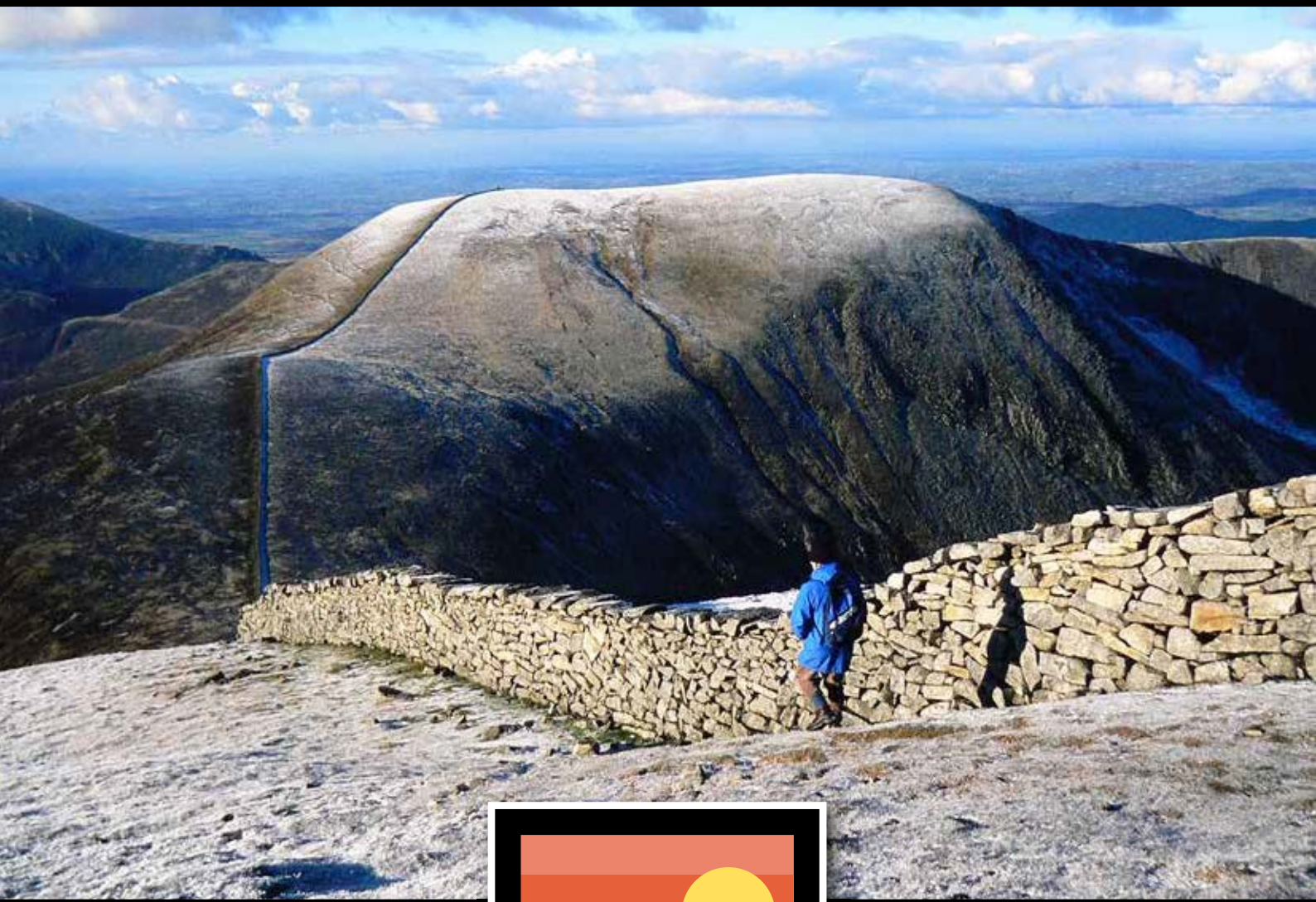


MOURNE MISCELLANY

Celebrating 50 years of walking in the Mourne





Comhairle Ceantair
**an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin**

**Newry, Mourne
and Down**
District Council

The Council would like to congratulate the **Mourne Rambling Group** on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary and wishes the club continued success in the future



Editorial and Acknowledgements.

The Editorial Committee has taken great pleasure working together on this special publication to mark the MRG's 50th Anniversary. Our aim has been to ensure that the legacy of the past is documented, in both words and pictures, as a reminder of the work undertaken over the years to keep this club a thriving and welcoming base for experienced and aspirant hillwalkers alike. Fifty years of hill-walking in the MRG are well worth treasuring and worthy of celebration. We hope that the articles and photographs herein will stir happy memories of past times and serve as a lasting record and souvenir of the five decades members have tramped the length and breadth of the Kingdom of Mourne. For others the Journal might serve as an insight into the club's activities, both past and present. Many thanks to all who have contributed to this publication, in text and/or photographs.

Finally thank you to our advertisers, without whose help this special edition would not have been financially viable.

Fionnula Carragher, Harry Goodman, Peter Mc Gowan, Vincent Trainor (Editorial Committee)

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Rambling On: 50 Years of the Mourne Ramblers



Many important and life changing events happened in 1969: man first walked on the moon, the first Concorde test flight took place, Woodstock hosted its rock festival, and the first communication was sent through the ARPANET, the predecessor to the Internet.

Set against these events, the setting up of the Mourne Rambling Group (MRG) may seem like a minor feat, but the flourishing of the club during the last half-century is something to be celebrated. It began in the year that soldiers were first deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland, it survived the dark days of the Troubles and has continued to flourish into the dawn of the twenty-first century.

This journal commemorates the fifty years of the Mourne Rambling Group, and includes pieces written specifically for this publication, as well as some items from the archives of the regular MRG Newsletter that was started in 1981. The variety of articles range from memories of the early days of the club, to changes of clothing and equipment through the years, to how the club has embraced new technology: a genuine miscellany. It can offer no more than a flavour of the history of the club, but I hope that you enjoy its combination of old and new, seasoned with photographs of people and places that have formed the fabric of the Mourne Ramblers.

The club organises walks each Sunday (except if Christmas falls on a Sunday), and this regular availability of an appropriate hike in the hills is one of the strengths of the club. There can be up to four groups of walkers from the Mourne Ramblers enjoying a day in the hills on any given Sunday, then departing at the end of the day, "leaving no trace", so that others can continue to enjoy hill walking in the years to come.

This was the notion originally conceived by our founder, Clarence Cheney: "friends ... meeting occasionally during weekends ... to enjoy an afternoon leisurely ramble within the Kingdom of Mourne area".

Long may it last!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P McGowan'.

Peter McGowan
Chair-Mourne Rambling Group

How it all Began...

Reflections by Clarence Cheney, President and founder of the club, introducing the first Mourne Rambling Group newsletter

Some fifteen years ago, a small party of friends were meeting occasionally during weekends in the Mourne area, apparently with the same outlook, to enjoy an afternoon leisurely ramble within the Kingdom of Mourne area. So successful were those social events that applications began to pour in for details of membership of that small party and a meeting was called to discuss the possibility of forming a proper group, which resulted in the formation of The Mourne Rambling Group. Applications continued and a few basic rules were laid down for the guidance of members and so the success of the earliest days continued. It was soon to be noticed that several friendships began to form amongst the members – even ‘Cupid’ itself was at work.

At the beginning, an afternoon’s ramble was usually one particular peak in the Mournes, but the extension of membership brought about new ideas and so an occasional trip to other parts away from the ‘Home-Land’, not only in Northern Ireland but further afield, was refreshing and the call came from places like Rathlin Isle, Wicklow, the Sperrins and more recently Glencoe and Ben Nevis in Scotland, etc, from which several members will have many pleasant memories.

The success of the group continues and The Hand of Friendship is extended to all.

Clarence Cheney, President
(MRG Newsletter 1983)



Clarence Cheney



The Earliest Days in the Mourne Rambling Group



Vincent Trainor

1969 was the year in which the Mourne Rambling Group officially came into existence. It was started under the guidance of Clarence Cheney. Along

with a group of friends they would have had regular Sunday walks in the Mourne Mountains and elsewhere. Of course, not everyone would have been out every Sunday. So it seems that Clarence, being the resourceful man that he was, began to provide 'Rambling Notes' for local papers such as the Outlook and the Mourne Observer as well as the Belfast Telegraph (I believe).

“..these walking pioneers”

These notes gave an outline of where the group had walked the previous weekend and (more importantly) where they planned to meet for the next Sunday walk. As you would expect, some other readers of the articles became interested to know more and wondered if and how they might join with these walking pioneers.

Well, I do not know exactly when and where the first official Mourne Rambling Group walk took place, but it seems to have been in the latter end of 1969; I do not have an exact date.

So what was it like to be a member of the Mourne Rambling Group 50 years ago? I have in my possession a little red book which gives many interesting

facts of the earliest years. This book is a meticulous volume containing names and addresses of members, statements of account, income and expenditure, etc. The first year for which we have a kind of membership list is 1970. In those pre-decimal days, the membership fee was the princely sum of ten shillings. It looks like there were about 50 paid-up members, the income being £27-0-0d, the expenses £12-13-4d, leaving a balance of £14-6-8d. The Group paid an affiliation fee of £1 to the Rambling Association of Great Britain. 1971 was an interesting year. All payments up to 14 February were paid in 'old money'. All payments after Decimal Day, 15 February, were in the decimal currency, so membership became 50p a year. In 1973 the annual sub increased to £1 per annum. It looks like the group had about 50 members then.

The table below shows how the membership fee has increased over the years.

1969 - 1972	10/- (£0.50)
1973 - 1978	£1
1979 - 1988	£2
1989 - 1990	£3
1991 - 2000	£5
2001	£7.50
2002	£10
2003 - 2005	£15
2006 - 2008	£18
2009 - 2010	£20
2011 - 2019	£22

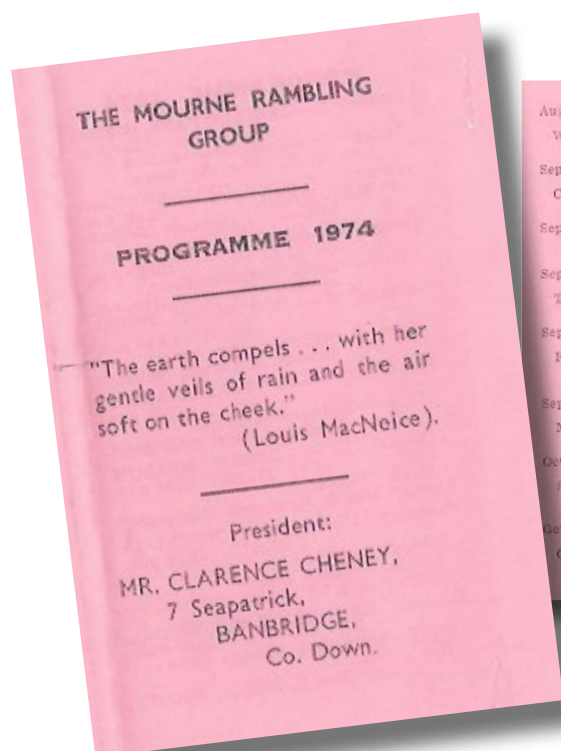
In the formative years, there was only one group of walkers. By 1981, demand necessitated a split into A and B groups. This continued up until 1993 when the C group was formed although there wasn't a C group walk every week until 1998. The D group came into being in 2015 on selected Sundays and the number of walks for them has gradually increased each year.

In the beginning, the Sunday walks started at 12.30. It seems hard to believe that you would have much of a walk, especially in the short days of winter, but that was how it was then. In 2008 a starting time of 10.30 appeared on the programme and that has been the starting time ever since.

It seems that 1971 was the first year programmes were provided as there is an item in my little Red Book of 500 programmes on 18 January 1971 for £7-10-0d. I have a copy of every programme since 1974 up to the present. They make very interesting reading. Way back then, there was a venue given for every walk during the year, as well as the starting time, the leader's name

and the leader's home town. The programme also listed the number of mountains proposed to be walked on each Sunday. The programme of 2019 (and for many previous years) is rather different because with more groups each Sunday, more leaders' names have to be accommodated. A lot of our older members regret the omission from the programme of where the walk is to go.

I hope that this article has given some idea of the development of the Mourne Rambling Group from its earliest days. We owe a great debt to the pioneers who had the foresight to get the group up-and-running and set it on its way to provide the wonderful experiences we still have every week.



