

# irish mountain log

THE MAGAZINE FOR WALKERS AND CLIMBERS IN IRELAND

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## ISSUE 87

The Irish Mountain Log is the membership magazine of the Mountaineering Council of Ireland (MCI). The MCI promotes the interests of hillwalkers and climbers in Ireland.

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**Copy deadline** for the Winter 2008 issue of the Irish Mountain Log is Friday, October 17th, 2008.

## Readers of the Irish Mountain

Readers of the Irish Mountain Log are reminded that hillwalking and climbing are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks, and be responsible for their own actions and involvement. The MCI publishes and promotes safety and good practice advice and through Bord Oiliúntaí Sléibhe (BOS, The Irish Mountain Training Board) administers a range of training programmes for walkers and climbers.



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*Learning the ropes: A new generation of alpinists is on the way, writes Neil Johnston.*

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# Benefits of access

**T**he benefits of providing reasonable access to the Irish uplands are obvious to all hillwalkers, in terms of them being able to engage in their chosen pastime. However, two of the contributions in this issue of the *Mountain Log* emphasise benefits of ensuring access that may not be so obvious.

MCI Access and Conservation Officer, Aodhnait Carroll, writes about the health benefits of walking (see page 53) and asks why the Government in the Republic isn't doing more to secure the necessary access so that the health of the nation can be improved, this at a time when the Government is also acknowledging the increasing problem of obesity and its associated health problems. This article is timely. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Ireland and the mortality rates here from heart disease are still higher than in many neighbouring countries in Europe. World Heart Day in Ireland on October 5th will focus on the health benefits of regular physical activity, particularly walking, as this is a form of physical activity that most people can easily engage in.

Then, in an article on the Paps in Kerry (see page 20), Mike O'Sullivan raises the issue of access to our heritage sites being the right of every person on this island. He points out that the failure to provide a right of reasonable access to the uplands is damaging walking tourism, with many potential tourists from overseas preferring to go to countries where access to the uplands is more assured, as it is in our near neighbours, Scotland, England and Wales, and in many other countries in mainland Europe. This failure to provide access to upland areas is already apparently affecting jobs in parts of the country where tourism is an important source of employment, such as in Kerry. It is evident that assuring reasonable access to upland areas could protect those jobs by encouraging walking tourism.

In this time of increasing health problems related to inadequate activity levels and of threatened economic recession, let's hope that our political leaders will take note of the potential benefits to the population of ensuring reasonable access to upland areas.

*Patrick O'Sullivan*

Patrick O'Sullivan  
Editor, Irish Mountain Log

**ON THE COVER:** View of Piz Bernina (4,049m) (in centre background) as seen from the summit of Cima di Castello in the Bregaglia valley, Switzerland. The Forno valley glacier is visible in the foreground, with Cima di Rossi the summit on the right.

Photo: Jack Higgins.

**THIS PAGE:** The Punta Torelli and Punta S. Anna in the Bregaglia valley, Switzerland.

Photo: Dawson Stelfox.



# News

Get all the latest news at [www.mountaineering.ie](http://www.mountaineering.ie)

## New staffer in MCI office

### Assistant to Training Officer appointed

KATE HEBBLETHWAITE has been appointed Training Administrator by the MCI. Describing herself as an unintentional adrenaline fanatic, Kate's prudence is all too easily railroaded by her unruly sense of adventure. Four years playing in the Cairngorms under the guise of taking a degree at St Andrew's was followed by trips to New Zealand, the Alps, the Pyrenees and the hillier parts of England and Wales, and a year working in the Langtang, Jomsom and Annapurna regions of the Nepal Himalaya.

Kate's experiences taught her two invaluable lessons: always break in kit before travelling and never underestimate the power of smiling broadly!

A move to Dublin in 2001 was followed by a stint as a lecturer in English literature at Trinity College. During her time in college, Kate took to the water and in 2002 she rowed her way to a National Championship. More recently, she was recruited into the extreme sport of adventure racing, which has necessitated learning the esoteric arts of mountain biking, fell-running, and sea kayaking.

Training and racing throughout Ireland has allowed Kate to experience the scale and variety of the country's wilderness landscapes. Falling off, over or into various natural features, however, has meant that



these encounters have often been quite painful! Her team, the Average Joes, are currently training to represent Ireland at the four-day, 600km, non-stop Portugal XPD race in December 2008.

Kate's passion for mountains is matched only by her enthusiasm for inspiring the same in others. She says she is looking forward to assisting MCI's Training Officer, Tim Orr, to help members to identify and address their training needs and ambitions, and to meeting many more members of the Irish mountaineering community. ■

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## Equality monitoring survey

THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF IRELAND is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and diversity. To help us monitor the equality element of our programmes and activities, we ask you to take no more than two minutes to complete an online survey. The survey is completely confidential and you can find a link to it on the front page of our website, [www.mountaineering.ie](http://www.mountaineering.ie). Monitoring is recommended to eliminate all forms of discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional. The MCI is committed to regularly updating its monitoring data. However, we respect a person's right not to answer sections of the survey. The information you provide will be kept confidential and will help us monitor areas of under-representation. Data from this survey will be used to make recommendations for changes within our association. The assistance of your feedback will help the MCI attract new members among under-represented sections of the community. – (Stuart Garland)

# New guide to Burren launched

## MCI publishes eagerly awaited rock climbing guide

THE MCI'S LATEST rock climbing guide, *Climbs in the Burren and Aran Islands*, was officially launched in July at the Burrenbeo Centre in Kinvara, Co Galway.

Dr Brendan Dunford opened the launch by welcoming everyone to Burrenbeo. He was followed by Ruairí Ó Conchúir, Chairman of the MCI, who spoke about the importance of the region to hillwalkers and climbers, and introduced the author of the new guide, Peter Owens.

Peter reminded those present that it was over 10 years since the last guide to the Burren was produced and that it was now long out of print. As a consequence, an update had been eagerly awaited by local climbers and the many who regularly came to climb in the Burren from other parts of Ireland and from abroad.

The first, albeit informal, guide to the region was drafted by Dublin-based climber Steve Young back in 1972-1973. Steve was part of an IMC group that stopped at Ailladie, discovered the crag and, together with other climbers such as Jim Mackenzie, made repeated forays onto the rock, yielding such classic routes as Genesis, Nutrock, Bonnán Bui and Pis Fliuch. Following on from this, Tom Ryan produced the 1977 guide and Calvin Torrains edited Tom's work in 1986 and in 1997, producing the last, now out of print, guide with Clare Sheridan.

Peter acknowledged those who had produced the earlier editions of the guide, saying that the new guide had been built upon their voluntary efforts in putting together these guidebooks for the good of climbers throughout Ireland.

Living in Kinvara gave Peter the necessary access to the crags, but he also has a deep interest in the Burren region, having left Dublin to live there some years ago. Having agreed to work on the guide, he said he wanted to produce something on a par with other modern climbing guides by introducing full colour and illustrating the guide with better maps and topos to make the crags and routes easier to find. He had surveyed existing guides, looked at their good points, and in particular said he had taken inspiration from Niall Grimes's award-winning climbing guide to the Peak District.

A climbing guide is concerned with routes, descriptions and grades, and the main task of the authors is to get them right, but there is also



a need for more general information about the region. Peter said that he was fortunate to get some very good contributions. Brendan Dunford had written an excellent piece on the flora and fauna of the Burren, Sábha Baxter had given a climber's slant on the geology, and Marcin Ostacz from Poland had become fluent in Irish and had given translations for all the Irish names found on the Burren crags. In addition, Howard Hebblethwaite had put together a superb piece on the history of Ailladie.

Peter thanked all of the many climbers who had contributed to the production of the guide in different ways. He also thanked those who had reviewed the guide when it was finished – Ronan Keane, Diarmuid Duggan, Paul Daly, John Loane, Howard Hebblethwaite, Calvin Torrains and Clare Sheridan. Finally, he thanked his wife Vera, who he said for a time had become 'a guidebook widow.' Peter finished by saying that he hoped it showed that a modern quality rock climbing guide could be produced by volunteers within a reasonable time frame.

For a review of the guide, see page 55.

• *Special thanks to Anne O'Connor and Brendan Dunford of Burrenbeo for hosting the book launch at their resource centre in Kinvara. Burrenbeo (www.burrenbeo.com) is a not-for-profit organisation providing information and education resources on the Burren region.* ■



## IN BRIEF

### Better travel insurance

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BMC Travel & Activity Insurance is the UK and Ireland's leading specialist travel insurance for climbers, mountaineers, skiers and adventure travellers, and is run and managed by climbers and outdoor enthusiasts. You can purchase this insurance online through the MCI website.



# National Trails Day

Sunday, September 28th 2008



IRELAND'S FIRST ever National Trails Day was held on Sunday, September 28th. Everyone was encouraged to get out and enjoy the huge range of trails available across the country.

Ireland has a wealth of trails of many types, from multi-access trails for all users to more challenging trails for the serious hill-walker or biker. National Trails Day saw events being organised

to suit all ages, abilities and interests. The event aimed to create an awareness of the trail network that is provided by many organisations free, for all to enjoy.

National Trails Day events covered all trail activities – guided nature walks, mountain biking for beginners, trails maintenance days, 'Leave No Trace' awareness walks and walks and treks of different lengths in some of the most beautiful scenery in Ireland.

The partners in National Trails Day were Coillte, Fáilte Ireland, Comhairle na Tuaithe, The Department of Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs and the National Trails Office of the Irish Sports Council. All events were listed on [www.nationaltrailsday.ie](http://www.nationaltrailsday.ie).



Popular travel show presenter Kathryn Thomas promoting National Trails Day 2008.

**nathan kingerlee**  
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## Walks scheme

### Payments for landowners

STAGE I OF THE National Walks Scheme, the scheme by which private landowners are paid for the maintenance of trails that cross their land, has been almost completed by the National Trails Office of the Irish Sports Council. Agreements have been made between the relevant Leader companies and nearly 300 landowners. Some payments have been made on the Sheep's Head Way, the Bluestack Way and the Tipperary Loop Walks and agreements are nearly complete on the Suck Valley Way and the South Mayo Walks. Work is now commencing on Stage II agreements on the following walks: Beara Way, Burren Way, Kerry Way, Wicklow Way, and Loop Walks in Kilkenny and Sligo. With the experience gained from Stage I, it is planned to complete the scheme on all the Long Distance Walks and many Fáilte Ireland Walks in 2009. – (Joss Lynam)





**Walking Week** Walkers taking part in the recent “Welcome to Walking” week in Sligo. The event was organised by Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership with support from local clubs including Sligo Mountaineering Club, Curlew Walkers and Lough Talt Ramblers.

## Minister replies to concerns

### MCI raises issue of dumping on Skellig Michael

CONCERNS WERE RAISED at the MCI annual general meeting last February about alleged dumping on the Co Kerry world heritage site of Skellig Michael. The MCI Chief Officer Stuart Garland subsequently contacted the Minister for the Environment John Gormley about these concerns, saying the National Parks and Wildlife Service was investigating an incident in which five tonnes of waste from maintenance works on the island's monastic remains had apparently been dumped from the South Peak into the sea, a height of over 700 feet.

Referring to the MCI's Environmental Policy and its concerns for the natural environment, he asked the Minister to investigate the incident so that lessons could be learned from any mistakes made on the works programme on Skellig Michael, an UNESCO world heritage site.

In reply, the Minister said his department had contacted Kerry County Council and they had informed him that they visited the island in September 2007 to investigate any possible

water and air pollution, and had asked the National Parks and Wildlife Service to look at the effects of the dumping on the island's habitats. The NPWS concluded that there had been no impact on habitats in the Special Protection Area. The county council reported to the Environmental Protection Agency that no environmental pollution had occurred, and the EPA confirmed that no further investigation was required.

The Minister's department had invited UNESCO to examine the conservation works on the monastic remains on Skellig Michael, in the context of a review of the draft management plan for the site. UNESCO inspected the site and concluded that “whilst the works have transformed the appearance of these remains, they are justifiable, and the outstanding universal value of the site remains intact.”

These findings were formally approved at the 32nd Session of the World Heritage Committee in Quebec.

## IN BRIEF

### Threat to hare in Belfast Hills

A report commissioned by the Belfast Hills Partnership has called for urgent action to save the Irish hare after a study found that numbers of the native Irish mammal are at dangerously low levels in the Belfast Hills.

The Belfast Hills Mammal Survey established that there is only a small population of Irish hares in the west of the city at Divis and Black Mountain. The study calls for increased monitoring, creating a mix of habitats to encourage the recovery of the species, possible fox control and the targetting of resources to locations where numbers still exist on Black Mountain and Divis.

This iconic and mystical Irish mammal is also declining in numbers in the Republic.

### Minister to talk on walks and planning

Minister Éamon Ó Cuív TD will give a talk ‘as gaeilge’ in Cultúrlann na hÉireann at 32 Belgrave Square, Monkstown, Co Dublin, on October 2nd at 8:30pm. All are welcome. Please contact Máire Uí Lafain on (01) 289 5778 for further details.

### Annual guided tour of Belfast Hills

On August 30th, the Belfast Hills Partnership again organised their popular annual bus and walking tour of the spectacular Belfast Hills. Everyone was welcome to join the tour to discover the hidden treasures on the city's doorstep, to find out how to access the hills and to learn about the ancient legacy of the hills. The tour was hosted this year by Dr Jim Bradley of the Belfast Hills Partnership and took in the sights and sounds of Cave Hill, Carnmoney, Ligoniel, Colin Glen and Divis and Black Mountain. Those who joined the tour got stunning views of Strangford and Lough Neagh, the Mourne Mountains, the Antrim Plateau, Donegal and the Sperrins.



*MCI promotes the principles of Leave No Trace*



# Stacks to do in Donegal

## Coastal sea-stack climbs in spectacular locations

Iain Millar and Marty McGuigan on the way to Cnoc na Mara sea-stack off Port, Glencolmcille, Co Donegal, in July.  
Photo: Alan Tees.

### ALAN TEES

INSPIRED BY THE EXPLOITS of Iain Millar, some Colmcille Climbers have been turning their attention to the legion of rock stacks of all shapes and sizes that festoon Ireland's northwest coastline, and more particularly the giants that stand guard off Port, Glencolmcille.

Stacks have many defences: steep rock; loose rock; steep grass; fulmar puke; and, most notably, sea conditions.

On 26th July, 2008, Iain Millar, Marty McGuigan and I climbed "Cnoc Na Mara" by the spectacular "Landward Arête." The approach was down a long, steep, grassy slope to a stony beach opposite the stack and along a fixed line on which a small inflatable dinghy was shuttled out to the stack. It was climbed in four pitches. We had an abseil descent off pegs and slings from pitches 3 and 1. The belays we put in are still there, as is one of my friends, at the top (£20 reward for recovery!). Although the technical grade was 4b at most, it is a serious undertaking and probably the most marvellously dramatic piece of climbing I have ever done in Ireland! Fortunately (for us), Bill Magowan arrived late and was able to photograph the escapade from the mainland.

I had made five previous (though admittedly pretty half-hearted) attempts to climb the nearby Tormore Island, whose landward approaches are formidable, but this time we had the services of a big, and expensive, RIB with a 250-horsepower engine and a man, Paul, who could use it. Legend, and Haskett Smith, has it that a young man by the name of Cunningham died of starvation and exposure out on the rock during the Great Famine, when he was cut off for a long period whilst out collecting eggs. Local men went out, once the weather had moderated, and buried him in a grassy place called "Borraidh Na Cahal." We could find no place there suitable to bury even a mouse!

After one and a half hours on the RIB around Aranmore Island and south from Burtonport, we arrived, battered and soaked, in the channel below Tormore. The party, comprising the irrepressible Iain Millar, Peter Cooper, Peter McConnell and myself, was duly deposited with our gear on ledges at the base of the climb. Four and a half pitches of steep, mixed (rock and grass) climbing later, we were taking photos on top. Descent was again by abseil, mainly off pegs. Not nearly as good as Cnoc Na Mara, but a great adventure nevertheless!

We were down at 3:30pm and the boat was due to come back at four. By four, we could see no sign of it, and the sea was getting up, with sudden huge swells racing around the stack. If we were going to be out here for a few days, I was glad I hadn't eaten my sandwiches!

Suddenly, the big RIB appeared around the corner and cruised into the channel, only to be caught by a huge wave and carried like a toy towards the rocks. Paul and the 250 Mariner were up to it. He rode the swell and, although shaken, even



managed to pick us up, but only after a number of abortive attempts. I had the sandwiches for lunch the next day!

To the north lie the granite islands of Gola and Owey. Gola is now well known to rock climbers, but Owey is of more interest to adventurers, not only for its wonderful caves (and the fact that Daniel O'Donnell's mother was born there) but because of its amazing rock architecture. What is surprising is that two Polish climbers, having seen pictures of a needle at Stackamillion on the Colmcille Climbers website, crossed to the island, climbed it, and left details at Cruit Golf Club, as you do!

We have now started to log the various stacks on the Colmcille website, under the Donegal On Line Guide Book "Stacks and Pinnacles," with pictures. If you have anything to add to this database, please contact [pete@pete-smith.co.uk](mailto:pete@pete-smith.co.uk). ■



# Climbing walls seminar

## Managers and owners invited



THE MCI IS PLEASED TO invite all climbing wall managers and owners to the MCI's first Climbing Wall Managers' Seminar, which will be held at Sport HQ on Wednesday, October 1st, 2008.

In the next few weeks, all climbing walls should receive a pack with all the information about the seminar. This will include details of the topics to be covered, a programme of events, an application form for delegates and a map of how to get to Sport HQ. If you think you are not on our mailing list, please send your details to [stuart@mountaineering.ie](mailto:stuart@mountaineering.ie). This seminar is open to public and private wall operators.

The seminar should be a great event as there are some exciting things happening in the world of climbing walls at present, including the launch of NICAS, the National Indoor Climbing Achievement Scheme in Ireland.

We would encourage as many climbing wall managers and owners as possible to attend, as the topics that will be discussed at the seminar will affect the entire climbing wall industry. There will be a chance to find out about funding opportunities, good practice, youth programmes and developments in the field of climbing walls. The seminar will be from 9:30 to 16:00 and a buffet lunch will be provided. – (Stuart Garland & Angela Carlin)

## Bouldering competition

### Irish Bouldering League 2008-2009

THE IRISH BOULDERING LEAGUE 2008-2009 is at an advanced stage of planning. At the moment the calendar is coming together, venues are being booked and sponsorship deals worked out. The 2008-2009 programme for the IBL will hopefully have a whopping six rounds. Three rounds are planned for the pre-Christmas period and three for the post-Christmas period. Currently we are trying to organise two rounds in Dublin and one each in Cork, Galway, Dingle and Belfast. Please visit [www.mountaineering.ie](http://www.mountaineering.ie) and [www.climbing.ie](http://www.climbing.ie) for more information and any updates.

A vertical advertisement for Patagonia. The background is a photograph of a kayaker in a red and yellow kayak navigating a narrow channel between large icebergs in a body of water. The sky is blue with some clouds.

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# Triumph and tragedy on K2

## Pakistan's Savage Mountain claims more lives

IN ONE OF THE WORST mountaineering tragedies there to date, eleven climbers are known to have died between August 1-2, 2008 on K2, the world's second highest mountain at 8,611m. Those who died on the mountain that is also known as 'the Savage Mountain' included 37-year-old Limerick man Gerard McDonnell, who on August 1st had become the first Irishman to stand on the summit of this Himalayan giant (see 'The Last Word,' page 57).

In total, seventeen climbers summited K2 on August 1st from several different teams, all of whom had been waiting for some time in Base Camp for the weather to improve. When the weather did improve, all of these teams made their summit bids at the same time, leading to congestion in the Bottleneck, a steep gully some 400m below the summit, and slowing their ascents. There were also apparently problems with the fixed ropes on this dangerous section of the mountain. The teams had divided the responsibility for laying these fixed ropes but some were wrongly positioned.

A Serb and a Pakistani climber died on the ascent, but the massive loss of lives that occurred on the descent was apparently caused by the collapse of a

serac above the Bottleneck, at more than 8,200 metres on K2. The collapsing serac took with it many of the fixed ropes which the climbers were using for the descent and some descending climbers were also carried down by ice blocks from the falling serac. Other climbers, including Ger and an Italian team mate from the Dutch Norit K2 Team which he was a member of, were then trapped above the Bottleneck as night fell. It seems that Ger was carried away by an avalanche the following day as he and his team mate, who was a little ahead, descended the Bottleneck.

