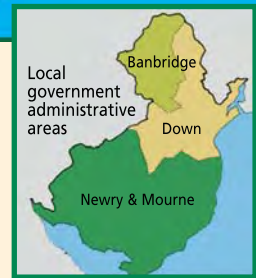


MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST



Annual Report & Accounts
April 2007 – March 2008

Mourne and Slieve Croob Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



The Mountains of Mourne and surrounding countryside and coast are renowned for their natural beauty. At the heart of the AONB is the range of mountains which gives the area its name and image. Although relatively small in area, the Mourne AONB combines the stunning scenery of mountains, with coast, farmed drumlin and hill country and a diverse range of habitats, evidenced by the range of international, European and national conservation designations. Administratively the AONB is split across the three local government districts of Banbridge, Down and Newry and Mourne.

MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST



What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a precious landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard it (NAAONB, 2003). The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order 1985 sets out the main purposes of an AONB:

- to conserve or enhance the natural beauty or amenities of the area
- to conserve wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within the area
- to promote enjoyment by the public
- to provide or maintain public access to the area

Mourne Heritage Trust Limited

Company Registration Number: NI 32946

Main Registered Office

87 Central Promenade
Newcastle
Co. Down
BT33 0HH

Sub Office

Silent Valley Gate Lodge
74 Head Road
Kilkeel, Co. Down
BT34 4PU

Auditors

Purdy Quinn *Chartered Accountants*
42 Greencastle Street
Kilkeel, Co. Down BT34 4BH

Bankers

Bank of Ireland Ltd
5 Church Square
Banbridge, Co. Down
BT32 4AS

Solicitors

McBurney & Co.
19 Greencastle Street
Kilkeel, Co. Down
BT34 4BH

Chairman's Foreword

I am pleased to present this report on the work of the Mourne Heritage Trust for 2007/2008, representing Year 1 of the programme outlined in our Strategic Operational Plan 2007- 2010. It is encouraging for me, as Chairman, to note that progress has been made against all but 8 of the 60 Priority programmes and projects set out in that document.

As one would perhaps expect in Year 1, and this report reflects it, considerable time has gone into scoping and planning projects which I look forward to seeing come to fruition in the remaining two years. This focus on project preparation for future action also reflects something of a hiatus in the project funding on which Mourne Heritage Trust so heavily relies. With the successful closure of the Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative which the Trust operated coinciding with the beginning of this reporting year, we are looking forward to the commencement of the new Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme in 2008/09 and playing our part in ensuring that this funding makes a positive impact on Mourne and its communities.

As well as important environmental monitoring to identify priorities for visitor management and habitat enhancement over the coming years, a key feature of this year's work has been the preparation of a tourism development action plan in pursuit of the Mournes Signature Project. Again we look forward to delivering on the clear agenda for action that has been set out.

We have also seen progress in developing relationships with our neighbours in the Ring of Gullion AONB in County Armagh and Cooley Peninsula in County Louth, reflecting the shared characteristics, proximity and undoubted joint potential of our landscapes. These relationships offer the prospect of exciting cross boundary and cross border initiatives – something, in a climate of competing pressures on resources and increased co-operation, it is incumbent upon us to explore. Also particularly encouraging this year has been the very positive reactions to our efforts to promote both local produce in Mourne and the area's rich cultural heritage through workshops and conferences, guided walks, study visits, web based information provision and other initiatives.

As this report also highlights, the contribution of volunteers from varied backgrounds has gained even greater significance in the Trust's work. From Volunteer Rangers, to Youth Rangers, to people with special needs, to corporate bodies, to third level students and others, people have engaged in ways that have not only benefited Mourne but also themselves, including, I am pleased to say as a former GP, in leading healthy lifestyles. The Trust also continues to benefit very tangibly from the generosity of people not just with their time but also in some cases their money, whether subscribing as Friends of Mourne or making very generous donations. To all our volunteers and supporters can I say a very sincere thank you and assure them that their contributions really do make a difference, particularly in the current climate of diminishing grant funding availability in Northern Ireland in relation to European, Lottery and other sources.

This time last year as I introduced the Trust's annual report, the formal consultation process on the potential for a National Park in Mourne had recently been completed, having stimulated an active and passionate debate in keeping with the importance of

the issues raised. In the course of this year, the National Park Working Party presented its report on its programme of research, consultations and deliberations to Minister Foster. I wish to commend my colleagues on the Working Party for the time, expertise and commitment they put into producing this document, which above all else highlights in very clear terms the range of needs and issues to be addressed relating to the Mourne area. In doing so I am confident they, and those who contributed to the debate, have moved the needs and opportunities to be found in the Mournes up the government's agenda and in so doing have done a service to the area's environment and its communities. This was highlighted in the announcement by the Minister of an initial tranche of funding of £500,000, open to all who can positively contribute to addressing issues related to countryside management in Mourne. This funding is most welcome and I'm hopeful it will prove to be just the start of things to come.

It has always been the mission of the Mourne Heritage Trust to enable the management and sustainable, yet sensitive, development of the Mournes and Slieve Croob. This will not be achieved unless it is supported by a level of economic investment commensurate with the national environmental and economic importance of such natural resources. The true value of Northern Ireland's natural assets must not only be recognised but physically realised so that they can economically and environmentally support society in general but particularly local Mourne and Slieve Croob communities. Some people will question whether we will be able to manage the additional pressures, to which I respond that it has been done successfully elsewhere. Realistically, when we examine recent research results we must admit that the present level of investment into management only fractionally meets the needs. The pressures that the Mourne area is already under are highlighted in this report through activity such as our visitor counters and erosion monitoring.

In addition, it is my wish to see management of one of Northern Ireland's finest landscapes recognised with stability as well as extent of resources in a way that reduces the time spent on funding applications and administrative processes rather than addressing directly the now well acknowledged task in hand. With these sentiments in mind I look forward to the opportunity presented by the planned independent review of the role of Mourne Heritage Trust in the Autumn of 2008 which I hope will put AONB management here on a more effective and sustainable footing, while eagerly awaiting the outcome of government's considerations of the National Park Working Party's report .

Finally of course I must express my gratitude to my dedicated and knowledgeable fellow Trustees and to the Trust staff who are instrumental in making our plans a reality. You can be assured of the ongoing commitment of all involved in Mourne Heritage Trust to 'Caring for Mourne'.



