

Media Release

Wednesday 28th February 2024



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Ár dTodhchaí
Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



Our Rural Future: Minister Humphreys announces largest ever expansion of Ireland's National Walks Scheme

- ***62 new way-marked walking and hiking trails added across 17 Counties***
- ***Total number of nationally recognised trails now stands at over 140, up from just 40 trails in 2019***
- ***Department to work with landowners to provide access and create world class walking and hiking amenities***
- ***Expression of Interest for further new trails opens***
- ***Minister: "I want to make Ireland an international destination for walking & hiking"***

The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, has today (28th February 2024) announced the largest ever expansion of Ireland's National Walks Scheme with 62 new trails announced across 17 counties.

Today's announcement includes 5 trails on two offshore islands – Inis Meáin and Oileán Chléire. Also for the first time, National Walks Scheme trails will now be located in Counties Monaghan and Wexford.

This is part of a phased expansion that will see the number of trails on the Walks Scheme increase from 80 to 150 over the next two years. The initiative is designed to boost outdoor recreation and rural tourism and is a key element of ***Embracing Ireland's Outdoors***, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy.

Under the Walks Scheme, funding is provided to farmers and other landholders to maintain the walking trails that go through their holdings. The Scheme is operated by the Department of Rural and Community Development in conjunction with Local Development Companies.

Among the new Walks Scheme trails being announced today are:

- **Lúb Dún Fearbhaí**, Inis Meáin, Co. na Gaillimhe
- **Carrigmeal Woodland Loops**, Co Laois
- **Strickeen Mountain Walk**, Co Kerry
- **Cullentra Trail**, Co Wexford
- **The Devils Chimney**, Co Sligo
- **Ardmore Cliff Walk**, Co Waterford
- **Six Fastnet Trails**, Co Cork
- **The Monaghan Way**, Co Monaghan

Over €15 million has been paid to farmers and landholders participating on the Scheme since 2017, with an additional €1.4 million spent on materials for the maintenance of trails. This expansion will see an additional annual investment of over €500,000 to rural areas through the scheme.

Announcing the expansion at the Carrigmeal Woods Loop Trails in Co Laois, Minister Humphreys said:

"I want to make Ireland an international destination of choice for walkers and hikers. We have a unique offering in terms of our natural landscape filled with mountains, forests, lakes, rivers and sea.

"Often these amenities can only be truly appreciated by crossing through fields and land owned by local farmers. The National Walks Scheme is about working in partnership with landowners so we can open up access to local communities and tourists to enjoy these wonderful hidden gems we have all across Ireland.

*“I want to acknowledge and thank the work of all the farmers and landowners involved in the Walks Scheme who provide access to their holdings and who help to maintain the trails to a high standard for the benefit of a huge number of locals and visitors. Without the goodwill of farmers we would not have access to many of our favourite tracks and trails. It is incumbent on all of us to use these amenities responsibly, respect local landowners and of course – **Leave No Trace.**”*

“Getting out into the fresh air for a walk is good for the body and good for the mind. These trails allow people of all ages and ability the opportunity to enjoy open countryside, riverside walks and mountains hikes. There is something for everyone, just put on your walking shoes and get out there and have a go.”

The Department is now inviting expressions of interest from LDCs for new trails and substantial extensions to existing trails. Potential applicants (e.g. trail management committees, community groups, local authorities, and other similar entities) should be advised that expressions of interest must be made through LDCs in respect of trails that are eligible for inclusion in the scheme. The closing date for EOIs is **11th October 2024.**

The Minister concluded:

“Due to the phenomenal response to this expansion, I am formally launching a further call for expressions of interest to join the Walks Scheme.

“I would encourage trail management committees, community groups and other similar bodies to contact their nearest Local Development Company to make an expression of interest for trails they would like to include in the scheme.”

The expansion of the Walks Scheme was also warmly welcomed by Dr. Liam Twomey, the Chairperson of Comhairle na Tuaithe which is representative of the key stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation in the countryside.

Dr. Twomey said:

"I very much welcome the addition of these trails to the Walks Scheme. Comhairle Na Tuaithe has been involved in the sustainable development of the sector since 2004. Following the launch of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, and the strategic development coming from that, the continuing growth of the Walks Scheme is so beneficial, both from an economic and wellbeing point of view.

The list of trails approved in this expansion can be found in Appendix 1 below.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Our Rural Future

Our Rural Future is the whole-of-government policy for rural Ireland for the period 2021-2025. It represents a new milestone in the approach to rural development policy for Ireland and adopts a more strategic, ambitious and holistic approach to investing in and maximising opportunities for rural areas.

The Walks Scheme

The Walks Scheme was launched in 2008 to facilitate the development and maintenance of key walking trails by private landholders. The scheme is administered by 20 Local Development Companies (LDCs) who deliver the scheme in their area on behalf of the Department. The Department funds 21 Rural Recreation Officers (RROs) in these LDCs, with a contribution from Fáilte Ireland, to assist with the delivery of the Scheme and support other rural recreation initiatives at a local level. In 2019 there were 40 trails on the National Walks Scheme. This has been expanded to 80 in recent years and today's announcement will bring the total number of nationally recognised trails to 140.

Further details of the Walks Scheme can be found at:

gov.ie - [The Walks Scheme and Rural Recreation Officers \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie).

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027 *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* was launched in November 2022. In light of the significant contribution of the Walks Scheme in delivering high quality trails it committed to further expanding the Walks Scheme to 150 trails by end of 2024. For more information on the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027 see [here](#).

