

Glenbower Wood

(Welcome to Glenbower Wood. Here is the text from the nature trail printed for Glenbower in the 1970s by the Forest & Wildlife Service. We hope you enjoy this trip down memory lane!)

Nature Trail (From the 1970's)

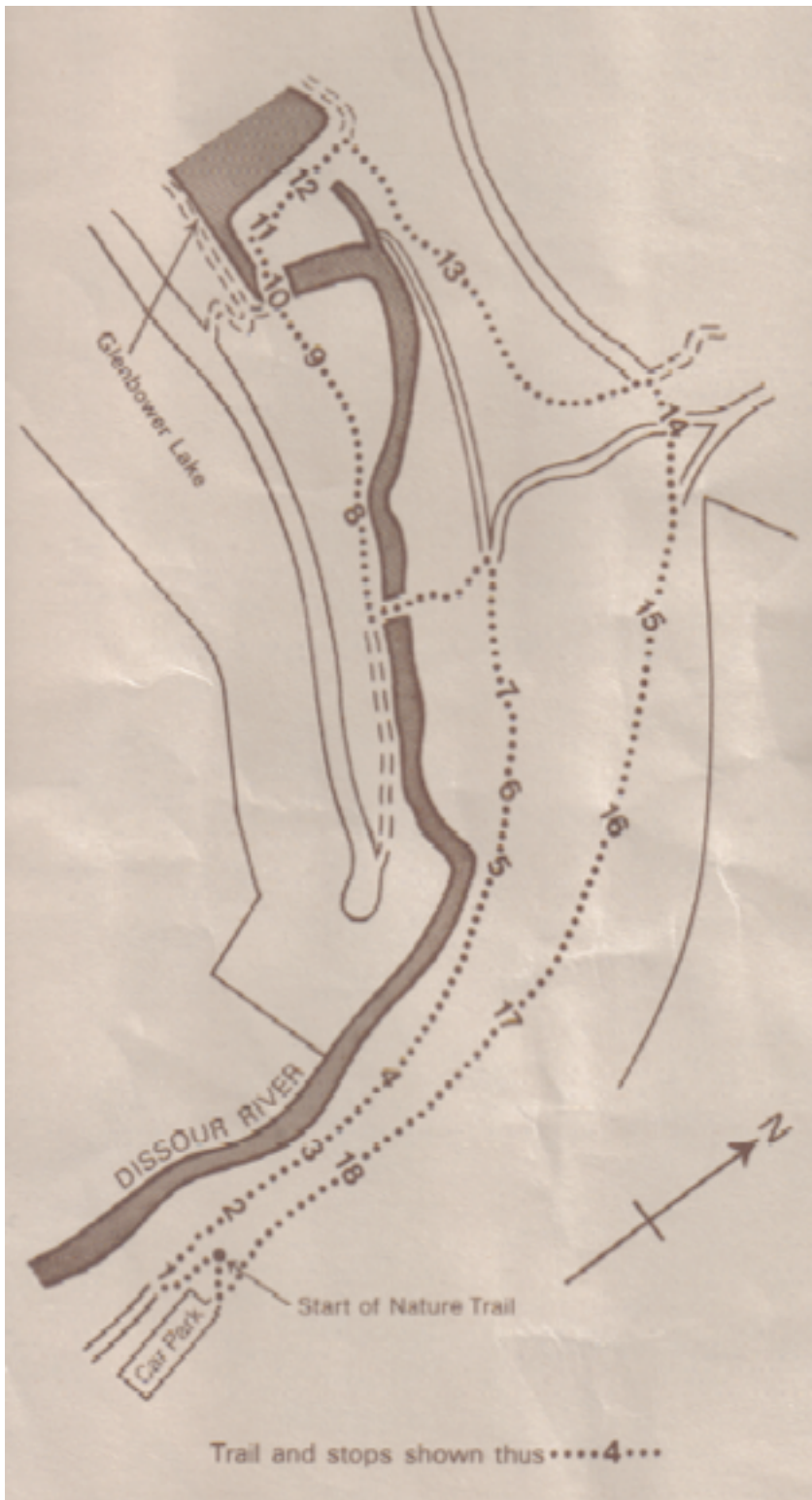
Introduction

The trail is a loop about 1 1/2 miles long. You can walk it in less than an hour but we hope that you will take longer and enjoy it all the more. You will find numbered stops along the route and what follows is a description of what may be seen at each stop.

Glenbower gets its name of “Gleann-bodhar” or “Deafening Glen” from the noise the River Dissour makes when rushing headlong in winter spate through the valley. This glen and the surrounding valley was known locally as the ‘Maiden Estate’, to distinguish it from the other forfeited properties. It remained in the same family since 1172, when, it is claimed, it was granted to Philip de Cappell, lineal ancestor of Sir Arthur de Cappell Brooke, who in the 1830's built the present road and bridges through the wood. At this time a contemporary writer stated that the sides of Glenbower were richly wooded, and that it was one of the few remnants of the ancient forest which once covered the country. Its steep slopes being inaccessible and useless for agriculture, it escaped both the axeman and intensive grazing over the centuries when the Irish countryside was generally denuded of its timber. The wood was acquired by the forest and wildlife service in 1933 and most of the present stands of Norway Spruce and Scots Pine were planted in the following few years.

