

ANNUAL NUMBER 7 **MOUNTAIN VIEWS** PUBLISHED 2022

THE SUMMIT

FOR HILLWALKERS AND WALKERS IN IRELAND

SARANGKOT, NEPAL: UNEXPECTED DANGERS

A close shave in the
Himalayas

ISLAND-HOPPING IN NORTH DUBLIN

So close to Dublin,
yet seldom visited

ARARAT

An ascent of
a fabled peak

A WILD CAMP IN THE MWEELREA MOUNTAINS

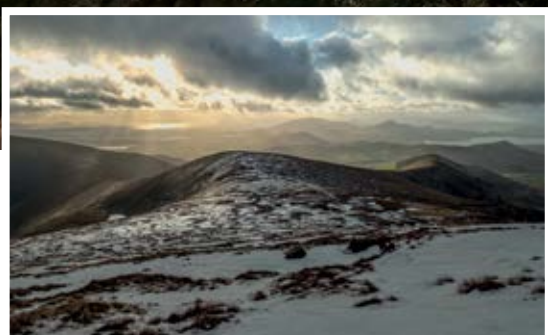
GEORGIA ON MY MIND!

The mountainous
margins of Europe

MOUNTAIN HIKING IN GREECE

THE WILDERNESS OF GULL ISLAND

A coastal route in
SW Donegal



GALLERY

BEST PHOTOS FROM
MOUNTAINVIEWS
MEMBERS IN 2021



MOUNTAIN VIEWS WALKS

2021 saw a gradual return to hillwalking and hopefully the general situation will be positive in 2022. So with that in mind, we'll be setting up MountainViews organised hillwalks on an occasional basis.

You might like to consider trying one (and it's not just for members - anyone able to do an intermediate standard walk is welcome).

If you are a member why not get to meet some of your fellow members on one of our hikes?

Details will appear in the Events section of the MountainViews monthly newsletter.

Here's hoping for a great 2022 on the hills!



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Out of the lockdown pot.

We have a great and varied selection which we hope will be of interest to our readers for this Annual thanks to our volunteer contributors. Read Lee Gallagher's piece on Sarangkot – hair-raising. Read Michael Guilfoyle on a very different experience to be had in Donegal, read about Georgia, about Mount Ararat - that's only four out of eighteen. MV gets a big look in this year and we have our usual photos of the year with videos now added.

Into the fire? Hopefully the lockdowns have abated and we have escaped things like the 5k limit – we all became “Explorers of the Nearby” see JB Malone Book Review. Time will tell what impact the energy crisis, climate change, inflation and a war will have.

20th Anniversary. MountainViews started operation in June 2002 – we will celebrate in due course.

Finally. A personal thanks to all those that joined me on Torc in celebrating my completion of the Arderins after 52 years or so.



Simon
Simon Stewart,
MountainViews.ie
founder

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The best videos by MV members in 2021

Front cover: Hillwalkers cast shadows from the summit of Torc Mountain, Co. Kerry

The Summit Annual Newsletter 2021 is published by the MountainViews committee in February 2022.

The usual MountainViews Summit Monthly Newsletter will return for March. Should you wish to comment on any article then you are free to do so through the Motley Views General Forum within the usual terms of MountainViews.

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A WILD CAMP IN THE MWEELREA MOUNTAINS

GERRY MCVEIGH

First Light on Ben Lugmore East Top
GERRY MCVEIGH

Since taking up wild camping with some degree of seriousness (buying the gear and going out once or twice a month) I have found myself revisiting past hiking trips with a view to going back and spending the night. I even have a list (I admit to some geekiness about lists and the weather, so I know I am among friends here).

Top of my list were all those beautiful locations in Donegal – places where the outdoors was forged into my being on family holidays as a child. The Derryveaghs, the Bluestacks and the wild Donegal coastline all helped to build confidence with wild camping in beautifully remote areas.

It took some time to find the courage to leave this relative comfort and familiarity and move further south along the Wild Atlantic Way. This eventually led me back to the mountains of Mayo and Galway, where at one time I was focused on the much busier list of ticking off summits to be climbed (my knees where in much better shape then).

I did tick off the Mweelrea Mountains on that busier list, though there was something about these mountains that made me pause. It might have been the views across to

Mweelrea, from the heights of Ben Gorm or the Sheeffry Hills, which invoked a sense of awe at the rugged hillsides, sheer cliffs and enormous coums – often shrouded in mist. I was much more ready to tackle the likes of the Glencoaghan Horseshoe (one of the toughest and most satisfying mountain days I have ever undertaken).

It says something that the 5 high tops in the Mweelrea Mountains feature within the top 16 of the 100 best mountains in Ireland as rated by Mountain Views (MV) members. It was partly accounts from fellow walkers on Mountain Views that helped give me the confidence to plan and successfully follow a route over the Mweelrea Mountains. That was an amazing day that will stay with me to my last breath and inspired a return for a wild camp in May 2021.

Doo Lough

When you live in Antrim a trip to Mayo involves a wee bit of planning, not least the 4-hour drive. I think my timing was spot on as I arrived in the spectacular Doo Lough Valley at 9am with good weather forecast (geeks win out). There



Reflections on Doo Lough
GERRY MCVEIGH

by the geological processes which have dramatically shaped the area into a hiking paradise.

It is difficult to focus on one aspect of this stunning landscape and attention is pulled in all directions. East is the towering bulk of Barrclashcame (mountainviews.ie/summit/60/) where the long line of Sheeffry Hills end abruptly. South is Ben Creggan (mountainviews.ie/summit/118/) rising magnificently as from the waters of Doo Lough. West is perhaps best, as this looks directly into the vast corrie of Coum Dubh which has been torn out of the Mweelrea massif.

Coum Dubh and the Ramp

There was a sense of childlike excitement at the adventure ahead, balanced with some trepidation and healthy respect as I set out across the shoreline of Doo Lough. The Mweelrea Mountains have a reputation that demands preparation and respect.

Blanket Bog and Wet Heath habitat restoration are taking place to the north of Doo Lough - to improve river water

was informal roadside parking at the northern end of the lough for at least 10 cars (this was the number present on my return, though there were none here this fine Friday morning).

Recent history is marked by a Famine Memorial in this bleakly beautiful place. A much older history is marked



'The Ramp' backed by the three Lugmore Tops
GERRY MCVEIGH

quality as part of www.pearlmusselproject.ie. The stream flowing into the NW corner of Doo Lough is a great way to start the climb up to the Coum, with plenty of waterfalls and the soothing sound of the water for company. This was magnified as it joined the Sruhauncullinmore River, with the sound of water now becoming a roar. Beautiful oak trees have found a sheltered home here and looked almost

I was huffing and puffing on what was an unrelenting climb to over 700m as 2 lads came down in shorts and t-shirts. They had climbed from the Silver Strand side of Mweelrea (an example of a route from Silver Strand can be found at mountainviews.ie/track/1461/ from MV user AdrienneB) and were going to contour back around the base of the mountain. They did comment on the big pack'

I was carrying as I enviously looked at their complete lack of pack.



Views from Ben Bury
GERRY MCVEIGH

Ben Bury

On exiting the Coum views opened over the significant plateau to those 5 tops pushing for the 800m mark. Mist was still blowing around the top of Mweelrea itself as Atlantic air rose steeply on hitting its slopes. It was t-shirt weather for me too now as the strength of the late May sun shone and a slight breeze kept insects at bay. The walk to the top of Ben Bury was less than a kilometre and I followed the line of its steep eastern and northern slopes for

surreal with their new growth leaves in this landscape devoid of trees.

the best views. These were initially down into the Coum, though increasingly across Doo Lough to the Sheeffry Hills and Croagh Patrick.

Ben Bury (mountainviews.ie/summit/43/) is ranked

Looking into Coum Dubh

The river was a beautiful guide into the amphitheatre of Coum Dubh, with its steep slopes, crags, cliffs and scree soon enveloping me and cutting off the outside world. There was a stillness here, punctuated only by the sound of water flowing downhill and the calls of ravens. The river was easily followed as it lazily meandered across the floor of the Coum.

Climbing resumed in the south east part of the Coum and contoured westward along the back of the Coum through increasingly varied terrain – with boulders, streams to cross and crags with increasing height. This reached the famous 'Ramp' which is basically an area of gentler (though not gentle) slope with steep crags below and sheer cliffs behind. It was a fantastic route to the top and with height the views became ridiculously stunning.



Lough Luggaloughan
and Killary Harbour
GERRY MCVEIGH

43rd in the Vandeleur-Lynam list (Irish mountains of 600m+ with a 15m prominence) at a height of 795m. On a good day its cairn is a wondrous place to sit and contemplate, as you do literally feel like you are on top of the world. Today the views stretched along the Mayo coastline, taking in Clare and Achill Islands and reached the Nephin Beg Mountains to the north. To the south the shapely Maamturks and 12 Bens captured all the attention. On a previous trip I sat here and watched a mountain hare stretch less than 30m from me.

A long gentle ascent on easy ground brought magnificent views out to the islands off the Galway coast and to the high point of the trip – Mweelrea. Near to the col I passed some decent sized pools of water, which were brimming with water following overnight rainfall and teeming with tadpoles. I would use these to fill my water bottles on the return as water sources are scarce on the plateau.

Mweelrea

Mweelrea (mountainviews.ie/summit/34/) at 814m is ranked 34th on the Vandeleur Lynam list and 16th on Irish Highest 100 list (Irish mountains with a prominence of 100+m). It is also the Provincial Highpoint for Connacht and the high point of County Mayo.

The climb to its summit from the col with Ben Bury wasn't overly taxing, partly due to the views down into another stunning corrie containing Lough Bellawaum. I met a handful of other walkers on the climb, though it was far from a crowded Saturday shopping trip.

A small cairn (underwhelmingly) marked the summit, though I know there are different opinions on cairns! The strong sun was causing the peat to steam as the overnight rain was drawn out, giving a surreal sauna like appearance to this highpoint – I half expected someone to randomly appear wrapped in a towel.

Views opened down into yet another superb corrie,



The Lugmore Ridge at sunset
GERRY MCVEIGH



Sunrise from inside bivy
on Ben Lugmore East Top
GERRY MCVEIGH

this one containing Lough Luggaloughan. A ridge running southeast from the summit takes in a further 2 tops – Mweelrea SE Spur (495m) and Teevnabinnia (379m). I still need these for the full set and the next time I might just try the route from MV user simoburn (mountainviews.ie/track/4532/) which looks like a glorious circuit.

The views continued over Killary Harbour to the mountains of Galway. I could have stayed here for hours, though the return trip was calling, and I needed to set up camp for the night.

Triple Score with Ben Lugmore

It wasn't long before I was back at the point of exit from Coum Dubh, which is marked by a small cairn. This was the start of the exhilarating climb over the three tops of Ben Lugmore.

First up was Ben Lugmore West Top (mountainviews.ie/summit/50/) which rises to 790m. It was a short climb on a broad grassy slope, where you can follow the cliff edge as closely as you feel comfortable. It is only on reaching the summit that the beautiful airy ridge ahead comes into

sharp focus (if the weather allows).

On one side of the ridge there are sheer drops into Coum Dubh, on the other there are seemingly endless steep slopes down to Lough Bellawaum. In between a little bit of magic has been formed.

I have to say this is one of the most stunning sections of walking that I have experienced in Ireland, as it rises and falls for over a kilometre. There is a degree of exposure in walking along this narrow ridge, though there were options on how close I ventured to the sheer drops into Coum Dubh (I don't particularly have a head for heights). My three visits have all been in fine weather with good visibility and comments from other MV users attest to the difference that more adverse weather conditions can make.

Prominent in the centre is Ben Lugmore (mountainviews.ie/summit/38/) at 803m. A shapely top with a small cairn on its small summit, though all the other adjectives about this mountain are much grander in their scale. The immediate views that drop away hundreds of metres into Coum Dubh and the wider views over the mountainscapes of Mayo and Galway are stupendous.

A drop and climb to Ben Lugmore East Top (mountainviews.ie/summit/51/) at 790m brought an end to the magical ridge walk. There was now a broad space available at this fantastic height to contemplate a wild camp for the night.

Summit Bivvy

It was late into the evening, though at the end of May there is a fair stretch to the evenings, especially in the far west of Ireland. Ben Lugmore East Top had been my intended camp spot as it has generous areas of level ground and stunning views. My third criterion for wild camping was met with a nearby pool of water (which I hadn't remembered from previous visits) which I could use to boil water for cooking and drinking.

There was a stiff breeze which brought a chill to the air and led to the donning of an insulated jacket, beanie and gloves. The well-worn routine of setting up camp then followed. This started with unpacking all the gear from my backpack (groundsheet, sleeping mat, sleeping bag, bivvy, pillow (essential!), cooking equipment, food and water. The sleeping arrangements with a bivvy are usually quick and easy to set up,

Attention then turned to food and drink. I carry a small gas stove and cannister with a cook set on my camping trips. Noodles were brought to the boil and tuna added for a simple and filling meal. My camp was right next to Coum Dubh and I was able to descend a few metres to

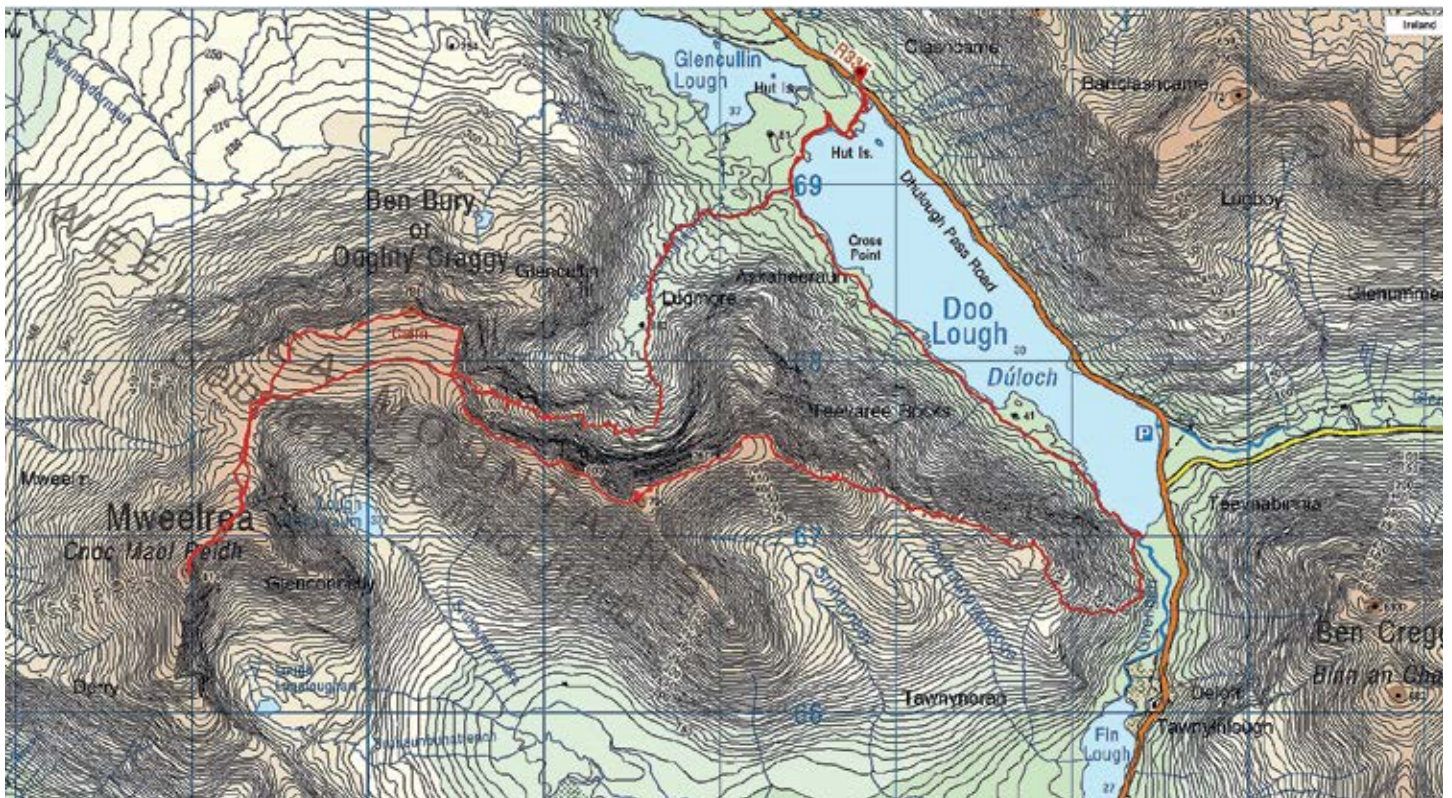
find shelter from the biting breeze. Tea always follows food and is a fantastic way to fill up, warm up and get ready for settling down to a night under the stars.

Lying in a bivvy is a wondrous thing, especially with a clear night sky. In these wild areas, far from the light pollution that is a constant in urban areas, clouds of stars build, satellites are briefly lit up by the sun as they quickly move in different orbits and occasionally shooting stars bring a mile wide smile. A good sleeping bag and mat bring a cosy warmth while your face is gloriously exposed to the elements. When you wake up in the middle of the night you are staring straight up at the night sky and part of you just wants to keep on doing that.

First light was at 5.30am and I dragged myself out of the warmth to take some pictures of the beautiful colours and crystal-clear views to Croagh Patrick and the Nephin Beg Mountains. This wasn't really a civilised time to get up so I opted for the warmth again and only stirred when the rising sun started to take the chill out of the air.

Another well-worn routine ensued as I packed up camp, made breakfast and had more tea. All this took place against the glorious backdrop of mountains, coums, loughs, ocean and islands - views I had to myself. Another cool benefit of wild camping is that you are often the only person remaining in these wild places.

