

ROUND OF A PAWS FOR CHARITY FUNDRAISER!

Described as a man with “a seriously big heart”, Dermot Cosgrove has been raising money for ‘Irish Dogs for the Disabled’ since 2016, and to date he has raised over €13,000 to assist the incredible work of this charity. He is now training for a 600km trek across Iceland in July, in preparation for his latest fundraising effort – Walk for the Dogs, writes Ruairí de Barra.

At the age of 19, Dermot Cosgrove had a taste for adventure. The call of the French Foreign Legion (la Légion Étrangère) brought him to France and over the next six years he served with great pride and distinction across the globe, including service in the First Gulf War.

He also has served twice in Somalia with UNTAF and UNOSOM, where he met his fellow countrymen deployed with the Irish Defence Forces. Although he has long hung up his ‘kepi blanc’, this native of Ennis, Co. Clare has

continued to work as a security consultant for over 20 years mainly in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

He also has combined his two lifelong loves of hiking and birdwatching into a guided tour business, where clients can avail of his expert ornithology knowledge and his vast walking wisdom by joining him on tours in Ireland and across Europe.

DOGS FOR THE DISABLED

“I first heard about ‘Irish Dogs for the Disabled’ from my sister, who fosters dogs during the socialisation phase of their training. But it was really after I decided to raise funds for them that I learnt the real extent of fantastic work they do,” Dermot explains.

These charitable events form a really important part of helping the Irish Dogs for the Disabled achieve their mission “They don’t receive any supplementary funding from the Irish government, so they rely on fundraising and donations. Each dog, which from the time it’s born to the time is assigned to a person, costs about €5,000 – it’s a massive investment.”

His long-distance hiking efforts are worth it, because he points out that nine out of ten recipients of a dog are children, and they receive their assistance dog completely free of charge.



“So, when you hear a six or seven-year-old say that they cannot wait to get a dog because then they can get rid of their wheelchair and walk, things hit a whole new level of importance.”

LONG-DISTANCE WALKING

Dermot gained the walking bug from long days under a military pack. “My experience of long-distance walking started while I was in the French Foreign Legion. The Legion loves to walk, and walk far, and I spent quite a bit of time in both the Pyrenees and the Alps.”

After leaving the Legion he became more of a day hiker and bird watcher. “Living in the west of Ireland, you have endless opportunities.” The slightly more sedate short hikes kept him ticking over for a while, and it was his love of birdwatching that turned his thoughts to ever greater distances again.

“My interest in long-distance walking was rekindled in 2016 during a conversation online about geese with Huw Thomas, who is part of the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study. He’s an avid long-distance walker, having walked the Arctic Circle Trail (ACT) and around Greenland eight or nine times. Huw agreed to mentor me for a solo walk of the ACT as



Dermot is training for his latest fundraising effort – a 600km trek across Iceland in July.

long as I was serious.”

He also decided that if he was going to be there for himself, that he might be able use the opportunity to help others. “While the trek was something of interest to me, and I want to try and photograph the wildlife there, I felt that I could combine that by raising funds for a good cause.” His first ‘Walk of the Dogs’ campaign in 2016/17 raised nearly €11,000, and recalls “the charity honoured by naming a pup after me (Kossie), so my hope is to go one better this year and raise the full €15,000 to cover the cost of one assistance dog”.

MILITARY PRECISION PLANNING

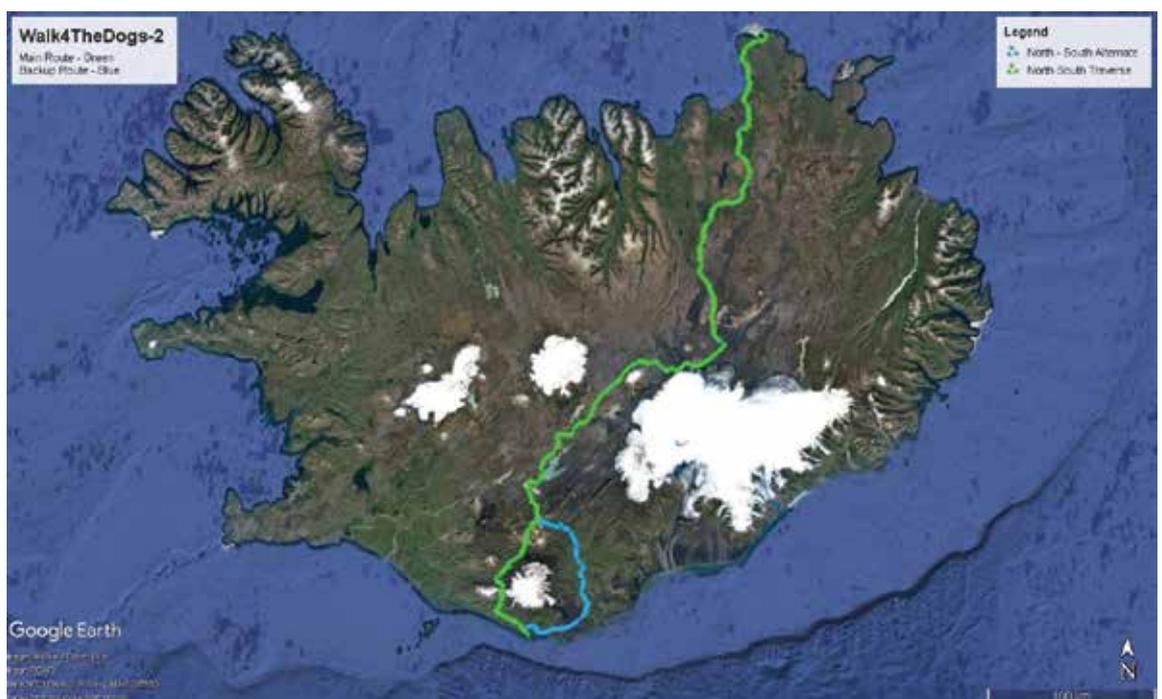
So, this intrepid adventurer has been training very hard as he intends to go further than ever before with his ‘Walk for the Dogs 2’. This is no light undertaking and the expedition must be planned with military precision to ensure its success.

