

IRISH Trekker



The Trekkers Mountaineering Club
Glenageary, Co. Dublin
www.trekkers.ie

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Produced By
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Social and Personal

Acknowledgements

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M. Cotter

Welcome New Members

Welcome to our newest members, Geraldine Boland and John Casey

Condolences

Members of the Club extend their deepest sympathies to Paddy O'Duffy on the death of his sister Sr. Mary Duffy who died on 21st July 2012. May she rest in peace.

Warm congratulations are extended to:

Dick Ryan on the birth of his granddaughter Anna.

Eileen Gallagher on the birth of granddaughters Clodagh and Alice.

And to Ita Lawton on the birth of Aoife.

Trekker Notes

Dates for your diary

Away Trips 2012/13

Dates	Trip/Organiser	Walks
16-21 September 2012	 The Galtees, Tipperary (Monty Tilsley)	B/C
20-27 February 2013	 Tenerife (Shay Murrán)	A/B

Other Dates

22 October 2012	AGM, Killiney Castle Hotel
15 December 2012	Christmas Walks and Dinner Wicklow Heather Restaurant, Laragh

Guidelines for Organising Trekker Away Trips

Check List for Leaders :

1. Send out notification to all members at least 2 months before the planned trip once the approval of the committee has been given. This can be by email and on the website. All emails should use the BCC facility.
2. Advise all details of the walks involved, i.e. Grade and where possible to include distance, height gain, and approximate duration.
3. Give full details of cost and dates by which deposits / payments are required.
4. Manage all money / deposits.
5. Inform Members travelling of cancellation policy, highlighting any cancellation penalty that applies.
6. Keep numbers travelling to a manageable level - refer to "Organisation of club trips abroad Non-Members and Expenses" on the Trekker Website.
7. The Committee should be kept informed of the names of Trekkers booked on a trip and also those unconfirmed or on a waiting list.
8. All members travelling on trips to give contact details for someone at home, ie spouse/partner, son/daughter, niece/nephew. Details to include telephone number, and/or mobile, address, and email address. The reason being in the event of illness involving hospitalization or worse a serious accident.
9. Restrict communications about the trip to those travelling unless there is a valid reason to copy third parties.
10. Inform Members travelling of the need for travel Insurance

Trekkers' Appalachian Venture

22-30 June 2012

By Niall Humphreys

Arrival

Friday 22nd June 2012 we nine intrepid walkers (Brendan, Richelle, Mary, Ita, Paddy, Gilbert, Shay, Pearse, Niall) left Dublin for the Appalachian Trail – or rather for a tiny part of it. The Appalachian Trail stretches for over 2,000 miles near the east coast of the US from Georgia to Maine. The threatening goings-on reflected in the film “Deliverance”, which jumped to most people’s minds on the mention of the Appalachians, were set in Georgia, far to the south of where we were going. We were headed to the White Mountains, New Hampshire, a State with the motto “Live Free or Die”, of rugged individualism, with no general sales or income tax (but taxes aimed at visitors such as a meals and rental tax). The full hike is undertaken by about 2,000 people each year - about 200 completing it and taking about 6 months.

Being a regular visitor to the US I made straight for the US immigration area at Dublin Airport, queued there until I reached the officials only to be told that the Boston plane was not going from there but from a different gate with immigration control in the US, not Dublin. Time now short, I hurried there only to find my way blocked by a glass door. It was exactly the boarding time on my boarding card so I had the bad feeling that they had closed the door to late comers. There was no sign of the others so, presuming they were already through, I tried ringing them on my mobile. In fact I was the first there, and too early, the boarding time on the boarding card being incorrect. No problem, no rush. At Boston there was no delay at immigration, it was probably faster than it is in Dublin.

We were met at the airport by a small bus which brought us the three hour journey, over bone shaking concrete road, to our destination – the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) centre at Crawford Notch. Crawford Notch is in the middle of nowhere, there is no commercial centre and no shops, the nearest shopping area being North Conway 26 miles away. It is however down the road from Bretton Woods, an equally lonesome spot, but the location for the Mount Washington Hotel where the Bretton Woods Agreement was negotiated in 1944 which laid the groundwork for the IMF and the World Bank (incorporating the International Bank

for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA)). A notch is what they call a pass in the White Mountains, apparently because there was no passage through the mountains before the Europeans arrived. The main Indian tribe had been the Abenaki who were decimated by diseases and pushed out of the area by the colonialists. Paddy came up with an easy mnemonic for Crawford Notch involving just the first and last few letters.



The AMC, at whose very comfortable Highland Centre we stayed, is one of the US's oldest outdoor associations. Founded in 1876 it supports outdoor activities and promotes preservation of forest including 37,000 acres it bought in 2003. It maintains the New Hampshire part of the Appalachian Trail and provides huts for hikers using the trail. Unlike parts of the trail in other states, however, the AMC charges for the use of these huts. Hence the sobriquets of "Appalachian Money Club", and "Dollar Mountain Club" used by some disgruntled hikers, and apparently the addition of a "\$" sign on some of the AMC notice boards at trail heads.

As we arrived at Crawford Notch we encountered a black bear, the only bear we saw in the whole trip. It was mooching around a building close to the AMC centre, snuffling at the building and peering into parked cars. Later in the evening Richelle bravely ventured out and took a photo of it, now beside the centre itself. The coincidence was so remarkable that we wondered was it a set up – the bear kept in a shed until some naïve travellers like ourselves arrived.





Mount Jackson (4052ft)

Not letting the grass grow under our feet, but also not testing ourselves too much, the first day's target was Mount Jackson. Mount Jackson is a peak in the Presidential Range, the part of the White Mountains which was our primary interest. The range is so called because the peaks are named after Presidents – starting from the south there are Mounts Jackson, Pierce, Eisenhower, Munroe, Washington, Franklin, Adams and Madison. The trail connecting the peaks is part of the Appalachian Trail. I wonder would it be a good marketing ploy to name the twelve Bens after our presidents or national heroes, or the Kerry mountains after Irish literary figures?

