

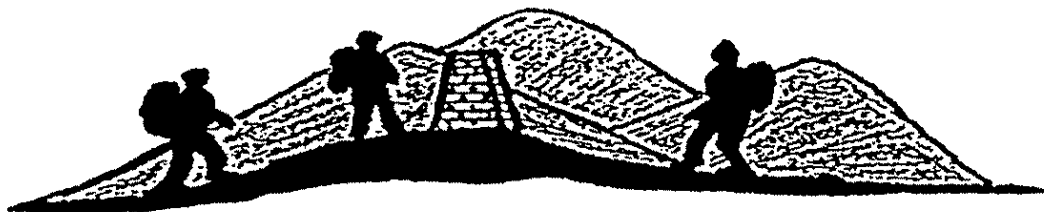
Hillwalker

January 1999



The magazine of the An Óige Hillwalkers Club

The Hillwalker



Planting Rice in Laos

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Points of Interest:

- 1999 Membership is now due
- Club Annual General Meeting

Sunday Hikes

MEET: Outside Irish Press Offices, Burgh Quay
DEPART Sundays 10.00AM. (or when the bus is full)
COST: Private bus. £5.00 (unless otherwise stated)



NOTE: The leader has the right to refuse anyone who is not adequately equipped (*i.e.* without adequate rainwear, spare clothes, food, torch and hiking boots). The leader has the right to extend, curtail or alter the route from that described in the program. The leader sets the pace of the hike and walkers are expected to obey his/her instructions at all times.



During winter months it is essential to bring a (head) torch on all Sunday hikes and weekends away. Don't forget to check your batteries and bulb.

Date	Route Description	Leader
10 Jan	Fernhill Tunnel - Three Rock - Fairy Castle - Tibbradden - Pine Forest - Cruagh - Killakee - Glendoo - Knocknagun - Prince William Seat - Raven's Rock - Shop River.	Ita O'Hanlon
17 Jan	INTRODUCTORY HARD HIKE Crone Wood - Maulin - Toneduff South - War Hill - Djouce - Wicklow Way - Glensoulan - Crone Wood.	Monica Cadden
24 Jan	Knickeen Ford - Knocknamunnion - Table Track - Wexford Gap - Cavanagh's Gap - Lobawn - Corrie Bracks - Church Mtn. - Hell Kettle Bridge.	Pat Flanagan
31 Jan	Pier Gates - Cloghoge River - Lough Dan - Knocknacloghoge - Luggala - Sally Gap - Grouse House - Liffey Head Bridge - Kippure Gates.	Prionsias Mac AnBheatha
7 Feb	Fenton's Car Park - Camara Hill - Lugnaquilla - Slievemaan - Ballineddan - Camara Hill - Fenton's Pub.	Tom Kenny

Important Notice

Your club membership card **MUST** be carried and produced on all Sunday hikes. Numbered tickets will be given out on the quays by a committee member. People with a valid membership card and ticket will be given preference on the bus.

MOUNTAIN SAFETY NOTE

Mountaineering is an activity with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants should be aware of and accept these risks. People who take part in our club activities do so at their own risk and are responsible for their own actions and involvement.

The Committee requests that anyone who is on medication or with a medical condition inform the leader before the hike.

The Hillwalker's Club Annual General Meeting

The An Óige Hillwalker's Club Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 27 January 1999, at 8.0pm **SHARP** in The Central Hotel, Exchequer St. Dublin 2.

Where will the Club ring in the new century, head for on those weekends away and exciting holidays abroad? All will be revealed at the AGM.

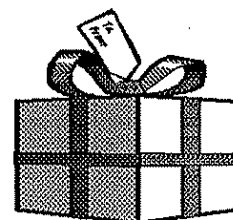
Directly after the meeting Donal Finn and Barbara Sudrow will give a slide show on their holiday to Thailand and Laos.

Three car parks in the immediate area. On arriving at the hotel check the notice board or ask at reception for directions to the function room.



Christmas Party News

The Christmas party which was held in the An Óige Youth Hostel in Glendalough was a huge success and the Committee would like to thank all those people who helped, including the hostel staff who cooked such a festive meal on Saturday evening and the various outdoor shops, individuals and businesses listed below who donated spot prizes.



Army Bargains, Little Mary St.

