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Introduction

To help people compiling climbing guide books we have put together this basic guide to preparing the crag and route information, taking photos and drawing topos. You will need to take account of the needs of typographer and designer by preparing the text in the right format, and indicating roughly where topos, maps and photographs should be placed

What you do, what we do

Your job is to provide the contents of the document. This includes all the photos for the photo-topos, action photographs, all the drawings if drawn topos are being used, all the approach maps and all the text descriptions for the routes and the general crag information. We will then produce the finished photo-topos and drawn topos in the correct format. The final document will be produced in the standard guide format (and you are invited to suggest any possible improvements) and then you'll be sent a proofing copy of the PDF. Once proofed the document can go live

A guidebook should be a team effort

In the past guide-book editors have often suffered criticism by the hurlers on the ditch who do nothing but find fault with the result of a lot of hard work. This has led to a lot of unhappiness and has meant that the most important people, the climbers, are left without a guidebook, for years sometimes, while potential editors agonise over whether to set themselves up for attack.

For this reason, and also because the job is bigger than you might expect, MI would like to see guidebooks compiled by a team. There is safety in numbers and the climbers who need guidebooks can again become the most important people in the equation.

Throughout this document we refer to "you" but this is always to be understood as a plural.

The text

If you are dealing with a mountain range or similar big area the team should divide it into areas and make one person responsible for each area. Don' t be afraid to call in local experts on particular crags.

Getting the text right is essential and will make the difference between an ok guide and a great guide. This section covers the writing of the main introduction, the general logistics information, the crag descriptions and the route descriptions.

There are ideas you should think about, things which shouldn't be missed and a general guide to style.

General area introduction

The introduction to an area should give a general overview which is interesting to read, inspiring and realistic. The introduction to each crag in the area should give particular information about that crag which is not included in the general introduction.

The following headings probably only need to be included in the general introduction, for guides covering more than one crag. These headings are just rough guidelines; use any others that are appropriate to your area.

Geology/type of rock.
History of climbing in the area.
Information on the natural environment.
Explanation of the grading system used.
Explanation of star system used.

Gear (The details required here may vary from crag to crag). What sort of rack is required? Are there any particular nuts or cams that may be found more useful?Are there any very important special gear requirements like the need for an abseil rope?

Logistics: Guides need to be stand-alone to an extent since they may well be bought by people without any other local information.

List maps of the area

Accommodation -Camping, hostels, B&B. List some contacts.

Food and Drink -List the local eateries and supermarket and any pubs or bars and include details of how to find them if they aren't obvious.

Tourist Information -Accept the fact that we can't provide all the info and find out the number of the local Tourist Information office.

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Crag introduction

Access

Helping to safeguard access to the cliff covered by your guide is one of the most important jobs for the author. You are representing the climbing community and one silly mistake or oversight could jeopardise access for everyone. Find out who owns or manages the land and check on their attitude (if any) to climbers. Also talk to other local climbers and get their opinions on the access situation.

Specifically these questions need to be addressed and the answers included in your guide

1) Where is the best and safest place to park your car
2) Are the currently used paths OK to approach the cliff?
3) Do you have to ask the land owner's permission before you climb?
4) Are there any cultural or archaeological sites nearby that should be avoided?
5) Are there any seasonal restrictions because of nesting birds or rare plants?
6) Do climbers need to keep a particularly low profile because of nearby houses or other recreational users?

Crag Approach

One problem with many guidebooks is that the local author has climbed on the crag for years and has taken certain aspects of the approach information for granted. Another problem is that many people are hopeless at reading maps. This is why all descriptions should stand alone without the aid of a map. Nevertheless we should still include maps.

With the more complex approaches it is often a good idea to walk it yourself with pencil and paper in hand. It is also a good idea to test your approach descriptions on other people who don't know the area very well.

Make sure that access routes across private land have been cleared with the landowner. Failures by walking-guide writers to do this have created access problems in the past.

Start with an introductory sentence stating the crag's approximate position.

"Hen Mountain is situated to the right of the D123, between Hilltown and Spelga Dam."

