

1 Planning to walk the Way

Your Kerry Way holiday deserves careful planning. Committing yourself to the full distance of 210 km (130 miles) demands nine full walking days, three of them long ones of 30-33 km (19-21 miles): see Table 1 overleaf. This is more than many walkers are used to, even experienced ones. Aim to build in some flexibility, perhaps allowing for a rest day, especially in poor weather, or for a change of activity. A couple of spare days might make the difference between an enjoyable holiday and a test of stamina. Give yourself time to appreciate the scenery and wildlife.

If you have less than nine days to commit, there are various ways of shortening the walk using public transport: see page 9. And if you can spend longer, there are some enticing side trips, notably climbing Carrauntoohil or visiting the Skelligs (see pages 17 and 45).

An important advantage is that the Way passes through many villages and a town where you will find accommodation, pubs, places to eat, and usually also a shop. So you don't have to allow for any significant walking distance on top of the overall total merely to reach and return from your overnight stay.

The Way makes use of a variety of routes: green roads, historic old roads, farm and forest tracks, and paths across moorland and fields. However, the Way also follows tarmac (bitumen) roads for about 35% of its length. This is more road-walking than visitors might expect, albeit less than most other Waymarked Ways in Ireland.

The Way passes over Gortamullin, near Kenmare

None of the stages involves more than 55% on roads, and for five stages (1, 5, 7, 8 and 9) road-walking is under 50%. The prevalence of roads partly reflects the fact that in the past even tiny communities were linked by a track of some sort, and partly that rights of way are almost non-existent in Ireland, so it is difficult to secure access to land off-road.

Fortunately the road walking is varied, almost always scenic and mostly along quiet lanes with little traffic. It also makes for faster average times than the off-road sections, especially those punctuated by frequent stiles. For safety advice on road-walking, see page 8.

Most people walk the Way anti-clockwise, turning west near Galway's Bridge towards Black Valley and the mountains. That way, you encounter the longest days after you're well into your stride. Stages 1 and 2 are of modest length, but they include the finest mountain scenery along the Way (and in Ireland). Should you need to curtail your walk, there are public transport options for returning to Killarney from Glenbeigh onwards, see Table 2 on page 9.

Elevation, pace and waymarking

The Way is generally a low-level walk, spiced with several crossings of ridges and spurs between 200 m and 300 m high. The highest point on the main route is at the modest altitude of 376 m (between Cahersiveen and Waterville). However, it undulates continually, and in the off-road sections obstacles such as stream crossings, stiles and fallen trees will slow you down.

Depending on the season and recent weather, several tracks and paths may be boggy, perhaps extremely so, reducing your average speed.

Table 1 Daily stages for a 9-day itinerary

Stage	km	miles
1 Killarney to Black Valley	24	15
2 Black Valley to Glencar	20	12
3 Glencar to Glenbeigh *	13	8
4 Glenbeigh to Cahersiveen	31	19
5 Cahersiveen to Waterville	33	21
6 Waterville to Caherdaniel		
6a coastal	13	8
6b inland	29	18
7 Caherdaniel to Sneem	18	11
8 Sneem to Kenmare	30	19
9 Kenmare to Killarney	26	16
Total (coastal)	208	129
Total (inland)	224	139

* see page 32



The size of your group is important: groups travel at the pace of their slowest member or slightly less. Overall, reckon on averaging 3-4 km/hour (2-2½ mph), unless you're particularly fit and keen to press on.

The route is waymarked, mainly with black posts bearing a distinctive yellow walker icon and/or an arrow head and, in places, also a vertical splash. Sometimes arrows or marks are painted on rocks instead: see page 6. Nevertheless you still need to watch where you're going. Revisiting the trail in 2009 it was clear that much upgrading has been done since our first edition, but a few waymarkers are still missing or obscure, and further route changes are inevitable: be vigilant.

Route changes 2005–2010

There have been several route changes since our first edition. Our dropdown map was updated in 2010, as were all three OSI Discovery maps (4th eds): see page 63. The main changes are the extension of the route into the centre of Killarney (page 24), the option of the Windy Gap route into Glenbeigh (page 34), and the rerouted approach to Cahersiveen (page 39). If you are using a pre-2010 Discovery map, take extra care to follow signage.

It's easy to overshoot a turning where the marker has been hidden by vegetation, removed or vandalised. Signpost arms may be twisted by practical jokers or by the wind, so don't follow them if they contradict the notes and your map reading. It's vital to detect a mistake quickly: if you haven't seen a waymarker for about 15 minutes, or if you reach an unmarked junction, you may not be on the Way. If in doubt, retrace steps and check your position from the map and printed directions. Note that North is tilted by 90 degrees on all drop-down map panels.