Some climbers had passed the Bottleneck before the serac fell or succeeded in descending afterwards and were subsequently able to assist in the rescue attempts. Two Dutchmen from the Norit K2 Team, reached Base Camp on August 4th and an Italian got there two days later. They were all badly frostbitten and had to be air-lifted to Skardu. One of the Dutch survivors, Wilco Van Rooijen, had climbed Broad Peak with Ger in 2006.

The details of the dead mountaineers have now been released by the Pakistani authorities. As well as Ger, they included three Koreans, two Nepalīs, two



Pakistanis, a Frenchman, a Serb and a Norwegian. The Presidents of the UIAA and the Alpine Club of Pakistan have expressed their condolences to the families and friends of those who perished. Alan Tees, President of the MCI, added his personal condolences and those of the Mountaineering Council of Ireland to all those who had lost loved ones in this tragedy, and especially to the family and friends of Ger McDonnell. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h-anam dhilis. – (Joss Lynam)*

## Success in Spiti

### Irish make a first ascent

ON 22ND JUNE 2008, IMC members Gerry Galligan, Darach Ó Murchú and Paul Mitchell made the first ascent (via its SW ridge) of a 6,135m peak in the East Upper Debsa valley of Spiti, located in the state of Himachal Pradesh in India's far north. It was climbed alpine-style in favourable conditions and graded AD. Although the quality of the rock was bad, the long ridge presented interesting challenges. They propose to call the peak Ramaban, meaning 'place of Rama.' Rama is a hero in the important Hindu text, the *Ramayana*. After summiting Ramaban, they made probably the first



crossing of a col from the Bauli Khada tributary valley of the Debsa to the Dibibokri glacier and so to the Parvati

valley, creating a viable new route between the Debsa valley in Spiti and the Parvati valley in Kulu. – (Joss Lynam)



# First ascents in Garwhal

## Irish Panpatia Expedition 2008 climbs new peaks

### ALAN TEES

THIS SUMMER, MEMBERS of Colmcille Climbers and the North West Mountaineering Club organised an expedition in India's Garwhal Himalayas. The group succeeded in ascending four previously unclimbed peaks, crossing the 4,500m Holdsworth Pass and reaching the Panpatia ice-cap, where six of them camped for four days at over 5,000m. Three others left the group when base camp was established, and they spent ten days trekking to the remote Hem Khund Lake (4,429m) and the Valley of Flowers, above Gangariah, and then climbing to the Kaurie Pass (4,229m), to reach Joshimath and meet up with the climbers again.

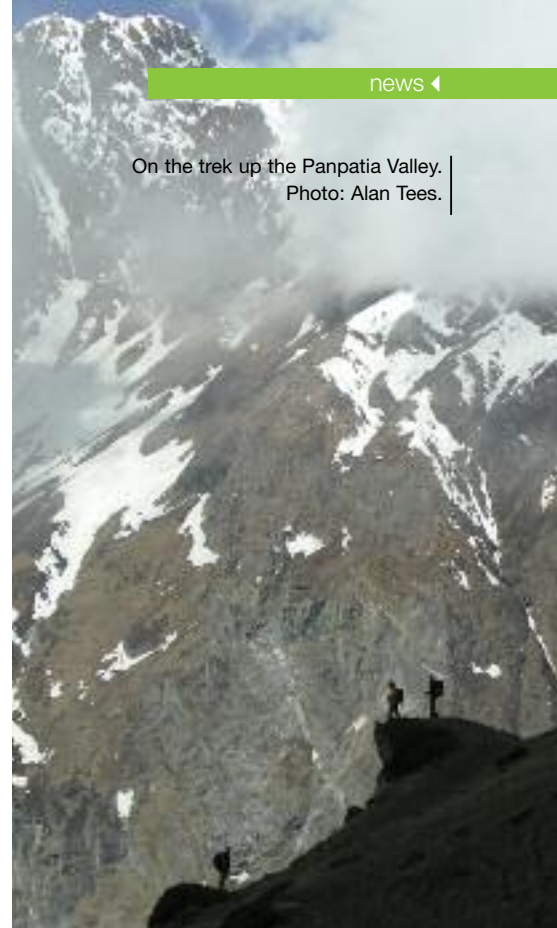
The area was first visited by CF Meade in 1912, and then by the explorers Shipton and Tilman in 1933, when they went in search of the legendary easy passage through the mountains between the holy temples of Badrinath and Kedernath. The route they found was desperately difficult and they barely survived. Two Indian mountaineers disappeared in 1984 on the same mission and, in 1999, Anindya Muherjee, a Himalayan guide, reached the Panpatia ice-cap. Writing about the experience, he concluded that a crossing was possible

here, but not easy. The following year, mountaineer Martin Moran's party crossed the ice-cap and descended to Kedernath. In the last couple of years a number of parties have followed, but none have attempted to climb the virgin peaks that surround the ice-cap.

I first met Anindya Muherjee in Sikkim in 2006 and plans were hatched to explore the Panpatia ice-cap and hopefully to climb from there. In the meantime, Anindya visited Ireland and spoke at the MCI's 2007 Autumn Gathering in Ballyliffin, Co Donegal.

In the event, the expedition was not without its setbacks. Early on, on the crossing of Holdsworth Pass, a number of poorly-clad porters dumped their loads in the snow and retreated to Badrinath, resulting in the high-altitude Sherpas having to carry heavier loads. And there was a subsequent delay to hire more porters to carry over essential food and equipment.

Fortunately, due to the immense effort put in by Anindya and his small "Adventuremania" team, the lost time was made up and, despite most of the Irish contingent being affected to varying extents by recurring tummy upsets, high camp was established on May 30th. The next day, all six climbers summited on Point 5,687m, together with Anindya and



On the trek up the Panpatia Valley.  
Photo: Alan Tees.

Tindoop Sherpa. The peak was named Shanti (Peace) Peak. The following day was scheduled for rest and acclimatisation, but five members climbed the spur above the campsite and named it Nasta (Breakfast) Point, 5,296m. It proved to be a superb viewpoint for the entire area.

On day three, the party had planned to cross the ice-cap to climb an attractive peak on the other side, but that night it failed to freeze and they spent three hours ploughing through soft snow before climbing the north summit of what was duly named Panpatia Ridge. The next morning, two of the climbers plus Sherpa and guide tackled the rock tower (Tindoop Tower) between Shanti and the unnamed Point 5,841m. This proved to be very steep and exposed, but the summit was eventually reached at 9:15am, and the whole party descended to Advance Base Camp at 4,400m. Three days later we were all back at the roadside.

The climbers and trekkers who were on the trip were Dennis Golden (Strabane), George Carlton (Cullybackey), Andrew Tees (Eglinton), Martin Boner (Gweedore), Valli Schaffer (Sligo), Martin Hasson (Feeny), Finbarr Mullin (Dungiven), and Margaret and Alan Tees (Culdaff). ■



On the summit ridge of 'Shanti,' the previously unclimbed and un-named Point 5,687m.  
Photo: Alan Tees.





despite the poor weather during the jamboree.”

The volunteers from the MCI and the Irish and Belgian Venture Scouts, who assisted with the Climbing Walls during the jamboree, were as follows: Ciara Benson, Kenneth Burgess, Fien Druyts, Stuart Garland, Christine Hughes, Fiona Rice, Lieve Van Loo, Kieran McCormack, Sean Meade, Sean Mooney, Mark O'Connor, Philip Neville, Niall Quinn, Ilse Ravoet, Sam Sutcliffe, Anneleen Trogh, and Kris Walsh.

## Jamboree 2008

### Over 12,000 scouts attend Irish gathering

WITH THE ASSISTANCE of the MCI, scouts attending the International Scout Jamboree at Punchestown Racecourse in August were able to practice climbing and abseiling during the jamboree.

Over 12,500 scouts from 17 different countries attended the jamboree and, during the ten-day programme, scouts and leaders climbed over 50,000 metres on the three mobile climbing walls provided for the event, equivalent to over five times the height of Mount Everest.

Speaking at the Scout Jamboree, Stuart Garland, MCI's Chief Officer and

team leader for the Climbing Walls, said, “The MCI is delighted to be involved in this initiative to introduce climbing as a sport to young people and their leaders. This is a showcase for the MCI to promote our sport among the next generation of walkers and climbers.”

He went on to say, “I would especially like to acknowledge the tremendous effort that has been put in by our MCI and Scout volunteers in running the Climbing Walls during the jamboree. Their expertise and enthusiasm has meant that the scouts were kept in high spirits



The MCI also had a stand in the Village at the jamboree where volunteers were on hand to answer any questions scouts or their leaders had about mountaineering. Many thanks to the following who manned the stand: Gonzalo Banda-Cruz, Kate Hebblethwaite, Mairead Kennedy, John O'Brien, Tim Orr and Elizabeth Williamson. In addition to the Climbing Walls, rock climbing and abseiling were provided off-site by Jane Carney Instruction at Dalkey Quarry, and the Mountain Challenge and Mountain Expeditions were led by Zef Klinkenberg in Glendalough.

The MCI and Scouting Ireland would like to acknowledge the generous sponsorship of Berghaus and in particular the support of Tony Maguire. The assistance of The Highpoint Group, Lyon Equipment and Petzl was also greatly appreciated. ■





# Build your own climbing wall!

## Climbing wall co-operative set up in south Dublin

ANGELA CARLIN

MICHAEL DUFFY POSTED the following message on the discussion forum of [www.climbing.ie](http://www.climbing.ie) in January:

"Dear all, – As you know, the lack of decent indoor bouldering facilities in Ireland is appalling. In Wicklow alone there are countless high-calibre problems still to go and, to be blunt, as there are no facilities, we do not have the standard of climbers to climb them. A space has become available in south Dublin which is ideal for housing a bouldering venue. Taking the School Room in Sheffield as an example, a group of people could share responsibility for what was essentially their wall. A co-op, where everyone had an input."

There was a flurry of excitement among Dublin climbers and they contemplated



the idea of setting up their own facility. Before long, enough people had dug deep in their wallets and their tool sheds to make the project go ahead.

Within weeks, the lease was signed, the co-operative wall had sorted out its insurance and construction had got underway. Six months on, I asked Neal McQuaid and Michael Duffy, members of the co-op, to tell me a bit more about Ireland's first (perhaps the first of many?) co-operative climbing wall.

**AC:** What started the idea of building a co-op venue? Has this sort of thing been done before?

**NMcQ:** It's been discussed on and off for years, but no one had ever done anything about it. Michael Duffy and Jennie Coughlan decided to get a group of people together and rent a premises for the sole purpose of training and bouldering.

**AC:** How difficult was it to find suitable premises and to sort out things like insurance?

**NMcQ:** Premises took a while, as far as I know. Insurance was pretty ok, involving registering as a club with the MCI, nothing too difficult. Al Sarhan deserves all credit for the legalities.

**AC:** Who built and designed the wall?

**NMcQ:** Michael is an architect and put together the drawings and models for discussion with those involved.

**MD:** Everyone rowed in with the construction. It's all wood and completely free-standing, meaning the wall can be dismantled and reassembled should we ever have to move premises. The whole thing, four separate walls of varying angles, was constructed in three days.

**AC:** How often do you use the wall, now that it's finished? Has it benefited your training?

**NMcQ:** Not as much as expected, but more due to my lifestyle issues in Dublin at present!

**MD:** Without a doubt it is the best training facility in Ireland and is hopefully the first of many. Also, there is always somebody there, which is good for the social aspect as well as for raising local climbing standards.

**AC:** Now that the wall is finished and you have the benefit of hindsight, what advice would you give to anyone considering following this as an example?

**NMcQ:** Just do it! The interest is there. Discussions have already taken place for another one on the northside of Dublin. Just put together a group of motivated people and start looking for a venue. ■





# IMRANews

Get all the latest news at [www.mountainrescue.ie](http://www.mountainrescue.ie)



## Teams assist pilgrims on Reek

**Over 60 casualties aided on Reek Sunday this year**



Members of Donegal and Glen of Imaal MRTs stretcher a casualty to safety. Note the belay line set up behind to slow the descent. Photo: IMRA.

### PAUL WHITING

OVER 250 UNPAID volunteers from three voluntary emergency services – Mountain Rescue Ireland, Order of Malta Ireland and Civil Defence – provided medical care to those in need of assistance among the estimated 25-40,000 pilgrims who climbed Croagh Patrick in Co Mayo on Reek Sunday this year, on July 26th, 2008. While the Mass said by Archbishop of Tuam Michael Neary and the pilgrims themselves received much media attention, the unsung heroes of the emergency services received little mention.

The three emergency services worked together in a joint operation which utilised three locations: an Order of Malta first-aid tent on the Murrisk or front side of the mountain, a Mountain Rescue and helicopter base on the back of the mountain, and a medical tent half-way up the mountain.

130 Order of Malta volunteers and 20 Civil Defence volunteers covered the lower half of the mountain while 120 volunteers from the twelve Mountain Rescue teams provided cover on the upper half. The medical tent was staffed from 5:00am to 9:00pm by three doctors and two nurses who volunteered their specialist skills for the day. They were supported by two Order of Malta medics.

Sixty-six casualties were treated on the day, thirty-six in the lower first-aid tent and thirty in the medical tent at the half-way point. The injuries seen ranged from blisters and minor cuts and bruises through to leg fractures, and some pilgrims were treated for suspected heart attacks. Eighteen of the casualties were evacuated by the teams.

The volunteers from the emergency services were also supported by the Gardaí and the Irish Air Corps. One of the Air Corps' new Augusta Westland 139 helicopters was fitted out with an air

ambulance configuration and this was jointly staffed by an Air Corps and Mountain Rescue paramedic.

The helicopter was kept busy, being used nine times to evacuate patients. Two of these were serious enough to require air-lifting directly from the medical tent to Mayo General Hospital in Castlebar. The other seven flights were from the medical tent at the half-way point to the Murrisk side for less serious injuries. There were also six ambulance transports from Murrisk to Castlebar by Order of Malta vehicles.

This year also saw some technical advances for Mountain Rescue. The first was a type of radar which allowed the Mountain Rescue base manager to track the Mountain Rescue teams on the mountain. This was possible through the use of GPS-enabled radios and electronic maps provided courtesy of Ordnance Survey Ireland. The second was a radio repeater funded by the Barclaycard "Make a Wish" grant which provided a constant communication link with the Air Corps Air Ambulance.

One of the responsibilities for Mountain Rescue on the day was the tasking of the Air Ambulance. Communication is normally lost between the Mountain Rescue base on the back of the mountain and the Air Ambulance when it is on the Murrisk side because Croagh Patrick blocks communications. The repeater sitting on a nearby mountain addressed this. Both of these technologies optimised the tasking of the Mountain Rescue teams and the Air Ambulance.

Shane McGuire, chairman of the local Mayo Mountain Rescue Team, said, "This year was the busiest year so far for all of the services, particularly in the late afternoon. We expect next year to be even busier for us, given the TV coverage that the pilgrimage received this year. We cannot thank enough the local Gardaí, the Air Corps crews and all the volunteers from the three services who helped so many people over the weekend."

Paul Whiting is Development Officer of the Irish Mountain Rescue Association (IMRA).



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# Alpine meet highly rated

## More than half of respondents rated '08 meet as 'excellent'

THE MCI HAS RECEIVED excellent feedback from members who took part in this year's Summer Alpine Meet, held in Vicosoprano, Switzerland in July. This year, the meet included an Alpine Walking Course for the first time.

After the meet, the MCI carried out an online survey. Just over half of those surveyed by email responded, with the following findings:

- 56% of respondents rated the overall quality of the meet as "excellent"
- 40% of respondents rated the overall quality of the meet as "good"
- 27% of respondents rated their level of confidence in the MCI to deliver the products and services you require as "complete"
- 58% of respondents rated their level of confidence in the MCI to deliver the products and services you require as "a lot"
- Overall, 31% of respondents were of the opinion that "MCI's performance is getting much

better," while 40% of respondents felt that "MCI's performance is getting better"

- 95% of respondents said they would attend the 2009 Summer Meet.

While these results are very positive, we are taking on board all the comments made as part of the survey process so that we can make sure the 2009 Summer Meet is as inclusive as possible and offers a wide and varied programme of activities for walkers and climbers alike. If you have any comments or suggestions, please email [stuart@mountaineering.ie](mailto:stuart@mountaineering.ie).

Planning for the 2009 Summer Meet, which takes place from Saturday July 4th to Saturday July 18th 2009, is already underway. Put the dates in your diary now! Full information on the courses that will be provided will be available in the winter issue of the *Irish Mountain Log*. – (Stuart Garland)

## UIAA Youth Summit Mt Blanc climb

### UIAA youth mark Olympic peace

WHEN THE FLAME IN BEIJING was extinguished on August 24th, hundreds of young climbers from around the world lit torches on mountain tops to keep Olympic values alive. In South Africa, Italy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia and Greece young climbers celebrated "Ekecheiria," the ancient Greeks' name for the peaceful period which reigned during the Olympic Games.

In Greece, local youth joined by climbers from South Korea, Spain, Italy and China climbed Mount Olympus (2,917m) and lit a torch. This was organised by the Hellenic Mountaineering and Climbing Federation and the Italian Alpine Club (CAI).

In Italy, 205 groups of young climbers, aged eight to seventeen, from the Italian Alpine Club (CAI) lit torches on an equal number of peaks to symbolise each of the National Olympic Committees.

Young people from different parts of Slovenia also lit torches on Triglav (2,864m), the nation's highest mountain.

The purpose of all these events, which were part of the UIAA Global Youth Summit, was to keep the Olympic values and ideals alive, sending a message of peace and friendship around the world from the mountaineering community.

### Bicentenary of first female ascent celebrated

ON JULY 1st, TWENTY-SIX women from different European countries climbed Mont Blanc and stood together on the 4,810m summit to celebrate the bicentenary of the first female ascent of the mountain, by Marie Paradis in 1808. The climb also sent a message on the theme of sustainable development on the day that France took up the EU presidency.

The women were accompanied on the ascent by French sports minister Bernard Laporte, as far as the Tête Rousse Hut; the minister then returned to the valley by parapente.

Mary Davis, now Managing Director of Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia but previously CEO of Special Olympics Ireland, represented Ireland on the climb, having been nominated by the Minister of Arts, Sports and Tourism, Martin Cullen. She found the climb tough but rewarding. Earlier in the year, Mary spoke about volunteering at the MCI AGM.

## IN BRIEF

### Photo competition announces Canaries walking holiday prize

Scubadive West, a leading PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) dive centre in Connemara, has just launched its Autumn 2008 Photo Competition.

With both underwater and seascape categories, this competition will appeal to divers and non-divers alike. Entry is free of charge and prizes include a guided walking tour of the Canary Islands and an Island Dive Safari for two to the value of €500!

This popular competition will culminate in a prize-giving evening on Saturday 25th October in The Bard's Den pub in Letterfrack, Co Galway. This event takes place in conjunction with Connemara Sea Week.

All details and entry procedures are available on Scubadive West's dedicated competition website, [www.competitionssdw.com](http://www.competitionssdw.com). Check out Scubadive West's homepage on [www.scubadivewest.com](http://www.scubadivewest.com).

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The awesome beauty of Purple Mountain and the Reeks as they loom behind the Paps.  
Photo: Mike O'Sullivan.

# In the throne room of the Mountain Goddess

Mike O'Sullivan describes the majesty of the Paps.

**T**he first shafts of midsummer sunlight rising over Caherbarna paint the western Pap in a golden hue as the early morning silence is shattered by an incessant, airborne “kee-kee-kee.” I’m rigid with cold and expectation; this is the moment that has got me out of my warm bed at 3:30am and will have made the hour and twenty minute-long hike up to Bohar-a-Ciche worthwhile.

Looking through my binoculars, I can almost feel the intensity as I watch the female peregrine lift her shoulders and stretch out those powerful wings as she lifts off from the crag with an answering call to the tiercel. The furious calls cease just as quickly as they began.

Fearing to get too near to the larger female while she is incubating, the

male falcon makes a pass a hundred feet out from the ledge, which is a thousand feet above the valley floor, and drops a young pigeon. Fifteen seconds later, with the dead bird locked securely in her claws, the female is back on the nest. Having had a life-long interest in nature and the mountains, this brief episode epitomises, for me, one of the most dramatic moments in Irish wildlife. It is one of the sights I will never tire of, and more importantly, one of the reasons I love my mountains.

