

# Introduction

This document outlines the background, comparative case studies and an overview of the natural heritage and historical significance for the Glendalough Valley. This forms the context for the refreshment of the interpretative experience at the Glendalough and Laragh valley and monastic settlement, incorporating a section of the Wicklow Mountains National Park. This strategy is aligned with the overall masterplan which incorporates the wider Wicklow visitor experience, and is developed in conjunction with Consarc, Paul Hogarth Company, Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland, Faith Wilson and Doyle Kent.

Our overall proposal encompasses a reimagined visitor experience model in the valley, which is necessary in order to mitigate the current confused and disparate experiences available for visitors in this incredibly significant area. We envisage the significant stories and histories of the valley being incorporated more widely across the sites, including the Upper and Lower Lakes, through newly developed pathways and cycle routes as well as on current routes, and further into the valley and on the Military Road.

The project presents a unique opportunity to consider what stories are told to visitors at Glendalough and Wicklow, and how to tell them. It provides a concept of a visitor journey that will deeply connect visitors

to the special landscapes and habitats of the Glendalough valley, while relating the significance and spirituality of the monastic centre in an engaging and relatable way.

The proposals outlined have been informed by a detailed site appraisal and consultation with NPWS and OPW management and staff, and by Fáilte Ireland's market insights.

The proposals have been benchmarked against international models and standards for best practice, with the aim of deepening the engagement of visitors to the monastic settlement and the Glendalough Valley through developing an authentic, meaningful and deeply emotional experience. Ensuring this important destination for locals and international visitors alike is maintained and respected is key to our proposals, which align with other parts of the masterplan aiming to disperse visitation throughout the amazing range of experiences available in Wicklow.

Providing a range of access options to the valley, as outlined in the Tourism Interpretative Masterplan for Ireland's National Parks, has also been outlined, to ensure the congestion and access issues experienced in recent years are relieved.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Experiencing the Wild Heart Of Ireland: A Tourism Interpretative Master Plan for Ireland's National Parks and Coole - Garryland Nature Reserve. June 2018  
200805 Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park Masterplan

## Who are we?

Tandem Design are a specialist design agency, based in Holywood, Northern Ireland. Our team of expert graphic designers, interpretation planners and education consultants have experience in developing awe-inspiring visitor experiences from national parks to museums, from art installations to archaeological sites. We use smart, beautiful design with diligent research, writing and planning to tell stories that inspire and entertain. It's unusually rich and exciting work that makes a real difference.

We believe in the power of interpretation to help individuals and communities find long-lasting value and meaning in heritage and culture. That's why we place learning at the heart of our design process and understand its role in providing fun, thought-provoking and fulfilling experiences that will be remembered.

## What is interpretation?

The provision of relevant and effective interpretation is critical to the creation of a successful model for visitor experience and management at Glendalough.

It is an essential tool which contributes to NPWS satisfying its responsibilities with regard to education and public engagement. National Parks organisations and other conservation organisations around the world use interpretation successfully in this way, and excellent interpretation can make the difference between a good experience and a truly amazing one.

Potentially the most effective and enjoyable form of interpretation is interaction with a human being. Everyone who works at Glendalough can use interactions with visitors to help foster understanding and appreciation of what makes the place so special.

The Association for Heritage Interpretation defines interpretation as:

*“Interpretation is primarily a communication process that helps people make sense of, and understand more about, your site, collection or event.”*

It can:

- Bring meaning to your cultural or environmental resource, enhancing visitor appreciation and promoting better understanding. As a result your visitors are more likely to care for what they identify as a precious resource.
- Enhance the visitor experience, resulting in longer stays and repeat visits. This will lead to increased income and create employment opportunities.
- Enable communities to better understand their heritage, and to express their own ideas and feelings about their home area. As a result individuals may identify with lost values inherent in their culture.

Freeman Tilden, one of the founders of modern interpretation, defined it:

*‘An educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information’.*

After 50 years, this is still one of the clearest insights into the role of the interpreter.

Interpretation also happens via other media, such as written, illustrative and digital content around the site, in the visitor centres or on outdoor panels, on the website, and during special events.

Any means of communication with the public has the potential to feature elements of interpretation, as it offers a chance to overtly or subtly impart the area's values and significances, and to influence visitor behaviour and attitudes.

It can be as discreet as a thoughtful colour choice for trail wayfinding arrows, as creative as an interactive indoor exhibition, as entertaining as a themed guided tour, or as direct as listing the Leave No Trace principles on trailhead signs.

### **Successful Interpretation**

The success of interpretation is dependent on its ability to connect and resonate with visitors, and so the development of interpretation is necessarily visitor-centric. The process of developing interpretation should have an emphasis on defining the needs of the various target audiences in the context of their visit. Engagement with relevant stakeholders is also a key part of the development process.

The National Parks and Wildlife service have a number of responsibilities and objectives in terms of learning, emotional and behavioural outcomes. This includes the Wicklow Mountains National Park's primary objectives under the IUCN Category II National Park Status "to protect natural biodiversity and promote education and sustainable recreation. Recreation and Tourism must be environmentally compatible with this objective." National parks under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature guidelines also have the opportunity to provide "respectful visitor access for inspirational, educational, cultural and recreational purposes".<sup>2</sup>

The site-specific interpretation at the Glendalough monastic settlement also needs to highlight the exceptional historical significance of the site, as befitting the bid for World Heritage Site status through UNESCO.

Interpretation enables informal education to take place by all visitors, as well as working in harmony with the formal education programmes offered within the Wicklow Mountains National Park, by providing opportunities for school pupils and third level students to engage more generally or specifically with media that is relevant or linked to their learning journey.

In doing all these things, we can make sure to capitalise upon these opportunities to help visitors not only enjoy themselves but also to understand what makes Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park so special.

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<sup>2</sup> Experiencing the Wild Heart Of Ireland: A Tourism Interpretative Master Plan for Ireland's National Parks and Coole - Garryland Nature Reserve. June 2018  
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## What do we mean by ‘visitor experience?’

Further in this plan we have undertaken a detailed audit of the current visitor experience at the Glendalough Visitor Centre and at the National Parks and Wildlife Service visitor centre. Please see this section for further analysis. Fáilte Ireland defines a visitor experience as different to a tourism product. There is currently an emphasis on creating experiences that visitors take part in, rather than consume, which provide opportunities for imaginative learning and where encountering the unexpected elements is the norm. All elements of the visitor journey combine to create an experience worth more than the sum of its parts.

Fáilte Ireland has developed an Experience Development Framework to support the development of world class tourism experiences in Ireland, which identifies the components that combine to deliver a memorable experience (see table below<sup>3</sup>).

As visitors move around the valley — from arrival at the arrival point in Laragh and begin their journey via the entrance hall, make their way to the Upper Lake monastic via the Green Road, cycling or shuttle, visit the monastic settlement, explore the trails and viewpoints, and perhaps venture further into the National Park itself, we can ensure that they have the best possible experience by thinking carefully about what messages they are receiving in each context.

Not only does this include when we are actually speaking to visitors, but also includes other cues that visitors pick up on, including signage, labels and exhibits, marketing material, website and social media content, and special events provision.

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<sup>3</sup> *Experiences Explained: a guide to understanding and developing memorable tourism experiences* Fáilte Ireland: National Experience Development Framework Ref: FI-23051-14

Component	At Glendalough/WMNP	How?	Visitor outcome
<b>Product</b>	Attractions, activities, trails, facilities	The experience is truly immersive	Feels energised and instilled with a deep connection to the place.
<b>Service</b>	Looking after the customers' needs	Meeting passionate and hospitable people, who present a unified approach to welcoming visitors	Feels valued by the quality of service on offer and the personal service experienced.
<b>Story</b>	The story of the Glendalough valley, its monastic heritage and significance, its natural history and the wider stories of the national park	Meaningful and emotive stories of place, history and culture	Feels enlightened by stories that resonate and last a lifetime
<b>Narration</b>	How we tell the story - before, during and after the visit	Communication that informs, motivates and inspires	Feels enriched by being immersed in the local culture and becoming a part of the story

# Visitor Profiles to Glendalough Valley

Visitors to the Glendalough Valley come from all walks of life, with a range of different ages, needs and expectations prior to their visit. Understanding what these visitors need and want from their

experience helps us to shape an interpretative journey that engages and excites as many visitors as possible.

Below we have mapped out how different visitor segment groupings, sourced from Fáilte Ireland, are likely to engage with Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park. These are indicative groupings and will not cover all visitors to Glendalough and the wider national park, but give an indication of how we can shape interpretation to delight, engage and inspire different segments of visitors.

	Connected Families (ROI/NI)	Culturally Curious (international)	Great Escapers (international)
<b>Why does Glendalough/ WMNP appeal to the key market segments?</b>	It is a beautiful day out, with the chance to create family memories in a special place.	A chance to explore a beautiful, unique place on their own terms, and immerse themselves in nature and history.	Somewhere spectacular to connect with landscape and nature, and disconnect from their normal daily lives.
<b>What do they want to do during their visit?</b>	Primary motivation is to spend quality time as a family and connect in a meaningful way. For parents, they are particularly concerned with their children having a good day out and experiencing the outdoors, away from screens and indoor activities. They wish to create special memories together that can be treasured. Learning something new is of interest, but is not the priority. Instead fun experiences as a family are key.	These visitors wish to connect with nature, get off the beaten track and have an authentic and meaningful experience. They wish to explore at their own pace, and immerse themselves in the stories of the location. They will appreciate understanding why a place like Glendalough is so important, and feeling a connection to the landscape and the history that it holds as a unique memory of their time in Ireland.	Seeking down time somewhere beautiful where they can be off the beaten track exploring somewhere new. They enjoy strenuous activity, but need the wow factor without too much effort to get there or make decisions. They're interested in seeing landmarks and important sights, and understanding their own place in history.

<b>What experiences will enrich/improve their visit?</b>	<p>Good access for buggies and small legs</p> <p>Easily accessible hidden gems to discover, with well-marked trails and way finding.</p> <p>Traffic-free areas for safe play and exploration</p> <p>Child-centered activities and stories that are engaging for the whole family.</p> <p>Photo opportunities</p>	<p>This visitor segment are interested in new and unique experiences which give them a sense of authenticity and understanding of the place and its people. They enjoy walking to explore amazing scenery so well-marked trails with plenty of information about what they can see en route will help them to plan their tour. Guides or other staff on site to direct and engage with them will be appealing.</p>	<p>Information to facilitate active exploration around the site, to discover remote and exciting places either by bicycle or on foot. However they don't want it to be too difficult to get to these places, with good access to trailheads and directions making it straightforward for orientation. Something out of the ordinary but with limited hassle or challenge – a truly relaxing experience.</p> <p>Photo opportunities at amazing views</p>
<b>What interpretative facilities will promote/support these experiences?</b>	<p>Activity trails that are child fun</p> <p>Clear, colourful information about birds, plants and animals to search for</p> <p>Buggy-friendly walks with clear time and distance markers</p> <p>Great photo opportunities</p> <p>Traffic-free areas to walk and cycle</p>	<p>Engaging visitor centre which provides an overview of the unique elements of the story</p> <p>Well-marked trails with key information along the route</p> <p>Guides on site to provide personal experience</p> <p>Facilities to enable a longer stay – toilets, food and drink, shelter for a picnic</p>	<p>Information about walks that highlights amazing views and landscapes, while including length of walk</p> <p>Information about cycle friendly tracks</p> <p>Something that will take the hassle away – planned out itineraries, easy decision making, proactive guides</p>

<b>What topics could hold particular appeal?</b>	<p>Key animal and plant species in the Wicklow Mountains National Park, and guides to identification</p> <p>From an ocean to mountains: ancient formation of the valleys</p> <p>Myths and legends of St Kevin – the deer stone, the blackbird</p> <p>Everyday life in medieval Glendalough – what did monks eat/wear? Where did they sleep?</p>	<p>The history and significance of the Monastic Settlement</p> <p>Some of the hidden sites in Glendalough Valley – St Mary’s Church and Reefert Church</p> <p>Myths and Legends of St Kevin and how his followers lives on the land.</p> <p>Mining history and lives of those in the valley</p> <p>Key species and habitats to look out for during a visit</p>	<p>The history and significance of the Monastic Settlement</p> <p>From an ocean to mountains: ancient formation of the valleys (and great viewpoints)</p> <p>Key species to look out for during a visit</p> <p>Pilgrim paths and a spiritual connection to the natural world.</p>
<b>How will new interpretative experiences and stories impact the visitor/park (what is the outcome)?</b>	<p>Families experience a rich and rewarding day out</p> <p>Encouraged to return again as there is so much to see</p> <p>An appreciation beyond the obvious natural beauty</p>	<p>Develop a connection with Ireland’s landscape and history</p> <p>Surprised and delighted by the layers of heritage in the valley</p> <p>Inspired to tell their family and friends</p>	<p>Recharged and relaxed by an easy yet rich experience</p> <p>Soothed by the natural beauty and peace</p> <p>Inspired by stories of pilgrimage and connection with nature.</p>

## Target Audience Experiences

In order to better explore how different visitor profiles can be applied to the Glendalough experience, we have developed a series of fictionalised case studies to explore how a visit to Glendalough can be rewarding in different ways for different groups.

### Example 1: Siobhan, 40 (Connected Families)

Lives in Ballyboden, Dublin 16

Has three children: Shane (12), Ella (9), Amy (7)

Siobhan lives in suburban Dublin with her husband and three children. Her husband works full time in insurance, while she works part time as a medical receptionist when the kids are at school. Their schedules are busy, with sport and other after school activities taking up both weeknights and some weekends. The three children are very active and on the rare weekend days the whole family is together, Siobhan likes to organise activities that they can do together that the kids will enjoy. Glendalough has appeal as a day trip destination because of its reputation as a beautiful view with plenty of space for the kids to run around in. Ella loves riding her scooter while the older children like their bicycles, so Siobhan is always interested in spaces where they can safely engage in these activities.

#### How can we appeal to Siobhan?

- Create opportunities for intergenerational engagement with interpretive content.
- Encourage a sense of exploration of the hidden stories of the local area, creating unexpected moments of discovery.

- Provide learning opportunities as entertainment, which link with the school curriculum.
- Identify areas for safe biking and other activities away from cars and high footfall
- Showcase special activities or events that appeal to kids and families
- Highlight the great value of a day out in Glendalough, especially with regards to free parking and a well marked, well surfaced path to the Green Road for walking, or on the associated cycling paths and scootering.
- Social media advertising (Facebook) and recommendations from word of mouth.

#### What might a visit to Glendalough look like for Siobhan?

Mid-morning arrival but in their own car. Taking the train or the bus is too hard with three kids and bikes/scooters, but they are willing to use the free car park and cycle on the designation cycle paths, provided it is well sign posted and not too far. Once they arrive, the kids spend a bit of time on their bikes, while Siobhan and her husband look at some of the information about activities on site and trails they can take. They decide to explore the Poulanass Waterfall and take some photographs of the family there, and are drawn to explore the Reefert Church nearby, taken by its secretive nature and beautiful setting. They sit near the Upper Lake to enjoy a picnic lunch and make use of the facilities, before going for a bit more of a cycle down the Miner's Road. They're thrilled to see a red deer on the hillside, and return to the upper lake find out a bit more about them on the information panels. By 2pm everyone is getting pretty tired, so they slowly cycle back to the car park, stopping for a photograph or two overlooking the monastic settlement.

## Example 2: Hans, 56 (Culturally Curious)

Lives in Munich, Germany

Travelling with his wife, Sarah

Hans loves the great outdoors, and is interested in travelling to Ireland for its reputation as a naturally beautiful country and a chance to understand a different culture. He carefully plans his trips overseas, and both he and Sarah are particularly interested in walking trails which are combined with a chance to explore history and culture. World heritage sites are of great interest to them, but they also like to get off the beaten track to experience an authentic location at their own pace. When planning their trip to Ireland, Hans has read about the significance of Glendalough and is intrigued by the opportunity to explore the Monastic City and its history as well as take in the scenery on a hike. He is a little concerned reading reports of traffic congestion, as he doesn't want to waste his precious leisure time stuck in traffic.

### How can we appeal to Hans?

- Provide plentiful trip planning information online so he can plan his trip to Glendalough in advance
- Highlight medium and longer hikes with added information about sights along the way, so Hans can feel prepared to get off the beaten track
- Encourage a sense of exploration of the hidden stories of the local area, creating unexpected moments of discovery.
- Provide information about options further afield, such as the Military Road and St. Kevin's Way, to reduce impact of congestion and give the sense of exploring hidden gems.

- Proactive guides providing information and options tailored to Hans and Sarah's needs.
- An accessible visitor centre which gives them context for their visit, and with key information at sites around the valley

### What might a visit to Glendalough look like for Hans?

Hans and Sarah take the Dart from their city centre accommodation to Greystones, where they take a shuttle connection to the Visitor Centre. They arrive at opening time, to make the most of their day out. After exploring the visitor centre and getting a sense of the scale and history of Glendalough, they're feeling inspired to explore the site. They have a chat to one of the guides on site, who recommend that they consider exploring the Monastic centre, before taking one of the trails up either Derrybawn or the Spinc to take in the views of the valley and to understand the natural heritage of the valley. After a detailed exploration of the monastic site, they stop for some lunch at the Upper Lake, before following the markers to the Derrybawn Loop. They appreciate the peace and quiet of the trail and take plenty of photos looking out through the valley. They return via the Green Road, where they make a detour to visit St. Saviour's Priory and Trinity Church, feeling like they've discovered some hidden gems. Finally, they return to Laragh, to enjoy a well-deserved pint of Guinness before heading back to Dublin.

## Example 3: Emma, 36 (Great Escapers)

Lives in Boston, USA

Travelling with her wife Theresa

Emma is looking for a relaxing adventure, away from the everyday stress of her busy life as a GP. She and her wife run marathons in their spare time, and enjoy escaping the city for hiking and rock climbing. They have a rare opportunity to travel overseas together, and are interested in exploring Ireland's great outdoors, dipping into the history and culture as well. They're interested in taking in some day walks to take some beautiful photos (ideally to feature on Instagram) but aren't interested in taking completely untravelled paths. They're not sure what to expect from Ireland's natural landscapes, and assume it might be hard to get away from built up areas.

#### How can we appeal to Emma?

- Showcase the range of short and long distance walks and cycle paths throughout the Glendalough valley, and further afield – dispel any thoughts of Ireland being small and crowded with people
- Plenty of images to help Emma find the spots she most wants to see
- Highlight the stories connecting the monastic heritage of the valley with an appreciation of nature and solitude – meeting Emma's desire to escape from her busy urban life.

- Highlight the heritage of pilgrimage in the valley and connect with Emma's desire to escape and get back to nature.
- Outlined itineraries that give her options for her whole day, from walks to accommodation, making it simple for her to decide how to spend her time in the valley.

#### What might a day at Glendalough look like for Emma?

Emma and Theresa arrived in Dublin two days ago, and while they've enjoyed exploring the city they're interested in getting out into the countryside. They've read that Glendalough is a must-see location, and have planned out an overnight visit to really relax into the landscape. They've hired a car so drive down to the valley, where they take a quick look at the Visitor Centre to get more of an idea of the history of the valley. They're inspired by the stories of St. Kevin's monastic life, and are intrigued to see his 'bed' on their walk. After discussing their itinerary with guides, they feel confident that a walk along the Miner's Road to see St. Kevin's Bed and then over the Spinc will meet their aim of a leisurely day of escape. After a quick coffee stop, they enjoy the tranquility of the upper valley, amazed at the life St. Kevin and his followers lived in the valley. They have their lunch (bought on the way) at the end of the valley, with only deer in the distance and larks for company. After a meander back, they enjoy a slow wander along the Upper Lake shore and to the Reefert Church, before heading back to their accommodation for a well-deserved rest.

# Experiences in Wicklow

Wicklow County is bursting with incredible visitor experiences, from exploring the natural beauty of the valleys, mountains and rivers; to experiencing an adrenaline rush at the Ballinastoe Mountain Bike park; to experiencing the best of history and nature at Sealife Aquarium in Bray or at Powerscourt Estate. Although this strategy primarily focuses on the Glendalough Valley with some investigation into the Military Road and neighbouring valleys, it is important to note that visitors have a plethora of experiences available throughout the county of varying price and quality. These are available to browse at [visitwicklow.ie](https://visitwicklow.ie/)<sup>4</sup> which outlines a huge number of these opportunities.

An overview of experiences available to visitors and locals in County Wicklow is developed in more detail in sections developed by Paul Hogarth Company and Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://visitwicklow.ie/>

# Site Significance

## Natural Heritage

Glendalough valley is part of the Wicklow Mountains National Park and has a number of significant natural heritage features. The upland areas of the park are a mosaic of heath, blanket bog and upland grassland, with small pockets of woodland along rivers and small lakes and corries. Rare plants are scattered throughout the park, with records of Bog orchids, Marsh Clubmoss and Parsley Fern, amongst others, and some rare arctic-alpine plants such as Alpine Saw-wort and Alpine Lady's-mantle being noted.

Hares, badgers, red grouse, otters and the commonly seen red deer-Sika deer hybrids are all present on the upland areas including on the slopes in the Glendalough valley. Pine Martens and red squirrels are occasionally seen, and wood warblers, redstarts and ring ouzels are present. Recently, the distinctive Goosander has established a breeding population and these can occasionally be seen on the Upper Lake in Glendalough. One of the most distinctive species seen in the park are peregrine falcons. These incredible birds of prey have an important breeding location in the National Park, and can be spotted soaring high above the lakes, occasionally at their top speeds of up to 300km an hour! Other birds of prey such as merlins and sparrow hawks can also be spotted, and the mountains provide a breeding refuge for these magnificent birds.

The Wicklow Mountains National Park are an important and complex upland site, with large areas of grassland. Although some areas are relatively undisturbed, the very popular locations around Glendalough especially trails such as the Spinc see high footfall. This has caused peat erosion and other damage. However, the site does provide an incredible amenity for people in Dublin and Wicklow, with easy access to outdoor activities and experiences. For many urban dwellers in

Dublin and Wicklow, access to this area of relative wilderness is an escape to a completely different landscape, and it is an incredible resource for people to explore the natural heritage of Ireland so close to major urban settlements.

*“The Ireland of the man who goes with reverent feet through the hills and valleys accompanied by neither noise nor dust to scare away wild creatures; stopping often, watching closely listening carefully. Only thus can he, if he is fortunate, make friends by degrees with the birds and flowers and rocks, learn all the signs and sounds of the country-side, and at length feel at one with what is, after all, his natural environment.”*

*Robert Lloyd Praeger*

## The Monastic Settlement

The Glendalough Valley is renowned for its extensive monastic settlement, spread through the Glendalough Valley from St. Saviour's Priory to Tempall na Skellig. The original wattle and daub buildings throughout the upper and lower lake sites were systematically replaced through the 10th - 12th centuries by buildings of stone, and many of these ruins remain extant. Founded by St. Kevin (also known by his Irish name, St Cóemgen) in the 6th century, Glendalough became a centre of early Celtic Christianity, learning and pilgrimage. After St. Kevin's death in circa 620, Glendalough's importance as a pilgrimage site increased further as Glendalough was described in one of the Lives of St. Kevin as "A gracious Rome, city of the angels, western Europe's Rome". A period a pilgrimage to Glendalough was regarded as equivalent to a pilgrimage to Rome. The medieval lives of St. Kevin tells the story that he brought back soil from Rome and sprinkled it in the church and cemetery in Glendalough. This reportedly made Glendalough one of the four chief places of pilgrimage in Ireland, although its initial power as a pilgrimage site was changed to seven pilgrimages to Glendalough being considered to be of equal value to one pilgrimage to Rome.

Building works carried out by order of the King of Munster, Muirchertach Ua Briain, saw Glendalough compete with Dublin for the most important ecclesiastical centre in Ireland during the 12th century. St. Laurence O'Toole was abbot of Glendalough during the period of Glendalough's eminence, and he was renowned for his charitable works, using his inherited wealth to build churches and feed the poor. O'Toole eventually became Archbishop of Dublin.

The O'Tooles were of high importance in medieval Ireland, with Laurence being held as a hostage by the King of Leinster as a ten year old.<sup>5</sup> The Reefert Church at Glendalough is known as the burial site for many of the O'Toole family, with the name Reefert being drawn from the Irish *Rígh Fearta*, the burial place of the kings.

Regular raids from Norse invaders and Irish tribes led to original wattle and daub buildings being burnt, and rebuilt, eventually in stone. Over time Glendalough's importance waned, with Dublin re-emerging as the key ecclesiastical centre. Glendalough was subsumed into the Dublin diocese, and from the 13th century the significance of Glendalough fell into rapid decline. By the 17th century, the churches had fallen into ruins, although St. Kevin's pattern day was still celebrated and pilgrimages to the site continued.

Today the site is one of the largest and best-preserved medieval ecclesiastical sites in Ireland and is globally significant, with evidence of human occupation from Neolithic times. The main monastery at the lower lake was redesigned to form an ecclesiastical city in the 12th century, and the medieval gate leading into the complex is the only one of its type remaining in Ireland.

The round tower is one of the best preserved examples in Ireland, and there is still evidence of the raised site for the main ecclesiastical sites. At the peak of Glendalough's importance, more than 1,000 laypeople along with the clergy would have worked and lived in the valley, producing food, crops, manuscripts and more.

More prosaic buildings would have ringed the central, sacred section of the site near the Lower Lake which can still be seen today, with bakeries, food storage, gardens and accommodation all featuring.

At the Upper Lake, the ruins of the 10th-century Reefert Church are hidden amongst the trees near the Poulanass waterfall. A church was likely here at the time of St. Kevin also. St. Kevin's Bed, a small man-made cave dug out of the cliffs rising from the lake shore, was used as a retreat for both St. Kevin and later St. Laurence O'Toole, but archaeological evidence suggests it was dug out much earlier and may date from the Neolithic period.

The large green space by the lake was likely used as a pilgrimage settlement, where pilgrims visiting St. Kevin's Bed and the relics housed at Priest's House could stay and receive hospitality from the monastery. Little remains of these sites other than the Caher, a stone

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<sup>5</sup> Grattan-Flood, William. "St. Lawrence O'Toole." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 9. New York: Robert Appleton Company,

circle which may have originally been a ring fort, and was reused as an enclosure for animals, and a number of stone crosses throughout the area and in the valley more widely. These may have been used as pilgrimage stations or to mark the borders of the sacred areas, providing sanctuary to those entering.

