

15. Newcastle West River Walk/ Demesne/ Rail Track to Ardagh

Newcastle West is a busy town on the N21 and is the largest town in the county. There is a short river walk and a large town park known as the Castle Demesne that has many walks on offer for the visitor. There is also an abandoned railway line that has been developed as a walking route by the Great Southern Trail. It is now possible to walk to Ardagh and back in the peace and quiet of the

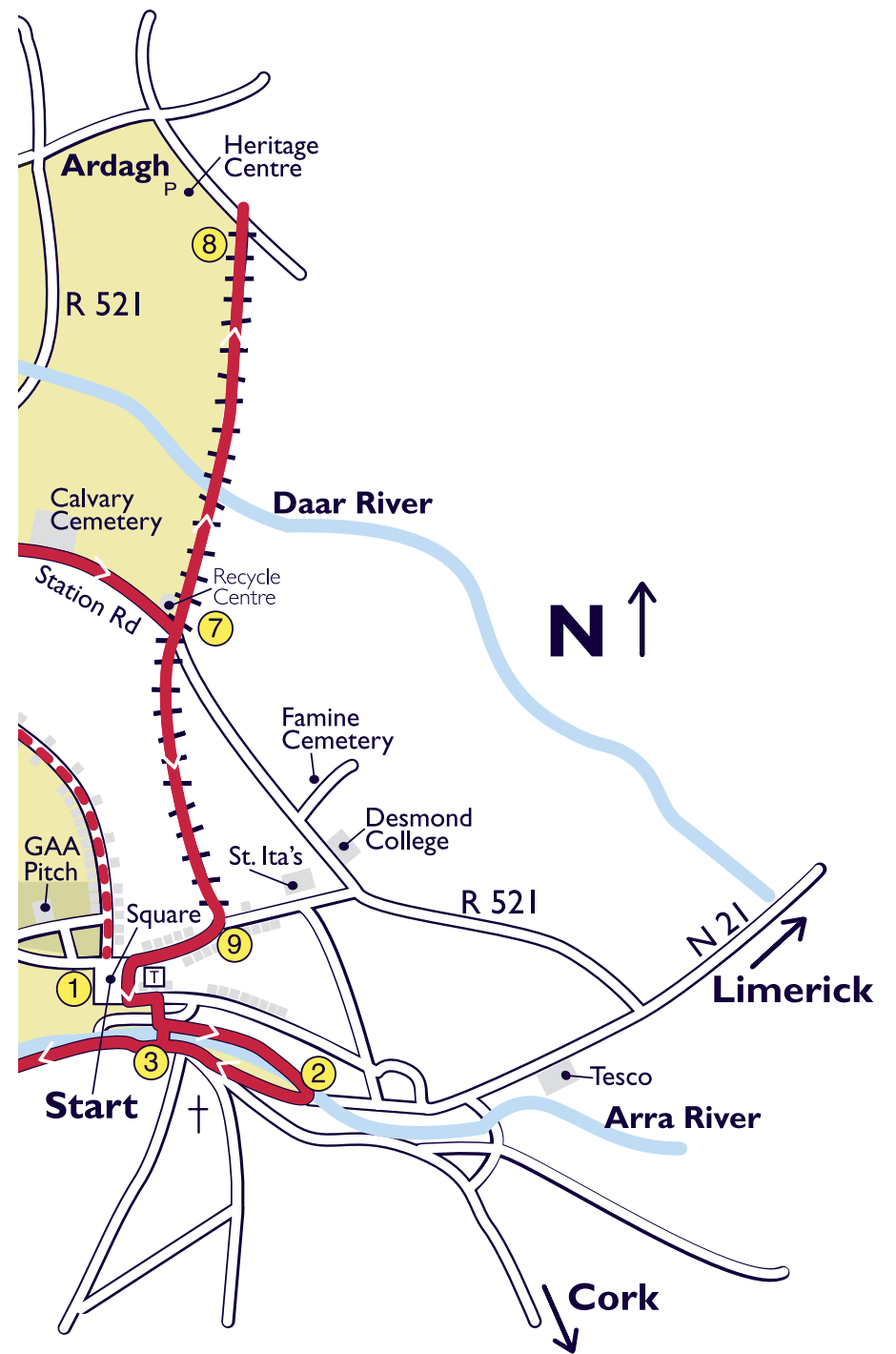