The AMC Centre stands at about 1900ft so this trek of about 8 miles incorporated a climb of about 2,200 feet. It was all on track and much of it was between contours. It turned out to be a good introduction to what was ahead of us as it was much more difficult than expected. Though it was all on a track (as all walking in this area



of the WhiteMountains is), the track was frequently no more than a series of boulders. In the photo, we took the path to the right; the trail was over the boulders on the left. Contours are 100ft apart on our maps so there was plenty of room for significant rises and falls while remaining between contours. We realised that walking speeds in the White Mountains would probable average about 1.5 mph!



All of this walk was through forest (some of the other walks reached above the tree line), but it was still interesting particularly when crossed by streams. At one stage we found ourselves below a cliff, Bugle Cliff, which we knew we should be above. A young couple had just passed us and they too had gone wrong. Fortunately it was not too difficult to correct the situation and regain the track to Bugle Cliff from which there was a terrific view back to the AMC centre. On the way back we found the place where we went wrong – the “track”, a heap of rocks, was virtually impossible to identify from the easterly direction.

As we approached Mt.Jackson we could hear a thunderstorm threatening. The last element of the climb is over a number of enormous boulders which were becoming quite slippery as rain was beginning to fall. At the

top, which was very exposed and windy, we could see the storm coming nearer and it looked as if there would be only minutes before being engulfed by heavy rain and possibly lightning.

Obviously we did not want to be standing on an exposed peak when this arrived (the advice is: if in a lightning storm throw your pole some distance away as it may act as a lightning conductor). This, however, was our first peak in the trip, and a 4,000 footer at that, so Paddy naturally produced his camera to ask Gilbert the customary question "So, where are we now?" Gilbert's answer does not bear repeating, though preserved on the tape!

On the way back Mary and I took a short diversion to Elephant head, which is not as high as Bugle Cliff but also has a great view of Crawford's Notch. There is a rather touching plaque there commemorating a death – it does not record the name of the victim or the griever, if it is for a child, sibling or partner, if it was accident or suicide. The inscription reads:

*If tears could build a stairway
And memories a lane
I'd make my way to heaven
And bring you back again.*

Though only Mary and I enjoyed Elephant Head on this day, Paddy and Pearse came up on the Friday.



That night I left my walking pole outside at the Centre when quaffing a much needed drink of beer at the end of the walk. I did not notice this until the following morning and it never reappeared. This was rather surprising as the level of honesty throughout seemed to be excellent. However the centre had a facility for loaning trekking gear including poles so I was able to borrow one for the rest of the week.

The total Mount Jackson walk was somewhat over 8 miles.

Mt Eisenhower (4780ft), Mt Pierce (4310ft)

Sunday was a beautiful day. I decided to wear shorts, a decision to be later regretted. I put on plenty of sun tan lotion and insect repellent. We were driven to the trail head for Edmands Path which leads up to Mt Eisenhower. Mt. Eisenhower at 4780ft is somewhat higher than Mt. Franklin and our starting point was about the same height as before. However, though initially steep, this was a more pleasant trek than the day before, helped enormously by the better weather. There were some terrific views back to the valley overlooking the Mt. Washington Hotel.



On the way we passed a sign warning us of the terrible weather to be expected. Mt. Washington experienced, in 1934, the highest wind speed ever recorded of 231 mph. It also recorded the worst wind chill factor of 100 mph winds at -47 degrees Fahrenheit. The weather is notoriously erratic largely due to the convergence of several storm tracks, mainly

from the South Atlantic, Gulf region and Pacific Northwest.

Mt. Eisenhower is above the tree line and its slopes are bedecked with a proliferation of delicate alpine flowers. They are so orderly that they look cultivated rather than wild. There are hundreds of trekkers crossing the mountain every day yet there was no litter to be seen. One of our group (not to be named!) strayed off the track and was quickly informed by an oncoming walker that this was not permitted. The views from Mt. Eisenhower itself were magnificent. Unfortunately in taking a group photo I took the inexcusable risk of stepping back, without looking, to fit the whole group into my picture. Standing on loose stones I, needless to say, stumbled sending camera, glasses and walking pole flying. Luckily no harm was done.





From Mt. Eisenhower we followed the Crawford path which leads back to the AMC Centre, taking a diversion to include Mt. Pierce, 4310 ft, (obviously with a photo of Pearse on Pierce) and a look in to the Mizpah Spring Hut. Visiting the Hut on this beautiful day gave us some (false) idea of what would await us when we overnighted later in the Lakes of the Clouds Hut before completing the climb of Mt. Washington.



Towards the end of the walk, as we approached the main road we passed a rather impressive waterfall, the Gibbs Falls.

Here too is the start of the Crawford path, a trail to the summit of Mt. Washington since 1819.

A Note on the Trails

I have indicated that the trails can be quite difficult to identify. There are, however, a couple of aids to this. Colour coding is used to distinguish various trails (The Appalachian Trail is yellow). So the appropriate colour (or colours if more than one trail is using a particular path) may be painted as a band on trees or rocks where the trail route is doubtful. In open areas cairns are used to identify routes as well as for marking the top of a peak. It was often a relief, in poor visibility, to see a cairn emerging from the mist confirming that we were on the right track. We were not aware of this system when ascending Mount Jackson (we had only seen the sign posts which are placed where tracks meet) and I cannot say if there was a tell-tale mark which would have prevented our error on that occasion.

Day Off

The original plan was to hike to the Lakes of the Clouds Hut on Monday before ascending Mt. Washington and following this with a rest day. The weather forecast however threatened severe lightning storms and poor weather for the next few days before clearing at the end of the week. Consequently we decided to take Monday as the rest day and go to North Conway to browse the shopping outlets there. This was just as well since we suffered the mother of all storms which would make you never again complain about Irish rain, and lightning flashing right over us. It was also useful in that we all purchased sleeping bag liners for use in the hut when we eventually got there.

