

# IRISH Trekker

April 2006 - Issue 30

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Before the rain came (and come it did!). Joe Murray's A walk up Lug on March 25<sup>th</sup>.

*The Trekkers Mountaineering Club*

GLENAGEARY CO DUBLIN

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## Taking flight

I thought before a word came about my own change in circumstances – absconding to work in Germany for a couple of years – that ‘flight’ seemed to be the unifying theme of the Springtime/April issue: Our former editor took flight over the Christmas to the small Canary island of ‘La Gomera’ – a two-hour ferry ride from Tenerife. International communication skills were tested...but, ever the consummate PR man, he deftly(?) avoided diplomatic ‘incidents’ with the ‘Wanderführer’ and fellow hikers.

Fergal Mulloy headed further afield to the south island of New Zealand. There he added crampons to his boots and took to the glaciers, where he learned that New Zealand’s glaciers are bucking the trend and advancing, not retreating as so many other glaciers are.

Army veteran, Philip O’Neill, is probably as comfortable flying as he is driving, having spent the greater part of his military career overseas. His 39 year career in the army took him from Cyprus to the Lebanon and Kosovo, with duty at home in between. His article, ‘A life less ordinary’, spans the decades and captures the full flavour of army life.

Not all the flying was one-way, however. Dick Ryan gives great insight into the birds we can expect to encounter in the hills over the coming months. Many, including the better-known Swallows and Swifts, coming from as far away as Africa.

Closer to home, Gilbert brings us up to date with the final stage of the An Óige Map and Compass course, and Dick (Ryan) went shopping...well, only looking really, when he visited 53 Degrees North. Paddy very kindly agreed to go surfing on behalf of the ‘Trekker’, but due to space constraints, you’ll have to wait for the next issue to hear how he got on.

**Trekker**

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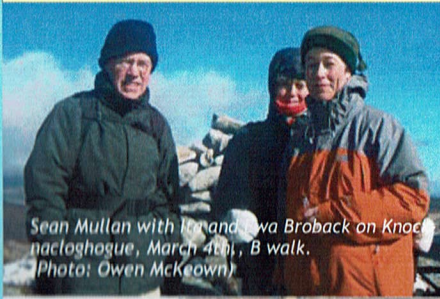
Working on the ‘Trekker’ and being a member of the Committee has been the best of all possible gigs. You see yet another incredibly positive side of the Club – a side that further demonstrates the talent, generosity and genuine ‘niceness’ of the members.

I will be in touch and help out in any way I can...and I will be back for hikes from time to time, but, in the meantime, if you’re in Munich, please look me up. And, who knows...we may get to do some hiking in the Alps together. (Possibly even establish the ‘international’ division of the Trekkers!)

Breda

## Welcome new Members

A hearty welcome to new Trekkers; Marie Comiskey, Henry Jack, Sean Mullan, Ewa Broback, Mary Dillon, Suzanne Browne and Lesley Tilson. We look forward to many happy hikes with all new members.



Sean Mullan with Ewa and Marie Comiskey on Knocknagloghogue, March 4th, B walk.  
(Photo: Owen McKeown)



Helen Warrinton, Marie McKeown and Mary Dillon on the Cooleys, 8th April.

## Dates for your diary



The Committee has arranged a First Aid Day for Saturday, May 13th.

It is very important that all Trekkers have some knowledge of First Aid and the Committee would strongly encourage as many members as possible to take the opportunity and avail of the course. Even a very basic knowledge of First Aid will ensure that, when an emergency occurs, Trekkers will be in a position to offer immediate assistance to the injured or suddenly ill person, while they await more appropriate medical help, if required, to arrive.

The cost is a very reasonable €10 per head.

**When:** Saturday 13th May, 2006

**Where:** The Dun Laoghaire club premises

**Start time:** 10.00 a.m.

**Finish time:** No later than 4.00 p.m.

Members of the Order of Malta, Bray Unit, will provide the training. They plan to cover the following topics:

- introduction to First Aid
- contents of a First Aid kit
- how to deal with wounds
- how to deal with soft tissue injuries
- low sugar levels
- heat emergencies
- cold emergencies (Hypothermia)

We can add to the list to ensure we cover relevant outdoor activity-related injuries/incidents.

Contact Pearse asap to sign up.



## FOOT & MOUTH DINNER

The Annual Foot & Mouth dinner will take place at the Glenmalur Lodge on Saturday, 24th June at 5.30 p.m.

The B walk will leave at 10.00 a.m. on the 24th and C walk at 12.00 noon. Both walks will be followed by the meal.

All-in cost for bus, meal, etc. €35.  
Accommodation limited.

