

Part One.



1 Two page spread. L to r, Knockatee, Place Totem on Scalp Mtn, Croughan Hill view of Comeraghs, Night from the Little Sugarloaf, Knockfeerina Ridge, Ballyarthur Hill, Knockfeerina View.

The Discreet Charms of Ireland's Smaller Hills.

From Amazing to Zany via Artistic, Boring, Craggy, Farmed, Forested, Industrial, Island, Mast-covered, Panoramic and Surprising.

Part One of a two part article.

MANY AND VARIED are the reasons to want an occasional walk up a small hill. Perhaps you would like a short walk with friends on a summer evening, or to photograph a landscape or to introduce children to the uplands (or get away from children). You may be summiteering, you may be less fit, you may want to walk somewhere, anywhere in icy weather. There's many to choose from. MountainViews describes and lists 538 summits under 400m, scattered all over the island of Ireland. More about lists in Part Two.

MANY AND VARIED are the smaller hills and summits of Ireland. We already mentioned that we mean summits under 400m. For most of these we include a further criterion: they must be recognisably higher than the surrounding land, so we usually specify a drop or prominence from the top before ascending to another top of at least 100m.

The mountains of Ireland (464 over 500m) follow various patterns. There are of course considerable variations in experiencing what you will find from the inland and bog-smoothed Sperrins to the dramatic beehive-quartzite shapes in Connemara to the wild and craggy coastal summits of the Cahas. Unifying their look however are the climate and economic activity. Most are covered in montane flora such as heather growing on blanket bog. Most are uncultivated with little more than occasional sheep farming.

The smaller hills have more variation. For a start many of the lowest are situated in or near farms. The surrounding land may have fairly intensive use for livestock or be cultivated and this has implications for access, which we will consider in Part Two. Many of those with a better view also have telecoms masts or wind turbines on them. While this diminishes the sense of wilderness it often signals photographic opportunity and easy access. Then there are those on the coast or constituting islands (including sea-stacks), those that are being quarried or are deep in Sitka spruce.

Let's start with a few near cities.

Near Dublin most walkers will have visited the iconic Great Sugar Loaf. At over 500m it's out of the scope of this article however two of its neighbours: **Little Sugar Loaf** and **Carrigoona Commons** 242m are easy ascents with good views. The **Little Sugar Loaf** at 342m copies the Great in being

made of hard, whitish quartzite; there's an excellent way up via an agreed path and great views over Dublin and sometimes to the Mournes.



2 Carrigoona Commons for a short walk - Glencree behind.

Carrigoona Commons allows excellent views to the three giant's steps that make up the north end of the Great Sugarloaf and is easy to climb. Like all of the others we will be mentioning, further information such as parking or access can sometimes be found in local websites or guidebooks and usually on MountainViews.ie.

Neither of the former hills give particularly long walks so you could try **Saggart Hill** 395m, a place where megalithic and microwave towers collide. It's possible to walk around here for about 4k or take a longer walk to **Cupidstown Hill**, 12km. Cupidstown is the highpoint of Kildare over which it has huge views and while it's nothing much aesthetically it was reputedly named from Oliver Cromwell's gun after his troops used the place while ravaging that view.

Near Belfast

Belfast's hills are remarkably proximate to its streets and houses, seemingly attempting to push the city out into the Irish Sea. Ostentatious is **Cave Hill**, whose craggy frontage buttresses a serrated skyline whose resemblance to a man lying down inspired both the nickname "Napoleon's Nose" and Swift's "Gulliver's Travels". A fascinating ascent can be made through the thick trees below, and is ultimately rewarded by reaching McArt's Fort on the summit, an ancient stronghold giddily situated on a basalt promontory.

Further north, surrounded by suburbs and extensively wooded, is **Carnmoney Hill**; a marked trail leads over the hilltop without quite reaching the summit (although the diversion is easy) and like Cave Hill it commands an extensive and contrasting view of city and coastline.



3 Cairngaver's view of Scrabo tower and Strangford.

Further east lies **Cairngaver Hill**, more reserved when seen from afar, seemingly 'just' the highpoint of a series of tree-studded hummocks. But appearances can be deceptive, as the lucky ascensionist will be greeted by a beautiful panorama of Strangford Lough and the Ards peninsula. Further north still, approach **Black Hill** 381m, Antrim from the south and you will find yourself on a magnificent balcony walk overlooking the coastline north of Larne. An occasional delight here is that you may find a carpet of bluebells.

