

MOURNE HERITAGE TRUST



# Annual Report and Accounts

April 2008 to March 2009

# 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.

## 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.

(NAAOB, 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



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# Chairmans Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the annual report of the work of Mourne Heritage Trust. The process of putting together the report provides an opportunity to take time out and reflect on the ever increasing task of Caring for Mourne, across the many approaches the Trust employs in this hugely important endeavour.

A particular emphasis in the year to March 2009 has been on helping to address issues relating to the impact of the growing numbers of people engaging in outdoor recreation within the boundaries of the AONB. The Trust adopted an approach of involving landowners and farmers in both identifying and helping to implement necessary works. Although delivering on the programme of works set out in the Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities remains the greater proportion of the Trust's countryside management work, this year the Mourne Access Funding from the Department of the Environment, which I was pleased to welcome in my remarks last year, has been very beneficial in enhancing the Trust's ability to tackle emerging issues on the partnership basis that is essential in the Mournes.

In my introduction to last year's annual report I also looked forward to the opening of the new Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2008 – 2013 as a key source of funds for other strategic activities. While calls for applications had not been made by the end of 2008/2009, the year has been put to good use in ensuring that the Trust has a range of fully scoped and developed projects, linked to key needs, to present to this and other funding streams such as the Mourne Signature Project Capital Programme through Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

The work required to develop practical projects to a point of implementation is often unappreciated by observers of the end result, but requires significant human resource. While quite substantial capital funding is available, or soon to be available, for application through the funding mechanisms mentioned and others, the initial development work represents an ongoing challenge to the Trust. However it is one that, with the assistance of professional technical input and our statutory partners, we have worked hard to overcome so that maximum benefit can be brought to the Mournes. One example is the development of a Vision and Masterplan for the enhancement of visitor amenities and interpretation along the Mourne Coast, which was submitted for funding to NITB in January 2009.

We are conscious however that while many 'non-core' funding streams are targeted as capital expenditure, we must ensure adequate staff resource is available to work with the private sector; the community and others to enhance awareness of and protection of the special qualities of the Mourne AONB, as well as the related opportunities for sustainable development. An example of our ability to successfully engage people in AONB management, when given the necessary resource, is the Natural Heritage Outreach Project, funded for a time limited period by Heritage Lottery Fund and NITB. This project really came into its own this year with a number of innovative approaches and imaginative events to engage local communities and visitors to Mourne with the wonderful world around them.

In the course of the year the Trust underwent a rigorous re-assessment process in pursuit of renewal of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. Having first received the award in 2003 we are hopeful of being the first area in the UK to be successfully re-accredited. This is of great importance to Mourne because an opportunity now exists to extend accreditation to individual tourism businesses through a partnership arrangement. Implementation of this aspect of the Charter has largely been limited to date to scoping work carried out by third level students

but we will be making every effort to identify the necessary resources to take further forward this opportunity, which is available on the island of Ireland only to the Mourne area.

Also in the course of this year a successful Rural Heritage Project came to a close leaving the Trust with a number of very valuable resources such as a beautifully illustrated cultural heritage trail and tools to promote the use of local produce, including a set of Mourne Signature Recipe Cards. Unfortunately again funding for continuation of this work has yet to be identified and the Trust has instead sought to influence other agencies to build on the basis provided, particularly in relation to local produce.

Reflecting some of the resource constraints and funding issues I have touched upon the Trust was pleased to co-operate this year with an external review of the need for AONB management in the area. Staff devoted considerable time to providing information and analysis to inform the review and in the coming year we look forward to working with our funding partners in local and central government to address the recommendations that will emerge.

One of the ways of course in which the Trust has typically made limited resource go a long way is through the input of volunteers and I would like to finish by paying tribute to one of these in particular, while also acknowledging the contribution of our Mourne Conservation Volunteers and Volunteer Rangers. Dick Oram, who sadly passed away in December 2008, made a contribution to the work of the Trust that is difficult to overstate, notably through the Mourne Homesteads Scheme, for which the Trust was presented with a European Union Cultural Heritage prize this year. Not only was Dick the prime mover in evolving the concept and carrying out the painstaking preparatory work, but he guided the project carefully throughout and latterly, ill health notwithstanding, even assumed the mantle of project manager to see the work to a successful conclusion. As much as the buildings, the memory of Dick's passion for the built heritage of Mourne is a source of inspiration to the staff and Trustees of MHT while many more will, perhaps unknowingly, be able to appreciate his legacy for years to come.

In looking forward to the Trust continuing to work hard to ensure that all aspects of what makes Mourne special can be appreciated for years to come, I commend this report to you.

Dr Arthur Mitchell, MBE





# Introduction to Mourne Heritage Trust

## 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 Mournes communities”

## 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:

- Natural Environment Enhancement and Protection
- Visitor Management and Visitor Services
- Built and Cultural Heritage
- Sustainable Tourism
- Creating Awareness and Promoting Understanding
- Strategic and Cross Cutting Initiatives

See *Company Structure* opposite.

## 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

Miss Joanne McAlinden left the post of Rural Heritage Officer in March 2009 and Miss Emma Cunningham was appointed as AONB Management Plan Officer in March 2009.

