

NETWORK *News*

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS & ACTIVITIES NETWORK

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Climbing Wall in Co Fermanagh



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Volunteer Rangers in High Places!

The invaluable work of the Countryside Access and Activities Network's (CAAN) volunteer rangers was recognised at an evening reception held in the Great Hall, Parliament Buildings, Stormont Estate on 3rd June 2010. The evening was hosted by Naomi Long MP, MLA.



L-R: Derek Clements (Volunteer Ranger), Diane Patterson (CAAN) and Martin McGuigan (Volunteer Ranger)

"it's great for this sort of event to take place that recognises the contribution of older volunteers".

To mark National Volunteers Week, the Belfast based volunteering organisation, Volunteer Now, organised the special event to highlight the value that volunteers over the age of 50 bring to their local communities. A range of organisations which rely on the work of volunteers were invited, with a member of staff and 2 volunteers representing each organisation. Representing CAAN were Diane Patterson and volunteer rangers Martin McGuigan and Derek Clements. Martin commented that "it's great for this sort of event to take place that recognises the contribution of older volunteers".

By 2020, over half the Northern Irish population will be 50+, hence highlighting what an invaluable resource the group is. The evening reception was specifically organised to act as a thank you to all those who currently dedicate time to volunteering. Naomi Long made an opening speech followed by a presentation to recognise the contributions of individual volunteers. This was followed by speeches from Clive Goody of the Unlocking Potential

Advisory Group and Wendy Osborne (OBE) of Volunteer Now who highlighted the value of older volunteers in society. After some light refreshments, the council chambers in Stormont were opened for the volunteers to tour. The evening was enjoyed by all.

CAAN's volunteer rangers are also contributing to a research study undertaken by the Volunteer Development Agency and the University of Ulster which is assessing the impact of formal volunteering on self rated health of volunteers aged 50+. The results of this research will help to inform public policy on the potential health benefits of volunteering on people aged 50+.

Although only 2 of CAAN's volunteer rangers could attend the invaluable evening, we want to thank all our volunteers for their contribution to the work of 'inspiring outdoor recreation' across Northern Ireland.



Venture Outdoors help communities reach new heights around Northern Ireland...

Venture Outdoors is now well and truly underway throughout Northern Ireland. Ten of the project's 40 groups have already tried an exciting list of outdoor activities such as climbing, archery, orienteering, cycling and caving.



Lurgan Park, Co Armagh

The project's 3 key target groups are; the disabled, minority ethnic and disadvantaged communities. Groups who have started the 6 taster sessions include Mindwise, Greenlight Gateway, Autism NI Folye branch, Newry & Mourne carers, Station Road Armagh, Albert Street Youth Forum and Belvoir Men's group.

The taster sessions to date have proved inspirational as highlighted by Neil Mulholland from Belvoir Men's group who took part in a session of caving at Belfast Activity centre, Neil, who has cerebral palsy

and epilepsy, highlighted "despite my disability, which means I have a weakness on my left side, I get out and about as much as possible. I certainly had never been caving before and it was quite a challenge...it was a fantastic experience. I'd tell anyone else to give it a go and try something a bit different!". Maeve Curran, Venture Outdoors Marketing Officer highlighted, "the caving taster sessions got the Belvoir group members up and involved. The next steps are to get more groups out into the countryside to enjoy what's right on their doorstep."

Highlights of some of the other exciting activities that groups have taken part in include; Albert Street Youth Forum, who had a rocking experience on a mobile climbing wall in Lurgan Park, facilitated by Life. Newry and Mourne Carer's group ventured out onto the waters of Strangford Lough. The group explored Ireland's best kept secrets along the Irish coastline on board a comfortable, modern 12 seat RIB boat organised by Clearsky Adventure Centre. The Private Eye walking club,

supported by the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), gathered with anticipation in Lurgan Park to take part in an interpretation tour facilitated by 'About Ulster' walking guide, Martin Bradley. Martin himself leads interpretation tours to provide an appreciation of the geology, archaeology and ecology of the landscape.

Sharon Donnelly, Venture Outdoors Development Officer, commented "This is a fantastic opportunity for all the groups to enjoy getting outdoors and also helps raise awareness of all the outdoor activities that are available within their localities".

The Venture Outdoors Project is a 3 year initiative of CAAN and has been funded from the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities Programme and Ulster Garden Villages.

For more information on Venture Outdoors please contact Maeve Curran on 028 9030 3930 or at maeve@countrysiderecreation.com.

