

**Beara-Breifne Way**  
Slí Bhéara Breifne



---

GUIDES TO THE WAY-MARKED TRAILS  
**VOLUME 1**

# The Beara Way

**West Cork/South Kerry**

*Text and Images by **Dermot Somers***

Published by:

Beara Tourism and Development  
The Square  
Castletownbere  
Co. Cork

© Beara-Breifne Project, 2008.

Text and images by Dermot Somers (©2008)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the publishers.

A catalogue record is available for this book from the British Library.

First Edition: July 2008

ISBN: 978-0-9559094-0-5

THE BEARA WAY AND BEARA-BREIFNE WAY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES, THE AUTHOR AND THE PUBLISHERS, HAVE TAKEN EVERY CARE TO ENSURE THAT THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS BOOK IS ACCURATE AT THE TIME OF WRITING. THE WALKING ROUTES DESCRIBED HEREIN HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE PRIVATE LANDOWNERS AND FARMERS THROUGH WHOSE LAND THEY PASS AND ARE NOT RIGHTS OF WAY. OCCASIONALLY, SHORT SECTIONS OF THE ROUTE MAY BE DIVERTED TO COMPLY WITH THE NEEDS OF THE LANDOWNERS. WALKERS ARE REQUESTED TO FOLLOW THESE DIVERSIONS WHEN IN PLACE. THE AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER SHALL HAVE NO LIABILITY IN RESPECT TO ANY LOSS OR DAMAGE, HOWEVER CAUSED, ARISING FROM THE USE OF THESE TRAILS OR THIS GUIDE.

*Cover Photograph: Glengarriff Harbour and Garnish Island.*

# Contents

The Beara-Breifne Way	4
The Beara Way	6
Useful Information	8
Introduction	10
<b>The Beara Way - South of The Peninsula</b>	<b>14</b>
Dursey Island	15
Dursey Sound to Allihies	17
Allihies to Castletownbere	20
Bere Island	24
Castletownbere to Adrigole	27
Adrigole to Glengarriff	31
Glengarriff to Carriganass, Kealkil	35
<b>The Beara Way - North of The Peninsula</b>	<b>38</b>
Allihies to Eyerics	39
Ardgroom to Lauragh	43
Lauragh to Bonane	45
Bonane to Glengarriff	49
<b>Maps</b>	<b>50</b>
Map Legend	51

# The Beara-Breifne Way

**The Way runs 400 km north from Beara in Co. Cork to Breifne in Co. Leitrim, following generally the line of the 17th century march of O'Sullivan Beare, the last great chieftain of west Cork.**

In the words of Dan Sullivan, Community representative, Kealkil, the idea was to transform *"the theme of tribulation into a celebration of human spirit and endurance."*

In 1602 Munster was ravaged by war. The forces of Elizabeth I had defeated the Irish and Spanish at the Battle of Kinsale and advanced to capture the territory of Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare, Chieftain of Beara. Following a series of battles and the loss of his stronghold, Dunboy Castle, O'Sullivan and his troops withdrew to Coomerkane Valley near Glengarriff. On New Year's Eve 1602, faced with almost certain starvation, they were finally forced to flee. A thousand men and women, including four hundred soldiers, embarked on an epic mid-winter march, hoping to join forces with rebel leaders in Ulster.

Travelling through Ireland at a time of war and severe food shortages they were seen by local chiefs as a threat and were attacked. Women carried infants and many of the camp followers could not keep up. By the time they reached the River Shannon their numbers were severely reduced.



*The Beara-Breifne Way*

Hemmed in by enemies, they crossed the river at night in a boat made of the hides of slaughtered horses, the meat eaten by the starving in the camp. Two days later, at Aughrim, their path was blocked by cavalry and infantry. O'Sullivan Beare's camp had no choice but to fight. Against all odds, his exhausted band defeated greatly superior forces, then continued to march without a rest.

As the mercenaries among O'Sullivan's followers began to drain away, returning to their Connaught homes, the remaining refugees were continuously threatened. On the fourteenth day, O'Sullivan Beare reached Leitrim castle, stronghold of the rebel O'Rourke of Breifne. Of the original one thousand followers only thirty five remained<sup>1</sup>.

The dramatic history contrasts with the beauty and diversity of the landscapes along the Beara-Breifne Way. The walk begins with a rugged coastline, then threads a barrier of hills. There are bogs and woodlands, riverbanks, rolling farmland and wayside villages. The route links counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Offaly, Galway, Roscommon, Sligo and Leitrim, and it also connects a series of rural communities along the entire way.

The finer detail of the route is supported by strong folk memory and there are unbroken clan connections with the story. The 400th anniversary re-enactment of the march galvanised the route's communities to develop the walk. The venture could only have come from the ground up; almost all the land used is in private hands and access has been granted, neighbour to neighbour, for the greater good of the wider community. The route may be nationwide but the sense of ownership and heritage is emphatically local. For the seasoned walker it is this local interaction which sets the Beara-Breifne Way apart.

## ***The Beara-Breifne Way Development Committee***

<sup>1</sup> Peter Ballagh

# The Beara Way

**The Beara-Breifne Way, links a series of way-marked routes. The local way on the Beara Peninsula is called The Beara Way. It is approximately 220 km in length and completes a circuit of impressive coastal and mountain scenery, before turning inland to Kealkil.**



*Massmount Church*

The Beara Way was developed by the Beara Tourism and Development Association and links many of the peninsula's main attractions. These include the bird life of Dursey Island, the copper-mines of Allihies, the military heritage of Bere Island and the famous woods and harbour of Glengarriff. Along the way there are O'Sullivan ruins near Castletownbere and Kealkil, a Heritage Park at Bonane, lakes at Tuosist, and lush gardens at Derreen in Lauragh. Megalithic remains are scattered along the coast and throughout the uplands. Ardgroom has its fine stone circle, while the Hag of Beara – ancient goddess – maintains an eerie presence on the coast near Eyeries.

The extended Beara-Breifne Way takes the Beara Way from Dursey, along the south coast to Glengarriff, then inland to Kealkil.



*Bog asphodel, Lough Fadda*

Both Ways follow off-road tracks and quiet back roads. However, since traffic has increased in recent years, walkers and cyclists are asked to take care, particularly on busy roads near towns and villages.

The Beara-Breifne and the Beara Ways cross public and private lands and dogs are not permitted on either Way. Access to private lands is by permission of local landowners, arranged by the local community, and especial thanks are extended to both landowners and community groups for their assistance in making this venture possible.

*The Beara Way Development Committee*

# Useful Information

## Emergency Service

Telephone **999** or **112**

Ambulance, Fire Brigade, Gardaí (Police), Lifeboat,  
Mountain/Coastal Rescue

## Getting to and from the Beara Peninsula

### Buses:

(Cork – Beara)

Bus Eireann (021) 450 8188

Harringtons (027) 74003 / (087) 267 8388

O'Donoghues (027) 70007

### Taxis:

For taxis to and from Cork Airport and Train Station please contact Beara Tourism or check the Beara-Breifne website (*see below*).

