

September 2014 - Issue 53

Irish Trekker



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



Welcome

Welcome to recently joined members - we wish you long and happy trekking.

(apologies if you already feel like part of the furniture)

- Jim Bourke
- Jane Cochrane
- Marion Jennings
- Patrick MacManus
- Peter McGonigal
- Aine O'Donoghue
- Brian Snow

Upcoming Away Trips

January/February

*Malaga with Shay,
Grade B*

April

*Wales with Owen,
Grade A*

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Chairperson's Greeting

Noreen O'Brien

We are at the end of Summer 2014 and what a glorious one it was. Blue skies and brilliant sunshine made hiking a pleasure and I certainly enjoyed it. It's also the end of my term as Chairperson and time to retire gratefully back into the general ranks. I was honoured and I must say very taken aback to be proposed as Chairperson in 2011. I hope I lived up to past Chairs and did some good and no harm.

I would like to thank everyone, Committee members and all Trekkers, for their help and support in the past 3 years.

Looking forward to having a full house for AGM on Thursday 9th Oct 8pm sharp at Killiney Castle and for a drink in the bar afterwards.

Áine & Tanzania *(responding to our interest on hearing of her upcoming trip)*

Hello, my name is Áine O Donoghue and I joined the Trekkers in August. Next February I am going to Tanzania with the Willow Wheelers Cycling club to visit and support projects funded by the club. These include water, health and educational projects. Last year in Kenya I witnessed how every cent gathered by the club is given directly to people who need it most. One example is Barpello school in north Kenya. The Willow Wheelers were involved in building the school and continue to pay the salaries of the teachers. Children from bush who otherwise would face a bleak future are given a high quality education, indeed I met some graduates of the school who are training to be doctors, engineers and teachers.

In Tanzania I will be visiting schools and sharing skills with the teachers there. We will also be visiting other health and water projects. I would appreciate any sponsorship from members of the Trekkers. Any donation no matter how small will help a child in need and I can guarantee the the money will go directly to where it is needed most. Thanks for your support and I am really enjoying the walks with the Trekkers, the social after each walk is an added bonus.

Editor's Note

Welcome to Trekker number 53. Thanks to all who contributed, particularly Mary for her piece on Romania and Lucia for sharing her experience in the Gambia. Thanks to Owen, Myles, Emmet, Michael, Breda, David, for photos. We have another caption competition in this edition with again a free busride for the winner. Thanks to Breda for organising the Meitheal day which gave us a new perspective on trekking! We have a new guideline from Owen - this for the general walker; it is also now on the Website Guideline page. Enjoy
- Niall

Niall Humphreys; niallandeileen@gmail.com



History, Hiking, and Count Dracula

A trip to the Carpathian Mountains in Romania

Mary Dillon

The start of our week-long sojourn in Romania began on Sunday, June 29th, in the old-world village of Măgura in the heart of the Piatra Crăiului National Park. The Piatra Crăiului, which translates as the “Rock of the Kings”, is a mountain range in the southern Carpathians, almost smack in the middle of Romania.

Măgura is a charming village, 36 km from Brasov, where the traditional ways of life are embedded into the modern Romanian lifestyle. Old-style hay forking and hand-milking are still to be seen in the surrounding fields. Frequently, upon setting out in the mornings, we met local villagers heading to our Villa Hermani guesthouse with freshly gathered wild produce for our evening meal. Food at the guesthouse was very good, and our hosts, Katherina and Hermann, were very particular about serving as much local produce as possible – home-made breads, cheeses, yoghurt and honey, as well as delicious herbal drinks.



Pension Villa Hermani in Măgura - cntours.eu

We set out on our first morning on a tour of the village with Thomas, our guide for the week. Throughout our stay, Thomas gave us great insight into the history and culture of Romania.

The next day we ventured further afield, with a tour of the surrounding area and a visit to a nearby



monastery, where we observed local artists decorating the interior. Following this, we visited a bat cave in Peștera. As it was daytime, there was little or no bat activity.

The Piatra Crăiului National Park is a haven for wild life, with over 45 brown bears in the area. Thomas warned us about the frequency of wolf and wild dog attacks on shepherd dogs, as well as the occasional hiker (!), and, in the following days, we noticed that he was armed with a large knife to protect us. That day passed uneventfully!

In the evening, after an early dinner, we made a trip to a bear hide (lookout) in Stramba valley, where we had the opportunity to observe bears at their ritual evening feeding sessions, organised by the rangers. The rangers do this daily to discourage the bears from roaming the outskirts of nearby Brașov in order to raid the dustbins. That evening we observed up to eight bears and their cubs feeding near the bear hide.

