



Entrance Road to Ballaghny Bog

Ladestown is a popular recreational area on the shores of Lough Ennell. Pause here awhile on a fine weekend or summers day to enjoy the scenic views from the lakeshore. There are some prime specimens of the Copper Beech tree to be seen in the parkland on the left as you head away from Ladestown. The Copper Beech with its purple leaves was popular with the landed gentry in the 1800's and widely planted as a decorative estate tree.

Dysart River This small stream looks somewhat channelled and arid at first glance, however, look carefully at the fast flowing water and you may well see the quick dart of small trout.

Raised Bog You will pass through Ballaghny Bog en route to Dysart. There are many great raised bogs in the central plains of Ireland, formed when the ground became water logged, which prevented full decomposition of plant and animal matter. The partly decomposed material slowly built up over thousands of years to form the dense black brown peat, traditionally cut as turf for winter fires.

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST

ON THE ROYAL CANAL

Dwell for a moment on the horses that once laboured along the Royal Canal Towpaths, as they slowly hauled the barges carrying goods to the towns and villages along the canal system. The Royal Canal journeys from Dublin City to the Shannon, some 145 kilometres and can be walked using the Royal Canal Way, or Slí Ríoga. The canal closed to commercial traffic in 1961 but is now fully restored as a navigable watercourse for various recreational uses including: angling, boating, cruising and watersports; walking and cycling on the upgraded towpaths and nature studies of the surrounding countryside.

As you approach Mullingar, you will note several railway sidings and sheds on your right hand side. These date back to a time when the Irish railways played a greater role in transporting goods and in Mullingar's case as a Market Town, the goods particularly included cattle. Markets were held in Mullingar for local farmers with the animals being transported to Dublin and exported to the U.K. via cattle boat.

OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST

The River Brosna provides a scenic passage from Kilbeggan to Ballinagore along the high bank thrown up from some past drainage scheme. Leaving Kilbeggan you pass along the banks of a canal (millrace), constructed to supply water to turn the waterwheel at Locke's Distillery. At Coola bridge, a couple of kilometres away, observe the old mill building and a short distance upstream see the weir arrangement and canal supply to the mill.

Lough Ennell is renowned for its tranquility and beauty and is one of the main brown trout lakes in the Midlands covering an area of around 3,200 acres. Ireland's largest ever brown trout which weighed a staggering 26lbs 2oz and now on display at Belvedere House, Gardens and Park was caught on this lake in 1894.

Lilliput is named in honour of the author of Gulliver's Travels, Jonathan Swift, who was a regular visitor to Westmeath where he stayed with the Rochfort family at Gaulstown House. It is said that whilst visiting in Westmeath, Swift looked across the expanse of Lough Ennell and saw people who were tiny on the opposite shore and this was where he got his idea for Lilliputians.



"ENJOY THE WAY - REMEMBER YOUR STAY"

The Westmeath Way has been developed by Westmeath County Council with the assistance of local landowners, Collite and Westmeath Community Development under the LEADER Programme and Rural Social Scheme. Acknowledgements: Ordnance Survey Ireland - Discovery maps, sheets 41 & 48. Reproduced in part from Ordnance Survey Ireland, permit no. 7601. © Ordnance Survey Ireland and Government of Ireland. Map Production is by EastWest Mapping, Clonegal, Enniscorthy, Co.Wexford. Phone: 053-9377835. Trail Access Permissions: A special thanks to the landowners who have facilitated this trail development and for giving their permission for recreation users to pass through their lands. Note: This trail is closed to the public on Christmas day each year. Whilst every care has been taken in compiling this guide, Westmeath County Council, its servants or agents are not liable for any loss, injury or damage which may arise.

Rich in medieval history, meandering rivers and majestic lakes, Westmeath is a joy to visit and provides a comprehensive range of both cosy Bed & Breakfast accommodation as well as top class Hotel accommodation. For further information visit <http://www.discoverireland.ie/westmeath>.

ACCOMMODATION

Given its central location, Westmeath is easily accessible if travelling by car from any part of Ireland. Visit AA Road Planner to view online maps of the routes to and around County Westmeath. The county is also well served by public transport including Bus Éireann services to Kilbeggan and Mullingar. Visit www.buseireann.ie for bus timetables. There are also several daily train services to Mullingar from Dublin and Sligo. Consult www.cie.ie for complete timetables.

GETTING TO WESTMEATH

Ballinagore is a charming little village built on the River Brosna with a rich tradition in milling. From the early 18th century the mills here produced linen, flour and corn. Most of the buildings were demolished and today the only remaining landmark is the lower Mill that overlooks the River Brosna. Ballinagore is said to be one of the first in Ireland to have gas lighting. The Perry family were mill owners in the 19th century and supplied the village with "peat gas" street lighting.

