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TOUR A ~ GOLDEN VALE DRIVE



TOUR A IN A NUTSHELL

START:
KILMALLOCK
FINISH:
BALLYLANDERS

DISTANCE:
112KM

DURATION:
1-2 DAYS

This sweeping drive will introduce you to the natural features that gave The Golden Vale its evocative name. It will take you from the level pasturelands of the north, to the foot of the highest inland mountain, Galtymore (3,015ft) by Griston Bog, you'll pass from picturesque countryside through the medieval town of Kilmallock and around Lough Gur, famous for its many archaeological sites. The signposted driving route weaves through the villages and towns of Kilmallock, Bruree, Bruff, Croom, Lough Gur, Ballyneety, Pallas Green, Emly, Galbally, Kilfinane and Ballylanders.

WHY IT'S SO SPECIAL?

Every twist in the road reveals a landscape rich in history, folklore and legend. Pick up the Living Land Golden Vale Drive audio CD from Kilfinane Tourist Office, pop it in the stereo, and listen to your personal guide unravel the mysteries and tales of these ancient lands. Plan to stop at Lough Gur, to explore this mysterious area and lose yourself in the past. Local folklore hints at Lough Gur's importance to the ancient people who came to this magical lake to worship and make offerings. The arrival of Christianity in Ireland during the 5th-century AD may have changed local practices forever, but tales of its enchanted past have never been forgotten.



Take time to visit the ancient settlements close by, or take a guided walk in the summer with one of the knowledgeable locals. You're bound to spot the lake's potential as a picnic spot too - the tranquil waterside setting and rolling hills make this perfect location for a relaxed al fresco experience, surrounded by pristine nature and wildlife.

KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED

Hop out of your car in any of the pretty villages and towns along the route, to soak up the local atmosphere and get a real sense of the history. A stroll through medieval Kilmallock, fortified in 1375 with five impressive towers, hints at the wealth of this once thriving town. As Kilmallock grew in prosperity, so too did the quality of its merchant's houses: you'll find a fine example of one on the main street.



Galbally is another treat for visitors, with plenty of pretty photo opportunities. Its quaint market square has been the focus of village life since the early 1800s, when horses from the Bianconi company pulled mail coaches to stables on the northern side of the square. Today, its brightly painted houses and shop fronts give it a distinctive Irish character. Stray from the village and you'll find two historic sites close by: the ruins of Moor Abbey, a Franciscan friary founded in the early 13th century, and Darby's Bed, a megalithic passage grave. Believed to be 6,000 years old or more, it is similar in style to the megalithic tombs in Brittany, France, with its entrance facing northwest in line with the midsummer sunset.

SPECIAL INTEREST



Theatre buffs should fit in a visit to Briar Cottage in Bruree, home to the Genesius Theatrical Museum. Hosting an array of costumes, props and scenery from Flash Parade, one of the bigger drama and variety shows to ever tour Ireland in the late 19th century until the early 1970s, the collection includes costumes dating back to the 1860s. This is the only collection of its kind in Ireland. Bruree is also home to the De Valera Museum, housed in the national school where the former President of Ireland Eamon De Valera attended as a young boy. There's an interesting collection of his personal belongings alongside items



recording early 20th century village life. For a broader look at local history, make time for the Ballyhoura Heritage Hub in Kilmallock. Here key periods of Prehistoric, Christian, Medieval, Anglo Irish, Irish Revolution, 20th

century life and literary traditions are brought to life through the interactive medium of art, sculpture and literature. Chilled out souls looking to perfect the art of escapism will find a visit to Tig Roy ticks all the right boxes. This little piece of paradise near the Glen of Aherlow takes a holistic approach to life while celebrating Irish culture.



Activity weekends offer everything from yoga to cookery classes, hill walking to set dancing, and meditation to traditional Irish music. The outdoor Finnish spa is reason enough to check in, but there's also an opportunity to improve your Irish language skills while meeting the locals every Tuesday evening.

Kilmallock's Friars Gate Theatre and Art Gallery guarantees a good night's entertainment, with a vibrant programme encompassing contemporary drama and theatre, film, dance, jazz and cabaret. The adjoining Art Gallery hosts monthly exhibitions by local, national and international artists, and is open by day.

FEELING ACTIVE

Take to the countryside on horseback at Hillcrest Equestrian Centre near Galbally, for a day's cantering or some lessons to improve your ability.

For a unique view of the countryside join in a point to point race, run between December and May across farmlands in Bruff, Athlaca and Kilmallock. (Visit www.turfclub.ie for fixture dates.) While undeniably controversial in some circles, hunting is quite popular in the region, with groups like the



Scarteen Hunt and Limerick Harriers active between October and March.

Those more comfortable on their own legs will enjoy an amble through Griston Bog, a unique conservation area 1 kilometre from the village of Ballylanders. Here you'll find a wooden causeway giving easy access to this beautiful raised bog, and its resident newt population! Golfers should endeavour to fit in 18-holes at Limerick County Golf & Country Club, a championship course at Ballyneety, but if you prefer to watch sport rather than partake, head to any of the local GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) pitches to take in



the energy and thrill of a hurling or football match.

SOMETHING FOR THE KIDS

Time to introduce the kids to a real taste of country living! At Free Range Kids, in Croom, County Limerick, you'll find a summer camp whose main aim is to let kids be kids – all within a safe and fun environment. Youngsters are introduced to the simple pleasures of a by-gone tech-free era, that includes traditional games (like capture the flag), bread and cookie making, tie-dying, pet farm experience with ducks, calves and donkeys, and plenty of outdoor activities, including orienteering, soccer and tennis. Also in the Croom area is Buttercup Farm, a traditional old farm that's perfectly geared towards family visits. Amongst the animal paddocks and intriguing old machinery, you'll all enjoy pony and trap rides, nature quizzes, the picnic area and coffee shop, or perhaps a visit to the Santa Claus Village in December!

RECOVERY POSITION

The farmlands of the famed Golden Vale produce some of Ireland's finest dairy produce,

which bodes well for hungry travellers in need of sustenance. A simple picnic basket allows you sample the region's best artisan produce – from local cheese, creamy butter, fresh fruits, bottles of Ballyhoura Country Apple Juice, apple jams and chutneys, Hodgins sausages and Hanley's pudding, and real Irish floral honey from Kildorrery. Or hit one of the farmers markets, where you'll find it hard to resist the local banter. (Friday, 9am-1pm in Kilmallock; Friday, 2pm-5.30pm in Bruff; The last Sunday of each month, 10am-12 noon in Caherconlish's Millennium Centre.) If you fancy someone else doing the cooking, you won't be stuck for choice. Riordan's Pub at Holycross near Lough Gur and Clancy's Bar in Bruff both serve celebrated pub grub. Fairways



Restaurant is ideal after a round of golf in Limerick County Golf & Country Club, while The Old Bake House in Bruff, Deebert House Hotel in Kilmallock and Poachers Restaurant at Bulgaden near Kilmallock all offer promising dining experiences.

IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS

Join in an evening's entertainment like no other, at one of the region's rambling houses. In times past, the rambling house was a place

where locals gathered to entertain and be entertained. This revived tradition welcomes everyone to join in, but there's no pressure to perform – simply sit back and enjoy the songs, recitations, dancing and storytelling. Lough Gur Rambling House takes place on the second Thursday of each month in

the Honey Fitz Theatre, when traditional apple tart, brown bread, scones and tea are served. Ballinvreena rambling house takes place on Wednesdays at Davy's Cottage, Ballinvreena with crossroads dancing every Sunday throughout the summer.