Before leaving I ensured that my campsite was as close to the way I found it as possible, following the #LeaveNoTrace principles (www.leavenotraceireland.org/). ■



Annapurna massif from Sarangkot, Annapurna south [left] Annapurna 1 [center left] and right Machapuchare
LEE GALLAGHER



SARANGKOT, NEPAL

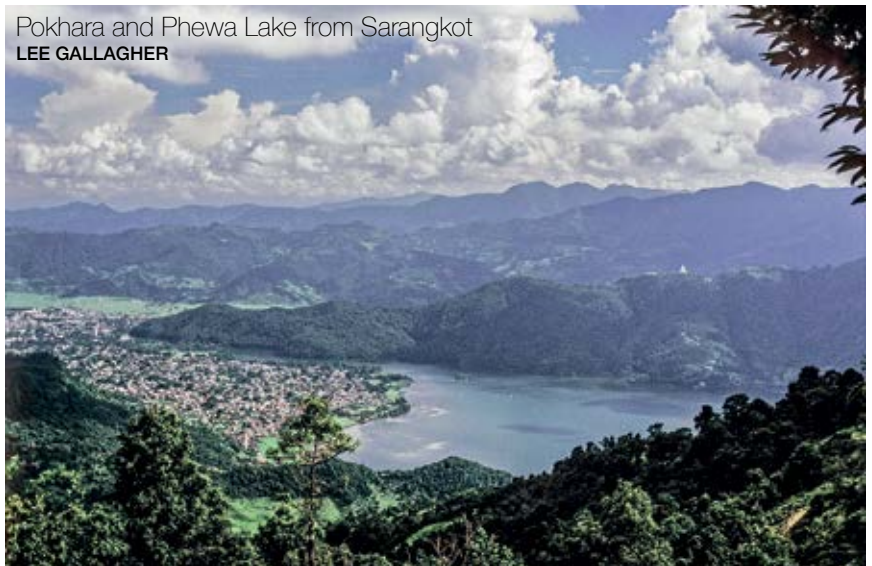
THE ACTION STARTS WITH A MISSED TAXI, PROCEEDS VIA INTIMIDATION AND ENDS WITH A DEADLY LANDSLIDE. BY **LEE GALLAGHER**

By mid September the monsoon was still falling. The deluge would commence at dusk and continue long after tiredness had lured us to sleep. Usually the rain would clear by morning and if lucky, a cloud break might offer brief glimpses of Machapuchare high above. It was an astonishing apparition, a soaring cathedral of rock and ice floating within a sea of cloud and turbulence. Seconds later it would vanish as if never there.

We had arrived in Pokhara three days previously having sat out two weeks in Katmandu waiting for the torrent to subside. It had not ceased but was lessening in intensity. The objective now was to get into the mountains before time intervened. Our guest house manager kindly offered to organize a Poon hill-Ghandruk trek which left two days to kill. Pokhara was peaceful compared to the chaos of Katmandu. Apart from a Maoist convoy storming through the atmosphere was relaxed, even the cows in the street looked sedated. It was undoubtedly serene yet more attuned to a stay of recovery following an expedition and we were itching to be moving.

The taxi ride was steep and hilariously bumpy. Sarangkot is a village near the climax of a 1600m hill of the same name which runs for several kilometers west of Pokhara. The summit and ridge line are famed for superb views of the Annapurna Massif and Dhaulagiri. I arranged with the driver to return at 5 pm which afforded us four

Pokhara and Phewa Lake from Sarangkot
LEE GALLAGHER



hours exploration and leapt from the cab with trepidation eager to attain the summit before afternoon cloud cloaked the panorama.

A sign posted path led us from the village on to open hill side. The slope was grassy and easily inclined but worn and awkward from foot fall. Ten minutes in we paused for a break. Gina wanted to apply sun block as the heat was intense. As we set off again, three Nepalese men who had been working their way down passed and I caught the eye of the tallest among them.

“Namaste.” I said and instantly regretted it.

The man gazed at me and flashed a vicious smile.

“Namaste.....”

But this was no greeting. It was a hollow drawn out growl followed by a weird piercing stare. He lingered, laughing cynically, then continued on, all the while indicating something about us to his companions.

Gina was tending to her backpack and had not noticed yet sensed my agitation.

“You Ok Lee, is something wrong?”

“No everything’s fine, let’s get going.”

It was a strange unnerving incident but I decided to put it to the back of my mind.

The viewing platform was a hive of activity. Chatter and excitement hung in the air. Directly across the valley, the Annapurna massif rose vertically 23,000 feet into the sky, cloud obscuring its central ramparts. The mountains appeared as if detached from the earth below.

The elevation gain was breath-taking and I was actually relieved when the elements intervened, it was challenging to observe anything else.

Gina was getting hungry.

“Let’s find somewhere to eat.”

We discovered a guest house/restaurant a few minutes south of Sarangkot village perched on a rocky outcrop overlooking Phewa Lake. The vista was magnificent, high mountains and lush green Himalayan foothills to the horizon.

After dinner we conversed with the waitress. She was a local and owner of the guesthouse.

“Did you see Annapurna?”

“Yes we did, incredible, really amazing.”

“October and November much clear, no cloud.” She gently chided us for arriving in Nepal early in the trekking season.

Drinks were served followed by further rounds. I could not have imagined a more appropriate place to enjoy cold beer. The setting, tropical heat and soothing effects of alcohol made a perfect partnership. Meanwhile hours ticked by and we hardly noticed the sun’s rays casting longer shadows. I was about to order another when our host enquired as to where we were staying.



Local boy Sarangkot
LEE GALLAGHER

“Pokhara. By the Lake.”

“You take taxi?”

“Yes the taxi is coming at five.” I looked at my watch. It was 5.15.

“Christ! I think we’ve missed our taxi..... we might have to hike down now.”

Her calm almost homely demeanor abruptly turned serious. She pointed to the exit.

“No! You must go now! Go..Take Taxi ...”

I was confused but then swiftly interpreted a warning, that perhaps things up here were not always as pleasant as they appeared. Her anxious, even frightened expression was concerning.

We bade a hasty farewell and hurried down to the village. It took longer than expected. We were tipsy and had to double back after venturing down a cul-de-sac.

Sarangkot was completely deserted. No taxis, not a single person on the street. The shops and stalls had shut and there was nothing but an eerie silence.

Gina looked at me for inspiration.



“What now?”
 “Walk I suppose.”
 Daylight was fading fast so we set off at a brisk pace. We had only walked a short distance when I thought I heard footsteps behind us. I stopped and glanced back. There was nobody there. We continued on but then I heard it again. I looked back and in the middle of the street perhaps 100 meters away, stood three figures. Their stance was unmistakably menacing.

Gina was suddenly wary.
 ‘I don’t like the look of them.’
 “Nor do I, let’s keep moving.”
 We began a trot and as I peered over my shoulder it became clear they were pursuing. I halted briefly. They stopped too, glaring at us. Immediately I recognized the tallest man as the same diabolical creature from earlier on route to the summit.

I calculated my chances against three. There was none. All we could do was run and run faster.

The situation was deteriorating rapidly. Barely 50 meters separated us. Ahead the road swung sharply left and lay hidden behind some buildings. On the right, jungle covered mountainside dropped down to Phewa Lake. Once around the bend and momentarily out of sight I gripped Gina and



Gina taking pictures at Sarangkot
 LEE GALLAGHER

we shot through a gap in the bush.

After tumbling and sliding for several meters, we landed on a patch of sodden detritus. Adrenalin was pumping through my veins. Above on the road the sound of voices drifted down.

“Do you think they’ll follow us?” whispered Gina nervously.

“I doubt it, they must know it’s risky.”

Several minutes later the voices faded and I suspected we were safe. The sense of relief was palpable.

It was just possible to distinguish a trail in the semi darkness. Probably one of many that crossed the slope linking isolated homesteads to one another and crucially, Pokhara below.

Like clockwork, the monsoon began as darkness set in though heavier than any we had yet experienced. Our raingear was useless and the canopy offered no shelter. I cursed myself for not packing a headlamp but then remembered our disposable lighters had miniature in-built torches. They were merely powerful enough to illuminate our footsteps.

We began the descent, often losing the trail in the thick vegetation. After a tortuous back climb and endless traverse to avoid cliffs we stumbled upon a traditional Nepalese rural homestead. A woman appeared at the door. Instinctively realizing our predicament she ushered me away from an obvious trail and promptly led us to a path behind her house which terminated in blackness. I sensed a deep ravine and hesitated. The woman kept encouraging me to move. It was impossible to see the opposing side but I could just discern a meager ledge.

It was a matter of leaning in and inching with side steps, grasping the overhanging bushes for all they were worth. Rain was gushing off a spur above my head and into my eyes. We were half way across when suddenly the entire slope began to violently rumble. The sound resembled a tower block being demolished. The ledge beneath our feet began to crumble and slide away. I found myself frantically attempting to get a purchase and make progress at the same time. I don’t know how, but we managed to scramble to solid ground and collapsed with exhaustion.

“Earthquake?”

“Either that or a landslide. Wow that was close!”

The rumbling and shaking ceased. We had to keep moving. The trail was narrow and ill defined, camouflaged from disuse. The ordeal was becoming a burden on Gina. She repetitively asked if we were getting close to the bottom and I had to keep lying in the hope it might help maintain her morale.

It took over three hours to fight a way down, negotiating swollen streams and thick, almost impenetrable jungle. On steeper terrain we both slipped though were fortunately arrested from certain rapid descent by boulders and rocks. Completely shattered, we eventually staggered onto the shores of Phewa Lake. Gina was torn by scratches and cuts. Blood dripped down her legs from numerous leech bites. I was not much better and my shoulder ached from a collision with a tree. Our clothes were either ripped or shredded and now resembled rags.

There was difficulty comprehending what we had endured, it all seemed unreal.

“I cannot believe it Lee, all that because we missed our taxi!”

The next day we were totally wasted and did not leave the guest house, only arising to eat. The following morning on the bus ride out to begin our trek we passed Sarankot on its northern flank. From the summit to the valley floor a landslide 200 meters wide had taken everything down with it. Homes and terraces, entire swathes of forest, and as we discovered later, several people. At the very top, a large section of house hung over the void, the floor was gone and its empty interior clearly visible. ■



Pokhara and Phewa Lake from Sarankot
LEE GALLAGHER

WALK FOR THE WEEKEND: **THE WILDERNESS OF GULL ISLAND, MAGHERA, CO DONEGAL**

MICHAEL GUILFOYLE



Loughros Beg Bay with
Maghera Strand
MICHAEL GUILFOYLE

This walk of 15kms will take you into a very special Irish coastal wilderness, an untouched place of mountain and shore as only God and millennia of glaciers and Atlantic storms made for us. It is doable in a long single day, but to savour the unique wonder of the place, take two.

Ideally start with an overnight of sand and stone in the most easily accessible sea cave at Maghera, the first one on your way along the beach from the car park. Climb the

**Great beauty
opened up for
us to the east
and north**

sand slope and settle onto the sandy floor of this elemental place. Let the sound of the sea soothe away inevitable fears conjured up perhaps by a bedtime glass of wine and

flickering candlelight, even as it locks you down around high tide. Next morning take a swim, climb the dunes to the landward side of your cave and hike the coast over two days to tiny beautiful Port, ideally making the heart of this wilderness, beside Gull Island, your home along your way.

Summer sunshine came softly for us when we did this walk in the second week in August, though sadly this time logistics were against that magical cave overnight. And so we walked Maghera Strand past happy Summer-

clad people, a little incongruous in full back-packing gear, and climbed up and into a wild and silent land of heather and stone between the remotest of glacial loughs and the sea. As we climbed, great beauty opened up for us to the east and north. The low sun seemed to hush the land and shore and sea, from the distant Blue Stacks right around to Arranmore Island, and all the hills and dales of west





Tormore Island centre top, at the end of Glenlough Bay, with Port Hill to the left of picture
MICHAEL GUILFOYLE

a helpful fence line over the north-pointing shoulder of the western summit (460mts) of the Slievetooley massif. Port Hill and Tormore Island now came into view, across wide deserted Glenlough where the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas was unsuccessfully sent to “dry out” in 1930. We descended slowly to a swim in the Glenlough River, taking in a wonderland of island, cliffs and ragged sea-stacks as we went, before the long pull over Port Hill to beautiful Port.

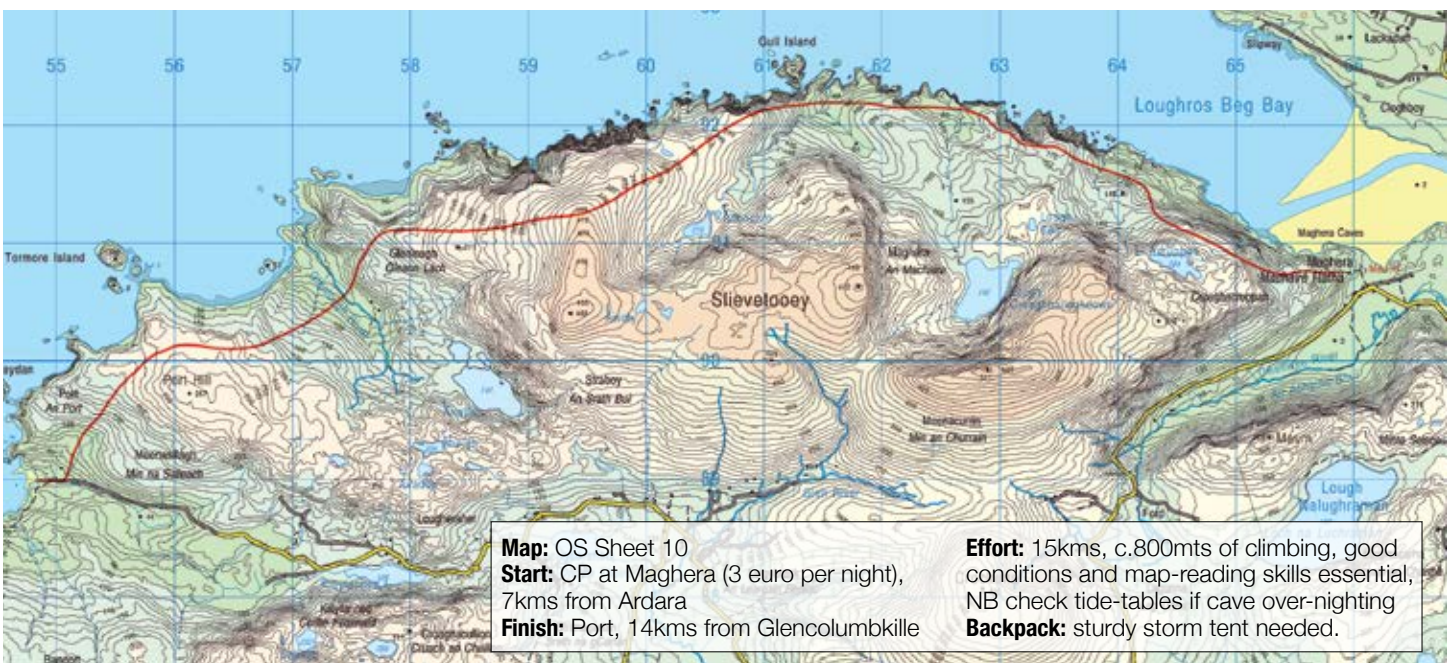
This robust coastal wilderness is one of only two in Ireland – the other being the northwest coast of Achill Island. We are privileged to have them to enjoy. ■

Donegal in between. Long lazy arcs of swell washed gently into an embrace of pristine sands, and heathers turned from purple to burgundy as a river of Atlantic gold pointed to the prospect and place of a special sunset.

The highlight of the two day hike was our long hang-out at Gull Island, bounded in beauty by a golden sunset and a silver sunrise. We happily lingered there in evening and morning, the same place in different light, and watched two solitary gulls wheel through the shingle-floored canyon between our high campsite and Gull Island. A morning pull of nearly 300mts took us safely away from precipitous ground where mountain meets sea, following



Sunset
MICHAEL GUILFOYLE





GEORGIA ON MY MIND! TREKKING IN THE MOUNTAINOUS MARGINS OF EUROPE

SHARRON SCHWARTZ AND MARTIN CRITCHLEY

Svan tower, Lamaria Church, Ushguli
PURPLE PEAK ADVENTURES

The stifling humidity of early evening has vanished and it's now icy-cold in the unheated sleeper train rattling through the night somewhere in western Georgia. Lying on a dreadfully lumpy seat covered in threadbare burgundy velvet, I tug a uselessly thin paper blanket tightly around my neck. It's way past midnight and we will soon be approaching our final station. For the princely sum of €10 each, we boarded this dimly-lit, dilapidated Soviet-era train in the capital, Tbilisi, for an overnight journey to the city of Zugdidi. It's patrolled by a colossal uniformed woman with her hair scraped back into a bun. It's a scenario that wouldn't look out of place in a Cold War spy thriller!

Indeed, this journey would have been inconceivable back in the 1980s when I first heard émigrés talking about Georgia. Situated in the mighty Caucasus Mountains on a narrow bridge of land between the Black and Caspian Seas, this country occupies a unique geopolitical space betwixt Europe and Asia, belonging neither fully to the east nor to the west. For much of the twentieth century it was firmly in the grip of communism, hidden away behind

the 'Iron Curtain' and virtually unknown to westerners. Its isolation finally ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, its subsequent independence in 1991, and the bloodless Rose Revolution of 2003 which set it firmly on a pro-Western trajectory.

In 2008, despite the turmoil of post-communist separatist wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we were busy planning a visit to Georgia only to be thwarted by the outbreak of the Russo-Georgian War. Our plans then languished on the back-burner for the next decade, before the political turbulence subsided sufficiently for us to book flights with *Lufthansa* from Dublin via Munich to Tbilisi.

A Sojourn in Svaneti

It's late-July and we're en route to the mountainous Upper Svaneti region which lies 220km north west of Tbilisi, in a part of Georgia that is particularly steeped in history and tradition. Now part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its medieval *koshki* (stone towers), Svaneti is the ancient homeland of the Svan. This ethnic minority group

with its own endangered language, unique tribal rituals and rich musical customs, formerly engaged in vicious blood feuds (*litsvri*) with their neighbours, and the tapering multi-storied defensive stone towers dominating the skylines of mountain villages are a reminder of this bellicose period.

In the Bronze-Age, the Svan homeland was a part of the incredibly wealthy and economically advanced Colchis Empire, which covered much of modern-day western Georgia. Alluvial gold was won from mountain streams using sheepskins, and the Colchians developed metal-working techniques far in advance of contemporary Aegean

long-running blood feuds still simmered

civilisation. It was to the shores of Colchis that Jason and the Argonauts set sail in their quest to capture 'The Golden Fleece', giving rise to one of

the most enduring tales in Greek mythology.

