

The Ring of Gullion

A Newsletter for the Ring of Gullion
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and
The Landscape Partnership Scheme

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Two Ring of Gullion volunteers presented with 100-hour plaques

Two Ring of Gullion volunteers, Claire Voigt and Seán Maxwell, have been presented with beautiful hand-carved wooden plaques celebrating the one hundred hours that each has volunteered in the Ring of Gullion over the last two years. The plaques were created by local artist and woodturner Padraig Carragher.

“Volunteers are the lifeblood of the LPS,” said Volunteer & Outreach Officer Alison Henderson, who organises a team of over 100 volunteers. “Some volunteers can spare just an hour or two here and there but some, like Seán and Claire, have broken all records and continually amaze us with their dedication” she continued.

Everyone on the team volunteers for different reasons: for Claire, it has helped her back into the workplace after staying at home with her young children, while Seán has started a BSc Environmental Management & Technology course linked to his voluntary work and hopes to make a career of conservation.

“I volunteer for many reasons, mostly because I care about the beautiful landscape and special places in the area. Volunteering has plenty of benefits though; I’ve met some really wonderful people and learned a lot about nature and myself. There’s also the health perks, it’s a great workout most days and gives you a great sense of accomplishment when projects are finished.” said Seán.

“I take part in conservation volunteering to show my children the importance of working to help the environment, if everybody helped a little our local area would benefit incredibly. Volunteering has not only taught me new skills but has also taught me about local historical sites and traditional crafts, all of which are important to pass on to younger generations in order to keep our heritage alive.” added Claire.

Anyone interested in volunteering in the Ring of Gullion area can visit our website to find out more and register for volunteering opportunities.



Climbing the Heights as ASCENT team visit Scotland

In March, staff from the Ring of Gullion Partnership and Mourne Heritage Trust took part in a study visit to Scotland. The visit included the best practice examples of upland paths on the peaks of Ben Nevis, as well as exploring some of the 96 miles of the West Highland Way. Sustainable tourism and positive use of the highlands of Scotland have been well established for years and provide useful lessons for the ASCENT project.

The ASCENT project, which was launched in October 2016, aims to address the environmental challenges facing seven northern European upland areas, including peaks in the Ring of Gullion and the Mournes.

Unregulated access to upland sites and natural erosion has meant that some areas of natural beauty have experienced degradation, loss of unique biodiversity and bio-resources. In response, the ASCENT project, an acronym for ‘Apply Skills and Conserve our Environment with New Tools’ sets out to develop management plans and implement innovative measures that will address future economic and environmental sustainability.

Gillian Fitzpatrick, Chair of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council explained,

“The landscape quality of our mountain areas must be maintained and conserved and in bringing together all of the stakeholders, project partners and engaging with our local communities ASCENT will make a very positive contribution towards the sustainable management of our upland areas.”

“The group studied upland visitor management, path maintenance and landowner liability and were pleased to learn from some of the best in the world. Seeing the positive partnerships that have developed between landowners and visitors in action, was inspiring,” said Des Murphy, Chair of the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership.



Have your say on the development of Outdoor Recreation in South Armagh

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council through the Ring of Gullion Partnership have commissioned Outdoor Recreation NI to develop an Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for South Armagh.

It is well known that attractive, safe and accessible outdoor spaces such as forests, rivers, and the uplands, deliver a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits in addition to improving the health and well-being of those participating in outdoor recreation activities.

The Action Plan will make recommendations for the sustainable development, management and promotion of future outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities within the Ring of Gullion AONB and South Armagh region, accommodating both the needs of the local community and those visiting the area whilst reflecting the corporate priorities of the council.

