



Sliabh Aughty Ramble

Gerard Madden

Sliabh Aughty, covering over 250 square miles is one of the largest mountain ranges in Ireland but one of the least known. Some equate the desolate hills of Sliabh Aughty with poverty and hardship stemming from penal times when communities of refugees were forced by circumstances to seek a living on their apparently hostile barren slopes. The Ultachs who settled near Woodford are still remembered for their sober ways and hard work in reclaiming the mountain.

Others see the mountains as a magical, mystical and mysterious place, part of a unique cultural landscape. It was from this vast mountainous region where human habitations are few and far between that the poet and teacher Bryan Merrymann and the wise woman Bidy Early emerged.

There are many pleasant lakes and rivers in the valleys, innumerable little streams along the slopes and wells near every habitation. A large and well organised community lived on the foot-hills around 2000 B.C. They were cattle farmers who grazed their animals on the grassy hillsides above the wooded lowlands. They buried their dead in megalithic tombs variously called Dolmens, Cromlechs, giant's graves, pagan altars, druid's altars, Diarmuid and Gráinne's beds. They are the earliest surviving architectural structures in the Sliabh Aughtys.

The mountains have not been lauded by many poets, painters, travel writers or composers. It is not promoted or referred to in tourism brochures and even the cartographers have on occasion omitted it from maps. This unique and beautiful landscape is waiting to be discovered by the discerning traveller. There are numerous roads, like a spider's web, circling and encroaching into the interior. Many are fair, most are bad and some, as the poet Pádraig Colum noted in *An Old Woman of the Roads*, are neither graced "by house or bush" only by "the crying wind and the lonesome hush." The full-colour, attached map with index will make the journey all the more pleasurable. Up to now one had to purchase three of the Discovery Series of maps to navigate the area.

The mountains abound in placenames in a form of Gaelge not subject to any standardisation in grammar or spelling. They are the last part of a language to disappear and it is virtually impossible to say in any particular instance how old they are. Some are very interesting such as Glenwaunish which comes from *gleann bainís*, the valley of the wedding feast. *Reana-humana* in Killanena is *reidh na h-íomána*, the mountain land of the hurling. The name may be 1,000 years old. In Feakle we have *Derrynagittagh*, *doire na g-ciotach*, the oak wood of the left-handed men. One wonders what unusual race resided here.

Sliabh Aughty Ramble. Musings on the folklore, history, landscape and literature of the region, is a one hundred and eighty page, indexed, publication with 120 illustrations. It will be launched at the Mountshannon Hotel on Saturday the **3 April 2010** at 8.30 P.M and in Woodford Hall on Saturday the **10 April 2010**

You are cordially invited to attend

Gerard Madden