

The Grainuaile Loop Walk, Achill

Trail Surface:	Old bog roads now grassed over and open moorland.
Difficulty:	Strenuous
Distance:	6.8 km
Total Ascent:	334 metres
Highest point:	189 m
Duration:	Hiking 2-3 hours
Trail Head:	Johnny Patten's Public House, Derreens, Achill.
OSI Discovery Map:	Number 30
Dogs:	No dogs allowed as this walk goes through open farmland.

In the middle of August, whilst in vacation mode, I had the distinct pleasure of being invited to walk a newly developed trail in Upper Achill called the Granuaile Loop Walk. As all the Dillane household were on holidays at this time, a somewhat undemocratic decision was taken that some quality family time would be beneficial. Where better to experience this than a healthy hike among the hills of Achill.

To locate the Granuaile Loop Walk is relatively simple. Pass through the Achill Sound heading west and after 400 metres or so take the first road on the left and travel along the Atlantic Drive for 4 km. You will then come across Johnny Pattens Public House on the right and the car park here is the official trailhead for the walk. There is a newly erected map board with both Irish and English text giving all the information required to complete the hike. One of the advantages of a loop walk (As distinct from a linear route) is that one starts and finishes at the same place, so therefore only one means of transport is necessary.

Summer 2015, weather wise had been poor and many households like our own were experiencing a sense of cabin fever. Therefore when a fine day does eventually arrive there is a renewed sense of urgency to take full advantage of it. We were fortunate with a rare, beautiful day and so it was with a sense of both adventure and apprehension that we headed out on the trail.

After a brief five minute initial climb, we joined an old grassed over road which was built in the early 1940's by local men unable to go to England due to the threat from the German U boats. Even at this early stage of the walk the views are truly stunning. The walk offers a panoramic view of Clew Bay, Croagh Patrick and Clare Island as well as many historical local features. One such feature is the deserted village of Ailt. Over 79 families lived here in 1838, but by 1854 the landlord William Pike had evicted them all as it was more profitable to have cattle rather than people on his land. To the south west is Gráinne Mhaol's castle in Kildownet which was built in the 16th century. The Achill Lifeboat lies at anchor beneath the castle which was once the anchorage of Gráinne's fleet.

As we continued we stumbled on about 40 large stone cairns, monuments of an ancient burial site on the old funeral path to Kildownet Cemetery known locally as the 'Leachtaí'. A

sea mist suddenly descended on us at this point and created a most eerie atmosphere of calm and foreboding. However as suddenly as it had appeared the mist vanished. The trail then turns north and offers a sweeping view from the cliffs of Ashleam Bay to the west through to Davitt Bridge at Achill Sound.

The final section of the walk brings Carraig Na Loinge, a rocky outcrop located between Shraheens Points and Belfarsad into view. Historically this was an important landmark for Yawls and Hookers as they travelled from Achill Sound through the channel carrying cargo to and from Westport. They also carried turf from Saulia to the villages along the coast including Achill Beg.

Back in Johnny Pattens, while enjoying a cupán tae and some sandwiches, the youngest pipes up, "hard to beat quality family time". Certainly hard to beat the Granuaile Loop Walk.