Pilgrimage to Glendalough continued after its annexation to the Diocese of Dublin in 1215, but its importance waned over the following centuries. During the 18th and 19th century the natural beauty of the valley combined with the evocative medieval ruins made it a popular day trip from Dublin and further afield. Restoration works were carried out, including reconstructing the roof of the Round Tower in 1876 and the Priest's House, which was reconstructed from fallen stones in 1779. Today the valley receives upwards of one million visitors a year, and is one of Ireland's most popular tourist attractions.

## Mining Heritage

The Glendalough, Glenmalure and Glendasan valleys have a rich mining heritage. The Wicklow Mountains are part of a huge granitic mass, which extends from Dun Laoghaire to New Ross forming the largest expanse in northwestern Europe. As the granite cooled, minerals in the liquid were deposited as veins in granite cracks, with lead and zinc along with very small amounts of silver.

The earliest documented mine was worked from 1726 in Glenmalure. Other sites were developed from the turn of the 19th century, and mining continued until the 1950s. Remains of villages developed alongside mining sites can still be seen at the top of the Glendalough

valley, and industrial heritage sites such as the Crusher House in Baravore remain in the landscape. The Miner's Way trail provides a guided overview of these key sites over a 19 km way marked trail.<sup>6</sup>

## The Military Road

Running from Rathfarnham in South Dublin to Aughavanna in Wicklow (with a side arm from Enniskerry to Glencree) the Great Military Road indicates an amazing history of the 1798 rebellion in Wicklow. Covering 58 km, it was constructed between 1801 and 1809 and is still a key route through the Wicklow Mountains, although mostly used by cars today. It traverses the inhospitable mountain blanket bog habitats which are a key feature of the Wicklow Uplands.

The inaccessibility of the Wicklow Mountains was well-utilised by rebels based in Wicklow during the 1798 rebellion. As there were no roads from north to south in the county for it was very challenging to find the guerrilla forces, who knew the landscape well and could seemingly disappear into the mountainous wilderness. From August 1800 the road north to south was built, with the added impetus that the feared possibility of a French invasion, meaning troops would need to quickly move down the east coast. The road was built by soldiers in four teams, who camped alongside the site in tents or sod houses. Four permanent barracks were also built, although these only had a very limited use at the time.<sup>7</sup>

The 1798 Rebellion was long over by the time the road was completed, but it has been well used since its opening. Today the Glencree barracks are still in use as a Peace and Reconciliation centre. Preban Graveyard has a number of graves associated with the 1798

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<sup>6</sup> *Miner's Way: Explore the Rich Mining Heritage of the Glendasan, Glendalough and Glenmalure Valleys in County Wicklow.* Miner's Way Committee. nd.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wicklowmountainsnationalpark.ie/history/military-roads/>

rebellion, as well as Neolithic rock art and gravestones carved by notable stonemasons.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/category/places/preban\\_graveyard](https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/category/places/preban_graveyard)

# Audit of Interpretation Provision

## Arrival and Visitor Centre

The visitor centre facilities at Glendalough are currently under-utilised by general visitors, instead being primarily marketed towards booked tour groups and international tourists on guided experiences.

The visitor centre's location adjacent to the main car park seems to assume a model of learning and engagement that requires visitors to 'load up' on information regarding all aspects of the Park's heritage and significance at the visitor centre, which they must retain in order to apply during their self-guided exploration of the wider valley.

Although elements such as the model of the settlement and of the round tower are appealing and engaging, the high word counts and disjointed layout have the unfortunate effect of lowering engagement overall.

There is very limited provision of information or interpretation outside of the visitor centre that references the history, significance or stories associated with the site.

### Visitor Centre

The visitor centre was opened in 1988. It has not had any substantial additions or changes since this time.

Primarily the centre operates as a tour point for coach tours and booked groups, and there is very limited information pre-visit

(particularly on the website or on social media channels) or on the outside of the building to inform visitors they are welcome to enter.

If independent visitors wish to partake in viewing the exhibition and taking a tour operated by OPW, they are sometimes facilitated but this is dependent on booked tours and guide capacity.

Visitor numbers supplied by OPW, who operate the centre, report an average of 75,000 visitors per year between 2016 and 2019. This compares to over one million visitors estimated to have visited the Glendalough Valley more widely in 2019, highlighting there is immense potential for audience development.<sup>9</sup>

### Atrium

The arrival into the visitor centre is easily congested, with a large desk blocking a fairly narrow entrance to the exhibition space. This is to funnel visitors via staff, to ensure numbers and bookings are taken. This layout offers very little to entice visitors towards the exhibition and if visitors are not prebooked onto a tour, there is no information other than what may be provided by staff to let them know that an exhibition is even available. The welcome desk also provides maps, souvenirs and guidebooks for purchase, although at the time of site visit only cash was accepted.

Toilets can be accessed from either the atrium or outside the visitor centre, where many visitors using the OPW-provided car park will use the facilities. Currently due to COVID-19 provisions there can be queues for the toilets due to deep cleaning requirements, but there are a decent number available. However it is likely that large queues could form if large groups arrive on a busy, sunny day where general visitation is also high.

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<sup>9</sup> Data provided by OPW on 26 November 2020.

### ***Holding area***

On proceeding into the main space of the building, visitors reach a large and mostly empty space, with large picture windows facing out onto an expanse of lawn running up to a small hill. Trees unfortunately block the view of the monastic settlement, which would provide a lovely visual link to the content of the exhibition. The view looks out over an expanse of lawn which belongs to the Glendalough Hotel, and on busy days at the hotel this lawn is used for overflow parking which greatly detracts from the view. Basic interpretation provision is displayed on the walls of this space, including etchings from different time periods, and a large map of trails and other experiences available in the wider Wicklow Mountains National Park. There is also a visitor services desk where visitors can ask for advice and purchase maps, guidebooks, postcards and other souvenirs.

### ***Exhibition***

The exhibition interprets a wide range of topics, including:

- An introduction to monasticism (via audiovisual experience)
- Round towers in Ireland and their uses
- The history of St. Kevin and his association with Glendalough
- The history of St. Laurence O'Toole and his association with Glendalough
- Daily life in a Monastic settlement, including clothing, food, pigment creation, reading and writing.
- Folklore associated with St. Kevin
- A model of the monastic settlement as it may have looked during the 10th–12th centuries
- An outline of each of the sites extant at Glendalough

- High crosses and carved stone slabs

The exhibition is primarily located in one room, with additional material along the walls of the associated corridor. There is a circular flow within the exhibition with an introductory panel, but it isn't particularly clear as to which direction the visitor should go. Although most of the content can be explored in any direction, it is slightly confusing to begin with and there is not clear direction for the visitor.

On first entry to the exhibition the visitor is drawn to the large model of the monastic settlement, which gives a lovely overview of the extent of the site at the peak of its activity. Its location in the centre of the exhibition draws visitors towards it. Its simple mechanism and overview means it is a useful tool for exploring themes of everyday life at Glendalough. The model relating to the Round Tower is also appealing as it lays out the potential uses for their uniquely Irish structures as well as providing a slightly different learning experience through audiovisual materials.

The exhibition is primarily displayed on light boxes along the walls, which are darkened until visitors approach. This can be confusing on entry as there is little around the walls to engage the visitor at first glance. Small audiovisual elements add interest such as the round tower explanation, but elements are not working and these are quite small. An area set apart from the main bulk of the displays offers audio folk tales relating to St. Kevin, but these are displayed using incongruous cartoons and are hard to engage with. A slightly more immersive experience is provided behind a walled off section of panelling which through visuals and small snippets of text conveys with some success the sense of isolation St. Kevin and early monks would have experience at the site.

Overall the exhibition is underwhelming and passive, and is not particularly appealing to the target audiences. There are a number of barriers to engagement at the visitor centre:

- The arrival at the visitor centre is very confusing and dated, with limited information provided for visitors as to what they can expect and whether they are even welcome to the visitor centre. This is

reflected in visitor statistics – although over 750,000 people visited Glendalough in 2018, only 76,562 visited the visitor centre<sup>10</sup>.

- The interpretation is split across a number of different spaces, with limited direction provided to visitors. Some important artefacts are located at the end of a corridor and poorly interpreted.
- The use of light boxes for displaying the information makes it hard to engage deeply with interpretation, as the text is small and it takes movement by the visitor to light up the panels. With no instructions provided, it is possible for visitors to not realise there is information provided if the movement sensors aren't activated.
- Some artefacts and interpretive panels are split and important monuments (such as the Market Cross) are less likely to be viewed as significant by visitors, as interpretation has to be sought out to understand the context and importance of the Cross.
- The hierarchy of text and visuals is not clear, and visitors are less empowered to understand the key elements of the narrative. As there is not clear flow around the exhibition it is very possible that visitors will leave without a clear picture of life at Glendalough and the site's significance.
- The tone of voice is dry, and does not necessarily prompt reflection or discussion amongst groups. It is also a text heavy space which prioritises adult audiences with a strong grasp of English. Given a high proportion of visitors to the monastic settlement are international audiences, this has the potential to exclude a number of visitors.
- All interpretation is provided at the exhibition and visitors are expected to retain extensive knowledge of each element of the site and its significance before entering the landscape.
- The interpretation is completely divorced from the landscape, and acts as an entirely separate experience.

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<sup>10</sup> Data provided by OPW on 26 November 2020.

## **Auditorium**

On arrival at the visitor centre, visitors can choose to engage in the film experience. For tours operated by OPW, this is the first part of the visitor journey.

The sparsely decorated room has a formal academic feel and is very much divorced from the outdoor setting, which is not in keeping with the aspirations of the target audiences for their experience at Glendalough and the wider National Park.

There is only one video on offer for visitors, and at a running time of approximately 15 minutes is much longer than many audiovisual experiences in a museum setting would be in current practice. The content of the exhibition is extremely specific, focusing on the history of monasticism in Ireland and its impact worldwide. Although this is an essential part of the story of Glendalough, such a narrow focus detracts from the wider stories of the valley that visitors would be more readily able to engage with.

The length of the video is also problematic for visitors who are more accustomed to short, punchy videos delivering strong messages on social media, and its outdated quality is counter to current standards in video streaming. There is certainly potential for an introductory experience via an audiovisual experience, but this would need to be significantly shorter and more impactful to reach a wider audience.

## **Summary**

The current exhibition and audiovisual experience at the visitor centre are not delivering a modern and engaging experience for visitors. The lack of information provided on entry means the majority of visits to Glendalough do not include any engagement with the visitor centre or OPW staff at all. There is immense scope to develop interpretative experiences which better highlight the significance and history of the site, which would greatly deepen visitor engagement.

## Monastic Settlement - Lower Lake

### ***Arrival and Orientation***

Currently the majority of visitors to Glendalough arrive via private vehicle, although a significant minority will visit as part of a coach tour and day tour (Covid-19 restrictions notwithstanding). The first available car park visitors can use is operated by OPW with a charge of €4 per day and which is located near to the visitor centre.

If visitors park in this car park, they have multiple options for entering into the monastic settlement, none of which are clearly signposted. Low-level, degraded wooden arrows point to the monastic settlement, but these are often obscured by hedging or in hard to see locations. There is one large map on arrival outside the visitor centre which details the entire offering throughout the valley, but this can be crowded with visitors and many will walk past. A large lawn adds to the sense of sprawl and uncertainty, with small paths crisscrossing the area but limited guidance.

To get to the monastic settlement, visitors can either walk through the hotel complex, funnelled through the hotel's signage and then entering the monastic settlement through the medieval gate. The potential gravity of the entrance loses its magic through the encroaching commercial aspects of the hotel, its parking, a lack of directional signage and commercial elements at the medieval entrance. The result is a confusing approach, a sense of disappointment before arrival, and no sense of the sacred nature and importance of the monastic sites.

Alternatively, visitors can cross the lawn at the visitor centre, take a small bridge over the river and join the Green Road. They can then follow the Green Road pathway to another small bridge which leads into the monastic settlement, by St. Kevin's Church. Although this is a much more scenic approach, it is not particularly clear that this is an option from the car park and it does not incorporate the significant medieval gate entrance to the site. It does however provide a very

scenic outlook over the site which also showcases the raised location that the monastic centre is situated on.

This mixed approach to the site, with no clear routes and a lack of anticipation and sense of importance greatly decreases the impact of the site once visitors arrive. If the first experience of Glendalough is confusing and underwhelming, this will shape their experience of the whole site. Ensuring visitors are provided with a clear direction and an understanding of the site's opportunities for engagement will better prepare visitors to understand and appreciate the experiences available.

Some visitors may arrive at the monastic settlement via the Green Road from Laragh, where a temporary free car park has been developed. Signage on this pathway is very limited and there appears to be an expectation that visitors travelling this route will be using the car park as an access point to walking trails, rather than the monastic settlement, and have pre-existing knowledge of the site. As above, visitors using this route are greeted with remarkable views of the monastic site, particularly the round tower, along the route and are also able to deviate from the path to visit St. Saviour's Priory. However there is no interpretation along the route, particularly at the Laragh end of the path, and with only a temporary map provided at the car park and occasional directional signage along the route.

Finally, visitors may park at the Upper Lake car park, situated at the end of R757. Like the Visitor Centre car park, this has a €4 charge and is manned year round. The arrival here is also underwhelming, with a confusion array of paths to choose from. One end of the car park is dominated by food caravans and dated toilet facilities, while the path leading to the lake has large health and safety signage and limited directional information. There are two routes from this car park to the monastic settlement at the Lower Lake – the boardwalk and the Green Road. In order to access the boardwalk, visitors either need to navigate to the rear of the food caravans and facilities to enter the boardwalk directly, which is not signposted, or else double back on themselves from the Green Road. There are limited directions along the boardwalk although the view is very pleasant, and visitors need to follow their nose to make it back.

### ***Monastic Settlement - Lower Lake interpretation***

Despite being significant enough to warrant consideration for World Heritage Site status via UNESCO, the interpretation at the monastic settlement at the lower lake is extremely limited.

Unless a visitor has looked up material online or purchased a map in the visitor centre, the information provided is primarily made up of very small, dated panels installed on some (not all) of the remaining buildings. These interpretative panels are very dry and offer a very basic introduction to each building, and not all of the remains have a sign attached.

There is no contextual information provided within the settlement about the lives of those who resided there, as well as any information about how deeply spiritual and significant this site is for early Irish Christianity. The site works on the expectation that visitors will have experienced the visitor centre and retained the appreciable and quite complex information there. In practice, only a small proportion of overall visitors will attend the visitor centre and even fewer will be able to retain much of the information, meaning that there is limited interpretation provision at this incredibly significant site. In particular, understanding the breadth of the site, its inner and outer sanctums and some of its more remote ‘satellite’ churches, and the daily lives of those resident there are not available to many visitors.

### ***Guided Tours***

Guided tours are provided by OPW (outside of Covid-19 restrictions) via the Visitor Centre, and theoretically these are available both to booked tour groups and general visitors. In practice however general independent visitors are unlikely to realise this option is available, particularly as booking is not available online and is instead only available as a walk in, ad hoc booking, which cannot always be accommodated.

Prior to Covid-19 restrictions tours were often quite large and were tailored by OPW guides to groups, particularly around place of origin

and interest areas. Guides have reported that previously if they were conducting a tour, independent visitors would frequently either join or ask questions of the guides on site, indicating a desire for more information from visitors.

### ***Monastic Settlement - Lower Lake satellite sites interpretation***

The lower lake area of the monastic settlement includes three satellite sites: Trinity Church, St. Saviour’s Priory and St. Mary’s Church. As visitors travel into Glendalough on R756 a very small sign points towards Trinity Church. Although a very beautiful site with a lovely vista across the valley, there is no further interpretation at the site, and it is not well connected to the rest of the monastic settlement.

St. Saviour’s Priory is nestled within a conifer plantation, close to the Green Road path but hidden from view. There is a small wooden sign on the Green Road pointing visitors to the priory, but again no information at the site and limited connections to the rest of the monastic settlement. The bullaun stone (locally known as the Deerstone) is located across the bridge from the monastic site, at the mid-point of the Green Road path. There is no interpretation of this site despite its interesting folklore.

Finally, St. Mary’s Church is located to the west of the main monastic settlement, across a field which is currently partly excavated by UCD’s School of Archaeology. There is no wayfinding provision to St. Mary’s Church, and visitors are required to go through a gate outside of the main settlement, through a field and then through another gate and over a wall to get to the site. Although the site is very beautiful and has an incredible view of the valley, there is no information or storytelling at all at the site.

### ***Summary***

Interpretation provision for the incredibly significant Lower Lake ecclesiastical sites is sorely lacking at present. Visitors are required to

either do their own research prior to arrival or visit the information centre and retain the majority of the information provided to understand the site. Connections between areas, particularly satellite sites, is currently missing, meaning the expansive nature of the monastic settlement, as well as some truly remarkable views and sites, is lost to many visitors.

## Monastic Settlement - Upper Lake interpretation

### ***Arrival and Orientation***

As mentioned in the Lower Lake section, many visitors will park at the Visitor Centre car park and navigate their way to the Upper Lake. Signage on arrival is present, but only one map means that visitors may walk past on a busy day or if the weather is poor as there is no shelter. Visitors are guided by small, low-positioned and faded wooden signs to the Green Road, but unless they have engaged with the single map, it is unclear how long the walk to the Upper Lake is.

Alternatively, visitors can park at the Upper Lake car park, which has an entry fee of €4. On weekends and holidays anecdotal evidence from OPW guides suggests this car park is full by 10am, particularly with hillwalkers wishing to take some of the longer routes through the valley. On very busy days parking extends along the very narrow road to the upper lake, making walking and cycling this route hazardous and creating extensive tailbacks, an unpleasant arrival to such a beautiful site.

The car park appearance is particularly underwhelming with one end dominated by aged facilities and a number of food vans. Multiple paths snake out from the car park with limited information other than dominant health and safety notices relating to the lake. While

important, it is challenging to visitors to understand what options are available to them to experience. They are required to travel along the lake to the far end of the expanse of lawn to find any further information, which is primarily explaining trail options around the wider valley. There is no information at this end of the valley regarding the monastic settlement or any narrative about the site.

### ***Monastic Settlement - Upper Lake interpretation***

The Upper Lake at Glendalough is sorely lacking in interpretation exploring the monastic, natural and geological heritage of this important location. Currently, much of the landscape appears more like a municipal park, particularly to the east of the lake where large grassed expanses are a popular spot for picnicking. While these activities are not inherently problematic, most visitors would have no chance to discover that this area was in fact part of the overall monastic settlement of Glendalough, and the wilderness areas around the shores of the Upper Lake housed St. Kevin during his periods of ascetic retreat from the world.

A staggering number of stone crosses and remnants of built heritage dot this landscape but there is no interpretation provided at all to explore the stories here. Archeological studies have suggested that this site may have been used as an area for pilgrims to stay, with stone crosses marking boundaries of sacred areas and acting as stations for pilgrimage activities. This history is not referenced at all at the Upper Lake.

The sites at this location are more spread out than at the Lower Lake, and there is directional signage to the Reefert Church, although limited narrative relating the site to the wider ecclesiastical complex. Sites further around the lake from the Reefert Church are inaccessible for visitation, but basic signage points from the Miners Road across the lake to St. Kevin's Bed. Again, unless visitors already have prior knowledge of the site there is no explanation of what visitors are looking at or any narrative around its significance. Further along the lakeshore are the remains of Temple na Skelling, a church which is not visible to visitors and is also not interpreted.

Finally, the end of the Miners Road track contains remains of industrial sites and housing associated with lead mining in the Glendalough and Glendasan valleys. These panels do provide an overview of the industrial heritage of the site and its importance, although this does detract somewhat from the spiritual history of the valley and could perhaps be better interpreted in other locations.

Although the Upper Lake includes a number of trailheads for short, medium and longer distance walks and hikes, there is limited information available outside of the visitor centre (see below) about landscapes, ecological habitats, species or the national park more widely on trails or at trailheads.

### **Visitor Centre**

As visitors move through the grassed lawn area, they eventually reach a very small visitor centre operated by NPWS. At the time of visiting the centre was closed to the public but a NPWS guide was available for questions and guidance. In more normal operating times, the centre offers a limited range of dated information about the natural history of the park more widely.

As the sole information provided about the breadth of the WMNP, the current visitor centre offering does not provide much in the way of excitement, anticipation, or learning opportunities for visitors. Although the presence of knowledgeable guides on site does help to develop the understanding of the stories and key elements of the park for visitors to understand, the approach to the centre is not welcoming and it is not clear from the outside what visitors will gain from visiting. A multitude of maps and plans are available to take away, including more specialised information about mining heritage but the primary focus is on walking trails. These are not particularly appealing to visitors as many are black and white or quite dated, and as such do not always receive much attention from visitors.

### **Trails and walks**

There is good provision of information about walking trails at the trailhead behind the visitor centre, outlining the options available, level of difficulty, key viewpoints and experiences on the route and an estimated completion time. This gives visitors who are seeking a walk a good overview of their options, although ideally there would be further examples of this map at other sites around the upper lake, particularly closer to the car park. Although experienced hikers would be less likely to need such information for day trippers or those new to the area, interpretation like this can extend a visit and develop more engagement with the wider site.

Along walks there are good way finding symbols, provided visitors have engaged with either brochures, online or at the map provided as mentioned above.

### **Other activities and events**

#### **Website**

The online presence for Glendalough and the wider Wicklow Mountains National Park is disparate and spread across multiple websites. The WMNP website has extensive information available to visitors, and includes a reasonably detailed series of pages about the monastic heritage, natural heritage and industrial heritage of the park. It also includes very extensive information about available activities and experiences at the park including walking trail maps, guidance for hunting and fishing, cycling and other activities.

Although the content of the website is detailed, its design is quite basic and not particularly easy to navigate.

There are multiple websites detailing information about the Glendalough monastic site specifically, including [glendalough.ie](http://glendalough.ie) and [heritageireland.ie](http://heritageireland.ie). The [glendalough.ie](http://glendalough.ie) website does contain a useful array of information but it is challenging to navigate (particularly on mobile devices). The Heritage Ireland website provides basic visitor

information and opening hours with a short statement of significance. The Glendalough heritage forum website offers extensive information for researchers and divers into the stories of the valley, but does not provide information regarding basic visitor information and facilities.

The outcome of this disparate series of websites is that it can be challenging for visitors to wade through to find the information they are seeking.

Wicklow Tourism operates the [visitwicklow.ie](http://visitwicklow.ie) website which gives a comprehensive overview of opportunities to visitors within the Wicklow county borders. Although the different elements of the Glendalough Valley are split between different pages on the website, they are linked together and provide a thorough overview. However the separate nature of the pages means it is hard to get a complete picture of what is available at Glendalough for visitors, and can be quite confusing to navigate without prior knowledge of the terrain or names of sites.

### Summary

Although interpretation provision for trails and hiking is reasonably well provided for, there is a serious lack of provision throughout the Upper Lake area relating to the significant lack of ecclesiastical heritage of the area, and limited linkages to the main monastic settlement at the Lower Lake. Currently the expanse of lawn and its associated archaeological sites are completely dislocated from their narrative for the vast majority of visitors, and an understanding of the connections between areas, the stories and legends and associated characters is impossible for visitors to clearly ascertain. While some heritage elements are introduced, particularly at the miner's road trail, overall visitors are left to wander without a clear understanding of the heritage of the valley.

## Key Statistics<sup>11</sup>

### Total Glendalough Visitor Centre

Year	Number of Visitors
2016	78,589
2017	74,289
2018	76,562
2019	71,335

### Footfall Counters

Year	Glendalough	Bridge	Arch
2016	397,661		
2017	357,058		
2018		448,510	263,295
2019		467,162	265,200
2020(Jan_to end of Oct)		180,131	76,558

<sup>11</sup> Statistics provided by Patricia McGuire, OPW, 26 November 2020.

# Benchmark Case Studies

## St. Alban's Abbey and Cathedral

The Abbey and Cathedral of St. Alban began in the memory of St. Alban, who was beheaded for refusing to renounce his Christian faith in Roman Britain. He was honoured as Britain's first saint. Early churches and sites of worship were constructed over Alban's grave, and the Shrine of St. Alban led to the construction of a monastery in 793.

A rebuilding of the abbey with an associated tower was completed in 1115 and the Norman church still stands today, built from bricks and tiles saved from Roman Verulamium. The medieval abbey was a key site for scholarship but closed in 1539. Although the church remained in use by the people of St Albans, it was in a poor state by the 1800s. It was refurbished and became a cathedral in 1877, a position it retains.

In 2019, a £7 million redevelopment project refreshed the visitor experience at St. Alban's Abbey and Cathedral, highlighting the stories of the site and the saint.<sup>12</sup> The visitor centre sits on the site where St. Alban was executed and buried, and includes objects excavated from archaeological digs prior to the building being developed. Sensory panels invite visitors to touch, see, hear and even smell the abbey and its history, encouraging visitors to step back in time to imagine daily life in medieval Britain.<sup>13</sup> Interpretation of key sites is continued outside the cathedral and grounds. Every year 2.2 million visitors (domestic and international) visit Hertfordshire, and visitor

numbers to St. Albans had been on an upward trend – increasing 36% between 2013 and 2018. Although the impact of coronavirus has hit visitor numbers, the site still saw 36,000 visitors by the end of August 2020, compared to 40,000 in the previous year.<sup>14</sup>

## Nendrum Monastic Settlement

Like Glendalough, Nendrum is an early Celtic Christian monastery, thought to have been formed some time in the 5th century. However unlike Glendalough, its Mahee Island location in Strangford Lough has meant it is a far less developed site and retains its sense of isolation and spirituality.

Although exact dates of the monastery's formation are unknown, it is associated with St. Mochaio. A tidal mill excavated on the island is the oldest known in the world, dating from 619. Like Glendalough, the site was largely self-sufficient and included orchards, cereal drying kilns, gardens, pastures, guest houses and scriptoria. The remains of a medieval sundial, from approximately 900, is one of only very few medieval sundials still in existence.

Although not in regular use the monastic site still has annual services on particular days, creating a spiritual connection to the worshippers of the past. The island was used as a parish church until the 15th century.