## Accommodation and Transport on Beara

Accommodation in the Beara Peninsula is mainly Bed & Breakfast. Many can book onward accommodation and arrange to have your luggage sent ahead allowing you to enjoy a day's walking unhindered. Or, you may prefer to remain in the same accommodation and arrange collection by taxi. A limited local bus service is also in operation.

Hotel accommodation is available in Castletownbere, Glengarriff and Kenmare while hostels and camp sites can be found in Castletownbere, Glengarriff, Adrigole, Tuosist and Allihies.

The range of providers is always growing and may vary seasonally. For the most up to date information please check the Beara-Breifne website or contact Beara Tourism (*see below*). Bus timetables and taxi numbers can also be found on the website or by contacting Beara Tourism.

## Tourism

Beara-Breifne Website [www.beara-breifne.ie](http://www.beara-breifne.ie)

Castletownbere Tourism Office run by  
Beara Tourism and Development [www.bearatourism.com](http://www.bearatourism.com)  
(027) 70054

*This community-run tourist office offers a year-round service, with limited opening hours daily.*

Fáilte Ireland, Tourist Information 1850 230 330  
Or (021) 425 5100

Bantry Tourist Information (seasonal) (027) 50229

Kenmare Tourist Information (seasonal) (064) 41233

# Introduction

**Beara in southwest Cork and south Kerry is unique in terms of landscape, archaeology and folklore. The Miskish and the Caha Mountains form the rugged spine of the peninsula, deeply indented by corries and hidden valleys.**



*Ardnakinna Lighthouse*

flourish here. They include the insectivorous Greater Butterwort, a large and beautiful bog-violet. The lack of intensive farming on the peninsula allows hedgerows, wild flowers and fruits to thrive with casual luxuriance. Colours range from the bruised red of protected betony to the piquant purple of the fraughan, or bilberry.

The coastline is ever present, often accessible. The Gulf Stream climate encourages subtropical trees and shrubs in lavish gardens from Lauragh to Glengarriff. Bursts of native woodland – oak, ash, holly, birch – punctuate bare rock and heather. Mediterranean plants not found elsewhere in Ireland, or in Britain,

Beara is densely studded with Bronze Age remains. Wedge tombs, stone circles and standing stones bear witness to the dignity of ancient inhabitants. Iron Age sites, early Christian ringforts, medieval tracks and bridges, holy wells, famine ruins, old churches, graveyards, vivid villages add further layers of history and culture. Rich deposits of copper drew prehistoric settlers to the peninsula; the same resource brought the industrial revolution to the rocky hills of Allihies in the 19th century.

Bantry Bay and Berehaven boast a maritime tradition that ranges from early medieval Vikings to Basque fishermen in the 16th century, a failed French invasion in 1796, American submarines during WW1, and the British Atlantic fleet that anchored here until 1938. Today, Ireland's largest whitefish fleet is based at Castletownbere.

A Beara legend demonstrates the age-old traffic between the peninsula and the outside world. Eoghan Mór, a 2nd century king of Munster was driven out of Ireland by Conn of the Hundred Battles. Eoghan spent nine years in exile and married Beara, daughter of a Spanish king. Returning to regain his territory, he landed on a peninsula, which he named in honour of his wife. Eoghan and Conn are mythical ancestors of two actual tribal powers: the *Eoghanacht* who ruled Munster, and the *Connachta* who gave their name to the province of Connaught. (When the O'Sullivan's were pushed southwest by the Anglo-Normans in the 12th century to become the new chieftains of Beara, they crowded in on a remnant of the *Eoghanacht*.)

Another famous journey-man was the chieftain, Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare (1560-1618) on whose winter-march the Beara-Breifne Way is based. After the Irish defeat at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601, Donal Cam defended his territory for a further

year against ruthless Elizabethan attack. He was forced out of the woods around Glengarriff in December 1602 with four hundred soldiers and six hundred dependants. They struggled north through hungry terrain in an attempt to join Gaelic allies in Ulster. O'Sullivan's midwinter march covered hundreds of miles and has achieved cult-status in popular history. After fifteen days, Donal Cam reached Leitrim Castle with thirty-five followers.



*Ardgroom Stone Circle and The Reeks*

Soon afterwards, O'Sullivan fled to Spain, continuing to seek the support of the Spanish king for the Irish cause. Whether or not Ireland would have fared better under Spanish rule is an open question. Unlike Eoghan Mór, his mythical predecessor, Donal Cam never returned to Beara and the O'Sullivan grip on that territory was lost.

Despite its heroic soldiers and sailors, it seems fitting that a landscape as elemental as that of Beara should be dominated by a personage who is herself an everlasting force of nature: *An Chailleach Bhéarra*, the Hag of Beara. Changeable as the weather, she is older than Time itself. Even the Indo-European cow-goddess *Boi*, who gave her name to *Oileán Banoi* or Dursey, cannot be separated from the *Cailleach*. Deity, witch, wise old woman, healer, medieval nun, shaper of the landscape, she continues to surface in literature, in academic research, in place names and in the subversive storehouse of folk-memory.



*Foxglove*

# THE BEARA WAY

## South Of The Peninsula

### DURSEY ISLAND

#### Oileán Baoi

**Dursey Island is the sanctuary of Beara. A tidal rip through Dursey Sound sets it apart. Renowned for its birdlife, including the popular chough, 'the Dursey' also favours whale and dolphin watchers.**

The cable car carries sheep and visitors – separately – 200m across the Sound. A track wanders uphill from the landing place through furze and heather. The mainland soon seems like an offshore island and 'the Dursey' becomes the real world.

The Beara Way contours the south facing slopes for shelter at first, joining a pleasant green road. Each field has its own name and tradition, stitching it into the island-culture. *Dinnseanchas*, or place lore, is the ancient art of translating landscape into story. It was a narrative geography encompassing the whole country – an essential strand of Irish culture. *Oileán Baoi* (Dursey in Irish) recalls a local divinity, Baoi, who was mother of the land and spirit of the wild. She was a version of the *Cailleach Bhéarra* (the Hag of Beara), a goddess and wise woman known throughout Ireland and Scotland.

Views from the Dursey include the humpbacked islands, Scariff and Deenish, and the mountains of Iveragh to the north. Skellig Michael, the monastic island, appears to the northwest.

The signal-tower, was a link in the coastal system built in the early 19th century in case of Napoleonic invasion. A ruin on the western tip of the island enclosed a temporary beacon, replacing the ill-fated light on Calf Rock, still visible as a stump. The Bull and the Cow are the tall islands just west of the Dursey. The Bull, a sea-arch, was a doorway to the Otherworld. Known for its lighthouse today, it was once *Tigh Dhoinn*, house of darkness, or death.



*Tilickafinna*

The Beara Way returns by the road. Tilickafinna is the most westerly townland. A shed by the first house on the track (walking east) is the original *Tigh Lice Finne*, 'house of the white rock', with a boulder in its seaward gable.

