

The Magic of Mulranny



Route to the ridge offers staggeringly beautiful views, writes Deirdre Davys, Irish Times, 9 July 2016

If you set out on a walk full of good cheer and it becomes a real slog, do you do as my sister once did and ask: “Why am I doing this? My heart is pounding. I’m not enjoying myself, I’m going back. Do you know, I think I’ll go and have a facial,” or do you slog it out thinking that the reward will be the actual completion of the route?

These questions may well go through your mind as you set off on this walk, which at the start offers little more than a gently rising hill across rather nondescript bog. As yet nobody has invented hats with wing mirrors which allow you to see what’s going on behind you. These would be ideal because until you reach the summit you are missing the best bit – the vast expanse of Clew Bay which is behind you all the way.

If ever there was a geology student’s dream this must be it. Here you can see what happens after an ice age, when the land begins to warm and the lumps of rock and mud deposited by the melting glaciers are drowned by rising seas.

The result is a stunning bay filled with tiny green islands, some with holiday homes boasting their own sandy beaches, others inhabited by the odd local trying to do a bit of farming.

The village of Mulranny looks across this bay, to the misty cone of Croagh Patrick and down the coast to the Twelve Bens of Connemara. Behind the village, the now famous Cycle Greenway hosts hundreds of visitors pedalling between Achill and Westport, providing much-needed revenue to the area.

Above the Greenway, rugged hills rise up and merge with much higher mountains, providing days of hill-walking and real adventure to those who are prepared to leave civilisation behind and head to Ireland's only real wilderness – the Ballycroy National Park.

The starting point is anywhere along the little road near Bunnahowna Bridge about a kilometre outside Mulranny on the Newport side. Follow the signs for the Greenway.

Two dead straight bog roads head off uphill on your left. Take the second one and, when it peters out, use the river as a guide to lead you upwards. The terrain is bog, so be prepared. Your goal is the top of a ridge which can be approached from a number of different places, each offering staggeringly beautiful views.

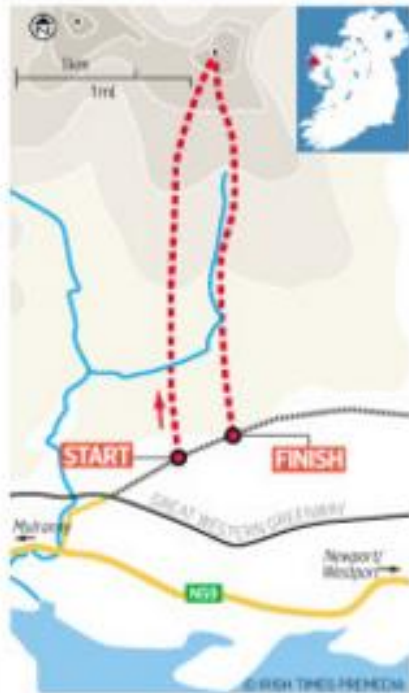
The mountain itself is mostly sandstone sometimes appearing in layers, clearly visible where the bog has peeled back or as thousands of little stones along the edge of the rivers. It gets you thinking about how the land was formed all those millions of years ago.

At last you reach the summit and now another world opens before you. The wilderness of the Ballycroy National Park stretches away into the distance, while directly below you, a long narrow corrie lake looks as if it could spill over the edge at any moment.

This is the Nephin Beg Range and perfect for keen ridge walkers who like to get up and stay up all day. Taking a tent and disappearing from the world into the wilderness might not be a bad idea.

If you must come down, head back roughly parallel to the way you came up. You'll see the river and when it turns right, the path will be just above it.

WALKS MULRANNY, CO MAYO



Start/Finish: Near Bunahowna Bridge
Time: 3½ hours. **Distance:** 10km
Map: OS Discovery Sheet 30
Suitability: Relatively easy but be able to use a compass.