

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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SAVE Our Ancient MONUMENTS



The cairn on Slieve Gullion, South Armagh, desecrated and filled with stones.

RECENTLY, when I paid an annual visit to one of Ireland's most ancient monuments on the summit of Slieve Gullion in South Armagh, I felt both ashamed and depressed. I felt ashamed because I knew

around the top brim with huge slabs of stone. Actually, it is a chamber of a tunnel and was once covered over the now gaping top; where, and what the passage leads to is unknown. Portion of the tunnel mouth towards the

depredations can now be seen: the abuse expands. Some of the slabs forming the top circular brim have been levered from their positions and thrown into the stone-filled cairn below.



Can this abuse to our ancient monuments located in remote regions like the cairn on Slieve Gullion be stopped? Most of the ancient monuments situated conveniently to the roads below are amply protected, and notices with details, warnings, etc., have been erected. All ancient monuments are important, but some are more so than others; usually, it is the monument in a desolate glen or on the mountain top which offers most to the archaeologist. Yet, no protection is afforded them by notice board or other means.

It may be that a notice board erected by the responsible authority would look rather out of place on a mountain top; but I believe that the board lends an importance to the monument

This disdainful attitude is likely interpreted as a method which brings an air of the supercilious with it—like the "intelligent" mentalities on the Continent who fail to see the irony in their acclamations of regimes which dominate them with a spell more diabolical than any ever conjured up by any legendary witch.

Our ancient monuments are important to the nation, and the nation is ourselves; it is rather unhappy that only the archaeologist realises fully their importance. These ancient monuments were erected by our ancestors, people of our kin and blood. When we desecrate a monument we desecrate our own! Would you pull down for sport the house in which, say, your grandfather was born?



For obvious causes, our ancient monuments were neglected by responsible authority during past years. Later, financial difficulties were impediments. These factors enhanced the opinion that old monuments were of no value to the nation. But just reflect how many foreign universities have so realised the intrinsic importance of our Irish monuments to send archaeological expeditions to excavate here. Now, thankfully, Irish universities are taking a livelier interest in our ancient monuments. Some of these are protected these

By
MICHAEL MURPHY



As the nights draw in and the trees put on their autumn colours we have a brief look back at the highlights of the summer, before updating you on on-going projects and upcoming events.

Lúnasa Festival Highlights

We had a fantastic Lúnasa Festival this year; here are a few of the highlights.

Strawcraft



Calm Waters



Flagstaff Fiesta



Feadh Rua



Geotastic Extravagansa



Serendipitous Sessions



One-hour or 100-hours, we value your time

Volunteers with the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership (RoGLP) come from all walks of life, with some gifting a few hours here and there while others volunteer more regularly. Recently, during a presentation evening in September, we celebrated four long-serving, regular volunteers, Anne, Claire, Órlaith and Séan, who between them have given over 500-hours service to the RoGLP. Between them, they have turned their respective hands to any volunteering opportunity the RoGLP has to offer, from helping in the tree nursery, to practical conservation such as cutting down unwanted vegetation and path building, to carrying out research and helping update our website or lending a hand at events.

If you'd like to get more involved in the diverse work of the RoGLP, why not volunteer a little of your time to something that interests you? Perhaps you'll find a new passion and will decide to volunteer regularly, whatever your interest we will endeavour to find an opportunity to suit you.

Volunteering with us is a fantastic opportunity to try something completely different. Perhaps you're an office-based professional but dream of working outdoors, why not join us at one of our weekend practical conservation work days? Scientific research has shown that spending time in nature is beneficial both for your mental and physical health, so why not twin that with a bit of work to improve the environment we often take for granted. Perhaps you're a student looking to gain useful work experience, or perhaps you have a little time to spare and would like to meet new people or gain new skills? Volunteering with us is a great opportunity to do both.

If you'd like to learn more, check out the range of opportunities available on our website, or contact Alison (volunteer@ringofgullion.org / +4428 3082 8594), for more information.

The ASCENT Project: Passing on our learning

As the ASCENT project reaches its first anniversary, the team are organising a workshop event to 'Review upland path principles'. The workshop will be a space for land managers, practitioners and local communities, who are responding to increased erosion in protected upland landscapes to discuss these principles, their effectiveness and how they are implemented.

