

WALKING THE WICKLOW WAY

A WEEK-LONG WALK FROM DUBLIN TO CLONEGAL

About the Author

Paddy Dillon is a prolific outdoor writer, with over 100 guidebooks to his name and contributions to 40 other titles. He has written for several outdoor magazines and other publications and has appeared on radio and television.

Paddy uses a tablet computer to write as he walks. His descriptions are therefore precise, having been written at the very point at which the reader uses them.

Paddy is an indefatigable long-distance walker who has walked all of Britain's National Trails and several European trails. He has also walked in Nepal, Tibet, Korea and the Rocky Mountains of Canada and the US. Paddy is a member of the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild and President of the Backpackers Club.



www.paddydillon.co.uk

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Fuerteventura
Walking on La Palma
Walking on Madeira
Walking on Malta
Walking on Tenerife
Walking on the Azores

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by Paddy Dillon

CICERONE

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL
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Updates to this guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. This guidebook was researched and written before the COVID-19 pandemic. While we are not aware of any significant changes to routes or facilities at the time of printing, it is likely that the current situation will give rise to more changes than would usually be expected. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1050/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: The prominent Great Sugar Loaf as seen from Knockree Youth Hostel

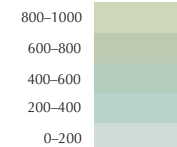
ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Day	Stage	Distance	Ascent	Descent	Time
Day 1	Marlay Park to Knockree	20km (12½ miles)	650m (2130ft)	570m (1870ft)	6hr 30min
Day 2	Knockree to Oldbridge	21km (13 miles)	720m (2360ft)	650m (2130ft)	6hr 30min
Day 3	Oldbridge to Glendalough	9km (5½ miles)	300m (985ft)	400m (1310ft)	3hr
Day 4	Glendalough to Glenmalure	14km (8¾ miles)	460m (1510ft)	460m (1510ft)	4hr 30min
Day 5	Glenmalure to Moynes	23km (14¼ miles)	750m (2460ft)	720m (2360ft)	7hr 15min
Day 6	Moynes to Boley Bridge	23km (14¼ miles)	490m (1610ft)	540m (1770ft)	7hr 15min
Day 7	Boley Bridge to Clonegal	19.5km (12¼ miles)	400m (1310ft)	440m (1445ft)	6hr
Total distance	Marlay Park to Clonegal	129.5km (80½ miles)	3770m (12,370ft)	3780m (12,400ft)	7 days

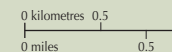
Note that consistently choosing longer alternatives could add as much as 16km (10¼ miles) extra to the route, and detours off-route add even more.

Symbols used on route maps

-  route
-  alternative route
-  start point
-  finish point
-  alternative finish point
-  route direction
-  woodland
-  urban areas
-  railway
-  peak
-  campsite
-  building
-  church/monastery/cross
-  track
-  vehicle track
-  tarmac road
-  other feature

Relief
in metres

SCALE: 1:50,000



Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/1050/GPX.

A prominent round tower stands in the 'Monastic City' at Glendalough (Day 3/Day 4)



INTRODUCTION

Walkers above the Dargle River, with Djouce Mountain beyond (Day 2)



The Wicklow Way is an ideal introduction to the network of trails in Ireland, being easy to reach, obvious to follow and full of interest. The Wicklow Way was the first waymarked long-distance walking trail to be established in Ireland, leaving Dublin and heading south through the Wicklow Mountains. The driving force behind the route was John James Bernard Malone, who was always referred to as JB Malone. He used to write for the *Evening Herald* and he later converted his newspaper articles into books about walking, with a particular emphasis on the history and heritage of the countryside. He first promoted the idea of a long walk through the Wicklow Mountains as early as 1966, although the route

wasn't officially opened until 1981, starting at Marlay Park on the southern outskirts of Dublin. It was a shorter route in those days, finishing at Moyné, but it was subsequently extended southwards to finish at Clonegal. My first encounter with the Wicklow Way was in 1982 and my correspondence with JB was brief, as he died in 1989. His memorial stone stands on the Wicklow Way above Luggala.

