



CUILCAGH MOUNTAIN

Outline Interpretation Plan, 23 November 2021

PRODUCED FOR THE CANN PROJECT

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Introduction

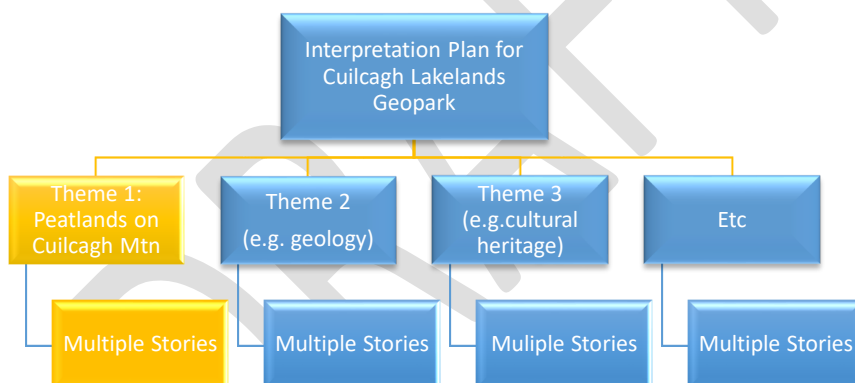
The CANN project is a cross-border environmental project which aims to improve the condition of protected habitats and to support priority species found within Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Scotland. The project covers twenty-seven sites across the three jurisdictions, focusing on Natura2000 sites comprising wetland, peatland and freshwater habitats and associated species.

The CANN project launched in 2017, with €9.4 million of funding from the INTERREG VA programme. It runs until the end of 2022 and over this period, Conservation Action Plans will be produced for a range of sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). In addition to working with partners and private landowners to carry out on the ground conservation activities, the project also aims to raise public awareness of the importance of these sites and their species. This will be accomplished through physical interpretation at sites with public access (some are on private land) and potentially digital assets as well.

Interpretation will also identify the threats which the sites face and encourage the public to get involved and make sustainable choices.

This outline interpretation plan covers interpretation for two CANN sites around Cuilcagh Mountain on the border of Ireland and Northern Ireland: Cuilcagh Mountain SAC and Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands SAC. These SACs are primarily important for their peatlands and associated species.

Parts of the Cuilcagh Mountains SACs are located within the Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark. As the CANN project is time-limited, the Geopark is considered to be the ultimate beneficiary of this outline plan, which it can use as a guide for developing additional interpretation on Cuilcagh Mountain in the future. Additionally, this outline plan should be viewed as forming a part of any full Interpretation Plan that might in time be developed for the whole Geopark. This diagram illustrates this relationship, with the portions in yellow forming part of this outline plan which will be delivered in the short term through the CANN project.



It is anticipated that the interpretive framework and approach laid out in this outline plan will provide a model for development of new interpretation in the wider Geopark in future. And while interpretation at each CANN project site will need to respond to the local environment and requirements, the principles set out in this outline plan could provide a unifying approach across the project area.

In essence, 'Peatlands on Cuilcagh Mountain' becomes a worked example of one theme for the wider Geopark.

Audiences

This discussion of key audiences for the Cuilcagh Mountain SACs is informed by a report produced by Maurica Mackle Communications (January 2021) for the Geopark.

The cross-border nature of the Geopark complicates efforts to align target audiences for marketing and interpretation purposes to audience segmentation research and analysis already in place. This is because various tourism bodies have divided up their audience profiles slightly differently and given them different names. The



following table summarises relevant audiences for the Geopark as identified by Tourism Northern Ireland (domestic visitors - Column 2 and visitors from the Republic of Ireland – Column 3) and Tourism Ireland/Failte Ireland (Column 4). Column 1 is Mackle Communications' summary of motivational factors for visitors as identified through their consultation exercise.

Geopark Research on motivations	Tourism NI segment	Tourism NI/ ROI Segments	Tourism Ireland segment
Sightseers & Explorers	Natural Quality Seekers/ Comfort Seekers	Active Maximisers/ Open Minded Explorers	Culturally Curious/ Great Escapers
Curious to Learn	Aspiring Families/ Comfort Seekers	Open Minded Explorers/ Open to Ideas	Culturally Curious
Day Trippers	Natural Quality Seekers/ Aspiring Families/ Comfort Seekers	Open to Ideas	Great Escapers/ Social Energisers
Fitness Focused	Aspiring Families	Active Maximisers	Social Energisers
Education	Natural Quality Seekers/ Comfort Seekers	Open Minded Explorers	Culturally Curious

