Donegal, through the Blue Stack Mountains, and into Northern Ireland, where it joins with the Ulster Way, passes through the Giant’s Causeway, and through County Antrim.

In the Republic of Ireland, RRO in the Bluestacks, Inga Bock, is very involved with the development of the IAT, as are Cormac MacDonnell of the NTO and Mark Flagler of [**Flagler Films**](http://www.flaglerfilms.com/)**.**  In Northern Ireland,  WalkingNI is deeply involved with IAT development and has a very helpful website on the [**IAT Ulster-Ireland**](http://www.walkni.com/iat/).  The next international meeting of the IAT will be hosted in Northern Ireland in September 2016.

Interestingly, the IAT is on track to finally realize one of the original dreams of those who initiated the National Waymarked Ways in Ireland: connecting the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland, via the Ulster Way, with a long distance path.

## Non-governmental organizations

Mountaineering Ireland (MI) is a highly active and respected advocacy and educational organization.  It is one of several “National Governing Bodies” within the Irish Sports Council, which describes the functions of NGB’s as:

National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs) are identified in A New Era for Sport as key delivery agencies for the Council's strategic priorities. The Council works in partnership with NGBs to make them more effective in developing their sport and servicing the needs of their members. The Irish Sports Council sees NGBs contributing to the achievement of our vision mainly through the "developing abilities" and "world class" strategies, although some also have the resources to contribute to local participation initiatives.

With their member clubs and affiliates, NGBs organise and administer most of the organised sport in Ireland; they train and deploy coaches; they organise representative level sport; and they provide sporting opportunities and pathways leading from local sport to national and international competition. Core funding is used to support NGBs in the areas of Strategic Planning, Administration; Information technology; Competitions; Equipment, Coaching and core activities including Code of Ethics and Anti-doping Programmes.

Founded in 1971 with a primary focus on mountaineering, Mountaineering Ireland, has steadily expanded its focus to fully embrace hillwalking, and has played a key role in stimulating and supporting the development of a strong culture of walking in Ireland.  MI has grown to about 1,500 individual members, and between 9,000 and 10,000 members through the approximately 184 affiliated clubs.

Apparently there is sentiment among some walkers that MI ignored “mere” hillwalkers for many years, until it realized that there was no over-reaching organization for walkers, and that by taking that position it could increase its national stature.

It’s official Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Objectives (2015) nicely summarize its purposes:

**Mission**

Mountaineering Ireland exists to represent and support the walkers and climbers of Ireland and to be a voice for the sustainable use of Ireland’s mountains and all the places (coastline, crags, forests) we use.

**Vision**

For all walkers and climbers to:

* enjoy secure and responsible access to Ireland’s mountains and the other places we use in Ireland; and
* have the opportunity to improve their skills, to explore, to be adventurous and to maximise their potential within our sport.

**Values**

* Responsibility – To take personal responsibility for our actions. To foster the development of personal skills for clubs, groups and individuals.
* Respect – To respect the wonderful, but fragile, environment that we enjoy and to be a strong voice its protection.
* Partnership – To recognise that relationships and trust are vital within our activities and in helping realise our vision.
* Recreation and well-being - To recognise and promote the contribution our sport makes to the physical and mental health of participants.

**Strategic Objectives**

Based on our Mission, Values and Vision, we have identified 7 Strategic Objectives. Namely:

* To represent the interests of walkers and climbers;
* To be the voice for Ireland’s mountains, to protect and encourage responsible and sustainable use of the mountain environment;
* To improve and secure on-going access to Ireland’s mountains and the other places we use in Ireland;
* To ensure high standards in mountain training and to support skills development for our members;
* To support and promote all age groups, especially youth, in all aspects of mountaineering;
* To provide a talent development pathway to high performance;
* To promote a spirit of adventure and self-reliance.

