

Map 29 The Mournes. or with more detail:

The Mournes Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland Map 1:25 000

Map Coordinates: Start: 345219 Finish: 338259

Refreshments

There are no shops, cafes or restaurants near to this location. It is best to get sandwiches, food and drinks from Newcastle or Annalong before you start.

Start and Finish

The walk starts at Carrick Little Car Park approx 4km West of Annalong. Coming from Newcastle, take the A2 to Kilkeel. About 9km from Newcastle there is a right turn past a petrol station - Quarter Road - take that. After about 2 km it takes a sharp left turn. Keep going for approx. another 3 km over a single lane bridge and on the right at a T- junction which comes in from the left is Carrick Little Car Park. Coming from Annalong, from the centre of the village, turn northwest opposite a church and head up Majors Hill Road. Roughly 2 km later, turn right onto Oldtown Road. 2 km later on the opposite side of a T-Junction is Carrick Little Car Park. From Carrick Little Car Park, take the track right beside it heading north, passing houses on the left. After approx 1 km you arrive at the Mourne Wall, cut by a gate and stile. Instead of following the wall to your left continue straight along the track towards Annalong Wood on your right.

Terrain

Initially the path is well defined, very stony and rocky and regularly crosses shallow streams. The paths then become a mixture of granite slabs and gravel although shortcuts can be taken across gorse and heather covered bogland with the previously mentioned risks from hidden boulders and rocks strewn everywhere.

Route

From the Mourne Wall gate and stile continue parallel to Annalong Wood to your right. After approx 2 km from the gate. the wood ends and you are presented with a choice of paths leading off to the right.

If you are choosing to explore Percy Bysshe Cave, keep on the main path for approx another 500 metres and to your right is a heather covered granite buttress. A short but quite steep ascent takes you to the very narrow opening of the cave.

It is recommended that you find and explore this cave with an experienced guide. It is very tight in places and requires headlights and preferably, hard hats.

If you choose not to do this or once you have completed your exploration, 500 metres back along the track you can take one of those paths to your right which lead directly to Cove Cave and Mountain. The Cave can be seen in the middle of the rock face of Lower Cove, approx 1.5 km from the end of Annalong Wood up the Annalong Valley. On the left along the path is the grey and steep-sided Slieve Lamagan. When you reach the base of the Lower Cove buttress, access to the cave is by a short but slippery climb up a grass and rock face.

The opening at the top of the cave can be seen from the base, but once again it is recommended that you explore and climb this cave with an experienced guide. It is full of huge boulders which are very slippery, require a lot of scrambling and climbing and the final exit through the hole at the top is tight and tough.

However, once out through it and after another short climb over some rocks you are standing on a thin ledge which offers some of the most exciting and stunning views over part of the Annalong Valley, to Slieve Lamagan and further south, Slieve Binnian and its Lough.

Walk Two. Annalong Wood, Blue Lough and Slieve Binnian

Height: 747 metres (2450 feet)

Round trip: : 14 Kilometres (9 miles)

Time: 6 to 7 hours

Level 3 to 4: Moderate to Difficult

This is a long, tiring steep ascent and walk along the ridge and needs quite a good level of fitness. Cloud covers this mountain frequently and so navigational skills and warm clothing are recommended.

Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland Discoverer Series 1:50 000

Map 29 The Mournes. or with more detail:

The Mournes Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland Map 1:25 000

Map Coordinates: Start: 345219 Finish: 321234

Refreshment

There are no shops, cafes or restaurants near to this location. It is best to get sandwiches, food and drinks from Newcastle or Annalong before you start.

Start and Finish

If you have decided to do this walk, without the exploration of Percy Bysse and Cove caves, then you begin your walk at Carrick Little Car Park and follow the directions as above, to the end of Annalong Wood.

If you have camped overnight then start from the end of Annalong Wood (335244) as above.

Terrain

Initially the path is well defined, very stony and rocky and regularly crosses shallow streams. The paths then become a mixture of granite slabs and gravel. As you climb higher and up Slieve Binnian the tracks are a well trodden mixture of grass, bogland and then muddy and stone and soil tracks. Initially on the start of the steep climb there is some scrambling up and over rocks but eventually the walk along the ridge is well defined and along broad tracks and rock in most places. The final ascent of the summit requires a bit of scrambling over large boulders.

