

# Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark

## Winter Newsletter 2025/2026



**EXPERIENCES,  
IT'S IN OUR  
NATURE** 



**Upper Lough Erne, Co Fermanagh**



**CUILCAGH  
LAKE LANDS  
GEOPARK**



**Comhairle Contae  
an Chabháin  
Cavan  
County Council**



**Fermanagh & Omagh  
District Council  
Comhairle Ceantair  
Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí**

# Shared Island Funding Secured for Cross-border Tourism Collaboration

Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark and Ballyhoura Development CLG have secured €25,000 in funding under the 2025 Shared Island Civic Society Fund, announced by Helen McEntee, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The funding will support Connecting Tourism Communities: Cuilcagh Lakelands and Ballyhoura Country, a cross-border initiative aimed at strengthening collaboration between tourism communities, Networks and organisations across the Ballyhoura region of North Cork and East Limerick, and the Cuilcagh Lakelands area of Cavan and Fermanagh.

Led by Ballyhoura Development CLG in partnership with Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark, the project is rooted in the principles of community-led regenerative tourism and seeks to build lasting North–South civic relationships through shared learning,

innovation and cooperation. The project will be delivered through three interconnected components:

## 1. Scaling a Community-Led Tourism Framework

A key output will be the development of a Community-Led Regenerative Tourism Toolkit, providing practical guidance and indicators for communities and tourism Networks. This will be supported through regional workshops and training sessions to test and embed the framework in both regions.

## 2. Animation and Capacity Building

Tourism providers, SMEs and community groups will be supported through thematic workshops, mentoring and peer-learning exchanges,

helping to build confidence, skills and collaboration across borders.

## 3. Tourism Development and Marketing Innovation

The project will also support the co-design and piloting of shared thematic tourism experiences, alongside the development of joint storytelling, video content and a collaborative digital marketing campaign. Activity will align with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland strategies, strengthening visibility under the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands proposition.



## Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark at the Holiday World Show 2026

Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark was pleased to participate in this year's Holiday World Show, held at the RDS Simmonscourt, Dublin, from 23–25 January 2026. The event brought together a broad range of exhibitors and with lots of visitors keen to hear about the Geopark, we had a valuable platform to promote the region's distinctive landscapes, geological heritage, and diverse visitor experiences.

Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark was delighted to be represented on both the This is Cavan stand and the Fermanagh Lakelands stand, showcasing our unique cross-border proposition.

We thank all those who visited the stands and engaged with us throughout the event and we look forward to welcoming you to Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark very soon.



# Sustainability Tourism Business Training - Certificate Ceremony

Last week, at the beautiful setting of Lough Erne Resort, Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark was proud to celebrate tourism businesses from across the region who completed the 2026 Sustainable Tourism Business Training Programme. Certificates were presented by Councillor John Paul Feeley and Councillor Anthony Feely, Chair and Vice Chair of the Geopark Committee.

This 14-week programme supported participating businesses in strengthening their environmental and community-focused practices. Training covered a wide range of topics including energy efficiency, waste and water management, accessibility and inclusion, biodiversity, community engagement and storytelling. Each of these areas plays an important role in fostering long-term, responsible tourism within the Geopark.

The programme is led by Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark, with support from Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Cavan County Council, Tourism Northern Ireland, and Fáilte Ireland, and is delivered in partnership with The Tourism Space. Together, this collaboration equips local tourism providers with practical tools and forward-looking approaches to help shape a more sustainable future for the region.

Businesses that completed the training will now become part of the Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark Regenerative Tourism Business Network, a Network of over 40 tourism businesses dedicated to developing tourism in a way that supports local communities, protects natural heritage and enhances the visitor experience.



Participants of the Sustainability Tourism Business Training receiving their certificates

## Congratulations to Barry Flanagan on Appointment to Board of Tourism Ireland

Barry Flanagan, owner of the award-winning [Erne Water Taxi](#) and a long-standing Network Member of the Geopark's Regenerative Tourism Business Network, has been appointed to the Board of Tourism Ireland. His appointment was formally approved at the North South Ministerial Council meeting on 28 January 2026, following a nomination by Northern Ireland's Minister for the Economy, Dr. Caoimhe Archibald.

Minister Archibald praised Flanagan's extensive industry experience and his commitment to promoting Fermanagh and the wider region. Over the past decade, Barry has welcomed visitors from across the island of Ireland and abroad, showcasing the area's natural, cultural, and built heritage.

His appointment marks a significant recognition of grassroots tourism leadership within the region, and the Geopark Network celebrates this achievement as a valuable opportunity to strengthen sustainable tourism development on a national and international stage.

Congratulations Barry!



Barry Flanagan - Owner of Erne Water Taxi

# Understanding Peatlands: How Piezometers Are Helping Us Protect Vital Landscapes

As our cross-border peatland research continues, our Peatland Engagement Officer is investigating how water flows through some of our region's most sensitive habitats. Healthy peatlands depend on a stable water table, which helps reduce flooding, store carbon accumulated over centuries and support the specialist vegetation that allows peat to grow. Maintaining consistent groundwater levels is also essential for helping these landscapes recover from historical pressures such as fire, drainage, and turf cutting, while offering long-term benefits for biodiversity and sustainable land use.