Canoeing on Strangford Lough, Co Down



High level of participation on Paddling Survey

Northern Ireland is known to be an excellent canoeing destination for paddlers with over 50 identified locations across the country used for various disciplines within canoeing.

The activity of canoeing experienced a dramatic increase in the number of participants, according to a research report on "Trends in Outdoor Recreation (1995-2008)". The report indicates that the number of participants tripled from 772 to 2600 during the research period. There is also anecdotal evidence that in recent years there has been an increase in tourist participation levels, which is thought to be in response to the development of the 5 Canoe Trails by CAAN.

Aligned with the development of the canoe trails, CAAN also launched the website CanoeNI.com, with the aim of becoming the definitive source of canoeing information for Northern Ireland.

Whilst these developments in canoeing in Northern Ireland have been very positive and reassuring for all bodies involved in canoeing, there has been very little information collated directly from the canoeists to date.

In order to fill this gap, members of the paddling community were invited to take part in an online survey that went 'live' during the paddling season in 2009 on CanoeNI.com and cani.org.uk. Part of this research was funded by The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

The high response rate (478 participants) is not only very positive for research purposes but also shows how active the

paddling community is and how much they want to voice their opinion.

The aim of the survey was to gather information on:

- The profile of the paddlers
- The behaviour of the paddlers (where they paddle, how much they spend, who they paddle with etc.)
- CAAN's marketing activity and the impact of the 5 Canoe Trails
- Perception of the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland (CANI)
- What sources of information paddlers use when planning a trip

Results of the survey revealed that the average Northern Irish Paddler:

- Likes to go with friends and family when paddling
- Paddles on flat water or sea with the most popular destinations being Lough Erne, Lower Bann, Belfast Lough and the stretch from Strangford to Newcastle
- Paddles on a day trip
- Spends £58 on average per trip
- Is highly satisfied with the canoeing aspects of Northern Ireland
- Plans to take part in more paddling trips in the future

The results of the survey are concluded in a report which can be downloaded from the 'publications' section on www.countrysiderecreation.com.

Attracting Walkers from the Republic of Ireland

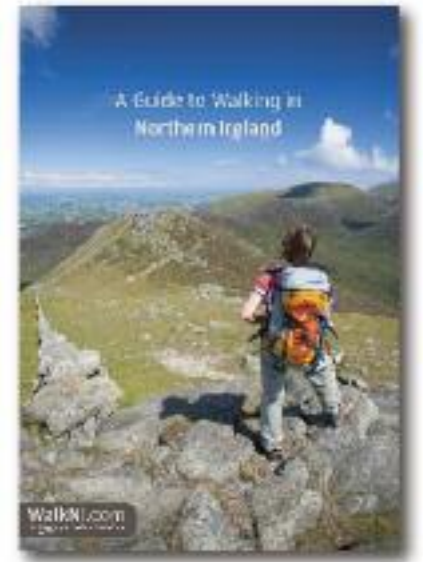
As the transport links to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland improve, CAAN is embarking on a marketing campaign encouraging walkers to cross the border and come for a walking break in Northern Ireland.

It is believed that many walkers in the Republic of Ireland have not taken a walking break in Northern Ireland as they are not familiar with the best areas, walking routes and accommodation.

In order to address the issues, CAAN has developed a 14-page publication "A Guide to Walking in Northern Ireland" to showcase the walking highlights as well as give specific and practical information for the walker. To supplement this, CAAN has developed two in-depth destination guides to walking: 'A Walker's Guide: The North Coast & Glens' and 'A Walker's Guide: The Mourne Mountains' which are available to download on WalkNI.com.

The publication will be distributed through inserts in Mountain Log and Walking World Ireland magazines as well as a mailing to walking clubs. There will be a range of other activities as part of the walking campaign including attendance at walking festivals, presentation at appropriate forums of walkers and FAM trips for key walking organisations.

For more information on the campaign, please contact Aileen Exley or Chris Armstrong on 028 9030 3930.



National Trails Day: Sunday 3 October 2010

National Trails Day is a celebration of Ireland's wonderful variety of trails and a chance for everyone to enjoy some of our most beautiful countryside, forests, mountains and lakes. Its primary objective is to raise awareness of outdoor trails.

CAAN will be leading the organisation and marketing of National Trails Day for Northern Ireland in partnership with our financial partners Inland Waterways of DCAL, Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Waterways Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. The day is also supported by the National Trust and Forest Service.

National Trails Day 2009 was very successful in the Republic of Ireland, with more than 10,000 people getting out enjoying trails in a variety of ways. Events included 'bat walks', mountain bike cycles, family orienteering, horse riding, try canoeing, heritage walks and just plain ordinary walking! Several events were held in Northern Ireland. This year it is hoped that in all areas of Northern Ireland we can have a fantastic range of interesting and exciting experiences on a trail, be it on land or water.

