

Slí Gaeltacht Mhúscraí

An Chaolchoill
Kealkill

Béal Átha An Ghaorthaidh
Ballingeary

Baile Mhúirne
Ballyvourney

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, his 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 four thousand sheep, two thousand cattle and one hundred ponies. The loss of supplies of milk, butter and meat, as well as essential pack animals, made it impossible to remain in the valley.

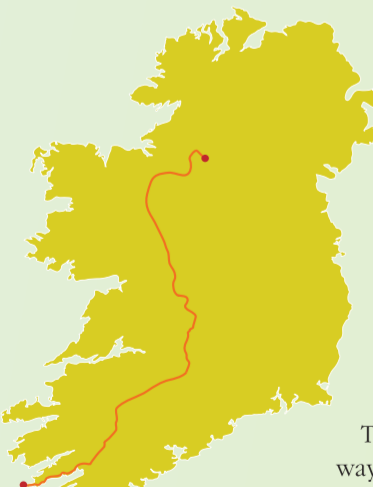
On New Year's Eve 1602, faced with almost certain starvation, O'Sullivan Beare fled with four hundred fighting men and six hundred camp followers and women, children, servants and porters: a thousand men and women on an epic march northwards.

O'Sullivan Beare was counting on his ally, O'Rourke of Breifne, to provide refuge at Leitrim Castle three hundred kilometres to the north. Travelling through Ireland at a time of war and severe food shortages they were viewed by local chiefs as outcasts and attacked. 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 were as low as three- to four-hundred.

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 an exhausted army of refugees defeated greatly superior forces but were unable to rest. They had to travel a twenty 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 one thousand followers only thirty five remained.

The Beara-Breifne Way and Slí Gaeltacht Mhúscraí



The **Beara-Breifne Way** follows the fourteen-day march taken by Donal O'Sullivan Beare and one thousand supporters in 1603. The Way, 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 four hundred years ago.

The Beara-Breifne Way interlinks a series of local ways. The local way in this area is called Slí Gaeltacht Mhúscraí. This is one of the shortest local Ways on the Beara-Breifne route but is one of the richest in terms of Irish culture; it is the only local way that passes through a Gaeltacht, that is, an area in which the Irish language is spoken on a daily basis. The route utilizes a variety of landscapes including the ridges of the rivers Lee and Sullane. The area is also renowned for its traditional music, singing and poetry.

Both 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. The Beara-Breifne Way and Slí Gaeltacht Mhúscraí cross both public and private lands and dogs are not permitted on either Way. 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 both Slí Gaeltacht Mhúscraí and The Beara-Breifne Way are closed to the public for one day each year, the 31st January.



4 Gougane Barra Church



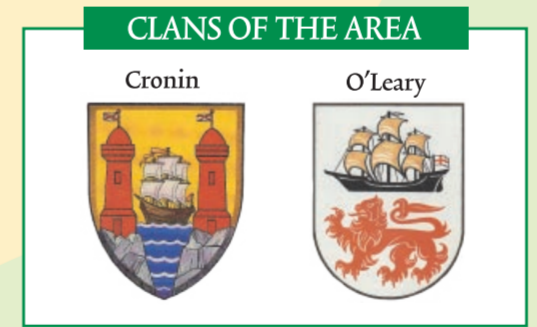
Country code for Walkers

- Respect farmland and the rural environment.
- Do not interfere with livestock, crops, machinery or other property.
- Do not light any fires, especially near forests.
- Leave all farm gates as you find them.
- Always keep children in close control and supervision.
- Keep away from livestock – your presence can cause stress to livestock and even endanger your own safety.
- Do not enter farmland if you have dogs with you.
- Always use gates, stiles or other recognised access points, avoid damage to fences, hedges and walls.
- Take all litter home.
- Take special care on country roads.
- Avoid making unnecessary noise.
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees.
- Take heed of warning signs they are there for your protection.
- If following a recognised walking route keep to the waymarked route.
- Immediately report any damage caused by your actions to the farmer or landowner.
- Do not block farm entrances when parking.



KEY TO ROADS	
	National Primary Road
	Track
	Third Class Road
	Regional Road

KEY TO AMENITIES	
	Accommodation
	Pharmacy
	Post Office
	Restaurant
	Tourist Information
	Doctor



Along the Way

- 1 Carriganass Castle** is the best preserved of the tower houses of the O'Sullivan Beare chieftaincy. It was built in 1540 but surrendered to English forces in 1602. Donal Cam O'Sullivan attacked the English occupied castle with cannon-fire, destroying much of the northern wall. After this, the castle was abandoned. With its spectacular views, perched above the River Owvane, the now ruined castle is a focal point for the Kealkil community and has recently been opened to the public.
- The **Pass of Keimaneigh** is an ice-age meltwater channel. The almost vertical rock walls slice through the Shehy Mountains for over 3 kilometres. The pass was the site of Battle of Keimaneigh fought between English forces and up to 400 members of the secret agrarian society, the Whiteboys, in 1822. The battle was commemorated in the poem 'Cath Ceim An Fhia' by Máire Bhui Ni Laoghaire, the popular nineteenth century poet.
- The mystical **Guagán (Gougane) Barra** valley is glacial in origin, the still lake lying in a basin gouged out by the ice. As the climate improved and the glacier retreated, ridges of gravel (moraines) were left behind, one of which forms Saint Finbarr's Holy Island. Saint Finbarr, built his monastery here in the sixth century and gave his name to the valley which may mean 'rock cleft of Saint Finbarr'. The island has been a site of pilgrimage for over 1,000 years.
- One of the first casualties of the epic march of O'Sullivan Beare north to Leitrim in 1602 occurred in the townland of **Gortin na Coille**. Astonishingly, this detail is recorded in folk memory and locals can still identify the victim's final resting place.
- Teampallín Eachrois (Augeris Church)** was already a ruin when it became the site of the first encampment of O'Sullivan Beare. He and his 1,000 followers camped in the area on New Year's Eve 1602. The following morning, not long after leaving the church, O'Sullivan's horse 'An Cearc' (the Hen) broke a leg in nearby boggy ground, which to this day is known as Poll na Circe (Hole of the Hen).
- The only written record of the hunger march of 1602 is that of O'Sullivan Beare's nephew, Philip O'Sullivan in his book *The Catholic History of Ireland*. In it he records that the chieftain and his followers stopped at the village of **Baile Mhúirne (Ballyvourney)** on **New Year's Day 1603** to pray at the shrine of Saint Gobnait for a successful onward journey.
- Saint Gobnait's Wood**, south of Baile Mhúirne (Ballyvourney), is important for the presence of old oak woodlands. The wood is also a rich habitat for many other tree varieties; shrubs and herbs in particular.