As the Geopark covers a wider area and broader range of visitor experiences than simply Cuilcagh Mountain, the target audiences for this outline interpretation plan have been further refined through discussions with the client team. We have focused on the characteristics of users for four Cuilcagh Mountain trails, selected for the specific

interpretive stories CANN wished to tell and the suitability of the sites for public access. The four trails and the characteristics of their users are:

1. Cuilcagh Mountain Boardwalk Trail/Legnabrocky Trail¹ – This is by far the most used trail in the entire Geopark, attracting tens of thousands of visitors every year and during summer 2020, between 3000 and 4000 a day at its busiest. These represent largely one-off visitors aged 25-49 and mostly couples. Family and friend groups make up the majority of remaining visitors. While there are no doubt keen outdoor enthusiasts and hikers in these numbers, many seem to be attracted by social media reports of the ‘Stairway to Heaven’ and perhaps represent more of a ‘general public’ than might be normally expected on trails of such length and challenge.
2. Cuilcagh Hiker’s Trail: This starts at Gortalughany Viewpoint and ascends to the summit of Cuilcagh Mountain. This walk attracts more serious hikers, largely couples or groups of outdoor enthusiasts who have experience, knowledge and interest in the natural environment.
3. Cuilcagh Way: The Cuilcagh Way is a 33km route that encompasses a number of other named trails in and around Cuilcagh Mountain, not all of which traverse either SAC. The portions covered by this outline interpretation plan include the Cuilcagh Hiker’s Trail and the Cuilcagh Mountain Boardwalk Trail.
4. Bellavalley Gap: This lesser-known ascent to Cuilcagh Mountain summit from the Cavan side is used mostly by hikers and local groups.

It is clear from the above that the target audiences differ between the Cuilcagh Mountain Boardwalk Trail and the others. On the ground surveys conducted amongst visitors to the Boardwalk in 2020 revealed that many people didn’t realise the sensitive nature or the importance of the peatlands and their behaviour reflected this in relation to littering and staying on the boardwalk and marked paths. The numbers of visitors at a given time on various routes is also a factor in identifying appropriate interpretation, for example the chance of seeing shy wildlife from the Boardwalk might be slim when it’s crowded with a noisy public.

So, how do we tailor our interpretation to these audiences? There are a number of key points common to all visitors and routes:

- Our visitors are not coming to Cuilcagh Mountain with the intention to read (as they might in a museum setting) but for recreation. They are more likely to engage with interpretation if it contains limited text and large-scale, attractive imagery.
- They will be put off by a technical, dry or academic tone of voice. This is not entertaining.
- Interpretation cannot assume any previous knowledge of the topics.

¹ Assessing the Impact of Visitor Pressure on Cuilcagh Mountain SAC, Mark McBride, 2021

Additionally, Boardwalk interpretation may be best focused on educating the general public about the significance of peatlands, why they're important in a global context and how to protect them. While ambassador species could be brought into this interpretation, key messages here should be focused on higher level messages and not too much detail on specific flora and fauna.

Alternatively, interpretation at the starting points to other walks while reinforcing the high-level messages could focus visitor attention on flora or fauna they might be likely to spot on their visit. Keen hikers are likely to arrive with greater appreciation of the natural landscape and already adhere to outdoor behavioural codes, so may appreciate more detail 'interpretive nuggets' to deeper their knowledge of Cuilcagh Mountain SACs.

The specific proposals below for interpretation as part of the current CANN project build on these audience considerations.

Interpretive objectives

Today's visitors come to enjoy being outdoors and immersing themselves in the natural world. Allowing visitors to simply experience the landscape and the views will remain a key objective and any new interpretation should be carefully considered not to interfere with this. However, moving forward we want to encourage visitors to have a deeper engagement with the site's stories, coming away with a greater appreciation of the importance of Cuilcagh Mountain's habitats and species. Therefore, key interpretive objectives for the project follow.

What we want visitors to understand or appreciate:

- The international value & importance of these peatland and bog habitats
- How rare and special the active blanket bogs are on the island of Ireland and in a worldwide context
- Peatlands are important to biodiversity as they support rare and fragile species found nowhere else
- Eroding blanket bogs contribute to carbon emissions but maintaining and preserving them helps slow climate change as they store carbon
- A number of partners are actively working on conservation projects here including local landowners, charities and governments
- The impacts of climate change are visible right here, right now

What we want visitors to do:

- Stay on the boardwalk or designated footpaths
- Take and share selfies
- Engage with the interpretation (in whatever form that takes)
- Enjoy wide open views
- Listen e.g. to birdsong
- Be discouraged from littering, picking wildflowers or letting dogs off leads



What we want visitors to feel:

