

West Clare Trails Guidebook

Experience the Loop Head Peninsula
through 14 looped walks



West Clare Trails

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West Clare Trails

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West Clare Trails is a project developed through partnership between local community members, **Loop Head Tourism**, its supporting partner **Astoneco Management**, **Clare Local Development Company**, **Clare County Council** and the **Department of Rural Development** under the **Outdoor Infrastructure Scheme**.

All feedback on your experience of the **West Clare Trails** is welcome.
info@loopheadtourism.ie

Loop Head Tourism is a community-based voluntary group working to develop and market visitor experiences that contribute to sustainable community development on the **Loop Head Peninsula**.



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West Clare Trails

Wildlife & heritage on the Loop Head Peninsula...

Loop Head epitomises what the Wild Atlantic Way is all about; cliff views, vast skies, invigorating salt breezes, and plenty of quiet beauty spots where you can pause and wonder at this unforgettable part of the world...



A ramble along the West Clare Trails on the Loop Head Peninsula takes in wildlife, history, geology, heritage, scenery and of course the obligatory stops to chat with the locals and enjoy a meal or a coffee.



Along the way you can experience the essence of the Loop Head Peninsula, from ring forts to holy wells, from ancient grave yards to vernacular houses, cottages and remnants of our military and maritime history, as well as the peaceful, pastoral landscape.



Year round, in all weather, you will experience the ever changing moods of the Loop Head Peninsula. Winter storms, slow moving clouds, dramatic seascapes, all provide a backdrop to your meanderings along these quiet country trails. Springtime brings a multi-coloured hue to the fields and hedgerows.

Loop Head is famous for its nesting seabirds, rare birds such as choughs, fascinating geology and a variety of wildlife, including Europe's largest group of Bottlenose Dolphins, grey seals, wild goats and otters.

So keep an eye out and bring your binoculars!



There's a lot to see and do. Make sure to plan ahead. While much can be enjoyed as you go, some things require booking. Read on to find out about the many walks and activities that you can do in different areas of the peninsula.



West Clare Trails

So many ways to actively enjoy the countryside...

To make the most of your experience, you might like to try a guided walk led by a knowledgeable local chaperone. Martin Haugh of **Loop Head Walking Tours** offers a unique insight into the history and folklore behind many of the trails on the peninsula. There are a variety of activity packages which Martin can tailor to suit your needs.

Contact: 086 826 0978

martin@loopheadwalkingtours.ie



If you have less time and want to get around the peninsula a little faster, you might like to rent an electric bike. **Loop Head e-Bikes** provides bespoke bicycle tours and eBike hire, with top quality Giant eBikes. These bikes can be collected in store or made available at designated collection points. All safety equipment is provided along with child seats and carriers if required.

Contact: 065 9062486

loopheadbikehire.ie

Each walk is marked with coloured arrows on black recycled plastic way-markers and finger posts. For your safety, especially when walking in groups, walk on one side of the road. Although traffic is typically very light, respectfully allow for animals crossing, farming equipment, cyclists and others who share these small roads. If you walk at dusk, it is a good idea to wear a high viz vest – most accommodation providers will make them available should you require them.



Or why not mix in with the locals and go for a community walk? Every Sunday at 12:15 sharp, Mags Keane organises a walk for those who want to lift their spirits and exercise their bodies, while meeting new people. Mags uses Carrigaholt, Co. Clare Facebook page to communicate the meeting spot every week.

West Clare Trails **K**ilbaha


Kilbaha village feels like a trip back in time; the peaceful remoteness, the clean air, the small picturesque 19th century fishing pier, the friendly people and ancient cliffs. **Between Two Waters**, a trail from the Shannon to the Atlantic ocean (2 km, easy walk), taps into the energy of two shores; one inhabited by humans and the other by a wonderful biodiversity. Or take **St. Cuan's Way** (5.7 km, easy walk) for a quieter farmland experience and stunning coastal walk.



So much to see and do along the way...


1 Before you start your walk, have a look at the memorial to five local men who drowned piloting a ship along this coastline in 1873.




4  Grave of the Yellow Men, unknown sailors who died in a shipwreck in Kilbaha Bay in the 19th century.

2 Located in the church at Moneen, the Little Ark is a small wooden structure on wheels containing an altar. It was rolled onto the beach at low tide to facilitate the Catholics in the practice of their faith in the 19th century, when the local landlords refused them permission to build a church.



5  St. Cuan's Well was believed locally to have powers to cure skin and eyesight ailments.

3  At the Bridges of Ross, marvel at the unique natural sea arch and keep an eye out for the many rare seabirds that pass close to the shore on their southbound migration.