The monastic ruin near the cable car is probably Franciscan. Foundations of an O'Sullivan fortress can be seen on *Oileán Beag* (little island). It was sacked by an English force in 1602, aided by an O'Sullivan kinsman from a hostile faction. Occupants, including women and children, were reputedly hurled over a cliff edge. The owner of the fort, Diarmuid of Dursey, joined his nephew, Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare and one thousand fugitives, on the winter-march from West Cork to Leitrim, commemorated in the Beara-Breifne Way.



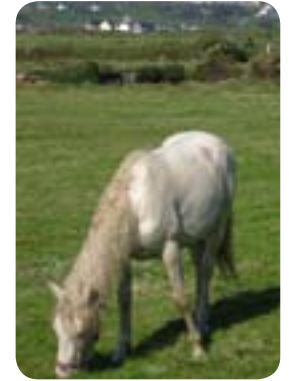
*Dursey cable car*

## DURSEY SOUND to ALLIHIES

Leave the car park via the stile and climb the rocky hill. Note the corduroy texture on the east facing slope of Dursey Island. 'Lazy beds' are old cultivation-ridges where potatoes and other crops were grown.

Follow the ridge above a cliff-rimmed cove, passing a fine stone wall and a concrete plinth. Hill views and sea vistas alternate. Cod's Head extends northeast. Crow Head, low and flattened, reaches south. Crow Island at its tip was home to the mythical blacksmith, Goibhniu, or *Goibhleann Gabha* in local lore. (*Gabha*, a smith.) He served the shipping trade. His cow was the legendary *Glas Goibhleann*, a prodigious source of milk. His treasure is buried on the island but any attempt to find it sparks a storm.

Heather-slopes tilt to the shore at Garinish Point. Sandy coves and tiny islands suggest swimming and snorkelling. Tranaduileasg, the middle cove, is the strand of the edible seaweed: *duileasc*, or 'dulse'.



*Near Allihies*

Here, an extra loop of the Beara Way offers a figure-eight walk, or a varied run. From the acute junction southeast of Garinish Quay, follow the R572 west for a few hundred metres to a layby on the left and take the little back road that zigzags roughly south. A track, full of damp and ferny character, contours the hillside above the sea, ascending the slope to a WW2 sentry box on the summit.

Below, to the east, lies the Firkeel Gap. At the bottom of the slope, a channel leads down to the road. Cobbled and slabbed in places, with a few steps cut from the rock, it tunnels between steep banks roofed with fuchsia.

Firkeel Gap is a complex road-junction. (The loop-walk, mentioned earlier, returns to Dursey Sound from here.) Otherwise, the route breaks away behind the rugged bulk of Lackacroghan. Rising gently, the track overlooks the islands and coves of Garinish, already familiar. Cliff-scenery ahead and a glimpse of Ballydonegan Strand. The painted gables of Allihies glow in the distance, like festive bunting. Behind the town, a wall of rugged hills runs east from Knocknagallaun (Hill of the Standing Stones) to Knockoura.

Foher, on the left below, is an ominous place name. *Fothair*: a grassy slope above a precipice. The cliffs at Keam Point overlook an island of rock, a popular spot once for lobster and salmon. Seine-boat fishing for mackerel, with two boats and a net, prospered around the coast of Beara. The crew might number a dozen or more. A net could be a hundred metres long and a quarter of that in depth. Mackerel were fished at night when

the glint of a shoal was easily spotted. A man who worked in the copper-mines at Allihies by day might crew a seine-boat at night. Big families were raised on potatoes and fish.

A headland east of Foher hosted an Iron Age fort two thousand years ago. Its earthen ridge still stands.



Purple 'Loosestrife'

Along the autumn ditches, clumps of creamy yarrow (*athair thalún*) with tight little florets and serrated leaves, contrast with the buttons of blue scabious and stalks of purple loosestrife.

Starved white stonecrop trails pinkish stems and green fleshy leaves along the ground.

The bright little village of Allihies (*ail*, a cliff) sports every colour in the pastel range, with deeper hues for emphasis. The gaiety enlivens its rugged setting, intensively mined for copper in the 19th century. Surface ore was worked here in prehistoric times. The Puxley family began the modern operation in 1812. (Their Italianate mansion at Dunboy, near Castletownbere, has lately been restored.) Sand washed out of the copper mines formed the beach at Ballydonegan Strand.



The engine house overlooking Allihies

An engine house stands on a terrace above the town. Besides raising ore to the surface, it ran a steam-powered 'Man Engine' that lifted miners 320m from the bottom of the shaft. When the mines closed in 1884, many of the miners emigrated to Michigan and Montana. 'Don't stop in America,' was the catchcry: 'go straight to Butte!' Butte became, for a time, the leading source of copper ore in the world and retains strong family-connections with Beara today. The Allihies Copper Mine Museum offers detailed information.

## ALLIHIES to CASTLETOWNBERE

The rocky ridge above Allihies gives way to the smooth outline of Knockgour with its crown of masts. (*Gabhar*, a goat). A winding lane goes east through little fields to cross the Ballydonegan river. A blocky castle on the left is not a castle at all, but an engine house built in 1845. A pump cleared water from a nearby shaft over 440m deep.

In autumn, the banks of the lane are heavy with blackberry bushes, furze and heather. Ferns sprout among the stones,



*Fuchsia*

honeysuckle sways in the breeze. Monbretia (*feileastram dearg*) a garden escapee, waves its orange-yellow blossoms on supple stems. Fuchsia Magellanica, with its deep red, pendulous flowers, colonised Ireland from S. America. Its partner, the hummingbird, stayed at home. (The large hummingbird hawk-moth does a good imitation

and is often seen here.) Grown from twigs poked into the ground, fuchsia is the great shelter-shrub of the southwest.

A wren chitters and chirrs in the undergrowth and a meadow pipit mimics a lark. A grey carrion crow broods on a fencepost, waiting for something to die. Local tradition insists that the legendary Children of Lir are buried just west of Allihies, having served nine hundred years as swans. When a Christian bell rang out they reverted to human form, were baptised, and died here of extreme old age. (Allihies challenges Inishglora, Co. Mayo, for this tradition.)

Watch out for the sharp right turn at Kealoge (*Caológ*, a narrow strip) leading to Knockgour. Clumps of rushes invade the fields; sitka spruce stalks the hillside. On the seaward (south) side of the ridge, a pair of slabby standing stones are rooted in prehistory. The entire walk from Dursey (possibly *Doirse/Doors*) can be framed between these uprights, as if they were a portal to the past.

This was the main route from Allihies to Castletown in living memory. Cattle were walked across the mountain to and from the fair. *Tobairín*, the little well, was associated with the Feast of the Assumption, August 15th, principal feast of the Virgin Mary. This is still a festival day in Allihies. Broad views to the south include the signal tower on Black Ball Head.

Before the track dips into forestry, Castletownbere appears below, flanked by Berehaven harbour opening on to the broad sweep of Bantry Bay. The rugged bulk of Hungry Hill dominates to the east. Slabs of forestry fill the foreground.

