COUNTY WICKLOW FILM COMMISSION

EXCALIBUR DRIVE

The Excalibur Drive

North Wicklow Film Trail – The Excalibur Drive – 42 miles round trip. This drive starts and finishes in **Roundwood** and brings you through some of the most spectacular and varied landscape in County Wicklow. The isolated Wicklow Mountains with their domed granite peaks reach heights of over 2,500 feet, and form the largest undisturbed uplands blanket bog in Ireland. There is an abundance of flora and fauna to be found here amongst the hidden lakes, rivers and numerous waterfalls. Look out for deer, foxes, badgers, flacons and merlins. No wonder this area is popular with film makers as the scenery shows the very best of the Irish landscape. However, the mountains, towns woods, lakes and beaches in County Wicklow have also served as s backdrop for places in counties as diverse as France, America, Russia, Italy and Germany.

Roundwood

The Excalibur Drive starts in the village of Roundwood, reputedly the highest village in Ireland. At 238 m above sea level, Roundwood is surrounded by some of the most spectacular scenery in the county, flanked on one side by the tranquil lakes of the Vartry Reservoir, which supplies Dublin City with its water, and on the other by the dramatic Wicklow Mountains. Roundwood has been used extensively as a film location by films such as the famous King Arthur epic **Excalibur**, shot in **Childer's Wood**, south of the village. From Roundwood, follow the Excalibur Drive north, past the curious Victoria's Way, an inspiring garden full of thought-provoking hand carved granite statues, before starting to climb into the Wicklow Mountains.

On your left you see the brown waters of **Lough Tay** and the dramatic cliffs of **Luggala Estate**, or locally known as the **Guinness Estate**. Both have been used extensively for filming in the past, in fact this area is nearly a living film set with filming taking place frequently. The mysterious Luggala Estate, is privately owned, but from the road and the car parks there are some spectacular views of the lake and grounds around it. It is not hard to see how the stunning setting of the tranquil lake and towering cliffs around it has inspired many film directors. Rather than serving as a backdrop for another historical drama, the bleak bog lands around the road leading up to the **Sally Gap** provided the brave new world of **John Boorman's** futuristic sci-fi **Zardoz**.

The unequalled wild beauty of the Sally Gap, between Kippure at 752 feet and Djouce Mountain at 727 feet, cannot be surpassed and has to be experience first hand. Pull into on the car parks along the route to enjoy the scenery and the fresh mountain air.

During the summer of 2000 a number of films were shot around the Sally Gap area. Amongst these are **How Harry Became a Tree** (working title) with **Colm Meaney** and **Adrian Dunbar**, **Not Afraid Not Afraid** (working title) and the sixth series of **Ballykissangel**. Also shot along the road was **The General**, a black and white film relating the story of Dublin's most notorious criminal **Martin Cahill**. The General won John Boorman the Award of Best Director at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival.

At the Sally Gap crossroads the Excalibur Drive takes a right turn and you follow the **Military Road** past Upper and Lower Lough Bray down towards the scenic valley of Glencree. The Military Road was built during the aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion in a bid by Dublin Castle to gain control over this vast open space and to capture the Chief of the Wicklow Rebels, **Michael Dwyer**. Along the Military Road several army barracks were established and the Glencree Barracks is on of them. The barracks are now the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. In 1978, the prestigious **The First Great Train Robbery**, **directed by Michael Crichton** and **starring Sean Connery**, used the roof of the Glencree Peace and Reconciliation Centre for a dramatic escape scene.

The views from the centre down towards the cone of **The Great Sugarloaf** at 504 feet and the coastline are just stunning and truly inspirational. Before coming to the **Glencree Peace and Reconciliation Centre** the Excalibur Drive takes a turn right along the Glencree River and this small winding road takes you through the valley towards **Powerscourt Waterfall**. John Boorman also used this impressive location of steep cliffs, mist and falling water for some of the scenes of the King Arthur saga **Excalibur**. **Powerscourt Waterfall** is the highest waterfall in Ireland and tumbling from a height of 120 metres, the **Dargle River** crashes spectacularly down and runs through the beautiful glen at the foot of it.