Route

From the end of Annalong Wood, take the left main track which bears left past Percy Bysse Buttress on your right. To your left is Blue Lough Buttress. 600 metres later on your right is the picturesque Blue Lough, which fills a wet depression between Slieve Lamagan and three imposing crags which form the north-east shoulder of Slieve Binnian. The outflow from Binnian Lough (unseen 160 m above) descends as a cascade separating Douglas Crag from the Blue Lough Buttress. Further north is the last of the three crags, Buzzard's Roost. Continuing along the path past Blue Lough on your right 800m later is the col at the head of the valley, which brings into view Ben Crom's cliffs and steep scree slopes as well as the dark and beautiful waters of the reservoir at its base. Turn left at the cor on to a narrow track which leads steeply upwards through heather and rock outcrops and then a gradual sustained ascent towards Slieve Binnian's summit ridge and North Tor.

Follow the clear path onwards along the ridge, keeping left (and east) past the curious arrangement of wrinkly tors known as the Back Castles. Eventually you will reach a wall. Passing through a break in this wall, this section of the walk concludes 450 m further at the Mourne Wall. A way then can be picked past some more tors and then eventually you reach the summit outcrop which can be climbed by a short rocky scramble.

The descent can be achieved by returning along the walk by which you arrived, or by following the Mourne Directly down the steep slope of the southern end of Slieve Binnian to arrive at the gate and stile from which you began at the end of the track from Carrick Little car Park

Points of Interest

Apart from the attractions of the caves already examined in the first walk and Blue Lough, Binnian Lough, Ben Crom and its reservoir, the views in any direction from the summit of Slieve Binnian are stunning, provided it is not covered by cloud. To the North East, North and West you can see virtually all of the peaks that dominate the Mourne mountains. There are superb views North East down into the Annalong Valley and North West to Lough Shannagh between Doan and Carn Mountain. Immediately below you is the Silent Valley Reservoir and to the South are the

patchwork fields of the Kingdom of Mourne and the sea, with maybe a distant glimpse of the Wicklow Mountains and the Isle of Man.

Safety Information

Be Prepared

With a bit of forethought, common sense, the right equipment and knowledge, hill walking can be a fun, sometimes challenging and hugely rewarding experience. It is remarkable how many people go out hill and mountain walking, without the proper skills, information, clothing and equipment and preparation. National Outdoor Adventure Centres and rambling or walking clubs will always give advice.

- Whether walking with friends or alone, ensure you plan well and allow plenty of time for your walk. Be realistic in your estimates, allowing ample time for navigating/route finding, stops and breaks etc.
- Check the weather reports before you set off. Take note of extremes, especially heavy rain, high winds and high and low temperatures.
- Let someone know your intended route and when you expect to be back (and let them know when you have returned).
- A change of footwear and dry clothes left back in the car (if that is how you arrived at the start) will always be welcome.
- Don't take on too much and enjoy your day.
- Follow the Countryside Code, "Leave No Trace".

The following items should always be carried.

- A comfortable well fitted rucksack with a waterproof liner will allow you to carry all the basic equipment for a safe and enjoyable day on the hill.
- The straps should be suitably padded and sit on the shoulders without rubbing. It should have a supporting waist belt and chest strap to keep it in place. As a general rule of thumb, a 30 litre sack will be plenty for a day walk and 45 - 60 litres should suffice for most multi day camping trips.
- Warm hat and gloves or mittens (sun hat in hot weather) - preferably thermal insulated. Up to 33% of heat is lost through the head. waterproof jacket, waterproof trousers, fleece or jumper. Sunglasses may be beneficial during the summer months.
- Thermal Base layer. Quick drying layers worn against the skin which can transport moisture away from the skin are an important addition in all sorts of weather conditions.
- A fleece is a useful thing to carry, either as a "mid layer" between base layer and outer jacket in cold weather or as an outer layer in slightly warmer conditions.
- Dehydration is an issue at any time of year so ensure you take adequate fluids for the day ahead. Consider the forecast temperatures and how strenuous your day is likely to be. For a full day in the hills 1 litre of water should be the minimum.
- Food for the day. Sandwiches are the easiest to prepare and fruit and chocolate are always good additions.
- Emergency survival bag. This is a brightly coloured plastic bag designed to reduce the loss of body heat.
- A compass and suitable map of the area (with waterproof cover) - and know how to use them.

