

President Michael D. Higgins Opens ‘Beyond the Trees Avondale’, a Unique New Visitor Destination in Coillte’s Avondale Forest Park, Co. Wicklow

- **Coillte, Fáilte Ireland and EAK Ireland collaborate to create a spectacular new visitor attraction in the heart of Ireland’s garden county**
- **This €19 million project transformed Avondale with the creation of an elevated Treetop Walk, 12 storey high Viewing Tower made from locally sourced Douglas fir and larch wood alongside a 90m spiral slide – the highest slide in Ireland**
- **Visitors will experience the beauty of Avondale’s tree canopy and enjoy incredible views of the surrounding estate and Wicklow countryside from the 38m high Viewing Tower - the first of its kind in Ireland**
- **Beyond the Trees Avondale expects to attract 200,000 to 250,000 visitors in its first full year of opening**
- **Beyond the Trees Avondale has been created with sustainability and accessibility at its core**

Issued Wednesday, 6th July 2022: President Michael D. Higgins today performed the official opening of ‘Beyond the Trees Avondale’, a spectacular new visitor experience developed in partnership between Coillte, Fáilte Ireland and EAK Ireland in Avondale Forest Park in Co. Wicklow, combining a stunning 700 metre Treetop Walk with a 12 storey high Viewing Tower. Visitors to Beyond the Trees Avondale will experience the beauty of Avondale’s tree canopy on the Treetop Walk and enjoy incredible views of the beautiful Wicklow countryside from the spectacular Viewing Tower created for the project by EAK Ireland. The Beyond the Trees Avondale experience will be further enhanced in the Autumn when restoration work on Avondale House, the home of Charles Stewart Parnell, will be completed and the house will open to visitors.

Ireland’s newest visitor experience is a collaboration between Coillte, Fáilte Ireland and EAK Ireland, bringing a truly unique visitor experience to Ireland’s Ancient East which will delight young and old alike. This €19m project at Avondale is part of Coillte’s strategy to create more world class visitor destinations and increase recreation spaces nationally, and will encourage international and domestic visitors to stay longer and spend more in Wicklow and the wider Ireland’s Ancient East region, driving economic and employment opportunities for local communities. 60 new full and part-time jobs have been created to staff the site, the majority of whom are from the locality. Beyond the Trees Avondale expects to attract 200,000 to 250,000 visitors within a full year of opening.

Avondale occupies a significant place in Irish history both as the birthplace and home of Sir Charles Stewart Parnell, and also because of the work of Samuel Hayes who inherited the estate in 1770. In addition to Samuel Hayes being the author of Ireland’s first book about trees, he also played a very important role in Irish forestry – it was he who realised that the ancient forests of Ireland were disappearing and who set about creating a forest park at Avondale, which is often thought of as the birthplace of Irish forestry. Following his death, Avondale was inherited by his cousin, Sir John Parnell, great grandfather of Charles Stewart Parnell.

Treetop Walk and Viewing Tower

Visitors arriving at Beyond the Trees Avondale will enter through the new Seed Café into the Walled Garden, which also houses a Coillte Pavilion, an immersive exhibition that tells the story of Coillte's work in forestry, recreation, nature conservation and climate action. At the end of the Walled Garden, visitors enter the Treetop Walk and begin the journey on the elevated boardwalk, which is up to 23m above the forest floor at its highest point, making their way out over the Avonmore River valley. The surrounding forest habitat and the natural gradient of the land means that although the Treetop Walk does not climb or descend more than a few degrees, you will see all of the different levels of trees from the forest floor to the canopy. Visitors will pass through Avondale's Forest Arboretum, a collection of the finest trees in Ireland, featuring 300-year-old trees planted by the estate's founder, Samuel Hayes, and trees planted during the Great Tree Experiment when Avondale was a forestry experimentation station in the early 1900s. Forestry and wildlife facts are displayed in a fun, interactive way at various points along the Treetop Walk.

The Treetop Walk culminates in the journey to the top of the spectacular Viewing Tower. Standing amid a grove of eucalyptus trees on the edge of the historic Great Ride at Avondale, the Viewing Tower reaches 38 metres into the sky. The Viewing Tower was constructed using innovative glulam beams, an engineered wood product that equals the structural strength of steel, from Irish grown trees and is among the most modern methods of building with wood.

