

# MOURNE RAMBLERS NEWSLETTER

JULY 2022

## A message from the Editor

Welcome to the latest edition of the Mourne Rambling Group newsletter.

Since the last issue of the group newsletter in February 2022, the Mourne Rambling Group continues to provide exceptional walking experiences to our members. Membership continues to grow with 16 new members since February.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed.

Vincent Trainor, Editor

- NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER
- AUTUMN TRIP TO KERRY
- TRAINING UPDATE
- TRAINING COURSES PLANNED FOR LATE SUMMER
- THE MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST RANGER SCHEME
- WHERE THE MOUNTAINS OF MOURNE SWEEP DOWN TO THE SEA
- NOTICE BOARD

## NEW MEMBERS SINCE LAST NEWSLETTER UP TO AND INCLUDING 23 JULY 2022

David Johnston, Usman Ghazi, Orla McKeever, Veronica Mullan,  
Paul Burch, Lorraine Burch, Joanna Scott, Anita Williamson-Graham,  
Ian Bates, Anne-Marie McQuaid, Paul Donnelly, Karen Laurenson,  
Mary Joy, Michele Cotter, Kathryn Greer, Stephen McGeown

We welcome these new members to the Mourne Rambling Group.  
We wish them many years of enjoyable rambling.

## Autumn trip to Kerry

For the first time in three years the Mourne Ramblers will be having an official away trip, to Co. Kerry in September 2022. Following the easing of Covid restrictions a few weeks ago, a number of members were keen to resume this aspect of our annual programme. However, unlike previous trips, it has proven impossible to secure accommodation in one hotel for a large group of people. Some hotels are now being used for other purposes and with a post-Covid surge in demand for weekend breaks, there is limited availability this September to accommodate larger groups.

There is still lots of availability here and there with venues having 1 - 3 twin rooms available. Essentially club members will be dispersed in terms of where they're staying rather than everyone being under one roof. The trip will proceed with Killorglin, Co. Kerry as a base from Friday 16<sup>th</sup> Sept to Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, i.e., 4 nights including 3 full days of hiking. Because we cannot block book places in one venue as in previous years, we are proceeding on the basis that members book their own accommodation.

As it is a long drive down, some walk leaders plan to stay another day to make it a 5 day trip from Friday 16 Sept, returning on Wednesday 21 Sept. This has the advantage that if the weather is very poor one day we can still have three days of good hiking in the mountains. If you are planning to go and intend to car-share or room-share please make sure you pair up with someone staying the same length of time e.g. 4 or 5 nights.

So far, a number of B and C walk leaders and members have booked accommodation in Killorglin, Co. Kerry or in its vicinity. If any D group members would be interested going, let us know and we will see if we can find a leader for that group.

Members across all groups wishing to join the trip should book their accommodation and let us know that they plan to travel to Kerry and provide us with details of where they are staying and their phone number. This will facilitate walk leaders in preparing each day's routes, starting times, meeting points, etc...via WhatsApp groups. It will also assist in arranging group dinners in the evenings for those who wish to do so.

At the time of writing, there was still some availability in hotel/B&B accommodation in the following establishments in Killorglin itself, all within walking distance of one another;

- Bianconi Inn

- Kingston Townhouse/Kingston Boutique Hotel
- Rivers Edge Guest House
- Torine House B&B

There is also availability in several B&Bs in venues on the outskirts of the village. This offers the best opportunity for a trip to Kerry in early Autumn where we can all be in accommodation close to each other in a relatively small village/town. On a previous trip to Killorglin, some people stayed in Killarney, 13 miles away but, logistically, it worked out OK in terms of meeting up each morning at the starting point for that day's walk. If you wish to go on the trip, let me know once you have booked your accommodation.

Noel Rice   noelrice@btinternet.com

### **TRAINING UPDATE**

We held a leadership workshop on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June at the St John's Ambulance Cadets Grove premises – thanks for arranging the venue, Maggie!

There were thirteen participants, covering a mixture of new leaders, experienced leaders and people who have yet to lead a walk with the club. The atmosphere was relaxed and the format was conversational rather than lecturing, with topics ranging from the qualities needed as a leader and equipment to bring on a walk, through to planning and preparation for a walk, potential risks and hazards and mentoring.