All directions for this route are available to download from www.ballyhouracountry.com or www.aaroutefinder.com

Activities

Hillcrest Equestrian Centre	Galbally	062 37915
Lazy Dog Shooting Range	Ballylanders	087 907 9556
Limerick County Golf & Country Club	Ballyneety	061 351 881
Genesisus Theatrical Museum	Bruree	087 926 8481
De Valera Museum	Bruree	063 909000
Ballyhoura Heritage Hub	Kilmallock	063 98727
Lough Gur Visitor Centre	Lough Gur	061 360 788
Buttercup Farm	Croom	061 397 556
Tig Roy	Glen of Aherlow	062 37032
Free Range Kids	Croom	086 309 9376

Eating Out

Gallahue's Restaurant	Ballylanders	062 46644
Riordans Bar & Restaurant	Holycross	061 382 440
Clancy's Bar	Bruff	061 382 488
Molly Bloom's	Kilfinane	063 91919
Fairways Restaurant	Ballyneety	061 351 881
Old Bake House Restaurant	Bruff	061 382 797
Deebert House Hotel	Kilmallock	063 31200
Poachers Restaurant	Bulgaden Castle	063 98209

Entertainment

Lough Gur Rambling House	Lough Gur	061 382 698
Ballinvreena Rambling House	Ballinvreena	062 53286
Friars Gate Theatre	Kilmallock	063 98727

HISTORY & HERITAGE KILMALLOCK



If Kilmallock's walls could talk, they'd have some intriguing tales to tell. The Normans may have built a castle here in 1206, but nearby ruins, unearthed in 1986, turned out to be Neolithic houses built by locals over 5,000 years ago.

To be fair to the Normans, it was they who put Kilmallock on the map, turning it into one of the most important towns in Munster. The powerful Earls of Desmond, the Fitzgeralds, began using the town as their base and stronghold in the 13th century, contributing to its wealth and prosperity.

Confederate forces took control of the town in 1642 under the leadership of Lord Mountgarret, Lord Purcell and Garret Barry, but their power was short-lived against the might of Cromwell's men. In 1690



A STROLL WITHIN
THE WALLED TOWN
REVEALS A WEALTH
OF HISTORIC
BUILDINGS THAT
CHART THE
CHANGING NATURE
AND TIMES OF
KILMALLOCK



the town met with more destruction, caused this time by marauding Jacobites under the command of the Duke of Berwick. The devastation had a lasting effect, stifling the growth and prosperity of Kilmallock for almost 200 years. Today a large section of the old town walls are still intact, together with the last surviving town gate, Blossom Gate, located on Emmet Street.

Like many Irish towns and villages, the name Kilmallock is derived from a local saint – in this case Mocheallóg – who built a church on the hill that, today, overlooks the town. Kilmallock's Dominican Priory, referred to locally as 'the abbey', replaced that church, and is something of a landmark to this day. Established in 1291 by Gilbert Fitzgerald of the White Knights, who then invited the Dominicans to the monastery, where his clan remained the key benefactors. Maurice Fitzgerald was the main patron of the friary when it was enlarged in 1320.

Its community both grew and dwindled over the centuries, mainly due to changing land laws and wars, with friars eventually abandoning the venerable building for good in 1790.

A stroll within the walled town reveals a wealth of historic buildings that chart the changing nature and times of Kilmallock. The 15th-century John's Castle is a fine example of a Peel Tower, with its wide arched openings prompting speculation that it was originally a town gate. One thing that is clear is that it's had a variety of interesting uses, from a citadel to an arsenal, a school to a blacksmith's forge, and, most recently, the meeting place of Kilmallock Corporation!

Close by is the 16th century Stone Mansion, a handsome house built in the town's heyday under the Earls of Desmond. More recent history is commemorated in The Famine Memorial Park, or Bully's Acre, where the remains of countless famine victims, many of whom passed through the Union Workhouse in the 1840s, are now buried.

For a good understanding of the surrounding region, pay a visit to the heritage centre and local museum. Ballyhoura Heritage Information Centre at Friar's Gate Theatre & Arts interprets the heritage attractions of the Ballyhoura region through the medium of art. (Open 9.30am-5.30pm Monday-Friday or by appointment.) Kilmallock Museum takes a more conventional approach, reflecting local life during the 19th and 20th centuries. Scale models of Kilmallock in medieval times and the Stone Age at Tankardstown are especially interesting, as are the guided walking tours, which set off from the museum daily at 12 noon. (Open daily, 11am-3pm.)



FOR A GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE
SURROUNDING REGION, PAY A VISIT TO THE
HERITAGE CENTRE AND LOCAL MUSEUM



BALLYHOURA ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

Hospital, Co. Limerick

A survey of the built heritage of the Ballyhoura region in place since 1977.

The information collected is an important historical record of the architecture of the region at the turn of the 21st century. For further information contact the Architectural Survey on:

Tel: 061 383 982

E-mail: ballyhouraarchitecturalsurvey@eircom.net



BALLINVREENA CROSSROADS DANCING



IT'S WONDERFUL TO
KNOW THAT THIS
LIVELY TRADITION OF
OUTDOOR DANCING,

I COULD WRITE FOREVER AND YOU WOULD STILL
ONLY HAVE A TASTE OF WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT.

AS TOLD BY PADDY LEENANE, A KEEN DANCER



WHICH BROUGHT
COMMUNITIES
TOGETHER OVER A
CENTURY AGO, CAN
STILL BE ENJOYED IN
IRELAND TODAY.

"I discovered Ballinvreena quite by accident. My love of ballroom dancing and word of mouth brought me there. I share my love of ballroom dancing with a friend and we are always on the look out for good dancing venues. Some years ago, having heard of this venue we decided to explore it. We took off one Sunday evening from Cork City in the hope of some good music and dancing. We arrived around seven o'clock and there, nestling in the most beautiful hillside, was what we now know to be Ballinvreena, a Mecca for dancing in the form as we know from long ago: Crossroad or Platform.

The first thing that strikes one is the beautiful, peaceful surroundings and the magnificent view. Then one becomes aware of the real treasure – The Cottage, thatched, white, complete with little



windows and immaculately kept. On that first evening we were sitting outside and wondering at the possibility of a dance being on, and sure enough, there was. The notice on the wall advertised live music and dancing from 8pm-10.30pm. By now we were very interested at the prospect of a good evening. After a short while a few people started to arrive and, from memory, I think the first person we met was Donie Hannon. We enquired further and sure enough he was opening up and preparing for the night.

Donie went to unbelievable trouble to make us both feel welcome that night. He showed us the cottage, explained its history and told the story of the great man who had lived there, Davy Quish. He then took us to the back of the cottage where there was a matching thatched bandstand, and a great dance floor with seating all around and, best of all, in the open air... a real dancer's dream.

I really think if I could have bottled the feeling I got on that summer evening – the welcome of the place and a dance to look forward to – I would market it and everyone could take a bottle and live happily forever.

The dances run during the summer and I can honestly say that from that first evening I always looked forward to Sundays in Ballinvreena and tried not to miss too many, despite the fact that it is a bit of journey from Cork City. As we got to know the place and the people, and they us, it became clear to me that even if I travelled the world I wouldn't meet a nicer group of people.

The dancing lasts a few hours, and people started to arrive from 7.30pm onwards. Some come early to set up, being members of that marvellous committee, who tirelessly, week in and week out, open up, set up shop, light the fire and prepare for teas. Another commodity that should be bottled in Ballinvreena is the fantastic community spirit. People here are very united about what they

do, working together for the common good: it's a very unifying and inclusive experience. The welcome they provide and the kindness they bestow on the visitor is breath taking.

Another aspect I love about the night's dancing in Ballinvreena is the fact that there is no age barrier. Young and old come together here to enjoy the dancing and, as in former times, all the steps and skills are picked up quickly, particularly by the young. This social skill will stand to them for life, allowing them to take to the floor in ballroom and Irish set dancing styles.

It's a joy to see visitors from abroad looking on and, of course, taking part. This is a tourist attraction in its most natural and pure form. I only wish all Irish people and tourists could experience the fun and synergy of Ballinvreena and its environs at least once in their lifetime."

As told by Paddy Leenane, a keen dancer.

I DISCOVERED BALLINVREENA QUITE BY
ACCIDENT. MY LOVE OF BALLROOM DANCING
AND WORD OF MOUTH BROUGHT ME THERE.



