

# The Trekker

Our first overnight stop was at the French side of the border at St. Lary, a holiday resort. We booked a quiet hotel, the Terrance Hotel, where we found comfort and good service. There was a choice of several activities some of which included snowmobiling, skiing, and ice skating. In winter there is a choice of all sorts.

Next morning we set off early for the... via the... found... and headed for... an... and a... centre... While the weather was rather... on the other side of the...

Our first night... in... 155m... of... and...



On the 10<sup>th</sup> March a navigation night will be held in the British Legion Hall, Clarinda Park. This will consist of a talk on Mountain Navigation and a practical exercise with map and compass.

Mid-week walk: This is organised by Eugene Logan on Wednesday of most weeks. Meeting place is The Graduate public house car park, 9.30am. It is advisable to contact Eugene the previous weekend so transport can be arranged.

General get-togethers in the British Legion Hall will continue to be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month.

Brian Brennan



### *Walking in the Pyrenees*

Have you ever thought of a change from trekking the Wicklow Way and seeking out a completely different scene? Well, this year my wife Evelyn and I set out for new horizons in the Spanish Pyrenees. Really we weren't quite sure what to expect and indeed at times felt that the whole venture might be too much for us. However, taking the plunge we booked ourselves a "flight only" to Lourdes and hired a car on arrival. Now we were on our own - strange car, left-hand drive and a few words of French and Spanish. Armed with maps (and some money!) we set out to face mountains that seemed to reach the sky.

Our first overnight stop was on the French side of the border at St. Lary Soulon - a holiday resort. We booked into the hotel "La Terrasse Fleurie" where we found comfort and good service. St. Lary has a choice of several activities some of which are caving, canoeing, canyoning/rafting, hang-gliding and horse riding. In winter there is a choice of ski slopes.

Next morning we set off early for the Spanish Pyrenees via the Bielsa Tunnel and headed for Ainsa - an attractive town on the Ara and Cinca rivers and a good centre for getting around the adjoining countryside. Whilst the weather was rather dull en route to Spain, a pleasant surprise awaited us on the other side of the tunnel - brilliant sunshine and a cloudless blue sky.

Our first major walk was in the Pineta Valley - a glacial trough scoured with stepped rock walls terminating in the Circo de Pineta above which looms the majestic Monte Perdido (3355m) - one of the principal summits of the Pyrenees. The valley is well marked with signed paths and here we encountered our first glacier - only to touch it - we left it to others to cross it! For the professionals there are steep climbs to the higher slopes and many could be seen high up negotiating the paths to the misty summits.

The uninhabited Canyon de Anisclo was next on the list. Again, like Pineta, it leads to the foot of Mr. Perdido. The canyon in places has high sheer walls and these amplify the roar of the torrents swollen by the melting snow. Wild flowers and herbs grow in profusion adding colour and softness with beech and yew trees providing shade from the midday sun.

We then moved on to one of Spain's National Parks - the Ordesa. We drove to the village of Torla - the most obvious gateway to the Park. Torla seems to

have mushroomed in recent years. Ten years ago it was a farming enclave in the mountains; indeed fresh cow dung still appears in its steep streets and lanes. There are plenty of comfortable hotels and hostels. We stayed in a two-star hotel for about £13 each on a bed and breakfast basis, with all modern conveniences available.

The Ordesa Valley has a variety of walks to suit all abilities. We chose the popular one - a seven and a half kilometre hike up the valley to the Circo do Soaso accompanied by many different age groups. This trail, through giant beech trees, leads to Cascada de Abarrico - a truly marvellous sight of the river falling downhill over giant rocks which appear to be fashioned like steps. At the end of the valley there is no way out except upwards to the peaks of Mt. Perdido and Mt. Cilindro - over those and you are in Gavarnie, on the French side. We returned by a higher path and as we descended through steep woods we experienced our only rain of the two weeks. By the time we reached ground level we were in the depths of a thunderstorm. Lightning flashed across the sky, thunder roared and sheets of rain sent angry rivers flowing down the mountainsides. As we made our way back to the hotel the storm abated and we looked forward to dry clothes and a pleasant meal in La Brecha, one of the local restaurants.

