

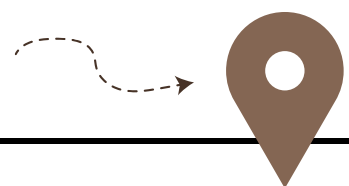
COMMUNITY MAPPING WORKSHOP

Girley Bog



Girley Bog Natural Heritage Area and Special Area of Conservation is one of the few remaining raised bogs in County Meath, and an increasingly rare habitat worldwide. It is home to a unique community of plants and animals and provides a range of benefits for people too. When bogs are wet, they keep carbon locked up, so restoring bogs helps Ireland meet its climate commitments. Girley Bog is managed by a range of stakeholders including National Parks & Wildlife Service, Coillte, Irish Peatland Conservation Council, Meath County Council & the Girley Bog Meitheal.

"In their most literal sense, maps provide direction"
Katherine Dunster



Report compiled by Kate Flood, School of Geography & Archaeology, NUI Galway, in collaboration with workshop participants and members of Girley Bog Meitheal, 2020.



"Our cognitive or mental maps guide the paths and routes that make up our lives. Each of us has a different sense of place, a distinct way of seeing and being in the world"*

COMMUNITY MAPPING OF GIRLEY BOG

Community-generated data about local places

The purpose of this community mapping workshop, held in November 2019 in Kells Library, was to explore the benefits and value of Girley Bog to the local community. Through a series of exercises centred around a map of the bog, participants worked together visually to articulate what they value about this local peatland and how they would like to see it protected. The process provided a platform for people to discuss current issues and explore through dialogue their hopes and concerns for the future of the bog.

There are many types of peatland maps, including subsoil maps, historic maps, geological maps, archaeological site maps, and hydrological and habitat maps which inform peatland restoration. Maps combine and display a range of multi-layered information but rarely do maps capture the value of places like Girley Bog to local communities, hence this value is often less visible and tangible to decision makers. This value is critical to communities' sense of place and wellbeing, benefitting physical and mental health, and holding educational, spiritual, and inspirational value. Community mapping can provide a space for people to tell their stories, share their experiences, and generate data about their interactions with landscapes from the ground up to help bring about inclusion of community concerns in future policies and planning.



"The interesting bit is hearing from other people, what they love and what they think, it's a good way to get people talking, a platform to get people's thoughts on different issues"

"Girley bog is a very special place for a lot of people"



LEGEND

Observing nature
Cloudwatching
Learning
Relaxing
Walking



"The legend is after all only a legend, the trappings of authority"*

It is said that 'maps don't just reflect 'reality', they help to create it'* This map was created to reflect the experiences and knowledge of the many people who connect with Girley Bog and its wildlife in a multitude of ways.

DIVERSITY OF WILDLIFE

*Rook flocks passing over at dusk
The cuckoo call in Spring
Kestrels hovering over the bog
Whooper swans trumpeting at dawn and dusk
Sightings of rarer birds like the hobby, merlin
Flushing snipe & pigeon
Pine marten raiding tree nest
Foxes with cubs
Displaying sparrowhawks
Buzzards worming in fields*



KEEPING IT WILD

A major theme and consensus within the group was the wish that Girley Bog would retain its wildness even as it accommodates more people who come to experience its beauty. The balance between conservation and recreation was discussed, with suggestions that it should be called a wildlife trail or nature walk to distinguish it from a park or other recreational amenity. The group expressed the desire to see more 're-wilding' rather than what was described as 'unwilding', in the form of more paths, infrastructure and signage.

PRESENCE

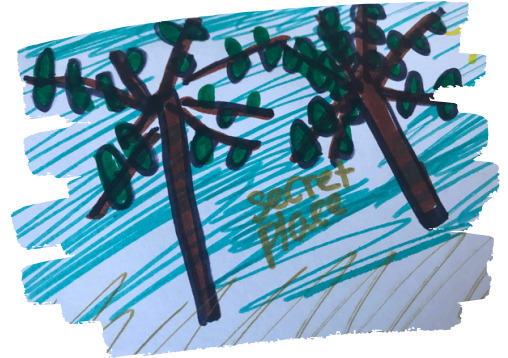
"Without a camera I just walk, but with the camera I look. I can find something absolutely beautiful that I might miss without it. I mostly look with my heart with a camera because you are so close to nature, you don't remember time, you forget everything ... you are lost in that"



WHAT SORT OF ACTIVITIES DO YOU DO AT GIRLEY BOG?

The bog is a place of inspiration and beauty for many people, providing a restorative experience and a safe place to connect with nature and observe flora & fauna

- I like to take in the whole bog and view the landscape
- I like to go alone but occasionally I meet people
- I bring friends, family and visitors here
- I'm inspired to photograph or draw
- Noticing seasonal changes in colours and smells
- Cloudwatching across the open bog
- Thinking and not thinking
- Observing nature, birdwatching



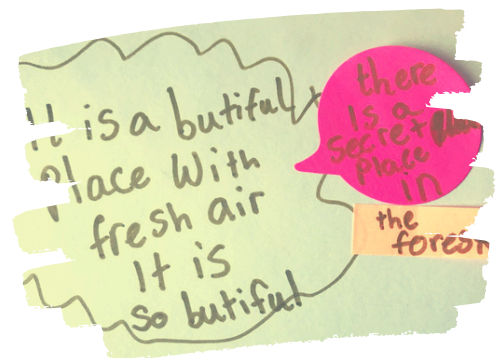
"It's a bog, so you must be careful, it's not a park"

DO YOU HAVE CONCERNS FOR THE BOG'S FUTURE?

Issues such as dumping, litigation, community engagement and consultation, & climate change emerged in discussions as current and future concerns.

- There's a lot of dumping still
- Burning or fires on the bog
- The more popular it gets the more upkeep is required
- Risk of litigation
- More commercialisation of recreation
- Need more people from the local community

"We have very little access to the countryside in Ireland, to wild places. Where else do you go to get that kind of experience?"



WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR GIRLEY BOG?

The history of Girley Bog has been a major influence on the landscape we see today and our actions in the present will shape the future of the bog.

- More scientific and educational resources shared about the bog
- A community-led behaviour guide or code of conduct for visitors
- More collaborative consultation between local people & agencies
- More children experiencing nature
- A safe place for wildlife
- That the bog retain its wildness



"It's important how you phrase it - rather than saying 'you're not allowed to do this or that', say 'come to our bog and uphold our hopes & standards. Enjoy it & be mindful of the wildlife that lives there and the people who visit so they can enjoy it too'"