

The Irish 'Munros' 12 peaks in 48 hours for the Architects Benevolent Society **17th- 19th June 2011**



There are 12 mountains in Ireland over 3000ft – what is classified as a 'Munro' in Scotland, and this year's challenge walk was to climb them all over a weekend, with sponsorship raised from architects going to the ABS.

This involves a journey starting with Lugnaquilla in Co. Wicklow, taking in Galtymore, in Co. Tipperary, the full length of the Macgillycuddy's Reeks in Co Kerry, including the highest of them all – Carrauntoohil, and finishing on the Dingle peninsula with Brandon.

In good weather this would have been a tough but pleasant walk but conditions more normal for November than June greeted us as we drove south past Dublin and Glenmalur was almost overflowing with water from swollen rivers and the thundering roar of Carrawaystick waterfall in full flood. Thick cloud accompanied the driving rain, as we ploughed up through muddy tracks with visibility at the summit cairn of Lugnaquilla around 20m. Not that we spent much time there before slithering down again, soaked to the skin, behind schedule and very conscious that we had climbed just 1 of the 12 mountains.

An uncomfortable change of clothes in the still driving rain and then on to Tipperary, with a gradual drying up with each mile south, and the reward of a good track and dry weather as we headed for Galtymore and the added 'bonus' mountain of Galtybeg, with extensive 360 degree views over Cork and Tipperary, before heading on for our overnight stay in Killarney, dry clothes and a good meal.

Despite a promising forecast, Saturday dawned dull and grey with the cloud well down over the hills and heavy showers scudding through on a stroing westerly wind. It was tempting to linger over breakfast but we had a long day ahead of us, taking in 9 summits over 3000 ft and a few lower ones, not to mention Carrauntoohill twice as we had to divert off the main west-east chain to pick up Beenkeragh.

At least the wind was behind us as we slogged up the steep slopes of Caher West, and then Caher, and although the cloud denied us the dramatic views, precipitous drops looming out of the mist added a considerable adrenalin urge to the journey. Although not raining hard there was sufficient moisture in the strong wind to make it a cold hard walk up Carrauntoohil where we huddle for a while in the stone shelter below the summit cross.

The Carrauntoohil to Beenkeragh ridge is normally a delight – rough rocky ground with spectacular views and great exposure but in strong cross winds and stinging rain it was a considerable challenge, though with occasional welcome respite when the track crossed to the eastern side.

From Beenkeragh we split up – the three drivers following the ridge down over Skregmore back to the cars, while the rest retraced our steps back over Carrauntoohil and down to the top of the Devil’s Ladder where we emerged from the cloud for the first time since Caher.



In improving weather we climbed up onto the Reeks ridge and the last 5 summits – firstly tantalizing glimpses down to sunlit valleys below, then ridges and the summits of Cnoc an Chuillin, Maolan Bui and Cnoc na Peiste emerging from the gloom until finally, as we headed for the last two peaks, the sun emerged, just in time to reveal the rocky and precipitous ridges leading to the ‘Big Gun’ and Cruach Mor and guide us down to the valley far below.



Despite the weather, we completed the full walk in just under 9 hours, well under the guidebook times, and we now had the satisfaction of having climbed 11 out of the 12 peaks, just leaving Brandon for Sunday morning.

Another early start to ensure we finished within our 48 hour time limit and it was off to Brandon in bright sunshine, depleted in numbers as some of the team had other commitments. Brandon is possibly the most dramatic and picturesque of all the Irish Munros, with craggy slopes on all sides and the sea stretching away on both sides of the Dingle peninsula. We climbed up past the 'paternoster' lakes and strolled up the final ridge, for the first time able to linger on a summit and soak up the spectacular views.



With a total walking time of just over 17 hours, 4000m of height gain and 48km of distance it had been an exhausting few days, but it was with a great sense of satisfaction and achievement we turned back north.

Thank you to all who supported us and the Architects Benevolent Society.

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