<p>August 25 — CCHULLION (311313). 12.30 p.m. White Plains - Pot of Legawberry. Leader: G. McCreery (Killinehy).</p> <p>September 1 — LEITHIM LODGE (224257). 12.30 p.m. Crotchieve. Leader: L. Waring (Holywood).</p> <p>September 8 — DROMARA HILLS (322422). 12.30 p.m. Leader: P. Clough (Belfast).</p> <p>September 15 — DONARD PARK (372304). 12.30 p.m. Thomas - Eagle Rock - Donard. Leader: Miss P. Wallace (Belfast).</p> <p>September 22 — ATTICAL (280185). 12.30 p.m. Ford - Red Bog - Shanileve - Eagle - Windy Gap. Leader: Mrs. C. Mackle (Kilkeel).</p> <p>September 29 — DEERS MEADOW (271253). 12.30 p.m. Muck - Slieve Lough Shannagh - L. Shannagh Track.</p> <p>October 6 — BLOODY BRIDGE (359279). 12.30 p.m. Slievenagerragh - Spence's Mt. - Wall - Crossone. Leader: J. Taylor (Portadown).</p> <p>October 13 — ROSTREVOR SQUARE (179184). 12.30 p.m. Ghana River Valley. Leader: S. McKnight (Kilkeel).</p>	<p>October 20 — OTT MOUNTAIN (268271). 12.30 p.m. Carn - L. Shannagh - Doon - Ben Linn - Ben - Linn. Leader: T. Harrison (Belfast).</p> <p>October 27 — BOURKE'S PARK (358223). 12.30 p.m. Blue Lake - Ben Cross Reservoir - Bignish - <i>could not find the right way</i> Leader: P. Clough (Belfast).</p> <p>November 3 — LEITHIM LODGE (224257). 12.30 p.m. Rostrevor Forest. Leader: Miss P. Wallace (Belfast).</p> <p>November 10 — DEERS MEADOW (271253). 12.30 p.m. Pigeon - M'more - Eagle - Sl. na Geogh. Leader: Mrs. C. Mackle (Kilkeel).</p> <p>November 17 — HILLTOWN SQUARE (211259). 12.30 p.m. Carnoon - Standing Stone. Leader: Mrs. McNeely (Newcastle).</p> <p>November 24 — SPELGA DAM (267273). 12.30 p.m. Butter Mountain. Leader: H. Shaw (Newcastle).</p> <p>December 1 — DONARD PARK (372304). 12.30 p.m. Glen River - Saddle - Commedagh - Shan Slieve. Leader: Miss B. Henderson (Newcastle).</p> <p>December 8 — DEERS MEADOW (271253). 12.30 p.m. Pigeon - Moughanmore. Leader: J. Mackle (Kilkeel).</p>	<p>December 15 — HEN MOUNTAIN (233277). 12.30 p.m. (Venue Rostrevor Road). Muckan - Hen - Cock. Leader: J. Taylor (Portadown).</p> <p>December 22 — CCHULLION (311313). 12.30 p.m. Bearnagh. Leader: G. McCreery (Killinehy).</p> <p>December 29 — CROCS NA FEOLA (290250). 12.30 p.m. Slievenageogh. Leader: T. Harrison (Belfast).</p>
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MEMORANDA

Walks begin punctually.
Breaking off into splinter groups is discouraged.
Close gates — except when meant to be left open.
Leave no litter. Take your litter home.
The 1in. Ordnance Survey map is used.
There are 6 figures given for each starting point. The first two figures give the number of the vertical line. The fourth and fifth figures give the number of the horizontal line. The remaining figures give fractions towards the next line.
Membership fee is £1 per year.
Enquiries to — Miss P. Wallace (secretary), 6 Devon Parade, Belfast, BT4 1LT.



1973

A Year in the Life of the Mourne Ramblers

MRG Newsletter 1983

In 1973, the UK (and Ireland and Denmark) joined the European Common Market; Northern Ireland saw the introduction of the Proportional Representation system of voting, which resulted in the ill-fated Sunningdale Assembly; the war in Vietnam came to an end, but war flared up in the Middle East, resulting in an energy crisis for the West. Meanwhile, the Mourne Rambling Group met as usual at 12.30 every Sunday afternoon, "except where stated on the programme".



Sunday 29th April



A bus outing to the Giant's Causeway was arranged. The bus left Kilkeel, picking up people from Kilkeel and Newcastle and then on to Supermac at the top of the Ormeau Road to pick up people from the Belfast area. The day turned out a lovely sunny day and on arrival at the Giant's Causeway, we had lunch in the Nook. Then some of the group walked along the lower path and some along the top path.



Port Bradden and White Park Bay

I was among the number who went along the top. The views were lovely and the day was so clear that the coast of Scotland was plain to see. At Pliskin Head we waited for the other group to join us and then we went along the path to Dunseverick Castle, with great views of Rathlin and Fair Head in the distance. We then went by Port Bradden and finally Whitepark Bay where we had some tea and joined the bus which was waiting for us there. The run back was via Ballycastle and the Antrim Coast Road with very clear views of the Antrim Hills and the coast of Scotland. We arrived back at Supermac with a walk and a day to remember.

Sunday 3rd June

Mourne Wall Walk held by the Youth Hostel Association. As usual, many of the Mourne Rambling Group completed the walk. The day was very good and en route we had welcome refreshment from Clarence and his willing band of helpers.

Sunday 2nd September

Mourne Rambling Group met at Leitrim Lodge, Jim Mackle from Kilkeel leading. He took us to Gruggandoo which overlooked the Ghann River. We had our lunch there. After lunch, we went to Slieve Roosley. We then descended to the Hilltown-Rostrevor Road where we climbed Crotlieve Mountain. Jim pointed out a standing stone which was called the Grey Lady. We then returned to Leitrim Lodge where Mrs Meneely was there with tea and biscuits.

Sunday 9th September

Joined the Mourne Rambling Group on the Ardglass Road to walk in the Dromara Hills. Our leader was Peter Clough. We went first up Slievenagarran and came down a lane to Fry's Bridge, joining a road. Leaving the road, we went up Crotlieve where we had our lunch.

After lunch we went to Slieve Croob. On the top was an army station. Views of the rolling County Down countryside were in the foreground with the Mourne Mountains on the horizon. We then went to Slievenisky and back to the cars, where as usual we had a welcome cup of tea from Mrs Meneely.



Slievenisky from Slieve Croob

Sunday 16th September

Joined the Mourne Rambling Group at Donard Park. Our leader took us along the Glen River. We went to the Saddle by way of the gully, which was quite an exciting climb.

We then reached the wall and went down the Brandy Pad. There was a nice view down the Annalong Valley and on our right were the Commedagh Castles. Then we went off to the left to Slieve Beg and we had a look down the Devil's Coach Road and we then climbed Cove where we had our lunch.

While we were on Cove, there was a heavy shower, but it didn't last; the day had been nice until the shower. It then cleared and we returned by the Saddle and Glen River to Donard Park, where Mrs Meneely was there with a welcome cup of tea.



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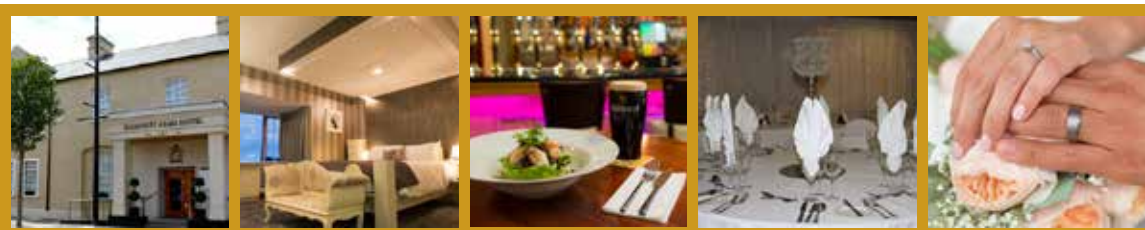
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A Mourne Rambler in Mountain Rescue



Jonathan Shields

I joined the Mourne Ramblers in 2014. At that time, I was actively working towards my Mountain Leader qualification and thus the experience of planning and leading walks was particularly appealing. I had my first outing in the Mournes aged 12 through my school mountaineering club.

After about a year or so of leading A walks, I completed my Mountain Leader Training in Snowdonia, Wales. This helped to reinforce skills such as navigation, leadership and group management. It built on skills gained walking in the UK and abroad.

“some simple lessons were learnt”

It was also at this time that I volunteered to join North West Mountain Rescue Team (NWMRT), being based in Newtownabbey. The team covers all of Northern Ireland with the exception of the Mourne Mountains area. I had never heard of the team previously and was shocked to learn of the number of annual call outs, particularly in the Belfast and Antrim Hills areas.

Progressing through Probation and onto Full Member status was relatively simple due to my



experience gained, including that with the Mourne Ramblers. I'm sure most Ramblers are aware of the various 'epics' experienced on my walks! Some simple lessons were learnt; always carry a head torch and a spare, plan your route as a leader and inform other leaders of your intentions.

A leader should never be embarrassed if something goes wrong on their walk. They should, however, know about various emergency procedures, how to lead peers in the mountains and how to lead a challenging but rewarding walk. I've had great joy in discussing this with fellow ramblers during training, on walks and the UFRC Gathering.

In 2018, I was Team Leader of NWMRT for one year, responsible for 60 volunteers across the province and around as many call outs per year. This role was simultaneously incredibly rewarding and challenging. The demands of the 24/7 operational nature of mountain rescue can be immense, added to by the need for training, fundraising and administration.

I have since moved on from the operational role, this year being elected as Chairperson of Mountain Rescue Ireland (MRI). MRI is the national body which represents the eleven member teams across the island of Ireland. The role is administrative; sourcing insurance, grants and representing teams at governmental level. It's a far cry from cold, wet nights on the hill!

(The Mourne Rambling Group makes a contribution each year to the North West Mountain Rescue Team and the Mourne Mountain Rescue Team out of club funds.)

IF...

If you can keep your head on Sunday morning
When Michael Fish says it's going to pour,
If you can keep on Mourne-wards without turning
Although your passengers are very far from sure;
If you can wait by Donard Park or Trassey,
All booted up and raring to go,
Even if the day's leader you don't fancy,
Perhaps because he or she's a bit too slow:

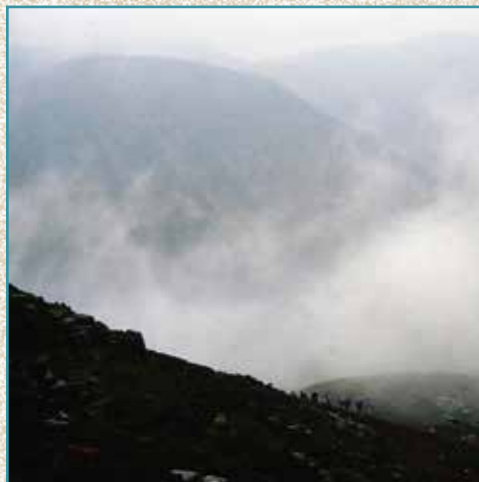
If you can dream of chasing up Muck's plaster
If you can bear to hold till Bearnagh's done,
If you can meet Triumph and Disaster
- Like following a hyperactive one;
If you can suffer Spence's mountain heather
And the bracken has masked every step you've trod,
Or get to Eagle Mountain despite the weather
Via Finlieve and the worst of hill-top bog:

If you can trek up Slieve Binnian when there's a fog
And down again by the quarry in the snow,
Or sweat up Lamagan like a sheep-dog,
Better equipped - with four legs - there to go;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To take your turn at leading all the way,
And struggle to the car park with nothing in you,
As if everything was easy on your day:

If you can walk with those that love a mountain
Teachers, nurses, shepherds - all your peers,
The 'craic' will flow as if it's from a fountain,
Fed by all the hill talk over years;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute,
With sixty seconds worth of distance won,
Yours is the Mourne land and all that's in it,
And - what is more - you'll ramble on, my son!

Square McCartney (with acknowledgements to
Rudyard Kipling)

MRG Newsletter 1998



The Impact of the Internet & Social Media on the Mourne Ramblers



Irene Cauley



Peter McGowan



Maggie Pridgen

One of the biggest changes to occur in the past 50 years has been the introduction and subsequent ubiquitous nature of the internet and social media.



Some of us can still remember the quaint days when external communication was primarily carried out by post and (landline) telephone, and people were not expected to be available 24/7. However, there were many good things about digital technology, including the ability to document and share information to a large number of people very quickly. The history of Information & Communication Technology and the Mourne Rambling Group is a text-book example of how the technology grew into being an essential part of communication. Irene Cauley was elected a member of the committee in the 1980s and her computing background was invaluable and led to the Group computerising its membership list and expanding its documents

literature (e.g. guidelines for walkers and leaders, constitution). However, it soon became obvious that a website would solve many of the problems of keeping members informed of updates. Although she was a keen web user, Irene was not a web developer, but nevertheless took on the task with gusto. The first few months were devoted to deciding what was required, designing the layout, and structuring the information so that it was logical and as intuitive as possible for members (and potential members) to find information. There was regular reporting back to the committee for comments and suggestions. The site went public in 2004 and comments from members were very favourable. It was a well structured useful first port-of-call for potential members and did the job for many years. It also was invaluable to the committee as a storage location for the master copies of minutes, newsletters etc.

However, the success of the website gave rise to some challenges – new people were turning up at the start of a walk, occasionally in groups of three or four, quite often badly kitted out and not fit for the walks. As they were being directed to the B or C groups in the first instance, our leaders were beginning to rebel and threatened not to lead. This was resolved by the introduction of New Members Officers in 2006 and the introduction of Aspirant or Tester walks for potential new members.

After five or six years, the website began to look a bit lack-lustre and in need of a makeover. Fortunately, during one of the Sunday walks, Irene discovered that a new member, Tom Creed, was a web developer and she persuaded him to lend a hand. Together with Loretto Coyle, who brought the experience of maintaining her own website, Tom and Irene redesigned the website, took out a formal contract with a web hosting site and registered the current web address (www.mourneramblers.org.uk) and email address (info@mourneramblers.org.uk).