Expressions of Interest

The Department is now inviting expressions of interest from LDCs for new trails and substantial extensions to existing trails. Potential applicants (e.g. trail management committees, community groups, local authorities, and other similar entities) should be advised that expressions of interest must be made through LDCs in respect of trails that are eligible for inclusion in the scheme. The closing date for EOIs is **11th October 2024**.

It is essential that any expression of interest is developed based on direct engagement with the relevant Trail Management Organisation and landholders.

Appendix 1 – List of new trails being added to the Walks Scheme:

County	Name of Trail	Name of responsible Local Development Company
Cavan	Moyar Loop Trail	Cavan County Local Development
Clare	Lissycasey Cascades loop	Clare Local Development Company
Cork	Ladysbridge Loop Trail	IRD Duhallow
Cork	Fastnet Knockaphuca Loop	West Cork Development Partnership
Cork	Fastnet Goleen Harbour Loop	West Cork Development Partnership
Cork	Fastnet Tormore Loop	West Cork Development Partnership
Cork	Fastnet Gortyowen	West Cork Development Partnership
Cork	Fastnet Gortdubh Loop Walk	West Cork Development Partnership
Cork	Fastnet Lissigriffin Loop Walk	West Cork Development Partnership
Donegal	Leghowney Loop Walk	Donegal Local Development Clg
Islands	Cnoicín Loop, Oileán Chléire, Co. Chorcaigh	Comhar na nOileán CTR
Islands	Gleann Loop, Oileán Chléire, Co.	Comhar na nOileán CTR

	Chorcaigh	
Islands	Lúb Dún Chonchúir, Inis Meáin, Co. na Gaillimhe	Comhar na nOileán CTR
Islands	Lúb Cill Cheannannach, Inis Meáin, Co. na Gaillimhe	Comhar na nOileán CTR
Islands	Lúb Dún Fearbhaí, Inis Meáin, Co. na Gaillimhe	Comhar na nOileán CTR
Kerry	Siuloid na Cille	North & East Kerry Development Company
Kerry	Kilgarven Village Loop Walk	South Kerry Development Partnership CLG
Kerry	Kilbanow Mountain Loop	South Kerry Development Partnership CLG
Kerry	Castlequin/Paddy Casey Loop Walk	South Kerry Development Partnership CLG
Kerry	Cullum's Cup Kilbeg Loop - Valentia Island	South Kerry Development Partnership CLG
Kerry	Cullum's Cup Main Loop - Valentia Island	South Kerry Development Partnership CLG
Kerry	Strickeen Mountain walk	South Kerry Development Partnership CLG
Kilkenny	Kilmacoliver Woodland Loop	Kilkenny Leader Partnership
Laois	Carrigmeal Woodland Loop - Milos	Laois Partnership Company
Laois	Carrigmeal Woodlands Loops - Tir na nÓg	Laois Partnership Company
Laois	Carrigmeal Woodlands Loops - Sheep's Walk Trail	Laois Partnership Company
Leitrim	Keeldra Lake Walkway	Leitrim Development Company
Leitrim	Bóthar na Naomh	Leitrim Development Company
Leitrim	Crummy Loop	Leitrim Development Company
Leitrim	Mullaghgarve Mass Rock	Leitrim Development Company
Limerick	Ballinvreena Loop Walk	Ballyhoura Development CLG
Limerick	Blackrock Loop	Ballyhoura Development CLG
Limerick	Moore Abbey Loop	Ballyhoura Development CLG
Mayo	The Nature Walk Kilmaine	South West Mayo Development

		Company CLG
Mayo	Newtown Forest Trail	South West Mayo Development Company CLG
Monaghan	The Monaghan Way	Cavan County Local Development
Roscommon	Ballintubber Rambling Trail	Roscommon LEADER Partnership
Sligo	Sruth in Aghaidh An Aird (Devil's Chimney)	Sligo LEADER Partnership CLG
Tipperary	Cosán Felim Inch Loop	South Tipperary Development CLG
Tipperary	Killoscully Mass Path Looped walk	South Tipperary Development CLG
Tipperary	Knockmealdown Trail	South Tipperary Development CLG
Tipperary	The Source of the Nore Walking Trail	South Tipperary Development CLG
Tipperary	Loop of Lahile and Laughaun	South Tipperary Development CLG
Waterford	Rathgormack Boolas Loop Walk	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	Waterford Estuary Coastal Path: Dunmore East to Ballymacaw Cove Linear	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	Mount Melleray Pilgrim Paths: Byrnes Bridge	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	Mount Melleray Pilgrim Paths: The Cross	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	Mount Melleray Pilgrim Paths: The Grotto	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	Mount Melleray Pilgrim Paths: The Source	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	Mount Melleray Pilgrim Paths: The Well	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	The Nire Valley: Coumduala Loop Walk	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	The Nire Valley: Coumlara Loop Walk	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	The Nire Valley: Gap Walk	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	The Nire Valley: Sgilloges Walk	Waterford Leader Partnership
Waterford	Ardmore Cliff Walk	Waterford Leader Partnership
Wexford	Ballybrittas Dolmen Trail	Wexford Local Development

Wexford	Mt. Nebo Trail	Wexford Local Development
Wexford	Kilanerin Curragh Wood Loop	Wexford Local Development
Wexford	River Walk	Wexford Local Development
Wexford	Cullentra Trail	Wexford Local Development
Wicklow	Lacken Mass Path	County Wicklow Partnership
Wicklow	Jubilee Loop	County Wicklow Partnership