The tone of the day was set by our Chair, Bert, who explained that the club seeks to achieve a balance between an informal approach to leadership that allows people have a good day out in the mountains, whilst ensuring that safety issues associated with hill walking are satisfactorily covered: basically, to be in control of the group without spoiling their enjoyment.

This has generally resulted in Mourne Rambler leaders not using directive leadership as much as some other clubs, especially if the weather is fine, and it was noted that we are one of the friendliest clubs for new members. However, it was also noted that in walking circles generally, there seems to be a gradual move away from relaxed leadership towards a tighter leadership style.

On the subject of preparing to lead a walk and what factors to consider, we shared experiences of route planning, hazards (and how to avoid them) and

what should be carried in your rucksack. The MRG website has a section for leaders which contains much useful information.

Practical issues raised their head, particularly with regard to the size of the group, using a back marker, and the difficulties of dealing with group dynamics. Regarding pace setting, the words in our programme were emphasised:

- *Walkers should follow the leader and not attempt to lead the walk or force the pace. The group must keep together. If a member wishes to leave the group during a walk, please inform the leader. Members must accept the leader's decisions.*

The issue of mentoring came up a number of times: this would involve another leader discussing the planned route with the new leader, possibly going on a recce with them and discussing various aspects of the walk, and perhaps acting as a silent partner on the walk itself. Most felt that this was a good idea, but agreed that it should not be obligatory, with new leaders free to avail themselves of it and also to be free to choose the mentor (or mentors) that best suits them.

The workshop ended with a hike up Cavehill and the weather played its part in showing off the beauty of the hills surrounding Belfast.

Peter McGowan

### **Training courses planned for late summer/early autumn**

We plan to run two training courses in the near future:

#### **BASIC NAVIGATION TRAINING**

This course is aimed at walkers who have little or no experience in navigation or whose knowledge was shrouded in the mists of time. It covers map reading, including setting the map, contour lines, grid lines, grid references; using a compass including magnetic variation; and plotting a course to a given point.

This is an in-house course, run by members of the club, and the atmosphere will be informal with participants encouraged to ask questions.

## SAFETY IN THE HILLS COURSE

This will be an informal course to discuss the steps that can be taken to encourage safety in the hills, including what you should have in your rucksack, as well as risk assessment and what to do when an incident happens. It will include basic first aid.

Members will be advised of details of these courses in the next few weeks, so please keep an eye on your emails!

Peter McGowan

## The Mourne Heritage Trust Ranger Scheme

The Mourne Heritage Trust (MHT) has received funding for three Rangers whose main function is to engage with the public which uses the Mourne Mountains. The Rangers do not have a role in controlling behaviour or policing of any sort but are there to advise members of the public in terms of equipment that they need, maps, where to go, routes and weather conditions. Other concerns of the Rangers are:

- dogs off the lead
- erosion because of the increased foot fall
- car parking problems

Apparently, Instagram selfies of people on the rock on the Northwest face of Binnian, sunrise on Doan, as well as on Donard have given an enormous boost to numbers there. As a result, there are a lot more people who walk in the dark in the Mourne Mountains with potential effects on nocturnal animals' well-being and a potential for accidents to happen.

There is wide support for the engagement of the Rangers with the public and the programme will continue to be funded, because, from contacts in other areas in GB, the MHT approach and programme has some outstanding features and trailblazing effects. The Rangers have not had any unpleasant exchanges with the public and the advice they gave was in the main well received.

The Rangers felt that they have had an impact on the number of people putting their dogs on the leash when it was pointed out that it was not only the sheep but also ground nesting birds and other wildlife that was affected by unrestrained roaming by dogs.