Members were made aware of the ongoing work on the website and most importantly several keen photographers - notably Wilf Green, Harry Goodman and David Oldfield – were targeted for photographs and happily obliged. The new website was launched in 2011 and Tom agreed to maintain the site initially, but control was then passed back to Irene.

Over the years, the website has been down only once and that was over a weekend. However, the surprising thing was the number of people on the Sunday walk that informed Irene that the web was down – it was reassuring to know that people were accessing it on a regular basis.

Irene continued managing the website, but increasingly felt the need to pass on the responsibility to the next generation. Ian Stuart took it over for a few years, but his work commitments meant that he had to give it up, and responsibility passed back to Irene. Eventually, Robert Roulston was 'persuaded' to take over the web site in 2014/15 and the Club is grateful for Robert's continuing maintenance of the site.

The next development came when members were suggesting linking in with Facebook. This challenge was taken up by Lynda Martin, and the Mourne Ramblers' Facebook page went live in 2013. Responsibility for this was taken over by Maggie Pridgen in 2015.

The club's presence on social media was strengthened in 2016 when Maggie attended a Facebook course run by Walking In Your Community and then had the skills to exploit the potential of the media. There are now some 350 people viewing the Mourne Rambling Group Facebook page each week, which is nearly three times the number of club members! Many potential new members contact the club through Facebook, and they are then referred to the New Member Officers. Photographs of the weekly walks are often posted on Facebook, in addition to other newsworthy items.

Although Facebook has become the 'new kid on the block', the club's website is still a primary source of information for many. This became evident when an oversight on the website resulted in an incorrect starting point being published for one Sunday, and a number of members turned up at the wrong location! (Thankfully, someone had the brainwave of phoning one of the committee members, who was able to tell them where the walks were starting from and they were able to join the rest of the group for the normal Sunday walk. All's well that ends well!)



MRC

OFFICE BEARERS

YEAR	CHAIR	SECRETARY	TREASURER
1971	JIM MACKLE	CLARENCE CHENEY	GRACE WATT
1972	JIM MACKLE	CLARENCE CHENEY	GRACE WATT
1973	JIM MACKLE	CHRISTINE MACKLE	JOHN TAYLOR
1974	JOE BARTLEY	JOHN TAYLOR	PAT WALLACE
1975	TREVOR HARRISON	JOHN TAYLOR	GORDON McCREERY
1976	TOMMY HOLMES	JOHN TAYLOR	GORDON McCREERY
1977	NORMAN GLOVER	BARBARA KYLE	GORDON McCREERY
1978	DAVE WATSON	BARBARA KYLE	GORDON McCREERY
1979	GORDON McCREERY	PAT BECK	DAVE WATSON
1980	VINCENT TRAINOR	PAT BECK	DAVE WATSON
1981	VINCENT TRAINOR	PAT BECK	DAVE WATSON
1982	JOHN TAYLOR	ANN McCONVILLE	DAVE WATSON
1983	ALAN PARKINSON	JOAN HIGGINS	DAVE WATSON
1984	SHELAGH MURPHY	JOAN HIGGINS	VINCENT TRAINOR
1985	DAVID OLDFIELD	LIZ McFARLANE	VINCENT TRAINOR
1986	MYRDDIN RUDDOCK	JANE MINTY	VINCENT TRAINOR
1987	VINCENT MURPHY	FRANCES BURNS	VINCENT TRAINOR
1988	IRENE CAULEY	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1989	IRENE CAULEY	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1990	PATRICK FLUSK	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1991	PATRICK FLUSK	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1992	DELIA CUNNINGHAM	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1993	DELIA CUNNINGHAM	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1994	DELIA CUNNINGHAM	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1995	SQUARE MCCARTNEY	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1996	SQUARE MCCARTNEY	PAT BECK	VINCENT TRAINOR
1997	BILLY JARDINE	JIM HORGAN	VINCENT TRAINOR
1998	FIONNUALA CARRAGHER	JIM HORGAN	VINCENT TRAINOR
1999	FIONNUALA CARRAGHER	JIM HORGAN	VINCENT TRAINOR
2000	TERRY MAGOWAN	JIM HORGAN	VINCENT TRAINOR
2001	TERRY MAGOWAN	JIM HORGAN	VINCENT TRAINOR
2002	MARY MAGOWAN	JIM HORGAN	VINCENT TRAINOR
2003	MARY MAGOWAN	MARIE DORAN	VINCENT TRAINOR
2004	LORETTO COYLE	MARIE DORAN	DAVID OLDFIELD
2005	LORETTO COYLE	MARIE DORAN	DAVID OLDFIELD
2006	TERRY MAGOWAN	GERRY FARRINGTON	DAVID OLDFIELD
2007	GEORGE ACHESON	GERRY FARRINGTON	DAVID OLDFIELD
2008	GEORGE ACHESON	GERRY FARRINGTON	DAVID OLDFIELD
2009	GEORGE ACHESON	IAN STUART	GARY BROWNE
2010	VINCENT TRAINOR	GEORGE ACHESON	GARY BROWNE
2011	VINCENT TRAINOR	GEORGE ACHESON	GARY BROWNE
2012	VINCENT TRAINOR	GEORGE ACHESON	GARY BROWNE
2013	VINCENT TRAINOR	GEORGE ACHESON	GARY BROWNE
2014	HARRY GOODMAN	GEORGE ACHESON	VINCENT TRAINOR
2015	HARRY GOODMAN	GEORGE ACHESON	VINCENT TRAINOR
2016	HARRY GOODMAN	GEORGE ACHESON	VINCENT TRAINOR
2017	PETER McGOWAN	GEORGE ACHESON	VINCENT TRAINOR
2018	PETER McGOWAN	GEORGE ACHESON	VINCENT TRAINOR
2019	PETER McGOWAN	GEORGE ACHESON	VINCENT TRAINOR

Mourne Rambling Group Members 2019 (& Dates of Joining)

1970: Patricia Beck
 1971: Gordon McCreery, John Taylor
 1972: David Oldfield
 1976: Vincent Trainor
 1978: Irene Cauley, Owen McManus
 1979: Shelagh Murphy
 1982: Fionnuala Carragher
 1984: Philip Gunn
 1986: Dora McCavera
 1987: Patrick Hanratty, Dermot MacDermott, Andrew McKibbin, Pat Tumilty
 1988: Loretto Coyle, Harry Goodman, Toni Taylor
 1989: Rodney Magowan, Carmel Quinn
 1990: Barry Scott
 1992: Domnall McComish, John McGivern, Elizabeth Sloan
 1993: Ken Reid
 1994: Alice McParland
 1995: Joan Hulme, Terry Magowan, Sarah Newell
 1996: Gerry Farrington
 1997: Gary Browne, Teresa Hughes, Ian Stuart
 1998: Thomas Cummings, Hazel Smyth, Raymond Smyth
 1999: Patricia Connolly, Raymond Connolly, Marie Doran
 2000: John Tweed, Anne Trainor*
 2002: George Acheson, Seamus Gilmore, Pamela Quierly, Trevor Russell
 2003: Joan Calvert, Ellen Greaney, Marie Hoeritzauer, Robert Roulston, Cecilia Sochor

2004: Anna Carragher
 2006: Thomas Hughes, Catherine McAllister
 2007: Wilf Green, Ian Proctor
 2008: Peter McGowan, Wendy Patterson, Helen Templeton
 2010: Doreen Green
 2011: Vincent McKenna, Hilja McMahon
 2012: Joan Hamilton, Francis Mackey, Anne Moore
 2013: Geraldine Browne, Laura Fawcett, Raymond Gray, Helen Henderson, Ann Keown, Victor Knox, Joseph McKnight, Martin Overend, Norman Patton, Maggie Bridgen, Kingsley Thompson, Donna Webb
 2014: Liam Dean, Reg Magowan, Monica McClay, Janet Muller, Bert Rima, Jonathan Shields
 2015: Denis Drinkell, Reynold Gribbin, Robert Marshall, Mark McGinley, Bernie Moore, Jackie Wales
 2016: Anthony Forsythe, Ciaran Hanna*, Seamus Hughes, Rafia Hussain, Gabriel McCauley, Bernard McLean, Damian O'Connor, Nuala O'Connor, Mary O'Dea, Noel Rice
 2017: Joseph Agnew, James Aitken, Roisin Franklin, Christina Gibson, Elaine MacFarlane, Neill Matson, Catherine McAuley, Gillian McClelland, Michael Power, David Reid*
 2018: Philip Appleton, Andy Bolwell, Kevin Brazil, Adam Brett, Robert Campbell, Patricia Chapa, Maire Hanna, Olwen Herbison, Jana Hnojekova, Patricia Kelly, Mark Patience
 2019: Norman Elliott, Stephen Goodman, Karen Laurenson, Isabelle Martin, Maggie Martin, Patricia McLoone, Jane McMeekin, Mark Miskimmin, Liz Osborne*, Robert Osborne*, Mel Pettyfer, Mary McDermott, Jeffrey Smyth, Alan Stapleton, Graeme Stevenson, Bernard Walsh, Moira Walsh, Linda Watson

List compiled by Vincent Trainor (* denotes an associate member)

WANT TO HANG OUT FOR A WHILE?

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Passing Thoughts: Walking in the Mourne



Fionnuala Carragher

As hillwalkers, members of the Mourne Rambling Group are familiar with the Mourne landscape: its granite peaks, mountain passes, bogs, loughs and reservoirs. Ramblers are aware of the hard and easier mountain slopes and the well-trodden tracks and lesser paths.

A welcome landmark when out on a Sunday walk is of course, 'The Wall' or to use its older, official name - the 'Belfast Water Commissioners Boundary Wall'. It is now simply marked on contemporary maps as the Mourne Wall. A few summits also serve as sites for modern communication masts. But there are many less dramatic features in the landscape which are sought by Ramblers when out on the hills, such as established stiles and bridges and the best place to ford a stream, to climb over a stone wall or wire fence. Best of all are the sheltering outcrops or hollows suitable for the group to stop for a banana- or lunch-break.



Weather permitting, on most Sunday walks the opportunities to gain excellent panoramic views are appreciated by the Ramblers. Once the summit is reached, a well-earned rest is often passed by Ramblers jointly identifying [or just guessing] which peak is which; individuals name their favourite mountains in the Mourne and study the more distant peaks. The Isle of Man can be easily identified but there is often a debate as to what a particular mountain outline on the horizon may be: the Hill of Howth, the two Sugarloafs, the Scottish or the Cumberland coastline or, taking the inland views, a probable view of Lough Neagh or the faraway Sperrins and the mountains of Donegal?

Nature in the Mourne is often keenly observed by

Ramblers and although most wildlife gives noisy walking groups a wide berth, the common birds of the mountainside, fields and hedgerows can be seen and heard. The large black ravens are distinguished by their pruk-pruk call and acrobatic flight, the meadow pipit by its darting flight and thin call, the summer skylark by its ascendant hovering flight and musical song.

Other passing encounters with nature belong to walks and to individually remembered sights or encounters: the small frog captured is hand inspected by all the group and then released; the quick dart of a small lizard into a crevice; the alarm calls (now long gone) of nesting peregrine falcons by the slabs of Bearnagh; the glimpse of a deer in Tullybrannigan; the first call in spring of the cuckoo by Long Seefin. Most astonishing of all is the sudden appearance and then disappearance of that most mysterious of all mountain creatures: the Irish mountain hare.

***“Their scattered bones rest
upon the slopes”***

Taken for granted too are the farm livestock which seasonally graze upon the mountain pastures; above all the black-faced Mourne sheep whose numerous, single line sheep tracks we have all followed at times contouring around mountain sides. Their scattered bones rest upon the slopes. Both the older granite-boulder built 'sheepfolds' and new cement-built and metal-gated sheep pens are man-made features present in the landscape. Several Mourne mountains bear names which confirm ancient sheep pastures.

Lower down the mountain sides may be found cattle and occasionally a few ponies. One unconventional Mourne resident which Mourne ramblers of 50 years ago did not encounter is the reindeer whose home is now at Santa's Cottage, below Altnataggart.

Held in the Mourne Mountains nomenclature are reminders of the natural history in the Mournes; centuries ago eagles did once soar over Eagle Mountain and Eagle Rock. Rock doves nested on Pigeon and Hen and Cock mountains. But there are still badgers and foxes in the Mournes and [allegedly] red squirrels in the forestry plantations. Gone almost from living



memory are the small flocks of semi-feral goats which once grazed on the slopes of Slieve Donard and other Mourne slopes. The high-sided, awkward track leading from the Hare's Gap down towards the path and ford was until a few decades past known as the Goat's Path but the name is now rarely used.

The mark of man is, of course, well attested in the Mourne mountains; but not surprisingly there are no permanent dwellings in the High Mournes, though summer pasture or booley huts were once a feature of certain locations of which the best historically recorded site is the Deer's Meadow.

Enclosed stonewalled fields and farmhouses are found in sheltered lowland locations and while there are ruins of older farmhouses there are also many comfortable modernised farm-houses and ordinary houses. Older weathered, low-height field walls are now obvious survivors of earlier decades of rural life. Their replacements are the ever-present 'wire and post' wooden fencing or the massive granite boulder walls, the latter being constructed, not by hand, but by machinery. I wonder what these high walls will look like in fifty years time?

