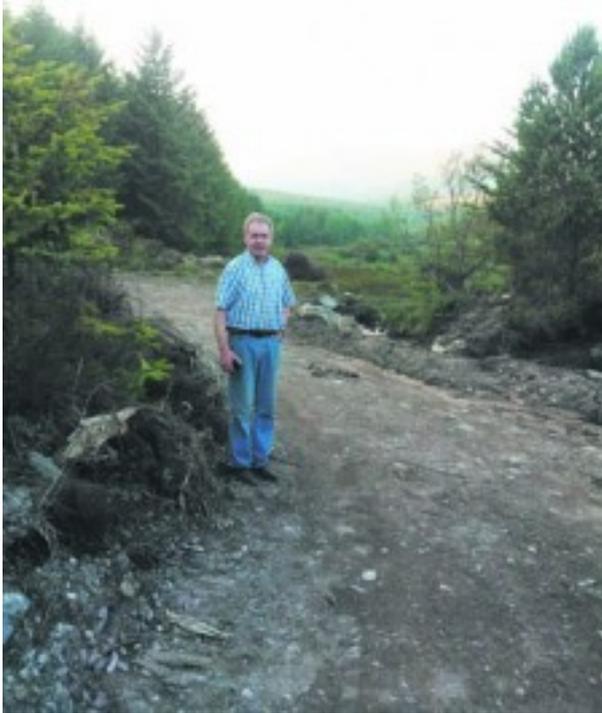


## If you go down to the woods today...



Declan Mulhearn, Comeragh Community Development Group.

'If you go down to the woods today you're sure of a big surprise' - so the famous song tells us.

Well, visitors to beautiful Crough Wood beneath the Comeraghs are certainly in for a pleasant surprise.

You may not meet any bears as the song states, but you will instead enjoy a fantastic walk through stunning landscape.

Earlier this year I reported on the work which was taking place on the Crough Wood Extension Walk near Mahon Bridge. And I'm happy to report that Phase 2 of the project is nearing completion.

Crough Wood is situated in a scenic and tranquil location just past Mahon Bridge on the road to the Mahon Falls.

The Comeragh Community Development Group (developers

of the walk) have been engaged in efforts to extend the existing walkway which has proved immensely popular with both locals and visitors alike.

Situated underneath the majestic Comeraghs, and with the River Mahon meandering alongside, the walkway is the perfect location in which to relax and unwind and walk off the overindulgent Sunday roast.

Popular with hillwalking clubs, the area also attracts many artists and photographers entranced by the area's natural beauty and abundant wildlife.

The walk was officially opened in 2007 and, in a great example of community collaboration, any maintenance work is carried out by volunteers from the local community.

A lot of planning and decision making has gone into developing Phase 2 of the walkway which stretches as far as the cattle grid near the famous Magic Road. Approximately three quarters of a mile in length, Phase 2 traverses a route which was previously impassable.

Huge advances have been made in extending the walkway, including the mammoth task of clearing an area of extremely rough terrain.

The Comeragh Community Development Group are very grateful for the support of a local landowner and, during the summer, the group received funding of €11,250 from IPB Insurance as part of an All-Ireland fund.

"That was a God send. Without that money we would not have progressed as much," explained Chairman of the Comeragh Community Development Group Declan Mulhearn.

This has enabled substantial work to take place on Phase 2. The walkway further opens up the Comeraghs, making an area of natural beauty more easily accessible and providing an important local recreational facility.

Not an overly challenging walk, but demanding nonetheless, the walkway offers various incline levels.

Phase 3 will eventually progress along the side of the river and up towards the Mahon Falls.

A lot of voluntary time and effort has been invested into the project.

However, additional funding is required in order to bring the final plans to fruition.

According to Declan, the entire Phase 2 section could be opened within one month if sufficient funds were made available. "There is huge potential. This is a viable project crying out for funding," he said.

"The required infrastructure is already in place as are the future plans for the area," he added.

The Crough Wood Extension Walk would surely represent an ideal project for receipt of LEADER funds or any similar funding. Declan hopes Minister Paudie Coffey may be able to provide some assistance in securing funding given his new brief as Minister of State at the Department of the Environment.

The Comeragh Community Development Group has had to engage in fundraising efforts themselves and will be carrying out further fundraising activities in the near future.

Declan has a huge passion for the area and is keen to promote the Comeraghs as much as possible.

However, the area faces a huge challenge with the proposed erection of pylons as part of EirGrid's Grid Link project.

Such a plan seems to be in stark contrast to the efforts being undertaken by the Comeragh Community Development Group who are doing all they can to improve and protect their area.

Interestingly, Declan says there has been a noticeable increase in people stopping in Mahon Bridge during the summer asking for directions to nearby Coumshingaun.

The lack of signage for the renowned location is something which he believes should be addressed.

It's surprising that no significant efforts have been undertaken by the powers that be to promote Coumshingaun much more forcefully.

A significant number of people are still unaware that his jewel in the Comeraghs actually exists.

However, we must ask ourselves the question: will there still be so much interest in Coumshingaun, Crough Wood and the surrounding areas if pylons dot this beautiful landscape?

I can't speak for everyone, but I know that when I 'go down to the woods today' I think I'd rather see a bear than observe monstrosities such as pylons.