In the past, Svaneti had something of a reputation for lawlessness. Remote and insular, its people were unused to outsiders, long-running blood feuds still simmered and armed brigands on horseback roamed the countryside, sometimes robbing unsuspecting foreigners. But all that changed during the investment of the Saakashvili years (Georgia's former president), and modern-day Argonauts come not in search of gold, but of scenery and cultural heritage. Svaneti is now open to tourism, and homestays which can be booked over the internet have sprung up in even the remotest villages to cater to trekkers using a network of ancient trails that criss-cross this incredibly scenic mountainous region.

The train pulls into Zugdidi station not long after

daybreak. In the midst of an almighty thunderstorm, we jostle with locals and other trekkers to get out of the torrential rain and into a cramped *marshrutka* (a small mini-bus taxi) reeking of diesel fumes, for the 136km journey north to Mestia. This town, where chic new 'après ski' bars, alpine-style lodges and postmodernist architectural developments (many funded by the European Union) seem to be springing up everywhere, is the starting point of a classic multi-day trek to Ushguli. This group of villages are allegedly the highest continually inhabited settlements in Europe. You don't need a guide to undertake this 4-day 60km trek, and we'll be stopping at pre-booked homestays.

Holy Cow!

It feels decidedly muggy this morning after yesterday's storms. The weather is still unsettled, and a feeble sun struggles to shine through a blanket of ashen cloud as we head out of town to begin the steep 400-metre climb to a nearby pass. The well-signposted trail traverses pretty wooded glens interspersed with alpine meadows carpeted in knee-high wildflowers. The views over Mestia, the braided turquoise channels of the Mestiachala River, and the soaring peaks of the surrounding mountains gripped firmly by crooked fingers of glacial ice, are impressive.

The pass brings us to another valley through which the milky-grey Mulkhura River meanders past numerous tiny villages bristling with towers which look diminutive beneath the jagged snow-crested peaks of the High Caucasus looming far above them. We head for one named Chvabiani, along a trail which passes right through the semi-deserted village of Zhamushi. Its ancient stone houses are in various

states of dilapidation, bees buzz round scores of hives, and pigs, cows and chicken roam the narrow village lanes. There's little mechanisation here and we spot a man and woman arduously building a hayrick with pitchforks, and several others hoeing vegetable plots enclosed by wooden palisade fences.

It's late afternoon and threatening rain when we cross the roaring Mulkhura River via a very rickety wooden bridge. At the end of a muddy lane leading into Chvabiani is a gated compound containing

Mulkhura River
PURPLE PEAK ADVENTURES





Making kubdari with Maia
PURPLE PEAK ADVENTURES

Maia's Guesthouse, a large, double-storied stone house with a spacious wooden balcony, offering grandstand views of the surrounding mountains and a Svan tower in its grassy yard. Maia, a big-hearted woman with a broad smile and a pair of mischievous brown eyes, does not speak English, but in faltering Russian we manage to communicate. She's in an ebullient mood and immediately pulls me into the kitchen where her grandchildren stare and giggle as I help her to make *kubdari* (the Svan signature dish of bread stuffed with spicy meat).

Dinner is tasty and plentiful, the ingredients all home-grown and reared, and afterwards we are invited to try *chacha*, their homebrewed pomace brandy flavoured with honey from their beehives. Never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, with a hearty 'Zazdarovje', I knock back a small glass of the amber liquid. Maia immediately refills it with a wicked grin, and I imbibe once more to her squeals of laughter. I point to an empty glass and suggest that she has one too. Arms linked, we knock back our shots with great merriment.

She then grabs me by the

arm and leads me across the darkening yard towards a shed where I'm placed on a three-legged stool. Two eyes suddenly appear in the gloom and I laugh ruefully when it dawns on me that I've been well and truly set up. I'm about to milk a cow for the first time in my life! The docile animal ambles forward, and taking an udder in each hand, she demonstrates what to do. She makes it look easy, but much to her amusement my efforts are virtually in vain and I manage to extract barely enough milk to wet the bottom of the pail! Slightly embarrassed, I leave her to it and slope off to bed, head full of *chacha*...

Somewhere over the Rainbow

It rained heavily in the night and the morning dawns cool and grey. The nearby mountains are snuggled under a thick duvet of white cloud as we begin the 13km trek to Adishi village along a forested trail that climbs

steeply for over 700 metres to a road leading to the new Tetnuldi Ski Resort. It isn't well-marked and we stray off it several times into annoyingly dense thickets of Caucasian rhododendron.

Past the ski resort, we follow the road up another 200 metres to reach the undulating downward trail to Adishi. The sun eventually breaks through the cloud, and the wet landscape gleams in pin-sharp detail in the lurid light. We are completely surrounded by rich meadow pastures which form dazzling, buzzing, technicolour insect-carpeted of



Walking through Alpine meadows
PURPLE PEAK ADVENTURES



white ox-eye daisies, candy-pink snakeweed, pale-lemon lilies, pink pyrethrum, mauve geraniums, flame-orange marigolds, speedwell-blue forget-me-nots, and saffron horse-heal. I've never seen such a dense, magnificently diverse floral display, or beheld such a riotous chorus of insects.

You don't really see Adishi, a remote village cut off by snow for around six months of the year, until you're virtually on top of it. Perched on a sloping hillside just above the Adishchala River, around a dozen towers sprout from amid a tightly clustered mass of nougat-coloured stone houses. This was once a thriving village of over 60 families and boasted seven churches and dozens of priceless sacred artifacts, including the Adishi Gospels dating from 897 AD. But during the Soviet period it became a virtual ghost town and only four families remained, eking out an increasingly precarious existence. It's prime location on the Mestia to Ushguli trekking route has resulted in its renaissance. As we approach its outskirts we are caught in a heavy shower, but the sun suddenly breaks through the cloud behind us flooding the landscape in a golden light, causing a shimmering rainbow to arch right over the rooftops.

during the Soviet period it became a virtual ghost town

Elizabeth's Guesthouse is a huge, ramshackle two-storied family dwelling house with a cerulean-blue wooden façade dominated by scores of small windows. It's acquired a new extension since our stay and is located at the lower end of the village. Elizabeth Kaldani, a sharp, business-savvy young woman, shows us up a steep, rickety staircase to our pre-booked room. It's rather spartan with bare wooden floorboards, a table which has lost most of its varnish, an enormous

ancient wardrobe and a sagging double bedstead sporting mismatched linen and garishly patterned blankets. The place is packed to the rafters with at least a dozen other trekkers, the family have given up their bedrooms to sleep in makeshift cots on the wide landing outside our room, and there's a queue for the communal shower.

On the veranda where the dinner table is being set, a jet-black lamb is skipping about and seems to enjoy being the centre of attention with some of our fellow guests. However, it soon disgraces itself by peeing all over the floor! None of the Georgians bat an eyelid, but one or two Europeans look on aghast! These village folk are used to living cheek by jowl with their livestock and they aren't fussy about hygiene. From around €17-25 per person per night

for bed and breakfast (lunch and dinner are extra, usually in the region of €3-6), don't expect the same standards we enjoy in Western Europe.

A dinner of homemade chicken and vegetable soup, crispy fresh salads and potato fritters satiates our hunger. Bottles of Georgian beer are procured from a café in the village as we chat into the night with our fellow trekkers. As we climb the stairs to bed, I spot a mere sliver of a moon in a star-filled sky, making me hopeful of better weather tomorrow.

River Deep and Mountain High

I'm woken by the loud lowing of a cow directly below our bedroom window. The unsettled weather of yesterday has indeed passed over and there isn't a cloud in the cobalt-blue sky. In the shade it's deliciously cool, but I've already worked up a sweat just sitting at the breakfast table in the sun-drenched yard. It's going to be an absolute scorcher on this, the toughest day of the trek. We wolf down great doorstops of succulent *khachapuri* (cheese stuffed bread), homemade cheese and yoghurt, scrambled eggs, salad with herbs, and crispy potatoes prepared by Elizabeth's grandmother on a wood-fired stove. This veritable smorgasbord of delicacies is washed down with fruit *kompot*.

The trail to Iprali, the next large village which is over 18km away, takes us up through Adishi's narrow maze

of cobbled streets, where livestock roam freely amid a jumble of dilapidated houses with rusting window shutters and wonky wooden verandas. It's like stepping back into the medieval era. As we proceed up the valley above the village, the magnificent snow-capped summits of some of Svaneti's most significant peaks dominate our field of vision: the 5,193-metre-high Mount Shkhara, Georgia's highest mountain; the distinctive spire-shaped double summit of Ushba, dubbed 'the Matterhorn of the Caucasus'; and the iconic pyramid-shaped Mount Tetnuldi.

We soon spot the faint line of the trail leading over the pass to the neighbouring valley, but we must first cross the Adishchala River, a hot topic of conversation round the dinner table last night, and best tackled early in the morning when the river level is lowest. Elizabeth's brother

is already there with his horse to take trekkers across for 15 lari each (over €4), which is a real rip off (and the cost has recently risen to over €5)! He hails us as we approach the frigid, deep and menacing milky-grey water flowing straight off the Adhisi Glacier, a huge wall of shattered, gnarled ice which dramatically dominates the end of the valley. With some

difficulty I mount the horse and after securing my rucksack, he hops effortlessly into the saddle behind me. The stoic beast sallies forth into the torrent, gingerly negotiating the river cobbles churning unseen in the river bed, and after one or two heart-stopping stumbles, it deposits us safely

**livestock
roam freely
amid a jumble
of dilapidated
houses**



Top of Chkhunderi Pass
PURPLE PEAK ADVENTURES



on the opposite bank.

The 500-metre climb to the Chkhunderi Pass (2,655m), the highest on the trail, is steep and absolutely gruelling in the heat and humidity and we're plagued by pestilential clouds of horseflies. But the bird's-eye view of the Adishi Glacier with a silvery mare's tail of water cascading from a turquoise cave in its icy snout, more than compensates for the discomfort. I'm truly aghast at the mountains' raw physicality. Everywhere serrated fins of grey rock tipped with snow thrust upwards from gleaming glaciers with contorted fingers of ice that claw their way to the very bottom of the verdant valley floors.

the silence that follows is absolutely spine-chilling

From the pass we descend steeply through glorious flower-strewn, sun-kissed alpine meadows towards the Khaldechala River. An almighty gunshot-like sound suddenly ricochets round the valley. A huge slab of snow and ice has slipped from the nearby Zaresho-Khalde Glacier and is tearing at break-neck speed down the mountain in vampire-white clouds, before crashing onto the valley floor.

A gut-churning rumble and a powerful cool blast of air reach us shortly after the event. As the avalanche subsides, the silence that follows is absolutely spine-chilling.

We stop at the *Khalde Guesthouse*, the only inhabited house in a crumbling ancient village of the same name on the mountainside just above Iprali, where we are warmly greeted by an equally ancient couple who are Elizabeth Kaldani's cousins. The man, whose heavily-lined face is the colour of tanned leather, kindly lights a wood-burning stove to heat some water for us to take a much-needed shower. As dusk falls, we congregate round a large dinner table with an affable group of fellow trekkers, and eagerly demolish another excellent home-cooked dinner interspersed with countless shots of wickedly potent *chacha*...

Medieval Mountain Magic

Ushguli, located at an altitude of 2,100 metres, is a community of four small villages (Zhibiani, Chvibiani, Chazhashi and Murqmeli), located at the confluence of the Enguri and Shavtsqala-Kvishara Rivers which are fed by the enormous glaciers of nearby Mount Shkhara. These villages pride themselves on being the highest continually



inhabited settlements in Europe and lie at the heart of Upper Svaneti, which has been described as a living ethnographic museum. The centre of the community, Chazhashi, has indeed been declared a museum, and is the jewel in the crown of the Upper Svaneti UNESCO World Heritage Site, making it a magnet for tourism.

I have developed a rather painful pinched nerve in one of my legs, and as we have completed the most scenic parts of the trek, we opt not to walk the final 15km to our accommodation in Zhibiani village along arguably the least interesting stretch of the route which passes partially along a steep and dusty mountain road. For a few lari, we hitch a lift with a local delivery man who drops us at the *Discover Ushguli* guesthouse. This is sited at the northern end of the haphazard maze of narrow, dung-strewn village streets running between honey-coloured stone houses with ornately carved verandas set amid umpteen crumbling tower houses. Our very basic but spotlessly clean room with two single beds looks out over the medieval Lamaria Church.

We visit the museum, Lamaria Church, and a renovated medieval tower house, and amble part way along the trail above the Enguri River towards the Shkhara Glacier. The villages have a timeless charm; old men sit on doorsteps to chat and smoke, livestock wander about freely, there are beehives in the gardens, and piles of wood chopped ready for the long, hard winter ahead. However, as in Mestia, change is in the air here too, as the incongruous

old men sit on doorsteps to chat and smoke

sight of several enormous Swiss-style chalets being built among the crumbling Svan towers attest.

We take our evening meal in the guesthouse’s garden where the air is scented with fragrant woodsmoke from the fire on which our dinner is being cooked. Sipping cold beers, we watch in reverent silence as the setting sun enflames the jagged peaks of the nearby snow-capped Mount Shkhara, sending it vermillion, then ox-blood-red.

The following morning after a breakfast fit for a king,

we walk down to the old bridge between Chvibiani and Chazhashi where *marshrutkas* leave for Mestia. It's a scene of total mayhem. There are well over two dozen people - locals and tourists - haggling with several drivers over the fare. Amid the crowd, a rather precocious young boy on horseback is barking orders at everyone in broken English and Svan. Ignoring his constant heckling, we and four other trekkers manage to quietly procure a lift for a very good price from an old couple in their aged Mitsubishi *Delica* van, much to the chagrin of the young boy and drivers!

The 60km journey to Mestia entails driving through the narrow Enguri Gorge along a death-trap unsealed road that throws up clouds of talcum-powder fine dust. This will soon be a thing of the past as the road is currently being paved, which will prove to be something of a double-edged sword for the people of this Tolkienesque World Heritage Site valley. Balancing the benefits of increased tourism, while safeguarding the ancient customs and traditions of the Svan from homogenising outside influences, will undoubtedly prove challenging.

Back in Mestia we muse over our sojourn in Svaneti. In a

world of increasingly sanitised, over-commercialised travel, this trek through a technicolour wonderland still largely

a technicolour wonderland still largely untouched by modernity

untouched by modernity, was a refreshing change. It offered a tantalising glimpse into a unique cultural backwater at the very margins of Europe,

but one that is on the cusp of change. A whole new Europe, a gloriously wild yet very welcoming one, presented itself and all we needed to do to fully immerse ourselves in it was to lace up our hiking boots and hit the trail.



Follow us on



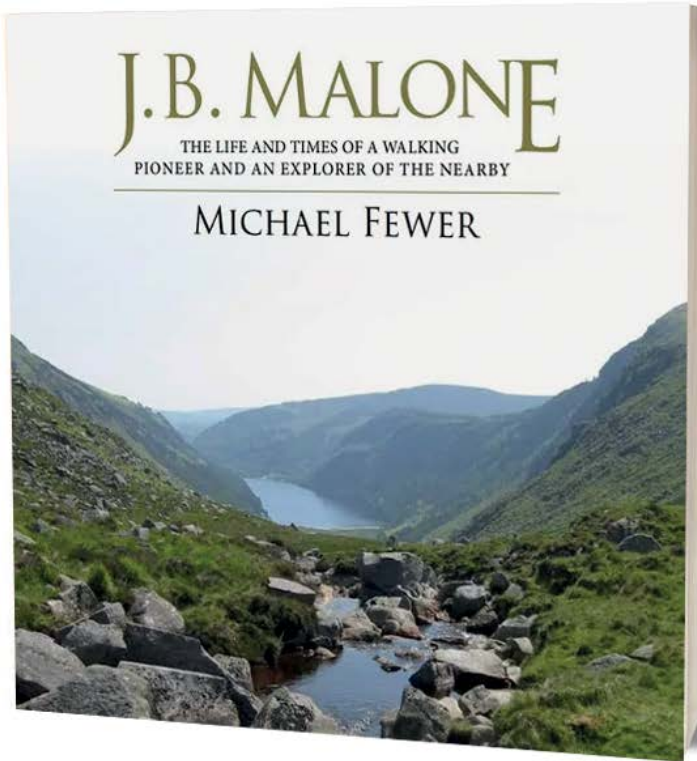
Sharron Schwartz and Martin Critchley are a couple of keen photographers and film-makers who live in Donegal. For more than a decade they have enjoyed trekking and travelling worldwide.

They operate photography tours and workshops.

www.purplepeakadventures.com/ ■



Horse used to cross the Adishi River
PURPLE PEAK ADVENTURES



**BOOK REVIEW:
‘JB MALONE: THE
LIFE AND TIMES
OF A WALKING
PIONEER AND
EXPLORER OF
THE NEARBY’
BY MICHAEL
FEWER**

REVIEWED FOR MOUNTAINVIEWS BY **TOM BARRAGRY**



JB Malone

A biography of JB Malone, the pioneering hill walker and prime mover behind the establishment of one of the first of Ireland’s way marked trails, the Wicklow Way, is long overdue. This lacuna has now been filled with the arrival of Michael Fewer’s latest Book : “JB Malone The Life and Times of a Walking Pioneer and Explorer of the Nearby”.

The author, has clearly enjoyed much unique and direct access to many heretofore unseen records, diaries, writings and log books of JB Malone, and he has happily relied on all of these extensively in his text. These personal records written in Malone’s unique style, certainly contribute valuable new information and add much corroborative detail into the public domain. They provide new insights

into the determination, curiosity, passion, perseverance and precision of JB Malone, both as a walker, journalist, cartographer and chronicler.

This book is liberally sprinkled with many illustrations including old photographs of JB Malone, and with reproductions of his old maps, articles, and hand drawn walking routes which are delightfully interesting... especially his detailed tabular account of the trip to Mullaghcleevaun in 1936.

Throughout the book, Fewer writes with a fluid, relaxed, and easy style which constantly engages the reader’s interest. The book is comprehensive as to the chronological substance and details of JB’s employment career, personal life, walking forays and writing pursuits.