There are numerous other walks in this part of Spain. Accommodation wasn't a problem in July. August may be much busier. Accommodation and meals are reasonably priced. Alto (High) Aragon is the least developed area of the range - a paradise for walkers and naturalists. We didn't bring any specialised equipment other than a day bag and light rainwear. Good walking shoes were quite adequate for the popular walks. Of course if you have ambitions for higher slopes, you must go prepared for real mountaineering.

For naturalists the region is full of delights. Iris, orchid, campanula, edelweiss, gentian, dianthus are just some of the flowers which abound. Beech, poplar, pines, oak and maple trees grace the slopes. Many varieties of butterfly flit among the flowers while vultures soar high above the rock walls. We saw marmots, deer, wild ponies and evidence of chamois but there was no sign of the brown bear which is native to the area.

The venture was very successful, most enjoyable and can be recommended to all trekkers.

Eugene Logan

## GUIDELINES FOR WALK LEADERS

### *Planning the Route*

Route Selection Selection of a route depends on a number of factors, in particular

- the grade of walk, A, B or C
- the daylight available
- the expected weather
- the condition of the ground to be covered

Grade A Walk Can include all types of terrain encountered on the mountains, including steep climbs and descents and some scrambling but excluding rock climbing. Will normally take 6 to 8 hours but this may sometimes be lengthened.

Grade B Walk Puts more emphasis on forest roads and paths and less on rough or very steep ground. Will normally last about 6 hours.

Grade C Walk Largely confined to tracks and forest roads with little rough or steep ground. Will normally last 4 to 5 hours.

Daylight In planning the duration of a walk, pay close attention to the time of year and the amount of daylight available, so as to avoid getting caught out on an open mountain after dark.

A track which provides a good guide in daylight may easily be lost after dark.

A public road, particularly one which is narrow and twisting with no footpath, as are many roads in the mountains, poses a special risk from motor traffic after dark.

Weather Get the weather forecast and judge how the weather may affect the walk. The telephone number for the official forecast for the greater Dublin area is 1550-123854.

Steep Ground Be aware of any particularly steep sections on the route and how they will be dealt with. It is more dangerous descending steep ground than ascending it. Steep ground can, if necessary, be avoided by adjusting the route.

Rivers Many rivers in the mountains are difficult, sometimes dangerous, to cross after a spell of rain. Be aware of any river crossings on your route and, if in doubt, change the route to avoid the crossing.

Protecting the Environment Some parts of the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains are being cut up by large groups of walkers. In order to protect the mountains, it is desirable to avoid such areas. A list of these areas is published in this edition of the Trekker.

Route Card Prepare a route card which divides the route into a number of sections. For every section, calculate:

- compass bearing
- distance
- amount of climbing
- time required
- grid reference points

Leave a copy of the route card at points where it will be readily accessible in the event of a delayed return, e.g. at home, with the bus driver.

Time Required The walking time can be calculated by using Naismith's Rule, i.e. 5km per hour plus one minute for every 10 metres climbed. On the Discovery map the contour interval (height difference between two adjacent contours) is 10 metres. Some allowance might also be made for steep descent and for obstacles such as river crossings or an area of peat hags. The time required for breaks must also be estimated.

Escape Exits In planning the route, points suitable for exit to the public road should be noted.

Group Equipment The walk leaders should arrange that a Club first-aid kit, kishu and portable stretcher are carried by members of the group. This equipment can be picked up at Shaun Trant's house on the morning of the walk. A number of members carry mobile phones and it should be checked that at least one phone will be available.

Leaders' Equipment Every walk leader (as well as every other member) should have map, compass, whistle, torch, bivi bag and personal first aid kit. Suggested items for a personal first aid kit are:-

Adhesive dressings, preferably waterproof, individually wrapped	10
Triangular bandage, preferably sterile	1
Sterile covering for a serious wound (e.g. melolin 10cm x 10cm)	1
Roller elastic bandage, 3 inch	1
Adhesive pads, 2.25 x 3.00 inch	3
Safety pins	4
Foil survival blanket	1

Estimating the Number of Walkers Walk leaders should use any convenient opportunity to check who is going on the walk e.g. on the day of the preceding walk or at an evening get-together. Any telephone calls can be shared between the three leaders.

Transport Walk leaders should inform Kevin Beegan by Tuesday preceding the walk of the number of walkers expected. He will then arrange transport.

Route Checking If unsure of any sections of the route, it is advisable to check out these sections before the day of the walk. Particular attention should be paid to the exit from the mountains at the end of the walk.

