

# **Croagh Patrick: A Study of a Mountain Pilgrimage**

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## **Abstract**

Croagh Patrick is the most famous and popular pilgrimage mountain in Ireland. During the summer of 2003 semi-structured interviews and on-site observations were used to determine how people perceive the mountain, what motivates them to undertake the climb and what they experience during the climb. The mountain was perceived as an historic monument and holy place, which should not be subject to any development work that could interfere with the challenge or the traditional element of the climb. The main motivational factors involved challenge, preserving a tradition, visiting a famous site and involvement in penance. The climb was experienced as a positive communal event and provided spiritual or meaningful experiences for some individuals. It would appear that the climb has moved away from being a penitential ritual towards being a personal challenge related to a personal value system. This shift reflects changes in an increasingly secular Ireland. When viewed within the framework of self-determination theory, there appears to be a greater amount of personal ownership or internalisation of motivational factors than may have occurred in the past.

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Dedicated to the memory of Niamh McGrath.

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# **1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1 Introduction

The most famous pilgrimage mountain in Ireland is Croagh Patrick (Harbison, 1991). The steep quartzite cone of 710m rises from a narrow ridge along the western shore of Clew Bay, an island-studded inlet of the Atlantic (Appendix A). According to the eminent folklorist Máire MacNeill (1982, p.71) “the sublimity of its appearance and its nearness to a populous plain helped to make it the holiest mountain in Ireland”. Along with Knock Shrine, County (Co) Mayo and St Patrick’s Purgatory, Lough Derg, Co Donegal (Appendix A), Croagh Patrick is among the most visited pilgrimage sites in Ireland (Hughes, 1991). The mountain, which in popular speech is often called The Reek, is closely associated with Saint Patrick. According to tradition, it was the location chosen by Saint Patrick in 441 AD for a forty-day fast, following the example of Christ and Moses, and the mountain is now venerated as a shrine commemorating his time there.

Evidence from various historical texts such as The Annals of the Four Masters (circa 900 AD) and the Annals of Loch Cé (circa 900 AD) suggest that pilgrimages have been carried out there for over 1,500 years without interruption (Harbison, 1991). In the travel books and discourses on manners and customs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there are many references to the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, all testifying to its popularity and specifying that thousands of pilgrims visited the mountain every year (MacNeill, 1982). It has been estimated that nowadays approximately 100,000 people visit the mountain annually (Battersby, 2003).

Although the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick can be undertaken at any time of the year, the last Sunday in July is the most significant and popular day. On that day, according to Harbison (1991) and figures from Mayo Mountain Rescue (2003), around 30,000 pilgrims from all over Ireland come to partake in the pilgrimage. A small number still follow the tradition of starting off at midnight and making the ascent of about three hours in darkness, sometimes barefoot. It is a steep climb that starts at sea level and finishes up steep, loose scree on the summit cone.

An article from the Connaught Telegraph August 3, 1972 describes some of the difficulties.

Prayers for peace throughout Ireland were offered at Masses on the summit of Croagh Patrick when about 40,000 people- many in their bare feet- made the annual national pilgrimage. Dry shale, after the recent fine weather, squally showers that fell from dawn and a slippery descent made the descent this year particularly hazardous on the three and a half mile climb... There were 15 accident victims and six cases were detained at the Co. Mayo Hospital,

Castlebar. All were carried down on stretchers by the Knights of Malta (cited in Turner & Turner, 1978, p.208).

The mountain was an important site long before the arrival of Christianity to Ireland. Archaeological excavations have revealed that the summit of Croagh Patrick was occupied by a hill fort, complete with stone ramparts and dwellings (Morahan, 2002). MacNeill (1982) has pointed to the probability that the pilgrimage's roots go back to pagan times. She argues in favour of seeing Croagh Patrick as one of the many places in Ireland where the festival of the Celtic harvest god, Lugh, was celebrated. It seems clear that in both pagan and Christian times, The Reek has been a site associated with divine power and inspiration.

## **1.2 Changing times**

Many religions preserve traditions of mountains as places from which the gods hand down wisdom or commandments to their followers. Mountains, as the highest and most dramatic landscape feature, have an extraordinary power to evoke the sacred (Bernbaum, 1997).

However, research by Cooper (1997) found that the traditional way of seeing mountains as sacred places is disappearing in Europe. Glimpses at mountain landscape did not inspire the same reverence that they once did and mountains were seen more as recreational resources than sources of inspiration.

In Ireland, religious attitudes and beliefs are changing. Tovey and Share (2000) state that the religious affiliation of the population of Ireland is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic (at 94 %). However, over the past twenty years there has been a steady reduction in the numbers of practising Catholics and credibility of the Catholic Church as an institution has never been lower (Tovey & Share, 2000). According to Cassidy (2002) between 1980 and 2000, there has been a decline in the moral authority of the Catholic Church and a decline in religious observance. An *Irish Times* article (2001), reports that the once powerful "traditional Irish Catholicism", seems to be grinding to a halt in the face of a secular, "pluralist" modern Ireland.

Notwithstanding this decline in Catholicism in Ireland and a reduction in reverence towards mountain landscapes, the tradition of pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick is still strong. However, the motivating factors for this comparatively arduous climb are not clear. In the past, a pilgrim could gain a Papal forgiveness for sins and other religious 'rewards' for completing the climb and the associated rituals. Whether the modern

day pilgrim is seeking the same experience or has the same aim as pilgrims from the past are questions that will be examined by this dissertation.

### **1.3 The Research Question**

#### **Justification**

There is much documentation describing pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick from early Christian times to the present day. This documentation assists in gaining an understanding of the mountain and its place in peoples lives. The literature on the mountain examines, in detail, its history, archaeology, the rituals involved in the pilgrimage and subsequent celebrations (Harbison, 1991; Hughes, 1991; MacNeill, 1982; Morahan, 2001). The literature describes the people on pilgrimage, their dress and demeanour. There are occasional quotes from pilgrims describing what motivational factors led them to the mountain and what they experienced there. However, these pieces have been written from an historical or folklore perspective rather than from a sociological or psychological perspective. There is a lack of research that examines how the mountain is perceived and the meaning that people attach to climbing the mountain.

Until the early 1970s, the apparent motivation for a pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick was as a source of spiritual reward in the form of a plenary indulgence or as a penitential exercise (Hughes, 1991; Murphy, 2005). A plenary indulgence is a complete release from time to be spent in Purgatory due for sins already forgiven. In Catholicism, Purgatory is a place where the souls of the dead remain while seeking forgiveness for sins before entering Heaven (Hughes, 1991). However, Plenary Indulgences are no longer a significant feature of Catholicism and in addition, religious observance is in decline in an increasingly secular Ireland (Cassidy, 2002). Despite these changes in Catholic practise and belief, Croagh Patrick continues to hold a strong attraction for people. According to Gibbons (2005, p.30) the main pilgrimage day on Croagh Patrick is “without doubt one of Irelands great cultural treasures”. Given the importance of the mountain in Irish culture and its continuing popularity, the mountain is deserving of more research.

#### **1.4 Aims of the Research**

This research examines how a sample group, all of whom have climbed the mountain, perceive the mountain, what they experience during the climb and what factors

motivate their climb. The sample group included both those who climbed the mountain in the main pilgrimage days in July and those who climbed at other periods.

The aim of this research is to understand;

1. How people perceive and experience the mountain and pilgrimage
2. How people believe the mountain should be managed and developed
3. What motivates them to undertake the climb in comparison to pilgrims in the past
4. The reasons for the continued popularity of the climb in an increasingly secular society

### **1.5 Possible Benefits from the Dissertation**

The findings of this research may assist in planning for future developments on the mountain. Croagh Patrick is a national site of pilgrimage, but it is also an important tourist attraction and recreational resource. Its unique profile is linked to the image of County Mayo as a tourist destination. Despite the popularity and importance of the mountain, there is no management plan in place for the mountain, which is the responsibility of Mayo County Council. Issues and disagreements have arisen regarding safety, erosion and the organisation of the main pilgrimage day (Gibbons, 2005; Ring, 2005). This dissertation will provide a greater understanding of the motivation of those climbing the mountain and their opinions on development work. This may be useful when trying to resolve these issues.

It may be of interest for the outdoor education profession to examine a mountain pilgrimage such as Croagh Patrick. There are many similarities between the outdoor education experience as described by writers such as Priest and Gass (1997) and pilgrimage as described by Osterrieth (1997). Outdoor education research usually focuses on structured and formal educational programmes rather than informal traditions such as Croagh Patrick. However, despite the unusual focus in this dissertation, it still has relevance to the outdoor education profession. The popularity of climbing Croagh Patrick suggests that people value the experience they have during the pilgrimage. This dissertation may help to identify elements of the mountain pilgrimage process and practise that could enhance outdoor education programmes.

The dissertation may also help to address the lack of attention shown to the study of the relationship with landscape within outdoor education literature, as noted by Nicol and Higgins (1998a). Much less research is carried out in Ireland than in the United

Kingdom and it is very probable that a similar criticism could be made of outdoor education literature in Ireland. The Croagh Patrick pilgrimage is inextricably linked to the mountain on which it takes place and this dissertation aims to understand how the study group perceive and experience the mountain. This constitutes a study of relationships with a landscape and will contribute to a neglected area of research.



## **2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the nature and practise of pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick and in the rest of Ireland. It shows the considerable variation in practise and beliefs between the pre-Christian era and contemporary times. While the focus of this dissertation is modern day pilgrimage, it is important to understand how pilgrimages developed and changed over the centuries and to discuss the modern day pilgrimage within that context. The perceptions of pilgrims, the motivation for pilgrimage, and the potential effect of the pilgrimage experience on pilgrims will also be examined. The review concludes by examining the variety of perceptions of the natural landscape with an emphasis on the mountain landscape.

This chapter is comprised of three main sections.

1. Pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick and Ireland
2. The Nature of Pilgrimage
3. Perceptions of Landscape

The first section includes discussion of the mountain in Pre-Christian times, the connection with St Patrick and ritual associated with the pilgrimage. It includes a review of historic descriptions of the pilgrimage as both a penitential penance and as a community celebration. It also locates pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick within the broader context of pilgrimage in Ireland. The second section examines the multiple forms pilgrimage has taken and the meaning pilgrims ascribe to the act of pilgrimage. It discusses the motivational factors involved in pilgrimage and the connection between pilgrimage and outdoor education. The third section charts how perceptions of landscape have changed, examines the emotional effect of landscape and motivational factors involved in wilderness journeys. It also discusses pilgrimage as a tradition taking place in a cultural landscape and how cultural landscapes have a relevance for the outdoor education profession.

## **2.2 Pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick and in Ireland**

### ***2.2.1 Croagh Patrick***

Travelling westwards through Mayo, the pyramidal quartzite peak of Croagh Patrick dominates the landscape. The mountain is the highest part of an isolated ridge that stretches for fifteen kilometres along the shore of Clew Bay (Appendix B, Plate 1 Appendix C). Several nineteenth century travel writers attempt to capture the beauty of the peak with florid prose. Russell (1789) wrote that

Croagh Patrick seems to have been made to cheer and to delight and not terrify or to startle. It seems to have said to the mountains around it- 'Stand back; come not too near me lest your shadow fall on me and hide, even for an instant, one gleam of my radiant loveliness'. So the mountains do stand back and this is one cause of its winsomeness, rightness and cheerfulness (cited in Corlett, 2001, p.3).

There are many man-made constructions on the mountain including the small Catholic Church on the summit, built in 1905 (Morahan, 2001). However, the most prominent feature when viewed from the south and east, is the path leading to the summit. A hillwalking guidebook describes the final section to the summit as steep, slippery when wet and potentially hazardous due to loose stones (Lynam, 1991). Due to the popularity of the mountain, serious accidents to walkers occur annually (Mayo Mountain Rescue, 2003) and there have been calls for improvements to be made to the track by a local politician (Ring, 2005). The path has also been described as an ugly scar on the hillside (Herman, 1998).

There is no information on how present day walkers and pilgrims perceive the mountain from an aesthetic perspective. However, the general attitude of hillwalkers to eroded tracks would tend to be negative. The Mountaineering Council of Ireland (2005) perceive badly eroded tracks negatively in terms of safety to walkers, ecological damage to vegetation and aesthetics. A voluntary organisation, set up hillwalkers to undertake repair work on paths, is well supported (Mountain Meitheal, 2005). However, the historic nature of the path on Croagh Patrick may lead to it being perceived differently to paths in other mountain areas.

### ***2.2.2 Pre-Christian Pilgrimage***

Given the dominance of the mountain in the western landscape, it is of little surprise that there is a tradition of pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick dating from pre-Christian times. Archaeological evidence of prehistoric activity of possible ritual importance has been found in the area close to the mountain. The rock art carvings of the Boheh Stone situated four miles from the mountain (map Appendix B), possible Bronze Age cairns near the summit, an earthen fort and a collection of ancient monuments on the seashore suggest that the Christian pilgrimage may have its roots in earlier prehistoric rituals (Morahan, 2001). The mountain is layered with historical and mythic associations pre-dating St Patrick's arrival and continuing to semi-religious, contemporary Ireland.

MacNeill (1982), in her research on the festival of Lughnasa, suggests that Croagh Patrick was one of the many places in Ireland where the festival of the Celtic god, Lugh, was celebrated. Lugh was an ancient pagan god of the Tuatha De Danann, a divine prehistoric Irish race (Hughes, 1991). The Lughnasa Festival is associated with the harvest and is traditionally celebrated on the last day of summer or the first day of the harvest season. A link with the Lughnasa festival is still maintained as the main pilgrimage on The Reek takes place on the last Sunday in July, the date traditionally associated with Lughnasa. When Christianity arrived in Ireland, it incorporated many of the pagan rituals into the Christian calendar and this coinciding of dates is a clear example of this practise. Interestingly, on Mount Brandon in County Kerry (map Appendix A), which according to Harbison (1991) is a fascinating mountain pilgrimage, the pilgrimage day also occurred on the last Sunday in July.

Throughout Ireland, the pagan traditions were not denied fully by the church but were subtly integrated in a new Christian mythology. The anthropologists Turner and Turner (1978, p.18) use the term ‘baptising the customs’ to describe how the Catholic church assimilated local practises in the hope that allegiance would transfer from one religion to the next. Turner and Turner (1978) categorise pilgrimages that bear evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols as ‘archaic pilgrimages’. Along with Croagh Patrick, St Patrick’s Purgatory in Lough Derg with its reference to a pagan past, and Glastonbury in Somerset with its Celtic overtones are some of the many sites in this category.

### ***2.2.3 St Patrick and Croagh Patrick***

While associated with Celtic rituals, it was through its link with St Patrick that The Reek became a famous site of pilgrimage. St Patrick is generally regarded as the greatest of Ireland’s missionaries. He was born in western Britain but was kidnapped at the age of sixteen by Irish raiders and shipped as a slave to Ireland where he remained for six years. He managed to escape but the Irish continued to haunt his thoughts and after ordination as a priest he returned to Ireland. Although not the first missionary in Ireland, he won many converts and visited parts of the country where no Christian missionary had previously gone. It is popularly believed that St Patrick visited Croagh Patrick and there is some documentary evidence to support this connection (Simms, 1995). Tireachain wrote a memoir in Latin of St Patrick’s travels some two hundred years after the Saint’s death (circa 670AD). This memoir, which is contained in the Book of Armagh is the most authentic proof of St Patrick’s fast on Cruachain Aigli (Croagh Patrick).

According to Tireachain, circa AD 670,

Patrick proceeded to Mons Aigli (Croagh Patrick) intending to fast there for forty days and forty nights, following the example of Moses, Elias and Christ.... And Patrick proceeded to the summit of the mountain, climbing Cruachain Aigli (Croagh Patrick) and stayed there for forty days and forty nights and the birds were troublesome to him and he could not see the face of the sky and land and sea (cited in Hughes, 1991, p.13).

This reference to troublesome birds has been expanded upon by later writers who refer to fights with demons and with poisonous animals (Hughes, 1991). The reference has developed into the belief that when St. Patrick was on the mountain, he banished snakes and serpents from Ireland; hence the traditional explanation as to why there are no snakes in Ireland.

The account in the Book of Armagh includes a divine injunction to follow St Patrick's example and climb the mountain.

To all holy men of Ireland, past, present and future, God said: 'Climb holy men, to the top of the mountain to the west of the sun in order to bless the people of Ireland' so that Patrick might see the fruit of his labours (Simms, 1995, p. 67).

All available accounts of St Patrick's connection with the mountain were written at least two hundred years after his death. Therefore, the historical accuracy of the connection is difficult to verify. It is now generally recognised by historians that many of the stories about St Patrick were very much invented traditions that were designed to serve some particular function. DePaor (1971), cited in Carroll (1999, p.37) contends that many of the stories about Patrick were based on a concern (which emerged long after the death of the historic Patrick) to establish the primacy and power of sections of the Catholic Church rather than for genuine religious reasons.

#### ***2.2.4 Date of the Pilgrimage***

In contemporary times, the last Sunday in July, locally known as Reek Sunday, is the most popular day for pilgrims. The Last Friday in July, often called Garland Friday, is also a popular day of pilgrimage among people from Westport and the local area. Mass is only conducted in the church on the summit on these two days and on 15 August, The Feast of the Assumption (Hughes, 1991). In the past, both documentary evidence and tradition attest that the pilgrimage could be made at any time. When it was penance imposed by a priest to atone for some wrong doing, it was usual for the penitent to travel alone and the specific date on which the mountain was climbed was of no concern (MacNeill, 1982).

### **2.2.5 Indulgences**

While today a pilgrimage is popularly associated with some type of ‘spiritual enlightenment’, in earlier times a pilgrimage often had a more practical side. A system of indulgences was widespread throughout Europe. A plenary indulgence is a remission of punishment for sins so that time spent in purgatory after death could be shortened dramatically. The system enforced the idea of a pilgrimage as a transaction. Indeed, indulgences were subject to the forces of supply and demand as competition between suppliers increased. According to Coleman and Elsner (1995), by the end of the thirteenth century, shrines were outbidding each other in the length of remissions they could offer and professional pardoners (sellers of indulgences) had appeared throughout Europe. In the case of Croagh Patrick, Hughes (1991, p.30) cites Papal documents that show that the earliest records of indulgences for pilgrims who performed the stations on The Reek were granted in 1432. In 1607, Pope Paul V issued a brief in which he conceded a plenary indulgence to the faithful who visited twelve popular Irish pilgrimage sites, including Croagh Patrick (Hagan, 1914, cited in Carroll, 1999, p.112). The last Indulgence, granted in 1958, states

Every pilgrim who ascends the mountain on St. Patrick’s Day or within the octave, or at any time within June, July, August or September and prays in or near the chapel for the intentions of Our Holy Father the Pope, may gain a plenary indulgence on condition of going to confession and Holy Communion on the summit or within the week (Hughes, 1991, p.31).

Indulgences were highly prized. In 1885, Dr. MacEvilly, the local bishop, petitioned the Pope to allow pilgrims who were unable to perform the stations of the Reek due to a physical impairment to gain an indulgence. It was agreed that this group of pilgrims could receive an indulgence by just visiting St. Patrick’s church. St. Patrick’s church is located in the village of Lecanvey at the foot of the mountain (Appendix B) (Hughes, 1991, p.60).

Receiving indulgences or doing penance for sins committed appears to have been the primary motivational factor for the pilgrimage in the past. As pointed out by Carroll (1999) it is interesting to note that there is no strong tradition of pilgrims to Croagh Patrick receiving miraculous cures for illnesses. Cures for illness are routinely associated with other major pilgrimage sites. According to Healy (2000), the popularity of Knock Shrine, Co Mayo (Appendix A), and of many holy wells in Ireland is linked to a belief in the curative properties of visits to these sites.

### ***2.2.6 The Stations of The Reek***

The stations of The Reek consist of a series of penitential exercises and were once considered an integral part of the pilgrimage. However, in more recent times the stations have declined in popularity and for many pilgrims, attending mass on the summit is the only ritualistic part of the pilgrimage (Hughes, 1991).

