

Introduction

The Dingle Way can claim perhaps the finest scenery and richest archaeological heritage of all Ireland's 32 Waymarked Ways. Throughout its 183 km (114 miles) it combines wild coasts and cliff-tops with superb uplands and beautiful, tranquil and fertile countryside.

Starting and finishing in Tralee, County Kerry's largest town, the route resembles the outline of a leaf on a stalk. The stalk comprises the first, and most of the last, day's walking. It supports the leaf, which encircles the Dingle Peninsula, seldom far from the coast, passing close to Europe's most westerly point. Through small villages and farmlands, over moorlands, and along coastal cliffs and vast beaches, the Dingle Way is magnificently scenic, providing ever-changing vistas that linger in your memory.

Highlights include the wild moorland on the lower slopes of the Slieve Mish mountains, overlooking Tralee Bay; the beautiful white ribbon of Inch Strand; charming Annascaul village in its wide, fertile valley, overlooked by the mountains; the picturesque town of Dingle, set in its sheltered harbour; the superb traverse of the lower slopes of Mount Eagle strewn with archaeological features; the glorious, rugged coastline seen from the cliff-tops north of Clogher; the traverse of the northern shoulder of Brandon Mountain, and the exhilarating freedom of the extended beach walk right around the shores of the Maharees Peninsula, between Brandon and Tralee Bays. Wherever you go, you'll find friendly, welcoming people, ready to dispense their uniquely Irish brand of hospitality.

Looking north-west towards Sybil Point, and the island An Fiach



Planning to walk the Way

The Way makes use of a variety of routes throughout its length. Several beaches provide glorious walking along wide sands, mainly on the north coast between Cloghane and Lower Camp (about 17% of the Way). It also uses historic paths such as the line of the old Tralee to Dingle road, boreens, farm tracks and paths round field edges or cliff tops.

However, in common with other Irish Ways, this one involves a considerable distance of road-walking, much more than visitors might expect. Overall, about 48% of it follows tarmac (bitumen) roads, though nearly half of this is over once you reach Dingle at the end of the third day. This partly reflects the fact that Irish communities were (and to some extent still are) widely separated, and that, in the past, people moved about on foot or by donkey. It also reveals that rights of way are almost non-existent in Ireland, and that it is difficult to secure access to land off-road.

Fortunately the road walking is very varied, almost always scenic and is mostly along quiet lanes with very little traffic. However, remember that large tractors are frequent road users, that there are many blind bends and that most minor roads are narrow and lined with high hedges. If two vehicles need to pass each other, retreat to the verge – if there is one – and wait until the road is clear.

North-east from Smerwick Harbour towards Ballydavid Head



Restaurant in Castlegregory

An attractive feature of the Way is how it passes through so many villages where you can find accommodation, pubs, places to eat, and usually also a shop. This means you don't have to allow for any significant walking distance on top of the overall total merely to reach (or return from) your destination or overnight stay.

Elevation, pace and waymarking

The Way is generally a low-level walk, with only one significant ascent – in the north-west, up and over a spur of Brandon Mountain at 650 m. Elsewhere the route never rises above 230 m, although there are plenty of minor ups and downs as you cross small valleys or headlands. Depending on the season and recent weather, several sections may be boggy, some extremely so: this applies to most boreens and farm tracks, parts of the moorland path between Blennerville and Camp, to the offroad section east of Feohanagh and to the steep descent from Mount Brandon.

Conditions underfoot will reduce your average speed, as will the number of people if you walk in a group. Groups travel at the pace of their slowest member, or a little less. Overall, expect to average 3-4 km/hr, (2-2½ mph) unless you're particularly fit and impatient to press on.

The route is waymarked, mainly with black posts bearing a distinctive yellow walker icon and an arrow head, plus some fingerposts. However, you still need to watch where you're going: it's easy to overshoot a turning, perhaps because a crucial waymarker has been used as a rubbing-post by animals, removed

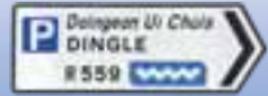
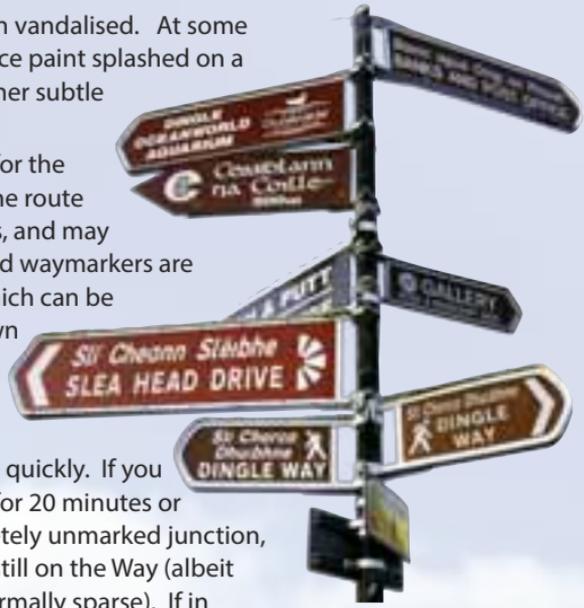


by souvenir hunters or even vandalised. At some junctions, you need to notice paint splashed on a rock, arrows on poles or other subtle clues.

Our directions are reliable for the Way as it ran in 2019, but the route has changed over the years, and may change further. Superseded waymarkers are sometimes left in place, which can be confusing. Rely on your own common sense and map reading, and remain vigilant.