Mike O'Reilly
087 414 8816
www.ballinvreena.ie

Situated off the Kilfinane – Tipperary road. Follow the signpost for Ballinvreena Community Hall (approx. 1.5km)

Summer Schedule from end of May to the first Sunday in September
Every Sunday 8pm-10pm

Winter Schedule
Rambling House
Second Wednesday each month

At the turn of the century, Crossroads Dancing at Corbett's Cross, Ballinvreena, was one of the main social activities of the area. Locals, both young and old, came to the dancing which became their weekly meeting place. Today you can still experience the magic of that traditional crossroads dancing to live music.



CO. LIMERICK LOUGH GUR



The crescent-shaped lake at the foot of Knockadoon Hill is widely known for its beautiful setting; flora and fauna thrive here, there's a network of charming walks, a wealth of historical sites, and the kind of peace and tranquillity you find too seldom on this earth.

The best way to get to grips with Lough Gur is on foot. But make the trip more fulfilling by first paying a visit to the local Interpretative Centre. Here, your journey takes you back to around 3,000 BC when pre-Celtic settlers farmed and lived in this peaceful valley. Archaeologists have found evidence of the activities of these first farmers, their dwellings, rituals and burial sites as well as their tools and implements, and many can be seen in the visitor centre.



NESTLED DEEP IN COUNTY LIMERICK LIES MAGICAL LOUGH GUR, A PLACE OF LEGEND AND HISTORY JUST 21 KILOMETRES FROM LIMERICK CITY.



After reading the display panels and watching an audio-visual presentation that takes you up to the present day, you're ready to head outdoors and view Lough Gur in a whole new light. A beautiful walk behind the Visitors Centre will lead you past dwelling sites of Neolithic man, who sure knew a good view when they saw one! Look out for Bolin Island, a seeming tuft of sunken trees, that are actually remains of a crannóg (an ancient lake dwelling, constructed by Neolithic man as a safe home for their family or tribe.) The remains of at least three crannogs can be found in the area, as well as a number of ancient ring forts. More recent history has left Lough Gur's shore with the ruins of Black Castle, a 14th-century Norman castle, and Teampaill Nua (New Church), a 17th-century church.

Close by, at Grange, lies the largest stone circle in Ireland. 150 feet in diameter, the circle is aligned with sunrise at the summer solstice, when rays shine directly across its centre. The weather gods haven't been so kind to early birds in recent years, with cloudy skies often preventing eager visitors from witnessing this annual wonder on June 21st. If you're not lucky enough to time your visit here with mid-summer's day, settle for the easier, and more realistic, expectation of spotting a mute swan. These feathered beauties, amongst many other birds, make Lough Gur their home year round.

Fresh air and all this history make for thirsty work, and, if you don't fancy a waterside picnic, Lough Gur is within easy reach of some good restaurants and bars. Reardon's Pub in Holycross and Clancy's Bar in Bruff make smart spots for re-fuelling, with children very welcome. Enjoy the tasty fare on offer. The Old Bakehouse in Bruff is a popular local restaurant opening daily for lunch and dinner, and offering a broad menu.

If time is on your side, take a guided tour with local expert Michael Quinlan. He'll regale you with tales of the people of Lough Gur and the stories of a Viking ship hidden in the lake. Ask him about the treasures he found on the lakeshores and listen to the story of the mysterious rider, who circles the Lough once a year.

Better still, why not take a room nearby, and enjoy the setting for as long as possible. Desmond Lodge, a family run B&B on the shores of the lake, has large rooms, wonderful waterside views and a character of a hostess who's a great ambassador for the area. In the unlikely event that she can't answer your questions, you can be sure she knows a local who can!

A BEAUTIFUL WALK BEHIND THE VISITORS CENTRE WILL LEAD YOU PAST DWELLING SITES OF NEOLITHIC MAN



LOUGH GUR INTERPRETIVE CENTRE

Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, **Tel:** 061 360 788
Open: Daily May to September 10am-6pm

GUIDED WALKS

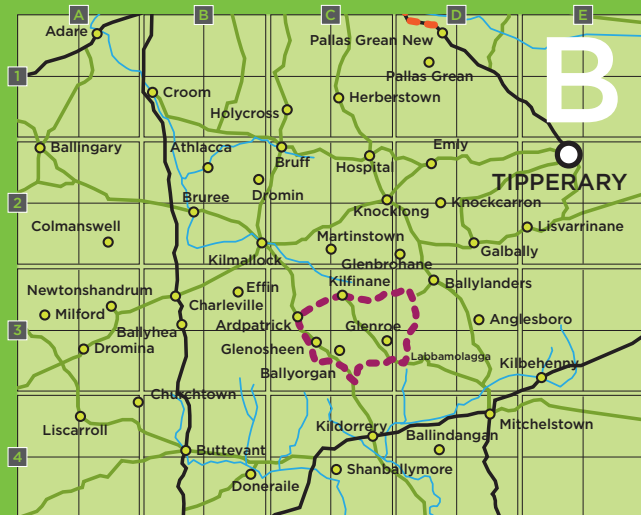
Contact Michael Quinlan **Tel:** 087 273 9199

DESMOND LODGE

Lough Gur, Co. Limerick. **Tel:** 061 382 963
www.desmondlodge.ie



TOUR B ~ SLÍ FINN DRIVE



TOUR B IN A NUTSHELL

START:
KILFINANE
FINISH:
BALLYLANDERS

DISTANCE:
30KM

DURATION:
1 DAY

Gentle, winding roads cut through this scenic terrain that's dotted with wonderful archaeological, mythological and historical sights. Amongst the rolling countryside you'll be tempted to stop-off at the pretty villages, make time for a way-marked loop walk, amble down a nature trail or try your luck at bird watching. The signposted drive takes you through Kilfinane, Ardpatrick, Glenosheen, Ballyorgan and Ballylanders.

WHY IT'S SO SPECIAL

Nature lovers may want to drive this route in reverse after its completed, such is the abundance of beauty to enjoy! The village of Kilfinane, the highest in Limerick, is surrounded by the Ballyhoura Mountains on its south, east and western sides and owes much of its present layout to the Oliver family. They acquired 6,500 hectares of land here in the 1650s when the Fitzharris family, who had owned the land since the 13th century, disposed of it during the Cromwell invasion. The Oliver's kept the land for 300 years, during which time they commanded a local military force, held seats in parliament, acted as magistrates and created a handsome planned town that still thrives today.



The small village of Ardpatrick, a few miles south of Kilfinane, lies beneath the slopes of the Ballyhoura Mountains. According to local legend, St Patrick established a church on the hillside here in the fifth century, thus giving the village its name.

For breathtaking views of the countryside, brave the steep climb to the ancient ruins, which only date back to the Middle Ages. Centuries on, it's still easy to see why this promontory was such a serene choice for a place of worship.



IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS

No matter how many stately manors you've seen in your life, Castle Oliver is still destined to take your breath away. (Those of you who've been reading closely will have guessed that this was the family home of the prolific Oliver family.) The Scottish Baronial masterpiece was started in 1845, to replace the original house in Ballyorgan which had fallen into disrepair after 200 years. Sisters Elizabeth and Isabella Oliver-Gascoigne employed an English architect to create their dream home, changing its name from Clonodfoy to the more anglicised Castle Oliver. The red exterior, fashioned from local sandstone, and high tower cut an impressive dash on the 20,000 acre country estate, and although the sisters were actively involved in the design and decoration of the interiors they wouldn't recognise it today. Rescued from ruin in 2006, the magnificent historic home, which was at

the centre of life in this area for centuries, has been restored to past glories - with the added benefits of modern technology. Now available to hire as private holiday accommodation, it comes complete with baby grand piano and your very own butler!



KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED

Don't be confused by the many winged creatures you'll spot on your drive through this area. Pick up a copy of the Birds & Butterflies booklet at the Ballyhoura Office in Kilfinane and you'll have a head start identifying Slí Finn's abundant flora and fauna.



