



The Chairman's View



Richard Gillen
Chairman of Binevenagh
AONB Management Forum

It's been a busy time in Binevenagh AONB since the first newsletter was published last Spring.

New boundary signs have been installed which has stimulated a great public debate on the spelling of

Binevenagh, should it be Bin or Ben? If it gets people talking about the AONB then it's no bad thing. In addition it makes anyone travelling through the area aware that they are in an AONB.

Binevenagh Mountain itself has featured in the BBC's Off the Beaten Track programme with Hannah Shields explaining her love for the place and why she trains there for her various adventures. This has led to further interest in outdoor recreation in the AONB.

In June local schools went exploring as part of a Roe Valley Learning Community project which saw them examine the Binevenagh and Downhill Estate through drawing and photography. This work was then exhibited in Limavady Borough Council offices for the public to view.

A number of other raising awareness publications are planned including posters and a bird guide which links to the guides developed for the Antrim Coast & Glens and Causeway Coast NONBs.

The staff at the Trust has to be congratulated for their hard work so far but it doesn't end there. Terms of reference have been drawn up for the production of a 10 year management plan and 5 year action plan for Binevenagh AONB. This has been a great start. I am hopeful that over the next few months the Trust will be able to further build on this good work.

As we head into the Autumn and Winter months we will begin to see some very different visitors to the AONB with the migratory wildfowl returning to Lough Foyle and the Bann Estuary. Shore anglers and kites return to the beaches in greater numbers and you may even see surfers braving the swell and the cold. It's a great time to get out and enjoy the AONB.

Roe Valley Learning Community Binevenagh AONB field trips



Some of the pupils from Limavady High School, Limavady Grammar School and St Mary's, Limavady, whose work was exhibited in an exhibition featuring the Roe Valley Learning Community Binevenagh AONB field trips. Also in photograph, Mayor of Limavady, Brenda Chivers with Miss Rachel Cassidy, Roe Valley Learning Community Co-ordinator; Dr Michael Cross, Educator at Magilligan Field Centre and Liz Wallace, Assistant Advisory Officer at Magilligan Field Centre. Some of the other staff who participated in the field trips; Miss Anne-Marie Payne, Nrt teacher at St Mary's, Limavady; Miss Charlene McLaughlin, SERVE (Sharing Education in the Roe Valley) Teacher of Dance and Drama; Dr Alan Bogle (Head of Geography at Limavady Grammar School) and Mrs Cathy Boyd (Head of Geography at Limavady High School).

Year 8 pupils from Limavady High School and St Mary's, Limavady, had the opportunity to participate in a History trip on the 12th June to different locations in the Binevenagh AONB and meet pupils from another school. Mr George Dallas, Head of History at Limavady High School, provided a colourful insight to pupils of the built and cultural heritage at St. Aidan's Church and graveyard, Tamlaghtard Church and Downhill Demesne.

Year 9 pupils from the five Post-Primary schools in the Roe Valley Learning Community; Limavady High School, St Mary's, Limavady, Limavady Grammar School, Rossmar School and St Patrick's College in Dungiven, had the opportunity to participate in the 'Binevenagh from the Air project' from the 9th-11th June. This project, also co-ordinated by Dr

Michael Cross, Education officer at Magilligan Field Centre, provided pupils with the opportunity to explore the natural environment in the Binevenagh AONB. Pupils completed interactive Science and Geography studies at various locations in the Binevenagh AONB; the Upland Bog on the mountain top, the forestry area, and the base of the Scree slope and Nature Reserve.

Year 11 Art pupils from Limavady High School, St Mary's, Limavady, and St Patrick's College in Dungiven, had the opportunity to gather first hand resources through drawings and photography of the natural and built environment on the 18th June at locations in the Binevenagh AONB; St Aidan's Church and graveyard and Downhill Demesne, to help in preparation for their GCSE Art.

The pupils were not only inspired by the beautiful environment but also by their fellow pupils art work.

'The Binevenagh AONB field trips have helped to develop the realisation amongst the five post-primary schools in the Roe Valley Learning Community about the importance of utilizing the environment that is on our doorstep, and how numerous subject areas within the curriculum can benefit from the exploration of the diverse natural, built and cultural heritage in the Binevenagh AONB. The pupils were given the opportunity to develop their understanding and appreciation of their local environment and the significance of the area as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The trips also enabled pupils to meet and work with pupils from different schools.'

Miss R Cassidy, Roe Valley Learning Community Co-ordinator and co-ordinator of the Binevenagh AONB Field trips.



