

The Multeen Way Bealach an Mhoiltín

Donohill Cappaghwhite Upperchurch

Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare and the Beara-Breifne March



Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beare and the Beara-Breifne March

In 1602 Munster was ravaged by war. The English 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. With many Irish chiefs in submission to the English crown, O'Sullivan Beare's continued support for the Irish cause and loyalty to Philip II of Spain was a last barrier to English ambitions to secure crown rule in Munster. O'Sullivan Beare's main stronghold was Dunboy Castle, overlooking the harbour of Berehaven. In June 1602, after an eleven-day siege, English forces breached the walls of Dunboy, killed its last defenders, and forced the local population into submission. O'Sullivan Beare and an army of supporters withdrew to the Coomerkane Valley, near Glengarriff, and launched guerrilla attacks on their enemies.

Following a siege, the English army struck a blow at O'Sullivan Beare and captured his herd of 4,000 sheep, 2,000 cattle, and 100 ponies. The loss of supplies of milk, butter and meat, as well as essential pack animals, made it impossible to remain in the valley.

On New Year's Eve 1602, faced with almost certain starvation, O'Sullivan Beare fled with 400 fighting men and 600 camp followers: women, children, servants, and porters. About 1,000 men and women embarked on an epic march northwards.

O'Sullivan Beare was counting on his ally, O'Rourke of Breifne, to provide refuge at Leitrim Castle, 300 kilometres to the north. Travelling through Ireland at a time of war and severe food shortages, they were often attacked by local chiefs who viewed them as outcasts. The need to stay ahead of their enemies meant that they were often unable to bury their dead or carry off their wounded. Women carried infants and many of the camp followers could not keep up. By the time they reached the River Shannon, their numbers had dropped to between 300 and 400.

With enemies on either side of the river they crossed at night in a boat made of the skins of twelve slaughtered horses, the meat almost certainly eaten by the starving in the camp. Two days later, at Aughrim, their path was blocked by English-led cavalry and infantry. O'Sullivan Beare's camp had no choice but to fight. Against all odds, the exhausted army of refugees defeated greatly superior forces but were unable to rest. They had to travel a 20 mile detour during the night to escape further attack. As the Connaught mercenaries among O'Sullivan Beare's camp began to disappear and return home, the remaining refugees were continuously threatened.

On the fourteenth day, O'Sullivan Beare reached Leitrim Castle. Out of the original 1,000 followers, only thirty five remained.

The Beara-Breifne and Multeen Ways

The **Beara-Breifne Way** follows the fourteen-day march taken by Donal O'Sullivan Beare and 1,000 supporters in 1603. The route, the longest in Ireland, runs almost the length of the country and takes the walker and cyclist to some of its most beautiful and least explored areas: along the coast of the Beara Peninsula, across six mountain ranges, along the banks of the River Shannon and through the lake regions of Roscommon and Leitrim. The landscape contains an extraordinary variety of heritage sites - prehistoric features, castle ruins, and religious and battle sites - many of which bear witness to the march of 400 years ago.

The **Beara-Breifne Way** interlinks a series of local ways. The local route here is the **Multeen Way**, which follows the path of O'Sullivan Beare northwards from Tipperary Town. It stretches across some of the most unspoilt rural areas in South Tipperary, taking in two extremes of landscape: the fertile lowland plains of the Golden Vale around Tipperary Town and wilder uplands with panoramic views extending across seven counties from the Red Hills. Much of this route is off-road and crosses beautiful landscape, providing a unique opportunity to appreciate the wildlife of this part of the county.

The Beara-Breifne and Multeen Ways follow off-road tracks and quiet back roads. However, traffic has increased in recent years and walkers and cyclists are asked to take care, particularly on the busy roads entering and leaving towns and villages. Both routes cross both public and private lands and **dogs are not permitted** on either. Access to private lands is by kind permission of local landowners, arranged by the local community, and special thanks are extended to both landowners and community groups for their assistance in making this venture possible.

Walkers should be aware that The Multeen Way and The Beara-Breifne Way are closed to the public for one day each year, 31 January.