The route is mostly, but not entirely a 'Wicklow' way, because although the bulk of it is in Co Wicklow, it starts in Co Dublin and finishes in Co Carlow. After leaving Dublin city, the trail climbs quickly into the Dublin Mountains, and it soon becomes apparent that the route relies

heavily on roads and forest tracks to cover most of its distance, although there are some fine paths across high heather moorlands. A succession of open hillsides and forested glens are crossed en route to Clonegal.

In recent years, several adjacent trails have been signposted and way-marked, and in some cases, these offer splendid alternatives to the main course of the Wicklow Way. Walkers can include nearby summits on clear days, enjoying extensive views that could well stretch to North Wales. The scenic Lough Dan can be explored, instead of following the Wicklow Way through a nearby forest. Villages with a range of facilities can be included for the sake of an hour's detour. The Miners' Way is a scenic and interesting alternative to a densely forested part of the Wicklow Way between Glendalough and Glenmalur. The entire course of the Wicklow Way is described from start to finish, but each day there are alternative routes that diverge from the main route and join again later, and these are included for their scenery, interest and variety.

Walkers can expect to spend about a week on the Wicklow Way, covering a minimum of 130km (80 miles). However, there are very few facilities actually on the route, so numerous detours off-route will ensure that anything up to 150 kilometres (93 miles) are more likely to be covered. While most people won't mind walking up to an hour off-route, anything longer seems excessive, so

some accommodation providers offer pick-up and drop-off services.

Since its inception, the bulk of walkers have followed the Wicklow Way from north to south, and all guidebooks have been written in that direction. There is no reason why the trail can't be followed from south to north, as the waymarking works just as well in reverse. However, care would be needed in order to re-interpret the route directions in reverse.

GEOLOGY

The geological history of the Wicklow Mountains begins 500 million years ago. There were no mountains. There was no Ireland. There was just the ancient Iapetus Ocean. Nearby land-masses were being eroded and volcanoes were erupting, so that the sea became filled with layer upon layer of sand, ash and mud, which hardened into sandstones and mudstones.

Around 420 million years ago, the European and North American continental plates collided, crushing and crumpling layers of rock upwards until they rose from the ocean as land. Deep within the rock, the heat and pressure were so intense that the rocks were transformed, with sandstones fusing into quartzite, while mudstones were converted into schist. Furthermore, the deeper part of the Earth's crust melted under the immense pressure, and a huge mass of molten rock formed a vast, deep-seated dome of magma, known as a batholith, that pushed the



Two Rock Mountain, or Fairy Castle, and its prominent cairn (Day 1, alternative route)

older rocks upwards under incredible pressure.

Where the molten magma found itself alongside the older rocks, molten materials and highly-pressured hot gases were forced into cracks, eventually solidifying into mineral veins, and the older rocks closest to the batholith were baked by the heat and transformed into what is known as a metamorphic aureole. The magma never broke the surface, but remained underground and cooled slowly into distinctive crystalline granite, formed of visible crystals of quartz, feldspar, mica and other minerals.

Over hundreds of millions of years, as Ireland itself finally took shape, with weathering and glaciation scouring away the landscape, the dome of ancient rocks was worn away, exposing the huge mass of

granite beneath. Evidence of glaciation can be seen in the many steep-sided U-shaped glens, bowl-like corries, some containing little lakes, along with masses of ill-sorted rubble and boulder-strewn moraine.

The Wicklow granite is the largest mass of granite in both Ireland and Britain. Only tiny remnants of the original 'roof' of the dome that once covered the granite can be seen today, most notably as the schist cap on top of the highest mountain – Lugnaquilla. The main granite mass is surrounded by the older rocks, with Djouce Mountain being a notable peak of schist and the Great Sugar Loaf being a notable quartzite peak. The rich mineral veins were plundered to release their wealth between 1800 and 1963, yielding lead, zinc, copper, silver and even a little gold.

The waymarked Miners' Way visits several interesting mining sites and conveniently links with the course of the Wicklow Way.

