

# The Walks Scheme



*An Roinn Gnóthaf Pobail, Tuaithe  
agus Gaeltachta*  
*Department of Community, Rural  
and Gaeltacht Affairs*





## Introduction

Éamon Ó Cuív, TD, and Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs launched the Walks Scheme on 4th March 2008. The scheme is aimed at farmers/private landowners and landholders/users and involves the development, enhancement and maintenance of National WayMarked Ways and priority walks.

It is a national scheme and open to all landholders on National Waymarked Ways, Looped Walking Routes and Heritage Routes along with other trails that have been approved by the National Trails Office. The scheme will only operate where there is agreement on the entire walk and will not be available for part of a walk.

The scheme is administered by Local Development Integrated Companies (formerly LEADER Companies) with the assistance of the National Trails Office at the Irish Sports Council and Fáilte Ireland and in association with local walking management committees and Local Authorities on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs.



### Outline of development, enhancement and maintenance scheme for permissive WayMarked Ways and priority walks

1. The scheme shall be known as the Walks Scheme.
2. The scheme is aimed at farmers/private landowners and landholders/users<sup>1</sup> and will be administered by Local Development Integrated Companies (formerly LEADER Companies) with the assistance of the National Trails Office (NTO) at the Irish Sports Council and Fáilte Ireland and in association with local walking management committees (LWMC) and Local Authorities on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA).
3. Where land is held under a lease, the scheme will be payable to either the landowner or the landholder/user but not to both. Where the land is leased and where the leaseholder holds the land for a period in excess of eleven months, the leaseholder is the person who will be entitled to avail of the scheme and the leaseholder will declare that he is entitled to do so under the lease and sign an indemnity to that effect. Where the landholder/user has a lease for eleven months or under, the person entitled to participate in the scheme shall be the landowner who will likewise declare that he is entitled to do so under the lease and sign an indemnity to that effect. Where the lease is eleven months or under and the landowner does not avail of the scheme, the landholder/user may participate.
4. It will be a national scheme and open to all existing National WayMarked Ways (NWMW) and Looped Walking Routes. In the future, new NWMW, Looped Walks and Heritage Routes may also be included along with other possible trails, subject to local agreement and based on need and potential value to the local area and once they have been approved by the NTO.
5. Agreements will be for 5 years and payment will be for development, enhancement and maintenance work prescribed for the recognised and agreed walking routes.

<sup>1</sup>Landowner/User is defined as being the person having exclusive possession and use of land or buildings in return for a specified payment.

6. Six-months notice is required before a participant can seek to leave the scheme. It may be necessary over time to alter or terminate a route and the participant will be given six months notice of such a change. The Department reserves the right to withdraw from the scheme in such circumstances.
7. Where an issue arises as to the selection and approval of a route for inclusion in the scheme, the matter shall be referred to a sub-group of Comhairle na Tuaithe for consideration.
8. Where land is held in commonage and where there are multiple applications to carry out works by persons with an interest in the same area of commonage, the following procedure will apply.
  - (i) A single work plan for the area of commonage shall be agreed in accordance with the provisions of the scheme.
  - (ii) The hours of work designated as appropriate for the area of commonage shall be divided equally between all individuals with an interest in the land who have submitted an application.
  - (iii) The Local Development Integrated Company (LDIC) will be responsible for notifying each applicant of the number of hours of work for which they will receive payment and for dividing out the work between the participants.

### Applications for Participation in Scheme

9. It will be a national scheme and open to all existing National WayMarked Ways (NWMW) and Looped Walking Routes subject to landowners' permission. In the future, new NWMW, Looped Walks and Heritage Routes may also be included along with other possible trails, once they have been approved by the NTO.
10. The LDIC in association with the LWMC will agree a draft work plan with the participant based on NTO guidelines and will determine the materials required along with the hours deemed necessary for the work to be carried out. (NTO will be able to provide information/guidance on the basic standards required and guidance on drafting an enhancement and maintenance plan).

11. The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is prepared to supply the materials for those elements of the walking route that cross private land.
12. Upon receipt of the completed application form/work plan the LDIC will request the NTO to verify that the draft development, enhancement and maintenance plan meets the standards set out in their guidelines.
13. Following approval of the application/work plan by the NTO, a list of those applicants whose work plans have been approved will be confirmed with the relevant LDIC in order to include them on the scheme.
14. The LDIC in consultation with the LWMC will deal with the administration and coordination work on the scheme with each participant.
15. All payments will be administered by the LDIC.
16. A contract will be signed between the LDIC and the participant.

#### Insurance/Indemnity

17. The responsible Local Authority or the relevant LWMC will continue to provide insurance for farmers/landowners for recreational use of the land once the walkway has been inspected and approved by the NTO. The walks will be subject to annual inspection by a suitably qualified individual, appointed by the NTO, to ensure that standards are maintained.

#### Payment

18. On entering the scheme, participants will receive 50 per cent of the labour cost up front, on an annual basis, for maintenance/ enhancement/ development works with the balance being paid 6 months later.

