

What to See & Do

This page is intended for people planning to visit Wicklow Mountains National Park for the first time. What is there to see and do? The three most popular ways to experience the National Park are:

- Visit Glendalough.
 - Take a scenic drive through the mountains.
 - Go hillwalking in remote locations. (Experience required)
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Visit Glendalough

Glendalough is a beautiful valley located close to Laragh village. The area has many historic sites, several good walks, wildlife and nature, and various visitor facilities. The valley has two main 'starting points' for visitors. The eastern end of the valley has parking at the Visitor Centre and the Glendalough Hotel. The western end of the valley has parking at the Upper Lake car park. A twenty minute walk along the pedestrian 'Green Road' links the two areas.

Within the valley are the ruins of an early Christian settlement (known as the Monastic City), complete with round tower and churches. The monastic ruins are located within the National Park, but are looked after by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The Visitor Centre has an excellent display and offers guided tours of the ruins.

There are more monastic ruins at the western end of the valley. A 30 minute walk takes you to the more modern remains of an old lead mines (the Miners' Village).

There are many good walks in Glendalough. The National Park has a series of nine way-marked walking trails around the valley. These walks vary from a half hour stroll to a four hour hill-walk. The Wicklow Way (a seven day long distance route) also crosses through the valley, and the St. Kevin's Way, a pilgrim path, finishes at Glendalough having crossed the Wicklow Gap from west Wicklow.

The valley has a variety of good wildlife habitats – native oak woodland, Scot's pine woodland, plantation conifer forests, lakes, rivers, cliffs, bogland and heath. The valley has large populations of sika deer and feral goats, both of which are often seen by visitors. More elusive native red squirrels, pine martens, badgers, peregrine falcons, ravens, and lots more can be seen on occasion. More advice and information can be obtained at the National Park Information Office close to the Upper Lake.

A Scenic Drive

The Wicklow Mountains are traversed by three roads, all of them small and twisty:

- The Military Road (R115) runs north-south across the mountains passing through Glencree, the Liffey Head Bog (source of Dublin's river Liffey), the Sally Gap, Glenmacnass waterfall, and down to Laragh.

- The R759 runs east-west from near Roundwood to near Blessington, and crossing the Military Road at the Sally Gap. Of particular interest are the views over Lough Tay and the privately owned Guinness Estate. Further west, the road passes the historic wooded Coronation Plantation.
- The Wicklow Gap (R756) runs east-west from Laragh to Hollywood. A viewing platform on the top of the Wicklow Gap is worth a stop. On the western side, a right turn to Vallemount will take you around the Pollaphuca Reservoir.

Depending on your starting point, there are a variety of circular routes that can be driven around these three routes to give a true appreciation of the wildness and beauty of the National Park.

Hillwalking

The National Park is a huge area – 20,000 hectares, most of which consists of wild mountain bogland and heath. Much of it is only accessible to experienced, properly equipped hillwalkers. (Such walkers will find more information on our ‘Recreation’ pages.) If you are not experienced at map reading, there are some local walking guides that will lead groups across the hills.

Information Office & Garden

National Park Information Office

The Information Office for the National Park is located 200m from the Upper Lake Car Park in Glendalough. This small cottage contains a wealth of knowledge about the Park – nature, history, trails, mining, and more. The staff on duty are happy to answer any query, no matter how curious. A range of walking maps and postcards are on sale.

Lost property, lost visitor, first aid and emergency facilities are also available here.

Opening Hours:

November, December, January	Weekends only	09:30a.m. to 4.30p.m.
February, March, April	Weekends only	10.a.m. to 5:30p.m.
May, June, July, August, September	Daily	10.a.m. to 5:30p.m.
October	Weekends only	10.a.m. to 5:30p.m.
Christmas & Easter Holidays	Daily	10.a.m. to 5:30p.m.

Wildlife & Sensory Garden

Behind the Information Office is a tiny garden that has been designed to appeal to all the senses and also to attract wildlife. Visitors are encouraged to smell and touch the plants, listen to nature's sounds, and admire the planting. Nature abounds. There is a wildlife pond with frogs and dragonflies. Butterflies, bees and hoverflies feed on the flowers in the borders. Bats and birds enjoy the garden too.

The garden is open during the spring and summer, between 10a.m. and 5p.m. It is closed in winter.