Following a successful public consultation in Mullaghbane, members of the local community and interested individuals can continue to feed into the plan by emailing views and opinions on the current outdoor recreation facilities and service provision in the area as well as opportunities for development to info@ringofgullion.org



Jonesborough's Sleeping Beauty awakes

Jonesborough Forest was planted roughly 20 years ago on Parish land behind Jonesborough Pastoral Centre. A lot of effort went into making this an inviting place to walk; with paths, picnic benches and a small pond. Sadly though, as the forest grew, it was forgotten about, a bit like Sleeping Beauty, though instead of being hidden by a high thorny hedge, a high bank of cherry laurel did the same job.

Far from sleeping though, the forest continued to grow and develop, to become a thriving forest habitat for all manner of forest plants and animals, from a thick carpet of bluebells and wood sorrel to nesting song birds and breeding rabbits. Four years ago, during the winter of 2013/2014 volunteers began the work of restoring Jonesborough Forest to its former glory. Most of the clearance work of removing the cherry laurel, clearing the paths, removing invasive gorse and coppicing the hazel has been done by hand.

Recently the local community association, with help from Therese Hamill, the Ring of Gullion AONB Officer, secured Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Challenge Fund money to finish off the rejuvenation. The paths were restored; interpretation boards and new picnic benches have been added along with a story telling area for children. It is a beautiful and inviting place to go for a walk and spend time in nature.

We are working with Spouncer Ecology consultants and the people of Jonesborough to draw up a five-year community-linked management plan for the woods.

As Jonesborough is a living, thriving woodland there will always be work to do, particularly in the winter. If you'd like to get involved in the upkeep of Jonesborough Forest contact our Volunteer & Outreach Officer, Alison, on 028 3082 8594 or volunteer@ringofgullion.org.

If you'd like to see photographs of the restoration of Jonesborough Forest visit the gallery page on our website www.ringofgullion.org/gallery and look under volunteers.



Competition time

The Ring of Gullion partnership has so much news and so many events to share that we can't fit it all in our newsletters. Once a month the partnership brings together all of the highlights and condenses them into one email, and we want to share this with you.

So to enter our Spring competition and sign up for our email newsletter, simply head over to www.ringofgullion.org and sign up.

One lucky winner will be drawn at random on the 15th June and will be presented with a £100 shopping voucher just in time for your summer holiday!



Local Artist launches first book

Local artist, Edel Fearon, recently launched her first book at Tí Chulainn Cultural Centre. The book, titled 'War of the Queen', is a short story created to highlight the issue of bullying. The book, which was produced locally, features photographs set around the story trail at Slieve Gullion and started as a college project.

Edel is passionate about sharing a message with anyone affected by bullying;

"An increase in social media use has altered the way bullying affects young people. My hope is that this book will send a clear message to those young people – Stand up to those who make you feel weak by believing in yourself."

'War of the Queen' features local models Yvonne and Ruth, who were dressed in fashion couture by Claire Garvey, the make up artist was Marie O'Brien-Tierney and the girls' hair was styled by Melissa Convery. The finish on the print was done by RA Calvert, Lurgan.

To purchase a book please call Edel on 077 9443 3571 or visit www.ed-photography.co.uk

Youth Rangers 2017

Do you have a passion for the environment and outdoor adventures?

Are you aged between 14 and 17?

If you answered 'yes' to those questions then why not apply to become a Ring of Gullion Youth Ranger?

The Youth Ranger programme is a two-week programme running from 17th July to 28th July (excluding the weekend). As a Youth Ranger, you will have the opportunity to explore the Ring of Gullion by various modes of transport, learning about the landscape and heritage of the area as you go. You will also help Partnership staff look after our wonderful and unique habitats through hands-on practical conservation. In return, we will give you the opportunity to gain valuable skills such as first aid, navigation and how to survive the ever eminent zombie apocalypse (aka bushcraft survival skills). At the end of the programme, you will receive a bronze 50-hour Millennium Volunteer Award as well as an Explorer-level John Muir Award.

To participate in the programme you need to have a reasonable level of fitness, enthusiasm, willingness to have-a-go and of course, complete an application form. An application pack detailing everything about the programme and the application process is available for download from www.ringofgullion.org/jobs/

Alternatively, scan the QR code to download the pack directly to your phone or tablet. Applications are open from 1st March until 5pm on 31st May.