With the planned departure date set for Friday 5 July, he aims to start the 600km walk from the northern most point on mainland Iceland at Rifstangi (3kms below the Arctic Circle) to the

southern most point at Dyrholaey near the town of Vik. The final section will include two of Iceland’s most famous hiking trails – Laugavegur and Fimmvorduhals.

Although Iceland is often called ‘the land of the midnight sun’ during the summer, due to the extremely long hours of daylight, with full darkness not present for some months, it is still a wild place, which can experience extreme weather at short notice, being so close to the Arctic Circle.

This can challenge the most prepared and experienced hikers, and since these trails can sometimes be shut due to bad weather (blizzards can happen even in July), Dermot says that a back-up route has been mapped out. “Plans are in place to



The 600km route mapped out across Iceland for the ‘Irish Dogs for the Disabled’ fundraiser.



Dermot pictured some weeks ago in Ennis, Co. Clare with (from right) Cllr Clare Colleran (then the Mayor of Ennis) and assistance dog 'Leon' in training, Aisling Glynn and her assistance dog 'Gina', and Jennifer Dowler, CEO of 'Dogs for the Disabled'.

meet the unexpected. The current plan is to complete the route in three weeks or slightly more, including rest days.”

A HELPING PAW

All the funds raised from completing this Herculean effort across the remote Icelandic landscape will go directly to 'Dogs for the Disabled' – a unique charity founded in 2007 in Cork, to improve the lives of children and adults living with

physical disabilities in Ireland.

The charity's CEO Jennifer Dowler outlines that they deliver approximately 25 fully-trained assistance dogs each year to their profoundly disabled partners, and do such incredible work while operating on a budget of circa €300,000 per year.

With five core staff members on board, the rest of their team is made up of dedicated and selfless volunteers. This

charitable body has developed a unique Assistance Dog Stability Programme for children. “Our long-term vision is to have a global reach by replicating our Assistance Dog Stability Programme around the world. The charity supports each of these wonder dogs for their entire life – from birth through to retirement, and while they ensure the highest standards possible in running an ethical breeding and training programme – breeding and training all their own dogs in-house,” according to Jennifer.

The charity also works with the Irish Prison Service, whereby inmates are actively involved in taking care and training the pups. “This has given great results in rehabilitation of prisoners. Their goal is powerful yet simple, to continue serving and helping the most vulnerable in society,” she adds.

REAL LIFE HEROES

Broadcaster Deirdre O'Shaughnessy, volunteer charity director says that people like Dermot who undertake these events to support the charity are “fantastic and seriously committed people”.

Overseeing all this important work is the Chairman of the Charities Board, Dr Tom Clonan, journalist, author and noted security analyst.

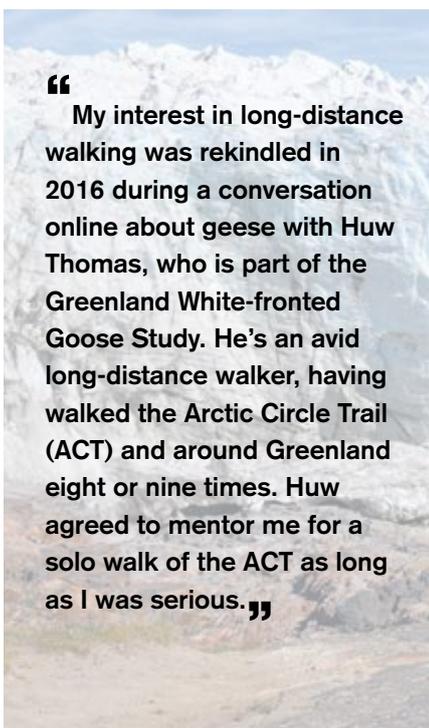
This former Defence Forces Captain and UN Peacekeeper has a deep personal connection with the charity's work; his son Eoghan suffers from a rare neuromuscular disease. “He is a bright, happy boy, an inquisitive teenager and a great big brother – who happens to use a wheelchair and be legally blind,” his dad notes.

Eoghan has an assistance dog called 'Duke' and Dr Clonan describes the impact of Duke on Eoghan's life as “simply transformative, for the entire family really”. It was a chance passing of one of charity's vans which led Dr Clonan to apply for an assistance dog for Eoghan.

He has been involved since then with the charity for many years, in trying to help those who have helped his family so much.

“Without people like Dermot, it would not be possible to help so many families. They are real life heroes,” he says.

Thank you to the Editor of 'An Cosantóir' for his permission to reproduce the article which first appeared in the May 2019 edition of the Irish Defence Forces magazine.



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