The Waterfall is open daily and should not be missed at any tie of the year. Tel. 01 2046000 for information.

Next on the drive is **Powerscourt Estate** near the colourful village of Enniskerry. The lush and wooded area, with its narrow winding roads into **Enniskerry** is scattered with numerous old estates and demesnes and exudes an air of grandeur and history. Powerscourt Estate is one of the world's greatest gardens. The 18th century Palladian House was designed by **Richard Castle**, and now incorporates an exhibition that traces the evolution of the house and its owners. The formal garden, a sublime blend of sweeping terraces, statuary and ornamental lakes, was begun by Richard Wingfield in the 1740s. Powerscourt House is well worth a visit for a

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relaxing ramble through the gardens and refreshments in its prize winning terrace café. Enniskerry with its charming square and abundance of little shops and cafes makes for an excellent place to soak up some of the local atmosphere.

The attractive village of Enniskerry has been immensely popular with film makers who have used it as a village set in America, France and Germany. During the summer of 1996 all the shopfronts in Enniskerry were given a make over to create the set for the television film **Rosamund Pilcher's September starring Jacqueline Bisset, Edward Fox and Michael York.**

Next the drive takes us from the leafy setting of Enniskerry to the bustling seaside resort of **Bray**, where there is an abundance of activities to be enjoyed. Bray's history goes as far back as pre-historic and early Christian times. Over the years Bray was repeatedly attacked by neighbouring O'Toole and O'Burne clans.

During the reign of Henry VII the Manor of Bre was given to the **Brabazon Family**, ancestors of the present **Earl of Meath** who lives in Killruddery, now just south of Bray. In 1854 **William Dargan** the great 19th century entrepreneur brought the railway to Bray and he and other far seeing developers laid out the main part of the town . Bray became the leading seaside resort in Ireland with a cable car going up to **Bray Head** offering spectacular views of Dublin Bay. The cable car is unfortunately no longer in operation. Many historic and famous people have had connections with Bray including **Sir William Wilde**, father of Oscar, and the young **James Joyce** who lived with his parents in Martello Terrace from 187 to 1891. In the main street you will see signs for **Ardmore Studios**, located on Herbert Road on the outskirts of Bray. Ardmore Studios has played host to hundreds of films since its establishment in 1958. It has welcomed international film starts such as **Fred Astaire, Charlotte Rampling and more recently Sir John Gielgud, Pierce Brosnan, Daniel Day Lewis, Gabriel Byrne and Jane Seymour. The Boxer, In the Name of the Father, the Tailor of Panama, The Count of Monte Cristo and Ballykissangel** are just a handful of the hundreds of titles of films and television productions produced in Ardmore. The Ardmore complex offers several stages, editing and sound suites as well was a number of back up companies which makes it the hub of the Irish film industry.

Follow the drive turning left on the Main Street down to the seafront and the promenade where you will find a storyboard with information on the countless films made in Bray. The idyllic promenade, called the Esplanade, lends itself perfectly as the typical setting for an old English seaside resort.

Complete with bandstand, an interesting Sealife Centre and fun park Bray's promenade still attracts plenty of seaside visitors on a summer day or for a leisurely stroll in the evening. At the end of the Esplanade you see the dramatic cliffs of Bray Head and the Bray Head Hotel ahead of you. Bray features in a huge number of films such as the bank robbery scene in **The General, My Left Foot, Michael Collins, The Commitments,** and especially **The Miracle** directed by **Neil Jordan.**