- Relaxed, comfortable and safe in the outdoors
- Refreshed by their first-hand immersion in the natural world
- A desire to return to witness seasonal changes
- Empowered to take small yet important steps to tackle climate change
- Optimistic about the future of our native plants and habitats
- Satisfied that they've had a great experience and even a 'wow' moment
- A desire to tell others about their visit
- An appreciation of how special these habitats are

Interpretive context



As mentioned above in the Introduction, the two CANN project sites, Cuilcagh Mountain SAC and Cuilcagh – Anierin Uplands SAC, are located partly within the Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark. The Geopark has its own existing interpretive signage which overlaps in content with that proposed as part of the

current project. The Geopark is part of a 147-strong network of Global Geoparks spread across 41 countries. It is one of three on the island of Ireland and the first ever Transnational Geopark in the world straddling the border between two countries - Northern Ireland (UK) and the Republic of Ireland. Cuilcagh Mountain is geographically the focal point of the Geopark.

Several of the goals as expressed in the current development plan for the Geopark (2020-2030) relate to interpretation and thus overlap with current work under the CANN project. Notably these include:

Heritage

- We will protect, promote and communicate the built, natural and cultural story of our Geopark's heritage in a way that will entice and inspire.

Landscape

- We will conserve and interpret the landscape in everything that we do.

Knowledge & Learning

- We will promote a well interpreted landscape that allows access to learning and research for all.
- We will offer programmes, events and information to communicate this unique story.

Climate Action & Education

- We will place climate action at the centre of our practices and policy. We will strive to become a carbon neutral Geopark educating visitors and locals alike to the significant of climate change in everything that we do.

The interpretive framework outlined below takes these into account, as it is hoped moving forward that this Outline Interpretive Plan will be adopted by the Geopark as a model when adding to or replacing existing interpretive signage or implementing other forms of interpretation in the Geopark.

One of the main visitor attractions in the Geopark is Marble Arch Caves. This underground caving experience is very popular with family audiences and attracts around 150,000 visitors a year. It has very recently announced a change from a seasonal to year around opening. The 75-minute visitor experience includes a guided walk and a 10-minute boat ride. Formerly part of the Geopark, the Caves now operate as an independent visitor attraction. The visitor centre is located not far from carparks for the Cuilcagh Mountain Boardwalk Trail and there are obvious opportunities for cross-promotion and partnership working.





By far the most visited location on Cuilcagh Mountain itself is the boardwalk trail to the summit, nicknamed the 'Stairway to Heaven'. This heavily travelled route attracts upwards to xxx walkers every year. It traverses some of the mountain's most sensitive habitats and offers spectacular views from the top. Existing interpretive signage explains to visitors some of the flora and fauna associated with the peatlands and discusses ongoing conservation work. Although messaging also emphasises the importance of visitors staying on the boardwalk to conserve the environments, there are considerable problems with erosion where visitors stray, especially at the summit. Part of the broader goal of the Geopark is to spread visitors around and away from this 'honeypot' site.

Commented [AT1]: I couldn't actually find a statistic on how many visited in 2020.

A number of local councils, national government bodies, conservation charities and landowners on both sides of the border are involved in caring for the Geopark and the two SACs. These include Ulster Wildlife, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and ROI's Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Over many years, a number of project-funded or independent initiatives to interpret aspects of the natural and cultural heritage have resulted in a motley assortment of signage at a number of car parks and public access points for walkers. Moving forward, addressing this 'sign litter' and its sometimes repetitive interpretive messaging should be a key consideration. Pictures of this existing signage are provided in Appendix A.



Interpretive Approach

The target audiences for new interpretation are largely families and the general public – those without in-depth existing knowledge about Cuilcagh Mountain or the surrounding environment. Content developed for these audiences needs to focus on high-level

messaging that is engaging in design and tone of voice, without overwhelming with too much detail.

Current best-practice for interpretive design and copywriting for exterior signage limits main texts to 150 words and includes 2-3 high impact, large-scale images with brief 30-word captions. The average reading age for texts should be around 12-13, which makes content accessible to children, the less-educated and those whose first language may not be English. Writing in simple, straightforward English does not mean content is 'dumbed down', as complex topics can be interpreted using simple language. Written texts should not assume that visitors have any previous knowledge of our stories and avoid technical or scientific jargon. Where scientific terms are required, they should be explained. The tone of voice should be engaging and conversational, not dry or academic, and perhaps bring in a bit of humour. An interpretive panel that doesn't capture visitor interest with attention-grabbing graphics or opening texts will not be read by a passing audience intent on recreation. This is perhaps in contrast to audiences at museums or other heritage sites, where the story of the place or exhibition is a main reason to visit.

