

Hiking in Ireland 2010

Featuring the Ancient Pilgrimage Trails around Galway Bay, including the Aran Islands, Connemara, the Burren and Galway City

Led by Jim Gallagher, Professor Emeritus University of Wisconsin, La Crosse and Maeve Kelly, Director of Walking Boots Tours

June 11-19, 2010

Join me, archaeologist Jim Gallagher, and Irish walking guide Maeve Kelly, on wonderfully adventuresome and fun hikes on the amazingly beautiful islands, mountains, and scenic areas of the breathtaking west coast of Ireland around beautiful Galway Bay and one of my favourite places in all of Ireland, the Aran Islands.

Maeve and I have picked the best hikes and places to visit in County Clare and County Galway featuring ancient pilgrimage trails steeped in history for this year's tour. The highlights will be the spectacular Aran Islands and the Burren in county Clare. We'll hike along spectacular sea cliffs and visit sea bird nesting areas, breathtaking seashores and landscapes, and mountains. This year's tour is loaded with special hidden places and lots of extras. Some of the features of this tour which add to the enjoyment of the experience include:

- We will be in areas that most tourists don't get to see and we will enjoy amazing scenery, spring wild flowers, nesting shore birds, archaeological and historical sites, all far removed from the crowded tourist destinations.
- Knowledgeable and fun local Irish guides and experts who accompany us
- Accommodations in excellent B&B's and small lodges and great food!
- The opportunity to experience Irish culture, traditions, people, and music
- Van transport for all luggage. No need to carry heavy packs on the trail!
- Spectacular and challenging hikes that provide a wonderful sense of discovery and accomplishment
- The camaraderie of a small group (minimum 10, maximum 14) of people who enjoy hiking and nature. Recounting of the day's highlights and challenges over a good meal or turf (peat) fire at the end of the day are one of the most enjoyable parts of the trip experience.

To best sample this beautiful, rugged and remote area, we have chosen a mixture of moderate to-strenuous day hikes along with some sightseeing. This allows us to experience the beauty and natural wonders of the area as well as explore places of historic interest (castles, archaeological sites, etc).

Please contact me if you would like more information about this tour, but don't wait too long. Four out of the last five tours have sold out early and the longer you wait the more expensive (and hard to get) are the airfares.

Furthermore, 2010 and 2011 will be the last years I will be doing these tours.

I hope you can join us!

Jim Gallagher, Tour Leader, 608.784.8042, jimjangallagher@msn.com

The 2010 Tour

This year's tour follows a fascinating theme of Irish archaeology and history: ancient pilgrimages. For the last six thousand years (even up to the present day) the Irish have been taking pilgrimages to sacred places characterized by dramatic scenery, the ruins of ancient monuments, and isolated and beautiful places on islands or near lakes where extraordinary sacrifices could be made. This interest in journeying to sacred places and shrines was also continued in medieval times, especially with the advent of the early Christian missionaries such as St. Patrick. These sacred places were located on mountain tops, at ancient sites and ruins, and in singular landscapes that had special meaning and power to people for thousands of years, right up to the present. Following these ancient routes will take us through some of the most unusual, beautiful, and historic areas in the west of Ireland!

Our trip features two especially spectacular scenic areas the Aran Islands and the Burren. The Aran Islands are characterized by well preserved traditional culture and language, a grand accumulation of dramatic archaeological sites, a unique landscape crisscrossed with ancient stone walls and quiet country lanes, soaring sea cliffs with an abundance of nesting seabirds (including rare puffins), and a wonderful sense of getting away from it all that islands can give.

The Burren has a similar unique limestone geology and landscape and is also littered with fascinating archaeological sites and wildlife. The Burren has one of the finest botanical showplaces in Europe, earning this distinction on two main counts: the wealth of special flowering plants (especially rare ones) and the presence of species normally found in very different locations ranging incredibly from arctic and Alpine to Mediterranean species. At last count the Burren boasted 22 species of wild orchids alone.

Itinerary

Dates to be determined: Included in the tour, for those able to attend, is a pre-trip reception at the home of Jim and Jan Gallagher to meet your fellow travellers and talk about our upcoming trip, and a post-trip reunion to exchange photographs and stories.