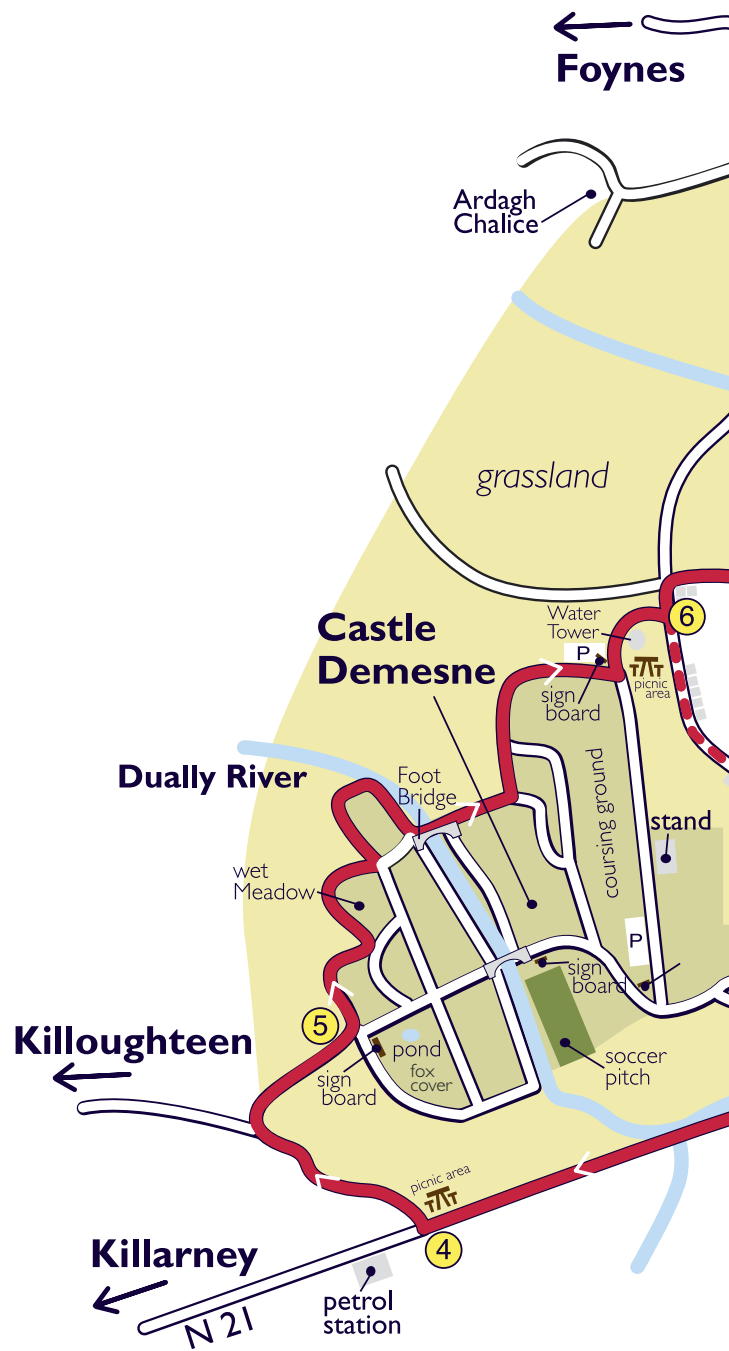


The Arra River

countryside, without the noise and danger of the traffic. Walking distance: Castle Demesne and river 5km, Time 1 hr 30 min. Terrain casual. Rail track to Ardagh: 8km round trip, time 2hrs 30 min. There is parking available at the Ardagh Heritage Centre, which makes it possible to start your walk from there. There are other options for shorter walks. Terrain easy. O.S.Map 64: Start grid ref R279337