Descend through the trees. On this sheltered side of the ridge blackberries are abundant. Sweet blue fraughans (*fraochán*, a heather berry) cluster among pale green leaves. Quit the road for a gravelled track to the left, after some ruined houses. An old apple tree flanks a broken gable. Tortoiseshell butterflies, wings hemmed with blue, feed on the crumpled blossoms of purple loosestrife (*créachtach*). Insects forage in the yellow crowns of hawkweed, cat's ear and dandelion.

Cut quickly through conifers, expecting mud. Emerge to find Knockoura towering above, with the rocky ridge of Miskish Mountain just ahead, to the north east. (*Mioscais*, malice, or spite.) After confinement in conifers, this is wide open country full of swirling Atlantic air. Fleecy bog-cotton flags the direction of the wind.

The view ranges north over Eyeries and Coulagh Bay, past Inishfarnard Island and Kilcatherine Point, out across Kenmare Bay to the coast of Iveragh – Caherdaniel to Sneem. A sharp turn right (south east) follows the angle of the fence down rolling moorland. This broad valley leading to Castletownbere is studded with antiquities, some not easy to find. A *fulacht fia* was a Bronze Age pit for boiling water with heated stones; perhaps for cooking, washing, or rituals. Little evidence of bone has been found at such sites to prove that they were cooking pits. In medieval accounts, a fold of animal skin on pointed sticks was used as a vessel for cooking meat.



*Derreenataggart stone circle*

Local people still ‘win’ their fuel from turf banks in this valley. It’s not unusual to find a family boiling the kettle while ‘footing’ turf, close to a *fulacht fia* – a sophisticated echo of the past.

To the east, the contorted ridge of the Miskish Mountains crumples against the angular bulk of Hungry Hill. Derreenataggart stone circle is an elegant megalithic monument, associated with the Bronze Age. (*Doirín an tsagairt*, oak grove of the priest). Many of these ancient monuments are quietly decorated with bunches of heather and wild flowers. Coins and pieces of quartz (*grianchloch*, sunstone) are left as offerings.



## THE O’SULLIVANS

The O’Sullivan name is derived from *súil amháin*, ‘one eye’, more favourably interpreted as ‘hawk-eyed’.

Still one of the most common family-names in Ireland, it is largely centred on Cork and Kerry.

Displaced from good land in the south-midlands by 12th century Anglo-Normans, part of the O’Sullivan clan settled in Beara south of Kenmare Bay.

Their main income came from valuable fishing-dues, along with port and anchorage charges paid by foreign fleets.

The O’Sullivan chieftain was subject to an overlord, MacCarthy Mór, who imposed costs and obligations, including his own charge on the fisheries.

One year after the Battle of Kinsale, following a bout of guerrilla-warfare, the rule of the O’Sullivans came to an end in the winter of 1602-3 with a forced march north from Beara to Leitrim.

The O’Sullivan Beare motto –  
*Lámh foisteanach abú*: The steady hand forever!

## BERE ISLAND

**The car ferry from Castletownbere into the west end of Bere Island crosses a kilometre and a half of sheltered water. About nine kms by three, the entire island offers a good day-walk. (Another ferry runs to the mainland from Rerrin, near the island's east end, with a 4 km walk along the coast road to Castletownbere.)**

Islands have a different timeframe: a step out from the coast, a step away from the present. Not so much oldfashioned as unhurried. As usual, the cars are over ten years old; some with bonnets and doors of different hues. The permanent population is about two hundred – down from two thousand in the mid 19th century.



*Green road*

Up the hill from the pier and turn right at the grotto. For centuries Bere Island was a British naval base. Pass a pill-box and the derelict gun posts of the Derrycreeveen Battery, ghost-guarding the west entry to Berehaven. On the coast behind, Knockgour wears a thorny crown of masts and a rough shawl of forestry. Hungry Hill, northeast, is a blunt buttress blocking access. Between them, a ring

of hills seems to cut Castletownbere off from the outside world. But the outside world was never the Irish interior: it was always the ocean and its seaways, familiar to Greeks, Romans, Vikings, the English, the Spanish – and now to the fishing-fleets of the world.

Across the narrow sound, a grove of evergreen oak in front of the rebuilt Puxley manor, reveals the site of the O'Sullivan castle at Dunboy. So close, it seems, that a flat stone could be skimmed across. Not so. The castle was destroyed in June 1602 by Carew's English forces. They landed first on Bere Island to prepare the attack, then shipped their cannon to the shore at Dunboy. The siege ended in a gory massacre of the defenders. Forty survivors who took to the water were individually shot by marksmen waiting in boats.

Above the island shore, a green road wanders towards the fine lighthouse on a grassy platform at Ardnakinna Point. The world looks rinsed after morning

rain, and the sea glints like hammered silver in the midday sun. Edible mushrooms, bigger than the toecap of a boot, dot the track.

The Beara Way strikes eastward through rising moorland to reach the ruined Napoleonic signal tower. It looks as if it might have been a target for some bored battery, but in fact it was damaged by lightning in the 1950s and levelled by a storm soon after.



*Gallán and Martello Tower*



Knockanallig (258m), high point of the island, is reached by an excellent track. The Holy Cross stands on a shoulder, prominent from the mainland, but the actual summit of the island is unencumbered.

Drop down into a gap. A stern standing stone (*gallán*) is rooted in the very navel of the island. A Bronze Age marker, it gallantly holds the pass between the Holy Cross and the Martello Tower on their respective hills. (Martello Towers are late 18th century fortifications, usually built to defend landing points along the shore.) At the bottom of the hill, Rerrin the harbour-village, is reached. A regular ferry runs to a pier 4 km east of Castletownbere.

Adding to its fine landscape and antiquities, the entire island is a living museum of naval and military heritage. East of Rerrin, there are further batteries and some impressive cannon. There is also an active army camp. It is a relief to find the Irish Army in peaceful possession, after the imperial legacy encountered throughout the island.



## CASTLETOWNBERE to ADRIGOLE

**Leave the R572 at the Millbrook Bar. Look out for the low and lovely arches of the Aghakista bridge, where the old road from Glengarriff reached Castletownbere. Turn left on to a classic country lane, thickly hedged, with gates giving glimpses of rumpled fields.**

Fine holly trees are thick with berries in late August and hazel bushes flaunt ripening nuts. Small oaks recall the dominance of that tree in former times, as revealed in place names. (Derry/derreen means an oak-wood or grove.) In many parts of Ireland, extensive oakwoods were reduced to charcoal for smelting iron ore, some of it imported into the country, refined, and shipped out again. Remains of these furnaces still exist in West Cork.

Even in the lane, the partition between old and new, past and present, is thin and the rumble of Castletown traffic breaks through at times. Bere Island lies behind. An armed fisheries-patrol, slipping sleek and grey into Berehaven, recalls a complex naval tradition. European ships had always fished the coast, but the early 16th century saw a boom. Vast catches of hake and herring were taken. Pilchards (large sardines) were Ireland's most valuable export in that century. Hundreds of men from the northern regions of Spain were seasonally based on the Irish coast, catching and curing fish. Trading was intense. Hides and leather were the second most important Irish export, with ready markets in Spain, France and Italy.

