



# Making Memories Magical

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## Cooley Camino Trail (Walking / Cycling)

### Welcome

Welcome to the Cooley Camino, otherwise known as An Sli Cuailngne, a long distance trail from Armagh to the Cooley Peninsula. It is part of an ancient route, used in trade and for pilgrimage, taking in areas of the most outstanding natural beauty, through a landscape filled with legends, local stories and traditions.

The **Cooley Camino Trail** is full of surprises, even for those who are familiar with the area. Its twists and turns will guide you through historic towns and villages and you can explore some beautiful countryside on the way. There are plenty of places to pause and reflect, while you can also enjoy some well-earned rest and refreshment.

### Origin

The story of the Cooley Camino and its origins goes back to the 12th and 13th centuries, when upwards of half a million pilgrims were making their way to and fro across northern Spain each year to the shrine of St James the Apostle at Santiago de Compostela. Their journey became known as the Camino or the Way.

Local kings and clergy built hospitals, hostels, roads and bridges to accommodate these traveller pilgrims. The Knights Templar patrolled the Camino, providing protection, for those using their network which expanded across the length and breadth of Europe, with places of hospitality, healing and worship, shipping and transport, as well as the banking system that became another source of their fabled wealth.

As time progressed, they began to loan money to states and kings, creating a debt burden, which in time became unmanageable for the most powerful rulers of the period. It led to their downfall.

Their network extended from the southern tips of Europe and North Africa to the likes of St Petersburg in modern Russia. It emerged that anywhere with a place name referring to St James had a direct connection with the pilgrimage. For want of linguistic skills, all a traveler had to do was ask for St James to be pointed in the right direction.

### Irish Connections with the Camino

Here in Ireland, we are now familiar with the connection with St James' Gate on St James' St in Dublin, dating back to 1220, where the tradition has survived of pilgrims passing through the medieval city gate, nowadays calling into the Guinness Brewery Office, or into St James' Parish Church to get their pilgrimage passport stamped with their Stella.

Within Ireland, by medieval times, there were already a large number of established pilgrimages, of local as well as national importance. Including many dedicated to SS Patrick, Colmcille and Brigid, with Armagh, Lough Derg, Downpatrick, Croagh Patrick, Glencolmcille and Faughart amongst others, all being widely attended.

Each diocese in Ireland had its own port, for Armagh, the most important ecclesiastical centre in the country, Carlingford was its trading port and its access to the sea.

Anyone from Gaelic Ulster in medieval times, intending travelling to Santiago, travelled the trade route leading from Armagh, along the ancient road of the Sli Miluachra, to the Gap of the North near to the Hill of Faughart, over into Annaverna, continuing across the high paths of the Cooley's then through Bearnavave and the Grange/Templetown area, before progressing to Carlingford.

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From **Carlingford**, pilgrims travelled by boat to France or Spain to join with the nearest set of paths bringing them to their destination. One of the reasons those from Gaelic Ulster would have used the high paths was that up to 1600, all of Cooley was within the ancient province of Ulster, therefore these paths were already familiar to them.

Additionally, for their own security the lower paths out through **Ballymascanlon** and **Lordship** were not as secure from Norman times onwards, these were controlled as part of the English 'Pale'.

In the economy of the day, where the cash/coin system was less developed in Ulster, than in the Pale, therefore, to finance a pilgrimage, as still applies today, cash was required.

This could be raised by driving livestock or poultry to the Templars perceptory at Kilwirra, benefitting from the ready market available on some of the best land in the country at Templetown, with ready cash or using the benefits of their available banking system.

## The Modern Cooley Camino

It can best be travelled in the traditions associated with the Camino or pilgrimage to St James at Santiago de Compostela, where the journey is completed on foot, by cycling, on horseback or any other method which comes to mind that does not involve the assistance of a mechanical engine.

The **Cooley Camino Trail** is rich in history and will take you through some of Ireland's finest countryside. There is so much to see that you will want to linger – so why not split the Trail into shorter sections to suit your taste and take your time to complete it?

Or if you like to stride out at a more determined pace, you will find that the Trail is long enough to provide a challenge - so go for it!

Along the way, the pilgrims passport can be stamped at a variety of places, to record the distance travelled which can be included to form part of the entire journey to Santiago, just as it was in the past.

## Places along the way

### Section one

The first point of departure is **Armagh**, a city of two cathedrals, a city on seven hills, the city of legends. She boasts a strikingly colorful history. The oldest city in Ireland, Armagh has played host to the first Celtic high kings of Ireland, St. Patrick, and Jonathan Swift, amongst others.