During the workshop, leaders in the field will facilitate discussion on common challenges, knowledge exchange, innovation and policy development.

This event will result in targeted best practice guidelines for rural community networks, landscape management bodies, path practitioners, outdoor recreation providers & participants, government agencies with a role in the rural landscape and protected area management and also for those promoting the outdoors for health and well-being, tourism and economic development.

Ascent trip to the Arctic

At the workshop some of the ASCENT project partners will discuss the recent ASCENT team trip to Finland; a week of meetings, site visits, thematic seminars and many project planning activities in the magnificent wilderness of the Hossa and Oulanka National Parks.

The ASCENT team visited Finland's Oulanka National Park where officers from Mourne Heritage Trust and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council helped fix some trails, with the aim of sharing skills and knowledge. The team also explored some of Hossa National Park's 90km of trails, winding easily through the spectacular lake scenery. The park was designated in 2017, and new paths and infrastructure were built for its opening.

The ASCENT team visited Julma Olkky by boat with the fieldwork manager and rangers from Metsähallitus, a state owned enterprise that manages one third of Finland's surface area. The trip took the team to view a new suspension bridge, metal staircases, stone pitching on a fall line trail (a trail that goes straight up a slope) and extensive safety work carried out last winter. We look forward to welcoming the Finnish team to Slieve Gullion and Slieve Donard in March 2018.



Youth Rangers 2017

During the last two weeks of July ten young people gave up their valuable summer holidays to become Ring of Gullion Youth Rangers; assisted each week by two Junior Leaders. Working closely with Alison, our Volunteer and Outreach Officer and supported by John, from Life Adventure, the Youth Rangers carried out lots of valuable conservation work. The work was varied, ranging from bracken bashing along the Famine Wall on Slieve Gullion in preparation for a Lúnasa Festival event, to creating a protective dead hedge and an adventure path in Glasdrummond Wood, ready for its public opening.

It wasn't all work though, in return for their efforts the Youth Rangers were taught valuable navigation and first aid skills and were taken adventure canoeing on Camlough Lake and bouldering up Bloody Bridge river in the Mournes.

Through the programme, the Youth Rangers also achieved a 50-hour Millenium Volunteer award and an Explorer-level John Muir Award. The John Muir award encourages participants to discover a wild place, explore and conserve it, then share their experiences. If you'd like to read about the Youth Rangers' experiences visit the Projects page of our website to read their daily blog or check out their pictures in the Gallery.

The programme wrapped up in September with a presentation evening, where their parents were given an insight into the Youth Rangers' adventures and antics. They also were presented with their certificates by Des Murphy, Chairperson of the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership Board and Roisin Mulgrew, Chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.



Celebrating Bessbrook

The Bessbrook Model Village Living History Archive has now been completed. This fantastic project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the culmination of the programme that captured the hearts and minds of the village, was a well-attended celebration event held in Bessbrook Town Hall in October.

The project had a range of main outcomes; the first was the creation of a piece of art entitled "Now and Then". This sensory wall hanging is the result of extensive engagement and input from the local community and includes poetry extracts and felted panels, created by the participants. The piece is available to view in Bessbrook Library and images of it can be seen on the new website that has been built to accompany the project. The website, www.bessbrook.org, includes an on-line archive of images of the items brought to a show-and-tell evening in July. This evening encouraged people to bring along items of historical interest to be examined and photographed; creating a valuable on-line resource that crosses the generational and global divide.

"Bessbrook has a rich tapestry of history that is at risk of being lost in the digital age. This project has offered us a fantastic opportunity to record and preserve this element of our heritage," said Roisin Mulgrew, Chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.



The website will also host a series of docu-dramas that came out of media training workshops, provided by local company Slack Press. The dramas explore and interpret the history of Bessbrook in a modern way. Workshop participants were young people aged 16-25 not in education, employment or training. The young people learnt skills in video production, writing and developing storyboards and scripts, filming and film editing.

However, the project was not all virtual and a key part was the provision of a series of fascinating guided walks by Rosemary Mullholland. Walkers experienced the dawn chorus in Derrymore and discovered the industrial heritage of the Camlough River and its impact on the development of the area. They were also given the opportunity to explore the Millworkers House in College Square East, Bessbrook; which has been restored by the Bessbrook Development Company in the style of the late 1900s.

