

September 2016 - Issue 59

Irish Trekker



Brown Mountain

Trekkers Mountaineering Club
Glenageary
Co. Dublin
www.trekkers.ie

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Chairperson's Greeting

Hi Trekkers,

We have had a wonderful summer period with a large attendance at walks, many weekend trips and new members joining. The **Summer Party** in the St. George Yacht Club was very successful. Hon-Life Member Certificates were presented to 6 members who had contributed in a major way to the club.

Brendan Bracken organised a wonderful trip to the **Blackstairs Mountains** in August and a most enjoyable walk to the **Slieve Bloom Mountains** as a normal Saturday walk. Terry and Noreen O'Brien and Geraldine Boland organised the weekend in the **Cooley Mountains** in September. There was a large number of members on this very successful trip.

Michael Cotter is planning a trip to the **Cathar sites in the south of France** next year. I did this trip about 10 years ago with my wife and we enjoyed it. Please support Michael in this large undertaking.

A leadership programme as advised by Mountaineering Ireland given by a qualified mountain leader will commence on Oct 1st.

Two items of importance: the AGM in Killiney Castle Hotel on **Wed 26th Oct** and the Christmas Party in the Killiney Golf Club on **Sun 18th Dec.**
- Shay

Wicklow Way

Congratulations to Ita Lawton and Anne Hayes for completing the full Wicklow Way. The walk took 6 days to complete and they covered 22Km approx. per day. We hope to have an account of this in a future Trekker.

Photo Records

We intend to have photograph records of social occasions published on the "members photos" section of the website - Myles' **Summer Party photos** are now displayed there. Joe Murray's photos from the recent trip to **the Cooleys** are also there. Many thanks to both for these.

Training

The first course on **leadership** will commence on the 1st October in Glenmalure. The course will be a pilot which will be assessed later.

Guideline Update

The leaders guideline on the website has been updated since the last issue of the Trekker to take account of Met Eireann's weather warning system. Leaders should consult the met eireann site (<http://www.met.ie/nationalwarnings/>) and cancel the walk for a red warning and consider re-routing for an Orange warning.

Editor's Note

Niall Humphreys; niallandeileen@gmail.com

*Thanks to all who contributed to this issue of the Irish Trekker. We have some great stories for you again - an account from Fiona O'Sullivan of the weekend on **Mount Leinster**. Owen tells of his trip to **Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe**. Mary Murphy recounts her journey to the **Dolomites** with Una Davis and Mary Dorgan. Aine has a quirky **story about a dog**. And of course there is a **new Caption Competition**, something about rainbows.*

Before all this Brendan has written a beautiful appreciation for Pearse. We will sorely miss him - not least myself who benefitted greatly from his generosity, kindness and wit.

*Lastly thanks again to photographers, Myles, Joe, Ita, Owen, Fionna, Noreen, Noel & whoever I have missed.
- Enjoy, Niall*

Pearse Connolly - An Appreciation.

Pearse joined The Trekkers in 2001. He was introduced to the club by Eugene Logan, walks coordinator at the time. Eugene certainly knew his man. Pearse's deep knowledge of Wicklow, experience, leadership skills and his wonderful gift for friendship made an important contribution to the development of the Club. The hikes that he led were challenging and a history lesson. You had to book early to be sure of a place. He took a leading role in organising the Wicklow Way twenty five years commemoration where a number of Trekkers completed the entire route over a number of weekends. He was the Club's representative on the Wicklow Uplands Council, a forum where landowners and hiking clubs met to review issues, build bridges and mutual understanding. No better man than Pearse for such a task.



I met him shortly after he joined the Club and we immediately hit it off maybe because we both enjoyed a pint of Smithwicks! He was great fun; "A bus picks you up... you have a banana at 11am... the bus brings you to the pub and then brings you home".

