

Míle Órga Léim

Fáilte go Míle Órga Léim. In the past, in order to reach Leam people had to jump (léim) across the river and this is how the area got its name. Later, a stone bridge was built and this has brought fame to the place as it featured in the “*Quiet Man*” starring John Wayne and Maureen O Hara which was filmed in the area in 1952. John Wayne plays “Sean Thornton”, a retired prizefighter, who returns home to Inishfree in rural Ireland, with the intention of buying back the cottage where he was born. The ruins of the cottage may be seen at Maam and many of the scenes were filmed at Ashford Castle in Cong.

Maam Turk Mountains - Twelve Bens - Drumlins.

Looking westward from the bridge, you can see the Maam Turk mountains in the distance and beyond them the Twelve Bens. To your right, above the main Clidfen road (N59), are drumlins – smooth egg shaped hills, made up of gravel, sand and boulder clay. The word ‘Drumlin’ comes from the Irish word ‘Droimnín’ meaning ‘small round-backed hill’. Drumlins were formed as the ice cap retreated at the end of the Ice Age about ten thousand years ago. The three beautiful lakes - Agrafield (1.6 km to the east), Adrehid upstream of the bridge and Bofin a little further west were also formed during this period.

Old School House and Teacher’s Residence.

In 1852 Christopher St George - a landlord in the area who resided at Tyrone House, Kilcolgan - gave the site to Fr Kavanagh, PP of Oughterard, for the purpose of erecting a new school. At that time, approximately 100 children were attending school in a leaky cabin on the mountainside which, in turn, had replaced a hedge school of Penal Times. Some children also attended school at nearby ‘Glengowla’ now known as ‘Glengowla Lodge’. That school, which had been built in 1852, was run by the Irish Church Mission and the schoolmaster, on a salary of £20 a year, was obliged to teach scripture according to the Authorised Version of the Bible for no less than two hours a day. When the new ‘Leam National School’ opened in 1877, all of the pupils deserted Glengowla and the building reverted to the O’Fflahertie landlord. From 1881 to 1867 an average of 69 children attended at Leam. Irish was the spoken language and the curriculum included English, singing, geography, drill, drawing, religion, needlework, laundry, maths and algebra. The little stone shed at the rear of the building was the outside toilet. Using chalk, the children did much of their work on slates and, when copies were used, the local shopkeeper recycled them to make paper cones to hold sweets. One qualified teacher and two monitors were employed. Monitors were assistants of 15-16 years of age. If their work was satisfactory, the Inspector recommended that they sit the “King’s/Queen’s Scholarship” and attend Training College. Leam School was in continuous use until it the new Derryglen School replaced it in 1959. Following its closure, the building was slightly altered so that it could be used as a church. The teacher’s residence is now in private ownership.

Galway Clifden Railway Line 1895-1935

The shed opposite the church was used as an office for the Railway. The next road junction is part of the old Galway /Clifden Railway line which opened in 1895. The Railway line was a relief project supported by Arthur Balfour who had been appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland in March 1887. The local landlords, the Martins of Ross and the O’ Fflaherties of Lemonfield were influential in bringing the railway in this direction. Mitchell Henry of Kylemore Castle and Mr. Eyre of Galway each gave £5000 while the Government provided a grant of £264,000. The total length of the line was 48 miles 550 feet and there were seven stations about seven or eight miles apart – Moycullen, Ross, Oughterard, Maam Cross, Recess, Ballynahinch and Clifden.

Work on the line began on 2nd January 1891 and, with over 1500 men employed at the end of 1893, the entire project was completed in four and a half years. The workers slept in huts which had been specially erected at various points along the route and four of which were here at Leam. It was intended that each hut would have ten beds and a stove but sometimes up to 14 men occupied huts where just seven beds were available. The Galway to Oughterard section was officially opened on New Year’s Day 1895 and the rest of the line to Clifden opened on July 1st of the same year.

Fish caught on Lough Corrib were brought to the London Fish Market while, cattle, sheep, ponies, Guinness, flour, sugar, tea and animal feed were also carried on the train. Tourists, anglers from England and Scotland and other parts of Ireland came by train to the area. The Quiet Man Bridge was the half way mark and when you reached this point you knew you were an hour away from Galway or Clifden. Many young men also left by train when going off to fight in the First World War (1914-1918). The train did not break any speed limits as it travelled at a leisurely pace of 24km/h (15mph). By 1935, the line had become uneconomic to operate and, as considerable repairs were needed, the Midland Great Western Railway Company decided to close it. The last train left Clifden station at 5.00 p.m. on Saturday 27th April. With many wagons having to be collected at stations along the way, the train had become very long by the time it reached Galway. Buses and lorries replaced the train and the company argued that this would offer a much better service to the people as goods could now be delivered directly to houses and shops.