Pupils sketching at St. Aidan's Church graveyard





Birdlife of Binevenagh

The Binevenagh AONB undoubtedly consists of some of the best sites for bird-watching in the province. With a wide selection of different habitats, whenever you may decide to don your walking boots and pick-up your binoculars, there is likely to be a spot with some treats in sight.

how novice, will soon have a new tool in the form of an illustrated bird guide, being produced by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust. The free guide is hoped to be winging its way to you at the end of 2008 and will be distributed throughout the AONB at information centres and from the CCGHT offices.



Joanne Pollock
Lancaster University, Student Placement, CCGHT

Low lying farmland at Magilligan and the adjacent coastal dune network supports some of the province's dwindling populations of song-thrush,

linnet & the skylark which are resident species with us throughout the seasons. In summer, sea-bird displays of flocks of fulmars circle Binevenagh's craggy cliffs looking for suitable nesting sites and the spectacular autumn & winter visitors along Lough Foyle include birds such as the majestic whooper swan and a huge variety of waders, the

Oystercatcher, Knot and Curlew to name but a few. Within this diverse landscape any bird spotting enthusiast, no matter



Peregrine Falcon



Mayor of Coleraine,
Councillor David Barbour

Ice cream by the beach.



Castlerock

As a native of Limavady, but one who has spent over half his life living 'over the mountain' in Coleraine, I consider it a real blessing to have lived and worked within, and around, this beautiful landscape that is Binevenagh AONB.

Although early childhood memories are more focussed on the landscape that now constitutes the Roe Valley Country Park, where my uncle farmed many acres alongside the Roe, I also fondly recall excursions as a child, along with my cousins, to Castlerock and the wider Downhill area. Without giving away my age, the mode of transport was steam train, and the highlight of such trips was, unsurprisingly, ice cream by the beach. Also the long, dark railway tunnels on the edge of the village, under the iconic

Mussenden Temple, made the 'ghost train' at Barry's seem like child's play! Little did I realise then that such a journey would, decades later, be described by Michael Palin as one of the most stunning in Europe.

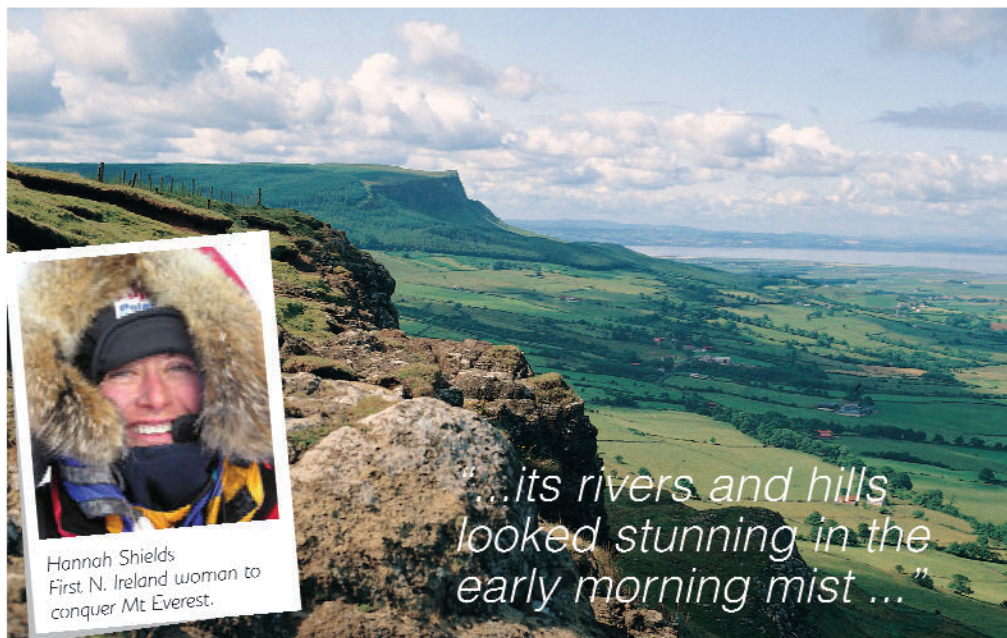
The picturesque village of Castlerock is really the only settlement within the AONB. Given its range of services, amenities and accommodation, coupled with its close proximity to this stunning landscape, it is well positioned to service the future requirements of locals and visiting tourists using and enjoying this area.