Even in the harsh 17th century, the fisheries yielded '... such abundance of fish as few places in Christendom'. By then, the Spanish fishing fleets had shifted to Terra Nova (Newfoundland and Labrador). Before the end of WW1, American battleships and submarines were based in Berehaven.

As a result of the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921), the harbour remained under British control until reclaimed in 1938. This independence was crucial in keeping Ireland out of WW2.

Miskish, Knockoura and Knockgour crowd the horizon to the west and the old pass from Allihies (yesterday's route) crosses the forested gap. Swallows swoop among morning midges; a wren chatters in the furze, tail cocked like a little handle. Rocks that might or might not be megaliths stud the cutaway bog. Anyone with dry feet has not been searching for archaeology. The slabby rocks were ideal for a tomb-building culture. It would have been a poor enough hero who had no *gallán*, or standing stone, to commemorate his ancient deeds – even if it tumbled later in the bog.



*Cloontreem wedge grave*

A delicate little wedge grave, damaged, stands high on the slope and gazes west. Bronze Age wedge graves tapered towards the back: hence the name. In this case, three uprights remain in position, while the roof slabs have slipped off like discarded shields. Swing east briefly before the cairned knoll, then north again along a track. The tiny, sky-blue flowers lost in the rushy grasses are blossoms of Heath Milkwort, known in Irish as *na deirfiúiríní*, the sisters. Believed to increase milk-yield.

The rocky snout of Maulin (621m) draws the Miskish Mountains down to meet the route. Grassy ramps and terraces scramble to its summit between vegetated slabs, while the Beara Way keeps low on fine, dry tracks. Flying ants on a mating flight swarm on an outcrop.

West of Berehaven, along the wooded coast, the rebuilt Puxley manor at Dunboy clearly dominates the shore. Ore from the Puxley mines at Allihies was transferred to a 'copper house' at Dunboy by boat, or by horse and cart over the mountain. It was shipped from there to Swansea for smelting.



*Coumnagapple, Hungry Hill*

The ruins of the original Dunboy Castle, an O'Sullivan stronghold, are invisible from this height – a sad reversal. A grove of evergreen oak surrounding the site can be made out. The castle was destroyed after an English siege in 1602 when all its defenders were killed. Donal Cam, the O'Sullivan chieftain, was absent. He fought a guerrilla war in Beara for a further six months, before leading a winter-march north to Leitrim.

The path swings around into the valley of the Owgarriff (*abha gharbh*, rough river). A farm sits in a lattice of fields and cutaway bog under Knocknagree. A walkers' bridge crosses the river near a deeply tempting pool. Hungry Hill (*Cnoc Daod*) lifts forcefully into view, its flanks scored and furrowed. The finest mountain in West Cork, its character far exceeds its stature (682m). *Déad* is a tooth. This fits a themed ridge running south from Keecragh (ravenous), through Knocknaveacal (teeth hill) and Tooth Mountain. Another theory offers *éad*, jealousy, as the root. The rib in the foreground is the normal line of ascent.

The Beara Way loops deep into the back of Coumnagapple (cirque of the horses) west of Hungry Hill., The fins and folds of sandstone are tinged with purple. A mountain ash, richly berried, hosts a flock of thrushes. Butterwort and sundew – insectivorous – cluster in damp hollows, digesting nitrogen from midges. Buttresses on the track emerging from the Glen offer short, sharp rock climbs.

Turn east, uphill. Seagulls beat their wings on the fresh water of Park Lough, rinsing out the salt. A red-beaked chough, black wings indented, red legs tucked up, swoops and veers with an explosive screech. A meadow pipit, streaky brown, takes off underfoot, lights on a wall to watch. Cross an expanse of angled slab to reach a descending track. Quit this soon to veer along the O'Sullivan Beara Way, reaching the road to Adrigole before long.



*Heath Milkwort*

## ADRIGOLE to GLENGARRIFF

**Adrigole is named for its inlet and branching rivers, (*eadar ghabhal*, in a forked place). Launch pleasantly uphill on blackberry lanes. Tussocks of bleached grass poke through tarmac, like hedgehogs in the distance. From a bush comes the warning tick! of a robin, as if cocking a tiny gun.**



*Corries on Hungry Hill*

The purple striations of Adrigole Mountain seem finger-painted. Massmount Church is an enigmatic ruin overlooking Adrigole Harbour and the sweep of Bantry Bay. One arm of the transept is oddly extended. The doorway in the west gable frames a wild view of Hungry Hill and its east facing corries, source of the Mare's Tail waterfall. Cross the gentle ridge, and Hungry Hill drops from sight.

Bronze Age, Iron Age, early Christian and medieval landscapes are all layered across these hillsides. Buddhist sanctuaries have settled in. Old cottages slump into the past in bushy corners. New

dormer-homes spring up from suburban spores. A boy in a soccer shirt dashes across the road with a pan of breakfast fat, pours it

into a ditch. The smell of cooked bacon is a visceral summons to the boar-hunter in us all.

A little wedge grave at Ballynahown is worth a detour. It stands in its field like a blunt hieroglyph from a language that we do not know. While the neglect today is sad, it is lucky perhaps that these monuments have survived at all. A blend of

superstition and respect preserved the tombs, the ringforts and the standing stones of a vanished race. Their ghosts, if we honour them, will keep us upright in our landscape.

Leitrim is a Connaught county. Elsewhere, the name raises eyebrows. It derives from *liath dhroim*, grey ridge, and is found throughout the country. A fine *gallán*, a standing stone, broods on a knoll at Leitrim Beg. Overlooking Bantry Bay, this must have been a powerful place of memorial, or of celebration. Men in furs and skins, ignorant of iron, raised this monolith upright to be seen from a distance.

A ringfort, its earthen bank rimmed with trees, supervises a bend in the road. This was once the main route west. For centuries, a track crossed the wooded slopes, fording the stream and veering under the ringfort.



*Massmount Church*

These monuments are common throughout Ireland, belonging mainly to the early Christian/early Medieval era. They were farm homesteads, generally not defensive. However, this key location, at an important ford, conveys a militant sense of purpose. Big herds, sometimes stolen, passed this way in both directions. Cattle were mobile Gaelic wealth.

Quit the tarmac for a track. Throughout the world, hill-people travel routes like this on foot, knowing by name each rock on which a load can be leaned and rested. A man would be famous, not for wealth, but for the weight of grain or iron he carried around the mountain. Such feats were recorded on the Dursey, at the tip of the Beara peninsula.

At Athnaclaha the medieval eye of a bridge (with cataract) peers into the past,

proving again the antiquity of this hillside track. Under the arch, Kidney Saxifrage clusters in damp shade, its leaves sprouting grey bristles, like an old bachelor surprised by visitors.

Contour around the front of The Sugarloaf (*Gabhal Mhór*, the big fork) and drop into the gap between it and its rugged satellite. The age-old track is studded with hoofprints. Easy to imagine a bawling *creacht* (herd) of small black cattle, raided by a party of Beara men, funnelled through the hills into hiding.



