

Beara-Breifne Way, Duhallow

MillstreetBallyvourney

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 guerilla 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, Duhallow



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.

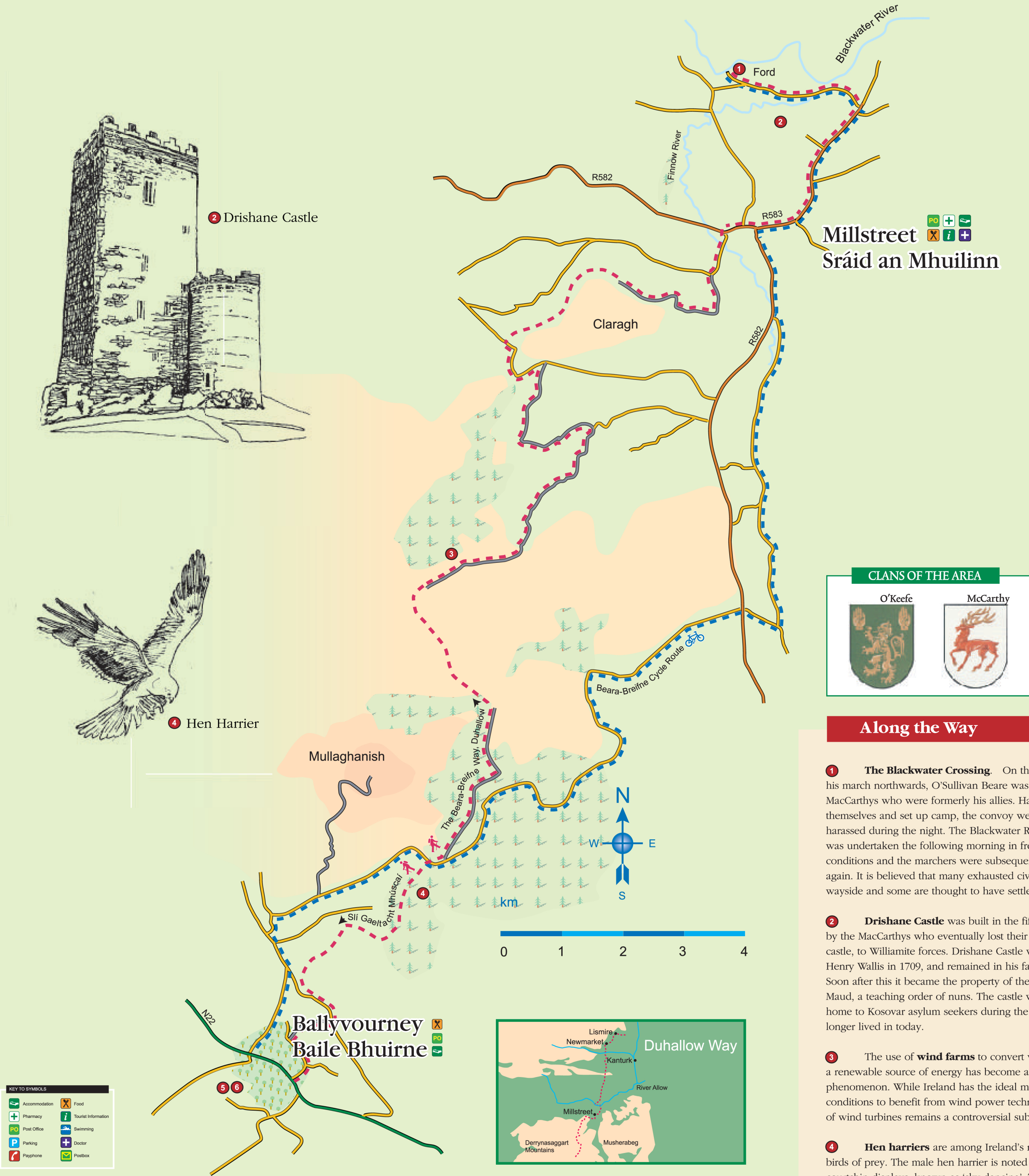
The Beara-Breifne Way interlinks a series of local ways. In this area the local walking route is known as the Duhallow Way and runs in a generally east-west direction. The Beara-Breifne Way uses only a small portion of this route as the route heads northwards. To help walkers distinguish the Beara-Breifne logo is used on all signage and the route is called 'The Beara-Breifne Way, Duhallow'.

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 the Beara-Breifne Way, Duhallow 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 especial thanks are extended to both landowners and community groups for their assistance in making this venture possible.

