

We're standing on the shoulders of giants

Discovering the heritage on our very own doorstep

BY BRÓNACH NÍ THUAMA
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DIVIS and the Black Mountain – whose names derive from Irish word 'Dubhais' – meaning 'black ridge', has been much the focus of Glór na Móna's youth team of late.

Standing on the shoulders of giants, both literal and figurative, the Irish language youth and community organisation has been developing its latest environmental and heritage project, Athmhúscailt an Fhathaigh (Reawakening the Giant). The project takes its name from the work of the famous

Anglo-Irish writer and satirist, Jonathan Swift, whose inspiration for the sleeping giant in his classic novel Gulliver's Travels, is widely regarded as being inspired by his view, from the east of the city, of the Belfast hills.

The project therefore, aims to bring into focus the heritage of the hills, in the form of local and natural history; folklore, songs, stories, wildlife, and the environmental community activism that has taken place on the hills.

Project Co-ordinator, Conchuir Mac Siacais, said: "The project will provide local community members with the unique opportunity to engage with their natural surroundings, making use of the rich and varied heritage of the Black Mountain which has left an indelible mark on the community. It also brings into question the role of nature and the outdoors in providing a

counterbalance against the ever-growing problem of mental ill-health, which affects so many people in economically deprived areas, particularly young people.

"What we are trying to do with Athmhúscailt an Fhathaigh, is instil in our community members, a sense of pride of place, which comes from an awareness of the both the heritage and history of the area, and which can be more effectively realised when opportunities to engage with the physical and natural environment become more easily available".

The development of storytelling workshops, guided walking tours and other resources aimed at community members, both young and old, are therefore central to the vision of the project that is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Developing its own youth group, and building community partnerships by providing local schools and youth groups with



OIDHREACHT: Glór na Móna's youth team on the Black Mountain

opportunities to make use of the natural gem on our doorstep, Athmhúscailt an Fhathaigh has endeavoured to reconnect local people with their 'place', that is to say, providing valuable access for locals to the heritage, history, and beauty of the Black Mountain.

Much of the recent environmental activism began in the mid-eighties, spearheaded by a small collection of local activists from the Upper Springfield, led by Terry Enright Snr. The important activism in question that initially brought attention to the irreparable damage being caused by quarrying near the Black Mountain, was carried out

through various campaigns over several decades, including the 'Save the Black Mountain' campaign. This work laid the foundation for the development of a community-based archive. The archive has been developed through a group work process which saw project members and facilitators engaging in training provided by the Cardinal Ó Fiaich Library, in which they developed an awareness of the theory and skills needed for the practical assembly of the archive.

Dáire Mac Menaman, group member, said: "It's always good to have the opportunity to look at the history of your own area, it makes you feel more connected

to it, something a lot of young people don't feel. When we took part in the project and in the archiving training, we had the chance to spend time on the mountain and then we had the chance to look at ways to tell the story of the mountain."

The heritage based archive contains photographs, videos, letters, interviews, and newspaper articles developed and collected by Terry Enright Snr of his 40 years of activism.

The archive will be showcased as part of an exhibition in the first quarter of 2018, which aims to provide a brief historical timeline to the audience of the local and natural history of the West Belfast Hills.

The event, which will feature a number of educational pop-ups, a short documentary film made by the project's youth group, and the archive itself, aims to educate the public on the heritage and importance of the Belfast hills. In doing so, it will review the rich and varied history of the Upper Springfield environmental work, whilst highlighting potential future opportunities for the community regarding the use of the Black Mountain.

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