As at other places of popular pilgrimage in Ireland, the stations involve repeating a prescribed number of prayers while walking around monuments or cairns. There are three stations in total. The first station is located at the base of the cone of the mountain at an altitude of 420m and consists of a small circular cairn of stones. The pilgrim walks around it seven times and says three different sets of prayers. On reaching the summit, the pilgrim enters the second station by kneeling and saying a set number of prayers. After praying for the Pope's intentions near the chapel, the pilgrim walks fifteen times around the church saying fifteen sets of prayers. At Leaba Phadraig (Patrick's Bed) the pilgrim finishes the second station with seven rounds (circuits) while saying seven sets of prayers. This is the traditional site for the Saint's rest during his forty days on the Reek (Hughes, 1991).

The third station is some distance down the western side of the mountain. It consists of three cairns and the pilgrim walks seven times around each one, saying seven sets of prayers. The pilgrim finishes by going around the enclosure seven times. This station is rarely visited nowadays. People generally ascend and descend the mountain by the same route and therefore miss this station. The third station concludes the pilgrimage, although some pilgrims continue on to make further rounds at the holy well at Kilgeever (MacNeill, 1982) (Appendix B). According to Hughes (1991), there was also a tradition that the full pilgrimage was not finished until Caher Island was reached. Caher is situated five miles offshore in Clew Bay and contains a small hermitage site (Appendix B). O' Donavan (1839) also mentions this tradition and found many place names and items of folklore connecting St Patrick with Caher Island.

According to research by Hughes (1991), it is not possible to state the exact date on which the stations started but it is likely that they started soon after Saint Patrick's visit in the 400's. The summit has been identified as an early Christian site. An archaeological dig was conducted on the summit in 1994 and the remains of an oratory with a radiocarbon date of 430 to 890 AD was revealed (Morahan, 2001).

Detailed descriptions of the stations by MacDonnell (1820) and O'Donovan (1839) indicate that the vast majority of pilgrims completed the stations. While the format was similar to that undertaken today, the stations were then completed in bare feet and sections of the journey were completed on the knees. Thurston (1905) cited in Carroll (1999, p.107) says that one circuit of the summit on bare knees was often substituted for fifteen rounds in bare feet. Today, only a minority ascend the mountain barefoot (Hughes, 1991).

The stations are the element of the pilgrimage most closely associated with religious ritual. Completing the stations is time consuming and demanding on pilgrims. The extent to which the modern day climber completes the stations may provide an indication as to the role and importance attached to religious ritual as part of contemporary pilgrimage on the mountain.

#### ***2.2.7 Pilgrimage as Penance***

Hughes (1991, p.16) lists many references over the centuries to pilgrimages to the mountain in honour of what has been described by O Corrain (1989, p.39) as the “cult of St Patrick”. One of the most interesting is from The Annals of Ulster and it records that thirty fasting pilgrims were killed by lightning when undertaking the pilgrimage in March 1131. This record shows that by the early twelfth century, the mountain was an established pilgrimage site and that fasting was an established devotional practise for the pilgrims. According to Carroll (1999), these medieval pilgrims who visited Croagh Patrick almost certainly felt they were imitating the fasting of St Patrick himself.

According to MacNeill (1982), travel books and essays on manners and customs were popular in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. Those based in the West of Ireland contain many references to the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage. They all testify to the popularity of the mountain and record that thousands of pilgrims visited the mountain each year (MacNeill, 1982).

During 1835 an English traveller, John Barrow climbed to the summit and recorded an early description of pilgrims to the mountain.

On arriving at the summit we found a poor woman, barefooted and barelegged, her clothing coarse and scanty, trudging seven times round the outer edge of the level summit, which is about an acre, strewn over with small, sharp stones, telling her beads [saying the Rosary] as she hopped along.... Besides the old woman there were two stray sheep on the summit of Croagh Patrick, who had



selected a very bad pasture, as there was not a blade of grass, so that they too were performing a penance (cited in Corlett 2001, p.40)

The English travel writer, Thackery, gives an interesting account of climbing The Reek on Garland Friday, 1842. Thackery (1843, p.237) writes that people often came away from the mountain “suffering severe pain, wounded and bleeding at the knees and feet and some of the women shrieking from the pain of their wounds”. O’Donovan (1839) records that pilgrims tore strips of cloth from their clothes and left them stuck in between the stones of the chapel at the summit. Carroll (1999), who has made a psychological study of religion in Ireland, argues that having completed the penitential rounds, pilgrims to Croagh Patrick visualised their separation from their sins and the associated punishment in the same way as at holy wells. He interprets the act of leaving something behind as a metaphor that allowed the person to enact in a concrete manner what they wanted to achieve; to separate themselves from the physical ailment or the punishment and guilt caused by sin. At many disused holy wells in Ireland, one can still see small tokens left behind by pilgrims (Healy, 2000). However, this practise seems to have disappeared from The Reek.

#### ***2.2.8 Pilgrimage as a Festival***

Festivities at the foot of the mountain were in contrast to the hardship experienced during the climb. It was the tradition that after the climb, crowds would gather in festive mood at the base of the mountain. Thackery (1843) found fifty tents in one field in heavy rain and described the scene:

Here was a great crowd of men and women, all ugly...Stalls were spread about, where of the owners were shrieking out the praises of their wares- great, coarse, damp looking bannocks of bread for the most part....Add to these caldrons containing water for tay at the door, other pots of masses of pale legs of mutton. In the booths it was impossible to stand upright, or to see much on account of smoke. Men and women were crowded in these rude tents, huddled together and disappearing in the darkness. Owners came bustling out to replenish the emptied water-jugs and land ladies stood outside in the rain calling strenuously upon all passerbys to enter. Meanwhile, high on the invisible mountain, the people were dragging their bleeding knees from altar to altar, flinging stones and muttering some endless litanies, with the priests standing by (p.98).

This type of festival, called a pattern, was an integral part of many rural festivals that combined a religious and festive dimension. O’Donovan (1839, p.65) climbed the peak twice and remarked that “stations are still performed with great devotion on this aerial peak”. He also remarked on the pattern associated with the pilgrimage.

There are several enclosures of stone, not all dedicated to Saint Patrick or the purpose of penance but rather to Bacchus and built for sheltering whiskey drinkers from the asperity of the weather and the fury of the Atlantic blasts on the day of the pattern (O'Donovan, 1839, p.66).

The Croagh Patrick pilgrimage was not unique in this respect. Harbison (1991) describes similar festivities accompanying the pilgrimage on Mount Brandon, Co Kerry. Indeed, boisterous scenes were an integral element of many pattern days throughout the country. The pattern was a celebration of the feast day of the local patron saint and was a prominent community event. The celebrations had both a religious dimension and a festive non-religious dimension. According to O'Riordain (1995), the aspect of the pattern that struck outsiders as most ironic was the combination of pious devotion and drunken, anti-Christian debauchery displayed in the festivities. This licentiousness was as important as the devotional aspect of the pattern.

This element of celebration on the mountain continued in the 20th century. The Irish poet, Kavanagh, climbed The Reek on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1940 and wrote a report for the Irish Independent newspaper. He was captivated by the gaiety of the occasion and its contrast with the austerity of the other pilgrimage associated with St Patrick, Lough Derg.

Gay piety is not a contradiction...Croagh Patrick is flamboyant and colourful as some warm-hearted faithed corner of mediaeval Christendom...Croagh Patrick is the glorious singing, laughing climb of an Ireland, young in spirit and truth and enthusiastic in performance (Kavanagh, 1940, p.9)

#### ***2.2.9 Pilgrims on Croagh Patrick: the Modern Perception***

According to Most Rev. Dr Joseph Cassidy (1989), that lively gaiety still exists. "The Reek is a lively, exuberant place. The Christianity it gathers to its summit is penitential in its purpose but celebratory at its core" (cited in Hughes 1991, p.4).

The mountain has the ability to provoke an emotional response in people, as was evident in 1989 when a mining company proposed to develop a gold mine on the slopes of the mountain. This proposal provoked a massive public outcry that eventually led to the abandonment of the project. Many local community groups and organisations such as the Mountaineering Council of Ireland were concerned about preserving the beauty and history of the mountain and lobbied strongly against the

proposed development (Somers, 1989). Dr Joseph Cassidy (1989) captured the mood of the Catholic Church when he stated

Croagh Patrick does not merely occupy space. It straddles history. For Irish Christians it is our foundation mountain, the mountain where our father in faith fasted and prayed. It symbolises the religious aspirations of our people and their upward journey to God. Digging into the Reek is not just digging into a mountain. It is digging deep into history and into the religious sensibilities of our people (cited in Hughes 1991, p.72).

A recent account of Reek Sunday in a local newspaper describes the sense of enjoyment and the affection with which people hold the mountain and suggests that the sense of gaiety still exists in the 21st century (Tobin, 2002).

This affection is also tinged with recent worries over safety and accidents on the mountain. There have been calls for work to be carried out on the path to help prevent accidents (Ring, 2005). There have also been calls from mountain rescue organisations that they should have the authority to prevent people climbing the mountain in the event of poor weather (Gibbons, 2005). This increased demand for safety controls may reflect modern attitudes, which require higher levels of safety at public events than in past (Tovey & Share, 2000).

### ***2.2.10 Pilgrimage in Ireland***

A unique aspect of Irish pilgrimage is its strong focus on natural site features, such as hilltops like Croagh Patrick. In an analysis of data from 6,380 shrines, Nolan and Nolan (1997) highlight the fact that Ireland is unusual in a European context. Relics and images such as statues and paintings are less common as cult objects than is the case elsewhere in Europe. Shrines that focus on natural features such as water, stones or high places, are by far the most common type of pilgrimage site in Ireland. In Ireland, 92% of shrines are associated with natural site features compared with 42% of shrines in the rest of Europe. The appeal of Irish sites, including Croagh Patrick, and other Irish holy mountains such as Slieve League and Mount Brandon (Appendix A), also differs from that of most other pilgrimage sites in Europe as they contain few material manifestations of the divine such as tombs, relics and images. All over Europe, relics such as wood from Jesus' cross and the dismembered body parts of saints were held in high esteem.

On Croagh Patrick, the only material sacred detail is St Patrick's bed. According to traditional religious belief in Ireland, St. Patrick spent forty days and nights on

Croagh Patrick and the spot where he slept on the summit is now honoured as part of the pilgrimage. Metal railings surrounding a small hollow mark the site (Hughes, 1991). Occasionally, small religious icons are left attached to the rails.

Croagh Patrick conforms to the general characteristics associated with Irish sacred sites. What makes it unique is its continued popularity at a time when other sacred sites are being neglected. Harbison (1991) states that attendance at previously popular sacred sites, in particular at holy wells and Lughnasa sites, has been in decline since at least the 1970s. However, the reasons for the continued popularity of Croagh Patrick, where annual numbers have remained static over recent decades, (Battersby, 2003) are unclear.

### ***2.2.11 Pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick and in Ireland: Conclusions***

This first section of the literature review describes the actions and possible motivational factors influencing pilgrims over the last 2,000 years. There is evidence of a continuous reverence shown by pilgrims to Croagh Patrick over many centuries. The review highlights the historical importance of the indulgence system and seeking forgiveness as part of the pilgrimage. The opportunity to receive an indulgence provided pilgrims with a simple and compelling reason for completing the pilgrimage. Interestingly, there was no reference in the literature to rewards such as ‘personal growth’ from the pilgrimage. The emphasis on forgiveness, rather than seeking self-realisation, may be due to the fact that in medieval times a terror of Hell and an overwhelming sense of sin were quite common (Osterrieth, 1997). Therefore, an emphasis on seeking God’s forgiveness through penance and prayer is not surprising.

In addition to the penitential element, the celebratory element of the pilgrimage was also significant. According to Turner and Turner (1978, p.38), combining “devotion with pastime and mirth” was an integral element of pilgrimage in the past. This seems to have been the case on Croagh Patrick. Accounts from the 1800s such as Thackery (1843) and O’Donavan (1839) describe the importance of the festive element of the pilgrimage.

The historic accounts describe the actions of pilgrims and provide an introduction to the possible motivation behind the pilgrimage. However, care must be taken when comparing pilgrimages throughout various time periods, even when there appears to be many similarities. Coleman and Elsner (1995) question whether we can compare pilgrimages in the same religious tradition from different periods in history. The religion of early and medieval Christendom is very distant from Christianity in the

twenty-first century and similar actions can have very different meanings and interpretations for each individual participant. As stated by Coleman and Elsner (1995, p.198), “pilgrimage in the context of secularisation or pluralism is a vastly different phenomenon from religious travel in an age when atheism was virtually inconceivable”. Notwithstanding this statement, an overview of pilgrimage in the past can still provide a useful reference point when discussing pilgrimage in the present day. It provides an initial basis on which to make a comparison between the motivation of present day pilgrims and pilgrims of the past, which is a central aim of this dissertation.

While there is much writing describing the origins and ritual of the pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick, there is little evidence, either in the past or in more recent times, about how pilgrims perceive the mountain. There were comments from religious figures regarding the importance of the mountain following the mining threat and concerns about safety from public figures. However, the lack of information originating directly from pilgrims highlights the need for more research in this area.

### **2.3 The Nature of Pilgrimage**

This second part of the Literature Review examines the concept of pilgrimage and its affect on pilgrims. The motivational factors influencing pilgrims and the links between pilgrimage and outdoor education are discussed.

#### ***2.3.1 The Elements of Pilgrimage***

Throughout history, people of all the major world religions have made sacred journeys to confirm their faith and their part in a larger identity. The meaning of a pilgrimage for participants and the motivation behind it is varied. Therefore, it is difficult to define and isolate pilgrimage and what is a pilgrim as discrete phenomena. According to Stoddard (1997, p.42), “it is not surprising that a human activity as complex and varied as pilgrimage has no universally accepted definition.” As stated by Eade and Sallnow (1991) cited in Coleman and Elsner, (1995, p.200) “if one can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one can no longer take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of ‘pilgrimage’ either”.

Despite the difficulty in reaching a standard definition of what constitutes pilgrimage and a pilgrim, possible elements of pilgrimage can be identified. The minimum elements include a religiously or spiritually motivated person, the intended sacred goal or place and the physical act of travelling some distance from home to the holy

place and back again (Bhardwaj, 1997). Coleman and Elsner (1995) describe the defining characteristics of pilgrimage. First, there is a physical journey. Second, the pilgrimage involves the confrontation of pilgrims with rituals, sacred architecture and holy objects. Third, the act of pilgrimage may entail a ritual transformation of the pilgrim's inner state or outer status. Fourth, it may be a quest for a transcendent goal and finally it may involve healing a spiritual or physical ailment.

Osterrieth (1997, p.27) proposes a theoretical model for a pilgrimage and the journey of the pilgrim. She identifies three objectives that can motivate a pilgrimage and three associated categories of pilgrimage;

1. The quest for forgiveness and salvation (the redeeming pilgrimage)
2. The quest for a cure for the body (the therapeutic pilgrimage)
3. The quest for revelation (the mystical pilgrimage)

In medieval times, the quest for salvation motivated most pilgrims as terror of Hell and an overwhelming sense of sin was quite common. Those who wanted salvation would seek God's forgiveness through penance and prayer (Osterrieth, 1997). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, historic accounts of pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick tend to describe the pilgrimage in terms of a redeeming pilgrimage with most pilgrims seeking indulgences and forgiveness. Seeking miraculous cures as in a therapeutic pilgrimage or seeking some type of personal insight or revelation as in a mystical pilgrimage, receive little mention. However, according to Cassidy (2002), people in contemporary Ireland are no longer ruled by a fear of the afterlife or seeking forgiveness from sin. Irish society is becoming more secular and autonomous with regard to value systems and less affected by a sense of guilt imposed by traditional religious dogma (Cassidy, 2002). This change in society may affect the importance of the redeeming pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick.

Osterrieth's (1997) model is based on readings of the medieval narratives of pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela in Spain and to Jerusalem. While recognising the more obvious role of the pilgrimage for salvation, she stresses the benefits of self-realisation that are gained from the journey and the interaction with nature. Osterrieth (1997) suggests that people may seek travel, particularly pilgrimage, to achieve a type of inner change and to complete a quest; "a cognitive and behavioural process involving a redefinition of one's identity and place in the world" (p.25).

Osterrieth (1997) sees the challenge of the pilgrimage or 'quest' as important. Quests always involve risk, perhaps outright danger or milder forms of discomfort,

inconvenience, difficulty or hostility. Pilgrims are therefore deliberately setting off into a new environment to test themselves. The element of risk is important, as without risk there is no test of competence that confirms one's own worth. Pilgrimage can be intrinsically rewarding because the journey offers opportunities for the pilgrim to gain a sense of achievement and confidence. For Osterrieth (1997), the issue of difficulty and hardship in a pilgrimage deserve special recognition. While pilgrims may seem to confront difficulties to obtain some prized object or reward, closer scrutiny shows that the situation itself can hold its own intrinsic motivation independent of the final prized object that initially motivated the pursuit.

According to Osterrieth (1997), the element of danger plays a triple role in the pilgrimage. First, the greater the hazard, the more dramatic the pursuit, and the more valuable the object of the quest. Danger has a key role in the emotional engagement of the pilgrim. Second, the recurrence of risk helps to maintain the focus and tension that is needed for the task. Third, the difficulties to be overcome provide the trials that act as a competency test to the pilgrim. The element of danger and difficulty gives the measure of the pilgrim's determination and faith. The element of difficulty or penance can be seen in going barefoot, having little clothing or food, completing night time vigils or completing circuits of the base of a mountain on hands and knees.

Pilgrims to Croagh Patrick can increase the level of difficulty of their quest in several ways. Fasting, doing night climbs and being barefoot were once central to the pilgrimage. In addition, while the traditional start to the pilgrimage was from Murrisk, at the foot of the mountain, there is also a lingering tradition of more arduous walks to the mountain. This could entail the pilgrims walking from home over long distances or along the Tochar Padraig, a twenty-two mile route from Ballintuber Abbey (Appendix B).

While there is much theorising by scholars as to why people go on a pilgrimage, empirical research that actually asks the pilgrims why they go has been difficult to find. Only one source is available for Irish pilgrims. McGrath (1989) in an unpublished paper, cited in Park (1998, p.280), interviewed pilgrims visiting St Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg. Lough Derg is considered the most extreme penitential pilgrimage in Ireland and possibly in Europe. It involves three days of physical and mental stress with fasting, a twenty-four hour vigil, walking barefoot and a long series of ritualistic exercises (Nolan & Nolan, 1997). McGrath found that the reasons for undertaking the pilgrimage varied greatly and included penance, asking God for special favours, thanksgiving for good health, recovery from illness and good

examination results. Others performed the pilgrimage out of tradition or to enjoy the pilgrimage atmosphere.

While, empirical research is limited, especially in an Irish context, Osterrieth (1997) provides an interesting theoretical framework in which to examine pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick. She offers a psychological perspective on the motivation for pilgrimage rather than a historical and geographical description of pilgrimage and emphasises the wide range of intrinsic and extrinsic benefits that can attach to a pilgrimage.

### ***2.3.2 Outdoor Education and Pilgrimage***

It is interesting to note the similarities that exist between outdoor education and pilgrimage. Much of the language describing pilgrimage (Osterrieth, 1997) is similar to that used to describe an outdoor education experience (Priest, 1990). There are opportunities in both for reflection, gaining personal insight and overcoming challenge as part of a journey. The Croagh Patrick pilgrimage, with its potentially arduous ascent of a mountain is similar in terms of structure to outdoor education programmes that include hillwalking.

Outdoor education can be examined under the headings of premise, purpose and process (Priest, 1990). According to Priest, the premise of outdoor education is that change may occur in groups and individuals from direct and purposeful exposure to challenge, adventure and new growth experiences. The purpose of outdoor education is to bring about an awareness of self and to enhance self-concept and improve social interaction. The process of outdoor education involves using an adventurous activity or a journey to provide an experience that involves challenge to the individual or group. Through facilitation and a supportive group the participant develops ways to overcome the challenge and in the view of outdoor educationalists, has personally developed.

