

MOURNE RAMBLING GROUP NEWSLETTER

February 2026



Hi All

Rain, and more rain; where does it all come from? A simple fact for every degree Celsius of warming the atmosphere can hold 7% more rain! The year has started with, many cancelled walks due to flooding and heavy rain and wind and uncrossable rivers as a result have led to frequent changes in the routes on the day. Hardly any leader dares to publish a route in the emails we get from Robert, Peter or Fionnuala.

In this issue we report on:

- The away trip to Westport in May 2026
- Risk assessments
- A Code of conduct
- A dive into the Archives about social media and the MRG
- Training issues
- The list of 2026 with new and renewed memberships. If your name is not there, then you probably forgot to renew!

Away Trip to Westport, Co Mayo

The Club is planning an away trip to Westport in May 2026 as a base for exploring the Nephin mountain range in County Mayo as many members have not been there before. A

base in Westport will allow at least 2 days hiking in the Nephin Range to the north with the possibility of one hike on Achill Island to the north west or in the Doolough/Mweelrea area to the south. Following a recce in late March, the exact details of planned walks for May will be finalised.

The trip will take place from Sunday 17th to Friday 22nd May 2026 and our base will be the **Westport Coast Hotel** which is located down in the Quays area of Westport. Our May trips normally are from Sunday to Thursday but, under its Golden Years deal, this hotel is offering a fifth night's free B&B for those who book for four nights. Twenty-nine members have booked accommodation to date. Anyone else considering going on the trip should check availability under the Golden Years offer and book, either;

- A Single Superior Harbour View Room at €609 for 5 nights (4 evening meals and 5 B&B)
- A Twin Superior Harbour View Room for €459pps for 5 nights (4 evening meals and 5 B&B)

As this is part of a package offer, there is no discount for those opting not to stay for the fifth night. The trip from 17th-22nd May will enable 3 full days of hiking on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Those staying for the extra day/night on Thursday can just relax and enjoy Westport town or the surrounding area or, for those really keen on a hike, Croagh Patrick is not too far away.

To check availability and book a room phone 00353 98 55088 and ask for the Reservations Team. As this is part of the Westport Hotel Group, state that you are with the Mourne Rambling Group and you are booking a room at the **Westport Coast Hotel** for the 5 night Golden Years package including one night free B&B from Sunday 17th May 2026, departing Friday 22nd May. The hotel will request a valid debit/credit card to guarantee the booking, but will not charge the card until the day of arrival. Please note that, as with most hotels, there are terms and conditions around cancellations so you should check what period of notice is required for free cancellation when booking.

When you have booked a room, please let Noel Rice know at noelrice@btinternet.com and, where appropriate who you are sharing with, so that we can compile a list of members who are going.

Risk assessment - hill walks

Risk assessment is part of a walk leader's preparation for undertaking a walk and the guidance and forms used can be found on our websites Home page under Leaders Information. However, while leaders will undertake assessments to identify risks and actions required to eliminate or mitigate them, club members also have responsibilities in this regard, both for their own welfare and that of the group. These include being properly attired and equipped, bringing sufficient food and water, informing the leader of any relevant medical conditions and, following the leader's instructions, particularly when navigating hazardous terrain or dealing with rapidly changing weather. The committee

recommends that all club members have a look at the generic risk assessment form to familiarise themselves with the issues that should be considered in advance of a hill walk (see link below).

<https://mourneramblers.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/mrg-risk-assessment-sheet-for-leaders-29-may-2024.pdf>

Not all risks identified in this form will apply on each walk but it will assist the leader in identifying those that may be relevant. It covers things like the basic navigation and emergency kit that leaders should have with them at the outset, before considering the potential risks that may be encountered on the specific walk and the control measures to be undertaken to either eliminate or mitigate them. Such risks include adverse weather, slips, trips, falls, getting lost, illness, encountering livestock, crossing stiles, streams, ditches, etc., the list is not exhaustive.

Hill walking remains a very enjoyable pastime for all of us. Whilst it is not without risk, those risks can be eliminated or significantly reduced by pre-planning and carefully following the control measures set out in the assessment form.

(from Noel Rice)

Code of Conduct

The Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs recently issued a document entitled "Governance Guide for Walking/Hiking Clubs." Having read through the Guide, one recommendation that we felt would improve our governance procedures is around a Code of Conduct for members. We will add this to our Advice to Walkers sheet which is found on our Membership page under Forms and which all new members are asked to read upon joining the Club.

Put simply our code of conduct prioritizes **safety and respect for others, towards other peoples' property and to the environment and local communities within the areas we visit.** At all times members should be respectful and considerate;

- to other Club members
- to other visitors out on the hills
- to the environment and to the local communities within the areas we visit and
- towards other peoples' property

(from Noel Rice)

Impact of the Internet & Social Media on the Mourne Ramblers

One of the biggest changes to occur in the past 50 years has been the introduction and subsequent ubiquitous nature of the internet and social media. Some of us can still remember the quaint days when external communication was primarily carried out by post and (landline) telephone, and people were not expected to be available 24/7. However, there were many good things about digital technology, including the ability to document and share information to a large number of people very quickly. The history of Information & Communication Technology and the Mourne Rambling Group is a text-book example of how the technology grew into being an essential part of communication. Irene Cauley was

