

## THE WICKLOW MOUNTAINS OF EIRE.

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DURING a stay of eighteen months in Eire I managed to do a fair amount of walking, and I feel that the following notes may be of interest to members who, when these troublous times are over, may feel inclined to sample the delights offered by this charming country.

The district to which I shall confine my observations is easily reached from Dublin, and although it does not offer the best walking in the country, is well worthy of notice.

The Wicklow Mountains, or, as the northern fringe is termed, the Dublin Mountains, rise immediately south of the city and do not at first present an imposing spectacle. Farther south, however, some very fine scenery is to be found. This, though lacking the majesty of our own Cairngorms, has a beauty of its own which may be likened to that of the Border hills of Scotland. Heather is not as plentiful as in Scotland and it is much intermingled with grass. There is a good deal of bog, and occasionally heavy, damp peat is found even on summits of over 2,000 feet. Rock is not very plentiful. The corries are, as a rule, of the long, smooth type, but there are one or two magnificent examples of the "pothole" type of corrie with sheer cliffs and cold lochans at the foot.

Examining the range from Dublin, two small but sharply defined peaks—the Great and Small Sugar Loaves—are seen. These rise to the east, while to the west runs a long pleateau, gently undulating, and called the Featherbed. Behind this, and invisible from Dublin, rise the true Wicklow Mountains.

The best centre for a walking holiday is the village of Glendalough which, although inundated by charabanc parties in the "season," has a good hotel and some magnificent scenery. The village lies about twenty-five miles from

Dublin and may be reached by two roads. The better is the main Dublin-Bray road which forks right and brings one direct to Glendalough. The other, which is longer but far more interesting, is the old military road from Rathfarnham. The surface is not good but quite practicable, and the authorities are steadily improving it. The road winds up the steep side of the Featherbed in a series of magnificent curves. At every turn fine views are to be had across Dublin, and on a clear day Carlingford Lough and the Mountains o' Mourne may easily be seen. Once the summit is reached the road flattens and the gently rolling plateau stretches out on all sides. Some miles farther on a steep climb over the shoulder of Kippure (2,475 feet) brings the motorist to Sally Gap. A pause here is suggested, for below and to the right lie two very fine corries. Each has a lochan nestling in it: the Upper and Lower Lough Bray. Seemingly hewn out of the mountain by some gigantic hand, they are frowned upon by great cliffs of a sombre colour. I have not climbed the rock of these corries, but I think that, as in other parts of the Wicklows, the going is very treacherous.

Leaving Loch Bray and Sally Gap behind us we follow the road on its descent to Glendalough.

Glendalough is the third of three branching glens: Glenmacnass, Glendasan, and Glendalough. Farther south and on the same "stem" lies Glenmalur. There are two loughs in the Vale of Glendalough. The Lower, which is nearer to the hotel, is not worthy of mention, but the Upper, lying between great cliffs, presents an awe-inspiring sight. From the antiquary's point of view there is much of interest. St Kevin had his home there—if a cave in the cliff which rises sheer from the water can be called a home! There is also an example, said to be one of the finest in existence, of a Round Tower.

A very pleasant walk may be had by following the path to the north of the lake up to the far end. Here may be seen the remains of old lead mines. A burn, the Glencalo River, falls from the heights above into the head of the lake. Climbing now by way of the old lead-workers path through masses of fallen rock one soon reaches the top of a "saddle."

On looking back a striking resemblance, on a smaller scale, to Loch A'an of the Cairngorms is noticed. The lough is roughly the same shape and, although lacking the wildness and majesty of Loch A'an, is very beautiful indeed. Striking east and following the top of the cliffs which, in some places, are over 1,500 feet sheer above the water, the interest never fails. Ever-changing lights off-set by dark masses of precipitous rock make this walk at a height of between 1,500 and 2,000 feet one of pure delight. A sharp scramble down a fissure known as the Giant's Cut brings one out at the foot of the lake, and in a few minutes the hotel is reached. The distance is nine miles, but it may be lengthened with advantage by climbing from the cliff edge to Mullacor (2,179 feet), whence a fine view of both Glendalough and Glenmalur may be enjoyed.

While the average height of the tops in the Wicklows is between 2,000 and 3,000 feet, there is one, Lugnaquilla (3,039 feet), which is above the average. Lugnaquilla, or just Lug, as it is familiarly called, lies to the south-west of Glenmalur. The ascent is made from here and is steep up to the 500-foot contour. It then rises gently to 2,400 feet, where a sharp climb brings one to the flattish top. The summit, known as the North Prison, is marked by a cairn, and on a clear day the views are very fine. To the west and north-west lies the vast central plain of Ireland, while to the north the hills of Donegal and Mourne may be seen. Very rarely, and I was fortunate, the Welsh hills may be made out with Snowdon as a clear landmark. The summit is rocky, though there is much bog where the several burns have their sources. The majority of these flow down to Glenmalur and help to feed its river—the Avonbeg.

From Lug two smaller tops may be climbed. Either the Carraway Stick (2,218 feet), which lies to the south-east, or going northwards to Table Mountain at 2,302 feet. Both make pleasant walks, although a certain sameness of outlook is unavoidable. This latter point is one that is a little apt to mar the pleasure of the Wicklow Hills; there is never a very wide difference of view. All are most extensive, but a little variety would be a great improvement.

One thing that struck me very forcibly while exploring this region was the absence of wild life. I saw an occasional peregrine, and once a raven flew up the Glendalough cliffs. One or two brown hares made the total of all I saw. This absence of life surprised me, as the altitudes are not great and the climate is pretty temperate.

I have not the space to describe any more of the many climbs that are to be found in these hills, but Tonelagee (2,636 feet), with the heart-shaped Lough Ouler tucked away at the foot of a corrie 1,000 feet deep, is well worth a visit. Mullaghleevaun (2,615 feet) may be reached from Tonelagee or, as a separate walk, from the Wicklow Gap at the head of Glendasan.

In conclusion let it be said that any member who has not been too spoiled by our Cairngorms to appreciate the rather simpler beauty of these lower tops would, when travelling restrictions are once more removed, be well advised to try a holiday in this land of charming hospitality and to make the acquaintance of the Wicklow Mountains of Eire.