One of the core objectives of new interpretation at Cuilcagh Mountain is to increase visitor appreciation of the significance of the sensitive peatland and upland habitats. The intention is that this will lead them to respect these environments and change their behaviour to help preserve them – most notably by staying on designated footpaths and boardwalks. Visitors are more likely to engage with, remember and follow such instructions if they are presented with a bit of humour.

Design of interpretation will follow best-practice for accessibility including reading heights, font size and contrast and placement of signage within the landscape. Please see Appendix B for initial design concepts.

Site Significances

Good interpretation builds on solid research that identifies the unique stories a site has to tell. This brings a focus to the interpretation that provides clear takeaway messages for visitors, without overwhelming them with a multitude of seemingly unconnected facts or too much detail. The key importance of the two Cuilcagh Mountain SACs is outlined in their listing statements and summarised here:

Habitats & species

- Cuilcagh Mountain SAC is the second largest expanse of intact, active mountain blanket bog in Ireland and one of the best in the UK.
- Cuilcagh Mountain SAC contains one of the best examples of dystrophic lakes and ponds in Northern Ireland. Lough Atona contains notable invertebrates (e.g. *Gyrinus natator* and *Glaenocoris propinqua*).

- The summit of Cuilcagh Mountain contains an expanse of rare *Racomitrium* alpine heath.
- Cuilcagh Mountain SAC is considered to have a high diversity of habitats & species of European importance. Rare and notable species include bryophytes (e.g. *Bazzania tricenata*, *Dicranum scottianum*, and *Marsupella sphacelata*) and higher plants (e.g. *Salix herbacea*, *Diphasiastrum alpinum*, *Carex bigelowii* and *Asplenium viride*).
- The SACS contain exceptionally well-developed vegetation cover in flat plateau areas, including dystrophic lakes, hummock and hollow complexes and large areas of wet heath, and to a lesser extent dry heath.
- Other important habitats with a significant presence include: alpine & boreal heaths, European dry heaths, natural dystrophic lakes & ponds, Northern Atlantic wet heaths, siliceous rocky slopes and siliceous scree.
- Inland cliffs (e.g. at Bellavalley Gap) support a range of locally rare mountain plants, such as the rare and unusual moss *Discelium nudum*.



- Key bog plant species include Deergrass, Cross-leaved Heath, Bog Asphodel, Common Cottongrass and Sphagnum moss.
- The sites are important breeding areas for several upland birds, including Curlew, Golden Plover, Merlin and Dunlin and other Red-listed or protected bird species are also present including Peregrine, Ring Ouzel and Red Grouse.

Conservation

- Conservation activities on Cuilcagh Mountain demonstrate the benefits of training local landowners in peatland preservation, who have become core partners carrying out additional works on their land outside the SACs.
- The CANN project has involved innovative trialling of locally-sourced materials like wool and heather as potential substitute for



imported coir logs made of coconut fibre, with a future goal of lessening the carbon footprint of conservation works in Ireland.

- The CANN project has entailed innovative use of LiDAR imaging using drones to survey landscapes to identify the most effective places in large watersheds to block drains, thus ensuring funds are used where they make the most difference.
- Conservation works demonstrates the wider benefits of bringing these habitats back into health beyond just for individual species, including helping to address climate change and improving water quality and flood control.
- The Cuilcagh Mountain SACs have pioneered new wildfire planning techniques in Ireland, using Lidar imagery to model and predict how fires would travel through the topography and potential impacts of climate change in future.

Geology



- Cuilcagh Mountain SAC contains the only gritstone edge and pavement in Northern Ireland.
- The extended stratigraphy of the site is of international significance, containing the complete Carboniferous Leitrim Group.
- Inland cliffs of shales occur at the higher elevations and include important fossil remains,

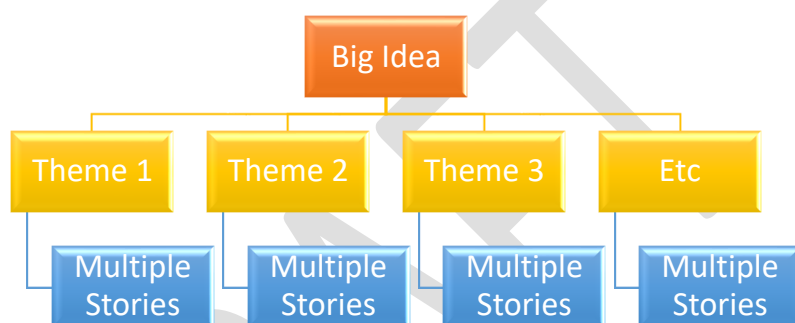
notably goniatites.