SCENERY

Granite, schist and quartzite form rather poor soils, and as the Wicklow Mountains are consistently high, snagging the damp maritime airstream, the exposed and extensive uplands are notoriously bleak and boggy, spending a considerable amount of time covered by damp mist. While Co Wicklow is known as the 'Garden of Ireland', the main feature of the higher mountains is the brief summer flush of purple generated by blooming heather, otherwise visitors should look to the glens and lower hills for colour, including the bright yellow blaze of gorse bushes and rich green growth. The Wicklow Way only occasionally climbs high, and while it sometimes leads onto high and exposed slopes, it also spends a lot of time in the shelter of commercial forests, or follows roads and tracks through gentle pastoral country, dotted with farms, where rampant hedgerows are often filled with flowers. There are wooded areas, lakes and rivers, so overall the scenery is quite varied and enjoyable.

HISTORY

It is a futile exercise to try and condense the history of Ireland, often intensely and turbulently tied with

the history of Britain, into a few short paragraphs, but it is worth making some basic points by concentrating mostly on Dublin and the Wicklow Mountains.

One thing worth bearing in mind is that, before the arrival of humans, Ireland was well-wooded and some remarkable beasts roamed through the countryside. The animal once referred to as the Irish Elk is now referred to as the Great Irish Deer (*Megaloceros giganteus*). It had immense antlers. Ireland's woodlands have been plundered by people for centuries, leaving Ireland one of the most sparsely-wooded countries in Europe. One of the last great woodlands is represented by a mere shadow of itself at Coolattin, near the village of Shillelagh in Co Wicklow. Hardly any self-generating ancient woodlands are left, and as coniferous tree species actually became extinct in Ireland, the extensive coniferous forests now blanketing parts of Co Wicklow are entirely recent and this is now the most forested part of Ireland.

In the distant past, Ireland was controlled by Celtic chieftains who generally accepted the authority of a High King. It was customary for chieftains to meet with the High King after travelling from various parts of Ireland to the Hill of Tara, well to the north-west of Dublin. (Bear in mind that Dublin city didn't exist at the time.) Those chieftains who passed through what ultimately became Co Wicklow followed a traditional route known as

the *Slighe Cualann*, whose modern spelling is *Slí Cualann*. Remember this, as the Wicklow Way's Irish name is *Slí Cualann Nua*, meaning a 'new' version of the old Celtic route. This name is used on bilingual signposts along the length of the trail. The literal translation of 'Wicklow Way' into Irish would be *Slí Chill Mhantáin*, but this is not the accepted name, though for some peculiar reason it appears as such on Ordnance Survey maps. Perhaps someone at the Ordnance Survey wasn't paying attention!

Notable points in Irish history include the arrival of Christian missionaries from the 5th century, most notably the Romano-British St Patrick. Celtic Christianity favoured secluded rural retreats, such as the Monastic City at Glendalough. Christianity flourished in Ireland, at the same time as Christianity on the continent was suffering internal schisms and apparently endless strife with non-Christian cultures. The Vikings often targeted monasteries and churches, starting in the 8th century, and by the 9th century they dug in their heels and laid the foundations of the city of Dublin. The Vikings had very little influence or interest in the Wicklow Mountains.

Ireland's rural style of monasticism was eclipsed following the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, from the 12th century. The Normans favoured large-scale monasteries and abbeys, and controlled land in a way that was foreign to the native Irish. Despite many Norman settlers



An arched window in the ruined Cathedral at Glendalough (Day 3/Day 4)

inter-marrying with the Irish and becoming 'more Irish than the Irish themselves', the way was already being paved for centuries of Anglo-Irish strife.