When one studies this designated area, what is striking is the sheer diversity of the landscape and the biodiversity contained therein. Residents of both Coleraine and Limavady are truly fortunate to have such a precious natural asset within such easy travelling distance. Bound by the Bann and the Roe, this landscape is home to cliffs, beaches, upland blanket bogs, forests and low-lying fertile farmland.

Despite its proximity to centres of population, this AONB affords many secluded spots where busy individuals can quietly reflect and enjoy the solitude in beautiful natural surroundings. One such place, and a favourite of mine, is the stone bridge and waterfall on the Burrenmore Road on the edge of Downhill Forest, just off the main Mussenden Road to Downhill.

As Mayor of Coleraine, I would encourage local residents to get out and explore and enjoy this wonderful landscape, but in particular, I have a passion to see schoolchildren and students being given the opportunity and encouragement to study in this 'outdoor classroom' and use the experiences gained as building blocks for later life.





Hannah Shields
First N. Ireland woman to
conquer Mt Everest.

*"...its rivers and hills
looked stunning in the
early morning mist ..."*

Binevenagh up until 6 years ago was an area that I was aware of on my frequent drives between Derry and Portstewart/Coleraine. It was there completely dominating the horizon yet surprisingly I felt no urge to explore the area.

I travelled all over the world to climb, walk and run in amazing landscapes but disregarded something right on my door step as I thought, at that time, the hill and area held no challenges for me. I first became aware of its potential when a few mates from Coleraine suggested we run in the area, in preparation for a hill race they were hoping to establish on the hill. So I dutifully turned up at St Aidan's church car park, one dull January morning, expecting an hour of light undemanding hill running - how wrong I was!

We started at the car park and entered the forest just behind the grave yard. Within 5 steps we were enclosed in a tiny single track that took us up through the heart of the forest, climbing at a steeper angle than I had anticipated. Eventually, we reached the top of the forest and came to a clearing, that again, I assumed was going to be a small area. From the distance it appears that the forest runs right to the base of Binevenagh itself. I was not prepared for the view that greeted me when we climbed over the last fence and advanced into the clearing. There were low clouds engulfing the area and these occasionally broke up to reveal the imposing steep face of the hill. Mind you, on that occasion I didn't have time to really take in the splendour of this view as I was already chasing the lads, who I have to admit, were much quicker than me. There was plenty to test me over the next half hour as we ran up and down through the various faces of the hill and along its entire base until we came to the forest again. Here we climbed through a muckier, steeper area until I found myself gasping at the view when we cleared the forest and ran onto the summit ridge. Never did I expect to see such dramatic views—the Atlantic Ocean making its way into the Foyle estuary, flanked by the distant hills of Donegal, Tyrone and the Sperrins. As we ran further

around the cliff edge, the Limavady area with all its rivers and hills looked stunning in the early morning mist. I did manage to take in these views even though I was concentrating on where I was running. It was important to do this as there was a huge vertical drop, the whole way around the cliff edge, one lapse in concentration resulting in a tumble and I would have been over the edge. Not a happy prospect!! We then ran around the lake on the plateau for another 15 minutes then proceeded to retrace our steps to make our way back to the car park.

I arrived there tired, dirty but completely exhilarated one and a half hours later. I knew I had experienced something unique for me, an area that 'ticked' all the boxes for my training requirements. More importantly I felt completely at ease in this area and happily it was only 35 minutes from my own home. This I knew was going to be my outside gym from now on. And so it has been. Not only do I run in the area but there are tremendous on and off road cycling routes for all abilities.

Binevenagh is not only a training area for me, it is also an area I go to, to escape from the world. Very rarely do I ever meet anyone, so to me it also provides a place where I can escape the rush of modern life and give myself time to contemplate. Every week I train and spend time around Binevenagh and I never tire of it. On no two days is it ever the same.

I was asked to take part in a BBC documentary last year on my favourite walks in Northern Ireland. Well there was no hesitation in my choice - but then I thought people will come to MY area and I got very protective and to be honest selfish. One of the reasons I liked it was because no one went there, but I know this area is there for everyone to enjoy and experience. Since the programme it has become more popular and it gives me great joy when I hear that people have gone to the area and loved it. Next week I have a group of mates coming from Belfast and Derry to walk with me for the first time around the Binevenagh area and I know that no matter what the weather they will enjoy the experience that this corner of the north west of Northern Ireland will offer.