He was a well-read man with an extensive library and his hero was Parnell. He was a regular attendee at the Parnell summer school. On a hiking trip to the Yorkshire Dales we visited a school library. I remember his delight that Parnell was represented. We were on many overseas Trekker trips and usually roomed together. Talking late into the night about the days' hike and the quality of the drink! In the last few years he did not enjoy good health. However he was persuaded to make the Trekker trip to the United States. Paddy O'Duffy's video of the trip includes a wonderful interview with Pearse in which he talks about his delight at making the trip and the importance of hiking in his life. On this trip he delighted ourselves and the locals with his powerful rendition of his party piece, "The Wild Rover".

In recent years, poor health prevented him from hiking but we met regularly for a few pints. He enjoyed receiving letters as distinct from emails. "I love to receive a letter and read about the entire goings on".

A few days before he died, Ita and myself visited Pearse in the Blackrock Hospice. Eileen, his wife gave us a warm welcome. He had a lovely room leading to the garden. We held his hand and talked about the good times we had together. He squeezed our hands and smiled.

Brendan Bracken

Weekend on Mount Leinster

Fiona O'Sullivan

Photography: Ita Lawton

19th August 2016 Friday afternoon. At 16.30 we meet at the usual spot Glenageary Dart Station. Led by Brendan, we will be 10 walkers in total. I am excited as it's my first away trip in Ireland with the Trekkers. Taking the N11 Billy drives us to Ferns, then we head inland to Killealy and on to the tiny village of Rathanna, Co. Carlow. We are in the middle of nowhere.



The weather had closed in somewhat and Brendan unbeknown to us, is busy thinking of an alternative to the planned climb along the ridge leading to Mount Leinster.

We are met on arrival by our host for the weekend Eric Osbourne. We are staying in a hostel but it is a rather luxurious hostel sleeping up to 12 people. We divide into groups - the women on one side and the men on the other while our leader is allocated the Queens room with a large double bed and ensuite facilities but no fear he very generously shares the ensuite with the group - to such an extent he at one stage has to queue for his own bathroom.

Brendan has organized that Melanie a local woman will prepare dinner for us both evenings. At 7pm she arrives with freshly made bread, a tasty chicken and leek pie with salad and Bakewell tart - dietary requirements beautifully catered for as well.

The pub is quaint Victorian and belonged to Eric's grand aunt and uncle, Marie and Harry, brother and sister who spent their lives here, they were cobblers, blacksmiths, and operated the old petrol pump outside the front door. After Marie died, Eric, an architect living in London came back to open the bar for the annual Pattern Mass in the village and the rest is history. Eric now runs his



practice from a kiosk in the bar which used to be a bank that looks out on to the main street. His bar is full of character- he sells, boots, shirts,

caps, sunlight soap and many other everyday essentials. He has a swanky coffee machine, imports a fragrant coffee from London and sells Melanie's mouthwatering chocolate brownies.



Brendan is aware there is yellow weather warning for Saturday and chats with Eric about our walk. ***There have been three incidents in recent times on Mount Leinster when people have been airlifted or helped off the mountain.*** Like the good leader he is he has an alternative and will not take any risks.

It's not a late night!

The house is awake early all eager to get walking. A good breakfast with Eric's strong coffee, Anne and Dympna's homemade brown bread and fruit and yogurt is had by everyone as we prepared our picnic lunch. Flasks may have got mixed up but we are all ready for our taxi at 10am. Brendan has organized local farmer cum taxi Ter Kelly and his neighbour to pick us up and drop us at Kildavin a small village on the South Leinster Way. I discover that the taxi driver and I come from the same house in Ballymurphy as he proceeds to regale everyone with some murky family history!

