



The Cooley & Mourne Mountains

A self-guided walking holiday

TOURS AVAILABLE

6

DURATION

5-8

DISTANCE

37.3-84.3 km

GRADE

Easy/Moderate

Ready to Book?

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About This Walking Area

Two granite mountain ranges separated by Carlingford Lough and connected by a ferry crossing — where the Cooley Mountains of County Louth meet the Mourne Mountains of County Down in a single, cross-border walking adventure.

The Cooley peaks are rounded and forested, shaped by glaciation. The Mourne Mountains are rockier and sharper, with granite summits that feel genuinely remote. Carlingford Lough lies between them, a sheltered sea inlet framed by mountains on both shores.

Lower slopes carry oak, birch and ash woodland. Higher ground opens to bare granite, alpine grasses and purple heather blooming in late summer. The Mourne Wall runs across the high plateau like a spine.

Red grouse work the heather. Peregrine falcons hunt the cliff faces. Sika deer cross the open moorland at dawn and dusk.

BEST MONTHS

May

June

September

July

August

Why Walk Here

The Cooley and Mourne Mountains sit at the intersection of ancient mythology, mediaeval history, literary inspiration and cross-border identity. Few walking routes in Ireland carry this much layered meaning.

The Táin Bó Cúailnge, the great epic cycle of Irish mythology, unfolds across the Cooley hills. Cú Chulainn defended the ford against an entire army on these slopes. Walking here with that story in your pocket changes how the landscape feels beneath your feet.

Carlingford is the historical anchor. A mediaeval Norman stronghold with King John's Castle, intact gate towers and narrow streets that have changed little in centuries. The town's oysters are celebrated for their clean, mineral taste, farmed in the lough since the 1970s after the old herring fishery that sustained generations of coastal families finally faded.

C.S. Lewis spent childhood summers in the Mourne Mountains. The view from Rostrevor across the lough was, by his own account, the direct inspiration for Narnia. Percy French immortalised these mountains in his 1896 song, which is one of the most recognised Irish songs ever written.

For food, look out for Carlingford oysters, fresh seafood from the fishing port of Kilkeel, and the seafront restaurants of Newcastle at the journey's end. A fine walk deserves a fine finish.

Who Is It For?

This tour suits walkers who have completed at least one long-distance trail and want a genuine mountain challenge. The cross-border element adds a layer that few Irish walking routes can match, moving from the mythology of the Cooley Peninsula through mediaeval Carlingford and into the granite uplands of County Down.

Terrain & Difficulty

The Cooley and Mourne tour ranges from rated as moderately to challenging. The two ranges demand different things from you.

The Cooley side is more forgiving, rolling hills with well-established paths and manageable ascents. A strong walker will feel comfortable here from day one.

The Mourne are a different proposition. Higher, steeper and rocky underfoot, with exposed ridge walking that demands hillwalking experience and good judgement in poor weather. We have adjusted our walks to make the Mourne more accessible.

Daily distances range from 15 to 22 kilometres, with ascents of 400 to 700 meters. The mountains face the Atlantic directly, and conditions can change quickly. Proper waterproofs, sturdy boots and solid navigation skills are essential on the high ground.

Available Walking Holidays

Cooley Peninsula Hiking Tour

From

5 days · 3 walking days · 37.3 km · Easy

€645

per person

A perfectly paced 5-day self-guided introduction to Ireland's Cooley Peninsula — mountain trekking, ancient Celtic mythology, and the charm of medieval

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Mourne Mountains Walking Holiday — 5 Days

From

5 days · 3 walking days · Moderate

€625

per person

A focused 5-day self-guided walking holiday in the Mourne Mountains — arriving in the Victorian village of Rostrevor, exploring Kilbroney Forest on a

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Mourne Mountains Walking Holiday — 6 Days

From

6 days · 4 walking days · Moderate

€739

per person

A relaxed 6-day self-guided walking holiday in the Mourne Mountains — arriving in Rostrevor, spending a full day in Kilbroney Forest, following the

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Cooley & Mournes Walking Tour — 6 Days

From

6 days · 4 walking days · Moderate

€725

per person

A 6-day self-guided walking holiday combining the highlights of the Cooley Peninsula and the Mourne Mountains — the spectacular Táin Way descent

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Cooley & Mournes Walking Tour — 7 Days

From

7 days · 5 walking days · Moderate

€799

per person

Seven days walking from Ravensdale Forest to Newcastle — the full cross-border journey through the Cooley Peninsula and the Mourne

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Cooley & Mournes Hiking Tour

From

8 days · 6 walking days · 84.3 km · Moderate

€879

per person

An 8-day self-guided hiking tour through the Cooley Peninsula and Mourne Mountains — ancient trails, dramatic peaks, medieval Carlingford, and the

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Practical Information

Best Time to Visit

May and June are our top picks. Long evenings, wildflowers on the Cooley foothills and manageable trail traffic make these months hard to beat. June and early July offer the longest daylight hours, which matter for the longer Mourne Ridge days.

September is arguably the finest month of all. Bracken turns gold, the light is sharp and clear, trails are quieter, and accommodation is easier to book.

July and August are the warmest months but the busiest. Slieve Donard sees significant foot traffic, and accommodation needs to be booked well in advance.

The walking season runs from late spring through to late autumn, typically April to October.

Time your visit with a festival. Many trails host walking festivals throughout the season — see our complete 2026 walking festivals calendar to plan around one.

Accommodation

We book quality guesthouses and B&Bs at each stop along the route.

Carlingford offers charming guesthouses and small hotels overlooking the lough, a fine base for your first night in one of Ireland's most intact mediaeval towns.

Rostrevor is a quieter stop, a Victorian seaside village sheltered beneath the first Mourne slopes, with welcoming B&Bs and views back across to the Cooley Mountains.

Newcastle is the largest base on the route. It is a Victorian seaside resort with a full range of accommodations, a promenade, and direct beach access.

All properties are selected for hikers. Breakfast is included at every stop. Your bags are transferred ahead each day, so you only carry a light daypack on the trail.

Practical Information

Dublin Airport (DUB) is the primary arrival point, with direct services from across Europe, North America and the Middle East, approximately 100km south of Dundalk

Belfast International Airport (BFS) and George Best Belfast City Airport (BHD) both serve the Mourne side, within 60km of Newcastle

Irish Rail operates services from Dublin to Dundalk and Drogheda on the southern section of the route

Translink NI Railways operates Belfast services connecting to Newcastle in approximately 45 minutes

Plan your full journey at Transport for Ireland

We Handle the details. Full transfer and logistics details are included in your pre-departure pack. You arrive knowing exactly where to go and how to get there.

Gallery



Ready to Book?

See live availability, full daily itineraries and current rates on our website. Each holiday includes accommodation, daily breakfast, luggage transfers and route notes.

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