It's vital to detect a mistake quickly. If you haven't seen a waymarker for 20 hours or so, or if you reach a completely unmarked junction, question whether you are still on the Way (albeit markers on beaches are normally sparse). If in doubt, retrace your steps and check your position from the map and directions.

The brand 'Kerry Camino' was launched in 2012 and its website claims this name for the first three sections of Dingle Way (from Tralee to Dingle). To download a logbook and locate stamping stations (mainly in pubs and shops) visit www.kerrycamino.com. Much of the route is part of the 'Wild Atlantic Way' which covers all 2500 km (1550 miles) of Ireland's Atlantic coastline. You will see its blue logo with white waves on many road signs.



Waymarking on Brandon Mountain





Crossing a stream on Fermoyle Strand

Beach walking, tides and stream crossing

The long stretches of beach walking are a major feature of the Way, and most of Dingle's beaches can be walked safely at nearly all states of the tide. If you are unlucky enough to face stormy weather, be cautious of walking on a beach around high water, especially during 'spring tides' of up to four or five metres. 'Springs' have nothing to do with seasons: they are very high tides that occur for a few days, twice per lunar month, about or just after the new and full moon. It may then be safer to take to the dunes, or to bypass the beach using roads. Remember that the flatter the beach, the faster the tide will seem to come in.

High water occurs twice per lunar day (roughly 25 hours), but local landforms and weather can vary both timing and height of the tide. Tide tables are available locally for a couple of euros. If relying on them be sure to allow for local variation (Dingle high water is up to an hour ahead of the times printed for Cobh, near Cork) and for summer time: when in force, this may be an hour ahead of the time shown in tide tables.

Normally, the state of the tide affects walkers more in relation to whether the vast expanses of sand are visible, how firm the sand is to walk on, and where and how you choose to cross the various streams. In warm weather you may choose to walk barefoot anyway, but in colder weather you may need to take off your boots to keep them dry when crossing the occasional stream.

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 71

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 and drink

Be especially careful in winter.

Safety and weather

The Dingle Way deserves to be taken seriously – it passes close to precipitous cliff edges, crosses exposed moorland, and traverses tidal shores. Even a minor accident can have major consequences, though for most of the Way help should never be very far away. It's safer to walk in a group, but if you decide to go solo, think how you would handle an emergency, remembering that mobile phone coverage is patchy, and that a dead battery makes a mobile useless.

The weather has a crucial bearing on your plans: check the forecast daily before setting out; check www.met.ie or ask locally. Rain is always likely, and the weather is unpredictable and very changeable year-round. It's vital to have the right gear: without effective waterproofs, the risk of becoming chilled or hypothermic is high. Damp feet can cause serious blisters which could ruin (or even curtail) your holiday.

New to long distance walking?

If you haven't done much walking before, it is advisable to tackle the Way with someone who knows how to use a map and compass. Note that our mapping has a km grid and also shows distances in km for a clockwise circuit from Tralee to Camp.

Well before you leave for Dingle, do a few day walks (at least four hours long) to test your footwear and to build up fitness. Comfortable, waterproof boots are the first essential. For advice on choosing gear, obtain our *Notes for Novices*: see page 71.

Clockwise or anticlockwise?

Most people walk the Way clockwise, turning south from near Camp village towards the south coast of the peninsula. That way, you will be well into your stride before you face the toughest ascent and longest days.

How long will it take?

The full distance of 183 km (114 miles) is commonly regarded as an eight-day walk, though it can be done in less by combining sections to make very long days, or by using public transport to bypass certain sections. You may prefer to spend more than eight days, for example to allow for a visit to Great Blasket Island (see page 28), or to take in other side trips.

Fortunately, little extra time needs to be allowed to reach places with accommodation. If you choose somewhere more than 1-2 km from the Way, ask in advance whether your host can provide a lift. If so, it's customary to make a small cash payment to cover fuel. The drawback is that you need to make a firm commitment to a pick-up time and place at the end of the day. Phone to confirm arrival at the rendezvous – assuming that you have a signal on your mobile (cellphone).

Some walkers save time by using a bus to start and/or finish at Camp instead of Tralee. Others take a bus to start from Dingle and/or return to Tralee by bus from Camp (or on a Friday from Cloghane or Castlegregory). Study the website www.buseirann.ie carefully. Don't underestimate the time you need to appreciate the scenery and wildlife, and perhaps to make side-trips. Enjoy your walk to the utmost.

If there's a driver in your group, it's easy to arrange pick-ups: each day's walk ends in a town or village. Please park considerately, preferably in a formal car park. Leaving cars in passing places or in front of gates may infuriate someone and is often dangerous.

Daily distances (rounded) for an 8-day itinerary

| | km | mi |
|------------------------|------------|------------|
| Tralee | | |
| | 18.4 | 11.4 |
| Camp | | |
| | 15.7 | 9.8 |
| Annascaul | | |
| | 22.5 | 14.0 |
| Dingle | | |
| | 22.4 | 13.9 |
| Dunquin | | |
| | 23.1 | 14.4 |
| Feohanagh | | |
| | 25.7 | 16.0 |
| Cloghane | | |
| | 26.4 | 16.4 |
| Castlegregory | | |
| | 10.4 | 6.8 |
| Camp | | |
| | 18.4 | 11.4 |
| Tralee | | |
| | | |
| Total (rounded) | 183 | 114 |

Bus services *Check www.buseirann.ie before relying on these buses*