elected a member of the committee in the 1980s and her computing background was invaluable and led to the Group computerising its membership list and expanding its documents literature (e.g. guidelines for walkers and leaders, constitution). However, it soon became obvious that a website would solve many of the problems of keeping members informed of updates. Although she was a keen web user, Irene was not a web developer, but nevertheless took on the task with gusto. The first few months were devoted to deciding what was required, designing the layout, and structuring the information so that it was logical and as intuitive as possible for members (and potential members) to find information. There was regular reporting back to the committee for comments and suggestions. The site went public in 2004 and comments from members were very favourable. It was a well structured useful first port-of-call for potential members and did the job for many years. It also was invaluable to the committee as a storage location for the master copies of minutes, newsletters etc. However, the success of the website gave rise to some challenges – new people were turning up at the start of a walk, occasionally in groups of three or four, quite often badly kitted out and not fit for the walks. As they were being directed to the B or C groups in the first instance, our leaders were beginning to rebel and threatened not to lead. This was resolved by the introduction of New Members Officers in 2006 and the introduction of Aspirant or Tester walks for potential new members. After five or six years, the website began to look a bit lack-lustre and in need of a makeover. Fortunately, during one of the Sunday walks, Irene discovered that a new member, Tom Creed, was a web developer and she persuaded him to lend a hand. Together with Loretto Coyle, who brought the experience of maintaining her own website, Tom and Irene redesigned the website, took out a formal contract with a web hosting site and registered the current web address (www.mourneramblers.org.uk) and email address (info@mourneramblers.org.uk).

News for the Mourne Heritage Trust

The trust is thrilled to be expanding its team as part of the PEAT+, a project supported



by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body - SEUPB. PEAT+ is a cross-border initiative led by Ulster Wildlife to restore and protect vital peatland habitats. Locally, Mourne Heritage Trust is partnering with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to deliver conservation work across the Mourne and Slieve Gullion Special Areas of Conservation.

These new roles mark an exciting expansion of the MHT team, strengthening our capacity for peatland restoration, community engagement, and environmental education. We look forward to welcoming our new team members as they join us in safeguarding the landscapes and heritage we all cherish.

Mourne Heritage Trust regrets to announce that our Engagement Ranger initiative will come to an end immediately due to financial constraints. This initiative, piloted during the COVID-19 pandemic, was introduced at a time when the Mourne saw unprecedented visitor numbers, many of whom were exploring the hills for the first time. The initiative was continued beyond the COVID-19 period in recognition of its ongoing value in supporting responsible access, visitor awareness, and care for the Mourne.

Since its introduction, our Engagement Rangers played a vital role in ensuring the safety and enjoyment of visitors. They provided guidance on responsible behaviour, preparation for changing terrain and weather conditions, managing dogs on leads, and raising awareness of wildfire risks. Their work not only protected the landscape but also helped foster a culture of care and respect among those experiencing the Mourne for the first time.

Over the years, funding for this initiative has gradually declined, and, despite its importance, we unfortunately can no longer sustain it in the absence of external funding. This has been a difficult decision for the Trust, as the Engagement Rangers have been invaluable in safeguarding both visitors and the natural heritage of the Mourne.

We wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the Engagement Rangers who have served in this role. Their dedication, professionalism, and passion for the Mourne have made a lasting impact on our landscapes and the countless people who have enjoyed them.

We remain committed to the protection and promotion of the Mourne and will continue to seek ways and the resources to engage and educate visitors in the future.

Training news

There have been several obstacles in the past couple of months to getting training sessions booked in, not least the weather. My own night navigation refresher has been postponed until next week because of all the rain.

That said, help may be on the way. The Dept. has invited bids for expenditure before the end of March and the UFRC is hoping to run fully-funded courses in navigation and first aid. It is hoped that the bids will be approved in the next couple of days. So, here is what is being planned:

Navigation Training

It is planned to run 2 x one day Basic Navigation courses. The dates currently planned are both on a Thursday, 5th and 26th March.

First Aid Training

The plans here are still to be finalised. Over two consecutive weekends in March the UFRC hope to run a REC Level 2 Outdoor First Aid course and a one day Basic First Aid course. The REC Level 2 course is a requirement for any of the outdoor leadership qualifications, so, if you are thinking of starting the ML, HML or even Lowland Leader, you would need the REC 2 course.

The dates being considered for these training courses are 14th/15th March and 21st/22nd March. Hopefully one weekend for the REC 2 course and a single day for the Basic First Aid.

I should emphasise that, when these courses are approved, they will be advertised and places will be available on a “first come, first served” basis. However we have advance notice so that helps us.

What I need to know is your expressions of interest in either or both of the above training sessions. So, please email me ASAP to let me know your interest: cjianstuart@icloud.com.

In other news, the UFRC recently offered clubs access to 2 training courses, run as evening sessions via MS Teams. Initially places were limited but opened up to additional attendees at very short notice.

Noel Rice attended a session covering Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training. He found it informative and enlightening.

I attended a session on “PR & Comms Training” provided by Mackle Communications. It was really very interesting. Following the session Kerry provided us with the materials from the session, including suggested templates for Press Releases, social media posts, etc. and of course a link to enable us to watch back the recording of the session. I will be very happy to share all of these materials with anybody. As above just drop me an email.

(from Ian Stuart)

Membership Renewal 2026

Membership subscriptions for 2026 became due from 1st January 2026 and I'm terribly pleased to let you know that 147 members have renewed. Sadly that leaves 25 for whom we have no record of renewal.

The table below lists all those who we are aware have renewed. If your name is not on the list and you have already paid your membership fees, then let me know (cjianstuart@icloud.com) and I will get the membership stuff posted out to you.

For those of you who have not yet renewed, we would be most grateful to receive payments as soon as possible. Please note the cost of membership has been kept at £20 for another year.

Our preference would be that payment is made online by bank transfer. Alternatively, cash or cheque can be given to a walk leader or committee member to be passed back to Jen Rainey, our Treasurer.

In all these cases please email me, cjianstuart@icloud.com, so that I can update the membership list.