SPECIAL INTEREST

Culture vultures, especially those with a keen interest in Irish traditions and folklore, should pencil in a visit to Glenosheen, at the foot of Seefin, the highest peak in the Ballyhoura Mountains. It was home of the Joyce Brothers, who made an outstanding contribution to Irish scholarship, through both the written and sung word. Patrick Weston Joyce (1827-1914) was a celebrated music collector, historian and scholar, who, despite very humble beginnings, graduated with a Master of Arts

from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1864. He undertook extraordinary work to protect and record Irish culture, with *The Origin and History of Irish Names and Places* the best known of his 20 published books. Patrick's brother, Robert Dwyer Joyce (1830-1883), was a physician, poet and Fenian who penned the enduring ballad of *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. After graduating from Queen's College, Cork, in 1857, he became Professor of English at the Catholic University, Maynooth, before moving to Boston in 1866 where he practised medicine and became a lecturer at Harvard medical school. While in America he published several collections of Irish music and poetry, and returned to die in Ireland in 1883. Today, a plaque is on display in Glenosheen, to mark their birthplace.

Long before the Joyce brothers put Glenosheen on the map it had secured a place in Irish folklore. The popular mythological Irish legend *Tír na nÓg* (Land of Eternal Youth) is, in fact, where Glenosheen gets its name. According to legend, the Fianna hero, Oisín, was out hunting when he met the beautiful Niamh of the Golden Hair, who was riding a white horse. She told him she loved him and invited him to

join her in Tír na nÓg. Travelling west with her, he arrived in Tír na nÓg where they both began 300 years of lovemaking, with Oisín never experiencing sickness, age or frailty. However, not a day passed when he did not think of returning to Ireland and his family and home. Eventually, Niamh reluctantly allowed Oisín to return but she warned him not to dismount from his horse or he would become old, withered and blind. Upon returning to Ireland, to his great sadness, the good old days of 300 years earlier had gone and all his friends were long dead. At Glenosheen (The Glen of Oisín), he leaned from his horse to help men lift a stone into a wagon. As he did so, his reins broke and he fell to the ground. Oisín immediately transformed into an old man. As luck might have it, Saint Patrick happened to arrive on the scene and had barely enough time to baptise Oisín a Christian before he died!



FEELING ACTIVE

It's no idle claim to declare Ballyhoura the mountain biking capital of Ireland. Clever use of local resources resulted in the opening of the brilliant Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trails in 2007. Offering 96km of purpose-built bike tracks, designed by world-class trail designer Dafydd

Davis, you'll find a ride to suit all skill levels. A brilliant way to explore the surrounding forests and hills, you can rent bikes, simply set out on foot, or join up with the Ballyhoura Bears, a walking group who do a series of organised walks in the area year round. Check out their website at www.ballyhourabears.com for a list of upcoming walks. Maps are also available in the Ballyhoura Office in Kilfinane. See www.xct1.com for mountain bike rentals and www.ballyhouramtb.com for



mountain bike trails. For a real taste of the great outdoors, Kilfinane Outdoor Education Centre offers both group and individual programmes and courses. Try your hand at rock-climbing, abseiling and orienteering, or take to the water in kayaks, canoes or hand-built rafts (which you'll have built yourself!). Check out your hand-eye co-ordination at the Clay Bird Shooting centre in Ballintubber, on the Kilfinane to Ballylanders road, or check out the new Pistol range on the Kilfinane to Mitchelstown road. Booking for both activities is advisable.

If walking is your thing, don't miss the International Ballyhoura Walking Festival held on the May Bank Holiday weekend annually.

Starting in Kilfinane the weekend caters for walkers of all abilities, and makes a great weekend for all the family. If walking isn't hardcore enough, check out the Ballyhoura Beast Race held every August Bank Holiday weekend. This 24-hour adventure race will push you to your limits as you orienteer through forests and mountains, abseil down waterfalls, run through valleys, bike through forest and kayak through rivers. The non-stop race is not for the faint-hearted – watch out for the beast!

RECOVERY POSITION

Weary walker? Tired traveller? Chilled out cyclist? Whatever your want, you'll need good food and refreshments along the way. Thankfully the Slí Finn route has plenty of choice for quick energy boosts, long lingering lunches and evening meals. Enjoy an evening in any of the traditional country pubs along this route, and experience the warmth and friendliness of the locals.



In Ballylanders, at the end of your drive, you'll find Gallahue's Bar and Restaurant, serving decent pub grub and good pints! Greenwood Inn in Ardpatrik is known for its eclectic evening entertainment, including music and talent shows. They also run

Irish dancing classes here on Monday nights, with newcomers welcome to try their hand... ahem, foot... at traditional set dancing!

BEAR IN MIND

In late July come to the Ardpatrik Na Fianna Festival for a weekend of fun and entertainment. Ardpatrik is also home to the talented Hillside Players, a local drama group who put on performances in January and February each year. Ballylanders Pattern festival takes place for a week in August, celebrating the Catholic feast day of Our Lady on August 15th. Combining sports, children's entertainment and a vintage car rally you can also witness old style craft demonstrations, from butter making to treshing, sheep shearing by hand to wattle fence making. A pure slice of nostalgia!



All directions for this route are available to download from www.ballyhouracountry.com or www.aaroutefinder.com

Activities

Ballyhoura Development Ltd.	Kilfinane	063 91300
Bike Rental	Ardpatrik	087 203 3060
Ballyhoura Bears	www.ballyhourabears.com	
Kilfinane Outdoor Education Centre	Kilfinane	063 91161
Lazy Dog Shooting Range	Ballintubber	087 907 9556
Pistol Range	Kilfinane	087 293 5065

Eating Out

Gallahue's Bar & Restaurant	Ballylanders	062 46644
Greenwood Inn	Ardpatrik	063 91026

THE BEAST OF BALLYHOURA ADVENTURE RACE



It's after midnight. A double-barrel shotgun is aimed point-blank range, directly in my face. Dazed, I stare down the long barrel, straight into the eye of the stranger squinting over the sights directly into mine.

"Have you got it?"
I take a deep breath, steady my nerves.
"Yeah", I nod, "I've got it."
I breathe in relief as the gun is lowered.
This is no ordinary race!

The previous day, twenty minutes before race start, I feel as if I'm part of a slow motion crash as the clock ticks towards the race start. My attempt to rally my team to run a final gear-check falls on deaf ears.



IT'S THIS EUPHORIA
OF ACHIEVEMENT
SET AGAINST THESE
AMAZING BACKDROPS
THAT BRINGS ME BACK
TIME AND AGAIN TO
ADVENTURE RACING



Adrenalin-stoked by the challenge ahead, and by the charged pre-race atmosphere, they ignore me. Each deals with their own last minute panic. It feels like no amount of readying will help.

The race starts, and this mix of adrenalin, commitment and almost dread of all that lies ahead of us creates a dizzying mix of emotion that pushes each of us to give our all. Despite abysmal conditions, continual rain, and poor visibility I revel at the beauty as, elated from the climb, we run off the peak of Galtee Mor. The wonderful view is replaced by clouds and mist that rolls right up the edge on either side of the ridge. My teammates speed along in front of me on what appears almost as a sky-bridge connecting the two mountain peaks. It's this euphoria of achievement set against these amazing backdrops that brings me back time and again to adventure racing. Why else would I push myself so hard physically in such foul conditions?

Hiking completed, my feet skid wildly on the slime-covered rock as I abseil down a waterfall high in the Galtees. Despite best efforts to lean back fully, and spread my legs, I still pendulum wildly into the flow of the water. Braced for a bruising against rock, the shock of the icy waters catches my breath. Reaching the bottom, I realise the abseil took more out of me than the previous five hours hiking.

Giddy with the fear I've overcome I drink in the green splendour of the Ballyhoura hills, carved open by the river route which we now follow. Drunk on our progress, we transition quickly to the bikes at a local village hall, and, much to the bemusement of a few locals, head straight back out into the wet conditions for a fast road section that yields to steep fire-roads on the Ballyhoura Way. We're well into the dark of the night at this stage.

Ray of 'Lazy Dog' shooting range breaks the gun, proffers the open barrels. "Look, no cartridges. Empty. See?" He closes the gun, puts it to his shoulder and aims it right at me so I can see how I

hours we've already put in. Flung out the far side of the single-track, we have another few hours of fire-road to cycle before the kayaking stage.