The spiral, ramped boardwalk of the tower rises slowly through the forest, never exceeding a gradient of 6 degrees which makes it fully wheelchair and pram accessible with resting points on each level. New vistas of the surrounding countryside emerge at each level as you journey to the top. For the adventurous visitors, young and old, you can 'whoosh' your way quickly back down via a 90m slide, providing an exhilarating end to your unique Beyond the Trees Avondale experience.

The Treetop Walk and Viewing Tower have been developed by EAK, a German company and an experienced developer of such facilities in Europe. All of EAK's treetop walks, including the facility at Avondale, are designed to be easily accessible and offer 'access for all' to wheelchairs, prams and elderly visitors, making Beyond the Trees Avondale a perfect excursion destination for the widest range of visitors, from young to old and of all abilities. EAK Ireland is a partnership between EAK and Carlingford Adventure Centre to find the best locations to create amazing treetop walks in Ireland and UK.

In addition to the Treetop Walk and Viewing Tower, this new destination includes a Walled Garden, Seed Café, a children's playground, a sensory garden, a Coillte pavilion area which showcases the history and relevance of Irish forestry and a series of facilities to ensure the overall site is as inclusive as possible to those of all abilities. The project was constructed with sustainability at its core using fully renewable and climate friendly wood products. Homegrown timber was used to create the innovative timber structures seen at the park. Locally sourced Douglas fir and larch was used for the Treetop Walk and Viewing Tower, and the longest spans ever produced from homegrown Sitka spruce are clearly visible in the new Seed Café.

Accessibility

The Treetop Walk and Viewing Tower visitor experience is 100% accessible and our new visitor centre has been designed to ensure universal access, featuring entry ramps and an accessible lift in the building. There are also generously appointed accessible toilets and baby changing facilities provided, including a fully equipped Changing Place room. Wheelchairs are available to loan on site. A sensory

garden located in the courtyard area is designed to be a welcoming space to both children and adults especially those who have sensory processing challenges, including autism, physical disabilities, and dementia.

In his remarks to formally open Avondale House and Forest Park, President Michael D. Higgins said:

“In terms of lived experience, may I suggest that places like Avondale House and Forest Park allow us all – people from diverse walks of life, of all ages and backgrounds – to reconnect with nature, to reaffirm its critical position in our lives, perhaps even to commit to taking individual and collective actions to protect it, to tackle declining biodiversity and climate change.

This could be the greatest impact and legacy of this beautiful forest park which I am so pleased to formally open today.”

Imelda Hurley, CEO, Coillte, said

“Avondale is a very special site for Coillte, both because of its unique forestry heritage and the historical connection to the Parnell family. We are honoured to welcome President Higgins here today to officially open Ireland’s latest world class visitor destination, Beyond the Trees Avondale, a unique collaboration between Coillte, Fáilte Ireland and EAK Ireland which offers visitors, young and old, the opportunity to experience the beauty of Avondale and the surrounding Wicklow countryside in a fascinating new way that brings drama and excitement to the simple exploration of the forest.

Every consideration has been given to sustainability and accessibility in the development of this spectacular visitor destination, and we are very proud to join with Fáilte Ireland and EAK Ireland to welcome Irish and international visitors to go Beyond the Trees here at Avondale. Our new forestry vision announced earlier this year aims, among other things, to grow new forests, manage our existing forests for greater carbon capture, deliver valuable wood products and enhance biodiversity. In addition, this vision aims to create more incredible visitor experiences for the enjoyment of our citizens and tourists, with Beyond the Trees Avondale being an outstanding example of a new world class visitor experience on the Coillte estate.”

Orla Carroll, Director of Product Development at Fáilte Ireland added *“Investing in standout attractions is a key element of attracting international visitors to Ireland and encouraging domestic tourists to explore different areas of Ireland. Beyond the Trees Avondale is a totally unique world-class addition to the tourism offering in Ireland and will attract thousands of visitors to Wicklow and the wider Ireland’s Ancient East region, driving regional tourism growth and economic benefits for local communities.”*

“Beyond the Trees has been executed with sustainability at its core, delivering on Fáilte Ireland’s Opening the Outdoors strategic pillar and contributing another exciting focal point in Ireland’s Ancient East that supports our ambition to develop Ireland as an internationally recognised Outdoor Activity destination. We are pleased to have developed this significant project under our strategic partnership with Coillte and our partners in EAK Ireland, and we look forward to seeing it develop as a must-visit destination for domestic and international tourists in the years ahead.”

