

Introduction

The Kerry Way is one of Ireland's longest waymarked Ways, and arguably its finest. Its pedigree stretches back to 1982 when it was proposed and 1989 when it was completed. Only the Wicklow Way has a longer history and the Kerry Way offers more variety and less road-walking. Throughout its length (210 km/130 miles or more) it takes in dramatic peaks and glens, wild moorlands, windswept loughs and magnificent coastal panoramas. It skirts Ireland's most spectacular mountain landscapes and passes the foot of Carrauntoohil, the country's highest peak.

Starting and finishing in Killarney, the route makes a circuit of the Iveragh peninsula – a walker's version of the Ring of Kerry. Its structure is like a leaf upon a stem that hangs south from Killarney. Although coastal waters are often in view, the Kerry Way is largely an inland route, through remote and lovely glens, past loughs and over high passes, often following centuries-old roads and tracks. It wanders through small villages, prosperous farmlands and the beautiful woodlands of Killarney National Park.

Highlights include sublime views across Loch Leane and Muckross Lake; the secluded cascades of Torc Waterfall; inspiring views of the peaks of MacGillycuddy's Reeks; old coach roads above Dingle Bay, above the south coast and north from Kenmare; wide-open views from the ridges between Cahersiveen and Waterville; the mosaic of sheltered beaches, islets and rocky headlands of Derrynane Bay; oak woodlands – light and shade in sunshine, eerie and mysterious in the mist; and the tall, dark woods beside the Kenmare River. And wherever you go, you'll find friendly, welcoming people with their uniquely Irish brand of hospitality.

Across Loch Leane to MacGillycuddy's Reeks



1 Planning to walk the Way

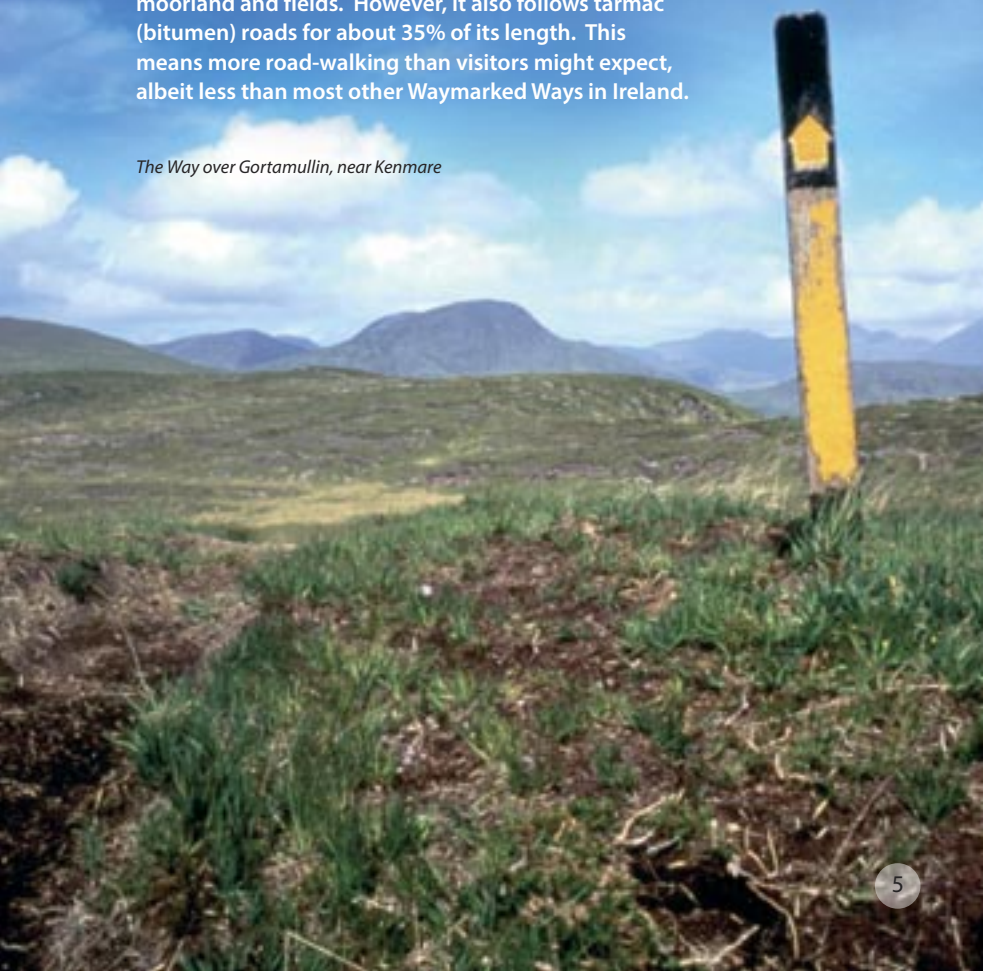
Your Kerry Way holiday requires careful planning. Committing yourself to the full distance of at least 210 km (130 miles) demands nine full walking days, two of them very long at 34-36 km /21-22 miles and three more of 24-30 km (15-19 miles): see Table 1 overleaf. This is more than most walkers are used to, even experienced ones. Aim for 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 fewer than nine days to commit, there are various ways of shortening the walk using lifts and/or public transport: see page 6. And if you can spend longer, there are some enticing side trips, notably climbing Carrauntoohil or visiting the Skelligs: see pages 17 and 57.