The premise and purpose of a mystical pilgrimage and outdoor education contain some similarities. The element of a challenging journey seeking inner change and the associated sense of achievement in overcoming challenge is common to both. For large communal pilgrimages, there can be emotional support from the pilgrim crowd (Stoddard, 1997). The major difference is with the process and the element of facilitation. The only facilitation for the pilgrim is divine assistance, the religious belief or a tradition rather than the facilitative leader within an outdoor education programme.



Pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick has developed more as a tradition rather than a structured, organised practise and continues without direct organisation whereas outdoor education is increasingly linked to professional design and structure. It will be of interest to the outdoor education profession to learn what motivates people, without any apparent form of compulsion, to participate in the climb and what they experience as part of an informal, unstructured tradition. There may be elements of the pilgrimage that could be included in outdoor education programmes and that would improve the programmes This dissertation may help to identify elements of the mountain pilgrimage process and practise that could enhance outdoor education programmes.

### ***2.3.3 Self-determination Theory***

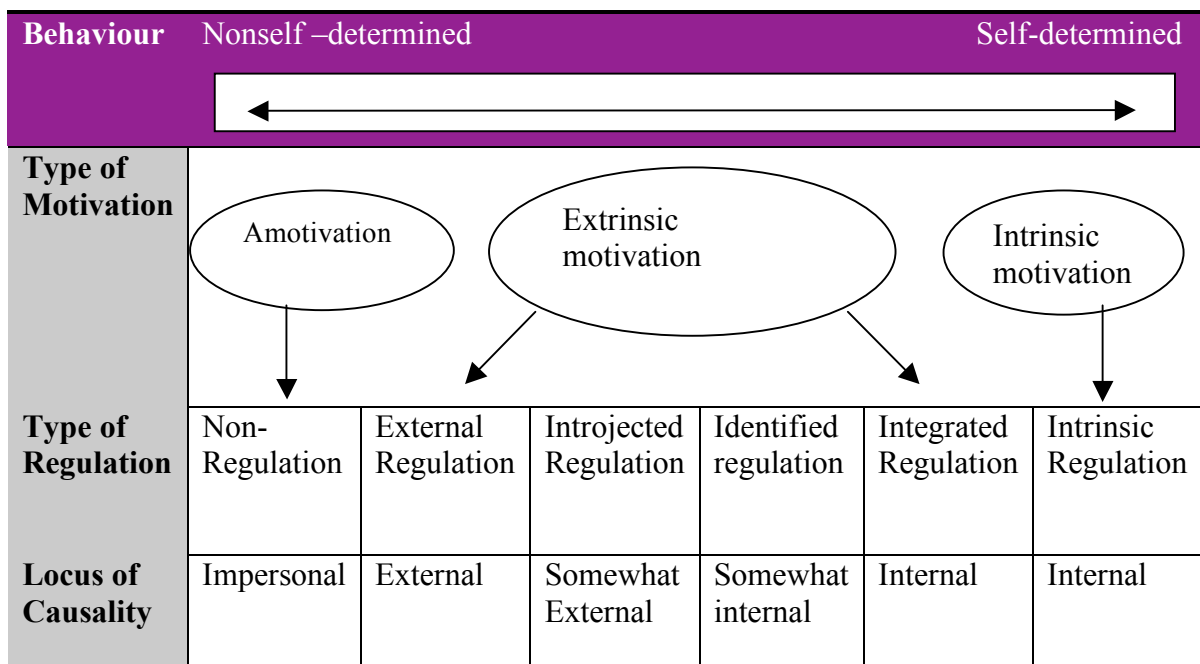
Further insight into the possible motivational factors influencing pilgrims is offered by self-determination theory (SDT) as developed by Deci and Ryan (2000). SDT seeks to understand the factors that motivate behaviour and takes psychological needs and motives into account (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to STD, the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are important for energising human action and must be satisfied for long-term psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The need for autonomy is defined as the need to feel ownership of one's behaviour. The need for competence refers to the need to produce desired outcomes and to experience mastery. The need for relatedness is the need to feel that one is connected to others. These three needs can be satisfied while engaging in a wide variety of behaviours that may differ among individuals and be differentially manifest in different cultures. SDT suggests that it is part of the "adaptive design of the human organism to engage in interesting activities, to exercise capacities and to pursue connectedness in social groups (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.229)

Deci and Ryan (2000) propose a continuum of self-determined behaviour with intrinsic motivation at one end and 'amotivation' (non-intentional, non-regulated behaviour) at the opposite end. Intrinsic motivation involves active involvement in tasks freely engaged in out of interest and that in turn promote growth. Such tasks are characterised by novelty and optimal challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). In between these two end points lie four forms of extrinsically motivated behaviour. The term extrinsic motivation refers to doing a task in order to attain some separable outcome, rather than for inherent satisfaction (Ryan & Deci 2000).

Unlike some perspectives that propose extrinsic motivation as invariably non-autonomous, SDT views extrinsic motivation as varying in its relative autonomy. Deci and Ryan (2000) formulated a differentiated concept of extrinsic motivation, built around the concept of internalisation. SDT proposes that like intrinsic motivation, internalisation is a natural active process in which individuals try to change socially accepted values into personally endorsed values. It is the method by which “individuals assimilate and reconstitute formerly external regulations so that the individuals can be self-determined while enacting them” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.236).

Internalisation can happen to differing degrees, leading to the following four types of extrinsic motivation or regulation. External regulation involves doing an activity to satisfy external demands and is evident when no internalisation has taken place. Introjected regulation involves doing an activity for reasons based on what others think or to avoid guilt. It is characterised by a feeling of ‘ought to’. Identified regulation involves doing an activity to achieve a certain goal or purpose and described by Wang , Ang, Teo-Koh, and Kahlid (2003, p.58) as “characterised by a feeling of ‘want’ to rather than ‘ought to’”. The most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation. This involves activity that is assimilated with ones beliefs. Actions characterised by integrated motivation may share similar characteristic to intrinsic motivation but are still considered extrinsic because they are done to attain separable outcomes rather than for their inherent enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73).

The amount of choice or a sense of volition increases as the individual moves from external regulation towards integrated regulation. The four types lie along a continuum of controlled versus autonomous motivation. The regulatory styles are presented in figure 1 and “represents the outcomes on a person - environment interaction in which the person has become less versus more effective in internalising and integrating the regulation of an activity” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p.237).



**Figure 1 The self –determination continuum**

It may be useful to consider the motivation of those climbing Croagh Patrick in this framework. As discussed previously, in the past, pilgrimage was associated with indulgences and therefore was often externally regulated. People were required to do it for penance or chose to do it to gain exemption for sins committed (Hughes, 1990). The decision to climb the mountain was controlled by religious dogma. However, in contemporary times, people are not compelled to make pilgrimages and there may be a greater amount of internalisation regarding the decision to do the climb or pilgrimage. As Ireland becomes increasingly secular (Tovey & Share, 2000), people are beginning to develop their own sense of values rather than accepting values imposed by the church (Cassidy, 2002).

#### ***2.3.4 The Perception and Affect of Pilgrimage on Pilgrims***

While there is much written on pilgrimage, the amount of research on the specific affect of pilgrimage on the individual is small. Much of the writings on pilgrimage, as typified by this extract from Frey, make claims that are only supported by anecdotal research. Frey (1998) writes of the long-distance pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain,

When pilgrims begin to walk several things usually begin to happen to their perceptions of the world which continue over the course of the journey: they develop a changing sense of time, a heightening of the senses and a new awareness of their bodies and landscapes” (cited in Solnit 2001, p.51).

There appears to be a lack of empirical research into the motivation of pilgrims. Much of the research in the area of pilgrimage is historical, geographical and anthropological in nature rather than psychological. No research was found that uses psychological instruments, for example, to measure the precise impact of pilgrimage on people.

Anthropology appears to offer the greatest insight into the affect of pilgrimage. Anthropologists, Turner and Turner would be considered to be influential and significant researchers in the theory of pilgrimage (Coleman & Elsner, 1995). They have studied pilgrimage from around the world, including pilgrimage at Lough Derg and Knock in Ireland (Turner & Turner, 1978). They describe how a pilgrim can leave behind the complications of one's place in life and by so doing family, rank, status and attachments become less important. Turner and Turner (1978) state that pilgrims are

stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and levelled to a homogenous social state through discipline and ordeal....Much of what has been bound by social structure is liberated, notably the sense of comradeship and communion (p.94).

Turner and Turner (1978) use the term *liminality* to refer to any condition which is outside of, or on the margins of, ordinary life, a condition which is potentially sacred. Turner and Turner (1978, p.41) believe that pilgrimage, as a journey to a place that is sacred and peripheral at a time that is outside of ordinary profane time, is a particularly liminal occasion. It liberates the individual from mundane structure and reduces all to the same status. The ritual humiliation and the ordeals, the removal of signs of status and rank bring about a commonness of feeling or "communitas". There is a sense of the old self dying and a new self being born. The every day self comes back to life after the pilgrimage but has been physically renewed, cured or spiritually transformed.

At the end of the pilgrimage, pilgrims may find themselves members of a large crowd. The emotional impact of the devotions and prayers derive from the union of the "separate, but similar, emotional dispositions of pilgrims converging from all parts of a large sociographical catchment area" (Turner & Turner, 1978, p.13).

Turner and Turner (1978) suggest that while mystics and monastic contemplatives could make daily interior journeys to refresh and save their souls, those in the world had to exteriorise theirs in the infrequent adventure of pilgrimage. "If mysticism is an

interior pilgrimage, pilgrimage is exteriorised mysticism” (Turner & Turner 1978, p.7). The extent to which a pilgrimage involves the effects described by Turner and Turner is obviously subject to particular circumstance.

Although Turner and Turner (1978) have visited many pilgrimage sites, studied pilgrimage narratives and observed pilgrimages throughout the world, their work is largely theoretical. Some of their work also involves generalisations about the nature of pilgrimage. Coleman and Elsner (1995) write that it is important to avoid spurious generalisations about pilgrimage that ignore the clear differences between cultures. Although they may be involved in strikingly similar activities, members of different religious traditions may produce radically different interpretations of their actions. Even fellow pilgrims who attend the same site at the same time may have very different experiences. The pilgrim’s experiences may be framed by the same rituals and occasions but their perspectives are formed by their cultural background, expectations, position in the crowd and an infinite number of other variables. Of course, as stated by Coleman and Elsner, (1995), all social practise is open to contestation. However, there is a suggestion that detailed analysis of the unique aspects of a pilgrimage site and the particular culture of pilgrims at that site is preferable to broad and potentially vacuous generalisations.

### ***2.3.5 The Nature of Pilgrimage: Conclusions***

The meaning of a pilgrimage for participants and the motivation behind it is varied and therefore, it is difficult to define pilgrimage and a pilgrim as discrete phenomena (Stoddard, 1997). Despite the difficulty in reaching standard definitions, there are elements of pilgrimage that may form part of the modern day experiences of those who climb Croagh Patrick. Osterrieth (1997) identifies a quest for forgiveness, a quest for a cure for the body and a quest for revelation as three objects that may motivate a pilgrimage. The quest for forgiveness appears to have been the most important motivational factor on Croagh Patrick in the past. However, increased secularisation and greater autonomy over value systems in Irish society may result in the quest for revelation increasing in importance. Self-determination theory offers another interesting framework from which to examine the range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that may influence participation in a pilgrimage (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Again, it is possible that greater autonomy in Irish society (Cassidy, 2002) will be reflected in a greater amount of personal ownership or internalisation of motivational factors than may have occurred in the past.

While theories exist that can offer explanations for the motivational factors in pilgrimage, there is a lack of empirical research into motivational factors, with only one unpublished paper relating to Irish pilgrimage. Research on the specific effects of participation in pilgrimage is also sparse and tends to be anthropological, historical or geographical rather than psychologically based. Anthropologically based research stresses the liberation and release from the mundane structures of everyday life for pilgrims (Turner & Turner, 1978). However, given the difficulties in comparing pilgrimage from different cultures and the difficulty in reaching a definition of pilgrimage, it is problematic to generalise about the motivation and effects of pilgrimage. Therefore, it seems preferable that research on pilgrimage is site specific and results are not generalised.

Although weakened by a lack of data from empirical research on pilgrimage, this section of the literature review outlines the range of factors that can motivate people to go on pilgrimage. It provides two theoretical frameworks based on SDT and Osterrieth's work that will help in understanding possible reasons for the continued popularity of Croagh Patrick in an increasingly secular society, a central aim of this dissertation.

## **2.4 Perceptions of Landscape**

This third and final section of the Literature Review examines the multiple perceptions of landscape, how they have changed over time, the value attached to landscape and tradition and the emotional effect of landscape.

### ***2.4.1 Mountain Landscape: Many Perceptions***

Croagh Patrick is both a sacred site and a dramatic mountain landscape. Therefore, the perception of Croagh Patrick is influenced by how mountains as a landscape feature are perceived. The perception of mountains is culturally determined. As stated by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999), a particular landscape embodies meaning for people and that meaning varies depending on cultural background. All visitors to a mountain can stand back and examine its size and shape but Cooney (1994) argues that a person's perception or mental map of a place is what underpins his or her actions or experiences rather than the objective reality of that place. For example, a landscape or object is only beautiful because people perceive it as beautiful. Looked at from different sides of a cultural frontier, the same landscape may be viewed in a totally different way.

The literary critic Nicholson (1959), cited in Raymo (2004, p.21) describes how mountains were shunned until the mid 1800s by Europeans as “tumours”, “wens” and “blisters” on the landscape and as horrible disfigurements of the landscape that threatened the beauty of earth. The idea that someone would climb a mountain for aesthetic reasons was simply not entertained by the common people, at least not in the European tradition considered by Nicholson and Fleming (2000).

The general perception of mountains as horrible and evil places began to change in the 1800s. “Mountain gloom” gave way to “mountain glory”. Poets and philosophers such as Rousseau, Ruskin and Wordsworth began celebrating high peaks as places of grandeur. Climbers attempted summits in search of the aesthetic sublime. No longer feared, mountains became places of inspiration, reverence and exhilaration. Wordsworth walked the high ridges of the Lake District “awed, delighted and amazed” and Byron referred to the Alps as “palaces of nature”. Gathered around their icy summits he discerned “all that expands the spirits yet appals” (Baker, 2000). The enlightenment scientists such as Agassiz and Tyndall made mountains less fearsome by explaining their natural origins (Fleming, 2000). According to Raymo (2004,), during the 1800s there was a “shift of focus from ignorant fear to insatiable curiosity, from a world ruled by divine whim to a world that might be understood by the human mind” (p.13). Scientists made mountains less fearful by explaining their natural origins and the Romantic poets made the mountains seem more beautiful.

Irish mountains are much lower and less dangerous to humans than those in mainland Europe and there is no tradition of fear of the mountains in Ireland (Harbison, 1991). However, visiting mountains purely for recreation was relatively late in developing in Ireland compared to other European countries such as Great Britain (Unsworth, 1994). In Ireland, hillwalking was a minority activity until the 1970s but it is becoming increasingly popular as witnessed by the annual growth in the number of clubs and individuals joining the Mountaineering Council of Ireland (Lawless, 2005). As part of this trend, it is probable that Croagh Patrick is becoming an increasingly popular destination for hillwalkers.

More adventurous hillwalkers and mountaineers value wild places with the minimum visible human impact (Unsworth, 1994). It is likely that hillwalkers would view the extensive footpath erosion on Croagh Patrick negatively. The Mountaineering Council of Ireland (MCI) represents over 10,000 hillwalkers (Lawless, 2005) and it supports minimum impact to the natural environment by walkers. As discussed in the first section of the Literature Review, MCI policy states that footpath development on popular mountains may be required due to safety, ecological and aesthetic concerns

(MCI, 2005). Another mountain in the area, Diamond Hill, has been closed to walkers by the National Parks and Wildlife Service due to erosion and an expensive path-building project is due to be completed in early 2006. However, the footpath erosion on Croagh Patrick is strongly linked to tradition. This dissertation investigates the attitudes of those climbing the mountain to the issue of footpath maintenance.

#### ***2.4.2 Croagh Patrick as a Cultural Landscape and a Tradition***

As described in the first section of the Literature Review, the human imprint over many centuries is visible on Croagh Patrick. While hillwalkers may view recent human imprints as intrusive, Mitchell (1990) states that landscapes gain much of their character and interest from the evolving relationship between people and the land. Reading a landscape and learning about the history and traditions of an area provides a connection with the past and can provide a sense of place and local distinctiveness (McCullogh & Mulvin, 1987). As described by authors such as Schama (1996) and Robinson (1998), specific places have the capacity to instil a sense of place in people. The term, sense of place, refers to the idea that people have positive feelings for specific places, be they social, cultural, natural or historic resources (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999).

According to McCullogh and Mulvin (1987), these distinctively local features of a landscape are increasingly valued in a world of rapid change, homogenised culture and standardised products. The buildings and monuments on The Reek provide evidence of a long cultural history. Croagh Patrick is also a place where an ancient tradition of pilgrimage still survives. This tradition and history may be important to those who visit Croagh Patrick. Cooney, Condit and Brynes (2000) state that there has been a resurgence of interest in tradition and heritage in Ireland in recent times. This interest in tradition and heritage is reflected in a survey by The Heritage Council (2004), which found that 90% of the Irish public agreed that it is important to protect heritage. The percentage agreeing that it is very important to protect heritage increased from 46% in 1999 to 55% in 2004. Keeping their own identity, traditions and culture and passing them on to the next generation were the main reasons cited for protecting heritage. This may be due to a new self-confidence and pride in what it means to be Irish and a halting of the old attitude that everything modern was a sign of success and anything old was a reminder of poverty and inferiority (Cooney et al, 2000). This dissertation investigates the extent to which an interest in preserving and taking part in an ancient tradition is a motivational factor in climbing Croagh Patrick.



There is some concern that the tradition of the pilgrimage is under threat. Due to safety concerns on Reek Sunday in 2004, Mountain Rescue teams tried to restrict access to certain latecomers due to poor weather (Gibbons, 2005). This intervention by Rescue Teams was subsequently supported by the Irish Mountain Rescue Association (IMRA), the umbrella body for mountain rescue in Ireland. It was proposed at the IMRA Annual General Meeting in 2005, that the organisers of the main pilgrimage day in July should have the authority to “restrict access and even cancel the event” in the case “of deteriorating weather conditions” (Gibbons, 2005, p.31). This decision has been criticised by Gibbons (2005) who claims that the normal rules of mountaineering do not and cannot apply to Croagh Patrick. Gibbons (2005) considers that the difficulties and hazards encountered during the climb are key aspects of the pilgrimage and attempts to restrict access should be “strongly resisted so that the essence of this marvellous tradition can be maintained” (p.31). According to Gibbons, concerns for the safety of walkers are excessive and bureaucratic. However, there is no data from the walkers on their concern for safety on the mountain and their wish for preserving tradition.

#### ***2.4.3 The Cultural Landscape and Outdoor Education***

Croagh Patrick encompasses a rich cultural landscape and this has relevance for the outdoor education profession. Creating an understanding of the cultural landscape and developing a sense of place and connection with a landscape has been promoted by some as an integral part of environmental education and in turn outdoor education (Baker, 2005; Knapp, 2005; Nicol & Higgins, 1998a; Nicol & Higgins, 1998b; White, 1998). It is claimed that a greater understanding of the cultural landscape and the social and environmental actions which created that landscape can help to create a sense of connection with a landscape and thus can help create a sense of identity with a place (Baker, 2005).

