



Climbing Ireland's Munros in three days

On the August bank holiday weekend of 2014, two teams from Limerick Climbing Club took on the challenge of climbing the fourteen Irish Munros in three days. **Catherine Quinlan** was amongst them and filed this report.



Eager to go! Limerick Climbing Club members gather in Cronin's Yard in the MacGillycuddy Reeks on August 2nd, 2014.

What is it in recent years that has driven the 'grown-up' population to take on physically demanding challenges such as marathon running, long-distance cycling and hill-climbing, often combined with raising funds for deserving causes, when, in the past, exercise may have been furthest from their minds?

Seventeen members of Limerick Climbing Club took on such a challenge over the August 2014 bank holiday weekend when they attempted to climb the fourteen Irish Munros – or peaks over 3,000ft (900m) – in three days. Over half of the group were in their fifties and some were in their sixties.

When the club announced the challenge at the end of April 2014, I thought it was something I should have a go

at, and I commenced a training regime. Firstly, a few of us headed to Wales for the June bank holiday weekend and climbed Snowdon via Crib Goch, a mountain to be treated with utmost respect.

After that, a number of challenging Sunday walks were organised by some of the club's leaders. These consisted of 8 to 9-hour hikes, such as one from Cush to Templehill and back, in the Galtees, and others in the Knockmealdowns and on Mweelrea.

The challenge was organised by our then club treasurer Maureen Twomey, who put a lot of effort into planning it. We had a brilliant support crew of eight other club members – Mick Wall, Bernie Roberts, Deirdre O'Brien, Margie Flood, Dom Divilly, Eric Jones, Tom O'Brien and Paul Whelan –

who ensured that we got to each walk location and then back to our accommodation in the evening. Dinner and lunches were all organised at local hosteleries to ensure we were well fed to carry us through the weekend.

On Friday evening, August 1st, everyone made their way to Killarney. Accommodation was booked in Kissane's Mountain Rest Lodge, An Óige Youth Hostel and various B&Bs in the area. While we were there, we made a presentation of €1,000 to the Kerry Mountain Rescue Team.

The next day, we divided into two groups, Group 1 led by Cyril Doran and Fergus O'Flynn (Club Chairperson) and Group 2 led by Brian McNelis and Paul Murphy. Then we set off from Cronin's Yard.

Group 2 won the toss and were first out, at 8:00am,

heading for Cruach Mhór (932m) to climb the Reeks in a clockwise direction. Group 1 (my team) were next to go, leaving at 8:30am to climb the Reeks in an anti-clockwise direction. We headed for Beenkeragh (1,010m).

To the Reeks

In the beginning, it was wet and for about three hours visibility was poor, making the initial ridges very wet, slippery and quite dangerous. Arriving at Beenkeragh via Fionnchom (Fair Valley) at 11:00am, we stopped for a quick snack and then moved on to Carrauntoohil via the Bones Peak (959m), to arrive at the summit cross on Carrauntoohil (1,039m) at 12:12pm.

Three and a half hours of a climb in wet and humid conditions wasn't the best start, though the ground was

good underfoot after a very dry summer. The weather was now improving and the sun was appearing through gaps in the cloud, which gave us a burst of energy to make a quick descent from Carrauntoohil, then climb to Caher, dropping our backpacks as we ascended to Caher East Top (1,001m) and continuing on to Caher West Top (the Beehive Hut) (975m) and back again to the col. Some may say that was cheating, but with another 6 or 7 hours still to go...?

Heading for the Devil's Ladder, we passed Group 1 at around 1:30pm. Some banter ensued. I could tell that our leader, Cyril Doran, was already counting down and calculating how long it would take the other team to finish. The pressure was on in earnest. We needed some sustenance, however, so we stopped for lunch at the top of the boggy saddle above the Devil's Ladder.

Crossing the MacGillycuddy Reeks ridge on the best of



On the summit of Lugnaquilla, Co Wicklow, the final summit in the 3-day challenge.

days is not for the faint-hearted, as it is quite tricky in places and needs careful footwork. We were now five and a half hours out, climbing most of that time, and our energy levels were starting to dip as we faced our next climb – to Cnoc na Chuillin (958m), which our group reached by 2:45pm.

There followed more climbing as we ascended the Top of the Bone, Maolán Búí (973m), Knocknapeasta (988m) and the Big Gun. It was tough going, and some of us were starting to feel the pain and stiffness in our legs.

Our leader, Cyril Doran, was pushing ahead, conscious of our time and his targets. The

pace was fast and the climbs steep. From Knocknapeasta to our final climb, Cruach Mhór (932m), was one of the toughest sections for me, personally, with lots of scrambling and climbing over rocks with nowhere to look but some 950+ metres down.