Day 1: June 11th Arrival at Shannon Airport, and collection from there by our guide Maeve Kelly around 1:00PM. We will drive through scenic County Clare to Galway City to check in to our hotel, located just off Eyre Square in the city centre. You will have the remainder of the afternoon free to relax, unwind and/or explore this bustling and vibrant city. We'll meet for dinner at the hotel and then you will have the evening free to take in some of the great entertainment this town has to offer as the city is well known for its music and theatre.
Overnight at Foster Court Hotel, lunch on your own, evening meal included.

Day 2: (12th) Aran Islands Inishmore Depart Galway and drive to Rossaveal to catch the ferry at 10:15 a.m. to Inishmore, the biggest of the Aran Islands and our home for the next three nights. Once we arrive on the island we'll have time for a cuppa tea before we head out. Today's hike will be in the eastern end of the island starting in Killeany. This will be our first hike, a chance to take it easy, get used to hiking in a group, take in the Atlantic Ocean vistas and slow down to island life. We will take quiet island lanes to the coast, and follow the coast to the spectacular Dun Duchathai ("The Black Fort"), a classic coastal cliff fort dating back to about 1,000 BC.

Hike: 3-4 hours. Terrain: some asphalt lanes, uneven limestone pavement, some high steep cliff edge. Length: Approx 5 miles. Moderate hike.

After dinner talk on Inishmore Island. Overnight at an island B&B. All meals included

Day 3: (13th) Inishmore

We will be joined this morning by a local guide who will take us to some of the notable archaeological sites in the inner part of the island including Dun Eochla (a well preserved stone ring fort), a wedge tomb (ancient burial chamber), and a *clochan* (stone beehive house). In the afternoon after our picnic lunch another local guide will join us. We will hear stories of times past, legends from the Otherworld, time to let your imagination wander to a time in Ireland of superstition, battles and ancient tribes. We will also learn of the early pilgrims that visited the island following St Enda, patron saint of the island.

AM-Hike: 2-3 hours in the morning. Terrain: island lanes, some elevation, uneven ground on limestone. Distance: approx 6 miles.

PM Hike: 2-3 hours in the afternoon, similar to the morning hike. Distance: approx 4-5 miles. Strenuous day.

Overnight & Evening meal on Island (all meals included)

Day 4: (14th) Inishmore We will walk from the western most end of the Island along a spectacular cliff walk to Dun Angus Cliff Fort, a World Heritage Site and one of the most spectacular archaeological sites in all of Europe. We will hike along a spectacular sea cliff, taking our time so we can marvel at the stunning views across the Atlantic Ocean. We may have to cross some stonewalls; you will be experts by the end of the trip!! Time to watch the seabirds fly, and lunch in a little piece of heaven that Maeve has chosen. We will approach the fort from the western end, a spectacular approach along the cliffs that most visitors don't get to see.

Hike: 4-5 hours. Terrain: Uneven limestone, cliff edge, stone wall and fence crossings.

Some walking on asphalt lanes. Distance: 6-7 miles. Strenuous day. Overnight on island. All meals included.

Day 5: (15th): Connemara mountains. We'll take the 8:15 a.m. ferry to mainland.

From Rossaveal we will drive inland to hike in the spectacular quartzite mountain range, Maum Turk (pass of the wild boars). Staying with the earlier theme of pilgrimage on the island we will hike along an ancient pilgrimage path into the mountains. We will hike to the sacred pilgrimage site associated with St Patrick, patron Saint of Ireland, called Mauméan (pass of the birds). We will hear of ancient rituals, secret masses, and troubled times.

Hike: approx 2-3 hours. Terrain: wet, uneven, cross-country.

Elevation gain: 240metres (787 feet). Distance: 3-4 miles. Moderately strenuous. Overnight in Ballyvaughan in The Burren, all meals included.

Day 6: (16th): The Burren Today's hike will take us into the northern part of this stunning limestone region. This area is unique in Ireland with lots of exotic wild flowers, archaeological sites, and very unusual and fascinating scenery.

We will hike to the top of Turlough Hill to see one of the largest hilltop forts and follow the ridge into Oughtmama valley also known as the valley of the seven churches. As we descend into the valley we will visit the ruins of the most beautiful, early Christian monastic site and the holy well of St. Colman.