Site significances can be harnessed as individual stories and used to convey broader interpretive messages for visitors. These include:

- Peatlands/blanket bogs store carbon and therefore protecting and restoring them is critically importance to addressing global climate change.
- Fire is particularly damaging to blanket bog and wet heath, reducing the individual cover of *Sphagnum* mosses and ericaceous species, increasing the threat of erosion which results in the release of carbon into the atmosphere.
- A major conservation focus is blocking drains which carry water off the peat mass.
- Extensive treading of peat by grazing animals or hikers causes damage and increases threat of erosion; the public should stay on designated footpaths – this is a key threat.
- A variety of partners and landowners are funding and carrying out conservation activities in the Cuilcagh Mountain SACs.

Interpretive framework

An interpretive framework should be developed to guide storytelling in the Cuilcagh Mountain SACs and wider Geopark. The purpose of the framework is to distil and focus the multitude of messages we wish to communicate to the public into a set of easily understandable statements. Interpretive frameworks consist of an overarching takeaway message, a number of primary interpretive themes under it and individual stories supporting the themes. It looks like this:



All visitors to the Geopark should leave with an understanding of the Big Idea, at whatever level suits their age and ability. Additionally, they should encounter each of the high-level themes during their visitor journey. The individual stories they choose to engage with help interpret the themes and Big Idea in greater depth. The stories are the 'hooks' to capture visitor interest.

The immediate requirements of the CANN project mean that one of the primary themes is being developed in advance of a full interpretive planning process for the Geopark and independently from the rest of the framework. This is not ideal as the entire framework needs to work together. However, developing up one part of the framework does provide a working example for the future.

The Big Idea

A Big Idea for the Geopark will need to come out of a comprehensive interpretation planning and consultation exercise. Here, we explain what a Big Idea is and how its used.

To create a successful visitor experience in the Geopark, it needs to be understandable as a unified whole. All of the Park's interpretive themes and stories should be united into a single underlying relevance - one Big Idea that guides the content and approach to interpretation. The Big Idea becomes the most important interpretive message that visitors take-away. It can be viewed as the 'sound bite' that answers the question: "What is this Park about?" The Big Idea statement should clarify, limit, and focus the nature and scope of the exhibition². It helps planners decide what stories will and will not be included in the interpretation. While all visitors should be able to articulate the main message upon leaving the Park, the Big Idea statement is primarily for planners and will not appear in interpretation in this form.

The Big Idea statement should encompass all the interpretive themes and sub-stories the Geopark wishes to interpret. Some examples of Big Idea statements from other sites include³:

Big Idea Examples

From a zoo exhibition about a swamp: 'A healthy swamp – an example of a threatened ecosystem – provides many surprising benefits to humans.'

From an aquarium: 'Sharks are not what you think.'

From a planetarium: 'Most of what we know about the Universe comes from messages we read in light.'

Interpretive themes

Primary interpretive themes are the building blocks – the core content – on which the interpretive programme is based. They identify and convey the unique significances of the Geopark. They are the key ideas through which interpretation and programming communicates with the public. *They connect the Geopark to the larger ideas, meanings, and values to which all visitors can relate.*

The most effective interpretive themes link *things* (the tangible) with *ideas* and *meanings* (the intangible, the things of personal value that visitors are seeking). Heritage sites have both tangible and intangible attributes. *Tangible* characteristics are physical characteristics

² Serrell, Beverly. *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1996, pg. 1.

³ Ibid, pgs 3-5.

that you can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel (for example – the sound of spoken Irish, Pearse’s cottage, the landscape views). *Intangible* characteristics are ideas, meanings, beliefs, or values associated with a site (for example – identity, beauty, isolation). Intangible characteristics are important because they help us turn the bare tangible facts into stories, which is the best way to interpret the site to visitors. Interpreters use interpretive themes to craft stories that connect the tangible characteristics of sites to the intangibles that make those sites significant.

These overarching stories that we tell as part of the project are constant, no matter who the audience is or the storytelling methods we use. The themes can be interpreted at different levels depending, for example, on whether the audience is a school group or a knowledgeable adult, but the core messages remain the same.

Only one of the Geopark themes is detailed in this document as being particularly relevant to core significances of Cuilcagh Mountain. It will anchor interpretation about the SACs whether this is delivered through signage, print or digital resources, education programmes or other means.

Interpretive theme 1 for the Geopark is proposed to be:

Cuilcagh Mountain offers visitors a uniquely accessible opportunity to experience first hand one of Ireland’s largest intact peatlands, which has global importance in fighting climate change, and witness cutting-edge conservation aimed at ensuring healthy peatlands into the future for the benefit of many species, including ourselves.

Again, visitors to Cuilcagh Mountain will not see the theme in this form but it helps planners decide what sub-stories should – or should not – be included in the interpretation. Visitors will be overwhelmed if too much interpretation is provided. They will tune out or not engage with interpretation and thus key messages will be lost.