7 Visit Kim Thittichai, textile artist, tutor and author at her **Sonas Studio**. She is open most weekends and by appointment for workshops, summer schools and work for sale. **Contact: 087 6907809 www.sonas-studio.com**



6  After your walk, enjoy some great coffee and delicious bakes at the **Kilbaha Gallery**, on the main road to the Loop Head lighthouse. The Gallery sells a wide range of Irish contemporary art along with local gifts and souvenirs. Open daily during the high season and weekends thereafter. **Contact: 065 9058843 www.kilbahagallery.com**

West Clare Trails

CROSS

As their names suggest, the walks in **Cross** offer many opportunities to experience the beauty of the landscape; panoramas of the entire peninsula from the Shannon to the Atlantic side and views of Kerry (on a good day). Enjoy the big skies and sense of wide open space as you walk through the quiet pastoral landscape. Stop at the heritage sites along the way and be sure to partake of our local hospitality on your return to the village. **Tullig Goleen View** (7.89 km) is an easy-moderate walk with a little rise in the terrain; and **Rehy View** (9.93 km) is an easy walk on flat terrain.



So much to see and do along the way...



There are many fascinating engravings on the old stone crosses in the Killballyowen Medieval Church graveyard.



Along our small roads you will see a variety of vibrant native wildflowers. The hedgerows are home to many small creatures and birds.



Loop Head resident in the wild flower meadow.



The 19th century lighthouse at Kilcredaun was decommissioned in March 2011.



Tullig Famine Village: 1850
<https://wildatlanticway.omeka.net/items/show/6>



Drop into **Foley's Bar** for refreshments and the experience of a genuine local Irish pub!
Contact: 086 0858153

West Clare Trails **CARRIGAHOLT**

The scenic fishing village of **Carrigaholt** is a hub for nature, wildlife and heritage. Walk up the **Kilcredaun Heights** (6.23 km, easy-moderate walk), enjoy fantastic views of the Shannon estuary and enter a land rich in heritage. Follow the **Meadow of the Rabbits** route (7.25 km, easy walk) and tune into the amazing bird life in the salty marshlands and the spirit of long-gone forests submerged in the Shannon waters. On your return, stop in the village and have a chowder. You might even get to hear some local stories!



So much to see and do along the way...



The archaeological sites at Kilcredaun, such as St Credaun's well, are mostly on private land but some can be spotted along the trail.



Rinevella sunken forest. Note that access to the beach is not marked and only possible in a few areas, when the ground is fairly dry.

4 Take the award-winning **Dolphin Watch and Eco-Adventure** boat trip around the peninsula and meet the largest resident group of bottlenose dolphins in Europe. The dramatic view of the coastline from the water is stunning (trip guided by Geoff and Sue Magee).



Contact: 065 905 8156 www.dolphinwatch.ie



Get snacks and supplies for your walk from **Keane's Bar**, an old style pub and grocery shop dating back 200 years. In the evening you might encounter some local banter, impromptu sing songs & music, and of course, the perfect pint of Guinness.

Contact: 065 9058102
magskeane2016@gmail.com

1 Carrigaholt Castle is one of Ireland's best preserved 'Tower Houses', built around 1480 by the MacMahons, the last Gaelic Chieftains to rule this peninsula. Strategically located at the Mouth of the Shannon, the castle's story reflects the turbulence of European politics.



7 Stop halfway through the Meadow of Rabbits and enjoy some freshly baked scones, cake and a hot cuppa at **Glencarrig farm**. You might be tempted to take one of Mary's baking workshops. Check availability at 086 0748131 www.glencarrig.ie



2 Have you built up an appetite on your walk? A warm welcome awaits you at the award-winning **The Long Dock Restaurant** with an imaginative menu of local seafood, shellfish, and beef. You might want to visit their ice cream parlour too! Contact: 065 9058108 www.thelongdock.com



3 Enjoy the experience of an authentic Irish Pub at **Carmody's Bar**. Sitting outside in the sun, you can look down the street to the harbour. Contact: 065 9058038



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|---|---|---|---------------------------|
|  | Viewing Spot |  | Information Point |
|  | Swimming Spot |  | Area of Heritage Interest |
|  | Bird Watching |  | Parking |
|  | Wild Atlantic Way Signature Discovery Point | | |
|  | Wild Atlantic Way Discovery Point | | |

For your safety, be mindful: *Leave only your* 

- of others sharing these beautiful country roads: walkers, farmers, cyclists, drivers and sometimes livestock.
- of the proximity to cliffs / water on some roads, especially if you walk with small children.