A £50 refundable deposit (returned upon completion of eight out of the ten days) is required to secure the place of successful applicants.



The Ring of Gullion and its birds of prey.

The next time you are walking up to the summit cairn or across to Calliagh Berra's Lough or through the woodlands of Slieve Gullion's slopes, pay close attention to the skies, the moorlands and the treeline; you might be lucky enough to spot some of our most special birds - birds of prey.

The Ring of Gullion and its surrounding environs are home to a wide variety of raptors, including Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Peregrine Falcon, and both Barn and Long Eared Owls.

The area, with its mix of lowland farms, craggy mountains, forests and upland moorland provide the ideal habitat for raptors and their prey.

Said to be 'indicator species', raptors reflect the overall health of the ecosystem by their presence, abundance or absence. Being at the top of the food web in most cases, they can tell us if all is well or otherwise.

In spring, the birds will be pairing up with a suitable mate and begin nest building shortly afterwards. This is a very sensitive time, and care should be taken not to disturb birds of prey, especially during the breeding season as special protection is afforded to them under Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and the Wildlife and the Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 legislation.

Monitoring raptor populations is a vital aspect of conservation and the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) monitor and record the fortunes of birds of prey all across Northern Ireland, and the Ring of Gullion is no exception. Fieldworkers regularly monitor the local area for population distribution, breeding activity, installing nest boxes and recording persecution incidents.

So watch out for soaring Buzzards, hovering Kestrels or a speeding Sparrowhawk, and remember that you can report your sightings to www.raptormonitor.com or to raptorofficerni@gmail.com.



Mystical Mountain

The sun shone high from a cloudless sky
As I slowly made my way
Up to Slieve Gullion's summit
It was a lovely summer's day.

I could see far in the distance
The foam upon the wave
From my viewpoint on the mountain
By the Cailleach Bhéara's cave.

There plain to see was Collon Grove
And lovely Dundalk Bay
The Divis and Black Mountain
And Ulster's gem, Lough Neagh.

The Cooley and the Mourne range
They stand so proud and tall
The ancient town of Carlingford
By her medieval walls.

I turn around and fix my gaze
A little to the north
Towards the city of Armagh
By the ancient Navan Fort.

I recalled old tales and stories
That the history books would tell
Of the battles that took place there
And those who fought and fell.

Tales of Setanta and Cú Chulainn
How Ulster he did save
From Connacht's female warrior
The legendary Queen Maeve.

I make my way right to the top
There a little rest I take
By that old volcanic crater
That gives Slieve Gullion its own lake.

Can't believe it saw such fury
So many years ago
Now only peace and beauty
And little streams that flow.

The heather waves so gentle now
In the warm summer breeze
While further down its rugged slopes
I see it tall spruce tree.

A home now for the wild life
That shelter in its grass
No more the sound of conflict
Like it was in times now past.

How I love you, my Slieve Gullion
But to me it seems so strange
That a million years can come and go
and you never seem to change.

I often wish that you could talk
And tell your stories too
Of all the changes you have seen
And the people who have passed through.

Did you see St Patrick passing
As his journeys he did make
The Cailleach Bhéara trick Fionn MacCumhail
To find her ring lost in the lake.

The cattle raid of Cooley
Great battles fought and won
Our monasteries and castles
By invaders overrun.

Who built the tripod dolmen
By your foot at Ballykeel
The reasons for the Black Pig's Dyke
I would like you to reveal.

I pass close by your passage grave
As I make my way back down
Another story from your distant past
And still your sacred ground.

But you'll never tell your story
I know this to be true
For that would spoil the mystery
Slieve Gullion – that is you.

