

St Clomaun's Way

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Introduction

This leaflet is an introductory guide to St Clomaun's Way, a short but very pleasant, riverside and Hazel woodland walk in the village of Duncormick (Irish Grid S9209) on the south coast of County Wexford (Figure 1)^{1 & 2}.



Figure 1. Location map of Duncormick village. Source: Screen snip from <https://maps.wexford.ie/imaps/>. OSI copyright Permit No 0001920. © Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland.

Who was St Clomaun?

The name 'Clomaun' first appeared in print on the 1840 Ordnance Survey sheet of the Duncormick area¹. It is interpreted as an anglicised mis-spelling of 'Colmán', the Irish for 'Colman' with the Irish 'mán' spelled phonetically as 'maun' and the letters 'Col' transposed as 'Clo'³. Since 1840, the error has been copied a number of times and has appeared in publications. The name is pronounced as it is erroneously written. It is not known what connection St Colmán had with the Duncormick area.

The name 'Clomaun' is best associated with a holy well (Figure 2) located downstream of the village on the western bank of the Duncormick River estuary³.



Figure 2. St Clomaun's Well.

St Clomaun's well is located at the bottom of a steep, east-facing, cliffed slope and is subject to periodic tidal flooding when the river is in spate and/or when tidal surges occur. The well lay overgrown for hundreds of years before a local committee located and uncovered it in 1954. At that time, a stone was found buried there with the inscription 'RC 1696'⁴.

St Clomaun's Way is the gravelled walking track running from Duncormick Bridge on the main street of the village (regional road R736) to the holy well and back, a return distance of about 1km.

Who developed the walk?

St Clomaun's Way was developed in 2014 by the Duncormick Area Action Group, a voluntary group of local people who came together in 2003 with the aim of developing and enhancing their village⁵.

Members of the Action Group participated in a Wexford Local Development (WLD) Village Renewal programme and were grant-



aided by WLD to develop St Clomaun's Way. John Sinnott and Walter Cullen jointly donated the land for the project. Ger Ffrench and Gerry Mernagh, Community Employment workers for 2014, did much of the work on laying out and building the trail aided by significant voluntary local input. Significant repairs were carried out and a new car park was added in 2022. Members of the Duncormick Area Action Group continue to maintain the walkway and its associated amenities.

Rocks and soils

Four rock formations underlie St Clomaun's Way⁶. There are no exposures but the rocks are known from borehole data. St Clomaun's Well is a natural spring in the Ballysteen Formation, a band of dark grey, fossil-rich, muddy limestone that is very well exposed around the lighthouse at Hook Head. Rocks of the 350 million year old Duncormick Formation were quarried locally in the past and the coarse red and grey pebbly quarried rock (pictured above right) was used to build Duncormick Bridge. An exposure can be seen in the vacant house site on the village street.



Thick layers of clayey sediments left behind when the ice sheets of the last glaciation melted were the parent materials of the soil that developed over the past 13,000 years; a fine, loamy, poorly-drained soil type called a 'surface water gley' [Kilrush Series (0700KR)]⁷.

Duncormick River

The two opening lines of the ballad titled 'The Town of Duncormick' by Dublin-based P J McCall who holidayed in the area read: "Oh the town of Duncormick is built like a nest; With a hill to the East and a hill to the West."⁸ The lines describe how the village nestles in the large valley of the small Duncormick River. The modern misfit river flows along the bottom of what may have been a former glacial meltwater channel. The headwaters of the river are located 12km north at Taghmon and the total length of the waterway is 49.92km.⁹



'Lamb's tails': Hazel catkins, the plant's male flower clusters.



St Clomaun's Way

Introduction

St Clomaun's Way is a short but very pleasant walk in the village of Duncormick. The walk is along a gravelled path running from Duncormick Bridge on the main street of the village to a riverside holy well and back, a return journey of about 1km.

The first half of the walk is along the bank of the Duncormick River, while the second half is through an elevated Hazel wood clothing the steep, east-facing, slope of the river valley. The map (right) shows the walk highlighted in yellow with ten numbered stops. Points of interest at each stop are described very briefly below.

Stop No 1.

This stop is immediately inside the entrance gate/stile of the walk. Points of interest are: (1) Duncormick Bridge, (2) the underlying geology, (3) wildflowers on the bridge wall, and (4) the surrounding trees.