Burt Reynolds, eat your heart out, this kayaking feels almost like a 'Deliverance' scene. Strong currents assist as we paddle furiously, negotiating sweeping corners, alternately steering through small gaps, ducking limbo style under, and occasionally jumping into the swollen river to manhandle the kayak over fallen trees that obstruct the way. This river section is truly a testament to the versatility and stability of these fun sit-on-tops.

The Beast of Ballyhoura has certainly been a showcase for the region - exploiting the natural amenities of the hills and rivers, the Beast proved an excellent opening event for the newly opened MTB trails. The welcome provided by all the locals we've met through the race, from the lads at the shooting range, the thorough instructors at the ropes section, those at transitions and even local

"THE BEAST OF BALLYHOURA" HAS CERTAINLY
BEEN A SHOWCASE FOR THE REGION

should be holding it. "Got it?" His instructions are clear. Moments later, I'm tracking the fluorescent clay pigeon, a gentle squeeze of the trigger, the gun kicks and I'm delighted to see the shattering orange shards that indicate I've hit another. Five practice shots, and 10 competition shots for each racer. Ray's clear instruction ensures we all score well at the clay pigeon shooting.

All are thrilled by the sheer physicality of discharging a firearm, the power of the recoil, and the added success of getting a few clays. We mount our bikes for 10 miles of charmed cross-country single-track that sneaks between field and forest. This is evidently the combined joy and effort of both race organiser and local knowledge. This swooping, flowing, seemingly endless single track practically lures us through the Ballyhoura hills and forest - no mean feat considering the 12 or more

passers-by are all testament to how proud and determined the locals are to put on a show for us visitors.

High on the sense of achievement, the long list of many highlights from the day provides endless conversational buzz for the competitors at the post-race party. This is easily mirrored in the obvious delight by all involved in organising the race - locals, volunteers and race directors alike have seen the fruits of their labour really come together. At the post-race party watching the video of the highlights we all realised we'd been part of something really big. We've all helped create a monster. I'm already looking forward to next year's 'Beast of Ballyhoura'.

As written by race participant Bob Boles.

BALLYHOURA POINT TO POINT

B



You needn't be a horse lover to get the point of point to point. In fact, this equine entertainment is one of the few family activities that can be enjoyed from the depths of winter to the summer sunshine. A whole festival culture has sprung up around the event, which sees horses jump fences set up from point A to point B – hence the rather self-explanatory name!

The first ever recorded steeplechase was a two-horse race run in county Cork in 1752, when a Mr. Blake challenged his neighbour, Mr. O'Callaghan, to race from Buttevant church to Doneraile church across the countryside. Some four and a half miles' distance, they jumped stonewalls, ditches and hedges as these presented themselves.



THIS EQUINE
ENTERTAINMENT IS
ONE OF THE FEW
FAMILY ACTIVITIES
THAT CAN BE ENJOYED
FROM THE DEPTHS
OF WINTER TO THE
SUMMER SUNSHINE



By keeping the steeple of the church in sight, both riders could see their finishing point, and steeplechasing, or point to point was born.

Ireland has a long tradition of great jockeys and horses, and the point to point field has been a breeding ground for young new talent. Top English horse trainers Paul Nicholls and Henrietta Knight regularly visit to talent spot, while our own Irish trainers give their future champions their first taste of the job they are being prepared for. Jim Culloty, Adrian Maguire and Enda Bolger all train locally and John Thomas MacNamara, the leading rider of all time, also resides in Ballyhoura Country.

But a keen interest or knowledge of horses is not necessary for a truly unique Irish day-out. Whether you want to fritter away your money on backing a beast, bounce on the bouncy castle, enjoy a drink, have your fortune told or rub shoulders with the horse racing fraternity, the choice is yours.

Point to point is a great occasion for people-watching too! The welly-wearing local committee members act as racing stewards, collecting gate receipts, building the three-mile fifteen-fence course and keeping the show going. Historically the area has produced past champions like P.P. Hogan and Dan Moore, while high profile horses that have run on local tracks in the last few years include Denman, Monty's Pass, The Tinker and Yahoo. They continue a heritage of breeding in an area that has produced Jerry M, One Man, Hallo Dandy, Workman (Gold Cup Champion chase and Grand National winners) and English Derby winners such as Ardpatrick and Galtee Mór.

As with many horsey events, the fashionistas are often out in force at point to points. Look out for stylish ladies in large hats, who may secretly be wishing they'd donned wellies instead of those oh-so-impractical Jimmy Choo heels! Come along with a festival spirit, dress appropriately for the weather, be sure to partake in the ritual of eating a bag of vinegar-laced chips, and watch that cash! The bookmakers will be filling their satchels all day long, often as jockey-less horses speed by at the speed of light!

AN AREA THAT HAS PRODUCED JERRY M, ONE MAN, HALLO DANDY (GOLD CUP CHAMPION CHASE AND GRAND NATIONAL WINNERS)



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Email: lsutton@p2p.ie

For fixtures information, a fixture list, or indeed all things point to pointing, visit www.p2p.com



TOUR C ~ BALLYHOURA DRIVE



TOUR C

IN A NUTSHELL

START:
KILFINANE
FINISH:
KILMALLOCK

DISTANCE:
123KM

DURATION:
1-2 DAYS

Not only are you guaranteed beautiful scenery on this rural drive, but you'll pass through a collection of handsome towns that showcase the rich history and culture of Ballyhoura Country. En route you'll find archaeological and historical monuments, not to mention several castles, and many interpretative panels and town trails to lead you on a journey through thousands of years of history right up to present day traditions.

The signposted driving route takes you through Labbamolagga, Ballinvreena, Mitchelstown, Kilbehenny, Anglesboro, Kildorrery, Shanballymore, Castletownroche, Doneraile, Churchtown, Lisscarroll, Dromina, Milford, Charleville, Kilmallock and Kilfinane.

WHY IT'S SO SPECIAL

On this drive you will visit two counties, East Limerick and North Cork. One highlight is Mitchelstown, a thriving town founded in the 13th century at the foothills of the Galtee Mountains. The Norman family of FitzDavid de St. Michel named the town in honour of their patron saint, Michael the Archangel. The medieval town – 'a den of vagabonds, thieves and rioters' – was rebuilt by Robert and Caroline, Viscount and Viscountess Kingsborough, in the late 1700s. The 'new' town had two main streets intersected by several smaller ones, to form a grid pattern. It also had two fine squares – New Market Square and King Square – as well as several interesting public and private buildings. The design cleverly utilised views of the Galtee Mountains from George Street and Cork Street, making it an example of one of the best planned towns in Ireland.

Also in North Cork is Lisscarroll, famed for the imposing structure of Lisscarroll Castle. Its considerable remains, including main gate, stone towers and outer 'curtain wall', will transport you back to a time of battles and bravery. The castle was the most important military structure erected in county Cork in the 13th century, and was built on an outcrop of rock immediately north of the village. Curious features of the castle include The Hangman's Hole, a well-like opening adjoining the castle.

Lisscarroll Castle was built by the Norman family of de Barry, who held extensive properties in the county. In the early 17th century, Sir Philip Perceval acquired the castle, and it remained the property of his descendants, the Earls of Egmont, until the 20th century. In 1936, the castle was taken into state ownership. In the course of subsequent restoration works, a bronze harp-peg was found in a hole in the upper part of the south-west tower. The peg is now in the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.



The wonderfully named Labbamolagga is a small townland on the Mitchelstown to Kilfinane road, and is home to what is recognised as one of the most exquisite Early Christian graveyards in Ireland. Its enclosure of earth and stone is of considerable importance, marking the boundary between the spiritual world and the earthly world outside. The smaller of the two ruins (on the right as you enter) is thought to have been an oratory rather than a church while the second structure, probably late medieval in origin, was a parish church until the time of the Reformation in the 16th century. Inside the smaller of the two churches is an incised slab bearing an

unusual Celtic motif, beneath which Molagga is said to have been buried. Outside the eastern stile is Molagga's holy well, once famous for its cures. The tradition of prayer and pilgrimage to the well has declined considerably over the past century but tourists interested in the early Christian period will find the site fascinating.