Saturday Walk Routes Leaders of A walks should discuss the intended route of the walk with Shaun Trant. Leaders of B walks should discuss the intended route of the walk with John Furey. Leaders of C walks should discuss the intended route of the walk with Dick Needham.

### *On the Walk*

The Group Agree a leader and a sweeper. Nobody should walk in front of the leader or behind the sweeper. Whenever necessary, the sweeper should use his whistle to halt the leader and prevent the group getting too spread out. Keep the group together in such a way that contact between leader and sweeper can always be readily established. In poor visibility, the distance between leader and sweeper may need to be shortened.

Leader Training The senior leader of the day should encourage and facilitate the two other leaders to take part in navigating and leading during the walk.

**Breaks** It is normal to have a full lunch break (30 minutes or so) in the middle of the day and shorter breaks in mid-morning and mid-afternoon. The need for other breaks and the duration of breaks can be determined by the circumstances of the day.

**Walker's Problems** Leaders should be on the look-out for any emerging problems (for example, limping, or signs of fatigue or cramp) in any member of the group which might get worse if left unattended. Such problems should be dealt with at the earliest opportunity. It is desirable that members alert the leader to any medical condition that might give rise to problems during the day.

**Use of Escape Exit** Any one of a number of factors may make it necessary to leave the walk route before it is completed, e.g.

- onset of darkness
- injury or other problem affecting a member of the group
- weather deterioration

If in doubt, err on the side of taking the escape exit. When you reach a public road, it is invariably possible to get a lift from a passing car.

**River Crossing** If confronted by a river in spate, be very slow to attempt crossing it. It is better to take a circuitous way around than to risk the consequences of crossing.

### **Getting Lost**

If you are unsure of your position or the direction of travel, a number of courses are open to help you gain control of the situation:

- bring the group to a halt for a short break
- taking account of your last known position, the general direction and type of terrain since covered and the time involved, you should be able to work out from the map an approximation of your present position.
- consult with experienced members of the group in doing this
- if any member of the group has a GPS (satellite navigation instrument), use it to get an estimate (probably accurate) of your position.

Using the best estimate of your location, decide where you should now aim for, e.g.

- your last known position, from which you could take an accurate bearing on your objective, or
- some long feature, such as a stream or a forest boundary, which you could be reasonably sure of meeting at some point in its length and which, if used as a handrail, would help to establish your exact position.

Estimate the time required to meet your immediate objective and when you move off follow the compass bearing strictly and keep a note of the time.

### **Emergency Requiring Outside Help**

If, because of an accident or illness, outside help is required, a number of things need to be done:

1. Bring the group to a halt, using whatever shelter is available. Keep constantly in mind the safety of the group as a whole.
2. Treat the injured person. Be very cautious about moving an injured person. There is a real danger that inexpert lifting and carrying may cause further injury either to the injured person or to one of the helpers.
3. Use available resources to keep the injured person warm and sheltered - spare clothing, bivi bag, kishu.
4. Use the mobile phone. Dial 999 and ask for MOUNTAIN RESCUE. Give
  - your exact location, including six-figure grid references, which may be obtained from the GPS
  - the condition of the injured person; if a cardiac condition is suspected, the need for a cardiac ambulance should be stated
  - name of injured person and next of kin
  - your mobile telephone number
  - any relevant information regarding terrain and best approach route

(cont'd after membership list)

5. If it is necessary to go for outside help, select the persons who are needed at the scene of the accident. Ensure that they have adequate warm clothing, food, phone, torch and whistle. The remainder should go, with the twin objective of organising help for the injured person and getting those not needed at the scene of the accident off the mountain. Circumstances may make it necessary that the main body of walkers, whose objective is to get safely off the mountain, will take a different route to those who are seeking help for the injured person.
6. The party seeking help should write down particulars, including grid references, of the location of the accident. They should choose a safe route and, without rushing, aim for the most convenient place where they can expect to get help, e.g. farm or public road.

**Distress Signal** Six blasts of a whistle or flashes of a torch, followed by a minute's silence, then repeated. The answer is three blasts or flashes, followed by a minute's silence, then repeated.