A contemporary feature of the rural landscape is the singular, tall windmill-style, wind generator. Wind generators are now familiar landscape features as indeed are the earlier 20th century telegraph poles and communication masts. Over the centuries, hill farming has provided a living for rural families in the Mournes. In the 19th and into the early 20th centuries there were famous sheep fairs held in Greencastle, Hilltown and Dundrum. Farms were small and the main crops grown were potatoes, oats and wheat.

The original old routes through and around the Mourne mountains went along the coastline from Greencastle, towards Newcastle and Dundrum. At the Ballagh Pass [beside Bloody Bridge, formerly Midrace Pass] an inland track, famously called the Brandy Pad, led over the mountains to the Hare's Gap. (The older name for the Ballagh Pass was the Shepherds' Pass from the Rostrevor – Kilkeel direction).

Inland from Rostrevor, a busy country road led to the well-known locations of Deer's Meadow and the Spelga Pass and from there to Hilltown. Historically, Newcastle and Annalong were fishing villages and Kilkeel, [designated as the capital of the Kingdom of Mourne] a fishing and commercial centre. By the 18th century, Newcastle was established as a popular watering-hole/ seaside and Spa resort.

However, life was hard for many Mourne families; local hearsay has it that the letters spelling out the word Poverty may be discerned on the side of Slieve Muck, as viewed from the Bann's road which leads up to Slieve Lough Shannagh in the heart of the Mournes.

One ongoing response to rural hardship was depopulation as people moved to nearby towns and cities looking for employment. Many emigrants went further afield to Canada and the USA or they found a job and home across the water in Britain. The lovely and sentimental Percy French song 'Where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea', is after all, one of the many Irish songs of emigration.

However, the mountain slopes bear testimony to other forms of employment in the Mournes, most notably the quarrying and working of granite. Ramblers' walking routes in the Mournes utilise the many old quarry paths, and abandoned quarries are often chosen as rest or lunch stops. Present day hill walkers in the Mournes no longer hear the once distinctive metal noise of chisel and hammer upon granite, the 'clink-clink' sound of men working granite in the mountain quarries, but we are familiar with the left behind, often broken and incomplete, rectangular granite setts with their characteristic 'plug and feather' edging.

Another well-known aspect of Mournes is its woods, forests and smaller plantations; their names are familiar, namely, Donard Woods, Tollymore Forest and the Kilbroney Forest Park near Rostrevor. Smaller stands of woodland can be found on Clonachullion Hill, around the Fofanny Dam and the small Batt Estate plantation of trees near Leitrim Lodge which dates from the 1820s. The modern recreational trails through these woodlands and forest have largely been made by the Forestry authorities to service tree maintenance and logging activities; so shortcuts are few and some trails end abruptly. Sunday walkers will not encounter foresters at work, but we know the results of their work as we come across their large neat stacks of freshly



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clean cut timber by the side of the tracks, or perhaps the result of mechanised rough clearance of trees on slopes: suddenly no trees and a new vista opens over the landscape.



But forest trails sometimes fall into disuse or they are given a new dedicated, recreational function. Only a few decades ago, Rostrevor Forest Park was a location for pony trekking but recently this forest park has been actively promoted as the premier place in Ireland for competitive mountain biking. There are several bike trails including two challenging downhill trails. Oh, and there is also a family friendly 'Chronicles of Narnia Trail' in Kilbroney-Rostrevor Forest Park.

The Mourne are a landscape of granite and water, formed by ancient volcanic forces during the last Ice Age [c11,700 years ago,] and by the weather and the changing seasons. Most rivers and streams in the Mourne are spate rivers which after heavy rainfall can become raging torrents and are not advisable to cross, but in the Mourne foot bridges are scarce and fords are few. While on a walk, Ramblers are often obliged to retrace their steps upstream to find a safe river crossing and these interesting occasions can make a walk memorable.

On a good day's walk, it is exhilarating to come across a lovely rest site beside a mountain stream; natural beauty, a delight, and one reason why we return to walk in the Mourne. Nevertheless, hill walking is often challenging as each walk has its own character. Over the decades, Mourne Ramblers have experienced both pleasant and at times, thoroughly unpleasant and unnerving walks... known as 'Never Again' walks!

This is to be expected; because while they are not a true wilderness, the Mourne, are certainly part of the Great Outdoors. A few of the innermost glens and bogs do retain a lonely, silent quality of highland remoteness, but in truth, walkers are rarely far from a

recognised track or from the Wall. Sunday walkers will often encounter other walking groups, perhaps young Duke of Edinburgh students, casual walkers and their dogs and [no time to stop] Fell runners. Sometimes the distant sounds of road traffic can be heard or, above, the noise of a light aeroplane or helicopter. Infrequently, there will be a shout, call or whistle from a hill farmer at work, directing his sheep dog towards herding a flock of sheep. And, just to note, Mourne sheep can be a colourful breed, their sides and backs are now usually marked with daubs of bright pink or blue dye by the local farmers to denote ownership. But the most welcome companionship on Sunday walks [and on away trips] is our fellow members of the Mourne Rambling Group; invariably a friendly, helpful lot embracing both veteran members and younger and older more recently joined members. Individual walking abilities do vary from the fast walkers who can do several high summits per walk, to those who prefer the slower and more sedate, lower level walks. But whatever the pace of the walk, in each group, chat, banter and humour are rarely lacking. Opinions are readily given, and the outside world and its affairs is possibly set to rights.

Lastly, on a Mourne Mountain walk, 'the day that is in it' is a chief topic of conversation and consideration for individual Ramblers. But that is all to the good.... so, to another 50 years walking see you on the Hills.



Harry Shaw Challenge Walk



Joe Mc Knight

Harry Shaw was one of the founder members of the Mourne Rambling Group and one of its characters. In the days before Gore-Tex and wicking clothing Harry had a unique approach to kit selection. Members who knew him would not be surprised if his walking gear was what he had worn all week and it was always topped off with a cap. Harry was a strong walker and rarely used a compass. He didn't need to, he knew the mountains so well. As a young man he had spent many years in Canada where he worked in the Forestry Service. On returning to Ireland he worked with the Forestry Commission. Harry is remembered as a civil, quiet man who let his feet do the talking. The first Harry's Walk is believed to have taken place on Saturday 13th April, 1974. The walk began at Donard Park and was simply from Newcastle to Rostrevor led by Harry, who presumably devised the route. For many years 'Harry's Walk' was a fixture on the Mourne Ramblers' Walks Programme but as anyone who has walked this route will know it is not for the timid. Over time, the numbers undertaking the full walk dwindled and members started to do their own, shorter versions. Variations included starting at Newcastle and walking to Deer's Meadow or starting at Deer's Meadow and walking to Rostrevor: both challenging walks in their own right. The last time Harry's Walk was included in the programme was 2013. It was scheduled to take place on Sunday 12th May, 2013. Unfortunately, the weather on the day was horrendous and only 2 members turned out for the walk.



Walkers crossing Carn on their way to Slieve Muck

As part of the MRG 50th Anniversary celebrations, it was agreed that a 'Harry Shaw Challenge Walk' should be organised to commemorate and celebrate Harry's love of the Mournes and his contribution to the Mourne Ramblers. The date was set for the 1st June, 2019.

As with the original Harry's Walk, participants would walk from Donard Park, Newcastle to Kilbroney Park, Rostrevor via Deer's Meadow. The first segment is some 15.5k with approximately 1,000 metres of ascent, and from Deer's Meadow to Rostrevor is 14.5 kilometres with 650 metres of ascent. This is a challenging walk which should take between 8 and 10 hours and brings walkers

through some of the most remote and spectacular areas of the Mournes. By its very nature it is suitable for fit, experienced walkers who, if required, would be able to navigate through the hills in poor weather and / or visibility. Invitations were therefore made to members of the Mourne Ramblers and clubs affiliated to the Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs.

It was extremely important to the committee that the Challenge Walk was organised in a manner which reflected Harry's values as a walker and outdoor enthusiast. It was emphasized the Challenge Walk was not a race and no route would be specified or defined

by waymarkers or stewards. With the exception of a requirement to check in at Deer's Meadow participants would be free to choose their own route. Not having everyone taking the same route would minimise the impact of the event on the hills and paths.

In order to reduce traffic and the event's carbon footprint, walkers were encouraged to car-share and bus transport was organised from Kilbroney and Spelga Dam Carpark to the start at Donard Park.

Early on the morning of the 1st June a bus picked up walkers from Kilbroney Park and Spelga Dam Carpark and transported them to the starting point in Newcastle. The morning sky was grey and there was light drizzle but the forecast was for cloud, light showers and a gentle breeze during the day: very suitable weather for a long, challenging walk through the Mourne.



In all, 27 walkers set off from the starting point in Donard Park before 10.00am. Most of the participants were members of the Mourne Ramblers but there was also good representation from the Wee Binnians. For the organisers, attention now moved to the checkpoint at Deer's Meadow where they waited for the walkers, all the time praying that the weather would remain favourable.

Those waiting at Deer's Meadow had their binoculars focused on the slopes of Slieve Muck trying to spot the walkers as they descended through the thin cloud on the 'tops' toward the road. At the checkpoint there were refreshments, food and water for the walkers and they had the opportunity to take a short rest before tackling the remaining paths and hills on the way to Rostrevor.

Deer's Meadow was also a decision point for a number of walkers: to go on or to call it a day? While a couple of walkers, who had initially planned to finish at Rostrevor, decided to end their walk at Deer's Meadow, others who had planned only to walk the first segment decided they felt strong enough to walk on to Rostrevor.



Having accounted for all the starters at Deer's Meadow all that was left was to wait for them at the finish in Rostrevor. At Deer's Meadow it was noticeable that, despite having started in ones and twos, most of the walkers were in groups. After Deer's Meadow there was further consolidation and there is no doubt that it was only as a result of having help and encouragement from other members of their group that some of the walkers made it safely to the end of the walk.

As would be expected there was a significant time difference between the first and last finisher at Rostrevor. However, what really mattered was that each person had safely completed their own challenge and everyone enjoyed the walk and had a certificate to proclaim their achievement.

These events do not happen without a lot of effort and help from many people. In addition to the members of the Mourne Ramblers Committee, thanks are also due to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council for their help and support in providing facilities in Donard and Kilbroney Parks, Mourne Heritage Trust for their help during the planning phase and UFRC for advertising the Challenge Walk on their website. Thanks are also due to all the other volunteers who helped with organisation, printing, transport etc. etc. Apologies if anyone has been missed.



AWAY DAYS & WALKING WEEKENDS ON THE ROAD WITH THE MRG



On the Road with the MRG!



Harry Goodman



Nephin Bogs Mayo 2012 Leader Harry Goodman

Ever since the Mourne Rambling Group was formed our Annual Programme of Walks has included Trips Away either here in Ireland or further afield. Over the years Scotland, the Lake District and Snowdonia have all featured as popular choices. While these were most often organised between Easter and the Autumn bank Holiday week-end, David Oldfield also organised Winter Walking trips to the Scottish Highlands which were not for the faint hearted and required experience of snow and ice climbing as a minimum requirement. In earlier times back-packing was the chosen means of getting around with accommodation (tents) and food all being carried in the packs. On looking through old copies of the MRG Newsletter I found details of some trips away and was very impressed by the level of walking involved. An example from 1989, a trip to Connemara led by Gordon Mc Creery, is worth noting –

- **Day 1 Maumturks Walk 15 miles, 7,500 ft of ascent; strenuous walking; 10-12 hours**
- **Day 2 Glencoaghan Horseshoe (six of the twelve Bens); 10 miles 5,000ft ascent: 7-8 hours**
- **Day 3 Mweelrea 9 miles 3,500ft; 5-6 hours - (MRG Newsletter 1989)**

The Maumturks Walk is a route considered by many to be the most difficult challenge walk in Ireland and it is worth noting this was followed over the next two days by two more strenuous routes, either of which would be worthy of being the main challenge on any trip away. The Mourne Ramblers who made this trip and who, I am reliably informed, completed the walks are all worthy of belated commendation. This is even more noteworthy when we take into account that, when similar arrangements were made the previous year, MRG members had to abandon the walk due to adverse weather conditions and still came back for more!! This said I would not want members to feel all trips away are about “challenge”. In my experience, both as a leader and, as a participant, the most important benefit is always the opportunity trips give to visit places which we might not otherwise have walked in. Over the years these trips have evolved from tenting expeditions to the use of a wide range of B and B or half board accommodation and, dare I say, even Hotels with packed lunches, saunas, hot tubs etc., etc. Need I go on?

The photographs which follow are but a sample from over 100 MRG Trips Away over the past 50 years; sadly I could trace no photographic record of any trips made in the 1970's.



Lugnaquilla Wicklow 2018 : Led by Irish Rambling Club Dublin



Connemara 1982 Leader Steve McCoy



Achill Island 1987
Leader Myrddin Ruddock



Rathlin 1987
Leader Pat Beck



Donegal 1989
Leader Loretto Coyle



Lake District 1995
Leader Mary O' Callaghan



Connemara 1996
Leader Loretto Coyle



Goatfell, Arran 1998
Leader Donald Bell



Wicklow 1999
Leader Frank Hughes



Winter Walking Scotland 2001
Leader David Oldfield



Donegal 2002
Leader David Oldfield



Snowdonia 2006
Leader Gerry Farrington



Kerry 2008 Leaders Andrew Mc Kibbin,
Harry Goodman



Donegal 2010
Leader Brian Martin



Snowdonia 2010
Leader Andrew McKibbin



Galtees 2010
Leader Harry Goodman



Blackstairs and Mount Leinster 2013
Leader Harry Goodman



Comeragh Mountains 2016
Leader Peter Mc Gowan



Kerry 2016
Leader Andrew McKibbin



Donegal 2017
Leader Peter Mc Gowan



Connemara 2018 Leaders Andrew McKibbin and Ray Gray



Wicklow 2018
Led by Irish Ramblers' Club, Dublin



Mourne Wall Walk

Billy Jardine (MRG Newsletter 1981)

This year, 1981, on the first Sunday in June, sees the 25th birthday of the Youth Hostel Association of Northern Ireland (YHANI) Mourne Wall Walk. Twenty-five years ago, approximately 30 stalwarts, all members of YHANI, decided to walk the peaks over which the Mourne Wall traverses the high area of the Kingdom of Mourne.