On the return journey we stopped at the Mount Washington Hotel for a bite to eat. It is an immense hotel, more or less the last remaining from 200 hotels which were popular at the end of the 19th century before the proliferation of the motor car substituted short trips for long holidays and before sun holidays became the norm. The hotel is very impressive having recently had \$50-60 million dollars spent on it.



The "gold room" where the Bretton Woods conference was held is preserved and roped-off. We had a pleasant and inexpensive lunch.

Despite the grandeur the beers came in true American style – no glasses! The waitress judged Paddy’s pizza to be under par so she got him another one, and gave him a free beer while he waited. Then in the final bill she did not charge him for the meal either! Earlier in Starbucks I offered a \$50 note to pay for a cup of coffee so they said they would not charge me at all!

Because we had changed our day away for staying in the hut rather than the centre, we had to change rooms that evening. The resulting chaos was a situation comedy of people entering rooms already occupied and disturbing couples in compromising positions. The AMC is largely resourced through volunteers and this certainly told in their expertise in allocating rooms.

Mt Avalon (3442ft) and Mt Tom (4051ft)

By Tuesday bites I received (from the notorious black fly?) populated my leg so I reverted to long trousers. In any case the weather, though warm, was still poor. We had intended to go to Zealand Falls but as lightning again threatened we hiked instead to Mt. Avalon (3,442 ft) which provided a shorter route back if required. These are to the east of the AMC centre, the opposite direction from the presidential range. The weather held apart from some heavy showers however so we also took in Mt. Tom (4,051 ft). The climbs were as usual steep and rugged and mostly heavily wooded with occasional views and plenty of streams. There was a severe dip between Avalon and Tom so the climb was greater than it looked. Distance about 7 miles. Considering the conditions it was a very worthwhile day.



Evenings at the AMC Centre

Dinner at the centre is invariably at 6.00 pm which ensured our return before this, hopefully with time for a beer before changing. The food was surprisingly good, as was the wine, particularly a Pinot Noire. There are a number of sitting areas around the building though bringing drinks was only allowed in one – where we tended to congregate (&

dominate). The ethos of the AMC is one of socialising with other visitors hence long tables to eat at. Ours being a group of nine however was limited in this regard, though we did meet a few who ventured to join our table. One, Michael from Dublin and living in Boston for twenty years, particularly and mysteriously enjoyed our company after the meal even though we were talking shop (i.e. about the operation of the Trekkers).



Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail to Lakes of the Clouds Hut (5000ft)

Wednesday then was the day set for the trek to the hut. I think we all looked forward to this and the following climb to Mt. Washington as the highlight of the trip and it certainly fulfilled its promise. The weather was poor but walkable. The Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail is 3.1 miles of largely difficult and very steep terrain which took the day to traverse. (“Weren’t you great to go trekking” say our friends, “How far did you walk in a day?” “3 miles” ...”Oh ...”). There were a large number of hikers coming down the trail as we went up, including some youngsters. They warned us of heavy flows on the rivers





we had to cross. Due to weather conditions at the top walkers who had intended to continue on the Appalachian Trail had been redirected down the mountain. As it turned out the conditions, though bad, were not as bad as the worst prophets of doom we met had described. Still it was a long, slow, difficult climb and we were very glad to reach the hut. Any idea of continuing up Mt. Munroe which is only 0.3 miles further on and 300ft higher (at 5,372ft) was quashed by a combination of fatigue, poor visibility, high winds and the general embargo applying to hiking in that direction.



Lakes of the Clouds Hut

The Lakes of the Clouds Hut is situated at 5,000 ft., close to the peak of Mt. Monroe and 1.5 miles from the peak of Mt. Washington. There are two lakes (we skirted one but could not see its extent) and the views are apparently spectacular but we would not know anything about that. At the top of the Amonoosuc Ravine Trail, there were fortunately cairns to mark the way to the hut, otherwise we could not possibly see it, 50 metres away. It was difficult to stand or move against the driving wind and rain, but a great relief to see the hulking building emerge from the mist.

Lakes of the Clouds hut (as we never saw it).



The hut itself is quite large, it can house 90 travellers, there were about 70 the night we were there. Sleeping quarters were narrow rooms with triple tiered bunks – 18 bunks to a room. There was no gender separation between rooms – this did not constitute a problem as, far from disrobing, the inclination was to add further layers against the winds and rain which penetrated the windows. Our rain gear was soaking from the climb so any possible space was used on which to hang it. When hung near a window they were even wetter in the morning due to the leaks. Only later did we realise that there was a space near the kitchen where the cognoscenti hung their wet gear. There were a couple of windmills on the roof, of which the AMC were very proud – unfortunately one of them was broken and howled unmercifully all night. They are also very proud of their waterless toilets and recycling of human waste - so as well as the howling windmill above there is the whistling wind below as you sit on the toilet, feeling very fragile. The electricity was turned off at 9.30 so if you needed to use the toilets before daylight you used the head light you hopefully remembered to bring. Luckily no-one snored in the room some of us were in – not so fortunate were the others where a youngster talked in his sleep all night.

Dinner and breakfast are provided at the hut – both were surprisingly good. No drink was served, but of course we brought our own answer to that from the duty free in Dublin. The AMC give a festive air to the meals, calling out those who prepared and served the food for congratulations. In the morning they put on a comic performance demonstrating the exercise of muscles to leave the place in good order, by – folding the blankets, keeping any trash, using the heart – i.e. exercising a spirit of comradeship and co-operation. In the morning they also gave awards to kids for completing a specified number of pages of the Junior Naturalist Activity Book. The activities in the book are simple and informative, focusing on wildlife, leaves, weather, astronomy, mapmaking and suchlike. We should have acquired a copy - it looked an excellent entertainment and educational vehicle.