Perusing the MI [**Strategic Development Plan 2014-2017**](http://www.mountaineering.ie/_files/2014101410455_e78883fb.pdf) and its [**website**](http://www.mountaineering.ie/default.aspx) gives one a sense of the remarkable range of its vibrant portfolio of activities, publications, policies, and programs conducted on behalf of walkers and mountaineers in Ireland.

Following are the MI activities frequently mentioned in my work and that interested me most:

* MI is a vigilant and energetic advocate for responsible access to the countryside by walkers, and for environmental protection.  Under the energetic leadership of Helen Lawless, MI’s Hillwalking, Access and Conservation Officer, the organization produces thoughtful policy and position papers on legal issues, manages an [Environmental Defense Fund](http://www.mountaineering.ie/accessandenvironment/EnvironmentalDefenceFund/default.aspx), advocates the adoption of “Leave No Trace” principles, and produces scientifically accurate popular and more technical publications on flora, fauna, geology, and a wide range of environmental challenges.
* MI does an excellent job of informing the membership and the public about issues relating to walking, mountaineering and uplands conservation through the publication (quarterly since 1988) of the *Irish Mountain Log* (and its antecedent), and a number of leaflets.
* In addition to their current value, these publications, along with MI’s library collection, constitute a key historical resource in understanding the development of walking in Ireland.
* MI has a vigorous program of support for walking clubs.  This includes leadership and organizational training, work with club Environmental Officers, and publications.
* training and other forms of support for walking clubs, as well as training resources for individual skill development for adults and youth.
* Support for community management structures that seek to strike the proper balance among goals of opening access to countryside for outdoor recreation, attendant economic development, environmental protection, and preservation of traditional farming methods.  Examples include MI’s ongoing work with entities such as the Wicklow Uplands Council, and the Mountain Access Scheme of Comharie na Tuaithe, with its pilot programs in Kerry (MacGillicuddy Reeks Mountain Access Program), and Bin Shlebhe (Mount Gable) in Connemara.

**Observations on Mountaineering Ireland:**It is hard to overstate the importance of MI in the development of walking culture in Ireland.  Its support of walking clubs, including the insurance scheme, seems to be a major factor in the development of a robust walking culture in Ireland.  The organization is highly respected and influential in recreation and conservation circles, and deeply involved in seemingly every aspect of mountaineering and hillwalking in Ireland.  For Ireland it performs the functions of groups similar to those of the Sierra Club and Appalachian Mountain Clubs in USA.  For such a comparatively small organization, its efforts to advocate for access and conservation and its work in training and talent development are particularly impressive.

### [Mountain Rescue Ireland](http://www.mountainrescue.ie/)

The Irish Mountain Rescue Association is a private, charitable organization that provides emergency assistance response in mountainous and upland regions throughout the country.  It is an all-volunteer organization that operates 24x7x365 through 12 teams spread around the nation.  MRI teams are largely dependent on local fundraising, but seems MRI receives limited support from the government, but I’m not clear on the finances.

In case of emergency one calls 999 or 112 and is connected with the local Garda in the South (police) or Coast Guard in the North.  MRI teams cooperate with local police, Coast Guard and other groups.  The National Search and Rescue Dog Association, providing air-scented search and rescue service, is a member of MRI.

Unlike some other European nations, in mountain rescues in Ireland there is no charge to the person rescued. The number of rescues needed annually seems to be on the rise, as it is in many nations, with increasing numbers of unprepared hikers on the trails.

Three local MRI teams and their operations are briefly described in each of the three Case Studies in this report.

### [Mountain Meitheal/Path Savers](http://mountainmeitheal.ie/)

This voluntary organization undertakes trail-building, shelter construction, and conservation projects to address problems resulting from trail over-use, to reduce pressure on the landscape, and to preserve habitat.  The group is funded entirely by donations.  Founded in 2002, Mountain Meithal’s mission statement is:

Mountain Meitheal undertakes projects to protect and conserve mountain and forest areas in Ireland. We aim to counteract the pressures which are evident on our fragile landscape by building and maintaining trails which are sympathetic to the surrounding countryside. We promote sustainable recreation by encouraging personal responsibility and awareness.