The target audience is the general public and in particular those who haven't considered going out and using a trail or maybe those that don't know where to start. There are many different trails aimed at a range of users across the country and National Trails Day is intended to promote the diversity of what is available. CAAN will embark on a PR initiative for National Trails Day in September. Support has already been pledged by explorer Hannah Shields, TV presenter Darryl Grimason and footballer David Healy.

CAAN asks you to mark Sunday 3 October in your diary now for your local trail event. News will follow soon with a list of events planned for National Trails Day. If you would like to organise an event or for any other queries, please contact aileen@countrysiderecreation.com





"This show gives us an opportunity to tap into a market that is already enthusiastic about activities; there is no hard sell to push cycling in Northern Ireland..."

CAAN exhibits at key events

As part of its campaign to promote outdoor activities to as wide a range of people as possible CAAN has attended 4 key events under its consumer brand OutdoorNI.com.

Amsterdam Walking and Cycling Show

CAAN attended this year's walking and cycling show in Amsterdam from 27th to 28th February 2010 in the Amsterdam RAI Exhibition and Congress Centre where it exhibited within the Tourism Ireland stand. Walking and cycling are key products promoted by Tourism Ireland in the Netherlands as there is a great market potential. This dedicated walking and cycling show attracted 17,700 visitors in 2009, an increase of 19% compared to 2008.

Most enquiries over the weekend related to self guided cycling holidays. The majority of Dutch cyclists going on a cycling holiday will cycle for 2 to 3 weeks, therefore it is very evident that the long distance cycling routes in Northern Ireland are too short. Exploring all of Ireland, cycling routes linking the North and South of Ireland are therefore ideal to promote at this show.

"This show gives us an opportunity to tap into a market that is already

enthusiastic about activities; there is no hard sell to push cycling in Northern Ireland...well apart from the hills compared to the Netherlands". commented Beverley Pierson, CAAN's Marketing Officer.

Birmingham Outdoors Show

The Outdoors Show presents a fantastic opportunity each year for CAAN to showcase what Northern Ireland has to offer for activity enthusiasts.

This high profile exhibition was held in the Birmingham NEC from 26th - 28th March 2010 attracting over 30,000 visitors and 190 exhibitors, including all the main activity tourism destinations.

Key attractions at the exhibition included guest speakers such as Ben Fogle and James Cracknell presenting on their trek to the South Pole and Joe Simpson of 'Touching the Void' fame. Exhibiting under the **OutdoorNI.com** brand, the CAAN marketing team worked very hard to get across some very simple messages to highlight and reinforce the unique selling

points of Northern Ireland as an activity destination.

Strong messages included:

- Easy access through 44 direct airlines and 6 direct ferry routes – the CAAN Marketing Team had flown to Birmingham in less time and for less expense than many of the visitors to the show who were based in Great Britain
- Sterling Zone which allowed easy price comparison and increased the 'great value' on offer in Northern Ireland
- Compactness highlighting the ease of travel within Northern Ireland i.e. you can get anywhere within 2 hours
- Undiscovered due to Northern Ireland's recent history many visitors to the stand had never been to Northern Ireland but had made several visits to the Republic of Ireland, Wales and Scotland. So Northern Ireland is seen as something new.

Once these messages were highlighted, focus was then turned to the promotion of the 6 main activity clusters –

Fermanagh, Sperrins, Lough Neagh, Strangford, Mourne Mountains and the North Coast, each with their own unique selling points.

The promotion was significantly helped by the BBC's airing of 'Coast' during the week prior to the exhibition. "Coast had done a great job showcasing the entire Northern Irish coastline and approximately 40% of the visitors to the stand had seen the episode. They were all really impressed and were coming to the stand with specific enquiries about areas they had seen on the programme. It really demonstrates the value of good PR. I was always a fan of Coast but now I'm their number 1 fan." enthused Chris Scott, CAAN's Activity Tourism Manager.

The exhibition was very successful and a clear example of Northern Ireland's growing potential as an activity tourism destination. "It's also very positive to have visitors coming to the stand expressing a genuine intention to travel to Northern Ireland in the near future, in previous years this has not always been the case so I hope we can continue to grow this trend in the future. Stand out products such as the Canoe Trails really help set Northern Ireland apart from other destinations." added Chris.