While acknowledging the potential and value of cultural experiences, there is criticism that outdoor educationalists often fail to help people to develop a closer connection with the land during programmes. White (1998) suggests that outdoor educators neglect the cultural landscape in their work and is dismayed by what is lost in an outdoor education experience through ignorance of the rich cultural landscape such as in the Highlands of Scotland. Baker (2005) writes that adventure education focus has reached a stage where participants can complete an outdoor education programme

“with a sense of accomplishment but without a sense of their relationship to the land” (Baker, 2005, p.269). If an instructor’s expertise lies in technical competence and

people management skills, students' awareness of the land may be very limited and they may "become passers-by's travelling through 'Any Woods, USA'" (Baker, 2005, p. 269). The result is that landscapes become interchangeable and the unique aspects of a particular place may be lost. According to Nicol and Higgins (1998b) the landscape is often seen merely as a venue for recreation or as an arena for personal and social devolvement, while the opportunities for environmental education and cultural studies are ignored.

In addition to being neglected by practitioners in the field, outdoor education research has also neglected the cultural environment. Nicol and Higgins (1998a) write that the outdoor literature in the United Kingdom is conspicuous by the absence of any treatment of the relationship with landscape.

The focus of outdoor education in Ireland is biased towards recreational opportunities, personal development and group work. In the most recent review of outdoor education provision in Ireland, there is little mention of environmental education and no mention of a cultural aspect of outdoor education (Ni Aonghosa, 1998). Given the rich cultural landscape that exists all over Ireland, (Mitchell, 1990), this omission would seem unfortunate.

This dissertation examines what the specific landscape of Croagh Patrick means to the people who climb it. Gaining an insight into the way people perceive a landscape and the elements that make it special or significant may be of benefit to outdoor educationalists who wish to consider the role of cultural studies within outdoor education. While certain aspects of Croagh Patrick are unique, it has similarities with other culturally significant landscapes and dramatic mountains with historic legacies. This study may serve to stimulate thinking within the outdoor education profession as to the appeal and professional usefulness, or otherwise, of these areas.

#### ***2.4.4 The Healing Effects of Nature***

Croagh Patrick is widely regarded as a beautiful natural landscape feature in addition to being a pilgrimage site. It is possible that this beauty and "subliminty" of the mountain is viewed as an important aspect by some pilgrims and that it will have an impact on them (MacNeill, 1982). A large amount of literature has been devoted to descriptions of the inspirational and emotionally uplifting effects of beautiful scenery. MacFarlane (2003) and Bartlett (1993), for example, present reviews of literature that illustrate the emotional impact of mountain landscapes. Research also suggests that wilderness landscapes, and an awareness of the power of nature, can contribute to

meaningful wilderness experiences that are conducive to spiritual inspiration (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999).

Consalvo (1995) describes the link between nature scenes, pleasant sensory images and an emotional response.

Blue sky, red sunsets, white puffy clouds, green fields speckled with wild flowers, pine covered paths, moonlit meadows, crickets chirping, birds singing, snow crunching under foot, the smell of spring thaw, summer sweetness, autumn decay, a salty breeze... are just a few among a plethora of sensory images we experience while outdoors. These sensations often tap emotionally and spiritually uplifting memories (cited in Beringer & Martin, 2003, p.29).

In addition to the emotional response to beauty, Beringer and Martin (2003) suggest that there is a need to reappraise the value of the natural world and to acknowledge and “honour the healing powers of nature” (p.29). The natural world is often seen as a mere backdrop and is not credited with curative powers in itself. However, Beringer and Martin (2003) cite at least ten research papers that show that nature or contacts with nature can be powerful physical healing agents. Research commissioned by the Countryside Recreation Commission supports the view that exercise in nature can positively affect psychological wellbeing (Pretty et al, 2005).

#### ***2.4.5 Spirituality and Nature***

It appears that dramatic landscapes are conducive to experiences of a spiritual nature. A study cited by Barrett and Greenaway (1995) of 6,000 young people found that 80% claimed to have experienced something of a spiritual nature through encounters with landscape. Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) examined aspects of the wilderness experience as a source of spiritual inspiration and found that the expansiveness of the landscape and an awareness of the sheer powers of nature acted as spiritual inspiration for most of their sample. Moreover, positive interpersonal interactions combined with complete immersion in a wilderness setting seemed to influence the probability of perceiving elements of the landscape as sources of spiritual inspiration. Research based in wilderness settings in the United States found that the wilderness environment itself and the activities one engages in the wilderness are conducive to spiritual experiences (Stringer & McAvoy, 1992, cited in Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999, p.28). However, wilderness does not exist in Ireland, with the entire countryside showing evidence of farming or habitation at some point in history. Research based in remote wilderness settings such as in areas of the United States may not be applicable to Ireland.

Cooper (1997) interviewed 144 people about their spiritual experiences in the mountains worldwide and tries to assess the inspirational value these people place on their time on the mountains. Unfortunately, while Coopers interviews provide rich descriptions of spirituality in the mountains, only 15 interviews are relevant to Europe and there is little attempt to analyse the interviews and draw conclusions. One of the few relevant conclusions reached is that the traditional way of seeing mountains as sacred places is disappearing in Europe and mountains are seen more as recreational resources than sources of inspiration. However, overall the usefulness of his research to this dissertation is limited.

#### ***2.4.6 Motivational Factors in Mountaineering***

Finally, Croagh Patrick must be considered as a recreational resource. For many who climb Croagh Patrick, the overriding motivational factors may be more concerned with mountaineering than with visiting a sacred or historic site and therefore, it is important to understand the motivation for climbing mountains. Ewert's (1985) findings indicate that people climb mountains because of the challenge, catharsis, recognition from others, creative opportunities, locus of control and physical setting. A study of visitors to wilderness areas in the United States found that challenge, being close to nature, making decisions not faced in everyday environments and developing a fund of stories to tell people afterwards were factors that contributed to a positive wilderness experience (Patterson, Watson, Williams & Roggenbuck, 1998).

#### ***2.4.7 Perceptions of Landscape: Conclusions***

This final section of the Literature Review shows that perceptions of landscape are varied and culturally determined (Cooney, 1994; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). Mountains in Europe that were once viewed with fear and horror are now seen as places of beauty and inspiration (Fleming, 2000). While many hillwalkers prefer wild places with little visible imprint of people, for others a cultural landscape gains much of its character and appeal from the historic and traditional imprint of local communities (Mitchell, 1990). Research attests to an increasing level of interest in Irish heritage and tradition (Heritage Council, 2004).

While dimensions of landscape are multiple, the outdoor education profession appears to have a limited perception of what constitutes a landscape. While some advocates recognise the importance of understanding the cultural dimension of the landscape,

the outdoor education profession has neglected to include this cultural dimension within programmes (Baker, 2005; Knapp, 2005; Nicol & Higgins, 1998a; Nicol & Higgins, 1998b; White, 1998). Another dimension of landscape that may not be obvious is as a place of healing and spirituality. Research shows the significant emotionally uplifting effects associated with scenic landscapes (Pretty et al, 2005; Beringer & Martin, 2003) and how natural landscape can be conducive to spirituality (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Barrett & Greenaway, 1995). Any research where the findings may be affected by the surrounding landscape, such as in this dissertation, has to be open to this variety of perceptions and dimensions of landscape.

This third section of the Literature Review helps in understanding how people perceive landscapes, which in turn will help understanding how people perceive Croagh Patrick, a central aim of this dissertation. How people perceive Croagh Patrick may affect how they believe it should be managed and developed, another aim of this dissertation. This is evident in the conflict that has arisen between those who see the pilgrimage as a hillwalking event in need of greater safety controls and those who see it as a cultural occasion in need of preservation and underlies the importance of understanding how people perceive a mountain.

## **2.5 Overall Conclusions**

The three sections of the Literature Review provide information relevant to the four aims of this dissertation.

The first section on Croagh Patrick and on pilgrimage in Ireland offers an overview of pilgrimage in the past. It provides an initial basis on which to make a comparison between motivation of present day pilgrims and pilgrims in the past. The second section on the nature of pilgrimage outlines the range of factors that can motivate people to go on pilgrimage. It will help in understanding possible reasons for the continued popularity of Croagh Patrick in an increasingly secular society. The third section on perceptions of landscape helps in understanding how people perceive landscapes, which in turn will help understanding how they believe Croagh Patrick should be managed.

### **3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 A Qualitative Approach**

The central aims of this dissertation involve an examination of the nature of the experience of climbing Croagh Patrick. A qualitative approach was selected as the most appropriate. Such an approach allows the researcher to gain insight into a respondent's subjective view of the climb because the methodology generally tries "to capture reality as it is, as it is seen and experienced by the respondents (Sarantakos, 1993, p.45). Qualitative research aims to "understand people, not measure them" and avoids reducing people to numerical and statistical figures, which can "result in a loss of perception of the subjective nature of human behaviour" (Sarantakos, 1993, p.45).

Mason (1996) describes qualitative research as aiming to produce rounded understanding based on rich, detailed and contextual data. There is more emphasis on 'holistic' forms of analysis and explanation than on charting surface patterns, trends and correlations (Mason, 1996). La Pier summarises one of the main strengths of qualitative research when he states

The study of human behaviour is time consuming, intellectually fatiguing and its success depends on the ability of the researcher. Quantitative measurements are quantifiably accurate; qualitative evaluations are subject to errors of human judgement. Yet it would seem far more worthwhile to make a shrewd guess regarding that which is essential rather than to accurately measure that which is likely to prove irrelevant (cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.10).

Qualitative methods offer an opportunity to explore the actual experience of the participants and, through their observations, gain an insight into the process each has undergone. This means that the research is high in internal validity but not necessarily high in external reliability or transferability (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) describe

"internal validity as seeking to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a piece of research provides, can actually be sustained by the data.... External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalised to the wider population" (p. 107).

However, Thomas and Nelson (1996) suggest that the reader of the research can evaluate the findings and ask what findings apply to him or her. Thus, the reader of the research rather than the author does the generalising. In this way, qualitative research can gain transferability.

### **3.2 The Research Methods**

Semi-structured interviews and observation were used to obtain the data. Semi-structured interviews are used to gain a detailed picture of a respondent's beliefs about, or perceptions of, a particular topic. Questions are normally specified in a semi-structured interview, but the interviewer can ask additional and follow-up questions (Thomas & Nelson, 1996). Silverman (2000) describe the benefits of semi-structured interviews as follows. First, the method gives the researcher and respondent more flexibility than the more conventional structured interview, questionnaire or survey. Second, the researcher is able to follow up particularly interesting avenues that emerge in the interview and the respondent is able to give a fuller picture. The major advantage of face-to-face interviews is that they can deal with elaborate and complex qualitative responses. Agar (1980) writes that this type of interviewing allows respondents to answer more on their own terms than the standardised interview permits, but still provides a structure for comparability.

In this dissertation, it was hoped to gain rich descriptive data of people's experiences and thereby develop, through illustrative quotations, an understanding of the issues (Silverman, 2000).

### **3.3 Observations**

The researcher observed peoples behaviour along the path leading to the summit and at the summit. Observations were recorded on-site in a notebook. Given the size of the mountain and the number of people, the researcher was relatively unobtrusive. The researcher could be regarded as a participant observer as she participated in the event, the ascent of mountain, in similar manner to those she was observing.

Participant observation provides a good yardstick against which to compare data collected by any other method (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The data gained from observation, taken from another perspective but observing similar experiences may help to understand the interview data. The researcher is immersed in a research setting and systematically observes the settings, interactions, relationships and actions. It allows the generation of data on social interaction in specific contexts as it occurs, rather than "relying on peoples retrospective accounts and on their ability to verbalise and reconstruct a version of what happened" (Mason 1996, p.62). In this dissertation, the researcher was unable to observe the specific people who were interviewed. However, experiences similar to those of the interview group were observed and this proved useful when interpreting the data from the interviews.



The observations allowed the researcher to gauge very approximately the level of physical difficulty and hazard posed by the climb, the level of solemnity or gaiety associated with the climb, and the type of social interaction between people on the mountain. The researcher is an experienced instructor in hillwalking and mountaineering and thus has an ability to gauge the relative ease or difficulty that participants experience on the climb.

### **3.4 The Interview Process**

A series of questions, designed to provide a profile of those interviewees and to address the main aims of the dissertation were developed. These questions formed the basis for the interviews (Appendix D). Due to ethical considerations, the names of those interviewed were not collected to preserve anonymity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Thomas & Nelson, 1996 ). However, the sex and approximate age category were recorded by the researcher and the county or country of origin was asked during the interview. Where quotes from interviewees are used in the Discussion Chapter, the interviewees are identified by pseudonyms, age, gender and where relevant, by country or country of origin. This use of pseudonyms allows the reader of the dissertation to see that a range of interviewees has been quoted. It was decided that because of the large number of visitors to Croagh Patrick, identifying interviewees in this manner would not lead to a lack of anonymity. Any extra information supplied in the interviews that could reduce anonymity was not used.

Many of the questions were open-ended to allow the participants to present the experience in their own words. The interview was designed to start with introductory questions to gather demographic information on the person. The questions then asked the interviewees to recall the climb, explored the meaning of the climb to them, assessed their perception of the impact of the climb on them and probed for causation. This interview design was adapted from Pohl, Borrie and Patterson (2000) who used a similar structure as part a study of women's perceptions of wilderness experiences. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the interviewer asking the questions from a page and tape-recording the answers. This method allowed the researcher to explain any questions if necessary and to encourage more comprehensive answers. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim onto a word processor.

### **3.5 Number and Timing of Interviews and Observations**

A total of forty-two interviews were completed. Sixteen interviews were carried out on Garland Friday (25<sup>th</sup> July 2003) and Reek Sunday (27<sup>th</sup> July 2003) during the official pilgrimage weekend in July 2003. The researcher visited the mountain on five other occasions in June, July and September 2003 and completed twenty-six interviews. These latter dates had no special association with traditional pilgrimage days.

It was impossible to know in advance how many interviews would be required. The interviews were transcribed shortly after they were completed and were subject to preliminary analysis. This analysis was used to judge the amount and quality of the data. Time constraints limited the number of interviews that could be conducted during the two main pilgrimage days. There was ample opportunity to carry out interviews outside of the pilgrimage period. After approximately half of the interviews were completed, it appeared that no additional new themes or issues were emerging. After carrying out 42 interviews in total, it was clear that the data was becoming repetitive and saturation point had been reached. Focus was switched to analysis of the data.

From the outset, interviewees were assured of their anonymity in the dissertation and were invited to withdraw their participation at any stage during the interview, as recommended by Cohen et al (2000). Seven people declined to be interviewed. Two were initially willing but declined when they realised that a tape recorder was to be used.

Observations were carried out on five days; the main days of pilgrimage on the last Saturday and Sunday of July (26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July 2003) and on three other random occasions. Observations were carried out along the track to the summit and at the summit. Due to time constraints observations were not carried out on two of the days on which interviews were conducted.

### **3.6 Pilot Interviews**

Pilot interviews were conducted with two people who regularly climb the mountain. The pilot interviews were used to test the comprehensibility and wording of the questions, to estimate the length of time to complete the interviews and to find the best method of recording the data. The answers provided were in-depth and the necessity to tape-record the interviews was re-enforced. A question regarding the

type of religious group, if any, they belonged and if they were practising this religion, was removed. Both interviewees felt that these questions would be seen as intrusive.

### **3.7 Selecting the Group**

There is little or no homogeneity in the group of people who climb Croagh Patrick (Battersby, 2003). People climb throughout the year, are from a wide variety of age groups, religious backgrounds and fitness levels. It was not possible to get a representative sample of this population. The number of people who could be considered representative of this variety would be difficult to calculate.

The method you use to get a setting, or a group of participants or whatever is not that important. What is crucial about sampling is honesty and reflexivity. The most important things are to record how the sample was drawn and to think carefully about how the selection/recruitment has affected the data collected from them (Delamont, 1992, p.70).

Initially, it was planned to divide those interviewed (otherwise called the study group) into different categories such as recreational users and pilgrims. However, upon completion of the Literature Review it became clear that the meaning of a pilgrimage for participants is very varied and therefore it is difficult to define and isolate pilgrimage or what is a pilgrim as a discrete phenomenon. Therefore, it would be very difficult to decide who was or was not a pilgrim.

However careful consideration was given to the dates of the interviews and a 'purposive sampling' technique was used to select the dates for the interviews. Silverman (2000) states that purposive sampling allows us to choose a case, in this instance dates, because it illustrates some feature or process in which a researcher is interested. It was decided that the full range of motives and experiences of those climbing The Reek would best be accessed by doing interviews both during the main pilgrimage days (Reek Sunday and Garland Friday) and at other times during the year. It is more popular to climb the mountain on days other than the two main pilgrimage days rather than on those two days (Battersby, 2003).

It would seem likely that the experiences and motivation of those who climb the mountain during the two days associated with the traditional pilgrimage would vary from those who climb on other, quieter occasions during the year. As mentioned in Chapter 2, completing the ascent on the last weekend in July traditionally involves completing the full pilgrimage ritual of stations and attending mass. Although this tradition is dying, according to Murphy (2005), this date was the best opportunity to

interview those who complete the full pilgrimage ritual. Reek Sunday is also a communal event and the social atmosphere of the day provides people with a unique experience not available during other times of the year. Interviewing people who completed the climb on that day was therefore essential to capture this unique aspect. Interviews on pilgrimage days were balanced with interviews from other randomly selected dates.

### **3.8 Procedure and Location for the Interviews**

The interviews were held in the car park at the foot of the mountain and were generally done between noon and 4pm. There is no public transport service to Croagh Patrick and nearly everyone who climbed the mountain arrived by car and therefore used the car park. Outside of these times, there were very few people on the mountain. No interviews were conducted when the weather was very poor on the mountain in order to ensure that all those interviewed experienced approximately similar conditions for the climb.

The researcher approached people in their car and explained briefly the purpose of the research. Upon completion of the first three interviews, it was clear that people needed some time at their cars to physically recover from the exertion of the climb, change footwear and so on before the researcher approached them. Leaving this time interval before approaching sometimes resulted in people driving out of the car park before there was an opportunity to interview them. However, it was obvious that unless this interval was provided people were not relaxed during the interview and unlikely to give detailed answers.

Two interviews were conducted on the side of the mountain with two people who completed a day long walk to the mountain and who then bivouacked on the mountain on the Saturday (July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003) before Reek Sunday.

In order to reduce bias in selecting people, people were selected for interview in the order that they returned to their cars. The next available person who arrived after a completed interview was selected for the next interview.

### **3.9 Limitations of the Interview Process**

Aspects of the interview process impacted on the results of the dissertation and are outlined below.

1. The interviews were conducted in a busy, public arena, which was not conducive to gaining descriptions of the multi-layered richness of the pilgrimage experience.
2. Cicourel (1964) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p.267) states that that one of the unavoidable features of the interview process is that the respondents may feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep. Due to the fact that the researcher was unknown to those interviewed and that the questions were very personal in nature, there may have been a reticence by those interviewed to fully engage in an in-depth analysis.
3. The nature of the interview may have simplified the ambiguities and associations of the rituals and the pilgrimage experience. Certain questions required careful thought in order to answer fully. The interview group may have required greater time to consider the questions and to then analyse their motivation and experiences.

It was found that people did not always answer the questions asked in a direct fashion. For example, a question on whether the participant had a spiritual experience on the mountain, might prompt a story concerning a childhood experience on the mountain. As there was little time to build a rapport with the person, it was important to have a relaxed attitude and allow people to express themselves rather than badger them to get an exact answer. There also seemed to be reluctance amongst some people to admit to being religious and to preface remarks with comments such as “I’m not really into religion myself but...”.

### **3.10 Analysing the Data**

The interview text was read thoroughly and the quotes from participants were clustered into common themes or categories and each one of these assigned a code, a technique recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). These categories identified the perceptions people have of the mountain and the motivational factors involved in climbing it. Coding can be defined as the “process of identifying and recording one or more discrete passages of text...that in some sense exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive idea” (Gibbs, 2002). It is a way of connecting a concept or idea with passages of text that in some way exemplify that idea.

The literature review enabled the identification of some potential codes in advance of reading the interview text, such as challenge and penance. Additional codes were generated following close reading of the text. Gibbs (2002) states that identifying

codes both in advance of doing the interviews and then after reading the text is an established procedure.

