

Women with Altitude blossom in the rain!

Helen Lawless pulls together some blog extracts from participants in the Women With Altitude weekend in Glendalough, Co Wicklow, in April.

COLETTE MAHON



Ella Lindsay, Maev McKeever and Josie McGee enjoying the sun in Glendalough

For three days in April, the Glendalough valley was swamped with women of all ages and all abilities, from all parts of Ireland, but all Women With Altitude.

The positive atmosphere on Mountaineering Ireland's third Women With Altitude weekend surpassed the previous events. Despite generous wind and rain on the Saturday, participants returned from a range of activities, all absolutely buoyant.

Women With Altitude is an initiative to encourage women hillwalkers and climbers to improve their skills and build their confidence. Participants in this year's event completed an online survey afterwards; 100% of those who responded 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they enjoyed Women With Altitude, and 88% said they had 'learned new skills.' To give a better sense of what Women

With Altitude is about, we have put together extracts from blogs that participants posted on the Women With Altitude Facebook page. These are presented below.

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'Saintly Orienteering was the first event of the weekend and such fun was had by all, even the tourists learned where all the clues were. It ended with high spirits, which led on to Jane Gallwey's talk on her epic climbing adventures on El Capitan, Yosemite. Wow, what an amazing chilled-out speaker she was and a great way to start the climbing experience for everyone heading out the next day, El Capitan on the brain: Glendalough on the rock.' **Josie McGee**

'When I signed up for navigation I kind of envisaged a nice stroll around the lakes in

Glendalough, maybe a bit off the track, but near enough to civilisation. Instead, in relentless rain, we trekked through Coillte forestry, up to spot heights, down into cols, back up to spot heights, across gorse, along a narrow ridge and ultimately abandoned plans to meet the bus and clambered down what was meant to be a rather steep trail back to the hotel, but because of all the rain was essentially a waterfall. And I haven't had as much fun in ages. I learned some pretty interesting stuff as well:

- How to read a map and follow a trail.
- The meaning of various words like 'handrail', 'col' and 'cairn.'
- How to use a compass to get a bearing in mist.
- I take 71 paces to 100m.
- Only bring food that can be easily consumed while

wearing gloves.

- Tree roots are slippery when wet.

Ciara Galvin

'Great fun scrambling, rock-hopping, clambering, wading and walking up the river. It had rained, so the easy, long scramble at the top was now greasy and dangerous in the event of a slip. No worries; change of plan. Let's have a dip and a Timotei moment in a pool fed by an ice-cold chute of water. Brave women these.'

Brona Duddy (from an instructor's perspective)

'Saturday dawned with rain forecast, and rain it certainly did. Nonplussed, the women hit the ground running and disported themselves all over Wicklow and even back to Dalkey Quarry in Dublin, trying out new activities or honing already existent skills. There was something about the all 'femaleness' of the event that gave many women the chance to learn without fear, feeling totally supported. It had nothing to do with feminism or men-hating or anything like that. The atmosphere created by the instructors and organisers was one of relaxation and 'can do,' and people responded to it.

On Saturday night, as an entrée before the delicious dinner provided by the Glendalough Hotel, Orla Prendergast inspired us even further with her photos and stories of climbing trips at home and abroad. Not content with the blue skies of Bolivia, she had to make it harder and take on Greenland with its snow and ice and pristine nothingness.' **Deirdre Davys**

'Squeals of terror and delight resounded around the base of the rock as women of all ages, shapes, sizes and abilities got to grips, literally, with the basics of climbing and belaying. It poured rain, we floundered and we lost feeling in our extremities, but I think it's fair to say that everyone participated wholeheartedly; there was no complaining or grumbling about the weather. The instructors were a joy to spend time with; they were skilled, patient and most of all made the entire experience great fun.' **Heather Wilson**

AOIFE MANNION



Orla Prendergast with participants in the workshop on Scrambling and Ropework for the Hills

'My boots were still slightly wet on the Tuesday after Women With Altitude, but still filled with enthusiasm, and confident with my refreshed skills, I excitedly took to the hills. Fresh, confident and raring to go! Nothing too hectic, just around the lower Mournes.

I took multiple bearings, used features, contours, rivers, junctions, etc. I did make one mistake, but saw this as

constructive and corrected it effectively. I returned to my starting point, jubilant, and gave a quiet "Whoop, Whoop." This wouldn't have happened had I not gone on the Women With Altitude weekend and had such great instruction!

Anne Kenny

'I would highly recommend this weekend to women of any age who have a sense of adventure; you will learn new skills, update the ones you already may have, you will

have a great time and will make new friends as you are doing it. It will build your confidence and give you a better appreciation of what an amazing place the outdoors can be.' **Anne Kiernan**

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Thanks to all

The Women With Altitude organising team extends thanks to everyone who played a part in Women With Altitude 2013. Particular thanks to the instructors for sharing their knowledge and passion, the guest speakers, all those who led workshops and a really warm thank you to all the participants! Very big thanks to our sponsors, Berghaus, Gartan Outdoor Education Centre, Mountaineering Ireland and the Women In Sport programme, and all those who contributed items for the goody bag. The staff of the Glendalough Hotel deserve special thanks for looking after us so well, and likewise the Great Outdoors for their support. Thanks also to Wicklow Mountains National Park, the Glendalough Hostel, the Irish Mountaineering Club, the Brockagh Centre and the bus drivers!

More events

Following a review of the 2013 event, it was decided that Women With Altitude 2014 should take place in Connemara and, to avoid clashing with Easter or other events, it will be in May, from Friday evening 16th May through to Monday evening 19th May.

You can catch a little of the Women With Altitude spirit on some day events over the coming months. The Women With Altitude organising team is setting some dates for women and girls to come together to walk and climb at different locations around the country. There are some navigation refreshers planned too and Gartan OEC is arranging a Women's Mountain Skills Assessment for September. Check www.WomenWithAltitude.ie or our Facebook page for dates, locations and other details.

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MAEVE MCKEEVER



Josie McGee bouldering in Glendalough

