

By Kieran Mangan

# LAKES OF KILLARNEY & GAP OF DUNLOE WALK



Gap of Dunloe, Killarney, Co. Kerry

Poets, Painters, and visitors from all corners of the world agree on one thing about Killarney – 'It's a Magical Place' The jewel in Killarney's crown is undoubtedly The National Park, comprising of 27,000 acres and enclosing the three lakes and the surrounding mountains and woods. This magnificent valley was formed over 10,000 years ago during the last ice age.

Many books have been written about hill walking in the south-west which explore every nook and cranny of The McGullicuddy Reeks. The walks vary in difficulty catering for young and old. All have one aim in mind, which is to explore The Killarney National Park and learn much about its History, Flora and Fauna.

My favourite one, which is well known to IPA members in 'Ivernia', is The Lakes of Killarney and Gap of Dunloe Walk. The Kerry Branch members have organised this trip for the past 10yrs. It is as popular today as it was 10yrs ago when 100 participants went on our inaugural trip which, was sponsored by The IPA Activities Fund.

Our trip begins at Ross Castle on the Shores of Loch Lein. We board an open boat with space for 12 passengers. This is the largest of the three lakes which are inter-connected. Loch Lein, the Lake of Learning, derives its name from Inisfallen Island. Here Faithliu established a monastic site in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century Inisfallen was a great centre of learning. Its students included Brian Boro, King of Ireland. Here also the Annals of Inisfallen were written between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

As we cross the lake, our boatman tells us the history of every little island including Queen Victoria's visit to this area in 1843 and the many legends and folklore of Killarney. Many of them include the

exploits of Oisín and Fionn MacCumhal. If you wish you can switch yourself off and indulge in the scenery. Heading south-east across the Loch Lein, Tomies and Purple Mountain are on the right while Mangerton and Torc Mountains command your attention on the left. Before you know it we are under Brickeen Bridge and gliding across the still waters of The Middle Lake. Here we are into a narrow stretch of water as we pass through The Meeting of The Waters, a tranquil area where all three lakes meet. We head under The Old Weir Bridge in to the Upper Lake. Depending on the water level the able bodied men on board may have to get out and give the boatman a helping hand to pull the boat over the gentle rapids into the Upper Lake. Then off again as we pass Eagles Nest where the last eagle in Ireland is said to have nested. There are forty more islands here

for the boatman to tell you about. Two hours later we land on the southern shore of the Upper Lake where Lord Brandon's hunting lodge has been converted to a tea house. Homemade soup, scones and sandwiches await the hungry traveller.

When lunch is over a 10mile trek through The Black Valley and the Gap of Dunloe lie ahead. The less energetic can avail of jaunting cars. If one is feeling adventurous and does not mind a few saddle sores you can ride horse back or on a bike. The trek winds its way southwest along the banks of The Gearhameen River. The surface is tarred which makes the going easy. On a clear day there are splendid views of Carrauntuohill standing at 1040metres to the East. Then we turn north into the Gap of Dunloe. This is a Glacial valley littered with corrie lakes all connected by the River Loe. It is all down hill from here. You can just about smell the steaks in Kate Kearney's Cottage at journeys end. During the mid 1800s a local woman sold 'moonshine' here. Kate's is still popular for great food, drink, music and if you still have energy, a dancing session. 'Sláinte!'

*The Annual Region 3 Lakes Of Killarney and Gap of Dunloe trip takes place in early October each year. If you wish to join us, contact Kieran Mangan or Paudie Murphy at Killarney Garda Station.*

