

Research Travel Report, Ireland 2014

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The trip to Western Ireland in June 2014 was part of my dissertation research. The aim of my dissertation is to conceptualize the idea of heritage trails in reference to their evolution and biography. By compiling and assessing data relevant to the understanding of heritage trails and their narratives, the dissertation will help define the relationship between heritage practice and visitor engagement. In order to counteract the current lack of a cohesive understanding of the meaning and function of heritage trails caused by a very limited body of literature on the topic, I am planning to highlight the diversity and similarities between existing trails by means of two case studies (Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail in Ireland & Krabat Heritage Trail in Germany).

While both heritage trails are of varying characteristics in terms of their significance, age and structure, I am looking to connect both trails by identifying key elements that are common for both/all trails.

Going to Ireland I was able to walk the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail in order to explore and map the trail, consult relevant stakeholders and collect the data necessary to answer the underlying research questions of my dissertation. That also included the fact that I had to partly abandon the original trail and revert to an alternative route due to reasons of accessibility in some areas.

Interviews and active participation turned out to be important methods to collect information about heritage trails and data on visitors' attitudes towards these trails. As revealed repeatedly when comparing the information materials and touristic leaflets of the trails with on-site findings, personal site surveys were essential for making professionally well-founded statements. Even with those materials that were meticulously prepared and designed, authentic information about areas such as the conclusiveness of the orientation system or the availability and accessibility of interpretation materials could only be collected, or verified, by actively participating in the trail experience.