“Meitheal” is the Irish word for a workgroup usually made up of volunteers who come together to work on a project for the common good or to benefit the community.

With branches in Dublin/Wicklow, where the organization began, and in the Southeast, MM holds work days every two weeks and it also hosts week long work camps in the summer.  Its approximately 75 paid members are joined in their work by many more volunteers who are not formal members.  Collectively they have contributed over 22,716 hours of work since 2006.  Volunteers see their work as payback for the enjoyment of trails.  Their three Adirondack style shelters on the Wicklow Way and two in the Wild Nephins, perhaps their signature projects, are used by backpackers.  MM works closely with land owners, Rural Recreation Officers, Coillte, and the National Park Service.

The group has won international awards for their work and maintains an international perspective and connections.  In 2011 eight MM volunteers worked with Appalachian Mountain Club volunteers in Maine on a connector trail.  MM publishes a Trail Construction Handbook.

### [Mountain Views](http://mountainviews.ie/summit/):

This truly remarkable online community and set of resources about Irish mountains and mountaineering is briefly described on the Mountaineering Ireland website:

MountainViews.ie started in 2002 as a website to provide useful information about all of Ireland’s hills and mountains.  The site provides information about the summits, their locations, their name origins etc.  Try the site and find over 6000 comments on over 1000 summits with trip reports and information on parking, access, points of interest and photos.  Beyond statistics find shared interest expressed in the stories of other hill-walkers and of the summits they have climbed.

While documenting the summits continues, [MountainViews](http://mountainviews.ie/summit/296/) now also provides a way for users to share routes they have tried in the hills and modern mapping to visualise summits, roads, towns and walking routes in one place for planning purposes.  Further development for the sharing of information and hillwalking culture is envisaged into the future.

You are invited to add your stories or routes to the website.   Your participation helps all. You will be part of the group of 1000 community members that have made at least one contribution.

MountainViews also promotes summiteering (visiting each summit on a list) as an important and thriving discipline of hillwalking. While only a fraction of the membership participate in this often lifelong challenge this still amounts to over 1500 members. You can mark off which summits you have climbed and compare your progress.

MountainViews has brought together an extensive online community of like-minded people some creating material for a monthly newsletter going out to 12000 email addresses.  In-person activities, are coordinated by a committee and include occasional indoor and outdoor meets and a book published in 2013:  A Guide to Ireland’s Mountain Summits” through Collins Press.  The last mentioned prints a number of the lists that MountainViews has such as the “Vandeleur-Lynam” list of 600m summits and the “Arderin” list of 500m.   There are also shorter lists such as the “County Highpoints”.  The book includes over 80 photographs and background to the lists.

In short visit MountainViews.ie to find an already large and evolving community resource for hillwalkers in Ireland.  Find a wide range of information for free, wider than in any other single place.  Use its hillwalking resources and inspiration for yourself, a small group or your club.

Hill Walking in Ireland: <http://www.simonstewart.ie/> a valuable compilation of resources and links by the prodigious Simon Stewart!

### [Irish Uplands Forum](https://irishuplandsforum.org/)

The purpose of this estimable organization is summarized   in their [strategic plan](http://irishuplandsforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IUF-Statement-of-Strategy-2016_2020-Final_Oct2016.pdf) as:

**What is the Irish Uplands Forum?** The Irish Upland Forum (IUF) is a voluntary body established in 1995, to assist upland communities to face the many economic, social and environmental challenges arising in the upland districts of Ireland. Its members include farmers, recreational users, ecologists, tourism and other countryside service providers who represent those who live, work or recreate in the Irish Uplands. The primary focus of IUF is the pursuit of a partnership approach to sustainable upland management of upland areas and to support upland community groups to address local challenges.

