

MOUNTAINEERING IRELAND'S IRISH PEAKS

A review by Peter Walker

Within the relatively short evolution of books about Ireland's mountains, it's hard to think of another book that has arrived quite as belatedly and carrying quite the same weight of expectation as Mountaineering Ireland's 'Irish Peaks'. Conceived as a tribute to the late, great Joss Lynam, it aspires to both celebrate and give guidance to Ireland's high mountains.

The first thing you'll notice is the book's physical heft; its solid hard-backing and page size mean that its natural home is the coffee table rather than the rucksack, unless the rucksack owner has a strong back and money to burn. Thus liberated from the need for in-the-field practicality it is free to indulge in a riot of design and colour on page after page. This is not a book that struggles to get your attention. The hugely evocative shot of a descent from Mweelrea on the cover gives a fair indication of how the publications 'artistic' side will express itself.

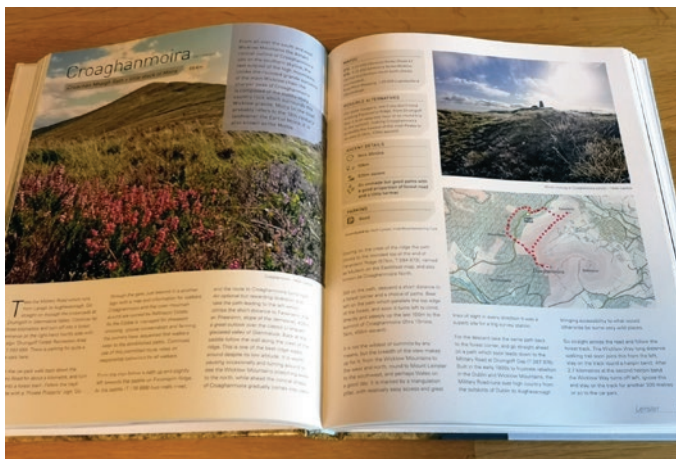
But it's also a goldmine of pure information.

The introductory passages of the book serve to provide a backdrop and a primer, with substantial articles on important issues such as access, safety and the environment and the walker's relationship with it, and in-depth essays on the mountains' geology, flora and fauna. There is also a thorough biography of Joss Lynam himself. All of this is quite sumptuously illustrated by means of photographs and diagrams; indeed, it has to be said that the photography throughout 'Irish Peaks' is often absolutely magnificent and utterly gripping.

But the meat of the book is the 'walking guide' section, divided into four Province-oriented sections (with Munster further subdivided in

BOOK REVIEW

two). Here 71 chapters serve to provide guidance to the ascent of the mountains that make up MountainViews' 'Highest Hundred' list (the highest summits with a prominence of 100m or more). The individual chapters feature a recommended route (and often some alternatives but never an exhaustive list; MountainViews provides much greater diversity in this regard), details about distances, timings and terrain, and also a map. Handily there's also an indication of the volume of parking available.



The route description texts come from many different contributors (including Joss Lynam himself...a nice touch), but have been edited sensitively so as to provide a reasonable continuity of style. The routes themselves are often 'interestingly debatable' but never (to this reviewer's eyes) 'plain wrong', and display an awareness of access concerns that isn't always obvious in guidebooks. As such they can confidently be recommended to any reader new to the area being described; 'Irish Peaks' may be too unwieldy for the field, but otherwise it totally delivers as a guidebook.

The book concludes with an article from our own Simon Stewart outlining the history of what is now known as the Vandeleur-Lynam list. Irish Peaks was originally to have included the 166 'separate peaks' of Joss's 600m list from 1999, but this proved impractical due to the anticipated size of the result. Instead the shorter MountainViews 'Highest Hundred' was used made possible by MountainViews having determined a prominence figure for each mountain. Simon's article goes on to introduce various other Irish mountain lists, up to and including the ultimate challenge of the Arderins.

There are a few things with which I would take issue in the book. I could not find the promised route update section on the MI website, a bit unfortunate at a time where pre-and-post-and-during-again lock-down turmoil has caused a noticeable increase in access issues. Despite the (acknowledged) contributions of many members of Ireland's many hillwalking clubs, their existence is barely touched upon within the main text, if at all, and Ireland's burgeoning Challenge Walking culture seems similarly absent (indeed, organised walks seem somewhat dismissed). Finally, MI now has a Hillwalking Committee, but contributions from or mentions of it are missing.

But as before, those are points that are debatable rather than binary. Taken as a whole, 'Irish Peaks' is a tremendously impressive and hugely inspiring piece of work, deeply ambitious but ultimately fulfilling that level of ambition. This reflects very highly on its editors Margaret & Alan Tees: there was a vast amount of material to draw on from a large number of disparate sources, and it was by no means a given that something this coherent would emerge from that.

'Irish Peaks' is a genuine landmark in Irish mountain publishing,



one that demands a place in any collection of books on the subject. No kidding.

There were some previous comments on "Irish Peaks", though not a full review, in MountainViews's Sept 2020 issue.

Note: MI are organising a talk on Irish Peaks, Mon 23rd Nov see <https://mountaineering.ie/aboutus/news/2020/?id=309>