To reserve your place on either walk and dinner, contact Eugene Logan or Eileen Gallagher.

## Inflation hits Trekkers! Rise in bus costs

Most people are probably aware, but, for anybody who has not been out for the past few weeks and may not know, please note that the bus cost has risen by one Euro and is now €15.

Leaders should note that the break-even number for a bus is now 13 (Trekkers/guests), and a minimum of 10 hikers is required before ordering a bus.

Note from the Committee re bus cancellations:

If people have to cancel their booking after the bus has been ordered on Tuesday, The Committee would greatly appreciate if Trekkers would volunteer to pay their bus fare. The bus is ordered based on the numbers the leader has received by Tuesday and if people do not offer their payment, and a sufficient number are not on board to meet the break-even cost, the Club will be running the bus at a loss.



## Birds of the mountainside

Dick Ryan identifies the birds we can expect to see over the coming months

One of the things that sometimes surprises newcomers to hill-walking is how few birds we see on a day's outing. The reason for this (apart from being distracted by the fantastic company and the great scenery) is that the habitats through which we most frequently walk (open mountainside, coniferous forests) do not support a great diversity of species. Other habitats (broadleaf woodlands, wetlands, the seashore etc.) do.

### The Raven

The bird which I see most often when out on the open mountainside is the Raven. Invariably, I hear the Raven before I see it: a deep, loud, honking "korrrp" sound, which reminds me a little of a dog's bark. It is the largest of the seven species of crows which we have in Ireland. It is all-black with a very heavy bill and a tail which fans out before narrowing in towards the tip in a wedge shape. They pair for life and breed in deserted woods, in uplands and on coastal cliffs (you can see them around Killiney).

### The Skylark

The bird which most Irish people associate with summer in the uplands is the Skylark. This bird is brownish in colour with creamy underparts and a crest on its head which can be raised or lowered. In size, it is midway between a Robin and a Song Thrush. Its most familiar characteristic is its song, which consists of a non-stop, strong, loud, clear warbling delivered as it climbs higher and higher into the sky on fluttering wings until it eventually stays at one spot, a mere dot in the sky overhead and very difficult to see, although you might be drowning in the gorgeous song. Our first singing Skylark this year was on the B walk on February 18<sup>th</sup> on Trooperstown Hill.

### The Meadow Pipit

Another bird which we often see on open moorlands and bogs is the Meadow Pipit. It is not unlike a Skylark in appearance although it lacks the crest and is slightly smaller. Like

the Skylark, it nests on the ground. We frequently disturb them when we are walking in open country. One can often see them rising in a display flight, giving a series of accelerated, thin, tinkling, piping notes before descending to the ground in a characteristic parachuting glide.

### The Red Grouse

A bird which we sometimes disturb from the heather is the Red Grouse. This is a dark, plump bird with rounded wings. It flushes noisily from the ground, flying with rapid, whirring wing beats and long glides on bowed wings. It is a fairly scarce bird in Ireland and nests on the ground in the heather which is its favourite food.

### The Pheasant

Another beautiful game bird which we very frequently see is the Pheasant. This bird hardly needs a description. It was introduced into Ireland in the sixteenth century. While some of the birds we see in Co. Wicklow are wild birds, I suspect that most of them have been released by gun clubs.

### The Wheatear

The five birds which I have mentioned so far are non-migratory – they live in Ireland all the year round. The next one I am going to mention is the Wheatear which winters in Africa and is amongst the first migrants to return to Ireland in spring, some birds arriving in early March. (I have seen them flying in off the sea on to the West Pier in Dun Laoghaire.) They are a little bigger than a Robin and have an upright stance. A creamy white underside, smooth blue-grey upperparts, black wings and black facial mask make for a very elegant bird. They breed mainly on rocky mountain slopes, which is where we see them most often. It is frequently the white rump ("white rear" became "wheatear") that catches the eye first, as it flies ahead on to the next boulder. They leave again for Africa in October.

### Other visitors from Africa

Other, more familiar, migrants which we see during the summer on our way to the uplands are the Swallows, Swifts, Sand Martins and House Martins, which also come to us from Africa.

I will end with a bird which you are unlikely to come across – but if you do, please let me know. This is the Ring Ouzel, which looks like a Blackbird but has a broad white crescent patch around its breast. Fifty years ago, it used to be a widespread summer visitor to mountain ranges all over Ireland, including

the Wicklow Mountains. Now the population appears to have decreased to perhaps 50-100 pairs, mainly seen in Donegal and Kerry, and its future looks bleak. The birds are most likely to be seen near cliffs, rocky outcrops and screes. Around the Upper Lake in Glendalough would seem to be a good habitat. The song is a series of lonely, piping notes, often finished with a clatter.