Then cover the specific details starting from an easy to find parking space, or some other major point. You have to use your own judgment in deciding where to start describing the approach, bearing in mind that space is limited and that even though some people are poor navigators they should still be able to find a town in a road atlas.

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Be specific, especially with road names and numbers, distances, junctions in the road, etc. Talk about real places that people know or notice like pubs or strange-shaped buildings. Always keep in mind that climbers will be visiting the crag using your directions, your map, your local knowledge. They will often be visiting the crag for the first time and it's infuriating if the directions are bad. They can only climb if they can get to the crag. Try to use features that are likely to last for the life of your guidebook. A building site or forest may have been a useful landmark for the past year but possibly not for the next 8 years.

East and west/left and right? - Since many people don't have a natural ability to know where east, west, north and south are, you should try to minimise their use in descriptions. Although it is clumsy, the phrase "start at the left (looking in) end of the crag" is a very clear alternative to "start at the east end of the crag" for those who don't know where east is.|

Conditions

This section includes information about which way the crag faces, when it gets the sun and when it gets the shade. Expand on these details if it is appropriate - "This is a great crag for getting some sun in the Spring months but from May onwards the crag is usually a sun trap climbable only in the cooler evenings."

Also cover other information like seepage and greasy holds and how exposed the crag is to the wind. Tidal sea cliffs need full information on to what extent they are affected, and where you can find tide tables. This section doesn't need to be written in fancy prose, simple functional statements will do.

Include descriptions of descent routes.

The route text

Getting the route information correct is key to every guidebook. This is the bit people read when choosing a route and providing the correct level of inspiration and accuracy can make or break a guide. Saying every route is brilliant when they aren't disappoints people but not enthusing enough makes people think there is nothing worth climbing.

Old routes which have appeared in previous guides should have their descriptions checked to make sure that they can be found by newcomers to the crag. Sometimes old descriptions assume detailed local knowledge.

Important routes need a line of introduction. Enthuse and summarise them to attract attention -"A magnificent route up the blank, leaning wall on the left of the crag."

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Then get stuck into the description. Be precise, clear and to the point while you describe where the route goes. That's not to say you can't use interesting adjectives, anecdotes, a bit of historical data or humour - please do - but not all the time. Only mention important gear that is either useful for route finding or utterly crucial for protection. Finish by saying where the route ends.

"Climb the slim groove to a horizontal break and some gear. Move left and then pull over the bulge onto the delightfully-positioned slab. Tip-toe up this until you reach the easy finishing corner. Belay on the top."

On multi-pitch routes good pitch-by-pitch descriptions are essential since a topo may be useless high on a cliff. Accurate pitch lengths are also useful. Give the length of each pitch.

Things to Avoid
Try and describe the route without forcing people to read the description of another route. (This is not always possible.)

Avoid the common guidebook mistake of starting successive routes with the phrase,"Start just to the right of...", "2m further right is..", "The next route to the right...".

Avoid using the word "obvious" unless the feature really is obvious. Guidebook writers often use this word to describe an obscure feature that they can't think of any other description for.

Grades
Give the grade that fits the route best. Don't be afraid to re-grade if you disagree with other sources; that is what guidebooks are all about, enhancing and refining the existing information, however, gain a consensus opinion and don't go out on a limb. There will always be odd grades which you can't agree with but which everyone else is happy with but a guidebook is no place to be pig-headed. Avoid split grades (eg. E3/4, 6a/b) unless you really don't know the grade.

First Ascents
Try and get as much first ascent information as you can and make sure it is accurate. Include leader and seconder and where aid was used on first ascents you should also list later first ascents with reduced amounts of aid.

Star rating
Stars have become a very important and powerful tool for the guidebook writer. They need to be carefully dealt with. Give too many and you degrade the system, give too few or none and you channel the people onto the over-used classics. Use

the following criteria:

*** A classic of the area. Remember this is a guarantee that it will get ascents and ultimately it may become worn-out.

** A very good route. This is often a good way of highlighting unsung gems.

* The single star. Spread this liberally across the guide. Give it to any route which is fun to climb.

No stars - There shouldn't be too many no-star routes. Giving a route no stars is saying "don't climb me" so only give them if that is what you think.