Dysart (An Díseart) derives its name form the Latin "desertum" meaning "lonely place" or "hermitage". There are many places in Ireland called Dysart and often a saint's name was added to distinguish one place from others. This particular parish is called Dysart Maeltuile after St. Maeltuile who founded a religious house here. The holy well known as "Multilly's Well" is still to be seen although well overgrown. In the centre of Dysart parish in an area called the "big meadow" are the ruins of a monastery of the Franciscan Order. It occupied the site of an earlier monastery founded by St. Colman. In 1611 the Nugent family were given custody of Dysart by James 1 and it was to remain in their possession until the beginning of the 20th century.

The ruins of the Church (reputed to have been ruined by Cromwell) can still be seen within the well preserved walls of the old graveyard. A little further on, you will see the original walled garden and the house which once was the cottage occupied by the Nugent's gardener.

Mullingar is the county's principal town and administrative centre for Westmeath. Built on the River Brosna and encircled by the Royal Canal, it is a vibrant, friendly and thriving commercial centre with a large selection of top class accommodation, fine restaurants and lively pubs.

The town takes its name from the Irish "An Muilleann gCearr" or the left hand mill". The story is related to how a local miller refused to grind barley for St. Colman as he was already grinding wheat for the Crown. Colman intervened, miraculously resulting in the mill grinding both forwards and backwards thus grinding both grains simultaneously.

The Mullingar skyline is dominated by the imposing renaissance style Roman Catholic Cathedral, which was completed in 1936. The Cathedral of Christ The King has twin towers over 42.5 meters high surmounted by gilt bronze crosses. The town itself has a very pleasing streetscape with much of the fabric of the town dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries.

WESTMEATH WAY

Slí na h-Iarmhí

Waymarked Walking Routes

ABOUT THE WESTMEATH WAY

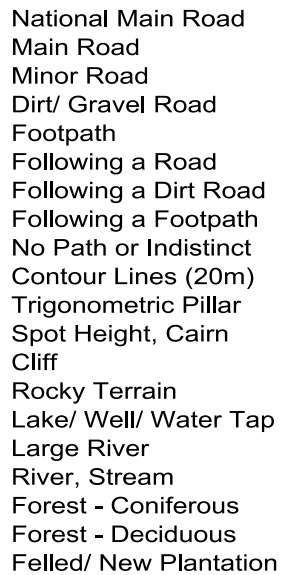
The Westmeath Way is a National Waymarked linear walking route, some 28 kilometres in length, from Kilbeggan to Dysart & Ladestown to Mullingar in County Westmeath. The Westmeath Way is currently sectioned into three manageable walks that can all be comfortably covered in two days, or indeed taken on in the shorter individual sections, if desired. Where possible, additional/optional shorter looped walk sections are being/will be added to the start and/or finish points of each section of the Way to provide increased opportunity for people to take leisurely walks.

THE WALKING ROUTE IN SUMMARY

From Kilbeggan to Ballinagore, the River Brosna provides a surprising passage through broad open countryside and riverside meadows with a rich variety of wildlife. The road section into Ballinagore village has some scenic views and from the village, another quieter section of road leads to the beautiful amenity area at Lilliput on the shores of Lough Ennell, one of several large lakes in the region. From Lilliput, the Way winds along by Ballaghny Bog, through fields and along streams, eventually leading to Dysart. From scenic Ladestown on the shores of Lough Ennell the Way follows the serene banks of The Royal Canal into Mullingar, where the walk currently ends at the historic Harbour Bridge.

TOWNS & VILLAGES ALONG THE ROUTE

Kilbeggan has been a place of importance since early Christian times when St. Beccan founded a monastery there. The surrounding area is noted for the extensive Esker Riada or sand hills that survive from the Ice-Age glacial drift. Kilbeggan has a proud history of flour milling and whiskey distilling, powered by the waters of the River Brosna. Much importing and exporting was undertaken in Kilbeggan, with the Grand Canal acting as the mode of transport. Locke's Distillery, Ireland's oldest licensed distillery has become one of the Midlands leading tourist attractions. Licensed in 1757, Locke's produced triple distilled Irish Whiskey for over 200 years. Today it is the last remaining example of a small pot still distillery in Ireland. The Museum is open all year round and visitors can avail of guided tours and learn how whiskey was made in yester-year. Kilbeggan is also noted for its Horse Racing and a series of meetings are held throughout the summer months attracting thousands of racing enthusiasts.



The route is shown in red with various symbols according to whether you are following a surfaced road, forest track or grass path (see map legend). Car parks are shown on the maps along the route. If parking your car unattended for any length of time, be careful not to leave any valuables on view.

You should prepare yourself for several hours out in the elements – wear or carry warm clothes including hat and gloves. A windproof jacket and over trousers will help to keep you warm and dry. The Way presents rough terrain in places, so good quality footwear is recommended.