Let me know if you see one.

### Birds we might be lucky to see on the hillsides

The Skylark



The Pheasant



The Meadow Pipit



The Wheatear



The Red Grouse



The Ring Ouzel





# Gliding on a glacier

Fergal Mulloy in New Zealand



Advancing glaciers in New Zealand

If glaciers are not numbered among the great wonders of the natural world they should be. They are truly awe inspiring and beautiful.

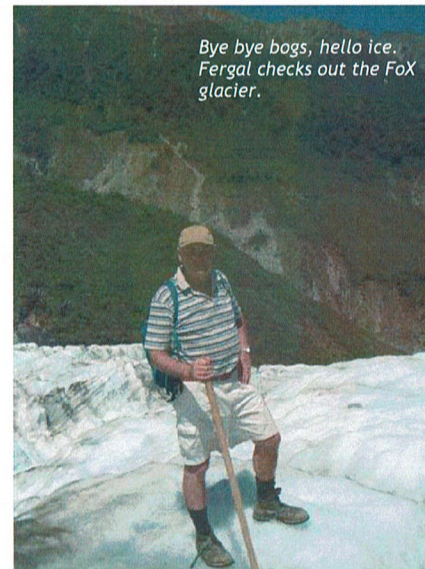
While we hear a lot about climate change, Greenland's retreating ice cap and rising sea levels, we hear little about New Zealand's advancing glaciers. One of the paradoxes of climate change is the fact that both the Fox glacier and Franz Josef glaciers in the roaring forties of South Western New Zealand are advancing instead of retreating. Apparently the explanation is that the great heat of central Australia in recent hot summers generates a warm air mass over the already warm Tasman sea between Australia and New Zealand. This brings vast amounts of moist air to the western slopes of New Zealand's Southern Alps and deposits large amounts of snow – up to 30 metres per year – to fall on the *neve*, or catchment area of the glacier. Snow that is compacted on the *neve* forms blue glacier ice that is funnelled down the valleys of the glaciers. This flows under its own momentum, forming these 'rivers of ice', creaking and cracking as it goes. The rate of flow in the Fox and Franz Josef glaciers is estimated to be ten times faster than most valley glaciers.

Thus began my first lesson in glaciology. A

fit, tanned and willowy youth was both teacher and guide to our group as we set out on a four-hour hike up and down the Fox glacier. This glacier was named by William Fox, an early New Zealand Prime Minister (he called it after himself and not after the tasty Foxes Glacier Mints!). The glacier is up to 300 metres deep and its terminal face is just a few miles from the village of Fox Glacier itself. It is fed by four alpine glaciers and falls 2600 metres on its short 9 mile journey to the coast.

**Warning! Do not attempt to jump across the crevasses**

The glacial hike was organised by a group appropriately called Alpine Guides. With all the necessary gear supplied (boots, crampons, sticks, rucksack etc), we set out on a steep breath-taking climb up the side of the valley until we came parallel to the end of the glacier. Below us we could see an ancient moraine from the glacier's earlier advances and retreats. We descended down to the edge of the glacier where we fitted our crampons. Following instructions about following the leader at all times, not attempting to jump across crevasses or walk over snow bridges, we climbed up on to the glacier itself.



Bye bye bogs, hello ice. Fergal checks out the Fox glacier.

Fortunately for the group of ten excited souls, a nice young man had, like John the Baptist himself, prepared the way. Steps had been carved out that morning with an ice pick, which certainly made the ascent

easier on to the glacier itself. The climb up reminded me of the walk up the Spinix in Glendalough. However there the similarity ended. As the sun was hot and the air was warm, the surface was just a tad greasy. At close quarters these enormous rivers of ice ripple with blues and greens with dirty gravel and boulders frequently puncturing the surface.

Apparently it takes about fifty years for compacted snow in the form of ice to travel from the top to the bottom of the glacier. The well rusted tin can I found peeping up at me from the ice came most likely, the guide told me, from an occupant of the mountaineering hut high up on the edge of the glacier who casually cast it aside about fifty years ago.

Altogether the hike was a most rewarding experience with spectacularly beautiful scenery. The air was crystal clear and the cosmopolitan company chatty and cheerful. I reckon the walk would be rated about B on the Trekker scale, although somewhat shorter than normal. The fee for the guided walk was NZ\$65 (€38).