This group’s policy and training work grows out of the vision of Prof. Adrian Phillips (whose papers I was not able to locate in my hurried attempts) and the pioneering work of the Wicklow Uplands Council, which is described in my [Wicklow Way Case Study](https://www.hut2hut.info/wicklow-way-case-study/) and [profile of Sean Byrne](https://www.hut2hut.info/sean-byrne-wicklow-farmer-host-to-walkers-and-uplands-advocate/).

Essentially, their work is in bringing together the disparate stake-holders in uplands communities to articulate and pursue sustainable economic development while preserving the fragile ecology and lifestyle/traditions of upland communities.  They do this through advocacy, research, community-building and partnerships with local organizations, and training and outreach programs.  This noble effort presents a model well worth consideration by rural communities in USA.

### [Keep Ireland Open](http://www.keepirelandopen.org/)

An advocacy group for access to the Irish countryside, KIO is thought by some in Ireland to be too militant, and by others to be an important voice of reason that must be heard.  It operates in partnership with a number of organizations in Ireland, lobbying for legislation to give recreational users the right to access to the countryside.  It is described in Wikipedia:

**Keep Ireland Open** is a voluntary campaign organisation established to promote access to the Irish countryside and walkways. Founded in 1994, its current chairman is former [Green Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Party_(Ireland)) [TD](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teachtai_Dala), [Roger Garland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Garland). The group believes Irish legislation protecting [rights-of-way](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rights-of-way) and access to recreational use of land is inadequate and minimal. It consists of combination of individual members and various outdoors and environmental groups; including the [Irish Ramblers](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Irish_Ramblers&action=edit&redlink=1), [An Óige](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_%C3%93ige), all of the Scout and Guide Associations, the [United Farmers Association](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=United_Farmers_Association_(Ireland)&action=edit&redlink=1), [Irish Wildlife Trust](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Irish_Wildlife_Trust&action=edit&redlink=1), [Association of Irish Riding Clubs](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Association_of_Irish_Riding_Clubs&action=edit&redlink=1), Federation of Local History Society and numerous other walking groups. It claims that the [Republic of Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland) has one of the poorest records of protecting walking routes in [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe) and that it is heavily influenced by farmers' lobby groups that resist further legislation. The organisation states freedom to roam over rough grazing land, a network of well-maintained rights-of-way in lowland areas and minimisation of barbed-wire fencing in mountain areas, as its aspirations. Keep Ireland Open has also been involved in several individual access disputes around the country, in [Wicklow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Wicklow), [Cork](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Cork), [Sligo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Sligo), [Donegal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donegal) and many other areas. These include groups such as the [Free the Old Head of Kinsale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_the_Old_Head_of_Kinsale) campaign which campaign actively for restoration of public access where it was previously enjoyed.

### [Leave No Trace Ireland](http://www.leavenotraceireland.org/)

This is Ireland’s agency of an international network of Leave No Trace organizations.  On its website LNTI describes itself as:

This partner driven organisation teaches people of all ages how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly, and is the most widely accepted outdoor ethics programme in Ireland. Through relevant and targeted education, research and outreach, Leave No Trace ensures the long-term health of our natural world. In its simplest form, Leave No Trace is about making good decisions to protect the world around you - the world we all enjoy. Do your part to pass our nation’s heritage of outdoor recreation to future generations by joining Leave No Trace Ireland.

**Mission**

Leave No Trace Ireland inspires responsible use of the outdoors through partnerships, research and education. It teaches people how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly.

Their important work in partnerships towards developing a coherent environmental ethos for outdoor recreation in Ireland is outlined in their [Strategic Plan 2016-2021](http://www.leavenotraceireland.org/sites/default/files/news/Strategic%20Plan.pdf).

# Commercial entities

I did not use any of the tour operators, but spoke with quite a few international visitors (mostly European) who did.  Most of the folks I spoke with were using self-guided tour packages rather than guided tours.  They were happy with the service and willing to pay the extra for having all the planning work done for them.  A number of people commented that it is hard to get the information you need to plan a trip from the existing websites and guides, and that it feels much easier and safer to book through a company.  As the number of guide books increases and as the long distance routes improve their websites it may become easier for folks to plan their own trips.