Milford's Kilbolane Castle is yet another reminder of times past, when Normans and resurgent Gaelic clans waged war across the land. Built as one of a line of castles (including Lisscarroll castle) to defend Norman territory, the state-owned ruin is not safe to visit, but can be viewed from the roadside at present. The openings in the tall walls are narrow slit arrow-loops, designed to allow the defenders of the castle to shoot outwards but also protect them from hostile fire. The central area or ward was clear of buildings but contains a well, very important to castles under siege.

En route to Kildorrery visit the substantial ruins of Aghacross, founded by Saint Molagga in the seventh century. The existing building has many interesting features, including a weathered carved head of Saint Molagga on the east gable. Saint Molagga's holy well, on the south side of the graveyard, has stonework which may be over 1,000 years old.

KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED

Along the route prepare to meet with many celebrated characters. Well, not exactly real

life characters, but local legends who have been cast or carved for all posterity. Mitchelstown's



New Square features a sculpture celebrating the works of William Trevor, Whitbread winner, and the town's most famous writer. There's also a statue of Fanahan, the local patron saint, who sits outside the Garda station, while an Bráthair Diarmaid Ó Briain, a much respected Christian Brother, is commemorated in a sculpture at Brigown Graveyard. Don't miss New Square's Timepiece either – this five-metre sundial allows your shadow tell the time.

FEELING ACTIVE

Doneraile will do its best to bowl you over! Here you can take to the roads to witness road bowling – an old game, played for centuries and at one time far more widespread in Ireland. Large crowds gather to watch the matches which are real family affairs. Visitors are welcome, but don't expect fancy facilities: be prepared to walk a few miles while following matches and to keep yourself out of the way of flying bowls! Held April-September, every Friday night from 7pm-9pm.

Craving something more familiar? How about a round of golf on one of the many local courses? Golfers will find Mitchelstown Golf Club an especially attractive course, with superbly manicured greens and fairways. This 18-hole course is widely regarded as one of Ireland's finest parkland courses, while Doneraile Golf Club, founded in 1927, is acclaimed by many as the "jewel in the crown of nine hole golf courses". Visitors are welcome at any time, though groups are encouraged to book in advance. Charleville is an attractive parkland course with a 27-hole heavily wooded course, well known for its lush fairways and beautiful greens.

If golf is not for you take to the countryside at Churchtown riding school. The centre offers cross-country riding plus pony club tuition, private lessons and summer camps.

SOMETHING FOR THE KIDS

This route is perfect for entertaining the little ones. Visit Mitchelstown Caves, some of Europe's finest show caves, where tours bring you through a half-mile of underground chambers. Hope you're not afraid of the dark! Or feed the donkeys at the Donkey Sanctuary in Liscarroll, where you'll be sure to fall in love with these beautiful animals. From donkeys to dinosaurs, visit the only dinosaur exhibit in North Cork at the Dino Café in Castletownroche, or pop in to Charleville's own Tír Na nÓg, a children's activity and fitness centre that's especially popular on rainy days.

For a fun family afternoon, head to Doneraile Court and Wildlife Park. Here 400 acres of parkland are laid out around this historic old manor. There are plenty of marked paths, including riverside walks, woodland walks and routes through the deer parks, all of varying lengths.



IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS

Visit Doneraile, a unique Georgian inspired town with a rich history. In 1752, two horsemen raced from the steeple of Saint James's Church (Buttevant) to the steeple of Saint Mary's Church (Doneraile) - a distance of four and a half miles across ditches and banks. While history does not record whether it was Mr. O'Callaghan or Edmund Blake who won the race, it does tell us that the race was the first ever 'Steeplechase' and the forerunner of steeplechases held throughout the world!

SPECIAL INTEREST

Annes Grove gardens are privately owned gardens open to the public during the summertime. The garden visit includes the 18th-century house, secretive pathways past limestone cliffs, lily ponds and wild meadows. For the specialist, the collection of rhododendrons is of particular interest including

specimens which were originally raised by Mr. Annesley from seed collected by the late Frank Kingdon-Ward in Tibet and Nepal. Extensive woodlands also feature, and magnolias, hoherias and eucryphias which grow to unusual sizes on sheltered slopes overlook the River Awbeg.

Ballyhoura Mountain Park offers even more fabulous flora and fauna, through woodland, rugged mountain, grouse moor and peat bog. With its abundance of beautiful trees and plants, it's an ideal venue for nature trails and bird watching. It may cover an area of approximately 10,000 hectares, but the many marked walking routes allow you to explore without the risk of getting lost!

LITERARY CONNECTIONS

The Ballyhoura Drive follows the path of some of the world's leading authors. Canon P.A. Sheehan and Edmund Spenser are the best-known writers associated with Doneraile. Canon Sheehan, hailed by Tolstoy as 'the greatest living author', wrote *The Triumph of Failure* (1899) and *My New Curate* (1899), which were immediate successes and met with critical acclaim. These, like many of his books, were written in the study and garden of his parochial house at Doneraile. Later works included *Under the Cedar and the Stars* (1903), *Glenanaar* (1905) and *The Graves of Kilmorna* (1915). His books displayed acute observations of rural Ireland and the changes occurring at that time and were enthusiastically received in America.



Spenser's pastoral, *The Shepherdes Calendar*, effectively marks the beginning of the Elizabethan 'golden age' of poetry. His masterpiece, *The Faerie Queen* - a vast allegory partly using geographical features from around Kilcolman - is regarded as the finest example of Elizabethan poetry. Spenser's last book, *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, advocated barbarous measures against the native Irish. Kilcolman Castle, where most of his writings were produced, was destroyed during the rebellion of 1598, and most of his estates were purchased by the Barry's of Ballyvonaire and the St. Legers. Spenser lost a child in the blaze and afterwards fled to England. According to Ben Johnson, he died a year later 'for lack of bread.'

Other literary figures associated with the area include the English novelist, William Makepeace Thackeray. He was married to Isabella Gethin Creagh Shaw, whose family built the wonderful Creagh House, on Doneraile's Main Street, in 1837. Thackeray never got on with his in-laws and even lampooned them in some of his novels.

The Anglo-Irish world has produced many gifted writers but few were as magnetic as

Elizabeth Bowen, who lived at Bowen's Court in Kildorrery. Her novels, mostly set in the Anglo-Irish world, have a universal appeal that places her in the top ten English language novelists on this side of the Atlantic. *The Death of the Heart* (1938) and *The Heat of the Day* (1949) are probably her best-known novels. Her stories, she said were 'a matter of vision rather than of feeling.' Her best-known book in this area is *Bowen's Court* - the semi-biographical story of her family and this locality. Elizabeth inherited Bowen's Court in 1930. Sadly, in 1959, she realised that her income from writing could no longer meet the costs of running a big house. A businessman who bought the property cut down all of its woodlands, subsequently demolishing the great house, of which nothing now remains. Elizabeth Bowen's grave and that of her husband, Alan Cameron, are just inside the Bowen's Court side of the churchyard wall. A mulberry tree grows over their graves. The church, built in 1720, is now closed but an annual Elizabeth Bowen Commemorative Service is held there every September.

George Bernard Shaw annually visited Mitchelstown Castle in the decades before and after 1900. The castle - Ireland's biggest Gothic house - was looted and burned during the Civil War in 1922. William Trevor, author of numerous award winning books including *The Story of Lucy Gault*, *Fools of Fortune* and *The Ballroom of Romance*, was born in Mitchelstown in 1928. Mary Wollstonecraft, the first English feminist and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of*

Woman, worked as a governess in Mitchelstown during the 1780s. Mary Shelley, her only daughter, wrote *Frankenstein*. Other significant writers with local associations include Oscar Wilde and Mrs. Victor Rickard. Every year the Trevor Bowen summer school takes place in Mitchelstown with workshops and lectures taking place in various locations around the town. Held every May, check out www.mitchelstownliterarysummerschool.com for further information.