To minimise bias, a sample result was independently validated. The researcher asked two colleagues to independently code a sample and compare their findings with the researcher's until all were satisfied that the coding was consistent. A similar technique was used by Pohl et al (2000).

### **3.11 Researcher Motivation and Assumptions**

Agar (1980) argues that the aspect of 'who you are' as a researcher deserves careful thought. The problem for Agar is not whether the ethnographer is biased; the problem is what kind of biases exist, how they enter into ethnographic work and how can their operation be documented. The background and prior commitment to particular beliefs of the researcher will have a certain influence on the research findings.

Whether it is your personality, your rules of social interaction, your cultural bias towards significant topics, your professional training or something else, you do not go into the field as a passive recorder of objective data. During fieldwork you are surrounded by a multitude of noises and activities. As you choose what to attend to and how to interpret it, mental doors slam shut on the alternatives. Although some of your choices may be consciously made, others are forced by the weight of personal and professional background that you bring to the field (Agar 1980, p.91).

The factor of personal background and experience may be impossible to negate in this type of research. However, Agar (1980) suggests making oneself aware of potential bias, forcing oneself to see things from a new perspective and seeking feedback from participants with regard to findings. This form of respondent validation is also recommended by Bryman (1988). However, for this research, it was not possible to ask the participants to comment on the interpretations of the data due to the difficulty in making contact after the interviews were completed.

The personal background of the researcher, which may influence this dissertation is that she was raised as a Catholic but is now non-practising. The researcher is a keen mountaineer who regards mountains as places of challenge and beauty. In her career as a mountaineering instructor, she has extensive experience in judging risk and difficulty in the mountain. She is also interested in all aspects of the Irish cultural landscape.

### **3.12 Summary**

A qualitative approach was selected as the most appropriate. Semi-structured interviews was the primary method used to obtain the data. The researcher also made observations on the mountain. Forty-two people were interviewed at the foot of the mountain, following their ascent of the peak. Interviews were held both on the two main pilgrimage days and on other occasions to ensure that the study group had the widest possible range of experiences and motivations.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The text was analysed and the quotes were gathered into common themes with an assigned code (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The information gained from the interviews was limited by the lack of privacy, the somewhat rushed nature of the interviews, the difficulty and depth of the questions and the fact that the interviewer was unknown to the group.

## **4 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**



## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter comprises of two sections. The first section provides a summary of the results while the second section discusses the main themes that emerge from the results

### ***4.1.1 Summary of the Results***

The purpose of this dissertation is to attempt to understand how people perceive and experience Croagh Patrick, motivational factors for the climb, what people experience during the climb and opinions on development on the mountain.

It is possible to note patterns and trends from the interviews. Although this is primarily a qualitative research thesis, it is possible and useful to present some of the data in quantitative format. This quantitative data provides a profile of the interviewees. It also provides a summary of how people perceive the mountain, motivators for the climb and experiences on the mountain. A detailed analysis of this data is presented in Appendix E. Due to the relatively large number of interviews conducted, 42, presenting the data in a quantitative format is useful to help gauge the relative strength of each motivational factor, perception or experience.

This quantitative data provides a useful overview of the information gathered in the interviews. However, it only charts surface trends and lacks detail and context. The next section, through the use of illustrative quotes and supported by the figures generated through quantitative analysis, produces a more rounded understanding of the experiences and motivations of the study group.

## **4.2 Discussion**

Those interviewed had a variety of reasons for climbing the mountain. Their motivation for climbing the mountain was closely linked to their perception of the mountain. Similarly, what they experienced during the climb influenced their perception of the mountain. Therefore, there was an overlap between perceptions, experiences and subsequent motivation for the actual climb. However, central themes emerged as important and these are addressed separately in relation to the main aims of this dissertation. Direct quotes from the interviews with pseudonyms are used throughout the discussions.

This section discusses the four aims of the dissertation, with each aim discussed separately. The discussion on the fourth aim of the dissertation, the reasons for the continued popularity of the climb in an increasingly secular society, is integrated into the discussion of the first three aims, in addition to being discussed separately.

Therefore, the discussion will be developed under the following headings.

1. How people perceive and experience the mountain and pilgrimage
2. How people believe the mountain should be managed and developed
3. What motivates them to undertake the climb in comparison to pilgrims in the past
4. The continued popularity of the climb in an increasingly secular society

## **4.3 How People Perceive and Experience the Mountain and Pilgrimage**

The perceptions and experiences of the study group with regard to the mountain and pilgrimage have been separated thematically and will be discussed under the following three sub-headings.

1. Perception of the mountain as historic and holy
2. Experiences of community and sharing
3. Spiritual experiences and other meaningful experiences

### ***4.3.1 Perception of the Mountain as Historic and Holy***

There was a strong perception of Croagh Patrick as a valued historic landmark. For 26 people, 62% of the sample group, the long history of pilgrimage on the mountain was the main feature that made the mountain special and created its unique identity. All those interviewed were aware of the link between St Patrick and the mountain and the

long history of pilgrimage on the mountain. As Tom says, “It’s the cultural and historical that’s important. It’s the Holy mountain of Ireland. I’m not into history usually but it’s like a link to what people did in the past”. For a local woman, Mary, the history of people on the mountain imbued the mountain with a certain quality. “I see it (Croagh Patrick) in the same way as I’d see somewhere like Newgrange\*. People have seen the mountain as important for thousands of years and that sense of all those people climbing it is nearly lodged here in the rocks”.

Newgrange\*: a well known megalithic tomb in Ireland

As mentioned in Chapter 2, specific places have the capacity to instil a sense of place in people (Schama, 1996; Robinson, 1998). The term, sense of place, refers to the idea that people have positive feelings for specific places (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). During the interviews there was support for the idea that the historical component of Croagh Patrick helps create this sense of place. John was very aware “that 5,000 years ago there was probably something happening here and that history makes it a special place”.

There was a sense that by climbing the mountain, a person can become part of that long history on the mountain, of history still being made on the mountain and of a tradition surviving. For Sean, who regularly climbed the mountain, this sense of history was created by the fact that “so many millions have gone before and so many will come again”. There was also a respect for the history of the pilgrimage, even among those who would not see the mountain as sacred or as a pilgrimage. A young woman, Joan commented, “it wasn’t a pilgrimage for me. I don’t really see it as sacred but respect it for what other people see in it. I’d be a bit detached from that myself. It’s more the history that makes it special”.

This perception of the mountain as a place of historic pilgrimage has two important consequences. First, it forms the basis for one of the main motivational factors involved in climbing the mountain; that of continuing a long tradition of pilgrimage. The importance of preserving tradition will be discussed later in the section on motivational factors. Second, this perception of the mountain as a place of historic pilgrimage in turns influences how people perceive the impact of human activity on the mountain. This will be discussed later in the section on how the mountain should be managed and developed.

#### ***4.3.2 Experiences of Community and Sharing***

On Reek Sunday 2003, approximately 30,000 people climbed the mountain (Mayo Mountain Rescue, 2003). Looking down from the summit, the researcher observed a continuous snaking line of people along the five-kilometre path. There was no sense of a reverential hush as youngsters pushed past, some falling hard on the rocks and encouraged by cheers from friends. Others, bent by age, gripped ash poles for support and inched their way upwards. Greetings were continually exchanged as climbers passed neighbours and friends and the chat focused on the weather or the likely outcome of a football match. A small number of penitents, clutched rosary beads and, seemingly oblivious to the crowds, stopped to complete the rounds at the various stations (Plates 2-4, Appendix C). This sense of community and sharing made the occasion very memorable for the study group

Walkers often praise solitude in the mountains and seek a sense of remoteness. As stated by Borrie and Birzell (2001), it is often assumed that high levels of visitor use of an outdoor recreation area leads to a decline in experiential quality for participants. McGowan (2000) identified quiet and solitude as conducive to spiritual growth. However, on Croagh Patrick the crowds of people are often perceived as enhancing the quality of the experience and do not seem to prevent a spiritual experience. The sense of encouragement and comradeship was continually mentioned in a positive light. Joan stated that “it’s nice to see such a lot of people. I think if you were on your own you might turn back but when you see people going up, especially in their bare feet, you keep going”.

Gerry who climbed it in June found that “you’re never lonely on it; everybody stops. They’ll say to you it’s this far to go...it’s always nearly there. It’s a social thing.” Other people acted as inspiration. There was a mentality that ‘if they can do it so can I’. Alan exclaimed

There’s a lot of boys doing it in their bare feet. That’s fantastic so it is, unbelievable so it is...A woman of seventy half way and she’s heading for the top. Its great watching everyone around you and they kind of encourage you.

For Jane, “seeing a person going by, the volume of people brings you along”. The chat and the element of fun were other important elements.

For the last piece, people are encouraging you to keep going, you haven’t far to go...I suppose it’s a bit easier when there’s people on it encouraging you and plus there’s a bit of craic\* when there’s a few from the town; the craic is important; it lightens the humour a bit.

Craic: colloquial term for fun and banter

Two very experienced mountaineers travelled from Dublin to climb the mountain on Reek Sunday, as they have done on many occasions, and deliberately left their specialised hillwalking clothing in the car. They ceased to be involved in a sport and merged to become members of a community moving as one up a mountain. The normal criteria by which a hillwalk is judged is abandoned. As one of them said

It's a day to join the crowds and share the mountain. Normally I keep away from busy mountains but the other people are the point of today ... All aspects of Irish life are there before you, all shapes and sizes. The banter and chat is all part of it. It's a chance for a sense of sharing that you don't get on a normal walk or probably don't normally want. There's energy and a sense of Irishness about it. All the football jerseys are out. It's like all the tribes have gathered.

For another experienced hillwalker, Sorsha, Reek Sunday was a unique experience.

It was a bit overwhelming looking up and seeing the people and looking down and seeing all the people. I nearly got claustrophobic at one point. But I enjoyed it as well. I'm so used to going to the mountains with all the gear, first aid, a flask and being nearly over cautious. And then watching people going up in jeans and from the pub. I really enjoyed that. People were doing it for totally different reasons from me. The atmosphere and camaraderie was great.

Hillwalking has developed into a recognised sport with governing bodies, award schemes and a recommended procedure during hillwalks (Long, 2003). The Reek provides the inexperienced walker with easy access to a challenge and the pilgrimage provides a motive. On Croagh Patrick, walking ceases to be an organised sport and becomes a community celebration and a return to an ancient ritual. The textbook equipped clad walkers with ski poles and map appeared incongruous in a crowd where training shoes and an ash walking stick are the sign of the well prepared.

Everyone was climbing the mountain on foot and as described by Turner and Turner (1978, p.89), the climbers were "stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and levelled to a homogenous social state through discipline and ordeal". The removal of signs of status and rank bring about a commonness of feeling or "communitas" (p.13).

The only negative comments about the crowds were more concerned with ease of movement and an overly boisterous atmosphere than as a wish for solitude. The father of a local family group, Tim, had previously done the climb on Reek Sunday but recently "started doing it on the Friday simply because it's less packed and easier to get up and there's not as many people bumping into each other". For Eileen, the

behaviour of some people spoilt the event because “some people make it into a sport, almost running down, so there is no silence on top of the hill. It’s not even the number of the people, it’s the spirit of the crowd.”

However, overall, the atmosphere of celebration was an attraction rather than detraction. At 10am mass on the summit on Reek Sunday, the researcher observed a crowd of approximately one thousand who had gathered around outside the church. Just over half of the crowd were listening and taking part in the ceremony. The others were sitting, chatting, calling friends on mobile phones, drinking tea from the stalls, recovering from their exertions or waiting to meet up with friends. People were continually arriving and leaving. The mood was more of community celebration than that of the hushed reverence of a religious ceremony. The number who completed the rounds of the church and St Patrick’s bed, the traditional pilgrimage, was very small in comparison to the numbers at the summit during the one hour period that the researcher spent observing.

There were no attempts by the more devout to quieten the more raucous or even any sign of frustration or displeasure. There was no mention in the interviews of displeasure with the level of gaiety and revelry displayed and it appears that there was a happy coexistence between the penitential and celebratory. The jovial atmosphere is in keeping with the pilgrimage in the past. As Kavanagh (1940) wrote, “Croagh Patrick is the glorious singing, laughing climb of an Ireland young in spirit and truth and enthusiastic in performance (p.9).” However, the drunken anti-Christian debauchery as witnessed by O’Donovan and Thackery in the 1800’s has disappeared. The only sign of drunken behaviour observed was during the late night ascents during Saturday night and early on Reek Sunday morning. A regular stream of people in small groups climbed the mountain through the night. In traditional style, some had headed straight from the public houses in Westport onto the hill with a very poor level of equipment.

As one young man, Joe said

It’s just something we’ve done the last few years. You sober up pretty quick and get down for a big fry as it’s getting bright. There’s a big gang of us and some people come back from working away especially for it. It’s all the locals that do it at night so it’s good craic.

During Reek Sunday and Garland Friday, celebration rather than penance set the tone and even though there are people from all over Ireland, there was also something

distinctly local about the occasion. The encouragement and inspiration received from others seemed to exist at all times of the observations on the mountain. The strong sense of community and encouragement were not considered as motivational factors for the climb but did enrich the experience of those involved.

#### ***4.3.3 Spiritual and Meaningful Experiences***

Only 8 people (19%) experienced the mountain as personally sacred or as a source of spiritual inspiration, which is a low number considering the mountain's title of 'Holy Mountain'.

It can be difficult to try to isolate one factor that makes the mountain special and to articulate what generates a sense of spirituality. Mick, who climbs the mountain on a regular basis, said that

There's something about being up there, it's spiritual, it's a holy mountain due to its aspect, history behind it. It's very difficult to explain, it's a sense of pilgrimage...I like to get to the top, there's a sense of peace up there. It's a combination of things including the physical effort; I set myself times and record them in a notebook. The view and aspect make it special even though there wasn't any today. But also the sense of history makes it special, a combination of physical challenge and an unexplainable spiritual feeling about it.

An experienced hillwalker, Dave could not but notice the sacred; it had an effect. Seeing others in deep contemplation made him reconsider his spirituality. Dave never thought of Croagh Patrick as a sacred mountain but realised it "when you get to the top and see the church, the odd person saying a prayer. It puts your mind on it".

For some, there was a sense that the setting of Croagh Patrick was different and offered a unique experience. Brian had "walked hills that are more challenging but I never had the same feeling as I would have from here". For Michael, the summit was seen as a place of calm and quiet. "There's a terrible peace up there, fierce peace up there; people are very contented, not restless".

There were instances where people had doubts about the mountain as a sacred place but were unwilling to totally dismiss the spiritual or religious dimension. Gerry "didn't think of it as sacred. I just kept thinking about getting to the top and getting back down again. I said a prayer at the top, though". Paul took holy water with him "just in case".

The spiritual, or very emotional experiences that do occur are varied as is evident in these two comments from Brian and John.

I get a sense of the sacred but it's not Catholic, it's God. If I was here 1,000 years ago and someone said lets climb it to be still, I would say ok, that's a good place to be still.

I climbed it 16 years ago and always promised myself I'd go back. It's a very positive energy going up the mountain and I think the basic reason people climb it, no matter what guise they put on it, is that it connects your head with your heart. That's about it. It gives you like a massage all over, inside and out. If you survive that you're all right...

As mentioned by Osterrieth (1997), people sometimes travel and submit themselves to certain environments in order to achieve a form of inner transformation. A pilgrimage or a journey can be rewarding because the journey, in this case up Croagh Patrick, offers opportunities for the traveller to gain a sense of achievement and confidence. Croagh Patrick seems to be a place where people seek challenge and a release from the limitations of daily life.

For a small number of people, five in total, the combination of the challenge of the climb and the visual impact of the mountain landscape also seems to be conducive to moments of clarity or personal insight. As described by Matt, "you get a sense of who you are, kinda". Research by McDonald and Schreyer (1991) and Beck (1987) cited in Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) found that a wilderness experience creates a combination of extreme states of consciousness and increased sensory acuity that can lead to meaningful experiences. While Croagh Patrick is not a wilderness, it is a dramatic landscape with a rich history and this may be sufficient to generate what can be considered meaningful or insightful experiences. For Peter,

It's (Croagh Patrick) got a good little relationship to what happens to us sometimes in life...It's not like a game of golf or bringing the kids to a bouncy castle. There's a different set of values at work there, beyond excitement. If you're close to your heart you don't need life distractions.

As similarly described by many travellers in vast landscapes, Tim found that sitting on the summit of Croagh Patrick provided a sense of scale regarding the human timescale and the relative importance of people.

The fact that it's Christian, there's no doubt about that, but it is also pre-Christian. You're aware of the fact that 5,000 years ago there was something happening here and I think it probably shows how insignificant we are, that we're walking here in their footsteps, we shouldn't do any damage.



Justin described receiving an emotional benefit from the mountain while still being unsure if it is a sacred mountain.

I didn't do any of the rounds or any prayers...you feel somewhat humble coming down. It was always something I wanted to do. I saw it on television. My wife died 4 years ago. I was watching TV one night. I was partly depressed. I got into my car and came down. This is my fourth year...it's rewarding, it's therapeutic...here's something special when you get to the top. I don't know how I'd describe it really; it's a challenge really. It's as hard as ever; it doesn't get any easier. I'll do it next year, please God ... I'm probably fairly neutral on it really (whether it's a sacred mountain). Because everyone else does (believe), I respect it for that, I really do but personally I don't believe that Patrick ran up and down it.

The ascent helped some people appreciate aspects of their life and to work through problems. Peter who did the climb with his children said it showed how insignificant people are in the scheme of things and "how we should appreciate what we have, that I have the health to walk to the top of the mountain and my daughter can come with me and enjoy it". Emily suggested that the simplicity of the climb can provide a sense of calm.

I love the peace and the simplicity up there. There's nothing spectacular, it's just a mountain...there's no fancy business. When you go up you have to come down, somehow or other.

There were some who were clearly not finding or seeking a spiritual experience and who rebut any suggestion of the climb as a pilgrimage or being spiritual. For Colin, "it was a day out; not a pilgrimage - nothing sacred in it for me".

As Sorsha, an active hillwalker explained, a sense of spirituality resided in the mood associated with the mountains rather than in a specific place. The number of people on Croagh Patrick was not conducive in creating a spiritual tone in someone used to the sense of isolation that hillwalking normally provides.

I don't see them (mountains) as sacred in themselves. Some are sacred to certain people. But normally you're on your own in the mountains and this sense of solitude and wildness gives a sense of the spiritual. You're exposed to the elements. For me, mountains are different to the sea. Mountains enclose me and contain me. It's a place I can experience that sense of spirituality. Being there allows that. On Croagh Patrick a sense of spirituality was replaced by a sense of community. There's too much going on for it to be a spiritual place for me.

Overall, it appears that Croagh Patrick is not very conducive to spiritual experiences. The limited spiritual and meaningful experiences of the study group that do occur

would fit the description of a mystical pilgrimage seeking revelation and insight as described by Osterrieth (1997).

#### ***4.3.4 Pilgrimage and Spirituality***

While 19% experienced the mountain as personally sacred or as a source of spiritual inspiration, a much larger number, 52%, described their climb as a pilgrimage. Therefore, it appears that it must be other elements of the climb such as the physical challenge, the penitential element or the historical connection rather than the spiritual element that generated this perception of the climb as a pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is often described as synonymous with some aspect of spirituality (Bhardwaj, 1997) but on Croagh Patrick, this was obviously not always the case. This would support Eade and Sallnow (1991) who suggest that “if one can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one can no longer take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of ‘pilgrimage’ either” (cited in Coleman & Elsner, 1995, p.200). The study group appear to be redefining what was previously a Catholic pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick, as personal ritual or pilgrimage, without any reference to spirituality.