Following is a list of the companies I heard about:

* Absolute Escapes
* Celtic Nature Walking Holidays
* Footfalls Walking Holidays
* Hillwalk Tours
* Hilltop Treks
* Ireland Walk Hike Bike
* Pilgrims Path
* Tailor-Made Tours
* Wonderful Ireland

# Accommodations

A striking feature of the Waymarked Ways is the availability of accommodations, generally about every 8-10 miles.    This makes the system of Waymarked Ways accessible to walkers of a wide range of abilities.  It also supports what is essentially a “front country” trail infrastructure, in American parlance.  In a this comparatively small nation the trails are not far from population centers; and the roads and public transportation are good.  Further, the Irish are a friendly people and they are known for providing good hospitality.  The national trails infrastructure has benefitted from this tradition and from the pre-existing accommodations infrastructure.

Many of the B&B’s, pubs and hotels predated the establishment of the nationally designated trails, while others were developed in response to real or anticipated demand. In general it seems that accommodations follows trail development; it is difficult to do them in tandem.  In terms of accommodations and trail planning, historically it seems there has been an assumption that accommodations would gradually be developed to supply a demonstrated need.  This has happened to a considerable extent, but there is room for further accommodations development on some trails. Addressing the classic chicken/egg problem of planning/timing in

* the development of trails and a steady flow of walkers

**in relation to:**

* the development of accommodations and other tourism infrastructure

is an ongoing challenge for which time, experience, and a certain degree of risk-taking seem to be essential elements of a planning strategy.

In summer the demand for rooms on national Waymarked Ways is particularly great and walkers need to book in advance.  Weekends in winter can also be busy on some trails.

Many foreign walkers choose to book their trips through a guiding service (see below).

Accommodations booking sites exist for several of the Waymarked Ways.  These are  usually operated by a private third party business Examples include that for the [Kerry Way](http://www.kerryway.com/accommodation/), and for the [Wicklow Way](http://www.wicklowway.com/accommodation/index.php).   There is no national bookings system for walkers’ accommodations, and it is not clear if one is needed.  The web landscape is littered with failed attempts to provide accommodations booking sites for walkers.  The closest thing to a national booking system is the [Walkers Welcome site.](http://www.bandbireland.com/themed-holidays/walkers-welcome-homes)   Failte Ireland developed a training and branding program for B&B’s wishing to specialize in catering to walkers.  B&B owners pay an annual fee for certification and are listed on a website that features a national location may and a booking engine.

Following is a brief description of the many different forms of accommodations available on the National Waymarked Ways. . I have not found any usage data on the different types of accommodation, e.g. what percentage of walkers use B&B’s Pubs, Hostels, Camping, etc.  However, anecdotally it seems that comparatively few camp, as this definitely weather dependent.

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#### Bed and Breakfasts

B&B industry in Ireland is very well developed.  The organization [B&B Ireland](http://irishfarmholidays.com/aboutfamhousebedandbreakfasts/) lists over 800.  B&B’s are the primary from of accommodation on the National Waymarked Ways.  Some offer meals, usually by prior arrangement, including pack lunches.  Some are self-catering, and some refer guests to local pubs and restaurants.  They range upwards in price from 30 Euros per person per night to 70 Euros per night per person.  Many are walker friendly and in some cases (e.g. Kerry Way) the Rural Recreation Officer has conducted training for B&B owners to familiarize them with the needs and wants of walkers, and to actually take owners on a walk on the trail (something many have never done).

#### Guest Houses

Guest Houses are similar to B&B’s but also serve supper on request.

#### Hotels

There are a few hotels, which tend to charge by the room rather than by the person, and which have more modern finishes.  These are in the larger villages/towns and are sometimes recommended for rest days.