## Board of Trustees

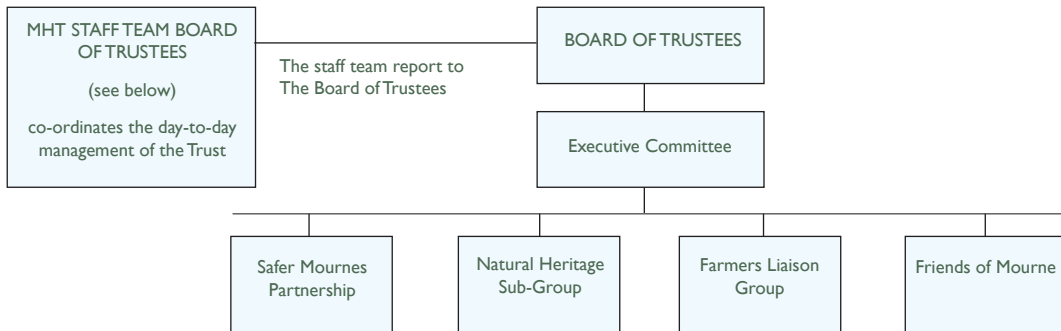
The Board of Trustees represents a wide ranging partnership of interests - including local elected representatives, landowner, farming and community interests. This broad representation gives a valuable collective focus to the area, its issues and its needs and allows The Board of Trustees to give a co- strategic lead to the management of the AONB. The sectors 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  
Ms Isabel Hood – Environment  
Cllr Isaac Hanna – Newry & Mourne District Council  
Cllr Mick Murphy – Resigned 10.07.2008  
Newry & Mourne District Council  
Cllr Ciaran Mussen – Appointed 10.07.2008  
Newry & Mourne District Council  
Cllr Seamus Doyle – Banbridge District Council  
Cllr Elizabeth Ingram – Banbridge District Council  
Cllr Carmel O’Boyle – Down District Council  
Ms Maureen Killen – Community  
Mr Sean McCarthy – Community (ECDRN)  
Mr William Burns – Farming  
Mr Patrick Kelly – Resigned 03.03.2009  
Community  
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  
Mr Ian Watts – Appointed 17.09.2008 Angling

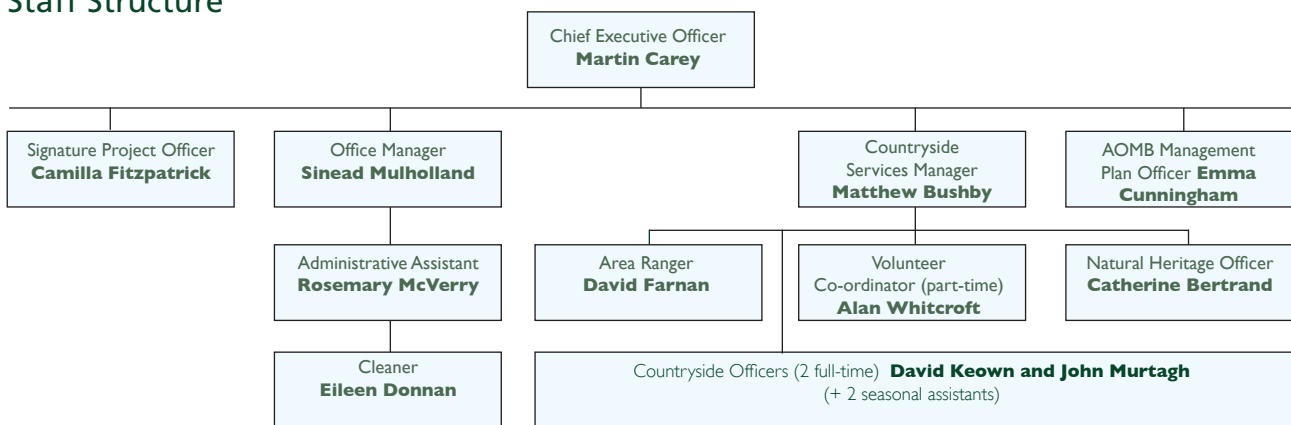
The Board of Trustees met on seven separate occasions throughout the year and there was three changes to the membership of the Board of Trustees throughout the year.



## Company Structure



## Staff Structure



### Annual General Meeting 2008

The Mourne Heritage Trust celebrated its eleventh Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 17th September 2008 hosted at Banbridge District Councils offices. Mr Graham Furey, President of the Ulster Farmers Union was guest speaker.

### Funding 2008 / 2009

Northern Ireland Environment Agency	£180,144
Banbridge District Council	£24,232
Down District Council	£43,616
Newry & Mourne District Council	£25,000
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	£55,000



# Natural Environment Enhancement and Protection

## Overview

This year the Natural Heritage Outreach Programme (NHOP) significantly boost the extent and breadth of environmental enhancement and protection in the Mournes, and the delivery of the Mourne Biodiversity Action Plan. The NHOP has complimented the ongoing management provided by the Mourne Ranger Service and Countryside Team, by engaging with the wider community to raise awareness, encourage participation and identify key projects to improve the focus of the Trust's work.

As in previous years, we have involved a wide range of people in environmental work to both maximise the Trust's ability to manage the environment and also to develop skills in the community. The Trust has focused its activity towards Volunteer Rangers and building volunteer interest through the NHOP, as a way of consolidating and developing partnership.

The third year of the Active Lifestyles and Youth Ranger Programme continued to make an invaluable contribution in delivering environmental management. It also proved the ability for prolonged outdoor conservation work to increase participants health and well being, to offer skills & training and also simply to be great fun.

Other important projects this year included: coastal management; Trees for Mourne, heathland management, red squirrel protection; invasive species clearance and facilitating training in species ID and habitat management.

## Natural Heritage Outreach Programme

A number of key activities and partnerships were developed by the Natural Heritage Outreach Officer in the first year of the Programme, and additional project funding was secured to enhance its capacity. Activity centred on the following themes.



Beachwatch



Youth Groups help restore heathland

## Shore Footed

Loughs Agency funding helped run a programme of coastal events and activities over the summer holidays. The programme was launched at Chestnutt Caravan Park, Cranfield on World Oceans Day at a mini festival including partners from Tidy NI, Ulster Wildlife Trust and the Kilbroney Centre. Other events included boat trips to watch marine wildlife in Carlingford Lough, coastal walks and seashore safaris

## Beachwatch

Beachwatch, an annual beach clean and litter survey organised by the Marine Conservation Society, was championed in Mourne in September 2008. The events attracted high numbers of volunteers including the whole of Year 10 from Kilkeel high school and the Mourne Conservation Volunteers, and removed tonnes of waste and rubbish from around the Mourne shore.

## Red Squirrel

The Trust has been involved in red squirrel conservation through a partnership with the Tollymore Forest Park Red Squirrel Group and Forest Service for several years. Over the last year a business sponsor was found for the group: Unicorn Containers, a metal pressing firm from Lisburn; who produced metal feeders and feeder doors out of scrap metal material at no charge. The Trust also assisted at events promoting red squirrels and carried out a number of talks at local schools.

