



SPERRIN MOUNTAINS EXPEDITION AREA

(also Co. Fermanagh and Co. Donegal)

Useful information from the Expedition Network

Welcome!

For more information, please contact your Licensed Organisation or DofE Northern Ireland Office on 028 9069 9100.

Sperrin Mountains

The Sperrin Mountains (OSNI 1:50 000 no 13) from which the Expedition Network takes its name are popular for expedition activity. They stretch from the north west to the south east and consists mainly of large areas of peaty land which makes walking quite heavy at times.

They consist of extensive lines of moorland ridges giving good walking and rising to over 600m. The valleys splitting and dissecting the ridges contain a network of minor roads, hamlets and isolated farms. There is some fencing over the hilltops and patches of conifer plantation on the valley sides. Cycle expeditions face relatively quiet but narrow hilly roads.

The higher range, which includes Rawel (678m) and Dart (619m), offers a view which extends to the Antrim Plateau, the Sligo Mountains and Errical. South of this range are lower hills which include a section of the Ulsterway, 500-mile waymarked route, and Glenelly Valley. This valley is the finest and longest of the local glens consisting of wooded areas and small rural populations.

Donegal

To the west Donegal (OS Ireland 1:50 000 nos 2, 6 and 11) has three significant mountain areas sweeping west to a dramatic well-populated Atlantic coastline. The small but beautiful Inishowen peninsula to the north; the extensive and quite remote Derryveagh range in the centre and, to the south, the Blue Stack and coastal Slieve League areas. To a large degree trackless and unfrequented Donegal's mountains provide challenging physical and navigational difficulties with stunning scenery. They very much represent 'Gold' terrain due to the challenging and isolated nature of the area. Because of its westerly position, rain and winds are common features of the weather.

Fermanagh, Cavan and Leitrim

The final section of the Expedition Area is the border and lake country of Fermanagh, Cavan and Leitrim. Moorland areas reach heights of around five and six hundred meters. These highlands generally rise steeply from wide valleys to form plateau like areas. Rich in historical, geological and environmental sites the area is undergoing a renaissance of interest.

Considerable activity is underway to designate, conserve and protect this previously little known heritage. Like Donegal's trackless and challenging terrain these uplands provide

good expedition and exploration country. There is ready access to good road networks in the sparsely populated valleys similar to the Sperrins. There are extensive conifer plantations on the plateau edges extending in places across the moorland. Some fencing is found across hilltops.

Water-based expeditions

This Border country is also renowned as an extensive Lakeland. The extensive waterways of Upper and Lower Lough Erne have endless potential as they constitute a very large area of slow moving rivers, canals and lakes. The river meanders through farmland often bordered by Willow and Alder, giving a great sense of solitude despite a network of quiet roads nearby. One's only companions on a typical day-long paddle (which is the average navigable length) are cattle, sheep, the inevitable heron and the frequent flash of blue - a kingfisher. The canal - the Shannon-Erne Waterway - is a long two-day paddle involving slow river sections, moderate lake crossings, and frequent locked portages, particularly at the Shannon end. Even at the height of the season cruiser traffic is not heavy. The surrounding countryside and atmosphere is similar to the rivers.

The Lakes - all inter-connected - vary from benign narrow waterways to very extensive open water areas. They stretch well over 50 miles from the headquarters south of Belturbet in the Republic of Ireland, through Co. Fermanagh to the Hydro Dam in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal.

Many shorelines are wooded with numerous islands, particularly in the southern section. The main consideration is the effect of wind. The northern Lower Lough Erne is a particularly serious undertaking with wide stretches of water prone to the prevailing westerlies. The north/south axis of Upper Lough Erne and the headquarters provide more opportunity to gain shelter along the shores.

Gold canoe/kayak expeditions and explorations occur regularly. Silver is also possible particularly in the river, canal and headwaters sections. Sailing projects might be better to choose an exploration option to cope with fickle wind conditions and narrow waterways.

The Lough Erne system linked as it is by a canal to the River Shannon provides a wide variety of canoeable or sailing waters; most of it benign and well sheltered. Whilst Lower Lough Erne provides a large area of quite serious open water the Upper River Erne consists of many intricately connected small lakes requiring careful navigation. In between is a well-developed water based tourist infrastructure. This supports fishing and cruising amongst the picturesque waterways which wind through rural countryside and wooded islands.

Access issue

There are access issues at various places across the Expedition Area. Early contact with local Assessors is advised. They will be able to indicate suitable alternative route options.

DofE resources

The current DofE expedition kit list can be downloaded from: www.DofE.org/go/expeditionkit

A range of expedition downloads, such as the Green Form and spare expedition safety cards, can be downloaded from: www.DofE.org/go/downloads

Further information of the Expedition section can be found at: www.DofE.org/expedition

Vouchers for network assessors need to be bought from the DofE Essentials shop accessed through eDofE.