Later we will visit the ruins of the 12th century Corcomroe Abbey.

Hike: 4-5 hours. Terrain: Uneven limestone rock.

Elevation: 300metres. Distance: 6-7 miles. Strenuous.

Overnight in Ballyvaughan. All meals included. Sunset at Cliffs of Moher.

Day 7: (17th): The Burren We will drive into the heart of the Burren to Eagles Rock and visit the ruins of an interesting hidden monastic hermitage, St. Mc Duach's Church, still a special place of local pilgrimage and prayer. Leaving here we travel south to one of my favourite parts of the Burren and part of the national park to climb Mullaghmore Mountain and Sliabh Rua.

Hike: 4-5 hours. Terrain: uneven limestone rock, country lanes, hazel woods.

Distance: 6-8 miles. Elevation: 300m (984 feet). Strenuous

Overnight in Ballyvaughan. Breakfast and lunch included. (Evening meal not included)

Day 8: (18th): The Burren We will finish the week's hiking with one of my favourite hikes in Ireland. Starting in the town land of Fanore on the coast west of Ballyvaughan we will follow the green road to Black Head. We have spectacular views across Galway Bay to the Aran Islands. At Black Head we will climb to Cathair Dun Irghuis an ancient stone ring fort. From here we will continue to climb up the hill to Dobhach Bhrainn Mountain for more spectacular panoramic views. From this top we will continue onto Gleninagh Mountain and then drop down to the pass. We take an ancient track to the main road. A short walk on the road takes us to another beautiful wooded trail that takes us back to meet Black Head and Fanore for a welcome stop at a great pub!

Hike 4-5 hours. Terrain: Green trail, short climbs over uneven limestone, some paths, main coast road, green trail. Elevation: 250m (820 ft.). Distance: 7-8 miles. Strenuous

Overnight in Ballyvaughan, all meals included.

Day 9: (19th): Departure for Shannon. Say a fond farewell to Galway Bay and our Irish adventure. Maeve will take us to the airport and drop us off with plenty of time before our flight. Light breakfast included.

NB: All hikes are subject to change due to weather, guides discretion and necessity.

TOUR INFORMATION

Number of Participants: The minimum number for the 2010 tour to make is 10 persons. The maximum number is 14. The minimum age is 18 unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Fitness level: This is a hiking tour and participants should be in good physical condition and capable of walking 6-10 miles over uneven and sometimes steep and difficult terrain. Walking conditions range from quiet country lanes and paths to steep rocky/boggy terrain and precipitous coastal cliff-tops. All of the hikes are rated at strenuous to moderately strenuous.

COST: \$2,576 per person, double occupancy, 14 persons

\$2,747 per person, double occupancy, 12-13 persons

\$2,979 per person, double occupancy, 10-11 persons

A limited number of **single supplements** are available for an additional **\$250**. Efforts will be made to find roommates for those who request them. If a roommate cannot be found by a month before the departure date, a single supplement will be required.

Included Costs: Within Ireland the price is nearly all-inclusive starting at Shannon on June 11th including: guiding services of Maeve Kelly and any other local experts and/or guides; most meals in Ireland including all breakfasts, seven packed lunches and seven evening meals; lodging for eight nights in Ireland; all ground and ferry transportation; admissions, gratuities, etc. for everything listed on the itinerary with the exception of items listed below.

Costs not included: Items explicitly not covered in the price: all airfare and transportation to Shannon; insurance; all beverages (alcoholic and otherwise); laundry; purchases of a personal nature;; evening meal on the night of June 17; lunch on June 11; gratuities for meals not covered; any activities not listed on the itinerary; and the gratuity for the principal guide (Maeve Kelly).

Payment Schedule: A \$650 deposit is due with registration. A payment of \$1,300 is required by February 1, 2009. If you register after February 1, then \$1,950 is due upon registration. Full payment is due by April 30. Registrations will be accepted after April 30 on a space-available basis. Full payment will then be required with registration.