As discussed in Chapter 2, it is difficult to reach a widely accepted definition of spirituality. What is agreed is that spirituality is not synonymous with religion and that awe, wonder, personal growth and reflection are seen as common elements (Prince, 1999; McGowan, 2000; Orgill, 2000). Due to the difficulty in defining terms such as sacred, spiritual, pilgrimage or religion it was sometimes difficult to interpret what people meant in the interviews as various interpretations are possible. It was neither appropriate nor feasible to preface the interviews with working definitions of the terms. Therefore, the difference between the mountain being sacred, holy and a spiritual experience are blurred within the research results.

However, overall it seems that the spiritual dimension is not of major importance to those climbing The Reek. This finding would contradict an established belief that there is a heightened sense of awareness of spiritual contemplation following a physical challenge in a dramatic landscape. As discussed in Chapter 2, the spiritual significance of mountains is universal (Bernbaum, 1997) and travel and mountaineering literature is replete with references to a spiritual element to journeying in the outdoors and especially in the mountains (Macfarlane, 2003; Bartlett, 1993). Research shows that encounters with a dramatic landscape are conducive to spiritual experiences (Barrett & Greenaway 1995; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). Therefore, the relative lack of a spiritual element to Croagh Patrick

could be seen as surprising. However, The Reek does not present the wilderness experience or prolonged immersion in nature that seem to accompany most descriptions of a spiritual experience in the landscape. The research mentioned by Fredrickson & Anderson (1999) was based in remote wilderness settings such as in areas of the United States and may not be applicable to Ireland.

In addition The Reek is eroded, littered in places and contains many man made objects that may contribute to a sense of history and tradition but which may not serve to inspire a spiritual dimension. The short time required to climb to the summit (two hours) and the volume of other people encountered may also not be conducive to a spiritual experience. Also, as mentioned in the Research Methodology, the structure of the interview process may have inhibited people in their discussion of spiritual aspects of the climb and so the number of spiritual experiences may be underrepresented.

#### **4.4 How People Believe the Mountain should be Managed and Developed**

##### ***4.4.1 Issues of Erosion, Maintenance and Development of the Mountain***

Human influence is everywhere on Croagh Patrick. There are cairns, crosses, stalls, toilets blocks and a church at the summit. The path is visible from a long distance and the hillside is heavily grazed by sheep (Plate 5, Appendix C). However, these signs of human intervention do not seem to be perceived as incongruous intrusions but rather as described by O'Dwyer (2004, p.9), they seem to be regarded as “monuments to how we use the uplands”. None of the interviewees expressed concern about the amount of buildings and other objects on the hill. There was a high level of satisfaction with the present condition and appearance of the mountain and general agreement that the path and the infrastructure were adequate and did not require further development. In addition, 45% were actively against any development and felt that renovations or footpath repairs would reduce the challenge of the climb or that the traditional climb would be lost. A local man, Mark, who climbed the mountain regularly, believed that no work should be done on the mountain. “In my opinion, it’s natural and that’s the way it should be left and if stones start falling from the summit and it gets a little mucky in places, so be it”.

Due to its popularity, footpath erosion is severe on Croagh Patrick, with an eroded track, often ten metres in width, leading to the summit. The researcher observed many people having difficulty walking up and down the final section of the hill due to loose

rock and a steep, uneven path. This included people slipping, requiring very frequent rests, seeking assistance from others for balance and occasionally sliding or crawling for small sections rather than walking upright. However, the risk and hardship of a loose and slippery path was perceived as part of the appeal of the mountain and there was a reluctance to make the journey easier. Tom stated that “the path is rough but that’s the point of it. The struggle is important. That’s a good metaphor for life”. For Sarah, the climb was “a challenge, a risk you take that you get injured but it’s worth it”. Michael said that if the path was made easier “it could ruin it (the walk) or make it too easy”. For some people, the mountain is a link back to Saint Patrick and there is a wish to keep the mountain close to its original condition. Simon felt that while the path was dangerous and difficult, “maybe if it was made easier it wouldn’t be the original mountain that was supposedly climbed by Patrick... I don’t think it would be appropriate to do it up.”

The challenge and risk involved in the climb is linked to the rough and steep path and as will be discussed later, the physical challenge of the climb is the primary motivational factor for climbing the mountain. Therefore, there is a marked reluctance for any change that may interfere with the path and reduce the challenge. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there have been calls by a local politician for repair work to be carried out on the path due to safety concerns prompted by accidents on the mountain (Ring, 2005). However, there is little support for such action from the study group.

With regard to the visual perception of the mountain, concern was expressed by 24% regarding erosion and litter. 20% believed that the mountain was damaged by its own popularity but only 9% believed that infrastructural development was needed in order to reduce erosion and to enhance safety. Sean believed that the path “should be looked after. It needs to be safer but also to protect the mountain from erosion”. Eileen who also wanted the path repaired, found it a “contradiction to say it’s a sacred mountain yet thousands of people walk up and destroy it”.

There was a high level of satisfaction with developments such as the café and carpark. One American visitor stated that “the developments have been nicely done. It’s not that different from 30 years ago when I first did it except for the car park and buildings. It’s not cheesy or honky tonk”.

There was one comment on legal liability regarding safety on the mountain. Aidan did not “understand why they don’t do something - a piece of rope on pillars – it is dangerous. If someone was to hurt themselves I’m not sure what the legal

implications would be”. According to Tovey and Share (2000), Ireland is considered to be a very litigious society by European standards. In this context, and considering the high accident rate on the mountain (Mayo Mountain Rescue Team, 2003), it is perhaps surprising that there were not more comments regarding legal liability for accidents on the mountain.

However, overall, man made objects such as the church and the path seemed to enhance rather than detract from the experience. The unique history of Croagh Patrick may have resulted in development work being judged by different standards than on other mountains. Positive comments about the path could be considered surprising. As mentioned in Chapter 2, hillwalkers generally see erosion on popular mountains in a negative light and some type of path maintenance is usually recommended (MCI, 2005; Mountain Meitheal, 2005). The perception of the study group is quite different. They expressed few negative comments regarding erosion and for some the erosion seemed to favourably increase the challenge of the climb. While Croagh Patrick is used as a recreational resource for walkers, those who climb it predominantly see it as an historic and cultural site. The mountain was seen as a tradition to be preserved rather than a tourist destination in need of improvement and extra facilities. The path was more of a record of the pilgrims than an ugly scar on the hillside. For Mary, the path reminded her of “all those who have climbed the mountain before. I think the path is more of a holy feature than the church really. It was made by all the pilgrims”.

Overall, walkers are satisfied with the current level of development and management of the mountain. However, in view of the attitudes of the MCI (MCI, 2005) and safety concerns (Mayo Mountain Rescue, 2003; Ring, 2005), it is likely that path repair work will be considered in the future. It is recommended that the views of the users and their wish that the challenge and tradition of the climb should not be interfered with, should be considered as part of any planning process.

#### **4.5 Motivational Factors in Climbing Croagh Patrick**

The five main motivational factors in climbing Croagh Patrick, listed below in order of importance to the sample group, will be discussed next. Following this, the significance of these motivational factors in relation to the outdoor education profession will also be discussed.

1. The challenge of the climb
2. Sense of history and preserving a tradition
3. Visiting a famous landmark
4. Penance

## 5. Beauty

### ***4.5.1 The Challenge of the Climb***

Challenge linked to the physical effort involved in the ascent and the associated sense of achievement was the most significant motivational factor for completing the climb and was mentioned by 19 people (45%). This concurs with Osterrieth (1997) who, as described in Chapter 2, sees the challenge of the pilgrimage as important and describes pilgrims as deliberately setting off into a new environment to test themselves.

Dave, a regular climber of the mountain describes a number of the rewards gained from making the ascent.

I've climbed it 30 times... there's a great sense of achievement when you get up there.. It gives you a great lift when you're up there, you can look out all over Mayo and that and see the beauty all round ... It's tough enough. It doesn't get any easier....if it was smaller it would take away from it.

For him, the beauty of the surrounding area, the physicality of the climb and the extent of challenge all led to a high level of stimulation. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1991) the stimulation of ones physical and or mental faculties will be optimal when the situation to be faced requires a level of skill performance equal to the level of competence that the individual possesses. The physical difficulty of the climb was mentioned by a majority of the study group with no mention of the climb being too easy or lacking in challenge. The physical challenge was always perceived as positive, as an opportunity to test oneself and to overcome rather than as a frustrating barrier. This is epitomised by the following sentiment from Tom. "The struggle makes it good".

Osterrieth (1997) argues that while pilgrims may seem to confront difficulties to obtain some reward, closer scrutiny shows that the situation itself can hold its own intrinsic motivation, independently of the final prized object that initially motivated the pursuit. This appears to hold true for some of the study group such as Tom.

There were examples of people changing the nature of the walk to ensure optimal challenge and stimulation. In the past, there was a strong tradition in certain parishes of people making long approaches on foot from their homes to the peak. Over the last 10 years this tradition has been revived and there has been an increase in the number of people completing long journeys on foot to climb the mountain (Walsh, 2003). Two people who completed one of these journeys were interviewed on the mountain. They walked for over ten hours to reach the side of the mountain and then spent the

night bivouacking on the shoulder before climbing it early the next morning. Rekindling an old tradition featured as the main motivational factor for these interviewees, but there was also a strong sense of increasing the level of challenge to match the level of competence of the individuals.

I suppose making the climb into a full day walk and then to sleep on the mountain made it into a real challenge for me. Just climbing from the Murrisk side would have been interesting from a social point of view but with no real hardship or struggle. It didn't feel like a meaningless challenge either; the fact that we were following a traditional journey across the col from Tourmakeady gave it a reason and a value.

(Tourmakeady, map Appendix B)

A man who brought his young children up the mountain described the inspiration of others to keep climbing and again stresses physical challenge and the sense of achievement gained from an ascent.

It's physically tiring. I was talking to a man today; he'll be 80 at his next birthday. He's been climbing Croagh Patrick for 69 years. Last year was the first year that he missed and he thought that he'd never climb it again. The sense of achievement at the top was great. I hope I have the same sense of achievement in 33 years time.

Challenge and physical struggle are seen as important components in mountaineering. As discussed in Chapter 2, several analyses of motivation in mountaineering literature describe the central role that challenge plays (MacFarlane, 2003; Bartlett, 1993; Bonnington, 1985). Research by Ewert (1984) and Patterson et al (1998) also emphasises the importance of challenge as a motivational factor in completing journeys in the mountains and wilderness areas. Therefore, it is predictable to some extent that challenge would be an important element of an ascent of Croagh Patrick. However, as will be discussed later, there is the added feature on Croagh Patrick that the challenge can also be seen as penance and that the challenge has a tradition dating back much further than the practise of mountaineering as a sport. The importance of this sense of challenge is reinforced by concerns voiced about any possible upgrade of the path, which would reduce the level of challenge involved.

For most of the walkers, the combination of physical challenge with the history of the climb and local tradition was an important element. However, for a small group, 9%, the history and religious aspects were irrelevant. Quick access to the mountain and the path make the mountain a convenient 'outdoor gym'. They approached the mountain with the attitude of athletes rather than devout pilgrims. A local walker, Colin, describes his reasons for climbing the mountain.

It has immediate access, always dry, underfoot that is! The views from the top are stunning. It's a lovely grand view with sea and land. The history of the mountain has nothing to do with it to be honest. ... I get a satisfaction from the physical exertion in climbing it, so it is often a training thing for me...I would time myself to the summit”.

It is inevitable that proximity to a large town, (Westport), easy access and an obvious pathway would attract people who wish to climb purely for reasons of exercise. Mags described her brother who “climbs it regular. He doesn't do football or anything but he climbs mountains. That's his workout”.

The majority of the interview group(74%) were not regular hillwalkers (more than six times a year) and The Reek is the only mountain they climb during the year. Therefore, for a majority of the study group, the physical act of the climb provides a novel experience. Seeking novel experiences has been identified as an intrinsic motivational factor (Gross, 2001) and while there was no direct mention in the interviews of the novelty of the climb itself as a motivational factor, there was much curiosity regarding the climb. There was a curiosity to know if they could meet the challenge of the climb and there was curiosity and a novel experience in visiting a famous landmark and event.

The sense of achievement gained on reaching the summit can dominate other possible motivational factors. Maurice, a farmer who completes the Knock pilgrimage, also in County Mayo, every year, was climbing The Reek for the first time. However, despite his interest in pilgrimage ritual in Knock, the ritual aspect of the climb became insignificant compared to the challenge of the ascent. He was also slightly bemused that he had become involved in hillwalking. On reaching the summit he

... got a great sense of achievement, at my age. The pilgrimage side didn't add anything to the experience. It was only when I was down that my wife said I was meant to say certain prayers at the stations – I hadn't even thought of that...it was a challenge, not a pilgrimage. I never thought I'd get into hillwalking but here I am and I'm not even looking for sheep!

The accessibility of Croagh Patrick may allow people to try a walk without having to join a club or become part of a walking culture. People who wouldn't want to identify themselves as hillwalkers can easily attempt the climb under the guise of tradition or pilgrimage.



Without the sense of challenge, the pilgrimage would lose much of its appeal. The hazard involved in the climb makes reaching the summit more dramatic and more valued. This reinforces the point made by Osterrieth (1997) that pilgrims set off into a new environment to test themselves. The element of risk is important, as without the risk there is no test of competence that confirms one's own worth. It is clear that the study group found the climb challenging and endorsed the view that challenge and overcoming challenge is personally beneficial. When linked to sense of challenge, the pilgrimage approximately fits the category of a mystical pilgrimage where the quest is for revelation and personal insight (Osterrieth, 1997).

Within the framework of self-determination theory as discussed in Chapter 2, the study group have internalised the value of challenge and its associated hardship. In the past, Catholicism has promoted the concept of hardship as something that one must suffer and as being good for the soul and moral character (Cassidy, 2002). The study group appear to have internalised the value of challenge by changed this socially accepted value into a personally endorsed value. The study group actually want to suffer hardship and deal with challenge rather than being compelled to do by religious authorities. In the differentiated concept of extrinsic motivation, challenge is a relatively autonomous form of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and could be described as a form of integrated regulation. This involves activity that's assimilated with ones beliefs. Actions characterised by integrated motivation may share similar characteristics to intrinsic motivation, but are still considered extrinsic because they are done to attain separable outcomes rather than for their inherent enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). There was no mention of fun and enjoyment in the act of walking. The reward came from reflecting on the achievement of reaching the summit rather than during the climb itself. Overcoming challenge was seen as important in their value system. This is not unique to Croagh Patrick and mountaineering literature is filled with descriptions of the extrinsic benefits of a successful ascent (Macfarlane, 2003; Bartlett, 1993).

#### ***4.5.2 Sense of history and preserving a tradition***

While overcoming a challenge was the most important motivational factor in climbing Croagh Patrick, preserving a tradition was also important. Although always mentioned with other factors, a wish to preserve a family or community tradition featured strongly as a motivational factor for 12 respondents (29%). An older woman, Clare, described her wish to "keep up the old ways ... our parents done it and we're just following in their tradition". 44% of people doing the climb were from the local

county, Mayo. Peter, from the closest parish to the mountain stressed the importance of the local nature of the tradition.

I'm very conscious of handing the tradition on to my son, he's here today, and that I've handed it on to my older girl to come with me and that it was handed on by my parents ... I think it's important that because I live in the parish that I should climb the mountain and go on a journey and realise that there is a greater and higher being.

Tim takes a day off work nearly every year to do the climb with his children because he "likes to retain the old traditions. I'm probably trying to pass it on to these lads so they can make up their minds later, whether they want to continue or pass it on again. It's nice to do".

The Reek pilgrimage has an appeal that encourages people to want to preserve it and pass the tradition onto their children. A sense of marking time, of commemorating another year passing and the beauty of the area were identified as additional factors.

There is a sense of achievement and following a local tradition. It's an annual thing. You feel good after it. There's a feel good factor. The mass is a nice bonus and there was lots of locals there, a Covey day. The day and the views were gorgeous.

(Covey: colloquial term for a person from Westport, map Appendix B)

The long history of the tradition is an important factor for some. Alan said "it's beautiful that the tradition has lasted since Patrick climbed the mountain". For another local woman, Jane, a link with the past combined with and a sense of penance and suffering draws her back on a regular basis.

God, I'm tired now... I just wanted to do it. I'm a native of the area and I wanted to do it today, my parents would have done it today. It's the day locals do it and I've done it and I'm happy and I would do it again. I see it as a holy mountain. It's definitely a penance to go up that mountain. I was very slow coming down, my knees started bothering me – but we're down now and we're safe and that's all that matters.

An experienced hillwalker, Sorsha, who moved to Mayo several years ago, described how her perceptions of the mountain changed over time. Usually, she selected hillwalks for their sense of solitude and remoteness, features that were absent on Croagh Patrick. However, over time, a sense of place, community and tradition began to compensate and she started to climb the mountain regularly.

I wasn't initially drawn to it when I first moved here. It's not the type of mountain I would normally want to climb. It's so busy with a big motorway

running up. It reminded me of Djouce\* or Sugarloaf\* so I wasn't really into it. But over time, I began to see it as a local mountain, something welcoming and familiar about it...at first the buildings on the top were nearly abhorrent. I hate to go to places where lots of people go but now I see it as a people's mountain. It's good to have a mountain like that; with a sense of history and community and great views.

(\*two popular mountains in County Wicklow)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, research by the Heritage Council (2004) found that there has been a resurgence of interest in keeping up old traditions. The attitudes of walkers on Croagh Patrick would support the Heritage Council's findings. There is strong support for the tradition of pilgrimage and climbing the mountain, both at family and local level. The mountain seems to provide a sense of connection and continuity with the past and a strong sense of the locality. As can be seen from the previous section, which described the wish for little or no development work on the mountain, there is a strong desire to preserve that connection. The mountain serves to bring people together with a common purpose. As discussed earlier, people derived a high level of enjoyment and encouragement from sharing the climb with others.

Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) highlight how landscape embodies meaning for people and that meaning varies depending on cultural background. Ireland has become increasingly secular (Cassidy, 2001) yet also, more interested in tradition and heritage (Heritage Council, 2004). This change in Irish culture may be partially reflected in the current motivation for climbing The Reek. The church no longer imposes the main rationale for the climb while preserving tradition and a link with the past are important motivational factors.

#### **4.5.3 *A Famous Mountain***

Climbing a well-known mountain was the third most important motivational factor and was mentioned by 11 people (26%) in the interviews. Croagh Patrick is a famous landmark and has an iconic value. The annual pilgrimage is a national news feature and it is mentioned in travel books on Ireland such as the Lonely Planet guidebook series. Taking part in such a famous event can confer a certain status or level of recognition on the climber. The interviews suggest that recognition and being able to tell stories about the climb is an important motivational factor. Similar findings are reported in research from Ewert (1985) and Patterson et al (1998).

Seeking public recognition from making an ascent can be categorised as an extrinsic motivational factor. Deci and Ryan (2000) identified four forms of extrinsic motivation on a continuum of self-determined behaviour. One of these is introjected motivation, which involves doing an activity for reasons based on what others think. Some climbers include an element of introjected motivation in their analysis of their motivation for the climb. Gerry wanted “to do it so I could say I did it”. There was also a curiosity in people to experience this famous mountain for themselves. Ollie sums it up when he says, “it’s one of the hills we intended to climb at some stage. You hear the stories but they mean nothing to you until you climb it. You realise how tough it is for people”.

The attraction of Croagh Patrick as a famous mountain has not resulted in any significant observable commercialisation of the mountain. It is possible to buy a certificate of completion and wooden pilgrim poles from the small shop in the car park but, apart from this, there are no signs that the mountain is being commercialised. Those who were attracted to the mountain as a famous feature, generally also mentioned an interest in the tradition or beauty of the mountain. There was no sense of the ascent as a tick on a list of tourist experiences to be consumed. The discussion on the importance of challenge and tradition and the next section on penance, show that the meaning people generally attached to an ascent, is more than a once off tourist experience.

#### ***4.5.4 Penance and Thanksgiving***

The fourth most important motivational factor is linked with penance. As outlined in Chapter Two, in the past Croagh Patrick was linked to religion, to rituals and adherence to a particular dogma. People climbed the mountain as an act of faith, perhaps as penance or for an indulgence. It was this tradition that gave it the title of a holy mountain. However, only a small number of the sample group (nine), climbed the mountain to give thanks or to do penance.