- A small personal first-aid kit including plasters, bandages, dressings, insect lotions or sprays and sun screen lotion or sprays in the summer months.
- A whistle for attracting attention in an emergency (six short blasts on the whistle is the internationally recognised distress signal).
- Head torch and spare battery and bulb
- A fully-charged mobile phone (signal strength can be weak or non-existent in some areas, but better to have it than not). Do not rely on the mobile phone be self-sufficient in your planning.
- Tissue/toilet roll for sanitary requirements (and a lighter or matches to burn them afterwards). These can also be buried (away from water supplies) after use but that may require a small spade to be carried.

Footwear.

- Comfortable mountain boots with a suitable sole, and ankle support.
- There are many types available in leather or fabric often with a breathable waterproof membrane.
- Boots also vary in their rigidity. Generally speaking the more technical the terrain the stiffer the boot,.
- To avoid blisters and rubbing they should be laced snugly and broken-in over a series of progressively longer walks.
- To help minimise blisters use medical tape or sticking plasters on the normal rub points - back of the heel and sometimes where the top of high ankle boots rub against the leg.
- Do clean and dry them afterwards (slowly - overnight if possible) and waterproof them regularly with a suitable agent.
- Good quality wool mix socks often help avoid blisters especially on warm sweaty days.

Waterproof Clothing.

- Jacket and trousers should be waterproof and preferably breathable. The jacket should have zippered pockets and a roomy hood with draw cord.
- Trousers should not be restrictive and should have lower leg zips to ease fitting over boots.
- Waterproofs act as a barrier against rain and wind/chill.

The following items are not essential but advisable to have them.

- A pair of adjustable walking poles. These certainly help with balance and support when ascending a mountain and are particularly helpful when descending
- Binoculars
- Personal GPS (Global Positioning System). This should only be used as an addition and never a replacement for map and compass.
- Well fitted and adjusted gaiters are very useful when travelling through bog land. They help to keep the mud and moisture away from the boots and are an extra waterproof protection. In warmer, drier conditions they are a good alternative to over-trousers, especially when walking through rough gorse, brush or thorn bushes!

If you are intending to camp overnight you will need:

- Tent or Bivy Bag
- Sleeping bag
- Insulating mat (or inflatable mattress)
- Spoon, knife and fork. Bowls and mug.
- Stove, fuel and pans.
- Food (boil-in-the-bag packs are light to carry and provide good hot meals)

Do's and Don'ts - the Countryside Code

Land and its owners.

- Keep the number of cars to the minimum (use public transport where possible) and park appropriately allowing for easy access to property, especially for farmers and landowners. Farm machinery and emergency rescue services may need wide space to turn into a field or gateway.
- All land is owned by somebody. Agreed access to that land is often with the goodwill of the owner, not as a legal right. If unsure, check with the owner and observe signs regarding access agreements/restrictions.
- Use agreed routes in these areas.
- Be friendly and courteous when you meet landowners and local residents.
- Respect private property and do not interfere with machinery, crops or animals.
- Avoid taking dogs into the hills, especially with livestock around.
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Be careful not to damage fences, walls or hedges.
- Use stiles and gates where they exist.

The Environment

- Take care not to disturb plants, birds and animals and in particular, nests.
- Where possible stick to tracks, or the most durable surface available.
- In heavily used areas, walk in single file in the middle of the path, even if it is wet and muddy. This helps reduce soil erosion and minimises path widening.
- In more remote areas, disperse use to prevent the creation of new tracks and campsites and try to avoid places where impacts are beginning to show.
- Avoid taking short cuts on zigzag paths as this creates new lines for run-off water and increases erosion.
- Leave cairns as they are: old cairns could have archaeological value.

Litter, waste and camping

- Apart from being unsightly litter is a hazard to wildlife. **As a general rule take out what you bring in.**
- Leave no litter behind: even biodegradable items like banana skins and teabags can take a long time to disappear and they are unsightly.
- With caution, pick up and remove litter when you see it.
- Human waste should be buried 6 inches deep and at least 30 metres away from watercourses and walking tracks and shelters. Toilet paper takes a long time to biodegrade. It and sanitary towels and tampons should be taken home in a sealed bag. Even if buried, they may be dug up by animals.
- Washing should never be done directly into a water-course, even if biodegradable soap is used. It is better to use a pot for washing and dispose of the dirty water away from the bank.
- Always ensure landowner's permission before wild camping.
- Choose unobtrusive sites at least 500m away from roads and buildings.
- Use a stove for cooking. Campfires leave their mark and poorly set fires, especially in hot summer may be dangerous.

To prevent damage to vegetation, tents should not be left on the same spot for more than two nights. In many wild areas tents should only be pitched between dusk & dawn.