Near Cork

Cork, as a port city, is surrounded on all sides by low summits that are largely ignored by hillwalkers. None are dramatic in appearance and one, **Knocknaheeny**, is next to a housing estate on the northside of the river Lee.

A little further out from the city though you find several of these quiet summits, accessed by tiny boreens with little traffic and few visitors, each have their own peculiarities to recommend them



4 *Garrylaurence stone circle.*

North West of the city a few kilometres from Midleton near Dungourney are the summits of **Knockakeo** and **Garrylaurence**. Both are forested but with easily accessible summits. On Garrylaurence the summit is one of the most surprising as it is marked by a large stone circle in a clearing. On the side of the hill to the east is a holy well dedicated to St Laurence O'Toole (Garrylaurence/Garraí Labhráis meaning Field/Garden of Laurence). On the way up to Knockakeo you will skirt the shores of a small lake.

South west of the city is **Doolieve** accessed by a woodland stroll to a moss covered trig pillar with views across undulating farmland to the mountains of North Cork and the Kerry border with the Galtees, Knockmealdowns, Comeraghs , the sea beyond Carrigaline and the planes landing on the runway of Cork airport .

Finding Huge Panoramas – stand well back



5 The Derryveaghs, Donegal from Errigal (I) to Muckish. Aka, the Glover Walk, a panorama from Dooish Mountain.

Ireland's high ground is mostly in ridges. Away from the east and centre many of the ridges are tens of kilometres long. How do you get a good view of a long ridge? If you view it from within the ridge you may well get drama in cliff and lake but rarely a sense of the whole. Many smaller hills, often relatively isolated, give uninterrupted vistas of entire ranges.

For example some of the hills near Letterkenny such as **Dooish Mountain** or **Gregory Hill** allow a view of much of the SE side of upland Donegal. Closer in, places like the roughly vegetated **Stagradhy Mountain** (just west of Loughsalt Mtn) show a narrower but nearer perspective.

Knockchree, 306m is somewhat south of the Mournes and sufficiently far east to see some of the major mountains. Of course the Mournes can also be seen from the Slieve Croobs and many of the smaller hills such as Slievenalargy, 280m. Because the Mournes are south of here at many times of day and year in some weather conditions they are going to appear in silhouette. You'll need to be up early or late to get decent illumination! In a very rough rule of thumb the views of ridges are better from the south.



6 Cnoc Mordáin looms over South Connemara.

Cnoc Mordáin, 354m in south Connemara is well worth a visit in its own right. It's a very walkable granite ridge smoothed by ice on one side, plucked on the other and looking like an overgrown *roche moutonnée*. On the top you find you can see most of the Twelve Bens and the first three quarters of the Maamturks all in one sweep over the lakestrewn landscape of Connemara bog.

Every hill has stories.

Sometimes an unromantic modern hillwalkers experience of difficult heather and briars but often quirky or interesting history as various commenters on MountainViews have revealed.



7 Landing on Inisnabro

Inisnabro, Island 175m, Dingle West: The landing on the island is pure James Bond, with the dinghy scraping through an archway barely wide enough to allow us through before entering a little cove hidden from the sea. The island nearly became even more like a scene out of *You Only Live Twice* when in 1973 it was proposed as the launching site for a space flight by the youthful Dr Gary Hudson. He wrote a letter to the Irish Vice Consul in the USA pointing out that as a neutral country with no

affiliated space programme, access to the EEC and the grants that would flow, the island's isolation from a large population in the event of a serious accident, and ready access to fuel (one assumes springy heather must be ideal rocket fuel), Inisnabro would be the perfect launch site ...

Clomantagh Hill, 349m in the South Midlands (Slieveardaghs). ... follow the wall to the summit. The trig bolt is set in a square of concrete on top of a megalithic tomb. An extract from Lewis Topographical Dictionary, 1837 says the following "On the summit of Clomanto hill is circular mound of stones, 87 paces in circumference, enclosed by a circular barrier of stones, including several acres, approaching nearest to the mound on the east. Part of this circle has been destroyed; the name 'Cloghman-Ta,' signifying in the Irish language the "stone of God," is sufficiently indicative of the use to which this place was applied" A little bit different then to the MViews name explanation. All together though both explanations suit a special and unusual little hill. ...