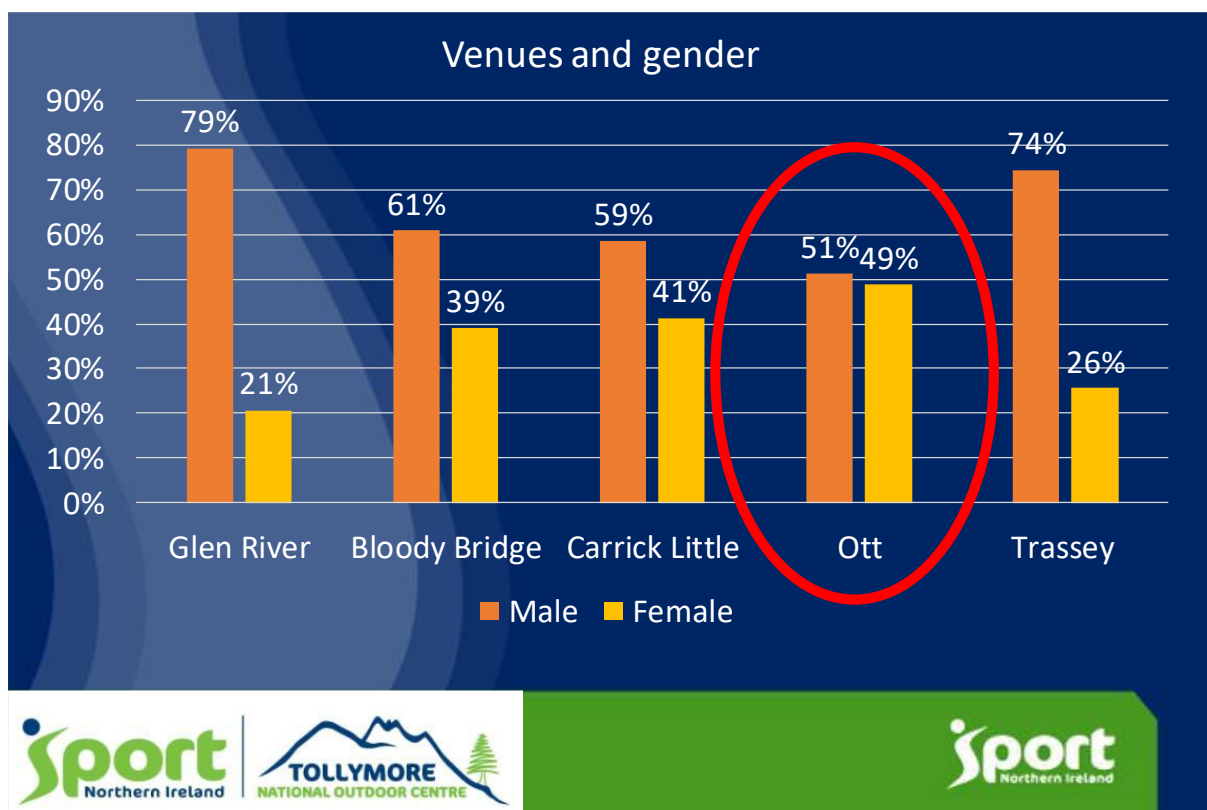
They've felt they had little impact on erosion, parking, or equipment (they pointed out that we have a somewhat strange attitude to it as we generally "approve" of fell runners who carry no equipment and have no supplies and "disapprove" of people not properly kitted out). They also felt that they had had an impact on making people aware of where they were (if they did not know), what routes to take and the facts about access and the land ownership etc. Most people seem to think they have rights of access in the Mourne Mountains rather than that we have permission from the landowners to walk there.

One *controversial suggestion*, mirroring what is considered in other National Parks, is to set aside an area for drinking parties and wild camping and for the MHT to occasionally clean

these places up and to confine this activity which will take place whether we like it or not. This would most likely be linked to one of the 5 main access routes probably near Donard Park.