FEELING HUNGRY

Given the ground this driving route covers, you can expect every manner of hostelry on offer. Mitchelstown, known as 'the home of good food', has access to wonderful local produce on its doorstep. Break your journey at the Georgina Campbell award-winning O'Callaghan's Deli, Bakery and Cafe on the Main Street where you'll find tasty fare for



a snack or full meal in the café. Stock up on delicious homemade breads, jams and chutneys, and be sure to try their cakes. For an evening meal in Mitchelstown, The Fir Grove Hotel or the Hunter's Rest are both reliable choices. (Don't forget to try Hodgins sausages and Hanley's

pudding for your breakfast, both produced locally too!

Charleville is home to many different style restaurants from fast food to pub grub and contemporary cooking. The new Charleville Park Hotel, located on the Dublin Road from Charleville is a good option, as is Corbett Court Restaurant in Ballyhea outside Charleville. For a carvery, look no further than The Forge restaurant on Charleville's Broad Street, where you can also buy local crafts made at the nearby St. Joseph's Foundation. For a burger with bite, try The Dinocafe in Castletownroche, or sample the fare at St. Leger Arms Restaurant and Bar in Doneraile. Churchtown is the home of Ballyhoura Country Apple Juice where the orchards are based; be sure to stop and quench your thirst here when passing.



Since the 14th century, Mitchelstown has held its market day each Thursday, and the tradition lives on in the New Square, with locals coming from all around to pick up bargains and, of course, fresh produce. Renowned for fish, fruit and vegetables, a visit to Reidy's fruit and vegetable shop at the top of New Square will allow you to stock up on local breads and preserves.

For little self-indulgence (well, you are on your holidays), check out Grove House Longevity Centre & Spa in Shanballymore.



Set in a beautifully converted country farmhouse, visitors can enjoy health treatments ranging from a mini-facial through to a back, neck and shoulder massage or a Reiki or reflexology session. The centre also features a swimming pool, Jacuzzi and steam room, and full day pamper packages are a specialty. Go on – you're worth it!

BEAR IN MIND

Ballyhoura's got lots on offer after dark, so be sure to sample the local nightlife. Dusting off your dancing shoes is a good idea, as this region has plenty on offer keen toe-tappers. T.O. Park in Labbamolagga hosts a traditional Irish music night every second Friday of the month. Irish dancing classes take place in the community centre in Kilbehenny every Monday night at half seven for beginners, from February until June, and on Tuesday nights there's ballroom dancing from 8pm-10pm.

Visit Colmanswell, just outside Charleville town, for a traditional rambling house, where groups come from all over the two

counties to watch and partake in 'ceol agus craic' (music and fun). Churchtown's rambling house takes place in the Village Inn on the fourth Thursday of every month in conjunction with the Ballyhoura Ramblers, and all visitors and musicians are welcome.

Check out the Irish night in Tomo's Bar in Doneraile every Wednesday night from June to September. Every weekend live bands of different genres perform in the bars along this route; check out the entertainment listings in the local newspapers (Avondhu



and Vale Star) to see what's on. Indie music fans should hit Mitchelstown's Indie-Pendence festival on the August Bank Holiday weekend annually, where revellers can look forward to alternative rock and indie bands playing on stage in the town centre. Check out www.mitchelstownfest.com for details.

All directions for this route are available to download from www.ballyhouracountry.com or www.aaroutefinder.com

Activities

Mitchelstown Golf Club	Mitchelstown	025 24072
Doneraile Golf Club	Doneraile	022 24137
Charleville Golf Club	Charleville	063 81257
Churchtown Riding Centre	Churchtown	022 48417
Road Bowling	Doneraile	063 91300
Doneraile Court & Wildlife Park	Doneraile	022 24244
Mitchelstown Cave	Burncourt	052 67246
Donkey Sanctuary	Liscarroll	022 48398
The Dinocafe	Castletownroche	022 26970
Tir na nÓg Activity Centre	Charleville	063 81838
Annes Grove Gardens	Castletownroche	022 26145
Ballyhoura Mountain Park	Ballyhoura Mountains	063 91300
Grove House Longevity Centre	Shanballymore	022 25518

Eating Out

O'Callaghan's Café & Bakery	Mitchelstown	025 24657
Hunters Rest	Mitchelstown	025 24746
The Fir Grove Hotel	Mitchelstown	025 24111
Charleville Park Hotel	Charleville	1890 267 554
Corbett Court Hotel	Charleville	063 21166
The Forge	Charleville	063 89252
St. Leger Arms Bar & Restaurant	Doneraile	022 24735
The Dinocafe	Castletownroche	022 26970
Reidy's Fruit & Veg	Mitchelstown	Top of town

Entertainment

T.O. Park	Labbamolagga	025 84372
Colmanswell	Charleville	063 81477
Kilbehenny Community Centre	Kilbehenny	025 85721
Churchtown Rambling House	Churchtown	022 42849
Tomo's Bar	Doneraile	022 24196
Vale Star newspaper	Charleville/Mallow	063 89682
Avondhu newspaper	Mitchelstown/Fermoy	025 24451

LISCARROLL DONKEY SANCTUARY



AS WITH OUR
SANCTUARY IN THE UK,
WE AIM TO GIVE EACH

FOR MANY IT IS THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR LIVES
THAT THEY HAVE FELT LOVING HANDS AND
HEARD QUIET VOICES.



OF OUR DONKEYS ALL
THE LOVING CARE AND
ATTENTION THEY MAY
NEED FOR THE REST OF
THEIR LIVES

It was after midday when we arrived in the picturesque village of Liscarroll in North Cork, approximately 22km from Mallow and 11km from the South Limerick border. After a nice lunch at the Old Walls in the village we travelled to the only Donkey Sanctuary in Ireland, which is located 1km east of the village of Liscarroll.

Our children were so excited at the prospect of visiting their two adopted donkeys, and to add to the fun, on arrival at The Donkey Sanctuary car park we were escorted to the Visitor Information Centre by a lovely black collie dog called Trixie.

In the Visitor Information Centre a friendly member of staff greeted us before showing us to the



Adoption paddock at the rear of the building. Here, with great excitement and delight, my son and daughter met their two adopted donkeys, Timmy and Jacinta, for the first time. After much petting and rubbing of muzzles Timmy and Jacinta lapped up this display of affection and responded happily with gentle nods of their heads.

After spending an hour here with the Adoption group we decided to meet the rest of the Sanctuary donkeys. On this particular day we were told that there were 120 donkeys on this farm, with the remaining 280 at the Sanctuary's second farm. This second location, Hannigan's Farm, is not open to the public as it holds the Isolation unit for new incoming donkeys as well as the donkey hospital.

As we started on our walk we met with the Oldie group, also affectionately known as the Geriatrics. We learnt that some of the older donkeys had been

through a tough, cruel life in the past. Here, at the Sanctuary, it was great to see that they had now arrived at a real donkey haven.

As we walked past the Crib Barn we were met by a group of friendly and affectionate donkeys, known as the Waltons, who were rescued in 2000 from a bad case of cruelty and neglect in the North West of Ireland. Because of slight medical problems these beautiful creatures will always remain at the Sanctuary under close observation and monitoring. And, yes, they were named after the famous TV family The Waltons!

The Sanctuary walkways make for a remarkable journey - stretching for over 800 metres with many points of interest along the way. Stop and read the information boards, packed with fascinating stories of many donkeys' journeys from all parts of the country to spend the rest of their days in the peace and serenity here. The memorial benches, trees and plaques dotted along the path have all been dedicated by kind sponsors and

enchancing walk to stop off once again at the Visitor Information Centre. We stopped to peruse the many Donkey Sanctuary items for sale and to help ourselves to the many interesting booklets and leaflets, all freely available!

As entry and parking is also free visitors are very welcome to leave a contribution in one of the collection boxes to support the work carried out by the Sanctuary. Having said one last goodbye to Timmy, Jacinta and all our other donkey friends, we set off on our journey for afternoon tea to Boss Murphy's in Churchtown. The children, chatting excitedly about the donkeys, were already planning their next visit to The Donkey Sanctuary, when they vow to bring carrots, Polo mints and ginger nut biscuits to pop in the treat box for their new-found friends!

FOR MANY IT IS THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR LIVES
THAT THEY HAVE FELT LOVING HANDS AND
HEARD QUIET VOICES.