Inishark, Island 97m, Mayo Islands. ... In 1958 a Shark man died from appendicitis because no word of his plight could be got out for five days. That death sealed Shark's fate. In October 1960 four boats arrived on the last mercy mission to Shark. The fleet was commanded by young Father Flannery, the island's priest. Men, women and children staggered along the stony 500 yards between their cottages and the landing stage with their burdens ...



8 The huge southern Wicklow view from Baltinglass Hill.

Baltinglass Hill, 382m, Wicklow Mountains— ... Neolithic burial cairn. Stripped of its earthen cover and robbed of its stone, the cairn comprises 3 passage-tombs and 2 single-chambered tombs. The site was excavated in 1934-6 revealing evidence of the cremations of at least 3 adults and a child. Fragments of quartz unearthed during the excavation suggest its use for decorative purposes. ...

Slievenalargy, 284m Mourne Mountains. ... While Slievenalargy may be one of the quieter Mournes hills, with little evidence of many visitors, it did hold a pleasant surprise in store for me ["wicklore"]. At approximately J299356 I discovered a Mass Rock, inscribed with chalice, crosses and the letters 'IHS'. It was a large block of granite, perhaps 3 feet high and 4 feet wide. It sat nestled between two areas of higher ground, and the views across to the Mournes from it were stunning. It was strange to think it had probably sat here for hundreds of years, and that it had once attracted so many people in secret onto this hill. Now hundreds of years later I was following in their footsteps, for a different reason, but seeing the same views ...

Inishhtooskert, Island 172m Dingle West ... There is a round corbelled building, sunk well into the ground, with a hole, presumably for smoke, at the top. The interior is seriously dirty with a discarded gas cylinder and other modern junk. According to Oileán, David Walsh's 2004 book on the islands of Ireland, "There is a local story of how the widow of a recently departed, corpulent husband got him out through the awkward entrance. She took him out in pieces." ...

Killough, "235m", South Midlands – .. working from OS map 66 printed in 1994 this was to be a short detour with a walk up thru forest to the trig . What a surprise when we arrived to find the entrance not to a forest but to a very large quarry. .. The rock from the original summit is probably now located in the middle of the M8 and the highest point now existing has coordinates at **S11172 51253** on a bench of rock earmarked for blasting ...

In part two: Unexpected Delights, Isolated Hills, Island Summits, Extreme Low Summits, Unexpectedly Difficult, Hills near the Cardinal Points, Oddest Names, MountainViews, Access issues & the Virtual Signpost, Last Words, References

,

Part Two.



9 The sweeping view from Cnoc Mordáin of the Twelve Bens and the Maamturks. Potential Double Page Spread.

The Discreet Charms of Ireland's Smaller Hills.

Part two.

Part One's topics were: Let's start with a few near cities, Near Dublin, Near Belfast, Near Cork, Finding Huge Panoramas, Every hill has stories.,

Unexpected delights



10 Oulart Hill memorial. Modern architecture meets megalithic.

Oulart Hill was the scene of a battle in the Wexford Rebellion of 1798. A nondescript trig pillar marks the summit (in a wheat field across which you might be ill advised to cross at some seasons) but then there's an architect designed monument created to be

“Like the surprise of finding a Fairy Ring”. A modern designed space (1998) this is truly a revelation with a hollow mound resonant of a megalithic tomb and enclosed space.

Inishturk – the Tale of the Tongs. Erected in 2013 this is towards the north of Inishturk Island. A glass box with seating for a dozen looks out on a series of smaller monuments including six that commemorate the family names of the island. The monument is directly below the highest point of the island, beside a lake and has views of the Mayo mainland coastline.

As diversion from this article, while an excess of such artistic monuments would be unwelcome on mountains, surely a few would add interest through allowing an artistic statement to enhance natural awe and contemplation?

Isolated hills.

