

# Beara Way Slí Bhéara

# Glengarriff Kealkill Ballingearry

## 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 Auhtrim, 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 and Beara Ways



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 on the Beara Peninsula is called The Beara Way. It is approximately 220 km in length and completes a circuit of breathtaking coastal and mountain scenery, before turning inland to Kealkill.

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 and the Beara Ways 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 Way and The Beara-Breifne Way are closed to the public for one day each year, the 31st January.

## Kealkill to Glengarriff

### Walking:

Walkers for both Glengarriff and Ballingearry should follow the winding road from Carriganass Castle into the foothills of the Caha mountains. This spur meets the main route at a signed junction and Glengarriff-bound walkers are directed left along a quiet winding round for 1 - 2 km then off-road onto a track which climbs over the moorland area known as 'The Bulls Pocket'. From here there are delightful views of Bantry Bay and Cnoc Baoi, the highest peak in County Cork. The track drops to meet the tarred road for a further 3 - 4 km after which walkers negotiate a series of well-signed junctions, cross the Coomhola River and subsequently head off-road again onto the shoulder of Cobduff. This gentle climb affords yet more views of the justly famous Bantry Bay. The route descends to join the busy N71 for the last 5km walk into Glengarriff. Allow approx. 3-4 hours in total.

### Cycling:

This route uses quiet and scenic country roads for the most part. From Carriganass Castle cyclists head northwest towards the Coomhola Valley, then southwest along the Coomhola River for 6-7 km before crossing the river at Coomhola Bridge. The route subsequently passes through a series of junctions to meet the busy N71. The stunning sea views and oak woods of Glengarriff Harbour, can be enjoyed on the 5 km descent to the town of Glengarriff. Approx. 20 km.

## Kealkill to Ballingearry via Gougane Barra

### Walking:

Walkers for Ballingearry and Gougane Barra should follow the same spur inland as those headed for Glengarriff. At the first junction Ballingearry-bound walkers take the right fork as will be indicated. The route travels on a mixture of boreens and off-road tracks so walkers should be vigilant for signage. This stretch includes the steep but short climb over Knockbreteen which rewards with panoramic views of Cnoc Baoi, Cork's highest peak, and Bantry Bay to the west. After 1 - 2 hours walkers will meet a junction where they will be offered two possibilities - the high route to Gougane Barra or the low route. Both require 3 - 4 hours but the high route is more strenuous and exposed and should be avoided in bad weather or when there is low-lying cloud.

The **High Route** uses quiet roads for 2km before walkers leave the road to climb between the Shehy peaks of Conigar and Foilastookeen from where there are spectacular views of Bantry Bay, the surrounding Shehy peaks and the plains to the east. The descent to Gougane Barra is very steep and walkers need to take care with their footing.

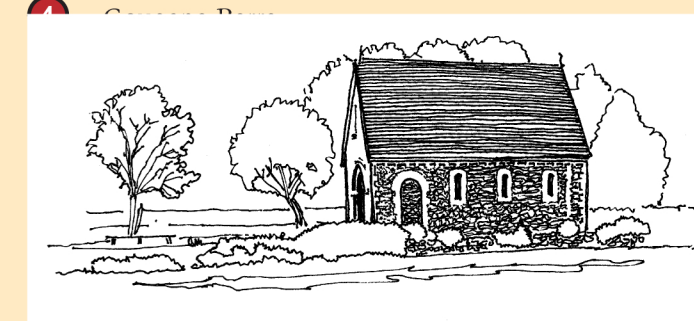
The **Low Route** passes through evergreen forestry and farmland before traversing the main R584 to follow a parallel but much quieter valley road lined with hazels. The route rejoins the R584 along the stunning and famous Pass of Keimaneigh for just 1 km and then goes off-road again to descend into Gougane Barra through forestry.

The walk from Gougane Barra to Ballingearry skirts the eastern end of the lake and follows a winding back road through a series of complicated but well-signed junctions before joining the old Gougane Barra-Ballingearry road - unused for the last 100 years - eventually reaching Ballingearry itself. The Gougane Barra to Ballingearry stretch is circa 1-2 hours.

### Cycling:

Approx 19km. Cyclists leave Kealkill on the R584, a narrow and winding road on which caution should be taken. The route gently climbs the valley for about 6 km then leaves the main road to follow a parallel but quieter road for a several kilometres. It rejoins the R584 to climb steeply through the narrow and winding Pass of Keimaneigh then out to descend steeply on the other side. The route soon turns exits the main road to bring the cyclist into the justly famous lake at Gougane Barra. Cyclists may opt to come off-route here to cycle through the forest park or to continue along the Beara-Breifne cycle route. The cycle to Ballingearry skirts the eastern end of the lake and passes through a series of junctions eventually rejoining the R584 into Ballingearry.

2 Maughnasilly Stone Row



## Along the Way

1 **Bantry Bay** is the largest in southwest Ireland and one of Europe's deepest natural harbours. The bay is home to four islands: Bere, Whiddy and Dunsey, all of which are inhabited, and Garnish Island which is famous for its Italianate gardens.

the Bay, paying harbour dues and fishing taxes to the O'Sullivan Clan, who controlled the area. Boats of many nationalities still fish and sail here these waters and are best observed on a stormy day as they shelter in the Bay's protective embrace.

2 **Bantry Bay** has featured prominently in the naval history of Ireland. Following the Irish-Spanish defeat at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601, English forces under Sir George Carew landed on Bere Island to prepare for their successful assault on Dunboy Castle, the main stronghold of O'Sullivan Beare.

3 **Maughnasilly Stone Row** is a Bronze Age row of five sandstone monoliths located on the crest of a small ridge near Lough Atoeren. Like other sets of standing stones they are aligned north- east/south-west and it is probable that they were built for ritual, ceremonial or commemorative purposes but an excavation at the site in 1977 yielded no clues.

4 **The Pass of Keimaneigh** is an ice-age meltwater channel and the almost vertical rock walls slice through the Shehy Mountains for over 3 km. The Pass was the site of Battle of Keimaneigh in 1822 between English forces and up to four hundred Whiteboys - a secret agrarian society - and was commemorated in the poem "Cath Ceim An Fhia" by Máire Bhui Ni Laoghaire, the popular nineteenth century female poet.

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6 **Mystical 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 were left behind, one of which forms St. Finbar's Holy Island. St. Finbar, built his monastery here in the sixth century and gave his name to the valley which may mean 'rock cleft of St. Finbar'. The island has remained a site of pilgrimage for over 1000 years. For centuries the fishing fleets of Europe fished in

As, historically, there is often more than one version of some placenames, spellings used on this map may differ from those found on O.S. maps, literature and even some road signs.