Starting at the town square [Point 1] walk down Bridge Street, which is at the southeastern corner of the square. Turn first left alongside the bank of the River Arra where you will eventually pass an iron footbridge. Pass Ó Neill's furniture shop and follow a path that runs beside the river where there is usually lots of bird activity. Listen out for Blackbird, Robin, Wren, Great Tit, Blue Tit and Collared Dove. On reaching the road bridge **[Point 2]** bend down to have a look underneath. Here you may find the nest of the Dipper on a concrete beam. Walk up the steps and turn right over the bridge along St Mary's Road. Continue along the path passing the Community Hall. When you reach the traffic lights, cross over and follow the riverbank **[Point 3]**. Look for Grey Wagtail and Grey Heron sitting on the rocks. The walls are covered with Ivy-leaved Toadflax, with clumps of Red Valerian growing at the top. This is a popular place for feeding the ducks.

Continue westwards along the N21 passing the iron bridge until you reach the first road on your right **[Point 4]**. Turn right along the footpath and continue to the black gates of the Castle Demesne. Enter the gates and follow this path, which brings you to the far end of the Castle Demesne where there is a signboard with site information and a map **[Point 5]**. Here you have a choice of many walks. We take the path to the left and keep to the left around the edge of the wet meadow. Here you can see the red berries of Guelder Rose in late summer, amongst the vegetation. At the next junction turn left, where an Oak tree has been left where it fell. Check the ditches along here in spring for the large yellow flowers of Marsh Marigold. Follow this path around until you reach a newly built metal bridge. When crossing over the bridge look downstream, where you will see Wych Elm growing from the bank. Turn left after crossing the bridge. The path then bends to the right. Under the trees in spring you will see violets and later the pink flowers of the Common Spotted-orchid. At the next junction, keep to the left. Follow this path that eventually turns right and begins to rise up to the water



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Castle Demesne at point 6



The Railtrack to Ardagh at point 7

tower.

At the gate turn left, where you will see a picnic table; here there is a grand view of the West Limerick Hills. Continue on past the water tower and along the edge of the cemetery until you reach the entrance gate **[Point 6]**.

Option: At this point you can turn right, which will bring you back to the Town Square for a shorter walk back. This is recommended for those with small children or pushchairs.

We turn left, passing the cemetery, and then turn right at the crossroads down station Road. Pass a second cemetery until you reach the recycle centre opposite Gaelscoil Ó'Doghair. There is a stile on the left for the rail track to Ardagh **[Point 7]**. Enter the stile and then take the track to the right, passing the signboard pointing for Ballingrane. The hedgerow on the right is mainly Hawthorn with some Blackthorn. The first large tree on the left is a Crack Willow of which the trunk often leans over. There is a metal pole barrier across the track just before the old railway bridge across the Daar River. On the other side of the river is a stand of Beech

on the left, whilst in the hedge on the right a little further on you will find Spindle; the fruits are a vivid pink with bright orange seeds in autumn. Where the track gets damp you will find the stems of Horsetail growing. During springtime, flocks of Whimbrel (known as the May Bird) feed in the wet fields. They can be confused with Curlew but you can identify them by their trilling calls as they fly overhead. There is a second pole barrier to pass. This is the boundary between Newcastle West and Ardagh parishes. You will eventually come to a gate beside a white house and a road, then another gate; go through these and enter under a canopy of Ash where you will find more Spindle and some Guelder Rose. Continue on to the end of the walk at the road bridge **[Point 8]**. Steps on the right bring you up to the road, which provides access to Ardagh village and the site where the Ardagh Chalice was found. Retrace your way back to the start of the rail track **[Point 7]**. At the gate, cross over the road and continue along the path. Soon you will enter Bishop Court. The original Railway station can be seen and a stand of Cork Oak that used to line the avenue to the old station. At the T-junction turn right **[Point 9]**. Pass the Courthouse and a pair of London Plane trees, to bring you back to the town square.