

# The Ballyhoura Way

## Bealach Abhra

# Ballylanders Galbally Tipperary Town

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



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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 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.



2 Darby's Bed



### The Beara-Breifne and Ballyhoura 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 through Ballyhoura Country - an area of undulating green pastures, woodlands, hills and mountains on the borders of counties Limerick, Tipperary and Cork - is called **The Ballyhoura Way**. It follows the path of O'Sullivan Beare and is linked to a number of local loop walks. It is approximately 90 kilometres in length and includes stretches into the lush pasturelands of the Golden Vale and the beautiful Glen of Aherlow, and through wild and spectacular uplands of the Ballyhoura Mountains and Slievenamuck.

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

### Ballylanders - Galbally

#### Walking

This section is one of the shortest on the Ballyhoura Way, and takes between 1 and 2 hours. The route takes you between the mountains on gently undulating old roads between the quiet villages of Galbally at the head of the beautiful Glen of Aherlow to Ballylanders. The Irish name of this village, Baile an Londraigh, translates as 'the town of the Londoner', and is derived from the Norman surname de Londres, referencing the history of the area.

#### Cycling

The cycling route coincides with the walking route along this section and follows minor roads for 6 kilometres. The road has no significant climbs, although cyclists should take care at sharp corners.

### Galbally - Tipperary Town

#### Walking

The route initially follows the Aherlow River down into the glen, leaving the road at Moor Abbey. It then climbs the hillside of Slievenamuck and proceeds northeastward along the line of the hill, below the ridge. Much of the route is through shady woodland on the hillside, but it also includes spectacular views across the majestic Glen of Aherlow, particularly from the Christ the King statue. As the walk emerges from the woodland and begins to descend to lower ground, there are impressive views of Tipperary Town, laid out on the plain below. This section will take between 8 and 9 hours to complete.

#### Cycling

The cycling route follows the busy R663 tourist road out of Galbally and into the Glen of Aherlow. It passes the ruined Moor Abbey and through the village of Lisvarrinane. Along the way there are impressive views of the Galtee Mountains to the south and Slievenamuck to the north. Turning left onto the winding R664, the route climbs out of the Glen of Aherlow, and 300 metres or so up the Slievenamuck hillside, passing the Christ the King statue with its excellent views southwards across the Glen of Aherlow. There are more views to the north overlooking Tipperary Town as the road descends through shady forests. There are picnic areas along this 20 kilometre section of the route.

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**KEY TO SYMBOLS**

|                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| € Banking       | X Food                |
| 🏠 Accommodation | ℹ Tourist Information |
| ⚕ Pharmacy      | ⚡ Doctor              |
| ✉ Post Office   | 📧 Postbox             |

**CLANS OF THE AREA**

O'Brien

**Ballyhoura Way**

Tipperary

Galbally

Ballylanders

Galtee Mountains

Ballyorgan

Churchdown

Liscarroll

River Aherlow

### Along the Way

- 1** Griston Wildlife Bog is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna typical of this type of peatland habitat. Wooden walkways and information boards offer visitors a unique opportunity to enjoy this wildlife.
- 2** A megalithic passage grave, perhaps 6,000 years old, **Dunryleague**, Dún-Trí-Liag (Fort of the three pillar stones) is known locally as Darby's Bed. This type of tomb is quite rare in the south of Ireland and is similar to megalithic tombs in Brittany, France. According to legend it is the grave of O'Bill Olum, an early King of Munster, and the eloping couple Diarmuid and Gráinne rested here in their flight from the angry Fionn Mac Cumhaill.
- 3** Those that died in the struggle for Irish independence (1919-1921) are commemorated by the **Monument to Local IRA Flying Column**. Two of these (Edmund Foley and Patrick Maher) were among the ten Republican volunteers executed in Mountjoy Prison whose bodies were exhumed from there in 2001 and given full State funerals.
- 4** The route from Galbally to Tipperary Town follows **Bianconi's old coach road**. From 1815, Italian Charles Bianconi developed a nationwide network of horse drawn passenger cars, the first public transport system in Ireland.
- 5** Approximately 1.5 kilometres to the east of Galbally are the ruins of **Moor Abbey**, founded between 1204 and 1212. It took 300 years to complete, and was burned four times during that time. Legend has it that three friars, beheaded by Cromwell's forces here in 1570, shed no blood.
- 6** The beautiful and tranquil **Glen of Aherlow**, nestling between the Galtee Mountains to the south and the ridge of Slievenamuck to the north, is a treasure trove of nature and history. A wealth of historic sites are scattered along the river, which is protected for Atlantic salmon that spawn there, and provides homes for otters, kingfishers, and Daubenton bats.
- 7** **Slievenamuck**, Slieve na muc (Mountain of the pig) takes its name from the legendary slaying of a sow called Beo, who had devastated much of Munster. Fionn Mac Cumhaill had spears forged locally and killed the sow, taking its head as a bridal gift to Cruithne, the smith's daughter. On the ridge are two megalithic passage graves (Corderry and Shrough Dolmens) known as Diarmuid and Gráinne's beds, where the legendary lovers are said to have rested whilst fleeing the angry Fionn Mac Cumhaill.