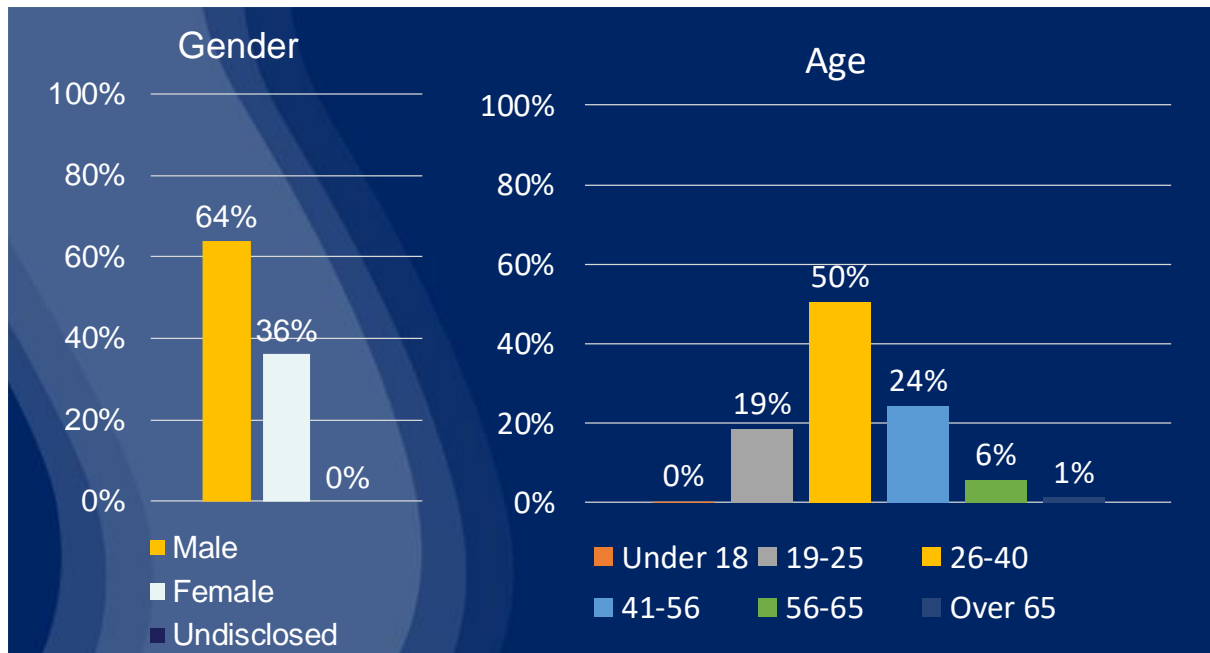
I include here some of the findings from the survey of 536 people that has been done by the Rangers and volunteers over the months that the Rangers were working (roughly last autumn 2021). They found a remarkable gender difference shown in the slide below between Donard Park (Glen River) access as it gives to the highest Mountain and Ott Blue Quarry (Ott) from where many walk the easier route and ascend to Doan. The preferred interpretation by SportNI is that testosterone-filled males are going to summit the highest mountain whilst others go for the most scenic location.

The Rangers primarily surveyed at Glen River, Bloody Bridge, Ott Blue Quarry, the Trassey Track and of course Carrick Little as the 5 main access points to the High Mourne. Hen and Cock car park was also identified as a very busy access point. May be best to continue to avoid if you want a walk away from other people.