Cappagh White – Donohill

Walking

This 3 to 4 hour walk leaves the road just outside the village of Cappagh White and heads in a southerly direction across country on tracks and paths. It passes through Greenfield Nature Park, and eventually joins the R497 road just as it passes Donohill Motte and enters the village.

Cycling

This 12 kilometre section of the cycling route leaves Cappagh White on the R505, crossing the famous Iron Mills Bridge before reaching the village of Annacarty. Here it turns southwards on old roads and eventually joins the R497 road just as it passes Donohill Motte and enters the village.

Cappagh White – Upperchurch

Walking

This 6 to 7 hour section of the walk leaves Cappagh White heading north through Raparee country, associated with the Irish Raparee outlaws of the seventeenth century. The tracks climb up to 440 metres into the Red Hills, from where there are impressive views into seven counties. Continuing on mountain paths, the route drops down across the Hollyford Valley, but does not enter the village, which is to the east. It passes through the townland of Losset, before climbing again over the hills of the townland of Barna with remarkable views of the surrounding countryside. The walk then descends once more and crosses the R497, passing just to the west of the village of Milestone. It continues on mountain tracks until it turns right on an old road that leads into the village of Upperchurch.

Cycling

This 22 kilometre section of the cycling route follows a quiet country road as it rises on the shoulder of the Red Hills, with views down to the Multeen River, and wanders into the village of Hollyford, joining up with the R497 at Metal Bridge. From Hollyford, the route follows an old road in the middle of the valley leading northeastwards and winding upwards along the shoulder of Glenough, before bearing left and rejoining the R497 travelling towards Milestone. The route bypasses the village and continues in a northeasterly direction joining the R503 towards Upperchurch, with views of the Owenbeg River and Knocklough mountain range, and finally turns left to enter the village.

Along the Way

1 A striking example of an early motte and bailey defensive structure, **Donohill Motte** was famously raided for food supplies by O'Sullivan Beare's forces in 1603 as they fled northwards to Leitrim. Originally there was a stone tower on the higher level (motte).

2 **Shandangan Fens** were formed in steep-sided hollows, known as kettle-holes, created by pockets of ice left among loose material deposited by the retreating glaciers approximately 10,000 years ago. Poorly drained, and so suitable for wetland plants, the waterlogged soil means that dead plant material does not rot, but instead builds up to form fen peat over thousands of years. If undisturbed, this can lead to the formation of raised bog. Many kettle-holes and fens have been drained or filled in, so these are interesting and unusual habitats.

3 The trees and woodland around **Greenfield House** are typical of the type of landscaping that was carried out around estates and demesnes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with trees such as beech or lime planted in straight rows along boundaries and avenues, and individual yew and cedar planted as specimen trees.

4 During the seventeenth century, outlaws known as the **Irish Raparee** roamed these hills, righting the wrongs of the underprivileged native Irish. Most famous

amongst these was Eamonn an Chnuic, Ireland's own Robin Hood.

5 From the summit of Red Hill there is a **viewpoint into seven counties**; anti-clockwise from the west these are: the Meelick Hills along the River Shannon in County Clare; the Paps of County Kerry; the Ballyhoura Hills of counties Limerick and Cork; the Galtee Mountains of County Tipperary; the Comeragh Mountains of County Waterford; and the Kinney Hills and Slieve Blooms of County Offaly.

6 In the distant past, much of this area would have been covered with oak woodland. Pockets of semi-natural woodland are still visible at **Inchinsquillib** to the east of the cycle route, and these give some idea of what the vegetation of the area would have been like before the intervention of humans.

7 The **sweathouse** in Hollyford is a 1.5 metre wide, thick-walled circular structure built entirely of stone. Inside, heated stones covered with water would have generated steam to treat rheumatic pains and respiratory problems long before the concept of saunas was introduced. These structures date from much earlier times, but would have been used whilst the copper mines in the village were operating in the mid-1800s.

All photography, unless otherwise stated, is the work of the author. All photography, unless otherwise stated, is the work of the author. All photography, unless otherwise stated, is the work of the author.

Emergency: 999 / 911
Metropolitan Police: 101 (2380)



Your Plan - Your Future
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN PART-FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION (ERDF) UNDER THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2000-2006 AND ASSISTED BY FÁS 2000-2006