The present three-span bridge is dated to the 18th century^{10 & 3} and its building stone is 360 million year old Duncormick Formation conglomerate¹¹. More than 20 species of wildflowers, ferns and mosses thrive in the lime mortar of the bridge, together with



liverworts on the gravelled path. The tallest trees are Ash, Sycamore, Elm and Oak. For a handy and very informative mobile 'phone guide, check out the free tree identification app available on the British Woodland Trust website¹².

Stop No 2.

This stop is at the newly-built bridge over a land drain. Points of interest are: (1) trees and (2) the rookery at Duncormick Bridge.

The native trees growing on the riverbank are predominantly Ash and Sycamore and some Elm with an understorey of Elder and Hawthorn and some Blackthorn.

The trees planted on the landward side of the path are predominantly Alder and Pedunculate Oak with occasional Rowan, Sessile Oak, Beech and Silver Birch.

Rooks are members of the crow family. They gather in mild weather during winter and nest late March to early May. The same nest is used



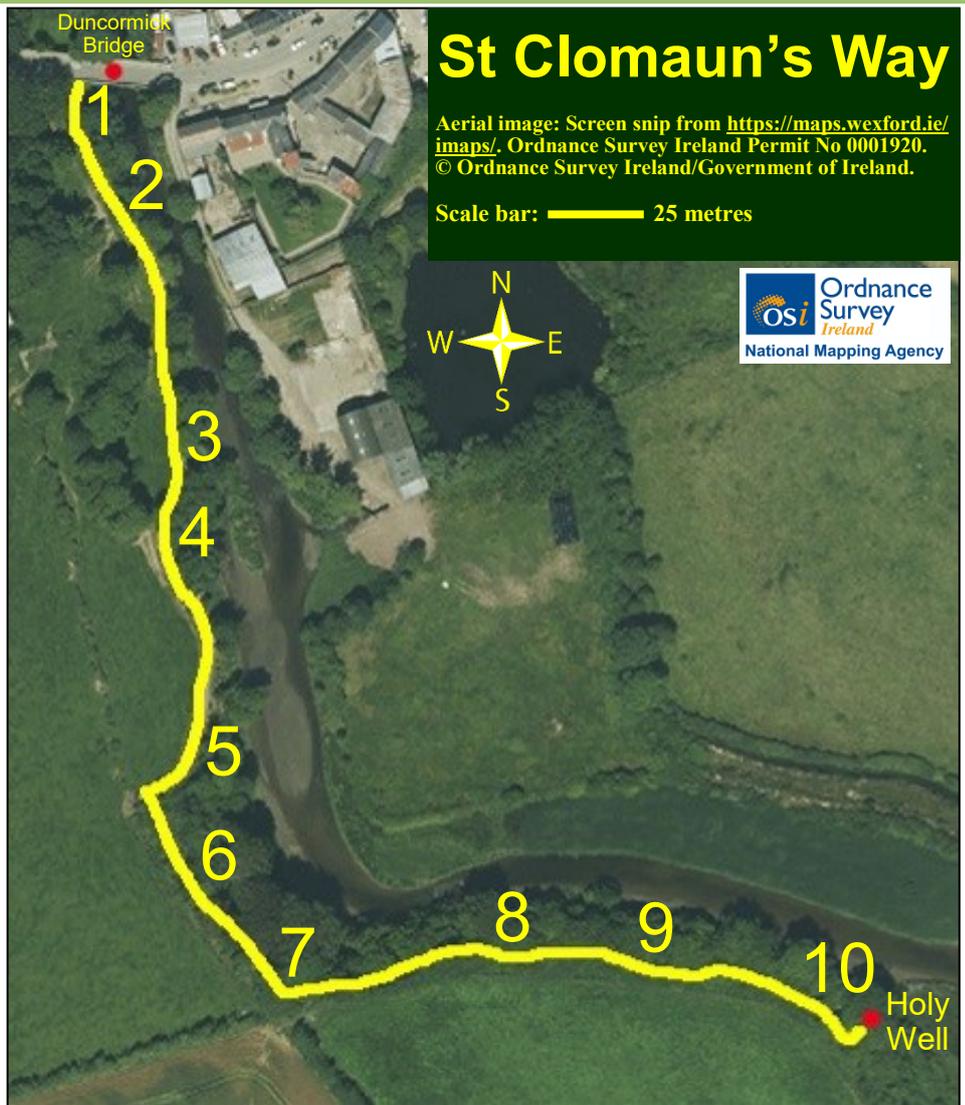
each year with repairs and additions. The male brings building materials and the female renovates. Eggs 3-5; blue-green base colour with highly variable markings. Female incubates for 15-18 days while her mate feeds her. Nestlings

fed for 31-35 days before fledging. Single brooded. Life span normally about five years.

