



AN OIGE HILLWALKERS PROGRAMME - NOVEMBER 1996

Sunday 03rd November : Introductory Hard Hike

Route: Ballynultagh Gap, Black Hill, Mullaghcleevaun  
Billy Byrnes Gap, Moanbane, Ballynultagh Gap

Leader: Joe Kelleher

Sunday 10th November :

Route: Barravore, Table Mtn., Lugduff, Mullacor  
Carrigeen, Shay Elliot memorial

Leader: Lorcan Sweetman

Sunday 17th November :

Route: Pier Gates, Lugalla, Knocknaclohoge, Military Road  
Gravale, East Top, Mullaghcleevaun, Oasis

Leader: Jim Barry

Sunday 24th November :

Route: Bohernabreena Waterworks, Kippure, Seefingan  
Corrig, Seahan, Stone Cross

Leader: Prionnsias MacAnBheatha

Sunday 01st December :

No hike due to Aghavannagh weekend. This will be a great weekend to get together for music craic, and some walking. There are still some places left for this weekend. Book in Head Office 35 includes bus, overnights and Buffet meal.

Sunday 08th December :

Route: Pier Gates, Djouce, Tonduffs, Military Road  
Pier Gates (may be varied on day).

Leader: Deirdre Corrigan

## DOWN DISTRICT WALKING FESTIVAL

3RD & 4TH August 1996

I represented An Oige Hillwalkers at this event. It was most enjoyable even though my legs are still shaking!

'twas on Sunday 4th August that our group set forth about 8am from Skerries, in Fingal Co.Dublin. An hour and a half later we were in Castlewella, Co.Down. This was the assembly point for the walks. A blue sky, the sun shining and smiling faces of the walkers ensured everyone was looking forward to the day. It was well organised with registration for all walks taking place in the town hall. In a well appointed room upstairs one could register for three different types of walks. There was large scale maps, brochures, hike information and equipment on display, - all was smiling and appealing.

The girls from the tourist office cheerfully signed us up five pounds, gave us our route tag (in case we got lost!) and then we proceeded outside to the blue buses of Ulster. These ensured conviviality and heightened the sense of adventure as well as caring for the countryside in a practical way by reducing the cars and noise pollution in the Mourne. Finally the walk commenced with a little talk from the leaders who brought us up gradually to Ott Mountain, where we met the Mourne Wall. We continued following the wall up and then down a few times! until we eventually reached the highest point - Bearnagh Mountain. After lunch we descended by the Hares Gap to a car park for the return buses.

This was my first venture to the Mourne and conditions were excellent. We had a history lesson on the origin of the Kingdom of Mourne. The reason for building the granite wall - the Belfast harbour commissioners defined their property - (the source of water for Belfast). It took from 1904 to 1922 to build the wall, a total of 23 miles in length. The place names are unusual, e.g. Doan, which means a crag rising in a bleak wilderness of little soil and plenty of granite Ott Mountain, (Biblical).

The landscape is unforgiving - little grass, much heather and few sheep, - it puts me in mind of Kidnapped by R.L. Stevenson. We walked 10 miles, about half the Mourne Wall we met pleasant folk, including East Antrim walkers, Nth.West walkers, Wee Binnian walkers.

I am very excited about walking festivals such as this one, where one meets many hill-walkers from different clubs and counties and the craic is just great.

I suggest that our club participate in some of these events - we could do with lively company especially in our club!

Diarmuid O'Sulleabhann

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Diarmuid, I don't think that there is by any means a lack of lively company in our club. In fact the success of our weekend trips (all booked out) will surely justify this. (Editor)

The adventure was Martin Fagan's dream. He conceived the idea and coaxed four of us, Lorraine Brady, Linda Woolhead, Tony ~~FARRELL~~ and myself to come with him. Not that we needed much encouragement! Martin did all the planning for the 24-day trip - costs, airline tickets, hotel bookings, visas etc. Proinsias MacAnBheatha, who had been there in 1993, provided enormous help with the projected route in Nepal, the pitfalls to be avoided and a host of useful tips - all set out on paper!

We flew from Dublin to Moscow on Aeroflot International on Good Friday (April 5<sup>th</sup>) and caught another Aeroflot plane to Kathmandu (capital of Nepal), stopping briefly in Sharjah in the Persian Gulf en route.

Kathmandu is a cultural shock, with its narrow dusty unpaved streets, crowded with beggars and street-dealers, unrelentingly pestering us to buy knives, essences, and souvenirs. The traffic is chaotic; bicycles, rickshaws, taxis and 'autos' (3-wheelers), all competing for the narrowest of spaces, their horns blaring non-stop. Kathmandu has a population of 1.5 million, occupying a large valley, entirely surrounded by mountains. The hotel, where we stayed (Hotel Moonlight) in the Thamel district, was an oasis - modern, almost luxurious and reasonably priced. In fact, everything in Nepal is cheap and our money went a long way.

We negotiated a deal with a trekking company in Kathmandu for our 14-day walking trip. We hired a guide, Bhim, and three porters, Gopi, ~~DAMAR~~ and Saila, and they became really firm friends. The Nepalis (there are 30 different ethnic groups) may be poor, but they are friendly, patient and lively by nature. Our four friends simply could not do enough for us.

Our journey started with a 7-hour bus-ride to Pokhara (2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Nepal) - that was a journey worth a separate article! An hour's journey in two taxis the following morning took us to Nayaphul (New Bridge), the start of our walk. We were not to see a road again for two weeks! Our route was a clockwise circuit of the Annapurna region from Nayaphul to Phedi, incorporating an up-and-down trek into the Annapurna Sanctuary, which ends at the Annapurna Base Camp [ABC] - 4130m (13550 ft).