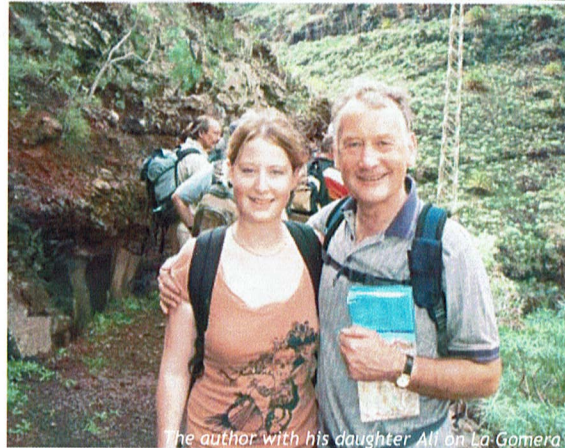
Fred English led the C hike on February 21



# Encounters with the Wanderführer

## Brendan Bracken spends Christmas on La Gomera

A family holiday over the Christmas break in Fuerteventura was the original plan "Very windy and lots of flies," said Mary Murray;" full of nudists" intoned Tom, though I'm not sure whether he approved or not. Whatever about nudists; wind and flies offered little appeal so a fresh look at the map came up with "La Gomera" a smaller Canary island near Tenerife.



The author with his daughter. All on La Gomera

"A haven for trekkers and independent travelers and has long been the secret jewel of the Canaries," said the Lonely Planet Guide. I didn't need much persuasion: the family were another matter.

Waxing lyrical about the joys of La Gomera I casually mentioned the walking possibilities. Five pairs of eyes, including the dog's, fastened on me instantly. "Ah hah!", "Typical", "What would you expect", were some of the milder expressions used. However, I know how to press the right buttons (I'm not a PR man for nothing!). "Sun-kissed beaches and wonderful seafood," I purred to my wife, Bernardine, "two euros a pint", I intoned to my three offspring. Feeling perhaps it was not the best time to mention that La Gomera involved a boat trip as well as a flight, I decided to quit while I was ahead.

Despite dark looks and mutterings about a "storm-lashed rock", the journey itself went swimmingly. An Aer Lingus flight to Tenerife, followed by a two-hour ferry ride brought us to Valle Gran Rey where we were to stay for the next ten days. Valle Gran Rey, the valley of the Great King, is the most beautiful part of the island and has the sunniest climate. Approaching by ferry you see a series of green

terraces that ascend like a staircase out of the valley floor. We had a lovely hotel with a swimming pool, spacious rooms overlooking the ocean and a great selection of restaurants, which kept everybody happy.

### The family wanted me to be happy

Looking out over the balcony on our first morning, all to be seen was a steady stream of hill-walkers heading off to the mountains behind the town. "Look at that!" I exclaimed more in hope than expectation. "Off you go," they intoned in one voice. Surprisingly, they were most insistent and ten minutes later I was outside Timah, a local hill walking company which organise trips throughout the island. "Lust auf's Wandern" was their motto. I wondered about the 'Lust' bit and did it involve a different type of physical activity than I had envisaged? But what the hell, I was on my holidays and signed up on the spot for three hikes at a cost of €80. An hour later the bus picked me up outside my hotel.

There were about eighteen of us in all, all Germans except for yours truly. My German does not extend beyond schoolboy comic stuff – "Gott Himmel", "Achtung" and "Swinehund" – not necessarily a diplomatic way to strike up a conversation so I kept my mouth shut.

At the start the leader addressed the group in German before coming over to me and introducing himself in English as Sebastian, the Wanderführer. Thinking this was a joke. I was about to go into John Cleese mode: "Ve haff vays of making you valk!" etc. until he gave me his card, which bore the "Wanderführer" imprint. Again no sound passed my lips. That day we climbed "Garajonay" – at 1487m the highest mountain in the island and walked through ancient rain forest to the mountain village of El Cedro before descending to "Vallehermoso", the "absolutely beautiful valley" passing by terraces and vineyards. Wonderful!

### And I was happy!

"Did you have a nice time dear?" "good!" "Do go again," was the response from the family as they sat around the pool drinking exotic cocktails.

Two days later I was off again with another Wanderführer, this time a young woman. "Lust auf Wanderin," I said, half expecting to be frog marched off the side of a mountain for lewd behaviour but she just laughed. Who said Germans have no sense of humour? That day we passed the highest waterfall in the island, through the National park and descended via a goat's path into the village of Hermigua, which boasts having the healthiest climate in the world. Again a fabulous walk with stunning scenery looking over to Tenerife, where El Tiede, the highest mountain in the whole of Spain loomed above the clouds. We were out for about five hours and the bus had me back by 4pm in time for a cooling swim.

Back at the ranch, my exploits obviously made an impression, or else she was completely bored but my daughter Ali accompanied me on the third outing. During the walk, one of the German hikers came up and said with a smile, "Bun Rattii!" "Brendan", I replied putting out my hand. "He is telling you that he stayed in "Bunratty", hissed my beloved girl. Needless to say

this caused much hilarity, though she needn't have mentioned it to the family when we returned that evening.