This love affair, however, has had its share of ups and downs. From nervous rain-sodden days on Gars-bheinn on the Cuillin to the 24 sunburnt degrees on the Striding Edge of Helvellyn, and from the howling mists of Brandon to the awesome beauty of Purple, I’ve been both blessed and cursed; but I keep doing it.

I suppose, like a lot of kids growing up in Killarney, I was drawn to the mountains almost automatically. I had ‘bagged’ Carrauntoohil certainly before I was ten and, by my late teens, almost every hill within cycling distance. Love, marriage, babies and high mortgage interest rates put the reins on the thing for a while, but the lure of the moor never left me. So when the time came, I went back to the hills and I’ve been there ever since. After a period of clubbing – and

there are some excellent long-established mountaineering clubs in Kerry – I needed something more; something I couldn’t explain, even to myself. Before long, I found it: space; my space.

In general, going up mountains in good company and meeting friends new and old is great fun, especially when there are a few pints thrown in at the end of the day. For me, however, the fascination with nature and an innate sense of my own place took over and I found myself going out more and more on my own. I wanted to find the few plants of Alpine lady’s mantle that Scully, the legendary botanist, described in his journal early in the last century. He said that in Ireland Alpine lady’s mantle was to be found only on the slopes of Slieve League in Donegal and on the east-facing cliffs of Buachaill in Kerry. So I went to Buachaill and spent several days scrambling before I found them. And I felt great, so great, in fact, that I was over-awed and found within myself an emotion I thought had long since died. I scoured the cliffs of Caher for roseroot and the same feeling welled up inside me. My forays were now becoming purposeful and I learned how to approach mountain hares, foxes, peregrines, merlins and hen harriers without disturbing them. Getting to a summit no longer had the attraction it once

**“The Paps are probably the most unmistakable mountains in Kerry.”**

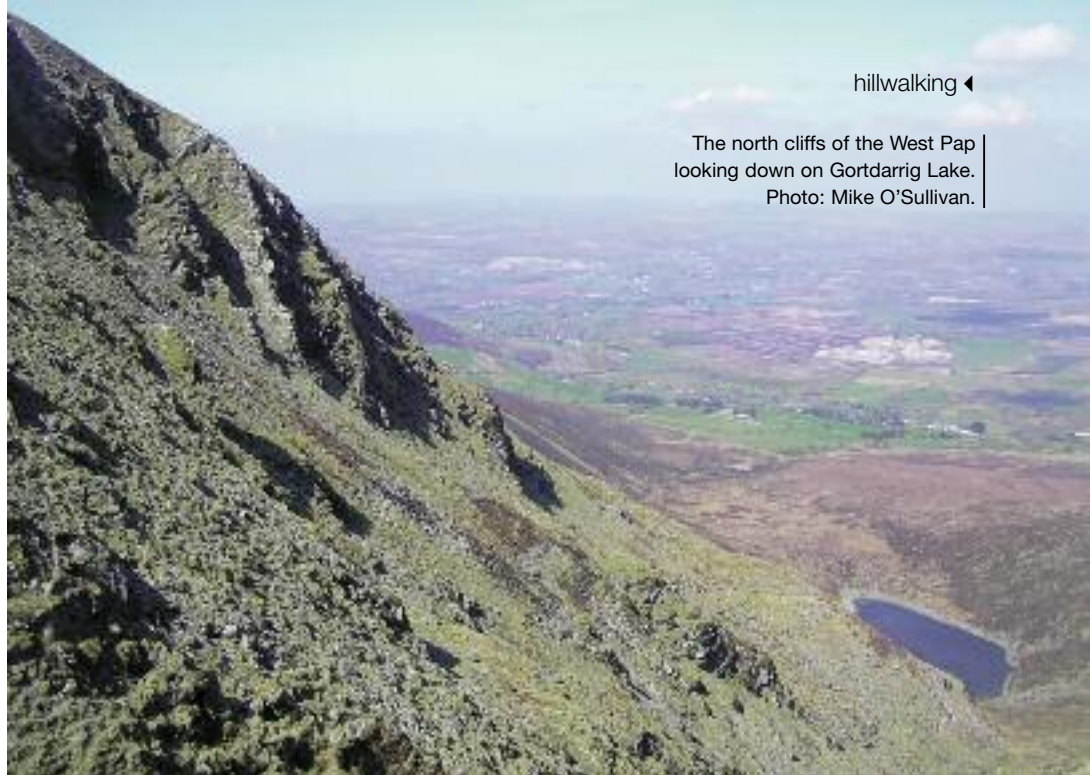


had, but going quietly and mostly early became almost an obsession. It goes without saying that I developed an acute sense of personal safety awareness, and risk-taking became a thing of the past. I set limitations well within my capabilities and learned to stick to them.

But here I was on the slopes of the Paps and before the morning was much older I would have been on the summits of both the eastern Pap and the western Pap. Today I was doing a recci for a group I would be leading to both summits as part of the Killarney Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Walk Killarney and Kerry Weekends, which are supported by Fáilte Ireland and which take place each bank holiday throughout the year. If this sounds contradictory to the foregoing, there's a very good reason for it; but first to the mountains themselves.

The Paps are probably the most unmistakable mountains in Kerry. Straddling the east Kerry border with Cork, they can be seen as two enormous cairn-nippled breasts to the north if you come over the county bounds from Macroom, or to the south if you are coming on the main Mallow to Killarney road. The traditional route from the south is to follow the signs for the Clydagh valley at Glenflesk. After three miles, leave the car at the obvious parking spot at Derrynafenia and turn left through the gateway to begin the climb up the green road, closing the gate behind you. This is An Sloigadeal, an ancient droving road associated with May eve ceremonies at a place called the City; more of that anon. Passing a Sitka spruce plantation you will notice a firebreak; go up through this break to your left and, immediately on exiting the road, turn sharp right and follow the rough track to the summit of the Eastern Pap. Alternatively, keep on the green road until you reach the high point and go up due west through the heather, mindful of the cliffs of Gleanafreaghaun on your right. From the cairn on the east Pap, descend westward to the saddle and follow the sandstone outcrop to the western summit. Either retrace your steps or slope around the eastern Pap until you regain the track to take you back to your car. Alternatively, if there are two cars available, descend to the north along Bohar-a-Ciche (the road to the breasts).

My favourite ascent is from the northern side of the mountains. Two



The north cliffs of the West Pap looking down on Gortdarrig Lake.  
Photo: Mike O'Sullivan.

miles from Rathmore village, on the Killarney side, follow the sign for Shrone. After another two miles you come to a crossroads. Turn left here and leave the car at Shrone church. Walk back to the cross and go down the narrow tarmac bóithrín on your left. This is a looped road of about a mile and, whichever branch you take, it will bring you to the City, or Cathair Croabh Dearth. This famous stone cashel has been a focus of worship on May eve for thousands of years. Here will be found a holy well, scribed stones and, in the centre, two energy reflector stones. Limited excavations have turned up a wealth of archaeological remains. This whole area is associated with the goddess Danu, or Anu, of the Tuatha dé Dannan.

The mythology of Danu is known across Europe into Asia and rivers such as the Danube are called after

her. Following the defeat of the magical Tuatha by the Milesians at the battle of Tailtiu, a settlement was reached where Ireland above the ground would be ruled by the Milesians and beneath the land and waves would be the realm of the Tuatha. The latter kingdom has since been centred here at the City and the Paps. On May eve, sick animals were brought from all over Munster to be herded or carried around the outside of the massive stone walls during the hours of darkness. These rounds were done in the pagan deisil or "sun-wise way." It was believed that the undying spirits of the underworld people – the Tuatha – cured the animals during the night. Mass is still celebrated here on the first Sunday in May, although nowadays without the drunkenness, debauchery and faction fighting which were recorded here over the centuries.

From the City, either pass over the



The Paps as seen from Cathair Croabh Dearth or The City.  
Photo: Mike O'Sullivan.





The West Pap with the Saddle to East Pap in the foreground.  
Photo: Mike O'Sullivan.

stile or preferably through the gate to the green road facing south. Follow this until it peters out in the bog and head towards the saddle between the two mountains. You will notice that the walls running up the eastern Pap disappear beneath the bog, signifying that they were first built three to four thousand years ago, before the bog began to grow. Cross the open heather slopes until you gain a steep track of sorts leading to the saddle. This is Bohar-a-Ciche and, as you gain height, you will see the beautiful Lough Nageeha, known locally as Gortdarrig Lake, below the cliffs on your right.

If you have any doubt that this is a magical place, take a look at OSI Map 79. According to the map, the outflow from the lake runs uphill for 1,200 feet to the saddle and drains to the river Clydagh on the other side of the mountain. Having come up here literally hundreds of times, I can assure you that it certainly does not, unless, of course, the cartographers happened to do their survey during the hours of darkness during May eve! At any rate, follow the rough track to the saddle and ascend to the west summit first and then to the eastern

summit. Because of their isolation, the views in all directions are stunning on a clear day. The panorama to the north is particularly impressive, with an unbroken view from Brandon in the west to the Galtees in the east and beyond. The stone cairns are massive from an Irish perspective, reaching up almost 20 feet. It is now considered possible that the cairn on the East Pap contains a passage grave, though again full excavations have not taken place. Be aware that this is a sacred site to many, so please do not interfere with or climb on the cairns. From the summit of the East Pap, return either by the way you came up or drop down directly north to the City through the heather slopes.

If the question as to why somebody who professes to love walking and climbing on his own should be doing a recci for Killarney Chamber of Commerce and Tourism bothers you, the answer is simple: we live at a time when access problems are increasing. Access to some upland areas has been restricted by some landholders for different reasons. Minister Ó Cuiv's attempts to secure access through partnership have not succeeded thus

far and appear to be unlikely to succeed in the foreseeable future. In my opinion, his efforts have driven a wedge between climbers and walkers and landowners.

Concern about access to the uplands should not be the singular preserve of hill-walkers; rather, it is an issue which should concern every man, woman and child on this island. As Con Moriarty pointed out in a recent article in *The Kerryman* newspaper, "The notion of the nation of Ireland compensating landowners for access to the nation's heritage becomes particularly absurd when we consider what we might be charged for." Con suggested that if we go down the road of compensation we could be asked to pay for school groups studying glaciology, or to pay for visiting rights to our 45,000 ring forts, stone circles, ogham stones, etc. It is my belief that the only way these access problems will be sorted definitively is by legislation, and Minister Ó Cuiv refuses to even contemplate such action. In the meantime, parts of our priceless archaeological heritage are being bulldozed on a regular basis.

By bringing people to the uplands on these bank holiday weekends, I can show them what their birthright is. Throughout the millennia, we have always been able to visit our sacred sites and I can see absolutely no reason for us to capitulate now to powerful, self-serving lobby groups in the absence of strong political leadership in this matter. There is also another reason why this issue needs to be resolved immediately: throughout Kerry and the southwest we are losing tourists and local tourism jobs at an alarming rate to places like Great Britain, where these access problems have been resolved.

If you still have any doubts as to whether or not access, enshrined in law, should be our right, go yourself to the Paps and follow the rough ancient tracks to the throne room of the Mountain Goddess. Then tell me that I'm wrong! ■

Mike O'Sullivan is a native of Killarney and now lives in Knocknagree on the Cork and Kerry border. He is secretary of the Killarney Nature Conservation Group and has written on conservation and environmental issues in many journals. He has also lectured on Kerry's environmental and literary heritage. (See [www.killarney.ie](http://www.killarney.ie) for guided walks.)

Camatruish Waterfall in the Caherbarna range east of the Paps.  
Photo: Mike O'Sullivan.







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# Above the clouds in a t-shirt

Anthony Toole goes hillwalking in Madeira.



Green plunge pool  
at Caldeirão Verde.  
Photo: Anthony Toole.

**O**ur first attempt at Pico Ruivo, Madeira's highest point at 1,862 metres, was snookered by a landslide. We had intended a short ascent from a car park at Achada do Teixeira, followed by a long downhill exploration of the laurel forest to Ilha. Unfortunately, a crag had collapsed and blocked the road from Santana with fridge-sized boulders.

Manuel and Renado were not worried, however. This was a common occurrence and the road would be cleared by the next day. They quickly decided that we should approach the forest from below rather than above. As we would not have time to climb Pico Ruivo, they promised us a destination which, though different in kind, would in its

own way be sufficiently impressive.

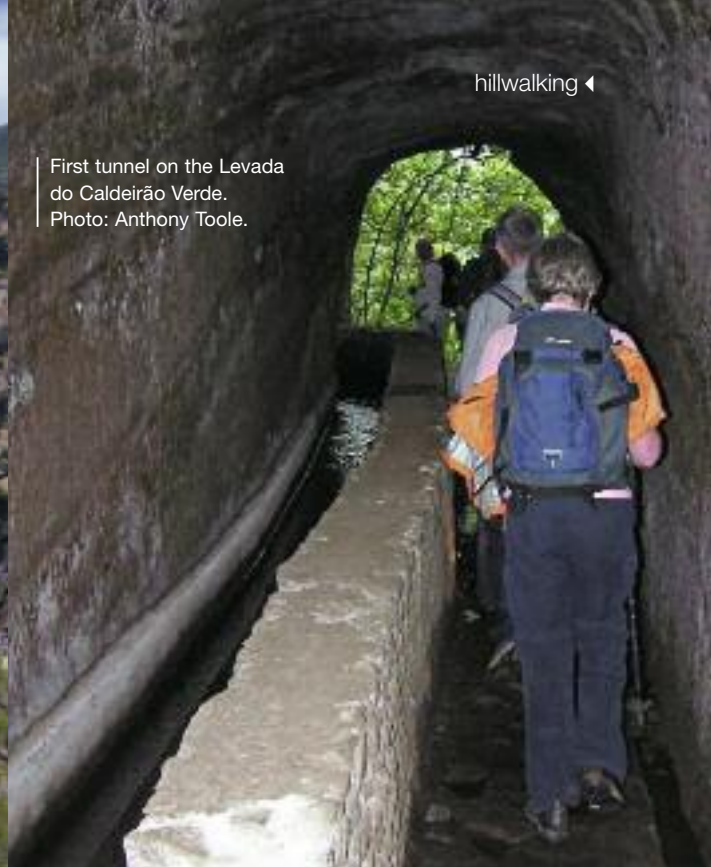
From Ilha, we followed a narrow, muddy track steeply uphill. Though it was mid-January, the mimosas were in bloom and a summer humidity clung to the evergreen forest. After nearly an hour we entered denser forest and a junction with the Levada do Caldeirão Verde.

The primeval laurel forest of northern Madeira, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, captures moisture from Atlantic mists and drains it into a sodden soil. From the seventeenth century this water resource has been transported around the island by a system of shallow, low-gradient channels known as *levadas*. Built initially by slave labour, the levadas now extend to a total length of around 1,400 kilometres, which is twice that of all the island's roads. The maintenance walkways alongside the levadas provide a network of footpaths, which are often the only means of reaching the more





View over the mountain refuge  
from Pico Ruivo summit.  
Photo: Anthony Toole.

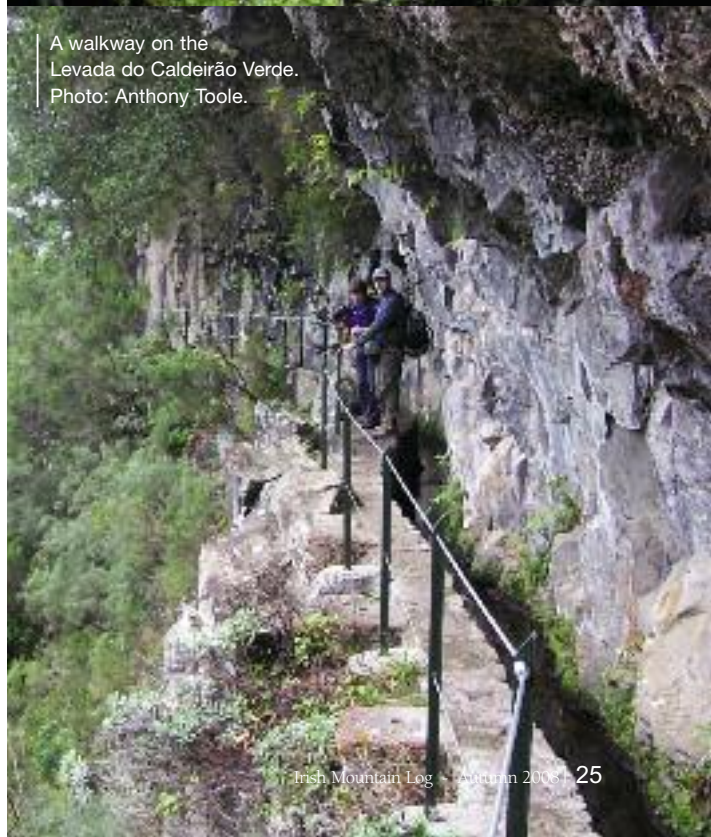


hillwalking ◀

First tunnel on the Levada  
do Caldeirão Verde.  
Photo: Anthony Toole.



View from tunnel window on the  
Levada do Caldeirão Verde.  
Photo: Anthony Toole.



A walkway on the  
Levada do Caldeirão Verde.  
Photo: Anthony Toole.

inaccessible regions of forest and mountain on Madeira.

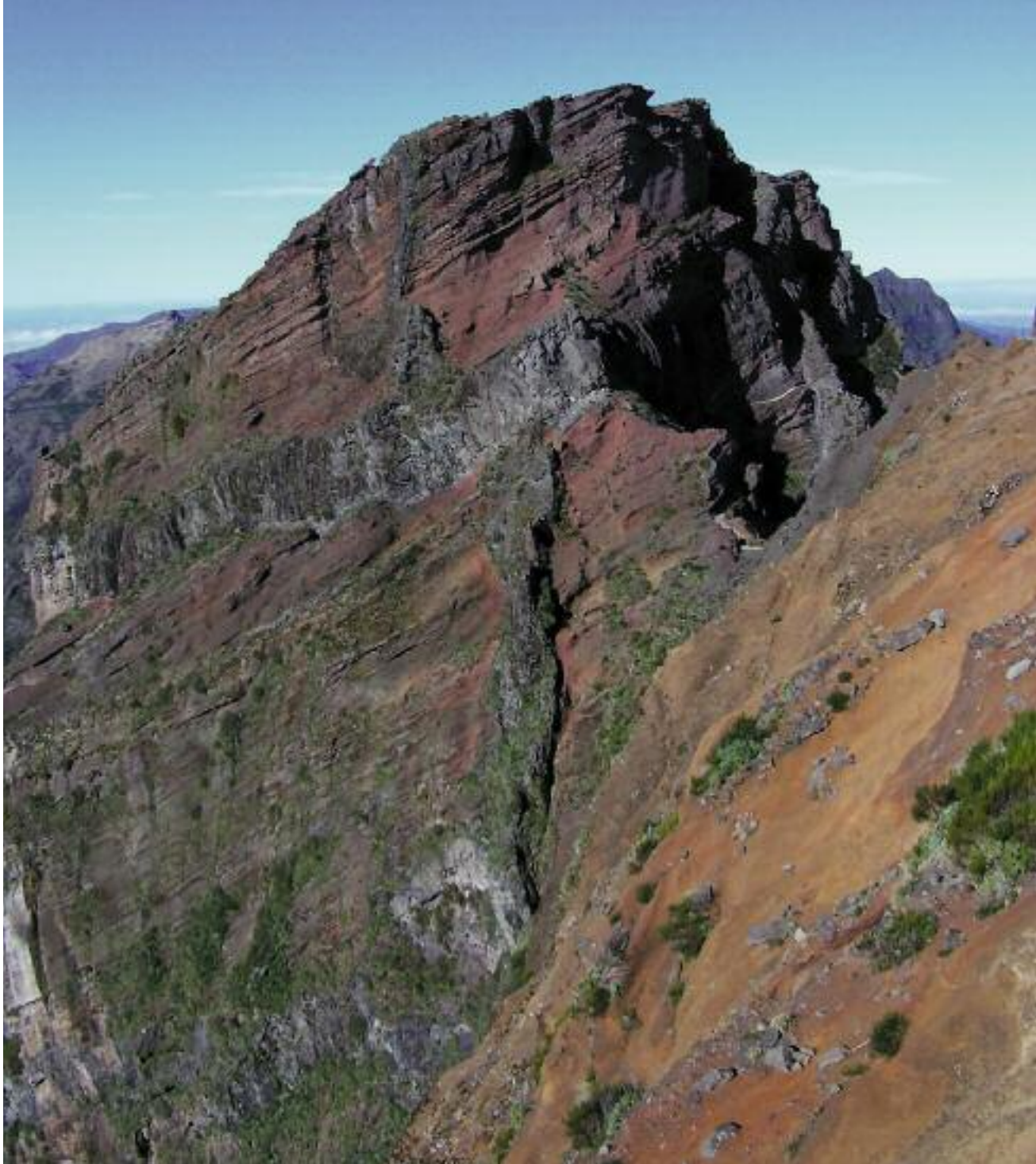
Immediately on joining the levada, we entered the first of a series of tunnels dug through the hard basalt bedrock. Between these, we traversed narrow ledges across precipices overhung by a dense jungle of laurel and ferns, which obscured much of any view. But when the jungle opened, it revealed deep valleys with near vertical sides, clothed in woods that appeared, from our position, to be impenetrable. The rocks around us were hidden beneath a waterlogged layer of lichens, mosses and bryophytes, which slowly trickled moisture into the levada. A wire rail guarded dangerous crossings but even this, in places, had been swept aside by rock falls.