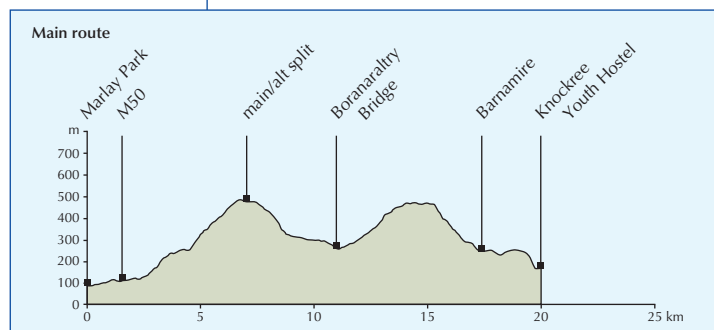
The phrase 'beyond the Pale' originated in Ireland and is particularly relevant in terms of Dublin and its relationship to the Wicklow Mountains. The 'Pale' was a rather fluid area of English control and influence that extended for some distance beyond Dublin. While the 'Pale' often extended beyond Drogheda and occasionally went as far north as Dundalk, it didn't extend too far across the plains into Co Kildare. The southern boundaries, however, finished abruptly far short of the

DAY 1

Marlay Park to Knockree

Start	Marlay Park, Dublin, grid ref O 155 267
Finish	Knockree Youth Hostel, grid ref O 192 150
Distance	20km (12½ miles)
Total ascent	650m (2130ft)
Total descent	570m (1870ft)
Time	6hr 30min
Terrain	Easy road-walking and forest tracks, with short stretches of more rugged moorland paths
Maps	OSI Discovery 50 & 56, OSI Adventure Wicklow North, EastWest Dublin Mountains
Refreshments	Cafés in Marlay Park, café and pub off-route at Glencullen
Accommodation	Plenty of choice around Dublin. Knockree Youth Hostel. Next nearest options lie off-route at Enniskerry.

The Wicklow Way leaves the southern suburbs of Dublin, passing through Marlay Park. Roads and forest tracks lead into the Dublin Mountains, where there is an option to vary the route using the Dublin Mountains Way. After crossing Glencullen and the shoulder of Prince William's Seat, the route passes close to Knockree Youth Hostel above Glencree.



MARLAY PARK



Marlay House is the centrepiece of the extensive Marlay Park

Marlay Park is reached by catching the number 16 Dublin Bus from the centre of Dublin, or the number 175 Go-Ahead bus that runs through the southern suburbs of the city. There are bus stops near the park entrance on Grange Road. The park is based on an 18th-century demesne that has changed hands many times. The Georgian **Marlay House** is flanked by extensive lawns, the Craft Courtyard, a walled garden and belts of mature woodland. There are also numerous sports pitches. The Little Dargle River was transformed into ornamental lakes linked by small cascades. A café stands at the entrance to the walled garden, and another café is located near the exit from the park. Public access is limited to daylight hours and there might be access restrictions when music festivals take place on the extensive greens. For more information contact the park rangers, tel 086 605 6634, or visit www.dlrco.co.ie/en/parks-outdoors/parks/marlay-park.

Starting on Grange Road, walk into **Marlay Park**, keeping left of **Marlay House** to enter a car park. Look for a granite wall carved with 'The Wicklow Way' beside a map-board illustrating the route. Cross a stone step-stile and follow a tarmac path straight through a grassy area. A marker post stands at a junction of five tarmac paths, where one path leads straight ahead and slightly downhill into woodland. ► The **Little Dargle River** lies to the

The woodland is mature and mixed, with tall trees and a holly understorey.

left, spanned by a stone footbridge, but avoid it and keep straight ahead, then keep straight ahead again, avoiding a concrete bridge.

Later, turn left as marked to cross a wide bridge between two ponds, then turn right at a path intersection, as signposted for College Road. Keep straight ahead until the tarmac path reaches two footbridges beside a tiny waterfall. Cross either of the bridges and turn left along a gravel path. This eventually reaches a junction with a broad tarmac path. Turn right as signposted for College Road, passing fitness equipment. Note a white building on the right, which is the Wicklow Way Café, and the last refreshment opportunity until distant Glencullen, which is itself off-route. Walk straight through a car park and turn left to leave Marlay Park.