Armagh gives voice to the spirits of two Christian faiths, in two commanding cathedrals situated on twin hilltops. Armagh sings the tune of myth and legend; outside the town, visitors can find one of the Gaelic world's most ancient ruins, Navan Fort, known as Emain Macha. The city is a destination that combines traditional small town charm with extraordinary attractions.

Leading uphill from Armagh is **Gosford Forest Park** which is located near the village of Markethill. Gosford Forest Park, is now owned by the forestry Service and boasts excellent facilities and a cafe. It also houses one of Northern Ireland's premier collections of rare breeds.

Many place-names in Ireland are Gaelic in origin and are descriptive of the topography. The interpretation of Tanderagee, Gaoth is an Irish word meaning wind and features often in place-names in reference to their exposure. In Tanderagee, which is Ton re Gaoith, meaning 'backside to the wind', as if suggesting that is the right stance to adopt in the area.

Overlooking the village is **Tandragee Castle**. Originally the seat of the Ó hAnluain clan, it was taken over by the English during the Plantation of Ulster and rebuilt in about 1837 by George Montagu, 6th Duke of Manchester. Today, its grounds are home to the Tayto potato-crisp factory.

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**Scarva** is a small village and townland in County Down, at the boundary with County Armagh, which is marked by the Newry Canal.

Scarva on the Newry Canal Towpath, is famous as the location of the "Sham Fight" Pageant on 13 July every year. The Pageant attracts thousands of members of the Royal Black Preceptory, a group related to the Orange Order, who come to march and stage a symbolic (sham) re-enactment of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne. In June 1690, a Williamite army of 30,000 men camped in the Scarva area for training before marching on to meet the forces of King James II at the Battle of the Boyne on 1 July 1690.

Whilst training his army, King William is said to have camped under a magnificent Spanish chestnut tree. The tree still flourishes to this day and measures over 25 feet in circumference at the base.

## Section Two

**The Newry Canal**, was built in 1741, to link the Tyrone coalfields (Coalisland)(via Lough Neagh and the River Bann) to the Irish Sea at Carlingford Lough. It was the first summit level canal to be built in Ireland or Britain.

With the coming of the railways in the 1850s, the canal went into decline, and finally closed to commercial traffic in the late 1930s. Although most of the lock gates have fallen into a state of disrepair, many of the locks themselves are in excellent condition, being constructed from local granite.

It is now a haven for wildlife, and with the construction of broad paths, is enjoying a renaissance, with many families and individuals using these for walking and cycling. The towpath has been incorporated into the National Cycle Network.

## Section Three

**The Craigmore Viaduct** is a railway bridge near Bessbrook. It spans the **Valley of Camlough** River. The viaduct consists of 18 arches of 60 ft span, the highest being 126 ft, making Craigmore the highest viaduct in Ireland.

**Derrymore House** is a National Trust property in Bessbrook. It is open to the public and is described by the National Trust as a "late 18th-century thatched house in gentrified vernacular style".

Built in the style of a cottage orné, house is set in over 100 acres of beautiful parkland and woodland. It features unique local thatching using Shannon reeds.

It was built between 1776 and 1787 by Isaac Corry, MP for Newry for thirty years, on land he inherited from his father. The Act of Union of 1800, was drafted in the drawing room of the house. The surrounding parkland was laid out by John Sutherland, one of the most celebrated disciples of Capability Brown.

The quaint town of **Bessbrook** is a very early Quaker settlement and model village. It was built around the linen industry in 1845 by the Richardson family to house their workers. The layout remains as it was in that time with the local granite stone, of which it is made, and the original streets, terraces and squares.

Along the road from the village which bears its name, **Camlough Lake** (the crooked lake), stretches for two kilometres along the Camlough Valley running between **Camlough Mountain** to the west and **Sturgan Mountain** to the east. It is also an important recreational resource for a range of water based activities including coarse angling, water- skiing, swimming and triathlon. Camlough Lake is situated within the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



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The beautiful, wooded area around **Killeavy Old Churches**, on the slopes of **Slieve Gullion**, is in an area which has numerous prehistoric cairns testifying to the presence of people dwelling here, devoting time, thought and prayer to a higher being, in a tradition going back many thousands of years. The sense of mystery and legend is without parallel and the feeling which drew St Moninna to the place can be understood.

**Kilnasaggart Stone** on the northern end of the Gap of the North is the oldest accurately dated, inscribed standing stone in Ireland.

**Moyry Castle**, built during the 9 Years War by Lord Mountjoy to secure access to the Gap and beyond.

**The Hill of Faughart** is located to the north of **Dundalk** where the stream and shrine associated with the childhood of **St Brigid** can be found. The view from the hilltop is inspiring, yet all around are reminders of numerous stories relating to the culture, traditions and history of the region.