<sup>2</sup>The current rate is  
€14.50 per hour

19. Payment will be calculated on the basis of a number of agreed hours per annum as specified in the work plan, at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food farm improvement "own labour" rate.<sup>2</sup> While it is anticipated that minimum trail maintenance will require at least 50 hours per annum, payment will not exceed 200 hours. Where this is not sufficient, any additional work can be done, with the prior agreement of the landholder, through the Rural Social Scheme (RSS), by the Local Action Group or by the Local Authority. This may vary in cases where lands are in multiple ownership.
20. The LDIC will ensure that agreed works are completed to a satisfactory standard before final payment is made.
21. Each landowner allowing his/her land to be used can carry out all or part of the necessary works him/herself or allow the works to be carried out by others such as the RSS/other (contractor, local community group etc.).
22. In cases where the landowner is not in a position to carry out extensive enhancement/development works, the landowner may permit RSS participants/other (contractor, local community group etc) to complete this work and the landowner can then enter into a maintenance contract.

#### Maintenance Guide

23. APPENDIX I contains a draft walking trails maintenance guide from the NTO.



## Appendix 1

### Walking Trails Maintenance Guide

The following is intended as a guide to LDIC's, LWMC's and farmers/landowners in the preparation of Trail Maintenance & Enhancement Plans.

Trail Maintenance & Enhancement Plans will be drawn up by the LDIC in consultation with the LWMC and participating farmers/landowners.

Trail Maintenance & Enhancement Plans will be drawn up following a site visit/maintenance assessment and should include all agreed jobs, the frequency and the time of year that work should be carried out.

All Trail Maintenance & Enhancement Plans should be consistent and only include jobs that:

- a. Are necessary and that will add to the overall quality and sustainability of the walking route/trail
- b. The participating landowner's/farmer's agrees to undertake
- c. Take account of the local heritage and wildlife

The National Trails office will undertake an annual inspection on each trail/walking route included in the scheme.

In general;

- Regular inspection and monitoring of the whole length of trail within the managed area of each farmer/landowner is essential to ensure the route is clearly marked, free from obstructions, active erosion and also to plan maintenance.
- A clearly identified and demonstrated requirement is necessary for all trail materials. The replacement or construction of surfaces/furniture should aim to achieve durable and/or low maintenance requirements.

- NTO does not recommend fencing off a trail from normal fields /agricultural lands unless specifically requested by the farmer/landowner or deemed necessary for the safety of trail users.
- The following tasks could be incorporated into Trail Maintenance & Enhancement Plans for individual farmers/landowners participating in the scheme.

### 1. General Scheme Requirements:

- Monthly trail check
- Initial Site Assessment
- Accompanying Trails Inspector (once a year)
- Training (optional)

Estimated Time: May range from 16 hours (2 Days) to 48 hours (6 Days) per year

### 2. Vegetation Control along trails

- Cutting back encroaching vegetation around markers, stiles and bridges and on path - 2/3 times a year.
- Hedgerow maintenance/pruning once/twice yearly (between 1<sup>st</sup> Sept and 1<sup>st</sup> Feb)

Estimated Time: May range from 16 hours (2 Days) to 64 hours (8 days) per year

### 3. Water Management on trails

- Digging new drains
- Check/clear drains after flood
- Carry out small repairs to existing drains by clearing out accumulated debris or silt from blocked drains and ditches
- Keeping water away from the trail by building/inserting culverts and water bars

Estimated Time: May range from 16 hours (2 Days) to 40 hours (5 days) per year

#### 4. Surface Maintenance Works

- Minor surface damage could be repaired as required
- Re-surfacing may have to be done periodically, depending on surface type
- Clearance of loose material and debris from trail
- Stepping stones or "Bog Bridges" (e.g. sleepers) could be laid across wet areas.
- Re-packing loose stone work where it has settled or washed out
- Re-surfacing washed out or worn away surfaces or compaction behind drains etc.
- Re turfing or blocking path braids, or short cuts and off-path use.
- Stone pitching/stepping

Estimated Time: May range from 32 hours (4 Days) to 80 hours (10 days) per year

#### 5. Structures Monitoring & Maintenance:

Structures such as bridges, stiles, marker posts, walls, handrails and gates should be inspected regularly and the following may need to be carried out.

- Replacement of missing, damaged or broken markers & directional arrows
- Replacement or repair of missing, damaged or broken signpost fingers
- Painting markers, gates etc
- Repair of damaged stiles, gates, fences and stonewalls
- De-scaling/cleaning finger signs, information boards

Estimated Time: Hours per year may range from 16 hours (2 Days) to 80 hours (10 days) per year

#### 6. Litter Clearance

- Pick up litter

Estimated Time: May range from 16 hours (2 Days) to 64 hours (8 days) per year

#### 7. Trail landscaping work

- Temporary Fencing (keeping stock off trail) or moving stock
- Re-seeding

Estimated Time: May range from 0 hours (0 Days) to 48 hours (6 days) per year

#### 8. Other Possible Maintenance Jobs:

- Paint stile
- Install stile
- Erect marker
- Fit plates to markers
- Re-stand marker
- Erect 3 m pole
- Re-stand 3m pole
- Attach finger sign
- Paint walkway
- Caution walker about dogs
- Fit mesh to timber surfaces
- Paint bridge
- Repair path
- Repair wire fence
- Repair stone wall
- Repair gates
- Paint gate
- Move electric fence
- Fit tubing on electric fence
- Fit warning signs for electric fence







The Walks Scheme  
Scéim Siúlóidí