To those who are unacquainted with this now famous, or infamous, walk (depending on your ecology viewpoint), the route covers eleven peaks and approximately 22 miles and is no place for the faint-hearted or the tender-footed. Weather-wise, as the walk is in June, in theory, it should mean roses and honeysuckle, with time to smell the heather all the way, but, in actual fact, some years the weather has been abysmal, even causing a semi-postponement a few years ago in monsoon-like conditions. It is indeed a test of stamina and endurance and, above all, fitness, and for those of us who indulge in pints, pies and pipes, not to be recommended.



Those happy people of a quarter century ago set forth to 'walk the wall' as a challenge, and although the approximate time taken was 7-8 hours, it was never meant to be a race and the 'Race' mentality is still very much discouraged by YHANI. Again, in the very early days, dogs sometimes accompanied the lads and lasses and indeed history records that at least two dogs received certificates. Today, dogs are most definitely 'VERBOTEN' mainly because of the danger involved where large numbers are walking and, of course, dog-fights.

The walk, like Topsy, has just 'growed and growed', not through any pushing or canvassing on YHANI's part, but more by word-of-mouth, by the foot slogging army of participants who are eager-eyed and bouncing at 7 am and glassy-eyed, exhausted, but triumphant, when being carried to their cars with certificates clutched in their hot and trembling hands, at 7 pm.



There has been talk, but only talk, about turning this annual happening into a two-day event and maybe, when YHANI get their purpose-built Youth Hostel at Dunnywater in 1982 (the present start of the walk), this could come to pass. In the meantime, good luck to any Mourne Rambler participating in this year's walk: may you enjoy this full day's walk in the glorious Mournes and perhaps live to tell the tale.

(Historical Note: Due to environmental concerns, the Mourne Wall Walk was last held in 1983)

Survey of Members

Bert Rima, Robert Roulston



In 2019 we carried out a survey of the members of the Mourne Rambling Group (MRG) to find out their likes and dislikes. We had a fantastic response rate with 60% of the membership (74 people) returning comments to the first survey in the 50 years of the MRG.

Grades of walk: About 6% usually walked with the A group, 36% in the B group, 51% in the C group and 14% preferred to walk in the D group. (Several people indicated two grades they walked with regularly resulting in a total greater than 100%.) As we organise a B and C grade walk each Sunday, this means that over 80% of members have the opportunity to take a walk at their preferred grade each Sunday of the year.

Age bands: The vast majority of members are aged 50 and over and, linking age to the grade of walks preferred, allows us to describe a life (or knee cartilage) time progression: the average “A” walker of 45+ becomes a “B” walker at 56+, rapidly proceeds to become a “C” walker at 58+ and a “D” walker at 66+. However, we all know of the exceptions to this timeline and long may they continue!

Favourite mountains: We asked members about mountains over 600m height that feature frequently in our walks. The preferred ones were maybe unsurprisingly Slieve Binnian and Slieve Bearnagh, closely followed by Commedagh, Meelbeg and Meelmore. People were not particularly keen on Slieve Donard or Muck (what is wrong with Muck?) and the others (Lamagan, Shan Slieve, Chimney Rock, Cove, Slieve Loughshannagh, Slievemoughanmore, Eagle and Shanlieve) had mixed, but overall positive responses. Of course, there are more mountains than those included in the survey and Doan stood out as the most mentioned other favourite mountain with Hen and Cock second and third respectively.

Routes to the summit: For routes to Binnian a surprise winner (to us) was the route straight up from Carrick Little to the summit tor of Binnian along the wall. It was as if people just wanted to get to the summit tor quickly and get it over with. It was three times more popular than the climb up to the North Tor or the one from the Binnian Cross roads via the quarries and along the Cross Water river. There are many ways to get up to Slieve Bearnagh but members do not prefer to go along the Mourne Wall at either side. Favourite routes were from the Ben Crom side, from Meelmore or via the Green Road via Hare’s Gap and even the one through the gully between the Bearnagh slabs had some appeal for some: it may be an occasion to be outside one’s comfort zone.

Favourite landscape feature: Apart from the Castles under Commedagh, which were most popular, other landscape features were well appreciated by the membership: Hare’s Castle in the Annalong valley was second with honourable mentions for Wee Binnian, the Annalong Buttress, Percy Bysshe’s Cave, the Eagle cliff path, Hare’s Gap and the views from Ben Crom over the reservoir. No real outstanding winners here, we like them all.

Best experiences walking with the Mourne Ramblers: A large number of responses mentioned that their best experiences were on MRG group trips away. Trips to Donegal, Kerry, the Wicklow Mountains, Connemara, and the Scottish mountains were mentioned, as well as walks in Snowdonia, Scafell Pike in the Lake District, Hadrian’s Wall and the Isle of Man.

Conclusions

We have a strong walks programme that provides an opportunity to walk at preferred levels for the vast majority of members each Sunday. As for the membership in general, cartilage issues are a factor as we seem to be an ageing group of intrepid walkers? Maybe not so surprising for a club that celebrates its 50th Anniversary!

Mourne Rambling Group Gala Dinner



Slieve Donard Hotel - October 2019



My Camino:

St Jean Pied de Port - Santiago de Compostela

Elizabeth Sloan



On the morning of Thursday 26th September 2013, I walked down the hill from Monte do Gozo into Santiago de Compostela. It was my 70th birthday and the last day of my Camino across northern Spain. I had set out from St Jean Pied de Port in France on Saturday 17th August with the dream of completing the Camino Frances. I had been a 'peregrina' (pilgrim) for just under six weeks. It is difficult to describe my feeling of elation at having completed such a journey. My elation, however, was tinged with a little sadness as I knew I would miss all I had experienced during the previous 40 days.

My Camino began many years earlier when I met Billy and Edith McBride, two very inspirational Mournie Ramblers, on one of our Sunday hikes. They told me of their pilgrimage and I thought, "That is something I would love to do". Of course, with a busy life, I forgot about it until some years later when another Rambler, Joan Higgins, told me of her experience on the Camino. When I indicated interest, she very kindly gave me information and very valuable advice. That was it! All I had to do then was get organised. With the big 70th birthday looming, it seemed like a good idea to celebrate it by completing the Camino.



Initially, it seemed a daunting task, but I set out to increase my fitness level and drew up a schedule averaging approximately 20 km per day. With that done, I was off! Although I went on my own, I never felt alone as, from the outset, I was with other pilgrims, starting with four wonderful friends from Cork whom I met on the plane from Dublin, and again on a number of occasions on the road. Also, I found that a number of peregrinos, knowing that I was on my own, took me under their wing and I spent many happy hours in their company. I am still in touch with Camino friends from Australia, USA, Canada and Israel.

I decided to be a 'real' pilgrim, i.e. staying in albergues (hostels) and carrying all my belongings. To begin with, it seemed strange to be sharing rooms with bunk beds with up to 20 others, male and female, but I would not have wanted to miss the experience of meeting so many interesting people from all four corners of the world. I never once felt nervous, afraid or uncomfortable. There was such an atmosphere of friendship and companionship.



There was so much to experience on the Camino. I so enjoyed the early mornings walking through forests listening to the wonderful birdsong, mostly on natural paths. The flora was magnificent. The terrain was fairly tough in places with some testing ascents and descents to test the joints. I so loved passing through the tiny quiet villages/hamlets. However, I was not quite so happy in the larger towns and cities, and generally managed to be in the company of other pilgrims when going through the busy streets.

A highlight of each day was a visit, if possible, to a small church. Many interiors were exquisite. The cathedrals in Burgos and Leon were magnificent, as, of course, was the Cathedral in Santiago where I had the honour of seeing the awesome ceremony of the 'Botafumeiro', the giant incense burner being swung aloft in the sanctuary.

Where I could, I made a point to book into small family-run albergues which generally offered an evening meal and breakfast. Often up to eight different nationalities sat down to dinner. This led to very interesting evenings which I thoroughly enjoyed. Other albergues were large and impersonal and I tried to avoid these.

I had only one experience when I thought my Camino was going to come to a premature end. About day six, a quite severe pain developed in my left shin. The pain became much worse as I approached Viana and when I got there, I enquired at the tourist office about transport to the nearest airport and a flight back to

Ireland!! However, it turned out to be 'only Shin Splint' as I was told by a medic. A day of rest, together with regular massage and taking it easy for a few days, and I was soon able to get back on schedule.

My first Camino in 2013 was a wonderful experience and, like many people who do all or part of it, it seems to call me back. I completed the Camino Frances again in two sections, St Jean to Burgos in 2016, and Burgos to Santiago in 2017.

I have just completed the Santiago-Finisterre-Muxia Camino, from 26th April to 2nd May 2019.

What made every Camino such a wonderful experience for me were the people I met along the way, in the cafes and albergues.

I hope this account of my Camino will inspire others to think about going.

Buen Camino!

Editor's Note:

Subsequent to writing this article, Liz succumbed to a terminal illness. However, earlier this year when the finality of her illness became apparent, one project Liz set for herself was to complete the final leg of the Camino — Santiago to Finisterre, a 90km hike. She accomplished this in April 2019.

Liz will be sadly missed by all who knew her and walked with her.

Painting a Scene



Dora McCavera

The view towards Ben Crom Reservoir from the Kilkeel River is one of my favourite views in the Mourne, so when Fionnuala asked if I would like to paint a watercolour for the Mourne Rambling Group 50th Anniversary I was delighted, and I knew the scene I wanted to paint. Walking with the Ramblers for over 30 years has given me so much pleasure this was an invitation I could not refuse.

On many occasions we walked from Clonachullion to the Hare's Gap and rambled down to the Shelter Stone where we would lunch in rain or shine, completing our trek with a steep hike up alongside the Kilkeel River. In the watercolour I wanted to capture some of the beauty of this area while adding a few touches of my own with bog cotton and heathers, grasses and rocks.

As a member of the Belfast Print Workshop (a purpose built studio which allows professional artists access to first-rate equipment) much of my earlier works on the Mourne were etchings and lithographs which, when compared to watercolour, can often be a more technical process. So this

was another reason I enjoyed the invitation to paint. Using watercolours is less formal and the washes of colour bleed into one another creating 'happy accidents'.

To paint for the Mourne Rambling Group 50th Anniversary gave me a lovely opportunity to revisit Ben Crom Reservoir, in my mind's eye, and through sketches and photographs, and to recall just how beautiful this part of the Mourne is for walkers. And lunch at the Shelter Stone (in sunny weather) is well worth the trek. So as I continued to work at the painting over the period of a year and maybe just a little bit more, I thought to myself that it could be a possible route for the 'D' group in the year ahead; they might like to ramble down to the Reservoir and sit for a while over a picnic lunch and soak up the scenery.



Editor's Note:
Dora's original painting was raffled at the Celebration Dinner in the Slieve Donard Hotel in October 2019. However, the interest shown in the painting by those present was such that signed and numbered prints of the painting were obtained and sold to members who requested them. The Committee wish to express their sincere thanks and admiration to Dora for marking the MRG 50th anniversary with such a beautiful painting.

The Mourne 'Two Thousands'

Colin Nutall, Dennis Smyth (MRG Newsletter 1985)

It was all Colin's fault! His listing of all the Mourne Mountains over 2000 feet in height led to an abstract, and therefore amusing, discussion as to how these might most advantageously be linked into a single day's 'round'.

From this simple example of armchair mountaineering at its best, it was, I suppose, inevitable: two semi-senior citizens intent on proving they weren't completely past it; a walk, which as far as we know, WAS new; and a reasonable forecast for a long July day, all combined (conspired?) to find us setting out from Leitrim Lodge at, perish the thought, 5.30 am.



Leitrim Lodge, a part of the Mournes well worth a visit in its own right, lies two miles SW of Kinahalla Youth Hostel, and was, we had agreed, the optimum start point for the walk.

Our route lay past Pierce's Castle and the Castle Bog (the latter named after the former). Given the driest spring since 1900, the Bog failed to live up to its name, being almost bone dry, and yielded easy access to the summits of Shanlieve and Eagle Mountain, thus dealing first with these awkwardly placed outlying peaks.

Breakfast on Eagle, and thence on through the Central Mournes to Deer's Meadow via (for there was no sensible alternative) Slievemoughanmore and Pigeon Rock. We crossed the road dividing the Central Mournes from the High Mournes and raced (sort of!) up the slopes of Muck for the bonus of morning coffee on top.