*Water Mint*



*Sundew*

Descend into an enclosed valley, obscured by conifers. Reach a forest road, swing right on firm ground again. The track is fringed with birch and with lost rhododendron looking for a home. Swing north (left) into a gap on the ridge between Derrynafula and Shrone Hill and descend through mixed woodland to reach the forest road by the river.

The Beara Way turns east (right) for Glengarriff. Two kms west, however, the magnificent valley of Coomerkane (coun of the little pig) keeps its secrets among cliffs and corries. Easy to imagine the legendary hideout in which an eagle-chick was cheated of its food in order to nourish a young O'Sullivan prince. A cord around the bird's throat allowed the food to be removed when the eagles flew off to hunt again.

Derrynafula (oakwood of the blood) is said to be the area in which Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare took his final stand against Wilmot's army in the winter of 1602. The capture of the entire herd of cattle and sheep on which his guerrilla force depended put an end to resistance and O'Sullivan began his famous march from this location. The wounded and sick were left behind, stoking fires to create a sense of military occupation. They were put to the sword when Wilmot's men discovered the deception.

## GLENGARRIFF to CARRIGANASS, KEALKIL

**Heading east, quit Glengarriff via the N71. The classic frontage of the Eccles Hotel, lofty and narrow when Thackeray, Shaw and Yeats stayed here, has spread extensive wings. Glengarriff harbour shines with the promise exuded by tree-clad islands in calm water. One of these is Garinish, celebrated for its subtropical gardens.**

Cobduff is the low summit east of the harbour, with a dark grimace slashing its ridge. This might be the 'dark mouth' possibly referred to in the name.



*Glengarriff harbour*

Monteensudder, Derreenathirigy: the signposts are clotted

with syllables. The little bogland of the trotting; the oak grove of the wizened one – the names reveal that this cosmopolitan coastline was once intensely local.

Beyond the golf course, turn left at the sign for Dromgarriff (the rough ridge). Rhododendron hangs over the rising roadside; wild strawberry plants edge the tarmac. Turn right and follow a lane. A rough track with holly trees leads up to open hillside. The views are worth the rather turgid ground.

To the left, the fault line that forms the *straois* or grimace on Cobduff is inexpressive on close acquaintance. The great gouged ridge of the Cahas runs along the entire horizon from west to north, and the rough triangles of the Sugar Loaf and Shrone

Hill pile up behind Glengarriff. The rim of the harbour is thickly wooded, hiding development in a rich camouflage of oak, beech and Scots pine. Bantry Bay sweeps out towards the Atlantic, flanked to the south by the tranquil outline of Sheep's Head peninsula. Softened by low sunlight, Whiddy Island wears its oil tanks like the scars of an old accident. In January 1979, a French tanker called the *Betelgeuse* offloading crude oil at the Gulf Oil terminal exploded at the dock, killing fifty people.

Veer across rough moorland on a mountain track. Below, the coast road hums and swishes with tourist-traffic but this old route contours across a different time and culture. When Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare slipped out of the woods beyond Glengarriff at daybreak on December 31st, 1602, he led one thousand followers along cattle tracks such as this from the Cahas to the Shehy Mountains.

The Elizabethan army under Wilmot did not pursue him. They spread out instead and laid waste to the Beara peninsula. The wounded and the sick, abandoned in the guerrilla-camp, were put to death in the manner of the time. Fleeing Beara, O'Sullivan began a winter-journey north in a desperate bid to join forces with his ally Hugh O'Neill in Ulster.

The Beara Way crosses the Coomhola River at a complex junction, swerving east under a steep slope at Cooryleary, then left on a narrow road that veers back towards the ridge, crossing it after a couple of kms. The road becomes a rutted lane in keeping with the views of Coomhola and Knockboy, the rugged mountains to the north. The narrow opening of the Borlin Valley lies directly north, with the broad ridge of Conigar on its eastern flank. There are those who suggest that O'Sullivan led his followers up the Borlin Valley, east across the mountain ridge and steeply down into the sanctuary of Gougane Barra. This heroic aspiration does not accord with the terrain.

Maughanasilly is *macha na saili*, cattle field (or milking place) of the willows, where five standing stones were aligned with the most northerly point of the lunar cycle by Bronze Age inhabitants nearly 4000 years ago. A splash of colour against the stones in the gloom of early November proved to be an offering of flowers and an apple so vividly red that it sorely tempted this visitor.

Determined to put the Shehy Mountains between himself and his enemies on New Year's Eve, 1602, Donal Cam did not break his journey at Carriganass, an O'Sullivan castle on the Kealkil road south of Maughanasilly, which was held by his own men. It had belonged to his hostile cousin Owen O'Sullivan, from whom Donal Cam had captured it. The garrison would shortly surrender to Wilmot, commander of the Elizabethan forces and the last of the O'Sullivan castles on the Beara peninsula would be lost.



Kealkil

Partly restored and open to visitors, the shell of the castle reveals a typical tower-house of the time, five storeys high, surrounded by a fortified bawn-wall. It stands above a ravine on the Owvane River.

The convoy of four hundred soldiers and six hundred camp followers kept to the cattle-tracks in the foothills and raced on towards the Pass of Keimaneigh several hours ahead. Once that barrier was crossed, Beara and the threat of pursuit would be left behind. A different landscape, new enemies, waited beyond the pass. For Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare there would be no return.

# THE BEARA WAY

## North Of The Peninsula

### ALLIHIES to EYERIES

The old engine house on the hill keeps its brick finger in the air, testing the winds of change. A lane from Allihies approaches it. Clean and colourful now, the village must have been an industrial nightmare in the 19th century, as ore was crushed, water pumped from mineshafts, and the entire population laboured among the spoil heaps.

Follow tarmac left of the chimney. A short crag above a hairpin bend is streaked with quartz and green with verdigris, a copper stain. Prehistoric miners were attracted by such evidence.

The mining-track winds on between slabs, benches and shelves of Old Red Sandstone, and crosses the barrier-ridge.

Knocknagallaun shoulders up to the left and little Caherkeen stretches out below, its cairn just visible against Coulagh Bay. Inishfarnard, long and low

in the water, is adrift from Kilcatherine Point. Across the Kenmare estuary, the clearest feature on the Iveragh peninsula is the notched ridge of Eagles Hill and the Windy Gap.

The big brown banks of the Slieve Miskish Mountains roll away east of the Beara way, scored by ditches and disused mining-tracks. Losing height, the lane grows lush with honeysuckle and big blackberries. The best are deep in a thorny ditch. The dark rock of Carrigoumpia is visible, just offshore from Travara Strand. *Carraig Iompaithe*, turning/overturning rock, is a marker for fishermen, a practical place name. Mackerel boats, fishing at night, were



*Eyeries village*

vulnerable to submerged rocks. A seine-boat accident in which five men perished in 1918 is still remembered in Coulagh Bay.

Tarmac briefly, then swing right on a green road between new houses. Miskish Mountain rises ahead. The track is flanked by the mauve-pink blossoms of native water mint, *mismín mionsach*, and a thick strip of water cress, *biolar*, sprouting in a ditch. A staple of the old Irish diet, extolled by monks and poets, water cress in the wild is seen now as a weed. A miracle-food in itself, its capacity to attract liver fluke from animal waste has undermined its appeal.



