
JANUARY 1997

Sunday Hikes

Sunday 05th January *Kevin Kelly*
Ballynulty Gap - Black Hill -
Mullaghcleevaun - East Top - Duff Hill
Ballynulty Gap.

Sunday 12th January *Lorcan Sweetman*
HIKE DETAILS TO BE ADVISED

Sunday 19th January *Joe Gilvarry*
SIX HILLS

Sunday 26th January *Joe Kelleher*
Glenmacnass, Tonlague, The Brockaghs
Laragh

Sunday 02nd February *Brian Madigan*
Pier Gates, Lugalla, Military Road,
Djouce, Tonduff, Maulin, Crone Wood.

Thank You

Aghavannagh, Ballinelea Re-Union
Just a few words to thank all those who made such a success of our re-union. So many people gave a hand, putting up decorations, keeping the hostel clean, during the final clean up, when everyone had left, all the talented musicians and singers, the set dancers, slide show etc., the list is endless. Special thanks to the dedicated team who worked in the kitchen all of Saturday and produced such a wonderful meal. They are Eileen Francis, Marian Goff, Lorraine Brady, Orla Shannon, Tony Farrell Bernadette Gilvarry.

Thank you one and all, and wishing everyone a gret new year in the hills.

SEAN DUNNE

Young Hillwalkers Club

*Saturday hikes meet at former Irish Press Offices, Burgh Quay at 08:45am
Bring: Packed lunch, wet gear, and torch.
Wear: Boots, tracksuit bottoms, (no jeans)
hat and gloves.*

NEXT HIKES

Saturday 11th Jan. Rockbrook
Saturday 08th Feb. Glencullen to
Curtlestown.

NEXT WEEKEND AWAY

Feb 14 - 16 Glendalough
for info. phone 8304555 An Oige.

For those of you who don't know us, Shane O'Sullivan and Colm McMahon are two really nice guys completely devoted to hillwalking. For those that do know us through An Oige, yes we are those two annoying little gits who listen to music via one walkman on the hills and bug everyone on the bus playing Christy Moore etc.

For the last two years Colm and I had consistently been drawn to Co. Wicklow for the walking weekends we did ourselves. This was mainly due to extreme financial constraints we have and Wicklow was always a cheap option for us. A certain apprehension existed also about going somewhere further afield. Don't get me wrong though, we are fairly experienced walkers for our age and we have navigation down to a tee, but everyone is wary of new territory. So when the opportunity arose for another weekend at Halloween the law was laid down by Mr. McMahon: We're NOT going walking in Wicklow. I put forward the idea of a canoeing trip, which was dived at, but alas one of my canoes (which we were to use) resembled more a sieve than a water going vessel. When that idea was washed away (excuse that very bad pun) I came up with the bright idea of going walking in the Mournes.

Because of an over-hectic summer of work and play, neither of us had much opportunity to get out on the hills. For that reason this was the first decent walking weekend in several months, the last being Wicklow funnily enough! In early September we joined with the Wee Binnian Walkers and did a day hike of Slieve Binnian, which is in the southern end of this magnificent range. We got a real taste for these hills and vowed we'd be back soon. We made it then at Halloween. Colm came out to Skerries where I live the day before the trip so we could prepare things. I had some route cards prepared that were just possibilities for walks and because Colm was too lazy to alter anything he just piped up "they're grand, can we go to sleep now?". In all fairness to the chap it was I am.

We got the train to Newry from Skerries, incidentally this is the only Newry train that serves Skerries in the week, and then a bus from the station into town. The guy at the Bus station was most helpful in taking our bags while we went to get our money changed. Newry didn't strike either of us as a particularly beautiful town but this probably had something to do with the fact that we got stung for five pounds on the exchange rate! The bus was right on time and took us out of Newry through Hilltown and Castlewellingan to Newcastle. We arrived here at about half past ten and checked straight into the hostel so we could get out on the hills as early as possible.

The hostel left good impressions in our minds for coming home that evening, although we didn't see it for very long, no thanks to the big fella's over eagerness. You see, all the way on the bus we could see the high peaks of the Mournes silhouetted against the dawning sky. When Colm saw the full extent of the range he and I became more and more excited at the prospect of climbing these amazing mountains.

Slieve Donard was the first day's walk. This meant a rather long road walk to Bloody Bridge, the site of the massacre of prisoners on escort from Newry to Newcastle during the 1641 rebellion. From here we went along a path called the Brandy Pad which took us through Crannoge to the saddle.

This was our first meeting with the Mourne Wall. Nearly as amazing as the breathtaking view across the north section of the range is the unbelievable achievement of the mourne wall. This was built early this century and is 23 miles long. It crosses many of the peaks and is generally up to 2 meters in height. I have to comment though on what an amenity the wall really is. For us it acted as the most useful navigation aid we've ever had in place on the hills. It can be reliably followed up to the peaks of many mountains. It is extremely well built and provided us with a lot of shelter on all days walking. For this reason I believe it's a very good safety feature to have on the hills, taking away the danger of wind-chill if a problem arises. Thankfully we didn't need it for this purpose but it gave a great vantage point to view the range. Anyhow, we followed the wall to the peak of Donard. It was a purely amazing feeling to be up on the highest mountain for a one-hundred mile radius. The wind was ferociously strong and we had to fight to stay in a vertical position on the peak. After five minutes of cold hands and watery eyes we continued down to the second saddle of the walk. From here we took a direct route down by Glen River to Donard Wood.

