



COUNTY WICKLOW
FILM COMMISSION

BRAVEHEART DRIVE

The Braveheart Drive

The West Wicklow Film Trail – The Braveheart Drive – 50 miles round trip. The Braveheart Drive is centred around the **west of**

the Wicklow Mountains and covers approximately 50 miles. The route starts in **Hollywood** and sets off in the direction of the **Wicklow Gap**. After a couple of miles the Braveheart Drive veers off left to **Ballyknockan, Lacken** and **Manor Kilbride**, with a possible whistle stop in **Blessington**. From Manor Kilbride the drive brings you right through the West Wicklow Mountains past the peat bogs of the **Sally Gap** and the villages of **Laragh** and **Glendalough** and then returns to Hollywood by the Wicklow Gap.

Hollywood

Hollywood, a close-knit community centred around farming, nestles in the hills of West Wicklow. Its location marks the boundary between rich farmland and the wild beauty of the open Wicklow Mountains. Hollywood, and indeed West Wicklow, is steeped in history, and nearby is an abundance of archaeological remains such as ring forts, portal tombs, and the imposing medieval **Baltinglass Abbey**. Hollywood is closely linked with **St. Kevin**, one of Ireland's most important Saints who also established the monastic city of **Glendalough** in the Wicklow Mountains. In the valley across the road from the small **Church of St. Kevin** many landmarks can be found such as **St. Kevin's Bed, St. Kevin's Chair** and **St. Kevin's Cave**. This valley has been used repeatedly for filming, recently for a joint BBC/RTE television series about the Civil War called **Rebel Heart** but also for the international blockbuster **Michael Collins**. Hollywood has welcomed some of Ireland's most famous films such as **Michael Collins** starring **Liam Neeson** and **Julia Roberts**, **Dancing at Lughnasa** with **Meryl Streep** and **Michael Gambon** and **This is my Father** with **Aidan Quinn**. The locals are well used to sharing a pint with celebrities and the **Hollywood Inn**, which also serves excellent food, has some interesting information on display about the local film glory. The small pub across the road, **Tutty's** has remained unchanged for the last forty years and is an attraction in itself. According to local history, Hollywood in California actually inherited its name from Hollywood in West Wicklow.

Ask any of the locals and they will fill you in on the history of this and any other film gossip from the area. The great grandfather of the owner of the post office in Hollywood, Mr. McGuirk, left Ireland and went to America to start a new life. He became homesick after a while and decided to call the area where he settled after his home village. Hollywood makes a good base to tour the south of the County and to sample rural Irish life

at its best. **Donard** and the **Glen of Imaal** are famous for its long distance equestrian event, which takes place in the summer. The Glen is steeped in local history and is well worth a visit. One of the easier ascents to Ireland's second highest mountain, **Lugnaquilla**, 925 metres, starts from the Glen of Imaal.

After 5 miles the Braveheart Drive takes a left turn off the Wicklow Gap road towards the **Blessington Lakes** and the village of **Ballyknockan**, famous for its granite. For over 170 years a community of quarrymen and stonecutters provided granite for many of Dublin's best known churches, public offices and other buildings. Not only was the granite stone extracted from the ground and shaped for use, it was often elaborately carved into architectural features before it left the quarry. Over time, odd skilfully carved features destined for far off locations have, for one reason or another, remained abandoned at the village. These unique carvings make for an extraordinary village of unique cultural character. Take time out for a little stroll around the lanes to admire the craftsmanship of a different era.

Lacken

The small village of Lacken was the location for most of the scenes from the film **Widow's Peak**. The sweeping views across the lakes are just breathtaking in this untouched part of County Wicklow. Indeed the small fields divided by stone walls and dotted with traditional houses exude a sense of West Ireland usually associated with County Kerry.

From Lacken the drive will take you towards **Manor Kilbride** but gives you the option to take a lunch or tea break in **Blessington**. **Archbishop Michael Boyle** built the town of Blessington in 1667. The town and countryside have changed dramatically following the planned flooding of the Liffey Valley in 1940 to form the Blessington Lakes. The Blessington Lakes were formed sixty years ago by the building of **Poulaphouca Dam** and a hydro-electric power station and today the lake serves the dual purpose of providing a power and water supply to the Dublin region. At the tourist office in Blessington you can find information on local activities and facilities.