## Silent Valley Heathland

The new Silent Valley Nature Trail meanders through several different habitats alongside the Kilkeel River in Silent Valley, including lowland heath, a Northern Ireland priority habitat. Working with youth groups and volunteers we have been gradually restoring this area of heathland, removing lodge-pole pine trees that are seeding into it, and destroying the native heathers, lichens and mosses by blocking out the light. Volunteers helped by felling trees and clearing scrub, as well as carrying out vegetation surveys and recording different wildlife species.



*Beachwatch volunteers*

### Bird ID Courses

In November 2008 The Trust helped UK wide charity the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to run two training courses at Attcall in the mid Mourne. This course aimed to encourage local people and bird enthusiasts to take part in the Bird Atlas recording programme, a 4 year project organised by the BTO to create an accurate bird census of all species and their distributions throughout the UK.

Crocknafeola Centre provided the venue and good food and overnight accommodation for participants, and field surveys were highlighted by sightings of linnet and sparrowhawk.

### Seals

The Trust met with the Kilkeel Anglers in the spring of 2008 to discuss different issues affecting the group such as concern about seal numbers in Carlingford Lough, and a desire to know more about what was being done to monitor the population. We were able to partner with the Loughs Agency, Tara Seal Research and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency who have responsibility for monitoring seals around the whole NI coast.

The Carlingford Lough Seal Survey Project has developed a new system of recording seals from the many haul-outs around the Lough and has trained up several staff and local volunteers in seal survey methodology. As a result we are able to obtain accurate pupping and moult counts of common seals throughout July and August and also estimate the number of grey seals in the area.



*Carlingford Lough Seal Survey Project*



*Bird watching work shop*



# Natural Environment Enhancement and Protection



Active Lifestyle Programme

## Trees for Mourne

The Trust has been establishing a native oak tree nursery over the last few years, particularly with the help of the Active Lifestyle volunteers. This is supplying stock for Trees For Mourne, a programme that aims to encourage new, local provenance oak woodlands in the Mourne AONB (identified in both the NI and Mourne Biodiversity Action Plans as priority habitat), and the Trust is seeking partners with available land to plant the woods.

Ideally, we hope to plant on a minimum of three acres per site, and have enough trees at present to plant up to 100 acres a year! Over the winter we planted up to 20 acres on 3 sites: Silent Valley; Ballyward; and Moneyscalp, on private and public land. The planting regime allows farmers to continue to manage the land in a traditional way and also to enhance its conservation status. We plan to advertise the scheme to encourage more partners for planting during winter 2009/10.

## Conservation through Active Lifestyles

The programme continues to provide an opportunity to improve health and well being and to care for the environment to groups and individuals with special needs from across the AONB and surrounding area, and also for youth groups and long term unemployed. As well as further developing the Silent Valley Tree Nursery, participants were involved in invasive species control, tree planting (See Trees for Mourne above) and trail maintenance.

## Conservation through Volunteers

The Mourne Conservation Volunteers continued to contribute to both environmental and visitor management in the AONB providing 85 days of work. This is down from the 130 work days achieved in 2007/08 and was achieved through 18 volunteer events as opposed to 23 the following year. The recent downturn in CV numbers is counter balanced by the increase in Volunteer Ranger activity.

The Area Ranger focused on developing Volunteer Ranger skills as a plan to build management capacity. 103 Volunteer Ranger days were achieved over 08/09 carrying out environmental and visitor management, such as training and carrying out vegetation survey of the high Mournes, Key Species monitoring and assisting with Active Lifestyles and Youth Ranger Groups. Corporate Group days also continued to provide a contribution to AONB management.

## Shore footed event







Youth Rangers

### Safer Mournes Partnership (SMP)

A Mourne Countryside Safety Day was held on 21 September 2008. It was a successful event with a good range of emergency service, community safety and environmental management exhibitions/ displays. The Coastguard helicopter landed and was a great attraction. A new Mourne Crime Prevention Leaflet aimed at countryside users was produced and has a reporting facility to help monitor anti-social behaviour and wildfires.

More headway was made in raising awareness of the potential damage caused by quads and scramblers: BBC Newsline featured an article on quads damaging heathland at Wee Binnian; and there were successful prosecutions of quad users who had been damaging coastal habitat south of Killeel.

A Mourne Emergency Access Review identified the key access routes used by emergency services dealing with missing persons, injured walkers and wildfires etc. NIEA now consider funding access routes on the basis of their importance for emergency services and this report would inform their decision making.

### Developing Youth Rangers

The Youth Ranger Programme now in its third summer, worked with eight young people between the ages of 14 and 17, undertaking a heathland restoration project, heathland wildfire site mapping, marine biodiversity survey, beach clean and installation of stiles. They also cleaned up a number of sites affected by nuisance camping, and this was broadcast on Radio Ulster's "Your Place and Mine" programme. The positive feedback from participants, parents and others helped in securing funding to extend the project for a 4th year.

### Invasive Species

In recognition of the Trust's ongoing monitoring and control of invasive species such as Rhododendron and cotoneaster; we were asked to host a NICVA/NIPAN seminar on managing invasive species. A group of over 20 involving government bodies and NGOs met to discuss issues, share experience and propose ways forward.

### At a Glance Highlights

- £1 300 Loughs Agency grant helped run the Shore Footed programme during 2008.
- 150 volunteers with Beachwatch helped remove over 2 tonnes of waste and rubbish from around the Mourne shore.
- Red Squirrel Group at Tollymore runs activities and develops partnerships.
- Bird ID courses attract 30 participants over 4 days to Atticall in November 2008.
- New system of recording seals developed for the Carlingford Lough Seal Survey & training run for staff and volunteers in seal survey methodology.
- £10k NIEA grant secured in March 2009 from to fund the Marine Conservation Society's interactive Cool Seas Roadshow to visit Mourne schools from April 2009.
- Mourne Ranger providing environmental and visitor monitoring and liaison with users and landowners.
- 188 total volunteer days in support of AONB management producing the equivalent of £9,400 worth of labour (excluding student placements).
- 94 Active Lifestyle group days.
- 649 individual Active Lifestyle work days: 549 Special Needs, 63 Youth.
- First 20 acres on 3 sites planted under Trees For Mourne.
- Co-ordination of Safer Mournes Partnership.
- The Mourne Countryside Safety Day held on 21 September 2008.
- A new Mourne Crime Prevention Leaflet aimed at countryside users.
- BBC Newsline and local press features on quads damaging habitats.
- Ongoing invasive species control and hosting of NICVA/NIPAN seminar on Invasive Species.
- Esmee Fairbairn funding secured towards a programme to enhance the environment of NI Water land in Mourne, in particular the Eastern Mournes SAC.
- Small grant secured for biodiversity equipment to encourage participation in monitoring natural heritage.