Pat McGeeney



This lovely poem was written for us by Pat McGeeney. Pat was the first Armagh man to win the coveted title, "Bard of Armagh" (at the annual Bard of Armagh poetry festival); a title he has since won three times. He has been part of a group of people, most of them from his native South Armagh, who have worked very hard to try to revive the great art of versifying, reciting and storytelling. We are working with him on the Bard of Armagh Homestead Project to investigate the development of the original Bard's home.



Footsteps in the Forest at Slieve Gullion Forest Park 3 & 4 June

As High Summer lingers on the horizon, a mythical people are coming together. Slieve Gullion is their destination and our preparations to welcome them are almost complete. Step into the forest this summer and step outside the world as you know it. Leave behind all that is familiar and let the gentleness of nature restore your weary spirit. Then close your eyes and listen, for in the distance a sound is stirring. Back for a second fabulous year, Footsteps in the Forest at Slieve Gullion Forest Park, winner of the 2016 Heritage Council Cool for Kids award is on the 3rd and 4th of June this year. Tickets for the guided theatrical show must be booked in advance but are FREE again this year! For full details on tickets and more on the festival see www.ringofgullion.org/events



Old Barracks to become Peace Forest

The site of a former British Army watchtower and barracks in Forkill, which became a symbol of the Troubles of the past, was planted with 1000 native trees as part of a project to create a "peace forest" on sites along the border. A total of 4000 trees will be planted this year to form a remembrance for all those who lost their lives in the conflict.

The Peace Forest project is being developed as a partnership between the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the Woodland Trust, the Peace Forest Ireland Project and Forest Friends Ireland. It is envisaged that it will strengthen the peace process and the principles based on the Good Friday Agreement by symbolically turning a contentious site into a wonderfully rich shared space for people from all communities and for wildlife.

Children from St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School began the first planting on the site with a spread of native trees and drifts of wildflower seeds in sunny glades.

"The idea of the Peace Forest is to bring communities closer together in the planting of trees and in celebrating their heritage and enterprise and seeing and seizing opportunities for joint initiatives that have the new woodland as a backdrop" said Gillian Fitzpatrick, Chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

"South Armagh is one of the least wooded areas in Europe" said Des Murphy, Chair of the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership, "and this lovely Peace Forest of 1000 trees will be added to the enormous total of nearly 150,000 trees already planted over the last two and a half years of the Landscape Partnership, he added.

Share your love of the Ring of Gullion in a Photograph

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and the Ring of Gullion Partnership are inviting amateur photographers, young and old, to submit their digital photographs to the Ring of Gullion Photography Competition 2017. The theme this year is "The Four Seasons in the Ring of Gullion", which photographers are free to interpret any way they choose. This could be our built, cultural or even natural heritage. Photographers can share some of their memories of a day out in the Ring of Gullion, or some of the wildlife they have been lucky to encounter on their travels in the area.

The two categories are under-14's and over-14's. We would encourage teachers and parents to get children under-14 out and about with their cameras before the deadline. **Only photos taken in the Ring of Gullion will be accepted, all photos must be in landscape orientation.**

The 1st prize of £100 for over-14's and £25 for the under-14's is up for grabs; which is hoped will attract a large number of entrants and help the Ring of Gullion team to promote the importance of the heritage of the area. Runners up will receive Compact Pro tripods. The top 13 will also feature in the 2018 Ring of Gullion Calendar; which is always highly sought after.

Photographs entered in the competition will be displayed in Newry in November and at Ring of Gullion events over the course of the year. This fantastic amateur photography competition is a great way to showcase the skills of local photographers and the outstanding qualities of the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The entries are usually a range of photos, from landscape photos taken on Slieve Gullion, photos of the local historical sights, as well as photos of local wildlife. **The competition deadline is 31st October.**



New Visions for Local Waterways

The communities of Forkhill, Mullaghbane and Cullyhanna have come together over the last ten weeks through the Shared Waters, Shared Landscapes Project to create a vision for their local lakes and rivers. The aim of the project was to re-engage the community, young and old, with the lakes, rivers and streams in the area.