The great success of the Bessbrook Model Village Living History Archive is summed up by Shelia McClelland, from the Heritage Lottery Fund, who said,

"We're delighted that money raised by National Lottery players could fund this engaging local heritage project. As an early Quaker village, Bessbrook has a fascinating heritage and still retains so much of the original buildings and lay out. This project has brought that heritage to life in an imaginative and creative way and has involved lots of local people in exploring and sharing their heritage. We congratulate the project team on all their hard work."



A Great Place - New Ring of Gullion Partnership Project

The Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership has applied to become a pilot for the Heritage Lottery Fund's Great Place Scheme through a Museum of Memory. The aim of the fund is to put heritage and culture at the heart of the local understanding of between two and four 'Great Places' across Northern Ireland. This will make a step-change in the contribution of heritage to those areas, and will embed it in the heart of those places' plans for the future.

The Museum of Memory will be a partnership working for the promotion, intergenerational transmission and creation of intangible heritage. Under the overarching structure of the Museum of Memory, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council will act as lead partner, working with a number of businesses and community organisations.

The Ring of Gullion and its hinterland is recognized as an exceptional cultural region with a unique intangible heritage that includes music, song, poetry, language, oral literature, place names, mythological tales, traditional knowledge and crafts.

The Partnership was successful with its stage one application and its panel presentation. The partnership was invited to submit a full application by the 12th December. The Partnership aim to submit a full application for a three-year project with funding totalling £307,000.

If your community group, business or school feel that you would like to get involved in the application and become a partner, please contact the Ring of Gullion Office on info@ringofgullion.org.



Winter Solstice Festival – Celebrating the shortest day

The Ring of Gullion Partnership is expanding the Winter Solstice Festival to start in November, in order to celebrate the turn in the year and the arrival of the shortest day. The festival kicks off with a new coach tour on the theme of Samhain with Una Walsh on the 1st November, which will trace the footsteps of the Celts in South Armagh.

There will be a range of talks during November and December, which will start on 8th November, in Flagstaff Lodge with Réamonn Ó Ciaráin telling the stories of Cú Chulainn. There will be signed copies of his book 'Cú Chulainn: Ulster's Greatest Hero' available for purchase on the night.

Other talks will include the geology of the area, bought to life by Dr Kirstin Lemon, who is always a popular speaker. With all the hustle, bustle and commercialisation of Christmas shopping and preparations, why not make your own straw or willow gifts at Straw Craft Ireland workshops, happening in November and December.

If you would like some quiet time to reflect on the last year and look forward to the next, join Ann Ward for an "Into the Light - Winter Solstice Retreat" on 16th December.

The ever-popular hikes to the Slieve Gullion summit running from 18th to 22nd December, will open for booking at 9am on 1st December, via the Ring of Gullion website: www.ringofgullion.org/events. Booking is essential, as places are limited. These walks are weather dependent and a good level of fitness is required.

Check out the Winter Solstice Festival leaflet and the Ring of Gullion website for a full list of events happening throughout the festival. Places on some events need to be booked, please visit the website to avoid disappointment.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership and the Heritage Lottery Fund support this festival.



Glassdrummond Grows – Community and woodland in partnership

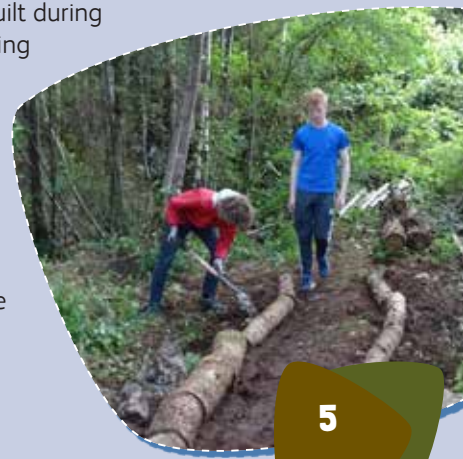
On a day of sunshine and showers in August, the local community of Glassdrummond turned out in force for the opening ceremony of the new Wildlife Safari at Glassdrummond Community Wood. The event was a great success with over 70 people attending, enjoying fun with butterflies, storytelling, pond dipping, and wildlife exploration. The opening ceremony was just the icing on the cake of many years of work that have gone into creating a beautiful community resource, from what was once a dark and inaccessible woodland.

