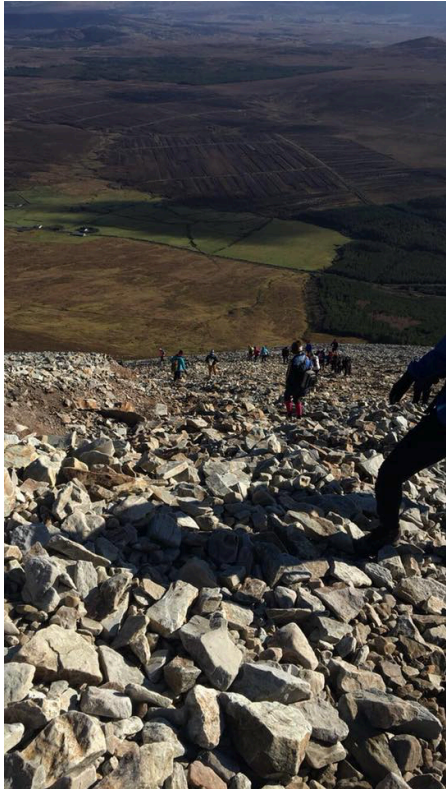


Croagh Patrick!

On Saturday, February 17th, I climbed Croagh Patrick! Meghan, Joe, Caitlin, Marielle, and I had signed up for this charity hike over a month ago and Saturday was finally the day! We had been excited for it ever since signing up, but had only actually started thinking about how difficult it might be a few days before it was time to climb. I had never climbed a mountain and did not know what to expect; yet, this had been a dream of mine for a while so I was up for the challenge. We arrived on campus at 9:30am and boarded a coach bus with about 40 other NUI-Galway students whom we had never before met. We sat in the back of the bus like the cool kids always do and giggled the whole way. We spotted Croagh Patrick about halfway through the hour and a half bus ride, which instilled excitement within us all. When we arrived at the base of the mount, we realized that this would be no small feat, but definitely worth the work. We headed up a neighboring mountain first, which wrapped around and connected to Croagh



Patrick. This was the longer, but less steep path. For the first hour and a half of the climb, it felt like a very inclined hike. I was loving it and feeling pretty good about myself. I met some Irish peers named Katherine and Danielle and chatted with them for the majority of this portion of the hike. Then, we got to the point where we could not chat anymore. The last bit of the climb (~40 minutes) was STEEP! It was about a 70 degree angle with loose rocks and snow. Every time I stepped up, I slid down a bit. It felt never ending. When I reached a curve, I turned to see more mountain. I was alone now because I was afraid that stopping would make the climb that much more difficult. I kept telling myself, "if I can run a marathon, I can do this," but to be honest, in that moment, they seemed equally challenging. Although it was super tough, there

was never a moment I did not enjoy. I prayed while climbing it because, I mean, it is “Ireland’s Holy Mountain” and also because I needed all the help I could get. There were little kids and dogs and adults and other students surrounding me, either on their way up or their way down. We were all in it together! There was a path but it was really only used to guide—not to assist. At last, I rounded a curve to see a church—THE church at the peak! I had done it! I met up with Meghan and Joe, who were sitting at the top. At first, there was fog. We were inside the clouds. Then, it cleared up. I could see Mayo. Clew Bay, Clare Island, little houses and green grass. The song “Green and Red of Mayo” kept going through my head. It was a stunning view. It was even more breath taking because I felt like I had earned this view; I had never seen anything like it.



We explored the peak of the mountain a bit. The church was closed, but the views from every angle were unique and incredible. I had to use the restroom, and the only option I had were toilets that were clinging to the side of the cliff. I scaled the mountain in my desperation to pee only to find the bathrooms locked up! I was disappointed that I had risked my life for nothing.

Soon, Marielle and Caitlin reached the top. We ate our PB & J sandwiches and appreciated the view. We also took a multitude of photos before it was time to head back down. This was a challenge, as well, but in a different way. It took a lot of focus to not go tumbling down the side of the rocky mountain! For the first, snow covered bit, I slid down on my feet like snowboarding. This did not work as well when I got to the rock covered bit. It worked even less when we got to the declined hiking portion. I think I appreciated the view more on the descend, which was probably because my sore legs could not move as quickly. The whole day had been flawless weather—sunny and decently warm (especially for February). We totally lucked out. The whole experience was surreal. I think it was my favorite experience ever. I would definitely want to do it again despite the physical strain. The bus ride home was also filled with laughter, although this time it was accompanied by exhaustion. When we arrived back at Niland, we showered then got burritos from Boojum, which is Ireland’s Chipotle. We ate them back at my apartment with Bre, Emily, and Connor and reflected on the day. 10/10 experience.