# Visitor Management and Visitor Services

## Overview

This year focused on new trail development and the Countryside Team's increasing capacity to carry out remedial works to mitigate user impact and repair key access routes:

Phase 2 of the Silent Valley Nature Trail was constructed; fencing and path works on the Brandy Pad at Bloody Bridge repaired damage caused by users and built good links with the local landowners; and heavy rain damage to access routes was addressed through emergency repairs on green lanes and upland tracks.

Damage to walls and other boundary structures caused by users has been a problem for years and we feel that we are now building capacity and volunteer skills to start to make significant headway in management. This year the Ranger and Countryside Team were able to work with Volunteers and local landowners to repair the Clanawhillian Wall adjacent to the Mourne Way.

The Mourne AONB Access Fund was launched by NIEA and The Trust provided advice and support in developing the parameters of the fund, raising awareness of the Scheme, and encouraging applications from the community. The Trust ran two information seminars at local venues to this end, and also prepared bids itself for a number of projects including a Mourne Pilot Access Ranger.

Working with NIAPA and UFU, the Trust focused engagement with local landowners and farmers on building links with individuals and specific Trustee Groups, based on addressing practical issues and projects.



*Heritage Walks*

## Silent Valley Nature Trail

Phase 2 of the Silent Valley Nature Trail saw the construction of a path, small bridge and boardwalk to create a return leg to the existing linear trail, making a 1.5 mile loop walk through the Killeel River Valley. The trail allows users of all ability to get close to nature, and provides information on the built, cultural and natural heritage of the Silent Valley. The trail was officially opened in October 2008 by the Minister for Regional Development, Connor Murphy. Significantly, the project was developed with the help of volunteers including adults with special needs, youth rangers and Business in the Community groups.



*Opening of Silent Valley Nature Trail by Minister Conor Murphy*



*Opening of Silent Valley Nature Trail*



## Bloody Bridge Works

The Trust secured a grant from NIEA and benefited from donations to finance much needed fencing and path repair work on the quarry track near Bloody Bridge. The project planned with local landowners was able to repair over 400m of fencing damaged by users and make repairs to the severely neglected quarry track. Granite waymarkers and interpretation will be erected in the coming year to encourage responsible use.



Fencing at Bloody Bridge



Fence and Native Hedge Planting, Binder's Cove

## Clanawhillian Wall

The Mourne Way runs alongside the Clanawhillian Wall between Trassey and Happy Valley, and the area is popular with walkers, hill runners and campers. As a result, the adjacent wall has taken a 'hit' over the years. Piece meal repairs have been carried out, but this year the Ranger and Countryside Team joined up with Volunteers and local landowners to make significant repairs to the wall so that all the major breaks were repaired. It is hoped that we can continue to highlight the importance of this issue and help landowners where possible in this work.

## Monitoring and Addressing Visitor Impact

The Ranger continued to manage the visitor counters across the AONB to provide an indication of use - despite technical hitches and severe weather!

The counts over the last year show continued high levels of use. Trassey track registered over 20,000 users, and over 46,000 were registered at Hares Gap. And at the car parks, Leitrim Lodge counted over 12,000 cars, whilst at Bloody Bridge there were almost 30,000 cars. They continue to provide evidence to focus resources to help landowners cope with and benefit from countryside use.

## At a Glance Highlights

- Construction and official opening of the Silent Valley Nature Trail Phase 2
- Remedial works at Bloody Bridge to help repair fences and eroded tracks
- Partnership of Ranger, Countryside Team, Volunteers and landowners carry out major repairs to Clanawhillian Wall adjacent to the Mourne Way
- New fences erected at Trassey Car Park & Binders Cove Souterrain in response to requests by landowners, improving boundaries and helping prevent impact from users.
- Flood damage repairs to the Lower Trassey Track, Ballywillwill Lane and Wild Forest Lane.
- Summer programme of 13 guided heritage walks
- Maintenance of a network of electronic pedestrian and vehicle counters
- Analysis and reporting of visitor data.
- Continuing development of proposals for major upland path repair programme
- Provision of advice and support on the Mourne AONB Access Fund to potential applicants and partner bodies
- Facilitation of 2 Mourne AONB Access Fund information seminars at local venues
- Preparation of bids for a number of projects including a Mourne Pilot Access Ranger
- Working with NIAPA and UFU on developing engagement with local farmers
- Engagement with landowners on access projects including proposals to repair 2km of Bloody Bridge Quarry Track
- 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
- Small grant used to acquire tools and equipment to enhance environmental management

# Built and Cultural Heritage

## Overview

The Mourne Rural Heritage Project came to completion in September 2008, leaving the Trust with a number of tools and mechanisms to promote appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of the area.

The outcomes of this project, highlighted below, reiterate the reality that Mourne is much more than outstanding natural beauty and biodiversity, it is, in fact a 'living working landscape', and has been for centuries. The small fields, heather uplands and dry stone walls, idiosyncratic features in the area, are a legacy of the traditional farming that once saw seaweed from the wrack beds of the Mourne shore fertilise the land, and grazing cattle in the uplands tended from booley huts.

The industrial aspect of our heritage means that anyone walking the streets of London, Liverpool or Belfast has a good chance of stepping on Mourne granite, hewn by hand from the mountains. These, stone working skills also built the Mourne wall. This granite masterpiece winds its way for 22 miles, defying gravity as it peaks the highest summits and is matched in construction prowess by the Silent Valley and Ben Crom reservoirs, which have been supplying Belfast with water since the 1930s. The landscape is dotted with Norman inheritance, exemplified by Dundrum and Narrow Water castles, which continue to stand guard over a landscape on which early man has also made his mark, with monuments such as the megalithic Legananny Dolmen.