Ten years ago Father King, newly arrived in the parish, saw the potential of the little woodland and campaigned ceaselessly to try to find funding to improve it. The first piece of practical work on the woodland occurred when, with the aid of the Ring of Gullion AONB Partnership, the local school was able to apply for funding through the Challenge Fund to create access and build a footpath.

With the assistance of the Landscape Partnership, Outdoor Recreation NI adopted the footpath as a quality short walk and a permissive path agreement was signed between St Brigid's church and the new Glassdrummond Community Group. With this agreement and insurance in place, work started in earnest. Volunteers cleared invasive cherry laurel, cut back undergrowth and removed two skips of rubbish from the site. We also had a tree surgeon fell some of the larger larch trees along the path and trainees laid a hedge on the boundary. The benefits of this work were already being seen this spring – bluebells, wild violets and wild raspberries quickly took advantage of the increased light.

The local community came together with St Brigid's Primary School to come up with hundreds of ideas for developing a wildlife safari in the woods. We took the most popular of these ideas and together with biodiversity management plans from our ecological consultants, we developed a wonderful plan including an outdoor classroom, animal hotels with secret cameras, a pond dipping zone and a den-building zone.

All this work together with a new "secret path" to the back of the wood was built during the summer. Further tree felling and replanting with native species is planned and the community is coming together with plans for a Halloween extravaganza "The O'Neills Ride Again" and a Christmas Fun Day, to embed the woodland in the heart of the community.





Holistic Traditional Woodland Management Training

Woodlands and hedgerows are just taken for granted as part of the scenery, but to a large extent, the framework to our landscape provided by trees is actually the product of hundreds of years of traditional woodland management carried out by skilled woodsmen. Sadly though, these skills are being lost and with them our managed woods, coppices and hedgerows. For lack of care, a neatly laid stock-proof hedge becomes a straggly moribund line of stunted trees that has to be reinforced with barbed wire to keep animals out; a coppiced wood full of bluebells is uncut and becomes choked and shaded with gorse and bramble with no flowers to delight us.

To slow the loss of these traditional countryside management skills in the Ring of Gullion and to improve the biodiversity by creating healthy woodland and hedgerows the Landscape Partnership has been developing a training programme in traditional woodland management. This course will be delivered on alternate weekends, starting on 26th November (mainly Saturdays but some Sundays and full weekends are included)



through to spring 2018. The course is open to anyone, however, it would especially suit those with an interest in environmental conservation or landowners who want to get the most out of their wooded areas and hedges or perhaps establish new plantings.

The one and two-day modules will be mainly outdoors and will take place at sites across the Ring of Gullion, mainly Jonesborough, Glasdrummond, Slieve Gullion Forest Park and Mullaghbane. Topics will include growing trees from seed, tree identification, removal of invasive species, wood and hedgerow foraging, hedge-planting and hedge laying, coppicing, establishing and maintaining living willow structures and fedges, and using forest products to create hurdles and other structures.

More than eight full days of training will be involved and people should only sign up if they can commit to the majority of these days. The cost of the course is just £50; however, volunteers who have built up over 75 hours volunteering with the Landscape Partnership will be offered this training for free, while those who have completed 35 hours will qualify for a 50% reduction in fees.

Please visit the website www.ringofgullion.org/jobs/ or phone the office on +4428 3082 8594 for further information.

Michael J Murphy Winter School 2017

The annual Michael J Murphy Winter School takes place on Friday 24th and Saturday 25th November in Tí Chulainn Cultural Centre, Mullaghbane. The theme of this year's school is 'Borders and Traditions'.

The winter school will open with presentations by 'The Old Irish Goat Society' and local historian Seamus Murphy, which will look at the importance of South Armagh goats and the tradition of pavhees, who were responsible for herding the goats to locations all across Britain and Ireland. 'The Goatmen of South Armagh' featured in Michael J Murphy's first BBC broadcast aired in 1937.

