

Book Review

The Mountain Meitheal Handbook of Trail Design and Construction

Bill Murphy. Mountain Meitheal¹, 2011

96 p. ISBN978-0-9568452-0-7

Price €15² (including post & packing), available from

www.pathsavers.org

Bill Murphy's huge enthusiasm for the great out-doors is evident throughout this book which takes the reader on an interesting journey through the development and maintenance of trails on our sensitive Irish landscapes. Bill has rightly adopted many of the methodologies used in America, where similar environmental difficulties have been experienced and dealt with in the past. In addition, the vast experience garnered by Mountain Meitheal during the past decade is also carefully integrated into the handbook.

This book begins with a chapter on trail planning and layout. This, of course, is an essential pre-requisite of minimising future maintenance as well as construction costs. Many of our existing parks and walks were designed without adequate consideration of these costs and if trails become expensive to manage and maintain they will quickly fall into disrepair as over time the unrelenting traffic of feet, tyres, frost, rain and wind all work to erode a trail. All trails, no matter how well constructed, do require maintenance to maintain their surface and structural integrity.

Regarding the management of water, the handbook recommends a simple rule for trail builders: "keep the users on the trail and the water off". This is indeed wise advice in our wet climate and particularly so at higher elevations where the ecosystem tends to be more fragile.

The handbook contains an excellent chapter on bog-bridges and board walks. These are often the only sustainable solution on our many boggy and wet sites, some of which are important conservation areas. Mountain biking is one of Ireland's fastest growing outdoor pursuits and the design and maintenance of mountain bike trails are dealt with in a separate chapter.

¹ Mountain Meitheal is a group of volunteers drawn from a wide range of outdoor backgrounds, who undertake hands-on trail projects on our mountain and forest areas with the aim of protecting the environment and promoting sustainable outdoor recreation.

Its objectives are simple; to counteract some of the pressures that are evident on Ireland's mountains by working with local stakeholders, including the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Coillte and private landowners.

Mountain Meitheal also promotes the concept of sustainable recreation through the Leave No Trace message and is a member of the Leave No Trace Ireland group.

² Special price of €10 plus post and packing for ten or more copies.

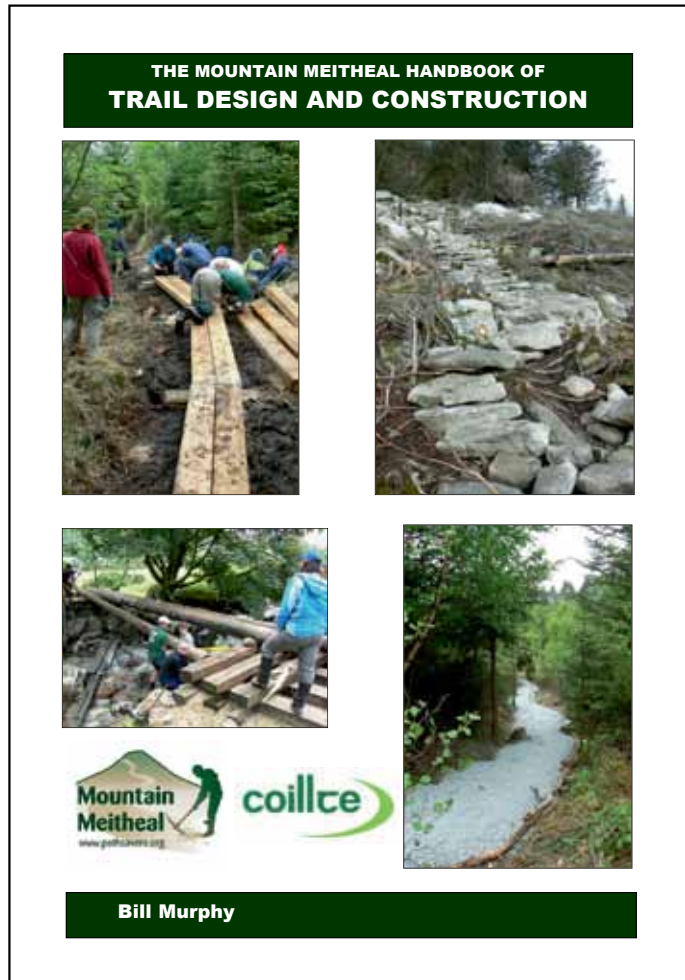


Figure 1: Book cover with images of trail building.

We are lucky to have this handbook available to us now as the number of people using our fragile uplands and forests is increasing year on year. Anyone planning to construct a trail should begin by reading this handbook thoroughly in order to ensure that they adopt best Irish and international practice.

John McLoughlin

(John McLoughlin is President of the Society of Irish Foresters and was formerly Chief Environmental Officer with Coillte and Project Manager with the People's Millennium Forests Project.)