At the levada's end, a short continuation track led over boulders and, without signalling its intent, into the base of an enormous

gash in the mountain, Caldeirão Verde. Imagine, if you can, a green-walled Malham Cove (North Yorkshire) wrapped around you on three sides. The scene was far too big and enclosed to be captured by even a wide-angle camera lens. Looking toward the top of this near-cylindrical, roofless cavern caused a strain in the neck. Water rushed down the walls in several places, feeding a lush of vegetation. In places, it parted from the rock and dripped free into a green plunge pool in which trout were swimming.

**“We traversed  
ledges across  
precipices overhung  
by dense jungle.”**





Descent from  
Pico do Arieiro.  
Photo: Anthony  
Toole.

After a lunch eaten in these awesome surroundings, we retraced our route to the junction with the track from Ilha, then continued along the levada, which snaked through another tunnel, and around the heads of narrow valleys to a road end at Queimadas.

**“All around was a wasteland of red rock, with hardly a plant, which fell away into valleys below.”**

Two days later, we stood in unblocked sunshine on the 1,818-metre summit of Pico do Arieiro. We were fifty metres from the car park, but feelings of guilt were flung onto the ocean of cloud beneath us by our anticipation of what lay ahead. All around was a wasteland of red rock with hardly a plant, which fell away into valleys we could not see the bottoms of, bounded by a jumble of jagged peaks that rose on all sides. Pico Ruivo was little more than three kilometres away, in a direct line, but the contortions of the ridge would at least double this. It lay hidden behind Pico das Torres (1,851 metres) with the intervening gap looking highly improbable, but it drew us like a

double-height Cuillin ridge.

A well-paved track led us down a fairly gentle slope to a viewpoint on the edge of the first crags. Then the slope steepened to establish the pattern of the rest of the walk. The rock shone various hues of red, but with darker basalt dykes breaking through the softer igneous ash and conglomerate like so many ‘Inn Pins.’ Lichens, yellow from frost-burn, hung over small flowers, in bloom despite the altitude and the season, while tiny lizards darted across sunnier patches.

The track now fell in a long drop to its lowest point, at 1,542 metres. A tunnel through to the far side of Pico das Torres had been blocked by a rock fall, so we had to regain height



by way of a staircase cut up the side of the mountain. A tremendous effort had gone into the construction of this track, but it did not make the route easy. It merely made it possible, for without it the traverse from Arieiro to Ruivo would involve serious climbing for most of its distance.

We continued down a lesser fall, then along an overhung ledge that cut across a face of Pico das Torres. This led us to a heather-covered col, with Pico Ruivo above. Some of these heathers were of tree height, and perhaps 1,000 years old. The smaller plants would probably grow to a similar height, now that grazing animals have been removed from the hillsides.

A gentler, though sustained, zig-zag ascent brought us to a refuge that sold a limited range of refreshments and offered a night's rough comfort, if necessary. It stood, like a miniature Neuschwandstein, on a promontory jutting out over the wooded valley of Caldeirão Verde. From there to the summit of Pico Ruivo took us a further fifteen minutes.

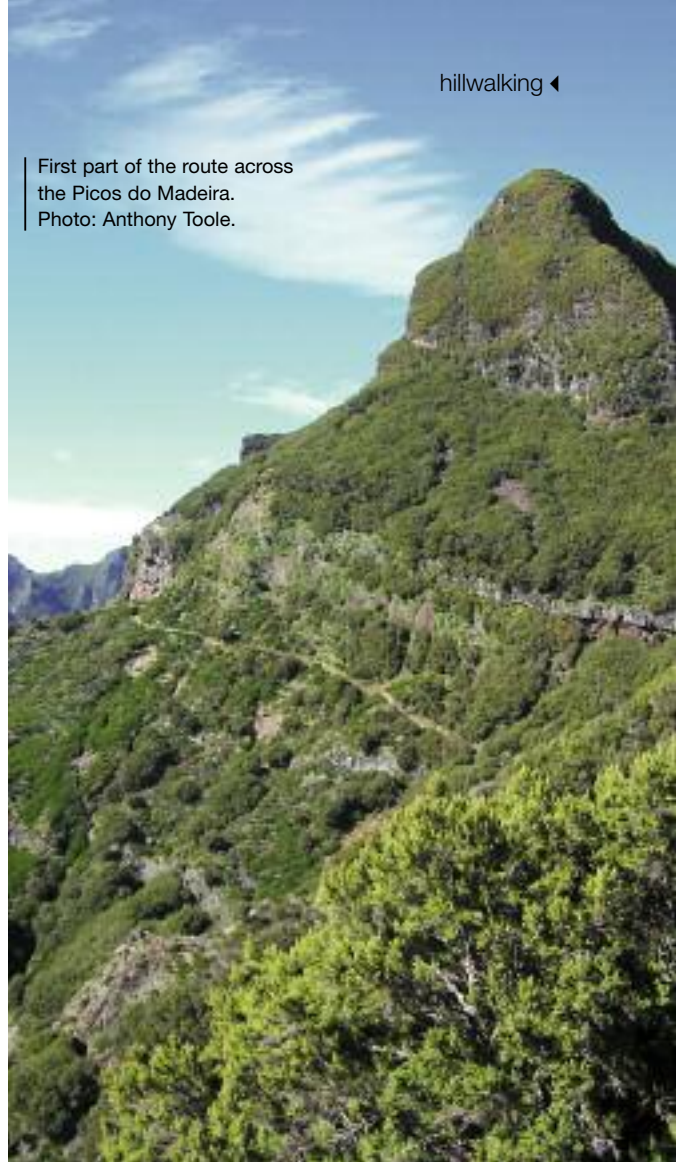
The full traverse from Pico do Arieiro had occupied us for little

more than three hours, yet as we looked back it was difficult to pick out our exact route. It still appeared somewhat unlikely.

The following morning, we were again on top of Pico Ruivo, having made the short ascent from Achada do Teixeira. This time our objective was the 1,004-metre-high pass at Encumeada, to the west. This pass separates the central craggy mountains from the high plateau of Paul da Serra in the east. But to reach it we would have to cross the Picos do Madeira, a series of peaks which, while slightly less rugged than those to the south, presented their own problems. And the distance was more than twice that of the previous day.

The track led off around the side of Pico do Coelho and into a forest of heather trees (*Erica arborea*). It became clear that our route would skirt around rather than climb over the peaks. While there were some steep crags surrounding the summits, the real barrier was in the heather, which covered every patch that was not either vertical or overhanging. These heathers are genuine trees, and so densely packed as to make the

First part of the route across the Picos do Madeira.  
Photo: Anthony Toole.



Looking back to Pico Ruivo from the Picos do Madeira.  
Photo: Anthony Toole.





On the western  
section of the  
Picos do Madeira.  
Photo: Anthony  
Toole.



forest impenetrable. As this whole area is part of a unique ecology that has to be preserved, cutting the trees is forbidden, so few climbers, if any, are likely to reach these summits in the foreseeable future.

Rather than a continually changing view, our route opened out on a series of spectacular scenes where the forest thinned. The dips between peaks were not as deep as on the previous day, but there were more of them.

We passed Pico das Eirinhas (1,649m) and ate lunch at Boca das Torrinhas (1,450m), where our track was crossed by one that linked Lombo do Urzal to the north with Curral das Freiras, the Valley of the Nuns, to the south. The latter was the site of a convent set up in this hidden valley during the sixteenth century as a refuge from frequent pirate attacks.

We snaked around Pico Casado (1,725m), then rose steeply almost to the summit of Pico do Jorge (1,691m) before passing Pico Ferreiro (1,580m) and Pico do Encumeada, beyond which lay the

final descent to the pass.

Madeira is only marginally larger than the Isle of Man, but the contrast could not be starker. With mountains three times as high, and the northern half covered by primeval forest, Madeira can undergo several weather changes in a day. One part of the island can scorch in sun while another drenches in rain. Adjacent valleys can experience vastly different weather conditions at the same time.

In a moment of idle speculation I wondered what the mountains would look like in winter. Then I realised that this was winter, mid-January, yet I had stood above the clouds, on the highest point, in a t-shirt. I even swam a couple of times in an outdoor pool. In a week, I had suffered one day of mist and light drizzle, and returned home with more than the beginnings of a suntan.

The forest density precludes ascents of some mountains, but there are others, such as Pico Grande (1,654m) and Cedro (1,759m), that could be climbed. There is certainly more than sufficient to repay several visits, and in this visit I had hardly begun to look at the coastal scenery and wildlife of this beautiful island. ■

Anthony Toole is a member of the Outdoor Writers' Guild (atoole@cheswick34.fsnet.co.uk; [http://mysite.freesevice.com/anthony\\_toole](http://mysite.freesevice.com/anthony_toole)).

## Travel Information

### Getting there

Flights can be arranged to Funchal (capital of Madeira) from Dublin and Belfast.

### Getting around

There are bus services from Funchal to all but the most outlying villages. Taxi hire is also relatively inexpensive.

### Maps

There are no maps comparable with OSI maps.

*Berlitz Holiday Map: Madeira 1:70,000* Excellent for travelling around; adequate for walking – levada and mountain tracks are well-marked, and easily followed once they are embarked upon. *IGC (Instituto Geografico e Cadastral) maps 1:50,000* and the *Military Maps 1:25,000* can be bought in Funchal.

### Guidebooks

*Berlitz Pocket Guide: Madeira*. Concise, well-illustrated and easy to use and slip into pocket. Madeira in a nutshell. *Madeira: Globetrotter Island Guide* by Terry Marsh (New Holland). Detailed guide to all the places to see and visit. *Walking in Madeira* by Paddy Dillon (Cicerone). An excellent walking guide to the whole Island.

### Madeira Islands Walking Festival

Walking on the levadas and mountains of Madeira and the adjacent island of Porto Santo, 13-17 January 2009. See [www.madeiraislandsawalkingfestival.com](http://www.madeiraislandsawalkingfestival.com).

**“Madeira is marginally larger than the Isle of Man, but with mountains three times as high...”**





**F**ollowing the success of the 2008 Scottish Winter Meet, the MCI will be returning to the Western Highlands in March for its 2009 Winter Meet. As before, the meet will be held at the Inchree Centre, which is situated in Onich on the shores of Loch Linnhe, providing participants with a central base for exploring such nearby classics as Ben Nevis and the Three Sisters of Glen Coe. The Inchree Centre offers a wide range of accommodation, including bunkhouses, hostels, chalets and B&B, and there is also a restaurant and bar on site. For details, visit [www.inchreecentre.co.uk](http://www.inchreecentre.co.uk).

### Who is the Meet for?

As with the MCI Summer Alpine Meet, all of our members are encouraged to attend this meet, whether on a training courses or on a more informal 'do your own thing' basis. The meet is for everyone from complete novices to hardened winter climbers. The ethos for the meet is to bring together as many like-minded people as

possible to share in the experience of winter days on the hills, evening talks and slide shows, and plenty of late-night discussions fuelled by hot toddies! However, whether on a course or just attending informally, all participants are asked to book through the MCI office.

### The Courses for 2009

We will be offering two different courses this year, both of which will be run by fully qualified instructors working within small groups.

#### 1. Basic Winter Skills

3 days, €300 (self-catering)

15-17 Mar & 19-21 Mar

This introductory course is suitable for hillwalkers of average ability and fitness who would like to try out winter walking for the first time and learn basic snow skills. You do not need any specialised technical mountaineering skills, but sure-footedness and an ability to walk on steep broken slopes will be necessary.

#### 2. Winter Mountaineering

3 days, €300 (self-catering)

15-17 Mar & 19-21 Mar

This course is for anyone who already has some basic winter walking experience and wants to try something a little more challenging. You will need to be a keen hillwalker of average fitness who already has some mountaineering experience, such as of roped scrambling, simple rock climbing or winter walking with an axe and crampons. The difference from the Basic Winter Skills Course is that

participants will explore more technical terrain, probably involving the use of ropes and harnesses. If participating in this course, it will be beneficial to have some basic skills in the management of ropes, such as knot tying and belaying. While we encourage independence and self-sufficiency, on these courses you will be in the safe hands of our qualified staff, but on the Winter Mountaineering course you will be expected to be somewhat self-sufficient in looking after yourself on the hill.

Details of this Meet are available in the Training & Safety section of the MCI website under 'MCI Meets.' For further information and to make a booking, please contact either Tim Orr (MCI Training Officer) or Kate Hebblethwaite (MCI Training Administrator) at the MCI Office, Sport HQ, 13 Joyce Way, Park West Business Park, Dublin 12; tel: (01) 625 1117; email: [training@mountaineering.ie](mailto:training@mountaineering.ie).

Resting in a snow-hole.  
Photo: Malachy Lavelle.

## Information Evening

The MCI will be holding a slide show and information evening at the Great Outdoors Shop, Chatham St, Dublin 2, on Tuesday 13th January 2009, starting 7:30pm, to answer any questions you have and hopefully inspire you to participate in the Scottish Meet. The evening is free of charge and also open to non-members. Attendance at the evening is not essential, but booking is recommended as places will be limited.



Climbing up to the final snow ridge on the Piz Morteratsch (3,751m).  
Photo: Dawson Stelfox.

# Alpine Meet '08

**For Alpine Meet Coordinator Declan O'Keeffe, the fortnight went like a song!**



*"Last night as I lay dreaming  
of Alpine Meets gone by,  
My mind began to wander and to  
Switzerland did fly,  
I stepped onto a mountain trail and  
followed with a will  
'til I shortly came to bivouac amongst  
the Alpine hills."*

**T**he MCI Summer Meet has gone from strength to strength since its inception in 1998, and this year's meet was no different. This, the eleventh meet, saw us return to Vicosoprano in the Bregaglia area of Switzerland for the first time since 2001. Over 100 MCI members descended on the local (and very well appointed and welcoming) Mischabel campsite for a fortnight of hiking and climbing from the 5th to the 19th of July. About half of those present had signed up for the very successful series of courses that ranged from Alpine Adventure Walking to Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced Alpine Mountaineering.

Things kicked off on Saturday evening with a reception in the very spacious base camp tent that was to

be the focal point for participants over the next fortnight. This was run with great efficiency and good humour by Stuart Garland and Christine Hughes, aided and abetted by several other volunteers. Chief Guide Mick Tighe briefed the course participants on what they might expect and divided them into groups before passing them on to their respective guides; we were off and running. Well, off and walking might be a better description, as the weather was not very promising for the first couple of days; in fact, it rained pretty much non-stop. This tested the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the guides but they are well used to such setbacks and there were no complaints from their tired but happy clients at the end of the first week.

*"Now Switzerland's surrounded by  
some mighty Alpine peaks  
(though the weather on occasion's like  
a bad day on the Reeks);  
The young folk and the not so young,  
around me all did mill,  
Their rucksacks bulged as they set out  
to climb the Alpine hills."*

The other side to the meet is the number of mountaineers that turn up (in some cases year after year) to meet old friends, make new ones and explore an Alpine region that they might not otherwise have visited (part of the thinking behind the meet). Vicosoprano is very well located between the alpine meadows and passes of the Albula Region on the north side of the valley and the beetling granite walls of the Bregaglia massif on the south, with its myriad climbs, passes and paths inviting the walker, scrambler and climber to explore ever deeper into its mystical interior. The snowfields and glaciers are smaller than some of the better known resorts but there is still plenty to entertain the aspirant alpinist, with the jewel of Piz Bernina, the most easterly 4,000-metre peak, a scant hour away in the Bernina massif.

After a few days a lot of exploration had been done in the high country and recommendations and warnings as well as tales of derring-do were swapped around the tents in the evenings. Plans were hatched, valleys hiked, crags and mountains climbed.



We got out hiking most days and were struck by the majesty of the scenery: verdant meadows under snow-capped peaks with naught but the sound of rushing streams and cowbells and rarely another hiker in sight. I kid you not.

*"The Cima de Castello,  
the Spaza Caldera,  
The Balzeto, the Piz Badile – I'll write  
home to me ma  
And tell her of the craic we had,  
the thrills and all the spills,  
The trails we hiked, the peaks we climbed  
among the Alpine hills."*

The second week followed the pattern of the first, and both weeks ended with a barbecue (in the large marquee on the site); these proved a resounding success. Plaudits again to Stuart and Christine and their support team of volunteers, too numerous to mention. The barbecues started early but continued into the wee hours and we're pretty sure that this was the first time the good folk of Vicosoprano witnessed a céilí. A special word of thanks is due to Eric Pirie (who is not only an excellent guide but a damn fine fiddle player) and his band of musicians: Macdara, Eileen, Dermot and Lucy.

Thanks are also due to the excellent guides recruited by Mick Tighe, many of whom have been with us for several years (take a bow, Eric Pirie and Alun Richardson). They have always been



Ploughing up the Forna glacier  
on the way to the Cima dal Cantun.  
Photo: Dawson Stelfox.



very professional, generous and good teachers who never seem to be off duty. Mick Tighe is an inspirational and much loved character and he will be missed in future years. He has decided to step back from guiding in the Alps in favour of his first love, Norway. You might also come across him in his spiritual home, the coastal crags of northwest Scotland, where he does more than his share of new routing. Mick has been a big influence on the summer meet since he first became involved in 2003 and we are deeply in his debt and will miss him lots. Thanks, Mick.

*"And as the meet began to near  
its most untimely end,  
We recorded our achievements  
and saluted our new friends,  
And thanked the guides  
who'd saved our lives  
and taught us some new skills,  
And vowed to meet  
again next year  
among the Alpine hills."*

In its eleven years, the MCI Summer Meet has become something of a highlight for walkers and climbers alike. If you haven't been on one yet, come along next year and see what you've been missing. ■

**...until we meet again**



The view from the south side of the Piz Badile.  
Photo: Dawson Stelfox.

# Balancing act

At the Alpine Meet, Dawson Stelfox returned to a peak he had climbed as a youth.



**T**he last few feet of the North Ridge of the Piz Badile lay in front of me – a narrow rock arête flanked by arresting exposure. What was it to be? A delicate balancing act along the crest, or, an undignified ‘au cheval’ scramble to safety? 30m below, Dee was unclipping from our last piece of protection as we moved together towards the summit, reliant on each other not to fall, or if we did, on the friction of the ropes threaded along the serrated ridge, a choice between the safety of speed and the safety net of belayed pitches.

There was no choice, really – a route of the quality of the North Ridge of the Badile demands a good style, so it *had* to be a confident stride across the pinnacles to the summit.

The morning had started wet, but a good forecast and an optimistic outlook had propelled us forwards and now the cloud had dissipated to swirling mists and hazy sunshine, revealing glimpses of Cengalo and

Sciara, adding immeasurably more atmosphere than blue skies and sunshine ever could. That route, on that day, was, for me, the epitome of the compelling attraction of alpine climbing – the multi-level balancing of many factors (weather, difficulty, capacity...) to achieve something that stretched but didn't break you.

It was now 3:00pm and the next decision was on us. Either at least five hours of back-climbing and abseiling to descend the ridge and then down the valley below in the dark to Vicosoprano and the final party of the MCI Alpine Meet, or, a couple of hours down the Italian side to a good meal and perhaps a glass of wine in the Gianetti hut, followed by a leisurely stroll the next morning down the valley and back to Switzerland by road. The enthusiasm of youth led John Minogue and John Harrison down the ridge, together with the remarkable Juan O'Raw and Dan Casey from Kerry, barely 18 and on their first major alpine route, fresh from the MCI Youth Meet. The prospect of bed and dinner just a few hours away was, however, too much of a temptation for Robbie, Mags, Dee and myself and the Gianetti hut it

was, the headlong rush for the valley tempered not only by physical capacity but a desire to extend and broaden the experience of a classic route in a stunning location.