The sense of peace and tranquility that accompanies a visit to Nendrum is quite different to arrival at Glendalough. As the ruins are

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-48621049>

<sup>13</sup> <https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/supplier-news/mather-co-unveils-new-visitor-experience-st-albans-cathedral/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/>

situated on an island (linked by a causeway) there is still a sense of journey on approach. Being surrounded by the waters on the Lough also provides a timelessness to the experience, as well as a dislocation from modern concerns.

“One of my favourite places since childhood, no matter where in the world, I look forward to getting back here. Not much to do, certainly not a ‘walk’ but a perfect secret, scared spot.” TripAdvisor review, August 2019

“Incredible to think of this deep history in such an amazing quiet place with a serene feel to it given its location on the Lough. The sense of the place and on the information boards makes you realise how significant this place was and is. Just standing looking over the Lough thinking of how it was all that time ago”. TripAdvisor review, June 2019

“Just walking around the site will give you a powerful feeling of peace and tranquility (and this is coming from a sixty year old non believer). Beautiful place.” TripAdvisor review, May 2019

“This is an amazing place. The world’s oldest tide mill from 600AD. The sense of history is moving. The views to the Lough on all sides are breathtaking.” TripAdvisor review, May 2017

“I am not into archaeology but when I visit this ancient site founded in the 5th century I am struck by the amount of time a church has been on the site, It is really over powering.” TripAdvisor review, November 2016

“Such a tranquil spot set high on a drumlin transporting you back to the time of the earliest monks in Ireland. Amazing that the monks had already discovered tidal power!” TripAdvisor review, September 2016

## Skellig Michael

One of the most dramatic examples of Celtic monasticism, Skellig Michael has seen an explosion of tourist interest after being featured as a set location for the Star Wars films. In 1996, the island was added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List in recognition of its outstanding historical and cultural value.

A monastery may have been formed on the island from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but the first definite record of a monastery on the site was in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. It is dedicated to the Archangel Michael, and reflected the ascetic desire to remove themselves from civilisation. A series of small beehive cells and a larger monastery were constructed, with the massive stone walls of the monastery also providing a microclimate for gardening and farming to support the monastic life. As there is no fresh water on the island, the monks created an ingenious water collection method through cisterns.<sup>15</sup>

There is no visitor centre on site, and all access is via a boat to the original monastic landing site, and written information links modern arrival to how monks would have arrived to this isolated site. OPW guides are on site to provide interpretation and information to visitors, and also monitor visitor behaviour onsite. Outside of specific opening times, the site is not accessible and the public are unable to visit on their own boats. Access to the island is free of charge but visitors must take a private boat transfer for extra costs.

A visitor centre is on Valentia Island, Kerry, the departure point for all tours to the island. It is open between April and October each year and details the lives of the monks, history of the built heritage on the island and the natural history of the area, particularly regarding seabird breeding. This site is not operated by OPW/Heritage Ireland and was originally developed by Peter and Mary Doyle Architects and opened in 1992.<sup>16</sup> Facilities are now out of date and cannot handle

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<sup>15</sup> <https://heritageireland.ie/visit/places-to-visit/skellig-michael/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.skelligexperience.com/>

the massive increase in visitor numbers. The boom in interest in the site following filming of Star Wars has meant many more people are unable to visit the site directly due to restricted visitor numbers allowed on the island. In order to protect the delicate structures, Fáilte Ireland has engaged Henchion-Reuter Architects to provide a design study to improve the visitor experience at this site. This was completed in 2019 and a Visitor Experience Management Plan for the Skellig Coast was completed by Fáilte Ireland in 2017 but as yet redevelopment has not been confirmed.<sup>17</sup>

“The views are to die for. The special peace that ascends on one as you walk through this ancient place. One of the guides gave a fascinating insight into the history of the monastery and its inhabitants. Well worth it to wait for the talk.” TripAdvisor review, July 2018

“Skellig Michael was one of the few things I have seen that truly deserve to be called awesome. It is an awe inspiring and spiritual place.” TripAdvisor review, June 2017

“The numbers from all boats are limited to 180 per day. I found even this volume a bit much. Slightly too many tourists larking about on what is a spiritual centre for my taste, but that is the compromise that I had to accept as a tourist myself.” TripAdvisor review, November 2017

## Tupapa: Our Stand Our Stories

Turanganui-a-Kiwa (Gisborne) was the location of Captain James Cook’s discovery of Aotearoa New Zealand, although the area had been settled by Pasifika voyagers 500 years earlier. The arrival of

Captain Cook in 1769 changed New Zealand dramatically, eventually ushering in a period of European settlement and control.

The Tupapa project aims to connect the stories of Māori pre-European settlement in the area and the use and meaning of the land and ocean, to the contact between Cook and the eventual European settlers that reached Turanganui-a-Kiwa. Using a website, app and a physical trail in partnership, the Tupapa experience encourages people to engage with the landscape of the bay, its key sites and the stories that reside in the landscape. Many sites, such as the Manu tukutuku (kite)flying sites, have no remaining physical evidence, but are richly furnished with stories and the wairua (spirit) of ancestors. People are encouraged to visit the site with the added layer of the trail and app to discover more of these stories and connect with the importance of the location, and understand how the present day landscape connects with the stories of ancestors deeply embedded in the culture of the local iwi.

In particular, the app and trail brings together elements of both physical and intangible heritage, imbuing the modern landscape with the significance of historical events and values passed down through generations. It also highlights the contested histories in these stories, and discusses the miscommunication between cultures that resulted in bloodshed.

The Tupapa project is a useful example in that it effectively layers information about both tangible and intangible heritage features, including elements of spirituality, values, connection to landscape and physical remains of this time.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.henchion-reuter.com/projects/skelligs-experience-visitor-centre-extension>

<sup>18</sup> <https://tupapa.nz/>

## Tongariro National Park

One of only 24 sites worldwide with World Heritage designations for both natural and cultural heritage, Tongariro National Park holds deep spiritual and cultural significance for New Zealanders, both Māori and Pākehā (European). Māori of the xx iwi (tribes) view Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu as their sacred ancestors, and as physical reminders of them as they too once lived beneath their summits. “We look upon [the mountains] with deep respect and reverence and a tinge of many other complimentary emotions, pride certainly being one of them. Proud that they are ours - Te ha o taku maunga ko taku manawa - The breath of my mountain is my heart”. This deep regard for the mountains leads to their designation of sacred, and as such a number of behaviours such as standing at the summits is prohibited under tikanga, or rules over behaviour. European settlers in the 1840s onwards did not appreciate these unwritten behavioural codes and caused great distress to tangata whenua by climbing these peaks, as this was viewed by Māori as standing on the heads of their ancestors.

However the designation of the site as a National Park in 1894 and designation on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1993, and an ongoing process of education and interpretation have led to the park and its summits being deeply beloved by Māori and Pākehā alike. As tourism has exploded in New Zealand in recent decades significant work has been undertaken in partnership with councils and iwi to provide international visitors and domestic visitors alike with an understanding of not only the natural significance of the area but also the intangible heritage values associated with the area.

“The mountains of the south wind have spoken to us for centuries. Now we wish them to speak to all who come in peace and in respect of their tapu. This land of Tongariro National Park is our mutual heritage.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tongariro National Park Management Plan Te Kaupapa Whakahaere mo Te Papa Rēhia o Tongariro 2006 – 2016. October 2006.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.archdaily.com/461242/stonehenge-visitor-centre-denton-corker-marshall>

## Stonehenge

As one of the world’s most recognisable ancient sites, the visitor centre at Stonehenge has an important role to play in exploring the lives of the people who built the monument, and connecting today’s visitors with the beliefs and lives of the past. However the stones themselves are the reason for the visitor centre and therefore the design of the structure has been carefully planned to provide a complementary experience that does not detract from the majesty and mystery of the stones themselves.

The architecture firm tasked with the building design in 2013 noted “The design of the centre is based on the idea that it is a prelude to the Stones, and its architectural form and character should in no way diminish their visual impact, sense of timeless strength and powerful sculptural composition.”<sup>20</sup> Unlike the stones which are deeply rooted in the land, the building design aims to float lightly in the landscape, with almost ethereal materials which are sourced locally and tie in elements of the landscape and geology.

The visitor centre provides a background for the visitor to the importance and history of the landscape and stones, not assuming a visitor’s prior knowledge. A combination of museum exhibition, reconstructed Neolithic housing and audiovisual experiences provide a rich overview to the site. Visitors are then invited to either shuttle or walk to the stones themselves, with the view of the stones slowly appearing to the east. This gives a sense of drama and mystery.

The Stonehenge visitor experience shows how the experience of an historic landscape can be carefully interpreted to not lose the sense of magic and mystery.

# Key Challenges

In summary, through analysis and conservation, the following issues and opportunities have been identified in the current interpretation at Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park:

- Dilution of the heritage significance of the site due to traffic congestion, infrastructure that is not sympathetic to the landscape and built heritage, and separation of the heritage sites by roadways or fencing, reducing flow and connection.
- Significance of place and importance of this site to the spiritual and cultural history of Ireland is greatly reduced due to lack of connection between sites, encroachment of car traffic and commercial activity, and limited interpretation for visitors to explore and understand the importance of the space.
- A sense of identity and place is missing at the monastic sites, particularly at the upper lake.
- Limited possibilities to reflect and absorb the beauty and isolation of the area as St. Kevin and his followers would have experienced due to encroaching traffic and commercial activity, particularly at the upper lake where sites of pilgrimage and spiritual reflection are missed in favour of picnics and hikes.
- Natural heritage significance has been reduced by crowding in particularly popular areas, such as the Upper Lake, along the Spinc walk and at sites highlighted by social media such as Lough Ouler and Lough Dan.
- Visitors are disconnected from an ability to mindfully engage with the landscape and ecosystems, as the presence of so many people in the Glendalough Valley detracts from the sense of peace and solitude that being in nature can provide.
- Dated interpretative facilities at the Glendalough Visitor Centre, which have limited appeal for the target audiences

- Limited access to the visitor centre, with primary users being booked groups, limited information outside of the centre to entice visitors in, and lack of awareness of the visitor centre's offerings amongst visitors.
- Passive interpretation methods and media
- Lack of outdoor interpretative experiences, requiring visitors to either supply their own interpretation or recall material from visitor centre
- Limited information available about the range of sites in the valley, so more isolated areas such as St.Saviour's, St. Mary's and mining sites are less appreciated than they could be.
- Limited interpretation provision relating to the national park, although some trail signs do indicate some of the key habitats and species to be observed. Providing light touch interpretation to give an extra layer outside the aesthetic experiences for visitors can deepen connection with the national park and foster a sense of care and responsibility.

*“Through interpretation, understanding;  
through understanding, appreciation; through  
appreciation, protection.”*

*Freeman Tilden.*

- Default option for visitors from Dublin and further afield to come to Glendalough for a day out - potential to spread the load for people to undertake a driving or cycling tour of the Military Road; provide an industrial heritage experience in the Glenmalure valley; and provide a connected network of interpretative signage to encourage deeper engagement around the county. Currently there is limited exploration of the wider sites in the county and disconnected information available, making the honeypot of Glendalough the perceived straightforward option. Table from Hogarth's - all that can be experienced in Wicklow.

“We arrived mid-morning and even then the car park and adjoining roads were all full of cars and coaches. It took us half an hour to eventually get a space, not my idea of fun. The whole place was thronged with people, worse than the most crowded shopping mall you can imagine. That was early Tuesday morning, I dread to think what it would be like at weekends. There are plenty of beautiful places to see in Ireland, and at many of these you'll be the only ones there. If you enjoy shuffling along on crowded paths like sheep visit Glendalough, if not, avoid.” TripAdvisor review, June 2017

“I was thinking we would visit these ruins and learn something about them. The visitor center gives you ( you have to pay .50 euro) a brochure which explains a SMALL amount. There was a film about Monastic settlements but they told us there were 30 French students who had just gone in and highly discouraged us from joining them (this was fine with me:). We walked around the ruins but not much signage on them. There were a lot of people out with their children, hiking, strollers etc. It seemed like more of a place to hike and enjoy a Sunday afternoon than a Monastic settlement. I think they could make it much more informative to the public.” TripAdvisor review, April 2017

“We were there in October when every other attraction in all of Ireland was relatively empty so we were surprised at the crowd. Must have been some special local event going on. It may have been interesting IF we hadn't arrived on a Sunday when EVERYBODY for miles around was partying there. Amazed we found a parking spot. Cars lined the road into the area. Mostly young people tramping over the graves disrespectfully. It is more of a hiking and picnic area and that is fine that the old places are still used today. But the vendors hawking t shirts etc really detracted from what I expected - an ancient historic site. Would have skipped it if I had known.” TripAdvisor review, October 2014

“This used to be a quiet reflective place, now I found it noisy and crowded, certainly seemed to me to have lost its "monastic" air. The site away from the settlement is lovely for a walk in majestic surroundings perhaps the whole area could be advertised in a different way.” TripAdvisor review, May 2014

“If you choose the latter point of entry be aware that you will have an experience akin to what medieval pilgrims once faced here. Not only will you find the racket of Babel as twenty different tour guides from twenty different countries direct the masses through the settlement, but you will also be faced with the hawkers selling various plastic trinkets from a factory in China. I rarely ever enter by this route: although in winter this area is deserted.” <http://irelandsholywells.blogspot.com/2011/09/>

# Aims for Interpretation

- To provide a spiritual experience for visitors, where they can ‘escape’ their everyday lives and step back into a different way of life.
- To create an experience which leaves the everyday world behind, ushering in a time for reflection, exploration and connection with people, place and landscape.
- To assist people to step into the world of St. Kevin and his followers, understanding the sense of isolation, connection with nature and spiritual connection experienced by these early Christians.
- To foster a deeper understanding of the delicate ecosystems and rare species making their home in the National Park.
- To provide context to deepen and strengthen the sense of awe and wonder that experiencing the Wicklow Mountains National Park can already provide.
- To create an emotional experience for visitors, creating a sense of awe, reflection and peace as they journey up the valley and encounter the history and spirituality of the early Irish church.
- To support visitors in their understanding of the richness of the site, in terms of heritage importance, spiritual significance and natural history.
- To develop interventions that maintain or enhance the built and natural environments in Glendalough and the wider valley, so as not to detract from the special qualities and atmosphere of the landscape but to add to its unique sense of place
- To develop an integrated approach to interpreting the natural, cultural, spiritual and historical significances of the monastic site

and the wider valley that allows visitors to generate their own meanings for the place as a whole or in part

- To foster a sense of responsibility and protection in individuals for the National Park and its landscapes, flora and fauna - seeing the site as more than for human leisure pursuits.
- To draw out the stories of the people who lived, prayed and worked in the Glendalough Valley and further afield, creating connections with our modern lives and highlighting the differences between then and now.
- To layer a variety of media and experiences in ways that will appeal to a broad range of audiences
- To deepen engagement with the site beyond its appeal for day trippers and picnics, instead engaging visitors with the depth of the valley’s history and encouraging a longer, more reflective visit, supported by varied interpretation methods.

## Experiencing the sacred

Sam Ham discusses the idea of a ‘numinous experience’, a sort of experience that takes the visitor out of their everyday self to a place of intense engagement and almost religious rapture. This transcendence of self and deep focus on the landscapes creates a connection to a place, and allow an individual to feel a part of a larger system. Interpretation at a site like Glendalough, which is rippled with both natural beauty and deep spiritual significance, can do more than simply provide interpretation. Instead, it can be “a mechanism for producing meanings that bond people to the places they visit and that create in us a sense of place and an empathy for the people who lived in times past. In empathy, not in the facts alone, lie the great lessons

that history purports to teach us”.<sup>21</sup> At Glendalough, we can do more than inform people. Instead, the lessons of nature and spirituality that imbue Glendalough with its significance can be beautifully interpreted, so visitors can experience a powerfully numinous experience that is deeply meaningful to them.

Related to this is the concept of ‘thin’ places. Based in Celtic Christian tradition, thin places are where the boundaries between the physical world and the eternal or spiritual world are far closer. Although often associated with organised religion, thin places do also associate with a dislocation from the everyday secular world into a slower, more connected way of experiencing a place. As Eric Weimar describes, “Thin places relax us, yes, but they also transform us — or, more accurately, unmask us. In thin places, we become our more essential selves.”<sup>22</sup> In a place like Glendalough, the combination of human history and spirituality with the natural world has the potential to lead to this numinous quality, a sense that there is something bigger than our human concerns. It has the potential to offer visitors a chance to reflect and immerse themselves somewhere other, and bask in the spirituality of the space. Time, too, can change in such as place. As Eric Weiner notes, “It’s not that we lose all sense of time but, rather, that our relationship with time is altered, softened. In thin places, time is not something we feel compelled to parse or hoard. There’s plenty of it to go around.”<sup>23</sup>

## Wāhi Tapu and Identity Making

Heritage sites are not only places where physical remnants of past lives can be viewed. Instead, they can be places where different realms of experience entwine to create a holistic, indeed even spiritual journey, engaging not only the learning brain but also emotions, senses and a meditative effect. Levi and Kocher note that sacredness can be developed at a site in many ways: “as an inherent characteristic of the place because of the presence of spiritual forces; religions can consecrate places to make them sacred, and historic events and artifacts may cause a place to become viewed as sacred.”<sup>24</sup> In Aotearoa New Zealand the concept of wāhi tapu is becoming more embedded within heritage management practice across the country, rather than solely for more specifically ‘Māori’ sites. Wāhi tapu refers to sacred spaces, and reflects the relationship people have with place, landscapes and the sacred. Intangible values have equal weighting as tangible values (such as built heritage or landscapes). As Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga states:

*“The histories and events which occurred at places of heritage significance are, in a sense, embedded in those places and in relationships with them. Heritage places are sources of identity and cultural values. Māori heritage*

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<sup>21</sup> Sam Ham, Keynote presentation to Scotland's First National Conference on Interpretation Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, April 4, 2002

<sup>22</sup> Weiner, Eric. 2012. ‘Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer.’ *New York Times*.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Levi, D., & Kocher, S. (2012). Perception of Sacredness at Heritage Religious Sites. *Environment and Behavior*, 45(7), 912–930.

*relates not only to the physical places but also the knowledge and stories of those places.”<sup>25</sup>*

Māori communities regard their heritage places as spiritual links and pathways, arawairua, to ancestors and to the past. These are seen as ‘markers of mana’ in which the spirit (wairua) of the people and Māoritanga reside.

A location like Glendalough, with its tangible values of monastic ruins and sites as well as natural landscapes with evidence of ancient human activity, can have its significance and value further deepened by engaging with the site’s intangible heritage as a wāhi tapu, a sacred space. The current approach at Glendalough to combine a highly spiritual site, along with outdoor activities, car parking and a wide variety of commercial activities has resulted in overcrowding, potentially inappropriate behaviour, and a lack of understanding from many visitors about the deep significance of the site, making it a hybrid and more social space. As Levi and Kocher note, “Respect relates to how the place is interpreted—whether it is presented as a tourist attraction, a historic site, or a religious place—and informing tourists about culturally appropriate behaviors”.<sup>26</sup>

The wairua (spirit) of Glendalough is entwined with its sacred history. Respectful and inspiring interpretation can help this wāhi tapu (sacred place) become a site of meaning, identity and deep engagement for a new generation of visitors.

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<sup>25</sup> TAPUWAE Te Kōrero a te Kaunihera Māori o te Pouhere Taonga: A Vision for Places of Māori Heritage. 2017

<sup>26</sup> Levi, D., & Kocher, S. ‘Perception of Sacredness at Heritage Religious Sites’. *Environment and Behavior*, 2012, 45(7), 912–930.

<sup>27</sup> Ahrens, A., and Lyons, S., ‘Changes in Land Cover and Urban Sprawl in Ireland From a Comparative Perspective Over 1990–2012’. *Land* 2019, 8, 16

<sup>28</sup> <https://council.ie/benefits-of-visiting-green-space-esri-report/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://bioweb.ie/lost-connection/>

## Oneness with Nature and Ecological Restoration

In a rapidly urbanising world, connection with the environments of our ancestors is becoming increasingly challenging. Urbanisation in Ireland has occurred faster than anywhere else in Europe and although some trends may shift in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Dublin remains the largest urban centre in the country.<sup>27</sup> For urban residents in particular, connection with open spaces and nature is extremely beneficial to overall health and wellbeing, reducing stress and anxiety in particular.<sup>28</sup> Finding the right balance in the Wicklow Mountains National Park to encourage visitors to understand the fine balance of ecological landscapes, as well as developing respect and care, is how we see our interpretation making a difference.

*“Only when the general public feels a connection and a desire to spend time in nature will there be the drive to protect it”.<sup>29</sup>*

Associated with this is the burgeoning field of ‘rewilding’, allowing natural processes to overtake previously highly managed or altered

lands. Although often associated with previously intensively farmed land, the approach to allowing nature to recolonise cleared areas can also work in national parks. Although markedly different from a more rigorously planned and maintained conservation approach, rewinding has the potential be self-sustaining and far cheaper. Such an approach has merit at Glendalough and is in many places already occurring albeit with assistance - for example, the pockets of regenerated woodlands which then encourage species such as many fungi and insects to return.

*“Rewilding - giving nature the space and opportunity to express itself - is largely a leap of faith. It involves surrendering all preconceptions, and simply sitting back and observing what happens”.<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>30</sup> Tree, I. *Rewilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm*. Picador, 2018, p. 9.

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Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park

# Indicative Signage Requirement

18 August 2022

the **paul hogarth** company

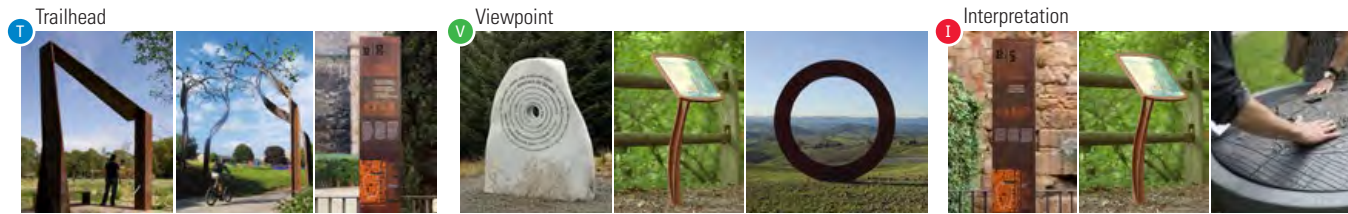
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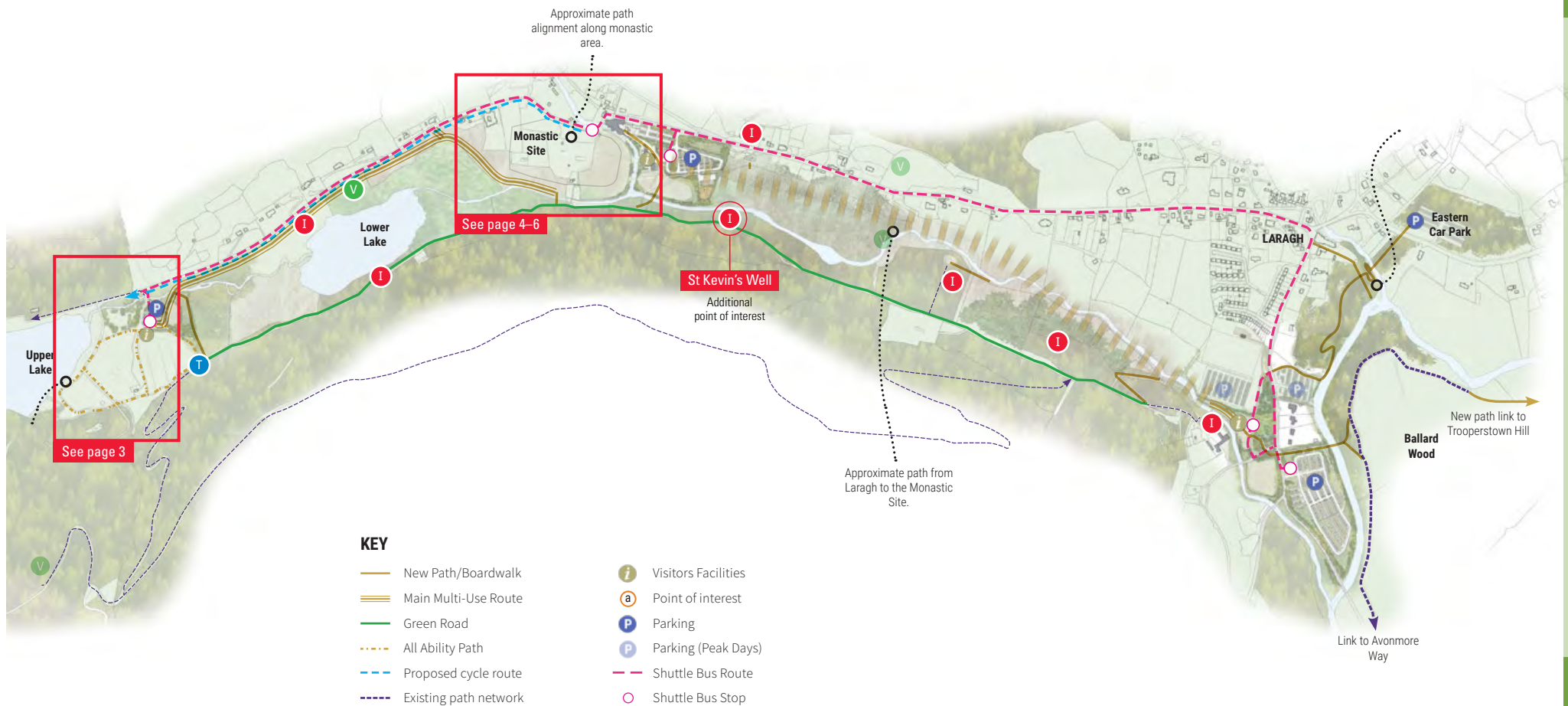
# Glendalough to Laragh Masterplan

DRAFT



Common hardware option

Common hardware option



# Glendalough to Laragh **Upper Lake Visitors Centre**

DRAFT

**T** Trailhead



**V** Viewpoint



**I** Interpretation



To be interpreted at accessible location:

St Kevin's Cell  
St Kevin's Bed  
Templenaskellig

Reefert Church

## Key

- New Path/ Boardwalk
- Main Multi-Use Route
- Green Road
- Existing Path Network
- Shuttle Bus Route
- Visitor Facilities
- Parking
- Parking (Peak Days)
- Shuttle Bus Stop

# Glendalough to Laragh Monastic Site

DRAFT

**T** Trailhead



**V** Viewpoint



**I** Interpretation



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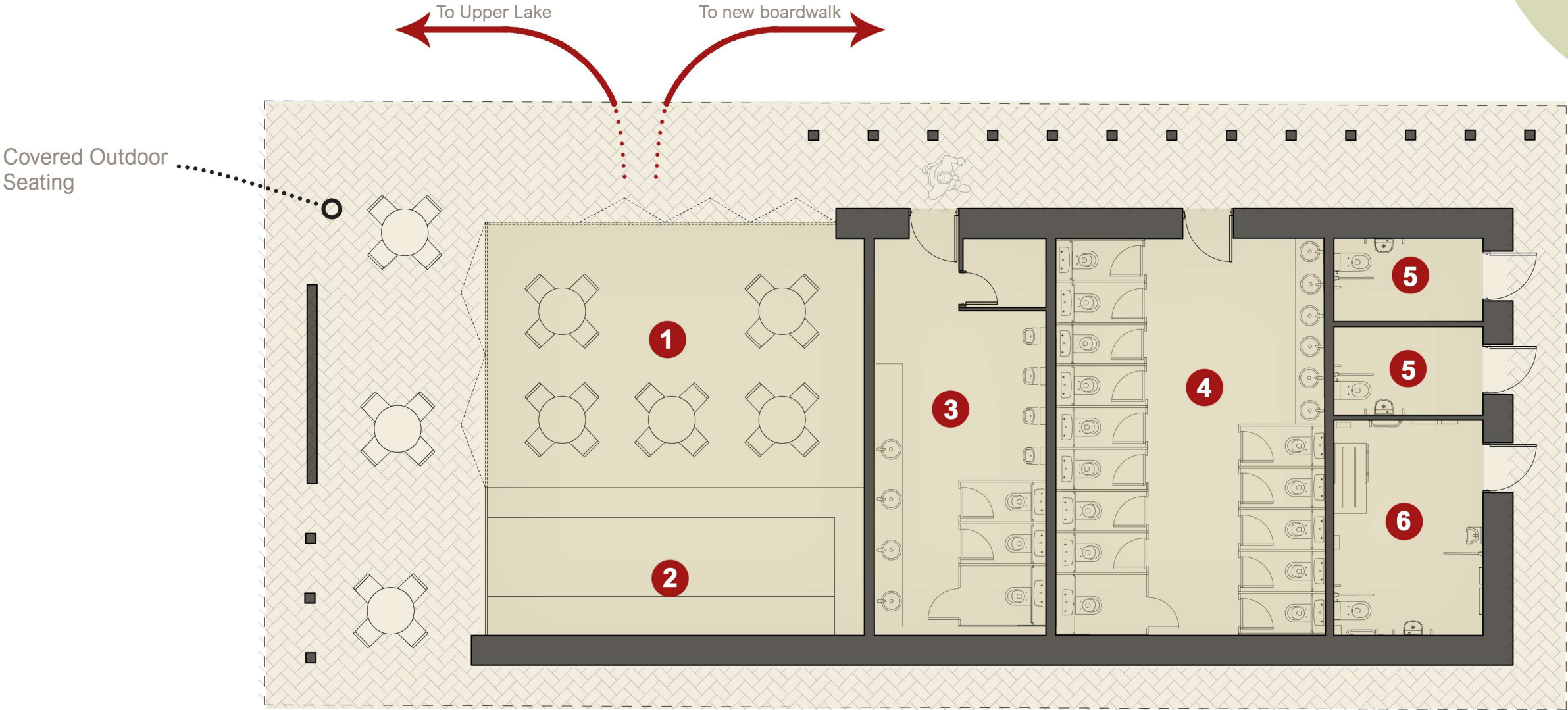
Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park  
Architectural Proposals

August 2021

CONSARC



Site Plan



Visitor Information / Cafe / WCs  
Floor Plan 1:100

- KEY**
- |                |                            |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Cafe Seating | 4 Female WCs               |
| 2 Cafe Servery | 5 Accessible WC            |
| 3 Male WCs     | 6 Changing Places Facility |



Architectural language and materials consistent with existing visitor centre



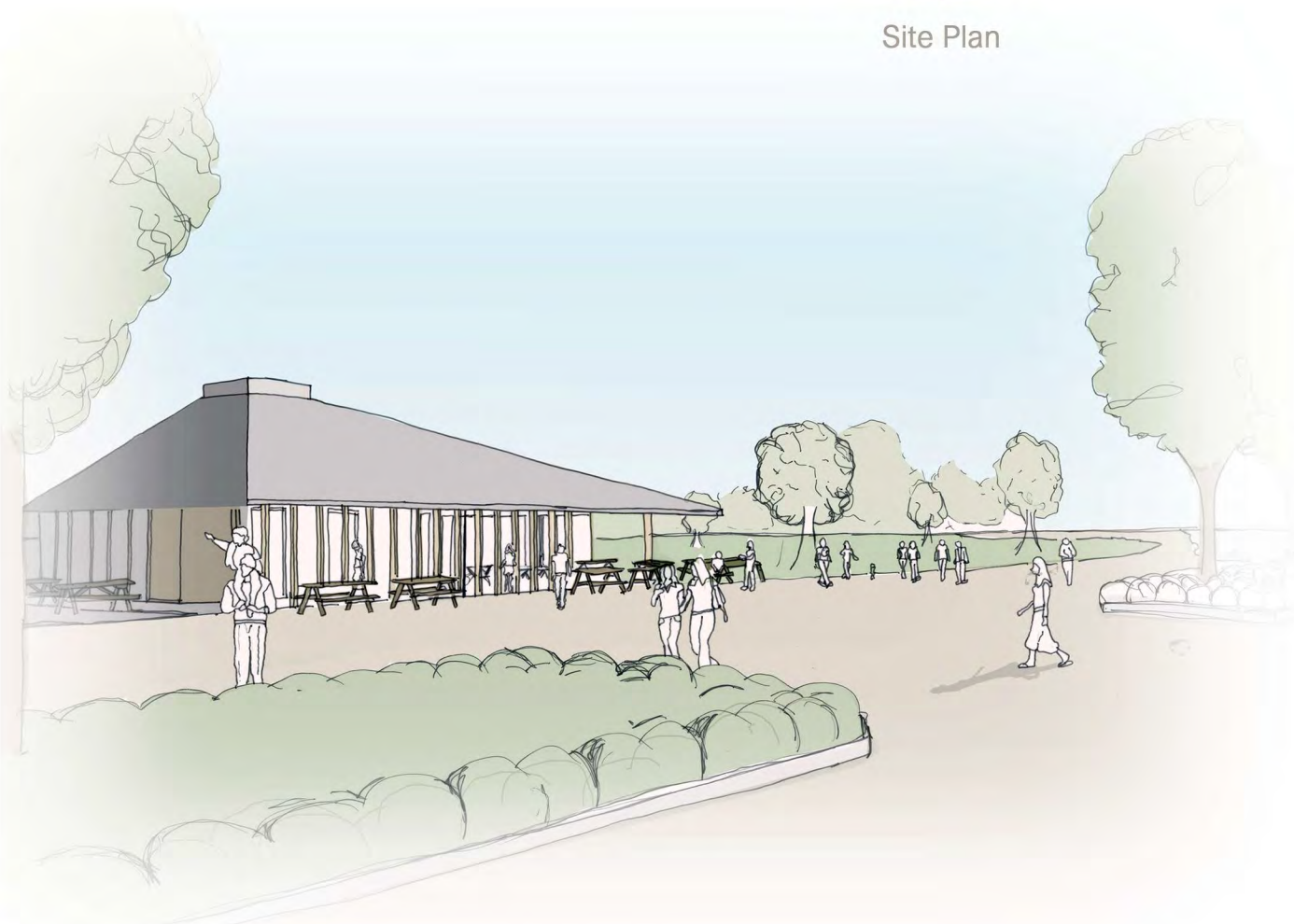
Flexibility with indoor, covered, and outdoor seating



Indicative Elevations of Visitor Pavilion



Site Plan



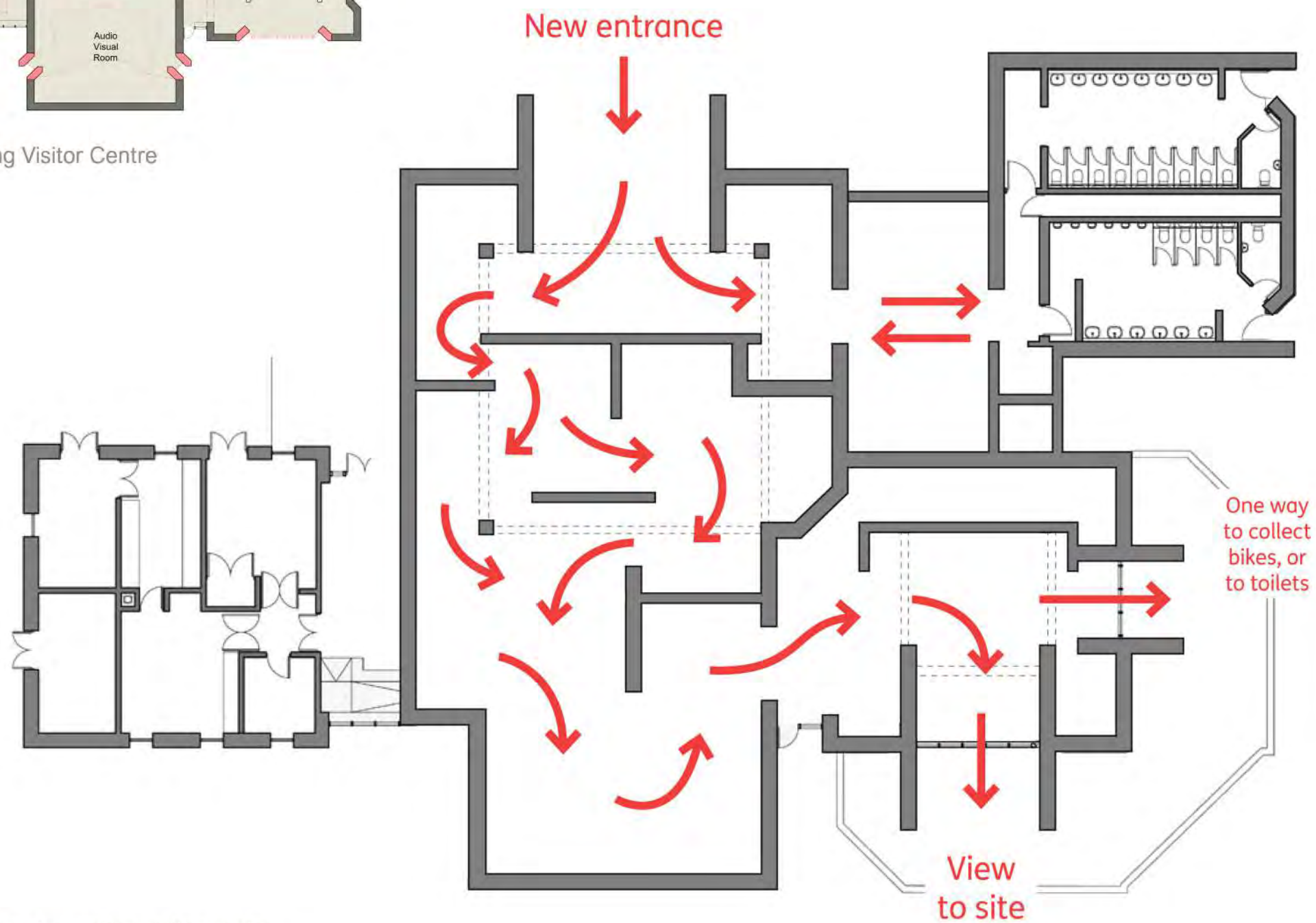
Approach to pavilion plaza from car park area



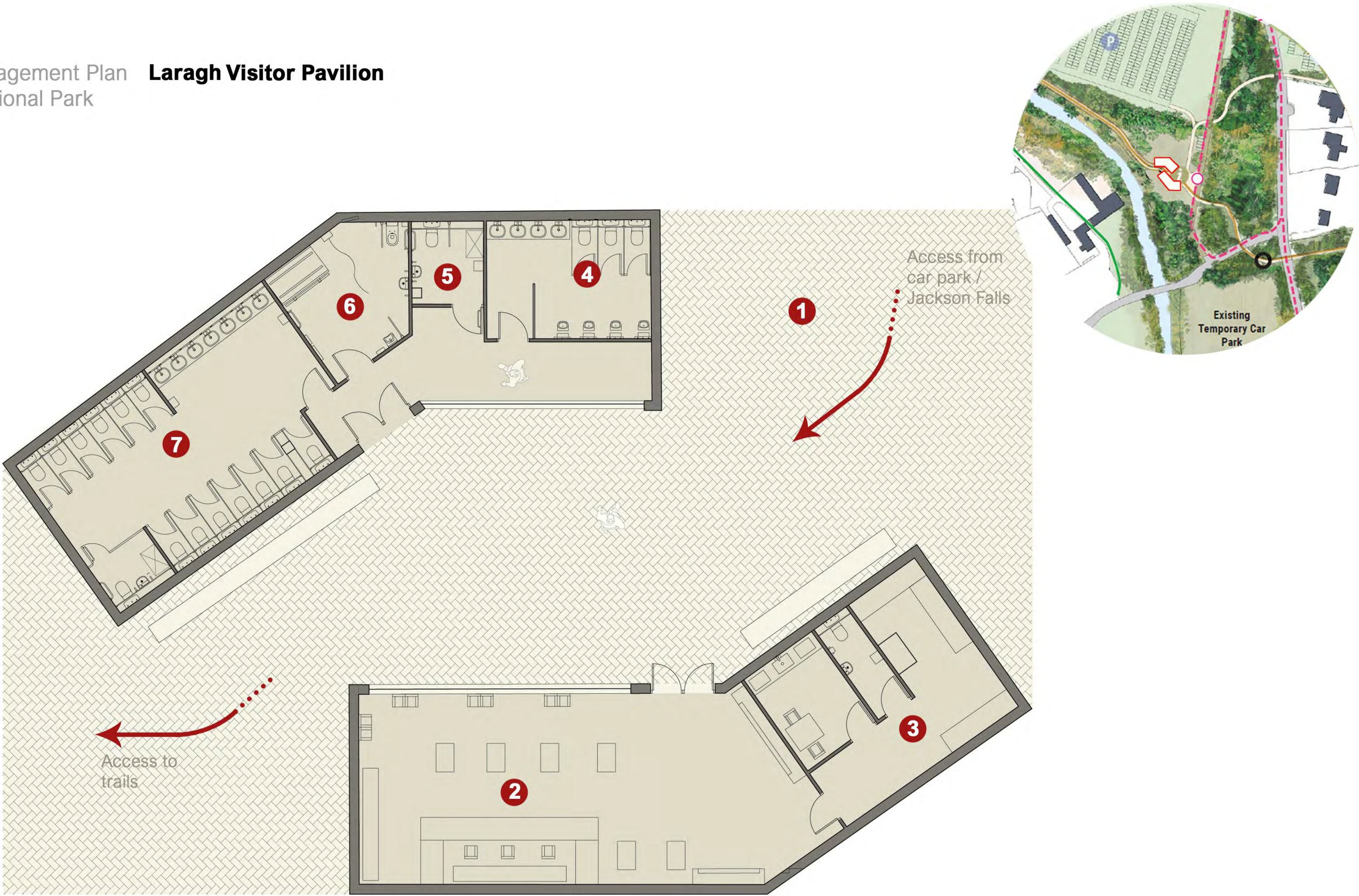
Alterations to existing Visitor Centre



Site Plan



Proposed interventions to existing visitor centre  
New visitor flow



Visitor Information / WCs  
Floor Plan 1:100

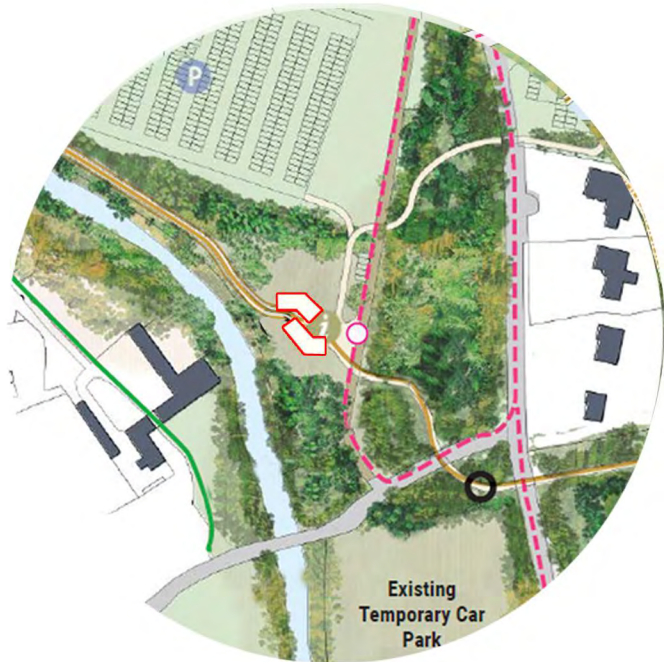
**KEY**

- |                      |                            |                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| 1 Entrance plaza     | 4 Male WCs                 | 7 Accessible WCs |
| 2 Information centre | 5 Female WCs               |                  |
| 3 Storage            | 6 Changing Places Facility |                  |



Sculptural pavilions  
representing geology and  
topography of valley

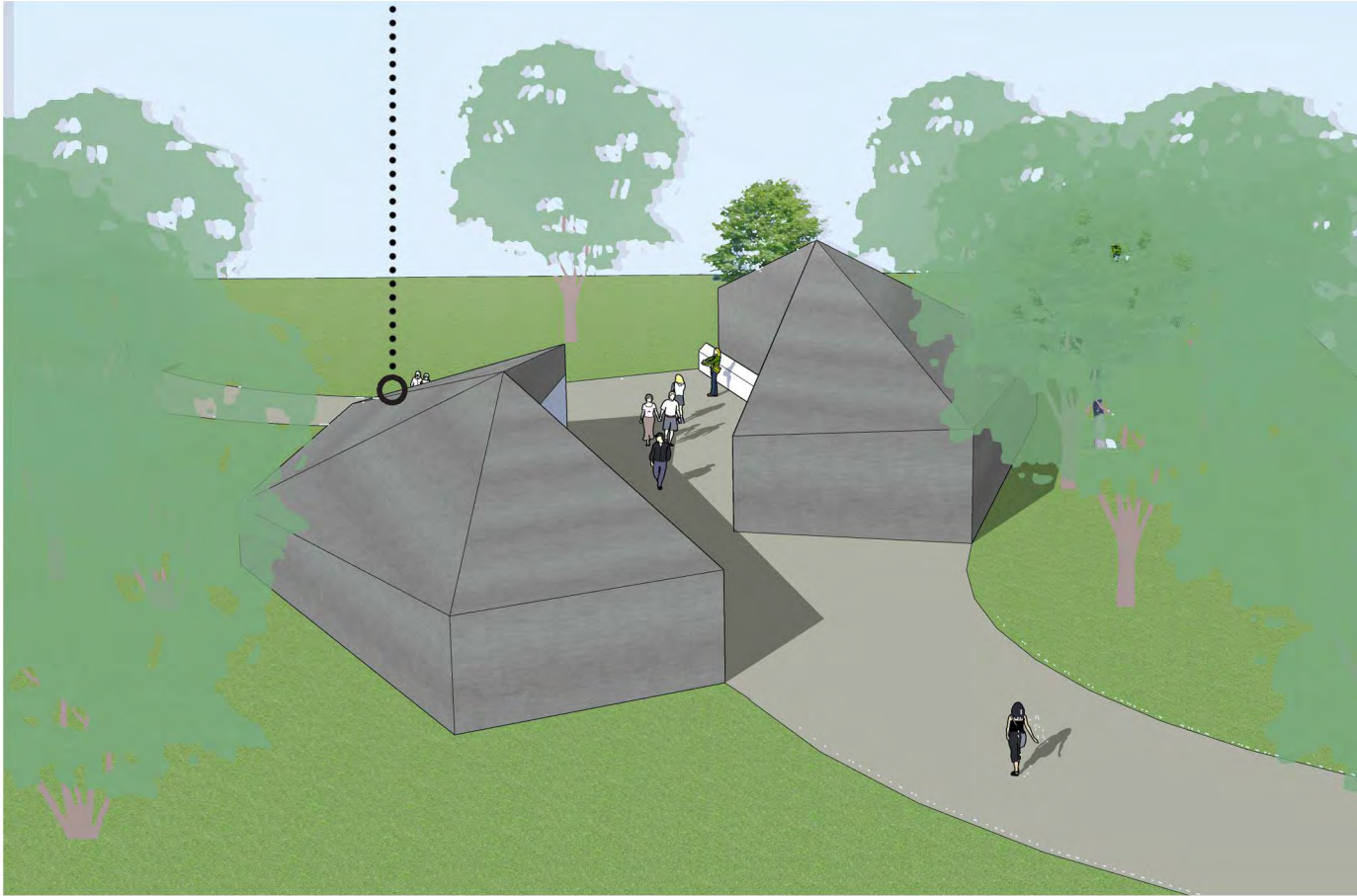
Threshold; tunnel effect demarking  
beginning of journey up the valley



Site Plan



Approach to pavilion plaza from car park area



Overhead view of pavilions

## Glendalough- Additional Information

Controlling of the car parking is essential at Glendalough so that it is managed in such a way to deter users from parking for free in the prime visitor spots. With some management it can deter the use of prime spaces by all day parkers or walkers and leave these free for use by those casual visitors that need to have access to mobility managed space or for those that have a short visit time and are content to pay for a prime space. For such a strategy to work it is essential that there are free or low cost spaces available for long stay users who do not wish to pay a premium. The management of the spaces can be controlled with appropriate charging policies for the different parking areas.

The management of the parking of the spaces is currently very labour intensive at peak times with high levels of staff deployed to each parking location to control parking and to collect parking charges. At peak times the parking attendants are already supplemented by Gardai staff directing traffic away from the prime parking locations when they are full. However, drivers still try to reach the prime car parks as there is no information to tell them that the spaces are already fully occupied.

The study considers a less labour-intensive way of dealing with the management of the car parks and the directing of traffic by Gardai.

### Variable Message Signage (VMS)

Implementation of Variable Messaging Signage (VMS) is critical in the management of visitors arriving by private car to remove unnecessary journeys from the road network and to decrease the likelihood of congestion throughout Laragh. The removal of such trips will assist in controlling queuing at car parking facilities, which is currently evident during peak times at Glendalough and Laragh.

The use of the VMS can provide advance warning information of the availability of parking spaces in each location and more importantly can be pre-programmed with variable messages to direct drivers to the most appropriate location for available parking. Such facilities will reduce the nugatory trips and remove the need for onsite traffic direction.

To provide this information it is necessary to have counting mechanisms at each parking location to allow cars to be counted both in and out of the car park so that it can be determined when the capacity of the car park has exceeded the 90% of capacity. At this stage the VMS system can trigger a message to direct car drivers to the alternative pre-arranged parking locations. Some drivers will already have passed the signage and so some capacity must be allowed to accommodate those vehicles.

At this stage we recommend that real time car parking information can be displayed on Variable Message Signage on the major approach routes to Laragh. The VMS can be erected temporarily or permanently and should be located in a visible location outside of the town on the major approach routes, such as the R115, R756, and the R755 (north and south). It is recommended that permanent VMS signage are implemented, wired with permanent power and telecoms. This would provide the most beneficial system as they can be switched on at any time when there is increased parking requirements in the area. The use of the permanent VMS would be beneficial for this site as peak visitor times vary throughout the year and are dependent on holiday seasons and weather. Therefore, during any abnormal peak times the VMS will be already installed and will activate when the car park is at close to full capacity.

Temporary signs are used at the likes of the Balmoral Show. These are located on trailers on the main approach routes, powered by batteries and solar cells and make use of mobile phone technology to provide the communications. Such temporary systems are sufficient for this four-day event. However,

at Laragh there are over 30 busy days a year spread over many weekends and public holidays. For this reason, the installation of permanent signs would be more reliable and more advantageous.

When the main car parks at the Upper and Lower Lake are near capacity, these signs can then display appropriate signage to direct cars to alternative parking locations and direct vehicles along the appropriate route, preferably avoiding the congested areas.

### **Car Park Control**

The counting mechanism of the system will require a detailed way of recoding the number of vehicles arriving and exiting each area of the site. This control mechanism must be implemented as a normal barrier which lifts to let vehicles in and out of the car park which in turn drives a mechanism for counting vehicles in and out of the parking areas. This can be done with a car park barrier on a separate entrance and exit lane or via automatic induction loops at the access and egress points. It is recommended that when the car park is filled to c90% this would then trigger the VMS to activate, deterring additional vehicles arriving at the car park which is close to capacity.

The use of barriers can be linked to a pay on foot system where drivers take a ticket at the same time as the barrier is being lifted. That ticket must then be prepaid before the driver returns to the vehicle and is inserted to open the barrier. If an induction loop is used in the ground a separate payment method has to be used otherwise drivers will just drive out of the site.

If a barrier is damaged, they tend to be low-cost items that simply bolt back into place.

### **Control system**

With modern technology an intercom can be accommodated within the barrier system that provide a contact mechanism if there is a problem or if the barrier fails to open. This intercom can be cabled through the normal telecoms or internet network back to the controller.

This controller will require to be located within a central control room. This will allow the controller to override the system should there be an issue, but it will also allow for a central location to control all the signs and barriers in the area. When all the equipment is cabled back through the telecoms network, this control can be remote from the actual site. However, it is advantageous to locate the control room near the main parking areas or visitor centre so that any problems can be easily rectified. At the Balmoral Show the Gold control room can be in the local Police Station or the Urban Traffic Control Centre some 7 miles away.