Here are some of the indicative sub-stories that come under this theme. Please note this is not intended to be comprehensive. Not all of these may be able to be incorporated in the current outputs for the CANN project.

- Cuilcagh Mountain SAC is the second largest expanse of intact, mountain blanket bog (active) in Ireland and one of the best in the UK.

- Cuilcagh Mountain SAC contains one of the best examples of dystrophic lakes and ponds in Northern Ireland. Lough Atona contains notable invertebrates (e.g. *Gyrinus natator* and *Glaenocoris propinqua*).
- Protecting and restoring Ireland's peatlands is critically important to fighting climate change at a global level, as peatlands store three times the amount of carbon as rainforests and represent 10,000 years worth of permanent storage if cared for properly.
- Peatland habitats on Cuilcagh Mountain make valuable contributions to global biodiversity, as they support a number of rare species who have adapted to thrive in these very low nutrient habitats and are found nowhere else.
- Habitats on Cuilcagh Mountain support a variety of rare and threatened migratory bird species such as the golden plover, hen harrier and red grouse.
- Cuilcagh Mountain demonstrates the wider benefits of bringing peatlands back into health beyond the benefits to individual species, including mitigating climate change and improving local water quality and flood control.
- Visitors to Cuilcagh Mountain and neighbouring landowners can positively impact their own futures in relation to climate change through helping to preserve sensitive peatland habitats by staying on designated paths to control erosion, appropriately managing dogs and grazing animals and not littering or picking vegetation.
- Wildfire planning on Cuilcagh Mountain represents cutting-edge work within Ireland and uses new technologies such as Lidar imaging to model the potential spread and impact of fires.
- Peatland conservation projects on Cuilcagh Mountain offer a good model for how local landowners can become partners by training them in the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out work on the ground.
- Peatland conservation on Cuilcagh Mountain utilises cutting-edge technology like Lidar imaging and drones to survey the landscape, identifying the most effective drains to block in a watershed to gain most benefit from investment and labour.
- Choosing specific materials to block drains on Cuilcagh Mountain must strike a careful balance between using proven products to address urgent needs (such as imported coir logs) and trialling innovative locally-sourced products (such as wool or heather logs) which have a lesser carbon footprint but a higher risk of failure.

Interpretive media

The budget for the current CANN project allows for four exterior signs (size A1 or equivalent), a species swatch and a short video to interpret the main interpretive theme and sub-stories from the interpretive framework detailed above. These initiatives may be supplemented in future phases by the Geopark to tell more stories through additional media or locations. Utilising a variety of media allows the Geopark to engage audiences with

different learning styles, interests and levels of pre-existing knowledge. It also allows for engagement with the Geopark for both onsite and virtual audiences.

Our recommendations for placement of the four interpretive signs considered the amount of visitor footfall at various access points to the SACs – trail heads and car parks – as we wished to place signage where the maximum number of people would see it. We also considered the placement and content of existing signage. While our original intent was to avoid duplicating existing signage and adding to sign litter, our understanding is that much of this existing signage is either in poor condition or contains outdated branding and thus will be slowly removed or replaced in time. Therefore, the presence of existing signage did not necessarily dictate we disregard a location entirely as a site for new interpretation.

The geographical expanse of the SACs has presented some challenges to making final recommendations, but based on site visits and multiple discussions with the client team and stakeholders, the following locations have been proposed:

Site 1: Cuilcagh Boardwalk Official Car Park

Site 2: Cuilcagh Boardwalk – viewpoint to Loch Atona

Site 3: Gortalughney Viewpoint Car Park

Site 4: Bellavalley Gap Car Park

[insert map – number sites 1-4 to cross-reference with remainder of discussion]

All locations will carry the overarching interpretive theme:

Cuilcagh Mountain offers visitors a uniquely accessible opportunity to experience first hand one of Ireland's largest intact peatlands, which have global importance in fighting climate change, and witness cutting-edge conservation aimed at ensuring healthy peatlands into the future for the benefit of many species, including ourselves.

Additionally, each sign will focus on key stories as indicated below.