Topos

Guidebooks need good and plentiful topos to give a clear representation of routes and crags. Use photo-topos where possible. Certain crags are impossible to photograph adequately and, in this case, basic drawing skills are essential for a potential author to produce drawn topos. These techniques are covered in the next section.

Draw up a list of crags to be photographed at the beginning of the project and delegate people to go ahead with this while the text is being written. This makes it possible to produce the guide in a shorter time.

Photo-topos

Photo-topos have been used in guidebooks for years but, until recently, they have almost always been in black and white. Developments in colour printing, online distribution and digital photography have changed all that. It is now relatively simple to reproduce a very clear colour photo of a crag with route lines overlaid. Full colour printing is now more available and less expensive than once it was.

Cameras

Digital photography is the only way of photographing crags. The ability to take multiple shots and to stitch and enhance the photographs means that we can create extremely vivid images.

Techniques

The best place to take photographs of a low crag is from below the crag with near climbers-eye view. Stand back from the crag far enough to fit in a sufficient section of the crag. Higher crags will need shots taken from a distance.

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Sometimes getting the correct distance away from the crag is tricky owing to trees or steep slopes. Climbing trees and scrambling across tide-washed boulders are all techniques that have been used in the past.

Shots taken in winter when trees are leafless are better than summer shots when a crag may be obscured by leaves. On the other hand winter seepage can look unattractive.

Focus: Digital cameras work brilliantly at low light levels but less well on over-exposed areas. You can enhance dark under-exposed shots far more effectively than bleached overexposed shots. Often an exposure on dark rock is back-lit by a bright sky and there is a temptation to focus for the crag but, be careful, you are likely to get an over-exposed shot if you do that. Take a number of shots with different settings to avoid extra visits to the crag.

Ensure sufficient overlaps

For crags where you can't get far enough back it is possible to take adjacent shots creating a photo-set which can be stitched together using image editing software. For successful panning you need to stand in one place and try and keep the camera in roughly the same position. You also need to ensure sufficient overlap on the photographs. This is especially important when using lenses less than 35mm since the distortion at the edge of the photos means that you can only stitch together the central part of the shot. However, wide angle lenses can be vital to get enough height on the photo-sets. As you pan across the crag, the camera needs to be tilted on the edge shots so that your panning action forms a smooth arc - see diagram. If you don't tilt then certain sections of the photographs can be missing when we try and join them. The degree of tilting depends on how far below the crag you are. If you are level with the mid-height point on the crag (which is unusual) then you don't need to tilt the camera at all. If you are at ground level then a gentle curve is enough. If you are in very close, if the crag is quite tall, or if you are taking more than two shots to fit the buttress in, then tilt the edge shots even more. In this case experience is everything and this is another benefit of digital cameras since extra shots don't really cost, just make sure you take enough alternatives. A pan consisting of more than 3 shots tends to suffer from distortion and is seldom successful. When panning you also have to be careful not to get different exposures on the photo-set. Exposure lock on the section with the most even light and then take each shot, based on this exposure.

If your distance from the crag is such that you cannot get the full height into each shot you will need to takes shots in tiers which can be stitched side by side and then top to bottom.

Remember to shoot a bigger area than you need to allow for the picture being shaped to fit the page.

Weather

The weather conditions when you take the photos are vital. An even light under thin grey clouds can give very good photos even though they may look dark when you first take them. Bright sunny days for sun-facing crags are OK although the shadow contrast on roofs can cause problems. For shady crags, bright and sunny days are hopeless. Shady crags are best taken on grey days with limited back-lighting from the sky. Underexpose and take several alternative shots.

Drawn topos

Sometimes taking photos of a crag is impossible. Trees often get in the way or steep slopes below the crag make getting in the correct position impossible. A very tall crag can also be difficult to photograph properly. In these cases a drawn topo can be used. Topos should fall between true symbolic topos, which are often over-complicated; and artists drawings, which are usually useless when it comes to route finding. They should look like the crag when viewed from a distance but also show enough detail for the climber standing below the routes. The topos use a combination of 'as seen' features and symbols representing features, although symbols are kept to a minimum to avoid the constant need to refer to a key.