Flowing through Glenbower is the Dissour River which gets its name from the Gaelic “Dis” and “Ur” or “Twice Wetted”, from the belief that in producing linen long ago, one wetting of the flax in the waters of the stream was as good as two wettings in other water.

Under the Warren Hill is the “Bathing House Glen” crossed by the Metal Bridge. This Glen gets its name from the fact that it contains a spring with reputed mineral ingredients or spa qualities, and over this was built a bathing house. Traces of this can still be seen on the ground.



Stop 1

Beside our path at this point is a former mill race. Up to 1948 the water running through this channel caused the erosion noticeable on the banks. The mills are now powered by electricity and the mill race has fallen into disuse.

The evergreen trees you see around you here are Norway Spruce above, and Sitka Spruce below the path, both used extensively in Irish forest plantations.

(Map from the original trail)

Stop 2

The bushy multi stemmed trees you see here are hazels. This is a tree native to Ireland but is of no real commercial use in forestry since it produces no volume of timber. It does, however, produce good strong sticks and poles, and its abundance of good eating nuts each autumn makes it very popular with the squirrels. The hazel has been long associated with magic, and hazel rods were considered as protection against all evils.

Stop 3

Here is another native Irish tree, the sessile oak. You will recognise it by its heavily grooved bark and its characteristic deeply indented leaves. It seeds by producing acorns. These are about the same size as the average nut, and are attached to the branchlets by means of a small cup-like base. You will find these trees growing naturally on sheltered rocky hillsides where they are remnants of the oak forest which covered most of Ireland in Primeval times.

(Leaves of the Sessile Oak)



Stop 4

Some of the underlying rock of the region is exposed here. This is old red Sandstone which derives from the Devonian period, 400 million years ago. At that time masses of fine sand were blown across the arid lands to become trapped in freshwater lakes. The sediment sank in the waters and became compacted until the resultant rock, stained red by iron oxides, was many thousands of feet thick. Subsequent foldings of the earth's surface resulted in the formation of the great east-west range of hills in Waterford, Cork and Kerry.

Stop 5

Here we can see examples of the plants which are usually found growing under hardwoods such as oak and beech. Can you identify the woodrush, growing in profusion here and recognised by its long narrow pointed leaves and sedge-like flowers? Notice the veins running parallel to the leaf edge. Look for the wood sorrel with its three-in-one shamrock-like leaves and delicate white bell-shaped flowers which give a white carpet effect to the wood in late spring.

Many flowers which bloom in spring, such as violet, primrose, bluebell and sorrel make use of the sunshine before the hardwood canopy casts its summer shade.

you may also see ivy, briars, columbine, ferns and mosses of varying types. Among the ferns are the hard fern, bracken fern, hart's tongue fern and the male shield fern.

If you now look into the evergreen wood beside you, you will notice that there are relatively few plants growing under the trees. The sun cannot penetrate the dense canopy of the trees which monopolise it for their own growth requirements.

(Leaves of Wood Sorrel)



(Woodrush)



Stop 6

You will notice that many of the branches here are covered with a grey coloured papery substance. this is lichen. It is half fungus and half alga, each helping the other quite differently.

The fungus which does not contain chlorophyll and cannot manufacture its own food supply, is living on moisture derived from the living alga. Its presence here indicates a moist and an unpolluted atmosphere.

Stop 7

the trees growing here are mainly alder. these are native trees, natural to wet places. They are most easily recognised by their little cone-like flowers which hang in clusters from the branchlets. They are growing particularly well and straight here due to the suitable conditions prevailing.

Stop 8

River erosion undermined the roots of this dead tree causing it to topple and to form a natural bridge across the stream. If you will examine the bank on this side you will notice a path leading to the tree trunk and along it to the other side. This path has been formed by denizens of the woodland such as foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, rats and mice in their ceaseless comings and goings through the forest.



Stop 9

This species is called Tsuga or “Western hemlock”. Notice its small dark green needles with two white streaks on the under sides, together with its graceful branching system and reddish fluted stems.

If you look at the ground at the base of these trees you will see how the root system spreads out in all directions to fulfil its twofold purpose of holding the tree in place and securing food from the soil to keep it alive. You can see

how the roots divide again and again into very small branchlets. It is through hairs on the smallest of these that the food, in the form of minerals contained in ground water, is absorbed.

Stop 10

When the earthen dam forming Glenbower Lake (stop 12) was built, a canal was excavated through the rock to take the overflow of water not needed to work the mills of Killeagh. The man-made waterfall resulted adding an attractive feature to the scenery of the glen. Note also the fish pass to your left as you look down; this was designed to allow the passage of salmon upstream to spawn.

The erosive power of the torrent over the years is apparent in the overhanging wall of rock to your right.

