

Connemara Mountain Walking Festival

Saturday Walk A

Peak the highest mountain in Galway

The Twelve Bens (Na Beanna Beola means the peaks of Beola) is a mountain range of 12 peaks that are visible from almost any point in Connemara. The mountains domineer much of the topography of the area with grey glassy peaks and boggy open hillsides. Sheer cliffs amid long glaciated valleys and torn streams make this walk demanding and dramatic and highly satisfying.

The walk along a bog road on the valley floor. The first real climb starts after 2km where a narrow spur rises towards the summit, the ground then steepens so the walk follows a sheep track across the face of BenBaun to a Mass rock. The walk then skirts around a loose shale section and continues upward through rugged terrain to the summit of BenBaun (725m). From here take in the views of real Connemara and the innumerable dappled lakes as the walk horseshoes around the hill to Muckanaght (654m). A rugged decline to Maumnascapla, one of the many cols which then rises immediately onto Benbrack (582m) and Benbaun (beag) (477m). It is here that the Kylemore valley opens up and there are spectacular views of the abbey, church, lakes as well as Benchoona and Ballinakill Harbour. The homeward downhill is soft and easy going and joins onto an old trail alongside the Mweelin River. Overall you will have engaged with 5 of the 12 Bens.

Distance 15km Ascent 1,180 total climb Time 7/8hrs

Saturday Walk B

Taking the path least treaded

Sheeffry Mountains (Cnoic Shíofra or the Fairy Mountains) are a series of hills, clustered through grassy led quiet slopes and weathered rock outcrops. The walk starts at Barnaderg close to the Sheeffry pass, with views across to Tawnyard Lough, Bengorm and Bencreggan. The walk follows west along an evenly sloped spur with the Glenlaur Horseshoe on the right. Most of the climbing will be complete after 3.5km when the mountain plateaus out at Tievnabinnia. From there the walk skirts the narrow path on a very slight incline past trigonometrical point at Tievummera (762m); the going is easy and soft until a minor col before Barrclashcame (772m). The views are spectacular with steep slopes and cliffs on both sides of the narrow path, Doolough and the Delphi valley are visible along with Mweelrea and Atlantic coastline glimpses. A short stony downhill scramble just below the brow after the summit needs to be cautiously approached, but it leads onto the last spot height at Clashcame (580m), before straggling downwards towards the Glenkeen valley and Carrowniskey River. The Sheeffry Mountains often receive little

acclaim but the scenery, landscape and experience are second to none, this walk takes you through the best of it. (13km track with 960m total climb)

Saturday Walk C (Easy)

Killary Fjord Famine Trail

The Killary Fjord An Caoláire Rua is the natural boundary between Mayo and Galway amidst dramatic North Connemara landscape. The inlet breaches eastwards alongside the great highland Mountain of Mweelrea and the rugged verges of Foher and Bunowen. A rocky trail is firmly etched on the hillside and meanders along the southern shore side of the Killary. This trail was originally constructed in the 19th century to alleviate communities in the area of deprivation and hunger. The walk starts at Rosroe pier at the tail end of the Killary. The linear ridges of lazy beds and homestead ruins lie despondent along the trail; the sea side has dashed long lines of blue mussel awaiting harvest. The walk enters a more consistent surface by 4km and passes alongside three working farms, one a mussel farm, a salmon farm, the other a sheep farm. This remote trail is nestled peaceful and serene amid the rugged and dramatic Connemara landscape.

Total length: 10km Total climb: 60m

Sunday Walk A

Peak the highest mountain in Mayo

Mweelrea Mountain (Cnoc Maol Réidh) is the highest mountain in Connaught (814m), rising from the bowels of wild Atlantic seascape in dramatic upland ruggedness. The mountain offers one of the finest panoramic views in Ireland on a good day although often shrouded in mist and mystery, the walk is always best undertaken with a guide. This year the walk will commence on the North shore of Doolough and through the gap in the loughs to the natural Ramp path amid house sized boulders. The airy glacial cliff edges pitch steadily to the first peak of Ben Bury, then skirting the horseshoe to the exposed summit. The narrow split ridge leads north eastward with surges of long and sometimes steep declines onto Tonatleva hill and a benign forest track guiding us tea-wards and bun-bound to the fabulous Delphi valley. (15km track with 1,120m total climb).

Sunday Walk B

Challenge the Devil

Maumtrasna Mountains (Mám Trasna meaning the crossing pass) has abundant corrie features carved coarsely throughout the mountain face, with uncompromising gullies, rock configurations and geology. In comparison the summit is a large flat and boundlessly indulgent plateau capable of potentially fitting many football pitches. The walk will start at Glenacally Bridge and meander along crystal clear streamscape and waterfalls. The first climb will be gradual but start to steepen before the brow onto the Maumtrasna plateau. It is difficult to find the summit here as it appears all flat but a short hike to trigonometrical station Maumtrasna (673m) the landscape dramatically unfolds in appreciation of the views of Lough Mask and Lough Nafoeey. The walk then turns westward, along the belligerent border between counties Mayo and Galway and onto Knocklaur (518m). The mountain drops down into a coll before a steady push for the Devils Mother (645m); the views here are spectacular on a fine day with evidence of glaciated valleys, Killary Fjord and Tawnaleen. The walk continues downhill along the border softly and steadily until the first sight of the Carraig Bar is visible where the smell of the scones and a warm cuppa will be a most teamly...I mean timely. (15km of track with 980m total climb)

Sunday C/B Walk

Glennagevlagh Hike

The glacial sculpted valley at Glennagevlagh or Gleann na nGeimhleach (Glen of the fetters) is situated at the head of the Killary Fjord. The 'hillock' spur is the most southerly point of the Partry Mountains. The hill boasts one of the gentlest hikes in the area, with soft harmonious rises from the shallow shoreline. The panoramic views in this short hike are rewarding and captivating, underfoot is soft and almost indulgent. The walk starts in the village and follows the old bog road towards the hearth of the hill. The trail grasses over on willow lined upwards steep, passing ruins of old homesteads and once nurtured lazy beds. The trail follows a fence line to the top of the initial spur and then hangs steadily around the Glenn. The rise is as subtle as the underfoot conditions for 3km until at 330meters the mountain takes over and rises sturdily upwards and northwards. The hike then turns for the green valley fields through an old barely there access track. The track skirts onto a headwater stream which together flows seawards onto the remote and peaceful country side and farmsteads. The tarmac leads the walker to the walks end at Glennagevlagh Bridge looking onto Aasleagh, Bengorm and the Killary islands.

(9km of walking and 510meters climb)