The space is not a large requirement, but the VMS system will require a control room/ person to activate the signage and required the space of several computers. The system can be set up to automatically highlight the pre-programmed messages and direct traffic depending on the different scenarios, with appropriate logic statements. For example, if Car Park A and B is full do C. This will then trigger the appropriate direction signage such as “car parking” and an “arrow” to direct the flow to C. These can all be pre-programmed.

The signs displayed will be programmed into the software, and a specific message will be chosen to be displayed. The wording of the signage is critical to the operation of the VMS and it must be simple, easy to read, understand and follow.

As the VMS works on a predetermined number being reached it needs to be managed in case the count goes astray. The system must have an option to override the count sequence to set the car park as full or empty at any time so that the messages can be displayed properly. For example, if the barrier

is broken or someone has parked on one of the counting loops it may give a false reading which will need to be updated. This may also be used to reset the counter at any time throughout the day.

It is recommended that the control room is located within the visitor centre and to assist in the operation, CCTV cameras and intercom should be linked to the control room so that an operator can trigger the VMS use when required.

Indicative costs for Implementing VMS:

- Permanent VMS: c£40,000-£50,000 for each sign plus service diversions and foundations.
- Cameras: circa £20,000 each + costs of services connections
- Software Control system with computer and monitors: £16,000
- Barrier installations: £10,000

### **Installation of a Barrier on approach to Upper Lake**

The installation of a barrier will be required along the R757, before approaching the existing Upper or Lower Lake car parks so that when the car parks are nearly full traffic is deterred from driving up this road. The VMS sign will already have highlighted the fact that the car parks are full and should be directing drivers to other locations.

Rise and fall bollards can be problematic with maintenance and hydraulic fluid, whereas a simple barrier that lifts and can be closed when full is commonplace. An appropriate barrier installed in this location, coupled with the proposed VMS signage, will prevent the existing congestion issues that currently occur along the R757 when vehicles waiting to park in the existing car parks during peak times.

The barrier should be in a location associated with a turning area to allow cars that have ignored the VMS signs to safely manoeuvre by turning and driving back towards Laragh, to park elsewhere. It is recommended to install a barrier at the front of the existing hotel. This will allow hotel guests to have access to the hotel car park without having to enter the Glendalough Lower/Upper Lake Car Parking area and will also facilitate a turning head to allow vehicles to turn and return to Laragh to park elsewhere.

This barrier can be used seasonally or be time sensitive. For example, it could stay open between 9pm and 6am to facilitate local hikers that wish to walk before work. It can be pre-programmed with the car park system so that it remains open until the pre-determined time is reached and then dropped. Alternatively, the first staff members to the site can manually close the barrier on arrival.

There are a small number of residents in the area that may need to access the road. They can be provided with an electronic fob system which can be implemented to open the barrier and to let them pass. It may be necessary to provide the barriers on each of two sides of the road and to only open one half at any one time. An induction loop will be required to ensure that a vehicle has cleared the barrier before it automatically closes again. An intercom should also be used on the arrival gate so that someone can call the control room to gain access should they be visiting one of the residents or making a delivery. The buses can also be provided with a fob to activate the barrier on approach.

Barriers should also be erected at the entrance to all proposed car parks and a counting mechanism integrated. This will allow the total accumulation of vehicles in the car parks to be counted to activate the VMS. It will also allow for ticket allocation for payment and can be used for pre booking systems (similar to city centre multi-storey car parks or car parks at airports).

### **Prebooking a space**

Technology exists with number plate recognition or with scan codes to activate barrier systems. For example, at airports a system can be installed that allows drivers to prebook a space for a specific time and then this space is allocated to them. A number of spaces can be reserved for use with ticket sales to the visitor centre. In this way someone who has prebooked a visitor ticket can also prebook a car park space. This does require an additional control module, computer system and scanners on the barrier to either read a prebooked ticket, enter a code or read a number plate. It will so require software to be incorporated into the booking system.

## **CCTV cameras**

Although fobs can be provided and mechanisms can be put in place to drive signs it is recommended at the controller has visibility of the essential parking areas, the barriers and main approach routes. To do this a system of CCTV cameras can be installed and cabled back to the visitor centre. The controller can then have access to override any barrier or VMS signs should the cameras identify a problem.

The cameras should be installed at the same time as the VMS signs and car park barriers to minimise on the power and telecoms equipment required. The control room should have monitors dedicated to viewing the camera and be capable of calling up any of the cameras at any time.

## **Charges**

It is imperative that the car parking charges, and shuttle bus charges are set at a level to meet the overall operating and maintenance costs. In this way the system can be franchised out so that it can be tendered and operated independently.

An overall Car Parking Strategy must be implemented with managed car park charges. Various car parks are proposed at the development and a shuttle bus service is planned to run during peak times to facilitate movement from the car parks at Laragh with drop off at Glendalough. The various payment methods can be considered:

- Free shuttle bus and pay for car parking; or
- Car parking free and pay for shuttle bus.

The optimum system is that the shuttle bus service be free and that visitors then pay for car parking. The reasoning for this is that during peak demand the weather is often pleasant which may deter the use of the shuttle bus service as people are more likely to walk. Therefore, the money made from paying for a shuttle bus service may be less than what is achievable. Also, a cost of a shuttle bus may act as a deterrent, especially for large groups or families.

A car parking costing system which is staggered from the most expensive price for parking at the Upper/Lower Lake and decreasing in price as you move further away may should be considered. This will deter cars parking in the car parks closest to Glendalough and this then may reduce the traffic flow though Laragh.

Seasonal car parking rates should also be considered with cheaper rates available at off peak times.

It needs to be agreed who controls the car parks and hence the car park charging.

## **Disabled Spaces**

We recommend that 4% of all spaces provided in the car parks are allocated for disabled/accessible use. These spaces should be located in areas close to amenities (visitor centre/ shuttle bus).

In addition to this it, may be beneficial to provide the majority of spaces in the Upper Car Park for disabled/accessible use, and reservation could be made online to use these spaces.

Car parking spaces for the disabled in the proposed car parks in Laragh must be located close to the shuttle bus service. This shuttle bus service should be equipped to accommodate disabled usage.



**GLENDALOUGH AND WICKLOW MOUNTAINS  
NATIONAL PARK**

Draft Visitor Experience & Management Masterplan

**Appendix B3**

*Wicklow Wide Strategies*

*Author: The Paul Hogarth Company, Tandem Design*

## Wicklow Wide Strategy

County Wicklow has been visited by people from nearby and across the world for centuries. Glendalough has been a place of pilgrimage, recognising the beauty of its landscape as the setting for spiritual reflection; the upland trails of the Mountains, the traditional seaside town of Bray, the grandeur of Powerscourt and the fairways of the Druid's Glen Golf Course all have a long-established profile. Across the county, there are many places of quality and interest to visitors, some already attracting significant numbers of people, others which are 'hidden gems'.

The analysis and consultation undertaken as part of this plan highlighted that there is an existing pattern of day-visits to the County, including from the greater Dublin area and beyond. Overnight and longer stays in the County are limited, with people tending to visit a specific destination. The 'brand' awareness of the county is limited, with 'Wicklow Mountains' having prominence. Specific places, even in the case of Glendalough are not synonymous for visitors with Wicklow County.

It has been observed that there is little coherence to the overall Wicklow visitor proposition, with some places being over-stretched whilst others have significant potential to deliver more and better. The Wider Wicklow plan seeks to address this challenge.

### Increasing the length of stay

Central to the plan is the objective of encouraging people to stay longer, visiting other places in the area and enjoying the local hospitality.

Building on the Wicklow County Council Outdoor Recreation Strategy, the plan proposes a series of clusters. These will strengthen the synergy between places in parts of the county, consolidating their distinctiveness and the associated visitor experiences.

The following outlines the proposed clusters and the synergies to be consolidated:

#### Glendalough

Since St. Kevin journeyed to Glendalough in the 6th Century, inspired by the beauty of the lakes and valley, the area has been a place of pilgrimage and a place for people to visit from nearby and around the world. The valley is of international significance

for its religious heritage. The industrial lead, zinc and silver mining heritage, dating to the 1790s provides another layer of significance, within the outstanding landscape setting. Added to this heritage/cultural focus, the valley has become a magnet for a wide range of outdoor recreational visitors.

The plans for Glendalough Valley identify how the qualities of the area can be improved, by managing the impact of visitors, enhancing their experience and encouraging people to stay longer to enjoy and explore the area better. As outlined, key to this will be to encourage people to explore and enjoy other parts of the County, dispersing the pressure that is currently focussed on the Valley. It is in that context that the proposed 'clusters' are particularly important, spreading the pressure as well as the benefits of tourism.

#### Active Outdoors

To the north of the County, there is an existing 'cluster' around Roundwood and Ballinastoe, where the upland landscape is the setting for a wide range of outdoor activities, with a focus on destination mountain bike trails, that attract visitors from across Ireland and beyond.

It is proposed to consolidate the 'Active Outdoors' offer, strengthening the awareness of opportunities in the area, enhancing the quality of experience, including the hospitality/accommodation offer. A key element will be delivery of the Signature Trails identified in the Recreational Trails Masterplan.

#### Blessington

Blessington is the hub for an area of rolling landscapes and expanses of water. With the mountain backdrop, this area lends itself to a 'gentle' enjoyment of outdoor activities. The Greenway, provides an extensive, safe and easily accessible facility. Likewise, the lakes, as relatively sheltered water bodies provide opportunities for a range of safe, readily accessible watersports.

Opportunities to consolidate this offer should be pursued, improving and enhancing the existing provision, with hospitality and accommodation provided.

#### Baltinglass

Stakeholder engagement highlighted the wealth of points of heritage interest in the

area. The complex of hillforts is particularly impressive.

There is an opportunity for awareness of the heritage of the area to be strengthened, encouraging exploration of the towns, villages and surrounding landscape.

#### **Tinahely & Shillelagh**

To the south of the county, is a landscape of rolling valleys and woodlands, with picturesque villages, steeped in history and culture and with a strong reputation for hospitality.

Opportunities to encourage exploration of this area and for it to strengthen its distinctive offer are encouraged.

#### **Uplands**

The Mountains dominate the central part of the County. This landscape of peaks rising to over 900m, dramatic valleys, waterfalls and lakes attracts visitors from nearby and from abroad. This is a landscape with extensive and well-used trail networks. For people experiencing it from cars and coaches, the Wicklow Gap, Sally Gap and Military Road, with views over Lough Tay and Lough Dan provide dramatic introductions to the area.

The Recreational Trail Masterplan outlines how access to the uplands can be better managed, encouraging dispersal, which takes pressure off areas where the environment and visitor experience are currently compromised. Improved parking provision is proposed giving confidence in their security and with basic facilities, that encourage use.

#### **Wicklow's Coast**

The County's 60Km of coastline includes dramatic headlands and sweeping beaches, traditional seaside towns, attractions such as the Sea Life Centre and rich maritime heritage. Long stretches are not easily accessed or even visible, greatly diminishing awareness of this outstanding asset.

It is in this context and cognisant of the environmental sensitivities that it is proposed to promote Wicklow's coast, encouraging dispersal of visitors and improving the quality of experience, including where possible, walking/cycling connections. The coastal towns should be the focus of sustained regeneration, developing their

specific visitor offer, accommodation and hospitality provision.

#### **The Garden County**

Across the County there are many grand properties with beautiful, managed grounds, these include places such as Russborough House, Kilmacurragh Botanic Gardens and Druid's Glen Hotel and Golf Course.

These are jewels in the county's visitor offer. It is proposed to better promote these destinations, encouraging people who visit one to explore others.

#### **Connectivity**

The M11 and N81 make Wicklow County an easy place to access, with proximity to Dublin making it a popular place for day-trips.

Key to sustainable development of tourism in the county will be using the main roads and rail links as points of connection, from where to enjoy exploring the county, at a slower pace and over a longer period.

Investment in the rail infrastructure is a priority, providing a regular service to Rathdrum, restoring the town's importance as a base for exploring the county. This will provide a viable alternative to access to Glendalough by car and coach, as well as strengthening connections along the coast.

Walking and cycling connections, including strategic routes from Arklow to Rathrum and onwards to Lara will support initiatives to deliver sustainable modal shift as well as being visitor attractors in their own right.

#### **Hubs**

It is important that there should be a clear vision for each town and village to thrive, strengthening their distinctive identity and complementing each other.

The role of Laragh as a vibrant village that is synonymous with the Glendalough experience is outlined in the Glendalough Valley Plan.

Rathdrum will have a key role to play, providing access by rail and integrating existing attractions such as Clara Lara Fun Park and the major investment at Avondale. Elsewhere, Arklow should be developed strongly, with its maritime heritage.

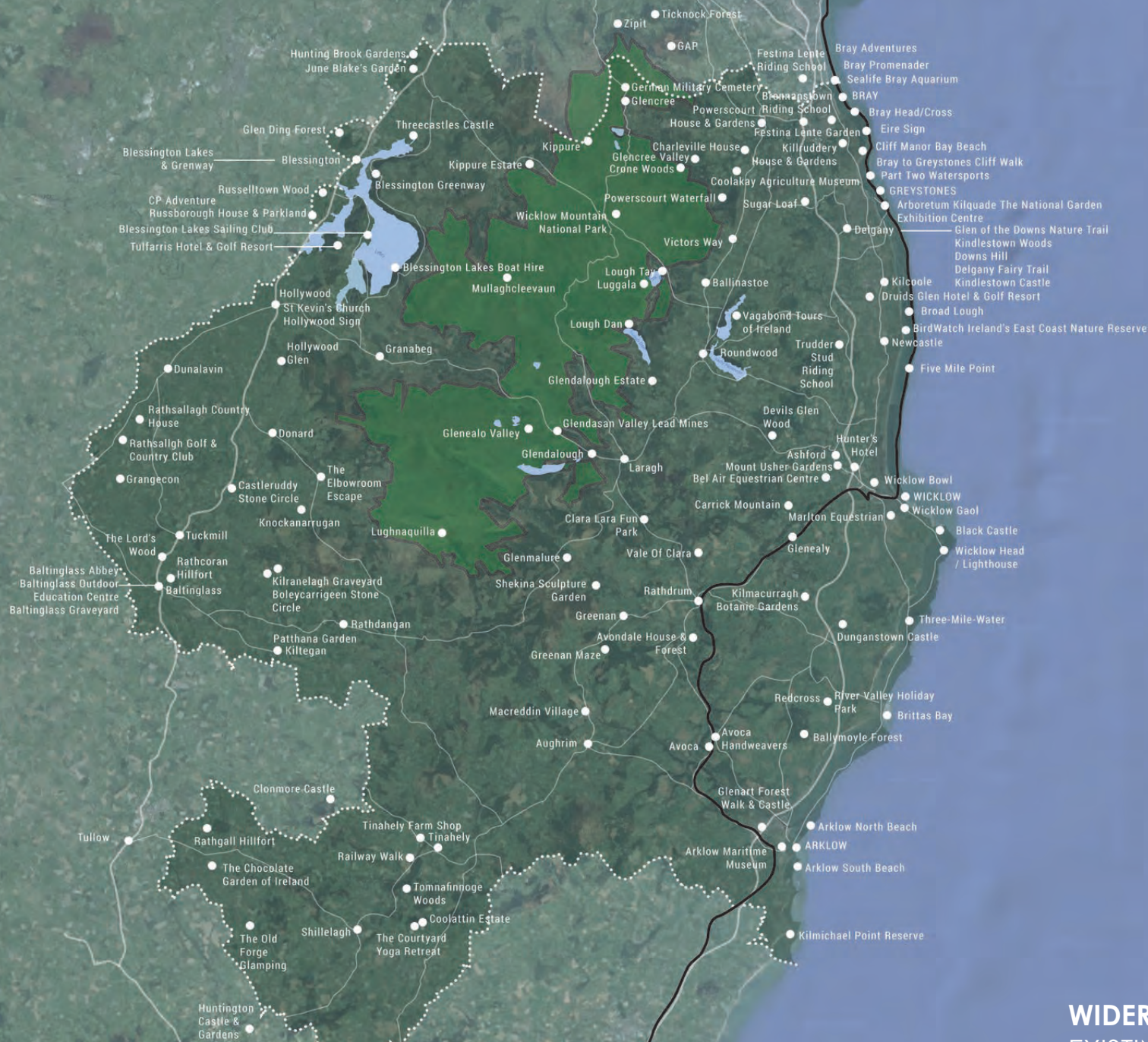
The hubs should become the focus for a diversity of types of accommodation, with assured quality standards and associated hospitality and cultural provision that will be central to the visitor experience.

**Establishing a Strong Cohesive Identity**

It is proposed to establish a strong 'brand' identity within which the various visitor destinations gain collective strength. This would apply principles similar to places such as the Lake District or Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.

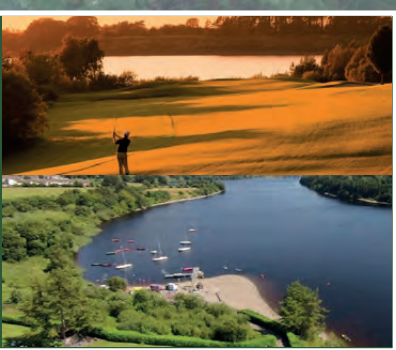
It is proposed to establish a 'Wicklow Mountains' brand for the uplands and their fringes. To the east of the M/N11 would be 'Wicklow's Coast'

Signage, online and promotional material will use this to strengthen cohesion, encouraging people to see these as areas to explore, rather than being individual locations to visit. The online presence will be particularly important facilitating visitors in understanding the breadth of offer and how to plan extended stays.



**WIDER WICKLOW**  
EXISTING VISITOR  
EXPERIENCES

Blessington



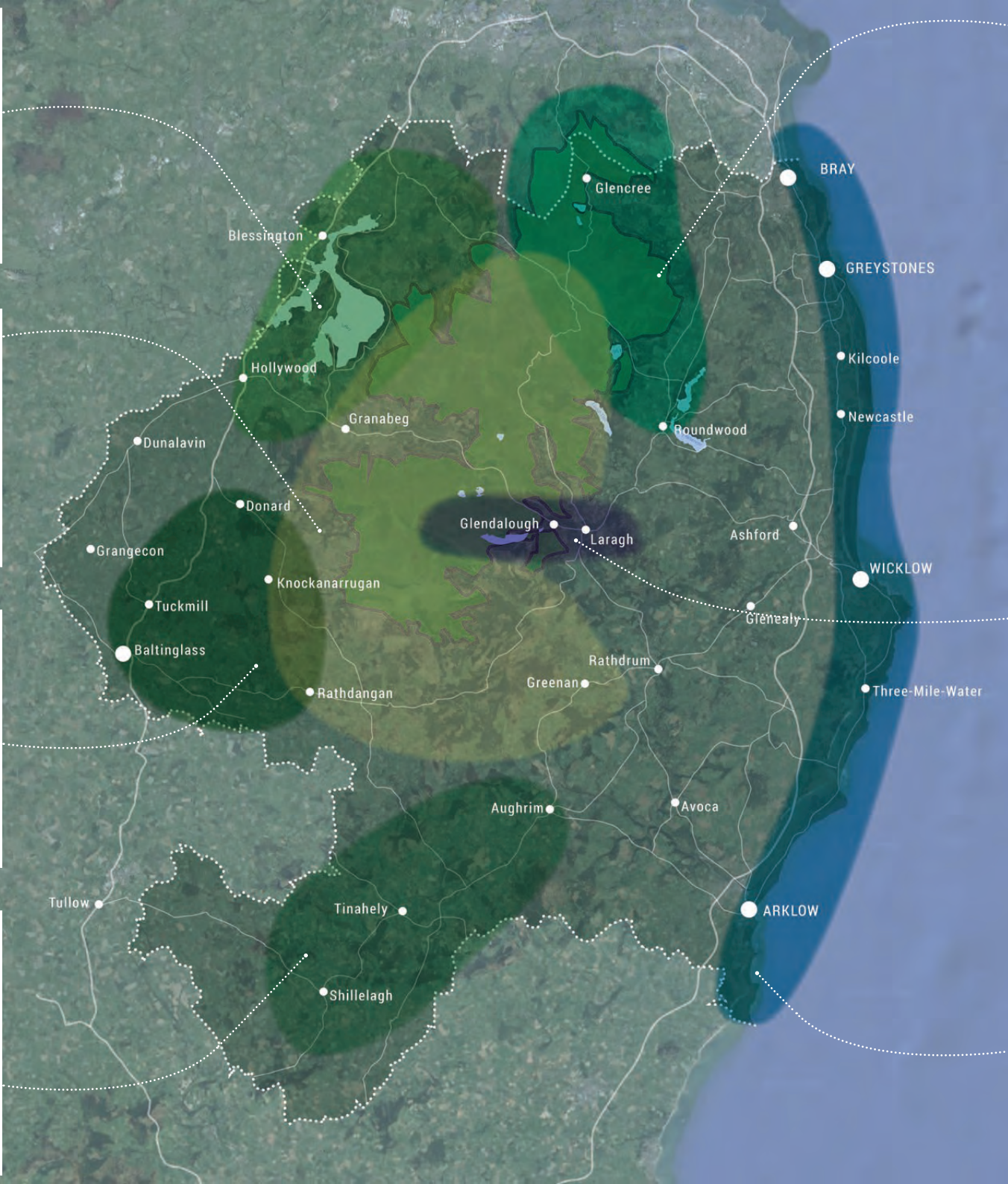
Uplands



Baltinglass



Tinahely & Shillelagh



Active Outdoors



Glendalough



Wicklow Coast



**WIDER WICKLOW  
PROPOSED  
CLUSTERS**



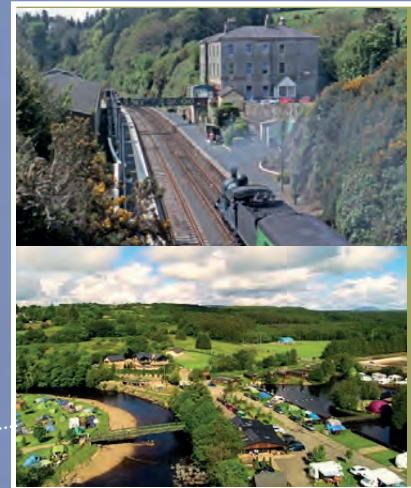
**WIDER WICKLOW**  
THE GARDEN  
COUNTY



Laragh

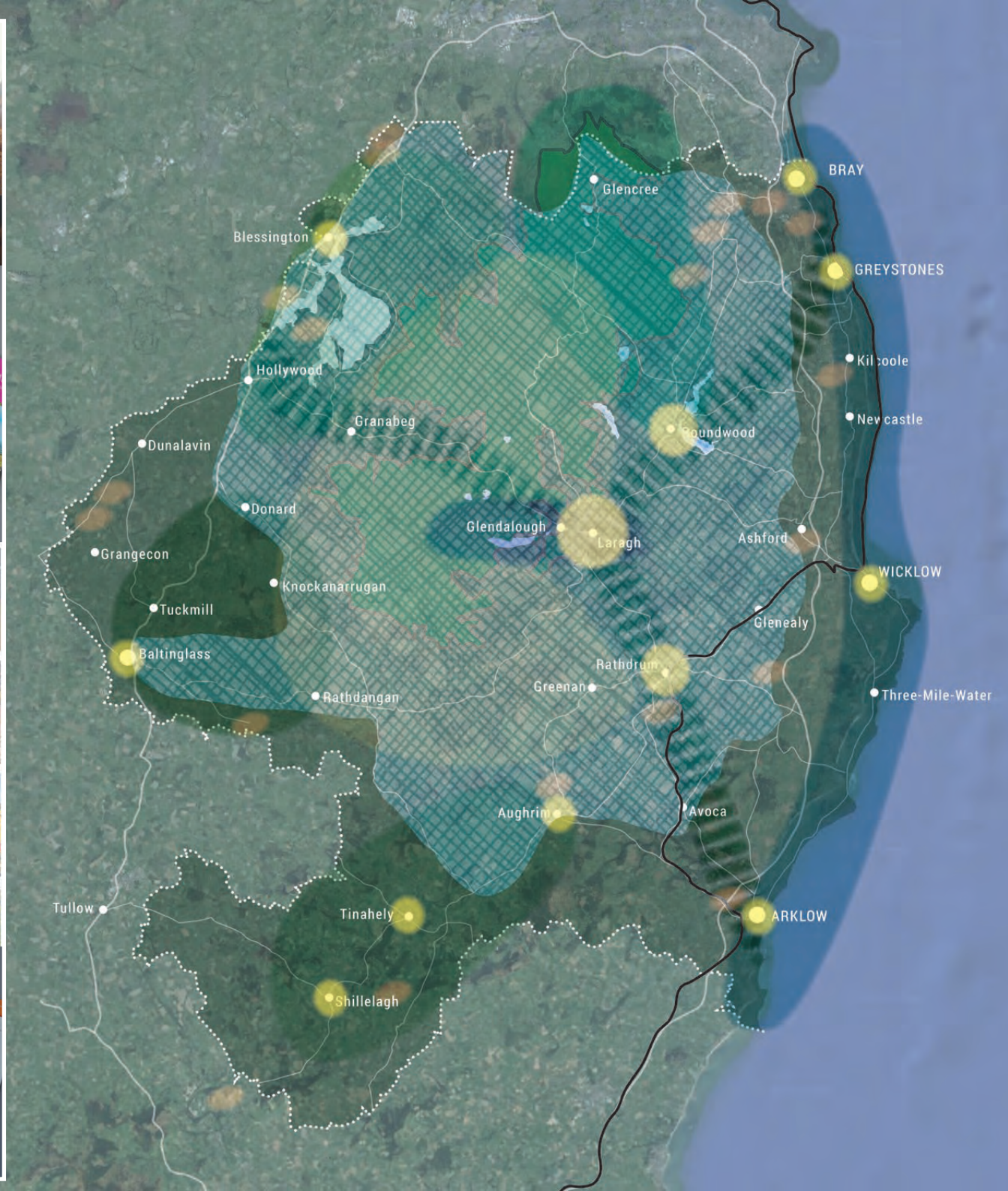


Valley Networks



Rathdrum

**WIDER WICKLOW**  
HUBS &  
CONNECTIONS



# WIDER WICKLOW

## WICKLOW MOUNTAINS - A STRONG IDENTITY

The background image is a landscape photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, there is a grassy field with a small stream on the right. A large, multi-story stone ruin, possibly a castle or a large house, stands in the middle ground. The ruin is made of rough-hewn stones and has several windows and doorways. Behind the ruin, there are rolling hills and mountains covered in green vegetation. The sky is filled with large, white clouds. The overall tone of the image is natural and scenic.

Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park

# Wider Wicklow Interpretation Vision

06 December 2021

## *‘Identify what techniques could be developed to alleviate capacity issues at pressure points within Glendalough, Wicklow Mountains National Park and greater County Wicklow.’*

Fáilte Ireland

### **Invitation to Tender**

Visitor Experience & Management Masterplan  
for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park  
and Visitor Orientation Recommendations for Co. Wicklow

The purpose of this document is to explore opportunities to address an identified visitor capacity issue across the wider Wicklow area.

It is anticipated that by broadening the visitor proposition to include less visited County-wide attractions – and by facilitating greater appreciation of such sites through interpretation – ‘pressure points’ can be alleviated.

In particular, the mining and military heritage of areas surrounding Glendalough can add a richness to the visitor proposition and, importantly, deepen the visitor’s understanding and appreciation of the unique natural and cultural heritage of the region.

This document outlines some of the key narrative elements to be further explored through interpretation in the valleys and uplands near to Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park.

### Contents:

Introduction	2
Themes and topics	3
Developing a visitor proposition	18
Interpretation delivery mechanisms	22

### Appendix:

Interpretation strategy (WIP)	24
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Wider Wicklow

## Themes and topics

DRAFT

## Wider Wicklow

### Themes and topics

This diagram illustrates the diversity of themes and topics spread throughout the wider Wicklow area.



## Weighting

The Wider Wicklow region has a series of themes and topics that can shape interpretation and visitor journeys throughout the county.

Thematic areas have been weighted with the following principles in mind, based on best practice significance assessments:

**Historic significance:**

A theme or topic may be historically significant for its association with people, events, places or themes; with local histories, events, or broader nationally important stories.

**Aesthetic significance:**

Stories of natural beauty, landscape or physical examples of craftsmanship and skill.

**Scientific or research significance:**

Themes or topics with potential and important scientific outcomes, including archaeological finds, ecological or biological research (land and marine), or sites containing documentary or oral history materials.

**Social/spiritual significance:**

Sites reflecting current cultural or social concerns or meanings, as well as sites with connections to religion or spirituality, whether organised or more casual.

With particular notice paid to representativeness, uniqueness/rarity and interpretative potential the significance of each theme/topic has been weighted accordingly, providing a framework which will help shape narrative experiences.

1

Natural  
History and  
Biodiversity

Ecclesiastical  
and Spiritual  
Heritage

2

Ancient  
Monuments  
and Sites

Big Houses,  
Castles  
and Formal  
Gardens

Rebellions/  
Independence

Mining and  
Extractive  
Industries

3

Marine and  
Coastal  
Biodiversity

Viking and  
Maritime  
Heritage

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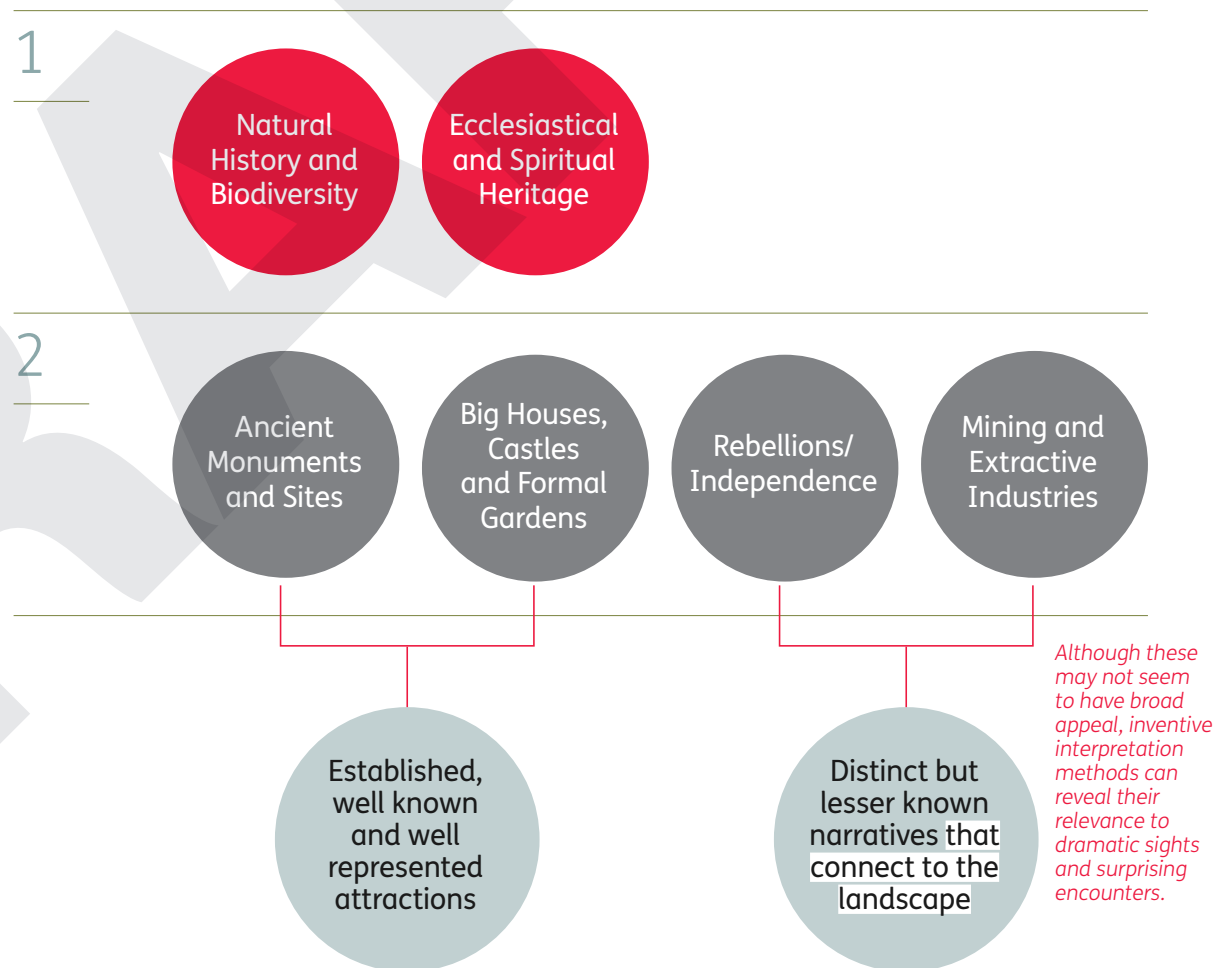
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## Natural History and Biodiversity

Weighting: 1

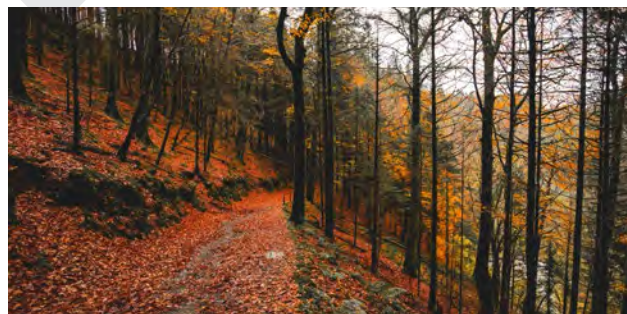
The importance of the National Park and areas of natural heritage within the region; its social significance as spaces for engaging with nature for those living in urban areas of Dublin and North Wicklow; historic significance relating to use of the land and its resources.

### Topics:

- Habitats and biodiversity
- Rewilding and human impacts on Irish natural landscapes
- Blanket bogs and uplands
- Engaging mindfully with natural world.

### Potential Sites and Activities:

- Tree felling and charcoal production in Glendalough – all landscape has been altered by human activities
- Tomnafinnoge Woodlands (last of Shillelagh Forest – original forest cover)
- Blanket bogs and heaths in the Uplands
- Vale of Clara oak forest
- The Lord's Wood
- Crone Wood
- Glen of the Downs forests and walks
- River systems e.g. Three-Mile-Water, east Wicklow River Trust, Meeting of the Waters
- Ballymoyle Forest
- Baltinglass Outdoor Education Centre



## Natural History and Biodiversity

Weighting: 1

*‘Ireland is a land where the past is ever present, both in the mind ... and in the landscape.’*

**Estyn Evans**

Prehistoric and early Christian Ireland  
1966

*‘Wicklow is the garden of Ireland; its prominent feature is, indeed, sublimity – wild grandeur, healthful and refreshing; but among its high and bleak mountains there are numerous rich and fertile valleys, luxuriantly wooded and with the most romantic rivers running through them, forming in their course, an endless variety of cataracts’*

**S C Hall**

Handbooks for Ireland: Dublin and Wicklow  
1853

*‘Landscapes are much more than one frozen moment. They are palimpsests revealing, once you learn how to look, layer after layer of dynamic natural and cultural changes.’*

**Paddy Woodworth**

The Irish Times  
25 January 2020

## Ecclesiastical and Spiritual Heritage

Weighting: 1

Special stories of saints and ecclesiastical life still in existence in the landscape; one of the most complete monastic settlements in Ireland; geographic spread of sites across Wicklow an indication of the significance of religious heritage to the region. Connections to the landscape to a religious way of life now mostly lost.

### Topics:

- The life of St Kevin and the formation of Glendalough
- Monastic life in Wicklow
- Pilgrimage and journeys to knowledge
- Understanding and using the natural world
- Mindfulness and connection with nature

### Potential Sites and Activities:

- Baltinglass Abbey and Graveyard
- Aghowle Church
- Brittas Bay Landing Site and Inis Baithin Monastery
- Castletimon Ogham Stone
- Kiltranelagh Graveyard and standing stones (one of the oldest cemeteries operating in the world)
- St Kevin's Church and St Kevin's Way Pilgrim Trail
- Glendalough Monastic Settlement
- Tearmann Spirituality Centre
- Pilgrim Paths
- Glendalough Hermitage Centre
- Slighe Chualann – ancient road now mirrored by the Wicklow Way



## Ecclesiastical and Spiritual Heritage

Weighting: 1

*‘Most important of all, people come as pilgrims, responding to the sacred energy of the landscape which drew St. Kevin to withdraw here in search of his God. The spiritual heritage of Glendalough is unsurpassed. This is indeed holy ground. Pilgrim, go gently.’*

**Glendalough Hermitage Centre**

<https://glendaloughhermitage.ie/glendalough/>

*‘A prayer his body makes entirely  
For he has forgotten self, forgotten bird  
And on the riverbank forgotten the river’s name.’*

**St Kevin and the Blackbird**

Seamus Heaney  
1996

*‘Great is the pilgrimage of Coemgen,  
If men should perform it aright;  
To go seven times to their fair is the same  
As to go once to Rome.’*

**Bethada Náem nÉrenn:**

**Lives of Irish Saints, Vol. II**

**Translations, Notes, Indexes,**

ed. and trans. Charles Plummer

1922

## Military History

Weighting: 2

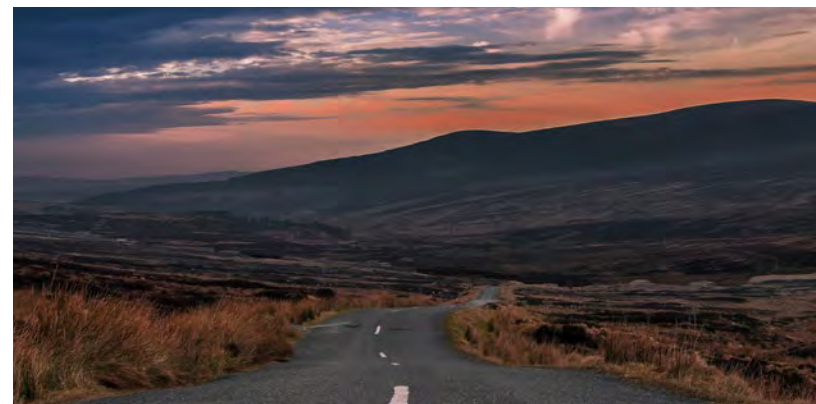
This Military Road and its associated stories of the nationally important 1798 Rebellion is both unique and highly representative for this important historical story. Remaining elements in the landscape can be used as guideposts for exploring further.

### Topics:

- 1798 Rebellion and activities in Wicklow
- Michael Dwyer's knowledge of Wicklow's uplands
- The Military Road – development and building
- Post-rebellion road use
- Connections to land and landscape by rebels and the need to control the terrain
- Changing use of road and associated buildings

### Potential Sites and Activities:

- The Military Road/1798 Rebellion key points: Glencree Barracks and German cemetery, plus access to turf bogs during World War Two fuel shortages
- Drumgoff Barracks (with crag called 'Dwyer's Lookout') and Aughavannagh Barracks with information about Michael Dwyer
- Eire sign on Bray Head
- Kilpedder Rifle Range
- Glen of Imaal
- Michael Collins and connection to Greystones
- Coastal Martello towers.



## Wider Wicklow

### Themes and topics



Glencree Barracks



Lough Bray



Sally Gap



Drumgoff Barracks



Aughavanna Barracks



## Military History

*‘Remaining elements in the landscape can be used as guideposts for exploring further.’*



Contextualising viewpoints through interpretation



### THE MILITARY ROADS, COUNTY OF WICKLOW

The Roads and Aurora Camp, appear in the Middle ground – in the Foreground the Lord Lieutenant and Suit – with the Soldiery and Peasantry employed in blasting, and removing the huge rocks, so numerous in this romantic Country.

S. Alken sculpt.

1804



### THE MILITARY ROADS, COUNTY of WICKLOW.

*The Roads and Aurora Camp, appear in the Middle ground – in the Fore ground the Lord Lieutenant and Suit – with the Soldiery and Peasantry employed in blasting, and removing the huge rocks, so numerous in this romantic Country.*

## Military History

Weighting: 2

*‘So we shall conduct him by the Military Road, from the cross-ways at Sally Gap, to Lough Bray. Here he finds himself in the heart of the most extravagantly wild mountain scenery, where numerous peaks raise their loft heath-clad brows on every side.’*

**G. N. Wright**

Guide To The County Of Wicklow  
1827

*‘Notice is hereby given that the mountain roads are now opened by the troops under my command. The possession of those roads, passes and mountains will most effectually open the country, and enable me to protect the persons and property of all its loyal inhabitants ... and I will give immediate protection to any of the inhabitants who shall assist me, or any detachment of the troops, in securing any of the gang of Robbers headed by Michael Dwyer’.*

**Lieut. Col. George Stewart**

Freeman’s Journal, 10 June  
1800

*‘The extreme tranquillity which has prevailed in this county for twenty years, has rendered these extensive structures quite unnecessary’.*

**G. N. Wright**

Guide To The County Of Wicklow  
1827

## Mining and extractive industries

Weighting: 2

Uniquely related to the valleys of Glenmalure, Glendasan and Glendalough, with strong connections to the extant landscape as well as telling individual stories of hardship and struggle.

### Topics:

- Wicklow's geology
- Early mining and iron production
- Lives of the miners; connection to the natural world
- Damage through extractive industries
- Decline of the industry

### Potential Sites and Activities:

- Glens of Lead Heritage Group - tours and talks
- Miner's Way
- International links to Scotland and Wales
- Fiddler's Row and Miner's Village in Glendasan
- Connection to mining structures in Glendalough valley
- Tunnels through Camaderry between two valleys
- Timber planting for tunnel supports
- Baravore rolls crusher house
- Lazy beds and gardens reflecting everyday life



## Wider Wicklow

### Interpretation delivery mechanisms

## Mining settlements

Text...

Many sites represent a rich heritage



## Mining Heritage

*‘Uniquely related to the valleys...  
with strong connections  
to the extant landscape.’*



Interpretation mechanisms

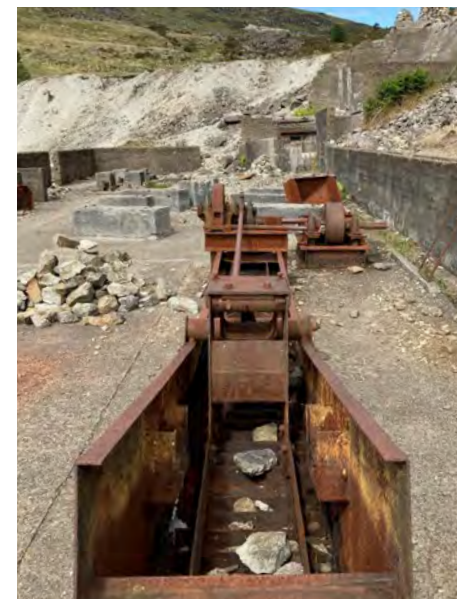
that reflect the materiality of mining



Reading the landscape



Surviving evidence



Interventions that blend into the landscape



## GOLD MINES, COUNTY OF WICKLOW

In the Fore-ground are several Figures employed in working or buddeling; in the Middle ground they are seen digging & barrowing the Earth, which contains the particles of Gold: on the first discovery of these Mines, pieces of pure Gold were found valued at eighty pounds and upwards, one of which may be seen at the Levarian Museum. The Scene closes with Croughan and the adjoining Hills.

T. Sautell Roberts delt ; J. Bluck.



## GOLD MINES, COUNTY of WICKLOW.

*In the Fore-ground are several Figures employed in working or buddeling; in the Middle ground they are seen digging & barrowing the Earth, which contains the particles of Gold: on the first discovery of these Mines, pieces of pure Gold were found valued at eighty pounds and upwards, one of which may be seen at the Levarian Museum. The Scene closes with Croughan and the adjoining Hills.*

## Mining and extractive industries

Weighting: 2

*‘It is probably no surprise that the men drank and played hard as their working day down the mines was anything but easy...The work was dangerous and the risk of tunnels collapsing was always present.’*

### Exploring the Mining Heritage of County Wicklow

Wicklow County Council  
2008

*‘The vale of Glenmalure is one of the most remote, and arguably, one of the most beautiful of all of the glens of County Wicklow. In viewing its majestic tranquillity... it is perhaps hard to visualise the tides of events which have swept through this glen: from the time during the last Ice Age, to the periods of human occupation up to and beyond 36 the time of the events of the 1798 rebellion and 19th Century mining activity.’*

### Exploring the Mining Heritage of County Wicklow

Wicklow County Council  
2008

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Wider Wicklow

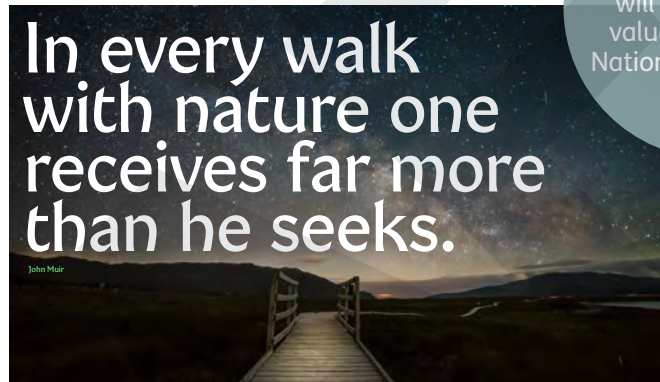
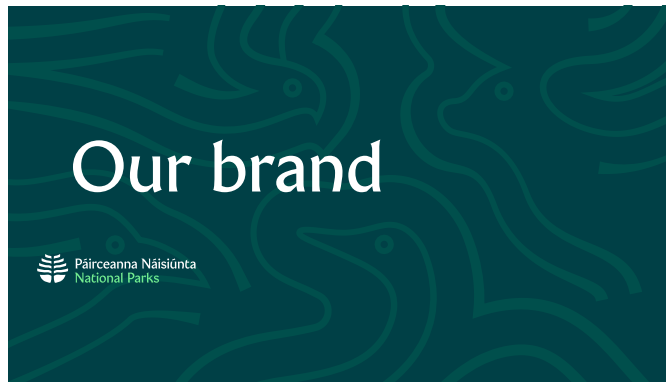
## Developing a visitor proposition

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## Wider Wicklow Brand alignment

In developing a visitor proposition for the wider Wicklow we should be aware of other propositions that are closely related, for example that offered by the Glendalough Ecclesiastical site and by Wicklow National Park.

The Wider Wicklow visitor proposition will embrace the values of the new National Parks brand



National Parks  
Our brand

Our values

5

- 1 Oneness with nature**  
National Parks provide unique opportunities to be at one with nature; the purest of experiences in nature giving emotions of awe, wonderment, feelings of connectedness and peacefulness.
- 2 Guardians of Ireland's nature**  
National Parks are guardians of Ireland's unique geography and ecology for future generations.
- 3 Privilege & respect**  
Visiting National Parks is a privilege and visitors should treat their environments with appropriate respect.
- 4 Conservation education leader**  
National Parks' responsibilities and educational initiatives do not end at the park boundaries.
- 5 For everyone**  
National Parks welcome everyone to experience nature's wonder and benefits to their own level or ability.

National Parks  
Our brand

Our colours  
Wicklow palette

Our colours  
Wicklow palette applied

40

Wicklow Accent  
C63 M17 Y100 K3  
R113 G158 B14  
PANTONE 377c

Wicklow Shade  
C92 M38 Y89 K37  
R0 G87 B51  
PANTONE 7484c

Secondary Base  
C100 M82 Y45 K51  
R15 G38 B64  
PANTONE 389c

Wicklow Pastel  
C15 M1 Y25 K0  
R227 G236 B207  
PANTONE 9600c

White  
C00 M00 Y00 K00  
R255 G255 B255

Wicklow Mountains National Park  
Wicklow  
Wicklow Trail Guide

Wicklow National Park  
Conservation  
National Parks  
Conservation  
Programmes

Educational  
programmes  
at Wicklow  
Mountains  
National Park

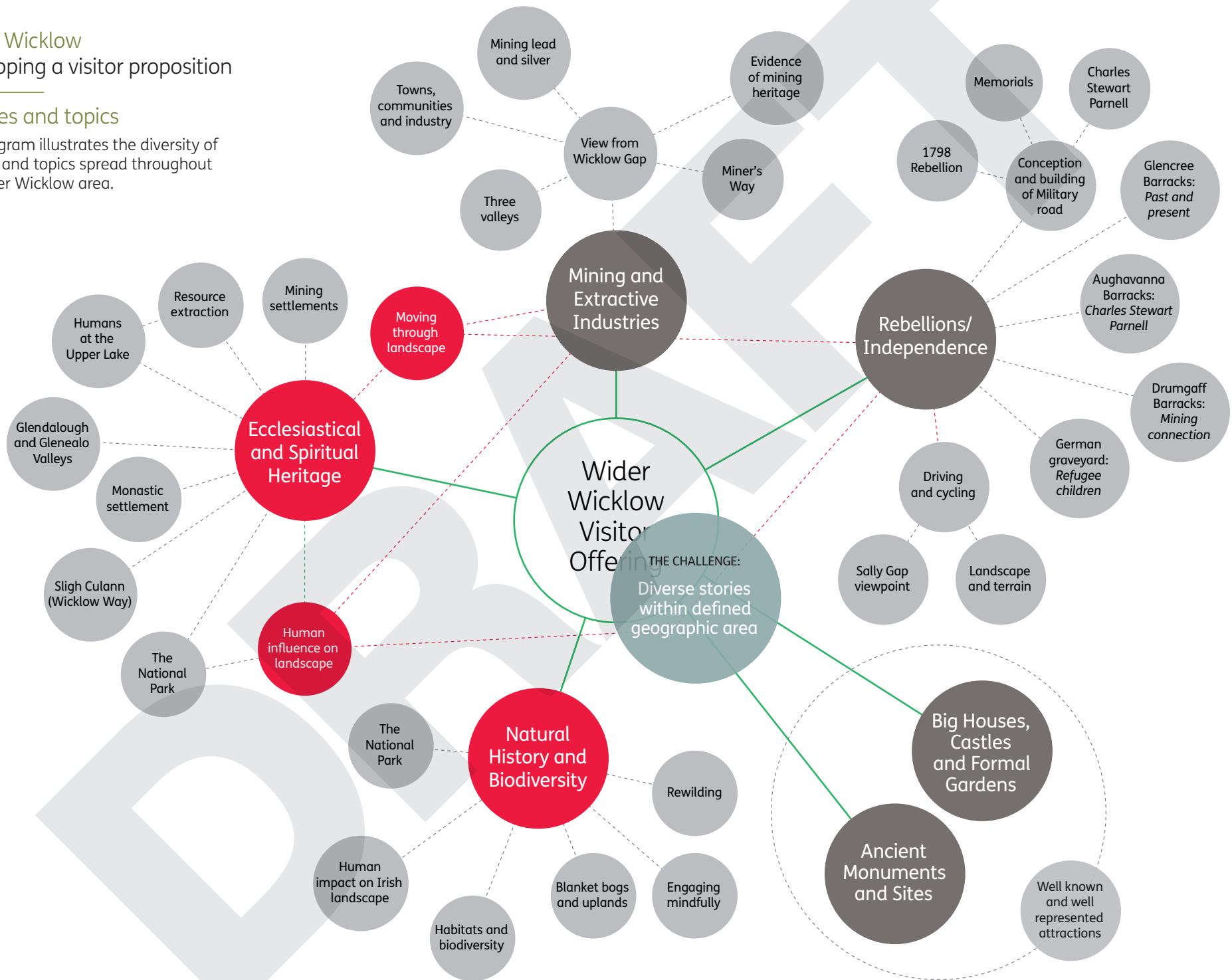
Make your  
own wildflower  
garden

## Wider Wicklow

### Developing a visitor proposition

#### Themes and topics

This diagram illustrates the diversity of themes and topics spread throughout the wider Wicklow area.



## Wider Wicklow

### Developing a visitor proposition

#### Draft visitor proposition

Not necessarily to 'external consumption' the proposition should capture the essence of the visitor offering and will guide visitor communications, including area-wide interpretation and marketing.





*Glendalough and Wicklow Masterplan*

# Wider Wicklow Interpretation Strategy

Issue: 02  
05/08/2021

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# Introduction

Alongside the interpretation vision for the Glendalough Valley, we have envisaged interpretation provision in the wider Wicklow region. In particular, the mining and military heritage in the areas surrounding Glendalough add a richness to the visitor experience and deepen the unique nature of the natural and cultural heritage of Wicklow.