The author traces Malone’s early years in Leeds and then his move to Ireland, where in 1932, he first laid his eyes upon the vista of Kilmashogue, Montpelier Hill and the Hellfire club, from his bedroom window. It was this landscape which whetted his appetite and magnetically drew him towards the Dublin and Wicklow mountains. Over the succeeding years Malone pressed further into Wicklow, meticulously recording his ascents of Lugnaquilla, Mullaghcleevaun, Arts Cross and many other familiar summits. He developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of

JB's log of the ascent of Mullaghcleevaun in 1936

the hills, with an accompanying propensity for forensic detail and accuracy in respect of the landscape, its wildlife, and its topography. Fewer repeatedly draws out Malone's passion for hill walking and its recording, which was all consuming, and notes that he was eventually a member of Cospóir, the Long Distance Walking Routes Committee, The Ramblers Walking Club, The Brothers of the Lug, Life member of An Óige, and many more.

Interestingly, as the author points out, when Malone was a novice hill walker, he did not possess a great knowledge of things historical nor archaeological. (Malone once described the megalithic tomb on Seefin summit as "a queer group of stones"). However, he did expand and develop his knowledge to a prodigious degree over the subsequent years by regular and assiduous study in the book lined study of the attic in his home, and not least by the many hours he spent in the National Library. Fewer notes the close parallel between Malone and his older English counterpart Alfred Wainwright who shared a similar passion for rambling the hills and committing his observations to very fine pen and ink notations and drawings. (In addition, neither of them could drive !).

Beginning in the 1930s and 40s, Malone travelled

CLIMB OF MULLAGHCLEEVAVUN 17-4-36					
TIME	POSITION	FOOT MARKS	ALTITUDE	WEATHER	SURFACE
10.00	DEP. BUREN QUAY DUBLIN	16.211		Wind WSW, slight.	
10.20	(PASSING) TALLAGHT	16. C. 10.	300.	Wind WNW, slight.	Main Rd. to Ballyglass
10.45	" BRITTAS	120 AB.	700.	No cloud over hills.	do.
11.10	DEP. SALFINGTON	120 C7.	700.	Snow lying above 2000ft.	Un-tarred Road.
11.30	ARR. LACKAN	120 D8	850.		do.
1.15	" BALLYMURTAGH GAP.	120 D7	1678.	Wind NW, fresh & strong.	do.
2.10	DEP. "	120 D7	1678.	Snow squalls over Black Hill.	accommodate Rd. Soft granite
2.20	ARR. END OF ACCOMMODATE	120 D9	1500.	Snow squalls from NW.	sand. slight turf banks.
3.20	" SUMMIT 1ST TERRACE (1ST HALT HERE)	120 E9	1750.	Wind veers WNW and W.	Deep heather, broken ground.
3.45	" MIDDLE 2ND TERRACE	120 E9	2200.	Snow fades off towards Sully Gap, and Sca mtns.	Broken ground, surface Br (as on Cooly mtn)
4.15	" CLEEVAVUN SUMMIT (2ND HALT HERE)	120 E9	2788.	Strong sun. Clear sky, W. Calm. Sky clear, except in NE, and in SSW. Welsh coat in sight E & S.	Broken ground, weathered heat bog.
5.30	DEP. CLEEVAVUN SUMMIT	120 E9	2788.		Course, short grass & a few boulders.
5.45	ARR. MIDDLE 2ND TERRACE (3RD HALT HERE)	120 E9	2200.	Wind veers SSW. Cloud coming up from SSW and SW.	Great bog weathered into channels.
6.0	" SOUTH FLANK BLACK MOUNTAIN	120 D8	1600.	Rain - wind over Cleevavun, driving from SSW	Soggy, slightly broken ground.
6.30	" WEST "	120 D8	1300.		Rocks scattered on a turf grass slope.
7.30	" BALLYMURTAGH - LACKAN	120 D8	700.	Wind SSW, drizzling rain.	Un-tarred Road.
7.45	" LACKAN.	120 D8	850.	Heavy cloud on all hills above 1000ft. Drizzle.	
8.00	" SALLYMURTAGH	120 D7	700.		
8.50	DEP. BLESSINGTON	120 C7	700.	Drizzle.	
9.15	DEP. "	120 C7	700.	Drizzle.	Main Rd. Dublin - Ballyglass
10.00	ARR. TERENURE.	16.211	150.	Cell, gusty rain.	

by bike or bus to his walking routes, where he ploughed his solitary furrow, driven by his own initiative, energy, tenacity and curiosity. The author mentions that JB Malone was a talented artist and could have had a career as a cartographer, graphic artist or cartoonist. This skill is clearly evident in all of the hand drawn maps and navigational routes displayed in the book.

In the period 1932-45 Malone kept meticulous journals of his walking trips in hard-back notebooks, where he noted weather conditions, routes, times, and his own observations on the countryside around him. These would prove invaluable resources for the planning of the Wicklow Way in later years.

As is known to many, the copious and prolific accounts he kept of each of his walks accumulated, such that in 1939 he was commissioned by the "Evening Herald" to write a series of regular hill walking articles. This long running series, known as "The Open Road" eventually ran to 959 articles. On the back of the popularity of these articles, in 1950 a historic trail-finder book called "The Open Road" was published.

Malone also ventured into broadcasting for the fledgling Telefís Eireann service in 1962/63 with his "Mountain and Meadow" series produced by his friend James Plunkett (of "Strumpet City" fame). Shortly after this came the publication of his book "Walking in Wicklow" in 1964. Malone then turned his architectural, and historical knowledge into the basis of another series of articles for the "Evening Herald" called "Know Your Dublin" which traced the history and heritage of well-known and not so well known buildings and landmarks in Dublin. A compilation of these articles was published in book form also under the same name

JB Malone in 1962



THE EVENING HERALD, FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 1939.

The Friendly Mountains—III.

CRUAGH, GLENDOO AND GLENCULLEN

J. B. MALONE.

IF you want proof that variety is the chief attraction of the Wicklow Hills, you should explore Glencullen after sampling the wide horizons offered by the Three Rock Mountains.

From Billy's Bridge (reached by the Whitechurch or Pine Forest bus) you can take the "back road," the first turn left beyond the bridge.

As this road rises gradually through quiet green fields, the hills fill more and more the sky. Soon you pass Mount Venus, and come under Mount

cullen, and gradually houses and green fields appear again.

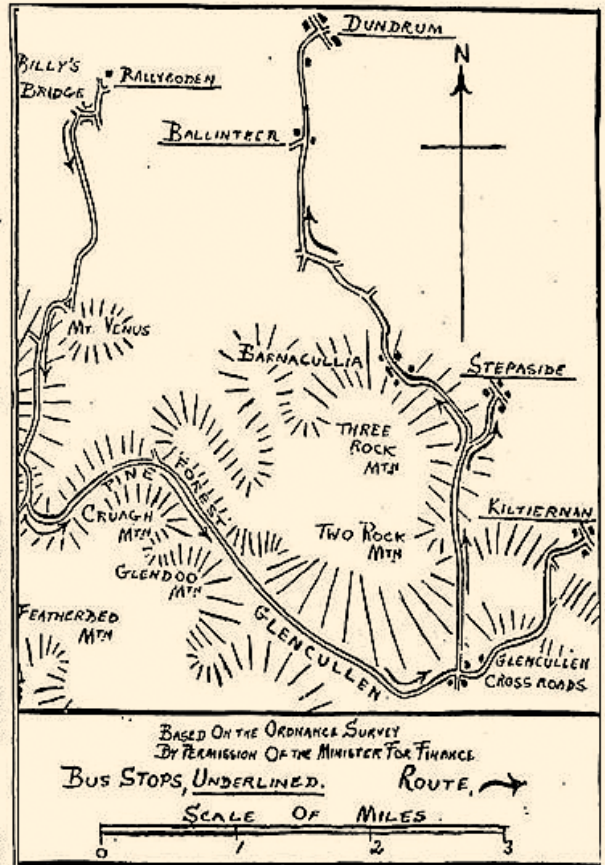


Away ahead rises the graceful cone of Big Sugarloaf, contrasting with the rounded outlines of the Glencullen Mountains on your right.

Arriving at Glencullen crossroads, you can either go straight on downhill to Kiltiernan for a bus, or turn left and follow the Barnacullia road up and down across the flanks of Two Rock, to get a bus at Ballinteer or Dundrum.



All the roads described in this article lie within Co. Dublin, and all



in 1969. These activities and much more are documented and described in Fewer's book.

The establishment of the Wicklow Way of course is what JB Malone is most closely associated with, and the author devotes considerable attention to the establishment of Ireland's major way marked trail. This whole concept had been in gestation in JB's head for many years going back to the early forties and JB had first proposed such a guided walk in 1966. Fewer records the chronology and the number of complexities involved in establishing this trail, not least the problems of rights of way.

JB Malone was clearly a fairly formidable figure at all levels, with strong views on how things should be done. The establishment of the Wicklow Way trail, and JB's views regarding "ownership" and "patent rights" thereon, was not without its problems. Malone had often discussed the new trail, modelled on the

Pennine Way, with the Irish Ramblers Club (of which he was member) and the IRC then became deeply involved in designing this route on a practical basis. Many conjoint meetings were held between the parties, concerning this

Lough Tay 1930



putative dual endeavour, but unfortunately this cooperative venture subsequently unravelled. A number of less than happy written exchanges from JB to the Irish Ramblers Club can be attested to by a number of longstanding members of that club today, who personally knew and walked with JB Malone. Their recollections would be somewhat at variance from those proffered by the author in this book, at least in terms of the origins of the Wicklow Way. There are clearly two sides to this story. A related issue that arises here is the relative tardiness in the establishment of any national coordinating body to oversee the sport of hill walking in Ireland in those early years. Perhaps, the pre-eminence and domination of the scene by a few of the major walking clubs and mountaineers at that time had, unwittingly, some inhibitory and negative effects .

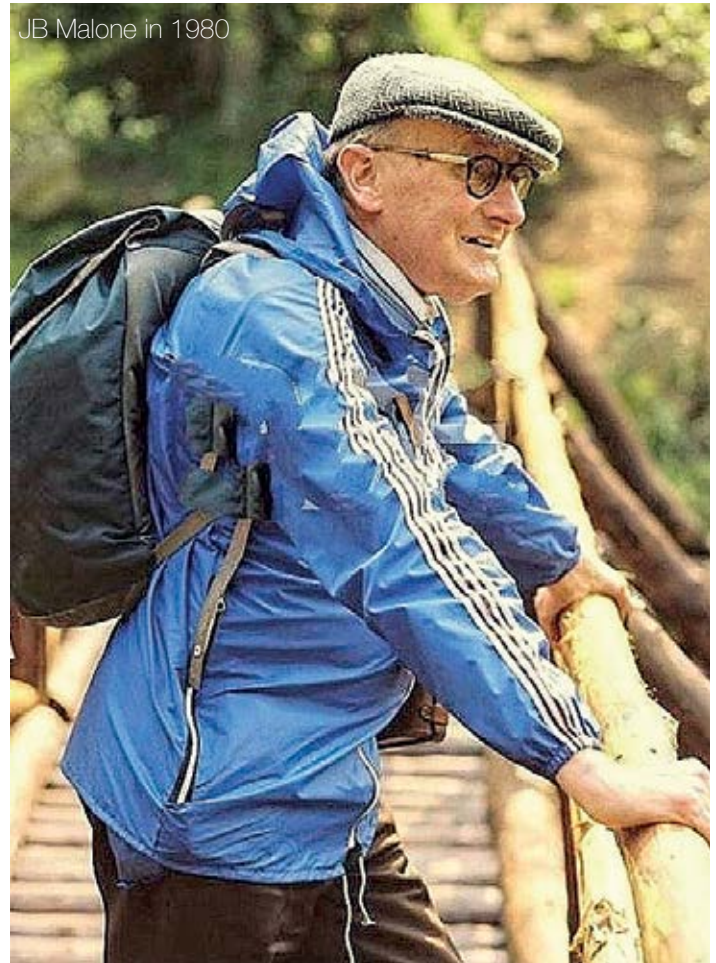
The appendix to this book reproduces four of Malone's old articles from the "Evening Herald" from 1940 to 1949. ("The Open Road" and "Over the Hills"). These make for wonderful and nostalgic reading and illustrate Malone's knowledge of the countryside and his great eye for navigational and environmental detail.

Fewer's book contains quite a number of attractive photographs .both of JB Malone himself and of Wicklow landscapes. Curiously, a number of the black and white photos of JB are relatively small, whereas the coloured photographs of familiar Wicklow landscapes, are somewhat larger and take up more space .I would have wished it to be the other way round and also to have included even more old JB documents and photographs . But that is a minor detail. There are also some repetitions in the book, a number of name misspellings, and incorrect dates given for Alfred Wainwright, which could have been better edited out.

On balance, this is a rewarding and informative book



JB Malone in 1980



which is to be highly recommended and which will not disappoint the reader. It is presented in a very attractive physical format, soft covered, with copious illustrations, old maps, reproductions of old articles and nostalgic black and white photographs .

It is highly readable, and an attractively written, new, and well researched book. The enthusiasm of the author, coupled with his mastery of his subject, comes across with high impact and to the great benefit of the reader.

As the latest offering, in filling a void and in covering a much needed biographical subject, this oeuvre is up there with the best of Fewer's previous books, and it provides an excellent insight into the life of one of Ireland's most significant walking pioneers.

***"JB Malone The Life and Times of a Walking Pioneer and Explorer of the Nearby" By Michael Fewer
Published by South Dublin Libraries 2021.
149pp. (RRP 20 Euro)***

Prof. T. Barragry, when he is not out walking the hills, is the author of a number of international scientific textbooks, and is also a peer reviewer for international biomedical scientific journals. ■



MOUNT ARARAT

FERGAL HINGERTY

Ararat from the Turkish side

Once you see this mountain, there is only one word that can be used... “Wow!”

I first saw this mountain from the east in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. On that day, when it was 43C in Yerevan, a snow-capped mountain 65 km away was an unbelievable sight. It is the national symbol of Armenia and is on everything from banknotes to brandy bottles. At first sight I was smitten, and I knew that one day I would have to climb it.

Background

This is one of the most iconic mountains on the planet and is known by many names by the local peoples of the area, but was only called Mount Ararat by Westerners from the Middle Ages onwards. Some of the local names include *Uwuhu* or *Masis* (Armenian) ... *Ağrı Dağı* (Turkish) ... *Çiyayê Agirî* (Kurdish)... *Kūh-e Nūh* (Persian). Mount Ararat is easily identified from space and was at the centre of Middle Eastern history for millennia, fought over by Turks, Kurds,

Persians, Armenians, Greeks, Phoenicians, Russians and many others. It is of course most famously known as the resting place of Noah’s Ark after the flood (Genesis 8:4).

The Persian name literally means Noah’s Mountain; however, given the long climb, the Turkish name translates into the Mountain of Pain, and that is equally apt. The mountain consists of two peaks, Greater Ararat (5,137m) and Lesser Ararat (3,896m); when we were climbing, we agreed that the taller one, despite the difficulties, did not look as hard or as steep as the lower one.

I have been told by an Armenian friend that if you go into any Armenian restaurant and the ubiquitous photo of Ararat is not on the wall, leave straight away, because it is not authentic but an imposter! Due to the troubled history between the Turks and the Armenians, the border is currently closed, and Mount Ararat can only be climbed from the Turkish side. Not only that, but a permit from the Turkish Army has to be obtained to climb it.

...(Not Constantinople)

My climbing group had flown into Istanbul a few days previously and, after assembling in a central hotel, flew on a domestic flight to Van city. From there, after seeing the local sights, we got a bus to Doğubayazıt, which is most people's base when climbing Mount Ararat.

Doğubayazıt is a town of around 120,000 people that appears to have been thrown together. There is no semblance of a centre, vacant lots lie beside apartment blocks, and there is a layer of dust on everything. The town has at least six heavily fortified barracks and security is tight due to its border location. It is quiet at night time, but very busy from the first call to prayer at 6am. There are many shops selling many products, as the town is a hub for the small villages that are scattered around this mountainous area.

We did a warm-up climb of 1,000 metres to the summit of Dogebaz (3,325m), but the following morning, after a final breakfast in the Tehran Hotel in Doğubayazıt, the big day had arrived, so we went to the local supermarket for last minute food shopping. The horses that would accompany us were able to take supplies of mineral water as well as our bags, so I stocked up; even the boiled water did not

look great for drinking. Bananas, bread and protein bars were added to the supplies.

The approach

Now, finally, the moment was upon us, we were about to start climbing Mount Ararat. We piled into two minibuses along with our gear and drove to the village of Cevirme, and continued over a dusty track to the starting point where the horses were waiting. With our second bags on the horses and rucksacks on our backs, the climb was finally on. A mix of excitement and nervousness was palpable as we lashed the factor 50 sunscreen on. The starting point was at 2200m and the Lower Base Camp was at 3200m, so there was a bit of climbing to be done.

UV levels increase with height, so the sun cream was vital in the thin air with the sun beating down and temperatures in the mid-twenties. After five hours we reached Lower Base Camp in a rocky, walled off area, where a toilet tents, two mess tents and our own tents were assembled. Towering over us all the way was the mighty Ararat but, despite climbing around 1,000 metres, it seemed we were getting no closer to it!

We got our bags from the horses and sorted out our



The party on the lower slopes



Cooking under canvas

sleeping arrangements in the tents, before heading to the mess tent to get the jet boils working. Soon the first of the packet food was prepared which we would eat over the next few days. This base camp had milky looking water from one of the nearby springs, which was undrinkable unless boiled first.

After eating there was a while to enjoy the night sky and the stars, but sadly the peacefulness was ruined somewhat by the military plane which flew constantly at night in the area. Being close to the Armenian and Iranian borders (and also with a large Kurdish population in the area) ensured that the military and the Jandarma were ever present.

The following morning, after an early breakfast and wash, we were ready for an acclimatization walk up the Cevirme Ridge (which runs parallel to the main route) to the Upper Base Camp. Before we left the Anatolian Shepherd dog with us came over to say hello and thankfully the hello was a bit more pleasant than what I had received from his cousins in Georgia!