Friday evening will feature a forum, chaired by Eamonn Mallie, on the topical subject of Brexit, where conflicting views will be aired and debated by a panel of speakers, including two MEPs.



On Saturday, attendees will be able to enjoy a reading of Michael J Murphy's play 'Men on the Wall', performed by the Newpoint Players. This controversial play deals with the clash of idealism and materialism, centred on the border. Other highlights of the day include an interactive insight into the flax industry of South Armagh and traditional crafts, as well as readings from some of Michael J Murphy's writings.

The winter school will culminate in a 'Céilí House', an evening of entertainment with music from the Traditional Arts Partnership of South Armagh, singing, storytelling, readings and more, an evening not to be missed.

You are warmly invited to come along and listen, and immerse yourself in lively conversations and entertainment, all while celebrating South Armagh's leading folklorist, playwright, social campaigner, novelist, broadcaster, short story writer and photographer.

A full schedule of the weekend will be available on the Ring of Gullion website.

Red Kites in the Ring of Gullion

RSPB NI has called on the public to help build a clearer picture of our red kite population. A new project 'RKites Project' is specifically geared towards safeguarding the species here and strengthening the link between people and this beautiful bird of prey.

Red kites were sadly persecuted to extinction in Northern Ireland more than 200 years ago because people mistakenly saw them as a threat to game and livestock. However, back in 2008 these beautiful birds were reintroduced into our skies. Unfortunately, the project hasn't been without its setbacks: population increase is slow and a number of birds have died as a result of poisoning, shooting and natural causes.

The current population is thought to stand at around 20 breeding pairs and, the population will be continually monitored until it's at a sustainable level - estimated to be around 50 pairs.

"28 chicks were born this year and each of those young kites carry with it our hopes for a strong and successful population establishing itself not just in Down but into Armagh and Antrim too," says Alan Ferguson, RSPB NI's RKites Project Officer.

If you are lucky enough to spot a red kite in the Ring of Gullion or elsewhere, please email redkiteni@rspb.org.uk. Alan would love to know the time, date and location and if there were any ring tags/colours etc.



Photo: Neal Stephens

Ring of Gullion Ambassadors 2017

Our latest group of 12 Ambassadors, from all walks of life, have graduated from the prestigious Gullion Ambassador programme, bringing our total number of Ambassadors up to 40. During the programme, the Ambassadors have developed a huge range of skills, enabling them to fly the flag of the Ring of Gullion with pride.

The Ambassadors had the opportunity to learn from already established local guides and explore the wealth of history and heritage that the Ring of Gullion has to offer. This knowledge and experience will enable them to complete their own Open College Network NI Level 2 qualification in Tour Guiding. The Ambassadors also gained a first aid qualification as well as becoming certified and insured as Community Walk Leaders under the Outdoor Recreation NI's programme of "Walking in your Community".

"The courses and qualifications are very beneficial to the Ambassadors as they enable them to lead their own guided walks at community level or indeed just show their friends and family around the area," said Des Murphy, Chair of the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership Board.

Ambassador Training 2018

Our final Ambassador programme will be running early in the New Year. If you would be interested in being sent information please contact Alison, our Volunteer & Outreach Officer, by email at volunteer@ringofgullion.org or by phone +4428 3082 8594.



Trees, trees and more trees

With the cold winds rising and winter tightening its grip, it's time to get organised, once again, for planting new trees. "Trees on the Land", formally "One Million Trees in a Day", are once again offering tree packs to land owners of any kind, who have the space and desire to plant some trees. The purpose of this all-Ireland charity is to establish tree cover and woodland that will grow for many years to come; providing valuable resources, beneficial ecosystem services and a lasting legacy for future generations. The charity has been operating since 2013 and in that time, 730,000 native Irish trees have been planted across 3,000 different sites. Over 134,000 of these trees have been planted in the Ring of Gullion area.

Trees on the Land have a range of certified native Irish tree packs available, depending on the planting project you wish to undertake:

- Woodland
- Hedge
- Coppice
- Agroforestry
- Orchard – these are extremely limited

Each pack contains 50 trees, and a maximum of 40 packs (2000 trees) are available for a single project, however, if you are only wanting a few trees they can also come in packs of 15 or 30 trees. A small application fee of £19 / €21 applies to each pack of 50, which works out at 38p / 42c per tree, which is a bargain. Applications close on Friday 15th December 2017.