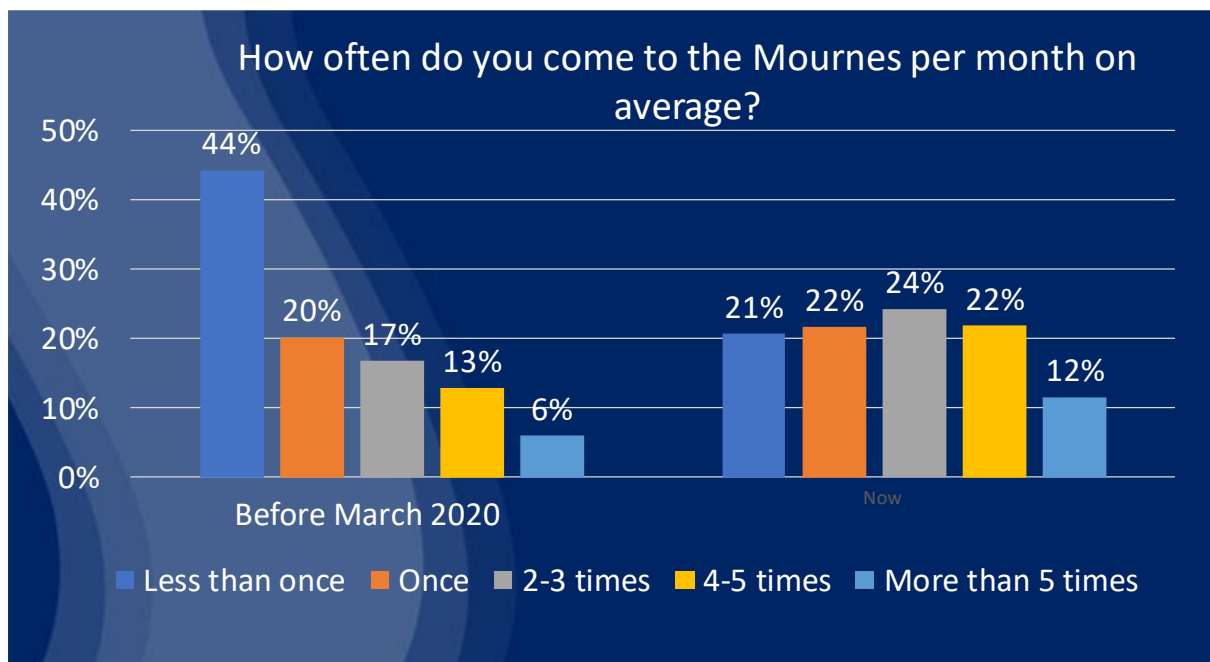


Slides/ figures supplied by Mike McClure for Sports NI.

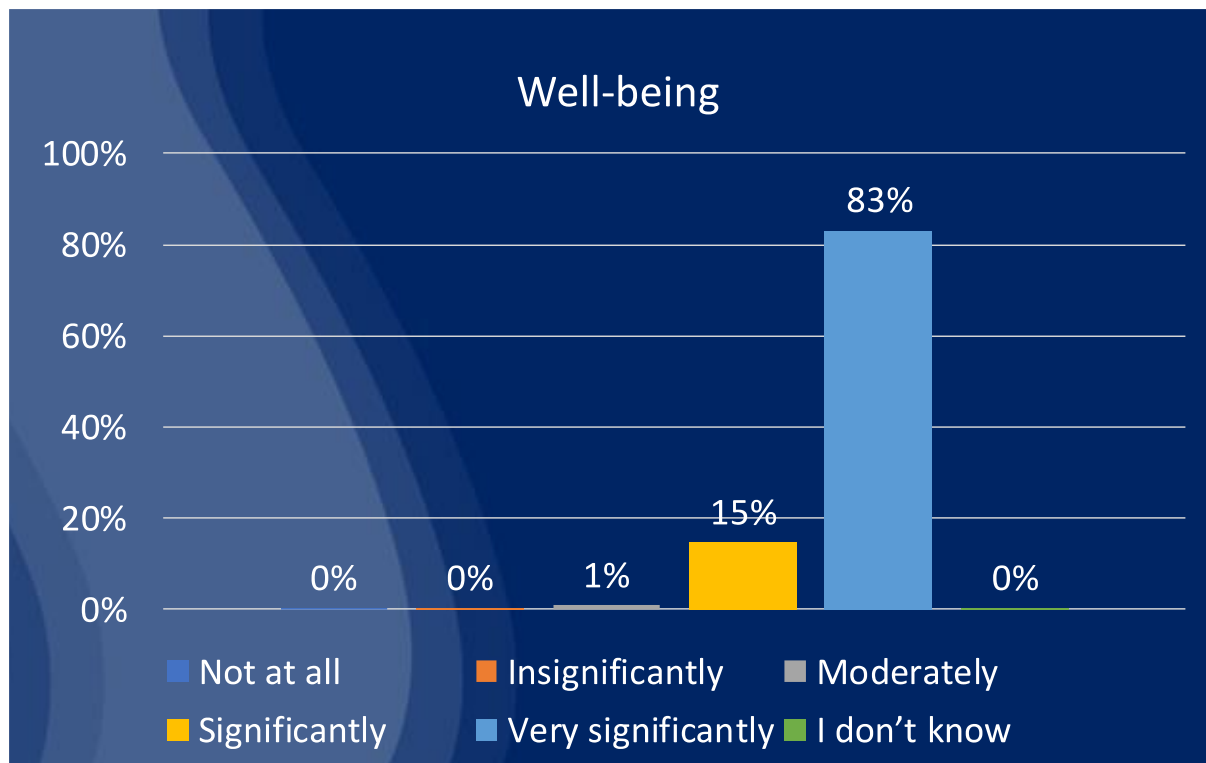
Another interesting finding is that more than one third of the interviewees was considering joining a club. The people interviewed had a peak age range in the 26-40 years of age.