Simon describes the role of penance. “There’s a sense of penance and thanksgiving. You’d always have a reason, something in the back of your head, for someone you’d be thinking of”.

The numbers doing the stations is very small in comparison to the total number completing the climb. The penitential element was more evident on Reek Sunday than at other times during the year. All of the five people from the interview group who completed stations had climbed the mountain on Reek Sunday. Doing the rounds

increased the level of challenge and penance but also seemed important in terms of preserving a tradition and 'doing it right'. Sarah climbed it first in the late 1960s

...and I've climbed it every time I get the chance since. It's a tradition and a penance. My parents would have done it....I did the rounds and the whole thing. What's the point if you don't do it right? There's certainly a sense of penance as well; it's a hard climb. It was cold and wet up there today.

There can also be a sense of renewal and peace from completing the climb. Liam, an elderly man climbed the mountain for his first time and for him the pilgrimage fits the category of a redeeming pilgrimage where the quest is for forgiveness and salvation (Osterrieth, 1997).

The pilgrimage is for sacrifice, to get rid of your sins...I did all the 7 circuits, the Rosary the lot and I don't feel any the worse for it. In fact I feel stronger now for doing it - 2 reasons for that. First, your mind is clear; second, you get rid of a lot of impurities when exercising, sweating. I did it partially for penance because I'm a sinner like all of us...you get peace through your penance. Simple but people are missing it.

(Circuits; another term for stations)

People found the climb rewarding in a variety of ways. For Celine, the climb provided a sense of personal satisfaction, an opportunity to be released from the guilt of sin and an occasion to offer thanks.

I suppose it's the challenge of doing it. You feel good in yourself that you accomplished something. I suppose from the religious aspect you feel it's a bit of a penance for the wrong you did during the year. When I was up there I prayed for my job and the whole lot but I also prayed for my family, for sickness and all that, so there's two parts to it.

The sense of hardship and struggle are important elements. Matt explained that "the climb was tough. I felt great at the top. It's thanksgiving for things you received during the year. It's a long journey and hard work". There is an attitude that a little bit of pain and penance is good for you and that the sedentary nature of a modern lifestyle leads us to seek out physical challenge. Michael has climbed The Reek forty-eight times as part of an annual ritual and for him the climb is more concerned with personal rewards than religious adherence.

I suppose that it's something that comes up every year and only every year and one gets half afraid that God gives you your health and if you don't do something that well, he mightn't leave it to you...it hasn't a great deal to do with religion. It's more some yearly sacrifice, that's what I do, one of the few things I do.

Fiona also believes in the possible benefits of penance even though she is not a very religious person.

The way I look at it is we don't do an awful lot of stuff say in the line of penance or that kind of thing. So even though we wouldn't be overly religious but in the back of your mind, that maybe it does some good, as well as the fact that you can combine it with a nice day. It's damn fine exercise to be honest.

In the past, those who wished to complete the greatest penance would complete the climb barefoot. However, for this young woman, Emily, who climbed barefoot, the motivation was personal rather than for reward or thanksgiving.

I'm not religious at all and it's not a penance thing as such. But I think by climbing barefoot you're forced to slow down, really concentrate. It's like a sort of meditation. Also, I just wanted to know could I do it, could I push myself.

The barefoot tradition is still evident on Reek Sunday when the researcher observed approximately one hundred people climbing barefoot. During visits at other time, no barefoot climbers were observed. This reduction in the numbers doing the climb barefoot is mirrored by a reduction in the numbers completing the rounds. For most people just climbing the mountain is sufficient challenge.

Climbing Croagh Patrick is very popular in the Traveller Community in Ireland. The Traveller Community is an ethnic minority group. They have a strong belief in the power of doing penance. Conversations with three groups of Travellers and one short taped interview showed a belief or at least a hope that, if you complete a penance, your prayers will be answered and you will be rewarded with good health or fortune. The large numbers of Travellers taking part on the pilgrimage on Reek Sunday and the interviews, suggest that it is a very significant event in the community and is associated with strongly held beliefs regarding the power of penance and pilgrimage. One young Traveller climbed in hope of a cure for the body or the therapeutic pilgrimage as defined by Osterrieth (1997).

My friend is really sick and I did it as penance... I did the rounds and all...all my friends have done it. I like climbing it. I'm not sure if it's holy. I'm not sure that it will help my friend but it might. I've heard of it helping other people.

No respondents mentioned receiving an indulgence and gaining remission from time spent in Purgatory as a reason for the climb. This is a marked change from the motivation of climbers in the past (Hughes, 1991). Only a minority see the climb as part of a religious ritual in terms of seeking good intentions and forgiveness for sins. The climb has become part of an annual personal ritual and as it becomes less associated with fulfilling a list of strict religious criteria, it has become a more

personally defined experience. The mountain is still climbed as an act of faith but the underlying motivation is primarily personal fulfilment rather than religious compliance and as discussed earlier, the atmosphere on the mountain is more community celebration than penitence. Within the STD framework of Deci and Ryan (2000), the motivation has become more internalised. The extent to which the pilgrimage could be described as a redeeming or therapeutic pilgrimage within the framework described by Osterrieth (1997) is small.

#### **4.5.5 *Beauty***

The fifth most important motivational factor was the beauty of the mountain but was only mentioned by 12%. This was surprising considering that Croagh Patrick is described as a dramatic mountain with scenic views from the summit. John describes the view from the summit.

This morning it was particularly wonderful because there was a very gentle breeze...and there was the most incredible view and because it was a rainy morning there was no fog or anything. The visibility was great; you could see the islands and the Sheffry Hills and that's what brings a sense of achievement. It's like being in an aircraft.

Six people selected the unique shape or profile of the mountain as the aspect that makes the mountain special. Mountaineering literature emphasises the aesthetic qualities of mountains as attractions for climbers (Macfarlane, 2003; Bartlett, 1993). However, on Croagh Patrick, its more unique attractions such as tradition and penance have superseded the physical setting as important motivational factors.

#### **4.5.6 *Implications for the Outdoor Education Profession***

The interviews show that a sense of connection to the past and local tradition was important to the study group and awareness of the mountains cultural history enriched their climb. This is an interesting finding for the outdoor education profession. Outdoor education has long realised the value of the challenges provided by adventurous activities and the associated opportunities for personal and social development (Priest & Gass, 1997). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, outdoor education has often undervalued the importance of the location of an outdoor education programme and the history behind that location (Baker, 2005; Nicol & Higgins, 1998a; Nicol & Higgins, 1998b; White, 1998). This study shows the importance people attached to the historical significance of the site. Also, the

knowledge that many others, especially ancestors, had completed the climb served to enrich the experience.

Chapter 2 shows the availability of rich cultural data associated with Croagh Patrick and hints at the large number of other Irish culturally significant landscapes and mountains with historic legacies (Harbison, 1991; MacNeill, 1988). This dissertation shows the significance of culture, tradition and heritage to those who climb Croagh Patrick. Making participants in an outdoor education programme aware of the cultural richness and significance of the landscape around them may serve to enrich their experience.

The study group also emphasised the importance and value of challenge and hardship as part of the climb. This adds some support to the inclusion of similar elements in outdoor education programmes.

### ***Conclusions***

Considering the historical accounts of pilgrimage on the mountain and popular perception of what constitutes a pilgrimage, it is somewhat surprising that the top three motivational factors were not related to religion or spirituality. This indicates the reduced influence of the Catholic Church on what was previously regarded as the Holy Mountain. The next section will seek to explain this apparent shift of motivational factors.



## **4.6 The Popularity of the Climb in an Increasingly Secular Society**

### ***4.6.1 Motivational Factors and Self-Determination Theory***

In the past pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick was closely linked to Catholicism. Despite a move away from Catholic religious observance in an increasingly secular Ireland, the pilgrimage has remained popular. This continued popularity can be explained by the development of motivational factors for the climb that are not linked with Catholicism or even spirituality, such as challenge, preserving traditions and climbing a well known mountain. The mountain is still climbed occasionally as an act of faith but the primary motivation is personal fulfilment rather than religious compliance and the atmosphere is more community celebration than penitential observance.

According to self-determination theory, the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are important for energising human action and must be satisfied for long-term psychological health (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The decision to climb is more autonomous than in the past. There was no suggestion from the study group that individuals felt compelled to climb by priests or fear of hell, situations that have occurred in the past and are mentioned in the literature review (Hughes, 1991). Instead, the motivation was more concerned with overcoming a personal challenge. Most of the study group chose not to complete the traditional pilgrimage (including the rounds and stations as well as the climb) but there was no suggestion of guilt associated with this decision. People seemed happy to take elements of the pilgrimage ritual and mould the experience to their own wishes. The extent to which the pilgrimage could be described as a redeeming or therapeutic pilgrimage within the framework described by Osterrieth (1997) is small. For the majority of the study group, the pilgrimage had characteristics of a mystical pilgrimage.

The main type of motivation seemed to be well-internalised extrinsic motivation as described by Deci and Ryan (2000). In an increasingly secular Ireland, people are beginning to develop their own sense of values which are not imposed by the church and less affected by a sense of guilt imposed by traditional religious dogma (Cassidy, 2002). This seems to be reflected on Croagh Patrick. Challenge and even penance were seen as personally accepted values rather than just imposed by a religious structure and therefore, within the framework of self-determination theory, the motivation can be described as integrated regulation.

The loose structure associated with Croagh Patrick which allows this flexibility is probably a key element in its continuing popularity at a time when more organised rituals such as mass attendance are in decline.

## **5 CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

## **5.1 Introduction**

This final chapter describes the recommendations proposed by this dissertation in relation to the outdoor education profession and to the future management of Croagh Patrick. Recommendations are also made in connection to the research methodology used and possible areas of further research.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings and an attempt to explain these in the context of an increasingly secular Ireland.

## **5.2 Recommendations for the Outdoor Education Profession**

This dissertation found that the study group predominantly perceived Croagh Patrick as a rich cultural landscape. They placed a high level of importance on the history and tradition of Croagh Patrick. Knowledge of the long human history on the mountain, with its associated imprint, served to enrich the experience of those climbing the mountain. This cultural aspect of the mountain gave the climb a meaning and a purpose. The mountain was not reduced to a mere backdrop for an outdoor activity.

The Irish landscape is devoid of wilderness. Due to the developed nature of the Irish countryside, an outdoor education ethos that stresses the value of wilderness areas is not possible. However an outdoor education approach that appreciates and understands the cultural dimension of landscape is possible. Outdoor education has the potential to reawaken a sense of connection to landscape for people in landscapes throughout Ireland. This sense of connection can enrich the experiences of those who travel through these landscapes as part of an outdoor education programme in the same way as this sense of connection enriched the experience for people on Croagh Patrick. People on Croagh Patrick may not have needed an outdoor education profession to help them interpret the landscape. However, in other areas traditions may not be as strong or the cultural richness as obvious and there will be a role for the outdoor education profession.

Based on the findings of this dissertation, the availability of rich cultural landscapes in Ireland and the virtues of a cultural approach as promoted by Baker (2005), Knapp (2005), Nicol and Higgins, (1998) and White (1998), it is recommended that the Irish outdoor education profession consider the place and relevance of cultural landscapes in outdoor education programmes.

### **5.3 Recommendations for the Management of Croagh Patrick**

Croagh Patrick is used as a recreational resource but it is predominantly perceived as an historic and cultural site. On another mountain the level of erosion would prompt calls for a path improvement project but the unique nature of Croagh Patrick may demand a different approach. There is a strong wish to avoid development work that has the potential to interfere with the traditional challenge of the climb.

Croagh Patrick can be viewed as a hillwalk to a summit or as a great Irish tradition spanning over 2000 years or in many other ways. It is recommended that the multiple perspectives of the landscape of Croagh Patrick be taken into account when deciding on the most appropriate infrastructure or management of the pilgrimage.

As highlighted by Gibbons (2005), disagreement has already arisen between those who see the pilgrimage as a hillwalking event and those who see it as a cultural tradition. This dissertation provides an increased awareness of the importance of preserving tradition and being part of a tradition to those who climb Croagh Patrick. This awareness may help in understanding those who view the mountain from a cultural perspective and may help in reconciling disagreements between the two groups.

Facilities on the mountain were seen as adequate and further development work such as cafes and shops are not recommended.

### **5.4 Recommendations for the Research Methodology**

This research provides a preliminary analysis of how the mountain is perceived and experienced. There was a high response rate to the interviews with only seven people refusing to give interviews. The location and timing of the interviews facilitated the completion of a high number of interviews and gave a representative sample of those climbing the mountain. Most of the interview group were willing to be very descriptive about their climb but less willing to engage in an analysis of perceptions or motivation. Several interviews superficial and added little to the aims of the dissertation. Therefore, there may be a need to reconsider the interview process for further research of this type.

The fact that the researcher was unknown to those interviewed, the lack of privacy and the personal nature of some of the questions may have led to a reticence to fully engage in an in-depth analysis of the experience. The interview group may also have required greater time to relax after the climb, to consider the questions and to then analyse their motivation and experiences. Therefore, consideration should be given to

trying to conduct a smaller number of interviews but in a more relaxed setting, with more time to discuss and explain issues and terms. Conducting the interviews several days after the climb and providing the questions in advance, may be beneficial. The weakness of this approach is that it may be more difficult to gain a representative sample.

### **5.5 Recommendations for Further Study**

This dissertation highlights the differing opinions on the footpath and erosion between those who climb the mountain and outside observers. Proposals for a maintenance project by outside observers seem inevitable and there is potential for conflict with many of those who climb the mountain. A study into the extent of erosion on the mountain, establishing a range of proposals for managing this issue and a consultation process with all interested user groups would assist in deciding on future plans for the mountain.

Large numbers of Travellers visit the mountain on Reek Sunday and the brief evidence from this dissertation suggests that it is a very significant event in the community and is associated with strongly held beliefs regarding the power of penance and pilgrimage. However, no research has been carried out in this area. An in-depth study of the significance of Croagh Patrick to members of the Traveller Community would be of interest.

### **5.6 Conclusions**

This research is the first to examine the modern nature and context of climbing Croagh Patrick and as such, succeeds in providing a preliminary analysis of why people climb the mountain and how the mountain is perceived and experienced.

The three most frequently mentioned motivational factors were linked to personal challenge, preserving a tradition and taking part in a famous event. The range of motivational factors involved in climbing Croagh Patrick included the sporting, the challenge, the spiritual, the communal, the penitential, the aesthetic and the historic experience. The traditional motivational factors for pilgrimage such as seeking forgiveness, giving thanks and gaining spiritual insight are still mentioned by the sample group. However, compared to the past, there is a move away from the redeeming and therapeutic pilgrimage and a move towards the mystical pilgrimage as described by Osterrieth (1997).

It is of interest to note the increasing similarity between outdoor education and pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick. As the pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick becomes more of a mystical type pilgrimage, it becomes closer to the premise and practise of an outdoor education programme. This dissertation highlights the need that some people have to physically test and challenge themselves and hints at the rewards they gain from overcoming that challenge. Many people cannot avail of challenging opportunities such as a Croagh Patrick pilgrimage. However, the outdoor education profession has the potential to provide those challenging opportunities and may gain some encouragement from this dissertation as to the necessity and value of providing such opportunities. The dissertation also highlights the importance that people attach to traditions associated with a specific landscape and to a sense of place. This may also serve to encourage the outdoor education profession to place a greater emphasis on exploring the cultural landscape within programmes.

The decision to climb is more autonomous than in the past. It appears that for most climbers the ascent is for personal fulfilment rather than for religious obligation or salvation. Within the framework of self-determination theory, pilgrimage can be described as having been more externally regulated in the past but there is now a greater amount of internalisation. There is a move away from traditional religious dogma. The numbers completing rounds and doing penance for religious reasons is small as are the numbers who report spiritual experiences. There was no mention in the interviews of the role of the Catholic Church in the pilgrimage and only passing reference to the importance of attending the mass at the summit. As stated by Coleman and Elsner (1995, p.198), “pilgrimage in the context of secularisation or pluralism is a vastly different phenomenon from religious travel in an age when atheism was virtually inconceivable”.

The pilgrimage has adapted and evolved and reflects changes in Irish society such as increasing secularism and individualisation. It still provides meaning and relevance but in a different way to in the past. This dissertation also shows the difficulty in defining pilgrimage. Pilgrimage on Croagh Patrick is no longer inextricably linked with a spiritual dimension and people can construct their own interpretation for what a pilgrimage includes. Indeed, it is possibly this flexibility that has helped to ensure the continuing popularity of the pilgrimage.

Croagh Patrick is generally perceived as a place of historical significance and there is a strong wish to preserve its history and tradition. People complete the climb to continue the tradition of their parents and to pass it on to their children. In order to

preserve this link with past pilgrims there is a strongly expressed wish that the mountain be kept “authentic” and not made safer or easier to climb. The path is part of the tradition and any attempt to reduce footpath erosion or to improve levels of safety would be generally perceived as negative interference with a valued tradition. Most people who climb Croagh Patrick are not regular hillwalkers and appear to have perspectives on issues such as erosion that differ from that of the hillwalking establishment in Ireland.

The most commonly described experiences are of positive experiences relating to encouragement from others and a sense of ‘communitas’ (Turner & Turner, 1978). It is a climb that is shared and people derive a high level of enjoyment and encouragement from the sense of community on the mountain. The main pilgrimage day is a day of celebration and local pride and is regarded as an important national cultural event. To a lesser extent, the mountain can also be a location for spiritual or meaningful experiences.

Annual traditions such as Christmas, Easter and St Patrick’s Day are popularly criticised as becoming too commercialised, artificial and having lost connection with the original event. However, no similar comments were made about Croagh Patrick. The difficulty of the climb may have protected Croagh Patrick from becoming a diluted and commercialised version of an older tradition. The climb may be easier than in the past but only by a small amount. Less people complete the rounds or do the climb barefoot but they still have to complete the walk. There is no mechanical assistance. It still provides people with an authentic and challenging experience.

For most people, the climb is a good day out, a bit of fun and “a damn fine workout”. The mountain provides a connection and continuity with the past. It provides a challenge, a test and a sense of achievement and people actively seek that test and challenge. It’s about a “little penance being good for you”, an annual ritual, hustle and good humour, community and encouragement, faith and celebration and sharing a cup of tea at the end. It is still a great pilgrimage route. Turner and Turner (1977) use the term ‘liminality’ to refer to any condition that is outside of, or on the margins of, ordinary life, a condition which is potentially sacred. Croagh Patrick is a journey to a place that is special and peripheral at a time that is outside of ordinary profane time. As such, it can be described as a particularly liminal occasion. It liberates the individual from mundane structure and reduces all to the same status. The interviews richly describe the challenge of the climb and the accompanying sense of physical renewal, community involvement and spiritual enrichment.



Croagh Patrick continues to capture the hearts and minds of the people of Mayo and Ireland. It is a mountain of the people. It has a powerful totemic presence and a physical quality that gives it the power to awaken a sense of the sacred. In the future, the role that the church plays in the pilgrimage may diminish even more. If current trends continue, the mountain will become less an institution and more a personal vision. In any case, the pilgrimage has shown it can adapt to a changing society and its future popularity seems certain.