Here we joined forces with the famous Boundary Wall, followed clockwise over Slieve Loughshannagh, Meelbeg, Meelmore and Bearnagh to the Hare's Gap. Meelmore ("big smooth") is perversely 73 feet lower than Meelbeg ("little smooth"). Equally perversely, the only shower of the day, just sufficient for wet weather gear, fell as we climbed Meelbeg.

From the Hare's Gap on to Commedagh and Donard and down to the Bloody Bridge track where it meets the wall. Since our interest centred on the 2000 footers, be it noted that preliminary examination of the map can save a few hundred yards walk, and some upward feet, particularly on the Hare's Gap to Commedagh section. Be it also noted that we felt it necessary to stand on the

very topmost pinnacle of Bearnagh and to visit the true summit cairn of Commedagh.

The sun came out around this part of the day and it was with



some relief the we hid our sacs in the peat hags near the Bloody Bridge track, and thus enlightened, tackled the trek to Chimney Rock Mountain (distinctly in the wrong place) and back again.

Thence, via the Brandy Pad (blessedly level!) to the shoulder of Slieve Beg and the last lap. Up to number 11 (Cove Mountain) and, now starting to tire, slowly over Slieve Lamagan. It is suggested the name means 'creeping, clinging with hands and feet'; we certainly crept(!) from the summit well to the SW (for to the South the slopes were boulder strewn) to the col below. This, the second Windy Gap of the day, was not living up to its name on what had become a pleasant summer evening.

The finish to our 'round', by intent, was up the fabulous path from the Windy Gap to Binnian North Tor, almost a rock scramble in places, and with fine prospects over the Silent and Dunnywater Valleys. From the North Tor (again the highest crag) on along the superb summit ridge to our fourteenth, and final peak, Slieve Binnian.

A small toast to the hills and then, now very slowly and carefully,



down through the gathering sea fog and mist to the road below.

Distance: 25 miles | Height: 10500 feet - Peaks over 2000 feet (sorry, 610 metres): 14 | Time: we took over 15 hours (Naismith suggested 13½!)

Six on Tour:

Mourne Ramblers on the Tour of Mont Blanc



Bert Rima

When Pam Quiry asked me in mid-2016 whether I wanted to do the Tour de Mont Blanc (TMB) in 2017 and told me that her intention was that we all carry all our stuff around and sleep in large dormitories, my answer was I haven't done anything like that for 5 decades. Nevertheless she was able to convince Joe McKnight, Annemarie Keown, Ellen Greaney, Marie Hoeritzauer and myself to pick up the challenge (and the heavy rucksack) and do it. So we started on 1 September on the 170 km long tour from France, through Italy and Switzerland and back into France, which also involves about 10,000 m climbing.



We had planned to walk the TMB in 11 days leaving 2 reserve days in case of bad weather. The start was good but overshadowed by worries over accommodation as at the same time there was the start of the Ultimate Tour which sees runners doing the same tour as we intended in 11 days running it in about 20 hours, running through the night with head torches over rather narrow mountain paths. However, luckily the groupies and support teams all had other accommodation booked so we had no trouble. When we started in Les Houches the weather was overcast with low cloud, a little different from what we had hoped for and it got worse as indeed the second day we walked in a blizzard into Italy over de Col de Croix de Bonhomme. Then followed some great days walking as the Italian section of the TMB opens up vistas on the Mount Blanc massif with the glaciers that are unsurpassed. On day 4 we missed a turn off and decided unwisely to make our own Mourne Ramblers alternative route over Mount Chetif close to Courmayeur (see photo). We approached it from the back so did not see what we were in for.

Well, we ended up walking 23 km climbing 1900 metres and having one of the scariest descends with precipitous falls, overhangs and via ferrata. We survived but decided to stick to the path after that. We stopped a day in Courmayeur to take the Skytrain to 3800 m and the 5 km gondola ride to Aigle du Midi. Blue sky and unsurpassed views of the glaciers under Mont Blanc and views of the top.

From then we had no further stops, we ran into large groups of Chinese, Americans and charity walkers who competed for hut accommodation. We had a few narrow escapes in terms of finding somewhere to sleep but we managed. Definitely book in advance if you want to do this. We walked out of Italy in to the Swiss section (3 days) over Col du Grand Ferret. The Swiss section is less spectacular and provides more gentle alpine meadow terrain except for the last days when it went higher (and rainier) again. We then



climbed back into France over the Col de Balme, which has a memorable hut run by two (at least) octogenarians who had not changed the interior (and the paint on the walls) for about 50 years. Service was slow. By this time we decided to get off the circuit of major stop-over places and stayed in less popular huts.

Our last memorable adventure occurred when we all had braved the via ferrata and the ladders to get to the hut at Lac Blanc where we had intended to possibly stay two nights. The hut is at 2352 m and no heating and ice cold. We sat with our duvet around the knees and drank glue wine to stay warm. All went to bed with everything we had to stay warm. Breakfast was the worst ever and to add to the misery, snow fell during the night obliterating the markers on the path. Luckily we were guided out and down by a local guide who knew the route so that all those who had stayed in the hut followed him down in a long chain of people. Anyway we walked out of the snow until we could take a chairlift down into Chamonix for a night in a comfortable hotel.

Next day was our last day of walking over le Brevent Mountain. Spectacular 'balcony' walking with super views on the Aigle du Midi and the glaciers and Mont Blanc but a steep and occasionally scary descend from 2500 m to 1000 m into Les Houches where we had started 13 days earlier.

All in all we all learned a lot (about ourselves and also about each other), we had a spectacular walk, enjoyed it and were still on very good terms at the end. Would I do it again? Probably not after doing it, as it was occasionally too busy with other walkers for my liking. It is a once in a lifetime thing to do. Was carrying your own stuff heavy? I think all of us found that easier than we had expected.

The walking was challenging on occasion, some of the climbs were tiring, but the huts and dormitories were more pleasant than I had anticipated. So maybe after all, Alta Via here I come.



600,000 steps - or thereabouts:

A Mourne Rambler's Walk along the Pennine Way



George Acheson

268 miles. 19 days walking back-to-back. Weather forecast grim – cold, strong northerly winds, driving rain and low clouds. I knew I could walk 4 days on the 'trot' and should be able to manage a few more, but 19 days into a headwind and across remote moorland I had never walked before? Would my body stand up to it – blisters? Would my navigation skills guide me safely? Such were my thoughts and doubts as I lay in bed in the The Rambler Inn, Edale on the eve of my Pennine Way (PW) walk up the spine of England and into Scotland. Outside, the wind huffed and puffed. The bedroom windows rattled. I didn't get much sleep.

Fortified by a good breakfast of porridge and honey I shouldered my rucksack and headed north past a fence containing rows of decaying boots left behind by north to south PW walkers. I wondered what state my boots would be in after many days of bog trotting and ridge wandering. My first challenge was crossing Kinder Downfall with its roaring waterfall – the wind was so strong that spray was being blown back up the mountain. Here I passed another PW walker heading north – his long, plastic Mac style jacket billowed in the wind giving him little protection from the elements. I never saw him again.

The weather next day was better. Andy and I were joined by 'Squirrel', a guy wearing a Cornish kilt who was walking from Land's End to John O'Groats via the PW. You meet all sorts of interesting characters on these walks. On we went past Laddow Rocks, Wassenden Head and Black Hill – still stepping out, still smiling. The following day took me past the Aiggin Stone, then, overtaking another pair of PW walkers called Frances and John (of whom more later), I followed an old Roman Road near Blackstone Edge and read its rock poetry before descending to Hebden Bridge in a cloud burst. 'Twas a long day.

"What am I doing here?"

Up with the larks and striding along Rochdale Canal's towpath – the familiar patter of falling rain soon reached my ears. It poured and it poured. My glasses steamed up as I tried to decipher the map - rain dripped off my nose – "What am I doing here?" I moaned inwardly. No option but to continue – through woods – crossing a fine clapper bridge over Colden Water – and beyond, over the moors to Top Withins with its associations with Wuthering Heights. The rain stopped and, as I ate my soggy sandwiches I spied some walkers heading my way. I watched, intrigued, as 5 young ladies dressed in period costume arrived – a Hen Party with a love for all things Emily Bronte. I departed to the strains of 'Heathcliff' and Kate Bush.

Now several days into the walk, my body and mind were settling into the 'groove' and becoming attuned to my new lifestyle. I relaxed, realising I could cope – although lying back that night in a cosy 4 poster bed in Beck Hall, Malham helped considerably. Walking though Malham Cove was a joy and then over delightful Fountain Fell with its mine hole warnings.



On the boggy plateau of Bleaklow (aptly named) another PW walker called Andy caught up with me and we headed into the murk together. Compass in hand we negotiated the peat hags that had intimidated the great Alfred Wainwright years before and found a path over Feather Bed Top made of flag stones from dismantled mills. Easy walking and straightforward navigation. However, all good things come to an end, and – plop – I took one step too many into a bog hole and had to be helped out by Andy. We eventually arrived at the B&B after 9 hours walking.

Soon I was looking up the 'nose' of Pen-y-Ghent and then, I noticed that my glasses, which had been tied with red cord around my neck were missing. "Oh dear", I said, or words to that effect – gone forever I thought. Not so. A day later whilst enjoying an evening meal with 2 other walkers in Hawes I mentioned my glasses. They said they had found them and placed them on a nearby wall. Then, unbeknownst to me, Frances and John happened by – recognised my glasses and lifted them. The problem was that they were now a day behind me and were unlikely to catch up. However, along comes fast walking Andy who collects my errant glasses, and some days later in Alston, there was a knock on my bedroom door – it was Andy, and I was reunited with my glasses.

So, onwards over exposed Black Moss Hill with its fossil tree imprints and Kidson with its banks of primroses. The weather turned nasty again. I gritted my teeth and tightened my hood which was making a machine gun rattle. I wondered how long my jacket and trousers would stand up to these conditions. They did – thank you, Paramo! However, it was with a little relief that I reached the Tan Hill Inn where I sat down beside its warming fire and enjoyed some refreshments. A long haul followed over Sleightholme Moor – interest revived when I found a meadow pipit's nest.

"A contented tiredness prevailed in Garrigill that evening."

The next day saw me heading up Teesdale. The sun shone and, for the first time on my journey I felt the sun on my back. Ahh, heaven – my spirits lifted. At East Underhuth I was head butted by an amorous Suffolk ram in the kitchen of my farmhouse B&B and there I met Helen and David with whom I would walk on and off for the rest of the PW. We scrambled up Cauldron Spout, traversed the hidden gem of High Cup Nick and wandered into Dufton. The most serious part of the walk now lay ahead – the climb over Knock Old Man, across Little and Great Dun Fells, over Crossfell (893m), eventually to descend via the old corpse road calling in at Gregg's Hut on route. A contented tiredness prevailed in Garrigill that evening.

Each day was now turning into a pleasant voyage of discovery – Roman ruins, bastion houses and Hadrian's Wall. North of the Wall we passed Honeystead – and, just as weariness was about to set in we saw a sign outside a remote farm. "Walkers – kettle, tea, coffee, cup of soup in the shed through gate on the left – help yourself". We did – and left a little money as thanks. Other special moments came and went – the Black Sky park with its twinkling night skies; the big bull which turned out to be friendly; witnessing a drumming snipe; looking for miles in every direction and not seeing another person – the peace was palpable – and, my first glimpse of the shapely Cheviot Hills which reminded me of the Mournes. By myself again (or so I thought) I sat down on the final day below the big trig pillar on The Cheviot's summit. Suddenly I was surrounded by a bevy of very fit ladies all dressed in lycra, out for a run; we shared some Jelly Babies, then they disappeared. A mirage?



Only a few miles left and I caught up with Helen and David. Together we leisurely walked into Kirk Yetholm – journey's end – had a meal, drank a free beer, collected our PW certificate and cheerfully recalled our experiences. A great walk – recently completed by the ultra-runner Jasmine Paris who ran the route in winter conditions (The Spine Race) – in 83hrs and 12mins – some lady!

Long Walks to Freedom in the Galtees

(With apologies to Nelson Mandela)

MRG Newsletter 2010

On Friday our group (Joan Calvert, Irene Cauley, Harry Goodman (Leader), Doreen and Wilf Green, Rodney Magowan, David Oldfield, Pamela Quiery, Trevor Russell, Vincent and Anne Trainor and John Tweed) converged on the Glen of Aherlow which runs along the northern edge of the Galtee (or sometimes Galty) Mountains.



With the recent improvement of motorways, travel time was amazingly fast (well under four hours) from Belfast to Cashel in time for a leisurely lunch. This allowed Harry, John and Trevor ample time to recce the start points for the three days of walking and even take in a couple of minor summits – Seefin N Top and Seefin – later that afternoon. Wilf, Doreen, Joan, Vincent and Pam, on the other hand, contented themselves with a visit to the bookies to place bets on some of the nags belonging to our landlady and which were racing in Dundalk that evening (beaten dockets all round!).

Our hostelry for the week-end was the fine Georgian setting of Bansha House sitting in 100 acres of wooded countryside and with an Equestrian Centre of some repute. To begin with the allocation of rooms went well, most of us settling into rooms with period furniture, fine views

and ample space. Problems only arose later with the overspill into Primrose Cottage where Joan and Pam opened the door onto cell-like conditions – white breeze-blocked walls, harsh fluorescent lights, short beds from wall to wall and a pervasive musty smell. While Wilf and Doreen had the advantage of an ensuite double room (and the pleasure of Wilf offering showering facilities to them) this did little to ease the “tension”. With the future of our trip on a knife edge Mourne Ramblers humour, as ever, came to the rescue. Wilf and Doreen, who had visited Robben Island, started to draw comparisons with their new found base and soon the banter was developing around Nelson Mandella, Cell Block H, and long walks to freedom! All was well.