Trekkers undertaking the Appalachian Trail do not have to pay the overnight charge (\$114!) if they help out in the kitchen or otherwise. On this night two did this by giving an account of their experiences on the trail.



Lakes of the Clouds hut.

(the guy with the cap is John from the AMC, who organised the trip with Brendan and who acted as our AMC guide up Ammonoosuc and Mt Washington – the only trips on which we used a guide.)

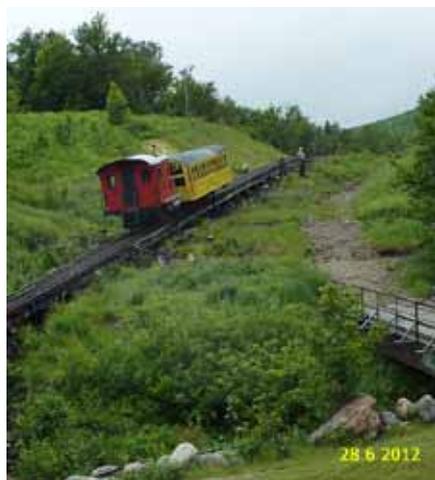
Mount Washington (6288ft)

On Thursday we finally reached the peak of Mount Washington, 1.5 miles and about 1300ft climb. Again the weather was atrocious coming from the Lakes of the Clouds huts. On the way we were passed by two of the Hut volunteers with enormous packs on their backs, being the refuse from the hut on its way to Mount Washington.



The peak of Mt Washington itself is not the most interesting from a trekking point of view though it is the highest in the North Eastern US. It is disfigured by multiple communications masts (though not any to give us a mobile signal). It can be accessed by a road from the west and by a cog railway from the east as well as by trekking trails. It has a large building incorporating eating area, souvenir shops and museum. This also contains a notice board listing the deaths on the mountain. The latest on the board was 1/4/2012 for a man who fell into a crevasse. He and his son hiked Tuckerman's Ravine (on the west side of the mountain) every year but this year he slipped, hit his head, and slid and fell more than 70 feet into a crevasse.

We had a snack, dried out and rested for a bit before heading off for the downward journey by the Jewell trail, somewhat over 4 miles. Some took the cog rail down and relieved some of the rest of the weight of their bags. A great idea until we came out of the cloud into



sunshine below and we had no bag to hold our coats, and, of course sun tan lotion and insect repellent were also in the bags. Still it made a very light journey. On the way we took in the actual peak, a short distance from the restaurant followed by more very rough going. Then it improved for the rest of the descent. We crossed the rail for the cog railway on the way, just before the train emerged out of the mist. It passed with cheery waves from the kids aboard and was swallowed up as promptly as it had appeared. Between this and the tree line there was a prairie-like spread of Balsam Fir which, above a certain height, only grows to a few feet and provides a very pleasant ground cover.

We all met up at the base of the cog railway. There we saw a chipmunk. In general we had seen little animal life apart from this, the bear, and a squirrel chattering and running madly around some trees in an immense rectangle beside Elephant Head (& a sign for "Moose Crossing").

Mt. Willey (4285ft) & Mt Field (4340ft).

Friday was our last opportunity for walking so we decided to try a final decent walk taking in Mts Willey and Field, to the East of the Centre. We were joined by Dermot, a friend of Brendan. Dermot and his wife Pam had come from Canada to be with us and joined us after dinner on Thursday evening. They were to greatly enhance our singsong on Friday night. Paddy and Pearse, on a separate walk, took in Elephant Head and Willie's house.

The climb to Mt Willey by the Kedron Flume track and taking in again a part of the Appalachian Trail, presented spectacular views. Some of it was so steep as to be provided with "ladders" attached to the vertical rocks. The saddle from Mt Willey to Mt Field was relatively easy and Mt Field provided a magnificent view west with Mt Washington Hotel in the distance. Returning from Mt Field



we passed Mt Avalon where we were earlier in the week – we were so confident of our expertise on the trails at this stage that we went slightly off the track again! The distance was about 7 miles, over 2,500ft climb.

Last Hurrah!

The customary singsong was duly held on the Friday evening. The AMC Centre did not seem ideal for this so Gilbert exercised his magnificent organisational skills to have the Mt Washington Hotel (no less) send a minibus to bring us up there. Dermot had brought his guitar, a great repertoire of songs, and the voice to match. His wife Pam had gone on an AMC walk on Friday morning, the only other visitor on the walk being Paul from New Jersey (or as he told us to say “New Joysie”), so we invited him to join us for dinner and later to the singsong. He was 84 and had been climbing the Ammonoosuc trail regularly until he was 82. Though a Jew he had been to many Catholic confessions as a boy. Not quite, but he went with his Catholic friend, waited for him in the church, and weekly quizzed him on his sins. He said he was impressed more by Jewish confession, which requires compensation for the victim and not just a commitment not to re-offend. A liberal in politics he was surprised that the Irish would classify Irish politics as left of the Democrats in the US. The American Irish he meets as a lawyer, though their parents would have been Democrats, have now gravitated to the Republican Party.

A great time was had by all in the Mt Washington Hotel. Everyone contributed something. Dermot led with a great range of songs, Brendan sang solos, Brendan and Ita sang a duet, Gilbert sang a solo as did Richelle. Led by Pam she, Mary, Richelle and Ita danced a four handed reel. As the time went on people began to assemble around us; apparently we were more entertaining than the pre-wedding entertainment elsewhere in the hotel. Paddy, as well as contributing his usual marvellous songs hobnobbed with the new audience. The most popular piece for this throng was Pearse’s rendering of “The Wild Rover” which we sang a number of times on request. My contribution to the evening was a trekking poem, “Over the Top” in the form of Chesterton’s “Lepanto”.

A memorable interlude occurred when a stocky man in his sixties lunged from the onlookers, jumped on a table, and proceeded to sing a very bawdy, crude song from his days in Vietnam. His daughter was there, who, instead of being mortified, was delighted, telling us that he had never done anything like this before - she was totally unaware of this side to him. Her mother is from Galway and she is coming to Ireland and, of course, fully intends to seek us out.

