

# SHANNON REGION TRAILS PROGRAMME 2007 - 2010



Developing the Shannon Region as a world-class trails destination  
A SHANNON DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE



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# SHANNON REGION DEVELOPING A WORLD CLASS TRAILS DESTINATION

The Shannon Region Trails Programme is a Shannon Development-led initiative which aims to establish the Shannon Region as a world-class destination for walking, cycling, water-based and other outdoor activity pursuits during the period 2007 - 2010. This will be achieved by developing and branding a fully integrated network of walking, cycling, water based and other outdoor activity trails to highest international standards.

The development of a world class recreational trail network will secure long term sustainable economic benefits for less-developed areas of the Shannon Region and is designed to create a network of trails demonstrating a best practice demonstration project for the wider national trails programme.

In implementing this new programme, Shannon Development aims to cater for the strong growth in trail-based holidays in Ireland with Irish and international tourists, and to attract tourists to less developed areas, in particular.

In a comprehensive three-year development programme from 2007 - 2010, Shannon Development is seeking proposals from promoters to upgrade existing trails and develop new ones. Details of proposals can be submitted in the attached application form (see separate sheet). The Company will also implement a wide-ranging branding system and dedicated website for trails across the region as part of an intensive marketing campaign.

## Rationale for new drive

National and international tourism trends show that there is strong demand for interesting, well-serviced trails for walking, cycling, water-based and other outdoor pursuits. Such routes enable holidaymakers to explore the unspoiled areas of the countryside and experience the scenery and hospitality of the people at first hand.

Shannon Development has tailored this three year programme to specifically respond to market research findings that reflect changing customer preferences and patterns. These include a tendency among walkers, for instance, to be more 'occasional' enthusiasts who stay for shorter periods. The programme aims to develop a top-quality network that will cater for these changing trends and meet exacting international-standards.

## Main Elements of Trails Programme

- Upgrade existing walking, cycling, water-based and other outdoor activity trails
- Develop and implement new trails
- Create distinctive branding for Shannon Region Trails tourism product
- Provide new Shannon Development website for Shannon Region Trails to compare with the highest international standards



# CYCLING, MOUNTAIN BIKING AND OTHER TRAILS IN THE SHANNON REGION



## Existing sector

**Cycling Holidays:** Cycling holidays contribute significantly to the Irish tourist economy, with more than 100,000 cyclists from overseas holidaying in Ireland annually and generating over €86m per annum. An estimated 50,000 Irish holidaymakers engage in cycling while on home holidays.

Research has shown, however, that cyclists holidaying in Ireland are concerned about road safety, traffic volumes and poor directional signage throughout the country.

There are a number of signposted, cycle trails in the Shannon Region, including West Clare, the Burren area of North Clare, the Lough Derg area including Nenagh, Keeper Hill, Clare Glens, and Holycross. In addition, there are many more kilometres of unmarked cycle trails in the Region which are used extensively by cycling enthusiasts, both from the domestic and overseas markets.

Specialist cycling tour operators also provide fully organised tours for visiting cyclists. Additional information on cycling trails and dedicated cycling brochures are available at Shannon Region Tourist Information Offices.

**Mountain Biking:** Mountain Biking is now becoming increasingly popular for Irish people and overseas visitors as an outdoor pursuit. A growing number of enthusiasts are seeking to experience the activity on purpose built single track trails.

Ireland's first dedicated mountain biking trail is currently being developed by Coillte in the Ballyhoura Mountains, in association with Shannon Development, Limerick Co Council, Cork Co. Council and Ballyhoura Failte. The 91km of dedicated mountain bike trail in south Limerick and north Cork has been designed by the world's leading trail designer, Dafydd Davis and will feature over 25km of purpose-built single track trail.

**Other trails:** While considerable numbers of overseas and Irish holidaymakers currently engage in other outdoor pursuits, e.g. equestrian, canoeing and other water-sports, there are few organised or dedicated trails in existence for such activities at present. The scope of the Shannon Region Trails Programme will be sufficiently broad to include a full range of recreational trails which caters for a variety of outdoor activities throughout the region.