 Dr Arthur Mitchell, MBE

Introduction to Mourne Heritage Trust

The role and structure of the Mourne Heritage Trust

The Mourne Heritage Trust was established in 1997 to meet an identified need for locally based, strategic management of the Mourne and Slieve Croob AONB. The model of a Trust-based partnership was agreed by Environment and Heritage Service (now Northern Ireland Environment Agency) and Northern Ireland Tourist Board, in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the three local authorities of Banbridge, Down and Newry & Mourne respectively.

In 2006/07, after consultations with local and regional stakeholders, the Trust put in place its fourth Strategic Operational Plan to cover the period 2007 to 2010. The Plan identifies six key performance areas as follows:

1. Natural Environment Enhancement and Protection
2. Visitor Management and Visitor Services
3. Built and Cultural Heritage
4. Sustainable Tourism
5. Creating Awareness and Promoting Understanding
6. Strategic and Cross Cutting Initiatives

see *Company Structure opposite*

Mission Statement

“To sustain and enhance the environment, rural regeneration, cultural heritage and visitor opportunities of the Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and contribute to the well-being of Mourne’s communities.”

The Mourne Heritage Trust staff unit and partnership

see *Staff Structure opposite*

The Management of the Mourne Heritage Trust is co-ordinated by a Staff Team which reports to the Board of Trustees.

Staff Changes

There were a number of staff changes during this report period. Mrs Elaine McAlinden left the post of Office Manager in November 2007 to be replaced by Mrs Sinéad Mulholland in January 2008. Ms Wilma Houston left the post of Administrative Assistant in January 2008 and Ms Catherine Bertrand was appointed as Natural Heritage Outreach Officer in February 2008.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees represents a wide ranging partnership of interests – including local elected representatives, landowner, farming and community interests. This broad representation gives a valuable collective focus to the area, its issues and its needs and allows The Board of Trustees to give a co-strategic lead to the management of the AONB. The sectors that Board members primarily represent are set out below. In addition a number of members also have expertise and interests in other important areas including education, fishing, rural regeneration and local heritage.

Dr Arthur Mitchell *Chairman – Environment*

Mr Desmond Patterson *Vice Chair – Farming*

Mr Jim Saunders *Treasurer – Environment*

Mr William John Martin *Company Secretary – Community (ROMAL)*

Ms Isabel Hood – *Environment*

Cllr Isaac Hanna – *Newry & Mourne District Council*

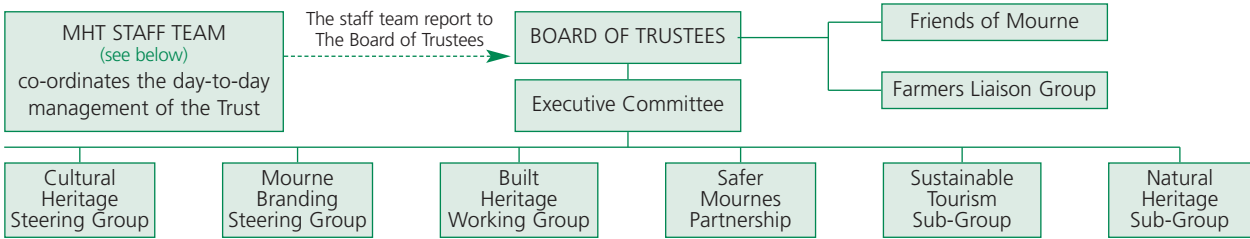
Cllr Martin Connolly *Resigned 30.06.2007 – Newry & Mourne District Council*

Cllr Mick Murphy *Appointed 30.06.2007 – Newry & Mourne District Council*

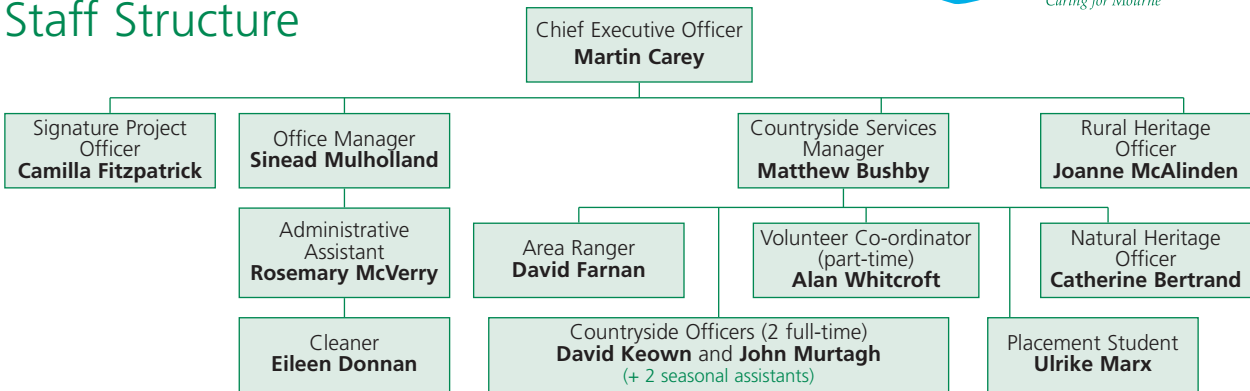




Company Structure



Staff Structure



- Cllr Seamus Doyle** – Banbridge District Council
- Cllr Elizabeth Ingram** – Banbridge District Council
- Cllr Carmel O’Boyle** – Down District Council
- Ms Maureen Killen** – Community (ROMAL)
- Mr Sean McCarthy** – Community (ECDRN)
- Mr William Burns** – Farming
- Mr Patrick Kelly** – Community (ROMAL)
- Mr David Maginn** – Tourism Business
- Mrs Rosemary Chestnutt** – Tourism Business
- Mrs Jo Whatmough** – Environment
- Mr Martin McMullan** – Tourism/Activity Business
- Cllr Francis McDowell** – Down District Council
- Mr Sean Fitzpatrick** – Farming
- Mr David Thompson** – Environment

The Board of Trustees met on seven separate occasions and there was one change to the membership of the Board of Trustees throughout the year.

anniversary of the establishment of the Trust and included a ‘Down Memory Lane’ slide show of key events and personalities from the Trust’s first decade of existence. Mr Martin McDonald, Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council who was closely involved in the establishment of the Trust as a then Department of Agriculture and Rural Development official, was guest speaker.

