



Cuilcagh Mountain Walks - The Ulster Way*

This walk along a section of the Ulster Way starts from the car park at the Gortalughany Viewpoint (signposted off the A32) and finishes at the foot of the final climb to the summit of Cuilcagh Mountain. The Ulster Way is waymarked by distinctive wooden posts with orange or yellow painted tops.

1. From the car park at the Gortalughany Viewpoint follow the trail heading west towards the summit of Cuilcagh Mountain. After approximately 300m, turn right to follow another track going approximately north north-west. At the end of the track continue straight on for 50m or so until a yellow “Ulster Way” marker post is seen. Before the post is reached follow a small track which leads off to the right towards Legacurragh valley.

A. The Legacurragh valley running north-east from here is developed in limestone. It has been interpreted as a series of caves whose roofs have collapsed to leave an open valley. However there are no large blocks of limestone here to suggest that this has happened and the shape of the valley is dissimilar to other known cave systems in the area. An alternative explanation is that this dry valley formed toward the end of the last Ice Age when this area was subject to permafrost conditions (see “Rocks and Fossils” card).

2. Return to the main path and continue until the track intersects with the marker posts of the Ulster Way. On reaching a yellow marker post turn left (or south-west) and follow the line of posts towards Cuilcagh. From here until the end of the walk there are 50 marker posts.

B. Due east of here is the rounded hill of Benaughlin. Made of limestone, the hill takes its name from Binn Eachlabhra - the peak of the speaking horse. The horse is supposed to have appeared here on the first Sunday of August (Bilberry Sunday) when it would speak to the local people. Another story suggests that the horse (which was white in colour - An Chopail Bán) belonged to a fairy king called Donn Binn who lived in the mountain and who

would travel the district on the horseevery May eve. May 1st was the Celtic feast of Bealtaine when bonfires would be lit to welcome the coming summer.

3. Walk south-west following the line of the yellow marker posts.

C. Between the 2nd and 3rd posts is a small cave (really a collapsed pothole), developed in an alternating sequence of limestone and shale both of which contain sparse fossil brachiopods, crinoids and corals (see “Rocks and Fossils” card). **Extreme care needs to be exercised here as potholes should only be explored by qualified cavers with proper equipment.**

4. Continue to follow the line of posts. Although the ground here is quite flat at the 12th post a small ridge marks a change in rock type from limestone to sandstone.

D. From here until the top summit ridge of Cuilcagh, the mountain is formed of alternating bands of sandstone and shale (see “Rocks and Fossils” card). These sandstones and shale beds all have different names, the Lackagh Sandstone forming the summit ridge. As explained in the “Tropical Seas and Arctic Ice” card, they represent the deposits left behind as an ancient delta continually advanced and retreated over this area millions of years ago.

5. Continue following the posts until an area of bare white rock (the Glenade Sandstone) is reached close to the 20th marker post. The walk continues to climb slowly although the terrain remains that of fairly featureless bogland. At the 29th post the walk crosses a small stream but continue on to the 33rd and 34th marker posts.

E. Between these two marker posts is a small river. There are examples of shales in the riverbed, some of which contain fossils such as goniatites, brachiopods and gastropods (see “Rocks and Fossils” card).

6. Marker post 39 overlooks the gully of Altscraghy. Continue on to the final ridge (at post 47) before the final climb up to the summit of Cuilcagh. The 50th marker post is the last before the final steep cliffs to the summit.

F. The summit of Cuilcagh is flat and is formed of very hard sandstone that is resistant to the agents of erosion. This sandstone, called the Lackagh Sandstone, was deposited as sand in a large river delta during the Carboniferous Period 330 million years ago. An equivalent sandstone in England called the “Millstone Grit” forms the higher ground of the Pennines.

The name Cuilcagh is Gaelic (Cailceach) and means “chalky”. This is puzzling considering that the rocks making up the mountain are essentially sandstones and shales rather than Chalk. A massive Bronze Age cairn with three accompanying small drystone huts marks the summit. A triangulation pillar was built on top of the cairn during the 1940’s at a height of 665m (2188 feet).



explore natural and cultural heritage

In clear weather it is possible to see from the Irish Sea at Co. Louth to the Atlantic Ocean at Co. Sligo. Return to the car park by the same route.

*Walks provided by Landscapes from Stone (GSI & GSNI)

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