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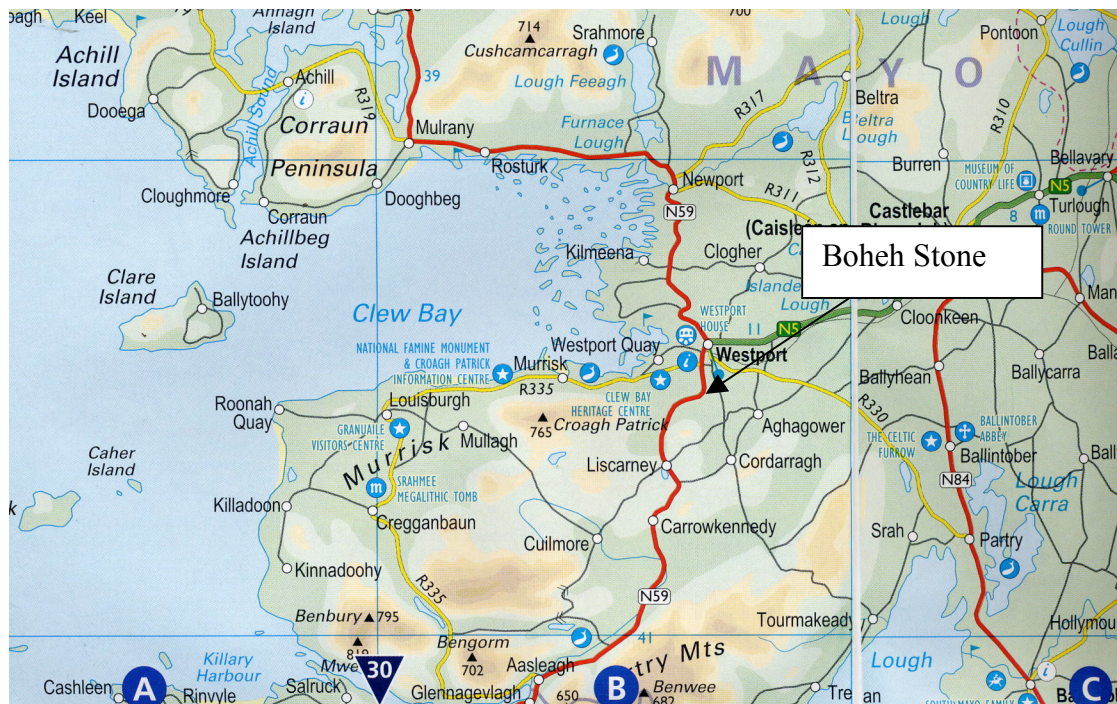
## **APPENDIX A**

# Ireland county map



## **APPENDIX B**





### Map of Local Area Surrounding Croagh Patrick

## **APPENDIX C**



Plate 1. North Side of Croagh Patrick



Plate 2. Near the Summit, Reek Sunday 2003





Plate 3 Approaching half way point, Reek Sunday, 2003



Plate 4 Final Section to Summit, Reek Sunday 2003





## Appendix D

## **Interview Questions**

1. What county/country are you from?
2. Did you climb to the summit?
3. Have you climbed it before/how often?
4. Do you hillwalk regularly?
5. Have you climbed any other mountains in the last year/how many?
6. Have you undertaken any other pilgrimages such as to Lough Derg/Lourdes?
7. Did you take part in any/all of the rounds?
8. Did you go barefoot?
9. How difficult did you find the climb?
10. Was it worth the effort to reach the top/ what made it worthwhile or not?
11. Why did you decide to do the climb?
12. What was the most memorable aspect of the climb?
13. Would you describe your climb as a pilgrimage/why?
14. Would you repeat the experience/why?
15. A lot of people describe the mountain as sacred. Would you agree?
16. Was the climb in anyway a spiritual or meaningful experience in any way? In what way?
17. What make Croagh Patrick such a special mountain?
18. The popularity of the mountain can be seen by the crowds/carpark/path. Does anything need to be done to improve/preserve the mountain? Do you think the mountain has been damaged by its popularity? What would you suggest

## Appendix E

## Summary of Results

### 1. Country/county of origin

46% of those interviewed were from County Mayo and a further 31% were from ten other counties. The remaining 21% were from overseas.

Table 1 Place of Residence

Resident in Ireland	33	Non Irish Residents	8
County		Country	
Mayo	19	United States	4
Galway	3	England	3
Roscommon	2	Germany	1
Sligo	2		
Armagh	2		
Down	2		
Dublin	2		
Offaly	1		
Antrim	1		
Donegal	1		

Map Appendix A for Counties of Ireland

### 2. Number of times to have climbed the peak

For eighteen people, (43%), it was their first time to climb the peak. Twenty-four people, (57%) had climbed it at least once before and of these, nineteen had climbed it on more than five occasions.

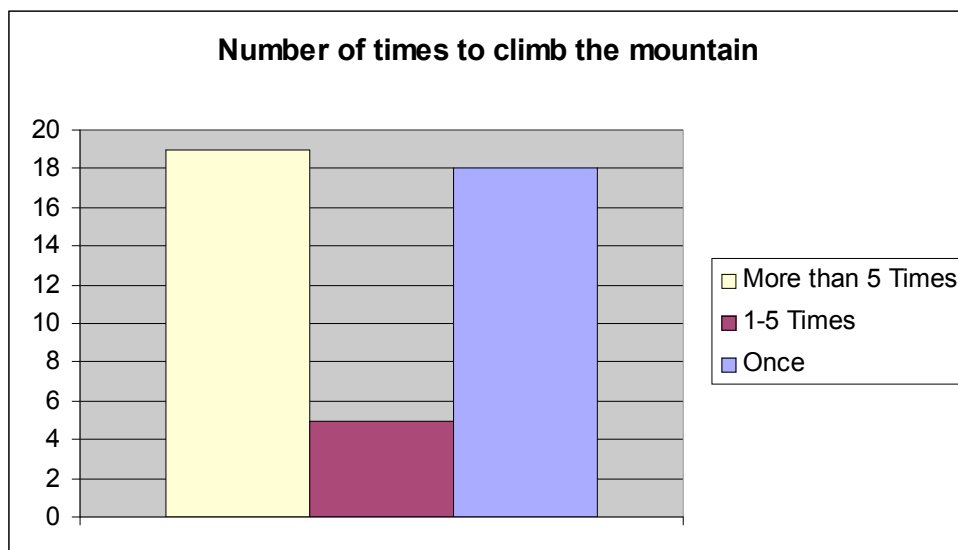


Figure 2 Number of times participants have climbed the peak

### 3. Experience of hillwalking

Thirty-one (74%) were inexperienced hillwalkers.

Eleven (26%) were experienced walkers (regular is at least 6 times a year).

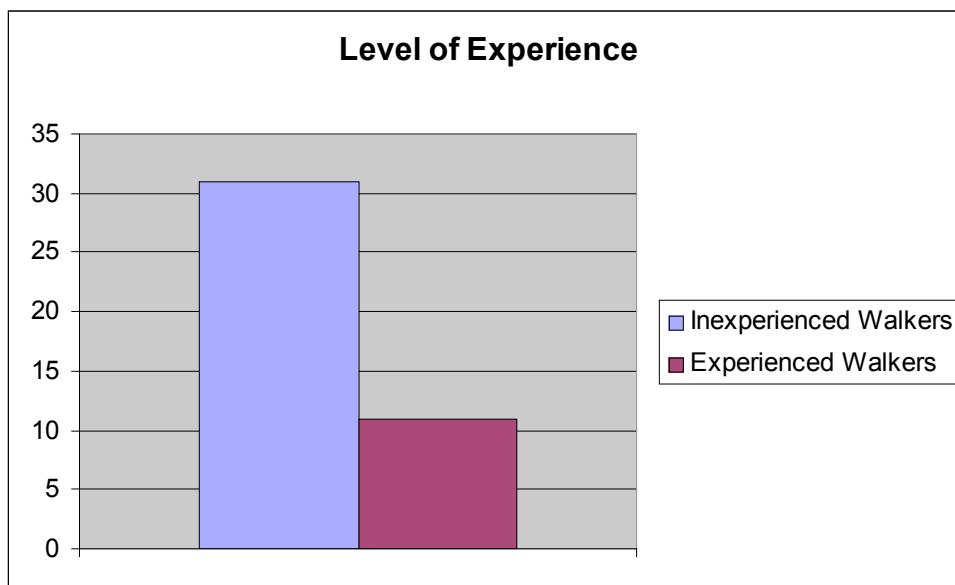


Figure 3 Level of hillwalking experience

### 4. Experience of other pilgrimages such as to Lough Derg/Lourdes

Nine people (21%) had taken part in other pilgrimages.

### 5. Number that took part in any/all of the rounds

Five people (12%) completed at least some of the rounds.

### 6. Numbers who climbed barefoot

Three people (7%) were barefoot.

### 7. Level of perceived difficulty of the climb

All except one (98%) stated that the climb was physically challenging to some degree. Four people climbed as fast as possible and timed their ascent as a method of increasing the level of challenge.

### 8. Worth the effort to reach the top

All stated it was worthwhile, although to varying degrees.

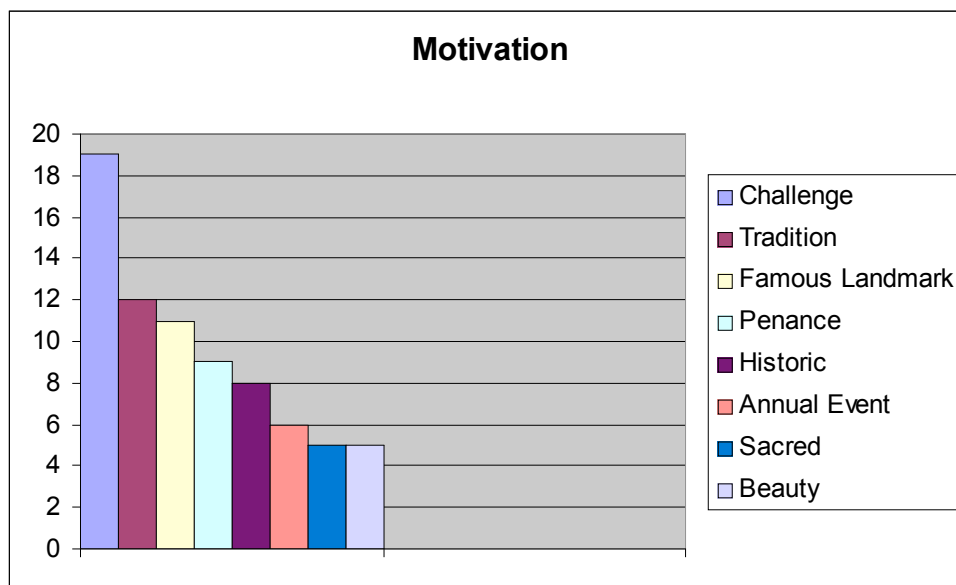
### 9. Reasons/motivation for completing the climb

This elicited a wide range of answers. Eight categories emerged. Some people gave more than one reason/motivational factor for the climb.

**Table 2 Motivation for completing the climb**

Reasons/motivation	Number of respondents
Physical challenge	19
Continue or pass on the tradition	12
Visit a famous landmark/ event	11
Penance	9
Historical interest	8
Annual event	6
Sacredness	5
Beauty	5

Respondents could mention as many motivators as they wished



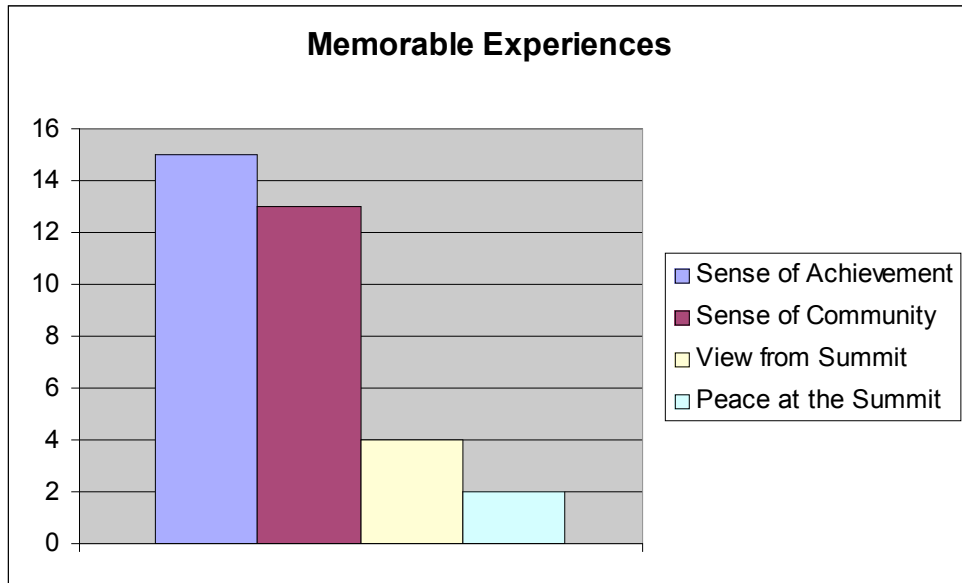
**Figure 4 Motivation for completing the climb**

### 10. The most memorable aspect of the climb

28 people reported a memorable experience. The four main categories are as follows.

**Table 3 Memorable aspects of the climb**

Memory	Number of respondents
Reaching the summit and sense of achievement	15
Sense of community and other climbers encouragement	13
View from the summit	4
Feeling of peace and calm at the summit	2



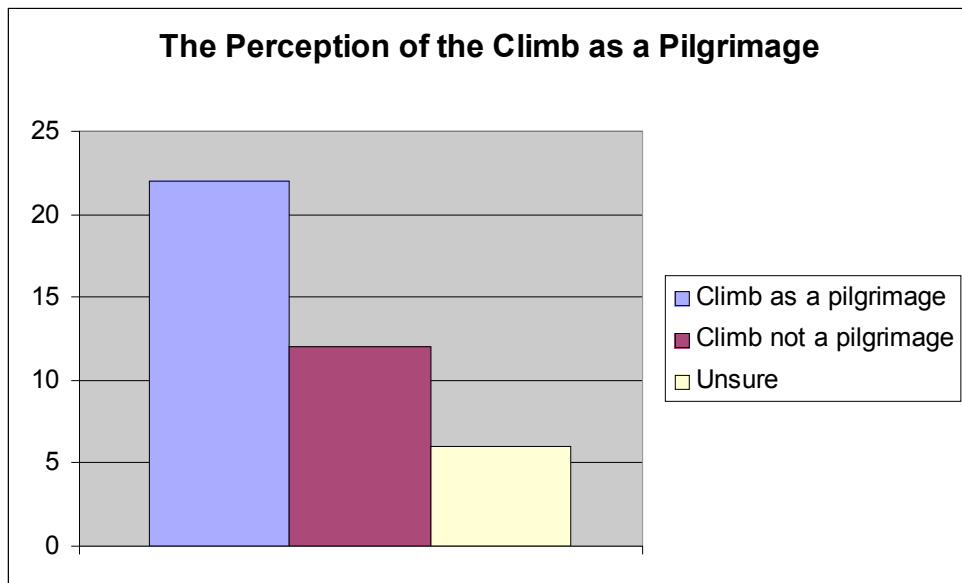
**Figure 5 The most memorable aspect of the climb**

### **11. The climb as a pilgrimage**

22 respondents (52%) saw it as a pilgrimage but to varying degrees.

12 (28%) though the climb was not a pilgrimage.

6 (14%) were unsure.



**Figure 6 The perception of the climb as a pilgrimage**

### 12. Factors that make Croagh Patrick a special mountain

The long history of pilgrimage was significant for twenty-six people (62%), local or family tradition for eleven people (26%) and profile or shape for six people (14%).

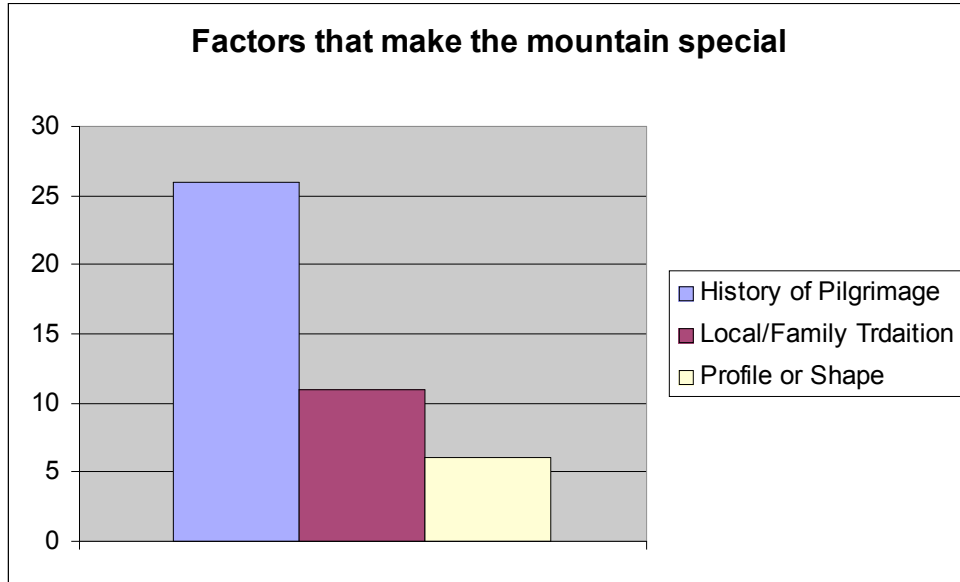


Figure 7 Factors that make Croagh Patrick a special mountain

### 13. Spiritual or Meaningful Experiences

Eight people (19%) had a spiritual experience, five (12%) had a meaningful/insightful experience and twenty nine (69%) had no such experience.

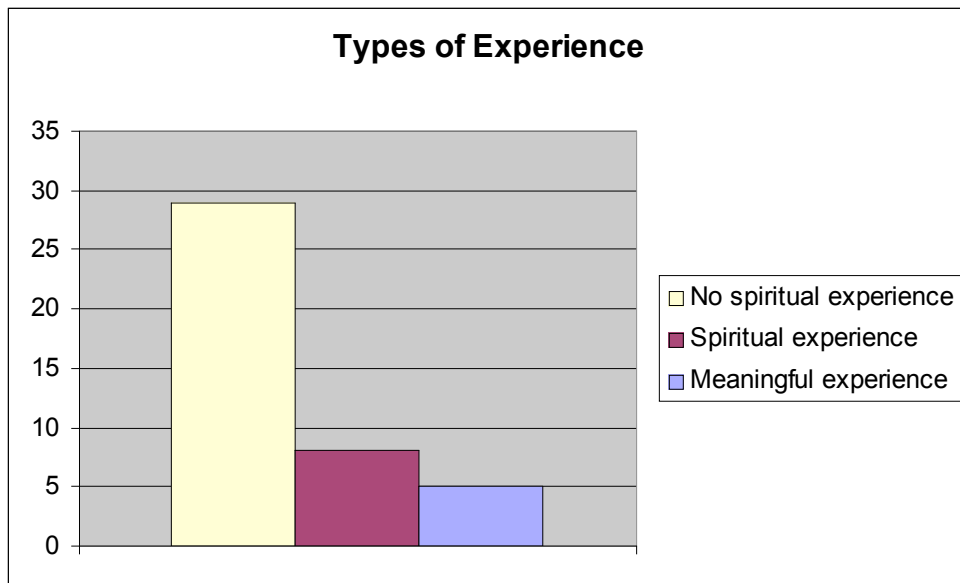


Figure 8 Spiritual or Meaningful Experiences



#### **14. Perceptions of development and use of the mountain**

Ten people (24%) stated that the mountain had been damaged in terms of erosion. Four people (10%) mentioned litter as a problem. Four (10%) mentioned stalls and selling food as a problem.

Twelve people stated that there was no damage being done by visitors to the mountain. An additional twenty (48%) respondents stated that they were happy with the facilities and condition of the mountain.

#### **15. Action to improve/preserve the mountain**

There was strong support for no development work to be carried out on the mountain. Nineteen respondents, (45%), stated that renovations or footpath repairs would reduce the challenge of the climb or that the traditional climb would be lost. For this group, improving the pathway would diminish the benefit and rewards involved in completing of the climb.

Ten people, (24%), were satisfied with the condition of the mountain but would tolerate minor development works to reduce erosion.

Only four people, (10%), strongly argued that footpath repair and work to achieve a smoother walking surface was necessary to reduce the risk of injury and to reduce damage to the mountain

Other suggestions for improvements that should be made included installing more signage, extra seats, an improved path surface and guiding ropes.