Paul felt he had not contributed to the evening (quite wrongly as he had driven Dermot back to the Centre to get his guitar). So, as we congregated later back at the AMC Centre he shared a joke with us:

A reporter goes to Israel. She is looking for something emotional and positive and of human interest. She hears about an old Jew who had been going to the Wailing Wall to pray, twice a day, every day, for a long, long time. So she went to check it out. She goes to the Wailing Wall and there he is! So she watches him pray and after about 45 minutes she approaches him for an interview. "Sir, how long have you been coming to the Wall and praying?" "For about 50 years." "What do you pray for?" "For peace between the Jews and the Arabs. For all the hatred to stop. For our children to grow up in safety and friendship." "How do you feel after doing this for 50 years?" "Like I'm talking to a f***ing wall."

There Goes My Next Paycheck

A final photograph on Saturday and we were off home. A last unexpected bonus came in the form of a telescope set up outside the Centre to view the sun - it revealed a flare rising from a position of about 1 o'clock on the sun's surface and clearly curling and trailing way. Often seen in pictures, it is much more impressive when seen in reality.

A more comfortable bus this time, but again we suffered the dreadful roads. They were so bad in fact that the bus hit the safety railing in the Boston Tunnel, destroying a mirror. The driver, she seemed desperately young, was naturally very upset. Given the nature of the road and way the railing was obtruding, we felt the fault was not hers – a small damper on the end of the great holiday, we hope it did not affect her prospects too much. Otherwise we arrived in Dublin without incident – a marvellous holiday.



Adventures In The Pyrenees

A chance meeting last December of John Brett (former Trekker) and Dick and Joan Needham with an invitation to visit the South Eastern Pyrenees as he had started a walking club there, resulted in 18 Trekkers going to see and walk in his adopted homeland, French Catalonia, or Roussillon segment of the Roussillon Languedoc-Roussillon region.

PRADES is a commune and a sub-prefecture of the Pyrenees Orientales Department in southern France. It has about 7,000 inhabitants and is 40k west of Perpignan. It is capital of the historical Confluent valley at the foot of Mount Canigou in the Pyrenees adjacent to northern Spanish frontier and half way between the Mediterranean Sea and the ski-slopes, close to Andorra and only 2-3 hours away from Barcelona. It is a trading centre between the plains and the mountains.

This area enjoys a sunny microclimate with 300 sunshine days a year, with long hot summers and relatively cold winters. The presence of the Pyrenees ensures ample rainfall and therefore lush vegetation, which can vary from valley to valley. Despite the cold in winter the days are usually bright with sunshine. The famous Pyrenean wind that gusts in this region is called La Tramontane - welcome in summer time, not so in winter! There is also the vent marin or sea wind.

HISTORY:

French Catalonia was put on the map when Perpignan became the capital of the Kings of Majorca, under James I. Roussillon remained under Spanish control until Louis XI came along in 1463 and conquered the capital making it French. Taken back by the Spanish again some 30 years later, it stayed Spanish for nearly 2000 years. However, in 1642 Louis XIV initiated the TREATY of the PYRENEES and signed in 1659, ensuring that Roussillon would become part of the French Republic, omitting Llívia which remains a Spanish enclave to this day.

To-day's stance is clear. This is France with a Catalan emphasis. The Catalan flag of yellow and red horizontal stripes can be seen throughout Roussillon. Catalan emblem is the famous Grenet de Perpignan, a deep red garnet set in gold. Street and place names are written in Catalan along side French. The Catalan language is taught in schools along with French, and

most people are bi-lingual.

Catalan cuisine is served in most restaurants, ranging from Boles de Picolat, spicy meatballs in a rich olive cinnamon and garlic sauce and Crème Catalane, crème brulee with a difference. Peasant stew or l'Ollada, is complete with pig's ears and tail!

The dry rich soil of the ancient vineyards produces dry and sweet Catalan wines.

Catalans pride themselves on their Rugby team from Perpignan.

Mount Canigou

This mountain is the most potent symbol of Catalan identity in the Roussillon to-day. Venerated as far back as 1001, it can be clearly seen throughout the region.

It is snow-capped from mid-October until spring. Height is 2,784 meters or approx. 9000 feet. Location is a mere 50k from the Mediterranean, between the Tet and Tech valleys south east of Prades. It is also reputed to have the steepest gradients in the whole range of the Pyrenees, thus earning its nickname 'The Catalan Fuji Yama'.

Ascent to the summit is usually done in summer, and there is also a 33K local race done every year including the mountain and Massif. The lazy way is by 4-wheel drive! Then hike the remaining 90 minutes during the summer months, during the winter there are manned and 2 unmanned shelters available for use.

The Canigou Massif a protected nature reserve offers numerous walking and hiking opportunities.

The whole area is classified as one of the Grand Sites of France since 1999.

'Catalan Days' follow the celebration of Good Friday and Easter when there is a huge procession in Perpignan. These days celebrate festivals of music and dancing throughout the region. Fireworks are lit on 14th July Bastille Day and 15th August Feast of the Assumption.

The Festa Major St Jean is a full 2week festival in mid-June, when the sacred Canigou takes on special spiritual significance with a flame ceremony reinforcing peace and fraternity amongst all Catalans. Perpignan plays host

to a laser show and thousands celebrate in the streets.

Prades known as the green plains has a couple of places of interest, besides the vegetable market on Saturday and large general one on Tuesday!

Church of St.Pierre was rebuilt during the 17th century on the remains of a Romanesque church from which only the great bell remains. The Catalan sculpture Josep Sunyer, built the large baroque altarpiece is classified as a historic monument and known as the largest in France. There is a treasury which holds pieces from the abbey St Michel de Cuixa. These are objects from the 15th to 18th centuries, pieces from the French Revolution, chalices, ciboria, and a gold altarpiece of St. Benedict.