Funding 2007/2008

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| Environment and Heritage Service | £154,202 |
| Banbridge District Council | £ 21,577 |
| Down District Council | £ 33,834 |
| Newry & Mourne District Council | £ 20,000 |
| Northern Ireland Tourist Board | £ 34,043 |

Annual General Meeting 2007

The Mourne Heritage Trust celebrated its tenth Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 26 September 2007, hosted by Down District Council – one of the Mourne Heritage Trusts’ five core funders. The venue was Glenada Conference Centre, Newcastle and the AGM celebrated the tenth



Natural Environment Enhancement and Protection

Overview

The Mourne Ranger Service and Countryside Team continued to be the mainstay of environmental enhancement and protection in the Mournes, despite relatively limited resources and ever increasing visitor use. As this review highlights, the impact of their services is greatly enhanced by the Trust's ability to involve a wide range of other people in environmental work. This continuing growth in voluntary input is a feature of the year just past and we are delighted to note that, as demonstrated below, the significant benefits to the environment are not the only ones that accrue.

Another development to the Trust's environmental management capacity was the acquisition of a compact tractor and flail which have served to enhance the efficiency with which routine environmental maintenance, particularly to green lanes in the lowlands, can be undertaken. Funded in large measure by a private donation, this again highlights the way in which voluntary contributions complement the Trust's core resources from government. A direct result of the new equipment has been increased capacity of the Ranger and Countryside Team to undertake specific environmental projects, a prime example this year being the repair of stone walls and erection of fencing along the Mourne Way in the Trassey Valley in direct response to environmental issues highlighted by local farmers.

Unfortunately resource constraints have limited the progress made in 2007/2008 with co-ordination and awareness raising aspects of the Mourne Biodiversity Action Plan, launched in early 2007. However, the activities described in this section in many cases either deliver direct benefits to the priority habitats and species identified in that plan and /or contribute to our body of biodiversity monitoring information. The recruitment, completed in February 2008, of a Natural Heritage Outreach Officer for the Trust enhances capacity for this work in future.

Developing Youth Rangers

The Youth Ranger Programme saw its second year, catering for eight young people between the ages of 14 and 17, working with the Trust's staff for a day each week during the school summer holidays. Their activities, including scrub clearance, a vegetation survey, a biodiversity survey, and litter lifting provided either direct protection or enhancement of the environment or valuable information to assist the planning of the Trust's activities in this regard. However, as demonstrated by feedback from participants, parents and others, the positive environmental outcomes are complemented by equally strong benefits to the young people themselves in terms of personal development and skills. The following is a sample of some of the feedback we have received from parents of Youth Rangers.

“The opportunity you availed to my son was exceptional. The development and learning he achieved has been immeasurable and has given him a clear direction in his proposed career path. The pride and enthusiasm my son and his fellow participants gained was clear to see at the 'award' ceremony. What a sense of achievement and camaraderie that I believe few other summer schemes could offer.

I want to thank all of you for giving my daughter such wonderful experiences. Behavioural difficulties mean she has spent a lot of time isolated from her peers. I do not know if it is the activities, the leadership or



Active Lifestyles

the group, but it works!! It has helped my daughter develop her communication skills and enabled her to work as part of a team.

My son has a great interest in trees. The Trust's tree nursery has inspired him to plant oaks, ash, holly and beech and he's had a terrific success with them so far.

My son found the Youth Ranger Scheme extremely enjoyable and as a result of attending it he has decided to pursue a career in conservation and ecology. He has taken more care with the environment and encouraged others in the family to do the same.



Youth Rangers

One of the main things my son learned was team building and working with others. He learned he had to work with others to achieve the tasks the rangers were set.

My son got the chance to make friends which is not easy for him as he has ADHD and also he got to explore and learn about the outdoors. ”

Conservation through active lifestyles

As with the Youth Ranger programme the Active Lifestyles programme has continued to clearly demonstrate the potential for dual benefits to the environment and peoples' health and well being through participation in conservation work. The programme catered mostly for groups and individuals with special needs from across the AONB and surrounding area, but also for youth groups and long term unemployed. As well as further developing the Silent Valley Tree Nursery, which is now producing a stock of native tree saplings for replanting in the AONB, participants were involved in invasive species control, tree planting and trail maintenance. The numbers of participant days set out in our 'At A Glance Highlights' demonstrate the extent of the impacts of this programme, but again the testimony of those involved in the scheme or closely related to them, speaks equally powerfully of the benefits. Again we have provided a sample of this feedback below.

“The activities provided have a positive impact on the health and well being of our clients (with learning disabilities). Parents and carers remark on how the clients have grown in self esteem and confidence with increased independence.



Natural Environment Enhancement and Protection

This is by no means token volunteering but gives our group the opportunity to be environmentally responsible adults regardless of their disability, giving them a sense of pride. The programme also has physical benefits, by means of the moderate activity involved in the work and promotes an active lifestyle.

There is also a positive 'ripple' through effect as parents / carers / families / community benefit from . . . the volunteer having an improved attitude/outlook due to positive volunteering experiences. ”

Conservation through volunteers

The Mourne Conservation Volunteers continued to contribute hugely to both environmental and visitor management in the AONB providing 130 days of work. This is down from the 140 work days achieved in 2006/07 but was achieved through 23 volunteer events as opposed to 30 the previous year, delivering a more concentrated impact in a more efficient way.

Meanwhile the Trust's Volunteer Ranger team devoted a day a week to assisting with AONB management, and were involved in all areas of the Trust's environmental and visitor management work including supporting the Countryside Team in day-to-day activities and assisting with Active Lifestyles Groups. The team was also particularly active in surveying for invasive species and GIS mapping of both Rhododendron distribution and fire sites in the High Mournes as well as creating a mobile phone map for the High Mournes.