That day we hiked through the south of the island along a goat's path and over a mountain to the Barranco de Guarimair, a mountain village growing figs and almonds. We were then brought to a local farmhouse where we had a delicious lunch of local specialities. After lunch we crossed a mountain pass and into the Santiago where we had some liquid refreshments before taking the short boat ride back to Valle Gran Rey.

Other days were spent whale watching, driving around the island and just lazing about. I had a few swims; the water was lovely but rough with strong currents.

The real revelation was the variety of restaurants and quality of the food. Twice I went native and ate hare and goat. The others stuck to fish. The prawns and sole were to die for, as were the prices. The total bill each night, for the five of us, ranged from €80 to €100 including wine.

La Gomera's spectacular scenery, along with its peace and tranquillity and a very old fashioned pace of life make it a very special place to visit. There are no traffic lights or dual carriageways, no roads straight enough to use top gear, no advertising hoardings. But there are abundant bars, restaurants and accommodation.

With regard to hiking, it's worth linking up with an experienced group. They know the best walks, how long they take and their degrees of difficulty; and most importantly they know how to get back.



La Gomera terrain



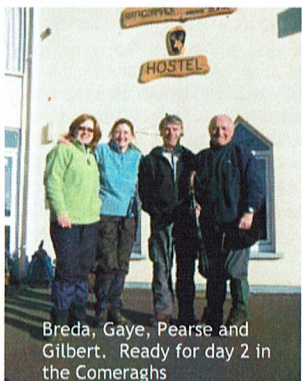
# Map and Compass course, Episode 2 – the Comeraghs

By Gilbert Little

No sooner had we got over the Trekkers Christmas Party in Laragh on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> December than those of us who had done the An Óige Map and Compass course were back into the walking gear again and assembling in Roundwood in the fading light of December 12<sup>th</sup> with lamps on our heads and ready for action.

We were taken to a rendez-vous in Trooperstown Wood, split into groups of three and headed off into the dark. As with our previous sessions, the pupil/leader ratio was very good. And as the same leaders were used, we had a good familiarity with all team members.

Exercises on the mountain were the same as earlier weekends, with the only difference that this time it was in pitch dark. It was a very cold but dry night and we were repeatedly given tasks of finding our bearings or acting as the leader of the group to find a specific feature.



Great satisfaction was gained from walking in total darkness and finding the feature (even though we knew it was there all along!). For my part, I was surprised at the actual pace of walking, which was not that dimin-

ished by the lack of light. However, the biggest problem we faced was simply drifting to the left or right off our bearing, most probably caused by picking the easiest terrain to walk on and thereby incurring the drift.

The evening ended with a convivial get together in Roundwood.

## No familiar features to go by

The last weekend of the course took us to the Comeragh mountains at the end of January. We stayed in a hostel in Rathgormack. Most arrived late on the Friday night, but no so late to sample the delights of Rathgormack which, on first appearances, is a sleepy sloping village, but turned out to have both of its two pubs humming at 12 midnight on the Friday night (not very conducive to an early start Saturday morning).

The weather was sunny, cloudless but cold and windy. We scaled all of the known features in the Comeraghs (Cnoc an Aifreann and Mahon Falls etc). Again exercises were the same as before but the essential difference being lack of knowledge of the terrain, which meant we had to be more reliant on maps than we had been when surrounded by so many familiar peaks in Wicklow. The great lesson we learned on Sunday, was the salient point of not depending too heavily on reference marks and symbols on the map – particularly forest trails. Despite trails being visibly marked on the map, we could not find the corresponding trails in the terrain around us....and we had three expert instructors who were equally befuddled by the lack of correlation in our midst!

As in the article in the previous issue, I speak for all four of us who attended the course – Gaye, Breda, Pearse and myself – and would urge all Trekkers to engage in courses like this in the future. The benefits to the club and to the individual make it well worth while.



Where's the trail?

And remember, a Wanderführer is your only Man!

By Ita Lawton



Important "dignitaries" visit Farmleigh

Tired after our journey and visiting Farmleigh we thought there might be time for 'a cuppa' in the Motorhouse Café in Farmleigh's historic courtyard but alas no, like true 'trekkers' we continued on our journey past the Ordnance Survey Office, which was established in 1824 to carry out a survey of the entire island to update land valuations for land taxation purposes.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March the leaders of the A and B walks decided to combine the two groups and have a day out in the Phoenix Park. Monty Tinsley, Philip and Derek O'Neill put a very interesting programme together and a most interesting day was had by all. It was very enjoyable to walk and chat to people you don't usually meet on regular walks.