Le Maison Jacomet or half-timbered house is one of the oldest in the whole region dating from the 15th century. It is where the 'Notables' those invited by the king to consult on matters of state lived.

Numerous facades and front doors of the houses have sculptured motifs in the rendering.

Material used the decoration of the houses include pink marble 'le galet' decorative stones and pebbles, and Catalan brick 'le cayrou' local black stone.

Since 1750 the Catalans have been extracting garnet from the slopes of the Pyrenees.

Some of famous people who lived in Prades include,

PABLO CASALS 1876-1973

Famous cellist, born in Spain refused to perform in Hitler's Germany and after the Spanish Civil War he went into exile in Prades. The bicentennial of Bach's death in 1950 led him to return to the instrument and create the Prades Festival.

Invited to the United Nations and the White House, he became a representative of World Peace.

THOMAS MERTON 1915-1968

A Trappist monk was born No.1 rue de September. His written works fight for world peace and the battle against poverty. He studied religions from Asia and the thoughts of Gandhi. In 1968 he was invited to a world congress

and died afterwards.

POMPEU FABRA 1868-1948

Was born in Garcia but became exiled in Prades. He wrote the "Grammar of the LLengua Catalana" which is the official reference book for the Catalan language. 1939 he became exiled in Prades fleeing the Franco Regime, and continued to work on the Catalan language until he died.

We stayed in **Villa Lafabregue**, with Nick and Kate as our hosts. It was built for a Catalan banking family around the 1870's in an acre of ground. The house became the German headquarters in 1943. It was taken over by the French resistance (Maguisard) in 1944, and the allies 1945. It is overlooked by the Pyrenees. Guests were encouraged to bring food back and eat on the terrace and free tea and coffee was provided in the rooms as well as in the open room downstairs. They were always welcoming, helpful in every way possible. Their home was our home while we there. We always looked forward to the cuppa which Kate kindly provided on return from walking, that's service! The pool in the grounds was used frequently by several members of the group an added enjoyment. When we arrived the first night May 8th, Kate provided us all with a delicious meal. All the ladies were looking for the recipes. Nick made sure our glasses were full, what an introduction to our new home!

Guides for our holiday were:

Nick, Richard, (Ford), John and Carol when possible and most importantly Indy the chochalate brown Labrador. They ensured we were all safe throughout our walking trips, spoke to us about the local area we happened to be in at the time, were always available for questions, and Indy reminded us to keep hydrated, because when she got too hot she went for a swim in the canals, and took to the drink!

WEDNESDAY 9th May

10.00 A.M.

Walked through the park of the Chateau Palms. Full of rare species and old trees such as redwoods, cedars magnolias, linden trees plane trees, chestnuts, oaks and mimosas.

Walked by poppy lined road ways, peach and cherry orchards, through forest trails up to **Abbey Saint-Michel-de-Cuixa**. This Benedictine Abbey is one of the most important ancient monuments of France. It dates from the 10th century; alas it was closed so we could not see the Byzantine arches. The bell tower from the early Romanesque period was visible, but

not the crypt, remains of a cloister and a gallery. We saw the remains of this year's collection of irises which bloom in the spring in the abbey garden. The monastic life of this monastery continues today by some monks from Montserrat.

There is a system of canals at the base of the mountains which collect the melted snow, and thus crops of fruit and vegetables can be irrigated. Each house has a canal running at the bottom of it in order to water the garden, water charges 16 Euros per year! Water is also collected from the mountains for electricity

We crossed a ridge down to Taurinya then back to Prades having walked 12k.

THURSDAY 10th May

9.00A.M.

Cars took us up to **Fontpedrouse**/Saint Thomas Les Bains to catch THE YELLOW TRAIN at an altitude of 1050m. We were all looking forward to a train journey with a difference and were not disappointed! This particular railway (Cerdagne) is an extension of the SNCF national French line. The open carriages we travelled in were referred to as les bains or the bathtubs that give the full effect of the fresh mountain air, and one could experience the engineering marvel of getting a track through this mountainous countryside. The dramatic alpine scenery over towering bridges, tunnels, and viaducts over forested valley floor were clearly seen by us. This train only stops at more major stops unless signalled by the passenger to stop, or prebooked with company before travelling. The speed limit is 55km/h. The 100 small villages are no longer isolated because of the railway.

Building of the railway started in 1903

1910 first section from Villafranche to Mont Louis was opened.

1911 the train climbed to Bourg Madame

1927 the last part Latour-de-Carol was completed establishing a link with the Transpyreneen..

It is the highest railway in France (altitude of 1592 meters at Bolquere Eune). There are 19 tunnels and 2 bridges in the architecture style of the 1900's.

The Sojourner Viaduct which is entirely of granite is 65m high, 230m long and is composed of a main arch of 30m wide supporting 16 smaller arches in Gothic style, above the Tat River.

The Giscard Bridge, built between 1905 and 1908, was considered at the

time as a real technical revolution. The central span of 156m and 2 and a half spans of 39m. Its deck stands at 80m. The 32m high piers support pylons of 30m. At the top of the pylons some guys and retaining cables are fixed to the dilation fitting. These cables are fixed in the mountain. Albert Giscard, the inventor of this new concept, was a mathematician and engineer born in Nîmes. Unfortunately he was killed during the official test ride. His train left earlier than scheduled and was yet to be equipped with the electric braking system chosen by the service.

We arrived at **Mont Louis**/La CABANASSE altitude of 1510m stunned by the beauty that this most unique train ride offered. Richard and Nick informed us that Mont Louis was listed as a UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE as part of the 'Fortifications of Vauban' group.

The world's first Solar Furnace was built there in 1949 by Tombe.

It is also is the first Ski Resort approaching the Pyrenees from the Mediterranean side.

