

HERITAGE WEEK TRAINING DAY

MINING HERITAGE HILLWALK

THE GROUP

The Glenmalure PURE Mile Group is a group of neighbours who live in the Glenmalure Valley in Co. Wicklow. We came together in 2014 to form a community group in an effort to clean up our valley and to preserve and protect its heritage, including its Natural Heritage.

Along with its stunning Natural Beauty, Glenmalure has a rich Social and Military History, and an Industrial Mining Heritage. Between 1800 – 1900, there were several Lead Mines in operation in the valley. In addition to the Mine Buildings themselves, there were 20-30 Cottages to house the miners and their families, a Mine Manager's House, a Shop, a Forge, and a School, which was built by the miners themselves, for their children.

Today, all of these sites are still clearly identifiable but with only scant remains, except for the more substantial ruins of two Mine Crusher Buildings at the very end of the valley.

For our MINING HERITAGE HILLWALK during Heritage Week 2017, we collaborated with The Glens of Lead Group who are a group of volunteers based in Glendalough, (our neighbouring valley), committed to preserving and promoting the Mining Heritage in the Wicklow Mountains.

THE EVENT

Our event was an 8 hour, 20 km Hillwalk, traversing the 3 Valleys of Glendassan, Glendalough, and Glenmalure, linking up 6 Mine Sites along the way.

The Purpose of our event was to inform people about the Mining Heritage in these 3 Valleys, and to correct misunderstandings and misinformation concerning the Mine Sites and surrounding ruins.

In particular, we wanted to Highlight and Celebrate the recent Conservation Work carried out on one of the Crusher Buildings at Baravore in Glenmalure, and the Restoration of the Old Miners' Track leading up to it, creating a new 2km Looped Heritage Trail – a 'dream come true' for our PURE Mile Group.

The walk itself started at the Hero Mine Site in Glendassan Valley. Skirting Camaderry Mountain, we descended into Glendalough, and continuing on up over the Spinc, we eventually joined a short section of the Wicklow way and finally, picking up an Old Miners' Track, we dropped down into the Valley of Glenmalure.

THE SPEAKERS

We had 3 speakers. Our first speaker was Robbie Carter a Former Miner at the Glendassan Site. Robbie gave us a first-hand account of what it was actually like working underground and spoke very poignantly about an explosion in which he himself was seriously injured, and which took the life of his friend and workmate. Robbie's personal sharing of his story really brought history to life for us and created a very human context for all the further information we would receive throughout the day.

Dave Shepherd, a Mining Expert based in Glendalough, and member of Glens of Lead Group, spoke about the Mine Sites in that valley, making the more technical aspects of the work both accessible and interesting for the lay person.

Carmel O'Toole, native of Glenmalure, Local Historian and member of PURE Mile Group, spoke about the Mine Sites in Glenmalure with particular emphasis on Social and Industrial aspects of the history. Carmel's intimate knowledge and deep feeling for the Heritage of her home place kept the group fully engaged and personally involved during the final stages of a long and challenging walk.

MOUNTAIN GUIDES

The walk was charted, led, and managed by Charles O'Byrne, a Professional Mountain Guide who lives in Glenmalure and is a member of PURE Mile Group. He was well supported by mountain leader Graham Connolly; by Jim Nolan, native of Glenmalure and member of Mountain Rescue; and by members of the Glenmalure PURE Mile Group.

With regard to the weather – we experienced all 4 seasons during the course of the walk! However, this did not deter from the enjoyment of the group whose feedback said they found it a very informative and interesting day, and a great mountain experience with stunning scenery.

We received widespread encouragement regarding our plan to make it an Annual Heritage Week Event and, hopefully, in the near future, to have the walk established as a Way-Marked Mining Heritage Trail.

WHAT WORKED WELL FOR US

The organic nature of the event worked well for us in that it grew naturally from all the Heritage work we've been doing in our own valley over the last few years. It was a natural next step for us to connect the Mining Heritage in Glenmalure with that of our neighbouring valleys of Glendalough and Glendassan.

It suited our Skills Set and Resources.

The good Relationships we've built up with relevant Bodies and Agencies helped a lot.

Limiting the Number of Participants; requiring them to Register for the walk by email; and giving them clear information in advance about the demands of the Hillwalk and equipment required, all helped to ensure that they were well prepared and able for the walk.

Although we had Insurance Cover for the event, we asked each person to sign in at the start of the walk which included a statement that they undertook the walk at their own risk. Everybody was more than happy to do this and it generated a spontaneous discussion around Personal Responsibility on the hills which was very positive.

At the end of the walk each person was given 4 Information Leaflets with Maps included, and a Certificate of Participation. This was greatly appreciated and everyone seemed to feel a real sense of achievement on completing the walk.

There was no charge for the event itself, as all Contributors and Facilitators on the day volunteered their services, except for a cost of €5 per head for a bus to take us from our meeting point to the starting point of the walk.

Our own Passion & Enthusiasm contributed a lot to the success of the day.

The Variety that was built into the day helped to keep people interested and motivated till the end. For example;

- 3 Speakers with different emphases.
- Regular interchange between walking / talking / snack breaks etc.
- Variety of terrain / scenery
- Variety of Participants – Locals/Historians/Geologists/Students/Hillwalkers
- Mixed Advertising - Facebook
 - Posters
 - Local Newspapers / Radio

- Word of Mouth
- Heritage Council Booklet / Website

WHAT WE WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

Very little.

At a meeting to discuss doing the event again this year we felt there was nothing significant that we would change.

ADVICE TO OTHERS

Choose an Event that suits the Skills Set and Resources of your group.

Know what you want to achieve.

Keep it simple.

Collaborate with other groups or individuals where possible.

Involve people – Don't alienate them.

If you don't love it - don't do it!

Your passion will help you to overcome obstacles encountered along the way.

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