



Duncan takes to the hills to dish dirt on weekend ramblers

By Jane Last

RTE star Duncan Stewart has slammed people for abusing the environment and leaving broken bottles in rivers.

The star threw his weight behind a new organisation that incorporates sports, environmental and government bodies.

Leave No Trace Ireland was launched by the RTE star at Larch Hill, the Scouting Ireland headquarters in Dublin.

"I am very excited about this new organisation and wholeheartedly endorse it," said Stewart.

"It brings together all the players — the landowners and the people who want to use the land. If users show more respect for the land, then landowners in turn will respect them."

The well-known broadcaster recalled growing up in the foothills of the Dublin Mountains and the actions of a few irresponsible weekend visitors.

"We would find literally hundreds of broken bottles in a nearby river and this kind of blatant abuse of the environment unfortunately still goes on."

A growing number of people head for the hills every weekend, with sports such as walking and mountain biking increasingly popular, but potentially damaging to delicate eco-systems.

"People now have access by car to areas in Ireland that would have been considered wilderness only a

few years ago," said Bill Murphy of Coillte, chairman of Leave No Trace Ireland.

"We knew something had to be done to educate people on why we should respect the environment and came across the Leave No Trace concept in the USA.

"We hope it will be the start of the cultural shift that is badly needed in Ireland if our wilderness areas are to remain special."

ECOLOGY

Coillte, the Heritage Council, Mountain Biking Ireland, the Mountaineering Council of Ireland, as well as the Northern Ireland Countryside Access and Activities Network are among the groups coming together in this all-Ireland body.

Duncan Stewart recently returned to the small screen with his new series of *About The House*.

An award-winning architect and specialist in ecology design, Duncan was back this week with his show that regularly attracts half a million viewers.

Two years ago, he nearly lost his life after a terrible accident while in Chernobyl.

He had climbed a tree to get a better camera angle, but the branch, weakened by radiation, snapped.

He fell to the ground and was extremely lucky he wasn't fatally injured.

However, he continued in highlighting the plight of children of Chernobyl — culminating in a documentary broadcast last April showing his emotional return to Belarus.



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