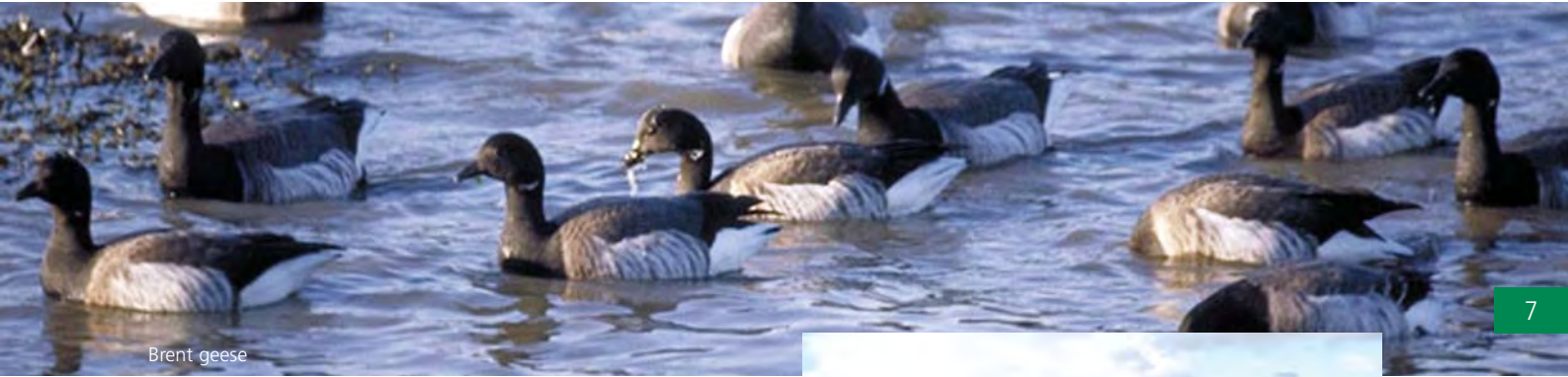
There were welcome and significant additions this year to the Trust's volunteer effort. Corporate Group days saw staff from a number of large Northern Ireland companies and voluntary organisations take part in activities such as path creation, scrub clearance and invasive species control. In some cases these events provided a dual



benefit as a donation to the Trust accompanied the labour input. Such activity provides the groups involved with a number of benefits including fun, team working impacts, an opportunity to enhance their understanding of the environment and to 'give something back'. Again therefore the extended benefits of involving people are demonstrated as exemplified by the following quote from a large company

“You arranged a number of activities as part of our Tax Department Away Day. This gave us a much greater awareness of our responsibilities to maintain and sustain our natural environment. It was great to get out of the office for the day as well as getting satisfaction of knowing some good came out of our efforts. The whole day was a real bonding session for our team. ”





Brent geese

The Global Exchange Programme saw volunteers from Kenya and England join one from Northern Ireland contribute 79 days between them, providing a welcome boost to staff numbers in the busy months of April and May.

Co-operating with third level education

The contribution of third level students to environmental enhancement and protection was a notable feature in 2007/2008, again helping significantly deepen and extend the scope of AONB management. Two local students and one from Germany were with the Trust for much of the year, essentially providing the equivalent of almost two extra staff members. They produced a condition survey of key access routes in the Mourne, a portfolio reviewing progress in Mourne against the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, and habitat monitoring returns for the Eastern Mourne Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The first two pieces of work are already helping the Trust to more effectively focus its efforts in managing the environmental impacts of recreational use of the Mourne, while the latter helps one of the Trust's partner organisations Northern Ireland Water in meeting its obligations under European Union Habitat Directives. Of course students themselves also benefit as one demonstrates:

“Thematically matched, as I study sustainable tourism management, the placement made it possible to finally apply my theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, it gave me a sense that I’ve chosen the right profession and showed me possible ways to go when it comes to start into working life.”



Native red squirrel



Third level student

Highlights - at a glance

- Mourn Ranger providing environmental and visitor monitoring and liaison with users and landowners
- 311 total volunteer days in support of AONB management producing the equivalent of £15,550 worth of labour (excluding student placements)
- 102 Active Lifestyle group days
- 502 individual Active Lifestyle work days: 421 Special Needs, 44 Schools and 37 Youth
- Development of Corporate Group volunteering days
- Acquisition of Compact Tractor and Flail
- Recruitment of Natural Heritage Outreach officer
- 2 meetings of Mourne Farmers' Liaison Group
- Co-ordination of Safer Mourne Partnership
- Development of methodology for assessment of condition of upland heath and impact of grazing in the Eastern Mourne SAC and first year's monitoring
- Establishment of Working Groups on Fire Management and Anti-Social Behaviour
- Initial development of management plans for scrub control to prevent wildfires in key hotspots
- Invasive species and fire site mapping
- Invasive species control
- Condition survey of key access corridors at Trassey, Happy Valley, OTT, Bloody Bridge and Carrick Little
- Fencing and Wall Repair at Trassey Valley
- Litter lifts at key hotspots
- Co-ordination of support for the Mourne International Walking Festival

Visitor Management and Visitor Services

Overview

As well as the often unnoticed but essential activity of maintaining and, where possible, improving the various amenity sites, access routes, green lanes and stiles, the Trust's activity in relation to visitor management this year has been dominated by planning for the future, notably in working with partners towards implementation of the Mourne Access and Activities Study. Produced in 2007 by the Countryside Access and Activities Network to inform the work of the Mourne National Park Working Party, this study highlights a number of issues relevant to visitor and recreational use of the Mournes.

Among the key issues under consideration have been measures to enhance awareness and understanding of access related issues and responsible countryside use as it applies to Mourne and the identified need for extended rangering services. The Trust has developed proposals for the latter and pursued funding opportunities which it is hoped will come to fruition in 2008/09.

Our visitor monitoring programme, through electronic counters, visitor surveys and the impact assessment outlined in the previous section of this report, continued to be a significant element of our activity and some of the outputs/results are summarised in this section of the report, along with some developments to our visitor services and infrastructure.



Walking and learning

For the first time the Trust's walks programme was themed around aspects of the rich cultural heritage of the Mournes and Slieve Croob, combining opportunities to enjoy the countryside with appreciation of the stories behind the landscape. Walks visited sites of archaeological interest and historical

demesnes, retraced the steps of ancient pilgrimages, and related stories of smuggling contraband and World War II Aeroplane Crashes. They also, among other things, traced the history of the upland industries of granite working, traditional mountain grazing or 'booleying' and the story of Mourne Water.



The number of participants in the walks was relatively modest but feedback was very strong. In particular, the majority (70%) of bookings were made by individuals that had not previously participated on walks organised by the Trust indicating that the programme reached a new 'audience'. In addition participants indicated that they learned something 'new' about the culture and heritage of the Mourne and Slieve Croob AONB by participating on the walks. The following quotes illustrate the general nature of feedback received

“I appreciated the opportunity to learn about Mourne and not just walk.

It was great to see familiar views and places through new eyes.”

