

THE IRISH MUNROS

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A recent surprise discovery of a few boxes of photographic slides in a bedroom cupboard has rekindled happy memories of a great trip to Ireland in June 1999 to climb the Irish Munros or Furths of Ireland.

The Irish Munros like the Scottish, English and Welsh Munros not to mention the Spanish Metric Munros get their name from Sir Hugh Thomas Munro 1856-1919 who although born in London came from a Scottish family with an estate near Kirriemuir about 20 kilometres north of Dundee in Forfarshire. Sir Hugh was an original member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club which was founded in 1889 in Glasgow a few years after the Cairngorm Club was established in 1887. He became forever famous when the sixth edition of the Scottish Mountaineering Journal published his now legendary Tables of Heights of mountains over 3000 feet in September 1891 in Volume 1 with a total of 283 separate 3000-foot mountains in Scotland. However, with the increasing accuracy of Ordnance Survey technology over the years there have been many revisions to this original list with numerous mountains having been promoted and many others demoted with the current total now standing at 282 for Scottish Munros at present.

Likewise with the Irish Munros when an expedition of 17 members from the Cairngorm Club and Westhill Walkers, including two past presidents of the Cairngorm Club, namely Judy Middleton and Ian Bryce, set off from Troon on the Firth of Clyde onboard a Seacat Catamaran bound for Belfast on Saturday 5th June 1999.

Our plan for the following week with overnight accommodation mainly in Youth Hostels was to climb all of Ireland's five Real Munros or Furths, that is, all of Ireland's mountains higher than 3000 feet above mean sea level with a prominence of 150 metres. The target mountains were Carrauntoohil, County Kerry, 3407 feet; Knocknapeasta, County Kerry, 3241 feet; Brandon, County Kerry, 3123 feet; Lugnaquilla, County Wicklow, 3035 feet and Galtymore, County Limerick/Tipperary, 3012 feet.

The Irish mountains with an elevation of over 3000 feet 914 metres and a minimum prominence of just 15 metres, number 13 peaks. These tops are spread out over four mountain ranges, all situated in the Republic of Ireland: The Wicklow Mountains situated just south of Dublin, The Galtee Mountain Range on the border of Counties Tipperary and Limerick, MacGillycuddy's Reeks in County Kerry, and the Brandon Group also in County Kerry.

With Ireland being a less mountainous country than Scotland the prospect of climbing all the Real Irish Munros in one week was a viable ambition depending on favourable weather. As luck would decide, that week we were blessed with a very dry week bestowed by a large developing anticyclone which recent research had shown to be centered in the Atlantic just west of Ireland with a high-pressure value of 1033 millibars at midday on Wednesday 9th June 1999. This was the day we climbed Ireland's highest mountain in the MacGillycuddy's Reeks of County Kerry, Carrauntoohil 3414 feet. That day we also climbed two other nearby peaks namely Caher East at 3300 feet and Beenkeragh at 3308 feet. These were not on our original list of peaks to be climbed that week with a prominence of 100 metres and 92 metres respectively. Also climbed on our return journey to Scotland on Saturday 12th June were the two highest mountains in Northern Ireland namely Slieve Donard at 2790 feet 850 metre and Slieve Commedagh at 2516 feet 767 metres where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the nearby Irish Sea above the pretty County Down, town of Newcastle. Here we celebrated our successful Irish Munro bagging week that Saturday night in a nearby hostelry with my retired BBC Weatherman cousin Bernard Davey who had guided us on our final Mourne Mountain hike earlier that day and the following day we returned to Scotland having spent a wonderful week in Ireland.



The summit of Galtymore 7/06/1999 Photo credit Liz McKenzie