

Beentee Loop

Cahersiveen, County Kerry

Themes: Scenery & Nature

The length of this loop walk, combined with rough and boggy stretches on Beentee hill and the accumulated ascent make it quite demanding, but the tremendous views from the top are very rewarding.

Starting behind the old station in Cahersiveen, we go left and uphill along a leafy lane, past extensive private gardens on the left that enhance the road greatly. Past the town reservoir the route reaches a grassy pathway, an old Mass Path, used in the old days as a short cut to the church in Cahersiveen for rural folk. It is a rare survival: most of the Mass Paths in Ireland have now disappeared.

The path contours around the north west flanks of Beentee, through a very pleasant old wood of oaks and beeches, the trees and branches clothed in a thick shroud of moss. Different varieties of trees are named with little signs, and there is also a sign that tells us that, in a glade below the path is a holy well called Tobar na Mban Fionn, or the well of the fair-haired women.

We soon leave the wood, crossing the first of many stiles along this route, into the open and across a field which takes us to a fragrant breen, rich in foxgloves and meadow sweet, and lined with alders. A derelict cottage is



Beentee Ridge

passed as the breen narrows, the bordering stone walls thick with moss and bracken.

Out in the open again, the route passes through sheep pastures and boggy fields where the butterwort and sundew add tiny flies to the sparse nourishment they get from the soil. Behind, the estuary of the River Ferta gleams against a backdrop of Knocknadober, the hill of the wells, a great whale-back reaching 690 m above sea level. Watch out for the Irish mountain hare in this area: they are big animals, indeed their Gaelic name is Gearr Fia or short deer. It is one of the longest established examples of Irish fauna: the remains of one excavated in County Waterford dated from over 28,000 years ago.

Eventually tarmac is reached again, a narrow road with grass down the middle, what is called in rural areas 'The Long Acre,' where landless peasants grazed their animals. The road is bordered with hedges thick with fuschia, wood sorrel and fraughans, or Irish blueberry, but after a short distance the route leaves it and goes steeply uphill beside a coniferous plantation. It's a good pull, but soon the ridge of the hill is reached and the route turns westwards towards the summit.



Ruined Cottage



Beentee Wildflowers

Beentee Loop

Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry

Tremendous views open up now to the south over Bolus Head and Ballinskelligs Bay, allowing the breathless walker plenty of excuses to stop and gaze at the scenery. The path you follow can be thought of as a route through time. The



Wood Sorrel



Standing Stone



The old Police Station

strata of the slate bedrock is projecting almost vertically towards you, which means as you progress uphill you are walking through a primordial past into a future that was thousands of years ago!

The east top of Beentee at 333m is soon reached and the route, a faint path through the moorland grass, rises and drops and crosses a quite narrow ridge as the main summit is approached. On the main summit at 376m there are extensive views all around. To the west is the 12 km long island of Valentia, connected to the mainland by a bridge at Portmagee, and to the south west in clear weather the two Skelligs are in view, on one of which an amazing monastery was built in early Christian times. To the south, Ballinskelligs Bay stretches between Bolus Head and Hogs Head. To the north is our goal, the town of Cahersiveen. The summit is featureless except for a small cairn of slaty rock, with carved initials of earlier visitors: the clearest seems to be dated 1863.

The route descends from Beentee across moorland to the forest edge. The town of Cahersiveen is laid out below, strung out along the estuary of the Ferta river. It is a relatively modern place in Irish terms: in 1815 there were only five houses here. The church was built in 1888 and paid for by emigrants in the USA. The keystone of the main arch came from Rome from the house of St Clement, who was pope in AD 92. The other large building in the town is the unusual former police barracks with its pinnacled tower, now the local heritage centre. Local stories relate how it was designed for the North West frontier of India, but that the plans got mixed up and it ended up here in Cahersiveen. The truth, however, is more prosaic: it was designed for the town in 1865 by E.T. Owens of the Office of Public Works in Dublin, who was clearly having a bit of an architectural fling!

Along the way down look out for Beentee's herd of feral goats with their fierce horns and long dirty coats: you may well smell them before you see them! Turning away from the forest the route goes steeply downhill to reach meadow fields and eventually the public road at Garranebane. The route now turns right and, passing a fine prehistoric standing stone in a field on the left, enters the town by way of Top Street. The start of the walk is now a few hundred metres to the east.

If you liked this walk, why not try the Bray Head Loop on nearby Valentia Island?

Useful Links

www.cahersiveencentral.com



Wild goats in the mist