First we had a guided tour of Farmleigh House arranged by the leaders. The house was built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was purchased from the Guinness family by the Irish Government in 1999 for €29.2m. It has been carefully refurbished by the Office of Public Works as the premier accommodation for visiting dignitaries and guests of the nation, and it is used for high level Government meetings, as well as the general public enjoyment. After viewing this magnificent house I feel we need have no worries that our visiting dignitaries are being entertained in style! I learned from some fellow trekkers that there is much going on at Farmleigh throughout the year, including lectures, concerts, special events and the Summer Cultural and Christmas programmes. (Log on to the website at [www.farmleigh.ie](http://www.farmleigh.ie) for more information.)

We passed St. Mary's Church which was built as the chapel for the Royal Hibernian Military School.

Next we arrived at the Magazine Fort, built in 1732 and once used by the Irish army to store ammunition. Our leaders decided we had earned a break so we settled down here to enjoy our picnic lunch.

After lunch, the pace quickened and we moved on past The Wellington Monument. It was built to commemorate the Irish born Duke of Wellington's military campaigns including the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815.

We stopped briefly at the Garda Depot and viewed the monument erected to commemorate members of the Garda Síochána who died on duty. We then moved on to the Phoenix Park Visitor Centre where we finally rested over a nice cup of coffee and a muffin. We didn't have time to explore Ashtown Castle dating from at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century and which has been beautifully restored and now forms part of the excellent Phoenix Park Visitor Centre. A good excuse for another visit!



# A life less ordinary

By Philip O'Neill

Some Saturdays while on the hills with the Trekkers, the conversation might come up about the "Day Job". Recently I was asked if I would pen a few lines for the *Trekker* giving a "flavour" of my experiences in the army over the past 39 years.

I have always enjoyed the outdoor scene and got my first taste of the Wicklow hills at about 12 years of age when I spent some weeks each year in Aughavanagh Hostel with the boys club. In May 1964 I joined the FCA at the Coastguard Station, Dun Laoghaire. We would train at the weekends in places like the Glen of Imaal, Kilbride and Kilpeddar etc. This was a whole new world for a young lad in 1960's Ireland and I enjoyed it so much, I left my Post Office job and enlisted in the regular Army in April 1967. I got a lift on that very first day from Tony Graham (of Graham Transport) from Dun Laoghaire to Rathmines to sign up. Tony was in the Army in the Coastguard Station at that time.

I was sent to the Curragh for recruit training which lasted five months and included two weeks adventure training under canvas north of Arklow. The training was hard but I enjoyed most of it and I must have impressed someone as when we "passed out" I received the best soldier award.

I was posted to an Infantry unit in Rathmines, where after some courses, I was sent to work in the cadet school in the Curragh. I also spent a month in the Ring Gaelteacht in County Waterford.

## Cyprus

Cyprus is a beautiful holiday venue now but I can tell the reader that when

Cyprus  
1969



I was posted there in March 1969 it was a very different, almost primitive island. The Irish were based in the North West of the island (it was not partitioned until 1974) in a hilly area. We were manning Observation Posts (OP) on hill tops for a two week stint, three men at a time. A local donkeyman brought up our ration pack food and a container of water daily and with no electricity or other sources of water or daily comforts, it was a lonely two weeks.

We spent two weeks up on the OPs and two weeks in camp. Post from home took two weeks. I got one week's leave during my six months there and I spent it in Farmagusta. The heat in the summer in Nicosia where I did a week's duty was almost unbearable. There were six nationalities in the UN Force there and each had its own area of the island to keep the peace. Some of the villages had a mixed population of Greek and Turkish and the situation was tense at times.

I did one "A" walk in the Troodos Mountains, played sport and swam in the Mediterranean Sea some days, if we had the chance. We lived in tents for the six months there. We beat the Irish Guards Regiment at hurling in a historic match.



Looking back now, we felt cut off from the world there for six months with no phones, mobiles or e-mail then. There were no flights home, or anywhere else, just long hot days in the hills, an endless summer.

On return to Ireland I spent a month in Dundalk as the North had erupted in August 1969. I applied and was accepted into the Military Police and after my MP course, my first role was to patrol the installations including Kippure and the Roundwood waterworks from my base in Collins Barracks (now museum). I also had great fun on a motor cycle course about this time, on a Triumph 500c.c. Then I was sent to Clancy Barracks Islandbridge (now closed) for security duties.

My next posting turned out to be the longest from 1970 to 1989 in Government Buildings/Leinster house and I wasn't elected! I enjoyed the duties there very much, there was always something happening.

