



# Magic Kingdom

The Reeks District is the jewel in Kerry's crown. **Eamon Donoghue** enjoyed the culture, craic and incredible scenery.

**K**ee your hips loose and your head straight on. Sound advice for kayaking along the Caragh Lake or taking on Ireland's biggest mountain, and a mantra in itself for a trip to the Reeks District in Co Kerry.

An adventure playground mixing the culture, craic and the incredible scenery that Kerry is renowned for, the Reeks District has an array of activities that sets it apart from its surrounding towns and attractions.

Nothing quite cures an aching body like a creamy pint, a jig and a sing song. And nothing quite clears a sore head like the fresh ocean breeze or the sense of awe and achievement as you look down from Ireland's highest point on to the Dingle Peninsula, Kenmare Bay and even as far as the mountains of north Cork.

The Reeks District – stretching from Ireland's highest peak Carrauntoohil to the Blue Flag beaches of Castlemaine Harbour – is a 3½-hour drive from Dublin and a matter of minutes away from Kerry airport. Flying in from Dublin was handiest for me, with the views on the way into Farranfore airport making amends for what is a rocky take-off and landing.

A half hour's drive from the airport, hugging the Caragh Lake and just outside the town of Killorglin, is the Ard na Sidhe Coun-

try House Hotel. Built in 1913, the hotel now has 18 bedrooms. There are no televisions in the rooms – or anywhere in the hotel – and aside from the newspaper that accompanies breakfast, you'll be able to switch off entirely from the outside world and just enjoy the crackling of the open fire, and the surrounding gardens and views.

A charming spot, it boasts hidden garden trails, and is well-placed for fresh morning swims. The nearby Red Fox Inn (which is only a 15-minute cycle away) is a great spot for a pint and a few good Kerry yarns, but not too many – you've to pedal your way back.

The area's main attraction, however, is the Reeks, and on my first morning in Kerry I took on the Coumloughra Horseshoe. This is a 12km hike/scramble of Ireland's three highest mountains – Beenkeragh (1,010m), Carrauntoohil (1,039m) and Caher (1,001m). We climbed in that order, with a scramble along Hag's Tooth Ridge separating the first two peaks.

Kerry Climbing guide and owner Piaras Kelly led my group up and following his lead allowed the freedom of mind to fully absorb the breathtaking views below and above. You can see the weather coming in and changing ahead of you. And it changes a lot in Kerry.

Kelly set a steady pace to match the