It also inevitably transported me back 27 years to my first time on the Badile. Ian, Tommy, Dermot and I had set out from Ireland charged with intent to climb the six great north faces of the Alps, and the Cassin route on the NE face of the Badile was our first target. Despite the streaks of snow and water making it obvious that the route was totally out of condition, we barely stopped at Bondo in our headlong rush up the route, dismissive of its technical difficulties, confident of our abilities, not even bothering with a weather forecast. The initial slab pitches were easy enough, even in the wet, but by the time we were committed to the steep central cracks, running with water, the weather was already changing and the skies threatening. We finished the route, soaked through, on the edge of darkness, the summit bivouac shelter our salvation as a full-scale storm settled over the mountain.

I have to balance a lot more now than I did in 1981 – family life, work



Climbing through the pinnacles  
on the North Ridge of the Piz Badile.  
Photo: Dawson Stelfox.



pressures and a range of other commitments, coupled with a steadily declining physical capacity, yet the sense of fulfilment from alpine climbing remains intense and addictive, because the essence of mountaineering remains in the act, the doing of it and not what you may have done. Mountaineers are collectors of experiences and the sweet spot is that balancing point between mundane certainty and dangerous impossibility. An uncertain outcome is essential, but it must also be possible, given all the factors, and not just desirable.

The Youth Alpine Meet follows that philosophy, helping young active climbers to come to terms with the complexity of alpine peaks, not as a formal training course but in a way that promotes self-reliance and independence. This is equally a challenge for Robbie and I, as the qualified guides, and all of the other volunteers, because we are, to a greater extent than is normal on formal courses, encouraging the young climbers to take control, to be reliant on themselves and their own decisions, to make mistakes, and to learn. Such an approach has its risks as well as its rewards and again reflects the balancing act of good judgment the

mountains demand. This year, sixteen young climbers got an introduction to the high mountains, through the experience and commitment of ten volunteer climbers. Some decided that alpine climbing was not for them and focused on the valley crags, but most quickly became self-sufficient to climb the high peaks – guided, directed, nudged at the start, but soon making independent decisions.

About half-way up the north ridge, I shared a belay with Juan. There was still a threat of more rain in the clouds and the rock was damp. Only a few days before, the ridge had been plastered with snow from an unseasonably bad storm and there were still snow-covered ledges as we gained height.

Yet despite this, and despite the fact it was his first big alpine route, Juan positively glowed with excitement, his eyes burning with a passion for just being there, at that time, surrounded by mountains, mist swirling around. Through his confidence, commitment and satisfaction, the single-minded expression of joy that I first experienced in the late 1970s came flooding back, enveloping me in a warm glow and a renewed affirmation in the value and power of mountaineering. ■

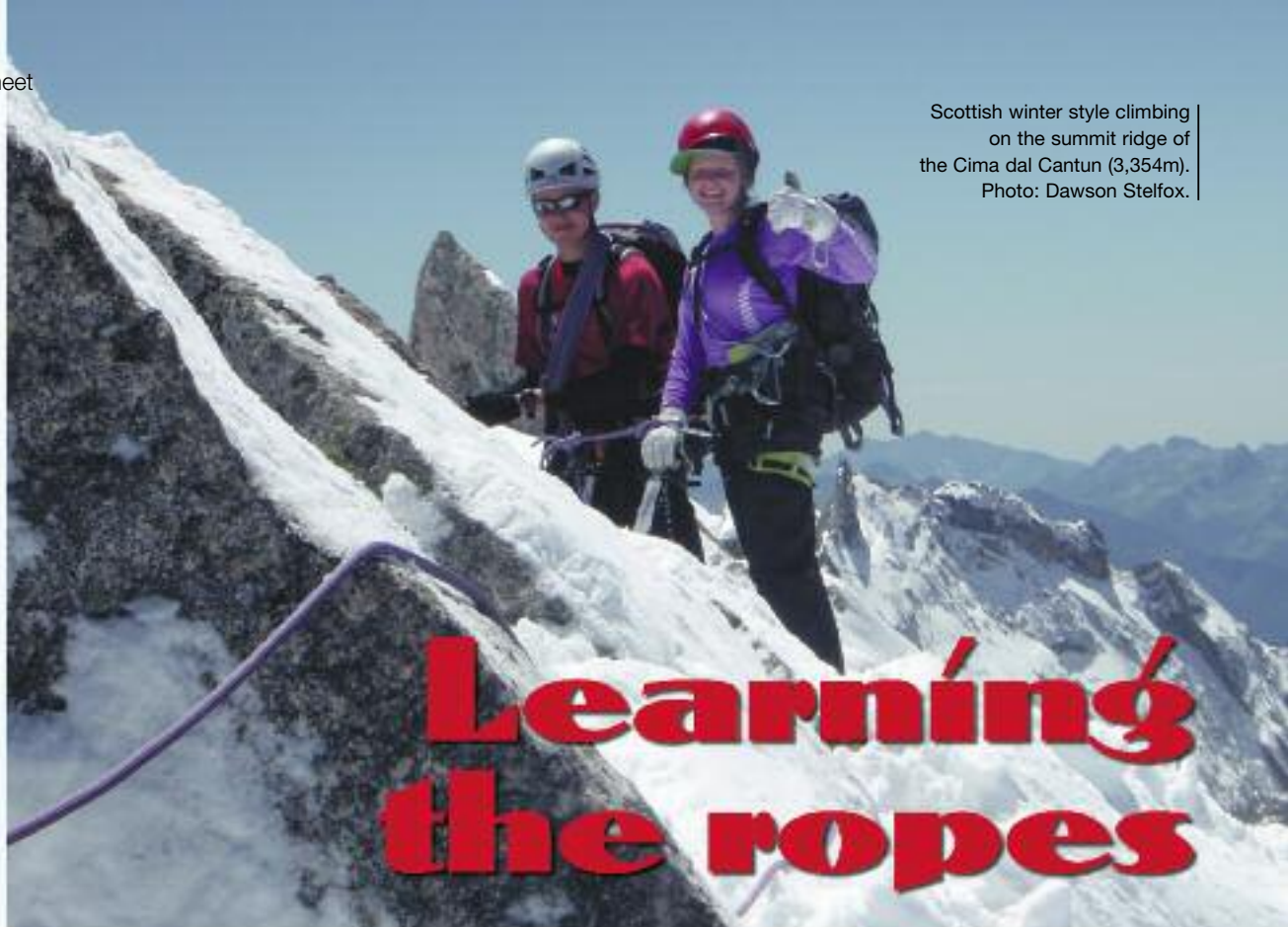


Margo Barry, Robbie Fenlon, Dawson Stelfox and Dee McCarthy after climbing the Piz Badile (to rear).



“ Having been on two other youth trips in the past year, I have to say this was by far the best. The meet format was very effective as everyone learnt a lot from each other and we were not totally dependent on the volunteers. The trip gave everyone an opportunity to do something new. Whether it was taking a jump onto an ice screw or merely using a gri-gri for the first time, not one of us left without learning a new technique and gathering a mass of experience. I personally learned that a 12-hour snow peak makes you want to kill yourself, while a 19-hour rock ridge makes you eat lots of cake in happy reminiscence of the day before! I would like to thank all the volunteers and guides, in particular John Harrison and John Minogue, who made my 19-hour trip up the North Ridge of the Piz Badile relatively event free.

Daniel Casey



## A new generation of alpinists is on the way, writes Neil Johnston

**T**he planning for the 2008 Youth Alpine Meet began at a meeting in the Mournes last November. It was there that a group of enthusiasts met to discuss the possibility of organising a number of weekends in Ireland as a means of preparation and familiarisation for the guides, volunteers and youth who were interested in participating in an Alpine Meet the following summer.

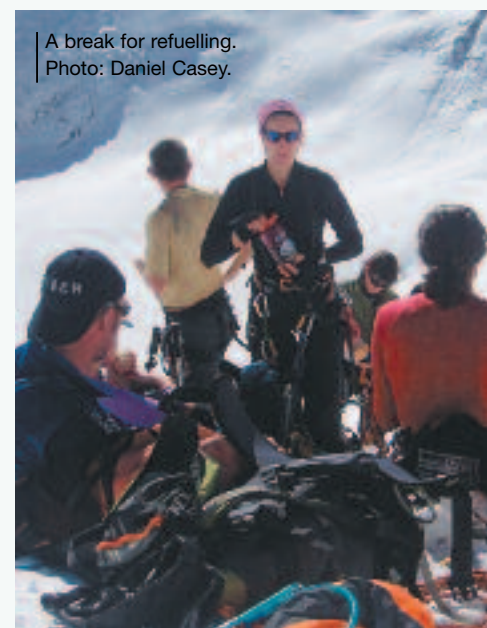
It quickly became apparent that there was great enthusiasm on the part of the guides and the volunteers, however far away the meet itself seemed to be at that time. However, one question persisted in my mind as dates and venues were discussed: would enough young people apply and would they be up for whatever the meet might throw at them? Now, looking back on the meet itself, the answer to both these questions can only be an emphatic yes!

Following the preparatory training and selection weekends in Ireland, a group of seventeen young people arrived in Vicosoprano in July to begin training. As one would expect, they were bowled over by the scenery. The valley of Vicosoprano is situated

below imposing, yet alluring, cliffs which conceal one of the most varied and inspiring Alpine regions in which I have climbed. The mountains boast pristine rock routes, long alpine classics and demanding test pieces, all flanked by Swiss chocolate-box scenery: alpine meadows, cows and snowy peaks. Having met the participants on a number of training weekends prior to the meet itself, we were aware of the high levels of achievement which some of them aspired to and it was superb to move through the mountains with them. It became apparent that this was not going to be a ‘course’ in the strictest sense, but more a kind of supervision, while they got a handle on the scale and demands of alpine climbing.

With a group of this size, it was necessary to divide it up, though this was not actually an issue but a solution, as many of the participants already had a good idea of what they would like to do. There were those who were purely interested in rock climbing, while others were attracted to ascending the snowy peaks.

My first outing with the latter group was a glacier day. After learning the basics of glacial navigation and rescue, we spent a night in the Boval hut, with Piz Morterarsch being our objective for the following day. After



A break for refuelling.  
Photo: Daniel Casey.

rising early, eight young climbers, Dawson Stelfox, Claire Michael and myself made our way up through a very accessible rock band onto the beautiful summit ridge. Perfect cramponing snow and clear skies saw the team summit with views of Piz Bernina and Piz Badile.

Meanwhile, Robbie Fenlon, Angela Carlin, John Harrison and Deirdre McCarthy began working on multi-pitch rock climbing techniques, first in the valley, and then moving up to Albigna and Spazacaldera above



Vicosoprano. On superb rock, many got their first taste of alpine climbing.

This seemed to set a pattern, where the group was divided as the participants got a taste of what they liked best, but almost everyone seemed to want to try everything. As the week progressed, it became more and more satisfying to watch as they came to us with ideas of things they'd like to try, be it pushing their climbing grade, learning to ice climb or tackling another alpine peak. In that way, it became a "meet" in the true sense and moved away from being a course. From then on, we were going to crags, be they in the valley or up high, and dispersing quickly, as each of the teams went off to climb their objective.

One factor that caused major disruption, and nearly as much discomfort, was the very mixed weather. Massive thunderstorms rolled through the valley, bringing in near-Scottish winter conditions. However, the show must go on, and more routes were planned. Robbie Fenlon, John Harrison and John Minogue wisely found some dry rock while the other half of the group planned to climb Monte



Disgrazzia, one of the classic peaks in the region. However, when we woke the following day the snow level had fallen to close to 2,000m. A new plan was formed in the Forno hut, as deep snow ruled out the long slog up Monte Disgrazzia. Instead, Cima di Castello was our objective. As expected, the deep snow on the glacier made for slow going and we finished on a long ridge to the left of the Castello, then making our way back to the Albigna cable car.

One important and encouraging



From the summit of Piz Morteratsch, looking across to the classic 'Biancogrät' on Piz Bernina (4,048m).  
Photo: Dawson Stelfox.

element of the Youth Meet this year was the exposure everyone got to the other climbers in the campsite. The likes of Vivienne Williams, Dermot Worthington, Karen Doyle, Aoife Byrne and Al Sarhan, who were flying up hard demanding routes or inspiring with stories and ideas of other regions, gave everyone plenty of reasons to return on their own next year. To my mind the fact that a number of the Kerry lads who had been on the Youth Meet went on to climb the North Ridge of Piz Badile immediately after the meet can only attest to the strength of the youth on the course and augurs well for Irish alpinism in the coming years.

**Angela Carlin, MCI NI Youth Development Officer, adds:-**

I would like to thank all the volunteers who helped with the Youth Alpine Meet and with the training weekends in the Mourne, Glendalough and Co Kerry. In particular, thanks to Dawson Stelfox, Robbie Fenlon, Claire Michael, Deirdre McCarthy, John Harrison, Neil Johnston, Rhys McAllaister, John Minogue and John Healy for their support. ■



Approaching Piz Morteratsch (3,751m) from the Boval hut.  
Photo: Dawson Stelfox.



# Pilgrim's progress

Kevin Higgins walks the Rennsteig in Germany.



Countryside  
near Homberg.  
Photo: Kevin  
Higgins.



**Many people have the impression that the Camino de Santiago is a pilgrimage route in Spain. Others maintain that the Camino begins at your own front door. In effect there are many routes across Europe that have Santiago de Compostela as a destination. It shouldn't have surprised us, then, to find that, as we travelled along the Rennsteig, we overlapped the Camino route from Krakow in Poland to Santiago.**

The Rennsteig is probably Germany's most highly regarded walking trail and has been in existence as a recreational hiking route since about 1830, when Julius von Plänckner first walked and described it. Its use predates this by many centuries and it is recorded as

having been used as a transport route since the fourteenth century. As such, it followed a route on higher ground through the Thuringian forests, often avoiding the valley settlements. By keeping to the boundaries of the small independent statelets travellers could proceed without encroaching on these territories. Many of the centuries-old boundary markers remain as carved stones bearing the armorial crest of the local lord.

The area traversed by the Rennsteig is steeped in history, tradition and folklore. The route begins at Hörschel (the Door to the Rennsteig), on the Werra River, at the border with the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Travellers traditionally dip their walking staff in the waters of the Werra and, at the walk's conclusion at Blankenstein, six days and about 170km to the southeast, they throw their staff into the Saale River as a declaration of the completion of the

walk. Apart from not keeping to this pace – sightseeing seduced us into covering about 20km per day – we decided to forego the pleasure of discarding our valuable modern walking poles!

Wartburg Castle at Eisenach is close to the start of the Rennsteig and, with the unification of Germany, has become easily accessible to visitors from abroad. The region has many links to Germany's historical events and cultural movements: Wartburg was where Martin Luther lived (as Junker Georg) and translated the Bible; the Bach family lived in Eisenach; Göthe lived in the area; Wagner based his Meistersinger on events at Wartburg; the Brothers Grimm used local folklore as a basis for their tales. Evidence also remains of the country's recent history. Near Frauenwald, a STASI bunker is now a tourist attraction. Built in secret in conjunction with an hotel, it was





Wartburg, where Elisabeth of Thuringe and Martin Luther lived.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.



Martin Luther's room in Wartburg.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.



The Lutheran Church in Hoerschel at the start of the Rennsteig.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.



Alma Holohan at Grosser Inselberg, overlooking the Thuringen Forest.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.

designed to hold 1,500 people in safety in the event of a nuclear attack, but functioned as a telephone monitoring station. Its cramped living quarters, the lack of daylight, the air and water treatment systems, massive bulkhead doors, all give the impression of life on a submarine. The forty workers who staffed the facility simply 'upped and left' with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Rennsteig can be a busy route, but in late October we met few other hikers and so had little opportunity to use 'Gut Runnst,' the walker's traditional greeting. As well as crowds of hikers, summertime can have biting insects and high temperatures. September and early October can be very pleasant with sunshine and settled weather. Since most of the route stays above 700m, with a high point of 973m, there can be some mist and cloud but fortunately we experienced little of this. The forest is

mainly open, mature hardwoods and presents a glorious array of colour when lit by the autumn sunshine. However, extensive views of the countryside are relatively rare.

'Runstianer' (as walkers on the Rennsteig are called), as well as walkers in general, are well catered for in terms of food and accommodation. At strategic points where the trail intersects a thoroughfare there can often be a kiosk selling food and beverages. Hardly a better way to have lunch than to sit in the sunshine enjoying a beer and bratwurst. The various hamlets close to the route provide a variety of overnight accommodation.

Route finding seldom presents a problem. Having been in use for so long, the way is thoroughly marked, usually with a large 'R' painted on trees or rocks. A special edition map/guidebook is available at a scale of 1:50,000.

Wartburg Castle, near the start of the Rennsteig, is also the start of a recently inaugurated pilgrimage route. St Elisabeth of Thüringen, a Hungarian princess, came to Wartburg and married the Count Ludwig IV at age 15 in 1222. Five years later, when Ludwig died while journeying to the Crusades, Elisabeth decided to dedicate her life to helping the poor and downtrodden. She travelled to Marburg to set up a hospital where she worked for the rest of her short life as a disciple of St Francis. After her death she was

**"The Rennsteig is steeped in history, tradition and folklore."**





Approach to Mosheim.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.

venerated as a saintly person, canonised and her burial site became a place of pilgrimage. In 2007, it being the 800th anniversary of her birth, her route from Wartburg to Marburg was inaugurated as a walking or pilgrim way – Elisabethpfad 2. Two other trails – from Frankfurt and from Köln – to Marburg are also designated Elisabethpfad (numbers 1 and 3).

Elisabethpfad 2 seemed to be a natural extension of the Rennsteig and, going westwards from Wartburg, ended at Marburg, giving easy train

access to Frankfurt airport. In character, however, it seems quite different from the Rennsteig. It leaves the high terrain of the Thuringian forest and, after crossing the former East/West German border, traverses cultivated farmland. It often coincides with the traditional Jakobsweg (St James' Way) and consequently is marked with both the scallop-shell symbol and its own Elisabethpfad letter, 'E'. This waymarking is, in places, somewhat hit and miss; and we regularly seemed to miss the markers, especially in the remoter parts of the journey. This necessitated some backtracking and caused some swearing, which, of course, was inappropriate for devout pilgrims! When we discussed this with the tourist official in Treysa it was agreed that the waymarking left a lot to be desired on some parts of the route.

Unlike the Rennsteig, the Elisabethpfad visits many hamlets and

villages on the way and invariably directs one via the village church, often an interesting medieval structure. In many instances the local pastor is the designated contact for overnight accommodation. This can range from the most basic – a sleeping mat on the floor – to a regular guesthouse or small hotel in larger towns. Payment varies accordingly, from a voluntary donation to about €25 for regular B&B. In tiny Dagobertshausen we spent two nights because of bad weather and were shown wonderful hospitality by the farm family who provided a self-contained apartment 'for pilgrims.' They plied us with a great variety of local cuisine, which included different kinds of 'wurst' or sausage. We were surprised to hear that the 'wurst' had been running around as pigs just a few days previously – the farmer did his own butchering! He was pleased to show us around his slaughtering

**“Der Weg ist das Ziel – ‘the journey is the goal.’**





Misty morning start near  
Homberg, on the Elisabethpfad.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.



In the village of Waldkappel,  
on the Elisabeth Path.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.

and processing facility and his private museum of farm implements and memorabilia.

The walking was over undulating countryside with few steep slopes, skirting cultivated fields and diverting, at times, into the forested areas. Apples are a local produce but the wayside varieties, probably for cider, were almost inedible. On occasion, delicious wild plums, which were ubiquitous, supplemented our lunchtime diet. In some areas the route is shared with cycle ways and, although we met very few cyclists, these stretches are tarmac-paved.

On the final couple of days, one traverses very flat countryside apart from the climb to the settlement of Amöneburg. This is located on a vast volcanic plug standing about 150m above its surroundings and its history goes back to prehistoric times.