Planning for improved visitor infrastructure

Enhancing the visitor infrastructure in a sensitive area such as the Mournes involves a very significant amount of largely unseen planning before new facilities can be put in place – the final product being very much the tip of the iceberg. This year saw significant time devoted to preparatory phases of two major projects. A second phase to what has proven to be a very popular recent addition to visitor infrastructure, the Silent Valley Nature Trail, was designed. Informed by user feedback it incorporates a footbridge and boardwalk to meet

the demand for a circular route rather than the present linear one. Landowner negotiations, route survey and design, a planning application, funding applications and a public tender exercise were all carried out to bring this project to a point where it could be commenced in Spring 2008.



Using the results of extensive survey work highlighting erosion in the Mourne uplands, a prioritised and phased programme of stone pitching of upland paths was also designed. Again consultations were undertaken and various statutory process completed to allow funding applications be submitted to enable this increasingly urgent work, which we hope to progress in 2008 or early 2009. As well as limiting further damage to the important upland habits, stone pitched paths will greatly enhance the visitor experience, providing both a comfortable walking environment and reassurance to walkers through the knowledge that their enjoyment of the uplands is not leaving behind an indelible imprint on the area.

Monitoring and addressing visitor impact

The Trust continued to maintain and collect data from its recently installed network of electronic vehicle and pedestrian counters. Considerable time was devoted to addressing ongoing technical issues resulting from the use of this equipment in exposed locations, with the result that a complete set of data can be expected for the forthcoming year.

Data collected to date has already begun to provide insights into the visitor pressure certain areas are under as demonstrated, for example, by the Trassey Valley. In the calendar year of 2007, the Trassey Track stile, one of the 'low' access points, registered 26,133 users. Further on, the Hare's gap stile and gate, one of the most used access points over the Mourne Wall to the high mountains, registered 32,192 in the 11 month period spanning July 2007 to May 2008, an average of almost 3,000 pairs of feet per month.



The condition survey of key routes, reported in the previous section, allowed us to further examine the impacts of this use and works have been undertaken in consultation with local landowners to mitigate some of these impacts.

Highlights - at a glance

- New programme of 13 guided heritage walks
- Official launch of Mourne Way long distance walking route and 13 enhanced visitor amenity sites
- Maintenance of a network of electronic pedestrian and vehicle counters
- Analysis and reporting of visitor data
- Mourne AONB Visitor Survey
- Achievement of planning permission and funding for Phase II of Silent Valley Nature Trail
- Design of programme of stone pitching for upland paths and submission of funding applications for phase 1 of this work
- Development of detailed proposals for improved Ranger services and submission of funding applications for such a service in the Silent Valley catchment
- Scoping, with partner organisations, of the potential for improvements to information and communication relating to access and recreational use in the Mournes
- Inspection, maintenance and minor enhancements to 19 car parks and amenity sites, 44 public rights of way, green lanes and paths, 7 way-marked cycle routes, 64 stiles, 60 Interpretative panels
- Wall repair and erection of fencing to address issues related to visitor use at Trassey Valley

Built and Cultural Heritage

Overview

This year continued to see the plaudits roll in for the Mourne Homesteads Scheme, and also saw the completion of the renovation of the final three cottages of the seven involved. Having previously achieved recognition at Northern Ireland and UK levels, the highlight this year was the award of a Diploma from Europa Nostra, the European Union's Cultural Heritage Awards. The citation from Europa Nostra praised the

“ sensitive rehabilitation of derelict dwellings, with scrupulous regard for vernacular materials and techniques, that has greatly enhanced the landscape and generated educational and employment benefits. ”



The Award was presented at a glittering ceremony in Stockholm City Hall, Sweden (also the venue for the Nobel Prize ceremony) in the presence of Their Majesties the King and Queen of Sweden along with Europa Nostra's President, HRH the Prince Consort of Denmark. The Homesteads Scheme was the only recipient from the island of Ireland in the 2007 awards.

Also this year substantial progress was made on projects designed to connect people, including visitors, local residents and those involved in research, with the rich cultural heritage of Mourne and Slieve Croob. As well as the heritage walks programme already mentioned, substantial progress was made with an online cultural heritage database, an AONB wide heritage trail and one off events around key dates such as European Heritage Open Days.

Celebrating Mourne Homesteads

An event marking the completion in May 2007 of the restoration phase of the Mourne Homesteads Scheme and celebrating the various awards won was attended by over 60 people. After a photographic exhibition charting the Mourne Homesteads journey, the first steps on which were taken back in May 2000, guests enjoyed a tour of the three most recently completed properties at Valley Road, Ballymartin, Head Road, Annalong and Dunaval Road, Kilkeel.



The event was also the platform for the launch of a publication entitled 'Homes and Heritage' showcasing the restored properties and the process involved. Both the event and publication are important elements of the overall project which, among other things, aims to inspire others to undertake renovations of these important landmarks in our landscape – showing tangibly what can be achieved when the alternatives to replacement are considered. The celebration event culminated with a focus group session forming part of an independent evaluation of Mourne Homesteads by consultants Cardiff Research Group. By year end a draft evaluation report had been completed.



Opening up heritage

As well as facilitating the opening of Mourne Homesteads buildings for European Heritage Open Days in September 2007, the Trust embarked on a schools event at Silent Valley in conjunction with Northern Ireland Water. Over 2 days, 113 primary 7 pupils and 10 teachers/teaching assistants from three schools in the Mourne and Slieve Croob AONB were involved locally in this Europe wide festival of heritage, culture and architecture. The event focused in particular on the industrial heritage of Silent Valley, while promoting the importance of conserving water in our everyday lives through 'hands-on' experiments. It is hoped that this event can become an annual one involving different schools each year.



Putting heritage online

The distinctive landscape that gives the Mourne and Slieve Croob AONB its designation has also given rise to cultural traditions, customs and ways of life associated with mountain and sea that are in themselves distinct and special. Documenting and preserving information on this heritage is vitally important, but so too is making this information accessible. The online searchable database of cultural / heritage resources and materials specific to the Mournes and Slieve Croob, takes the results of an exhaustive audit and presents these in a form that can be easily accessed. The database categorises information by type (books, journals, maps, photographic collections, corporate body publications, community resources) and can also be searched by author or theme, for example agricultural heritage, archaeology, industrial heritage, maritime. A keyword search facility is also available to make the database as user friendly as possible and results signpost the location of the various resources and where to access further information. It is hoped that this tool will help people to connect with the traditions of the area, whether to enhance the visitor experience or the quality of life locally.