As well as being an intrinsic part of what makes Mourne special, the importance of heritage came to the fore this year through Northern Ireland Tourist Board's branding exercise, which aims to 'create the new Northern Ireland experience' and also 'get it on everyone's destination wish list'.

The branding themes aim to both 'uncover our stories' – and 'experience our awakening'. The cultural heritage work carried out by the Trust is just one element through which the Mourne experience is brought to life; evoking the essence of what makes Mourne unique and worth visiting.

The Mourne Homesteads project continued to be recognised this year, thereby illustrating the value of the restored properties in encouraging and inspiring renovation of our vernacular built heritage, rather than dereliction or replacement.

## Bringing Heritage to Life

Myths, legends – and even a few facts! – associated with the Mourne and Slieve Croob landscape have been brought to life by the new publication. Containing a wealth of information on the stories behind this famous landscape and a beautifully illustrated map, by Strangford based artist Joanna Martin, the heritage trail leaflet provides a guide for those wishing to delve beneath the surface. A 'Heritage made Easy' section allows even the relatively uninitiated among us to identify clachans and crannogs, cashels and raths.

The new guide is aimed at helping the visitor and local person alike to not only enjoy the stunning scenery and tranquillity of our area, but also to explore its most fascinating themes and sites. From ancient pilgrimages and the smuggling of contraband, mass rocks and mysterious bells, to the traditional industries of granite working and upland farming, the colourful past of the Mournes and Slieve Croob is presented in an attractive and interesting way.

This resource has been very well received and complements the previous heritage audit and online searchable database of cultural / heritage resources and materials specific to the Mournes and Slieve Croob.



Heritage trail leaflet

*With Special thanks to Stephen Farrell of Farrell Photography and Alastair Coey Architects and Marty Johnston for use of photographs.*



## Plaudits for Mourne Homesteads

In April 2008 Traditional Mourne dwellings were again the toast of Europe with the formal presentation of a Europa Nostra Diploma from the European Union, handed over at Ronan's Cottage, Ballycoshone, Hilltown by Mr Lester Borley.

The award placed the cottages in the company of such sites and artefacts as the New York Palace and Café, in Budapest, Hungary; The Palace of Westminster in London, an ancient Greek bronze sculpture from Croatia, and a rock carved church at Cappadocia in Turkey. In another connection with Mourne, Brunel's SS Great Britain ship was also honoured. The ship, now on display in Bristol, once famously ran aground and lay for almost a year in Dundrum Bay while being restored.

Presenting the award Mr Borley said 'I am delighted to have travelled to the heart of the Mourne Mountains to see at first hand this exemplary programme that restores traditional farmhouses to provide affordable and attractive homes for local people.'

Dr Arthur Mitchell, Chairman of Mourne Heritage Trust said: 'I am delighted by the award of a Diploma from Europa Nostra. This prestigious honour is evidence that, in the eyes of the European Union, what may appear to be humble dwellings, are a hugely important feature of the rural landscape of Northern Ireland.'

Further recognition came in September 2008 at the Best in Heritage World Exhibition in Dubrovnik, Croatia. At this event, promoted by the European Council for Villages and Small Towns, the presentation on Mourne Homesteads given by Dr Harriet Devlin, placed second among a large number of cultural heritage projects from across the world.



Mourne Homestead



Volunteers

## Promoting Restoration

The recognition outlined was an important asset in realising the demonstration value of the Homesteads project. In what has been an important year debating future rural planning and housing policy in Northern Ireland, the Trust undertook a number of actions, using Mourne Homesteads as an example, to demonstrate that traditional dwellings are capable of supporting modern 21st century living, and to ensure this was factored into policy making.

These actions included the circulation of a summary document to all MLAs and other policy makers, which detailed the findings and recommendations of the external evaluation of Mourne Homesteads by the Cardiff Research Group.

Interest shown and feedback from several Ministers indicated that the Homesteads model featured prominently in the considerations of the Inter-Ministerial working group on Rural Housing Policy and the outcome of this work, Draft PPS 21.



Europa Nostra Award Presentation

## At a Glance Highlights

- Completion of transfer of Mourne Homesteads properties to owners for permanent occupation by people with a local connection
- Submission of final funding claims for Mourne Homesteads
- Completion and circulation of external evaluation of Mourne Homesteads
- Presentation of Europa Nostra Diploma for Mourne Homesteads
- 2nd place in ECOVAST 'Best in Heritage World Exhibition' in Dubrovnik, Croatia
- Promotion of searchable, online heritage database on [Mournelive.com](http://Mournelive.com)
- Completion of Mourne and Slieve Croob Cultural Heritage Trail art work and leaflet
- European Heritage Open Days schools event at Silent Valley
- Programme of heritage walks and accompanying fact sheets
- Built and Cultural Heritage Information Service from Newcastle Office assisting local groups businesses and individuals as well as visitors.
- Development of Mourne Public Art programme to interpret aspects of heritage in visible and engaging ways, with community engagement an integral feature.

# Sustainable Tourism

## Overview

Building on the completion in 2007 of a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan for the Mourne Signature Project, this year's activity focused primarily on the development of initiatives to achieve the aims and objectives identified therein and endorsed by the many contributors to the planning exercise.

This process involved significant liaison with partner organisations, such as Northern Ireland Water; National Trust, Forest Service, Planning Service, Roads Service and the councils of Down, Banbridge and Newry and Mourne, and with the private sector to identify immediate priorities. Accordingly significant progress was made with projects to enhance appreciation of the Mourne coast and to interpret the landscape of the AONB in innovative ways.

Much work was also devoted to further development of the Trust's position as the only area on the island of Ireland to hold the EU Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and to realise the potential, in tourism terms, of links with neighbouring areas.