Our Heritage

Natural Heritage

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

The craggy cliffs of Binevenagh are among the best spots to witness the peregrine in action. A powerful bird and adept hunter, when positioned for attack, the peregrine can hurtle towards its prey at speeds of up to 180kph! At such phenomenal speeds the peregrine's attacks are mainly air-borne to prevent injury to the bird, but it has also been known to pluck prey from perches or from the ground at reduced speeds. The peregrine is resident to the Binevenagh AONB, which means it can be spotted all year round.

Cultural Heritage

The Brighter Hoard

Binevenagh AONB has been settled since Mesolithic times and the area around both the Bann and the Foyle estuaries has a rich archaeological heritage. In 1896 a farmer, Tom Nicholl, unearthed what has been described as the "greatest gold hoard in Ireland" consisting of necklaces, torcs, a collar and a miniature boat complete with oars and seats. All these items were made of gold in an ornamental style known as La Tene.



Having been discovered, the next question was who could now claim these objects as their own? For if it could be proved they had been lost, rather than deliberately concealed, then it was 'finders' keepers. It became a celebrated court-case which by 1903 reached the Royal Courts of Justice London. Some argued that at one time that area had been covered by the sea and the hoard had been deliberately thrown into the water as a votive offering. However others proposed that the sea never reached these fields and so the ornaments were quite likely hidden with the intention of recovery later.

Eventually the court decided that the hoard had been deliberately concealed so was treasure trove and therefore belonged to the Crown. The gold was handed over to the National Museum in Dublin where it still resides although there is a replica set in the Ulster Museum Belfast.

Built Heritage

The Great Blast

There are many ways to see and enjoy the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty but if you haven't seen it by rail yet you are truly missing out on a breathtaking experience. This part of the railway journey between Coleraine and Londonderry features in Michael Palin's television series 'Great Railway Journeys of the World' and is nothing short of spectacular. Its route follows the coast and includes Downhill tunnel, one of the longest in Ireland. When the tunnel was blasted in 1846 it attracted crowds of over 12,000 people and afterwards over 500 people celebrated its completion at a huge banquet held within the tunnel itself. This event became known as the 'Great Blast'.

www.ni-environment.gov.uk





Posters of Binevenagh AONB



Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust in partnership with the Binevenagh AONB Management Forum has produced a series of posters illustrating images from the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The posters have been produced as part of the NI Environment Agency grant to raise awareness of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The posters will be available from the CCGHT office and from Tourist Information Centres in the area.



Conserving Portstewart Sand Dunes

During the Autumn/Winter of 2008-9, the National Trust will commence a nature conservation project in the sand dunes at Portstewart Strand in partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), to improve their overall habitat condition. The project, known as the MOSS scheme (management of sensitive sites) is a 5 year conservation project, supported on biodiversity objectives and financial grant aid by NIEA.

Currently the sand dunes are suffering an ongoing loss of habitat and wildlife biodiversity, with the two main threats being invasive scrub and rank grasses. If left unchecked with no management, the dunes at

Portstewart Strand would quickly become overgrown, with a loss of wild flowers and various insects. In addition path networks for the public would be reduced. In order to return the dunes to a favourable condition, the

National Trust will be commencing a programme of Sea buckthorn scrub clearance and introducing grazing animals to the site during Autumn/Winter 2008-9 period. The grazing of farm animals in particular will help keep dense grasses under control, allowing smaller and more delicate plants to flourish. It is hoped to graze a mixture of sheep and light cattle.

Both the National Trust and NIEA are very aware that this project can only succeed if the needs of the public who use the dunes for recreation are taken into account. If you would like to find out more about this Special Area of Conservation and the MOSS project in particular, please contact a member of staff at our beach visitor centre or phone our North Coast Office on 028 2073 1582.

Contact - Barry Crawford (Nature Conservation & Access Warden, National Trust).



Competition

If you can identify this flower found in the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) you could win a framed copy of one of our Binevenagh AONB posters. Competition entries must be submitted by post or by email to info@ccght.org to reach Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust office before 30th January 2009.

Congratulations!

Clem McCartney from Benone correctly identified the famous landmark in the Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the first issue of the newsletter. Clem, who has donated the prize to his Chilean born wife, Roberta, won a fantastic opportunity to see the AONB from a glider courtesy of the Ulster Gliding Centre.

www.ulsterglidingclub.org

Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust provides a secretariat service for the Binevenagh AONB. The Trust is grateful for support from the following organisations:



For more information on the Binevenagh AONB please check the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust website. www.ccght.org

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