#### Townhouses

This category of accommodations overlaps with others and is distinguished primarily by location within a town, i.e. in close proximity to pubs, restaurants, and other civic amenities.  The prices range widely.

#### Pubs and lodges

Rural public houses are magnets for walkers at the end of a day on the trail.  In addition to drinks and conviviality, many offer food, in Ireland local musicians are sometimes playing, and some offer lodging. On most long distance trails there are a few traditional pubs that gain a reputation as places to visit to get a flavor of the area.

#### Self-catering hotels and cottages

Several self-catering hotels are available, and groups and families can rent cottages near the trail to use as a base for day hikes.

#### Hostels

Established in 1931,An Oige (Irish Youth Hotel Association) currently operates 24 youth hostels in the Republic of Ireland and there are 6 in Northern Ireland operated by Youth Hostels International.  They offer affordable lodging for young travelers, including to some walkers.  Their aim is:

Helping all, but especially young people, to a love and appreciation of the countryside, particularly by providing simple hostel accommodations for them whilst on their travels.

Most An Oige hostels are in urban areas and their popularity subsidizes more rural locations.  An Oige is still committed to its early mission of fostering outdoor activities, and is keen to become a hub for adventure sports and develop hostels along new trails, such as bike paths, and to operate “in partnership with others in building synergy and increasing impact for young people.”

Historically, An Oige operated many more hostels in Ireland, but several factors combined to force a significant retrenchment: changes in guest preferences and demographics on walking trails, the recession, financial problems due to over-extension of the hostel network, and competition from private hostel operators, and the rise of internet booking services.

At one time youth hostels in Ireland were an important amenity in supporting young people and families walking in Ireland. For example, there were once 10 hostels on the Wicklow Way, where now there are 3 hostels.  Currently there appear to be 5 hostels in Ireland that cater specifically to hikers, including on the Wicklow Way.   As the standard of living in Ireland has risen and the average age of hill walkers has risen, folks wanted a higher level of amenities and use of hostels on trails fell.  A few of the remaining trail-based hostels provide meals (e.g. Glendalough), while most are self-catering and at least one (e.g. Glenmalure, an historic cottage operated by volunteers in season ) are fairly rustic, but still beloved and well used in season.

The number of privately operated hostels in trail towns is increasing, though I have no data on this.

#### Farm Stays

Farmstays tend to be priced and operate like B&B’s, but offer the opportunity to stay on a working farm.  B&B Ireland has a [booking service for farm stays](http://irishfarmholidays.com/aboutfamhousebedandbreakfasts/), though it is not focused on farm stays associated with trails.

#### Historic Houses

A category that overlaps with others on this list, these offer some historical character associated with the structure itself or the locale.  Again, priced variously.

#### Shelters

In recent years [**Mountain Meitheal**](http://mountainmeitheal.ie/) has constructed three Adirondack style shelters on the WW.  These provide water (collected from the shelter roof) and pit toilets, and appear to be well used, particularly in the warmer seasons.

#### Camping

Camping is prohibited in some National Park but allowed with permit in others.  I believe camping is generally not allowed on Coillite (National Forestry Service) lands.  On most National Waymarked Trails there are campgrounds in the vicinity of the trail, but none on the trail.  Apparently some farmers, hostels, inns,  and guesthouses will grant permission for camping.

Economics of Long Distance Walking in Ireland

The data and understanding I have of the overall finance of infrastructure for LDW is still very sketchy.  This section has not yet been written. Am hoping for assistance from the National Trails Office in providing some data on the economics of LDW in Ireland.  What are the federal expenditures in support of long distance walking in Ireland?  What amounts and what forms do they take for:

* + National Trails Office?
  + Department of the Environment?
  + Failte Ireland?
  + Other sources?