Cork - Kerry border

A stream is crossed by a little bridge. The route takes a hairpin bend, doubling back on the opposite bank. A heron flaps away on vaguely prehistoric wings. The knuckled bulk of Miskish blocks detours.

The islands of Scarriff

and Deenish to the west, are seen as one from this point. The *Cailleach Bhéarra*, Wise Woman of west Cork, owned rocky land. Her sister on another peninsula sent a fertile island as a present. Being towed across by a straw rope, it broke in two – Scarriff and Deenish – and never reached Beara. No mistaking the point where the rope was squeezed too tight. On a clear day, Skellig Michael, the monastic island, hovers like a mirage west of Scarriff.

The old stone barns on the back roads show how much style and skill has been swept aside by concrete. Cross the busy R575 and take a byroad to the shore. Ford a stream and follow a pleasant boreen to Eyeries, gallantly gay between mountains and sea.

Seen from the shore, the horizon is all mountain. Stumpy Miskish is just above; the long ridge through Maulin towards Hungry Hill runs east; Knocknagallaun stands behind, a barrier crossed, the hill-track visible. Fields around Eyeries offer enough archaeology to keep the searcher absorbed. The less patient will follow the foreshore around the Point, with a detour to the village.

A rocky cove en route invites the swimmer. Nearby, a bed of water-reeds (*giolcach*) rustles in the wind. Adapted to fresh water and salt, they are an important habitat and can also be used for the ecological treatment of sewage. They make an excellent roof-thatch, lasting up to sixty years.

The last of this year's white sea campion (*coireán mara*) withers among the stones, its little lampshades a brittle brown. The headlands are matted with dwarf furze and heather, yellow and purple still. A ruined coastguard station cries out for renovation. Formed in the 1820s, the original Irish Coast Guard, was a reserve of the British Navy. About two thousand 'revenue boatmen' protected the coast and cracked down on smuggling.

Dip into a little woodland full of willow, birch, holly and oak, revealing the benign climate of this southwest coast. The road leads circuitously to the great stone spike at Ballycrovane Harbour. (*Béal an Chorraigh Bháin*, mouth of the white marsh.) The elegant pillar stone is notched with Ogham, a script of the early Christian-era, commemorating here the son of *Decced*... the monument is far older than the inscription. The Ogham alphabet, read from the bottom up, is composed of a series of strokes to left and right of a centre line – usually the edge of the stone.

Further west along the road, a boulder is signposted *An Chailleach Bhéara*. Here, the Hag, the Wise Woman of Beara, overlooks the shore and waits for cosmic tides to turn. She is older than Time

and can afford to wait. A legendary figure, she was a healer and a symbol of fertility linked with the wild landscape, which she shaped. The eerie boulder is freckled with coins.

A boreen leads to Lough Fadda, set in classic moorland with every shade of sphagnum moss – yellow, russet, lime-green – hoarding water. Grasses, sedges, heathers and the yellow-orange spikes of bog asphodel stand out. Spongy moss chokes up a wheel rut, bulges above it, showing how quickly it can swallow ground. This relentless process creates peat, or turf. Ribs of Old Red Sandstone, scraped by glacial movement, break through the bog. The sinuous lake yields to a reedy creek, freckled with water lily leaves, *bacán bán*. The dark little peak to the east is Skellig, (*Sceilg*, steep rock, crag).

Swing left on tarmac till a brow is crested. The Iveragh panorama opens out again, from Lamb's Head through to Carrauntoohill (with luck.) When rain clouds lift, the Reeks are clear and Kenmare Bay is a silver threshold. Views come and go like lantern-slides. Serrated escarpments cut through the bog. The rock is folded in low ridges, as if it had been ploughed. The gables of a ruined cabin are a stark imprint of harsher times.

Ardgroom (*dhá dhrom*, two ridges) appears below. The bravely painted village is often mis-translated as *Ard Gruama*, gloomy height. Wrong, both on altitude and atmosphere. The toothed ridge behind seems set to gobble a grassy dome beside the harbour. A theme is shared by Keecragh (*ciocrach*, greedy), Knocknaveacal (teeth hill) and Tooth Mountain. Blocked from sight by Skellig, Glenbeg Lake is squeezed between Tooreennamna, Lackawee and Commons East. Tooreen/*tuairín* is common in Irish place names and usually means a green place where things were put out to dry or to bleach. Near Cappul Bridge a curlew flies up, frightening a heron and a cormorant off in different directions.

## ARDGROOM to LAURAGH

**Two roads run east from Ardgroom. Take the second – the lesser one. Deserted houses slump behind trees. An intact ringfort, early Christian era, is crowned with oak. Another sits on the grassy dome by Ardgroom Harbour. Detour south to visit Ardgroom Stone Circle, one of the more accessible megalithic monuments.**

Nine remaining stones up to 2m high form an elegant ring. The setting is dramatic, with the molar of the local Skellig (214m) in the background and the finest of Iveragh's peaks, Mullaghanattin and Carrauntoohill, visible to the north.



*Skellig, near Ardgroom*

Cross the Cork-Kerry border. Ahead, the rakes and terraces of Keecragh Mountain are grey as slanting rain, even under a blue sky. Drung Hill is the knuckle to the north. (*Drong*, a crowd). An old track crosses the rocky gap into the rich valley beyond. This is a coum of quiet distinction. Rock-benches and boulder-slopes are studded with knolls graced by mature birch, holly and whitethorn. Insectivorous butterwort (*leith uisce*) clusters thickly in the grass, with pale, sticky leaves and violet-blue flowers in summer.

A kestrel and a raven skirmish in mid air. The tawny hawk flicks upside down; the black-plumed raven keeps its poise.

Cashelkeelty Stone Circles contain massive uprights. Power lines and forest boundaries intrude. Cashelkeelty means the stone fort of Caoilte – one of *Fionn Mac Cumhail's* Iron Age warriors. It is far older than that. An archaeological dig has proposed a timeline of 6,000 years. Downhill, two deer – a fallow doe and fawn, white rumps outlined in black – graze in a hollow among drifts of daisy-like Mayweed.



Ringfort

Continue east to join the loop road towards Lauragh (*láithreach*, site or location). Derreen House and gardens face Kilmakilloge Harbour.

The English Landsdowne family formerly owned up to a hundred thousand acres in south Kerry and Beara, centred on Kenmare. Their summer home, Derreen House in Lauragh, was the heart of the estate. The exotic gardens surrounding the house, begun by Lord Landsdowne in the 1860s, are open to the public. They are noted for subtropical specimens such as tree ferns, bamboo groves and giant rhododendron.