Bray Head has some excellent walking routes, in fact you can walk all the way to **Greystones** along the cliffs. As the drive heads south towards Greystones call into **Killrudddery House and Gardens**, the most extensive surviving French style garden in Ireland. The **Earls of Meath** have been at Killruddery since the early 1600s. The House and Gardens enjoy an all time popularity as a film location and have been used extensively for period dramas such as **Stanley Kubrick's Barry Lyndon, David Copperfield** and **The Aristocrats**, a BBC series of the life of the four Lennox sisters n the 18th century. Some of the opening scenes of **Far and Away** with **Nicole Kidman** and **Tom Cruise** were shot here. During the summer of 2000 parts of the remake of T**he Count of Monte Cristo**, with **Guy Pearce** and **Dagmara Dominczyk** were shot here as well as the remake for **The Magnificent Ambersons**. The House and Garden are open to the public during the summer. Please enquire: Tel. 01-2862777. After visiting Killruddery, the drive continues on to the charming seaside town of Greystones, with its untouched old style seafront of Georgian and Victorian houses. Behind the seafront runs the attractive Main Street with plenty of excellent shops, coffee shops and restaurants. Take some tie out to savour the relaxed pace and beautiful views along the coastline before continuing on to Kilcoole. One the more recent films shot in Greystones is **Angela's Ashes** by renowned director **Alan Parker**. Some scenes of this film were shot in a private house in Greystones on Church Road. Originally set in Limerick of the 1930s, the film Angela's Ashes follows the experience of young Frankie and his family as they try against all odds to escape the poverty endemic in the slums of pre-war Limerick. Based on the Pullitzer Prize winning autobiography by **Frank McCourt, Robert Carlyle, Emily Watson** and a number of young Frankies give a very strong performance in the gritty reality of Angela's Ashes.

The film **The Life of St. Patrick**, with **Patrick Bergin**, **Malcolm McDowell** and **Susannah York**, was filmed on a number of locations scattered throughout Greystones and the rest of the County. It retells the story of Saint Patrick his

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years of slavery in Ireland and how he eventually returned to Ireland to save the population and turn the people to Christianity.

Jane Seymour recently starred in a television movie called **Yesterday's Children** which was shot on location in the pleasant harbour of Greystones, the cemetery in **Newcastle** and in the picturesque village of **Enniskerry**. From Greystones the Excalibur Drive heads south for the small yet nationally famous town of **Kilcoole**. Kilcoole played host to the RTE television soap series Glenroe. This Irish television series started in 1983 and quickly shot to the top of the Irish TV charts where it remained until recently when the series was concluded. It is centred around the lives of the people who live in the Wicklow village of Glenroe. Kilcoole, set along the Eastern coastline of Wicklow, was the ideal place for this series and welcomed the cast of this fictional community. Glenroe Open Farm is one of the principal film locations of the TV series as it was the home **of Dinny, Biddy** and **Miley Byrne**. Originally a family-run working farm it is now open to the public and shows Dinny's famous pink cottage with its original mud walls and believed to be well over 200 years old. The cottage also houses a photographic exhibition tracing the history of home-grown TV series such as the Riordans and Bracken. The cast of Glenroe has included some of the best Irish actors over the years, such as **Mick Lally, Mary McEvoy** and **Cyril Cusack**.

While in Kilcoole also visit the cosy pub **The Molly Malone**, which is reported to be the most televised pub in Ireland and which has an extensive photo gallery of the Glenroe stars. You should also check out **Teasy's Take Away**.

Next on the Excalibur Drive we pass the world **famous Druids Glen Golf Club**. **Woodstock House**, which is now the clubhouse, has served as the set for another RTE series called **The Price**. Druids Glen has hosted the **Murphys Irish Open** for four years running and is one of Ireland's leading golf clubs and well worth playing.

The drive comes through the town of **Newtownmountkennedy**, Ireland's longest place name, before heading to the finishing point at Roundwood. Roundwood is not only popular with film makers because of its setting but also because of its excellent pubs and eating facilities. Internationally acclaimed film actors, like **Daniel Day Lewis** and **John Hurt**, and directors, such as **John Boorman**, have homes in the Roundwood area and can be found sharing a pint with locals in one of the many cosy pubs.

Try some of the outstanding barfood and atmosphere in the **Roundwood Inn, The Coach House** or **DJ Mulhares**.