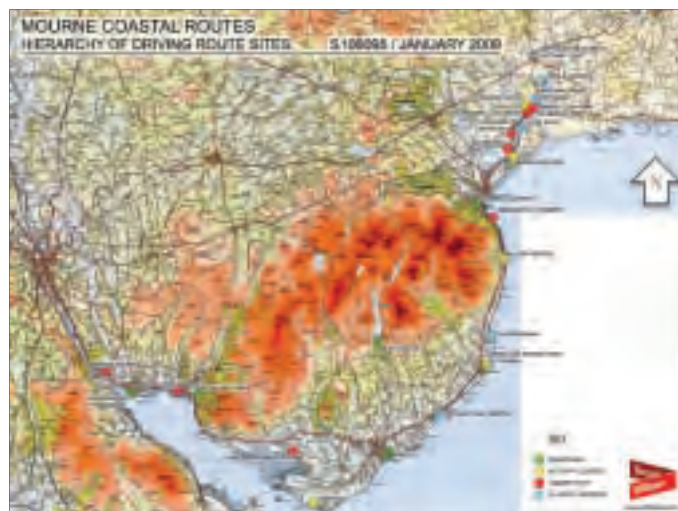
As elaborated below, it is hoped that this work, combined with significant capital investment, will provide the basis for further unlocking the tourism potential of the Mourne and Slieve Croob AONB, while maintaining the special qualities on which this potential can be realised.



## The Mourne Coast's Hidden Gems

In the shadow, literally and metaphorically, of the high Mountains, the Mourne coast was identified in the Sustainable Tourism Action Plan as something of an untapped resource. The potential to divert visitors from the 'honeypot' sites – both dispersing pressure and enhancing the visitor experience - was noted.

This led to the development of a Coastal Route Masterplan. An audit of coastal amenities, produced by the Trust, was refined with professional technical input from Scott Wilson landscape architects. The resulting plan takes a strategic viewpoint, adopting a tiered approach to site development, depending on the function of the site, as well as the existing and proposed services/facilities. The masterplan will form the basis for coherent improvement of coastal amenity and interpretation facilities, including pursuit of funding. Accordingly an application was submitted in January 2009 to the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) for the Mourne area (through NITB).



Mourne Coastal Routes

## Art Interpreting the Mourne

A further capital project submitted to the Mourne TDS was a "Mourne Public Art Programme", for which funding had already been secured from the Arts Council for Northern Ireland (December 2008). This project will create a public art trail around the Mourne area, using the artists' creations as an exciting means of interpreting the landscape. It will build on the use of art in projects associated with the Trust's Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative (2002-2006) and in regeneration of towns such as Newcastle and Killeel to the extent that the Mourne AONB will be strongly associated with high quality art that tells the story of the area and its people. In so doing, the trail will also contribute to creating a Mourne 'brand experience' and assist NITB in rolling out a new brand for Northern Ireland and the Signature Project areas. The Trust has played an active role in this NITB initiative during the period 2008-2009.





## Co-operation for Sustainable Development

Work has continued on Cross Border and wider European linkages, particularly in relation to 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 Association of AONBs and the Europarc Network. In conjunction with a range of partners, including local authorities and the Geological Surveys of both Northern Ireland and the Republic, the Trust submitted funding applications for a Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geo-Tourism project to the Special EU Programmes Body and East Border Region partnership.

Promotion of the concept saw it selected along with three other initiatives, by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development and endorsed in an implementation plan for the Newry-Dundalk Twin City Region, launched jointly in January 2009 by Minister Murphy (Northern Ireland) and Minister Gormley (Ireland).

'I am sure that we all know what a remarkable landscape the Cooley, Gullion and Mourne Mountains provide, but not all will know about the many geologically unique features they contain. Geoparks are now internationally recognised as an excellent way to exploit these features as visitor attractions, but in a controlled way, which protects these important natural assets'.

### Conor Murphy MP MLA, Minister for Regional Development

In addition the Trust, in conjunction with Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust, hosted in November 2008 a successful Sustainable Tourism seminar for the Europarc Atlantic Isles Network. Based at the Europa Hotel in Belfast and featuring field visits to the Mournes and the Causeway Coast, this event attracted the largest ever number of registrations for an Atlantic Isles workshop and brought expert speakers from England, Scotland, Italy and both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. It was a strong endorsement of the progress achieved through the likes of the Natural Resource Rural Tourism Initiative that, having selected sustainable tourism as a theme for its workshop, the network chose Northern Ireland, and the Mournes and Causeway Coast in particular, as a best practice venue.

## Continuing to Lead

Reflecting the values of the seminar, the Trust reviewed its progress against the EU Charter for Sustainable Tourism, which formed the basis of a detailed portfolio of evidence submitted as part of the Charter re-assessment process, which also included a two day inspection visit in September 2008 and a detailed report to an assessment panel, meeting later in 2009.

An outline approach has been agreed in principle for the roll-out of Part II of the Charter and, subject to staff resources, it is hoped that partnership agreements with tourism businesses will be established so that local operators will get recognition for their efforts to make their practices more sustainable in environmental, economic and social terms - and in so doing boost business. The approach will be used to encourage enterprises to make improvements on an annual basis that lead to a more coherent sense of destination for visitors to the Mournes.



Narrow Water proposed layout

## At a Glance Highlights

- On-going consultations with key stakeholders and submissions to relevant government departments on development of projects under the Signature Project Capital Programme
- Submission of a funding application to Arts Council NI for a Mourne Public Art Trail – Application successful
- Submission of an application to SEUPB for a Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geo-Tourism Project
- Coastal Route Amenity and Interpretation Audit
- Development of the Mourne Coastal Route Masterplan (January 2009)
- Submission of funding applications to NITB for the Mourne TDS programme
- Mourne Coastal Route & Amenity Development
- Mourne Public Art Programme
- Submission of Expressions of Interest forms to the 2 Local Action Groups managing the Rural Development Programme (match funding for TDS applications)
- Completion of Vision and Masterplan for development of Silent Valley Mountain Park as a tourism hub.
- Audit of Tourism Information Points in the AONB and development of plans for upgrade and expansion.
- Facilitation work with newly formed "Greater Newcastle Tourism Group" – a collective of private sector businesses seeking to maximise the potential of the area
- Re-assessment for the EU Charter for Sustainable Tourism (for period 2008-2013)
- Europarc seminar on Sustainable Tourism (October 2008). Jointly hosted in Belfast with Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust, a
- Detailed reference document "Walking in the Mournes" for local Tourism Information Centres, larger hotels etc (July 2008)
- Input to tourism sub-group of the South Eastern Tourism Workforce Development Forum, led by Southern Regional College

# Creating Awareness and Cross-Cutting Initiatives

## Overview

An important aspect of the work of the Trust is to promote awareness and appreciation of the special qualities of the AONB to a wide audience, so as both to influence policy and practice and to simply enhance enjoyment of the area. Inherent in this are a number of activities that cannot be pigeonholed into the thematic action areas already outlined in this report, but which contribute on a number of levels. This section of the report provides an overview of these activities, along with some important developments in relation to the Trust's corporate management.