This document outlines some of the key narrative elements to be further explored through interpretation in the valleys and uplands near to Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park. It takes into account the extensive research and knowledge held by specialist interest groups and the local communities, and visualises how visitors could be effectively drawn throughout Wicklow and its amazing heritage and stories.

High profile and well-established attractions such as Powerscourt, Russborough House and parts of the Wicklow Mountains National Park experience significant capacity challenges.

It is anticipated that by focussing a visitor proposition on less visited county-wide attractions, and by facilitating greater appreciation of such sites through interpretation, pressure on over-visited locations can be alleviated.

*‘Identify what techniques could be developed to alleviate capacity issues at pressure points within Glendalough, Wicklow Mountains National Park and greater County Wicklow.’*

# Mining in Wicklow

## - A brief overview

The Wicklow Mountains have a rich mining history. Copper was mined in Avoca, and lead was mined in Glenmalur, Glendasan and Glendalough. Within the National Park, spoil heaps and ruined mining villages can be seen at Glendasan (on the Wicklow Gap road) and at the Miners' Village in Glendalough.

### Gold rush

A gold rush occurred in Wicklow in the 1790s, when a nugget of gold was found after forestry work alongside the Gold Mines River, flowing off Croghan Kinshelagh to join the Aughrim River, near Woodenbridge. A rush of people came to the area to dig and pan for gold, dramatically changing the landscape and bringing thousands of people to search for gold and provide the supplies required to support the searchers. The reputed largest nugget was of 22 oz and was given to King George III in 1796. It is rumoured that he had it made into a snuff box, but there is no certainty about this or many other gold stories originating in the Gold Mines River gold rush.<sup>1</sup>

### Lead and Iron

420 million years ago, two tectonic plates collided. The area that is now County Wicklow, buckled and twisted, and a large batholith of molten magma was squeezed up. The magma did

not break the surface, but cooled slowly underground, to form granite. At the edge of the magma, where it met the overlying rocks, minerals formed — lead, zinc, silver and others.

Over the following 420 million years, the overlying rocks were eroded, exposing the granite that now forms much of the Wicklow Mountains. Where the granite meets the mica-schist, the minerals became the target for a mining industry that operated between 1800 and 1963. The most successful areas of mining in the Wicklow Mountains were in the valleys of Glendalough and Glendasan. The vein of metal ore known as the Luganure Vein ran through Camaderry Mountain which separates both valleys.

Lead was discovered in the Glendasan Valley in 1798 by Thomas Weaver, an engineer working on the Military Road. By 1809 mining had begun and the first vein to be exploited was Luganure, situated high up on the slopes of Camaderry Mountain. By 1820, the mine had ceased to be profitable, and it was closed and sold.

A few years later, in 1824, the Mining Company of Ireland (M.C.I.), purchased the Luganure Mine and worked it for the next 66 years. During this period profits fluctuated, but as a whole, the mines prospered, extracting 50,000 tonnes of lead and 25,000 ounces of silver, making it the most important lead mine in Ireland at the time. Most of the exploitation took place above the Glendasan Valley where eight tunnels were worked. Ore was transported to the Ballycorus lead smelting site to be turned into lead or sent for export.

Although probably better known to most visitors, the Glendalough Mines had a shorter history and extraction of ore was only done for 25 years, commencing in 1850. In 1850 a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Meehan, Matthew Parkes, Vincent Gallagher, Ronan Hennessy and Sarah Gatley. 2014. 'The Geological Heritage of Wicklow: An audit of County Geological Sites in Wicklow'. This report is an action of the County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2009 – 2014.

series of eight connecting tunnels were bored between the Glendasan and Glendalough valleys, remains of which can still be seen today. Ore was transferred through to Glendalough and it was processed in the valley. In 1868, an inclined railway system was installed on the southern side of the Glenealo Valley, though no trace of it remains today. Today the area at the top of the Glendalough Valley is still referred to as Van Diemen's Land, the name for the penal colony in Tasmania given to the area by miners in the 1850s, referencing the remoteness of the site.

The mines were put up for sale in 1888 and although some mining continued at times into the 20th century, the mines ceased permanently in 1963. A fatal accident in 1957 also hastened the end of mining, when 24-year-old father, James Mernagh, was killed in an explosion. Toxic heavy metals from slag heaps and mining operations leached into watercourses within the valleys. In the Glendalough valley, a square shaped tailings pond was constructed to prevent this contaminated water from flowing into the upper lake, and this can still be seen today.

Mining in the Wicklow Mountains changed the landscape in a number of important ways. Requirements to house miners (given the distance from other settlements) and provide education to their children led to housing developments and schools being built on the valley floors, including Fiddler's Row. This was so named as it's recorded that good musicians lived here. Miners raised money to build the Catholic Church in Laragh (opened in 1851) and the Church of Ireland Church also in Laragh (1843). Timber to provide supports for the mining tunnels was in high demand, and in the 1850s and 60s The Mining Company of Ireland planted approximately one million trees in the Glendalough Valley for use as timber props in the mines. This timber was also used for commercial sales.

Life as a miner was tough and dangerous, with the average life expectancy for a miner in the 1840s and 1850s only 42 years. Drinking and other perceived vices were common amongst miners letting off steam from their physically exhausting work days.

Remnants of the mining operations can be visited particularly in the Glendasan Valley at the remains of the Fox Rock and Moll Doyle mines. Various pieces of machinery and items used to process ore during the 1950s remains. Some remains of housing and lazy beds for growing food can also be seen, indicating the lifestyles of the miners and their families.

The Glenmalure Valley also has a long history of mining, with evidence of mining operations being carried out from the late 1700s and during the 1798 Rebellion. Ballinafunshoge Mine was the earliest mine in operation in Co Wicklow and was the most productive mine in Glenmalure. The main mining centres in Glenmalure were at Ballinafunshoge, Ballinagoneen and Baravore. Remnants of a smelter, a school house and residential areas suggest approximately 30 men worked in the mines and may have lived with their families alongside. As with the Glendalough Valley there are mature Scots Pine trees nearby planted originally to support the nearby mines for pit props, building floors and joists, as well as other functions.

There are also remains of two crushing and grinding plants at the Baravore mine. One is from 1851 and housed a single Cornish rolls crusher. In 1851 the population of Baravore was 278 people living in small dwellings built by the mining company. Local folklore claims that 100 lights were carried across the paved ford in the River Avonbeg as mining families made their way to church services on Christmas morning. The newer crusher plant was built between 1859 and 1860, and has been described as 'undoubtedly the finest extant example in

Ireland of a rolls crusher house'. It was powered by a huge water wheel.<sup>2</sup>

### Stoneworking

Wicklow granite has been used as a building stone of choice for many centuries, especially in Dublin City, but also in innumerable buildings local to the outcrop of the rock. At its height some 200 men were employed in stonecutting particularly around the Ballyknockan area near Blessington. The rock was used to build very many of Dublin's finest buildings such as the railway stations, Glasnevin Cemetery Chapel,



Granite features in Ballyknockan. Source: Wicklow Heritage



<sup>2</sup> Information sourced from: <https://glensoflead.wicklowheritage.org/> <https://www.wicklowmountainsnationalpark.ie/history/mining/> O'Toole, Carmel. 2015. *Glenmalure, The Wild Heart of the Mountains*. ERA-MAPTEC Ltd

gateway and mortuary, St Paul's on Arran Quay, the RDS entrance and many more. It was also used in buildings across

Ireland such as Kylemore Castle, and even exported to Liverpool, France and for the Cathedral of St John's in Newfoundland. The pride of the stonecutters in their work extended to their homes too, and the whole village of Ballyknockan is replete with quirky details of interest in the stonework of homes and even on barns and sheds, fenceposts, walls and pathways<sup>3</sup>. The tradition of stonecutting is still carried on but on a much smaller scale than during the famine period when over 400 people were directly involved with the quarries<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Meehan, Matthew Parkes, Vincent Gallagher, Ronan Hennessy and Sarah Gatley. 2014. 'The Geological Heritage of Wicklow: An audit of County Geological Sites in Wicklow'. This report is an action of the County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2009 – 2014.

<sup>4</sup> <https://wicklowheritage.omeka.net/items/show/10>

# The Military Road

## - A brief overview

The Great Military Road runs from Rathfarnham to Aughavannagh, with a side arm from Enniskerry to Glencree. The route from Rathfarnham to Aughavannagh covers 36 miles (58 km). It was constructed between 1801 and 1809, and is still an important north-south route across the Wicklow Mountains.

During the 1798 Rebellion, the inaccessibility of the Wicklow Mountains proved a problem for the government forces. Four roads crossed the county from east to west, but none ran north south to connect them. The rebel army, initially led by General Joseph Holt, used the Wicklow Mountains as a place to hide. After Holt's surrender in 1798, the role of rebel leader passed to Michael Dwyer. Dwyer was born in the mountains, and had family and friends there to help him. With a band of followers he lived a fugitive guerrilla life in the mountains.

The construction of a military road through the Wicklow Mountains was first suggested in the 1580s to deter Irish rebellion when the Elizabethan administration of the "Pale" experienced difficulty suppressing the "Tory" fighters of the O'Byrne and O'Toole septs. Construction of the road began in 1800 through parts of the county "infested with insurgent plunderers".

Towards the end of 1798, Colonel John Skerret of the Durham Fencibles suggested building a military road across the mountains. The idea was simple. The road would enable troops to travel quickly to wherever they were needed. At the same time, it would restrict the rebel's ability to move unseen. An additional factor was the fear of a potential French invasion on

the East coast at this time, which might necessitate rapid movement of troops.

The road was built mainly by soldiers working in four teams. Each team had an officer and 50 soldiers. Local people were also welcome to help, but most had no desire to. The locals felt that once the road was constructed, land in the area would become more valuable, and their rents would rise. The work was very physical, and the soldiers had to live in tents or houses made of sods. The bridges along the route were made of local stone. Tragically, by today's standards, the stone was often taken from local ancient ring forts.

The Great Military Road was finally finished in 1809. It cost £43,500, working out at over £1,000 per mile. It was twice what Taylor originally budgeted for. Dwyer surrendered in December 1803, long before the road was completed. At Waterloo, Napoleon was defeated and the threat of a French invasion receded. Eventually, the road ceased to be purely for military use. The local civilians were always permitted to use the road. Strangers who wished to travel the route had to obtain a permit of transit by application from the Barrack Master in Dublin.

### The Barracks

As the threat of a French invasion increased, it was decided to also make four permanent barracks along the route, with a fifth barracks at Glen of Imaal. Private contractors were employed to build barracks at Glencree, Laragh, Drumgoth (Glenmalure), Aughavannagh and Glen of Imaal. Each was to house 100 men, and the Glen of Imaal Barrack was to house 200.

Each of these structures was surrounded with a raised redoubt, which is a defensive wall with steep sides from which fire could

be brought to bear on all points. The redoubts were armed with two cannons.

### *Glencree*

Glencree was the headquarters of the Great Military Road, and the place where travellers collected their pass to travel the route. The barracks was only used by the military for 40 years. In the 1840's the building became a government store. The Ordnance Survey used it as a base for a while, and it was also used by the Post Office. In the 1850's, the Oblate Fathers ran an Industrial School in the building. It operated for 100 years. In 1946-49, German refugee children escaping the war were hosted here. Today the barracks is used as a Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.

It is thought that close to one thousand children, aged from 5 to fifteen, travelled overland through mainland Europe and arrived by mail boat into Dun Laoghaire before continuing their journey by road to Glencree. The children were malnourished when they arrived, some were near death. Under the care of the French Sisters of Charity, they stayed at Glencree for a period of recuperation, rest and orientation. With health restored, they travelled onward again into the care of foster families throughout Ireland who had responded to newspaper advertisements placed by the Irish Red Cross.

Few records are available for the Industrial School period of Glencree's history. It seems like that despite the training, food and exercise provided to the boys, life was harsh and brutal for the most part. The reformatory closed its doors in 1940, when the staff and boys moved to Daingean Industrial School, County Offaly.

### *Laragh Barracks*

Nothing now remains of the Laragh Barracks. It was demolished in 1955. The site is known as the Ordnance Ground. Its last use was as a private residence, and before that it was used by the Laragh Mill as a store.

### *Drumgoff Barracks (Glenmalure)*

Drumgoff Barrack was only used by the military until 1844. It was then leased to the Wicklow Mining Company and was used as both office and living quarters. By 1868, mining had stopped in the valley, and the barracks site reverted to the land owner – the Kemmis family of Ballinacor House. Only a ruined shell of the building remains today.

### *Aughavannagh Barracks*

Aughavannagh Barracks still stands today, although it is deteriorating and is no longer considered safe. The building was only used militarily until 1825. The site then reverted to the landowner – William Parnell of Rathdrum, grandfather to Charles Stewart Parnell. They used part of the building as a hunting lodge. For some years the Irish Constabulary used part of the building as a garrison.

Another politician, John Redmond, acquired the property after Charles Stewart Parnell's death. In 1944, An Óige bought the property for £350. It was used very successfully as a youth hostel until 1998, when unfortunately, the building was declared unsafe and too costly to repair and maintain.

### *Leitrim Barrack (Glen of Imaal)*

Following the surrender of Michael Dwyer in 1803, Leitrim Barracks ceased to be very useful, and was expensive to maintain. A fire in 1914 resulted in the demolition of the building and very little now remains.<sup>5</sup>

### *Michael Dwyer*

Born in in the townland of Camara, in the Glen of Imaal in 1772, it's said he was influenced to enter into republicanism by his schoolteacher, Peter Birr. He joined the United Irishmen in 1797. In the summer of 1798, he fought with the rebels as captain under General Joseph Holt in battles at Arklow, Vinegar Hill, Ballyellis and Hacketstown. Under Holt's leadership, he withdrew to the safety of the Wicklow Mountains in mid-July.

Dwyer, with a small group of men began a guerrilla campaign in the Wicklow Mountains which was to last for the next five years, and would result in the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of pounds on the part of the Government, in a massive military campaign to catch him. His force was strengthened by many deserters from the military, who headed to Wicklow as the last rebel stronghold and who became the dedicated backbone of his force. In December 1803, Dwyer finally capitulated on terms that would allow him safe passage to America but the government reneged on the agreement, holding him in Kilmainham Jail until August 1805, when they transported him to New South Wales (Australia) as an unsentenced exile.

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<sup>5</sup> Information sourced from: <https://www.glencree.ie/history/> <https://www.wicklowmountainsnationalpark.ie/history/military-roads/> [https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/people/michael\\_dwyer\\_1772\\_-1825](https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/people/michael_dwyer_1772_-1825) <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dwyer-michael-12896>

# Landscape Change in Wicklow

Within the Park, there is a great diversity of habitats with blanket bog, heath and upland grassland being the most dominant. The Park also contains important woodlands such as semi-natural oakwoods and pine plantations. Other important habitats include glaciated corrie lakes and valleys, river valleys and streams and exposed rock and scree. Many of the habitats within the Park are important on a European level and the Park has been designated a Special Area of Conservation as a result. It is the aim of the Park to protect and conserve these habitats for our wildlife, whilst enabling the public to benefit from and appreciate our natural heritage.

The flora composition of the Park and Ireland can be traced back 10,000 years to the end of the Ice Age. As the climate changed and became warmer, the huge ice sheets covering the country gradually melted. As a result, sea level rose and Ireland became an island, separate from Britain and mainland Europe. This isolation of Ireland effectively restricted any further natural migration of plants to this country, and left us with over 10,000 different species of flowering plants and ferns. Over subsequent years, human activities have caused about 300 more species of flowering plants to become naturalised. Some of these non-natives arrived here accidentally, possibly in the manure of imported livestock or mixed up in the seed of imported cereals and foodstuffs. Many others were brought here as attractive garden specimens, and have since managed to escape and thrive in the wild.

## Tree felling and charcoal production in Wicklow

The loss of Ireland's woodlands started with the beginnings of Agriculture, when small clearances were made. Subsequently, more than a 1,000 years later, the widespread plunder of the trees by occupying English landlords began. The timber was seen as a valuable resource and huge trees were felled and exported to England to build the cathedrals and ships, providing an extra source of income to many of the absentee 'Gentry' who had been granted ownership of land in Ireland as a payment for favours by English royalty.

Charcoal production for supporting iron smelting also had an extreme impact on Irish woodlands. Irish observers in the seventeenth century recording significant damage to woodlands, whereas others have argued that the iron industry would preserve the woods in its own interest. In Ireland, the exploitation of woodlands appears to have been part of a colonial, extractive economy, with little attempt to sustain the woodland resource. Indeed, 'the fact that Irish woods were being destructively rather than sustainably worked made Irish charcoal very cheap, its cheapness offsetting the cost of importing ore'. More sustainable management practices were developed, and the 'coppice with standards' system was widely used in Wicklow.

Arthur Young's account, *A tour in Ireland 1776–1779*, records that in Wicklow there were 'many copses on the sides of mountains of birch, oak, ash and holly, which are generally cut at 25 years for poles for building cabins; the bark for tan, and the smaller branches for charcoal'. Ten ironworks are listed in Wicklow during the seventeenth century, one of which is in Glendalough. In the 1640s, woodlands in the Wicklow valleys were exploited for fuel; some of the ironworks using this supply were in production for over a century. Before 1640 charcoal had been exported from Wicklow to south Wales. By the end of the

18th century it appears much of the Glendalough area was completely deforested.<sup>6</sup>

The woodlands within the National Park were often found in secluded valleys with acidic soil, leaving oak trees to flourish. The oak timber in them made the best charcoal. So these woods were largely felled and the trees made into charcoal to feed the mines in the glacial valleys of Wicklow and in Wales. The oaks were coppiced. That means that they were cut down to the ground in a twelve to fifteen year cycle. This method produced increased quantities of easily managed timber.

The oak and birch woods around Glendalough are mostly recently regenerated woodlands, some of which have been planted by Wicklow Mountains National Park with the support of Coillte and some is natural regeneration. Fences around some of the wooded areas are to deter the hybrid Red x Sitka deer population from destroying the natural regeneration of the woods by browsing the saplings. Today Wicklow is the most forested county in Ireland, supporting a sustainable forestry industry which employs over 1,000 people - an immense change to the 17th and 18th centuries, but leaving behind a vastly altered landscape.<sup>7</sup> Most of the trees at Glendalough today are only about 150-200 years old.

### Last original woodlands

Tomnafinnoge is the last surviving fragment of the great

Shillelagh woods which once clothed the hills and valleys of south Wicklow. As early as 1444, these woods supplied timber for the construction of Kings College, Cambridge, and later for Westminster Abbey, St Patrick's Cathedral and Trinity College Dublin. In 1634, the woods were estimated to cover 'more than many thousand acres', but were heavily exploited especially for shipbuilding. In 1670, the woods were reported to be still extensive, 'being nine or ten miles in length' and a valuation in 1671 found a total of 3905 acres (1579 hectares) of woodland here.

The present oaks were planted within an existing coppiced wood in the mid-1700s when there were still extensive native woods in the locality so it provides an important link between the ancient forest of Shillelagh and the woodland of today. It occupies the valley of the Derry River which flows in a south-west direction to join the Slaney. Unlike many other Wicklow woodlands, Tomnafinnoge is growing on deep, fertile soils, the lowest of which are liable to winter flooding.<sup>8</sup>

### Rewilding

It should be noted that much of the Glendalough and Glendasan valleys have been markedly changed by human interventions over thousands of years of human habitation (along with Ireland more generally). The Republic of Ireland now has the lowest forest cover of any country in Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> Recent excavations of charcoal production platforms in the Glendalough valley, Co. Wicklow. Graeme Warren, Conor McDermott, Lorna O'Donnell and Rob Sands. *The Journal of Irish Archaeology* Volume XXI, 2012

<sup>7</sup> Carey, Michael. *If Trees Could Talk: Wicklow's Trees and Woodlands Over Four Centuries*. COFORD, 2009

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/environment-geography/flora-fauna/wild-wicklow/tomnafinnoge-wood/>  
210805 3014 Wider Wicklow Masterplan Narrative/Interpretation Strategy Overview

Once, 80% of the land here was covered by native trees – the figure is now just 1%.<sup>9</sup>

*“Ireland has virtually no wild habitats, except the strip between the tides (and not always then). Most of the nature we know is a human construct, both in what we’ve added over centuries and – much more often – what we’ve taken away.”<sup>10</sup>*

Any suggestions for re-wilding the landscapes of Wicklow, particularly around the Glendalough valley, will need to incorporate the vastly altered landscapes. Our current thinking suggests that a re-wilding process to be more sympathetic to the monastic history of the Glendalough valley could incorporate more diverse planting, from wheat and barley close to the settlement to more diverse woodlands along the slopes and river valley. Throughout the National Park and Wicklow more widely there is enormous scope to diversify planting away from Sitka spruce and other commercial plantations, instead restoring native woodlands, wetlands and bogs to provide habitats for biodiversity to flourish.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210211-rewilding-can-ireland-regrow-its-wilderness>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/should-ireland-be-returned-to-the-wild-1.963784>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.independent.ie/regional/wicklowpeople/news/weve-spent-our-lives-hiking-and-walking-in-wicklow-and-can-see-how-wildlife-has-been-in-decline-40124642.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/enfo/irelands-environment/peatlands/peatlands-in-ireland/>

## Blanket Bogs and Heaths in the Uplands

Ireland has the largest coverage of blanket bogs in Europe (original cover was estimated at 773,860 ha – two-thirds of the original peatland cover in Ireland). Blanket bogs developed about 4,000 years ago but some are currently being created. They are most widespread in areas where the annual rainfall is greater than 1,250 mm and the number of rain days exceeds 225. Like raised bogs, blanket bogs are rain fed. Mountain blanket bogs occur on relatively flat terrain (across mountain plateaux and gentle slopes) in the higher Irish mountains above 200 m altitude<sup>12</sup>.

A typical area with blanket bog is found in the Sally Gap region. Blanket Bog in the Wicklow Uplands is important for biodiversity as it is the only example of extensive upland blanket bog in the east of Ireland. It is found wherever a deep layer of partially decomposed plant material has accumulated to form peat. It is a lack of oxygen that prevents the complete breakdown of plant material. Actively growing blanket bog will be very wet with pool systems and have a significant cover of bog moss, lichens, cowberry and heath rush. Low growing ling heather may also be present with some bilberry, white grass and tormentil.

Grasslands where heather and bilberry exceed 25% are considered as heath. Heath areas are of international importance and dominate large areas of the Wicklow Uplands. Wet heath is associated with wet conditions. However it can be

distinguished from blanket bog due to a shallower peat depth and the absence of pool systems.<sup>13</sup>

Lugnaquilla and the Ow Valley is an area which has been less disturbed by human activity than other parts of the valleys and uplands. This is a vast and apparently empty place but it is rich in wild plants and animals. The lower slopes are mainly covered with heather and purple moor grass. Higher parts, such as the saddle between Slievemaan and Lugnaquilla, have a covering of blanket bog and can be quite wet and difficult walking after rainy weather. The summit of Lugnaquilla is a plateau with a closely grazed sward of bilberry, grasses and mosses, and is the highest peak in Wicklow at 925 metres (3034 feet).<sup>14</sup>



Vale of Clara. Wicklow Heritage.

### Vale of Clara Nature Reserve

A large area of fragmented oak-wood. It contains the largest area of semi-natural woodland in County Wicklow and is potentially one of the largest stands of native hardwoods in the country. The area has been at least partially under woodland since the Ice Age. The oak-woods are also of high scenic value.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://wicklowuplands.ie/wicklow-uplands/habitats/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/environment-geography/flora-fauna/wild-wicklow/lugnaquilla/>

# Ecclesiastical sites around Wicklow

Other than the well known and heavily visited monastic settlement of Glendalough, County Wicklow has an extensive range of monastic and other religious sites spanning across many centuries. Along with ancient pilgrim routes such as St Kevin's Way, Wicklow has a deep history of spirituality, linked to its natural beauty. Below is an outline of some of the sites outside of Glendalough which give an indication of the opportunities for interpretation journeys throughout the region.

## St Kevin's Way

Although often associated with Glendalough, St Kevin's Way takes in a relatively large swathe of the uplands, and includes a number of sites of religious interest. There may have been ancient trading routes along similar routes to where St Kevin's Way eventually formed. The Hollywood area marked a very important crossroads between the ancient north to south road known as the Slighe Chualann and the East to West trading route which connected the sea ports on the East coast with the fertile plains of Kildare at Church Mountain. Folklore suggests that St Kevin spent time at Glendalough in retreat before he headed across the Wicklow Mountains and founded the ecclesiastical site of Glendalough. It is possible that a small church or hermitage may have existed at Hollywood in the early medieval period.

It was documented that pilgrims from both North and South would meet at Ballinagee. They waited here until there were sufficient numbers to travel on towards Tonelagee and the Wicklow Gap, which was done in a group as the Wicklow Gap could have treacherous conditions. There are carved standing stones and boulders along the routes which would have marked the way for medieval pilgrims.<sup>15</sup>



Baltinglass Abbey. Wikimedia Commons

## Brittas Bay Landing Site and Inis Baithin Monastery

There are a number of historical references to St Patrick's landing at Three Mile Water, Brittas Bay. In addition to this, an important monastic site was founded on an island at the mouth of the Three Mile Water, known as Inis Baithin. It was second to Glendalough and is the burial place of St Baithin, its

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wicklowmountainsnationalpark.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/St-Kevins-Way-2020.pdf> and <https://pilgrimagedievalireland.com/2012/09/05/medieval-pilgrimage-at-hollywood-co-wicklow/>

abbot. He was the cousin and successor to St Columba who brought Christianity to Scotland.