Once again it was around 1,000 metres of climbing; this was to help our bodies acclimatize in the thin air. The route was tough, with a lot of mini scrambles over loose rocks and boulders. Tea was ready for us at the Upper Base Camp, made by the guides, and then it was down the main route back to Lower Base Camp. We arrived back early evening and, after eating, an early night was taken as two tough days were to follow. We all slept well



Camping under the stars



The desolation of the higher slopes

after being up at 4200m earlier.

The next day we got up early and packed the spare bags for the horses, breakfasted, and again piled on the sunscreen before heading up the track by the main route to the Upper Base Camp. We arrived early afternoon and, after a hot meal, had another early night. The horses were the heroes of the hour; whereas we struggled in the heat and dust and thin air, they sailed up majestically to the camp with our bags and water. A case of two legs good, four legs better!

The climb

After a restless snooze for a few hours, we were up at 1am to boil water for tea and a warm breakfast. We put on various layers of thermal gear and our head torches. The water spring was a short distance over the rocky "waste area" which is never a pleasant walk, night or day! We spent a few minutes looking at the stars in the very cold air - some sight at 4000m, with no light pollution. One unusual but vital thing was applying sunscreen (in the dark at a temperature of -7C). At higher altitudes the UV levels rise, and the sun bounces off the snow and ice. Then it is very easy to burn, and much harder to apply sunscreen in a cold wind at altitude.

At 2.10am we assembled outside the mess tent and the long climb commenced. We started along a rough track

and over rocks; higher and higher, on and on, we headed into the cold night. We could feel the thin air tightening our chests with each upward step. As it got colder, each break for a rest and a sip of hot tea was gratefully appreciated. Cold water was also essential (it may not have been as appreciated as much as the tea), as dehydration can be a major problem when you have many layers on. Without exception, and in different ways, we all suffered some effects of the altitude: headaches, stomach problems, difficulty breathing and a general feeling of malaise. The only light, apart from the stars, was the wonderful sight of the chain of climbers heading upwards with their headtorches, leading the way.

After a while the skies to the east started to brighten, and behind us, over the flat lands to the west, the mighty shadow of Mount Ararat began to cast its spell. After five hours we reached the highest point of rock, and the interesting and challenging part of the walk began.

It was getting bright when we took the crampon bags out of our rucksacks and attached the crampons to our boots, before gingerly, one by one, we followed the guide up over the sheets of ice that covered the mountain. A few hundred metres of ascent later, we climbed onto the narrow ridge that marks the summit. We had made it to 5137m and were at the summit of Mount Ararat at last.

Things become wintry as the summit is neared



Summit fever

A great sense of euphoria swept over us. For those who had climbed a 5000m peak before there was a quiet sense of satisfaction. However, for those whose first 5000m peak it was, there was a mighty but brief celebration. Everybody was conscious that getting to the summit was optional but to descend afterwards was always mandatory. We all realized that this was only the halfway point, we still had to descend, and in many ways that is always the difficult part. "Ascending is physical, but descending is mental", the old saying goes.

The inevitable group and single photographs followed quickly, before we started our descent. We moved slowly, as one or two were feeling the effects of the altitude. Descending the ice sheet was perilous even with twelve-point crampons on our boots. This was a tricky section, as we knew that only our crampons kept us attached to the mountain. Metre by metre we slowly descended through the glistening white landscape, mindful to avoid the clear smooth ice and look for the crunchy white bits. Eventually

we reached the rocky section and the crampons were taken off for a more conventional descent.

We descended the 1000 metres to our Upper Base Camp, had a quick cup of tea and prepared our spare bags for the horses. We were looking forward to getting back down from this high altitude.

After a long descent through the rocks, we arrived at Lower Base Camp 15 hours and 23 minutes after we had started that morning. There was a surprise for us - there would be no packet food that night. It had been secretly arranged that the local village would slaughter a lamb, and the guides cooked it with rice and gherkins. Everyone enjoyed the meal and then headed to the tents for a deep sleep.

The following day was the day that the reality of what we had achieved really sunk in. We had done it, we had really done it, we had climbed Mount Ararat. Early morning photographs posing on a rock with various flags and with the summit in the background ensued. Then we got water from the spring to get the jet boils working again for the last

packet food breakfast. Finally, after packing our gear for the horses, we started our last 1000 metre descent to where the minibuses waited to bring us back to Doğubayazıt. We arrived mid-afternoon and went straight to one of the few restaurants that served alcohol for a few beers and kebabs, before walking back to our hotel.

In search of...

As for Noah's Ark, well there was no sign of it. I was not the first to climb this mountain curious about the Ark and I won't be the last. The astronaut, Jim Irwin, having become fascinated after seeing Mount Ararat from orbit, led six expeditions afterwards to this mountain looking for the Ark and found nothing. There are huge moraines and massive

boulders scattered all over this mountain, so if the remains of the Ark are there, more than a few rocks will have to be lifted first to expose it.

This wonderful trip in eastern Turkey was arranged by Ewa Stachura from Mountain Freaks Mountain Travel & Adventure Agency based in Stepsminda, Georgia. www.mountainfreaks.ge

Fergal Hingerty came to hillwalking relatively late in life, but has definitely made up for lost time. In addition to many travels abroad, he is Ireland's most prolific Summiteer, having completed the Arderins, the Vandeleur-Lynams, and being the only known completer of the Carns. ■

The author on the summit



GEAR REVIEW: THE GNARLY PEAKS 2.5 LAYER WATERPROOF JACKET

BY THOMAS GAFFNEY



Jacket in Orange & Red

When I met Miki from Gnarly Peaks to discuss his new range of outdoor clothing, I asked what had inspired him to design his own outdoor clothes. Miki, based in West Cork, originally hails from Slovakia, and he says he can't understand why Ireland is not at the forefront of waterproof clothing, since it rains here all the time. With the Gnarly Peaks brand, we finally have an Irish company specialising in high quality technical outdoor clothing.

Miki has hiked, biked and climbed from an early age and all this experience is obvious when you first wear the clothes he's designed.

Gnarly Peaks were kind enough to give me a sample of their recently launched waterproof jacket to test and review. I tested the Orange version, but the jacket also comes in Coral Red and Slate Grey.

This 2.5-layer jacket is very light and feels high quality. It compresses well and takes up very little space in your rucksack and at only 270 grams (men's medium), it's a great jacket to carry for when you need it. The recycled fabric is highly waterproof at 30,000mm and highly breathable at 30,000g/m2.

The helmet compatible hood is fully adjustable at the front and back and the toggles can be used one handed. It works well, but I would have liked to have seen a wire or polymer in the peak to make it stiffer.



Helmet Compatible Hood

Large pockets



The main body of the jacket is seam sealed and secured by a waterproof zipper with a storm flap behind it. The main zip is easily adjusted using the handy toggle, but can't be zipped upwards from the bottom, which can be useful when using the jacket with a climbing harness. The sleeve length is well

chosen and you are well protected if you need to reach your hands above your head when climbing or scrambling.

The two front pockets are nicely positioned so that they are low enough to take your hands, but high enough to usable with a rucksack or harness. They are also plenty large enough to hold a folded map. One minor gripe is that they don't have zipper toggles, so can be tricky to operate with gloves.

The twin draw-cord hem at the bottom of the jacket, as well as the anti-snap Velcro adjustments on the sleeves make it very easy to get this jacket to fit just right. The drop hem at the rear of the jacket is a great addition and stops the jacket riding up when mountain biking.

With respect to wearing comfort, the liner material for the fabric is well chosen and is comfortable against the skin, while a chin guard prevents zipper irritation.

Performance wise, the jacket is very waterproof and breathes well, I will admit, I don't see a huge difference in performance between this fabric and Pertex Shield (20,000 HH / MVTR 20,000), but that in itself is a complement. The jacket is very windproof, but isn't thick, so it would need to be paired with a warm mid layer in winter. This lack of thickness, while amazing for weight, does carry a penalty when it comes to durability, this isn't the jacket to wear for high abrasion activities.

In conclusion, apart from the few minor niggles mentioned above, this is a jacket that punches well above its weight: it's very light, comfortable and can be relied on to keep the wind and the rain off.

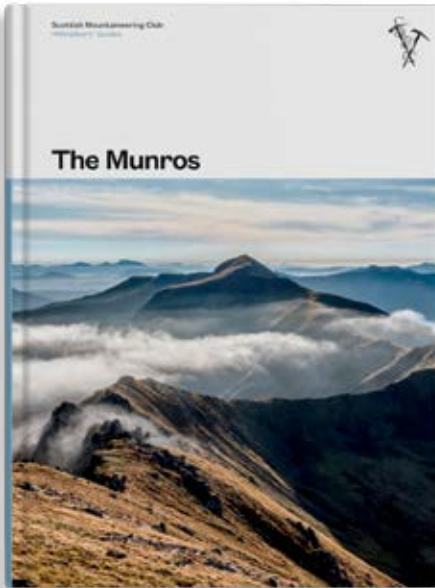
Given the fabric choice and how well designed the jacket is, it seems great value at €170.

This and all the Gnarly Peaks range are available at www.gnarlypeaks.com/.

Gnarly Peaks intend to extend their range with a 3-layer jacket in the future, which, while heavier, will offer all the performance of the 2.5 layer jacket in a more robust format.

Thomas Gaffney, Mountain Leader and member of the British Association of International Mountain Leaders. Thomas is a regular contributor to MV under name: Thomas_g ■





BOOK REVIEW: THE MUNROS (HILLWALKERS GUIDES) PUBLISHED BY THE SCOTTISH MOUNTAINEERING CLUB

A REVIEW BY **PETER WALKER**

In Ireland we have our hill lists: our Vandeleur-Lynams, our Arderins and so on. But none of them have the sort of recognition afforded to Scotland's Munros. Yet.

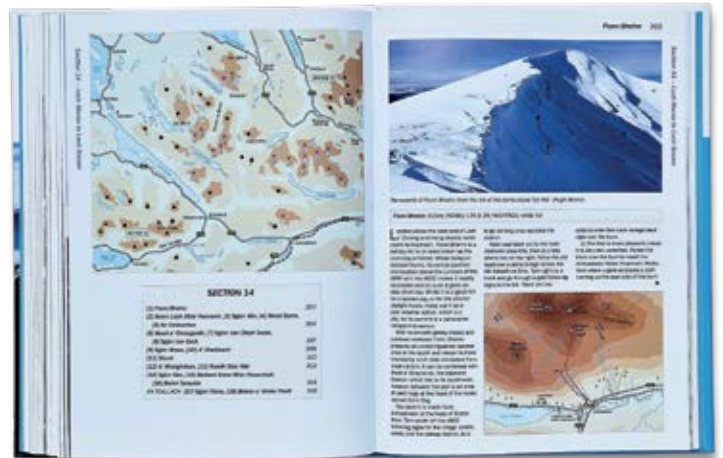
The mountains and the man

Sir Hugh Munro released his eponymous Tables in 1891, cataloguing Mountains and subsidiary Tops (with no hint as to the criteria he was using to make the distinction; the SMC has carried out revisions since based on more accurate measurements and attempting to iron out some of his more bizarre decisions). The first 'Compleater' (the term for someone climbing all the Mountains on the list) was probably (there's some doubt surrounding his claim) Reverend A. E. Robertson in 1901, with the subsidiary Tops being finished in 1923 by Ronald Burn. Over the years better information and access rendered them increasingly popular, and by the time the SMC published its first dedicated guidebook in 1986 those 85 years had begat 450ish more Munroists. Those days (when your reviewer climbed his first Munro) seem innocent given that at the time of writing there are now 7111 Compleaters, and that's just the folk who've notified the SMC. So, it's handy that this year has seen the launch of a fully revised new edition, the first in over 20 years. (All profits from the book go to the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, a charity helping to fund projects and organisations promoting recreation, education and safety in the mountains: more details can be found at www.thesmt.org.uk)

Before reviewing the book, it seems sensible to make some points to any intrigued hillwalkers who have never explored beyond this island. Experience in Ireland is valuable in the Scottish mountains, but the scale of the challenge in Scotland is different, often being longer, higher and more technical. (For instance, even the hardest

of Ireland's 900m summits wouldn't get anywhere near a difficulty-based discussion if they were moved to Scotland, and the distances involved for the remoter mountains are similarly disproportionate). In addition, most of the Highlands are made up of large sporting estates where deer stalking and grouse shooting are extensively carried out in the late summer months, and this needs to be considered if walking during that time of the year.

The Guide



After an excellent introduction (history, guide usage, mountain safety) and some precise notes on walkers' effect on the environment and the environment's effect on walkers, the meat of the book divides the Munros into 17 areas of Scotland's mainland and its islands, and those 17 areas are subdivided into sections describing the ascent of one or more Munros that can be accomplished in a single day (overnight possibilities are touched on, but generally the itineraries suggested are for a single day). The conclusion

The upper section of the Forcan Ridge of The Saddle



A'Mhaighdean from Slioch - probably the remotest Munro



is the complete Munro's Tables (current revision), which was previously available as a separate publication.

Given this extended history the editors have a fair idea of the elements of previous editions that work, so those are refined from a visual presentation standpoint rather than radically changed. (The visuals must be commented upon: the SMC's membership allows for a huge pool of photos for selection thus unsurprisingly the pictures are wonderful, and the mapping and layout are excellent too). Each mountain (or group of mountains) has a main route highlighted and described, and if there are alternatives for the walker (some of Skye's Cuillin summits are very limited in terms of 'safe' routes for even very experienced mountain walkers, and famously the Inaccessible Pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg can only be ascended by rock climbing) then these are also covered. Timings for all the routes mentioned are given using the metric version of Naismith's formula.

It's the additions in this edition that make this book genuinely exceptional though; I've walked in Scotland for nearly 40 years and I'm struggling to think of anything else I might want from a Munros guidebook beyond what this one provides. Previous versions gave routes up 'just' the mountains, with the Tops mentioned only if they were crossed by the suggested route of ascent or if they were otherwise particularly noteworthy; this book provides routes up all of the Tops as well. Previous versions touched upon the usage of mountain bikes along estate roads/tracks (much of the Highlands is given over to huge sporting estates) to shorten routes; this book fully embraces the tactic, making suggestions and amending timings as appropriate.

Any criticisms?

Gripes are minor, in so much as they're scarcely gripes at all. In terms of size some might think it compact enough to carry on the hill, but most wouldn't. Also, there is a tremendous density of information here, so even within an individual section of the book you may well have to scan back and forth a fair amount to garner the data you need; the fine editing mostly negates this, but this is a book that repays concentration rather than 'mere' browsing.

In conclusion, a publication crying out for purchase by any serious hillwalker bound for Scotland. A classic of the genre, and one that probably won't need updating for another 25 years.

The Munros (Hillwalkers' Guides) – Rab Anderson, Tom Prentice. 384 pages, published by Scottish Mountaineering Club and widely available (e.g., Amazon). ISBN-10 1907233385

Peter Walker lived in England for 40 years, and now lives in County Antrim. He has climbed sufficient Munros that he can hopefully competently review this guidebook, but not enough that he has no use for said guidebook in the first place. ■

Beinn Iuthar Mhor from Altanour Lodge in Glen Ey



MOUNTAIN HIKING IN GREECE

BY MARK TRENGOVE

Introduction

Greece (Ελλάδα in Modern Greek) has long been a popular tourist destination, famed for its beaches and archaeological wonders. It is also a recommended destination for both long-distance and mountain hiking activities which the central and local governments of the country have been keen to promote in more recent years. This is to diversify the sector and provide more sustainable tourism.

The country has a land area of over 132,000 km². It has a rugged coastline of over 13.6 thousand km, giving it the 11th longest in the world, including a vast number of islands. This makes Greece a country of great geographical diversity. About eighty per cent of its land area is upland or mountains, making it one of the most mountainous countries in Europe.

On the Greek mainland there are four principal mountain

ranges:

- **The Rhodopi (Ροδόπη) Mountains** lie in the far north-east, with most of the range over the border in Bulgaria. These are remote forested mountains, infrequently visited. The peaks reach 2000m in Bulgaria, whilst the southern part of the range in Greece reach 1800m.
- **The Pindos (Πίνδος) Mountains** form the spine of mainland Greece, stretching south for 160km from the Albanian border to the Corinthian Gulf. Mainly forested on the lower slopes, the high ridges, principally composed of limestone, are normally bare. The highest peak in the range is Smolikas (Σμόλικας) 2637m, P1736m.
- **The Olympus (Όλυμπος) Range** lies to the east of the main Pindos chain on the border between Thessaly and Macedonia. These are the highest mountains in Greece, and the traditional home of the Greek (and Roman) gods. They are steeped in ancient myth and folklore. The highest

peak, and Greek national high point, is Mytikas (Μύτικας) 2918m, P2354m (on which, see below).

- **The Peloponnesian Mountains** are located on the peninsula of that name, forming the most southerly part of the Greek mainland. They are effectively an extension of the Pindos. The highest peak is Taygetos (Ταΰγετος) 2405m, P2345m.

Most of the Greek islands are also mountainous, some with peaks over 1000m. These are on the islands of Lefkada, Kefalonia, Thasos, Samothraki, Samos, Chios, Ikaria, Naxos, Rhodes, Karpathos and Evia. Crete is the largest Greek island, and is very mountainous, with many peaks over 2000m – the highest being Ida/Psiloritis (Ιδα/Ψηλορείτης) 2456m, P2456m.

Hiking in Greece

Most of the peaks in Greece are accessible to those who have the skills and knowledge to gain the tops of the mountains of Ireland and Britain. A few require rock-climbing or scrambling skills, but the vast majority are accessible without the use of hands.

Snow can be expected on the higher mountains, especially on the mainland and in Crete, from November to April. Extensive patches may persist until the late spring

at higher altitudes. High summer is best avoided due to the heat and the ever increasing risk of forest fires. The weather tends to break in October. The best time to hike is therefore May, June and September, but be aware that mountain weather can change quickly even in summer. Thunderstorms may develop quickly, especially in the afternoon.

Skiing is also possible in winter on the higher mountains. There are established ski areas, such as on the Parnassos massif in central Greece, and ski touring is becoming more popular.

Rock climbing opportunities abound.

Wild animals are unlikely to cause a risk to hikers. Wolves and wild boar do exist in more remote areas, but you are unlikely to meet them. Hornets and scorpions may be encountered, but they can be managed. The biggest risk are the large, fierce Molossian hounds sometimes used to protect sheep and goats. They are best avoided, unless the owner is there to control them.