West Clare Trails

14 Looped walks to enjoy on the Loop Head peninsula

West Clare Trails Doonaha

The local area of **Doonaha** is steeped in ancient history. The famous historian and antiquarian, Eugene O'Curry, was born here in 1794. **The O'Curry Way** (5.7 km, easy-moderate walk) passes by his home. There are a large number of well-preserved earthen ring forts (fairy forts) along these trails (the Loop Head Peninsula has the highest density of such forts in Ireland). Try an **Bóthar Uaigneach, The Lonely Road** (4.5 km, easy walk) for a walk surrounded by farmland, with many small birds and beautiful wild flowers in the hedgerows. Bring along your binoculars and check them out!



So much to see and do along the way...



Birth place and monument of Eugene O'Curry, Irish philologist and antiquary.



Across from the O'Curry monument is the largest double-ring earthen fort in the area. It is on private land and is difficult to see from the road but is interesting to view from a satellite image on Google maps on your phone.



Built in 1808, Doonaha church is the oldest church in the Killaloe diocese.



Enjoy the peace and solitude of our small country roads.



Doonaha has some new local inhabitants! Billy and Valerie are happy to welcome visitors to their alpaca farm – meet the animals and learn about wool and the art of weaving. **Booking is essential at 083 8476093** loopheadalpacas@gmail.com



West Clare Trails **Querrin**

There are many intriguing stories about **Querrin**; stories of theft, landlord battles and revenge, stories of famine and ferry disasters, others of fishing and saints, all contained in a small area rich in boglands and biodiversity. Both walks give you the opportunity to stroll along a saltmarsh lagoon, a special sand dune/salt marsh habitat for flowers, seaweeds, razor fish and birdlife. Make sure you take the trail extensions to discover the various gems along the way. For a short walk, take the **Querrin Shore Way** (4.96 km, easy walk); or for a more in-depth discovery, take the **Poulnasherry Way** (11.1 km, easy-moderate walk).



So much to see and do along the way...



1 Built in 1843/44, Querrin pier was used to transport turf to Limerick by boat. Herring and mackerel have been fished from here since the 9th century.



View of the Shannon estuary from Querrin.

2 Querrin House was built in the late 1600s, in the Dutch style of a three story thatched house by the Van Hogart family; and rebuilt after a fire in the 1800s by the Burrough family.



Ruins of the 18th century Mount Pleasant House.



3 St. Martin's Well is a natural spring well that is famous for sight. It was used locally for water up until the time when electricity brought water pumps to the area.



5 You can experience our beautiful walks on horseback too! **Carmen's Riding School** has treks suitable for beginners as well as experienced riders. **Contact: 086 2264447**
www.carmensridingschool.ie

4 Need a good stretch and some relaxation at the end of your walk? Try yoga with Trea at **Purecamping**. Drop in classes or one-to-one sessions in a beautiful



yoga studio. On-site Glamping and woodland camping available. **Booking essential: 086 3819 216**
www.purecamping.ie

West Clare Trails **Kilkee**

The Victorian Town of **Kilkee** is surrounded by majestic views. Take the **The Iron Spa**, (7.5 km, easy walk); and **The Greedy Bishop** (16.7 km, easy-moderate walk), for a breathtaking experience of rugged cliffs and rolling waves. On a windy day you might feel the mist of a reversing waterfall! Take **Three Counties Lookout**, (12.58 km easy-moderate walk); and **Farrthy Lough**, (16.5 km, easy walk), to ascend Corballagh Hill. The view from its summit is magnificent, embracing the rim of the Atlantic for 150 degrees: the Aran Islands, the Cliffs of Moher and the Connemara mountains.



So much to see and do along the way...



1 This exposed cliff edge was the location of Dunlickey Castle, a tower house built sometime before 1574 by the MacMahon family (although no remains of the castle are visible). This is a very popular spot for mackerel fishing off the cliff edge.

The Pollock Holes are natural rock pools that have long been a traditional swimming spot for locals. They can be accessed when the tide is out, at the start of the Kilkee Cliff Walk (part of the Kilkee South looped walks), down the steps from the car park.



2 Situated off the coast about 3 km south-west of Kilkee, Bishop's Island is a sea stack with sheer sides rising 40m from the water. The presence of a dry stone church, beehive hut and other ruins make this a very unique site.

The cliff face exposures of the south-west and north sides of the Loop Head Peninsula have been the subject of intense study by geologists since the late 1950s. They illustrate the development of a large scale submarine fan delta which evolved over 7 or 8 million years, during the Upper Carboniferous Period, 320 million years ago.