They were 14 memorable days. Bhim insisted that we move at a slow pace - partly because of the steepness of the terrain (yes, it was seriously steep, both up and down!), and also to enable us to become used to the heights and to avoid contracting altitude sickness. It was very warm and dry, so the modest rate of progress was welcome. It also gave us a chance to enjoy the scenery which was stunning. The Annapurna Range includes some of the highest mountains in the world, including Dhaulagiri (8167m - 7<sup>th</sup> highest) and Annapurna (8091m - 9<sup>th</sup> highest). Another fine mountain is Machhapuchhre (or Fishtail). Though 'only' 6993m, its fishtail-shaped peak stands out dramatically. These superb peaks, covered in snow all the year round, were our constant companions, and photo-opportunities abounded.

We over-nighted everywhere in tea-houses, which are the equivalent of Youth Hostels. Accommodation is basic - normally, rooms with one, two or three beds, with virtually no other furniture, and a plain common room for dining, reading, writing, playing cards etc. There was no electricity; hot showers in the lower hills were powered by simple solar panels (a surprise!), but further up they consisted of buckets of hot water! The variety of food was a little surprising. Although meat and fresh fruit were not available, menus usually had 20 or more options. We had expected an overdose of rice, but you could also get vegetable curries, Swiss "rosties" (a potato/vegetable pie), omelettes, soups, macaroni, spaghetti, noodles, eggs, puddings etc. The Nepalese food went down a treat and the clean plates attested to our healthy appetites.

The days quickly passed. First night in Tirkhedunga (5200 ft), second in Ghorepani (9350 ft), after a monster climb of 1800 ft to Ulleri. Bhim remembered this particular climb as his worst experience, once taking a whole day to get a 22-stone German up this relatively short but stiff stretch. The locals put on a outdoor musical/dance show that night at the schoolhouse. It was for the benefit of visiting English Ramblers, who had been responsible over the years for building (or funding) a water scheme, the school itself, a telephone building, and a medical dispensary. We were invited along also, and had a great night's entertainment. The local "chief" made a speech and we were all presented with fresh flower wreaths. Next morning (4.30 a.m!) we went up to Poon Hill (10500 ft) to see the sunrise over the Annapurna Range - a little special.

Two more days took us to Chhomrong (6725 ft) - a thriving resort village in a magnificent location, and the last real village on the trail to the Annapurna Sanctuary. From here on, all lodges cook on kerosene, as it is illegal to cut down a tree or to cook with firewood. It was an exciting climb of 7000 feet to ABC through forests of bamboo, birch and rhododendron, with the Modi Khola River gorge escorting us all the way. There were also some adventurous moments over swaying bridges and stepping stones, and several icy avalanches were negotiated. We stayed at Machhapuchhre Base Camp [MBC] - 12150 ft - for two nights, and tramped through the snow to reach ABC on Day 8. It is set in an amazing natural amphitheatre, and a panorama of mountain views was enjoyed. A Russian climbing team had their base camp there - they were planning an assault on Annapurna South. The nights were cold up here and we finally got an opportunity to use our sleeping bags, goretex, gloves and warm clothing.

Down to Chhomrong again, and then we headed back to Pokhara on a different route. A day's rest at JINUWA was a treat. There are hot sulphur springs here on the bank of the Modi Khola, where we bathed and relaxed after the exertions in the high mountains. On then through Himalpani, Landrung, Tolka (yes, in Nepal!) and Dhampus, where Bhim baked a cake on the spot as a surprise and presented it with 21 lighted candles to celebrate Tony's birthday (not his 21<sup>st</sup>!). The two young girls, who served us the evening meal, put on a Nepalese song and dance show to help the celebrations, and they were accompanied on a bongo drum by a local lad and our four Nepali friends. We also had a go at the Nepalese dances with varying degrees of success! All in all, a night to remember.

On to Phedi (trail's end) next day and back to Pokhara by taxis. We spent two days there as "normal" tourists, then the bus journey back to Kathmandu, and two final days seeing the sights of the capital. The Swayambunath (or Monkey) Temple was a highlight, standing on a prominent hill overlooking the city. The old Royal Palace (9-stories high and now a museum) was also very impressive.

We spent two nights in Moscow on the way home - the Red Square and the Kremlin were two outstanding memories - but we found most of the Russians we met to be rather dour and disobliging, such a contrast to the cheerful and ever-smiling Nepalis.

Our trip lasted 24 days. The wonderful memories will be cherished and we can warmly recommend such an adventure to all our walking friends. One thing is for sure - we will be going back again!

# AN OIGE HILLWALKERS CLUB

Buxton Youth Hostel 28th December 1996 to 1st January 1997  
Telephone number from Ireland 0044 1298 22287

IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY

Saturday 28th December - Morning 8.45am - Meet at the departure lounge of the Irish Ferries, North Wall, Dublin.

Returning Wednesday 1st January 1997 - Evening 7.30pm - Arrive North Wall.

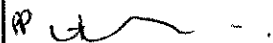
The remaining balance is due immediately.

Be prepared for very cold weather - Bring plenty of warm clothing, long johns (thermal) or several pairs of leggings - good thick gloves and a very warm hat.

Everything is provided - all bed linen - all food from Saturday dinner to Wednesday breakfast, tea and coffee is available at anytime.

Bring Bank of England notes for spending money.

Looking forward to seeing you



Seán Dunne