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 probably won't have to walk very much further than the overall total to reach and return from your overnight stay or meals.

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

The Way over Gortamullin, near Kenmare



Elevation, pace and waymarking

The distances shown in Table 1 refer to the main Way as we recommend and display it on our mapping. The actual distance that you walk will depend on which route options you choose (see page 8) as well as where you decide to stay and eat. You would increase the distance overall if you take the so-called ‘Scenic route’ instead of Windy Gap (see page 39) and even more so if you follow the inland route from Waterville to Caherdaniel: see Part 3-6b. Inland entails nearly 16 km (10 miles) further than the coastal route, but offers a great day’s walking through remote countryside with wonderful views of coast and mountains.

In case 210 km already seems overlong, we explain several places where you can take minor shortcuts using roads. You could shorten the route more drastically by getting a lift back to the main circuit from your host in Cahersiveen and/or by ending your walk at Kenmare and taking a bus back to Killarney.

More radically, you could cut out Cahersiveen altogether. This works best if you can stay at Dromid Hostel, but if you start from Glenbeigh that would make another 33-km long day. Ideally, extend the previous section beyond Glenbeigh to stay at Mountain Stage (Mountain View B&B) for a more manageable 27.5 km (17.1 miles) to Dromid Hostel. You then face only a half-day stroll (13.7 km/8.5 miles), giving you plenty of time to enjoy Waterville and Lough Currane.

None of the stages involves more than 55% on roads, and for five stages (1, 5, 7, 8 and 9) road-walking amounts to less than 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 9.

We recommend that you follow the general practice of walking the circuit anti-clockwise, turning west over Galway’s Bridge towards Black Valley and the mountains. That way, you start with three stages of modest length that include the route’s finest mountain scenery – perhaps the finest in all Ireland.

By the time you encounter the longest stages, you should be well into your stride. Should you need to curtail your walk, there are a few bus options for returning to Killarney from Glenbeigh onwards: see page 10.

Table 1
Daily stages for a 9-day itinerary

	<i>km</i>	<i>miles</i>
Killarney		
	23.7	14.7
Black Valley		
	18.3	11.4
Glenclar		
	13.8	8.6
Glenbeigh		
	29.9	18.6
Cahersiveen		
	35.5	22.1
Waterville		
coastal	12.4	7.7
Caherdaniel		
	17.4	10.8
Sneem		
	33.6	20.9
Kenmare		
	24.9	15.5
Killarney		
Total	210	130

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 371 m – the summit of Knockavahaun, see page 50. However, the Way undulates continually: see the profile on pages 8-9. Also, in the off-road sections obstacles such as stream crossings, ladder stiles and fallen trees will slow you down.

Depending on the season and recent weather, tracks and paths may be boggy, perhaps extremely so, reducing your average speed. 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 the distinctive yellow walker icon and/or an arrow. Sometimes arrows or marks are painted on rocks instead, some fingerposts carry the 'Kerry Way' label and others *Sli Uíbh Ráthaigh* – Gaelic for the Iveragh Way. (County Kerry includes all of the Iveragh and Dingle peninsulas and more besides, so the Gaelic name is more precise.)