Mountains are in distinct ranges but many smaller hills are well separated from others. Take the 48 hills in Ireland more than 10km from another ("isolation" as listed on MountainViews). There aren't any over 400m and many are under 200m. Some better known names are

Inishmore on the

Aran Islands, **Tara** (the east coast one) and **Lambay Island**, recently more welcoming to visitors.

Nip off the Dublin to Galway road M6 to sample the delights of the furthest from any other summit, **Croghan Hill**, 234m, with 25.7km isolation. At first glance a boring grassy hill, however it started as a volcano and has a long human history being once a monastery and also near the preserved remains of "Croughan Man" speculated to be a rejected ruler of the Iron Age. One MV contribution describes it as "island in the bog" and generally you will see few there except during "The Croghan Hill Challenge" a charity fundraiser with mud races and general mayhem. There's a vista of farming and industrial peat harvesting – it's the sort of overlooking high ground armies clash over.



11 Croghan Hill, North Midlands: Geology, history, vista and huge industrial bog.

Island summits



12 Scarriff and Deenish Islands, Great Skellig behind.

Some of the smaller hills are on islands. We already mentioned the variable nature of the lower peaks and islands like **Inishark** really show it. The first aspect is that of getting there. Using a rented boat it took us (an MV expedition) around 120 minutes of tossing around from Roonah Pier in Mayo. Uninhabited since 1960, visitors arrive via a derelict pier and walk past disintegrating, eerie houses, over moorland patrolled by a pair of swooping attack-skuas to a summit of huge panoramic views. North Galway and the south Mayo coastline, with islands, are all visible. (Marked on the map as 100m elevation we surveyed the top at **97.45 m.**)

Extreme low summits

Ireland has a few horrendous sea stacks such as those in Donegal like **Tormore Island North** 139m. Horrendous at least to hillwalkers – climbers might regard them as an adventure playground. Another is **Little Skellig** 139m off the Iveragh peninsula in Kerry. There was commercial gannet hunting on the island which ceased in the 19th century. I am not aware of a recent recreational user summiting this.

Unexpectedly difficult.



13 The delights of Barraniskey.

Barraniskey 280m in the Wicklow Mountains has punished those that didn't bother with instructions. You can get some mitigation if you read what others advise and can limit your traverse of the head-high furze to around 80m. Character building despite recent machete work.

Here's part of a visitor comment about **Inch Top**, 222m in the Inishowen area. "Alas, there really is no way around this ['the jungle section'], and believe me I was glad of my relative advantages in terms of height and leg span. A bit of scouting around and back and forwarding should mean you suffer at worst a few minutes of acute discomfort (rather than an eternity of agony and damnation), but this is still a route to commend heartily to one's worst enemy...especially if they tend to wear shorts"

The eponymous **Bruse Hill**, 260m is a superb photographic platform overlooking the lush, rolling North Midlands but comments have included: "Nothing can prepare you for the awfulness of this hill. Brambles, Bracken and Bushes aplenty." and "You have been warned, go in late winter or spring, and don't wear the good clothes!!!"

Hills near the Cardinal Points of Ireland

Should you wish to visit four extremities of Ireland, the four summits nearest to the coast of the points of the compass for Ireland are all smaller hills.

Most northerly	Crockalough Hill , 282m	Inishowen area.
Most southerly	Cnoicín an tSeabhaic , 160m	Mizen/ Sheeps Head area.
Most easterly	Ballywhite Hill , 101m	Belfast Hills area.
Most westerly	Tearaght Island , 200m	Dingle West area.

Oddest names

Names all over Ireland have largely reached us from Irish via the manglicisations of the early OS. There is a funny side to this so here's a list of some of the odder names of small hills.

Ben Dash	Only 21 mins will bring you through some vegetation to the top of this 267m W. Clare hill justifying the name.
Mouldy Hill	312m in Inishowen, overlooking Bunrana, with huge Swilly views.
Slieve Alp	Proudly proclaiming its 329m in the Nephin Bogs between the elusive Slieve Carr and glorious Achill Island. Alpinism on the cheap.
Kill Hill	The Kill name usually came from churchyard or woodland not homicide. 241m in the S Midlands – near a growing windfarm.