Also interesting was to see that the Mourne's were more used as an outdoor gym after the lockdowns when travel outside NI was difficult as indicated in the figure.



A final point that the survey brought out was that including questions about the interviewee's well-being was accepted as valid and questions were answered as shown below.



I am sure we can all agree about the fact that the Mournes and walking in them has had great benefit for our well-being during the pandemic. Let us hope we have seen the last of lockdowns etc.

Bert Rima

### “Where the Mountains of Mourne Sweep down to the sea...”

These evocative words are the title of a well-known and popular Percy French song which has stood the test of time although few people, including Mourne Ramblers, could readily recall all the five verses of the song. This is to be expected as the song is now well over a hundred years old and despite its lovely melody and sentiments, it is a tender nostalgic song.

The life and career of Percy French has been thoroughly researched and the portrait is of a talented, sociable and generous man: he was born in 1854, the second son of a (not that wealthy) Irish landlord and clergyman’s daughter. Percy French trained in Dublin as a civil engineer and was first employed as a sanitation engineer by the Board of Works in Co. Cavan or as he said of himself, he was an “Inspector of Drains”.

The Sanitation department reduced staff in 1887 and Percy French was free to start his new more congenial career as editor and journalist initially for the comic journal “The Jarvey”, and later as a professional musician and entertainer.



Percy French was known as a fine singer and his chosen instrument was the humble banjo. His talent and celebrity allowed him to entertain all types of audiences. He played in small seaside resort halls, large urban concert halls throughout Ireland and England and later toured in the USA, and Europe. At times, he was the invited professional "guest entertainer" in polite upper class drawing rooms.

Percy French's success was greatly aided by his partnership with his long-time friend and musical collaborator, TCD graduate and Anglican priest, Mus. Dr. Houston Collison...a noted church organist, pianist and concert organiser.

Dr. Houston is credited with composing the music for "The Mountains O' Mourne"; the melody is held to be partly based on a traditional old Irish air, named Carrigdhoun.

The words of the song were, of course, written by Percy French, and they give the thoughts and yearnings of a lonely emigrant, an agricultural labourer in London who, like his fellow friend and emigrant, Peter O'Loughlin, wishes to be as the final line of the song says:

"Where the dark Mournes sweep down to the sea..."

This very successful song was one of Percy French's later songs; it was written in 1902 and it was inspired by a view of the Mournes when he was living in the coastal village of Skerries near to Dublin. He was glimpsing a clear view of the Mournes from his home and the line "Where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea" came to mind.

An ordinary, lovely and imaginative refrain.

Fionnuala Carragher

## NOTICE BOARD

- The Annual Picnic on 05 June was once again a very enjoyable and well organised event. This is completely due to our organisers, Carmel Quinn and Toni Taylor. On behalf of all our members, I wish to offer Carmel and Toni our sincere thanks for all their efforts. Thank you also to Meelmore Lodge for the use of their premises.
- Another attachment to this newsletter gives a list of all paid-up walking members of the Mourne Rambling Group for 2022. Members may wonder why this list is included. Well, as Treasurer I am aware that some members are unsure if they have actually paid for this year. If your name is on this list, you have paid. Please check to see if your name is on the list. If your name is not on the list and has been omitted, please accept our apologies. Please contact the Treasurer on 078 3512 8564 for clarification. I am also aware that some walkers have not yet paid. The reality is that our Insurance only covers paid-up walkers.
- The next edition of the Mourne Rambling Group Newsletter will be published in November 2022. If you have an article you would like to include, please forward to me as an attachment. My email is [trainorvj@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:trainorvj@yahoo.co.uk)