

## On the right path at Crough Wood



Dr Michael Griffin and Sonia Griffin enjoying a walk in Crough Wood.

Crough Wood is a beautiful retreat of tranquility nestled beneath the Comeragh Mountains.

Drivers en route to the famous Mahon Falls may inadvertently ignore the beautiful walk which makes its way through this scenic wood.

Located just past Mahon Bridge, the walk was officially opened in 2007 and since then has been used extensively by both locals and visitors alike all year round.

In a great example of community collaboration, any maintenance work is carried out by volunteers from the local community. Work is currently underway on the second phase of the Crough Wood Extension Walk which will run along the banks of the beautiful River Mahon, ending at the cattle grid at the entrance to the Mahon Falls near the mysterious Magic Road.

The third and final phase, which is already being planned, will travel all the way to the Mahon Falls and double the length of the existing walk.

The outline of the extension walk has been constructed but isn't near opening to the general public just yet.

Declan Mulhearn, Chairman of the Comeragh Community Development Group (developers of the walk) said the wood has become a favourite location for many artists and photographers.

"Since it was opened to the general public photos of the River Mahon taken from the walk have appeared in magazines all over the world. It seems to be a haven for artists and photographers who spend hours wandering around the place. Many schools from the county and beyond visit the area and use the wood as a nature walk," he explained.

A fundraising drive is currently being planned to enable the work of the Comeragh Community Group to continue, as they do not receive funding from private or state sources. Tickets will soon go on sale for an upcoming draw, and Delcan is appealing to everyone to help out.

"A fundraising committee is now being formed and in due course announcements will be made regarding other fundraising activities. We are appealing to the general public to give as generously as they can afford," he said.

The extension of the walk will also represent a significant development in County Waterford's tourism offering.

"For a number of years the Comeragh Community Development Group has been working closely with the Copper Coast Geopark committee with a view to extending the Geopark into the Comeraghs," explained Declan.

"The Copper Coast Geopark is the smallest (by area) in the Geopark network, and there is a compelling logic to expand northwards into the Comeraghs, which is one of the finest glacial landscapes in Ireland and of international importance."

He continued: "Significant fieldwork has been conducted in recent years, culminating in two international conferences. One of these discussed the latest upland archaeology techniques and applied these to the Comeraghs, home to the second highest density of Bronze Age settlements in Ireland. The second looked at the power of ice and water and explored these in the context of the impact on landscape, from elucidating the glacial history of central Waterford to exploring industrial archaeology and the role of micro hydro power generating schemes. The link between the Comeraghs and the Copper Coast would be the Tay and Mahon valley river areas. Our plan for the Crough Wood extension would be to make it a Geological Walk with samples of the rocks that form the foundation of the Comeraghs. Each rock would be accompanied by a notice panel outlining age formation, history etc. There is great confidence that the expansion application will succeed."

Head of the relevant section with UNESCO Professor Patrick Mc Keever, who adjudicates on these applications, has said the expansion of the Geopark into the Comeraghs should be encouraged as it would result in a huge marketing opportunity for the county.

With so much positivity and potential, you might wonder why anybody would do anything which may even slightly jeopardise any of these developments.

Those who are striving to protect and promote the local environment are unfortunately facing challenges from those who seem intent on destroying it.

The erection of pylons as part of EirGrid's Grid Link Project would undoubtedly negatively impact on Crough Wood and all of the surrounding area.

"We in the Comeragh Community Development Group know that the plans by Eirgrid, a state company would destroy the visual aspect of the area forever," said Declan.

“This is state sponsored environmental sabotage and we appeal to the powers that be to immediately put a stop to the destruction of the Comeraghs as a tourist area. If pylons were erected there would be no chance whatsoever that the Copper Coast would be expanded into the Comeraghs.”

Crough Wood brilliantly showcases what can be achieved through community endeavour.

This spirit of determination and cooperation will hopefully defeat one of the biggest challenges the area has ever faced.