The first of many meetings and events took place in February in the Mullaghbane Community Centre. Many memories were shared on the night centring on the local rivers and lakes. One particular memory described how salmon used to be caught in the Cully Waters, near Tullydonnel, "With the supply being so plentiful that we would have them for breakfast, lunch and dinner". Children in the local primary schools worked with local artist Tracey McVerry, to create their own visions for the lakes and rivers using arts and crafts. The children really enjoyed the experience and came up with many great ideas; their work was displayed at the final workshop.



A number of other events were held as part of the project; free soil testing was offered to landowners and farmers bordering the rivers and lakes in the area; a River Restoration Course to look at reducing flooding and a mini-environmental fair which allowed people to get an insight into what is living beneath the water's surface.



The final workshop was held on 11th March at Mullaghbane Community Centre. This workshop relayed the visions developed for the local waterways by the communities over the previous weeks, with discussions about how these could be developed into the future.

Overall, the project was a great success, with the Ring of Gullion Partnership and Dundalk Institute of Technology Centre for Freshwater and Environmental Studies, wishing to convey their thanks and appreciation to all who have participated in making the project run so well. We would also like to thank the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Challenge Fund for funding the project.



Search for Voices and Views

Do you want your voice or your children's voices recorded for posterity? Do you want to tell a Townland Tale about your place? Your tale can be as simple as saying the name of your townland and what its name means or you can record a story about living in your place – perhaps you can talk about your parents and what their homes were like, maybe a local legend or just simply the best place to pick blackberries – your Townland Tale can be anything you like. As well as an archive of stories, this project will record local accents which are rapidly disappearing.

We are particularly looking for Townland Tales from the northern part of the Ring of Gullion. We have been very successful in getting children from the Creggan and Jonesborough parishes to tell us their stories but there are big holes in our interactive map from townlands around Newtownhamilton and Beleek so we'd really

like to hear from you if you live in these areas. We can lend out a pocket recorder or come out to your community to make a few recordings in one day, perhaps at a local youth club or GAA club. Please contact projects@ringofgullion.org if you are interested in taking part.

Our townland stones project is also looking for community groups, schools or individuals who would like to help us map the future locations of our beautiful townland marker stones in their communities. We need to visit the boundaries of the townlands and mark good places to place the stones. Often only people living nearby know which side of the ditch or which stream is the actual townland boundary.

When	What	Where
Events		
1st March - 31st May	Youth Ranger applications open www.ringofgullion.org/jobs	
May		
Friday 5th 7pm - 10pm	Introduction to Moth trapping and identification Learn how to identify moths	Slieve Gullion Forest Park
Saturday 6th 11am - 1pm	Cryptic Wood Whites & Butterfly Recording Learn how to identify butterflies	Slieve Gullion Forest Park
Saturday 20th 10am - 4pm	Bluebell Retreat Join Ann Ward for a meditative retreat Slieve Gullion Forest Park Cost: £65	Book: Contact Ann - 078 1683 5174 ann@xhale.biz
Saturday 27th 11am - 3pm	Volunteer Opportunity - Brash clearance	Glassdrummond Wood, Glassdrummond, Crossmaglen
June		
Saturday 3rd & Sunday 4th 10am - 6pm	Footsteps in the Forest Visit the mythical creatures of Slieve Gullion	Slieve Gullion Forest Park
Saturday 10th 11am - 3pm	Volunteer Opportunity - Squirrel hide & shed maintenance	Slieve Gullion Forest Park

These details are correct at the time of printing, however changes can occur; please check the website for up to date information.

