

Connemara Mountain Walking Festival

BenBaun - Saturday Walk A

Peak the highest mountain in Galway

The Twelve Bens (Na Beanna Beola means the peaks of Beola) is a mountain range of 12 peaks that are visible from almost any point in Connemara. The mountains domineer much of the topography of the area with grey glassy peaks and boggy open hillsides. Sheer cliffs amid long glaciated valleys and torn streams make this walk demanding and dramatic and highly satisfying.

The walk along a bog road on the valley floor. The first real climb starts after 2km where a narrow spur rises towards the summit, the ground then steepens so the walk follows a sheep track across the face of BenBaun to a Mass rock. The walk then skirts around a loose shale section and continues upward through rugged terrain to the summit of BenBaun (725m). From here take in the views of real Connemara and the innumerable dappled lakes as the walk horseshoes around the hill to Muckanaght (654m). A rugged decline to Maumnascapla, one of the many cols which then rises immediately onto Benbrack (582m) and Benbaun (beag) (477m). It is here that the Kylemore valley opens up and there are spectacular views of the abbey, church, lakes aswell as Benchoona and Ballinakill Harbour. The homeward downhill is soft and easy going and joins onto an old trail alongside the Mweelin River. Overall you will have engaged with 5 of the 12 Bens.

Distance 15km Ascent 1,180 total climb Time 7/8hrs



Sheeffry Mountains - Saturday Walk B

Taking the path least tread

Sheeffry Mountains (Cnoic Shíofra or the Fairy Mountains) are a series of hills, clustered through grassy led quiet slopes and weathered rock outcrops. The walk starts close to the Sheeffry pass, with views across to Tawnyard Lough, Bengorm and Bencreggan. Most of the climbing will be complete after 3.5km when the mountain plateaus out at Tievnabinnia. From there the walk skirts the narrow path on a very slight incline past trigonometrical point at Tievummera (762m); the going is easy and soft. The views are spectacular with steep slopes and cliffs on both sides of the narrow path, Doolough and the Delphi valley are visible along with Mweelrea and Atlantic coastline glimpses.

A short stony downhill scramble just below the brow after the summit needs to be cautiously approached, before straggling downwards towards the Glenkeen valley and Carrowniskey River. The Sheeffry Mountains often receive little acclaim but the scenery, landscape and experience are second to none, this walk takes you through the best of it.

Distance 13km track

Ascent 960m total climb

Time 5+ hrs



Saturday Walk C

Western Way day 1 Tawnyard to Aasleagh

This trail is a section of the wonderful Western Way from Tawnyard at the base of the Sheeffry Mountains and finishes at Aasleagh near Leenane. The walk starts out at a spectacular layby overlooking Tawnyard Lake and Glenumera forest. The trail is primarily flat and starts at the highest point so it is as they say 'all downhill'. The initial sheltered gravel roadway creeps downward towards the eastern side of Tawnyard and Derrintin Lakes, along planted pine, heather and bog cotton meadows. The walk then reaches the valley floor at Houstons Bridge along the pristine waters of Erriff River. Views of the Partry and Maumtrasna Mountains dominate the skyline to the south while Bengorm Mountain introduces itself gradually to the North. The southern grassy riverbank plays host to the downstream dry trail westward, which meanders casually with glimpses of wildlife such as otters, kingfishers, salmon, fox and heron to name but a few. The sounds, sights and scents of this riparian arena are captivating, the water rumbling amplifies as the walk brings you intimate with fabulous Aasleagh waterfall underneath the dominant Scots pine. And like the sea greets the river, so must the walker meet trails end, for now.

Distance: 10 km trail in total



Mweelrea - Sunday Walk A

Peak the highest mountain in Mayo

Mweelrea Mountain (Cnoc Maol Réidh) is the highest mountain in Connaught (814m), rising from the bowels of wild Atlantic seascape in dramatic upland ruggedness. The mountain offers one of the finest panoramic views in Ireland on a good day although often shrouded in mist and mystery, the walk is always best undertaken with a guide.

This year the walk will commence on the North shore of Doolough and through the gap in the loughs to the natural Ramp path amid house sized boulders. The airy glacial cliff edges pitch steadily to the first peak of Ben Bury, then skirting the horseshoe to the exposed summit. The narrow split ridge leads north eastward with surges of long and sometimes steep declines onto Tonatleva hill and a benign forest track guiding us tea-wards and bun-bound to the fabulous Delphi valley.

Distance: 15km track

Ascent 1,120m total climb

Time 7hrs



Maumtrasna - Sunday Walk B

Challenge the Devil

Maumtrasna Mountains (Mám Trasna meaning the crossing pass) has abundant corrie features carved coarsely throughout the mountain face, with uncompromising gullies, rock configurations and geology. In comparison the summit is a large flat and boundlessly indulgent plateau capable of potentially fitting many football pitches.

The walk will start at Glenacally Bridge and meander along crystal clear streamscape and waterfalls. The first climb will be gradual but start to steepen before the brow onto the Maumtrasna plateau. It is difficult to find the summit here as it appears all flat but a short hike to trigonometrical station Maumtrasna (673m) the landscape dramatically unfolds in appreciation of the views of Lough Mask and Lough Nafooe. The walk then turns westward, along the belligerent border between counties Mayo and Galway and onto Knocklaur (518m). The mountain drops down into a coll before a steady push for the Devils Mother (645m); the views here are spectacular on a fine day with evidence of glaciated valleys, Killary Fjord and Tawnaleen. The walk continues downhill along the border softly and steadily until the first sight of the Carraig Bar is visible where the smell of the scones and a warm cuppa will be a most timely...I mean timely.

Distance 15km Ascent 980m total climb Time 5/6hrs



Sunday Walk C

Western Way day 2 Leenane to Inagh

This trail is also a section of the wonderful Western Way and nearly a follow on from Saturdays walk from Aasleagh. The walk starts out in the heart of the village which is at the head of the Killary Harbour and follows the road westward past the pier to the offroad section near Derrynacleigh. The first section is a gradual incline both grassy and rocky in equal measure, with stunning views of the Killary which shimmers on the encompassing mountain ranges of Mweelrea and Garraun. The walk is at its highest point after 2km at 120m, the trail then drumlins south towards the Glencraff valley and wood. Much of the forest is being harvested at the moment; this has opened up views to the east of the Maumturk Mountains and the silver peaked Twelve Bens to the west. The remoteness and silence is enchanting, as the trail weaves along the soft floor of the Maumturks. The feeling as you step forward here is that you are taking a step back in time, striding gurgling streams and long boggy meadows, this is the essence and core of Connemara.

Distance 15km trail in total