So much to do in the town of **Kilkee**

Why not explore by sea? **Nevsall Watersports** offers kayaking, canoeing, and stand up paddle boarding.
Contact: 086 3308236
www.nevsallwatersports.ie



After your walk, try relaxing in a natural seaweed bath at **Kilkee Thalassotherapy Centre**
Contact: 065 9056742
www.kilkeethalasso.com



Call into the warm and friendly, family run, vintage café **The Irish House** for tea and cake.
Contact: 065 905 6766



Enjoy panoramic views of the Atlantic ocean at **Lir Restaurant** and top quality food all day.
Contact 065 9083000



Naughton's Kilkee specializes in fresh seafood, steak and an extensive list of gin and whiskey.
Contact: 086 6493307
www.naughtonsbar.com

Treat yourself to healthy breakfast & lunch alternatives at **The Pantry**. You may want to learn some of Imelda's secrets at her cookery course!
Contact: 065 9056576
www.pantrykilkee.com



Murphy Blacks Restaurant, multi award winning seafood restaurant.
Contact: 085 8754886
www.murphyblacks.ie

Experience **O'Maras Bar**, a very traditional Irish pub with the perfect suntrap out front.
Contact: 065 906 0967



The Strand Bistro looks out at the wild Atlantic ocean and specialises in seafood, steaks, and amazing sun sets!
Contact: 065 9056177
www.thestrandkilkee.com



Diamond Rocks Cafe has a delicious menu to be enjoyed while taking in the most stunning view of Kilkee Bay.
Contact: 086 3721063
www.diamondrockscfe.com



The Bay View Bar and Restaurant serves food all day and has live music on Saturday nights. Also a Hotel with a wide variety of luxurious rooms.
Contact: 065 905 6058
www.bayviewkilkee.com



Stay a few more days on the Loop...

Loop Head offers many accommodation options, including family run hotels, guesthouses, bespoke B&Bs, farmhouses, self-catering cottages/apartments, caravan sites and camping/glamping facilities. Each one has it's own unique story and charm. No matter where you choose to stay, our many attractions are never far away (maximum 30 minutes by car).



The **Old School House B&B** in Cross village, once the original school, has been repurposed by Ian & Teresa Glendining into a delightful B&B full of character and charm.
Contact: 086 1549402



Situated on a farm just outside Cross village, **Hilltop B&B** has one of the best views on the peninsula, overlooking the Atlantic ocean to the west and the Shannon river to the south.
Contact: 087 7744646



Rosewood Cottage is a four-bedroom family owned B&B offering a quiet place to stay with secluded garden and a real turf fire, only two minutes walk from Kilkee's famous beach.
Contact: 065 9056984



Situated in Kilkee town centre, just 2 minutes walk from the beach and restaurants, **Lynch's B&B** is an ideal location to stay in while touring the peninsula.
Contact: 085 7520588



Glencarrig Farmhouse B&B is situated off the coast road just outside Carrigaholt. Well known for her baking, your host Mary will spoil you with delicious products on arrival and an extended breakfast menu.
Contact: 086 0748131



Rich in character and charm, **Kilkee Town House** offers the experience of being right in the centre of town and has 16 guest rooms operating on a B&B basis.
Contact: 065 908 3623



The **Stella Maris Hotel**, a quaint 19th century Victorian hotel run by the Haugh family since 1997, is conveniently located in the centre of Kilkee overlooking the beach.
Contact: 065 9056455



Just four minutes' walk from the beach, **Kilkee Bay hotel** offers bright, spacious, fully-equipped modern rooms, Wi-Fi and plenty of parking.
Contact: 065 906 0020



Kilkee Thalassotherapy Centre & Guesthouse.

Award winning guesthouse and Spa in the heart of Kilkee. Spa Treatments, ensuite guest rooms, off street parking, WIFI.
Contact: 065 9056742 www.kilkeethalasso.com

LOOP HEAD HERITAGE TRAIL

Step back in time and immerse yourself in the archaeology, maritime and military history, religious heritage and local folklore of the Loop Head peninsula.

YOU'LL BE BLOWN AWAY

FOLLOW & LISTEN TO THE HERITAGE AUDIO GUIDE BY SCANNING THE QR CODE BELOW



<https://www.loophead.ie/heritage/>



1. West Clare Railway



2. Queenin Pier



3. Carrigaholt Castle



4. Kileadbain



5. Sunken Forest



6. Grave of Yellow Men



7. Prid's Memorial



8. Lighthouse



9. The Little Ark



10. Bridges of Bess



11. Dunluby Castle



12. Bishop's Island



13. The Paleck Holes



14. Kilkee Victorian Town