The final climb of the journey is over the Lahnberge hills and,

descending its wooded slopes, one gets the first views of the spires of the Elisabethkirche in the university town of Marburg. This is the destination of all three Elisabethpfad but, as the saying goes, 'Der Weg ist das Ziel' – 'the journey is the goal.' ■

**Kevin Higgins is a member of the Tyndall Mountaineering Club.**

Waymarker where the  
Jakobsweg (Camino  
de Santiago) and the  
Elisabethpfad coincide.  
Photo: Kevin Higgins.



## Travel details

**Aer Lingus** to Frankfurt;  
**RyanAir** to Frankfurt/Hahn  
or Leipzig (via Stanstead).

**Train** (D-Bahn)  
connections: Frankfurt or  
Leipzig to/from Marburg or  
Eisenach. Internet booking  
ahead gets substantial  
reductions.

**[www.rennsteig.de](http://www.rennsteig.de)**  
provides full details of  
food, accommodation,  
maps, guidebooks.

**[www.elisabethpfad.de](http://www.elisabethpfad.de)**  
has information and  
contacts regarding the  
route (in German).



# Mexico's high peaks

Richard Jones tackles three of the highest peaks in Mexico.

View from summit of La Malinche (4,462m) with Popocatepetl (5,459m) (an active volcano) to left and Iztaccíhuatal ('Izta')(5,286m) to right. Photo: Richard Jones.

**I**t was mid-November last year, Christmas and the New Year were looming, and I needed a fix...a mountaineering fix, that is! I could not find anyone able to travel with me, so the next step was to google 'mountaineering November.' I found a number of tour operators who were organising trips to the high peaks of Mexico.

The climbing season in Mexico starts in early November and goes through to March. On further examination of what was on offer, I settled on a tour operator trading under the name of Climb Ecuador, run by Rodger Kovary. He was offering a combination of some sightseeing and climbs on three peaks in two weeks. I felt that this time schedule would give a reasonable chance of good acclimatisation and a greater likelihood of success on the climbs.

So I signed on with Climb Ecuador and packed my ice axe, crampons, sleeping bag and warm clothing in a hold-all, with a large old rucksack strapped to it for portering. I took my day sack as carry-on luggage and flew Cork-Amsterdam-Mexico City all in one day, leaving Cork at 6:30am and arriving in Mexico City at 6:00pm local time.

Mexico City has a population of 23 million. It is situated at 2,200 metres and is surrounded by mountains. It is totally intense. People and cars are everywhere, not to mention the smog that hangs over the city. Rush hour officially starts there at 7:00am and finishes at 10:00pm. It is not a place for those seeking peace and solitude.

On arrival in Mexico City, I met Rodger Kovary, the tour organiser, and my fellow climbers, six Americans who had all arrived a day before me. The next morning we went by private mini-bus with a tour guide to the Pyramids of Teotihuacan, just north of Mexico City, where we climbed the

50 metres up to the top of the two 2,000-year-old pyramids.

The next day, we drove east and out of the traffic mayhem of Mexico City to a Government campsite at 3,020 metres where we stayed the night in cabins at the foot of La Malinche (4,461 metres), which was to be our first climb.

Our route next morning initially took us through a wooded area and onto a scree slope, then up to a ridge that took us to the top. From the top, we could see our next objective, Izta (5,286m) to the south, and our final summit, Pico de Orizaba (5,747m) to the north. To the west, the smog that hangs over Mexico City was very visible.

Three of us also traversed over to a satellite peak of the mountain at 4,160 metres, from where we got a view of the parched Mexican plains below the tree line. After a round trip of seven hours, we spent the night in the cabins again.

The next step was to go to the town of Amecameca, where we stayed overnight. The following morning, we drove via Passo Cortes to the trail head for Izta at about 4,000 metres. Porters carried our main climbing equipment to the high camp at 4,700 metres. Our camp was below the snow line amid volcanic scree and dust. The night was without cloud

**“From the top of La Malínche we could see our next objective, Izta (5,286m), to the south, and our final summit, Píco de Orízaba (5,747m), to the north.”**



and looked good for our planned 5:00am start the following morning.

After climbing for two hours the next day, the weather deteriorated, with light rain and wind. It was nothing more than you would encounter on a 'soft' day at home but, when we came to a large metal bivvy hut, our guide asked us if we wanted to turn back because of the weather conditions! Much to the guide's disgust, his suggestion was met with a resolute no from us all. We would carry on. No one was going to be put off by a little wind and rain and give the guide the short day he was angling for.

A steep snow and ice slope brought us onto the main ridge of Izta from where we traversed to the summit at 5,286 metres in light rain and poor visibility. The featureless summit was verified by GPS, just in case our increasingly grumpy guide was trying to short-change us! I had read beforehand that the ridge on Izta is spectacular, but alas, we saw none of it.

Our way back to high camp took a different route. We re-traced the ridge to where we had joined it, then continued along the main ridge, crossing a small glacier before descending several scree slopes back

to the high camp, which we reached at 2:30pm. We then broke camp and headed down to the trail head.

After our success on Izta we took a day to recuperate in the very scenic colonial town of Puebla, on our way to Pico de Orizaba which, at 5,747 metres, is Mexico's highest peak and the third highest mountain in North America.

We spent the night before our climb to the high camp in a disused soap factory, with its machinery still intact, in the town of Tlachichuca; it is now converted into a mountaineers' lodge.

What a night! We got no sleep. A local festival was in full swing, with bands until 2:00am and then crowd bangers going off for the rest of the night. We could have been in a war zone. We left early next morning for a rough two-hour drive up a forest road in a 1960s ex-army 4x4 jeep.

After meeting our guides and porters at the trail head, we climbed to above the snow line to camp at 4,600 metres. The snow was from the same weather system we had encountered on Izta and was not very deep, so we soon cleared some areas down to ground level and pitched our tents. Our high camp was on the north side of the mountain, so at 4:10pm the sun left us and the temperature dropped below zero. After a meal of soup, re-heated minced meat, dehydrated potatoes

Near the summit of La Malinche, with Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl to rear.  
Photo: Richard Jones.

On the ridge leading to the summit of La Malinche (4,461m).  
Photo: Richard Jones.

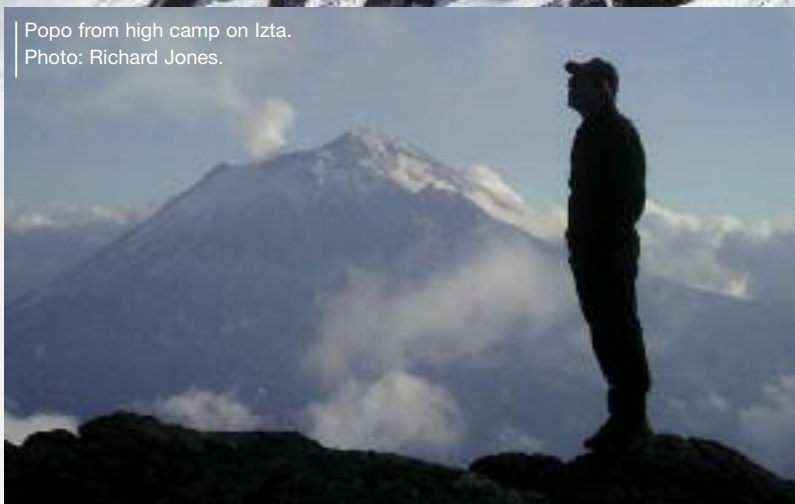




The slopes of Pico de Orizaba (5,747m) with its summit dome in background.  
Photo: Richard Jones.



Popo from high camp on Izta.  
Photo: Richard Jones.



and Mexican beans, we headed for the warmth of our tents and sleeping bags at 6:00pm.

We got up at 1:00am and departed at 2:00am. The conditions were perfect, with a full moon and no wind. We put on crampons from high camp and slowly made our way behind the guide through scree and some icy patches until we reached the foot of the glacier, which forms a cone on top of the mountain. Onwards we climbed, with the gradient getting progressively steeper. We stopped often to rest momentarily and to get that extra bit of energy to go on.

At last we reached the crater rim. The summit was only 15 metres higher up along the crest of the crater. It had taken us five hours to climb the 1,000 metres from our high camp.

The view from the top of Mexico was spectacular!

As we looked over the dry plains, we could see clearly La Malinche and Izta, which we had already climbed, and also the unimpressive smog of Mexico City.

From the top, the only way is down and this was completed without incident. Back in the Mountaineers' Lodge, we had to endure another night of Mexican festivities, but no one complained: we were all too tired. I had had my need for a mountaineering fix satisfied! ■

**Richard Jones is a member of Cork Mountaineering Club. He has climbed and ski-toured in the European Alps, Russia and South America.**

| At Piedra Grande hut, start of route to Pico de Orizaba.



## Travel Information

I travelled to Mexico with **Climb Ecuador**, [www.climbecuador.com](http://www.climbecuador.com), a small tour company, which was ideal for this sort of short trip. Although we encountered good conditions on Pico de Orizaba, which were helped by the snowfall that occurred on the days prior to our ascent, there was a warning locally that, due to slopes of 35 degrees, in places global warming had stripped the mountain of snow cover, resulting in very icy conditions on the glacier which had caused several fatal accidents.

The people of Mexico are very friendly and the roads very good, as long as you don't mind being stuck in traffic, which seems to be everywhere, for a lot of the time.



# Snowshoeing in the Provence Alps

Vincent Lamy shares his passion for snowshoeing.



**S**nowshoeing is the perfect way to enjoy the beauty of the mountains in winter and to observe the wildlife, far away from the busy ski-lifts. It has lost the backwoods image that it had in the past and is now one of the most popular winter recreation and outdoor fitness activities in the US and in some parts of Europe, especially in France, where snowshoeing has been developing as a modern recreational activity since the mid-1990s.

During the winter months, people are no longer looking for holidays where they will ski only. Many prefer holidays where they can engage in a range of activities. As a result, snowshoeing has developed into a major winter sport, which people of all ages and abilities enjoy.

Snowshoeing is essentially walking on snow in special shoes which distribute your weight over a large area so that your feet do not sink into the snow. Snowshoeing enthusiasts are able to experience the mountains in a totally different way to the more traditional downhill skiing. Welcome to this wonderful world of silence!

Although it is difficult to be absolutely certain, snowshoeing probably started about 4,000 years

ago. There is some evidence that snowshoes – the wood-framed, rawhide-laced models – were used as foot extenders in central Asia about this time. Since then, snowshoeing has played an important part in the migration of different populations in Asia, Scandinavia, Siberia and the Americas. In Norway, drawings show that snowshoes were used at least as far back as 2,500 years ago to walk and to carry food and fur.



Écrins Dôme, Provence Alps.  
Photo: Vincent Lamy.





| Beaver-tail snowshoes.

### Snowshoe design

Observing the behaviour of animals in winter has helped in the design of the modern snowshoe and has resulted in the 'bear-paw' and 'beaver-tail' shapes. The main advantage of the bear-paw shape is that it makes it easier to manoeuvre in forest or on terrain where multiple turns are required.

The action of a snowshoe's tail dragging on the snow and the toe rising in the air as the shoe is lifted is called tracking. A shoe with a long toe and a short tail does not track well as the toe often catches in deep snow or under the crust on snow and must be wrenched free to prevent a fall.

The tracking performance of a snowshoe is not noticeable on a level walk but is evident when climbing, traversing or descending. However, it is important to find the right balance between the toe and the tail lengths.



| Bear-paw snowshoes.

In addition, a bigger snowshoe may perform better but will be heavier and consequently more tiring to use. A wider version can be uncomfortable as it forces the person to walk with the feet wide apart.

Modern snowshoes are made either of aluminium or of a composite (moulded plastic). In general, the selection of your snowshoes will depend on your weight, including the weight of your rucksack, and on the type of snow and the slopes you will encounter on your proposed route. For following a track with packed-down snow, you should choose very light snowshoes with a very simple release mechanism. For more mountainous routes, you should select snowshoes with a quick release mechanism and with small crampons that will allow you to climb on the steeper sections.

## Benefits of snowshoeing

The benefits of snowshoeing are many. In the US, it is estimated that more than four million people exchange their summer shoes for snowshoes in winter. Many of them are summer hikers, walkers, cyclists, climbers and other sports enthusiasts eager to maintain their physical condition and take advantage of their favourite hiking trails during winter. According to a study conducted by the French Office of Tourism, the main benefits of snowshoeing are perceived to be that it promotes fitness and provides an opportunity to discover wildlife and explore undiscovered valleys.

The quick learning curve, much easier than for downhill skiing, makes this sport very accessible and it is also safer than skiing, with a very limited risk of injury. Whether you are looking to get into shape, to maintain your fitness level during the winter months, or just to enjoy the beauty of the natural environment and establish a mental connection with the outdoors, snowshoeing is an ideal sport for you and your family.

### The Provence Alps

In the 16th and 17th centuries it is said that the French saw similarities between the snowshoe and the racquets with which they used to play "Jeu de Paume," the old form of tennis. Whatever the origins, snowshoeing has now become very popular in France, as witnessed by the fact that it is estimated that approximately 1.4 million French citizens engage in this activity in the French Alps every year. An interesting recent study discovered that more than 10% of people going on a skiing holiday also go snowshoeing in the same week. Additionally, 93% of people who snowshoe are also walkers, many being members of walking clubs.

Since an initial boom in the 1980s, the sport of snowshoeing has expanded rapidly in France and is still growing steadily. In terms of people engaging in the sport and its infrastructure, it is now the second largest snowshoeing market in the world, behind the US. There are even special snowshoeing tracks in most French resorts now.

In France, the Provence Alps Côtes d'Azur (PACA) region gains its

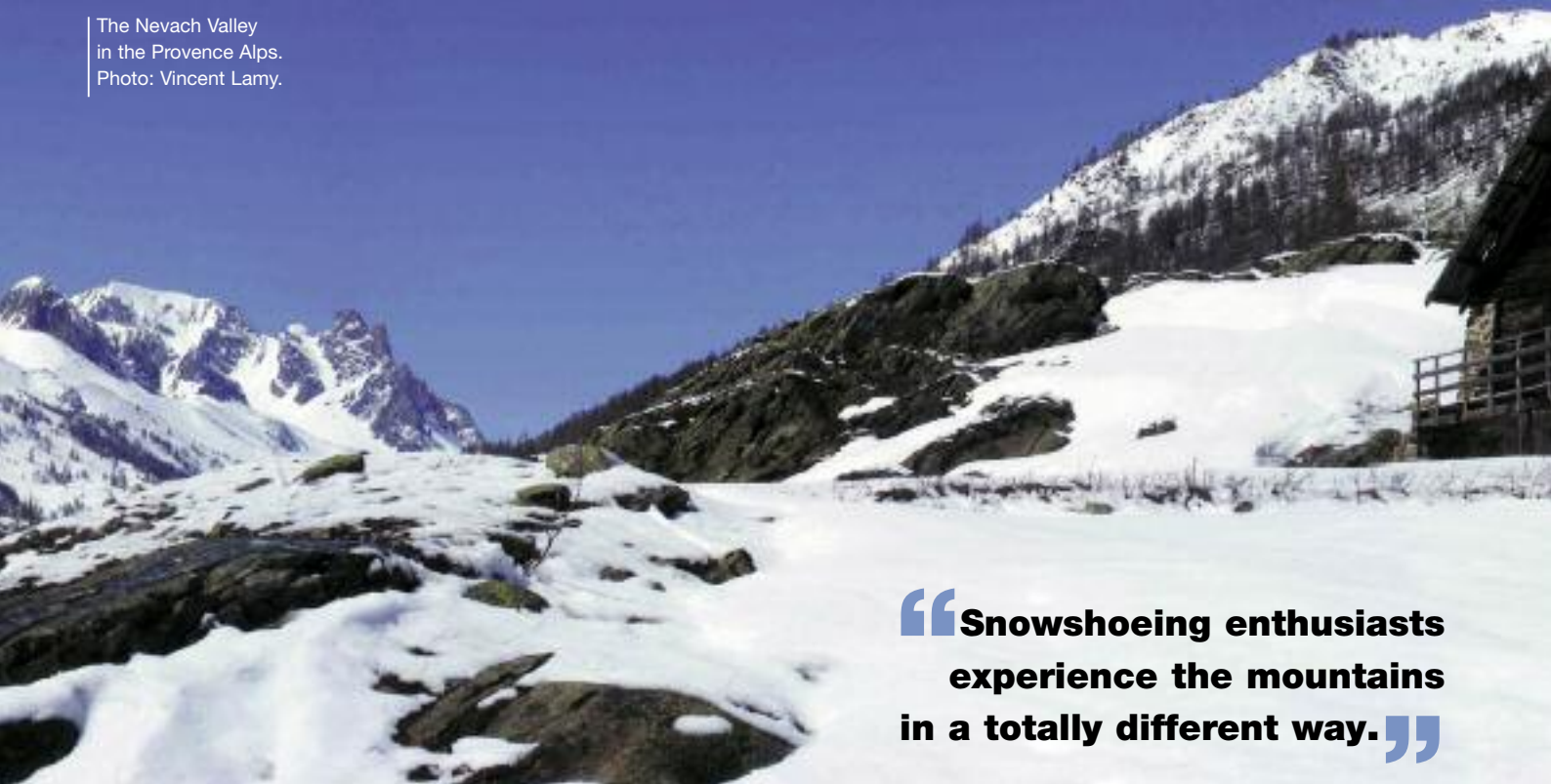


| Modern aluminium snowshoes.



| Snowshoes with moulded plastic frames.





**“Snowshoeing enthusiasts experience the mountains in a totally different way.”**

notoriety from the French Riviera. However, further north, the inland part between Nice and Briançon offers a fantastic playground for outdoor activities all year round in its regional and national parks. It also has a definite advantage over other areas in the Alps as it has about 300 days of sunshine a year. As for snow, the proximity of many peaks of around 4,000 metres ensures a very good snowfall in winter.

The recent improvements in the accessibility of this area by road, with a motorway between Marseille and Gap, have made it more popular. The region can be accessed from five airports. The airports at Marseille, Turin (the road from Italy via the Montgenèvre Pass is open all year), Lyon, Grenoble and Nice make the main places of interest in the region accessible within three hours by plane from Dublin or London. In addition, the TGV (high -speed train) will take you from London to Aix-en-Provence in less than six hours. As a result, more and more people who are looking for a holiday in an attractive environment far from the madding crowd are taking their holidays in this region each year.

The region contains two national parks – Parc des Écrins and Parc du Mercantour – and four regional parks – Parc naturel régional du Queyras, Parc régional du Mercantour, Parc naturel régional de la Camargue and

Parc régional du Luberon – where specific rules are in place to protect the wildlife.

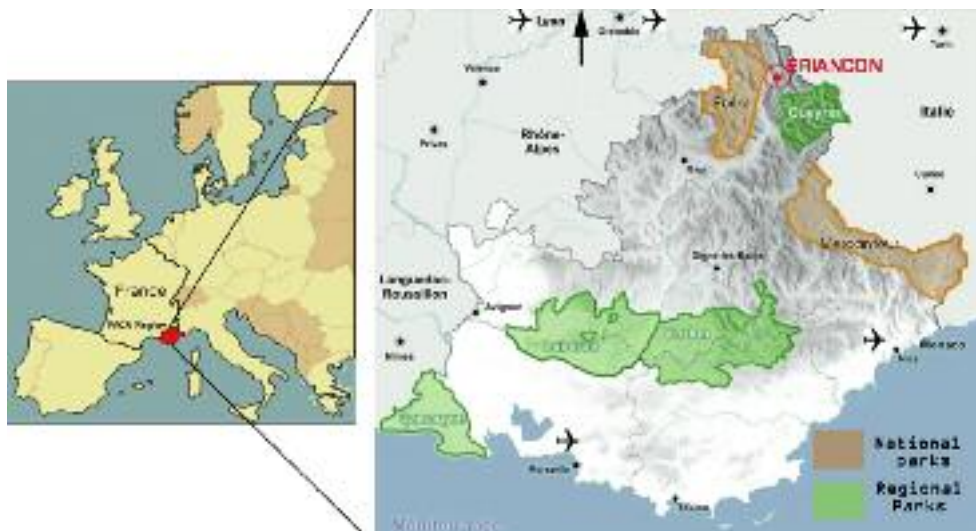
In terms of fauna, this region has over 167 protected species. Some of the most impressive protected animals are the chamois (15,000 in the Parc des Écrins alone), the golden eagles and the ibex. It is impossible to spend a week snowshoeing without seeing some of them.