Drawing crags on site

It can be useful, if possible, to take a photo of the crag which is inadequate for a topo and use it as a background for tracing the drawn topo.

First draw the outline of the crag or section from a distance. Next lightly draw any features you can see from the distant point and try and get them in relatively the correct position on the crag. This is important since everything becomes foreshortened when you look at the crag from below. Now approach the crag and stand at various short distances away from it and draw in the features and symbols from a climber's eye view. Get all symbols and features in the correct relationship to each other and in proportion and fit them to your lightly-sketched main features. Use vertical guidelines to keep a check on features at the top and bottom of the crag. Sometimes getting the distant view is impossible and then you can only draw the crag from below. Once this is done lightly pencil the route lines in (dashed line) and any belays and lower offs. Write lots of notes on the topo and indicate any changes in the colour of the crag. Don't draw every fracture and crease - just the major and important features. If you try to do an artistic interpretation the topos become messy and hard to follow - they are not supposed to be works of art.

Avoid scribbling random lines on complex features just indicate that the section is complex and draw it more simply. A good general rule is - If it's not there, don't draw it.

Trees and other vegetation must be roughly drawn however don't spend ages drawing detail on vegetated sections where there are no routes. Just indicate these sections on the topo. Artistically remove trees which block a view. If there is actually a tree stump there make a note of it on your topo. Once finished - check, check and check again - there is nothing more frustrating than realising that you have missed out some vital information when you are back at home.

Fills and Shading -Sometimes part of a crag will be distinctively darker or lighter than the rest of the crag. For example, part of the crag may be permanently in the shade, often in the shade, dirty or severely overhanging. To indicate these differences and enhance the overall look of the topos different grey levels of fill can be added on the computer. These must be indicated on your original drawings for use by whoever generates the computer topos. One method is to write a '20', '30', '40', etc. in the outlined darker area which is proportional to the darkness of the area. This method can also be used to distinguish streaks of different coloured rock, water stains, lichen streaks etc.

Drawing from photos

If you have resorted to drawing topos then it is likely that you couldn't get a decent photo of the crag in the first place. Even if you are able to get a decent photo it is still very difficult to produce a good topo from that photo. Having said this, it ist always useful to have a good crag photo and most climbers tend to find these preferable when looking at a crag from a distance. They can also be invaluable for checking missed or unclear information. They can also be used as a background for tracing the drawn topo.

Maps

Crag and approach maps are a vital part of any guidebook. Described below are the different sizes of maps which may be used. OSI have aerial views of the whole country which can be accessed on their website and used to trace any maps you are drawing

North and South - It is important to indicate North on every map you draw since it is vital for working out which way the crag faces for sun and shade.

Scale -It is also useful to try and ensure that every map has at least a basic indication of scale.

General Area Map

This will give a general view of the area showing roads, major natural features and towns or villages and locations of crags.

Crag Area Map

This is the one which gets you to the specific car park, and then from the car park to near the crag. As with the general maps, it should also be virtually self explanatory without a key and it can often be missed out if the approach isn't complex. This map needn't have great detail but keep in mind the ever-important fact that you are writing the guide for people who have never been to the crag before. Avoid missing out things that you take for granted, having been to the crag 100 times.

Detailed Crag Map

This shows detail down to significant trees, boulders and sign posts. It is often the hardest map to draw but often the most important. These maps should include all the information needed for tricky approaches and are also useful in describing the layout of a complex series of crags or buttresses. On some occasions they can even replace the need for a topo when route numbers can be dropped along the line of the crag showing the rough route positions.

The only methods to draw this map are to walk along the crag with a blank piece of paper in front of you or trace it from a map or aerial photo. Note down major features and the general outline of the crag.

Field work tips

To write a new guidebook you have to go to any crag with which you are not very familiar, to explore it, to crawl inside it, to view it from the top of a tree, to re-climb the route you last did 10 years ago, to meet the people at the crag and to ask them what they think. To do this "field work" you need to be properly prepared and have the correct equipment with you.