The Count's Castle

On day two we set out through high pastures and meadows for the town of Bran, which is famous for its castle dating back to 1382 – more popularly known as Dracula's castle. After a morning walk through the rain-drenched beech forests, we toured the castle. The rain did not let up much that day and we returned to Măgura via Zărnești thoroughly wet.



Our third day was a trip to Brașov, followed by a visit to a fortified church in the village of Cristian. Here we had the opportunity to scale the heights of the bell tower and were rewarded with great views over the valley. In Brașov, we toured the Black Church dating from 1383. Its name derives from its scorched appearance after a fire in 1689. We also had time for shopping and a stroll through the historic town.

On the fourth day we hiked from Măgura through the Prăpăștiile Zărneștilor gorge to the Curmătura Cabana and on to Piatra Mica in the Piatra Crăiului mountains. This is an area rich in flora and fauna and we were well rewarded with sightings of a black stork and numerous alpine swifts nesting in the high rocks. Scenes from the film *Cold Mountain* were shot along the gorge route and, today, you can still feel a sense of remoteness there.



Our fifth day was a walk from Măgura to Vulcan which took us up into the high meadows where the sheep graze all summer, and the shepherds, who live in the most primitive conditions, guard their flocks from wolves. In Vulcan, we were treated to a local speciality – a sugar-coated confection that resembled a crispy crêpe – baked in the traditional way over an open fire. A gathering of locals, including our guide's family, was taking place, and we had some very interesting conversations regarding the future of the area in the face of economic uncertainty and emigration – a topic not unfamiliar to rural Ireland either.

Our final day's walk took us to the Bucegi mountains in the Prahova valley. Unfortunately, due to the cool, damp weather, the mountains were fog-bound. As a result, we were denied panoramic vistas of some of the most spectacular scenery in the Carpathians, including its highest peaks, which are in the 2,000 meter range. However, the walking was great, if brief, taking us past the Sphinx rock at Babele and on to the Caraiman Cross, with spectacular abysses en route. It was too short a visit overall as the cable car times were restricted and we had to descend all too early.

It was a great week – full of interest and fun. We would highly recommend a visit there.

- Ita, Gerry and Mary.



“All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking.”
— Friedrich Nietzsche,

Trip to The Gambia 2014

Lucia Shelly

Last February I set off with 9 others to spend just over 6 weeks doing voluntary work in The Gambia. I knew very little about this country which is one of Africa's smallest. It is located on the west coast and sandwiched between Senegal to its north and south. It really is a country that is just a few kilometres deep each side of the Gambia river. It is an extremely poor country and its main industry appears to be tourism, popular with mainly English and Danish tourists.



I travelled with the organisation G.I.V.E. (Gambia Ireland Volunteers in Education). G.I.V.E. has been going to The Gambia since January 2011. It is involved in education at all levels, kindergarten, primary, post primary both junior and senior levels and in skill centres. The skill centres are for girls returning to education. The volunteers are mostly but not exclusively retired teachers.



After all the planning ...and injection (totally punctured!), I left Ireland on a cold damp day and met with the 9 others that were travelling with me. On arrival in Banjul airport I was greeted with a blast of hot air. As we travelled from the airport my first impressions were of a very flat country, with quite red soiland very dusty.

We were staying about 30 minutes outside the capital Banjul in Kotu. This is the area where most tourists stay and really is the only location available for accommodation. As a result we were beside a beach which was very pleasant, especially early in the morning when the temperatures were most pleasant. The sea was also very welcome after work to cool down.

Once we settled in, I and another volunteer started work in the St. Joseph of Cluny senior secondary school. We were pioneers for the organisation in the senior secondary level which is equivalent to 4th to 6th year in Ireland. This is an all girls school, students are Catholic and Muslim and as in a country that is mostly Muslim, all lived and worked in harmony.



Sleeping arrangement

Our brief was to “help” as standards in the school had dropped. Over the next 6 weeks we tried to forensically unravel the issues that needed to be improved and act as educational consultants. A lot of time was spent with the other Science teachers who were very willing and hopefully will apply some of our

suggestions. The main problems were years of lack of maintenance, very poor systems, almost no regard for health and safety issues and trying to upgrade their teaching methodology which was reminiscent of Ireland in the 1950's. It really made me realise the progress that



The road to the school

We also were involved in teaching and trying to demonstrate laboratory practicals but this was really hindered by lack of equipment. After an inventory of what was in the school.. it didn't take long ! we then formed a dream list of what was needed. The students were very enthusiastic and mannerly ...lovely girls, and were really appreciative of classes we gave especially in exam. techniques. Electricity cannot be depended on but we did manage one day to get computers working and showed D.V.D.s of lab work. They were fascinated.