Stop No 3.

This stop is at the start of the island. Points of interest: (1) the river and (2) its wildlife.

The river rises near Taghmon, 12km north of Duncormick. The river and its tributaries have a combined length of 50km⁹. At Duncormick village the river enters the tidal estuary. The



decrease in gradient causes the flow to become sluggish and for silt and other fine sediments to be deposited. The river banks are steep with



no adjoining floodplains, flood-meadows, riverside swamps, marshes or reedbeds. Brown Trout, Three-spined Sticklebacks and Stone Loach are common. Eels and Atlantic Salmon are now rare. Flounders and Thick-lipped Grey Mullet ascend to feed with the flooding tide^{13 & 14}.

Large Red and Common Blue are the most common damselflies. Emperor, Hairy Hawker and Common Darter are all common dragonflies during their flight periods.

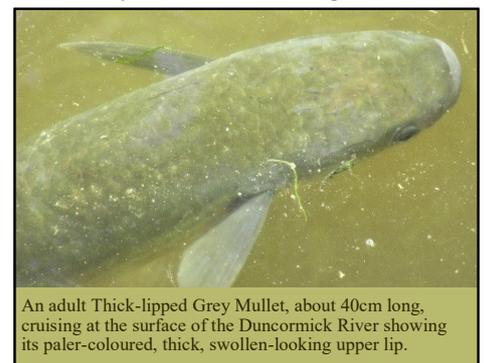
On summer nights, Daubenton's Bats hunt over the water surface for insects while Soprano Pipistrelles forage along the bank vegetation. Common Pipistrelles and Leisler's Bat occur occasionally.

Stop No 4.

This stop is at the hide and the points of interest are (1) birdlife and (2) rushes.

Moorhen and Little Egret are normally the commonest birds. When the tide has ebbed in a dry time, Pied and Grey Wagtails, Grey Crows and Black-headed Gulls often forage on the exposed gravel shoals. Grey Heron, Redshank and Common Sandpiper are occasional. Mallard breed in summer. Small parties of Teal are present in winter. A Wren is usually to be seen busily pottering around on the island. A sudden, brief explosion of azure and cobalt blue are a rare treat as a Kingfisher flashes by.

Rushes are a family of 22 flowering plants distinguished by their cylindrical stems and stiff, stem-like leaves. They decorate the riverbank on both sides of the hide; they are traditionally used to make St Brigid's crosses.



An adult Thick-lipped Grey Mullet, about 40cm long, cruising at the surface of the Duncormick River showing its paler-coloured, thick, swollen-looking upper lip.

Stop No 5.

This is a walk rather than a stop; it is a leisurely stroll up the steep incline with frequent stops to examine the wayside trees. The most obvious trees and shrubs are Alder (female cones right, top), Silver Birch, Hawthorn, Oak (with marble galls right, bottom), Hazel, Aspen and Blackthorn.



At the top of the hill there is a fine view of the large river valley with its small, misfit river.

Stop No 6.

This stop is where the path enters the Hazel woodland. Points of interest are: (1) the SAC and (2) the Hazel woodland community.



NATURA 2000



Natura 2000 is a network of 26,935 (February 2022) protected habitats and nature conservation areas throughout the territories of the 27 member states of the European Union (EU)¹⁵. On-going development of the network is the centrepiece of EU policy with regard to nature conservation and biodiversity.

The woodland here is part of the Natura 2000 network as the lower valley and

estuary of the Duncormick River comprise the northern extremity of the Ballyteige Burrow Special Area of Conservation (SAC)¹⁶.

The wood is a Hazel woodland, one of the 22 woodland vegetation types recorded in Ireland; it corresponds with both vegetation type 2c^{17&18} and habitat type WN2¹⁹.

Hazel is multi-stemmed shrub with large, roundish, soft, floppy, hairy leaves with a toothed margin that ends in an abrupt sharp point (right, top). The male flowers are the familiar dangling yellow 'lamb's tails' that appear in late winter. The fruits are the even more familiar edible nuts.

Wild flowers that regularly recur in a vegetation community are called 'constants'.

The constants in Hazel woodland are regarded as: Wood-sorrel (right, middle), Dog-violet, Barren Strawberry, Herb Robert, Sanicle, Primrose, Wood Anemone, Pignut,



Germander Speedwell and Yellow Pimpernel (bottom right)¹⁸.

Stop No 7.

This stop is at the picnic table. Points of interest are: (1) bat boxes, (2) woodland structure, and (3) lichens.