We start at the edge of the village of Kildavin and walk along a country road as we look for the South Leinster Way. We are well wrapped up but the weather is not too bad. We have to be very vigilant looking for the directional signs as they are hidden behind overgrowth. We climb up through a forest path. There are many wind farms in the area but I am struck by the beautiful early autumnal colours and in particular the purple heather expanses that stretch out in front of us. We keep a brisk pace and Brendan has decided we will have an early lunch. At this stage we are sharing the forest track with cyclists who are on an endurance circuit - plenty of room for us all! We have lunch at two picnic tables where Dympna introduces us to the delight of Lidl milk chocolate and hazelnuts. Mt Leinster is very close but covered in cloud. Brendan points out the ridge leading to the top of the mountain from Ballycrystal where he has hoped we would walk from.



The wind picks up and the rain comes for a while. We reach the Nine Stones where there is a paved road to the summit of Mt Leinster. Brendan has mentioned the possibility of walking up the road to the summit. The visibility is not good so instead we head up Slieve Bawn 528 m and as we do the clouds race across the sky, clearing the rain and revealing the top of Mt Leinster and the Black Stairs mountains - beautiful. There is a long 32 km summer walk of Mt Leinster and on to the Backstairs mountains, lots of talk about doing it at some stage.

As we head towards Tom Duff Hill there is a wonderful expanse of purple heather that stretches like a carpet below us. Our leaders encouraged by Ita lead us off piste and through the heather down to meet the road. We then walk for about an hour through the country roads back to the hostel. Signposting is not always good so we practice our map reading to find the shortest way home - guided by the Church of Rathanna. So we walked a total of 17.56Km.

Tonight we have Moussaka with a salad fresh from Melanie's garden and Gooseberry Pie with whipped cream. Back to the pub which is busy with locals. Eric has lots of old fashioned jars of sweets so we have drinks and sweets.



Some research on the Barrow

“The Barrow rises in the Slieve Bloom Mountains in the southern midlands, and flows to join its two ‘sisters’, the Nore and the Suir, before flowing into the Irish Sea at Checkpoint south of Waterford City.

The Barrow was made navigable in the eighteenth century by the insertion of short sections of canal along its course, and the 114km long Barrow Way follows surviving towpaths and riverside roads from the canal hamlet of Lowtown in County Kildare to the beautiful monastic site and village of St Mullins in south County Carlow. It is a peaceful route through a quiet sylvan landscape, with the constantly expanding river, growing more majestic every mile, for company.

Terrain consists mainly of grassy towpaths, tracks and quiet roads. the route is frequently punctuated with villages and towns, many of which were founded at fording places by the Normans soon after the invasion”

Sunday morning, we are all up bright and early again. No lunches to prepare today we are dining out after our walk. We pack up and leave all our belongings in the pub where Billy will pick them up later. Ter the taxi driver and my cousin (!) picks us up and brings us to River Barrow.

We start our walk at Ballytiglea lock north of Borris. Borris is the home place of the old Irish clan of the McMurrough Kavanagh. Our walk takes us through Graiguenamanagh, the “Grange of the Monks” . There is the beautiful restored Duiske Abbey which we don't have time to visit. The stretch from Graiguenamanagh to St Mullins is the most picturesque with beautiful woodland and a wide gracious stretch of water. The path is dotted with locks and lock houses. St Mullins is a religious settlement dating back to the 8th century and associated with St Moling. There is a fine example of a Norman motte and bailey (raised earthwork) fortification. We walk at a fair pace as lunch in the Muilichain Café beside the river beckons with delicious seafood and quiches followed by mouthwatering desserts. Hence to Dublin happy after a lovely weekend.

A big thank you to Brendan Bracken for all his research and excellent planning and to all my travelling companions; Anne Hayes, co leader, Gerry Fogarty, Ita Lawton, Gilbert Little, Shay Murrin, Dermot Murray, Breda O'Hara and not least Dymrna Thunder for a most enjoyable few days.

CAPTION COMPETITION

We invite everyone to take part in another Caption competition - Are things looking up for the trekkers?