Lick Hill	158m in the Shehy/ Knockboys.
If you can stomach this sort of woeful 'humour' there's plenty more: Gibbet Hill , Slievetrue , Topped Mtn (as opposed to an untopped?), Mount Alto (great name but quare briary wall for a top), Cupidstown etc.	

MountainViews.ie

MountainViews characterises hills under 400m with a prominence or drop of at least 100m as “**Binnions**”. As with some other MountainViews lists they are named after a hill that serves as an example. In this case Binnion 250m, *Cnoc an Bhinnín – hill of the little peak* which is a summit near the northern coast of Inishowen, Donegal. MountainViews has over twenty lists such as the **Carns** (400-500m), **Arderins** (500m+), **Vandeleur-Lynams** (600m+), **900s** (900m+) and **County Highpoints**. Maps such as those published by OSI and East-West mapping increasingly identify these summits.

One of the points of listing summits is that it provides a framework in which people can exchange information about their experiences. Where can you park? What ways up are there, requiring what permission? What makes the trip worthwhile (or not)? What does it connect to? In January 2014 MountainViews added 284 Binnions with prominences from 100 to 150m. The hundreds of comments coming in begin to illuminate such smaller hills, warts and glories. Surely it's the first time the smaller hills of Ireland have ever had such attention for recreational users. As with the higher hills, over time MountainViews intends to flesh-out and codify the information as a public resource.

Access issues & the Virtual Signpost

In some areas of Ireland identifying the lower hills may bring visitors to places not previously thought of being in the scope of walking or hillwalking. At least one bemused farmer I heard of didn't think his hilly land contained a hilltop! The situation varies from region to region. For example many of the lower summits in places like Donegal, Mayo or Kerry are wild places of little economic use, where access is probably not going to be an issue. In the large area characterised by MountainViews as “North Midlands” there's some 31 smaller summits and a proportion of these are on farms without alternative access such as through Coillte/ NI Forest Service land. It is important to talk to the landowners (who usually in our experience will give permission). Some summits we have found to have access difficulties, most do not.

Share what you find with the hillwalking community. For example are there particular local concerns and who or where is the relevant landowner. Your shared data can become part of the “Virtual Signpost” for those that follow. This provides updateable information without excessive signage. Recently one of our members reported the relevant farmer's change of wishes with regard to access to the southern ridge leading up Nephin. MountainViews now displays this suggested route which has also been communicated to the MI office.



14 A medley of access signs: Agreed, No Dogs, Polite Request.

It is also worth noting that reasonable access on some smaller hills may be seasonal. For example trampling through a field of planted crop is usually unreasonable and walking through a field of cattle may be plain stupid as well. Dogs and big groups are usually a no-no.

Last words

Visiting the smaller hills is a different experience to that of hillwalking the major ranges in Ireland. Of course the smaller hills will not have the same qualities of challenge and remoteness. Some are not so interesting. However sometimes we need short walks, taking less time in the day and less travelling. Knowing the general benefits and particular features of smaller hills can be really useful for example when high roads are iced up. Further, for the walking community pooling information using modern approaches makes increasing sense especially with the smaller hills which are numerous and have little documentation.

So, research something interesting nearby and visit! Even better, share your take on it – now's the age of sharing information.

References

Googling the name of a summit will get you a ton of arid geographical feature websites (many largely copycats) however sometimes you can find gems of community or hillwalker information. MountainViews.ie has data about all of the smaller hills and detail on many. For registrants the website provides the individualised "Local 100" list which in all parts of the island of Ireland will include many smaller hills.

Some statistical hill info can be found using the listing tools at mountainviews.ie/lists/ or mountainviews.ie/mv/irl150setup.htm

I am not aware of any comprehensive book on the smaller summits, though they do appear in various local walking guides and websites often with fascinating and detailed local history. Two books: Paul Clements *The Height of Nonsense* 2005 and Kieron Gribbon's *Ireland's County High Points* 2012 cover those smaller hills that are county highpoints.

Aidan Dillon wrote an interesting article *Ireland's lowest mountains* in Irish Mountain Log, Winter 2009.

-- Simon Stewart 2014, Publisher MountainViews.ie, with the help of Peter Walker, John Fitzgerald, Conor Murphy, Sharron Schwartz, Mark Brennan, David Flood, Adrian McGlynn and many other sharing explorers from MountainViews.