

A fatbike adventure on the wild atlantic way.

Straight lines on maps can hide unexpected adventures.

Baking in the sun outside the 'Rusty Mackerel' a picture perfect pub in a forgotten corner of south west Donegal on Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, I watch as the owner of the pub spins past on Garry's fatbike. "I am cruising" he shouts , cigarette in mouth. Sometimes days and experiences come along that you know will last forever. The ones you will try to recreate without success. The owner flies by in the opposite direction 'Still cruising' he shouts gleefully, cigarette still in mouth. The pint in front of me is going down easier than the first one. I may never leave. Garry, bike shop owner and fatbike lover, is talking to Mary, a local lady and her German partner. I am having my second pint because of this lovely lady. She is just back from bringing Garry up to collect the van, saving us an half hour uphill climb and more importantly creating time for me to have a second pint. She insisted on giving us a spin up even though we had only been speaking for few minutes. I am chatting to an Indian granny and her 6 year old American grandson about why bikes have gears. She had never seen a gear on a bike before. She says it's very flat where she is from. 'Feckin hell' I think 'I know we Irish are famous for our friendliness but this is ridiculous'. An Indian granny, a 6 year old American boy , a Berliner and a Manchuian (owner) all having the craic on a sunny evening after one of the best days on a bike I ever had.. South west Donegal has put us under a spell I think.



The basic plan had started with Garry saying that the Slieve League Cliffs in Donegal

should be checked out. A bit of a google and a rough plan was hatched. Head for Glencolmcille and follow a looped waymarked way in the morning and then go have a look at the cliffs. This was to be a fattie adventure as Dungeal would not be known for its mountain biking or singletrack. Bog, rain and being difficult to get to is what would spring to mind. Expectations were not low but not high. It was just nice to be off on an adventure which is what fatbikes seem to lend themselves to. Would we have headed up to this corner of Ireland if we didn't have fat bikes, probably not. Heading to Glencolmcille, we said we would get breakfast, a coffee and hatch a plan of attack. Glencolmcille was not what we had expected. There would be no latte or mocha. This was rural Ireland. A small street, a pub and a scattering of whitewashed cottages dominated by mountain and sea. A small empty beach with cliffs and hills all round, we headed off following a way marked route. Soon we were up on open hill, heading across the bog, the fatbikes allowing us to go wherever we wanted on the dry bog. Then up and over the crest and the vista opened. Sea and cliffs and sky.



In front of us a snaggle tooth of a ridge piecing out into the sea. Was this for real? Tearing down across the open hillside, excitement building, as the ridge grew in size and spectacle. Reaching the cliff edge, the sense of scale and ruggedness of the landscape was incredible. A pause, a breath, I knew it was coming. 'I'll ride it' breathed Garry.' I guess so' I replied. A ridge of granite jutting out like a knife with vertical drops left and right to the crashing atlantic below. The next hour spent climbing and dreaming and biking. Was this really in Ireland? This was the stuff of magazine covers and youtube videos. Yet here we were creating our own adventures and images that will last us a lifetime. I was happy to be on camera as Garry rode the thin line of rugged west of Ireland rock. Straight lines on maps can hide the most unexpected adventures. The ridge ridden it was time to head back to Glencolmcille. Hugging the

cliff line, the dramatic coastline dropped us back to the van. I think we had just ridden the classic fat bike trail in the country that no one knows exists. Back to decision time for the afternoon. The rain was starting to spill a little, so a bit of a drive to check out route choice and we would see from there. We park beside an old fella and two ladies trying to spark up a single ring on a gas barrel. Tea to be brewed and bourbon biscuits to be eaten. A traditional Irish BBQ. I am sure there was the making of a good hang sandwich packed away in the Jacob's biscuit box at their feet.



We decided to drive around to the car park of the Slieve League Cliffs and follow the pilgrim trail up the side of the hill to the summit of the highest sea cliffs in Europe. My legs and knees did not appreciate this 4 km slog up but we gained height quickly. Soon we were topping out. The plan was to head right over 'one man's pass' to the summit and make a quick descent back the way we came. This is what google told us to do. Then standing on the top beside a small cairn the sea mist blew quickly through revealing a panorama that was hard to believe. Slieve league are some of the largest sea cliffs in Europe and it looked like you could ride a ridge line to the left down it's entire length . Garry was a couple of seconds behind me. 'Holy shit' Garry shouted 'this is nuts'. So with a brief pause and deep breath off we went. It was exhilarating. The scope and scale of the landscape and cliffs created a sense of awe.



And the trail just kept going. You could ride this. The fat bike struck to the rock giving confidence and assurance when needed. I could see Garry start to loosen up on the bike. Allowing the bike to ride, flow and push the trail. My legs were tired. I was feeling a bit jaded as I looked to the right and all I could see was the edge of the world. I'd better be careful. Don't push it. Just ride it. Enjoy the vista. Focus on the trail. Just let go. A bit of climbing, dragging over one section and then the next 20 minutes is as glorious a time on a bike that can be had. Finishing off on swooping, fast descent to the tourist view point. There is about 10 people knocking around. We had seen no one on the trails all day despite this being the most incredible place. Having biked all over the world searching for that magazine cover shot I'd found it 3 hours from home in a small country I thought had nothing left to be discovered. A blast down the road and then a long slog back up to the van. I am tired. But wait ...we will stop here at this pub for a quick celebratory beer. The Rusty Mackerel.



Follow the link below to see the video of the trip.

<https://vimeo.com/133777278>