This is a fantastic wood and our route through it was through well matured deciduous forestry. Beech, oak and sycamore abounded and we got it at a perfect time of the year with all the variety of Autumn colours. The Glen River itself flowed beside us all the way through and it is a lovely clear crisp looking brook. The colour of the trees around and the granite rocks underneath give it this crisp colour. Our route card, which was meticulously completed, gave us a walking time of 5hrs 22mins. We cut one hour off this time which pleased us both considering the length of time it had been since our last trip.

It was great to arrive back to a hostel where the heating was on and the showers were hot, despite the fact that we were the only two staying in the hostel. The facilities were excellent - a well laid out kitchen with all the normal features plus microwave, deep fat fryer, a huge oven and no less than four fridges. I believe that some of our hostels could learn a lot from the example set by the Y.H.A.N.I. Having said that, they do seem to suffer from the same teaspoon famine as all hostels seem to! After sitting in our room looking out to the sea and the hills (a rare enough thing when you think about it) wallowing in the heat for about an hour we showered and made dinner. Colm's culinary activities aren't up to much as I learned on other trips and when I spent two weeks with the chap in Kerry. It's not all bad though, he can make tea and toast-Whoaoo!!! I was left to make the stir-fry which didn't turn out too bad. Colm ate it but then that's not saying much cause you know - he'd eat food he prepared himself.

We had this sitting in front of the telly. Things were getting better and better - I didn't even have to miss my fill of soap operas! Next stop was the Percy French for a couple of lemonades. While Colm rang his dad I began talking to a guy who turned into a good acquaintance. When Colm came back he suggested we ring our girlfriends but a quick look at what money we had left after buying all that lemonade made the decision for us. "Think about it - it's the choice between talking to your mot or getting another pint of lemonade". What could I say, the chap had a point. Our new found friend talked to us about many things, but mostly Northern politics and the troubles. I got the feeling he thought that was what we wanted to hear but Colm and I had already decided not to enter into political discussions with anyone for safety sake.

The more people we met though, the more politically orientated the conversations became. It was something else though, before long we were in a group with Catholics, Protestants, Orangemen and republicans, all sitting peacefully chatting and having a pint, of lemonade of course. People introduced themselves with their political stance first and then their name. It was like - Hi I'm Orange and my name is John. They did this purely to take the mickey though. I was really impressed by the people I met and their being so easy going about everything. I wish that the politicians could have experienced what we did in that bar, ahem lemonade bar. Anyway back to the walking!

We made it to bed early enough and were set to rise at 6:30. It would have been later but we lost an hour with the clocks changing. We did manage to get out of the sack at 7am and left the hostel an hour after this. We picked up the Ulster way in the middle of town and it took us out through Tollymore Forest Park, which is largely evergreen, to Trassey river. A decision had to be made here. Bearnagh was shrouded in mist so we decided to alter our original route taking in Meelmore, to go straight up Hare's Gap. Again this is a very impressive sight, crossed boldly by the Mourne Wall. The Gap is the saddle between Bearnagh and Slievenaglogh. By now some of the mist had cleared Bearnagh and we decided to make our ascent from here, using the wall as a guide. Unfortunately mist still clung to the peak so we didn't quite get the sights we hoped for. Even in that limited visibility, the rocky outcrop of Bearnagh was a sight to behold. We back-tracked to the gap and here picked up the Brandy Pad again. This well defined and partially paved path took us contouring around many of the hills of the north section of the Mournes. We passed through the saddle at Slieve Beg and crossed down to "the Castles". This is a most impressive array of rock tower like formations jutting out of the ground like spears. They look really good for a bit of bouldering, if any others are in to that. In fact these hills abound with rockclimbing opportunities and I'd say the ice climbing here is excellent. From the Castles we continued to the Donard saddle and resumed the previous day's route down Glen River.

More warmth in the hostel and food and showers left us perfectly relaxed and also the tiredness we could both feel catching up with us. We returned that night to the Percy French and met the same friends again. We were roped in to a table quiz with the others and we came third. No prize for this place but we won a bottle of wine in the raffle. This put us in a good mood leaving - the winning, not the wine! Before we left the bar we got lot's of offers of accommodation if we were coming back which were all gratefully received. Little do they know they'll be having house guests in the near future.

On our last day we did a little coastal walk and dropped into the tourist office to load up on brochures before we left. Financially we were finished by now so on the bus we had to assume the identity of either students or O.A.P.'s - the former seemed more credible than the latter. Our return train fares came to £9.90 and we scraped together £9.87 and left a virtual I.O.U. for the remainder.

So here ended our trip. I must say that we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, the walking and scenery was excellent, the people we found very nice and it made a real welcome change from Wicklow with which we are all very familiar. Anyone who may have some apprehension about going to this part of the world should drop those doubts immediately. As the commercial says - "you'll never know unless you go!". One thing though, if you do decide to check it out - bring someone who knows how to cook a decent stir fry!

Newcastle Youth Hostel,
30, Downs Road,
Newcastle,
Co. Down,
BT33 0AG.
03967-22133

Approximate cost of the trip:

Hostel: £6.50 stg per person/night
Transport: £20 stg & punts (trains and busses)
YHANI Phone Number: 0232-324733
N.I. Tourist Board (freefone): 1800 230 230
Map: Sheet 29, English O.S. (Great Outdoors)

Written By: Shane O'Sullivan (01) 8490530

Edited (in lots and lots of places) by: Colm McMahon (01) 4945053