DONKEY SANCTUARY

The Donkey Sanctuary is just outside the village of Liscarroll. When you arrive in Liscarroll take the turning up past the castle and the Sanctuary is about 500m up that road on the right.

Open Monday to Friday 9am-4.30pm

Open Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays 10am-5pm

Telephone us between 9am and 4.30pm,
Monday to Friday

Tel: 022 48398

Email: info@thedonkeysanctuary.ie

www.thedonkeysanctuary.ie



MITCHELSTOWN MITCHELSTOWN CAVE



Sometimes it's difficult to believe that a whole subterranean world exists beneath the ground we can see with our bare eyes. The scenic valley of the Knockmealdown and Galtee Mountains is a case in point: just 16 kilometres long and five kilometres wide, its sweeping plains belie the magical cavernous world that lies beneath.

Midway between the towns of Cahir and Mitchelstown you'll find Mitchelstown Cave, first discovered on the 3rd of May 1833 by Michael Condon, a farm labourer quarrying limestone. Accidentally dropping his crowbar into a crevice, he stooped down to pull out a few boulders and retrieve the bar. Next minute he found himself looking down into a vast series of underground chambers, passages and caverns.



THE TOURS ARE APPROXIMATELY 3KM IN LENGTH GOING THROUGH SEVERAL CAVERNS WITH EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF FORMATIONS.



News of his discovery quickly spread, with large numbers of curious sightseers coming to visit this natural wonder. In order to preserve their natural state the owners of the land the Mulcahy family organised guided tours and for over one hundred years visitors were guided through the network of passageways by means of paraffin torches and candles.

This might sound terribly romantic and adventurous, but was hardly an ideal day out for the faint-hearted! Electricity and footpaths were installed in 1972, making it the first cave in Ireland to be developed for the public. Fortunately the cave has remained in the care of the same family ever since, and though their surname has changed through marriage, Mitchelstown Cave is very much in safe, trusted hands for future generations.

Visitors to this natural treasure today still purchase their admission tickets at the English's family home and, after a short walk, arrive at the cave entrance. The entrance today is still insignificant and has changed little since Michael Condon made his first cautious steps underground. But don't be fooled! The subterranean world in the heart of these hills will simply take your breath away by its sheer scale and depth. The total length of the system is three kilometres long and you'll be guided through a kilometre of its well-lit passages.

Upon entering, the world outside seems to become unreal and with every corner turned another indescribable beauty waits to be savoured. Graceful calcite curtains drape from sloping roofs, stalactites and stalagmites spike and jut from above and below, and mystical crystals glisten like diamonds in the distance.

On the guided tour you'll visit three massive caverns, the largest of which has become known as Tír Na nÓg (Land of Eternal Youth) after the old

Irish legend. In this vast chamber many concerts have been held, the superb acoustics assuring an unforgettable experience.



Mitchelstown Cave is open to the public all year around.

Contact: John English
Mitchelstown Caves
Burncourt
Co. Tipperary
Tel: 052 67246

CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR
CAVES IN EUROPE MITCHELSTOWN CAVE IS LOCATED
IN CO. TIPPERARY 12KM EAST OF MITCHELSTOWN



THE DINOCAFE CASTLETOWNROCHE



In amongst the pretty cottages, rustic pubs and village shops of Castletownroche you'll find a place called The Dinocafe. Part exhibition, part museum, part restaurant, it's the brainchild of special effects wizard David Gavin and his wife Marian.

David has been a professional sculptor and model-maker for over 25 years. He is known mostly for his prosthetic work; making utterly realistic new 'parts' for people who have lost them through accident or illness. He also creates eyes and teeth for the figures at the world famous Madame Tussaud's exhibition in London, UK.

Walk in the front door of The Dinocafe and you'll immediately sense that this is something very

THERE IS SOMETHING
STRANGE, ANCIENT
AND PRIMEVAL LURKING

EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, THERE ARE
EXTRAORDINARY THINGS TO SEE AND DO.



IN THE PICTURESQUE
VILLAGE OF
CASTLETOWNROCHE



different from anything else you'll find in Ireland, let alone county Cork. Murals of long-dead creatures locked in mortal combat line the walls. As you walk down the corridor and into the main exhibition hall, you'll travel back in time to an era when giant monsters ruled the earth. And here you'll find them: life-sized and (as far as we know) anatomically correct dinosaurs in all of their glory.

The exhibits have all been painstakingly designed and built by David and his team of artists, most of whom were responsible for many of your favourite monsters from the Star Wars movies, Harry Potter films and many others. David himself has worked on films like The Fifth Element and The Mummy and has built models and props for places like The British Museum.

Everywhere you look, there are extraordinary things to see and do. You can feel the huge teeth of a

Tyrannosaurus Rex, as big as a kitchen knife and just as sharp. You can see an Allosaurus towering over its prey, a dead Stegosaurus. High above you, a giant winged pterosaur called Ornithocheirus soars on a three metre wingspan and, suddenly, a golden eagle doesn't look that impressive any more! Everywhere you look there are teeth and claws and fangs and talons... just thank your lucky stars that the last dinosaur died over 65 million years ago!

Alongside the exhibitions The Dinocafe has a restaurant and bar, The Mythical Restaurant, where you can enjoy snacks and hot meals surrounded by werewolves, dragons and unicorns. During 2008 and 2009, this part of the complex will be expanded to include an exhibition of faeries and other creatures from Irish mythology - a kind of Unnatural History Museum.

Welcoming individuals, visitors, coach parties and school trips, The Dinocafe is as much about education as it is entertainment. Ireland's only

permanent dinosaur exhibition is a great wet weather attraction, and its gift shop allows you to take home your very own pre-historic creature, if you're brave enough. Remember, they don't bite ...



CATERING FOR COACH PARTIES AND SCHOL TRIPS AS
WEL AS THE GENERAL PUBLIC , THE DINOCAFE IS AS
MUCH ABOUT EDUCATION AS IT IS ENTERTAINMENT



THE DINOCAFE

The Dinocafe
Castletownroche, Mallow
Co. Cork

Tel: (00353) (0)22 26970
Email: mail@dinocafe.com
www.dinocafe.com

DONERAILE WILDLIFE PARK

Doneraile, Co. Cork
Tel: 022 24771
Email: donerailepark@opw.ie
Opening Hours - **Summer**
Mon - Fri, 8am-8pm
Sat, Sun, Bank Holidays
9am-8pm
Winter
Mon - Fri, 8am-5pm
Sat, Sun, Bank Holidays
9am-5pm

ANNES GROVE GARDENS

Annes Grove Gardens,
Castletownroche, Co. Cork.
Tel: 022 26145.
www.annesgrovegardens.com

Open to visitors from:
17th March to 30th
September annually.
Opening Times:
Mon - Sat 10am-5pm,
Sunday 1pm-6pm.

BALLYHOURA FESTIVALS



GOLDEN VALE DRIVE FESTIVAL FUN

Ballyhoura Walking Festival Kilfinane	May Bank Holiday Weekend
Lough Gur Summer Fest	June 21st on the summer solstice
Kilmallock Medieval Festival	Mid-Late August
Ballylanders Pattern Festival	August 15th
Tommy Bruder Festival	Mid September
Galbally Horse Fair	Second Tuesday in October
Lough Gur Storytelling Festival	October Bank Holiday Weekend



Check out www.ballyhouracountry.com for further details.

SLÍ FINN DRIVE FESTIVAL FUN

Ballyhoura Walking Festival Kilfinane	May Bank Holiday Weekend
Ballyhoura Beast Race Kilfinane	August Bank Holiday Weekend
Ballylanders Pattern Festival	August 15th
Ardpatrick Na Fianna Festival	See www.ardpatrick.net for dates



Check out www.ballyhouracountry.com for further details.

BALLYHOURA DRIVE FESTIVAL FUN

Trevor Bowen Summer School Mitchelstown	Mid May
Festival of the Galtees Mitchelstown	June Bank Holiday Weekend
Castletownroche Arts Festival	Mid June
Charleville Agricultural Show	Late June
Indie-Pendence Music Festival Mitchelstown	August Bank Holiday



Check out www.ballyhouracountry.com for further details.