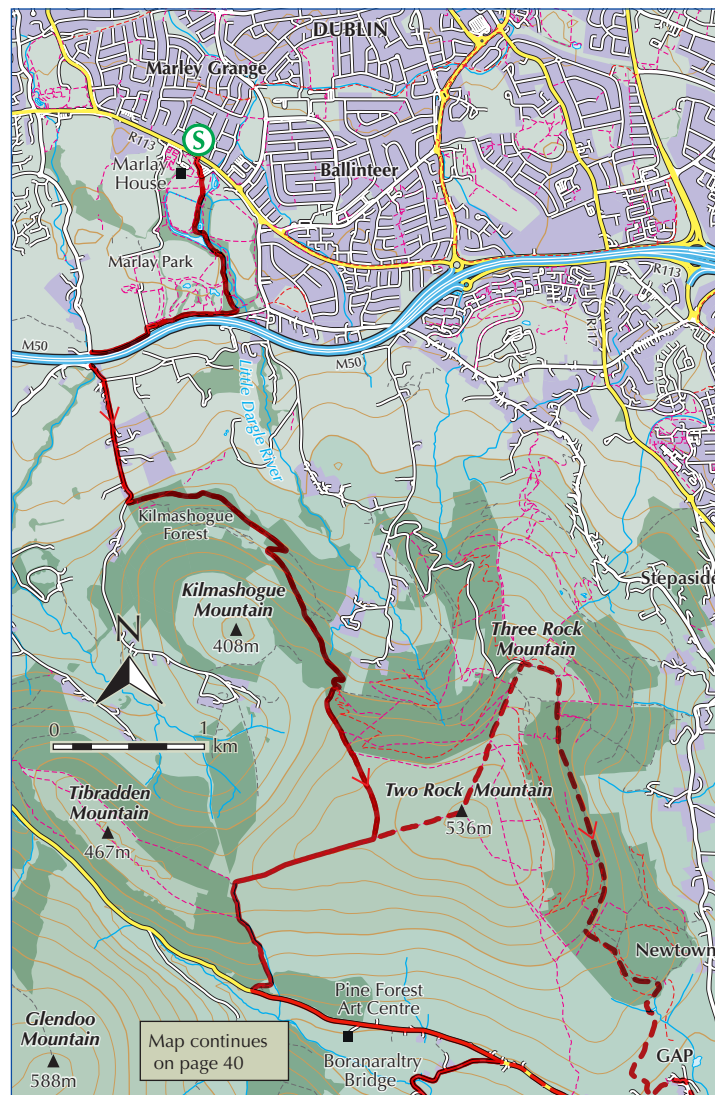
Turn right along College Road, which runs parallel to the busy M50 motorway. ◀ Turn left as signposted at a road junction and pass beneath the motorway, then turn left at a roundabout and walk up Kilmashogue Lane. Pass the entrances to St Columba's College and Ballynascorey Golf Club, and the lane climbs past a number of houses, including the thatched Fál Mór. Keep climbing until a left turn leads into the Kilmashogue Forest Recreation Area.

Follow the track to the right of a car park. ◀ Fork left at a track junction and pass a noticeboard about **Kilmashogue Forest**. The track climbs gently and eventually features a couple of prominent bends. To the left is a clear-felled and replanted slope, overlooking the sprawl of Dublin, the plains, and the coastline from the Hill of Howth to the Cooley Hills and Mountains of Mourne. Keep climbing, but watch for a marker post indicating a right turn up a few chunky granite steps, and leave the track at that point.

A path climbs, with forest to the left and a valley and a few houses down to the right. Open moorland lies ahead, featuring heather, gorse, bilberry, rushes, grass and tiny flowers. Cross a gentle crest around 490m, losing sight of Dublin behind, but facing the rolling Wicklow Mountains ahead. Reach a marked junction where the Wicklow Way joins the Dublin Mountains Way, where an

Watch for three 'fake' trees that are actually mobile phone masts.

A vague path uphill on the right offers a detour to a tumbled Megalithic tomb.



alternative route is available. Turn left for the alternative route, or turn right to continue along the Wicklow Way. Both routes re-join at Boranaraltry Lane in Glencullen.