There are some hazards along the Westmeath Way to be aware of, as follows:

- You will be likely to encounter swans on the River Brosna – move gently and be wary of disturbing them, particularly at nesting time.
- There are electric fences in several places – generally these are crossed by stiles and the wires will be insulated and signed. In any event, take care not to touch electric fence wires.
- Many river meadows may contain herds of cattle, mostly dairy cows which will rarely bother you. But keep a wary eye for bullocks and in any event walk purposefully.

The Westmeath Way avoids roads and traffic as much as possible looking to follow quieter tracks and paths. The countryside sections that are included on the Westmeath Way are by kind permission from local landowners/farmers in the area and it is therefore essential that every effort is made to respect private property at all times. Please therefore observe the following rules:

Kilbeggan to Lilliput	14.990km
Lilliput to Dysart	5.400km
Ladestown to Harbour Bridge	8.089km
<i>Note: Can be walked as individual sections if desired.</i>	

Lough Ennell & Crannógs Lough Ennell was particularly important between the 9th and 11th centuries and is noted for island dwelling places and crannógs. At a time when Ireland was subjected to Viking raids, the Clann Cholmain, an important branch of the powerful Southern Ui Neill dynasty, set up a royal settlement on Lough Ennell, thus affording them control of travel, both on the lake and on the nearby routeways on land such as Sliege Assail route between Tara and Clonmacnoise, which was just north of the lake.

Clan Cholmain's settlement centred on the crannóg, Cro Inis and the nearby mound of Dun na Sciath (Fort of the Shields) on the western shore. Also associated with these sites was Maelseachnail, palace of Maelsechnaill II and was an impressive residence surrounded by several concentric entrenchments. Nearby Cro Inis was where the high-king died in 1022 not long after his victory over the Vikings at Athboy in Co. Meath. Cro Inis was refortified in the 12th century and about three centuries later a tower house, associated with the O'Coffey's was built in the centre of the island.

Other crannógs on Lough Ennell include Goose Island, just offshore from Belvedere and probably has associations with Clann Cholmain; Rushy Island and Cherry Island, an enhanced natural island with the remains of a stone cashel or ringfort.

Rushes Rush is a plant with fine upright stems that likes to grow in wet ground. Soft Rush and Common Rush are similar in appearance and are frequently found in marshy land or poorly drained land. The stems are traditionally woven and made into strong baskets.

Eskers The word Esker comes from an Irish word Eiscir, which describes a low hill of sand and gravel that winds its way across the landscape. During the last ice ages, sheets of ice spread southwards over much of Ireland. Within these ice sheets, glacial streams flowed just like modern day rivers carrying and depositing stones and sand along their courses. When the ice sheets retreated northwards between 10,000 & 20,000 years ago, these sinuous bands of sand and gravel were left high and dry marking the course of the old stream beds. Sand and gravel drains freely and provides dry ground, hence the hills were often used by early Irish settlers to travel along. The Esker Riada or Esker of the Kings once provided a means of relatively easy travel from Dublin to Galway. You will see Eskers as you walk towards Ballinagore and in places the sand and gravel is quarried for use in the construction industry.

Limestone The midlands of Ireland has limestone as the surface rock although it is not often seen as it is covered by a dense blanket of glacial boulder clay. Limestone was formed in warm shallow seas during the Carboniferous age, 250 million years ago. Decaying plant and animal matter sank to the bottom in these seas and gradually turned into thick sheets of grey rock. In localised areas, fossil remains of plants such as corals and animals like crinoids can be seen embedded in the stone.

Bluebells If you visit Lilliput in springtime, look for the bluebells that carpet the woodland beside the lake. The bluebell has small bell shaped flowers of a blue to purple hue with long glossy green leaves. It is a flower of woodland and hedgerows and like many such flowers gets its 'spike in first' by flowering and seeding before the broad leaved trees have time to come into leaf and shade the ground underneath.

Swans The Mute Swan is Ireland's largest bird with a weight approaching the maximum which is possible to lift by wing power. In fact these large majestic birds tend to spend most of their day feeding in shallow water and resting and nesting in nearby reeds: they will usually only fly if disturbed – it takes too much energy. When they do fly in V formation on a journey, their strong wings beat out a throbbing hum. The mute swan is Ireland's resident and most common swan. It has an orange and black beak as opposed to the yellow beaks of the visiting Whooper and Bewick's swans.

Brown Trout The Brown Trout is a common fish in Ireland's lakes and rivers. The small quick-darting young trout can often be seen in little streams where they have been recently spawned. As they grow, they move to richer waters. After some years, the trout start a great journey, moving downstream to the salty sea waters and across the Atlantic. The female trout then return to lay their eggs in the very rivers where they were born. This necessitates swimming upstream passing both natural and manmade obstacles such as weirs. Look carefully at a weir and you will see either a channel of fast water called a fish pass or a series of boxes stacked at different levels allowing the trout or salmon to jump from box to box up past the obstruction. The trout is a good indicator of clean water.

