

KERRY TRIP – SEPTEMBER 2022

Introduction

Following the ending of the various restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, sixteen hardy souls decided to venture to County Kerry to avail of the wonderful walking opportunities there. Unlike many previous trips, this one was blessed with magnificent weather. Near-constant sunshine and a light breeze meant that I, for one, only had to put on a second layer twice – once during the helicopter rescue from the top of Carrauntoohil (about which, more later) and then again during the ascent of Mangerton.

A trip to Kerry is not to be undertaken lightly: it takes around 5 hours (plus stops) to drive there, despite the good road network. It is a popular spot, so getting suitable accommodation can be difficult, and the walks are a lot harder than we're used to, with long walk-ins before ascending some challenging peaks. However, it is worth it for the scenery (if the weather permits) and the Guinness (regardless of the weather).

Walking in Kerry was rife during the pandemic, with the result that there is a lot of erosion on popular routes, and some routes are starting to have access problems (as we found to our cost). The popularity of walking is such that the Kerry Mountain Rescue seem to have a constant presence on the top of Carrauntoohil, and, given the number of people who wanted to climb Ireland's highest mountain, they're never lonely!

Logistics

We stayed in and around Kilorglin, a small town in County Kerry with a population of just over 2,000 people (excluding tourists). Most people stayed in the Bianconi Inn, which is where we ate most evenings and planned the following day's expeditions.

The hotel was used to catering for walking groups and was able to make up sandwiches for any who wanted (there were also local shops who could make up sandwiches to order), and could accommodate the varying times of the evening meals. (Hence the phrase: "We'll have dinner whenever C group decide to come off the mountains", although in our defense, if you'd seen the weather, you wouldn't have been in any rush back.)

Most people travelled to Kerry on Friday 16th September, stayed for three nights and left on Tuesday 20th September, although a few walkers stayed an extra night (and one had to leave early)

The walkers were:

B Group: Andrew McKibbin (Leader), Robert Campbell, Malachy Devlin, Nigel Garrett, Karen Laurenson, Robert Marshall, and Brige Turley

C Group: Peter McGowan (Leader), Irene Cauley, Raymond Gray, Ellen Greaney (and her friend Cait), Domnall McComish, Janet Muller, Noel Rice and Bert Rima

The Walks

Both groups arranged their own walks for the first two days then started from the same point on the third day; there was a combined walk available on the fourth day for the diehards who stayed the fourth night.

Saturday 17th September 2022

C group decided to ascend Carrauntoohil on the first good day, and Saturday was a marvelous day, so we parked at the main car park at the Hydro Road and followed the track beside the information board. (Note: the board stated that groups of ten or more had to complete an Event Sheet and submit it to the MacGillycuddy Reeks Access Forum; both MRG groups had fewer than ten people so fortunately this didn't apply to us.)

Having followed the track to Lough Íochtair, we ascended Skregmore (848m) via Cnoc Íochtair (747m), and then on to Beenkeragh (1008m), where some adventurous scrambling was needed to reach the top. Crossing the ridge to Carrauntoohil was terrifying in places, but we all made it. An advance party reached the top of Carrauntoohil (1039m), but then had to wait on the remainder of the group because the Kerry Mountain Rescue had requested a helicopter rescue for a walker who had torn their calf muscle and couldn't walk off the mountain; the Irish Coastguard helicopter was on its way in, and the top of the mountain had to be cleared to allow it to rescue the casualty.

The rescue itself was exciting to watch, as the helicopter first scouted around the top to ensure there were no cross-winds before winching down

one of its crew, then retreated whilst the crew member prepared the casualty, before returning to winch up a companion of the casualty before winching up the crew member and casualty together. The down-draft from the helicopter was very powerful, so the Kerry Mountain Rescue ensured that all walkers at or around the top of the mountain were kept a safe distance away. This was the highlight of the trip as far as C group were concerned (and it helped us forget the terrifying ordeal of crossing the Beenkeragh Ridge!)

The plan had been to walk to Caher and Caher West Top before descending the ridge and rejoining the track back to the car park. However, given the time elapsed so far on the hike, the non-drivers headed straight down to Cronin's Yard, via the zig-zag path and the Hag's Glen, while the drivers descended the Devil's Ladder to be picked up from Cronin's Yard by drivers from B group, who gave them a lift back to their cars. The C group drivers then gave the rest of C group a lift back to the hotel.

An exciting day for a group of walkers who between them had two knee replacements and two reconstructed ankles!

B Group: B group travelled to Derrymore Strand and hiked a looped circuit of the Slieve Mish mountains, taking in Baurtregaum NW top (723m), Baurtregaum (851m – highest in the range), Caherconree (835m) and Gearhane (792m).

C Group walk: Length: 14.5 km; ascent 1249 m

B Group walk: Length 14.7 km; ascent 1040 m

Sunday 18th September 2022

Following the excitement of Saturday, the C group Sunday walk was to be a more relaxed circuit of Coomasaharn Lake. Wrong! When we arrived at our parking spot, kindly permitted by one of the home owners, we were informed in no uncertain terms by a local farmer's wife that we would not be able to complete the circuit, because it finished by going through their fields and they were denying permission. We decided to start the walk as planned, but to return by retracing our steps. This was easier said than done. The ascent included a steep climb up Knocknaman (561m), before a gradual climb to Meenteog (715m) before reaching the highest point at An Tráigh (772m). This meant that the descent also included the steep slopes of Knocknaman, but on our way back we noticed a more gradual descent (I use the phrase advisedly) and headed for that. The descent was more

challenging than the planned route, but we made it down safely, and even had time to pick blackberries on our way back to the cars.

The B Group ascent of Carrauntoohil on the Sunday, started from a car park at Liseibane which sits above Cronin's yard. The walk took in Knockbrinnea (854m), Beenkeragh (1008m), Beenkeragh Ridge, Carrauntoohil (1039m), Cnoc na Toinne (845m) descending to the Hags Glen by the zig zag path. No helicopter interlude this time!

C Group walk: Length: 13.6 km; ascent 796 m

B Group walk: Length 13.5 km; ascent 1135m

Monday 19th September 2022

Both groups set off on their Monday walk together, with B group leading the way from the car park to Mangerton (843m), via Mangerton North Top (782m). The walk from the North Top to Mangerton was over a ridge with the lake in the Devil's Punch Bowl on one side, and Lough Erhogh on the other: beautiful scenery. Both groups met at the top of the ridge, with B group just finishing their lunch, and about to set off for Stoompa (705m), and C group about to ascend to the top of Mangerton before descending to the Devil's Punch Bowl for lunch by the lake.

For once, C group made it back to the cars first, but arrived back at the hotel last (as usual) because we stopped off for some refreshments on the way.

C Group walk: Length: 12.1 km; ascent 780 m

B Group walk: Length 16.9 km; ascent 934 m.

Tuesday 20th September 2022

Most of the group headed home on the Tuesday but some walkers decided to stay another day. Three intrepid walkers headed up Caher to enjoy the great views from the high Kerry mountains, whilst another group stayed at a low level, enjoying part of the Kerry Way.

All in all, a very successful trip, not least because of the beautiful weather. (And the Guinness)