

All in a Day's Work

John Ahern – Walking Guide

PROFILE

John Ahern operated South West Walks Ireland for the last 20 years, taking visitors on walking tours to some of the most beautiful and spectacular places in Ireland.



John Ahern

Image courtesy of South West Walks Ireland



Experiencing some of the remoter parts of Ireland.

Image courtesy of Robbie Murphy



Sherkin Island and Cape Clear, Co. Cork.

Image courtesy of Susan Murphy-Wickens



Gallarus Oratory, Dingle, Co. Kerry.

Where do you work?

I am retired now but for the past twenty years I operated a Walking Holiday Company called South West Walks Ireland. During the winter months I travelled in Europe and the USA promoting the business and was a Walking Guide during the summer time. The best of both worlds!

How did you become interested in the outdoors?

My Dad was from East Cork and my Mom was from Kerry. I was born in Tralee in 1948 but soon after moved to Limerick. There were seven in my family, five boys and two girls. My father was in the Army and as children we moved around Munster a lot, living in Tralee, Limerick, Ennis, Cork and Galway but to mention a few. This made for an exciting youth and my love for the outdoors came from my Dad who liked nothing better than to take us as children into the fields and hills.

Have you always been interested in being a guide?

No, in my earlier years I had very little interest in the outdoors but as I got older my love of nature, history, culture, music and the people of rural Ireland grew. The best way to learn about all these things is to walk in the countryside, meet and talk with the people.

What training did you do to become a walking guide?

I did not know it at the time but my early years with my father in the countryside was like a university to me! At school I loved Irish and Irish history and both these experiences were the foundation for my knowledge and my success as a guide. I love Ireland and all its beauty so it's easy to get excited about it.

What was a typical day like?

Each day as a guide we had an early start, say 7.00 am for breakfast, to get the group ready for a full day's walking on the hills and byways of the West and Southwest Coast. A lovely evening dinner would follow and time to enjoy music in the local pub. Hard work! My goal each Walking day was to give our customer an enjoyable Irish experience, one never to be forgotten.

What is the best and worst things about the job?

Most of our walking tours were week long and it was lovely

and a joy to see the faces of the people/tourists as they walked each day in some of the most beautiful and spectacular places in Ireland. It was sad to say goodbye at the end for the week to the new friends I had made as they returned to their own countries. I loved my job and this helped in a BIG way in making the experience for the Walking visitor a real and enjoyable one.

Where did your work take you?

Over the past 20 years I have walked and visited nearly every corner of Ireland and its islands many times. Lucky me! Then in the winter I got to visit Europe and USA on tourist promotional trips with Tourism Ireland. But my first love was and is to be out in nature.

Did you work alone or as part of a team?

We had a great team in the company and this was very important as it allowed me the opportunity to be a guide and to travel. Teamwork is VERY important. All the backroom work done in the office made my days out guiding with the visitors a "piece of cake"!

What advice would you give someone interested in this type of work?

To enjoy your job you have to love what you do, be happy doing it and always try to deliver more than people expect. Always remember that saying goodbye to the visitor/customer is as important as the welcome. This advice was given to me years ago and it's something I will never forget.

What would you do if you didn't work as a guide?

During the past 48 years since I left school I have had many jobs and experiences. Some for short periods and others for longer, BUT I would do it all over again if the opportunity presented itself! Be happy, enjoy what you do and all those around you will be happy too!

<http://www.southwestwalksireland.com>