Dublin and Belfast Maritime Festivals

As part of CAAN's 'Outdoor Active' campaign which aims to promote outdoor activities to the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland through attendance at events, CAAN attended this year's Maritime Festivals in Dublin and Belfast under their consumer brand - **OutdoorNI.com**.

On June 4th the Maritime Festival made its way to the Liffey Quays in the Dockland area of Dublin. Incorporated into the event were the majestic tall ships, a lively street theatre, uplifting music and a colourful outdoor market. The event ran over the June Bank Holiday weekend from June 4th to June 7th and attracted over

150,000 visitors. This year's event was extended to offer even more attractions for all ages.

Visitors were able to visit the OutdoorNI stand to seek information on outdoor activities in Northern Ireland whilst their children scaled the associated climbing wall adjacent.

Beverley Pierson, CAAN's Marketing Officer explained "The wall acted as a visual attraction which brought many families over to our stand, the majority of their enquiries were about family outdoor activities in Northern Ireland. Most people were either thinking about going to or had already planned to go to Northern Ireland".

LIFE operated the climbing wall on behalf of OutdoorNI.com and put an estimated 350 young people up the wall. Around 266 families entered the OutdoorNI competition indicating that they would like to be kept informed about up-coming news and events relating to outdoor recreation activities.

Over the same weekend as the Dublin Maritime Festival, CAAN also attended the Belfast Maritime Festival at Queens Quay in Belfast. During the festival, visitors were able to enjoy a range of activities, such as an International Market, music, fun and games, seafood cookery demos, arts and crafts, face painting, circus performers and demonstrations.

A similar set-up to Dublin was present where visitors were able to visit the OutdoorNI stand to seek information on outdoor activities in Northern Ireland whilst their children took part in an interactive activity – but this time instead of scaling a climbing wall they were able to have a go Mountain Boarding.

Mountain Boarding involves standing on a mountain board which is a cross between a skateboard and a snowboard, whilst making your way down slopes

usually covered by grass or sometimes dirt. GASP set up and operated a ramp adjacent to the OutdoorNI stand where children and adults of all ages could participate.

The Mountain Boarding taster went really well because children of all ages and adults could take part, "...children in their nappies were even taking part!" commented Beverley Pierson, CAAN's Marketing Officer. The majority of those that did take part enjoyed it so much that they were interested in doing it again at GASP's centre in Newcastle or were interested in other things that they could do with their family...this is where the family friendly activity flyer proved useful.

At the end of the weekend GASP took approximately 250 children and adults on the Mountain Boarding Taster and many families entered the OutdoorNI competition indicating that they would like to be contacted by OutdoorNI in the future about outdoor activities in Northern Ireland.



Trail Hardware Training Workshop

Where: Greenmount College, Antrim

When: 19th October 2010, 11.00am - 4.15pm (after CAAN Network Meeting)

Newferry East, Lower Bann Canoe Trail



The aim of this workshop is to develop delegates' understanding of, and approach to the use of electronic counters, trail furniture (seating, gates, etc) and interpretation (panels etc). Delegates will develop an appreciation of the range of products available and learn how to select those which meet specific requirements. The workshop will be 100% interactive - incorporating sitespecific field work and discussion-based class work.

In teams, delegates will be asked to use their existing knowledge to assess a small trail system (within the grounds of Greenmount College), to identify locations for various trail hardware and specify the types of hardware they would choose and why.

Back in the class room, delegates will be asked to prepare their findings for presentation to the group. At this point, the group and a panel of experts (suppliers of people counters, furniture and interpretation), will discuss each team's ideas in terms of appropriateness, alternatives, costs, pros and cons, logistics etc. It is hoped that there will also be a range of sample products to view.

If you are interested in attending please contact Kathryn Callaghan on 028 9030 3937 or at kathryn@countysiderecreation.com. A small fee will apply.

Date for your Diary...

Network Meeting

The next Network meeting will take place on Tuesday 19th October at Greenmount Agricultural College.

The meeting will include;

- The recently completed feasibility study to return Magheramorne Quarry, Larne, into a World-Class Mountain Bike Park.
- Recent research which considered the trends in walking, cycling and horse riding since 1995
- Mapping public land in Northern Ireland for Outdoor Recreation



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Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN) is an umbrella organisation that brings together groups and bodies that have an interest in, or involvement with, countryside recreation. This includes those taking part in countryside recreation activities, local and central government organisations, farmers and landowners, environmental and community organisations, youth organisations and providers of outdoor education.

The Network is tasked with the strategic development, management and promotion of countryside recreation across Northern Ireland.

The Countryside Access and Activities Network is supported by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Sport NI and Inland Waterways of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.