Note the bat boxes in the tall Beech tree. These provide safe roosting sites for bats hunting in the woodland. The entrance is underneath and the wood is grooved to provide grips for bats crawling in.

The woodland may be perceived as consisting of three descending vertical layers: the tree layer, the understorey, and the ground layer.

The tree layer comprises a typically low (5m) sub-canopy dominated by Hazel with scattered, taller (8m) emergents of Beech, Ash, Sycamore, and a Poplar.

The understorey has frequent Hazel scrub, scattered Hawthorn and occasional Elder, Blackthorn and Aspen.

The ground layer comprises several mosses, most of the ten Hazel wood constants (listed at Stop 6 above) and a diversity of other flowering plants including Ivy, Bramble, Soft Shield-fern, Bluebell, Greater Stitchwort, Bugle, Wood Avenas, Lords-and-Ladies, Wood Speedwell, and Bracken.

Netted Shield Lichens are common on the tree branches.

Stop No 8.

This stop is at the exposed land-drainage pipes. Points of interest are (1) the glacial legacy and (2) the underlying soil.

Thick layers of clayey sediments left behind when the ice sheets of the last glaciation melted were the parent materials of the soil that developed over the past 13,000 years; a fine, loamy, poorly-drained soil type called a 'surface water grey' (Kilrush Series)⁷.

Stop No 9.

This stop is at the lowest point on the path. Points of interest are (1) tidal flooding and (2) woodland wildlife.

This lowest point, some 5-6m from the water's edge, is subject to occasional flooding from the



The colourful Peacock butterfly, here resting on Hazel leaves, with its four eye spots is one of our biggest and most beautiful insects. The most common butterflies found in the Hazel wood are Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Orange Tip and Small Tortoiseshell. Peacock, Painted Lady and Comma occur infrequently.

rare coincidence of a combination of prolonged heavy rainfall, extreme high tide, low pressure, onshore gales and an Atlantic swell.

Hedgehogs occur in the wood and Otters in the estuary. Wood Mouse tooth marks may be seen on Hazel nuts. Woodland birds are difficult to see due to the dense vegetation but Wood Pigeons, Robins, Blackbirds, Wrens, Great Tits, Magpies, Goldcrests, Collared Doves, Rooks and Jackdaws are all common.

The woodland is also home to a diversity of butterflies, bumblebees, hoverflies, bees and other insects together with a range of fungi, mosses and ferns.



Honey Fungus is very common in the Hazel woodland. It is a parasite that infects and ultimately kills trees.

Stop No 10.

This stop is at St Clomaun's Well. Points of interest are (1) the well, and (2) the reedswamp on the opposite bank of the river. St Clomaun's Well is a natural



Hedgehogs are primarily nocturnal. By day, they lie up in woodland undergrowth and emerge at dusk to feed. During the night they may travel over long distances hunting for beetles and other insects, earthworms, caterpillars, slugs, earwigs, and birds' eggs.

upwelling of calcium-rich groundwater issuing from the underlying Ballysteen Formation limestone rock formed some 350 million years ago. In the past, wells were venerated by pagans as spring water issuing from the ground was interpreted as a gift from the gods of the underworld. With the arrival of Christianity, well worshiping traditions were Christianised and wells were dedicated to saints.

Common Reed is our largest, native wild grass. In late May, Mallard ducklings venture out of the reeds into the main channel of the river closely guarded by their mother. There is an extensive stand of Sea Club-rush downstream of the well.

Conclusion

The St Clomaun's Way riverside walk and nature trail is an excellent amenity advanced by the Duncormick Area Action Group and Tidy Towns Group. Everyone using the wonderful amenity can contribute to conserving the biodiversity of the Duncormick area by following the Country Code.

Country Code

Local people and residents are justifiably proud of their village and seek to preserve and protect its many amenities. Visitors to Duncormick are, of course, very welcome and can help conserve the biodiversity of the area by following the Country Code.

- Leave the area as you found it. Do nothing to destroy the amenities you have come to enjoy. Kill nothing but time; take nothing but photographs and memories.
- Take your rubbish home with you. Leave nothing but footprints.
- Follow the Safety Rules posted at the entrance.



The Hazel woodland is a protected area managed by the government's National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). If you see any threats to wildlife report your concerns to Tony Murray, the local NPWS Conservation Ranger, email Tony.Murray@housing.gov.ie, telephone 01 539 3212.

Thank you.

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Soft Shield-fern is abundant in the Hazel wood growing upwards from the ground in shapes like giant shuttlescocks.



Bluebells are in flower on St Clomaun's Way during late April and the month of May.