Alternative via the Dublin Mountains Way

Additional 4km (2½ miles), 70m (230ft) ascent/descent, 1hr 15min

There are two benefits to following this alternative. One is that it climbs to a fine viewpoint on Two Rock Mountain. The other is that it visits Glencullen village, which offers a café, pub, accommodation and occasional bus services.

Turn left to follow an obvious, well-trodden path straight uphill, quickly reaching the summit of **Two Rock Mountain**, crowned by a large Bronze Age cairn known as Fairy Castle, and a trig point at 536m. Views embrace the Wicklow Mountains, Dún Laoghaire, Dublin and the coastline from the Hill of Howth to the Cooley Hills and Mountains of Mourne.

A wooden walkway surrounds the summit and three main paths leave it. Be sure to follow the path heading roughly northwards, down towards Dublin. It is rugged at first, but becomes gritty and boulder-paved, running between a moorland slope and a forest. Land on a track and keep straight ahead, then turn right at a crossroads on **Three Rock Mountain**, around 430m. Follow a broad



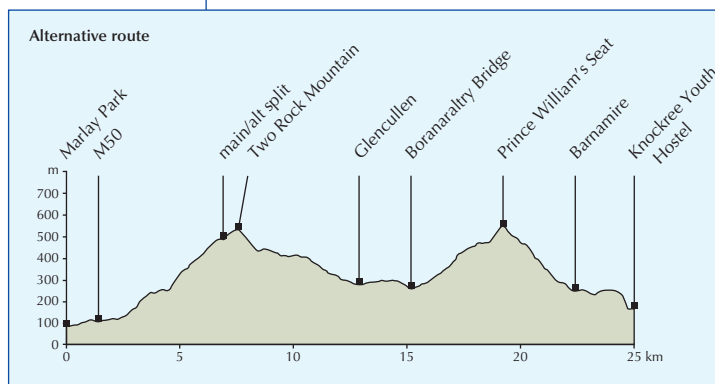
track while noting three granite tors and an assortment of ugly communication masts. This area is usually busy with visitors.

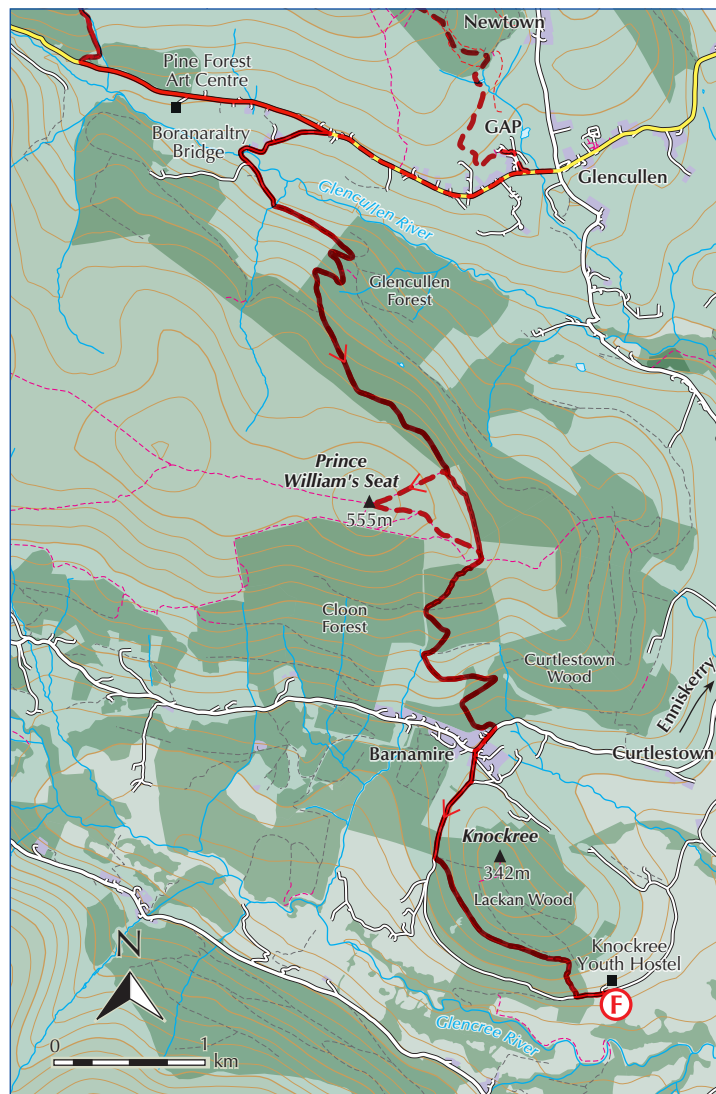
The track descends from a moorland slope into a forest, passing a barrier and always keeping straight ahead at any junctions. Trees obscure views, except for one stretch overlooking the urban sprawl of Dún Laoghaire. Watch out on the left for a path – definitely not the one where entry is forbidden – but the one shortly after it. Go through a small gate in a fence and observe all the safety notices that are displayed, taking care each time the forest path crosses mountain bike paths. The path later runs beside a fenced track then passes through the forest again.