We visited a number of other schools in the 6 weeks and saw that standards varied from excellent to very poor but the main problems were as we found in St. Joseph's.

We used our free time to visit other parts of this small country where temperatures were often in the 40's and where the winds from the Sahara left a haze over everything. We visited the fishing village of Tanji, had many crossings of the river in the local boats called pirogues, visited Kunta Kinte's village, went to St. James island where the slaves were kept before being deported, a fabulous morning of bird watching (this is something that the Gambia is famous for), went to the market in Serekunda... chaotic as expected, went to Tendeba and a trip up river to Georgetown and the Wassau stones. All of this was very interesting and gave a feel for the country. I did not see any place that looked tempting to walk!

Kunta Kinte (1750–1822)

Also known as Toby Waller; Kunta Kinte was a Gambian-born American slave. The outline of his life story was the basis for the novel "Roots: The Saga of an American Family" by Alex Haley, and the television miniseries Roots, based on the book.

All in all it was a great experience, and it gave me a huge appreciation of all that we have in Ireland, our standards in education but mostly the standards of our lifestyle.

Mining in Glendalough

Many of our walks take us through the miners' villages in the Glendasson valley (on St. Kevin's Way) or beyond the upper lake at Glendalough. For those of us who wonder about them, here are some salient facts:

- Co. Wicklow ores are mainly lead, zinc, and a small amount of silver.
- The Glendalough Mining Company was established by Thomas Weaver in 1805 after he discovered a rich seam of lead in the Glendasson valley.
- 200 men were employed by the 1850s. (2000 at the peak per some websites)
- They planted over a million trees for mine props and commercial sales.
- Exploration work started in the Glendalough valley in the 1850s with the construction of a second set of buildings, including a water wheel house and crushing mill.
- The two workings were connected by a tunnel through Camaderry mountain.
- With lead running out and prices falling, The Mining Company of Ireland sold up to the Wynne family in 1890.
- The mines closed after the first world war but operated again 1948-57 (the Fox Rock tunnel was three quarters of a mile long) when a Canadian company failed to find sufficient mineral deposits to continue.
- There were just 3 recorded accidental deaths, the last in 1957 when a drill struck a piece of dynamite (there were many more deaths from mine-working related illnesses).



This information and much more can be seen at <http://www.glendaloughmines.com/history.html>.

see also: <http://www.glendalough.ie/heritage/glendalough-mines/> ;

and http://www.mhti.com/mines_in_ireland_files/glendalough.htm

The Glendalough Mining Heritage Project was established to preserve and conserve the mining history and heritage of the Glendalough and Glendasan Valleys.

A Helping Hand for Mountain Meitheal

Niall Humphreys

On Saturday 20th September instead of walks, a posse of Trekkers assembled to support Mountain Meitheal in their work improving the mountain trails. The object of our endeavour was to improve the Glendalough trail through the Miners' Village and the start of the steps to Glenealo Bridge. The Miners' Village, structures and surrounding features are a miner's heritage conservation site.



The Chain Gang

Mountain Meitheal is a volunteer group who undertake projects to protect and conserve mountain and forest areas in Ireland. They aim to counteract the pressures which are evident on our fragile landscape by building and maintaining trails which are sympathetic to the surrounding countryside. They promote sustainable recreation by encouraging personal responsibility and awareness.

This happens to be the current Mountain Meitheal project. They also build and repair huts, boardwalks, bridges and whatever else needs to be done in providing the trails we enjoy so much.

(see <http://mountainmeitheal.ie/>)

We all assembled at the Visitors' Centre on a lovely bright morning having negotiated the Kilmacanogue to Laragh road past a large part of the 600 cyclists haphazardly taking part in a charity road race.

We met the Meitheal team who transported us by car to the Miners' Village. There they distributed gloves and demonstrated our tools for the day:- matlocks, spades, shovels, crowbars, and, the pièce de resistance – a winch.

We split into parties, one to work on the steps and one to assemble a low dry wall to guide walkers onto the path.

The wall work simply consisted of collecting stones and building the wall (shades of Oisín returning from Tir na nÓg). The slag face of the cliff and run off down to the river is, apparently, preserved, and stones cannot be removed willy-nilly, so we soon had to form a chain handing rocks up to the wall.



Pick-Matlock

A slow and painstaking business, but at the end of the day the results of our work were clearly visible.

