



**Clockwise from top left:** Sketch of Glenbeagh, looking down towards Lough Beagh. Photo at the same location. The River Moyola, near Ballymaguigan and just north of the enormous Lough Neagh. Sleepy Hollows Campsite in Meenalecky, County Donegal



**“ I might have had to push through four hours of torrential rain and headwinds, but I had seen puffins, wild deer and Irish hares ”**

more than that, it put me on the same track as others on their own adventures. Throughout the journey, I met motorcyclists exploring the Wild Atlantic Way, hikers who meandered between national parks, dozens of American tourist groups in matching beige hats, and a small number of cyclists navigating the TransAtlanticWay.

I had expected to see far more cyclists but the route I had planned was quiet and peaceful, only touching on parts of the TransAtlanticWay. Some days I didn't see a single other person until I arrived at camp.

At one point on the route, I stayed at a campsite where I met a lawyer from the Good Law Project who worked to secure abortion rights for women in Northern Ireland. We spoke at length over morning coffee, talking about the challenges and strategies associated with that kind of work. At another, I spent hours talking to a man from the Republic who explained the local stone

circles, Irish folklore and how it had survived in the Irish language through phrases passed down over dozens of generations.

The last days of my trip gave me time to reflect on everything I had seen and heard. Both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland had offered so much. The landscape frequently took me from gravel-track wilderness to populated hubs, bustling with life and lived history.

I might have had to push through four hours of torrential rain and horrible headwinds at one point, but I had seen puffins, wild deer and Irish hares. I had explored both countries and gained some understanding of their complex pasts. ●



Giant's Causeway

### Access issues

Unlike cyclists in England and Wales, those in Northern Ireland have no automatic right to ride on bridleways, and comparatively fewer rights of way in general. While some routes allow cyclists through agreements with landowners and councils, these are rare and not guaranteed. Cyclists must rely on designated cycle paths and permissive routes, which are voluntary and can change at any time. This didn't pose an issue for me on my bikepacking trip but might be on yours. For the latest info on where you can legally ride, check out the NI Direct website: [nidirect.gov.uk](http://nidirect.gov.uk).