Emerge from the forest to cross a metal mesh foot-bridge then follow a gravel path as it winds downhill, often with a mountain bike path running parallel. Later, the path passes the **GAP** (Glencullen Adventure Park) café. Turn right to walk through a car park and follow an access road through a grassy area to link with a road. Turn left to visit Johnnie Fox's pub in **Glencullen** village. ► The number 44B Dublin offers an infrequent, weekday-only link to Dundrum in Dublin city.

An obvious path along a moorland crest high above Glencullen

Johnnie Fox's claims to be the highest pub in Ireland. This isn't true, but it does offer food, drink and a quirky little museum.





If not visiting Glencullen village, turn right along the road, passing the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Stars of Erin ground and a Christmas tree farm. ► The road eventually reaches a Wicklow Way signpost at a road junction, where you re-join the main route and a left turn leads down Boranaralry Lane.

The main GAA sports are Gaelic football and hurling, played at local, county, provincial and all-Ireland levels.

Main route

Turning right, the Wicklow Way and Dublin Mountains Way follow the same pulverised granite path down a rugged moorland crest. The path has stones and boulders embedded in it, and a number of puddles after rain. The path swings left to descend beside a forest, where the Dublin Mountains Way turns right to enter the forest on **Tibradden Mountain**, and the Wicklow Way simply continues straight downhill. The Wicklow Way later enters the forest and passes a redundant gate before a short, steep descent lands suddenly on a road in Glencullen.

Turn left and follow the road as signposted. Note an access road on the right for the **Pine Forest Art Centre**, which offers educational art and craft courses for young people. However, keep straight ahead along the road and later note the 'Perfect Irish Gift' on the left, where people

This is where the alternative route joins with the main route.

are invited to purchase a square foot or more of land. A signposted road junction is reached. ◀ A right turn leads down Boranaraltry Lane.

Houses on the way down the lane generally have their names carved on big blocks of granite. The road swings left to cross **Boranaraltry Bridge**, where prominent dates in its history are carved into stone on the parapets. Walk straight ahead as marked at a junction, rising to gates where the road gives way to a gravel track. Enjoy views over Glencullen until a gate gives access to **Glencullen Forest**, and shortly after entering, turn right as marked up another forest track. The track is quite bendy as it climbs and there is a junction on one bend. Turn left, in effect keeping straight ahead, following a track to the edge of the forest. A path continues onto a heathery moor dotted with stray spruce trees, then note that a short extension is possible, though it is best reserved for use in clear, dry conditions.

Extension onto Prince William's Seat

Additional 1km (½ mile), 85m (280ft) ascent/descent, 30min

On leaving the forest, turn right, then quickly turn left just after a solitary tree and just before a small Wicklow Mountains National Park marker post. There is a path, but

it is rather vague at first, then it becomes much more obvious as it climbs a boggy, heathery slope. There is no mistaking the path, which leads straight to the summit of **Prince William's Seat**, crowned by a huddle of granite boulders and a trig point at 555m. You can retrace your steps, or else turn sharp left to follow another path downhill, which leads back to the Wicklow Way. Turn right to continue.