## LAURAGH to BONANE

**The Beara Way rises on quiet tarmac above Kilmakilloge Harbour and its mussel-farm. Though associated with earlier holy men, the area has long revered Saint Kilian as its patron. He was a 7th century martyr, popular also in Germany.**

A tiny lake by Bunaw Harbour in Kilmakilloge was celebrated for centuries for its floating islands, believed to have miraculous properties. These tussocks of vegetation drew international comment, including a 17th century Latin reference from historian Philip O'Sullivan Beare in Spain. The venue was intensely popular in the 19th century, particularly for afflictions of the eye. Drainage destroyed the lake however, and little remains but a patch of swampy ground. Those who carried out the drainage died within days, to general satisfaction.

Knocknaveacal, Keecragh, Drung Hill form the horizon behind. Sturdy Knockatee (*cnoc an tí*, hill of the house) rears ahead. Drop into the valley past Gowlaun Lough. A homely Stone Circle graces rough bogland, threatened by conifer planting. Look out for a right turn, east, at the bottom of the hill. Fields left and right of the road contain boulder-heaps: sadly, for the itinerant antiquarian, these are not ancient boulder-burials but modern reclamation.

Cross a stile at a bend on the R571, near Tuosist. (*Tuath*, territory, of the *Uí Síosta*). This is O'Shea country. They claim to be descendants of the original *Uí Síosta*. The O'Sullivans also had a stronghold in this area, the ruined Ardea Castle overlooking Kenmare Bay. Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare was in Ardea in June 1602, waiting for Spanish assistance, when his own castle at Dunboy was destroyed by Crown forces and all its occupants killed. His failure to come to their rescue is held against him.

Note the road bridge below the stile, invisible from above. It is a confident construction. The flattened arch is only a couple of courses thick, and relies on locking keystones. The bridge is square-ended, not tied in to the embankment either side. Powerful little structures like this, unnoticed by the public, carry heavy traffic throughout Ireland.

This is a well worked landscape under Knockagarrane (grove hill), with ancient field boundaries and enclosures. It was already a homeland long ago, before the climate worsened and the bog took hold. What did they call Knockagarrane then, back in the Bronze-Age, nearly 4,000 years ago? We have no idea what languages were used before the gradual advent of Gaelic and the Iron Age a few centuries B.C.

From the ridge on Knockagarrane, two of the finest hill walks in Ireland are visible. Straight across Kenmare Bay, behind a lower ridge, stands the cirque of Mullaghanattin, while directly to the north the Reeks and Carrauntoohill rise. In the foreground are the Cloonee Loughs. Drop down to a track that skirts the remnant-oakwoods by Lough Inchiquin. En route, the corrie of Lough Napeasta (*loch na péiste*, lake of the monster) shows a striking moraine, left behind when a hanging glacier thawed.

Cross between the lakes, with a detour to the stone circle and its prominent *gallán*, pillar stone. A tempting shortcut depends on the Ameen River and its stepping-stones. Ishaghuderlick, the waterfall on the black slabs to the southeast, may be a corruption of *uisce dubh d'urlic*, dark water spewing.

Turn left (east) at the boathouse. A tiny island, beyond the reach of grazing stock, is thick with oak. The steep road and boren ends at a little 'clapper bridge' made of slabs propped on a stone pillar. It demands to be used, whatever the water-level. There

are cairns and a megalithic tomb within reach. Right of the track, a stone enclosure contains a grassy platform and a sentinel hawthorn. A ruined homestead, 19th century or earlier, crouches behind an earthen ditch. Dense with history, this landscape is a re-used vellum – a palimpsest.



*Clapper bridge*

Eagles, associated with the corries of Lough Inchiquin, were hunted to extinction in the 19th century. However, white tailed eagles have been reintroduced to Kerry, red kites to Wicklow and golden eagles to Donegal. Perhaps these corries will be colonised again.

Cross the mountain pass. *Cnoc na gCormhíolta*, hill of the midges, to the south, prompts an anxious itch. Mucksna Mountain is part of the opposite ridge. *Mucshnámh*, place of the swimming pig. Pigs can't fly, but they can certainly swim. The belief that they cut their throats with their trotters is a myth.

Templenoe to the north, across Kenmare Bay, was the epicentre of a major glacial expansion that shaped these mountain ranges and deepened the estuary during the last Ice Age. Ice broke through the mountain-ridges of Iveragh, leaving glacial breaches visible as gaps in the horizon to the north. Templenoe today is home to the Spillanes, one of the great clans of Gaelic football.

Tilt steeply down to a complex valley of ridges and coums. Patches of sitka spruce break the tawny moorgrass slopes. Old boundaries, pre-bog, appear. A rough and ready enclosure may be a recent booleying-site related to summer pasturage. (*Buaile*, a milking-place; an enclosure.)

The route flares north (left) at the bottom, tripping over old stone sites. A blocky stone circle with a fine altar-like centrepiece, inscribed with Bronze Age cupmarks, is out of bounds. Reach a narrow winding road, traditional in character. At a hairpin bend, the Beara Way divides – continuing north towards Kenmare, and south (right) to Bonane and Glengarriff.



*Cummeengeera*

There are dramatic views into the Knocknagorraveela corries, excavated by glacial action. A fine ridge divides the two. Ahead, the mountain road boasts a green median strip and

hedges of hazel, ash and oak, with slopes of heather and ferns on either side, and pockets of sheep-grazing. Ferns can be a source of ticks: small insects that fasten on to flesh and gorge on blood. Trousers rather than shorts are recommended among ferns. Winding between broken cliffs and rocky terraces, the mountain road grows ever more unlikely, until it elbows eastward through a gap. The main ridge of the Caha Mountains is revealed to the south, with the N71 and its tunnels cleaving it. East to Bonane, where the route swerves south under the slopes of Deelis and Barraboy (*Cnoc Bharr Buí*, yellow top hill).

## BONANE to GLENGARRIFF

**Attention to navigation is required, following Beara Way signs at minor road junctions. Esk Mountain is the long ridge to be crossed ahead. A rocky fault line in the slope slants from bottom left to right. It is an age-old route between the valleys: a coffin-trail, coach-track, green road, shortcut.**

A slab thrown on the upper section shows inscribed cup marks – possibly Bronze Age. Clumps of rushes invade the route. This pervasive plant of boggy soil was once extremely useful – as bedding, for example. Also, the rind was peeled away from the pith, leaving a narrow strip for stability. Dried and dipped in fat, it made a steady, slow-burning wick, a rush candle called *coinneal fheaga*.



*Heath-spotted orchid*

Cross the narrow crest to join a forestry track past ruthless clear felling. In the distance, a galvanised rim of ocean gleams. Southwest, the Sugarloaf looms large. Barley Lake is separated from secretive Coomarkane by a rocky crest. All the Caha Mountains to the west pile into each other, under pressure. The Glengarriff road (N71) snakes through the foreground. Cross this and plunge into exotic woodland.

Much is rightly made of the Arbutus Tree of Kerry and Cork, with its red bark and its fruits like giant strawberries. It is one of fifteen members of the Lusitanian Flora, native to Ireland, though otherwise Mediterranean. But the showy fruit is a disappointment and there is nothing on earth to equal the wild sweetness of the woodland strawberry, small and shy, hidden in summer vegetation along the forest tracks. Emerge in the coastal town of Glengarriff.