Bramac, Liffey St.

Capel Camping, Capel St.

Great Outdoors, Chatham St.

K2 Camping & Clothing, Talbot St.

Patagonia, Exchequer St.

Outdoor Adventure Store, Liffey St.

Outdoor Stores (Macs & Wellies Group), Dundrum Shopping Centre.

Outdoor Stores, (Macs & Wellies Group), The Square Shopping Centre, Tallaght.

The Ramblers Way Camping Shop, Mary St.

Scotsman's Hut, Little Mary St.

Milletts Leisure Ltd., Blanchardstown Town Centre.

Milletts Leisure Ltd., The Square Shopping Centre, Tallaght.

The Palace Bar, Fleet St.

Arnotts Plc., Henry St.

Low Alpine Shop, Temple Lane South.

Jim Dowling, JF Dowling Coach Hire, Dublin.

An Óige Head Office, Mountjoy St.

O'Brien's Fine Wines, Dalkey.

Lost and Found

Found in Glendalough Hostel after the party were laminated maps and guide books. The owners can contact Martin Fagan.

Found on the bus after a Sunday hike were a pair of trousers and shoes. The owners can also contact Martin Fagan.

Also found on the bus were a pair of gaitors. The owners can contact Prionsias Mac AnBheatha.



A SOJOURN IN THE LAND OF A MILLION ELEPHANTS

Most tourists on arrival in Bangkok, appear to direct their attention either south to Phuket (beaches) or north to Chiang Mai (jungle trekking). We, however, decided to try something different; to go north by east, entering Laos at Vientiane, pushing onwards to the mountain-locked Luang Prabang and finally culminating in a 300km Mekong river journey to Huay Xai near the Lao-Thai-Burmese border... the Golden Triangle. So, with this semblance of a plan, we sallied forth to this fabled land of a Million Elephants.

However, there were a few niggling realities to be considered. For instance, independent travel in Laos has only been possible since 1994. At that time, a combined Thai-Lao venture underwritten by Australian funds saw the completion of a new bridge spanning the Mekong at Nong Khai¹. Yet, it was only towards the end of 1997 that the Lao authorities allowed independent travellers to enter Laos directly via the aptly named *Friendship Bridge*. Furthermore, Laos has few paved roads. For instance, Route 13 (Vientiane / Luang Prabang) was only paved in late 1997. Otherwise, there is only one other paved route in Laos.

So it was with some uncertainty, on a hot August day (35C 80%RH), Barbara and I, duly equipped with passport photographs, an appropriate Lao contact address and other bureaucratic necessities, were admitted to one of the world's few remaining Communist countries, the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the princely sum of \$50pp cash and a period not more than 15 days.

Prior to that we had spent a week travelling by train through Issan² (N-East Thailand) from Bangkok. Issan is the poorest part of Thailand and sees none of the tourist trade which has overrun other areas. This is probably part of its charm which when coupled with a distinct ethnic and cultural background, its own dialect and cuisine makes it a memorable destination. Furthermore, it is sprinkled with Khmer ruins, relics from earlier Cambodian influences. Its food, invariably hot and spicy and readily available from street vendors was one of its simpler delights.

Vientiane was... let's be direct... a shock, a mess. On the down-side, its streets were dusty, severely potholed and lined with open stagnant waterways that coupled as public latrines. Otherwise, a litre of beer came in at 2000 kip (35p). Despite being one of the poorest countries (per capita income basis), there appeared to be little visible poverty. Most memorable was the People's Revolutionary Museum, where the glories of the Communist state were exalted, whilst the Imperialist West castigated! I suppose

¹ Named "Friendship Bridge", It is one of two bridges that span the Mekong over its 4500km length. The other is in China.

² *Pira Sudham*, a Thai author has written award winning novels on Issan. Also, *Chris Kremmer* on Laos. Recommended plane reading!

³ Between 1964 and 1973 over 580,000 sorties were made over

it's not hard to see this alternative perspective, given that Laos holds the dubious record of being the most heavily bombed country in modern warfare³.

Next destination... Luang Prabang, which was reached after an overnight in Vang Vieng. Here, one was surrounded by ranges of impressive jungle-capped mountains. One interesting observation... a youth ambling nonchalantly by with a machine gun slung over his back!