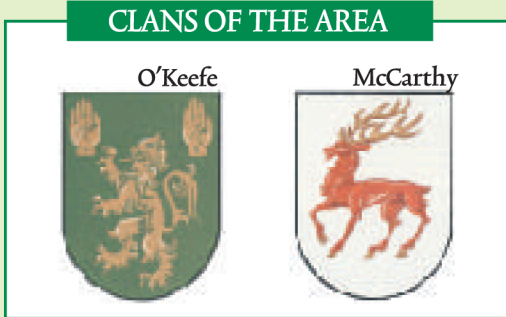
Walkers should be aware that both the The Beara-Breifne Way, Duhallow and The Beara-Breifne Way are closed to the public for one day each year, the 31st January



KEY TO SYMBOLS	
	Accommodation
	Pharmacy
	Post Office
	Parking
	Payphone
	Food
	Tourist Information
	Beverage
	Doctor
	Postbox



Millstreet
Sráid an Mhuilinn



Along the Way

- 1 The Blackwater Crossing.** On the second day of his march northwards, O'Sullivan Beare was attacked by the MacCarthys who were formerly his allies. Having defended themselves and set up camp, the convoy were further harassed during the night. The Blackwater River crossing was undertaken the following morning in freezing conditions and the marchers were subsequently attacked again. It is believed that many exhausted civilians fell by the wayside and some are thought to have settled in the area.

2 Drishane Castle was built in the fifteenth century by the MacCarthys who eventually lost their land, and the castle, to Williamite forces. Drishane Castle was bought by Henry Wallis in 1709, and remained in his family until 1892. Soon after this it became the property of the Dames of Saint Maud, a teaching order of nuns. The castle was temporarily home to Kosovar asylum seekers during the 1990s. It is no longer lived in today.

3 The use of **wind farms** to convert wind power into a renewable source of energy has become a global phenomenon. While Ireland has the ideal meteorological conditions to benefit from wind power technology, the use of wind turbines remains a controversial subject.

4 Hen harriers are among Ireland's most graceful birds of prey. The male hen harrier is noted for its dramatic courtship displays, known as 'sky dancing'. The birds' most spectacular trait is the 'food pass' from male to female – the male carries the prey in his talons, calls to the female who rises up from the nest and somersaults upside down while he drops the prey for her to catch.

Millstreet to Ballyvourney

Walking

This is a long section and walkers should allow between 6 and 7 hours to complete the route which involves a climb over Mullaghanish. Walkers should also be aware that there are no services between Ballyvourney and Millstreet and some stretches are quite lonely.

The route exits Millstreet along a public road on which caution should be exercised but walkers are soon directed off-road for several kilometres onto the shoulder of Claragh Mountain. Back on tar, quiet public roads are utilized but, as the route climbs, the roads give way to tracks. Walkers soon find themselves beneath towering windmills rotating in the high winds of the North Cork plains below, views of which extend for miles. The route then enters a mature Coillte forestry for around 5 - 6 kilometres, emerging a couple of hours later on the other side of Mullaghanish. The descent to Ballyvourney is on a mixture of tracks and tarred road with picturesque views of the oakwood and village below bobbing in and out of view. Walkers finally hit the N22 and follow this for a short distance into the village.

Cycling

The route from Millstreet to Ballyvourney is about 20 kilometres and is one of the most strenuous sections on the Beara-Breifne Cycle Route.

Leaving Millstreet along the R582, cyclists are soon directed onto a quieter parallel road. After circa 6 kilometres cyclists cross over the R582 and begin a long, steep climb up onto the shoulder of Mullaghanish. The route passes extensive coniferous forestry above and below, and cyclists should be vigilant for the occasional heavy forestry vehicle. Rounding the hill, long views south to Ballyvourney and the wooded hills opposite hove into view. From here it's downhill all the way, through a series of well-signed junctions, finally meeting the N22 for the last short stretch into the village.

5 Saint Gobnait's Wood, south of Ballyvourney, is important due to the presence of old oak woodlands. The wood is also a rich habitat for many other tree varieties; shrubs and herbs in particular.

6 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 Ballyvourney on **New Years Day 1603** to pray at the shrine of Saint Gobnait for a successful onward journey. Saint Gobnait lived in the fifth century and is the patron saint of beekeepers. She was venerated as a healer and tradition tells how she administered honey to cure illnesses and heal wounds. An annual pilgrimage to her shrine is still celebrated today on 11 February, Gobnait's Pattern Day. The shrine is linked to a graveyard, the burial place of the traditional musician Sean Ó Riada and the poet Sean Ó Riordáin, and a church with a Sheela-na-gig over one of the windows. This stone relief of a woman with her hands resting on her abdomen and genitals is one of many such carvings, probably dating from the early Middle Ages. Sheela-na-gigs are found in churches across Western Europe, although Ireland has the greatest number. While there is disagreement over their symbolism, they are usually interpreted as having links to female fertility and an earlier pagan tradition.