Cancellations/Refunds: For cancellations before February 1, refunds will be made less a \$150 penalty; Cancellations made Feb. 2- March 2 will receive a refund less a \$600 penalty; Cancellations made from March 3 to April 16 will receive a refund less a \$1500 penalty; after April 17 – no refunds. If the tour is cancelled due to insufficient registrations, all payments will be returned in full.

Passport: A passport with six month's remaining validity when you complete your travel is required. Since it can take up to four months to obtain a new passport it is highly suggested that you apply for one immediately if you do not have a passport or yours will not have six months validity when your return. There are also ways to expedite your passport application if you have less than four months prior to travel. Please note that the name on your airline ticket must match the name on your passport exactly.

Weather: June is a great time to be walking in Ireland! The climate is cool and breezy with average highs only in the mid 60's F. Rainfall is the lightest of any time in the year, 2-4 inches, lower than the Midwestern states of the U.S. in June. Days are usually sunny and bright.

What to bring: Required: A rain suit (pants and jacket with hood) made of Gore-tex or other breathable materials; waterproof (Gore-tex lined) hiking boots with good arch and ankle support, preferably medium (six-inch) height; and a back pack or rucksack for carrying your lunch, rain gear, camera, a sweater, water, and other items you will want on the trail. **Recommended:** walking stick(s)
A more detailed list of what to bring, as well as, some suggested readings will be provided to registrants at a later date.

Transportation: You may choose to travel over and/or back with Jim Gallagher or you may choose your own routes and dates. Either way, the tour starts on June 11 at Shannon Airport at 1:00PM when Maeve picks us up. Note that this will be the only pick up time. If you have arrived in Ireland independently then your options are to meet with the group at Shannon Airport at 1:00PM on the 11th, or at our first night's lodging, the Foster Court Hotel in Galway City.

Jim's Tentative Itinerary is as follows:

Depart June 10 La Crosse-Chicago-Dublin-Shannon
Return June 19 Shannon-Dublin-Chicago-La Crosse

On the 19th, Maeve will take the group back to Shannon Airport for Jim's flight departure at 7:00 AM (as of this writing). Individuals should not make arrangements for flights leaving earlier than Jim's, or should arrange for earlier transportation to the airport on their own.

Jim's suggestion is that, if you have the time, travelling over early and/or staying after the tour is ideal. Since the cost of transportation to Ireland is expensive, this is a good way to make the best of your trip and see some other parts of the country while you are there. Arriving a day or earlier also allows you to get rid of that nasty jet lag before the tour starts. Jim and/or Maeve will be glad to assist you in planning any parts of your independent travel.

It is suggested that you make travel arrangements through Jim's travel agent, Jo Ann Buening whether you are going over with Jim or travelling on your own. Past tour participants have found her services to be extremely worthwhile.

Jo Ann Buening, Leisure Groups and Sales Agent
"Travel Leaders" (formerly Carlson Wagonlit Travel)
2404 State Rd, La Crosse, WI 54601
1.800.657.4528 or 608.791.8358 (her direct line) or joann.buening@travelleadersgo.com

Jo Ann can also assist you with comprehensive travel insurance as well as lodging pre- or post- tour.

Some travel planning suggestions:

- A. Register for the tour first, then once the minimum number (8) have registered for the tour to ensure that the trip will make, go ahead and purchase your non-refundable airline tickets. Jim will notify you when the minimum number has been reached. If you find an especially good air fare before the trip reaches its minimum number of registrants you may want to grab it but keep in mind that the tour will only take place if we have ten registrants.
- B. Purchase comprehensive travel insurance to cover your airfare and tour registration. You should purchase the insurance at the same time you purchase your airfare in order to insure full coverage. If you purchase your coverage after the maximum period of time allowable (depending on your policy) you may not get pre-existing conditions covered.
- C. If you are travelling independently, choose a schedule that involves the minimum number of flight connections and the maximum amount of time between flights (Jim suggests at least two hours), especially on the way over. Experience on past tours has taught us that flights are frequently delayed due to thunderstorms in June. If you are on a delayed flight on the way to Ireland and miss a connection it will usually mean that you will have to wait until the next day to catch the next flight to Ireland and then catch up with the group on your own. Waiting for your connection for an extra hour or so is much better than missing a day of your tour. This is another good reason for arriving in Ireland a day or two early.