The Gatekeeper’s Cottage

The cottage on the left at the road junction was the Gate Keeper’s residence. It was one of 18 such cottages built at public road level crossings along the route. Each cottage had a living room and two bedrooms as well as a small porch at the front. Outhouses consisted of a fuel shed and toilet. It was his/her duty to open the gates to allow the trains to pass as well as to inspect the condition of the tracks. The building has been altered and extended recently.

Continue straight up the road.

Connemara Ponies - Quietman Stud.

(Turn Right here)

The owner breeds Connemara ponies – docile friendly animals, good for working, noted for its hardiness and agility, easy to handle and world renowned for its natural jumping and dressage abilities. Exact origins are uncertain but native ponies could have bred with horses from Spain and Morocco in the distant past. “**Cannon Ball**” is a local legendary Connemara pony. He was born in 1904, grew to 13hands 3ins (140cm) in height and was the first stallion registered in Leabhar Craigh Capaillíní Chonnemara (Stud Book of the Connemara Pony) published by the newly founded Connemara Pony Breeders’ Society in 1926. Harry O Toole (Honri), his owner raced him at Oughterard, Clifden and Roundstone where he won many prizes and was never beaten. On one occasion, a four mile race from Oughterard to Leam was arranged between Cannon Ball and the train. When the train reached Leam, Cannon Ball was waiting to see it go past! It is reputed that he used to run around a large garden continuously from morning until evening without tiring.

In March 1926, at the ripe old age of 30, this famous pony eventually passed away and was given a good ‘Irish Wake’ by his broken-hearted owner. A half-barrel of porter (Guinness) as well as a supply of poitín was available for those who called pay their respects. Cannon Ball is buried close to the two houses which you can see in the distance up on the hillside to your left. Two of Harry O’Toole’s grand nephews live here in Leam and continue to breed Connemara ponies.

Canon Ball’s sire, Dynamite, owned by Thomas Henry Lyons of Tullaboy, travelled by train on the first leg of his journey to New York in October 1904. He was being delivered to his new American owner who had purchased him for the sum of £100.

Dry Stone Walls

Stonewalls are a feature of the area – there is no concrete or cement holding them together. Look closely and you will see daylight between the stones. The spaces between the stones allow the strong winds to pass through so that the walls do not fall down.

Turn right at the next junction. You will come down a steep hill with wonderful views of lakes and mountains. Turn right at the bottom. You are now on the old railway line and you will soon be back to where your walk began)

Iron Gates

Blacksmiths made many of the old iron gates which you see at some places along the mile. You will see two on your right on the final section of the walk.

Hedgerows

The hedgerows are typical Irish hedgerows. A wealth of native trees and shrubs – brambles, gorse, fuchsia, hawthorn, ash, sycamore, heather, rowan, sally and oak grow in this hedgerow. Many of the plants have seeded naturally in the shelter of the stone walls. Some seeds may have been dropped by a bird or a mouse, have floated on the wind or have been carried unwittingly by farm animals or people. The hedgerows provide nesting places for birds as well as food and shelter for mammals and insects.

Famine Ridges. Dotted on the hillside are the outlines of numerous Famine Ridges. These were the potato ridges that provided “Food for our forebears till dread famine stalked this land.” from 1845-1848. Until quite recent times, local farmers continued to grow potatoes in such ridges.

Blanket Bogs

The high rainfall and the cool climate of the area provide ideal conditions for the blanket bogs of the landscape. They are shallow bogs of 1.5m in depth. Long ago turf was cut by hand with a special tool called a ‘sléan’ and was later raised up or footed to dry in the sun and wind. Large baskets called ‘creels’ and animal drawn carts were used to transport the turf. Nowadays machines are used to cut it while tractors and trailers are used to take it home.

Please note that your safety is your own responsibility. No liability can be accepted by the producers of the walks for any loss, injury or damage to or in respect of any property or persons in connection with these walks.

We hope you enjoyed your walk. Please take your litter home and return the leaflet to the box.