Our first week was spent between Bangkok and Nong Khai. Next saw Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Huay Xai. Our final week was spent in Northern Thailand before returning to Bangkok. Costs: £600 flight and about £350 for spending.

Luang Prabang was still an eight hour bus journey through further mountainous terrain. Our bus, a forty seater carried well over one hundred passengers with twenty extra sharing the roof with assorted cargo, both live and dead! We were one of the fortunate ones. Our roof top position gave us fabulous vistas and unlimited air conditioning. Luckily, the afternoon monsoon rains held off! Before being paved in 1997, this route was considered unsafe as buses had been subjected to attack from Hmong tribesmen⁴. Accordingly, for a 50 km stretch, there were armed troops every 500m.

Luang Prabang realised all expectations. Designated an UNESCO World Heritage city, it nestles on a wide sweep of the Mekong, still retaining a significant flavour of its French colonial past. Most remarkable, is its status as a Lao centre of Buddhist learning. On every corner temples were to be found, which made for a colourful collage of orange and browns as monks and novices came and went.

The atmosphere was extraordinarily peaceful. It seemed like a city from a past era... few cars, many mopeds and innumerable bikes. Street lighting was virtually absent. Tourists were few and sights were many, from the grandiose temples to the omnipresent street vendors.

Finally it was time to push on and not without considerable regret. Huay Xai, lay some 300km away, only reachable by either Mekong slow-boat (2 days) or Lao speed-boat (6 hours). Speed-boats are a most extraordinary example of engineering improvisation which is to be found everywhere in developing countries. They are a very low squat boat, barely capable of carrying eight people under very cramped conditions. Most interesting however, is their method of propulsion. In our case, it was a 3.0 litre Toyota engine, mounted externally on a swivel pedestal and directly coupled to a small two bladed propeller which appeared to be driven at about 4000 rpm. Exhausts were removed! The result, a thrilling though deafening 50km/hr ride along the Mekong that left us breathless by Huay Xai. *Donal Finn*

Laos. Averaged, it's equivalent to one plane load every 9 minutes or 10 tonnes ordnance per km²! In addition over 1,000,000 litres of "Agent Orange", a defoliant, was deposited over Eastern Laos.

⁴ The Hmong settled in Northern Laos from China in the early part of this century. They seek political autonomy within Laos.

The Committee

Chairperson:	Martin Fagan (01-8553653 h)
Secretary:	Donal Finn (01-4530617 h)
Treasurer:	Prionsias MacAnBheatha (01-8379897 h)
Editor:	Maggie Greaney (01-2834253 h)
Sunday Hikes:	Jim Barry (01-4556455 h)
Weekends/Holidays:	Martin Fagan
Membership Secretary:	Gerry Walshe/Pauline Morley (01-8225818 h)
Training Officer:	Joe Kellegher (01-8381973 h)
Social Events:	Donal Finn / Martin Fagan
Young Hillwalkers:	John Guy (01-4524627 h) or Dave Rooney (01-8344811)
Other members:	Frankie Comerford
Distribution:	Cyril McFeeney



To facilitate quicker processing of your membership, please send application forms and fees directly to membership secretary and not to An Óige Head Office.

Leaders urgently wanted. Contact Jim Barry at 01-4556455 between 7.00pm and 9.00pm.

Membership renewal

Annual member fees are now due. Please send £15 to Ger Walsh/Pauline Morley at the address on the form and not to An Óige Head Office. Fees may be paid on the night of the AGM.

Next Committee meeting

Next Committee meeting will take place on Wednesday 20 January 1999. All committee members are requested to attend to discuss the AGM.

A Note from the Editor

During 1999 all articles published in *The Hillwalker* will be entered in a competition under the categories of holidays/weekends abroad and holidays/weekends at home. Prizes will be awarded at the 1999 Christmas Party so please put pen to paper and send your articles or items of interest to the address below for inclusion in the newsletter. If possible the articles should be typed or in electronic form and should be a maximum of 500 words. A stamped and addressed envelope should accompany any photographs or articles to ensure their return.



Also, book reviews on hillwalking and related topics would be very welcome.

Articles for inclusion in the February newsletter should be sent before Friday 15 January 1999 to:
Maggie Greaney, 68 Newtownpark Avenue, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.
(e-mail: maggieg@tinet.ie)