As with the previous year there has been a significant emphasis on promoting the use of seasonal local produce, which has the potential to support local traditional farming. In so doing it can contribute to preserving landscape characteristics and biodiversity, to enhancing the visitor experience, and to addressing climate change through reduced food miles.

In addition, with the completion of the Mourne National Park Working Party's investigations and report, which required significant input from MHT in respect of information provision and general support, the Trust has been able to turn its attentions to other strategic matters. These include putting in place an AONB Management Plan and facilitating a comprehensive external review of the Trust's impact to date, as well as consideration of future management arrangements, both of which will be finalised in 2009/2010.

## Seasonal Local Produce

A tailored training and mentoring programme for Food and Hospitality Businesses was delivered in conjunction with Armagh Down Tourism and Southern Regional College, including modules promoting the use of local produce, among other tourism issues, in the 10 workshops which attracted 113 participants.

In May 2008 a 'Bringing Producers and Retailers Together' event in Castlewellsan concluded the training programme. Attracting over 50 participants it offered an opportunity for individuals in the AONB involved in, or thinking about, setting up a small business in the food, hospitality and tourism sectors to come together. The day long event included cookery demonstrations featuring new takes on local recipes.

A set of Mourne Recipe Cards was produced under the strap line 'Rediscover Local Flavours' to promote use of seasonal produce to an even wider audience. The attractively presented card set features an imaginative breakfast, lunch dinner and dessert recipe for each of the four seasons and also highlights the many benefits of using fresh local produce

A Mourne Branding Scoping Study was completed in the course of the year; taking stock of the progress made in the local produce project along with additional research and consultations. The resulting report was circulated to local authorities, economic development and rural development agencies, elected representatives and farming organisations, along with a tailored briefing paper. Positive feedback has been received and the scoping study appears to have influenced project development among a number of the agencies whom it is hoped, will provide vehicles to sustain the progress made.

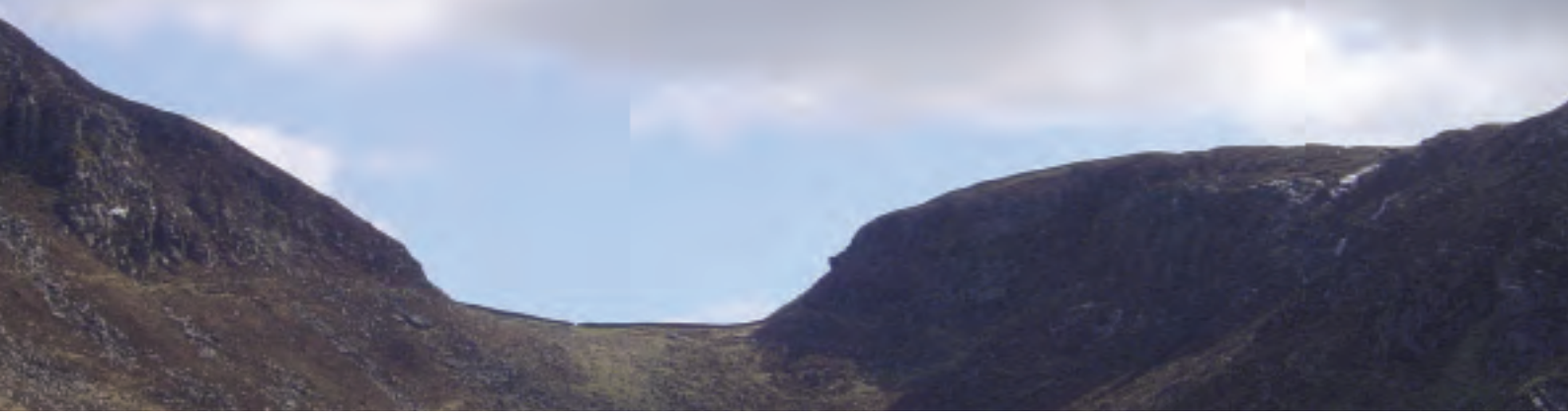


Local produce demonstration



Local Produce Recipe Cards





## Research and Communication

A comprehensive audit and collation of data and indicators relating to aspects of the Mourne landscape was completed. This will be used to establish a baseline from which to monitor the state of the AONB. It also supports identification and demonstration of issues to be addressed in the AONB management plan currently under consideration. The audit will be continually reviewed and gaps addressed where possible.

Another feature of the year has been the increasing popularity of Mournelive.com as a source of information on the AONB. Usage statistics show 142,869 hits over the year; representing an average of 11,905 hits per month, a very significant increase on the 6,573 hits per month in 2007/08 and close to the peak level of usage which occurred in 2006 and coincided with the extensive public consultations on a possible Mourne National Park. The figures appear to suggest a significant increase in the day-to-day use of the website to replace the 'issue specific' volume that accompanied the consultations.

Complementing the website, a regular e-zine was introduced to accompany the natural heritage outreach project, providing people with news on landscape and biodiversity features and events on a regular basis. A circulation list of some 200 names includes local NGO's who then in turn forward to their own membership.



