

# Friends of St. Declan's Way

E-zine

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## St. Declan's Way Gathering Walk a huge success

Tired but elated, leaden-footed but light-hearted, the walkers of St. Declan's Way arrived into Ardmore on Sunday afternoon July 28th following their trek from Cashel. Feet and calves were stiff and sore but spirits were most definitely high as the group of 60 approached Ardmore's famous landmark, St. Declan's round tower. On Wednesday morning, July 24th they had set off within sight of another round tower at the Rock of Cashel. Over a wonderful five-day adventure they had made their way southwards, retracing the footsteps of the 5<sup>th</sup> century saint.

The walk, organised by Knockmealdown Active, passed through Cahir and its imposing castle, down the River Suir and past the Swiss Cottage, on to Ardfinnan and past historic Lady's Abbey. There was camaraderie, hospitality and crack all along the way. We heard stories and tales and were treated to an abundance of history and heritage. Apart from a few showers to cool us down, the weather was extremely kind. Clear skies gave excellent views both north and south as we crossed the Knockmealdown Mountains on Friday.

One of the highlights of the event came after our descent of the mountains, when sister organisation Knockmealdown Forum welcomed us into County Waterford with a medieval-style meal complete with hosts in costume. Stew and traditional Waterford Blaas were served up and helped to restore energy levels after a long trek. A special thanks to Knockmealdown Forum for their hospitality and their assistance with signage and stewarding.

Our walk was a community-led initiative organised by Knockmealdown Active, a community group based on the northern slopes of the mountains. It was part of The Gathering 2013 and we were delighted to host ramblers from Australia, the UK, Cana-



da, the USA, France and the Cayman Islands. 106 individuals participated over the five days and an elite group of 20 completed all five days. Photos of the walk can be viewed on the Knockmealdown Active Facebook page and website – [www.kmdactive.com](http://www.kmdactive.com) Our photo above shows walkers approaching Bottleneck pass on the Tipp-Waterford border.

Well done and thanks to all those involved in the event, to the organising committee of Knockmealdown Active, to our volunteer walk leaders and first aid crew who provided excellent guidance and backup. Well done to those who enlightened the group about the history of all the places we passed en route. Thanks also to South Tipperary & Waterford County Councils, the OPW, Lismore Heritage Centre, Cashel Town Council, Ardmore Tidy Towns and South Tipp Tourism Company and South Tipp Development Company for their support.

## St. Declan the Muse



*"It seems to be true that pilgrimage brings out the best in people! It has been a beautiful experience and I can't wait to do it again and with groups".*

So says poet Kathy D'arcy (left) recalling her recent walk along St. Declan's Way when she encountered hospitality, scenery and history along the route. All along her journey from Ardmore to Cashel, she came across people who have a deep affinity with and reverence for St. Declan's Way.

Kathy has been artist in residence in Ardmore over the summer months and has sought poetic inspiration for her latest work from the history and heritage of St. Declan's Way. Already the author of two acclaimed collections of poetry and a play, Kathy chose to come to Ardmore when she was awarded an Arts Council Bursary. She has also engaged with the local community, running several writing workshops for both adults and children. As part of the Ardmore Pattern Festival, Kathy ran a special walking writing workshop which included a trek along part of St. Declan's Way. This culminated in the publication of a book of children's stories; both the workshops and book were supported by Waterford County Council

Kathy is now concluding an epic poem about ancient ways and will read from her latest work on Culture Night (Friday, September 20th) at 8 p.m. in Lismore Castle. For more on Kathy's work visit [www.kathydarcy.com](http://www.kathydarcy.com)

## The Life of St. Declan: Declan names Ardmore

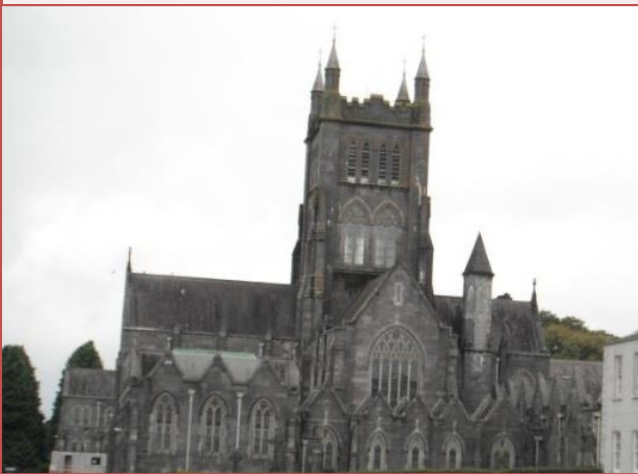
While on a return voyage from Wales, where he had spent 40 days as a guest of St. David, Declan's ship was magically guided by a bell floating on a rock. Declan declared to his followers that he would found his city and monastery wherever the floating bell led them. The story continues:

*The bell directed its course to Ireland until it reached a harbour on the south coast, in the Decies of Munster, at an island called, at that time, High Sheep Island and the ship made the same port, as Declan declared. The holy man went ashore and gave thanks and praise to God that he had reached the place of his resurrection. Now, in that island depastured the sheep belonging to the wife of the chieftain of Decies and it is thence that it derives its Irish name—Ard-na-Caorac. There was in it a high hill and it was a promontory beautiful to behold. One of the party, ascending the summit of the hill, said to Declan: "How can this little height support your people?". Declan replied: "Do not call it little hill, beloved son, but 'Great Height'," and that name has adhered to the city ever since, Aird Mhór-Declain. After this Declan went to the king of the Deisi and asked of him the aforesaid island. Whereupon the king gave it to him.*



A panoramic view of Aird Mhór Deagláin

## NTO: St Declan's Way suitable for development



Following a long process of assessment, the National Trails Office has deemed St. Declan's Way suitable for development. This is an important step along the way to having the route officially approved as a national waymarked walk. It clears the way for the next stage of the process, which entails putting all the necessary trail infrastructure in place and carrying out improvement works.

A key issue that had to be resolved was the Knockmealdown crossing. The NTO were reluctant to approve the route of St. Declan's Way over Bottleneck Pass (*Bearna Cloch an Buidéal*) for safety and environmental reasons. National policy in this area does not permit waymarked walks above 300m elevation, and the route over Bottleneck Pass exceeds this by over 200m.

An alternative route over the Knockmealdowns has been identified via Mount Mellary Abbey (pictured above). The NTO assessed this alternative in August and issued a report to express their satisfaction that the new route met the necessary requirements. It should be pointed out that the original route over Bottleneck Pass can still be walked by experienced walkers who can self-navigate and who have appropriate arrangements in place. It is also planned to arrange guided walks over the original route for those who wish to cross the mountains at this point.

South Tipperary Development Company is currently coordinating a funding application to source the necessary finance to carry out the work. A wide range of stakeholders along the route support this initiative and we hope to have positive news in our next issue.

For further details on the Friends of St. Declan's Way contact Conor Ryan, Conservation and Trails Animator, South Tipperary Development Company. Phone: 087 7378123; E-mail [conorjryan@gmail.com](mailto:conorjryan@gmail.com)  
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