Just above Mont-Louis is an area known as the **Cerdagne**, a vast plain of pastures, trees, and villages surrounded with peaks covered with snow. The largest river in Roussillon, the Tet arises from Pic Carlit 2921m the highest point in the Pyrenees almost beside Andorra. There are also several beautiful lakes here. These are used to collect water for sea-planes if a forest fire occurs. The river is 116K long and flows from west to east to enter the Mediterranean Sea near Perpignan.

We then started our descent back down to **St. Thomas les Bains**. The track was sandy and steep and difficult in parts. We were trying to get some shaded areas along the paths as the weather was very hot. We passed through a Nature Reserve one of the many in this region, and below the bridge we had travelled by train. We climbed out of the valley floor following the narrow track, and then had lunch. Our concentration was better after this and eventually we completed the last bit of the difficult descent having walked 12k. Some folk took the sulphur baths. The natural and thermal hot waters are amongst the warmest coming out of the ground at 58 degrees C before the water is cooled down to 34-38 degrees C. Chromotherapy (natural light and phototherapy), Turkish baths, Jacuzzis and massages are offered too. Some preferred a cool drink. We returned home by car relaxed and delighted to have had such a great day.

Evening meal was taken by the whole group at a nearby restaurant, owned by a German, with a Belgian chef, with Spanish food, in France!

FRIDAY 11th May

9. A.M.

We started our trip on a coach to **Le Racou Plage**. Racou which means corner in Catalan. It is a beautiful sandy beach the last one before the rocky outcrops of the Cote Vermeille.

Walking at the back of the beach past the car park, we headed east. As we browsed the 'table d'orientation' we could clearly see Racou beach and back towards port Argeles. Following the footpath which plateaus out along the costal hill we meandered down to the next cove, the Anse du Portell. This is a shingle beech and is very secluded. Along the path the Alberes hills and impressive tower at Madeloc are visible.

Steps are cut into the rock in places and almost look like a natural feature. We continued climbing on the rocks until we reached the well-marked path along the top of the low cliffs. As we passed the camp-site of les Criques du Portells on our right the waves were crashing dramatically on the rocks below on the left, until we descended to the Plage de l'Ouille. Draped over the cliffs were flowering plants and cacti.

As the old sea-level cliff path to Collioure is so weather damaged, we took another climb from l'Ouille which took us up to the highest point in the walk. We crossed more cliffs, below Fort Carre(1758) which was perched on top of a hill, then along grassy slopes until we reached Fort Miradou, the most northern part of Vauban's defensive wall of Collioure. This is an active military base, so we walked through a car-park along the road into the back streets art galleries and cafes to Collioure. 6K

This walk was a first for the trekkers, a costal walk by the Mediterranean.

Collioure (Paradise Reclaimed)!!

We were all charmed by this sea-side village, only 26K from the Spanish border. It is situated in a small harbour where the Pyrenees meet the Mediterranean Sea and is overlooked by a castle and surrounded by small coves and pebble beaches.

As Henri Matisse said *'In France there is no sky as blue as the one in Collioure ... I just have to close the shutters of my room and I have all the colours of the Mediterranean before me.*

We had time to have lunch (Catalan Menu) and taste some of the famous local wine (red, rose, or/and Banyulus aperitif or dessert wine). Afterwards we explored the old town, and the ladies shopped!!

Dinner was in down town Prades.

SATURDAY 12th May

Free Day!

A group of us decided the visit **Villefranche-de-Conflent**. We travelled by local bus as there was no local pathway. We discovered all local train and bus journeys are 1Euro!

This medieval town is only 6K from Prades, and is built in pink marble. It was fortified by Vauban who was a military engineer at the end of the seventeenth century, and is classified as world Heritage site by UNESCO. It is one of the 50 most visited sites in France thanks to a unique architectural heritage: the ramparts with 8 towers built in the 11-13th century, pink houses built in 13th century, the St Jacques Romanesque church, and the 2 main narrow streets. The houses were narrow and tall, shops at lower level, 1st floor professional level, and 2nd floor living quarters. The shops were full of crafts, time to shop again! The Monumental Gateways were added in the 18-19th century. Fort Liberia above Villefranche is connected by a tunnel of 775 steps. Everyone did their own thing, had coffee, did shopping, climbed up to Fort Libra. No one visited the 3 sets of caves across the road the Small and Large Canalettes, and the Prehisto-grotto.

The confluence of the 2 rivers Cady from the North and Tet is at Villefrenche hence its name. During the 11th century is acted as the border between Spain (Cerdagne Region) and France (Roussillon Region).

We had time to relax when we arrived back to the villa, where we were welcomed with a nice cup of tea made by Kate.

Le Galet - enjoyed Gourmet Meal; the French waitress was trying to explain the menu in English, but just couldn't make us understand. Guess who comes to the rescue a man from Mayo who is now living in France!

SUNDAY 13th May

10A.M.

Plans changed due to weather conditions, 30 degrees C! We had intended

to do a circular walk around **Eus**, where John and Carol live. It is the hottest village in France, having the most sunshine - 320 days per year. It is one of the four villages in the Conflent region named 'Most Beautiful Villages of France'. This label is proof of the quality and desire to preserve and promote rural heritage. John informed us that it was one time fortified, with an 18th century church built on a ruined castle. The village is pedestrianised and artists, artisans, and local producers live there. Population 400!

It was decided that we do a forest walk instead. We started out from Le Bach and walked upward through a forest path bypassing several villages in the distance to Mosset.

Mosset

Originally developed around a 12th century castle (now divided and used for private dwellings) which help defend the border between France and Aragon. We soaked up the medieval atmosphere, narrow streets, some towers, entranceways and ramparts which are left. The views of the surrounding countryside were magnificent. Mosset is classified as one of the 'most beautiful villages of France'. Because of its natural forests and agricultural land the region has a great biodiversity of flora and fauna. A European directive awarded this protected area a 'Habitat-Natura 2000'. We weren't surprised to learn perfume is made there.

