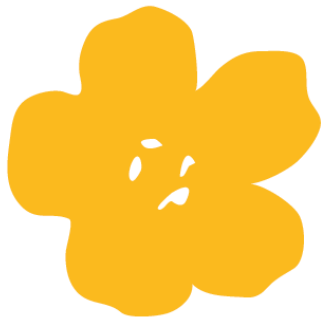


Case Study 3

Meitheal: Tourism businesses ‘give back’ to local landowners



Over 90% of the Burren is in private ownership and the landowners show great generosity in allowing access to visitors to walking trails and archaeological monuments on their land.

This level of access is a key tourism resource and to show their gratitude, the Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN) of tourism businesses have developed a ‘give back’ programme called ‘Meitheal’. In the old Irish tradition of neighbours gathering together to help each other, the network of businesses work with the Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers (BCV) and local landowners to repair damage caused to walls and habitats, and to help maintain and improve habitats and access to walking routes. ‘Meitheal’ is an annual event at the end of the tourist season.

The core partnerships here are between the landowners, the businesses and conservation expertise on habitat restoration and wall building. Conservation expertise can come from a range of organisations; such as a local conservation group, An Taisce, the Rural Recreation office, the County Council Conservation, Environment or Heritage offices. Training in conservation skills is an important part of the experience of ‘Meitheal’. This event also has a strong social aspect to it; it is an opportunity to meet, to share news and experiences, to network, to plan, to enjoy working productively together.

Both BEN and BCV have insurance cover; it’s important for landowners that any work carried out on their land by volunteers is indemnified.



The important skills here are in the quality of the organisation and communication of the event, the positive participation of the landowner, the effectiveness of the on-site training and the sense of achievement and well being for work well done.



Top tips

For networks:

- Appoint a coordinator; make sure they have the time and commitment to carry out all the organisation and communication of the event.
- Use local farming organisations, local conservation groups, rural recreation officers or County Council's heritage/conservation officers to identify landowners willing to engage and locations that would need maintenance or repair.
- Always consider health and safety and prepare a risk assessment for the activity. Make sure there is adequate insurance cover, either through the businesses or by way of partnership with a local conservation group.
- Team up with the County Council conservation or heritage officer, or local conservation group to discuss and agree the activity and the training needed to do this activity well.
- Charge the participating businesses a reasonable fee to cover training costs.
- Pick a date outside the main tourism season, advertise it well in advance and hope the weather will co-operate! Have a plan B date just in case.

- Keep a record; take lots of before and after photos. Post the event on social media and encourage more participation for the next 'Meitheal'.
- Celebrate! Have a social occasion after the work. Find a place nearby that can host some refreshments and give everyone a chance to chat and feel good about the day's work.

For landowners:

- Choose a location that is often used by visitors and is readily accessible.
- Be available for the event, it's a good opportunity to get to know local businesses and what they do.
- Give positive feedback to the group; it is the best motivation!

For the conservation specialists:

- Tailor the training as an on-site, learn by doing activity.
- Ensure that the businesses can see progress and have a sense of achievement at the end of the day.
- Make sure there is enough equipment and materials available by clearly communicating to the co-ordinator and landowner on who should provide what.