What last year's tour participants said about their experience:

On a post-trip evaluation form, the 2009 participants were asked to rate aspects of their trip on a 1-10 basis with 10 being "highly favourable" and 1 being "highly unfavourable". The numbers after each question represent the average response.

- Was the trip well organized? **Average score: 10**
 - "Well organized yet flexible. Thank you Jim, Thank you Maeve"
- What is your evaluation of our guide, Maeve Kelly? **10 (plus one "10+")**
 - "Maeve is highly knowledgeable about Irish culture and archaeology. She is open, kind, courteous, watchful, and sensitive to the needs of others". "Loved her! Great sense of humour, very knowledgeable, sensitive to individual needs, authentic"
- Your accommodations? **9.92**
 - "Loved the variety and the locally owned historic hotels and B&B's"
- Your meals? **9.89**
 - "Outstanding. I was not expecting such gourmet meals—our reward after a strenuous day!"
- Was the tour good value for the money? **9.89**
 - "Really can't believe such good food and accommodations for that price, with a nice van to boot! All this plus an excellent guide and a premier itinerary!"
- What is your overall evaluation of the tour?" **10**
 - "So glad that I came! It was unforgettable."

What people said they liked best about the 2009 tour:

Exhilarating hikes, spectacular breathtaking scenery, small group size and great camaraderie, Maeve, exploring areas off the beaten path, the Irish people, and "so much beautiful nature".

"This was my third tour with Jim and Maeve and I hope to go again!"

"I know a lot of planning goes into making a successful tour and I believe you've done it!"

"The combination of hiking, good food, interesting history, great scenery, and fun participants, made this a great trip for me!"

"A chance to really experience Ireland-without the tourist traps."

"Thank you for gracing our lives with such heart warming memories of Ireland and its people. It has been a wholly inspiring trip!"

What others say about the area we are visiting in 2010:

The Aran Islands are one of the natural wonders of Ireland. The cliffs of the Aran Isles are alive with sea birds in the spring, nesting puffins, guillemots in the thousands, razorbills, kittiwakes, fulmars, shags, as well as herring gulls and great black-backed gulls. **“Wild Ireland, The Sierra Club Natural Traveller” by Brendan Lehane**

There is no doubt that Arainn (the correct name in Irish for Inis Mor) is a very unique place. It has a depth of richness far beyond the average tourist destination in its beauty, its archaeological heritage and its local culture...In ancient times there were no tourists but many travellers. Arainn was an important place to visit. At one stage it ranked next to Jerusalem and Rome as a place of pilgrimage, at least as far as the Irish monks were concerned. **“Pocket Guide of Arainn, Legends in the Landscape” Dara O’Maoldhia**

The Burren contains a rare combination of exotic plant life including an abundance of both alpine flora found associate with cold climates as well as warm climate plants usually found long the Mediterranean shores. 22 species of orchids and in May and June are found in abundance. Unusual limestone geology, archaeological sites that go back thousands of years, ancient tombs, medieval abbeys and castles in romantic state of ruin are scattered across the region. Peer into the landscape and marvel at the extent and variety and buoyancy of species which, against all apparent odds, make the area paradise of wild flowers. **“Wild Ireland, Brendan Lehane, the Sierra Club Natural Traveller”**

The Burren has arguably the finest gathering of flowering plants in Ireland, if not in Western Europe. **Lonely Planet “Walking in Ireland”**

Few landscaped anywhere in Ireland have the surreal, other-worldly appearance of the limestone pavements and terraces of the Burren. **Lonely Planet “Walking in Ireland”**

The Burren is a geologically distinctive landscape, and the habitat of a rich and even unique variety of flora and fauna. **“The Book of the Burren”**

Part of the pleasure of visiting a place like the Burren is the element of exploration. There is also the additional pleasure, which can still be a genuine experience, of feeling as if you are discovering something for the first time. **“The Book of the Burren” Edited by O’Connell and Korff**

For more tour information contact:

Jim Gallagher at 608.784.8042 or jimjangallagher@msn.com

For information regarding registration contact:

UW-L Continuing Education/Extension, Jan Olson, 608.785.6506 or olson.jani@uwlax.edu