Site 1: Cuilcagh Boardwalk Official Car Park

Interpretive messages:

- This is an internationally important site (not emphasised currently on existing signage)
- the importance of peatlands
- recent bog restoration projects (current signage dated so this not covered)
- why the boardwalk is there; what species/habitats require protecting; a 'get on board' conservation message about staying on the footpath (this is covered pretty well in existing interpretation but appears on such high-density signs that these messages might not be read)



Site 2: Cuilcagh Boardwalk – viewpoint to Loch Atona



Interpretive messages (there is no existing interpretation about the lakes so all this new)

- Cuilcagh Mtn SAC contains one of the best examples of dystrophic lakes and ponds in Northern Ireland
- What dystrophic lakes are, why they're special & key species
- Conservation work to block drains to ensure water supply to lakes
- Use of jute and/or wool coil rolls (some displayed nearby)
- Biodiversity benefits, carbon benefits, water quality, flood control

Site 3: Gortalughney Viewpoint



Interpretive messages:

- Importance of peatlands as carbon sink (no mention of climate change on current panels)
- Dangers of fire – how they damage bogs & lead to carbon being released into the atmosphere
- Conservation messaging (on existing signage but these are so text-heavy that they may not be read)
- Specific flora & fauna along the Cuilcagh Hiker's Trail which leaves from this carpark (current mention of golden plover and photograph but no storytelling about it)

Site 4: Bellavalley Gap

A new car park here offers an excellent opportunity for an interpretive sign for those walkers accessing the summit of Cuilcagh Mountain from Cavan.

Similar to Gortalughney Viewpoint, the proposal is to cover high level messaging but provide more information on species:



Interpretive messages:

- Importance of peatlands as carbon sink
- Conservation messaging
- Specific flora & fauna along the trail which leaves from this carpark (perhaps here interpret the presence of hen harrier as a key predator and what that means as a key indicator of a healthy habitat, i.e. lower species are thriving so can feed higher species in food chain)

Commented [AT2]: We have discussed both golden plover and hen harrier for this site. Which?

Design approach & concepts

To come.

Practical recommendations

It is hoped that the outline interpretive plan encompassing the immediate outputs of the CANN project on Cuilcagh Mountain provides a model for the Geopark when considering future interpretation. The discussions and considerations above about audiences and their needs, identifying clear interpretive messages and a 'less is more' approach to both the amount of physical signage and the extent of its content should be followed when developing any interpretation for the general public. A number of existing and freely available interpretive toolkits provide step-by-step guidance in how to approach interpretive planning. Please see a list of these resources in Appendix C. A key point is that interpretation should be considered from the outset as part of budgeting exercises or funding applications. Good interpretation needs to be adequately funded across all stages of development: planning, community engagement, research, writing, design and production. The Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI) is currently compiling a go-to global index of costings for interpretive projects which should assist with this.

The toolkits offer a wealth of practical advice for developing interpretation. Some key points to mention in relation to Cuilcagh Mountain and the Geopark are:

- Consider carefully how many signage locations are appropriate and where. Work to avoid signage 'litter' where too many signs, especially of different styles and ages, may discourage rather than attract audiences to engage with them.
- Signage is not the only option for delivering interpretation. The 'Peatlands on Cuilcagh Mountain' interpretive theme guiding the current CANN project will also be delivered through printed species swatches and a short video. Guided tours, print material and digital media should be considered as part of an 'interpretive package' for the Geopark. Also consider both onsite and virtual audiences.
- Phase out old, dated signage and consider whether or not it is necessary to replace them. Poor interpretation either in design or content is worse than no signage.
- The recommendations in this outline interpretation plan represent best practice in interpretation and provide design and content templates for the Geopark moving forward.

CANN Project
Outline Interpretation Plan for
Cuilcagh Mountain SAC & Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands SAC
Ann Tweedie/G2 Design
Draft 23.11.21