Highlights - at a glance

- Completion of final Mourne Homesteads renovations
- Mourne Homesteads Showcase and Celebration Event
- Award of Europa Nostra Diploma
- Completion of programme of research on impacts of Mourne Homesteads Scheme and draft report
- Review of Traditional Buildings In Ireland: A Homeowners Handbook to plan revised 2nd edition
- Completion of Cultural Heritage Audit
- Development and Launch of Online Heritage Database
- Completion of Scoping Study for Mourne and Slieve Croob Cultural Heritage Trail
- Development of European Heritage Open Days Schools Event

Sustainable Tourism

Overview

This year saw a significant shift of emphasis in the Trust's role in Sustainable Tourism which for the previous four years had been focussed on funding improvements to the tourism offering – to the tune of £2.3 million pounds – through the Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative (NRRTI). This year the Trust took much more of a planning focus, making significant strides towards a comprehensive action plan for the Mourne Signature Project, one of five such projects identified in Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Strategic Framework for Action designed to deliver international stand out in tourism for Northern Ireland.

Cross Border and wider European linkages also took centre stage through exploration of the possibilities for joint development and promotion with the neighbouring upland areas of the Cooley Mountains in County Louth and Ring of Gullion in County Armagh, as well as developments in relation to the Trust's membership of the Europarc Network.

Of course, such is the integrated nature of much of Mourne Heritage Trust's activity; many of the achievements reported in other sections of this report also contribute very significantly to the development of tourism in the area in line with the principles of economic, environmental and social sustainability.



consistent with the natural attributes of the area and the principles of sustainability, and a series of priority actions to deliver that vision. It is hoped that the soon to be published action plan, will act as both a stimulus and guide to tourism development for the public, private and community sectors respectively. In the course of this year the Trust also devoted considerable time to working with partners to develop specific proposals, resulting in an outline implementation plan for key priority projects.

Planning for growth

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board identified five key "Signature Projects", including the Mourne, in its Strategic Framework for Action 2004 – 2007. Each Signature Project was seen as offering characteristics unique to Northern Ireland upon which to establish a world class visitor experience and achieve a step change for tourism here. The Trust commenced work on a Mourne Signature Project Action Plan in May 2007, assisted by Mr Richard Denman of the Tourism Company. Consultations with key stakeholders complemented a programme of research to examine the issues relating to tourism development and identify key priorities. A draft plan then formed the basis for workshops in October 2007 in Warrenpoint and Newcastle, well attended by the private sector in particular.

The culmination of this work is an action plan that presents a vision for the development of tourism in Mourne to 2017,

Ensuring growth is sustainable



Significant focus went into preparatory work for a re-application to the Europarc Federation for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. The Mourne AONB was the first of a growing number of regions in the UK or Ireland to achieve this standard in 2003, accreditation of which lasts for 5 years. Re-accreditation is dependent on submission of a detailed report on Sustainable Tourism activity, completed this year, and an inspection visit, scheduled for Autumn 2008.

To complement the re-application, research and scoping work was undertaken to develop a locally specific methodology for implementation of Part II of Charter, which offers the possibility to extend accreditation to tourism businesses. An outline approach has been agreed in





principle and, subject to staff resources, offers a potential mechanism through which to engage formally in partnership agreements with tourism businesses and to reward those that commit to the sustainable principles that are so important in a rural area like Mourne.

Equipping tourism businesses

With good quality local food becoming a key element of visitor expectations the Trust, in conjunction with Armagh Down Tourism Partnership, developed a tailored training programme for food and tourism related business in the AONB. Under the tag line 'Want to start or grow your existing food, hospitality or tourism business?' tailored training and mentoring sessions and a programme of site visits were designed. Southern Regional College, a centre of excellence for hospitality and tourism, was appointed to commence delivery of the programme in April and May 2008.

A number of tourism businesses also took part in study visits to view best practice in sustainable tourism with an emphasis on food at Flavour of Tyrone & Good Food Circle in County Tyrone and a number of locations in County Leitrim including Greenbox, Organic Centre, the Food Hub, Western Organics Network, and Carrick-on-Shannon farmers market.

Working with our neighbours

In conjunction with a range of partners, including local authorities and the Geological Surveys of both Northern Ireland and the Republic, and in consultation with a wider range of stakeholders, the Trust developed a detailed concept for a Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geo-Tourism project.

This is designed firstly to capitalise on the truly special and related geological qualities of the three areas and on the growing interest worldwide in geo-tourism. From this base it is hoped to develop a tourism profile that will take advantage of the prime location of the Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Uplands on the Belfast– Dublin corridor.

The proposed project was favourably received at a number of cross-border conferences and forums and attracted significant press coverage. Further work in 2008 will focus on identifying funding for this exciting initiative.



Highlights - at a glance

- Creation of Mournes Signature Project Steering Group
- Completion of programme of individual consultations on future tourism development needs in Mourne
- Hosting 2 industry consultation workshops on the Signature Project took attended by over 60 representatives
- Completion of Mourne Signature Project Action Plan, with input and advice from Richard Denman, The Tourism Company
- Inter-Agency workshop and meeting with Assembly Committees to facilitate cross-government approach to tourism development
- Agreement of outline Capital Development Programme for Signature Project
- Initial scoping of capital and visitor servicing projects in line with identified programme
- Completion of review and portfolio of achievements against European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.
- Mourne Visitor Survey
- Tourism Business Survey
- Mourne Sustainable Tourism Forum Briefing
- Review of role www.mournelive.com as a key visitor portal and design of programme of improvements
- Design of 'Grow Your Food, Hospitality or Tourism Business' training programme in conjunction with Armagh Down Tourism Partnership
- Implementation Plan and costings developed for Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geo-Tourism Project.

Creating Awareness and Promoting Understanding

Overview

A key function of the Trust is to promote awareness and appreciation of the special qualities of the Mourne AONB to a wide audience, so as to influence both policy and practice but also simply to enhance peoples' enjoyment of this wonderful area.

This year there has been a particular emphasis on promoting the benefits of use of local produce. This is one of the strategic and cross-cutting initiatives identified in the Trust's Strategic Operational Plan in recognition of its multiple benefits. As well as adding a distinctive local element to the visitor experience, increased use of seasonal local produce has environmental benefits in terms of reduced food miles and a lower carbon footprint. More directly by supporting traditional farming, use of local food helps to sustain the activities that shaped the Mourne landscape and that, if carried out using non-intensive methods, can promote biodiversity. Activities this year concentrated in a scoping study of the extent and nature of local produce, which by year end had been largely complete, along with a range of awareness and capacity raising activities, including the tailored training programme and study visits reported in the previous section.