**Examples of popular mountain routes in Co. Wicklow which have deteriorated sharply through overuse in recent years are:**

White Hill route to Djouce Mountain  
Coffin Stone NNW to War Hill  
Tonduff South to Maulin  
Djouce eastward to Old Coach Road  
Bracket Rocks (Kanturk/Brown Mountain) to Scarr  
Tracks around Fancy Mountain  
Pine trees (above Glendalough) to Camaderry Mountain  
Derrybawn Ridge SSW from summit  
Three Rock Mountain to Fairy Mountain and beyond (in Co. Dublin)

*George Barry*



# WALKS SCHEDULE - JANUARY TO JUNE 1998

## Dates of Walks and Leaders

DATE	GRADE A Leaders	Tel	Leaders	GRADE B Tel	Leaders	GRADE C Tel
24 Jan			Eugene Logan Maura Byrne Roger Kirker	285 2548 282 0553 284 0784		
7 Feb			Brian McKeon Ciara Furey Nancy Boyne	281 9717H 289 3045 269 3984		Liam Walsh John Brett Annette Keegan 298 2042 285 3358 285 4682
14 Feb	Bill Hannon Carol Behan Philip Owens	285 8251 280 5610 285 0435				
28 Feb			ANNUAL DINNER - NO WALK			
7 Mar			Paddy O'Duffy John Brandon Karen Pierce	280 4789 285 9563 282 9606		
14 Mar	Fergal Trant Barbara Lane Michael Dorgan	285 3979 285 9259 285 8170			Brian Brennan Collette Dorgan Clare Stephens	285 5700 285 8170 285 9026
28 Mar			Fergal Mulloy Anne Brennan Monty Tinsley	285 5614 / 706 7700 283 6595 285 2126 / 453 2936		
4 April	John Furey Jim Moore Kevin Moore	289 3045 285 5035 285 6592			Michael Armstrong David Brennan Maria O'Duffy	285 2434 285 5700 280 4789
11 Apr			EASTER - NO WALK			

25 Apr 2 May	APRIL WEEKEND - Dick Needham 284 9571 H 280 8074 / 280 1130 W					
	Eugene Logan Freddie English Noel O'Reilly	285 2548 280 4363 280 9929			Brian Brennan Paddy Furey Hilary Fitzpatrick	285 5700 295 6682 285 6502
9 May	Shaun Trant George Barry Michael Condon	285 3979 285 4906 289 3258				
23 May			Dick Needham Ronnie Doyle Dick Ryan	284 9571 284 1787 285 3960		Michael Dorgan Nancy Boyne Joan Needham 285 8170 269 3984 284 9571
6 June	Kieran Trant Eileen Gallagher Cindy Mangan	282 7591 285 5162H 204 9100W 285 2668				
13 June 27 June	JUNE WEEKEND - Dick Needham 284 9571 H 280 8074 / 280 1130 W					
	Tom Gillan Michael Armstrong Jane Sexton	298 5377 285 2434 230 0486				

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***Planning a training exercise? A patrolling exercise with an overnight patrol-base, perhaps, or possibly a hill walk. Whatever you're planning, it's worth considering whether it will help protect the country or destroy a little bit of it. Pte. BE Green draws some connections between ecological awareness and sound military practice . . . .***

Most of us know the Country Code, even if we can't rattle it off. It goes something like this:

- Take your litter home
- Don't light fires - dispose of cigarettes and matches carefully
- Don't disturb livestock, crops or wildlife
- Keep dogs under control
- Avoid damaging fences, walls or gates. Leave gates as you found them; if you must climb a gate, do so at the hinged side.
- Do not pollute water

That's it - a code of conduct for your outings to the countryside. Although it's simple, we in the Defence Forces haven't, unfortunately, always been rigorous in its implementation. Don't worry - we're no worse than any other section of society. It's usually just carelessness, but we do have a few particular problems. Obviously when psyching-up for a mock battle, covered in sweat, crawling in mud with an instructor shouting at you, your immediate concerns aren't for the chocolate bar wrapper you've dropped! Another example - if there's a night-time emergency evacuation from a forest basecamp, things more often than not get left behind.

Your responsibility as a leader, however, doesn't begin and end with the inclusion of a reference to the Country Code in your exercise instructions. You have to follow it up and, in the knowledge that soldiers under pressure will have a lot on their minds, you've got to organise a post-exercise clean-up. Why? For several reasons. It's the right thing to do. It's official policy to search for spent or misfired ammunition etc. Command Operations Staff will be on your case when someone reports that your abandoned base camp is a rubbish tip. If you've read this far, however, I'll assume you think it's the right thing to do. So what do you need to know? Well, there are a few things to bear in mind.