Saturday – The Glencush Horseshoe

Described by some as the most attractive and exhilarating walk in the Galtees – much was expected. Starting from Clydagh Bridge we walked up alongside a boren before turning off to ascend Cush (639m). During the long ascent, Rodney and Trevor did their best to induct Harry into the ancient C Group ritual of the ‘banana break’ – but to no avail. As visibility deteriorated and the wind strengthened we had to rely on Harry’s narrative of what lay around and below us. Sounded great! On the summit Pam noticed something glinting under a clump of heather and pulled out a set of car keys. Our collective heart went out to the unfortunate walker who would be returning to a locked car in the evening. Within the hour on the steep ascent of Galtymore (799m) we encountered a lone figure descending out of the mist



Trevor Russell

and asked if by chance she had lost keys. Not her, as she smugly patted her anorak pocket – and only then did her jaw drop! Once over Galtymore our next climb took us to Galtymore, the only inland 3,000ft peak in Ireland and the summit cairn of which sits on the long, broad and almost flat ridge of Dawson’s Table.



Buffeted to and fro by the strong wind and completely enclosed in the ever present mist we were glad to soon come to a large cairn marking the point for descent to pick up the County boundary wall between Tipperary and Limerick. We followed it along for some distance before ascending up and then out across marshy moorland to a large cairn marking the top of Slievecushnabinnia. From here it was all downhill along the broad spur of Knocknuss and back to the cars. Our evening meal was arranged in Chez Hans Cashel – originally a church and now a national award winner for “restaurant ambience”. The food was excellent and conversation lively on topics ranging from trench foot and modern art to Winnie Mandela and the Celtic Tiger (whose demise is greatly exaggerated judging by the number of young gourmets packing the tables).

Sunday – Temple Hill and the Monabrack Horseshoe

Our start point required a 20 mile car journey via Cahir to the other side of the Galtees. Initially we passed through some abandoned farmland before going up river as far as the Pigeon Rock. From here it was a steep pull up a gully onto the mist enclosed ridge of Temple Hill (785m). Visibility was very poor, the terrain featureless and navigation skills were at a premium. The summit was crowned with a small amphitheatre of loose stones and a pointer stick asking walkers to sign in a book housed in a rather rusting biscuit tin!



Vincent & Harry 'signing in' on Temple Hill

After lunch it was down, in thick mist, to the upper reaches of the Pigeon Rock River before climbing Knockaterriffbeg and then Lyracappul (825m), where at long last, the mist started to lift and the sun shone for the first time. Probably the highlight for all of us was the "banana break" on the next top Carrignabinnia (822m) taking in the panorama on both sides of the range with the Glen of Aherlow to the north and the Golden Vale to the south. So far we had not seen Galtymore but at last as the clouds broke up resplendent in the background was the high ridge we had traversed the previous day and at last all of the bits started to fit together.

As it was now late afternoon and there was some concern about failing light and even more about missing the planned home cooked dinner at Bansha House, the pace quickened. Although Harry had

one more summit up his sleeve (Monabrack) we still had time on the way down to investigate an abandoned caravan in the forest and compare its facilities with Primrose Cottage. On reflection Wilf and Co decided to stick with the cottage! That evening ravenous ramblers did justice to the home cooking of Mrs Marnane and a few bottles of well-chosen wine. Calculations by Harry confirmed that over the first two days we had ascended over 6,000ft and covered in excess of 30km with even more to come on Monday.



Mourne Ramblers on Lyracappul (825m)

Monday – Knockastakeen and Lake Muskry

At last we had a wind-down day up a way-marked path to a most picturesque corrie lake nestling beneath O'Loughlin's Castle and the option, on the way, of a short detour to climb Knockastakeen. Harry, John, David and Irene decided to take in this peak for glorious views over the length and breadth of the Galtee range and indeed much of Tipperary. For the rest it was time for lying in glorious sunshine to reflect on events of the previous two days. In perfect weather the craic was good. Sitting in the peace and tranquillity of this ideal lakeside location cameras were working overtime. All too soon it was time to head back down the track to the cars and make for home.

In spite of poor visibility on the first day and a half and the unanticipated "cell like" rooms for some, the consensus was that it was a very worthwhile week-end. Of our group only Harry had been in the Galtees before, for a climb of Galtymore, so we all explored new and interesting terrain. For Rodney it was a first week-end away with the MRG and in his words a very worthwhile experience. Thanks to Harry for checking out this new area and for leading us in his inimitable manner and to Wilf and others for their photographic records of the occasion.

Here's to the next time.

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MRG Photographic Competition



Harry Goodman

As part of the Club's 50th Anniversary celebrations a photographic competition was arranged. Members were invited to submit images in all or some of four categories, two in colour and two in monochrome (black and white) on the themes of Landscape or People. All the entries submitted were in digital imaging format and had to bear some relation to the Mourne or to walks done with the MRG on trips away. All of the entries were judged anonymously on their photographic and artistic qualities. The judge, Terry Hanna of Terry Hanna Photography, was not given the names of any of the photographers and has no association with the club. He selected a winning photograph for each of the four categories together with a highly commended and commended entry. Each of these twelve photographs was printed and given a card mount for presentation at the Gala Dinner in October. In commenting on the full entry of some 57 images the Judge expressed his congratulations to each and every photographer for the high level of photographic merit and artistic qualities displayed. The Club's thanks are due to Bert Rima who undertook the unenviable task of receiving all of the entries and sorting them into the various categories for submission to the judge. Bert also prepared a rolling slide presentation of all the photographs. This was shown to and greatly appreciated by those attending the Gala Dinner in the Slieve Donard Hotel in October 2019. The winning photograph in each of the four themes is reproduced below:



'B Walk Through Bernagh's Tors' | George Acheson



'Slieve Meelbeg Summit at Sunset in Winter' | Ian Proctor



'Wonderful Light Over Ben Crom' | Ian Proctor

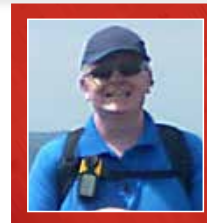


'MRG Lunchtime on Errigal' | Kingsley Thompson

The Well Equipped Rambler:



George Acheson



Peter Mc Gowan

The Mourne Rambling Group website (www.mourneramblers.org.uk) has a recommended list of equipment that walkers should take with them on a walk:

Using this as a basis, then, what would the well-equipped rambler be wearing in 1969 compared to 2019, and how much would it cost?

Note: figures are taken from the catalogue of Frank Davies – The Climbers' Shop, Ambleside (1969) and Jackson Sports (2019).

	1969*	2019
Walking boots (mid-range)	£6.8.6	£200
Rucksack	£2.3.11	£100
Anorak	£4.17.6	£150
Over-trousers	£2.12.6	£70
Silva Compass	£1.10.0	£30

* 1969 was before decimal currency was introduced and prices were in £.s.d – pounds, shillings and pence.

To put the 1969 prices in perspective, the price of a pint of milk (in decimal currency) was 6p, a pint of lager was 20p and a loaf of bread was 9p. However, in order to pay for these, the average UK weekly wage in 1969 was £32 (£1,664 per annum).

After taking account of inflation, many of the above items are considerably more expensive than in 1969, but this may be because of the increase in quality of the goods, and the technology now being used, e.g. Gore-Tex membranes in boots and waterproofs and air-mesh ventilation systems in rucksacks.

Speaking of rucksacks, in 1969, the canvas, external frame, often old war department backpacks, would have been a common sight in the hills. Nowadays, not only is the frame out of sight and the rucksack made out of nylon or polyester, but most also include external webbing loops and straps, mesh pockets, capacity for a water hydration system, internal dividers for organising your gear and padded straps for comfort as well as the aforementioned air-mesh ventilation systems. One of the most noticeable improvements in rucksacks, however, is the built-in waterproof cover: in earlier days, hikers had to put all their rucksack contents inside plastic bags (or even bags within bags) to ensure they remained dry; this is a simple solution to what had been a major problem.

However, the improvement in rucksack technology is not the only major change in the attire of the well-equipped hiker. In 1969, a hiker would likely be wearing a cotton top and woollen pullover when they went for a walk; these days, hikers are likely to wear high-performance base layers with good wicking

properties, under a similarly high-tech micro-fleece. Walking poles are almost de rigueur these days, but unheard of 50 years ago, and GPS trackers and View Ranger apps are as common a sight on the hills today as a map and compass was then.

1969 OS Map 1:63000 Scale



2019 OS Map 1:25000 Scale



The most essential piece of equipment for the hiker is a map, and this is another area where things have changed considerably in the last 50 years. The most common map in 1969 was 1:63360 but walkers in the Mournes are now used to a scale of 1:25000 – a huge advantage to the modern walker.

Turning to the subject of refreshments, the type and variety of food taken on hikes has developed considerably over the years, from basic sandwiches and tea, to high-protein and multi-nutritional bars, trail mix and energy drinks.

Another big difference is in the type and robustness of flasks taken on walks: old thermos flasks often had a glass interior that could break easily, whereas flasks these days can absorb a fair amount of abuse.

However, one item that went out of fashion but has seen a turnaround in its fortunes is the aluminium water bottle: from being popular 50 years ago, it lost out to plastic water bottles, but has made a comeback following the campaign against single-use plastics.

In some cases, it seems, the circle of life just continues on.



The Twelve Bens

MRG Newsletter 1992



Dermot Mac Dermott

Most of us met for breakfast at the Atlantic Coast Hotel; the night before, we had arrived in twos and threes and checked in. There was light drizzle as we made our way out of Clifden through Tully Cross to Joss Lynam's holiday home at Mullaghglass. After a long approach over sopping bog, we gradually began climbing. Low cloud blotted out the legendary view of the twelve Bens, but we enjoyed some steep ascents as we went round Binn Fhraoigh, Binn Chuanna and Maolchnoc. Our large group spent the day in rambler bonding, the regulars helping the strangers to feel part of it all. We came down by an exhilarating gulley where I must admit to getting stuck momentarily to the alarm of some of my more level-headed companions. Eventually, we picked up the river that falls into Lough Fee at MR783615. Skirting the corner of the lake, we came out on the road along Lough Muc, back towards the cars. Then we de-briefed for a few hours in the pub before a good meal across the road from the hotel.

Next day some of us headed for Inishbofin. Your reporter headed for Killary Harbour, round which Roy Allen led the die-hards. We motored out again almost the Lough Fee end of Lough Muc, then turned due north to the Youth Hostel at Rosroe to park the cars. We lunched on a cliff above Killary, looking across at Mweelrea, before heading on to Bunowen. There, we doubled back on ourselves over Binn Mhor, Fothar, Aill an Chapail and Meall an Fhathaigh. Towards the end of the walk, we peered across to Inishbofin and wondered how our friends there were getting on. We were later to find out that they had sat out all day and our eyes told us that they had the nerve to acquire a very respectable tan.

That evening, David Flinn had persuaded our host, Donal Scally, to regale us with a sumptuous repast at which any spare wine in Clifden was consumed. David proved as tireless a raconteur and bon viveur as he is a walker up on the hills. Nor was he the only one. If northerners have a reputation for being dour and sober, we can honestly say that it isn't really our fault!





So next morning there were cobwebs to blow away, and what better cure than a brisk circuit of the Gleann Chuachan horseshoe? Here we met briefly and by arrangement on Binn Meithri with a large and venerable YHANI group organised by Billy Jardine. Then it was uphill. Oh the agony! Dry and stony underfoot and not a drop of water to drink. Roy Allen noticed nothing and forged ahead, apparently accompanied by an oread from Australia. Binn Gabhar behind us, we pushed sternly on up Binn Bhraoin which seemed that day to be full of French.

Relief came for some, problems for others, in a longish scramble down from the summit. When the col flattened out, our party divided, some opting to go back down Gleann Chuachan, the others striking up the steep shaly side of Binn Dhubh. After a while, I glanced downhill to see Roy Allen wrestling with a huge slab of granite. A few tense seconds elapsed before Roy got it down, but at the cost of abrasions along his lower back and a badly sprained calf muscle. We stopped for lunch and to discuss what to do. Since a visit to the doctor seemed a wise precaution, Roy too now went down Gleann Chuachan, accompanied by Fionnuala and Aileen in case his injury should worsen.

Then we were four. Binn an tSaighdiura, Binn Chorr and Binn Dhoire Chlair, with clear skies and a pleasant cooling breeze, completed our walk back to the hostel. The evening was spent in the pub enjoying some excellent live country rock. Once again, a Ramblers party had enjoyed an excellent few days out of the Mourne and the thanks of all concerned go to David Flinn for his organisation, sociability and mountain leadership.

The Old Days

Francis McKnight
(MRG Newsletter 1981)

The mountains change gradually. The Happy Valley becomes Silent; the Deer's Meadow is drowned. Binnian has a tunnel through its core. Tollymore and Rostrevor are organised and forested. Access roads are improved but the mountain walls decay. Pebble-dash replaces white-wash, cement tiles replace straw, corrugated tin replaces Bangor Blues, haggards and loanins are grey concrete.