Although waymarking is good, you still need to be vigilant. It's easy to overshoot a turning where the marker has been hidden by vegetation, removed or vandalised. Fingerpost arms may be rotated by animals, humans or even the wind: don't follow them blindly if they don't make sense. It's vital to detect a mistake quickly: if you haven't seen a waymarker for 15 minutes or so, or if you reach an unmarked junction, you may be off-route. If in doubt, retrace your steps and check your position from our mapping.

Irish placenames, signage and maps

Part of the Iveragh peninsula is designated as *Gaeltacht* (Irish-speaking area), but you are unlikely to encounter the Irish language other than in signage and on OSI maps.

These no longer show anglicised placenames, and can be confusing to newcomers. Whilst we recognise that Irish placenames are authentic, they are unfamiliar to most visitors. With no disrespect to the Irish language we show anglicised versions only on our mapping. The following table is an attempt to help with recognition. It omits the key places that are shown in green at the start of each section in Part 3, and also omits the more obvious equivalents such as Muckcross/**Mucros** and Ferta/**An Fhearta**.



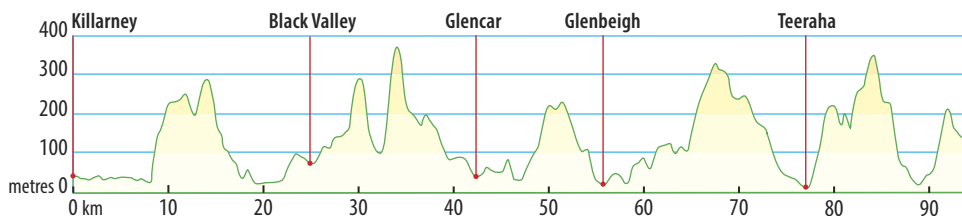
Killarney	Cill Airne	Coomcallee	An Ghuala Ghorm
Cummeenduff	Com Uí Dhuibh	Mastergeehy	Máistír Gaoith
Lough Acoose	Loch an Chuais	Lough Currane	Loch Luíoch
Carrauntoohil	Corrán Tuathail	Isknagahiny Lough	Loch na nGrág
Knocknadobar	Cnoc na dTobar	River Inny	Abhain na hUíne

Route options

There have been many route changes since the Way was opened in 1985. Many of these offer walkers options to suit different conditions, but the number of choices can be bewildering and several online sources show the Way branching without explanation or differentiation.

To avoid confusion, at every choice point we suggest a preference, show it in our main route style and we explain the alternative option which is differently styled. We document where the routes diverge and merge, both in text and on our mapping, and give an idea of the pros and cons.

Our mapping was created in 2021, when the OSI Discovery maps were still on their 2015 editions: see page 87. Always check the recommended websites for recent route changes and obtain the latest mapping.



Weather, safety and experience

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 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 (cellphone) 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. Weather forecasts are reliable at short range, so always check the evening before your walk. Rain is likely in Kerry, and it's vital to have the right gear: damp feet can cause serious blisters. Without good waterproofs, you risk discomfort or even hypothermia.

Make sure you set out each day with plenty of food and drink. There are shops at the beginning and end of each stage, and on certain stages you may be able to buy refreshments along the Way. Don't depend too heavily on the few shops or pubs: opening days and hours vary widely, especially since the pandemic. Some accommodation hosts will, with notice, prepare a packed lunch.

If you haven't done much walking before, it's advisable to tackle the Way with someone who can use a map and compass and/or GPS reliably. Long before you leave for Kerry, do several day walks of at least four hours duration to test your footwear and build up fitness. Carry a medium-sized pack to get used to walking with a load. The complete Kerry Way is a major commitment, and a challenging choice for your very first long-distance walk. For advice on choosing and buying gear, refer to our *Notes for novices*: see page 87.

When road-walking, remember that farm vehicles and livestock use minor roads which are often narrow and hedge-lined. If two vehicles need to pass each other, retreat to the verge if there is one. 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 sight lines when approaching blind bends. Aim to wear something bright or reflective, especially if walking near dusk or in foul weather.



Traffic jam on a minor road in Kerry