Future opportunities

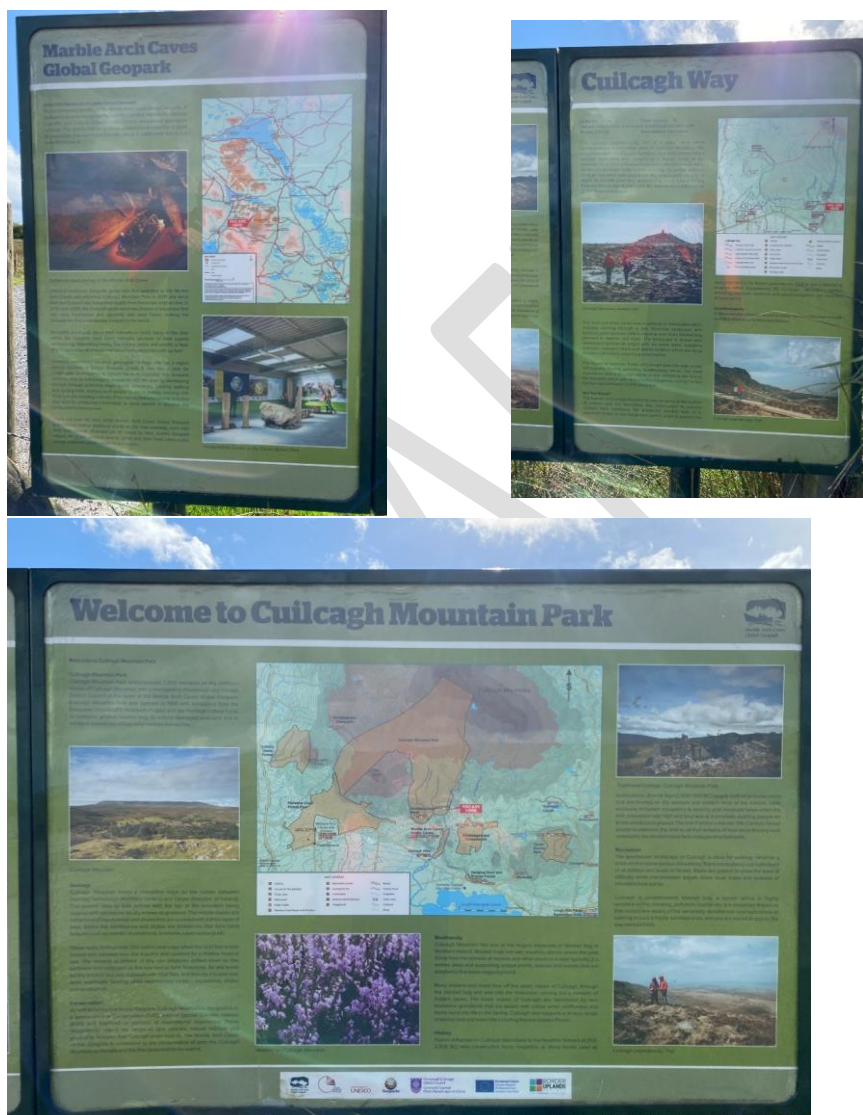
To come. This section will consider additional locations and media including digital. A 3-5 year forward plan will be proposed as requested in the tender brief.

DRAFT

CANN Project
Outline Interpretation Plan for
Cuilcagh Mountain SAC & Cuilcagh-Anierin Uplands SAC
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Appendix A: Existing interpretation

Cuilcagh Boardwalk Official Car Park



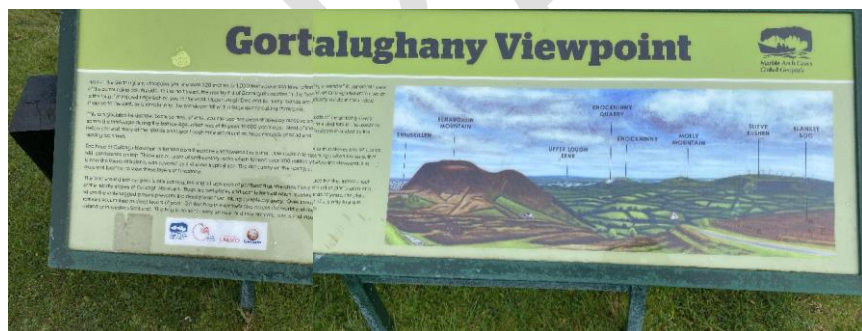
CANN Project
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Cuilcagh Mountain Boardwalk



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Gortalughney Viewpoint





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Appendix B: Concept designs

To come.

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Appendix C: Interpretive resources

This Appendix lists resources that offer step-by-step toolkits for Interpretation Planning for those with little or no background preparing interpretive resources. The ones selected here build on similar approaches and represent best-practice in interpretation.

A Sense of Place: An Interpretive Planning Handbook, ed James Carter, rev 2001. James Carter has been a leading interpreter in Scotland for many decades.

Free PDF copies are available on a number of websites by Googling the title. Try:

<https://www.scribd.com/document/405451817/carter-sense-of-place-pdf>

Sharing Our Stories, Failte Ireland. Two documents provide a solid background in interpretation (Heritage Interpretation Manual) and a set of accompanying exercises (Sharing our Stories Exercises) to help heritage sites to develop their own interpretation.

Free PDF copies at:

https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Your_Business/3_Marketing_Toolkit/5_Cultural_Tourism/Heritage_Interpretation_Manual.pdf

and

<http://www.scroope.com/cmsb/uploads/sharing-our-stories-exercises.pdf>

Telling Our Stories: An Interpretation Manual for Heritage Partners, Lancaster County Heritage, Pennsylvania, USA. This resource was developed for a specific region but the process could equally be followed for the Geopark. It takes users through a set of tasks to develop an Interpretation Plan.

Free PDF copy available at:

<https://lancastercountyplanning.org/DocumentCenter/View/134/Interpretation-Manual>

The Big Idea eBook, by Beverley Serrell. A workbook to help sites identify their overarching message (and why one is useful).

<https://serrellassociates.com/store/big-idea-ebook>