

All Mountain Meitheal volunteers bring different skills and talents to the work they do on behalf of the mountains. A core group, with available time during the week, volunteered to tackle the tricky job of repairing the badly deteriorated bridge on the Glenealo river which flows down through Glendalough. Kevin Carroll tells us how they did it.

The half finished bridge



A Bridge Too Far

A few years ago, Mountain Meitheal was approached by Wesley Atkinson of the National Parks and Wildlife Service about the possibility of restoring the bridge on the Glenealo river, part of the white route that carries thousands of walkers every year. In recent years, the bridge had deteriorated badly, and was in dire need of an upgrade. So Robert Grandon, Shay and myself went to assess the bridge's condition. On close examination, it was obvious that the job was going to be quite tricky; we contacted Wesley and told him 'We'll do it!'. It was arranged that the required materials would be airlifted to the site soon afterwards, but during the operation, the weather closed in, and only the metal frames were dropped. It took a further three years before the rest of the materials were finally able to be airlifted. In a way, the delay was fortuitous, as it took us all that time to figure out how we were going to go about it! It was decided that because of the heavy traffic on the bridge at weekends, the work would have to be carried out midweek. And so it was on a Tuesday morning in mid July that four of us, Shay, Stephen, Pat and myself,

stood at the miners' village in the midst of a pile of tools and camping gear, looking up at the track and wondering how we were going to get it all up there. We debated whether Cormac's trolley would be a hindrance or a help, but we finally decided to try it. We loaded it with as much as we could, and we set off. Well the next hour and a half is something I will never forget – at first, the trolley was helpful, but when we reached the rougher part of the track, we had to carry it, one person on each corner like a stretcher. The day was very hot, and we had to stop every ten minutes – it was sheer hell. When we eventually reached the top hut, we were delighted to see Gay Curren waiting for us, although to be honest, we would have been much more delighted to have seen him waiting at the bottom hut! He had arrived to find no one at the car park, so thinking he was late, he headed straight up to the bridge.

It was 12.30pm before we got started on the actual work, and with only two days allotted to the work in total, it wasn't looking promising. We started by stripping back the old boards and removing the handrails, then we replaced the rotten oak

frames with the new metal ones. We fitted the two at either end first, and then one at a time replaced the ones in between. The work proceeded well considering we had to stop every few minutes to allow people to cross – that didn't bother us too much, as the day was a scorcher and we were glad of the little breaks. Some people were quite nervous about crossing the bridge in the state it was in, it's hard to blame them, I have to say it looks an awful lot higher when there are no handrails in place! By the end of the day, we had all the new frames in place and we were ready to start fitting the new handrails. Shay, Pat and Gay were heading home, while Stephen and myself had decided to stay and camp overnight. Shay took the dead battery from the drill and said he would charge it at home. When the boys left, we set up our tents beside the top hut, which we decided to use as our kitchen. We were just in the middle of cooking our meal when we got a call from Shay to say he was down at the barrier with the wrong key, and could one of us meet him at the bottom of the track with the right one. Luckily for me, I was doing the cooking, so Stephen