... working on a chain gang wasn't so bad, I really enjoyed it ! - Dympna

Good to give back a little to the mountains we all so frequently enjoy and love. At the end of the day there was a real sense of achievement - John

Mountain meitheal is really a very worthy organisation and should be supported by all the clubs - Joe

Never thought I'd be picking stones and working on a chain gang but it was good fun and the foreman wasn't cracking a whip. I'd be willing to go again - Noreen

My second Mountain Meitheal, and I found it even more rewarding than the first ,,you will be able to see the "Great Wall" next time you pass near the Miner's Village! - Breda

At last, something for posterity! Where's the plaque? - Niall





The assembly of the steps was somewhat more dramatic. The winch looked old and frail but exerted extraordinary force. The rocks to be used as steps were much more readily available than normal as heaps of heavy rock had been recently cleared from the river leaving these stretched along the edge. Still they were lying piled up and askew and very difficult to dislodge. The winch, hand operated and attached to any available secure rock, was able nonetheless to pull them clear and gradually move them into position – a marvel to behold.

Again the day's work was evident for all to see.



There were just eight Trekker volunteers on this Saturday – Noreen, Breda, Gaye, Dymrna, Joe, Noel, John, Niall. Everyone else can expect to be proudly shown our handiwork whenever trekkers pass this way.

Don't despair though, there will be plenty more opportunities to make your mark. Mountain Meitheal alternate their work between Saturdays and Sundays from late February to late November.



The committee suggests that we should give more days to supporting Mountain Meitheal, possibly once or twice a year - assuming that the limited participation this Saturday was due to availability rather than



Still standing a week later

lack of enthusiasm.



Demonstration

In case anyone missed it - Fergal Mulloy contributed a fascinating piece on the Miners' Village in the last Trekker (No. 52):

The ruined miners' village - Beauty spot or ominous place?

Caption Competition

Following the excellent contributions to the last caption competition we are repeating the exercise. Happily everyone seems to have survived this peligro in Tenerife.

Any captions come to mind?

Again the winner gets a free busride.



Entries to be returned to Niall (niallandeileen@gmail.com) by the end of December.

Guidelines for Participants on Club Walks

Owen McKeown - Walks Co-ordinator

The following guideline, applying to all walkers, is now on the website:-

Before the Walk

1. Read the walk notification and satisfy yourself that you are capable of the walk proposed.
2. Contact the leader before 7pm on Tues before a walk and advise him/her of name and pickup point. Please advise leader of any pre-existing medical condition. If you are on medication it is a good idea to carry a copy of your prescription in Ziploc bag in the top Pocket of your rucksack where it is readily accessible to medical personnel in an emergency.
3. Places on walks are allocated to Members in order of application. After 7pm on Tues, Guests are accepted on the same basis as Members.

Cancellations: Please note that if you cancel after the bus is ordered on Tuesday, you are expected to pay the full contribution. (This may be waived in limited cases such as close family bereavements.)

On the Day

1. Hikes depart from opposite the Glenageary Dart station, unless indicated otherwise.
2. A and B hikes normally depart at 9 am and C hikes at 11 am. Please arrive a little before departure time so that the buses can leave on time. The normal cost for the bus is Eur 18 (it can vary up or down). Occasionally A or B walks may start earlier and this will be notified in the Walks description.
3. Make sure that you are properly equipped for a day in the hills. Following is a minimum for a safe and enjoyable hike:-
 - Suitable boots. (Preferably leather with good ankle support)*
 - Warm Jacket and trousers (Not denim), Gloves and hat.*
 - Rainproof jacket (with hood) and over-trousers.*
 - Extra layer of clothing.*
 - Food and hot drink.*
 - (We generally have lunch around 1pm and a 'banana' break at 11 on A and B walks)*
 - 1 Lt of water*
 - Head torch. Walking Poles and Map*
 - Suitable Rucksack to carry the above (35 Lt Min)*
4. Follow all instructions from the leaders of the hike. Please note particularly the following: Walkers must stay behind the Walk Leader (unless the leader tells you otherwise), in front of the rear leader (Sweeper), and within view of the group in general. The leaders have to be able to account for the full group at all times. It is crucial to stay close to the group in bad weather and mist.
5. If you need to take a toilet break, advise the Sweeper.
6. Please advise the leader if the pace is uncomfortable.

Note on Weather Forecasts:-

As a general principle, Club Walks proceed irrespective of Weather. The Walk Leader will take any forecasts into account and will, if appropriate, change the route or make alternative arrangements.

Photos



Brandon Cross



Sorrel Hill



Mullaghcleevaun



Laragh Loop



Barrow



Lough Iolar



Barrow



Barrow