For full details of which trees each pack contains and/or to make an application visit: www.treesontheland.com/plant-trees. Trees will be available for collection from Slieve Gullion Forest Park, provisionally on Saturday 3rd February 2018; this date will be confirmed nearer the time.

What's on!

When	What	Where
November		
Wednesday 8th 7pm - 8pm	Winter Solstice Festival – 'Cú Chulainn: Ulster's Greatest Hero' talk by Réamonn Ó Ciaráin from Gael Linn and Armagh Rhymers	Crossmaglen Library, Crossmaglen
Thursday 16th November 7:30pm - 8:30pm	Winter Solstice Festival – The Geology of the Ring of Gullion	Ti Chulainn, Maphoner, Mullaghbane
Saturday 18th 10am - 4pm	Winter Solstice Festival – Decorating willow wreaths	Slieve Gullion Forest Park, Annahaia, Meigh
Saturday 18th 11am - 3pm	Volunteer Opportunity – Vegetation Clearance	Location TBC
Friday - Saturday 24th - 25th -12pm to late	Michael J Murphy Winter School	Ti Chulainn, Maphoner, Mullaghbane
December		
Saturday 2nd 10am - 4pm	Winter Solstice Festival – Straw angels and Christmas decorations	Ti Chulainn, Maphoner, Mullaghbane
Thursday 7th 7:30pm-8.30pm	Winter Solstice Festival – Winter Solstice and the alignment of passage tombs by Dr Frank Prendergast of the Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland's leading authority on archaeoastronomy	Ti Chulainn, Maphoner, Mullaghbane
Saturday 2nd 1pm - 4pm	Volunteer Opportunity – Tree nursery maintenance	Ti Chulainn, Maphoner, Mullaghbane
Sunday 17th 11am	Race around the Lake – Price £15	Starts and finishes at Cowans yard Newtown Road, Carrickcloughan, Camlough
Monday - Friday 18th - 22nd 3pm - 5pm	Cairn Illumination Hikes – Booking opens 9am 1st December through the website www.ringofgullion.org/events	Slieve Gullion Mountain, Slieve Gullion Forest Park
January		
Saturday 13th 11am - 3pm	Volunteer Opportunity – Vegetation Clearance	Location TBC
Saturday 27th 11am - 3pm	Volunteer Opportunity – Vegetation Clearance	Location TBC
February		
Saturday 10th 11am - 3pm	Volunteer Opportunity – Vegetation Clearance	Location TBC
Saturday 17th 2pm-4pm	Nest box building workshop	Jonesborough Pastoral Centre, Edenappa
Saturday 24th 11am - 3pm	Volunteer Opportunity – Vegetation Clearance	Location TBC

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. The Fish in the Classroom Project will again be up and running this November. So far, this successful scheme has operated in eight schools and has released many thousands of fish fry into the streams and rivers of the Ring of Gullion. If your school would like to take part in this programme please contact Alison at volunteer@ringofgullion.org
2. Another successful project run in collaboration with local schools was the erection of swift boxes and a swift tower in Derrymore. It usually takes a few years for swifts to establish a new nesting site, so we are really impressed that the tower in Derrymore has already attracted nesting birds and 9 young birds fledged from the tower this year.
3. We are busy putting the finishing touches to the spring and summer training programmes which will be themed on gardening for wildlife and living on the land (foraging and bushcraft). Keep an eye on our email updates for more details.
4. The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) has just published its new walking guide 'Rambling on the Rocks; walk Northern Ireland's natural landscape'. The book features exceptional landscape photography of twenty walks, two of which are in the Ring of Gullion AONB. The book can be purchased directly from GSNI as well as Tesco and Eason branches and the Newry Visitor Information Centre in Baginbally Castle.
5. Over 20 people (see photo on Page 2) turned up to help relocate stones on the Cairn at the top of Slieve Gullion recently. The newspaper photo on the front of the newsletter gives an idea of what the Cairn used to look like when it was completely inaccessible and full of stones. Two major voluntary efforts over the last couple of years have cleared the passage to its original floor level and made it much easier to get into.

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

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Ring of Gullion
Landscape Partnership