As for the flora, while they will be less evident at the time of year when people are snowshoeing, if you go to this region in the spring or in summer you will be amazed at the variety of alpine flowers that flourish in the ideal conditions of the Provence Alps. This can be clearly seen in springtime when there is an abundance of

orchids and wild roses, the fragrance of which will delight the passing hillwalker. In summer, the Durance valley yields all sorts of fruits such as pears, apples, apricots, plums, cherries and grapes as well as delicious vegetables that are all available in the very attractive markets of Gap, Briançon and Embrun, which also open in winter.

From the heritage perspective, there are many examples of well-preserved old buildings of architectural interest in the region. For example, Saint Veran, the highest village in Europe, has some alpine chalets that were adapted to protect the inhabitants against the severity of the winter conditions. The huge attics were designed to store the hay harvested in

Location of the  
Provence Alps  
Côte d'Azur  
(PACA) region  
in France.





Watching  
wildlife on a  
snowshoeing  
excursion.  
Photo: Vincent Lamy.



summer to feed the animals during the long winters. In the lower levels, the rooms were very basic and designed to interlink with one another. The occupants used to live in the same rooms as the animals as this would keep them warm during the cold months. They used the kitchen mainly to make cheese.

In most of the villages and towns, you will find churches or religious heritage buildings of specific architectural interest, such as the baroque Roman style of Boscodon Abbey near Embrun.

PACA is also synonymous with the great outdoors, and the region offers a wide variety of activities. Apart from

the usual activities found on the coast, you can venture further north and enjoy whitewater sports, hiking, rock climbing, para-gliding, skiing, snowshoeing, kite-surfing on Serre Ponçon Lake, birdwatching and more. The weather and the clean air create ideal conditions for exploring the area and observing the stars from the Briançon observatory.

Within the Provence Alps, two valleys in particular offer fantastic opportunities for snowshoeing – the **Nevache Valley** (the valley of the Clarée river) and the **Vallouise Valley**. These valleys are both at the margins of the Écrins National Park and the Queyras Regional Park. I will

describe two snowshoeing excursions which demonstrate what is available in terms of snowshoeing routes in these valleys:

## The Nevache Valley

In the Nevache Valley, or the Clarée, there is one route which is basically a gentle stroll but which will reveal the delights of snowshoeing to the novice in a magical pine valley. It takes about three hours to complete the route with an ascent of 257m. You will need map IGN Top 25, 3535 OT Nevache.

From Nevache ville haute, take the snowy road right behind the sports shop, Nevasport, leading to the 'haute vallée.' In normal snow conditions you should be able to start snowshoeing from here.

The first part of the walk follows the road. You will encounter several small chapels on your way. Before the Saint Anne Chapel take a right turn and follow the sign for 'Refuge Buffère.' Cross the plateau to reach the Rately Bridge. Cross the river and take a right turn following the sign for Refuge Buffère. There is usually a track, thanks to the Buffère hut owner! Following a little climb, you will see a tree on your right with a black-and-white cross mark. Leaving the small chalets on your right (Basse Gardiole at 1,813m), keep to the right bank of the Clarée river until you reach the Basse Sause chalets and then the Souchère Bridge. In front of

Snow scene,  
Provence Alps.  
Photo:  
Vincent Lamy.





you, from left to right, you can admire the Queyrellin mountain chain, the Pointes des Cerçes and the Main de Saint Crépin. Still on the right bank of the Clarée river, leaving the chalet 'de la meuille' to your right, you will arrive behind the Fontcouverte waterfalls where you can see the Fontcouverte bridge. You can stop here for a break in the Fruitière Refuge for a glass of delicious mulled wine unless you prefer hot honey and lemon tea, also their specialty. To return, you can retrace your original route or go back by the road.

## The Vallouise Valley

In the Vallouise valley, there is a route that will take two hours or 45 minutes, depending on your starting point. The full route is somewhat harder but will clearly demonstrate the attractions of snowshoeing. There is an ascent of 450m from Puy Saint Vincent (1,400m) or of 100m from Puy Saint Vincent (1,600m). You will need map IGN Top 25, 3536 OT Briançon, Serre Chevalier, Montgenèvre.

This itinerary can begin from the ski resort at Puy Saint Vincent (1,400m) or at Puy Saint Vincent (1,600m) itself.

From the ski resort at 1,400m, after the first left turn a trail goes right along the canal and follows the sign for Narreyroux. This route will bring you to a magic larch forest, just before you reach the Chalets d'Altitude. During your climb do not take the trails

It's a family friendly sport.  
Children snowshoeing in the Provence Alps.  
Photo: Vincent Lamy.



going down right. The route is always obvious and the signs are excellent. When you reach the chalets you will experience the magic of this place and you can also admire the murals of the chapel dedicated to Saint Francois d'Assise. For the way down, follow the same path in reverse or take the trail described below from Puy Saint Vincent (1,600m).

From the ski resort at 1,600m, drive through the metal tunnel and park your car at the first u-turn. Take the track that goes to the right along an ancient canal, the Canal des Lauzes. After 500 metres you will cross a downhill ski piste. The track continues on the other side of the piste and will bring you gently round to the remote Narreyroux Valley. With a bit of luck you will be able to observe some good examples of the wildlife here and experience the joys of snowshoeing in full! ■

Vincent Lamy is a qualified mountain leader who is passionate about hill-walking and snowshoeing. He lived in Ireland for seven years before returning to France where he has set up France Outdoors ([www.franceoutdoors.com](http://www.franceoutdoors.com)), which offers activity holidays all year round in the Provence Alps. He can be contacted at [contact@franceoutdoors.com](mailto:contact@franceoutdoors.com).



[www.mountaineering.ie](http://www.mountaineering.ie)

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# **Training**Log

The latest advice and information from Tim Orr, MCI Training Officer



## TIM'S BLOGSPOT

THE SUMMER IS a quiet time for BOS (Bord Oiliúnt Sléibhe, the Irish Mountain Training Board) but although BOS does not meet formally between June and September there is still a lot of work going on in the background. During these quiet months, the Training Officer has engaged in much-needed updates

and reviews of official paperwork, syllabi and training proposals.

This essential work was greatly aided this year by the uninspiring summer weather and of course the recent appointment of a part-time Training Administrator, Kate Hebblethwaite. Kate's appointment will greatly improve the throughput of the training office and will allow us to progress many of our training initiatives.

Although the Irish Sports Council funding of mountain training may not appear as substantial as we would like, I feel positive about the outlook for the expansion of mountain training in Ireland at all levels. However, I would suggest that we will need to see an increase in volunteerism to support our training initiatives, but that this will ultimately lead to a greater promotion of safe best practice in the hills and mountains.

The ethic of volunteerism has been much in evidence throughout the summer with the new 'taster' sessions that have been run nationwide. This initiative, designed to encourage individuals to try out rock climbing and hill-walking, was run on an entirely voluntary basis by some of our most experienced, qualified and passionate members. Attendance was beyond our expectations and I really do believe that we have managed to introduce many newcomers to the sport of mountaineering.

The MCI would like to thank the following for all their time, passion and expertise in delivering these free taster sessions: Helen Lawless, Mor Active, Sinéad Pollock, Petersburg OEC, Outdoors Ireland and Irish Adventures.

Keep mountaineering, keep volunteering, but mainly, keep safe!

## Help needed!

THE TRAINING & SAFETY section of the MCI website is constantly being updated with details about forthcoming courses, workshops and training opportunities. These pages are a fantastic resource for finding out about what is going on in the MCI and the world of Irish mountaineering training, as well as providing free downloads of award syllabi, guidance notes and registration forms.

Webcams offering real-time feeds from MCI HQ, Dalkey Quarry and the summit of Carrauntoohil have been suggested, although it will be some time before MCI members can experience the thrills that these webcams might be able to offer.

In the meantime, 'Tim's Blog' in the Training section of the MCI website provides an insight into the weird and wonderful world of the Training Officer and his ongoing quest to ensure that every man, woman and child in Ireland can hold a compass and point north. The Providers section, meanwhile, will keep all providers up to date with current issues relating to training and the provision of mountaineering courses in Ireland.

One of the most recent additions to the Providers section is the 'Help Needed' page. The MCI is currently looking for assistance in running a number of its training initiatives, workshops and upcoming courses. These include the forthcoming Autumn Meet in Macroom and the Winter Meet in Scotland. If anyone with the relevant experience or qualifications would like to get involved, please contact the Training Officer, Tim Orr, or myself at the MCI office, (01) 625 1115. More information is available on the website.

**Kate Hebblethwaite, Training Administrator**



Participants (alongside Mor Active van) at a Climbing Taster Session in Kerry in July.  
Photo: Tim Orr.







Taking part in a Climbing Taster Session in Kerry in July.  
Photo: Tim Orr.

## Club Training Officers' Workshops

**Glen of Imaal, Co Wicklow, 1-2 November 2008**

**Galtee Mountains, Co Limerick, 29-30 November 2008**

THE MCI IS COMMITTED to responding to its members' mountaineering needs. One priority that has emerged from discussions with many clubs is to ensure that all of their members are trained in the skills necessary to safely enjoy a day in the mountains. These skills include navigation, having the correct personal equipment, informal leadership and being aware of hazards and the necessary safety measures to take.

In response, Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe (BOS) is working toward having volunteer Training Officers in all MCI-affiliated clubs. The role of these officers will be to liaise with the MCI Training Officer in promoting mountain training within their clubs.

As a first step toward achieving this, a number of weekend workshops are being organised around the country. These workshops are an opportunity for clubs' nominated Training Officers to meet with the MCI, discuss their clubs' training needs and work toward designing an effective training programme for their club.

The programme for the weekends will consist of both indoor informal discussion sessions and outdoor practical hill skills exercises. It is not the aim of these sessions to teach hill skills but to demonstrate how to pass them on to others: participants should, therefore, have some relevant prior knowledge and experience of the mountain environment. It is hoped that representatives will subsequently pass on the information learnt at the workshops to their fellow club members. In this way, training information can efficiently be widely disseminated among MCI clubs.

Initially, BOS will be organising two training weekends. These will take place at the Mountain Ventures Hostel in Glen of Imaal, Co Wicklow, on 1-2 November 2008, and at Kilfinane OEC in the Galtee Mountains on

29-30 November 2008.

We will be holding further workshops throughout the country in 2009.

The two upcoming workshops are open to any club member who may subsequently be willing to act as a Training Officer for their club. These individuals would also act as a direct link between their club and BOS, keeping BOS informed of any training needs that may arise, and passing on information about future training opportunities from BOS to club members.

There are 20 places available on each course, and two representatives from each club are encouraged to attend. Although only one need act as their club's Training Officer, it would be beneficial to have two people trained to pass on the hill skills learned to their club's members.

All training and workshops are being provided free of charge by BOS. The €80 charge for the weekend covers accommodation, food and all transport to and from the hills. Directions to hostels will be supplied upon confirmation of booking. Places will be allocated on a 'first-come, first-served' basis and in this instance there is no 'course only' option as the MCI has taken a group booking from each centre in order to keep prices down.

If you are interested in attending one of these workshops and acting as your club's Training Officer, please get in touch initially with your club chairperson or secretary.

Further information and booking forms can be obtained by emailing or telephoning Tim or Kate at the MCI office and should be returned (with full payment) by Friday 3 October 2008. Please ensure that you stipulate which workshop you wish to attend.

For further information, see the MCI website in the coming weeks.

## BOS awards

THE BOS PROVIDERS continue to maintain the highest standards of formally recognised training. Over the summer months many new climbers successfully gained the BOS Single Pitch Award (SPA). BOS would like to extend its congratulations to the following:-

### Single Pitch Award

Joey Geluk  
Alan West  
David Coman  
Dermot Moran  
Jason McGloin  
William Gander  
Carly Jeffreys  
Ronan O'Connor  
Bernadette Stubbs  
Conor Doherty

It was also great to finally see an almost forgotten Multi Pitch Award (MPA) assessment taking place and BOS would also like to extend its congratulations to Iain Miller who recently gained this award.

As relationships continue to expand between mountain training in the North of Ireland and BOS, it is also terrific to see many candidates passing through equivalent awards under the Mountain Leader Training Northern Ireland (MLTNI) scheme.



| Photo: Anne Murray Brown.

## Corrections to IML 86

Our report on the Spring Meet in Glendalough, published in the Summer 2008 issue of the *Irish Mountain Log*, included three photographs on page 47 taken by **Anne Murray Brown** and not, as stated, by Tim Orr.

The photograph of Gougane Barra in the advertisement for the Autumn Gathering (page 49) was taken by the late **Joe Cronin**, and not by Máire Ni Mhurchú, as stated.

We apologise for any distress these errors may have caused.



# MountainLeader

The BOS/MCI Mountain Leader training scheme provides tuition on the safe enjoyment of the hills and mountains for all. MCI Training Officer Tim Orr reports.

## Learn to lead in the hills

### Who is it for?

THE MOUNTAIN LEADER (ML) SCHEME is primarily for people who have already developed a level of personal proficiency in the hills and are now looking to share their mountaineering experience and lead others on the mountains, hills and moorlands of Ireland.

The level of experience that is required for the ML is similar to that necessary for the successful completion of the Mountain Skills Assessment. Fitness is another essential factor for consideration by candidates wanting to progress through the ML scheme. The hill fitness requirement for a mountain leader is reflected in the syllabus, which includes overnight wilderness camping and long days – and nights – in all weather conditions, and necessitates an ability to move freely on a variety of terrain types while looking after a group.

### How long is the course?

The ML scheme is generally divided into three blocks: Mountain Leader Training 1 (2 days), Mountain Leader Training 2 (3 days) and Mountain Leader Assessment (3 days). Training courses, although mostly based around practical outdoor exercises on ML-type terrain, will also include a number of informal lecture/discussion sessions covering a diverse range of useful topics essential to the ML award.

Understanding mountain weather, access and the environment, and styles of leadership are just some of the issues



Learning to look after someone else on steep ground.  
Photo: Tim Orr.

covered. The practical elements of the training will fit progressively into each day, allowing the candidate to develop and become a self-sufficient leader. Precise and efficient navigation, emergency rope handling, group emergency procedures and low-impact wilderness camping are just some of the elements covered out on the hills. There is also a substantial consolidation period between training and assessment where the trainee mountain leader is required to broaden their personal mountaineering experience and practise leading parties over a variety of routes. During this time candidates must also spend a period of time assisting other ML holders in an apprentice-style role.

### Do I need to do all three blocks?

Even the most experienced mountaineer is certain to gain further knowledge by

attending both of the training blocks and the assessment block. The ML development path is presented as a natural progression, and participation in all three parts of the scheme is strongly recommended.

### Who are the approved providers?

The MCI currently has nine approved providers for the Mountain Leader training scheme. All of these providers are experienced, qualified Mountain Instructors who have also completed further training in the specific skills required to teach others leadership in the mountains. The continuous and ongoing moderation of these providers ensures that all BOS/MCI ML courses are delivered at an exceptionally high standard. The maintenance of these standards by the providers presents the ML candidate with evidence that they



## Your guide to BOS/MCI Mountain Leader training

have received the stamp of approval from the National Governing Body for mountaineering in Ireland. An updated list of approved training providers is available from the MCI office.

### Booking and costs

A full list of upcoming Mountain Leader training and assessment courses can be found under the Training and Safety section on the MCI website, [www.mountaineering.ie](http://www.mountaineering.ie). Providers should be contacted directly and will look after you from there on. If you would prefer to organise your own group course at a location and date to suit your needs, you can contact any of the ML providers listed to see if they can fit in with you.

The ratio for ML training and assessment is one instructor to four candidates. Courses are priced by the individual provider and listed on the website. Some providers will also arrange accommodation, food and transport for you, if necessary.

### Will I get a certificate?

Although the ML is a nationally recognised qualification, the MCI does



Negotiating rivers safely is all part of ML training.  
Photo: Tim Orr.



It's not as hard as it seems!  
Photo: Tim Orr.

not produce certificates upon successful completion of the assessment series. You will, however, be presented with an official BOS letter of congratulations, have your name acknowledged in the *Irish Mountain Log* and be entered on the National Training Database as a qualified Mountain Leader award holder.

### Do I need to be a qualified ML to lead club walks?

If you are a keen hill-walker and local club member and you are leading others within your club on a non-professional basis, you do not need to hold a nationally recognised qualification. You still hold a duty of care towards the people you are leading, but this will be based on your own personal ability and leadership rather than on an official award.

### I want to train for myself but have no interest in leading others

Although some individuals do attend ML training purely to advance their own personal proficiency, it should be remembered that as a leadership training course the syllabus will mostly be based around matters and situations regarding group management.

### How will I know if I am suitable for the training?

Your Mountain Skills assessor will give you detailed feedback as to your level of ability at the time of the assessment. This will include guidance on when to progress to the next stage of training and to the ML scheme. ■

If you have any queries on the BOS/MCI Mountain Leader training scheme, please email [info@mountaineering.ie](mailto:info@mountaineering.ie).



Learn to live in harmony with nature.  
Photo: Tim Orr.



# Access & Conservation

The latest news from Aodhnait Carroll, MCI Access & Conservation Officer

## Calling Environmental Officers!

### Training workshop at this year's Autumn Meet

THE MCI IS PLEASED to announce the first training workshop for Club Environmental Officers. This event will be run in conjunction with the MCI Autumn Meet which is taking place on Saturday and Sunday, 11th-12th October 2008, in Macroom, Co Cork. The training workshop will consist of a 'Leave No Trace' awareness session, a discussion about the MCI's environmental policies, an explanation of Occupier's Liability in relation to recreational users, and a chance to discuss any other environmental or access concerns that your club may have.

The workshop will take place on the morning of Sunday, 12th October 2008 in Macroom at the Riverside Park Hotel, on the Killarney road to the west of Macroom. It

will run from 9:30am to 1:00pm.

The MCI Autumn Meet will be acting as host for the Environmental Officers' Training Workshop and I would encourage all Environmental Officers to join us for the whole event. However, if this is not feasible for you, attending the training workshop only is also an option.

If your club does not currently have an Environmental Officer, this would be a great time to appoint one and send your officer along to the training workshop.

Please contact me at the MCI office to let me know if you can attend. I can be reached at (01) 625 1115 or feel free to email me at [aodhnait@mountaineering.ie](mailto:aodhnait@mountaineering.ie). I look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity.



A 'cat-hole' is recommended by Leave No Trace for disposal of excreta in the outdoors.

## The role of the Club Environmental Officer

CLUB ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICERS will have two main roles: (1) to provide their club with information on best practice in regards to environmental protection, and (2) to be the liaison person between their club and the MCI Access & Conservation Officer about any access or conservation issues in their area.

Environmental Officers will be given a day's training by the MCI and provided with literature on current best practice. The first of these days will be at the Autumn Meet. The Access & Conservation Officer will also be available to support Environmental Officers should any questions or issues arise.

The aim of the day's training will be to provide Environmental Officers with the tools to disperse valuable environmental and access-related information to the members of their clubs. The training programme will consist of sessions, each covering one of the following topics:

**'Leave No Trace' Awareness:** The 'Leave No Trace' programme is designed to help outdoor enthusiasts to value the



A Leave No Trace workshop in progress.  
Photo: Aodhnait Carroll.

natural environment, to understand the impact of their activities on that environment and to make decisions on how to minimise that impact while still having the freedom to enjoy their activities.

**MCI Environmental Policy:** As the enjoyment of the outdoors is a fundamental aspect of hillwalking and climbing, the MCI has produced its Environmental Policy to guide the response of its members to issues arising from their use of the countryside

with regard to conservation of the landscape and biodiversity. The policy addresses the responsibilities of our members where their activities impact on the natural environment, and the response of the MCI and its members to issues that may affect the quality of the experience we derive from our sport.

**Occupier's Liability:** The Occupier's Liability Act of 1995 provides landowners with the protection they need to allow recreational users onto their land without fear of litigation. It is important that such users understand this document and can explain it in a clear and concise way.

**Environmental and Access Issues:** Participants will be given the chance to discuss and receive feedback on local or regional access or environmental issues that may be of relevance in their area.

If you have any questions about the role of the Environmental Officer, please contact the Access & Conservation Officer at the MCI Office by telephone on (01) 625 1103 or by email at [aodhnait@mountaineering.ie](mailto:aodhnait@mountaineering.ie).