Summary of Trail Systems in Ireland

There are many categories of trails and a growing number of different organizations developing, managing and promoting them.  Among them are:

* Sli na Slainte Walking Routes
* Coillte Forest Trails
* County level trails
* National Looped Walks
* Inland Waterway Walking Routes
* National Parks Trails
* Pilgrimage Routes - <http://www.pilgrimpath.ie/about/> is a great resource on the re-awakening of interest in pilgrim routes.  They have developed a Pilgrim Passport program.  John O’Dwyer is a leading journalist and author in this arena.  Amanda Wren Wagstaff has written a number of posts about pilgrimage walks for my website.
* Long Distance Waymarked Ways
* Northern Ireland Walking Trails
* Greenways in Ireland Trails

# Challenges and Opportunities

### Challenges/weaknesses:

* Property rights and lack of modern public rights of way legislation.  The Walks Scheme is closed to new landowner participants.
* Ireland is falling far behind other European nations in access to country-side, which undermines its competitive position in relation to international tourism.
* Quality of trails is limited by lack of resources.  For example, trail maintenance work is backlogged.  There is not a culture of volunteerism in Ireland, so there are few people to volunteer (94% of trail maintenance work in USA is performed by volunteers).   Further, very few people are employed in recreation management in Ireland, so training and supervision of the limited number of volunteers is a challenge.
* Tourism promotion around walking has got out ahead of funding trail maintenance and development, setting up the potential for perceptions of disappointment on the part of international visitors.
* Increased numbers of injuries on the trail and occasional challenges to indemnity laws.
* On some National Waymarked Ways, where it isn’t possible to gain permission to pass on private lands, a large proportion of the routes is on quiet public roads.
* There is insufficient government and non-profit investment in recreational opportunity planning to carefully locate more trails.
* Failte Ireland’s interest and investment in trail development and maintenance has waned since the recession.  The tourism emphasis is on public roads, e.g. Wild Atlantic Way.
* Safety and environmental issues: With increased use of walking routes the nation inevitably faces issues of over-use in some areas and of environmental impact of walkers and attendant amenities.  These are amply documented in the issues of *Mountain Log* (especially Helen Lawless’s column).  As in many nations, there are increasing numbers of safety issues resulting from both large numbers of unskilled, unprepared walkers, and from lack of adequate funding for trail maintenance.  Some truly creative work is going on to address safety and environmental issues related to walking, particularly through the various uplands forums.
* There are only 12 Rural Recreation Officers in Ireland and their remits are constantly expanding as new recreational opportunities open up in their regions.

### Opportunities/strengths:

* Great geographic resources: beautiful, green landscape.  Fabulous coastline,
* Numerous prehistoric archaeological sites, rich heritage and history.
* Friendly people and a strong tradition of hospitality.  Strong opportunities for positive interactions with the Irish people.
* Strong tourism industry, with growing demand internationally; potential for significant further growth internationally as well as in the domestic market.
* Good tourism infrastructure with many B&B’s and hostels, pubs, restaurants, and good public transportation.
* Walks that take advantage of the spectacular coastline, and the fact Ireland is a small island, would draw great international interest.  A number of people have suggested development of a coastal walk that goes around Ireland, such as the one being developed in UK.  Michael Fewer and others have suggested a Coast to Coast walk (like Wainwright’s in England), see Fewer’s book Walking Across Ireland: from Dublin Bay to Galway Bay, Collins Press (2003), and Gareth McCormack’s writing on the Causeway Coastal Path on the potential for further development.
* International Appalachian Trail presents further opportunity for international branding and for collaboration with Northern Ireland.
* Potential to link Irish long distance trails with other international trails through the World Trails Network’s “Friendship Trails” program.
* Improved booking engines on trail websites and/or centralized “destination management” system for walkers.
* Vast majority of use of Waymarked Ways appears to be for day hikes.  There is potential to convert some of these day-walkers into multi-day walkers.
* Pilgrim paths have great potential for use by international walkers. Several international pilgrimage destinations (e.g. Camino de Santiago and Kumano Kodo) have partnered through World Trails Network’s “Friendship Trails” program, and that form of partnering has potential for Ireland.