**Litter** - before going on an exercise, remove excess wrappings on rations, to allow quieter, faster access to food. Noise reduction makes military sense, lack of wrappings reduces potential refuse problems.

Bag and carry-out all litter; an excellent rule. It's clean, and makes military sense in that you leave nothing behind to give away your presence. Rangers always do this. Leaving litter behind should be regarded as irresponsible and

sloppy, and also an unprofessional breach of military discipline. Don't bury it! Badgers or foxes usually dig it up and spread it all over the place - and there's no mistaking an army refuse pit, with all those green biscuit wrappers and meal containers. Don't throw away teabags or apple butts in the belief that they're "biodegradable". It's an eyesore, and it may not decay for a lot longer than you think. Here are some decay times.

Tissue Paper - several months to a year.

Orange and banana peels - up to two years.

Cigarette butts - one to five years.

Plastic bags - 10 to 20 years.

Aluminium cans - 500 years.

Glass bottles - 1,000 years.

Styrofoam - indefinitely.

When you've collected refuse after an exercise don't drop it off where you see other refuse bags piled up, assuming that it's an official refuse collection point - often it isn't. This is illegal. Your refuse will be of a military nature - when a complaint is made you'll have your CO to answer to!

Finally, when you return to barracks, try to dispose of refuse properly - most barracks have some recycling banks. Lead by example and encourage others to use them.

**Fires** - soldiers on the ground usually follow a strict "noise/lights/smoke" regime, which doesn't allow for the niceties of a campfire. But when time out is taken, the prospect of a fire can be attractive. The leader must think if fires are allowed in the training area. If not, don't imagine that a little fire can't do any harm. The area may be managed for conservation, in which case the dead wood is as ecologically important as many of the living trees. Also, if you're operating in a working conifer plantation, with bits and pieces of "lop, top and brushings" lying around, a fire could still do harm. Burning wood may trigger "Group-dying disease", a fungus which can kill trees and cause considerable commercial loss. It can be spread by the burning of wood in a plantation. So, "No Fires" means just that, even if the reasons doesn't seem obvious.

**Latrine Drill** - a matter of hygiene in the field and tactical security, and a civic responsibility. The drill is simple to follow, but easy to "foul" up. It's difficult to get worked up about where to deposit your "calling card" after a few days crawling around in the droppings of sheep, goats, cattle, deer, rabbits and hares! But human faeces is more of an eyesore, and a significantly greater health hazard than animal droppings.



So to the drill - excrement is buried in a small pit and used tissues are burnt. Make sure the burning is complete before leaving the area, to avoid accidental fires. If your exercise is such that burning odours are not acceptable, you should carry out all excrement - if you think the whole subject too indelicate to mention, you're in the wrong job. To do a "shovel recce", as the Brits call it, you need an entrenching tool or spade, toilet paper and matches. This should be SOP; remember, one man's latrine is the next man's picnic site!

Your latrine site should, of course, be away from a water source and down-wind (especially after a few days on pack rations). Micro-organisms and invertebrates in the soil will take care of the rest. If you're on peaty ground and you have to "go", bury excrement in the top few inches of peat - this may be the only part of the peat where the micro-organisms are at work.

**Water** - the only other water pollution damage we can cause is by washing. In tactical exercises it isn't a problem, since soldiers rarely site a patrol base beside water - it muffles the sound of approaching enemies, and is an obvious route or objective for a searching enemy force. So water is usually carried to the base.

Once again, what makes military sense suits conservation purposes. Used washing water poured onto the ground will filter through the soil, lessening the risk of water contamination.

On camping trips, the most attractive campsites are at corrie lakes high in the hills. There's a great temptation to wash cooking utensils in the lake itself, adding nutrients in the form of porridge, milk, etc to the lake. These places are especially fragile features of our natural heritage, home to specialised plant and animal communities, adapted to life in low-nutrient waters.

**"Minimum Impact"** - a good motto for both patrolling in our hills and woods during training, and for "defending the country" as you do so. When planning an exercise, include environmental protection in your exercise instructions, oversee refuse collection as the exercise progresses and organise a post-exercise clean-up. Far from conflicting with the military agenda, what makes for good conservation also makes good military sense. You don't have to be an eco-warrior to be a green soldier!

**With Acknowledgement to Án Cosainteóir**