Blessington is a lively spot with its own character and a charming wide tree lined Main Street. There is an abundance of activities nearby on offer at the **Blessington Lakes Adventure Centre**, which offers horse riding, canoeing, wind surfing and a Water Cruiser.

Russborough House, 2 miles south of Blessington, is a prime example of Palladian architecture as it was built between 1740 and 1750 for the **Earl of Milltown**. Russborough House is home of the world famous **Beit**



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Collection of paintings which include some of the **Dutch Masters**, **Turner** and **Constable**. The house also contains magnificent displays of fine furniture, tapestries,

carpets, porcelain, silver and bronzes. Russborough House is open to the public every day from May to September. For information call: 045 865239. Russborough House was used during the summer of 2000 as film set for the film production called **The Abduction Club** which stars **Liam Cunningham, Alice Evans, Daniel Lapaine** and **Matthew Rhys**. There are some gorgeous lakeside picnic and amenity areas on this side of the Blessington Lakes.

Once you have returned to the Braveheart Drive and before coming through Manor Kilbride, you could take another short detour left to visit **Threecastles**. This typical Irish castle was built in the early 15th century and the English and **Brian O'Toole** defeated the **Fitzgerald clan** here in a battle that took place in 1547. The graveyard in Manor Kilbride recently provided the backdrop for a video for the American country and western star **Tim McGrath**.

The drive continues through some of the most rugged mountain terrain in Ireland. After about 7 miles the drive passes the old grounds of **Kippure Estate** on your right. **Mel Gibson** chose this location for a number of scenes for his Scottish epic **Braveheart**. Also on your right you see the beautiful woods of **Coronation Plantation** which were names in honour of the ascension in 1831 of King William IV and which formed the backdrop for **Dancing at Lughnasa**.

The peaks and slopes of **Seefin, Seefingan** and **Kippure** on your left are part of the **Wicklow Mountains National Park**. With many passage tombs and barrows in this area it is one of the most historic parts in the County.

At the **Sally Gap**, the Braveheart Drive turns right onto the **Military Road**, which brings you through a landscape, as fascinating as it is desolate and deserted. It is hard to imagine here that you are only 20 miles from the capital Dublin. The high mountains with their desolate bogland provided the backdrop for two **John Boorman films**, **Zardoz** and **Excalibur**.

During the autumn of 2000 a film production called **How Harry Became a Tree** was filmed here for four weeks. They built a small church with a cabbage patch beside it as well as a traditional Irish cottage but no trace can be found now of either of them. While filming late into the autumn the crew experienced some of the most extreme weather conditions so typical of the Wicklow Mountains. The cast for **How Harry Became a Tree** includes **Colm Meaney** and

Adrian Dunbar and this film will be released in 2001.

Further on, the stunning **Glenmacnass Waterfall** comes crashing down into the Glenmacnass Valley, Take some time to enjoy the spectacular views here before the drive brings you to the small village of Laragh, the gateway to the monastic city of **Glendalough** and the Wicklow Gap. During the summer Laragh and Glendalough are a hive of tourism activity and it is not hard to understand why. The spectacular natural surroundings of the mountains and lakes have served for a number of film sets and television commercials. Laragh with its abundance of B&Bs and a cosy pub with traditional music, is a lively place. Make sure to try an Irish Coffee or sample some of the best Wicklow fare in **Lynham's Pub, The Glendalough Hotel** or the **Wicklow Heather Restaurant**. The Italian Director **Sergio Leone**, famous for his westerns **The Good, the Gad and the Ugly** and **Once upon a Time in the West** used the pub in Laragh for the Irish segment of **A Fistful of Dynamite** in 1969. **James Coburn** plays an exiled IRA man who got caught up in the Mexican Revolution.

Glendalough Monastic City is famous for its stunning setting in the **Valley of the two Lakes**. The lakes and old monastic ruins exude an air of tranquillity and serenity, best experienced while walking through the valley. St. Kevin founded the monastery here in the sixth century and it has been a centre of pilgrims and visitors ever since. The fascinating round tower, about 34 metres high is almost 1000 years old, and the cathedral and cemetery are some the most notable of the remains scattered around the valley.