Clothing & equipment

Full mountaineering equipment will be needed in winter in order to gain the high summits. However, in spring, summer and autumn, when there is no snow, the clothing

Oros Ainos – Psili Koryfi 1616m, P41m, Kefalonia
MARK TRENGOVE



and equipment you use for peak-bagging in Ireland and Britain will be quite sufficient. In these months expect much higher temperatures, and dress accordingly to keep cool and protected from the sun. Temperatures can drop rapidly in storms, so waterproofs and warm layers should always be packed. Water, if drunk from streams, should always be filtered using a high-grade purification method.

Right to roam, and wild camping

Although there is no legal right to roam in Greece, you are unlikely to encounter any difficulties in upland areas if you hike responsibly. Likewise, responsible wild camping/bivouacking is not a problem. The people in the mountains will generally be friendly, keeping to the ancient tradition of ξενία (hospitality). It is normal for the stranger to make the first greeting.

Long-distance and local trails

Two of the long-distance E-Trails pass through Greece. The E4 follows the spine of Greece, into the Peloponnese, and then continues along the length of Crete. The E6 follows the northern border, near to the frontiers with Albania, North Macedonia and Bulgaria.

Various shorter national trails have been developed, both on the mainland and many of the islands. For more information, see at www.traildino.com/trace/continents-Europe/countries-Greece.

As elsewhere, colour-striped markers are usually painted on rocks or trees to mark the route, and some signs will be found. In general, however, do not expect these trails to be as well maintained as in Western Europe. Always take a map and other navigational device.

Refuges

Greece has over a hundred mountain refuges and emergency shelters scattered throughout its mountain ranges. Some are open all year, while others just between spring and autumn. For a list of refuges and shelters, see at www.geocities.ws/climernew/eosirb.html.

In general, do not expect the same overall standard of facilities as may be available in the refuges in Western Europe. Regarding refuges on the Olympos Massif, see below.

Mapping

For a long time, detailed topographic maps, produced by the Greek army, were classified documents not available to the general public. That situation has now changed. Good quality hiking maps of many of the upland areas, both on the mainland and islands, are now readily available. *Anavasi Editions* publish an ever-growing library of such maps, both in printed and digital formats – see at anavasi.gr/maps-en.

These maps often include hiking information as well.

There are also good topographic maps for some areas published by others – for example Tour & Trail hiking maps, published by *Discovery Walking Guides*.

If you can read the Cyrillic alphabet, the old Soviet military maps covering most of the world are now available as a smartphone app for free in the basic version. Search in your App store for '*Russian Topo Maps*'. The coverage for Greece is generally good.

Guidebooks

The classic work on the Greek Mountains is the three-volume '*The Greek Mountains: a Geographic Encyclopedia*' by Nikos Nezis (TA ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ ΒΟΥΝΑ), (ISBN 978-960-86676-4-8). This extensive and high quality work lists 861 hills and mountains in Greece over 500m altitude, which have been classified as main peaks and subsidiary tops in these books. The criteria for peak classification are unclear. For further details, see at anavasi.gr/ta-ellinika-vouna-gr. The work is only available in Greek.

For English speakers, the Cicerone Guide '*The Mountains of Greece*' by Tim Salmon and Michael Cullen (ISBN 978-1-85284-440-0) is recommended, although a little out-of-date these days.

If you speak German, Rother publish a number of hiking guides to the country – see at www.rother.de/en/peloponnes.html. The guide to Crete is also in English.

Safety, insurance & mountain rescue

As in any mountain area, safety should be of paramount importance to the hiker in Greece.

Like Ireland and Britain, mountain rescue (see at www.hrt.org.gr/mountain-rescue.en.aspx), staffed by volunteers, is free. You should still ensure that your travel insurance policy will cover you for medical aid for the activities you plan to undertake, or seek specialist insurance if it does not.

To contact Greek Mountain Rescue, the European emergency number 112 should be dialled. The operations centre direct number is +30 2310 310649.

Mountain Weather Forecasts

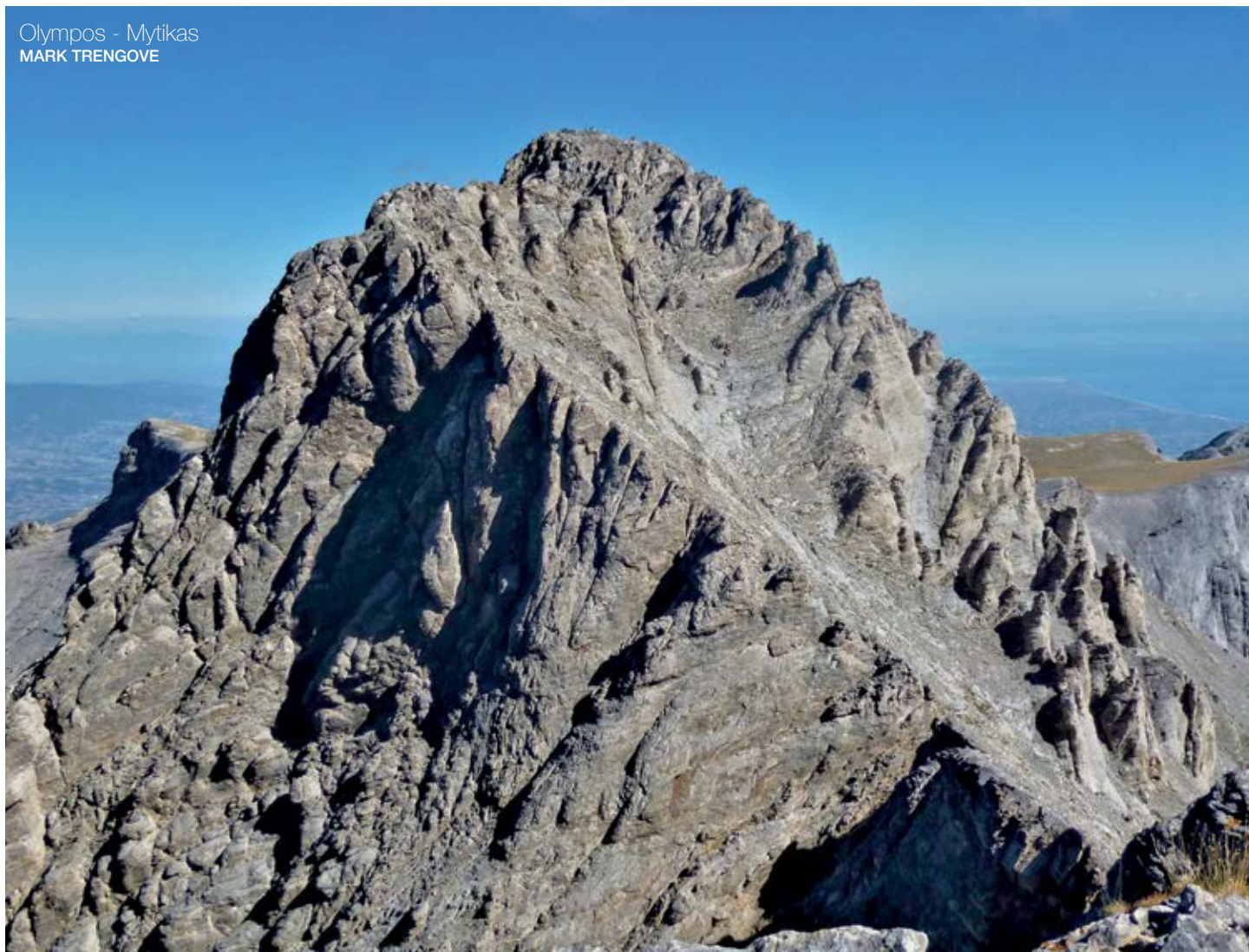
The Greek Meteorological Service's website is at emy.gr/emy/en. It does not produce specific mountain weather forecasts. Various international mountain weather websites do provide mountain forecasts for Greece – see, for example, www.mountain-forecast.com/maps/Greece.

Peak-lists and peak-bagging

The three volume *Greek Mountain Geographic Encyclopedia* has been mentioned above.

There are currently very few peak lists or challenges

Olympos - Mytikas
MARK TRENGOVE



available in English to peak-baggers. The Peakery website offers a selection of nine shorter mountain challenges – see at peakery.com/region/greece-mountains/challenges/#order=pursuers&page=1.

In the forthcoming months I intend to publish a series of booklets providing much wider coverage of the Greek mountains on the *Europeaklist* website (see at sites.google.com/site/europeaklist), with all Greece at P500m and mainland and island lists at 2000m and 1000m of altitude.

Olympos - Mytikas

To many foreign peak-baggers, as well as Greeks, the Olympos Massif in northern Greece represents the must-do mountain ascent in Greece. Mytikas 2918m, the highest peak, by the normal route, involves a steep hike-in from the entrance to the national park to the Spilios Agapitos Refuge (Refuge A) (see at www.mountolympus.gr/en/#.YdnUw_7P02w) at 2060m.

After an overnight stay in this refuge, the trail continues as a hike up to the minor peak of Skala (2867m). From

Skala, attaining the summit of Mytikas is by a scramble, exposed in places, down by the Kaka Skala to a narrow col, and then up around a false summit to the top. The main risk is from stone-fall from people above, and there have been a number of accidents for this reason. After the summit, many descend all the way down to the national park entrance again that day, making it a two-day outing. The town of Litchoro provides ample choice of places to stay and eat.

To lessen the risk of stone-fall and enjoy the mountain at a more leisurely pace, I recommend that the ascent from the Spilios Agapitos Refuge is made later in the day when most have reached the summit and started their descent from Skala. A second night can then be spent at this refuge, or one of the other high refuges in the area.

For a useful guidebook (in English) on Olympos Massif, I recommend *Olympus – Classic Ascents and Hikes*, by Miltos Zervas, published by Anevontas Editions (ISBN 978-960-88683-6-6). ■

Colt Island, Church Island
and the distant Rockabill
KENT WANG



ISLAND-HOPPING IN NORTH DUBLIN

BY DAVID MURPHY

It's possible to kayak from any point along the South Strand in Skerries and navigate and explore the town's three coastal islands in a couple of hours (Editor's note: it's actually possible to reach Shenick on foot if the tide is really low, see mountainviews.ie/summit/2224/comment/19547/) – but Pepé is made of sterner stuff and opted for a longer trip. He parked a couple of hundred metres south of Skerries Rugby Club, on the Rush Road, where there is room for five or six cars. From here steps lead down to Holmpatrick Cove, and the put-in is only metres away. It was a beautiful sunny morning, with the tide two thirds full.

The Tide Is High, Possibly

Tides around these islands do funny things. The first visible sign of this that morning was a distinct line in the water leading out to Shenick (mountainviews.ie/island/2224/). This line marks where twin arms of the same tide come in around the island and meet. Unsettling to see calm waters one side of the line and rougher waters on the other, but crossing it is no problem. Do note that OS maps refer to this place as Shenick's Island but nobody locally adds the apostrophe – it's known as Shenick (possibly from

sionnach).

Pepé landed on and explored an island less populated with birds than the other two. It has a Martello tower which features strongly (as do incoming tides) in Hugh Fitzgerald Ryan's fine historical novel *The Kybe*. Leaving Shenick, Pepé made a bee-line for what the OS maps call St Patrick's Island, and here we have another naming issue. Hardly anybody in the north county calls it that. It's Church Island (one glimpse from the mainland tells you why).

Pepe Le Canoe

Over two kilometres out from Holmpatrick, Pepé rounded the rocks off the southern tip of Church Island (mountainviews.ie/island/2223/) and eased up along its eastern flank. The island teemed with birds of different species, setting off a cacophony of alarm as he glided by. He could see that the high point seemed to be covered in cormorants standing with wings held open to ward off invaders. Pepé was thankful for no sign of the famous Skerries seals. A large colony uses Church Island as their favourite spot, so best avoid it during breeding season when they can be aggressive. Pepé heard of a girl who had a nasty fright

when a seal tried to mount the stern of her kayak because she ventured too close to the shore – not a pleasant experience.

Pepé approached the northern end of Church Island with trepidation – not because of angry seals but because ahead of him the sea was choppy with lots of little white horses, caused by a meeting of tidal currents. The great thing about kayaking is that you can manoeuvre between sheltering rocks and get to the other side of an island in shallow and calm water.

He pulled ashore on the mainland side and set off for the summit, ploughing through long grass, trying to avoid nests full of chicks. At the high point helpless baby cormorants squawked up at him from their ground-nests while anxious parents, and other birds, cartwheeled overhead. Pepé only had eyes for the fabulous views from the top. From here, Rockabill (mountainviews.ie/island/2225/) with its lighthouse seems invitingly near, but it's still about five kilometres out to sea

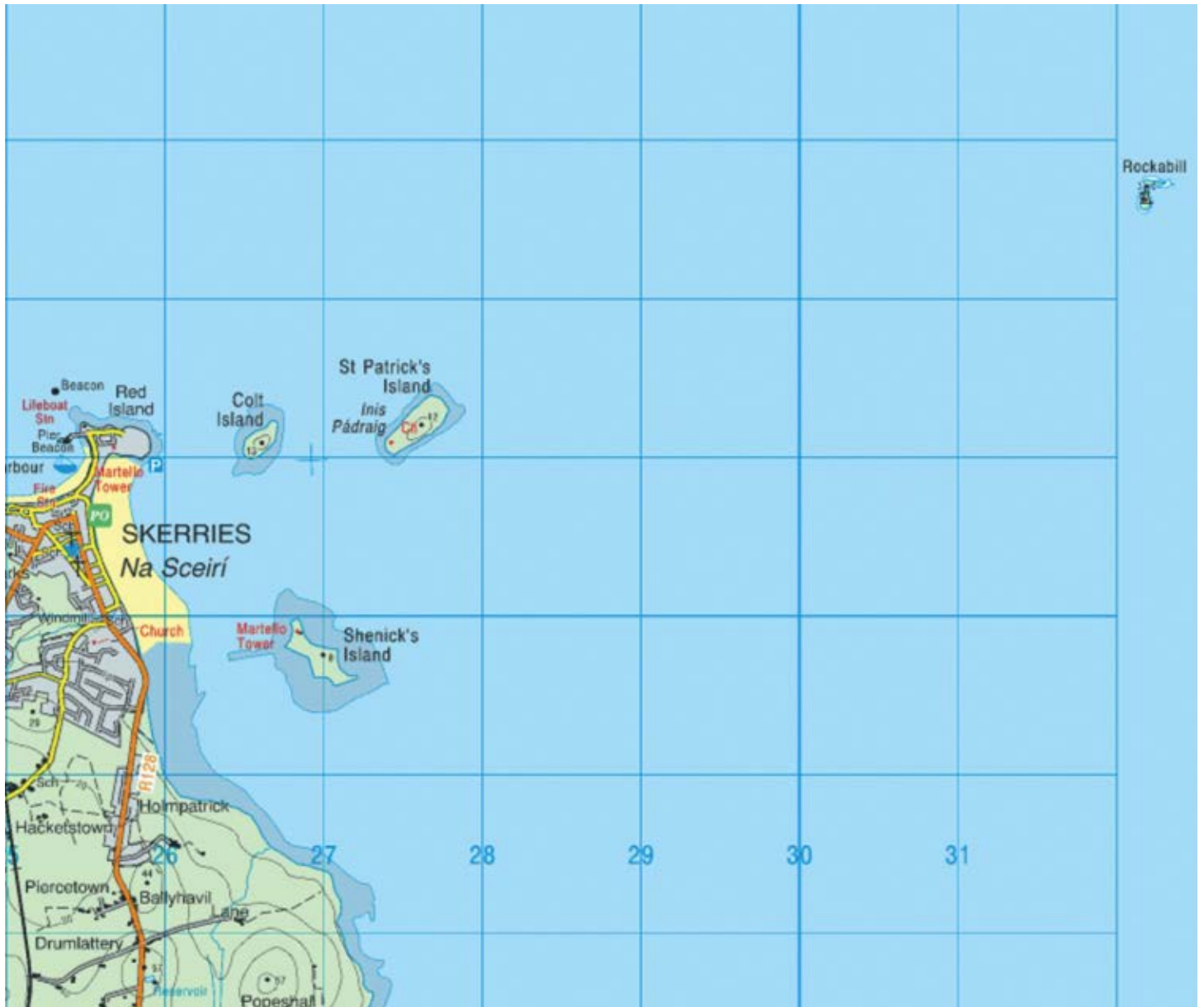


Satellite view of Church (St Patrick's) Island
KENT WANG

from Church Island. The Rock, as it's known, consists of two small islands and is the most important breeding site in Western Europe for roseate terns. A team of wardens guard the Rock during summer months and will not allow

How near Shenick is, but how difficult if you didn't check tide or weather
SIMON STEWART





visitors make landfall, so if you kayak out, you're looking at a round trip of 10K from Church Island with no chance of taking a rest on the Rock – recommended only for experienced groups.

Some local knowledge

Pepé trod down through the nests of Church Island, again trying not to squash chicks. Back on board, he paddled straight for Colt (mountainviews.ie/island/2222/), a kilometre away. Local poet Enda Coyle-Greene describes this island as ‘crew-cut Colt’ – when you see it you realise that is a perfect description. Again, tidal currents acted strangely as he rounded Colt on the northern side. He pulled ashore and ventured up top, causing more avian mayhem. Back on the beach another kayaker made landfall. The pair of them sat together drinking tea made on a stove the other man stored in his kayak.

‘It’s a bird sanctuary. If you walk on it, the birds abandon their nests and fly in the sky above you. The gulls, stronger than most other species, love this. They seize the opportunity to dive-bomb abandoned nests and snatch the poor chicks’

“I’ve never explored Church Island,” the man said.

“Why not?” Pepé thought it unusual that a Skerries native would opt not to land there.

“It’s a bird sanctuary. If you walk on it, the birds abandon their nests and fly in the sky above you. The gulls,

stronger than most other species, love this. They seize the opportunity to dive-bomb abandoned nests and snatch the poor chicks. It's the same here on Colt. Best never go above the shore."

Pepé felt racked with guilt and shame – how many defenceless chicks had been murdered in his careless wake? – but he let on nothing.