I spent six months working in the prison in the Curragh, on the right side of the bars! I didn't like this task, but it was another life experience. I completed two courses with the Garda (Drugs and Investigation courses) and a sniper course with my unit, which was interesting and not at all as easy as it looks in the films.

## Lebanon

In October 1980 it was my turn to "volunteer" to join the 650 troops heading for the "Leb". I was lucky to be stationed in the HQ with an International Military Police Company. Over the next 20 years I did 10 tours there (six month tours). We were responsible for policing all UN troops from Beirut to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv to the Golan Heights. This was a big task as every kind of

problem possible could and would arise almost daily.

I have fantastic memories of the "Leb". With ten nationalities in my unit, it was a great experience, sharing work, culture, living together and having the "craic" as the Paddies always do.

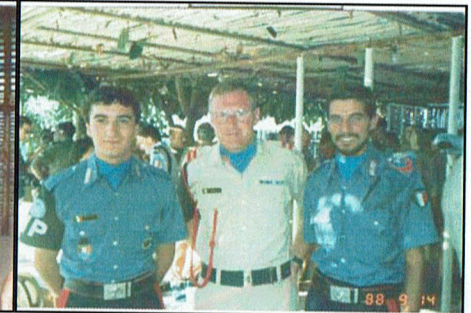
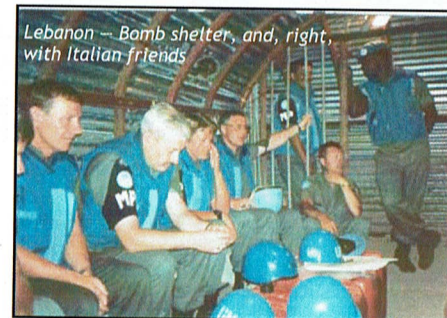
We had our sad times too, losing 47 Irish comrades there over the 23 years we had a Battalion there.

The place had to be seen to be believed. For example, in the middle of the hills in Leb you would discover a "Dunnes Stores", an "Ilac Centre" or a "Paddy the Leprechauns Shop". You would find locals who spoke with a Galway accent in a land like Connemara with sunshine. I suppose when Arab kids grew up with Irish lads (and girls) living beside them for so long this could be the outcome.

In 1988, while I was there, UN peacekeepers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. President McAlleese visited us there in 1997 and I also met Kofi Annan. I visited Bethlehem, Nazareth and Kana in Galilee and did some hill walking in Lebanon and Israel when the situation permitted, which was not very often. Members of my unit were from Norway, Sweden, Finland, France, Italy, Fiji, Ghana, Poland, India and Holland.

I was on the move again in March 1989 on promotion to Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) MP Corp at Collins Barracks. The unit was responsible for policing the Defence Forces from Dublin to Monaghan/ Dundalk and Cavan, including the Air Corp at Baldonnel.

I enjoyed being in the thick of all State Ceremonial and Military Ceremonies in the Dublin area, including the RDS Horse Show, Harbour





Hill 1916, Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Garden of Remembrance etc. All the visiting Presidents and Dignitaries kept me busy, not to mention all military funeral ceremonial, which was always very sad.

Our annual fitness tests (part of) were carried out using part of the Wicklow Way, usually from Rathfarnham to Crone Wood. The army reorganised in 1998, and, on 1<sup>st</sup> Janu-



ary 2000, I was posted to a new unit, a Logistic Battalion – the RSM in Cathal Bruagha Barracks, Rathmines. In it we have Transport, Medics, Engineers, Ordnance (Bomb Disposal) and Catering units, a real mixed bag! Every day is different in the job.

#### Kosovo

My last trip overseas was in September 2003

when I was asked to take an appointment in Kosovo with the first Irish Infantry Unit to go there. It was soon winter in a very bleak country, – 15° Celsius. I spent seven months there, part of a force of 30 nationalities based near the capital Pristina. Even getting home on leave was difficult as the airport “froze up”.

I was stranded in Budapest once. On St Patrick’s Day 2004, we were just about to eat our celebration dinner, when serious rioting commenced, so we had to postpone events and take up positions between the two sides and hold them apart until we were relieved five days later.

Villages were burned and churches destroyed and some people were killed. I travelled down to Macedonia sometimes to liaise with other Irish based there.

I have less than two years left to serve until I must retire. I enjoyed the life, which included fantastic experiences of travel, comradeship, team work and discipline. I enjoyed my life in the forces, and, by extension, my hobby with the Trekkers is a continuation of this wonderful outdoor experience, with fantastic friends and lovely people.