## Section Four

Walking over the high paths of the Cooley's is one of the outstanding walks in Ireland, to describe it as being beautiful, understates what is found there. It is recognised as a European Destination of Excellence.

**The Cadgers Path** was used for centuries, by fish sellers from **Omeath** carrying freshly caught fish over the mountains to the markets in Dundalk.

Legend has it that Fionn McCool buried his favourite hound at Carnawaddy. Another version about the Cairn's contents is that the giant hound killed by Cuchulainn is buried here where it is a landmark for miles around.

In the legend of the Brown Bull, in the Cattle Raid of Cooley or the Tain, Glenmore is where the mythical bull lived in peace and harmony with his fifty young heifers until the army of the west came to steal him away.

Another episode in the Tain, has Queen Maeve creating a new gap in the Cooley's as a keepsake for the Ulstermen, otherwise known as Bearnavave.

## Section Five

**Grange**, a traditional Irish village, with Bearavave in the background, was once an outlying monastic farm of the Cistercian Monastery in Newry, today home to the serene St James' Church, the oldest RC church in the Armagh Archdiocese.

### **Kilwirra or Mary's Church**

It is believed this church belonged to the Knights Templars, after whom the surrounding district, Templetown, is named. They were granted a large amount of prime land in this area by Matilda de Lacy in the latter part of the 13th cent.

**St James' Well** is another connection with the Knights Templar who was deeply involved for many years in the crusades and had a presence on the Cooley Peninsula. Saint James was seen as a patron saint of a sort for many of the Knights Templars, named at one stage as the 'matamoros'; the Moor slayer. James is also the patron saint of pilgrims and very often his symbol is the same as that of travelling pilgrims - a scallop shell. Locally, St James is the patron saint of all in Cooley.

**The Holy Trinity Church, Carlingford** was founded in the 1660s and incorporates an earlier medieval tower. Today it also incorporates the heritage centre for Carlingford. In medieval times, the building at its location, when it overlooked the foreshore of the day, was controlled first by the Templars before its transfer into the possession of the Knights Hospitaller.

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## **Ways to travel the Cooley Camino**

There are as many ways to travel the Camino as there are Camino trails. On each section of the Cooley Camino, whether they are travelled in sequence or otherwise, with a guide or without, there is enough information here for everyone to find navigating the route possible.

With ourselves, guiding any group, we provide transport to the start of each day's travelling and share the stories along the way as travelers did in times past.

If bicycle hire is required, we can arrange that, in a similar way if travelers prefer a small sandwich on the journey or prefer the thought of a substantial culinary discovery along the way, we will discuss whatever you prefer to do.

### **By Coach**

To satisfy the curiosity of anyone wishing to know the highlights of the route, with a view to walking or cycling at another time, travelling with a group on a coach could be the ideal introduction to the Cooley Camino.

Beginning in Armagh, you get to hear the stories associated with these places throughout the ages, you will understand what the Camino is about, with questions and answer sessions along the way, until we reach our destination in Cooley.

### **Walking**

Walking, Hill Walking, Rambling or Hiking, call it what you will, it still means putting one foot in front of another, out in the open air with the goal of covering a set distance or reaching another place.

Every section of the Cooley Camino is suitable for walking. There is a mixture of roads, boreens, grassy lanes and hill paths all along the way. On a guided walk, the guide will act as the group leader while recalling the stories of the section you happen to travel at the time.

## **Cycling**

Cycling the Cooley Camino will certainly cover the ground faster than walking but not every section is ideal for bicycles.

On *Section Four* the paths are not suitable for an average bicycle and a certain amount of pushing uphill is to be expected.

If bicycle hire is required for a group, we can arrange that as well as transport of the bicycles to the group starting point. For individuals wishing to cycle alone we can still make the arrangements for you to hire a suitable bicycle at a reasonable cost.

## **Leave No Trace**

We adhere to the principles of 'leave no trace' as part of the Outdoor Ethics Campaign. The program strives to build awareness, appreciation and respect for Ireland's natural and cultural heritage and is dedicated to creating a nationally recognized and accepted outdoor ethic that promotes personal responsibility.

## **Public Transport**

The Cooley Camino Trail has public transport connections at the start and finish, and there are numerous transport links on the way.

## **Suitability**

The Cooley Camino is suitable for walkers of all ages and abilities, but there are some steep slopes, patches of uneven ground and some stiles. Parts of the trail are therefore unsuitable for wheelchairs and buggies. Some areas may be slippery or muddy underfoot, so stout walking boots or trainers with good treads are recommended.

Feel free to contact us to discuss a full schedule of events arranged to your convenience.

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