After a pleasant half hour chatting with the local, he re-launched his craft for the half-kilometre crossing to the mainland. On the way he resolved never to explore a bird sanctuary again, and determined not to venture above high water mark in such places. Back at the coastline, he rounded a rocky swimming area known as the Captain's. Paddling another half-kilometre to the pier, he could see, on his starboard side: Balbriggan, Bettystown, Clogherhead, and on this clear day, Slieve Foye and the Mourne. At the Captain's, and also where the coast turns a corner adjacent to the RNLI station, he was watchful of swirling

lines on the surface indicating currents beneath.

With energy still left, Pepé took the chance to explore the wide open waters of Skerries harbour replete with dozens of other boaters, kayakers and paddle boarders. He beached his craft on the slipway at the harbour after a total sea-trip of perhaps half a dozen kilometres. From the slipway he walked twenty minutes to Holmpatrick to collect his car.

Footnote: an option Pepé recommends would be a put-in at picturesque Loughshinny, with the tide about three quarters full. Round the pier and hug the coastline north for a few kilometres, passing the famous Smuggler's Cave. Then it's a short dash across open sea to Shenick. Here you can circumnavigate the island and use the now slack or ebbing tide to help you return to Loughshinny (a round trip of 8km), or use different tidal times to navigate all three islands of Skerries. ■

Martello Tower on Shenick Island



HIGHLIGHTS OF MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND'S WORK FOR HILLWALKING IN 2021

BY RUTH WHELAN
HILLWALKING
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
AND SECRETARY FOR THE
HILLWALKING COMMITTEE



2021 was a year of two halves. The first six months were again limited in terms of what programmes/events and activities could be run due to restrictions. The latter six months were a hive of activity amongst our members, clubs and Mountaineering Ireland initiatives and programmes. Here some of the highlights.

Club Leadership Programme

2021 was another challenging year for hillwalking clubs and there was a significant concern from clubs regarding the limited number of walk leaders available. Additionally, confidence amongst current walk leaders needed to be addressed to ensure they continue to lead walks after much inactivity recently.

We identified a need for informal training and were

successful in obtaining funding through Sport Ireland to run programs around the country throughout the summer / autumn months. The Club Leadership Programme had an overwhelming response with over 440 club leaders from over 60 hillwalking clubs who took part in a full skills day training with a qualified instructor, tailored to the clubs need with emphasis on leading groups.

Embracing online platforms once again

By popular demand, Zooming Round the Mountains came back for a second series to keep everyone entertained and engaged when activities were restricted. There were lots of topics of interest to hillwalkers including a look behind the scenes of mapping with Barry Dalby, Kathryn Fitzpatrick prepared us for getting back to the hills and we were able

to ask Paul Kellagher an experienced leader and trainer and all-round guru of mountaineering, anything and everything about hillwalking. Other highlights were the talk on the Fei Sheehy Challenge, flora of the Irish uplands, and the topic of access. Jane Carney, Training Officer also introduced the joys of winter hillwalking, covering equipment, navigation, and skills throughout the winter skills series.

As restrictions were due to be eased, we continued our online supports and ran a series of workshops in March to support clubs and their committees as they start to plan to get back to the hills.

There were four further Club Committee Workshops run by the hillwalking development officer throughout October. Each workshop focused on a different topic: committee roles and club AGM's, Mountaineering Ireland's online membership system & GDPR, Insurance & Accident reporting and youths in sports. Over 85 clubs attended overall.

Get people started

We worked closely with Get Ireland Walking to try to reach the wider community that may be interested in heading upland and developed a programme, specifically aimed at people who participated in the active community walking programme, as a follow-on to provide those who are interested in taking to the hills with the support and tools they need.

I also got to chat with Linda Sankey on the Get Ireland Walking Podcast which was a great opportunity to reach people who are new to hillwalking, imparting information and useful tips on staying safe upland.

National Walking Day

The second annual National Walking Day took place on Sunday 26th September as part of European Week of Sport. There was a week of activities celebrating the many ways to walk, with many clubs and members involved.

'She Summits'

We ran a number of programmes and events over the summer specifically for women. These programmes, in conjunction with Local Sports Partnerships (Shed to Summit & She Summits), aimed to provide participants

with a safe environment to practice important skills to make sure their experiences on the hills are safe, positive and fun and that their confidence and ability to be independent on the hills grows. The Shed to Summit programme was in partnership with Wicklow Sports Partnership and Blessington's Women's Sheds. Participants were provided with three initial half day experiences with two additional training days to provide them with key skills to be able to hike within certain terrain in their local hills self-sufficiently. There were two groups each led by qualified mountain instructor sharing their knowledge and experience and imparting informal learnings.

We ran another programme called: She Summits in Kilkenny in partnership with Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership, following the same format.

Overall feedback from participants was exceedingly positive. The opportunity to broaden their horizons exploring the uplands in their local area more safely was widely appreciated. The sense of achievement from the groups at the end of the programme was immense and having the security of an instructor providing useful and helpful info built their confidence to continue their adventures.

Women With Altitude

Although restrictions meant our Women With Altitude event could not be held in its usual format this year due, we sent out our enthusiastic team of instructors to different counties to provide women with an opportunity to expand their



hillwalking and climbing experience and skills throughout the week of HER Outdoors. HER Outdoors week was the first of its kind in Ireland and was a great opportunity for all females to escape to the outdoors and try something new. There were over 18 Women With Altitude activities across 10 counties organised throughout the week, with around 130 taking part overall, many new female participants now more excited than ever to continue their journeys on hills and crags and gain even more skills along the way. www.womenwithaltitude.ie/

Hiking Skills day for Parents

It was also identified that there was a large cohort of families wanting to explore the uplands with their kids and there was a need to provide informal training to parents, giving them key information and basic skills, and promoting the Happy Hiking campaign. This programme was also supported by Sport Ireland. Hiking Skills day for parents (family support programme) ran during September with over 72 parents taking part, providing parents with an opportunity to train with a qualified instructor and gain useful information and skills that will help keep them and their children safe. (Multiple generations in Kilkenny: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iAUh1dZJNQ)



OSI Feedback

Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) has recently consolidated all its digital mapping data in a single database named Prime2. This allows all of OSi's map products and services to be generated and updated with minimal human intervention, dramatically transforming the organisation's product and



service production capabilities. We have engaged with OSi over the course of 2021 and over 100 members took the opportunity to provide feedback on certain OSi maps to ensure ongoing relevance for hillwalkers. This engagement will hopefully help them in the future to continue to produce a quality product that will stand the test of time and help modify and enhance our OSi product range for hillwalkers. **(Editor's note: MV sincerely hopes the MI/OSI relationship does indeed bear fruit for hillwalkers, as recent developments within OSi and their products have caused concern to many).**

Hillwalking Grades

Mountaineering Ireland's hillwalking committee identified a need to provide a standardised system for hillwalking grades, to provide a national benchmark for anyone who is selecting routes for club walks, gatherings, events and group walks etc. This grading system is now up at www.mti.ie

mountaineering.ie/hillwalking/HillwalkingGrades/default.aspx and also available in the toolkit for clubs.

Irish Peaks – the success continues

Mountaineering Ireland is immensely proud that Irish Peaks has won this year’s Guidebook Award in the hugely prestigious Banff Mountain Book Competition. The Banff Mountain Book Competition is an internationally recognised literary competition that celebrates mountain literature in all its forms. Banff jury member Heather Dawe described Irish Peaks as “A wonderful showcase of the rugged beauty of the island of Ireland’s upland landscapes, Irish Peaks made me want to head for these hills. This is an inspirational guidebook that will surely entice many hill-goers to further explore these mountains.”

Irish Peaks can be purchased online and from selected retailers, see irishpeaks.ie/ (Review at mountainviews.ie/newsletters/pdf/walkers_interest-Ireland-bookreview-IrishPeaks-MountaineeringIreland-2020-11/#page=9)

50th Anniversary

In a difficult year to plan a physical celebration with Covid restrictions in place, Mountaineering Ireland felt that there was still a need to mark this milestone for our

National Governing Body during 2021. To celebrate the 2021 Winter Issue of the Irish Mountain Log included thoughtful contributions from members and staff associated with the organisation over the years, and also included some articles of interest from past issues. See mountainviews.ie/newsletters/month/2021-05/ for our recognition of the progress that has been made.



Navigation in the hills.

As we wrap up a challenging but rewarding year we look forward excitedly in anticipation of a new era of hillwalking. Hopefully we can continue to support the needs of all hillwalkers new and experienced.

For any queries contact Ruth Whelan – Hillwalking Development Officer, Mountaineering Ireland : ruth@mountaineering.ie or the Chair of the MI Hillwalking Committee: Grainne McLaughlin, gmullan@yahoo.com

A KNOCKMEALDOWN NIGHT CLIMB

BY JOHN FINN



Watching the dawn from the summit of Knockmealdown
JOHN FINN

Knockmealdown was the first mountain I climbed. I was 19-years of age and in the recent possession of a brand-new Yamaha 200 motorbike. Now that I had an independent means of travel, I rode up to The Vee from my home in Youghal on a glorious summer's day determined to scale the mountain that was such a significant feature of the northern horizon from that seaside town.

And it was a joyous experience. Standing on the summit, viewing the panoramic vista, instilled a love of mountains that has never left me. I returned to the bike, parched with the thirst, and rode to the nearby Cat's Bar where I had the most refreshing pint of lager I have ever drank. It was my "Ice Cold in Alex" moment.

I've been back numerous times over the years and each visit feels like renewing acquaintance with an old friend, one that never lets you down, and that leaves you energised after each encounter.

Fifty years on from that first visit I returned once again on 13th November to do a solo night climb.

Why at night? Hillwalking can be risky at the best of times what with the danger of trips and falls as well as losing one's bearings in bad weather. Surely these are heightened in the dark and when one is on one's own? Perhaps, but not significantly, I would argue, if you choose the right mountain (one that has a clearly defined path), are familiar with the terrain, are confident of your route finding capabilities, and take the usual precautions such as leaving someone know the details of your route and your expected time of return.

The main reason for doing it is the unique experience

of traversing a mountain during the early hours, when there is no one else about, and when such natural light as there is, is produced by the moon and the stars. Stop and look at the sky: stare into the depths of the galaxy; notice the odd object moving across the heavens - a plane? a satellite? the ISS? Occasionally you may see meteorites. All this combines to engender a feeling of wonder and awe, a sense of the numinous even, as you stand there alone facing the unimaginable vastness of space. Then there is the gradual change from astronomical twilight to nautical twilight to civil twilight and finally, if you are lucky, a glorious sunrise. That is what makes a night climb worthwhile.

On this occasion I set off from my home in Carrigtwohill at 2:55 a.m. having grabbed a few hours sleep beforehand. I drove north via Tallow and Lismore. There was no one else at the Bay Lough car park when I arrived and at 4:22 a.m. I began the climb.

My route followed the 19th century Waterford/Tipperary





person abroad? No, it was just a sheep, probably astonished that a human should be out and about at that hour of the night.

The dark shape of Knockmealdown gradually became more discernible against the starry sky and by the time I reached the summit the south-eastern horizon was brightening slightly. Sunrise was still an hour and a half away.

It was cold but thankfully not very windy. I put on an extra layer and a few hot coffees from my flask made hanging around on the exposed summit more tolerable. I took some photos and video with my phone and GoPro but it was still too dark to get technically good results even though I was using a mini-tripod. I had deliberately left my more capable DSLR gear at home in order to save

weight but I regretted that decision: the situation demanded some long exposures and I didn't have the equipment to do them.

Just after sunrise cloud began rolling in and soon the summit was enveloped in fog. I began to retrace my steps, knowing that keeping near to the ridge wall would get me back to my starting point. There was no longer any need for my head-torch as the sun was well up albeit hidden behind the thick cloud.

County boundary wall up the Sugarloaf and then along the ridge to the summit. If the weather deteriorated at any point all I needed to do was to follow the wall and I could not get lost. (This wall is often referred to as "a famine wall" - as is the wall on the Galtees - but I don't think it was built during The Famine but many years later.

Certainly, the Galtee wall was built in the late 1870s. Be that as it may, in both instances the reason for the construction was to give employment to local men in times of economic hardship.)

The initial ascent of Sugarloaf is steep. I kept close to the wall all the way. The sky was mostly clear and bejewelled with stars and there was little wind. I stopped regularly and turned off my headtorch to take in the spectacle.

The headtorch, incidentally, is a powerful 900 lumens Petzl Swift RL. This was a recent purchase and was the prompt for me to do the night climb - I was curious to see how it would perform. It is astonishingly bright at full power - I was reluctant to aim it at the sky in case I might blind the crew on the International Space Station should it happen to be passing overhead. I never needed that much illumination: a lower setting did the job just fine. Highly recommended.

At the summit of Sugarloaf, I took a breather and surveyed the glittering lights of the towns and villages of Tipperary below me. Then I followed the wall down the short descent to the ridge leading towards Knockmealdown. There was no risk of my losing my way at any time but had the wall not existed it would have been a challenging navigational task on this dark moonless night and not one I would have been prepared to tackle.

Unlike the initial climb the ridge walk is an easy gradual ascent. I trudged along quite happily but I got a start at one stage when the torch picked out a pair of bright eyes staring at me from out of the darkness. Was there another



I followed the wall all the way to the summit of Sugarloaf whereas normally, in good visibility, I would veer across its western flank to avoid ascending it. That additional ascent is relatively minor however and, on this morning, it was safer to do it. Had I walked into featureless terrain in these conditions I probably would have quickly lost my bearings. (Memo to self: always carry a map and compass.)

At the Sugarloaf summit the wall veers west and down and after 30 minutes or so I was back at my car. Once again, Knockmealdown had afforded me an enormously satisfying experience. ■

Fahy lake, Omev Island
MARKBRIGGS



A WALK ON OMEY ISLAND DURING LOW TIDE

A BRIEF NOTE FROM DAMIAN MCDONAGH



visible along the island coastline. At the cusp of the Great Famine in 1841 around 400 people lived and eked out a meagre existence on the island. The former landlord's house is the desolate and deserted two-storey structure on the left, the first structure visible on the island. Next up is the "sunken treasure" - the ruin of Teampaill Feichin, the medieval church, (illegally) excavated from the sand in 1981. Originally constructed from local stone, there is general concern that it may not stand the test of time much longer as coastal erosion continues to cause ongoing damage. Carry on walking in a clockwise direction heading past the cemetery and finally trekking back towards the mainland at Claddaghduff.

More information and photos: mountainviews.ie/island/2184/

And a track mountainviews.ie/track/4336/ ■

Google Galway Tide Times for tidal information. Usually it's best to walk over around two hours before low tide: Park the car at Claddaghduff and trek across the strand following the large upright signs embedded in the sand. At Omev Island there is just a small segment of paved road and follow this in a clockwise direction until you see the sand dunes and Fahy Lake to your right.

The bizarre concrete structure perched on the small hill overlooking the island was the dwelling of Anglo-Irish poet, Richard Murphy constructed in the early 1970s. The scenery here is just stunning as the archipelago of small uninhabited islands off the Omev Island shoreline all merge into view.

The island was originally settled over 6000-years-ago and several shell middens hugging the coastline are still



Medieval church ruin Omev Island
DAMIAN MCDONAGH

HILLWALKING IN THE FANNICHS, SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

BY EAMON O'CALLAGHAN



An Coileachain 923m
EAMONOC



View towards Beinn Liath Mhòr Fannaich
EAMONOC

I managed to get a week in Scotland in October, climbed 17 Munros, with highlight of the week being a hard won ridge walk over 4 Munros in the Eastern Fannichs, Starting point for this walk is at Tornadhu Bridge on the A835, Weather was pretty cold with a dusting of Snow on the higher peaks, we followed a track for 2.5km before reaching open hillside, now followed a boggy trek upwards and onto more stony terrain to the 1st Munro of the day Beinn Liath Mhòr Fannaich at 953m, great views unfold here westwards, the next top Sgurr Mor beckoned. A steep climb down to a Bealach followed by a steeper climb to the well-made cairn on Sgurr Mor 1110m highest Munro in the Fannichs, there was a fair bit of snow lying about here. The rest of the ridge stretched away in an Easterly direction,

towards the next 2 Munros. Meall Gorm 949m was easily attained and it was onwards towards last Munro of the day An Coileachain 923m. Another well-built cairn stood atop a rocky outcrop here, fabulous views back along the ridge from here and down towards Loch Luichacrt and Loch Fannich. Now followed a long trek back to the days starting point. A really tough rewarding day out in the Scottish Highlands. Total distance was 26.5km 1500m ascent and it took us 6.5hrs.

Member eamonoc is poised to complete the Arderins, with as of time of publication, just two to finish. He has also logged climbing 187 Munros out of 282. ■





CHAMPIONING ACCESS AND THE PLACES WE LOVE

HELEN LAWLESS PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF
MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND'S WORK LAST YEAR
ON ACCESS AND CONSERVATION MATTERS

Looking towards Luggala mountain,
also known as Fancy

At the heart of the Wicklow Mountains, the spectacular landscape of Luggala Estate incorporates the mountains of Luggala and Knocknacloghoge and the popular walk from the Pier Gates down to Lough Dan. Following the sale of Luggala Estate to private buyers in late 2019 Mountaineering Ireland engaged with the new owners and maintained supportive contact while the estate dealt with littering and other consequences of irresponsible behaviour after the first Covid-19 lockdown. This relationship is blossoming, Mountaineering Ireland held a couple of environmental awareness hikes at Luggala in 2021 and we are currently discussing other opportunities for collaboration.

Some people have seen a car positioned inside the gates at Luggala Estate in Wicklow at weekends and thought that the people on duty were there to prevent the public getting in. The opposite is the case. Luggala Estate is employing a liaison team to welcome responsible recreational visitors who respect the Estate's Code of Conduct.

Access – a shared responsibility

Looking across the island of Ireland, there is a general picture of greater pressure on access due to increased numbers taking to the hills during the Covid period. From

Donegal to Connemara to Kerry there are more gates with 'private property' type signs. The reality is that most of the land in upland areas is privately owned, either by individuals or jointly owned as commonage. Our enjoyment of the mountains is due to the goodwill and tolerance of the owners.