The **Wicklow Mountains National Park** spans a core area of 3,700 ha. around the Upper Lake in Glendalough and the mountains around it. The total area of the park is about 20,000 ha. at present. The upland area consists of mountain moorland, heath and blanket bog but also contains important areas of semi-natural oak woodland, mainly around Glendalough.

There are a number of forest trails that you can follow to explore the valley.

More information on the monastic site and the National Park can be found at the information office at the Upper Lake car park or at the Glendalough Visitor Centre, Tel. 0404 45325/45352. The Visitors Centre contains comprehensive exhibitions on history, archaeology, folklore and wildlife.

A number of commercials have been shot in Glendalough as well as several feature films such as **Into the West, Moll Flanders, Kidnapped, The Field, The Dead** and **Braveheart**. **Patrick Bergin** starred in the filming of **The Life of St.**



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Patrick many scenes of which were fittingly shot in Glendalough.

In the springtime before the leaves appear and darken the sunlight, the

wood floor in Glendalough is carpeted with a fabulous display of bluebells, wood sorrel and wood anemones. From early spring the patchwork farmland valleys are ablaze with sweet-smelling yellow gorse which gives way during the summer to a wildflower bouquet in the meadows and along the hedgerows. And as the summer draws to a close the mountains take on a purple glow from the famous Wicklow Heather. All through the winter the spectacular colours of the Wicklow Mountains deepen from warm rusty red to bright yellow.

As the trail takes you back towards Hollywood over the Wicklow Gap you will notice the remains of old disused lead mines on your left. The Wicklow Mountains are made up of a mass of granite and mica. The boundary between these contains high concentrations of lead, tin, copper, iron and zinc. The old spoil heaps and ruins of the miners cottages have inspired many location managers and set designers to use them as the backdrop for their films. The children's series **Mystic Knights of Tir na nÓg** was shot around the mines which provided another world atmosphere. The 1995 film **Kidnapped**, produced by **Francis Ford Coppola**, and starring **Armand Assante** and **Brendan Gleeson** was also filmed around the old mines and used a large number of army extras.

Ireland's biggest film ever, working title **Reign of Fire**, also used the ruins of the lead mines on the **Wicklow Gap**. An immense modern castle was built here during the winter of 2000/2001. American film stars **Matthew McConaughey** and **Christian Bale** meet their equal in a ferocious dragon on a path of destruction. Filming started during the spring and had a profound effect on the people of the local community who watched the castle grow in astonishment over the course of nine weeks. The sheer scale and size of the operation took everybody by surprise as did the weeks of snowstorms and the subsequent Foot and Mouth Disease which slowed down construction considerably. The film is due out in 2002. The production took over most of Ardmore Studios in Bray but also used **The Black Castle** in Wicklow Town, the southern slopes of the **Sugarloaf Mountain** and the **Sally Gap Road** as locations for some spectacular helicopter stunts.

The Irish stage of the **Tour de France** came up over the **Wicklow Gap** in 1998 where a sprint was staged. Many of the local pubs display pictures to celebrate this memorable event which brought a veritable media circus to the area. Just before the

Wicklow Gap you pass **Turlough Power Station** on your left. An artificial lake was created on top of **Turlough Hill** to generate power for the Dublin region. Some scenes shot for **Braveheart** and **Into the West** were shot on the slopes of Turlough Hill.

The Wicklow and Sally Gap are both stunning viewpoints that should not be missed while touring Ireland. This area is also ideal for mountain walks and picnics. After you pass the Wicklow Gap the Braveheart Drive brings you back to **Hollywood**, the starting point of this drive.

Not quite along the Braveheart Drive but well worth checking out is the rural town of **Baltinglass** in South-West Wicklow. Baltinglass served as the background of the Donegal town in the filming of Brian Friel's play **Philadelphia, Here I Come**. The play was first staged at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1965 but went on to win worldwide acclaim.

Baltinglass Abbey was founded in 1148 by **Dermot McMurrough, King of Leinster**, for the Cistercian order of Monks. Ore information on the Abbey and local history and archaeology is displayed in the Heritage Centre and Tourist Office in Weaver's Square.