

# Route Descriptions

This book contains 85 route descriptions ranging from day trips to three-day walks, plus suggestions for other walks, side trips and alternative routes. Each walk description has a brief introduction outlining the natural and cultural features you may encounter, plus information to help you plan your walk – transport options, level of difficulty, time frame and any permits required.

Day walks are often circular and are located in areas of uncommon beauty. Multiday walks include information on campsites, hostels or other accommodation, and places where you can obtain water and supplies.

## TIMES & DISTANCES

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include stops for snacks, taking photographs, rests or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning your walk. Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with altitudes. Significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance.

## LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between walks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

**Easy** – a walk on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.

**Moderate** – a walk with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

**Demanding** – a walk with long distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding.

## TRUE LEFT & TRUE RIGHT

The terms ‘true left’ and ‘true right’, used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The ‘true left bank’ simply means the left bank as you look downstream.

# Planning

Variety is what walking in Ireland is all about, from precipitous mountain ridges to level canal paths, from windswept cliffs tops to woodland waterfalls. There are well-marked paths, firm forest tracks and wild, cross-country excursions. Such variety within a relatively small space means you can be standing atop a panoramic summit one day, and strolling across a golden beach the next. It's possible to cover a significant amount of the country in a couple of weeks, though locals will confirm that there are so many intriguing nooks and crannies it takes a lifetime to explore it all properly.

Most Irish walking comes in the form of one-day outings, whether it's a short three-hour stroll or an energetic, eight-hour mountain traverse. However there are also multiday walks in the form of the country's Waymarked Ways, the best sections of which are highlighted in this book. The length and accessibility of Ireland's walks means the logistics of planning a trip are relatively simple, though you'll appreciate your own transport if you're travelling to rural areas outside the summer months.

Though it could never be described as a budget destination, independent travellers can move around relatively inexpensively by staying in a combination of hostels and camping grounds. Of course there's also a wide range of B&Bs, guesthouses and hotels for those who prefer more comfort. In addition to the information given here, Lonely Planet's *Ireland* guide is indispensable as a general travel guide to the country.

## WHEN TO WALK

Ireland's relatively mild climate means walking is not restricted to particular times of the year like it is in places with more extreme seasonal variations. Though walking in winter requires different preparation from summer outings, most Irish hikers keep enjoying the outdoors all year round. Some routes are actually at their best on crisp, sunny winter days, when the bog is frozen underfoot and crystal-clear air makes views stretch forever.

That said, it's important to appreciate that walks present different challenges at different times of the year, and you may need to adapt your route decisions and equipment accordingly. Many mountain routes that are relatively accessible during the summer become serious undertakings on the rare days they're covered with snow and ice, when they should be tackled only by hikers with appropriate winter mountaineering experience and equipment.

The driest months in Ireland are April, May and June, with July not far behind; this is a particularly important consideration in western areas where rainfall is relatively high. The coldest months are January and February, and the mountains are generally covered by snow several times during this period. However, the snow rarely lasts more than a few days before thawing, and lowland areas receive just one or two modest falls each year.

Whatever time of year it is, it's often unwise, if not downright dangerous, to go out in poor visibility or strong winds. The potential hazards of making a navigational error in such conditions are especially acute on mountain or coastal routes that involve high cliffs and significant drop-offs. Rain also makes grass and rock slippery underfoot, and can cause rivers to rise rapidly – a gentle stream can become a raging torrent almost