When to Go

Weather is important (see also weather tips in photo-topos section). Dry conditions are needed for getting around the crag and drawing, photography needs the correct light and the whole procedure requires plenty of time. Plan your day well to ensure that you have enough time and daylight.

Equipment to Take

    Paper for the drawings.

    A clip-board to rest your paper on.

    Several retractable pencils; much better than conventional pencils.

    Two erasers in case you drop one down some unreachable slot in the rock.*

    Biro/ink pen, for annotating print outs and other notes.*

    Compass*

    Camera and extra memory card.*

    Wide-angle lens (28mm)*x

    Binoculars (good for checking route descriptions).*

    Plenty of food and water.*

Other things that have been found useful by some authors are an umbrella for use in the rain; strap it to your ruck sack to leave hands free for drawing. A mini-tape-recorder for describing approaches and routes more quickly. An abseil rope and jumars for sea-cliffs with abseil approaches.

A word of caution

Old established areas do not need the same level of reinventing the wheel as new areas and routes. Be sensible about what work you load onto yourself.

Guidebook field work can be very mentally exhausting. Your concentration can soon evaporate and the quality of your work will suffer as a consequence. Topos drawn at the beginning of a session are invariably much better than topos drawn at the end. Take plenty of rests and spread the work out over several site-visits if necessary.

Output formats

The procedure of creating guides becomes much easier if the original text, drawings and photos are created in the right formats.

Action Photos

All guides need one portrait action shot for the cover. Most will only contain a few internal colour action photos at most. This is to keep the finished document size down. Action photos should be saved as tiff images or hi-res jpegs.

General Text

The general introduction, crag information, approach and other text can be created directly in word processor files. These will need to be sent sent as email attachments to the typographer/designer as rich text files or in some other agreed format. There is no need to put double line spaces below paragraphs.

Text Format for Route Descriptions

The route text should also be supplied in the same way but only in a special format. It is crucial that the correct procedure is followed exactly, down to every full stop and comma. If the text files are typed in this way then it makes turning them into a finished guide a simple procedure.

Route number tab Route name tab overall lengthm tab adjectival grade tab number grade for each pitch enter (22   Tar baby 60m   E1   5a, 5b)

Introductory text enter

Pitch 1 including lengthm enter

Pitch 2 including lengthm enter

First ascent enter

First free ascent enter

Photo-topos

There are several stages to creating a good photo-topo. Once you have the digital images you should put one copy aside, unmarked. Mark routes on a copy of this file and save it with a new name. These files can usefully be titled "crag name clean" and "crag name marked". Send the photos burnt on a CD, as an email attachment if you have a fast enough Internet connection or best by using a file transmission service such as YouSendIt.

Routes should not be shown in red on topos because some people have vision problems that makes red hard to see. Avoid light colours on a light background e.g the blue topo line on page 206 of the Wicklow gude as these area wee bit tricky on the eyes

Guidebook writers with excellent computer skills may be able to bring the production process further than this in consultation with the typographer/designer.

Apple Macs -If you are one of those people who uses an Apple Mac for your work, then there could be an opportunity for you to have greater involvement in the production of the guide. This could range from simple image manipulation for the photo-topos to full scale dtp of the finished guide.

Drawings for Maps and Topos

Once you have returned to base with your rough drawings it is a go idea to ink them in as soon as you get the chance. If you wait the little notes and half-drawn items may fade from your memory. These inked-in drawings are all we need for processing into topos and maps. You can send them as photocopies through the

post of scan them in Greyscale at a resolution of 300dpi and send them via email.

Guidebooks and the internet

An important step towards the future of guidebooks is the route wiki of www.climbing.ie.

As well as being a resource for traveling climbers this serves Irish climbers as a repository of information which in the past would have been lost. It is flexible and can be continually updated while new guidebooks only come out at irregular intervals. It can draw on the experience of the whole climbing community.

In this way the text should not be lost and can form the basis for the next guide. Each guide climbs from the shoulders of the previous and lots of tedious typing is avoided. The text can be copied from the screen and pasted into a text file in the correct format.

When your guidebook text is finalised please remember to edit the database by making any necessary corrections to route information.