We made it to Cruach Mhór by 4:38pm, eight hours out. Cyril's target was 5:30pm, so we were an hour ahead of schedule. We took advantage of the extra time and stopped for a well-earned thirty-minute break. Lots of photos were taken and the banter was mighty.

From there it was downhill all the way! We arrived back at Cronin's Yard at 6:30pm, after ten hours on the go. Group 2 had arrived back in nine and a half hours.

At Cronin's Yard, we had time to savour their home-baked scones, fruitcake and tea.

We then showered and headed to Kate Kearney's Cottage for a lovely meal and some nice wine to complete the day. Eleven Munros covered, a distance of 21km, with 2,000m of ascent. ▶



On the summit of Cruach Mhór in the Reeks of Kerry.

To Brandon and on

We left Killarney at 8:00am on Sunday morning and made our way to Dingle Peninsula. We regrouped at the petrol station in Dingle before heading for An Baile Breac to climb Mount Brandon (952m) via the Saint's Road and the Stations of the Cross.

Maureen Twomey led this walk and set off at a quick pace to stretch the legs after the previous day and clear some cobwebs. For many of us, our legs hadn't yet engaged with our brains and were still feeling the effects of the previous day. However, we completed the twelfth Munro in three hours – a hike of 8km with an ascent of 789m.

From there, we headed for The South Pole Inn in Annascaul for pre-booked soup and sandwiches and a short break en route to

Tipperary to climb Galtymore (919m) via the Black Road. Here, we met Frank McMahon (Club Environmental Officer), our leader for this climb, and set off at 5:15pm.

The evening was beautiful, conditions were perfect and the pace was quick, with people getting stronger and faster as we progressed through the challenge. Our thirteenth Munro, Galtymore (918m), was finished in three hours in a distance of 11km with an ascent of 618m.

We had time to head to our various accommodations to get ready before meeting at the Coach Road Inn, Aherlow, Co Tipperary, for another lovely meal and a few celebratory drinks, safe in the knowledge that we didn't have to hit the road the next morning until 10:00am...a lie in!

On Monday morning, August

4th, the weather was beautiful as we left Tipperary and set off for Wicklow to tackle the last Munro, Lugnaquilla (925m). Here, Tina Cadogan (Club PRO) led us up from Fenton's Pub in the Glen of Imaal, starting at 1:00pm. We reached the summit in just over two hours and the buzz in the group was electric! There were lots of celebratory hugs and kisses and relief that we had conquered all fourteen Irish Munros.

A great weekend

We adjourned to Fenton's Pub for a drink, having completed our 14th Munro in just over 3½ hours, in a distance of 13.5km with an ascent of 772m. Here, everyone who had completed the challenge was presented with a certificate in memory of a great weekend. We adjourned

to Bardon's of Kilcullen for our last really nice, well-earned meal, to finish off the weekend in style.

The challenge was a great success after months of planning, training and organising by Maureen Twomey. There were lots of laughs, great teamwork and a few aches and pains thrown in to make it a memorable event, one which I will never forget.

I'm proud to have been a part of this remarkable team and to have completed the challenge. And we raised money for a worthy cause, raising over €2,000 during the three-day event.

► Catherine Quinlan has been a member of Limerick Climbing Club, and of Mountaineering Ireland, since 2009 and is currently the club's Environmental Officer. In September 2011, she obtained the Mountain Skills Award ■

THIS SPRING, WATCH OUT FOR...

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

The skylark can be difficult to distinguish from the meadow pipit, but its song is helpful. The male skylark defends his spring territory by ascending 50-100m where he hovers, warbling incessantly (chirruping for up to 15 minutes at a stretch) before plummeting to the ground. The meadow pipit flies lower and his song is shorter, thinner in sound, and he sings as he flutters down.

The skylark's distinctive head crest rises up when the bird is alarmed. In the uplands, skylarks feed mostly on seeds from grasses and sedges. Once a common farmland bird, changes to cereal production and increased use of pesticides now mean the upland margins are important for summer breeding.

The skylark is one of the species featured in *Walking with Wildlife*, an insight guide to the flora and fauna of Northern Ireland's uplands, published by Mountaineering Ireland with funding assistance through the Challenge Fund 2014/2015.

Work is currently underway to develop a similar guide for the Wicklow Mountains and the Blackstairs, and another for the mountains of Galway and Mayo. Mountaineering Ireland has secured part-funding for these through the Local Agenda 21 Partnership Fund. **Helen Lawless**

► Copies of all of the *Walking with Wildlife* guides will be available, free of charge, in May. If you or your club would like to request copies, please email info@mountaineering.ie ■



Skylark: bird of upland and coastal grasslands. Photo: Anthony McGeehan