## “Base-layer technology” comes to Ireland

Dick Ryan checks it out at 53 Degrees North



*53 Degrees North is the line of latitude that runs just south of Laragh, through the Upper lake in Glendalough, right through the summit of Camenabologue, all the way around the world and back to*

*Laragh, having had many adventures on the way, no doubt.*

53 Degrees North is also the rather quirky name of the latest (and Irish-owned) outdoor goods store to open in the Dublin area. It is located in a new retail park in Carrickmines, called, imaginatively enough, The Park. It is easy to get to by car: get on to the M50 at Cherrywood, going north; get off at the next exit (exit 15); take first exit off roundabout (Kiltiernan direction) and you will almost immediately pass The Park on the right; go on to second roundabout and double back to enter on your left.

#### Good range of leading brands

If you suffer from claustrophobia in places such as Millets, Ramblers Way and Great Outdoors, you will love 53 Degrees North. It is high and spacious with lots of room to move around. They have an enormous range of outdoor clothing with all the leading brands such as Berghaus, North Face, Columbia, Crag Hoppers etc. As well as jackets, there are lots of fleeces, base-layer technology (guys: it’s what you and I know as underpants and vests), trousers etc. They have a good selection of headgear and gloves (although I did not find what I was looking for in the latter). Their boot selection was nearly all suede-type, which I am not so keen on for our type of walking. Some of these seemed to be good value, however. For those of you who have problems getting boots to fit, they have a (unique to Ireland) pressure-point foot analysis system. (No, I didn’t try it). Compared to the longer-established stores in town, they seemed a bit under-represented in equipment and gadgets. For example, there was only one brand of walking pole - Leki. It is

not (as yet, anyway) a place to go to for camping gear or day-rucks. The supply of maps seemed limited but there was a good book corner with a range of trekking guides, Lonely Planet guides and books about the outdoors.

Their marketing strategy is to cater for both starters and committed outdoor enthusiasts with a very good coverage of premium brands. Some of these brands are unique to Ireland, e.g. Nike ACG, Eider, Karrimor and Osprey. Prices, in general, were on the high side (although I did get a nice light-weight flask for €8) and it appeared to us (the family) that they were particularly aiming at the upper end of the market. During our February visit, however, there was a general 10% discount, with some selected products at a 50% discount. You may return any product within fourteen days if you change your mind about it. In addition, if, within seven days, you spot exactly the same product at a cheaper price in another store, they will refund the price difference.

A disadvantage to us is that they do not provide discounts on the basis of our MCI membership cards. Instead, they have their own membership club which costs €20 a year, and entitles members to a 7% discount on all purchases. The membership benefits are being extended to include special deals on a product of the month, holiday deals, in-store talks etc.

We visited the store on two occasions. Once in December not long after it opened and again at the end of February. My impression is that it is a store that is still evolving to meet its customers’ needs and that it will eventually provide good competition for the longer-established outlets.

In summary, I would say that if you are planning a purchase, especially of outdoor clothing, have a look at 53 Degrees North – it is quite convenient - before (or instead of) heading into town.

**53 Degrees North, The Park, Carrickmines, Dublin 18. Tel.214-9352.**  
**Opening hours: Sat-Tues: 9.30-6.00. Wed-Fri: 9.30-9.00.**  
**(No website yet)**

## News

www.walktalkireland.com



Fellow hiker and new Trekker member, Sean Mullan, has his hiking-related business, ‘Walking and

Talking in Ireland’, on-line. Sean’s easy-to-navigate site, is fresh, lively and colourful, reflecting the counties of Antrim and Donegal where his guided hikes take place from April to October. Information is readily available, and testimonials – backed by lots of pictures of people having a great time – speak of the quality of the holidays.

## New routes to rekke!

The State has bought a 1,600 acre section of the honourable Garech Browne’s Luggala estate for €1.725 million. The land provides a significant extension to the Wicklow National Park and links two previously separated areas. The land runs from the Sally Gap and is bordered by the Military Road (R115) on the east and the Carrigvore-Gravale ridge on the west.

Leaders take note!

## Would you like to volunteer your services?

The Committee, in particular Walks Co-ordinator John Murphy, would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in organising the Trekker hiking break in September.



## Trekkers on the hills



A walk 4th March  
(Photo: Owen McKeown)



Lug walk 22nd Feb.  
(Photo: Paddy O'Duffy)



The Wanderführer leads an A walk on Jan 26th.



New vistas in the Comeraghs



Dad and daughter,  
Shay and Kathy, on  
A Walk 25th Feb.

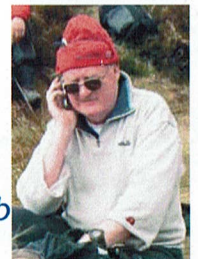
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Sometimes you  
just gotta be in  
touch.