

The Western Way – Sheeffry to Westport

Trail surface:	Quiet country roads, Mountain passes and forest trails
Difficulty:	Strenuous. Bring food, water and suitable clothing
Distance:	25 Kilometres
Total height gained:	430 metres
Duration:	6 to 8 hours
Dogs:	No dogs allowed as this walk goes through farmland
Start:	At the newly erected Map board at Sheeffrey
O/S maps 1:50000:	numbers 31, 37 and 38

This month, after our summer break in Achill, we are returning to the Western Way to walk the route between Sheeffrey and Westport. Starting in Sheeffrey, there are two routes available initially to walk, a mountain section through Tawny Rower or a road section through Drummin village. The mountain route should only be undertaken in good weather conditions with clear visibility. Fortunately for us, the country was enjoying a brief Indian summer in the first days of October so this was the route we chose. Conveniently, both routes converge circa four kilometres northwest of the village and a singular route then brings you on to Westport, our ultimate destination.

Starting out from Sheeffrey one immediately faces into an hour and a half of a lung busting climb to the top of Tawny Rower, but the view from this pass is definitely well worth the effort. The Western Way opened up before us with panoramic views of Croagh Patrick, Clew Bay and the many jewel like lakes shimmering in the distance in the late autumn sunshine. Lake Lugacolliee's sparkling blue waters are directly beneath and after a steep descent from the pass the trail hugs its rugged shoreline before following en route to the southern side of Croagh Patrick and passage through Teevevacroaghy forest.

Croagh Patrick or the Reek as it is called locally is 765 metres high and was once a place of pagan worship called Cruach Aigle or Eagle Mountain. The church on the summit was erected in 1905 to replace an older one and there has been a church on the summit since at least the 12th century. The path to the summit is well worn by the visit of thousands of pilgrims annually. From our vantage point as we journeyed through the forest, the numerous climbers high above us appeared like ants bringing and taking material from their ultimate destination, the church.

Upon exiting the forest one walks through the picturesque small village of Teevevnacroghy. Along the roadside sheep lay thoroughly contented as they bathed in the brilliant autumn sunshine, giving us a curious eye before dropping their heads once more for a further forty winks. The fine day means everything.

We marched on through Skeilp and across the shoulder of Croagh Patrick at Fahburren where Clew Bay and its many islands appeared before us in glorious detail. Once across this

shoulder the trail follows the coastline along the calm inner limits of Clew Bay before reaching Westport Town our first major urban destination since we left Oughterard at the start of the trail. Rest and respite was given to us in the Sheebeen and we finished the day with a well-earned ice cream at Westport quay.

Next month as we continue northwards from Westport the climbs become less dramatic as we leave the mountains of South Mayo and Connemara behind us. We are now preparing to enter the great wilderness of the Nephin Beg Range. Did someone mention a new pair of boots?!