## Expansion of facilities planned

Under the Shannon Region Trails Programme 2007 - 2010, Shannon Development proposes to:

- Extend and upgrade the range and quality of existing marked and signposted cycle trails to highest international standards
- Develop new signposted cycle trails at certain key locations in the region, also to highest international standards
- Create dedicated cycle ways which will link the region's main cities and access points, such as Shannon Airport
- Co-operate with the other agencies involved in completing Ireland's first dedicated mountain biking trail at Ballyhoura Mountains. This 91km mountain bike trail, straddling Counties Limerick and Cork, will include over 25km of purpose-built single track trail.
- While priority will initially be given to walking and cycling trails, it is intended to also develop trails for other outdoor pursuits, including equestrian and water-based trails for activities such as canoeing.

# WALKING IN THE SHANNON REGION

## Existing sector

Shannon Development began developing walking as a tourism product in the Shannon Region in the early 1990s. Working with other public bodies and local community groups and with financial support under the Operational Programmes for Tourism, the Company has made significant progress in the provision of long- distance marked Walking Ways throughout the Region.

This has led to 25% of the 32 National Way-marked Ways located throughout the country being sited in the Shannon Region and these routes account for approximately 650km of developed walking trails in the region.

In addition, there are many more kilometres of developed walking trails in the region, which are mostly made up of shorter loop walks linked to the Way-marked Ways. To further enhance these facilities, Phase 1 of the Shannon Region loop walks strategy commenced in 2006 with the research, identification and design of a number of new looped walks throughout the region.

Other trails developed around the Region in recent years include a range of themed trails (including environmental and geological trails), Fáilte Ireland National Looped walks, Pilgrim Paths, Coillte forest trails, National Parks and Wildlife trails, Greenways (walking/cycling trails), Slí na Sláinte programme and many short, local looped walks.

Walking holidays make a substantial contribution to the Irish economy, with over 250,000 overseas tourists engaging in hiking/hill walking in Ireland annually, generating an estimated €140m in visitor expenditure per annum.

## More Looped Walks to cater for changing trends

One of the top priorities for Shannon Development, under the three year programme to 2010, is to develop up to 30 quality Looped Walks in the Shannon Region. It aims to achieve this objective in association with other bodies, including Private Landowners, Coillte, Local Authorities, Local Community groups, the Irish Trails Advisory Committee and Fáilte Ireland through its national Looped Walks initiative.

The Company sees this approach as an important means of establishing the Shannon Region as a premier international destination for walking holidays and to cater for the projected future growth in walking tourist numbers to Ireland, particularly from the UK and Continental Europe.

The Looped Walks (see insert for details of criteria involved) are geared to cater for the changing nature of walking holidaymakers. Market research on Irish tourism indicates that, increasingly, such visitors are what are known as occasional walkers, i.e. broadly defined as people who have variable fitness levels, limited navigation skills and are unlikely to have done any research on walks prior to arrival. These visitors seek quality looped walks in areas of high physical and amenity value, where they can interact with locals and savour the relaxed pace of life.

Organisations or community groups interested in including or developing a looped walk in their area under the Shannon Region Trails Programme are invited to submit details of their proposal in the attached application form (see separate insert). Applicants should ensure that their proposal satisfies the specified criteria.





# MARKETING OF SHANNON REGION TRAILS TO BE INTENSIFIED

Increased marketing is an important part of the three-year Shannon Region Trails Programme to 2010 being implemented by Shannon Development.

This intensification of marketing support will include the branding of the trails as a distinct, world-class tourism product. Trails deemed eligible to join the trails network will have common branding/information that will clearly indicate they are an approved trail under the programme. This branding will involve a new Shannon Region Trails logo and marking system, leading to a distinctive independent identity. All national standards and information, e.g. standard marking systems for National Way-Marked Ways and National Looped Walks, will be incorporated, where applicable.

Another marketing initiative planned is the creation of a new Shannon Development website, dedicated to Shannon Region Trails, which will compare with the highest international standards. This website will incorporate features such as downloadable trail guide maps, information on transport, accommodation, activity operators and up-to-date news items including upcoming events.

Shannon Development will continue its promotion of the product through the production of detailed guides and holiday literature, directed chiefly at specialist overseas tour operators and the consumer market. This work is carried out on a co-operative basis, in conjunction with specialist operators and accommodation providers in the region.

Promotional efforts mainly consist of attending specialist consumer shows in the major overseas target markets, along with mailings to tour operators, specialist press and walking clubs. The new dedicated trails website will also form a critical part of this overall marketing strategy and action plan.

The new regional branding, coupled with the web material and other communications material, will have a common look and feel, to get the message across that everything belongs to one 'family' of Shannon Regional Trails.



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#### Contact Details

Further information on any aspect of the Shannon Region Trails Programme can be had from:

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