

Newcastle Walk No.1

Length:- 14 Kilometres (9 Miles)

Time:- 4 Hours

This walk will lead you along the quiet back roads north of Newcastle village. Apart from visiting Molough Abbey and the solitude of Tullaghmeelan churchyard, you will never be far away from the wide and deep River Suir. The walking is easy, mostly along narrow roads but if you take the alternative route near Tullaghmeelan, expect to get your feet muddy. The route is also suitable as a short cycle tour.

Places of Interest

A Newcastle House. Looking down the river, you will have a fine view of the ruin of Newcastle house. George Bassett wrote in 1889 that 'Newcastle is a village of 10 or 12 houses in the Barony of Iffa and Offa West, 7 Irish miles southwest from Clonmel. It is one of the best salmon stands on the Suir and near it, the Tar, a first rate trout river, also runs. The land of the district is good. Oats and potatoes are the chief crops. A great many milch cows are kept by the farmers. Miss Eliza Perry owns the village and neighbourhood. At various periods it belonged to the Birminghams and Prendergasts, coming into the possession of the Perry's at the close of the revolution in which James II and William III were the chief actors'. Thus in c.1690, the Perry family came to own large estates in the area of Newcastle and you will see further mention of their influence if you undertake other walks in this series. The house was destroyed by fire during the troubled period of the early 1920's which led to the setting up of the Irish Free State.

B River Suir. The River Suir is one of the main arterial rivers in the south east of Ireland. It rises above Thurles and flows over 100Km. to reach the sea at Waterford. The Vikings may have sailed up the river in earlier times, at least as far as Clonmel, a mere 10Km away. Seagoing ships once used to travel as far as Carrick-on-Suir and a barge service operated to Clonmel. The Suir has always been associated with salmon.

C Molough Abbey. This is recorded as the site of the first religious house in the Déise. It was built by Cinaedh, chief of the Déise for his daughter. The ruins of a later monastery are now to be seen, with two fine gothic arched windows in the east gable. There has been a long association with St. Brigid. A ford on the nearby River Suir connected the abbey with Ballymakee in Co. Waterford and the area was also noted for an annual fair. Molough Abbey was always been maintained as a convent and the last prioress was a Joan Power who surrendered her nunnery to Lord Chancellor Alen on the 11th April 1540, during the Reformation. The land was then let out to various tenants who paid rent in services and livestock - 1 pig, 1 sheep, 12 hens, 6 ploughdays, 3 cartdays, 3 boondays. The oldest legible gravestone in the adjoining graveyard is that of Maurice Lonergan, who lived to be 62 years and died in 1732.

D There is a fine view of the surrounding hills from this low hilltop. You may as well be at the hub of a wheel - the Galtee Mountains lie in front, the Knockmealdown Mountains to your left and the Comeragh Mountains to your right and behind you. The mountains were formed four hundred million years ago during the American uplift and consist of Devonian Old Red Sandstone. The Galty Vee valley lying between the mountains has a bed of Carboniferous Limestone laid down c. three hundred million years ago. Recent discoveries during construction work on a gas pipeline, exposed remains of village type settlements dating back to 1000 BC. The valley is now given over to both arable and pasture land. Dairying is an important aspect of local farming but otherwise the agriculture is mixed. The major farming co-operatives, Avonmore and Dairygold have a large impact on the local economy. However, small scale local industries such as cheese and honey production exist.

E Tullaghmeelan Church. The old ruin stands in a peaceful spot, surrounded by grassy graves and a wooded circular bank. Maolain may have been the founder of the church and a stone carving over the door is reputed to represent him. A report from 1640 states that 'upon the said lands of Tulloemealane stands two thatcht houses with a double chimney in each of them and some cabbynnys'.

F Ballybeg. Newcastle school children collected stories during the 1930's from the older inhabitants. One story was collected from Padraig O Caoin, aged 53, as follows:

'In a field near the property of James English in Ballybeg, it was said that a crock of gold was hidden under the ground. A longstone flag was supposed to be covering the crock. About one hundred years ago, a man whom this field belonged to, tried to find the gold. One day, as he was ploughing the field, the plough slipped along a flag and as he did not want to tell anybody that he had found the gold, he went to the ditch, got a long stick and stuck it into the clay. That night, he and another man came back to the place to dig up the gold but all the field was covered with switches like the one he had stuck in the ground. The man went home very disappointed and nothing has been heard of the gold since'.

Tullaghmeelan

