

Meitheal:

Tourism Businesses 'give back' to local landowners



About the case study: 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.

Checklist for community-based Meitheal scheme

Appoint a coordinator. Make sure they have the time and commitment to carry out all the organisation and communication for the event.

Use local farming organisations, conservation groups, rural recreation officers or County council Heritage /conservation officers to identify

landowners willing to engage and locations that need maintenance or repair.

Always consider Health and Safety and prepare a risk assessment for the activity.

Make sure there is adequate insurance cover for the group and the landowner is not in any way liable

Ensure adequate qualified training is available. This will depend on the particular activity chosen.

Remember for working near protected structures special permissions will be required. Under the National Monuments Acts, any proposed work at or in relation to a recorded national monument requires two months written notification in advance.

Select a date outside the main tourist season, advertise well in advance.

Keep a record. Take plenty of before and after photos, post on social media

and encourage more participation for the next event.

Choose a location that is reasonably accessible and used by tourists.

Ask the landowner to be present, they will have particular knowledge that will be invaluable to the group.

Ensure that the businesses can see progress at the end of the day.

Make sure enough equipment and materials are available for all. The people who turn up will want to be actively involved.

Celebrate! Have a social occasion after the event for refreshments and informal chats about the work achieved. This can be best time for new ideas for the next event.

Click on the image below to the video of the first Meitheal undertaken during the GeoparkLIFE project