After coffee we took a forest trail back down to the thermal station of **Molitg-les-Bains**. It is situated in a gorge in full view of Le Castile which lies in the village 600m higher up. The spa is in a beautiful park, and the baths are offered in a chateau now a luxury hotel that is actually part of the mountainside. The treatments offered are tailored to the various properties of the waters. It is a very peaceful and quiet place, and we all enjoyed a break there. Taking one of the hiking trails we returned to the cars for a relaxing afternoon having walked 10K

Richard's (F.) wife Jenny was singing in a Catalan choir competition. It was an opportunity to experience Catalan culture first hand. Each village was represented as far away as Barcelona. Those of us who went enjoyed it immensely.

Most of the group ate together, as there were only 2 restaurants open in Prades, and we all chose the same one!

MONDAY 14th May

We were taken by car to **Vinca**. Here Carol explained the local history and met her uncle down the main street! We walked on through this medieval village, and walked by olive groves, fruit orchards, and fields of vines, also enjoyed by the other places we passed through. We then walked through **Finestrat, Joch, and Rigarda**. These small hamlets had an open communal washing area, showering facilities still left from the long ago. Walking back to Vinca we could appreciate one of the natural lakes and protected parks of the region. Further along the way, we discovered a man made beech, that allow water sports and swimming for locals. We felt like a dip after the 9K walk in the hot sun.

Dinner (the last supper) was a beautiful meal made by Kate and served by our hosts and guides in Villa Lafabregue. Nick had kindly prepared a surprise! A CD photo show, photos taken by him during our walks. Paddy had an additional surprise, pictures of John when he walked with the trekkers!

Dick especially thanked John on our behalf of all of us. Without him we could not have experienced so much in the few days we were in the Pyrenees. It was he who planed our itinerary. He has such a relaxed manner he hid all the hard work he had done. His concern that we were enjoying ourselves was shown to each personally during our stay. Our holiday couldn't have happened without him.

Dick also conveyed our appreciation to our guides, Richard F, Nick, John and Carol and of course Indy. The weight watchers programme she had been on (exercise and no treats!) certainly worked.

Last of all he thanked our wonderful hosts, Nick and Kate. They were always available to our needs, and nothing was too much for them.

Noreen echoed all the above sentiments and acknowledged Dick and Joan for organising our visit to John to the Pyrenees.

TUESDAY 15th May

After breakfast, most of the group went down to the local market, which had literally everything on offer, more shopping for some. After lunch we boarded the bus for the airport and home. We all had a wonderful holiday, with plenty of special memories to treasure.

Memorial Walk

Dear Dreena,

Yesterday, on the B walk, 13 Trekkers climbed the Fraughan Rock Glen to Eric's Resting Place (elevation 504m). We spent some time remembering Eric - Noreen conducted the ceremony.

Paddy

Dear Paddy,

Thank you for letting me know about the Memorial Walk.

I would like to thank everyone for their continued remembrance of Eric and others. Some of the best times we spent here were with the Trekkers, and as I told yourself previously, Eric thoroughly enjoyed himself that day in the snow (in March 2005) where you both fell on top of each other. If someone would like to read the following excerpt from a poem by Ee Cummings, that would be lovely -

*Here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life: which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
I carry your heart (I carry it in my heart).*

Dreena

Memorial Walk Photos



Photo Gallery



C walk led by Eugene around Bray Head

Group at Glenmalure Pub



Group at Lough Dan



Group on Miners' Track



Karl, Mary on summit of a windy Scarr



Lunch on Kyle Loop



Mary D and Geraldine



Mary - blessed art thou among men

Prize for best caption



C Walk: Marlay Park to Blue Light, 1st Sep 2012



Walks Schedule September to November 2012

Date	Grade	Start	1st Leader	2nd Leader	3rd Leader
SEP 15	A	09:00	B Brackan	Gilbert Little	Barbara Lane
SEP 15	C	WALK CANCELLED DUE to TRIP to GLEN of AHERLOW			
SEP 22	B	09:00	Ita Lawton	C McCarthy	Tom Murray
SEP 22	C	WALK CANCELLED DUE to TRIP to GLEN of AHERLOW			
SEP 29	C	11:00	Eugene Logan	Sheila Cantwell	C Minogue
OCT 06	B	09:00	M Tinsley	O McKeown	P O'Duffy
OCT 06	C	11:00	Noel O'Reilly	Myles Duffy	Ann Little
OCT 13	A	09:00	Gilbert Little	Ita Lawton	C McCarthy
OCT 13	C	11:00	Dick Needham	Marelene Travers	Joan Needham
OCT 20	B	09:00	K Foley	Gaye Maguire	O McKeown
OCT 20	C	11:00	Noreen O'Brien	Sheila Cantwell	Teresa Casey
OCT 27		OCTOBER WEEKEND---NO WALKS			
NOV 03	B	09:00	Joe Murray	Phil O'Neill	Tom Gillan
NOV 03	C	11:00	R Kirker	Bernadette Coggins	Joan Needham
NOV 10	A	09:00	Gaye Maguire	Mary Dillon	Barry Walsh
NOV 10	B	10:00 <small>NOTE START TIME!</small>	Terry O'Brien	Monty Tinsley	Dympna Thunder
NOV 10	C	11:00	Eileen Gallagher	Kevin Moore	Mary O'Loghlin
NOV 17	B	09:00	Shay Murrán	John Murphy	P O'Duffy
NOV 17	C	11:00	Colette Dorgan	Noreen O'Brien	Catherine Minogue
NOV 24	C	11:00	Eugene Logan	Teresa Casey	Maura Byrne

Walk Leaders.

Walk Leaders should email members at least 10 days in advance of their scheduled walk to advise of the planned route details, including the distance to be travelled and height to be climbed. Where a named leader is unable to lead a walk, he/she should arrange for and agree a replacement. Any such changes should be notified to the Walks Co-Ordinator Owen McKeown.

Please note Bus Driver details: Tony Graham, Tel: 086 262 8857.