

study of the mountain paths in County Wicklow, which will serve as a measure of improvement or deterioration over the next decade. We also carried out a feasibility study on the Devils Ladder in Kerry, which we hope will be the beginning of a restoration project on that important route.

We do need volunteers to help otherwise it will fall back on a small group of people who won't be able to sustain the effort. We are encouraging as many outdoors people as possible to join our work and we suggest you give one day in seven to conservation

### THE APPRENTICE FARMHAND

How quickly we have lost our sense of community and our connection with the earth and our heritage. The word 'Meitheal' (working party) was mainly used in the context of farmers helping each other during the saving of the hay. A "mini Meitheal" from my club, The Bootleggers, was organised with a seven per cent club turnout. On a sunny day in September we can claim part of the credit for planting 800 heather plants on that atrociously eroded highway up Loughjoe in Co Wicklow.

On my way up the N11 from Gorey, I could see the Pied Piper's trail up the mountain from afar. Around thirty 'Meitheal-ers' from a variety of clubs and other interested individuals, learned from a horticulturalist and National Park Ranger, all about erosion, the resilience of heather (once given a chance) and how each and every step we take in our cherished hills has a potentially lasting effect on the eco-system. We combined glorious day's walking with a real

work. So if you walk once a week maybe you could give six or seven days a year; walk once a month, give two days - it's that simple. But it's not all hard work. We have great fun on the hills and nearly all our volunteers want to come back for more.

It's not money we need most - it's people so Go on, Get out, Get dirty, Give back!

See you soon,  
Bill Murphy, Chairman MM.

connection with the earth, some admittedly backbreaking work, and a realisation that many hands and trowels make light work. Ni neart go cur le cheile!

We had the 800 plants planted in record time, so much so that we then set about clearing loose stones on the path built by other 'Meitheal-ers'. How wonderful to know that my work was not out of economic necessity and I had the privilege of being able to enjoy the same hills as a hobby. The young of today and tomorrow will also have that privilege. We get carried away too often with expecting service - what about what we can offer back? What a wonderful world it would be if each and every club in the MCI were to field seven per cent of its members, even once a year, to participate in Mountain Meitheal's work. A quick calculation gives us 518 workdays.

*The mountains need your help!*

Emer Ni Bhraidaigh (reprinted from *Irish Mountain Log* 67 Autumn 2003)