The long summers of memory seem hotter, the rain warmer, the snow whiter. Twilight was starker, the Haulbowline and St John's the brightest lights below. No plastic, less litter, no rush home.

Hob-nailed boots, shrinking wool socks, corduroys, Harris Tweed, woollen shirts, sticky oilskins – all never seen. Everyone had time and inclination to chat. Shepherds, granite workers abounded even deep in the mountains – their bodies tied to Mourne but their minds far-reaching. Now Sunday sheepmen are rare, the young men forsake the hillsides for the motor car and bright lights.

Long solitary days, an old leather canvas haversack creaking on warm days, heavy, soggy on wet, the ring of hobnailed boots on clean granite, corncrakes and cuckoos echoing – butterflies colourful. It really was nice to ramble in the old days.





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Training in the MRG through the years



Joe Mc Knight



David Oldfield

A day in the hills is one of the most enjoyable ways of getting exercise away from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. However, the wild mountain environment brings with it its own challenges and it is important that walkers have the awareness and knowledge which will enable them to spend their time in the hills safely and be able to competently deal with the unexpected.

The Mourne Ramblers have been training members for decades, initially basic navigation training, but over the years, the need for training in group management in the hills, dealing with mountain emergencies, first aid skills and more advanced navigation skills has ensured a busy training schedule each year.

“...a highly qualified first-aid instructor as a member”

When the Group first introduced training courses, it was in the privileged position of having members with Mountain Leader qualifications or who had led educational groups to far-flung places, and was able to provide all its training needs from within the membership. We remain fortunate in having a highly qualified first-aid instructor as a member and she has run a number of first aid workshops. In addition, we were part of an Outdoor Northern Ireland initiative called ‘Walking in your community’ which was established to encourage more people to exercise by walking in parks and/or in the mountains. This programme contributed to the cost of courses in Rescue Emergency Care First Aid and Mountain Leadership and also worked with the Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs to organise its Spring Meet at which members were able to hear Mountain Rescue practitioners explaining their work and participate in workshops covering the use of GPS and the ‘Leave no Trace’ environmental initiative.

Members of the Mourne Ramblers are fortunate to be part of a very active walking club. Every Sunday, throughout the year, come rain, hail or shine the club organises

walks for up to 4 groups, predominately in the Mountains of Mourne. Each of these groups requires a leader who takes responsibility for the planning of the walk and, as the title implies, leading and managing the group when they are out in the hills. As club members we are very fortunate there is a cadre of members who are willing to take on this vital responsibility. However, over time leaders leave or move from one group to another so it is important that there is a pipeline of new leaders ready and willing to step up to the role and fill these vacant spaces.

“ensure that members can have an enjoyable and safe walk in the hills each Sunday”

In order to encourage more members to become leaders and to increase the competence of current leaders, in 2019, for the first time, the Group employed a professional mountain guide and instructor to put together a ‘Leadership in the hills’ course, which covered areas such as planning a walk, risk management, dealing with emergencies and managing people in a walking group. The Group intends to continue its ethos of training to ensure that members can have an enjoyable and safe walk in the hills each Sunday.

You may think that training was all about producing new leaders, making existing leaders more competent and confident, and enabling members to go to new places. Whilst all this is true, the best thing about training is the enjoyment and camaraderie that comes from learning new skills, as the following tale attests:

Garron Plateau

We started about midday, as it was the intention to do night navigation from the Glenariff side, back to Carnlough, where we had started. We had two groups, Billy McBride, Mary O’Callaghan, and Irene Cauley with me, and three with Myrddin Ruddock. We set off at staggered times so as not to influence the other group. Everything was going swimmingly with us, which is more accurate than you might think given the number of small lochs, and boggy ground. The terrain is brilliant for navigation, as the lochs are all in dips, and cannot be seen until you are on them. Perfect for timing and pacing, allied with bearings. Then the master-stroke. Below a little knoll, they would memorise a short route, align the map, and remember five key features at which point, I would take their maps and they would walk it – about five minutes. I dived off first to watch from high ground, as they set off at two minute intervals. Mary and Irene duly appeared, but there was no sign of Billy. High tailing it back, I saw him disappearing in the opposite direction, into a low bog. I yelled, but as Billy was virtually deaf, it was useless. I ran after him, and one kilometre later caught him. Somewhat chastened we bog hopped to where the others were drinking tea and bathing in the twilight over Glenariff. Ironically, the route back in darkness, was without incident!

Milestones Down the Years

1969 Mourné Ramblers formed by Clarence Cheney. Walks (one group) start at 12.30. Clarence held office as the MRG President from 1969 to 1986.

1973 60 members in the group

1974 Mrs Meneely (Tea Lady) known to appear regularly at end of walks with tea and buns - laid out on a table cloth. Harry Shaw leads first walk from Newcastle to Rostrevor

1976 A and B groups operate

1978 Club takes out insurance

1979 Free membership for over 60s debated and rejected

1980 Major discussion regarding dogs on walks. Decision taken to ban dogs.

1981 First Mourné Ramblers Newsletter circulated

1982 Recommended equipment list drawn up

1986 Mourné Ramblers founder, Clarence Cheney, dies.

1987 Early starts (12.00) introduced for winter months: Nov - Jan. Harry Shaw becomes President of the MRG and held this office until 1992.

1988 First computerisation of members' details

1989 Constitution for Mourné Ramblers introduced. Winter walks start at 11.00.

1991 Mourné Ramblers attend 'Host a Hiker Weekend' in Dublin organised by Irish Ramblers.

1992 Walks start at 11.30. Mourné Ramblers host the Irish Ramblers.

1993 Christine Mackle, a founder member of the MRG, becomes President and still holds this office during the 50th Anniversary year. Christine is also an Honorary Member. C Group walks (one per month) introduced - first Sunday of the month.

1994 25th Anniversary year

1995 C group walks every two weeks

1996 Walks start at 11.00

1998 C walks every Sunday

2000 Ramblers join Mountaineering Council of Ireland (MCI)

2001 Foot and Mouth crisis greatly affects the walking programme. Connemara Easter trip goes ahead with road walks and cycling.

2003 Star Trek first appears on the programme.

2004 Website launched. Sunrise walk appears on the programme for New Year's day.

2006 Ramblers resign from Mountaineering Council of Ireland.

2007 Walks for novice members introduced

2009 40th anniversary year

2011 New Website launched

2013 Mourné Ramblers Facebook site launched. Final Harry's Walk takes place.

2016 D Walks introduced on a monthly basis

2017 The Mourné Ramblers were joined by the Irish Ramblers for a weekend of walking in the Mournes.

2018 The Irish Ramblers were joined by the Mourné Ramblers for a weekend of walking in Wicklow.

2019 50th Anniversary Year, including special Harry Shaw Challenge Walk

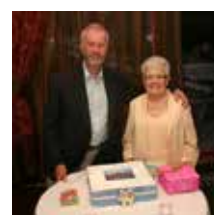


Photo Gallery - 50 years of Mourne Rambling









RAMBLING NOTES

In the early 1970s, when the Mourne Rambling Group was just a fledgling club, Clarence Cheney started writing a weekly column for local newspapers in County Down (and even as far afield as the Belfast Telegraph), providing details of the previous week's walks and giving notice of the walks taking place during the coming weekend. This methodology was the Facebook/Social Media of its day, and it was the primary means of making the Mourne Rambling Group known and was a good conduit for attracting new members.

Reading through the articles today gives a great insight into the workings of the club in its infancy, from the times of walks (12.30 or 1.00 pm preferred starts), details of individual walks (many of which would be appreciated by some of today's groups), and an early indication of the growing pains of a club starting from scratch: discussion of the introduction of a grading system to split up into a number of groups, and discussion on the length and duration of walks and whether to flex the times of the walks depending on the season.

7th January 1972:

The year's activities came to a close on Boxing Day when 28 members met in Donard Park (Newcastle), and set off for a ramble over the top of Donard with Jim Mackle (Kilkeel) in charge. Although the top was shrouded in dark, heavy cloud, the ramble was thoroughly enjoyed and just over four hours later, Mrs Meneely's Mini in Donard Park was the centre of much activity as she busied herself handing out tea and cakes to all on arrival back from the hills.

One thing that is greatly missed is the presence of Mrs Meneely and her mini car at the end of a walk, making sure everyone had a "wee cuppa tae" and, sometimes even a chunk of wheaten bannock or piece of cake. Just think about it, 28 members getting tea and cakes from a car the size of a 1960s Mini – it must have seemed like Dr Who's TARDIS!

The success of the club in those early days was demonstrated by the fact that there was one paid up member who couldn't easily drive home after a walk – California, USA being too far to travel to on a Sunday afternoon.

One member of the group – he has already paid his annual fee – who longs to make his debut with the Group is Mr James Haughlan (California, USA) whose father hails from the Mournes, near the foot of Binnian. James has never set foot on Irish soil, but reads of the progress of the Group each week in the columns of the Mourne Observer, which is sent to him regularly. A big welcome awaits James when he finds it convenient to make the trip.

Some of Mr Haughlan's fellow Americans were made to feel welcome during a hitch-hiking tour of Ireland:

15th October 1971

Still dropping in for a ramble with the Mourne Rambling Group are people from many parts of the world, and the latest guests were two young ladies all the way from Illinois, America. Having arrived a few weeks ago at Shannon Airport to "thumb" their way around Ireland, they eventually decided to come north and hunt up relatives of their grand-parents who hailed from the Mourne country.

Having made successful contact and voiced their interest in rambling, they were put in touch with Jim Mackle (Kilkeel) who naturally brought them rambling with the group on Sunday. Fortunately, the weather Clerk favoured the outing around Binnian and the Silent Valley. Having learned something in the youth hostels of the Mourne Wall, the two young ladies were taken for a short walk along a portion of it. And what could be a more fitting finish to a ramble in the Mournes than a "wee cuppa tae" and a chunk of wheaten bannock thrown in? "Marvellous", was how one of the young ladies described their ramble.

In the early 1970s, Sundays didn't suit all the members, and the club also organised Saturday walks for a time:

28 January 1972

This weekend, the Saturday Group will meet at Kinahalla and will have a walk over 'Hen' and 'Cock' Mountain if the weather permits, while the Sunday Group will try out a new route via Lough Shannagh track and Slieve Muck. Members would be advised to check their meeting point (ref. 284214) and not to confuse with the popular Ott Gate track. This will be a fairly lengthy ramble and we would ask all to be as punctual as possible (12.30pm).

Perhaps the most striking event in the Mourne Rambling Group's annual calendar in the 1970's, was the three-day ramble over the Easter weekend:

7 April 1972

Although the weather could have been much better for the Mourne Rambling Group's Three-Days' Rambles over Easter, those who did take part must feel that the weekend's events provided them with something from which they derived a certain amount of pleasure.

Unfortunately, Saturday's event from Newcastle to Rostrevor via the mountains was marred by low thick fog which made it difficult for the party to find their way in places when it was necessary for them to leave the guidance of the wall. Much credit is due to the leader, Harry Shaw (Newcastle), whose wide experience of the route was most helpful, and it was a tired and weary group who checked in at the half-way mark at Spelga Dam. It was no surprise when some decided to call it a day at this point, as the second part of the event is regarded as the toughest part. However, after a well-earned rest and some nourishing food more than half the party set out again en route for Rostrevor.

As expected, difficulties were met on the way with fog at its worst, but this was overcome as the party reached lower ground and eventually all reached the finish safely.

Sunday's event was marred by consistent rain as a large party, chiefly made up by the new Drumlough Rambling Group and a sprinkling of the Mourne Ramblers, set out. After an attempt to go over Slieve Commedagh, it was decided to try a more sheltered route via the Forestry paths and the quarry, returning via the harbour route. With a slight change in the weather, this was more enjoyable.

Easter Monday's event which is regarded as the toughest event of the three, started at Rourke's Park and took in part of the Mourne Wall Walk route, via Binnian and Slieve Muck and Carne and returning via Lough Shannagh, Doan, Ben Crom Dam and the Blue Lake. The weather was a complete contrast to the previous two days, with warm sunshine and beautiful scenery all the way.

Groups of Mourne Ramblers very kindly laid on refreshments at various points on the two main events and these were very much appreciated.

All taking part in any of the events agreed that they were well worthwhile and provided them with a good weekend's entertainment.

Basically, the Easter weekend walks consisted of Harry's Walk on the Saturday, a quick jaunt up Slieve Commedagh on Sunday for a rest, then a tough part of the Mourne Wall Walk on the Monday: not for the faint-hearted

All in all, these rambling notes provide a unique record of the early days of the club, and of the 1970s, which to many of us seem like just the other day, rather than nearly fifty years ago.

Peter Mc Gowan

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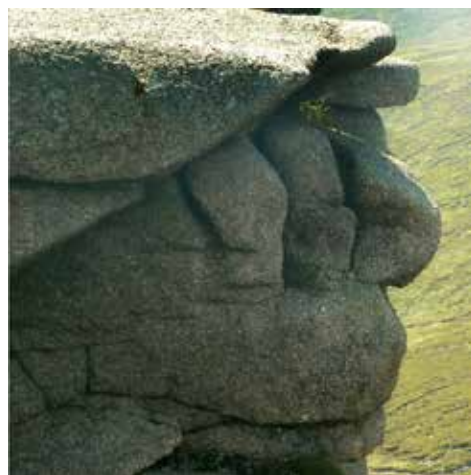


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