

THE HIGH ROAD

Battie Whitee



TAKE THE MILL ROAD out of Kinlough Village, down the hill and then a steady climb, through Moneen and Cloone. Turn left at the crossroads. You are now on the High Road, which runs along the foot of the mountain and overlooks the most stunning scenery you will ever see.

The High Road is best travelled on foot, or cycling. Take your time, listen, look, breathe in the fresh air, there's no rush. Leave your troubles behind; forget iphones, ipads, ipods and emails, just enjoy being there.

The world will carry on fine without you for an hour or two. This timeless landscape has been there for centuries, through plagues, famines and rebellions. It will be there for centuries to come, regardless of whatever fashions, fads and fancies may come or go.

The hedgerows are bursting with birdsong. All around the nest building is in full swing, thrushes, blackbirds and robins darting in and out. The hawthorns, whitethorns and woodbines are showing off their pink and white blossoms. Clus-

ters of primroses are sprouting from the ditches. A heady scent wafts in the soft morning breeze. The fuchsia hedge fronting the pretty cottage is a rampant riot of red and purple. In the field the newborn lambs prance about, under the watchful eyes of their mothers. A daring little fellow pokes his black head through the fence, with all the wonder and curiosity of a two week old.

To the south lies the magnificent Arroo Mountain, partly clothed in forestry green. Wisps of grey cloud drift across the jagged

rock outcrops, a reminder that, even with a blue sky, there is always the possibility of rain, the liquid sunshine of the North West. From the High Road you can see the mountains of four counties, all the way from Donegal, through Fermanagh, on to the awesome Dartry Range in Leitrim and as far as beautiful Benwisken and Benbulbin in County Sligo.

Down in the valley the River Drowes is a long silver thread, wending its way from Lough Melvin to the great Atlantic Ocean. The lake shimmers in the early May sun, reflecting the clear blue sky, the odd cloud straying across the surface. A fisherman starts his engine and guides the boat out towards the middle of the lake, then cuts the engine and drifts, silently. Somewhere far off a chainsaw wails, the only sound in a perfect stillness, broken only by the occasional baaing of the ewes and lambs.

Beyond the lake is Donegal Bay, framed by the majestic Hills of Donegal, stretching to the furthestmost cliffs of Malinmore. In the distance the lighthouse of St. John's Point glistens white against the purples, greys and blues. The delightful village of Kinlough nestles at the head of the lake, a mile from the River Drowes. Beyond Kinlough you can see

Bundoran, with its stunning Roguey cliff walk, thundering waves crashing on the beach, sheets of blowing foam and wheeling squawking gulls.

Further along the road a new sound is heard. Small streams rush down the side of the mountain, in a headlong exhilarating dash through the forest on their way to the lake and ocean. Stop, close your eyes and just listen. The murmur of bees mingles with the swoosh of tumbling water. No symphony orchestra in the great concert halls of the world ever played so sweetly.

When you get to the main road (the Dartry Road) turn left, back towards Kinlough. On your right, as you near the village, you come to the lake pier, and the impressive recently developed Lough Melvin Eco Park. Here you can wander the trails through the seventeen acres of woodland, with helpful information signs on the local flora and fauna to guide you. An oasis of peace and tranquillity, there is even a playground to keep the little ones happy, and picnic tables if you remembered to bring food.

A short walk on you are back in Kinlough, with its selection of pubs and restaurants, including the award winning restaurant, The Courthouse. You have now walked five miles, better exer-

cise than any sweaty gym, and with amazing scenery!

For the past four years we have been bombarded with a constant stream of depressing news. Austerity, the recession, cut backs, high unemployment, emigration, incompetent/corrupt politicians, bankers and businessmen; these are the issues dominating the news. It is likely that we'll be hearing similar stories for at least the next four years, and beyond, maybe forever. But there is a bigger picture. A walk in the countryside can lift our spirits and remind us that there is more to life than greed and money. We live in one of the most beautiful countries in the world, and despite some mistakes along the way it is relatively unspoilt. In the North West we have the most spectacular scenery in Ireland, in Leitrim itself and neighbouring Sligo and Donegal. Where in the world is there a beach more magnificent than Mullaghmore in County Sligo, or cliffs more awesome than Slieve League in County Donegal?

It may be a cliché to say that the best things in life are free, but it's absolutely true.

There is no joining fee, no membership fees. All you need to enjoy the countryside is a pair of runners or walking boots and a rainproof jacket, just in case it rains!