The Way passes among fallen trees



Mountain Code

To report an accident, dial 999 or 112 and ask for Mountain Rescue

Before you go:

- Learn to use map and compass
- Obtain the local forecast: see page 62
- Plan within your abilities
- Know simple first aid and the symptoms of exposure
- Learn the mountain distress signals

When you go

- Leave details of your route and check in when you return
- Take windproofs, waterproofs and survival bag
- Wear suitable boots
- Take relevant map, compass, torch, food & drink
- Be especially careful in winter

Steep terrain on Carrauntoohil

Weather and safety

The Kerry Way deserves to be taken seriously: it traverses exposed ridges and wild moorland. Even a minor accident can have major consequences, especially in remote countryside where the nearest help may be far away. It's safer to walk in a group. If you decide to go solo, think how you would handle an emergency, remembering that mobile phone coverage is patchy.

The weather is a crucial factor, and it is unpredictable year-round: on any one day, you can walk through conditions typical of all four seasons. Rain is always likely, and it's vital to have the right gear: damp feet can cause serious blisters. Without good waterproofs, you risk becoming chilled or even hypothermic.

Make sure you set out each day with plenty of food and drink. There are shops at the beginning and end of each stage, but only on stages 1, 6, 8 and 9 can you pick up refreshments along the Way. Don't depend too heavily on the few shops or pubs, as opening days and hours vary widely. Some accommodation hosts will, with sufficient notice, prepare a packed lunch.

When road-walking, remember that Ireland has one of the worst road safety records in Europe. Large tractors often use minor roads, blind bends are common, and most minor roads are narrow and hedge-lined. If two vehicles need to pass each other, retreat to the verge, if there is one, and wait until the road is clear. A few fairly short sections are along busy main roads where extra care is needed. Wherever possible, walk on the right side of the road so as to face oncoming traffic, but be aware of the sight lines when approaching blind bends, especially to the right. Where there is a narrow lane reserved for pedestrians, horses, cyclists and slow vehicles, use it.

How long will it take?


The total distance divides readily into nine day-long walks, suiting the spacing of villages with overnight facilities: see Table 1, page 6. Generally, little extra time is needed to reach accommodation. If you choose somewhere more than a couple of km from the Way, ask in advance whether your host provides lifts for guests. If so, it's customary to make a small cash payment to cover fuel, and you will be committed to a pick-up time and place. Expect to phone to confirm arrival at the rendez-vous. There are public phones (coin and card operated) in the towns and villages at the end of each stage.

The inland alternative route from Waterville to Caherdaniel is worth considering: see pages 47-50. It's 16 km (10 miles) longer than the coastal route, but offers as good a day's walking as any along the Way, passing through remote countryside with wonderful views of coast and mountains.

If there's a non-walking driver in your group, it's easy to arrange pick-ups as each day's walk ends in a town or village where there are designated car parks. Elsewhere it's difficult to find a safe parking place: leaving cars in passing places or in front of gates is extremely inconsiderate and almost certainly dangerous.

If time is short, you could finish your walk at one of several points, returning to Killarney by public transport anywhere from Glenbeigh onward (although services are limited). Table 2 summarises the main options; there's a few extra services in July/August (252 to Kenmare once daily, 270 to Sneem on Mondays and Fridays). Contact details for timetables are given on page 62.

Table 2 Bus services to Killarney

<i>Places served</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Journey time (mins)</i>
Glenbeigh, Cahersiveen, Waterville	279	once/twice daily Mon-Sat	50-115
Glenbeigh, Cahersiveen, Waterville, Caherdaniel, Sneem (Ring of Kerry)	280	once daily, July/Aug	60-220
Kenmare	270	twice daily, Mon-Sat, more July/Aug	45-50



Travel planning

There are good transport links from Dublin (the most likely port of arrival for visitors) to Killarney, at the start of the Way. Irish Rail operates at least four services daily between Dublin Heuston and Killarney stations, with an average journey time well under 4 hours. Bus Éireann operates at least five services daily between Dublin bus station (Busaras) and Killarney with an average time of just over 6 hours.

By road the distance from Dublin is 309 kilometres (192 miles); roads are generally good as far as Limerick, less so beyond. Journeys may take longer than you would expect as the main road passes through small, often congested towns.

Shannon airport, west of Limerick, is also an accessible airport, especially if you plan to hire a car. Another option is to fly direct to Kerry (the airport is at Farranfore, north of Killarney) from London (Stansted/Luton), Manchester or Dublin, or even from Frankfurt Hahn, Faro or Alicante. You could take a taxi for the final 12 km to Killarney.



What is the best time of year?

Except for mid-winter, the Way can be walked in any month. Be prepared for cold, wet and windy conditions at any time, and you may be pleasantly surprised. There are several factors to consider before deciding when to go.

Winter days are short: there are only 7-8 hours of daylight in December, leaving no margin for error on most days. In winter, bus services are less frequent or non-existent and many B&Bs are closed. Side-trips such as an ascent of Carrauntoohil are unlikely to be feasible, and no boats run to the Skelligs: see page 45.

Midges and horse-flies can be annoying in summer, requiring precautions. During July and August, the busiest months of the tourist season, accommodation may be difficult to find without advance booking. All in all, the ideal months are May/June and September/October.