

Great Southern Trail Greenway – Bealach Glas an Mhór-Dheiscirt

The Great Southern Trail (GST) is a unique 96km (60 miles) stretch of countryside in West Limerick/North Kerry. It was the route taken by the Limerick - Tralee/Fenit railway line, which opened in stages between 1867 and 1887. Most of the route closed between 1975 and 1978 but remains the property of CIÉ (the National Transport Company). In County Limerick, approximately 40km of the Great Southern Trail has now been developed for off road walking and cycling from Rathkeale to Abbeyfeale. The route makes its way through the West Limerick countryside giving the walker/cyclist the opportunity to stop off in towns and villages along the route including Rathkeale, Ardagh, Newcastle West, Templeglantine and Abbeyfeale.

Rathkeale to Ardagh (9km)

The trail head in Rathkeale is at the old station building which is now home to the Palatine Museum, a museum dedicated to the settlers from the Palatinate in Germany who arrived in Ireland 300 years ago. The westward journey continues through lands associated with the Palatines. You will encounter five beautiful cut-stone overhead bridges on the trail to Ardagh. The final bridge is at the former Ardagh Station (house private) from where you can visit the village of Ardagh where the Ardagh Chalice was found in 1868.

Ardagh to Newcastle West (4km)

This section is level at each end with a 'dip' in the middle in the form of a 1% gradient. The trail passes through pleasant farmland with views of the surrounding hills. You will cross the River Daar as you approach Newcastle West and then cross the R521 bringing you to Newcastle West station. The only surviving features of the railway age are the restored Station House (private) and the mature oak trees which lined the approach avenue from Bishop Street. Newcastle West is an ideal stopping point for rest and refreshments. Take time to visit the local shops and boutiques, view the Medieval Desmond Castle from the main Square and relax in the Castle Demesne which covers over 100 acres of parkland.

Newcastle West to Barnagh (10km)

This was one of the most arduous challenges in the age of the steam train as it is an uphill journey for most of the way and for the walker/cyclist is the section of the trail with the steepest incline.

The Rooskagh Hill Loop is well worth the 4km additional detour as it provides wonderful views of the Limerick Plains and the Golden Vale. Back on the trail, you will cross the restored Ferguson's Viaduct before entering a roadside section running parallel to the N21.

[In the past, trains entered Barnagh Station through a tunnel which can be visited along a 'stand-alone' 1km section of the old railway. Access to the tunnel is from the lay-by at Barnagh on the N21(westbound)]

Barnagh to Kerry Border via Templeglantine and Abbeyfeale (17km)

From Barnagh, the trail is pleasant passing downhill through cuttings and embankments and under two stone bridges. The pretty village of Templeglantine becomes visible on the left and is an ideal place to come off the trail for rest and refreshments. Leaving Templeglantine, the trail enters the tranquil Tullig Wood. Further on is the restored station (house private) at Devon Road. The trail now levels out as it comes parallel to the River Allaghaun and keeps company with it until Abbeyfeale. A stone bridge spans the trail and 2km later the Station (house private) at Abbeyfeale is reached. Turn left onto the R524 for Abbeyfeale Town Centre. Continuing westwards toward Co. Kerry the River Oolagh is bridged and Purt Castle (ruin) soon appears on the left, as does the River Feale.