Bernd Bayerköhler, CEO, EAK said

“In 2009, EAK opened the first treetop walk in Germany. Today, we are delighted to be here for the opening of our twelfth treetop walk in a total of seven European countries. Ireland has always been on my list of the most attractive locations for an installation like this. But for such a project in a new country, we needed not just the right place but also the right partners, and we were delighted to partner with the McArdle Family from Carlingford Adventure as our joint venture partner in this project. When we were invited by Coillte and Failte Ireland to visit Avondale Forest Park, for me it was immediately clear that this unique Arboretum at this historical location was the place we had been looking for to develop a world class tourist destination in Ireland.

Together we have managed in the last two and half years to complete this project despite all the challenges we had to face. Many thanks for that and for the opportunity to be a partner and co-investor in “Beyond the trees Avondale”.

Beyond the Trees Avondale is already welcoming guests to enjoy this spectacular visitor destination. Entry to the Seed Café, Walled Garden and Coillte Pavilion is free of charge. Tickets to access the Treetop Walk and Viewing Tower cost €14 per adult, €11 per child (under 3s go free), family tickets are priced at €38 for a family of up to five people, and student and OAP rates are also on offer. Car parking is available on site at a cost of €5 per day.

Ends

Media contact:

Notes to Editor:

Beyond the Trees Avondale Facts

- Length of the Treetop Walk & Viewing Tower: 1,440m

The Treetop Walk

- Length of the footbridge: 654m
- Maximum height of the footbridge: 23m
- Number of path supports (tripods): 22
- Maximum slope: 6 %
- Wood species: Douglas fir, larch
- Amount of wood: 1,100 m³
- Railing net: Stainless steel
- Total weight of foundations: 1,087 tonne
- Number of screws installed: over 110,000

The Viewing Tower

- Height: 38m
- Height of the viewing platform above sea level: 168m
- Length of path in the tower: 685m
- Platform Length: 101m
- Maximum slope: 6 %
- Outside diameter (pillar): 31m
- Number of tower supports (laminated beams): 12
- Number of floors (rounds): 10

The Slide

- Height: 29m
- Length of the slide: 90m

About Coillte

Coillte, Ireland's state forestry company, is responsible for managing 440,000 hectares of primarily forested lands. It is the nation's largest forester and producer of certified wood, a natural, renewable and sustainable resource. Coillte is also the largest provider of outdoor recreation space in Ireland, it enables wind-energy on the estate, processes forestry by-products and undertakes nature rehabilitation projects of scale. Coillte delivers the multiple benefits of forestry, including forests for climate, for nature, for wood and for people. For further information visit www.coillte.ie.

About Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland's role is to support the long-term sustainable growth in the economic, social, cultural, and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland. Tourism is of critical importance to the national economy and to regional development and employment. Pre-coronavirus, the sector generated revenue of €7.5 billion annually and supported 260,000 jobs nationwide while contributing €1.7 billion to the Exchequer.

We work in partnership with Government, State agencies, Local Authorities, representative groups and industry, to develop tourism across Ireland by creating destination development plans and networks, investing in infrastructure, activities, festivals. Fáilte Ireland also provides consumer and buyer insights, mentoring, business supports and training programmes and buyer platforms to help tourism businesses innovate and grow.

In addition, Fáilte Ireland supports Business Tourism, managing the bidding for and securing of larger conferences, meetings and events to be hosted in Ireland.

We are also responsible for domestic holiday marketing across four regional experience brands: Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Dublin.

About EAK Ireland

In 2021, Erlebnis Akademie AG (eak AG) from the Bavarian Forest in Germany and Carlingford Adventure Centre established a joint venture for the construction and operation of outdoor adventure facilities in Ireland & UK, starting with the Treetop Walk in Avondale Forest Park.