Stop 11

The growth in stem thickness of a tree depends on its cambium which is a wet thin bright-green layer of tissue between the bark, which protects it, and the wood of the tree. If the bark becomes damaged, as it has been by the carving on the trunk of this beech tree, the cambium is exposed, and in a somewhat similar fashion to the human body, a “wound” results. This can lead to permanent injury or even premature death of the tree because of the entry of disease. Again, as in the human body, the tree tries to heal the wounds by growths of callus at the edges of the wound but the process is so slow that widespread damage can find a tree unequal to the task of keeping disease at bay.

Your plea then is - no name-carving or other damage to the trees!

Stop 12

The earthen dam on which you are now standing was originally built to provide water for driving the corn mill in the village. Incidentally but very beautifully it added a tranquil lake to the beauty of Glenbower.

The Romans were the first to use water power for milling and hundreds of such mills were found in Britain by the Conquering Normans. In Ireland we are all familiar with the high, grey buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries which still stand as remnants of our industrial archaeology. Indeed many of our placenames are derived from flourishing mills of by-gone times were the Irish word ‘muilleán’ survives in corrupt forms such as mullen; mullin; willin; or, in the plural, multy.

As you walk along the dam notice on the bank, alder, sally and dogwood, all of which have a liking for damp places. Dogwood derives its name from the former use of its thin stems as ‘dags’ or skewers, and it is particularly conspicuous in Autumn with its glossy black berries and blood red twigs.

The concrete sluice box near the timber shelter controlled the flow of water to the mill race which also supplied the domestic water to the village via filter beds near the gate to the wood. Turn right at junction beyond the dam.

Stop 13

Notice on your left at the edge of the plantation that the principal species are scrub oak, holly, birch, rowan and hazel. The plantation is of Scots pine which has a more open canopy than most evergreen forest trees thus allowing these other species, together with whortleberry, ivy, honeysuckle and wood rush to survive.

To your right the area below the path has been planted with Norway Spruce, the traditional Christmas tree and on the same side as you proceed along the path you will see a few taller and older conifers. these are European silver fir, remnants of the older state plantings. Seeds from those trees have germinated and grown into young trees through the surrounding plantations. At junction with forest road turn right towards Metal Bridge.

Stop 14

Notice here the elaborate workmanship in stone and iron on the parapets of this bridge. This bridge and the original white bridge further upstream were the beginning of the planned improvements and access on the estate by the landlord de Cappell Brooke in the early 1830s. Further improvements were to have included the building of a new mansion, but the existing mansion was improved instead.

Stop 15

here you can see a line of young hardwoods bordering the road. They are beech and ash. Can you distinguish between them? The ash has a “compound” leaf. This means that each leaf is made up of many smaller leaflets. You can also recognise it by its large black buds. The beech has a more delicate branching system with long pointed shiny brown buds. The leaves have silky hairs around the edges and on the under sides. The timber of beech is used in furniture making, since it bends easily when steamed. Hurleys are traditionally cut from the butt ends of the ash to give the sweep of the ash grain into the “bos”. Ash is also used in many other ways for sports goods where lightness, coupled with elasticity and strength are desired.

(Beech Tree leaves)



(Ash Tree leaves)



Stop 16

the hardwood tree in front of you is a sycamore. You can recognise it in summer by its large 5-7 lobed leaves on red stalks and its double winged seeds. It is not native to this country but was introduced so long ago and reproduces itself so well that it qualifies for citizenship!

It is easy to grow from seed which occur in clusters and fall to the ground in pairs,

their attached wings causing them to

revolve like propellers. The sycamore is

native to Europe where it is found in the

Pyrenees, Alps and Carpathians. it is thought to

have been brought to England by the Romans.

You will notice that the branches of the sycamore

fan out into all the available openings in the

spruce behind, in order to expose their leaves to as

much of the light as possible. For the same reason most of the branches are growing out

over the road rather than into the forest.



Stop 17

The beech stems here are covered with circular growths. These are the result of the efforts being made by the tree to cover up the wounds inflicted on it during the pruning of branches along the stem. if pruning were not carried out the heavy branches would cause any timber sawn from the tree to show many knots which would severely weaken it.

Stop 18

This tree is a Scots pine. it is a native of Scotland and Northern Europe, and has been growing in Ireland long enough to be considered native now.

You can recognise it by its bluish-green pointed needles and its reddish coloured stem. it is a slow growing tree in comparison to the other conifers and therefore produces a good hard timber known as "Red Deal".

if you look on the ground here you should see the cones of the pine. Two-winged seeds are produced

on each cone scale. When the seeds ripen the scales open up and the seeds are dispersed.

The seed of pine is a popular food with the squirrel who strips the scales from the cone to get at the seed and leaves the central core. Can you find any about here?

Contrary to popular belief squirrels do not hibernate or store nuts in any systematic fashion but continue to seek food during the winter when they are less active during the very cold weather. if a store of seeds is not used it may contribute to a new generation of trees.



You have now reached the end of the trail - the car park is a little further along the road -and we hope you have enjoyed it.