**Entries by end
December**

***Remember -
a Free busride for the
most inspired!***
(in the Committee's opinion)



Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe (& Victoria Falls)

Owen McKeown

In a former life as an Engineer, I spent 5 years working in Botswana, in Southern Africa. Comparatively unknown in this part of the world, this country is a paradise for wildlife. I have been lucky enough to visit most of the countries of Southern and East Africa and I would regard Botswana as my favourite. The people are some of the friendliest anywhere and the Game Parks do not suffer from the mass tourism of other countries such as Kenya. Botswana, independent since 1966, was the former Bechuanaland and is situated between South Africa and Zimbabwe.

I was there in the late 1980s and early 1990s when neighbouring South Africa and Namibia were approaching independence. I often visited South Africa on business and with the Apartheid system still in place I was never comfortable with the atmosphere there. Botswana was a much more relaxed country and I was always glad to get “home”. I was in Johannesburg on the day that Nelson Mandela was released from prison - I was conscious that history was being made and will always remember the carnival mood on the streets.

The family shared the experience and our two girls went to school in Botswana - a unique experience and quite a contrast to Cluny! Africa affects people in only two ways - you will love it or hate it. I can say categorically that we fall into the former category. We have always wanted to go back and revisit the Game Parks of *Moremi*, *Chobe* and the *Okavango* together with Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Botswana and Namibia are largely the Kalahari Desert and road conditions vary from good tar roads to sandy and indeed nonexistent tracks. To go into the Game Reserves, a 4 X 4 is essential together with experience of driving a 4WD vehicle in rough conditions (and I don't mean visiting Avoca Woollen Mills on a Sunday for lunch!).

Planning for the trip took some months and having a little local knowledge certainly helped. Botswana can be an expensive country to visit as the Game Lodges start at US\$ 800 per person per night.



Camping is a more viable alternative costing around €30/night but may not be for the fainthearted. (See photo) When we lived in the region, we owned our own vehicle and camped all over Southern Africa which apart from saving a lot of money did give us a very authentic experience. Sights such as lions and elephants strolling by our tent were memorable even if terrifying at the time. A big fire is a good idea after dark!



We decided to hire a 4X4 with a roof tent. There are several firms in Johannesburg that will supply this and this is a good starting point for exploring the region. Being a popular hub also means that airfares from Dublin are competitive. Our Itinerary over a 5 week trip covered 8,000 kms. The distances in Africa are vast!

The best access route to Botswana's game parks is through Maun which is a real frontier town and is convenient for the Okavango Delta and the Moremi Game reserve.

As we had visited the Okavango on a previous trip, we concentrated on Moremi. We stayed in two camp sites, at South Gate and at Xakanaxa. The latter was one of the best sites on the trip and gives an authentic wildlife experience with Elephant and Hippo regularly walking through the site on way to water. On a previous trip in this area we were putting up our tent and suddenly realised we were being watched by two lionesses from 10 meters away. One of those experiences that is better to recall than to experience at the time. Thankfully, on this occasion, we did not have such a close encounter though sleeping with the background sounds of roaring lions is something that must be gotten used to. Definitely not for nervous sleepers.

After 4 days in this area we drove from Moremi to Kasane through the

Chobe Game reserve. The “road” on this section is basically a sand track and a 4WD is essential. The concentrations of Elephant are the highlight of Chobe and it is estimated that there are 30 to 50 thousand elephants in the reserve. Ivory poaching is a problem in a lot of Africa but Botswana does seem to manage the problem better than a lot of other African countries through a robust approach to patrolling. It is common to meet the army (BDF) which keep a high profile in all the Game Reserves.

Kasane is the area of Botswana that I would recommend to anyone on a first visit. There is a tar road from Gaborone through Francistown. It has an airport and there are regular flights from Johannesburg and Gaborone. It is accessible by a conventional car and provided that one stays in Lodges/ Hotels would make a very good base. The area is on the Chobe River (tributary of the Zambezi) and a boat trip is strongly recommended to any visitors. The game is breathtaking. Typically one goes out at 3pm and the game comes to the riverbank in the late afternoon to drink. (Sunset is about 5 pm in Sep/Oct). Many of the wildlife photos were taken on one on these “Sunset Cruises” and they speak for themselves. Any of the Hotels in Kasane will organise this. Equally, they will arrange game drives into Chobe and to Victoria Falls which is only 70 km away.