News in Brief

1. A brilliant new Wildlife Safari will be developed in Glassdrummond Wood next to the church in Glassdrummond, Crossmaglen. A permissive path has been arranged through the woodland between the new Glassdrummond Community Association and the church as a landowner. The footpath has been accepted as a Quality Short Walk by Outdoor Recreation NI.
2. Camlough Heritage Trail Launched - A series of interpretation boards to complement the Camlough Heritage Trail leaflet has been erected. The mini trail starts in the village centre and heads out towards Lowes Lane, the route then goes up towards Church Rock following round to visit St Jude's church before returning to the village.
3. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has launched its tourism strategy to position the district as 'the' premier, year-round destination in Ireland, over the next five years. The plan will focus on our 'Mountains, Myths and Maritime' links to develop a strong, distinctive image for our area, as well as delivering EPIC-experiences. The Council is running workshops during April 2017 for anyone interested in finding out how they can support local tourism and capitalise on business opportunities. Full details can be found here: www.ringofgullion.org/news
4. A new management plan has been published for the Slieve Gullion SAC, it can be found on the website
5. A draft management plan for the Ring of Gullion AONB has also been published and can be found at www.ringofgullion.org/projects. Any comments or input from interested parties as part of a consultation on this plan can be made to info@ringofgullion.org.

**Crossmaglen Community Centre,
O'Fiaich Square, Crossmaglen, BT35 9HG**

E - info@ringofgullion.org

T - 028 308 28590

Search for the Good, the Bad and the Ugly in Gullion

The Good

Our first "Good" is the early spring bumblebees. You might have heard a buzz in the air and caught a glimpse of insect royalty as queen bumblebees are starting to emerge from hibernation. They've been asleep for the whole winter and need to fill up on nectar for fuel. The first to emerge are usually the Buff Tailed bumblebees, keep an eye open for these giant bumblebees feeding on dandelions, pussy willow or crocuses. Did you know each bee has to visit 6,000 flowers every day to get enough food?

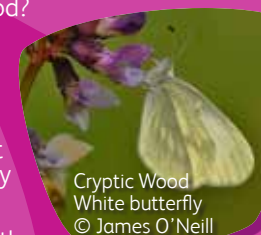
Another winged goody is the Cryptic Wood White butterfly, this delicate insect is only found in Northern Ireland. The male has a lovely habit of shaking his head from side to side to try to impress the females. Watch out for this subtly marked white with indistinct grey underwings feeding on rough sparse grassland

Another butterfly we would love to find is the tiny Green Hairstreak. We have the habitat for it but so far hardly any records. This is our only green butterfly. The Green Hairstreak holds its wings closed except in flight showing its metallic green underside. Watch out for the males dancing in spirals close to shrubs.

The insects on our good list so far all rely on early spring flowers and there is currently a survey being carried out of some of the more common species. These flowers should be fairly easy to spot but are under-recorded. Keep an eye open for the Lesser Celandine with its bright yellow flowers and dark green heart-shaped leaves growing on verges and along hedgerows. The Bluebell is another favourite on our list but many of the bluebells you see may have cross-bred with Spanish bluebells sold for garden plants. These cross-breeds have no scent and have flowers falling down on all sides of the main stem. Please record true native bluebells in woodlands hedgerows and on shady banks.



7 Spot Ladybird
© David Tosh



Cryptic Wood
White butterfly
© James O'Neill



Green Hairstreak
© James O'Neill



Lesser Celandine
© Zoe Devlin

The Bad

Extra funding was recently received from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to enable us to research and produce a much-needed management action plan for Alien Invasive Species in the Ring of Gullion and wider buffer zones. Alien invasive species are known to cause severe negative economic, social and environmental impacts. We are always looking for help to record the location of these biological bad boys. So if you see any of the following plants please record their location and let us know: Giant Hogweed, knotweeds (Giant, Himalayan and Japanese), Himalayan Balsam and finally two that might not be usually thought of as nasties: Winter Heliotrope and Old Man's Beard.

The Ugly

We would like to reduce the occurrence of litter and flytipping to provide a cleaner and safer environment to improve the quality of life, both for communities and for visitors to the area. But from time to time you will see some sort of litter and flytipping around our beautiful countryside or in our villages. Please use our on-line recording form to report this ugly blight on our landscape. Reporting can be completely anonymous



Ring of Gullion
Landscape Partnership