Shore Footed event at Mill Bay



Mountain Walk



Cool seas road show

## At a Glance Highlights

- Updating of [www.mournelive.com](http://www.mournelive.com) achieving 142,869 hits.
- Audit and collation of data to establish a baseline from which to monitor the state of the AONB.
- Presentations to Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development and Environment Committees respectively and to Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy.
- Natural heritage e-zine.
- Input to government consultations and policy development including the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme, draft PPS 21 Rural Planning Policy, DRD Review of Regional Development Strategy, Forest Service Recreational And Social Use strategy and DoE/ NITB proposals for a tourism specific planning policy.
- Print and broadcast media liaison including BBC television One Show, BBC Northern Ireland Newsline and BBC Radio 4 Open Country.
- Participation in Europarc Network Meeting in France, June 08 and General Assembly in Brasov, Romania, Sept. 2008
- Development of methodology and approach for production of AONB Management Plan and recruitment of Management Plan Officer.
- Information and analysis to inform an external review of AONB
- Review of Management in Mourne and Causeway Coast and Glens, discussions with consultants and consideration of draft findings.
- Training and mentoring programme for Food and Hospitality Businesses attracting 113 participants.
- Local produce promotional event - Bringing Producers and Retailers Together.
- Mourne Seasonal Recipe Cards produced and promoted
- Mourne Branding Scoping Study completed and circulated
- Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geological Field Guide completed in conjunction with Louth County Council and Regeneration of South Armagh.
- Funding application for Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geotourism Project submitted to Interreg IVA (June 2008). Follow up consultation with SEUPB Secretariat and East Border Region Partnership.

# Mourne Heritage Trust Limited

## Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31st March 2009

	Notes	Restricted £	Unrestricted £	Total 2009 £	Total 2008 £
<b>Incoming Resources</b>					
Voluntary income					
Grants & donations		-	180,144	180,144	171,060
Donations		5,000	4,692	9,692	820
Investment Income		-	149	149	503
<b>Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities</b>					
Grants and donations		-	153,113	153,113	137,607
Sales Income			3,704	3,704	4,178
Friends of Mourne			300	300	1,240
Silent Valley Nature Trail				53,500	53,500
TCCF		-	-	6,639	
NRRTI			-	-	92
Bloody Bridge			4,143	4,143	-
Mourne Coastal Route			28,000	28,000	-
Mourne Homesteads			-	-	278,627
AONB Mgt Plan		4,787	4,787	-	
Equipment grant		1,705	1,705	-	
NITB Signature Project		-	-	24,521	
Causeway & glens		15,252	15,252	-	
Active Lifestyles		16,483	16,483	27,210	
Mourne Rural Cultural Heritage Programme		39,290	290	59,978	
Natural Heritage Outreach Programme		41,106	41,106	9,120	
Other Incoming Resources		-	518	518	1,168
<b>Total Incoming Resources</b>		<b>209,266</b>	<b>342,620</b>	<b>551,886</b>	<b>722,763</b>
<b>Resources Expended</b>					
Fundraising trading: costs of goods sold & other costs	2.2	-	6,694	6,694	6,430
Charitable Activities	2.1	246,722	270,785	517,507	529,820
Governance Costs	2.3	-	43,846	43,846	40,624
Other recognised (gains) & losses	2.4	-	-	-	25
<b>Total Resources Expended</b>		<b>246,722</b>	<b>321,325</b>	<b>568,047</b>	<b>576,899</b>
Net Incoming Resources before Transfers		(37,456)	21,295	(16,161)	145,864
Transfers					
Gross Transfers between Funds		44,571	(44,571)	-	-
Net Incoming / Outgoing Resources		7,115	(23,276)	(16,161)	145,864
Balance brought forward as at 1 April 2008		151,070	60,240	211,310	65,446
Balance brought forward as at 31 March 2009		158,185	36,964	195,149	211,310

The following details are extracted from the full audited accounts for the financial year 2008/09.  
A full copy can be obtained from Mourne Heritage Trust office or at [www.mournelive.com](http://www.mournelive.com).

# Mourne Heritage Trust Limited

## Income and expenditure account for the year ended 31st March 2009

	Notes	2009 £	2008 £
INCOME	3	551,737	722,260
Project and administrative expenses		(567,484)	(576,752)
Operating surplus/(deficit)	4	(15,747)	145,508
Other interest receivable and similar income	5	149	503
Interest payable and similar charges	6	(563)	(147)
Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	14	(16,161)	145,864

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 31st March 2009

	Notes	£	2009 £	£	2008 £
Fixed Assets					
Tangible assets	7		64,874		64,178
<b>Current Assets</b>					
Stock	8	1,877		3,528	
Debtors & Prepayments	9	125,294		187,246	
Cash at bank and in hand		48,555		28,581	
VAT		-		16,378	
			175,726	235,733	
Creditors : amounts falling due within one year	10	(45,451)		(88,601)	
			130,275	147,132	
Net current assets/(liabilities)			130,275	147,132	
Total assets less current liabilities			195,149	211,310	
Accruals and deferred income			-	-	
			195,149	211,310	
<b>Capital Reserves</b>					
Restricted Funds	14		158,185	151,070	
Unrestricted Funds	14		36,964	60,240	
	15		195,149	211,310	

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 and authorised for issue by the board on the 26 August 2009 and are signed on its behalf by:

Arthur Mitchell  
Chairman



Jim Saunders  
Treasurer



## 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 Castlewellsan 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 & forest, including the Forest Parks of Castlewellsan, Kilbroney and Tollymore as well as the ancient oak wood at Rostrevor.

## Geology

The Mournes are comparatively young mountains formed over 50 million years ago when blocks of silurian 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 and Murlough are both National Nature Reserves and, along with the Eastern Mournes, 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 small holdings, 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 Mournes 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 Castlewellsan and Rostrevor.

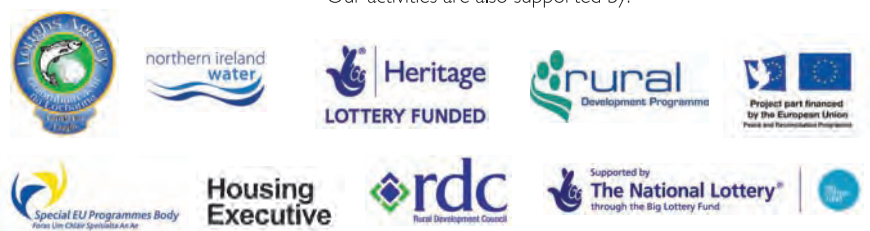
## Public Rights of Way

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

Mourne Heritage Trust is funded by:



Our activities are also supported by:



NORTHERN IRELAND REGIONAL FOOD PROGRAMME

Mourne Heritage Trust

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