

Connemara Hiking Trip 2024

Thirty four members of the Mourne Ramblers had a hugely successful away trip to Connemara from Sunday 19th to Thursday 23rd May. Twelve members who arrived before 2.00pm on Sunday had an introductory 2.5 hour walk up and down Diamond Hill on a beautiful sunny afternoon offering amazing views in all directions.

The full list of members attending the Connemara was; **B Group**; Philip Appleton, Olwen Herbison, Malcolm Buck, Seamus Hughes, Malachy Devlin, Karen Laurenson, Robert Marshall, Andrew McKibbin, Norman Elliott, Deirin Gallaugher and Nigel Garrett. **C Group**; Noel Rice, Irene Cauley, Eloise Cowie, Dymphna O'Brien, Geraldine Nelson, Suzi Fitzpatrick, Kate O'Hara, Severina Kelley, Patricia McCaffrey, Ray Gray, Gabriel McCauley, Marion Gunn, Philip Gunn, Mary Joy, Kingsley Thompson, Domnall McComish, Ian Stuart, Conor Mulvenna and Randal Nelson. **D Group**; Jackie Bates, Dermot MacDermott, Fionnuala Carragher and Pauline Dunlop.

C Group Walks (Led by Ian Stuart & Noel Rice);

On Monday 20th May, in beautiful sunny weather, 19 members completed the Mweelin Walk opposite Kylemore Abbey (Ben Baun, Benbrack and Cnoc Breac). In 6 hours we walked 10.8km and climbed 760m with one member capturing some fantastic footage with a drone.

On Tuesday 21st May, the weather took a turn for the worse with a very low thick mist hanging over the mountains all morning and into the afternoon. The planned walk was the Benchoona Horseshoe comprising Binn Fhraoigh (Ben Free), Garraun and Benchoona. It was intended to complete this in an anti-clockwise direction from Lettergesh Beach which, in decent weather, entails an 11km walk and well in excess of 700m ascent in around 6 hours. However, between Ben Free and Garraun it was decided, in the interests of the safety of the 18 member group, to abandon the planned route as the very steep descent from Benchoona would have been too risky in very poor visibility. It would also have taken much longer than 6 hours given the weather situation. We opted for an escape route back down the valley and still had a respectable C walk at 8km, 644m of ascent in 5 hours. To the delight of the sea swimmers in our group, at Lettergesh Beach the weather had improved sufficiently for 7 of them to spend an enjoyable 10-15 minutes in the water.

On Wednesday 22nd May, despite a reasonable weather forecast, before the ascent of Leenane Hill had started the donning of wet gear was required among the 17 strong group. With intermittent showers in the morning, by the time we reached the summit the weather had deteriorated with heavy rain, winds gusting to 50kmh and quite low temperatures. However, as lunch finished the weather improved to reveal stunning views of Leenane and Killary Harbour. We had much better conditions for the descent from Leenane Hill before returning to the hotel via the Western Way. The stats were 12.5km distance and 780m of ascent in just under 6 hours.

B Group Walks (Led by Andrew McKibbin)

On Monday 20th, the 11 member group, fortified on the first day with copious quantities of porridge, eggs and sausages, set off for Lough Inagh, south west of Leenaun, to the Bens range of mountains. We climbed Ban Corr (711m) and Derryclare (677m) in perfect, dry hot conditions, covering a total of 16.1Km with a total climb ascent of 1,036m.

Day 2, Tuesday 21st, saw a change to our original plan. Due to heavy overcast cloud and some rain, and the likelihood of little, if any, visibility, Andrew postponed the tour of the Maamturks and opted to climb Mweelrea (815m) from Doolough, ascending the famous 'Ramp'. The ground on the climb was wet and tricky in some places, and required care. At the summit of The Ramp, Andrew's expert navigation guided us safely around the edge of Beal a Mham, before the final ascent to Mweelrea. Those who had been there before could visualise the view to the coast, the islands, Silver Strand, and Ben Lugmore to the East, but for those who had not been there before, it had to be imagined. There will be another time. We lunched in heavy drizzle, and made our way back to The Ramp for the descent. The sky cleared a little, giving excellent views of the valley. Total distance was 11km, and ascent of 1,040m.

On Wednesday 22nd, Day 3, we returned to beyond Lough Inagh, to grapple with the Maamturks. Setting off from near Glendollagh Lough, the Group ascended Binn Mhor (661m). Around noon, squally rain set in, which made the going difficult, but it gradually improved, and we walked along the ridge line, with good views of the Maamturks, Bens and coast. Total distance was around 14Km with ascent of 1050m.

D Group Walks (Led by Fionnuala Carragher)

The first D Group walk on Monday 20th May was a climb on Diamond Hill, a small steep sided mountain (c.400m), in fine sunny weather offering stunning views, followed by a well - earned visit the Hiker's Rest Cafe.

On the following day we did a more relaxed walk within the expansive grounds of famous Kylemore Abbey and again it was a good, dry day.

The final walk of the trip involved a walk on part of the old " Western Way" above the line of the main Leenane to Letterfrack road with good views over Killary Lough and surrounding mountains.

The Leenane Hotel staff were fantastic throughout our trip and, as always, the food was excellent. On the social side, many new friendships were made and existing ones consolidated. We also discovered many hidden talents within the group. On Tuesday night with music in the bar, several members displayed their Irish dancing skills to the delight of many of the hotel guests. Hats off to Irene, Olwen, Mary J and Dymphna, MRG's very own Irish dancing troupe. As on other nights, the party continued well after the musicians finished, aided by modern technology (iphone and portable speaker). Talent was also rewarded when Ray Gray was awarded the title of Honorary Hen by the Hiking Hens within the group. He was so proud. Overall, a hugely enjoyable away trip. As well as hill walking and fine dining, Connemara 2024 offered much more; sea swimming, drone wizardry, Irish dancing and pop-up parties to name just a few.

Noel Rice, Norman Elliott & Fionnuala Carragher