Follow the path across the moorland slope, passing deep heather while catching glimpses between the spruce trees of the Hill of Howth, Bray and the Great Sugar Loaf. The path becomes crudely boulder-paved as it descends through young forest, and some of the boulders wobble underfoot. An easier path continues down to a forest track. Turn left down the track, passing through clear-felled and replanted areas where there are views across Glencree. Further down the bendy track, pass tall, straight Scots pines in **Curtlestown Wood**, then soon afterwards pass a barrier at a parking area to reach a road. ▶

Turn right as signposted along the road, then turn left at a junction beside a few houses. The road rises a little, then after turning right at a junction at **Barnamire**, it descends. A forest track on the left is signposted and flanked by two tall pines. Take the track, which rises across the slopes of **Knockree**, then once it descends gently, only the Great Sugar Loaf is seen ahead. Note a bench on the left, then turn right down a grassy path, passing another bench. Drop more steeply down a narrower path, passing a ladder stile before landing on a road. The Wicklow Way heads to the right, but anyone intending to break their journey here should turn left. A short walk leads to **Knockree Youth Hostel**. ▶

The old 18th-century building still exists at **Knockree Youth Hostel**, which accommodated hostellers from as early as 1938, as well as housing a family and a small shop. The modern hostel dates from 2008 and offers a lot more space and facilities. The dining room offers a splendid view across Glencree to the shapely peak of the Great Sugar Loaf.

If a taxi pick-up can be organised, it is 4.5km left along the road to Enniskerry.

If staying off-route at Enniskerry, a taxi pick-up can be organised here.



A short detour can include the summit of Prince William's Seat



The prominent Great Sugar Loaf as seen from Knockree Youth Hostel

ENNISKERRY AND POWERSCOURT

Local taxis are accustomed to providing pick-ups and drop-offs between the Wicklow Way and the attractive village of Enniskerry. Walkers who want hotel or B&B accommodation, shop, pubs and restaurants tend to favour heading there, but it lies 5.5km off-route. The village was built to house workers on the extensive **Powerscourt Estate**. There is an entry charge to visit the estate, tel 01 204 6000, www.powerscourt.com. Note that there is no direct access to the estate from the Wicklow Way, and a proper exploration would take a whole day. **Powerscourt Waterfall** can be seen to good effect, free of charge, on Day 2 of the Wicklow Way.

Enniskerry is served by the number 44 Dublin Bus, while local services are provided by number 185 Go-Ahead buses. Being so close to Dublin, Dún Laoghaire and Bray, there are plenty of taxi operators, but Kevin, on 087 257 2973, does most of the pick-ups and drop-offs for Wicklow Way walkers.

DAY 2

Knockree to Oldbridge

Start	Knockree Youth Hostel, grid ref O 192 150
Finish	Wicklow Way Lodge, Oldbridge, grid ref O 156 014
Distance	21km (13 miles)
Total ascent	720m (2360ft)
Total descent	650m (2130ft)
Time	6hr 30min
Terrain	Forest paths and tracks, as well as exposed hill paths with little shelter. A choice between forest tracks or valley paths towards the end.
Maps	OSI Discovery 56, OSI Adventure Wicklow North and Wicklow Central, EastWest Wicklow East
Refreshments	None on the route, plenty of choice off-route at Roundwood
Accommodation	B&B at Oldbridge, other options off-route at Roundwood, or on the alternative route near Lough Dan

The Wicklow Way reaches its highest point on the shoulder of Djouce Mountain, and on a clear day a summit bid is recommended. The higher parts of the route are inside the Wicklow Mountains National Park. On reaching the Pier Gates above Luggala, a splendid alternative route could be enjoyed, taking in the scenic Lough Dan in preference to the main route. Roundwood village lies off-route, in an area where there are otherwise very few useful facilities.