When we lived in Botswana, Zimbabwe, formerly Southern Rhodesia, was close enough to enable long weekend visits to areas such as Bulawayo and Victoria Falls. We were regular visitors and apart from Botswana, Zimbabwe was our favourite country in Africa. We did a lot of hiking there especially in areas such as the Matopos Hills and the Eastern Highlands. (Maybe an idea for a “Trekker” trip with a difference?) Unfortunately, the bureaucracy and cost of bringing a South African registered vehicle into Zimbabwe was off-putting so instead of spending a few days in the country, we opted instead to visit Victoria Falls as a day trip from Kasane. Vic Falls was as ever one of the great sights of the world and is a “must see” if in the area.



Back in Kasane, we set off next morning for Namibia via the Caprivi Strip. A Lion and Lioness casually lay on the side of the road just before we crossed the border - An incentive to return?

Namibia, formerly South West Africa, got its independence in 1990 and we were lucky enough to visit soon after. It is noted for the Etosha Game Park, the Skeleton Coast and the Sossusvlei sand dunes. We often see road signs warning of deer in Wicklow. In Africa, the hazards are a little bigger.

We spent 5 days in Etosha which is noted for Elephant and Rhino and we were privileged to get a good sighting of a White Rhino having a confrontation with a truck. The incident passed peacefully and both parties went their way.



Other notable natural sights in Namibia are the Sossusvlei sand dunes and The Fish River Canyon. Sossusvlei has some of the highest climbable dunes in the world. The going underfoot is difficult however and this is a walk to be done at sunrise both for the quality of the desert light and the coolness. One day we measured 46 Degrees C which is not a temperature that anyone wants to be out in, much less walking.

The Fish River Canyon is regarded as the second biggest in the world after the Grand Canyon in the US and is an area of exceptional beauty. There are several hiking trails down into and along the Canyon but there is a strict licensing system which precludes any casual walking visits. Hiking is restricted to the period of mid May to mid Sept.

After a week in the Fish River, we headed back to Johannesburg for the flight home.

In all we spent 5 weeks on the trip, the minimum for the distance of 8000kms that we covered. In hindsight, we probably tried to cover too much and if we were to return, we think we would be better to confine ourselves to one country such as Botswana and base ourselves in an area such as Kasane where one can access the Game Parks on organised daytrips.

Hiking in South Africa - A Summary

Botswana: Walking possibilities are limited - Hot, flat with remote hills of under 1500 ms.

South Africa: the well equipped Drakensberg Mts (3,500m) are much more attractive.

Zimbabwe (with political caveats): the Eastern Highlands and Matopos are attractive.

Namibia has walking trails in the Waterberg Mts and the Fish River Canyon but is restricted to the winter months of May to September and permits are required. Permits may have to be booked a year ahead (also true of way-marked trails in South Africa).

Trekking in the Dolomites

Mary Murphy

Brendan Bracken sowed the seed for our annual walking trip. Instead of battling the rain in the west of Ireland as we had been doing over the past few years we decided to venture forth to the Dolomites. Fellow trekkers, Una Davis, Mary Dorgan and myself dragged along Mary's husband Hilary, now wasn't he the brave man!

We organised our trip through Dolomite Treks, a small agency in Cortina D'Ampezzo. We wanted to self-guide and they suggested the itinerary, booked the accommodation and supplied maps and walking notes

The area

The Dolomites cover a large area and is very varied in historical, cultural, linguistic and culinary terms. At times it felt we were in Germany or Austria rather than Italy.

During the First World War the area was the scene of bitter fighting between Italy and Austria, many of the paths and tracks we took dated from that time and we saw evidence of trenches, fortifications and tunnels along the way.