St Patrick landed in 430 or 431 and was reported to have landed at a port called Ostium Dee. There is evidence that the Dee is the river now known as Three Mile Water. Inis Baithin monastery may have had a pilgrim path connecting to Glendalough.<sup>16</sup> It is thought that the old Three Mile Water graveyard is the continuation of the 6th-century monastery.<sup>17</sup>

### Castletimon Ogham Stone

The close proximity of the Castletimon Ogham stone suggests St Patrick's landing place at Brittas Bay may have been associated with the early Irish church. The inscription has been read by Macalister (1945, 51-2, no. 47) as 'NETA-CARI NETA-CAGI'.<sup>18</sup>

### Baltinglass Abbey

Developed as a sister abbey to Mellifont in Louth, the ruins here are dated to the foundation in 1148. It was Founded by Dermot MacMurrough (d.1171), king of Leinster as a Cistercian abbey in a valley which acted as a strategic pass for travelling between

north and south Leinster. The original place name Belach Conglais 'the pass of Cú Glas' retains the name of a mythological hero Glas who was reputedly killed by magical wild boars. The archaeology of the surrounding environs, and especially the substantial hillfort of Rathcoran on Baltinglass Hill overlooking the river valley testifies to strategic importance of Baltinglass from prehistory. The ruins of the twelfth-century romanesque church are all that survive of the monastery.<sup>19</sup>

### Aghowle Church

This 12th-century church occupies the site of an early monastery dedicated to St Finian of Clonard in the 6th century. The present ruins date from the 1100's and contain some good examples of early-Romanesque design. When St Finian was looking for a site to build his monastery on, he initially picked the site of the ring fort on the top of Barnacashel Hill. The stone which he placed there was moved to an orchard at the bottom of the hill during the night. It was said by angels he replaced the stone on the hill three further times and each time it returned to the orchard. After struggling with the land owner to have access to the land, eventually St Finian built his settlement among the apple trees.

There was limited water on the site so the industrious monks built wooden lined drains that brought the water from the hill

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<sup>16</sup> <https://visitwicklow.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Brittass-Bay-Saint-Patricks-Landing.pdf> and <https://monasticon.celt.dias.ie/showrecord.php?id=3885>

<sup>17</sup> [https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/co\\_wicklows\\_pure\\_miles/three\\_mile\\_water\\_pure\\_mile](https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/co_wicklows_pure_miles/three_mile_water_pure_mile)

<sup>18</sup> <https://maps.archaeology.ie/HistoricEnvironment/>

<sup>19</sup> [https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/topics/county\\_wicklow\\_heritage\\_plan-3/wicklow\\_in\\_the\\_early\\_middle\\_ages-5](https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/topics/county_wicklow_heritage_plan-3/wicklow_in_the_early_middle_ages-5) [https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/baltinglass/baltinglass\\_heritage/baltinglass\\_-\\_the\\_abbey](https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/baltinglass/baltinglass_heritage/baltinglass_-_the_abbey)

by gravity to the monastery, and remains of these are now held in the National Museum. St Finian erected a 'Teampall Mór' or big Church as he had a large number of monks living in Aghowle. They lived in beehive cells, built around a wooden Church. St Finnian continued to live in Aghowle for 16 years. Around 1100AD the wooden Church was replaced with the present stone structure. The West gable door is a rare example of Gaelic-Romanesque architecture with only one other example in Ireland. The 12-foot cross dates from the very early stages of the Irish Church as it exhibits no sculpture or inscriptions.<sup>20</sup>

Located on the eastern side of the cross is a large granite baptismal font which is believed to be pre-Norman. Local tradition claimed that water from the font could cure headaches and skin ailments.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> [https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/coolattin/aghowle\\_a\\_legendry\\_place](https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/coolattin/aghowle_a_legendry_place)

<sup>21</sup> <https://wicklowheritage.omeka.net/items/show/37>

# Ancient Monuments

As in the previous segment exploring some of the ecclesiastical sites around Wicklow, there are extensive remains of ancient people and their lives in the county. Below is an outline of some of the sites which give an indication of the opportunities for interpretation journeys throughout the region.

## Baltinglass Hillforts

Around 1400 BC, Bronze Age communities in many parts Ireland began to construct large enclosures, known as hillforts, on strategically positioned hilltops overlooking broad expanses of lowland. Baltinglass is at the centre of a huge complex of five hillforts. These hillforts may be tentatively dated to around 1,000 BC or slightly earlier. They were not made by the Neolithic people, but by a later metal-using people. It is one of the most impressive and massive constructions of the period within Western Europe. However currently it is unknown if the complexes were intended for serious defence or had a more ritual function; if they were intended as sites for permanent habitation or to be used as strongholds in times of war or if the five hillforts represent a single, united power structure or rival groups.<sup>22</sup>

“Baltinglass could be regarded as the hillfort capital of Ireland. It was one of the first, if not the first, location to practice agriculture as we know it almost 6,000 years ago”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> [https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/baltinglass/baltinglass\\_heritage/baltinglass\\_-\\_brusselstown](https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/places/baltinglass/baltinglass_heritage/baltinglass_-_brusselstown)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/wicklowpeople/news/baltinglass-could-be-hillfort-capital-37653694.html> and <https://cora.ucc.ie/handle/10468/3532>



*Rathgall Hillfort. Wikimedia Commons.*

## Rathgall Ringfort

This hillfort was the homestead of a significant family, possibly a chieftan or tribal leader. Legend suggests it may even have been the seat of the kings of South Leinster. The impressive defences and large volume of artefacts reinforces the high status of the occupants of this site. This impressive and important monument encompasses a total area of 18 acres. Excavations, started in 1969 by the late Barry Raftery revealed important evidence for Late Bronze Age settlement, industrial,

agricultural and funerary activity at Rathgall, dating to circa 800BC.<sup>24</sup>

accepted as the original type in Ireland, this cairn would appear to be a local variation, and, therefore, later in date, according to the general rule laid down by Professor Childe with reference to Scottish megalithic tombs”.<sup>27</sup>

### Seefin Passage Tomb

The Neolithic passage tomb of Seefin stands on top of a 650m high mountain in North Wicklow. It appears to be part of a series of tombs, as a number of other peaks in the area like Seefingan and Seahan also have similar large cairns covering passage tombs. When excavated, in 1931 this tomb was empty, an unexpected development given the size of the tomb and the amount of effort required to build it.<sup>25</sup>

Two rocks guarding the tomb's entrance are adorned with diamond shapes that some say resemble a human face. An additional stone on the roof also bears a mysterious carving of five lines. A peat profile taken in the 1960s showed evidence of Neolithic land clearing, suggesting there was once a settlement nearby. It's likely the tomb has been open and explored for a long time, as there is an Early Christian equal-armed cross added to one of the roof stones.<sup>26</sup>

“The cairn on Seefinn resembles some of those found at Loughcrew : the chamber has two lateral recesses at each side and one at the end, and thus seems to be a development of the more usual type of chamber with three recesses, the plan of which is of a cruciform shape. If the cruciform type is to be

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<sup>24</sup> <https://wicklowheritage.omeka.net/items/show/38>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.thejournal.ie/heritage-sites-hidden-ireland-seefin-wicklow-navan-fort-armagh-roscommon-castle-998600-Jul2013/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/seefin-passage-tomb-2>

<sup>27</sup> Price, Liam. ‘The Ages of Stone and Bronze in County Wicklow’. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, Vol. 42 (1934/1935), pp. 31-64

# Interpretation Journeys

## - some possibilities

- Linked journeys starting from Glendalough exploring the religious and spiritual histories of Wicklow. Incorporating the ideas of pilgrimage and returning to the original methods of travelling through Wicklow - by foot and on pilgrimage. See <https://www.tearmann.ie/what-we-offer/guided-pilgrimages/> <https://www.pilgrimpath.ie/st-kevins-way-activities-2/> and <https://www.wildernessireland.com/blog/irish-caminos-irelands-pilgrimage-routes/>
- Industrial and mining histories of Glendalough, bringing in elements of mining, charcoal burning, international links to England and Wales, and the impact this has had on the landscapes of Wicklow. Visitors should be attracted to the mining villages in the Glendasan valleys rather than concentrating in Glendalough/Glenealo. Miner's Way.
- Military Histories, guerrilla warfare and rebellion in 1798: linking the often desolate Military Road linking north and south Wicklow to Dublin to the amazing local stories of Irish rebellion. Marking out the barracks, both extant and lost, and potential for these to be destinations in their own right.
- Natural history and biodiversity: fostering understanding of the range of habitats and species within the national park, as well as throughout the county. It will be important that any sense of rewinding takes into account the long history of landscape change, from early settlements through to monastic farming and landscapes, to industrial impacts of tree felling, charcoal production and mining.
- Ancient lives: understanding the range of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments throughout Wicklow, giving a sense of the lives and rituals of ancient ancestors. Encourage greater respect, understanding and protection for these mysterious complexes and the people who worked so hard to build them.
- Connections to existing trails and journeys, such as the Celtic Route project developed with EU funding. This links the coastal regions of Wales and Ireland together through the stories of ancient Celtic people and their use of the landscape and natural resources.

# Key Interpretive Locations

## Laragh and Glendalough - Arrival Point

Visitors to Wicklow need a clear understanding of the county, its myriad opportunities for experiences and facilities to provide comfort and guidance before and after a visit. We envisage Laragh being an ideal location for visitors to better understand the National Park more widely; become aware of the different journeys available throughout Wicklow, and develop a sense of awe and wonder at this remarkable county.

The arrival point at Laragh has the potential to combine powerful storytelling with emotive messaging about the impact humans have had on the landscape and biodiversity of the Wicklow Mountains. We see this as a gateway into the monastic settlement of Glendalough and into the Glendalough/Glencarlo valleys, providing visitors to these 'honeypot' sites with key information to provide a frame for their experience, whilst also encouraging them to explore more widely throughout the region.

Finally, the site at Laragh would provide important facilities such as food and drink vendors, commercial vendors, way finding and transportation options to encourage visitors to explore with confidence.

### Key themes and topics to explore

- Today the site is one of the largest and best-preserved medieval ecclesiastical sites in Ireland and is globally significant, with evidence of human occupation from Neolithic times. The main monastery at the lower lake was redesigned to form an ecclesiastical city in the 12th century, and the medieval gate leading into the complex is the only one of its type remaining in Ireland. The round tower is one of the best preserved examples in Ireland, and there is still evidence of the raised site for the main ecclesiastical sites. At the peak of Glendalough's importance, more than 1,000 laypeople along with the clergy would have worked and lived in the valley, producing food, crops, manuscripts and more. More prosaic buildings would have ringed the central, sacred section of the site near the Lower Lake which can still be seen today, with bakeries, food storage, gardens and accommodation all featuring.
- The Upper Lake has had a long history of human habitation and resource extraction, from tree felling to smelt iron to ecclesiastical sites and pilgrimage destinations (along with the sites at the Lower Lake). The ruins of the 10th-century Reefert Church are hidden amongst the trees near the Poulanass waterfall. A church was likely here at the time of St Kevin also. It was used as the burial place for the O'Toole family. St Kevin's Bed, a small man-made cave dug out of the cliffs rising from the lake shore, was used as a retreat for both St Kevin and later St Laurence O'Toole, but archaeological evidence suggests it was dug out much earlier and may date from the Neolithic period. Further along the shoreline are the remains of the mining settlement of the valley, with tunnels linking through Camaderry Mountain to the Glendasan Valley and further mining settlements.

- The natural environment of Glendalough and the wider valley setting has been extensively modified by human activities since likely Neolithic times. From tree felling and clearing, to mining, road building and tourism, the valley of Glendalough and the wider national park are very different to their original state. The visitor centre has the potential to give visitors an insight into the landscapes of the park as well as the ways in which human interaction has massively changed the landscape.
- Connected landscapes: better understand how people moved throughout the county, from pilgrim routes from Kildare to Glendalough, the Military Road and mining tracks throughout the valleys, as well as wider routes such as the Sligh Culann (now the Wicklow Way) and routes from Wales to the East coast of Ireland. Visitors will be encouraged to explore the beautiful landscapes of Glendalough and further afield mindfully, stepping out of their daily routines and into a landscape transformed by those seeking spirituality.

### Outcomes

- Visitors to Glendalough understand the range of experiences available within the Park and wider within the county, through themes of journeys and engagement with landscapes.
- They will understand how human activities have irrevocably changed the landscape of Glendalough and the surrounding valleys, but will also be amazed at how ecosystems have continued and in some cases flourished.
- Visitors will develop a deeper respect for the landscapes of the national park and visit with more understanding of the

delicate habitats and how human activities have interfered over thousands of years.

- They will understand the importance of the Glendalough monastic site to the history of early Irish Christianity, and better understand the importance of St Kevin to the valley.

## Glens of Lead - Engagement Point

The Glendasan, Glenmalure and Glendalough valleys have been rich sources of lead and silver, exploited by humans since the late 18th century, although there evidence of mining activity in the Wicklow Mountains since the Bronze Age including the copper mines in Avoca. We envisage a stand-alone engagement point at the Wicklow Gap, where visitors can explore the rich seams of history located in the valleys, while also encouraging visitors to take in the view.

We see this site as sympathetic additions to the landscape, providing a focal point to the history of mining around Glendalough as well as shelter to discover more. The aim of these structures would not be to remove all trace of the story from other sites - instead, providing an entry point to this important history which can be further explored using the Miner's Way walking trail.

### Key themes and topics to explore

- Connected landscapes: better understand how people moved throughout the county, from pilgrim routes from

Kildare to Glendalough, the Military Road and mining tracks throughout the valleys, as well as wider routes such as the Slighe Cualann (now the Wicklow Way) and routes from Wales to the East coast of Ireland. Visitors will be encouraged to explore the beautiful landscapes of Glendalough and further afield mindfully, stepping out of their daily routines and into a landscape transformed by those seeking riches and livelihoods.

- The landscape shaping lives in Wicklow - hard lives for miners, but created townships, communities and industry in a rural area.
- Understanding how the landscape today has been altered beyond recognition by thousands of years of human use - from tree clearances in Neolithic and Bronze Age times through to extractive industries and tree planting (and felling) to create mining tunnels.
- The boom and bust of lead mining in Glendalough and what visitors can still see today. Industrial heritage and archaeology within the landscape, and connections to the Miner's Way.

### Outcomes

- Visitors will understand how human activities have irrevocably changed the landscape of the Wicklow uplands and the surrounding valleys, but will also be amazed at how ecosystems have continued and in some cases flourished.
- They will understand the histories of mining across the valleys, and see the remnants of this once-bustling industry.

- Visitors will realise they can explore further on the Miner's Way, while getting an overview alongside the astonishing view at the Wicklow Gap site.

## The Military Road - Driving/Cycling Tour

The landscape of the Wicklow Uplands proved to be a secret weapon during the 1798 Rebellion, and the landscape still bears the traces of this pivotal time in Irish history. The rugged landscape and challenging terrain provided excellent cover for the rebels, who knew the area intimately. The British forces struggled to track and find the rebels and therefore the Military Road was planned and eventually constructed provide greater access to this region, and is still used as a driving and cycling route today.

We see this road, particularly through the Sally Gap and through the Uplands, as a driving or cycling route with key information points at sites along the route, giving visitors a sense of the dramatic events that took place in Wicklow. We also imagine visitors relating the desolate and difficult landscapes that they can see today with the events of the past, giving them a greater respect for this incredible landscape and the secrets it holds.

Key location points would include the Glencree Barracks, which still operates today as a Peace and Reconciliation Centre. We would see this as a key start and end point to a driving or cycling trail, particularly for those beginning their journey from Dublin. Along with this, the unique stories of the associated German graveyard and the site for German refugee children to

be housed would be included as unusual parts of this otherwise very national story.

As visitors travel either by car or bicycle, key points to include would be to look over the Sally Gap, giving visitors a sense of the vast and treacherous landscape the rebels knew so well; along with the Aughavanna Barracks and its association with Charles Stewart Parnell; and Drumgoff Barracks and its connection with mining heritage. This tour has the potential to thematically connect with key elements of other interpretation journeys, particularly around the ideas of human engagement with this landscape through rebellion and mining, as well as providing a vista for visitors to understand the scale of the landscape. Providing a listing of memorials to this uprising would also be included so visitors could engage with these elements of the story while on their journey.

### Key themes and topics to explore

- Background to the 1798 Rebellion - a major uprising against British Rule in Ireland, incorporating guerrilla warfare tactics across the country including in Wicklow.
- During the 1798 Rebellion, the inaccessibility of the Wicklow Mountains proved a problem for the government forces. Four roads crossed the county from East to West, but none ran north south to connect them. Rebels who knew the Wicklow uplands intimately were able to escape British troops with ease, seemingly vanishing into the hills and remote valleys.
- One such rebel was Michael Dwyer, from the Glen of Imaal. He led a band of rebels after the battle of Vinegar Hill in Wexford, and his deep knowledge of the landscape led to his evasion of British troops.

- Towards the end of 1798, Colonel John Skerret of the Durham Fencibles suggested building a military road across the mountains. The idea was simple. The road would enable troops to travel quickly to wherever they were needed. At the same time, it would restrict the rebel's ability to move unseen. An additional factor was the fear of a potential French invasion on the East coast at this time, which might necessitate rapid movement of troops.
- The road was built mainly by soldiers working in four teams. Each team had an officer and 50 soldiers. Local people were also welcome to help, but most had no desire to. The locals felt that once the road was constructed, land in the area would become more valuable, and their rents would rise.
- The Great Military Road was finally finished in 1809. It cost £43,500, working out at over £1,000 per mile.

### Outcomes

- Visitors will understand how human activities have irrevocably changed the landscape of the Wicklow uplands and the surrounding valleys, but will also be amazed at how ecosystems have continued and in some cases flourished.
- They will understand how the landscape of Wicklow aided the Irish engaged in the 1798 Rebellion, and why the Military Road was built to counter this.
- They will understand how the use of sites along the Military Road has changed over time.

# Wider Wicklow Themes and Topics

Alongside previously developed themes and topics for Glendalough more specifically, the wider Wicklow region has a series of themes and topics that can shape interpretation and visitor journeys throughout the county. The following information showcases the range of themes and stories which can frame visitor experiences around the county.

The different thematic areas have been weighted with the following principles in mind, based on widely accepted significance assessments of museum and heritage collections and exhibition design worldwide:

**Historic significance:** A theme or topic or area may be historically significant for its association with people, events, places or themes. This can be an association with local histories or events, or tied into broader nationally important stories.

**Aesthetic significance:** Stories of natural beauty, landscape or physical examples of craftsmanship and skill.

**Scientific or research significance:** Themes or topics which contain potential or have already yielded important scientific outcomes, including archaeological finds, ecological or biological research (land and marine), or sites containing documentary or oral history materials.

**Social/spiritual significance:** Sites reflecting current cultural or social concerns or meanings, as well as sites with connections to religion or spirituality, whether organised or more casual.

Each of these areas can be applied to themes and topics within Wider Wicklow with particular notice paid to representativeness, uniqueness/rarity and interpretative potential. In doing so, the significance of each theme or topic can be weighted accordingly, providing a framework which will assist in shaping narrative experiences throughout Wicklow.

The purpose of this document and the below weighting guide is to explore opportunities to address an identified visitor capacity issue across the wider Wicklow area.

High profile and well established attractions such as Powerscourt, Russborough House and parts of the Wicklow Mountains National Park experience significant capacity challenges, while also already being well regarded by visitors for a day out and rich experience.

It is anticipated that by focussing a visitor proposition on less visited county-wide attractions and by facilitating greater appreciation of such sites through interpretation, pressure on over-visited locations can be alleviated.

In particular, the mining and military heritage of Glendalough's surrounding areas can add a richness to the visitor proposition for Wicklow, and this has been referenced within each theme areas weighting.

## Natural History and Biodiversity

**Weighting:** 1 - due to the importance of the national park and other areas of natural heritage within the region; its social significance as spaces for engaging with nature for those living in urban areas of Dublin and North Wicklow; historic significance relating to human experiences of using the land and its resources.

**Topics:** Habitats and biodiversity; rewilding and human impacts on Irish natural landscapes; blanket bogs and uplands; engaging mindfully with natural world.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** Tree felling and charcoal production in Glendalough - all landscape has been altered by human activities ; Tomnafinnoge Woodlands (last of Shillelagh Forest - original forest cover); blanket bogs and heaths in the Uplands; Vale of Clara oak forest; The Lord's Wood; Crone Wood; Glen of the Downs forests and walks; river systems e.g. Three-Mile-Water, east Wicklow River Trust, Meeting of the Waters; Ballymoyle Forest; Baltinglass Outdoor Education Centre.

## Ecclesiastical and Spiritual Heritage

**Weighting:** 1 - special stories of saints and ecclesiastical life still in existence in the landscape; one of the most complete monastic settlements in Ireland; geographic spread of sites across Wicklow an indication of the significance of religious heritage to the region. Connections to the landscape to a religious way of life now mostly lost. Provision of interpretation at key points in Laragh as well as in the valley will aim to disperse current bottlenecks and deepen the experience of Glendalough and its associated spiritual and ecclesiastical stories.

**Topics:** The life of St Kevin and the formation of Glendalough; monastic life in Wicklow; pilgrimage and journeys to knowledge;

understanding and using the natural world; mindfulness and connection with nature.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** Baltinglass Abbey and Graveyard; Aghowle Church; Brittas Bay Landing Site and Inis Baithin Monastery; Castletimon Ogham Stone; Kiltranelagh Graveyard and standing stones (one of the oldest cemeteries still operating in the world); St Kevin's Church and St Kevin's Way Pilgrim Trail; Glendalough Monastic Settlement; Tearmann Spirituality Centre; Pilgrim Paths; Glendalough Hermitage Centre; Slighe Chualann - ancient road now mirrored by the Wicklow Way.

## Military History

**Weighting:** 2 - the Military Road and its associated stories of the nationally important 1798 Rebellion are unique and representative for this important historical story. Remaining elements in the landscape can be used as guideposts for exploring further and engaging with the wider landscape and its sense of desolation and spaciousness. We note that the specific historical narratives do not have as wide an appeal as topics such as nature and diversity, therefore will need to be carefully interpreted to provide easy understanding of the key themes and stories, with personal stories and connections to landscape and extant architecture drawn out.

**Topics:** 1798 Rebellion and activities in Wicklow; Michael Dwyer and his knowledge of Wicklow's uplands; the Military Road - development and building; post-rebellion road use; connections to land and landscape by rebels and the need to control the terrain; changing uses of the road and associated buildings over time.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** The Military Road/1798 Rebellion, with key points of Glencree Barracks and the German cemetery, as well as access to turf bogs during World War Two fuel shortages; Drumgoff Barracks (with crag called 'Dwyer's Lookout') and Aughavannagh Barracks with information also about Michael Dwyer; Eire sign on Bray Head; Kilpedder Rifle Range; Glen of Imaal; Michael Collins and connection to Greystones; coastal Martello towers.

## Mining and Extractive Industries

**Weighting:** 2 - uniquely related to the valleys of Glenmalur, Glendasan and Glendalough, with strong connections to the extant landscape as well as telling individual stories of hardship and struggle. We note that the specific historical narratives do not have as wide an appeal as topics such as nature and diversity, therefore will need to be carefully interpreted to provide easy understanding of the key themes and stories, with personal stories and connections to landscape and extant architecture drawn out.

**Topics:** Wicklow's geology; early mining and iron production; lives of the miners; connection to the natural world; damage through extractive industries; decline of the industry.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** Glens of Lead Heritage Group - tours and talks; Miner's Way; international links to Scotland and Wales; Fiddler's Row and Miner's Village in Glendasan; connection to mining structures in Glendalough valley; tunnels through Camaderry between two valleys; timber planting for tunnel supports; Baravore rolls crusher house; lazy beds and gardens reflecting everyday life.

## Ancient Monuments and Sites

**Weighting:** 2 - some of the largest ring fort complexes in Ireland, as well as sites significant to the human experience in Wicklow. Unique experiences for visitors to Ireland as well as local visitors as sites of interest and to build enjoyment and respect for their local areas. Similar monuments can be found in other jurisdictions.

**Topics:** landscape change over time; rewilding and human impacts on Irish natural landscapes; ancient lives in Wicklow.

## Big Houses, Castles and Formal Gardens

**Weighting:** 2 - well developed experiences within their own right, as well as being well represented throughout Ireland. A range of highly attractive visitor experiences, often with manicured and managed estates, which provide an interesting contrast to the concepts of rewilding being developed throughout Wicklow. These sites do not require significant interpretation development as they are already well developed and marketed, making them key destinations within Wicklow.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** Athgreany Stone Circle; Castlerrudery Stone Circle; Rathcoran/Baltinglass Hillfort and Passage Tombs; Brusselstown Hillfort; Rathgall Ring Fort; Seefin Passage Tomb (also Seefingan and Seahan); Ringforts near Delgany/Glen of the Downs (Coolagad Hillfort); Castletimon (Brittas Bay) Dolmen; Drummin ogham stone; multiple bullaun stones throughout county.

## Viking and Maritime Heritage

**Weighting:** 3 - connections to Wales and other Celtic nations; connections with Skuldelev 2 and Viking Kingdom of Cuala. Currently proposals in development cover this theme comprehensively and therefore this may not need further development in this case. Other parts of Ireland also cover the history of Viking settlement in Ireland in great detail and have more obvious connections to this theme, therefore we do not feel it is a key narrative to develop at this time.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** Arklow Maritime Museum; Part Two Watersports; Bray Adventures; Canal Tours; Kingdom of Cuala - Great Sugarloaf; Battle of Delgany in 1022; trees from Glendalough used to build Skuldelev 2 longship around 1042; Delgany Viking Hoard; Glen of the Downs Toll Road; Coolnaskeagh Ringfort; Celtic Routes proposal.

## Marine and Coastal Biodiversity

**Weighting:** 3 - well shared and developed through the sites below, although certainly has relevance to wider development of narratives around respect for the natural world and human connection to landscape and journeys. We also note that much of the coastline in Wicklow is seriously over-subscribed with day trippers and locals, and therefore we do not intend to add pressure to these locations.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** SeaLife Bray Aquarium; Bray Adventures; Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk; Birdwatch Ireland East Coast Reserve; Wicklow Head/Lighthouse; Broad Lough; North and South Beach Greystones SAC.

**Potential Sites and Activities:** Powerscourt House and Gardens; Charleville House; Kilruddery House and Gardens; Belmont Demense; Mt Ussher Gardens; Black Castle; Kilmacurragh Botanic Gardens; Avondale House; Glenart Castle; Dunganstown Castle; Kippure Estate; Threecastles Castle; Hunting Brook Gardens; June Blake's Garden; Russborough House and Gardens; Coolattin Estate; Huntington Castle and Gardens.