# Why walk?

## The health benefits of walking

**The measurable health benefits of walking are many, and numerous studies all support the same message: we need to get out and walk to stay healthy. Aodhnait Carroll reports.**

In the first half of the 20th century, life expectancy was significantly shorter and infectious diseases, including vaccine-preventable ones such as measles, polio and diphtheria, claimed the lives of many people. With the advent of antibiotics, the development of an increasing number of vaccines and other advances in medical technology, we are now better able to prevent or treat these diseases. However, with a greater life expectancy, other threats to our health emerged towards the end of the last century and the diseases that are now the greatest threat to the health of our aging population are those such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, metabolic disorders such as diabetes and osteoporosis, which are related to lifestyle factors. These lifestyle factors include a poor diet, smoking, excessive alcohol intake and insufficient physical activity.

People give many reasons as to why they are unable to engage in sufficient physical activity. For example: "I'm not the sporty type;" the lack of facilities for exercise; the cost; not fit or healthy enough; too old; lack of time; the unpredictable weather; or the lack of social support. The answer to all of these potential barriers is simply to go walking. Engaging in walking is possible for almost all individuals. It is not necessary for a person to be of a certain age or to be sporty and fit to become involved in walking and there is no need for specialist equipment or expensive facilities. Furthermore, ensuring that there is reasonable access to places where people can walk safely will encourage them to engage in this beneficial physical activity with proven benefits for their health.

To remain healthy, it is recommended that all individuals engage in 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise five days a week or 45-60 minutes five days a week, if their goal is weight loss. Another option is to engage in 20 minutes' exercise of vigorous intensity three days a week. It has also been proven that it is just as effective to do three bouts of ten minutes of exercise as it is to do all of the 30 minutes at once. With all of these options, it is hard to say that you do

not have time to do at least the minimum amount of walking recommended each week. As the activity of walking has become more and more popular, it is easier to locate a variety of walking groups which you can join to help motivate you to continue being active.

We are often told that walking is good for us and we can believe it. We know that we feel better when we exercise, but some of us will still need some scientific evidence of what exactly the health benefits are:

- In one study, two groups of individuals were followed over a period of ten years. In one of these groups, consisting of men aged 55 to 64, there was 50% less illness and death resulting from heart disease among those who engaged in at least thirty minutes of brisk walking each day. In the other group, women aged 40 to 65, there was a reduction of 30-40% in the risk of having a heart attack among those who spent at least three hours a week walking briskly.
- Another study showed an increase in the 'good' HDL (high density lipoprotein) cholesterol and a decrease in the total cholesterol with 2.5 hours of walking a week. A raised total cholesterol is associated with an increased risk of heart disease.
- Cancer is, unfortunately, an increasingly common disease now, affecting more than a third of people during their

### Walk on World Heart Day

Cardiovascular disease, which includes coronary heart disease, strokes and other circulatory diseases, is the most common cause of death in Ireland. The Irish Heart Foundation is marking World Heart Day on Sunday, October 5th, by asking people from all age groups and all parts of the community to organise a walk with their family, other members of their community or other people in their workplace to show people how easy and enjoyable it is to be physically active. For more information, visit the Irish Heart Foundation's website, [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie).

***'Improving access to upland areas will improve the health of the nation.'***



Photo: Tim Orr.

lifetime. Walking 60 minutes per day has been shown to reduce the risk of cancer of the womb by 30% and the risk of breast cancer by 20%. People can also reduce their risk of bowel cancer by about 50% just by walking for at least three hours a week.

- When the relationship between bone density and walking was looked at, it was discovered that postmenopausal women who made time to walk at least 12 kilometres per week had a noticeably higher bone density, reducing their risk of sustaining a fracture.

The measurable health benefits of walking go on and on, with numerous other studies having been done, all supporting the conclusion that walking regularly will protect our health and well-being as we get older.

It is clear, therefore, that if the Government provides the people of Ireland with reasonable access to safe and enjoyable places to walk, their health will benefit. The relaxation and freedom experienced when walking in an open area cannot be compared to a walk along a busy, public road. By ensuring that there is reasonable access to the beautiful upland areas that we have, the Government can encourage people to look after themselves physically and mentally. They shouldn't let a lack of access to the open areas be one more reason for people not to engage in physical activity and reap the numerous benefits. ■

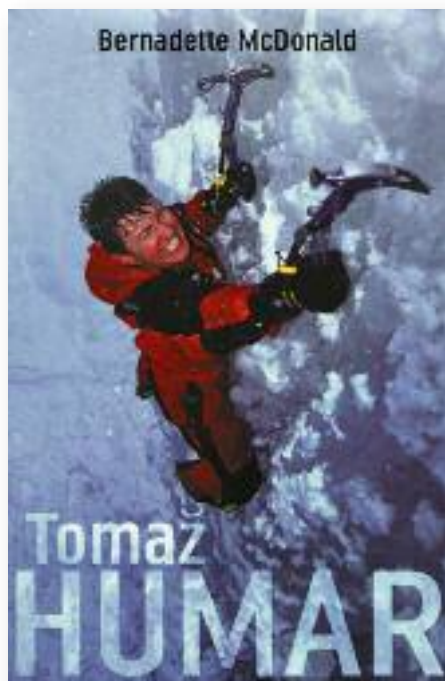


# Books

Literary Editor Joss Lynam presents reviews of some recent publications.

## *Suddenly he was famous...*

### Joss Lynam



#### Tomaz Humar

By Bernadette McDonald  
Hutchinson, 258pp.  
16pp b&w/colour photos,  
6pp route topos.  
£18.99 ISBN: 978-0-0917-9547-4

This is the most difficult mountaineering biography that McDonald has tackled. Elizabeth Hawley and Charlie Houston were not simple characters, but they were both well-respected in the mountaineering world. Humar is less well-known among English-speaking climbers and, where he is known, he is viewed with mixed feelings – especially in his native Slovenia.

Tomaz Humar learned to climb when Yugoslavia was a communist state in the structured Russian style and he had to work his way up through a series of steps before graduating as an alpinist. But Slovenia was on the edge of communism and he could see how, in Italy and Austria, mountaineers were free to make their own careers. He wanted that freedom and yet, as the son of a poor farmer, he needed the training and

equipment that his club could give him.

He got his first chance in the Himalaya in 1994 when he summited Ganesh 5 by the SE ridge, the second ascent. Annapurna was his first eight-thousander the following year and Ama Dablam by the NW Ridge in 1996 was his first new route, gaining him and Vanja Furlan the Piolet d'Or.

It was a turning point in his life. Suddenly, Humar was famous across the climbing world, but he had left behind his pregnant wife Sergeja, who bore him his first son while he was away – the beginning of the end of their marriage.

In the late 1990s, he made a number of very serious face climbs on major Himalayan peaks, the most difficult of which was probably the North Face of Nuptse, marred by the death of his companion, Janez Jeglic, who was blown off the summit ridge. The most contentious was his solo climb on the South Face of Dhaulagiri. By then he had a huge fan club and was receiving thousands of messages every day over the internet, relayed to him as he climbed. He had to veer off the face onto the Japanese ridge, and this, together with the publicity of Messner claiming him as his successor, disgusted top Slovenian mountaineers such as Stremfelj and Prezelj.

A serious fall while house-building stopped him for a while, but in 2005 he attempted the huge Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat, now supported by his doctor and his astrologist. He got stuck at 6,300m and, unable to go higher or to retreat, he was rescued by a team of Pakistani Air Force helicopters ordered to assist by President Musharraf in person. In Slovenia and all round the world, tens of thousands of people glued to their radios sighed with relief, though some mountaineers considered that he had devalued the sport.

Humar himself seems to have had doubts; in 2007, he soloed a new route on the South Face of Annapurna East. There was no previous media hype; the first the climbing world heard of it was in a brief report of his climb from the NMA.

Enough about the man, what about the book? Bernadette McDonald has fitted Humar's climbs into chapters about the

Rupal climb. For instance, one chapter starts with August 3 2005 on Rupal and then switches to Ama Dablam in 1996. I found this confusing and annoying, so finished by reading the section of each chapter on the climbing and then reading the sections on the Rupal Face.

The acknowledgments list a host of names of the world's top Himalayan mountaineers as well as family and friends. While McDonald includes the criticisms of mountaineers such as Steve House (who climbed the Rupal Face by a different route a month later than Humar), she is clearly on the side of Humar and his admirers. She writes about his climbs vividly and in detail; her description of the Rupal rescue is especially compelling, and yet she can write sympathetically of the break-up of the marriage.

This is a hard book to read and I found it hard to review. But it is well worth the trouble, and I know it is a book I will want to dip into again in the future. I can't finish without mentioning the dust cover: a teeth-gritted Humar climbing vertical ice on the front, a hands-clasped Tomaz praying on the back.





## To entice as much as to inform...

Damien O'Sullivan



Peter Owens on  
Wall of Fossils E4 6a.  
Photo: David Novak.

### Climbs in the Burren and Aran Islands

By Peter Owens. Published by the MCI, 196pp.  
Innumerable colour photos & topos, and many small sketch maps.  
€20.00 (€18.00 to MCI members). ISBN: 970-0-902940-21-5

After much eager anticipation, the new edition of the Burren rock climbing guide has hit the shelves. Editor Peter Owens has done a sublime job of coalescing in both words and pictures the magic that is Burren limestone. The new guide serves to entice as much as to inform the reader. It is not merely an annotated list of rock climbs; it serves to introduce the reader to the environment and the history of climbing in the Burren.

Howard Hebblethwaite traces four decades of climbing at Ailladie, from the initial forays by IMC members in the 1970s that produced some of the ultra classics we now cut our limestone teeth on, to the lightning raids of Ireland's strongest climbers to give us the jaw-dropping futuristic lines which are light on protection but heavy on grade.

The geology and fauna of the Burren are expertly introduced respectively by Dr Sadhbh Baxter and Dr Brendan Dunford. An appreciation for the rarity and fragility of the Burren should heighten every climber's appreciation and respect for the area. Marcin Ostasz gives a fine explanation of the place names of the Burren, from their Irish roots to their current manifestation, which means that I no longer have to perjure myself while trying to give an explanation to foreign visitors who ask me, "Hey, buddy! What does 'All A Die' mean?"

Most importantly, the publication functions very well as a rock climbing guide. The layout is clean and is easy to follow. Accurate route descriptions are supplemented by clear route photographs. The guide takes the reader on a journey through all the crags of the Burren, from well-trodden Ailladie to the less often visited inland crags. The increasingly popular bouldering venue of Doolin is wonderfully encapsulated by Grzegorz Florek. The guide also gathers together the ascents which have taken place on the Aran Islands to date and hints at the immense untapped potential there.

Visually it is a stunning piece of work. The guide is peppered with

excellent action photos, enough to elicit sweaty palms in any reader (don't fret, the guide comes with a protective outer cover). Great credit must go to John Goodall for the layout. The aforementioned pictures are more often than not set side by side with their description; no hurried fumbling to match picture and description here.

Buy two copies – one to keep on your coffee table to be appreciated as a great piece of work, the other to be abused at the crag and cursed by a generation of upcoming climbers. Surely Sky Walker is harder than E2?

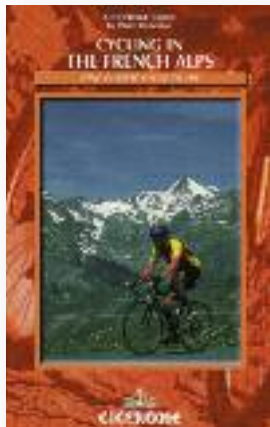


Steve McMullan on  
Black Magic HVS 5a.  
Photo: David Novak.



## Eager to plan for the next expedition...

### Bob Norton



#### **Cycling in the French Alps: Nine Classic Cycle Tours**

By Paul Henderson  
Cicerone (2nd edition 2008), 247pp.  
Many colour photos, maps and tables  
£14.00 ISBN: 978-185284-551-3

#### **Cycle Touring in Switzerland: Nine National Cycling Routes**

By Judith & Neil Forsyth  
Cicerone, 263pp.  
Many colour photos, maps and tables  
£14.00 ISBN: 978-185284-526-1

Nowadays, many people combine the sports of mountaineering and cycling. There are obvious cross-training benefits to be derived, and cycle touring is a great way to have the experience of being among big mountains and have the freedom to cover comparatively long distances quite easily.

Crossing a big mountain pass by bike, even the multi-geared modern lightweight tourer, requires a high degree of fitness and is immensely satisfying on many levels. The mountain peak-bagger has his equivalent in the pass-bagger in the cycling world.

The guide to the French Alps describes nine challenging tours of approximately a week each, though it would be simple to combine

two or more to make up longer tours. The stages average 50 to 80 kilometres per day with an average height gain of between 800 and 1,500 metres. There are clear maps of the routes with profiles to show ascent/descent and lots of useful information on accommodation, supplies and transport. The photographs are superb and make one eager to plan for the next expedition.

All of the tours described are loops, thereby simplifying transport arrangements. Three of the tours pass through Grenoble, which you can fly to directly from Dublin.

The Swiss guide is in a slightly smaller format and, though comparisons are odious, it did not turn me on as much as the French Alps guide. It contains details about tours based on the nine National Cycle Routes administered by Veloland Suisse, the Cycling in Switzerland Foundation. The routes vary in length from four to nine days and in the amount of climbing, from average days of 430 metres' ascent to 1,155 metres' ascent. The routes are linear, which could create problems in getting to and from your start and finish.

Having said that, there is a lot of information on rail and bus access.

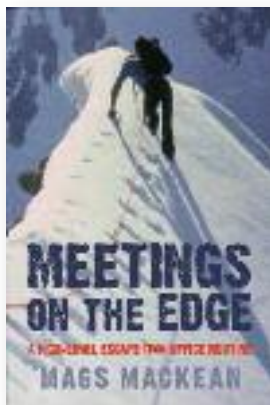
The photographs are smaller than in the French book and have nothing like the same "wow" factor. There are excellent maps and profiles and copious information on facilities.

Both books are attractively prepared to the usual high standards we have come to expect from publishers Cicerone. I recommend them.



## ...and escape from the office routine

### Cormac MacDonnell



#### **Meetings on The Edge: A High Level Escape from Office Routine**

By Mags MacKean  
The In Pinn, 198pp.  
5 sketch maps  
£14.99 ISBN 978-1-903238-80-6

*Meetings On The Edge* is an entertaining first book from Mags MacKean, setting out her journey of escape from office routine to discover the mountains of the world.

From her long-distance hiking exploits in the Pyrenees and French Alps to challenging expeditions in Nepal and summit attempts in Northern Alaska and New Zealand, the book is full of entertaining and exciting stories of her mountaineering exploits.

Stories are presented from her travel journals in a personal, warm and often humorous fashion and are further enhanced by her vivid descriptions of landscapes and settings. All her stories are really brought to life by the many personalities she encounters on all

continents, including Bollywood stars, some unusual hiking companions, wise Maori tour guides and 2,000-year-old kauri trees.

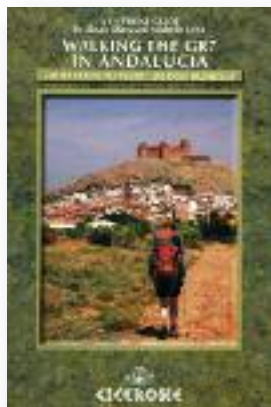
With its robust, water-resistant cover and handy, built-in bookmarks, the book is well designed for the backpack or hiking holiday and will certainly inspire many to do just as she has and escape the office in search of adventure in the mountains.





## From the southernmost tip of Spain...

### Joss Lynam



#### Walking the GR7 in Andalucia

By Kirstie Shirra & Michelle Lowe  
Cicerone, 285pp.

50 colour photos, 29 maps

£12.95

ISBN 978-1-85284-507-0

GR7 is the Spanish section of the trans-European route E4 and provides a 1,163km countryside walk across Andalucia from the southernmost tip of Spain, at Tarifa, to Puebla de Don Fadrique, at the border with Murcia, with a choice of northern and southern routes in the second half.

It traverses a countryside where villages, mostly quite small, are separated by mountainous country with passes that may run to over 1,000m and there are 5-600m climbs most days. It passes through Nature Parks, the Sierra Nevada National Park, pine forests and beside olive groves. I think it would be very enjoyable to pick a section for a few days' walking rather than to attempt the whole route. Accommodation is mostly in small, family-run two or three star hotels.

The guide gives what seem to be fairly detailed route instructions, which are warranted, since in the page margins there are remarks like "There are no markers on this section," though there are also more helpful ones pointing out good views, etc. There's also quite a lot on tarmac.

The sketch maps are just adequate; there are lots of cross paths so they look like caterpillars. You would definitely want to have the 1:50,000 maps along with you. The guide has a good introduction and many attractive illustrations.

## ...to a mixture of scrambling, swimming and abseiling

### Paul Whiting



#### Canyoning: Classic canyons in Spain, France and Italy: a selection of scrambling, aquatic and roped descents

By John Bull

Cicerone, 205pp.

Many colour photos and maps

£12.00 ISBN 1-85284-508-7

For those not familiar with canyoning, it is best described as the descent of gorges by a mixture of walking, scrambling, swimming and abseiling.

The first forty-eight pages of this guide provide the background needed to introduce the reader to canyoning in Europe. Topics include the regions and their wildlife, the seasons and when to go, how to travel and get around, route grading, safety precautions, equipment, techniques and special considerations for aquatic canyons.

Approximately eighty pages are dedicated to the twenty-six routes in the Spanish regions of Sierra De Guara (the areas of Rio Verde and Rodeller), Costa Blanca and Mallorca. Fifty pages are dedicated to the fourteen routes in the French region of Haute-Provence including the areas around Apt, Vaucluse, Sisteron, Moustiers-Sté-Marie and Verdon. The last twenty pages describe the five routes on the Italian island of Sardinia.

Although easy to follow and providing all the information that you want, there are some minor edits that could be made to improve the guide's quality:

- Better cross-referencing between tables, routes, maps and legends.
- For all routes there should be a 2D elevation diagram showing

the locations of pools and the length of abseils.

- The guide might have been better spiral-bound to allow you to photocopy a route, stuff it in a zip-lock bag and bring it along while descending the route.

I have to admit that I've never been canyoning and that this guide was my first exposure to Cicerone's guidebooks, but after reading it I'm keen to suggest to some of my friends that we head to Spain or France next year and give it a go!

### "Books to read as the evenings draw in"

The MCI continues to provide the book service previously operated by Joss Lynam. We can supply you with guidebooks and maps to almost any part of the world. For the walker, there is a large collection of Cicerone guides and books, or the wider selection of books and guides distributed by Cordee which also includes many climbing guides. Books reviewed in the Irish Mountain Log can usually be purchased through Joss Books with a members' discount. To place an order, ring the MCI office on (01) 6251115 or email [info@mountaineering.ie](mailto:info@mountaineering.ie).

# Joss Books



## Gerard McDonnell

# To the mountain born

AFTER MAKING THE first Irish ascent of K2 on August 1, 2008, 37-year-old Limerick man Gerard McDonnell tragically died the following day during his descent from the 8,611m summit.

Ger died as he lived, attempting to help some other climbers who had got into difficulty on the descent. For those who knew Ger, that was the kind of mountaineer he was; a team player and a man of great heart and spirit.



Ger McDonnell on K2  
on August 1st, 2008.

On a previous attempt at climbing K2 two years earlier, Ger had been forced to turn back some 600m below the summit, having been injured by a rockfall, and he had to be evacuated from the mountain.

Ger will be sadly missed – not only by the family whom he loved so much and by his partner, Annie Starkey, but also by the entire climbing community in Ireland and in Alaska, where he had been based for the past 10 years or so.

His passion for mountaineering and adventure, along with his love of Irish music and culture, won him friends from around the globe, many of whom travelled thousands of miles to pay their last respects to this great mountaineer and human being at his memorial service, which was held in his home village of Kilcurnan, Co Limerick.

From the early days, he was a passionate and skilled mountaineer, and it was this love of mountains that led him to base himself in Alaska. His climbing achievements were impressive by international standards. He climbed many difficult snow and ice routes on the mountains of Alaska, and summited on Everest in 2003 and on Broad Peak in 2006.



Wilco van Rooijen, Mick Murphy and Ger McDonnell  
at K2 base camp in July 2006.  
Photo: Banjo Bannon.

Ger was one of the strongest climbers I have known. As a climbing partner, he was one of the safest, most thoughtful and most entertaining people I have had the pleasure to climb with. He brought *ceol agus craic* to our base camps. Being the first Irishman to summit K2 puts Ger in his rightful place as one of

the mountaineering greats of Ireland. *Ní bheidh a leithéidí arís ann.*

May he rest in peace.

### Mick Murphy

*Gerard McDonnell, born 1971, died August 2nd, 2008.*