Walks

We took off from the stylish and upmarket little town of Cortina d'Ampezzo taking a bus to the starting point. As this is a skiing area we were able to avail of a variety of transport over the week, going up chair lifts, down cable cars and hopping on local buses.



Overall scenery was breathtakingly beautiful and so varied. We walked through tiny hamlets, around alpine lakes, along high mountain trails and rocky gorges, through forests and mountain passes with views of some of the most famous pinnacles and spires of the Dolomites.

A walk might start on a high mountain pass and end in a lush high pasture; we would be heralded by the sound of cow bells and on a couple of occasions happened upon a remote

mountain dairy serving just the most delicious yogurt. In terms of difficulty for the most part they were good B walks. By and large we met few other people on our treks apart from those on the popular and spectacular Tre Cime circuit.

The whole area is walker friendly, it's very well marked and peppered by Refugios. Suffice to say we never had to bring a packed lunch instead of the hard boiled sandwich, my standard trekking menu; we dined on Italian delights every day.



Weather

Weather was fantastic, generally warm and dry but most afternoons clouds appeared usually followed by thunder and lightning and a heavy shower. The evenings for the most part dried up and being in the most wonderful settings were just beautiful.

As we make an early start this did not really impact on us and by the time the rain came we were usually sipping a gin and tonic looking out at it!!! Needless to say it wasn't all hardship in the mountains, the food was great but then it always is after a day's trekking.

Accommodation



Accommodation was in small family run hotels with the exception of one night in a Refugio. We hadn't experience one before and didn't quite know what to expect but based on our experience we would have been more than happy to Refugio it all the way. Apparently the standards vary but honestly the one we stayed at was fab. Lovely friendly people, a family type room sleeping 4 with en-suite

bathroom, not slumming at all. The set dinner menu was good wholesome food and of course accompanied by Italian vino.

Safety Reminder

Tip from a member: Due to the rough terrain we traverse it is not unusual for us to trip or fall. Recently there have a number of occasions where colleagues have been hauled out of bog holes. It reminds us of the importance of not being alone - particularly not doing recces on our own no matter how tempting this often is.

Story of a Dog

Aine O'Donoghue

On a recent B walk along St. Kevin's Way, shortly after starting out from Hollywood, we were joined by a friendly guest walker. He didn't give us his name but we called him 'Doggie'. Yes I'm talking about a dog - a very friendly dog. Naturally we tried to persuade him to go back to his his owner but he kept returning to the group. Even Ita's firm but gentle



commands, didn't dissuade him from accompanying the Trekkers. Some members rang the number on the his collar but it was not in use. Having exhausted every avenue we carried on. We feared for him on the road sections, but Ita cleverly used her belt as a makeshift lead. At Glendalough he followed us into the grounds of the hotel, people we asked had never seen him before. The poor thing appeared relatively old and, by now, quite tired. A bowl of water and some bread revived him a bit, but we were worried about leaving the him alone. Our bus was waiting and it was getting late, it had been a long walk. Two women had noticed our dilemma and offered to look after him and locate his owner. So we headed home, relieved that the dog would be cared for. There was something particularly placid about him. From the outset he was determined to stay with the Trekkers. I would like to believe that, as dogs often do, he recognised something special about the Trekkers. The same 'something special' that I have experienced on walks with the Trekkers.

It hasn't got a name but we all know that it is there.

First Aid Tip: Strained Ankle

PRICE: Protect the ankle. **R**est the ankle for 48-72 hours. **I**ce: Apply ice pack (ice in plastic or towel, frozen peas, not direct ice) as soon as possible for 10-30 mins. **M**ild **C**ompression with bandage will limit swelling. **E**levate foot to reduce swelling.

Avoid **HARM** for 72 hours after injury: **H**eat, **A**lcohol, **R**unning, **M**assage (which may increase bleeding and swelling. However, after 72 hours, gentle massage may be soothing).

PHOTOS



Cooleys



Fairy Castle



Poulanass



Blackhill

Hazelhatch