

On Sunday 26th August 2007 thirty-three IPA walkers from Regions 9 ; 3 & 5, met at Kilclooney Wood on the Dungarvan to Carrick-on-Suir road; the rendezvous point for the Tipperary South Branch annual summer hill-walk. Our destination was the most impressive corrie lake in Europe, namely, Lake Coumshingaun, in the Comeragh Mountains, Co. Waterford. (Coum Seangan-pissmire valley, also translates as hollow of the ants),



Kevin Bowen

In Search of Coumshingaun

By Kevin Bowen

After an information/safety briefing by our guide, Kevin Bowen, (Clonmel Garda Station) assisted by his son, Anthony, the party set off on their 2km hike to the lake of Coumshingaun. A deep blue sky, warm sunshine and plenty of bottled water helped us on our climb. Excitement and great expectation were also packed into the rucksacks. The route is very manageable as it takes the walker through shaded woodland paths of coniferous, Sitka Spruce, Scots Pine, Larch and then out onto the vast and impressive open mountain side of the Comeraghs.

The area is strewn with boulders and other glacial debris left over from the Ice Age. We meandered through the heather and bracken and marvelled at the stunning scenery and the natural architectural glory of this very special place. The children were eager to discover evidence of the habitats of the fauna that live in this magnificent part of the world; unfortunately, the red

squirrel, the fox, the badger and the deer were all secreted in their hiding places enjoying their Sunday afternoon nap.

The IPA hill-walkers kept a very attentive eye on the caves cut into the old red sandstone rocks as they ascended the heights; interest in this was aroused by the history of the period, 1918 to 1959, when a hermit lived in a cave up in Coumshingaun. His name was 'Jim Laken Dara, the hermit of Coumshingaun'; he was a tall impressive figure with long hair and beard. He returned from World War 1 un-impressed with what he witnessed of the human race. Laken Dara headed high into the hills of the Comeragh Mountains to live in total solitude in the shadowy depths and the astounding glacial amphitheatre of Coumshingaun. One can easily see what attracted the hermit of Coumshingaun to this most magnificent and serene mountain-side. Incidentally, only 1½ kilometres north of Coumshingaun lies Crotty's Lake; reputed to have been a hiding place for "Crotty the Robber", a famous highwayman of the 19th century.

After an hour's climb Coumshingaun appeared in stunning glory before our eyes. This was our reward for the 235 metre ascent. The sight of Coumshingaun Lake is one of those special images that will always remain in the treasure-trove of memory. Everyone in the group just stopped and stared to take in the breathtaking surrounds. As they did, "wow" was the only word that could be heard from the group.

Subsequently the children threw off their footwear and paddled safely on the shoreline under watchful eyes of their parents.

We lingered in warm sunshine and in total serenity at the lake side, marveling on its spectacular features. The lake itself measures 700 metres in length by 250 metres wide; local folklore describes it as bottom-less. Its precipitous cliffs rise to a height of 385 metres to reach the Comeragh Plateau at 792 metres. There is a cliff in Coumshingaun known as *Carraig an Fhiolair* - "Rock of the Eagle", which probably relates to the use of Coumshingaun as a breeding site by eagles a number of centuries ago.

After dining *al fresco* and a photo safari the happy group said farewell to the fastness and turned easterly home. As they descended, a number of walkers in the group gazed back as the lake dimmed out of view catching one final glimpse of this mystical 'coum' lake. Enriched with dramatic scenery and unforgettable images the group rounded off their afternoon of the Comeragh Mountains in a local hostelry in the nearby village of Rathgormack. The hungry walkers were fed, *al fresco*, with a choice of hot dishes. Afterwards, Dinny Dunne handed out his selection of prizes to the lucky lottery winners of the 'Laura Foundation'.

Coumshingaun is best described as 'serendipity'; it is certainly a chance find. If you like to walk in the mountains and appreciate the wonders of nature, then you will surely find something as precious as this magical glacial lake. Rest peacefully on its Ice-Age shores and leave the noise of the material world below. It is in such tranquil moments of reflection that you will appreciate the wonders of, undoubtedly, one of the best kept secret places of our beautiful country.

Lake Coumshingaun can be accessed from Kilclooney Wood (grid ref: S 34 1:10 3) on the Dunganvan to Carrick-on-Suir road (R676).



Coumshingaun lake



Coumshingaun lake



"A well earned rest at COUNSHINGAUN, I wonder did they find any 'smires'"

Kilclooney Wood is 15km south of Carrick-on-Suir. O.S.I. (Ordnance Survey of Ireland) Map Discovery Series No. 75. Lake Coumshingaun grid reference is S 33 0:10 9 (walk destination).