That goodwill can be undermined by the poor behaviour of a small proportion of people, and through increased numbers leaving residents feeling that walkers are invading the place. Mountaineering Ireland (usually in cooperation with local members) has engaged with landowners at a number of locations where issues have arisen recently, however, once goodwill is damaged it is difficult to get it back. Parking in a way that obstructs farm or home access is a recurrent factor in access problems, so is the fear of being sued should someone get injured on your land. Continued respect and consideration for landowners and other local residents is needed to maintain the access that we depend upon for our activities. Taking the time to say hello or check about parking can make all the difference.

Mountaineering Ireland is also devoting considerable time to working with policymakers and other recreation bodies, north and south, to improve opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors, including the examples below:

- Mountaineering Ireland is centrally involved in the process to develop a **new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy**, which is intended to guide and support the development of this growing sector. Our involvement has provided opportunities to discuss the needs of hillwalkers and climbers with a wide range of national stakeholders. There's considerable momentum behind this project, with a focus on making outdoor recreation work well for everyone.

- **Mountain Access Project** – an insurance policy has been put in place to provide added protection for landowners in Comhairle na Tuaithe's two pilot Mountain Access Areas – the McGillycuddy's Reeks and Binn Shléibhe near Clonbur. Mountaineering Ireland is part of a group formed to review the Mountain Access Project, with the aim of expanding this arrangement to a number of other areas.

- Mountaineering Ireland has engaged with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on a **review of access legislation in Northern Ireland**. The next stage in that process is public consultation, which we will make people aware of as a strong response would encourage the government to bring forward fresh legislation to support the growth in outdoor recreation activities.

Mountaineering Ireland's credibility in engaging in

discussion about the management of outdoor recreation is bolstered by the responsible attitudes displayed by Mountaineering Ireland clubs and members. A key part of our strategy is working in partnership, being part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

Caring for the mountains

Littering in the outdoors grabbed public attention during Covid and in response Mountaineering Ireland promoted

One From The Hills, a challenge to all walkers and climbers to remove one item of litter from the outdoors each time they're out. This simple concept was proposed by a



Mountaineering Ireland member.

Undoubtedly the greatest impact of recreation on Ireland's hills, mountains and coastal landscapes is the impact of our cumulative footfall, ever more visible through erosion scars along popular lines on the hills. The year 2021 saw welcome progress to address upland path erosion in a number of key locations, with much of this guided by the

Lough Dan from slopes of Knocknacloghoge



Admiring how well the path on Croagh Patrick fits into the landscape



Croagh Patrick Path Manager Matt McConway with team members Frank and Tulio



Helping the Hills principles instigated by Mountaineering Ireland:

- At **Croagh Patrick** an experienced path manager is leading a team of four trainees on a sustainable access and habitat restoration project. Despite the challenge of working with scree on the summit cone, the team improved over 800 metres of the Pilgrim route last year. Mountaineering Ireland has been involved in this project throughout and we believe it will be instrumental in expanding national capacity to undertake quality upland path repairs.

- In the **Mournes**, despite the setback of a serious fire on the lower slopes of Slieve Donard in April the National Trust is continuing to lead path repairs on Slieve Donard, renewing some of the older stone-pitching below and above the Donard-Commedagh saddle. The Mourne Heritage Trust has also been busy with path work in the Mournes.

- The Wicklow Uplands Council, in cooperation with others including the National Parks & Wildlife Service and Mountaineering Ireland, commissioned a survey to assess the erosion on 165km of hillwalking routes in the **Wicklow Mountains**. The findings from this survey will be shared with hillwalkers in a Zoom meeting to take place in the coming months.

National Trust path workers Theo, James and Alan on Slieve Donard



with farmers to improve habitat condition in the uplands. Looking down on Dublin city while discussing how changes made in farming practice will help protect water quality, it was easy to see how projects like this can benefit everyone in society.

In October, **Blackstairs Nature** a small group of volunteers concerned for the future of biodiversity in the Blackstairs brought together a panel of high-profile speakers for a really stimulating event. The discussion examined Ireland's upland environment through the lens of the Blackstairs, with a good balance between reality and positivity. It also provided an opportunity for us to speak with two Green Party Ministers. The event was live-streamed and is available on the Blackstairs Nature YouTube channel.

Working together

In all of our work to care for the mountain landscapes that inspire and sustain us, and to ensure continued access to these places, Mountaineering Ireland is engaged with others – a host of interests from individual landowners to government departments. In a year that involved much online work, two in-person events stood out:

On a beautiful day in August, the **SUAS upland agri-environment project** hosted a farm walk at Kilmashogue in the Dublin Mountains to showcase the project's work

In the period ahead we want to encourage and support more hillwalkers to get involved in conversations about the places that matter to us, so that we can help find a balance that will enable people and nature to thrive.

Helen Lawless is Mountaineering Ireland's Access & Conservation Officer. If you have queries on these topics, or you would like to know more, contact helen@mountaineering.ie, or follow Helen on Facebook and Instagram. ■

The wide erosion scar on the summit cone of Croagh Patrick



PROVISIONAL AWARDS MADE BY MOUNTAINVIEWS IN 2021 AND 2022

This is our best endeavour to get lists of Awardees for the two years of Covid.

As always there could be errors and omissions. Our apologies in advance for these – please let us know.

Let us mention something about the awards this year. This is the first year we have attempted a “Video of the

Year” which as with the Picture of the Year is selected from a public vote. We did not have an enormous number of votes for the four nominated videos. This must be partially because viewing all the nominated videos takes time. It is perhaps a commentary on the videos needing to be brief to be compelling.

There are fewer than usual contributor’s awards and this can be put down to repeated lockdowns. Conversely and perversely the lockdowns had a silver lining. The volunteer projects expanded. The work for projects such as “Standardizing the area and subarea names” or “Creating a starting point list” took months or more than a year of effort which will contribute to the information available to hillwalkers for years.

2021 (WALKING YEAR 2020)

Arderins

Ilenia (Ilenia Vendutti)

Arderins & Arderin Bogs

Ilenia (Ilenia Vendutti)

Vandeleur-Lynams

Eamonoc (Eamon O’Callaghan)

Geo (George Hodgins)

Ilenia (Ilenia Vendutti)

Millsd1 (David Mills)

MountainMike (Mike Jordan)

Carns

Fergalh (Fergal Hingerty)

County Highpoints

Aidy (Aidy McGlynn)

Brendanbarrett (Brendan Barrett)

Dregish

Helenha (Helen Harris)

Jasonmc (Jason McAndrew)

Karloconnor (Karol O’Connor)

Kitchen (Mary Henchy)

Marty_47 (Marty Cooke)

MichaelG55 (Michael Gilmore)

RockyCaver

SenanFoley (Senan Foley)

Sfoley

Highest 100

Eamonoc (Eamon O’Callaghan)

Fergalh (Fergal Hingerty)

Geo (George Hodgins)

Ilenia (Ilenia Vendutti)

No1Grumbler (Bernard Mahon)

Local 100

Eugeneryan959 (Eugene Ryan)

BrianKelly / Abcd (Brian Kelly)

MichaelG55 (Michael Gilmore)

Daingean (Thomas Droney)

MountainMike (Mike Jordan)

Contributors Awards

Fergalh (Fergal Hingerty): *UK Hill Reports*

Markmjcampion (Mark Champion):

Short Summaries

Paul Tempan (Paul Tempan):

Placenames

Melohara (Mel O’Hara): *Subareas*

Miscellaneous/Volunteer Awards

Declan Murphy: *MI Arderin*

Committee

Grainne McLaughlin: *MI Arderin*

Committee

Alan & Margaret Tees: *Irish Peaks book*

Helen Lawless: *Irish Peaks book*

Hannah Ní Shearcaigh: *Kerry Pronunciations*

Photo of the Year

mcrctchly (Martin Critchley)

International Photo of the Year

mcrctchly (Martin Critchley)

2022 (WALKING YEAR 2021)

Arderins

Fergalh (Fergal Hingerty)

Simon3 (Simon Stewart)

Arderins & Arderin Bogs

Fergalh (Fergal Hingerty)

Vandeleur-Lynams

Fergalh (Fergal Hingerty)

Ulsterpooka (Steven Forde)

Wilderness

County Highpoints

Caherdavin1995

Carolyn105

ConMack23 (Conor McCarthy)

JohnRea (John Rea)

MickM45

nickywood (Nicky Wood)

nupat

TommyMc (Tommy McGibney)

Highest 100

derekfanning (Derek Fanning)
Grumbler (Derek McGrath)

Local 100

eflanaga (Laobhan Flanagan)
trostanite
Carolyn105
chelman7
blessobilly
loftyobrien
Wildrover
annem (Anne Morrissey)
pinchy
Pepe

Contributors Awards

dino - Niall Harran
Fergalh - Fergal Hingerty
Paul Tempan - Paul Tempan

Volunteer Awards

melohara (Mel O'Hara): *Standardising the area and subarea names*
peter1: *Proposing a list of 50 great hillwalks*
march-fixer (Tom Condon): *Correcting summt information*
Paul Tempan (Paul Tempan): *Improving summit information including names and pronunciations*
JohnA (John Burke): *Creating starting*

point list

markmjcampion (Mark Campion): *Correcting short summary information*
Frank Browning (Frank Browning): *Maintaining Article Index*
Sinead McCann: *Inishowen Pronunciations*

Photo of the Year

therifleganger (Akash Murphy)

International Photo of the Year

Peter Walker (Peter Walker)

Video of the Year

gerrym (Gerry McVeigh)



Irish Gallery

Outstanding photography from MountainViews members in 2021



2021 WINNER Gearhane: View of Kerry's snowy Brandon range in December. 📷 thrifleganger (Akash Murthy)
mountainviews.ie/summit/37/comment/22271/



2021 RUNNER UP View of the Achillbeg southern top in Mayo taken from the north west. 📷 markmjcampion (Mark Campion)
mountainviews.ie/summit/1376/comment/23051/

Irish Gallery

Outstanding photography from MountainViews members in 2021



From Caha SE Top. View looking towards Cummenadillure Lough and Cummeenanimma Mountain in Cork. 📷 Colin Murphy
mountainviews.ie/summit/1410/comment/18038/



A view of Blackstairs Mountain in Wexford from the north with partial cloud inversion. 📷 simon3 (Simon Stewart)
mountainviews.ie/summit/85/comment/23356/

Irish Gallery

Outstanding photography from MountainViews members in 2021



Descending Glenkeel Top via SE side of Knockeirky South Top in Cork, home to many waterfalls. 📷 Colin Murphy mountainviews.ie/summit/749/comment/23256/



The view over Glengarriff from Shrone Hill 📷 eamonoc (Eamon O'Callaghan) mountainviews.ie/summit/1168/comment/23185/

Irish Gallery

Outstanding photography from MountainViews members in 2021



Ridge Walk on SW corner of Oileán Molua or Horse Island 📷 conorb (Conor Buckley)
mountainviews.ie/summit/1410/comment/18038/



Sun setting behind the Knockmealdown Mts as seen from the Comeraghs in Waterford 📷 Barry28213
mountainviews.ie/summit/74/comment/23322/

International Gallery

Outstanding photography from MountainViews members in 2021



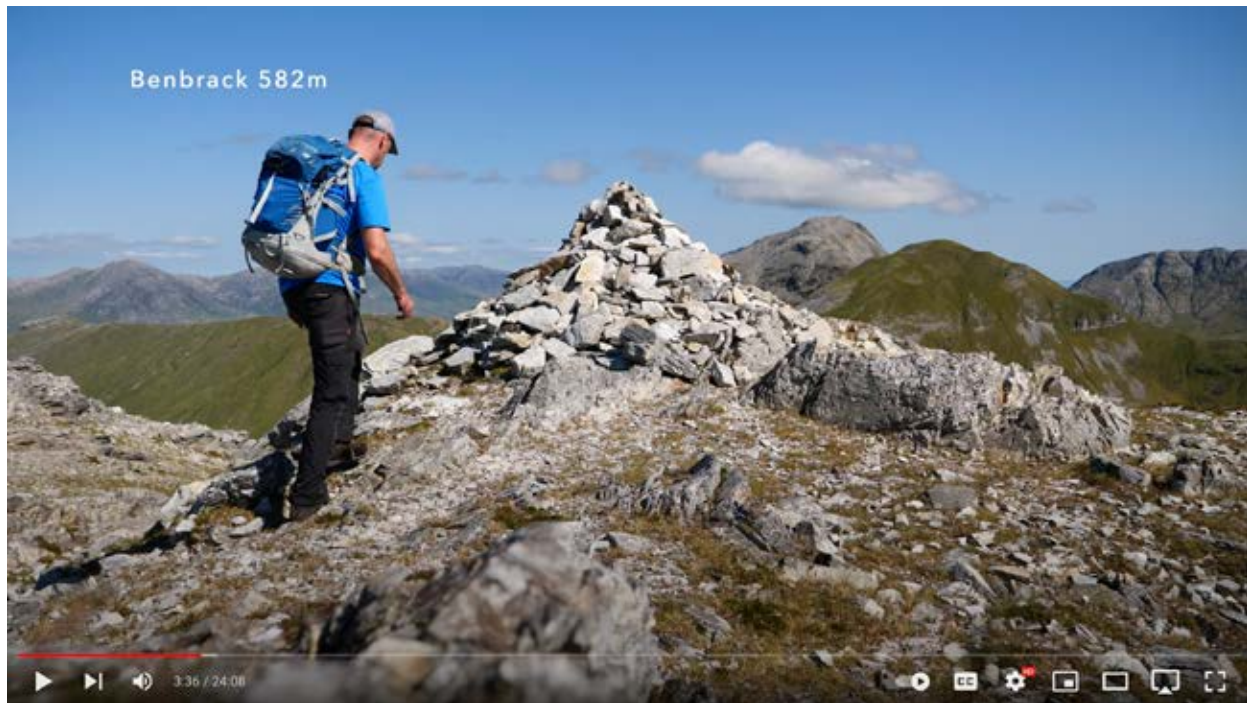
2021 WINNER Sgurr na Forcan. Ridge encountered via Glen Shiel to Loch Hourn and Loch Quoich, Scotland. 📷 Peter Walker
mountainviews.ie/track/4528/



2021 RUNNER UP Cynriau. Snowy trek from Bala to Welshpool (The Berwyns), Wales 📷 Fergalh (Fergal Hingerty)
mountainviews.ie/summit/B5176/comment/22945/

Video of the Year

Outstanding videos from MountainViews members in 2021



2021 WINNER Wild Camping in the Twelve Bens gerrym (Gerry McVeigh)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIYhpQ8p2Dc

Nominated for its languid capture of the spirit of hillwalking



2021 RUNNER UP A walk in the Dartrys
 Fergal McGrath Photography.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5nq8z0dJpw

Nominated for its technical prowess and non-clicked drone use



2021 RUNNER UP A rumination on the
 Cuilcagh Boardwalk Tough Soles
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQhFM-JO5pU&t=93s

Nominated for its deeply thought and felt commentary



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WE HAVE BOOTS WE NEED TO FILL.

Last year hillwalking has been badly curtailed due to lockdowns again. On the bright side, at each easing of restrictions members poured out comments, shared tracks, photos and more. Things look brighter for this 2022 so far.

As mentioned before we experienced a surge in research projects such as finally putting together short summaries for the Highest Hundred summits, getting names and descriptions for starting places including parking, creating a list of 50 Best Irish routes, further adding to pronunciation files, and reforming the areas and subareas we use to categorise hills and mountains. There is a list later.

Perhaps you have always wanted to help in these supporting tasks and have some time now. Perhaps you want to do something useful with enforced isolation. Perhaps you found MountainViews useful and would like to give back. We have projects that could use more people and will help the sport of hillwalking.

Compensation? No money but we can offer satisfaction for a job to do well with community recognition. Sometimes gathering information gives you fascinating suggestions as to where to go that will enhance your future exploration. Sometimes you will learn background to where you have been.

Here's some projects we could use help with:

RESEARCHING NAVIGATION APPS

We want to research the numerous navigation apps out there and see which would make sense. This is a project where typically you would take one or two of these apps and use them in depth for some months and then report their qualities against a list of what we are looking for in both free and paid apps.

Example apps: Maps.me, Gaia GPS, OsmAnd, Locus.

COASTAL SUMMITS AND FEATURES

We started adding coastal summits (smaller hills within a km of the sea coast). People have visited and written up many of them, so providing a resource for all. There are some coastal summits left to do and a wide-open space with regard for cataloguing the headlands and other coastal features.



SHORT SUMMARIES

These provide brief practical information about places. We want to make sure every summit on the island of Ireland has a concise and appropriate description. Currently all Highest Hundred summits have a Short Summary (though some could use revision). We want to expand this to all Arderins. This is a task that takes time and patience. It rewards through its connection with what you have already visited or are thinking of visiting in future.

PRONUNCIATIONS

We are preparing pronunciation files for Irish and English names of the places that MountainViews features. If you able to do this, preferably a native speaker and interested in helping please let us know. This project is coordinated by Paul Tempan. (Sample sound file here: mountainviews.ie/summit/148/) Currently we have files for most Kerry summits and some for Donegal.

IN BRIEF, SOME MORE HEADINGS:

Lake Islands, List of Heritage Hills, Researching a British+Irish list of summits, Characterising our extensive library of photos, Updating our list of maps of hillwalking interest for Ireland, Video Indexing, Climate Change implications for hillwalking.

VERY EXPERIENCED HILLWALKERS OR OTHER SPECIALISTS

We have some fairly open-ended projects we would like to progress with experienced hillwalkers, particularly where they have previously done research, GIS or photographic work etc.

YOUR PROPOSAL

If you have a good suggestion we will listen.

PROGRAMMERS

As always, we are keen to find people willing to donate time and experience to adding features to and maintaining our software. This uses a mostly open-source stack, including PHP, JavaScript to ES6, Webpack, OpenLayers, Git, Gitlab, QGIS, MySQL, Linux etc. We are also looking for algorithm developers particularly for GIS tasks.

**To Discuss Volunteering, contact us at:
admin@mountainviews.ie**

WALKING WILDERNESS WONDER

Sharing information on routes,
places, challenge walks, videos.
Forums, Lists, Newsletter.

**MOUNTAIN
VIEWS**

mountainviews.ie

Hillwalking website & community