Input to the ongoing National Park investigations continued to form a significant part of our awareness and promotion role this year, while with the return of devolution

the Trust was delighted to welcome two of our new Northern Ireland Executive Ministers to Mourne for fact finding visits early in their tenure.

Promoting local produce – towards a Mourne brand

A flagship 'Encouraging & Promoting Mourne Products' event took place in November 2007, attracting over 100 attendees from a mix of businesses and organisations involved in tourism, food, farming, and catering sectors was held in the Slieve Croob Inn.

The conference, hosted by Ulster Television's Frank Mitchell, featured guest speakers from 'Tastes of Lincolnshire', Forest of Bowland AONB in Lancashire and the Western Organics Network from County Leitrim. The best of Mourne produce was showcased in a demonstration lunch, after which interactive workshops gathered opinions on the development of a Mourne brand and means to promote local produce.

A raft of other promotional activities contributed to the success of this conference including production of promotional leaflets 'Encouraging & Promoting Use of Mourne Products' and awareness raising at events such as Castlewellan Farmers' Market, Booley Fair, Hilltown, Belfast Maritime Event, Castlewellan Agricultural Show and Annalong Fish Fest.

Cookery demonstrations given by Michelin starred chefs from local restaurants and showcasing local ingredients drew great interest at the Green Living Experience event in Castlewellan in August 2007 and a promotional DVD of the demonstrations was produced.



Informing policy

In April 2007, shortly after restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Agriculture and Rural Development Minister, Michelle Gildernew, made an early visit to Mourne discussing with Board representatives the challenges facing Mourne and other high landscape value areas, along with the potential for agriculture and rural development.



The following November, Environment Minister Arlene Foster was hosted by the Trust at Tory Bush Cottages where owner David Maginn explained the cutting edge energy saving technologies that have been employed in his new conference room and 'eco-apartment'. The Minister then enjoyed talking with some of the volunteers and special needs groups about the significant contribution they have made to 'caring for Mourne', before discussing with Board members the importance of our protected areas and in particular the cross cutting nature of the benefits spanning health, education, economy and other sectors.

Throughout the year the Trust continued to provide expert input to various government consultations, policy and planning proposals. In particular Ministers have shown an interest in the example set by Mourne Homesteads of what can be achieved through restoration of our vacant vernacular buildings and attention has been focussed on how policy can better facilitate such restoration. The Trust Chair and CEO also provided significant assistance and information to the Mourne National Park Working Party which this year presented a report summarising the conclusions of its 4 years of work to the Minister for the Environment.

Highlights - at a glance

- Revised National Park Position Statement and Information sheet to assist members of the public in engaging with the national park debate
- Input to National Park Working Party Report, Chairman as member and CEO as adviser
- Updating of www.mournelive.com achieving 78,881 hits (average 6,573 per month). Represents a reduction on last year's figure but in line with the previous year, last year's spike probably arising from the National Park consultation process.
- Friends of Mourne newsletter
- Significant increase in 'Life' Friends of Mourne
- Hosting of visits, including Ministers Foster and Gildernew
- Presentations to Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development and Environment Committees respectively
- Special meeting with key agencies including Rural Community Networks to generate recommendations on community engagement
- Input to government consultations and policy development e.g. draft PPS 14, Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme
- Comment on significant planning proposals
- 'Encouraging & Promoting Mourne Products' promotional leaflet
- 'Encouraging & Promoting Mourne Products' conference
- Local food cookery demonstration
- Audit and consultation on potential for a Mourne Brand
- Print and broadcast media liaison including advice and assistance to Ulster Television on production of *Ultimate Ulster* showcasing various sites in Mourne and *Insight* programme on proposed Mourne National Park. Assistance to BBC on *Britain's Favourite View* and BBC Northern Ireland on *Walk on the Wild Side*.
- Participation in Europarc Network Meeting in Cairngorms National Park, June 2007

The following details are extracted from the full audited accounts for the financial year 2007/08.
A full copy can be obtained from Mourne Heritage Trust office or at www.mournelive.com

Mourne Heritage Trust Limited

Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 March 2008

| | Notes | Restricted £ | Unrestricted £ | TOTAL 2008 £ | TOTAL 2007 £ |
|--|-------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Incoming Resources | | | | | |
| Voluntary income | | | | | |
| Grants & donations | | - | 171,060 | 171,060 | 154,202 |
| Donations | | - | 820 | 820 | 5,490 |
| Investment Income | | - | 503 | 503 | 525 |
| Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities | | | | | |
| Grants and donations | | 3,000 | 134,607 | 137,607 | 111,027 |
| Sales Income | | - | 4,178 | 4,178 | 2,973 |
| Friends of Mourne | | - | 1,240 | 1,240 | 580 |
| TCCF | | 6,639 | - | 6,639 | - |
| NRRTI | | 92 | - | 92 | 103,117 |
| Biodiversity Programme | | - | - | - | 26,499 |
| EU Charter Implementation | | - | - | - | 2,009 |
| Visitor Monitoring | | - | - | - | 26,770 |
| Mourne Homesteads | | 278,627 | - | 278,627 | 364,008 |
| Walk, Talk & Pedal | | - | - | - | 5,790 |
| Sustainable Tourism Training | | - | - | - | 6,301 |
| NITB Signature Project | | 24,521 | - | 24,521 | 12,500 |
| Visitor Site Enhancements | | - | - | - | 147,471 |
| Active Lifestyles | | 27,210 | - | 27,210 | 11,470 |
| Mourne Rural Cultural Heritage Programme | | 59,978 | - | 59,978 | 19,914 |
| Natural Heritage Outreach Programme | | 9,120 | - | 9,120 | - |
| Other Incoming Resources | | - | 1,168 | 1,168 | 677 |
| Total Incoming Resources | | 409,187 | 313,576 | 722,763 | 1,001,323 |
| Resources Expended | | | | | |
| Fundraising trading: costs of goods sold & other costs | 2.2 | - | 6,430 | 6,430 | 5,048 |
| Charitable Activities | 2.1 | 292,537 | 237,283 | 529,820 | 1,014,631 |
| Governance Costs | 2.3 | - | 40,624 | 40,624 | 38,647 |
| Other recognised (gains) & losses | 2.4 | - | 25 | 25 | (75) |
| Total Resources Expended | | 292,537 | 284,362 | 576,899 | 1,058,251 |
| Net Incoming Resources before Transfers | | 116,650 | 29,214 | 145,864 | (56,928) |
| Transfers | | | | | |
| Gross Transfers between Funds | | 9,338 | (9,338) | - | - |
| Net Incoming / Outgoing Resources | | 125,988 | 19,876 | 145,864 | (56,928) |
| Balance brought forward as at 1 April 2007 | | 25,082 | 40,364 | 65,446 | 122,374 |
| Balance brought forward as at 31 March 2008 | | 151,070 | 60,240 | 211,310 | 65,446 |

Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 March 2008

| | Notes | 2008 £ | 2007 £ |
|--|-------|-----------|-------------|
| INCOME | 3 | 722,260 | 1,000,798 |
| Project and administrative expenses | | (576,752) | (1,057,761) |
| Operating surplus/(deficit) | 4 | 145,508 | (56,963) |
| Other interest receivable and similar income | 5 | 503 | 525 |
| Interest payable and similar charges | 6 | (147) | (490) |
| Surplus/(Deficit) for the year | 14 | 145,864 | (56,928) |

The income and expenditure account has been prepared on the basis that all operations are continuing operations. There are no recognised gains or losses other than those passing through the income and expenditure account.

Balance Sheet for the year ended 31 March 2008

| | Notes | £ | 2008 £ | £ | 2007 £ |
|---|-------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Fixed Assets | | | | | |
| Tangible assets | 7 | | 64,178 | | 53,749 |
| Current Assets | | | | | |
| Stock | 8 | 3,528 | | 2,447 | |
| Debtors & Prepayments | 9 | 187,246 | | 190,171 | |
| Cash at bank and in hand | | 28,581 | | 46,738 | |
| VAT | | 16,378 | | 1,098 | |
| | | 235,733 | | 240,454 | |
| Creditors : amounts falling due within one year | 10 | (88,601) | | (228,757) | |
| Net current assets/(liabilities) | | | 147,132 | | 11,697 |
| Total assets less current liabilities | | | 211,310 | | 65,446 |
| Accruals and deferred income | | | - | | - |
| | | | 211,310 | | 65,446 |
| Capital Reserves | | | | | |
| Restricted Funds | 14 | | 151,070 | | 25,082 |
| Unrestricted Funds | 14 | | 60,240 | | 40,364 |
| | 15 | | 211,310 | | 65,446 |

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the special provisions for small companies under Part VIII of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

These financial statements were approved by the members of the board on the 27 August 2008 and are signed on its behalf by:



Arthur Mitchell
Chairman



Jim Saunders
Treasurer

Key Features of the Mourne and Slieve Croob AONB

Date of Designation

Mourne was first designated as an AONB in 1966, and redesignated and extended in 1986 to encompass the Mourne Mountains, Slieve Croob, their farmed foothills and Coast.

Extent & Administrative Areas

The Mourne AONB extends across 57,000 Hectares, divided between three local government districts namely Newry & Mourne (34,000 hectares) Down (13,700 hectares) and Banbridge (8,700 hectares).

Population

The resident population is 50,000 (2001 Census). There are 24 settlements, only 3 of which have a population over 5,000.

Mountains

The Mourne AONB contains 20,000 hectares of moorland & mountain, characterised by a hard granite core of twelve, closely grouped peaks, with Northern Ireland's highest mountain, Slieve Donard, rising 2796 feet / 850 metres above sea level. To the North, Slieve Croob at 534 metres is linked to the main Mourne massif by the broken rocky hills of the Castlewellan area.

Coast

The Mourne AONB contains 72 km of coastline. To the south is Carlingford Lough, the only fjord and deep water lough on the east coast of Ireland, to the north the sandy beaches of Murlough National Nature Reserve and in between the rocky coves and cliffs where the 'mountains sweep down to the sea.'

Forest

The AONB contains 5,000 hectares of woodland and forest, including the Forest Parks of Castlewellan, Kilbroney and Tollymore as well as the ancient oak wood at Rostrevor.

Geology

The Mourne Mountains are comparatively young mountains formed over 50 million years ago when a vast block of ancient shale subsided deep into the earth's crust, causing molten granite to fill the cavity left in its place. Slieve Croob is part of the much older Newry granite complex. There are 6 designated geological sites in the AONB: Charley's Rock, Ben Crom, Bloody River, Diamond Rocks, Eagle Rock and Murlough Complex.

Reservoirs

The AONB contains the five reservoirs of Silent Valley, Ben Crom, Spelga Dam, Fofannybane and Lough Island Reavey.

Conservation Designations

Carlingford Lough is an international Ramsar site as well as being designated by the European Union as a Special Protection Area. Rostrevor Wood & Murlough are both National Nature Reserves and, along with the Eastern Mourne, are recognised as EU Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). There is also a large number of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) and Areas of Scientific Interest.

A Living Landscape

The Mourne AONB contains approximately 29,000 hectares of farmland characterised by smallholdings, with 1500 farm units at an average of size approximately 20 hectares. In addition, farmers in Mourne use extensive upland areas as shared grazing. Traditional farming activity shaped the landscape, including the distinctive 'patchwork quilt' pattern of dry stone walls.

Granite Supply

Granite from the Mourne Mountains has been used widely as a building material, notably paving great cities such as Liverpool, Belfast, and London but also as millstones, lintels, window sills and door steps. Mourne granite has even been found at the Neolithic site of Newgrange in County Meath, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Historic Site Designations

As well as 7 state care monuments and 60+ scheduled historic monuments, 414 historic monuments that are not yet statutorily protected but which fall within agri-environment schemes are scattered across the AONB area, all providing a rich insight into man's imprint on the landscape.

Built Heritage

Mourne has a distinctive built heritage, typified by the traditional cottage. A 1989 audit logged 1,700 vacant vernacular dwellings. In 2001 / 2002, 963 such structures were identified, indicating that a considerable number had been replaced, demolished or deteriorated. The Mourne Homesteads Scheme, which renovated 7 dwellings to modern day living standards, has been acclaimed as an example of best practice with, among others, a Europa Nostra award. The AONB also contains approximately 400 listed buildings with the quality of its townscapes and villages also recognised by designated Conservation Areas in Castlewellan and Rostrevor.

Public Rights of Way

There are 33.52 miles (53.95km) of public rights of way throughout the Mourne AONB.

MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST
is funded by



Mourne Heritage Trust

87 Central Promenade, Newcastle, Co Down BT33 0HH
Tel: (028) 4372 4059 Fax: (028) 4372 6493
Email: mht@mourne.co.uk Web: www.mournelive.com