# Key Lessons Learned for the USA from Studying Ireland:

* It is possible to develop a robust walking culture in just a matter of a few generations.  Walking clubs and a strong, focused NGO like Mountaineering Ireland are some of the key ingredients lacking in USA.
* Walking festivals do not yet exist in USA.
* The American Alpine Club hasn’t embraced long distance walking. Nor have any other national organizations.
* The American craze for long distance “through hiking” will likely generate a wider audience for forms of long distance walking with more amenities as our walking culture matures.
* Tying walks development to international tourism has great potential in USA.
* There is scope for further development of front-country trails with accommodations in USA, providing the sort of trail qualities favored by the European Ramblers “Leading Quality Trails” criteria.
* Potential for a more national approach to supporting local search and rescue groups.
* Increased focus on pilgrimage walks that relate to contemporary and historical spiritual themes.
* Development of positions like those of the Rural Recreation Officers could be a good idea in some regions.  I believe the Appalachian Conservancy’s “Trails Town” initiative has begun some work along these lines.
* The branding program “Walkers Welcome” for accommodations may have potential in USA.
* Joining with trails internationally through the “Friendship Trails” program through the World Trails Network.
* Adopting a more widespread practice of strategically locating trails at lower elevations to protect fragile uplands environments.
* Study of independent management councils e.g. Wicklow Uplands Forum, McGillicuddy

Reeks Forum, Irish Uplands Forum.

# CASE STUDIES – links to online text

# Burren Way

### [Case Study of Burren Way](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/08/10/burren-way-case-study/)

### [Trip Report on Burren Way](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/07/18/burren-way-trip-report/)

### [Profile of Harry Jeuken and his Splendid Lough Avalla Trail](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/04/20/tochar-phadraig-co-mayo-ireland/)

# Kerry Way

### [Case Study of Kerry Way](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/08/10/kerry-way-case-study/)

[Trip Report of Kerry Way](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/07/25/trip-report-kerry-way-ireland/)

### [Profile of Rural Officer Patricia Deane](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/07/25/profile-rural-recreation-officer-patricia-deane/)

# Wicklow Way

### [Case Study of Wicklow Way](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/08/10/wicklow-way-case-study/)

### [Trip Report of Wicklow Way](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/01/16/trip-report-wicklow-way-ireland/)

### [Profile of Sean Byrne: Wicklow Way Farmer, Host, and Advocate](http://www.hut2hut.info/2016/02/01/sean-byrne-wicklow-farmer-host-to-walkers-and-uplands-advocate/)

# APPENDIX 1

People I met with:

* Brendan McGrath
* Eileen O’Rourke
* Rural Recreation Officers:
  + Patricia Deane
  + Eoin Hogan
  + Patrick Mellon
  + John Carney, Department of Environment
  + Inga Bock
* Cormac MacDonnell, NTO
* Doug Corrie, NTO
* Ruairi O’Conchuir, Mountaineering Ireland
* Michael Fewer
* Mark Flagler
* Cara Doyle & Brian, WUC
* Helen Fairbairn, writer of walking guides
* Sean Byrne, Lough Dan House, WUC
* Dave Fadden
* Roger Garland, Keep Ireland Open

People I hoped to meet with but wasn’t able to:

* Mary Stack, Failte Ireland (or anyone else from Failte Ireland)
* Declan O’Keefe, UCD Mountaineering Club, writer, editor
* Jean Boydell, Mountaineering Ireland
* Helen Lawless, Mountaineering Ireland
* Dr. Brendan Dunford, Burren Life Program and BurenBeo.
* GeoPark representative
* Guiding company folks:
* John O’Dwyer, Irish Times & Pilgrim Paths author
* Simon Stewart, Mountainviews.ie
* Ann Fitzpatrick, Wicklow National park
* Michael McHale, Dept of Environment
* Sean O’Sullivan, a founder of Kerry Way
* Colin Murphy, first director of WUC