To support this work, researchers are installing Piezometers, simple but highly effective instruments that measure groundwater levels. These devices, essentially narrow tubes inserted into the peat, allow water to rise and fall naturally inside them, offering an accurate picture of the water table. Some are monitored manually, while others use automated sensors that also record air pressure, temperature, and other environmental factors. Together, these readings help build a detailed understanding of how water behaves across the seasons.

Piezometers have now been placed at multiple locations, including Cuilcagh in Cavan and Fermanagh, as well as sites across the Sperrins near Omagh. Each has been strategically sited to study different conditions; areas affected by erosion, past turf cutting, or former conifer plantations, as well as untouched control sites. In some of the most sensitive habitats, innovative new Piezometers powered by plant-root and soil-microbe technology are being tested, offering a low-impact, sustainable solution for remote monitoring.

Although a minimum of 12 months of data is required for a full assessment, early readings are already revealing seasonal fluctuations and highlighting priority areas for further investigation.

Next steps include staff training, ongoing monitoring, and planning restoration approaches informed directly by the evidence gathered, ensuring peatlands continue to support wildlife, store carbon, and protect communities from flooding for generations to come.

Right - Peatland Engagement Officer, Roisin, installing a Piezometer

Below - Early insights revealing seasonal fluctuations and highlighting priority areas for further investigation



# €19.2 Million Cross-border Peatland Restoration Project Launched

Cuileagh Lakelands Geopark welcomes the launch of a major €19.2 million cross-border project to restore peatlands, enhance biodiversity and combat climate change. The initiative was officially launched on World Wetlands Day (2nd February) at Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, with particular significance given the internationally important peatland landscapes within Cuileagh Lakelands Geopark.

The PEAT+ Project is led by nature conservation charity Ulster Wildlife and is funded by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Delivery partners alongside Cuileagh Lakelands Geopark and Fermanagh & Omagh District Council in the project include Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon District Council; Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Donegal; Crichton Carbon Centre; Newry, Mourne & Down District Council; Mourne Heritage Trust; and RTÉ; along with associate partners NI Water and National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS).

The project will deliver large-scale peatland restoration across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland on 19 priority sites over the next three years and will include innovation and research along with promoting the heritage of our peatlands. Despite huge progress in delivering restoration works on peatlands across Ireland in recent years, it is estimated that 80% of Irish peatland is still in a degraded state and a source of carbon emissions. Restoring these landscapes is therefore critical for tackling climate change, along with restoring nature, improving water quality and reducing flood risk.

Launching the project brought together Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Andrew Muir, Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Biodiversity Christopher O'Sullivan (via video), SEUPB CEO Gina McIntyre, and PEAT+ project partners to mark the official launch of this important, multi-site peatland restoration programme.



Martina O'Neill, Countryside Management and Geoscientific Officer, 4<sup>th</sup> from left and Grainne O'Connor, Geopark Manager, 3<sup>rd</sup> from right, front row with PEAT+ partners at the recent launch

Dawn Miskelly, CEO Ulster Wildlife, Gina McIntyre, CEO SEUPB, and Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Andrew Muir MLA at the PEAT+ launch



# Construction Advances on Shannon Pot Visitor Centre

Work on the new Visitor Centre at the Shannon Pot has reached an exciting milestone, with the project now entering an advanced stage of construction. A recent aerial view of the site highlights the impressive progress made to date, as the building takes shape against the backdrop of the iconic surface source of the River Shannon.

Inside the Centre, first-fix fit-out works are currently underway, marking a key step toward completing the internal layout and essential building systems. Significant improvements are also being made to visitor access, with construction of the new access road and a network of walking trails progressing steadily. These enhancements will offer safer, more intuitive routes to the Pot while opening up the surrounding landscape for exploration.

Once complete, the Visitor Centre and upgraded trails will provide an enriched and welcoming experience for all who visit this treasured natural landmark.



A bird's-eye view of the new Visitor Centre currently under construction at the Shannon Pot

## Team Updates: Welcoming New Faces and Wishing a Fond Farewell

The Geopark team is delighted to welcome Ashley, our new Community Officer, who joins us with a passion for engagement and a commitment to strengthening connections across our communities. Ashley will be working closely with Kate, our new Community Assistant Officer, as they continue to support local groups and help champion the value of our shared landscapes.

As we welcome new energy into the team, we also share a heartfelt farewell to Martina, our Countryside Management and Geoscientific Officer, who is moving on secondment after more than 20 remarkable years with the Geopark. Throughout her career, Martina has played an instrumental role in conservation, education, and the stewardship of our natural heritage. Her dedication, expertise, and warmth have left a lasting impact on colleagues, partners, and visitors alike. We wish Martina every success and happiness in her new role.



Farewell to Martina, our Countryside Management and Geoscientific Officer