

Site Guide

by **Cóilín MacLochlainn**



Glendalough, Co Wicklow

Upper Lake, Glendalough, and car park viewed from the Spinc. Note the mature Scots Pines planted in the mid-1800s. **Photo:** C  il  n MacLochlainn

C  il  n MacLochlainn describes some of the many great walks to choose from in Glendalough.

Glendalough is highly popular for its scenery and ancient monuments, including its famous round tower; but birdwatchers visit for an extra reason: not only does it host all of the usual woodland birds but there is a hope, almost an expectation, that it will deliver a surprise, even a rarity, in spring or summer.

The reason is that the vale of Glendalough, in Wicklow Mountains National Park, contains substantial old oak woodlands, ideal habitat for rare summer migrants like **Wood Warbler** and **Common Redstart** as well as for Ireland's newest resident, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**.

You could do a different walk in Glendalough every day for a week and still not have exhausted its possibilities. Here, we will focus on walks that tend to deliver exceptional bird sightings. I show all of the walks on the map opposite, but for more precise details you should study the noticeboards in Glendalough or consult guidebooks or the internet in advance of your visit. There is a €4 parking fee at the Upper Lake.

St Kevin's Cell to Pollanass

This is the shortest walk but is a traditional one for birdwatchers and still the most popular:

Walk from the Upper Lake car park to the lakeshore and scan the lake for **Goosanders**: they are most often seen after dawn in spring and summer:

Walk towards the Information Office and cross the wooden bridge, turning right to make

for Reefert Church and St Kevin's Cell. Pause near the cell and look for woodland birds, including **Chaffinch**, **Jay**, **Treecreeper**, **Mistle Thrush** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. In May and June look for **Chiffchaff**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Wood Warbler**, **Common Redstart** and **Pied Flycatcher**; even a **Golden Oriole** has been heard here, and **Red Squirrels** can be seen. **Purple Hairstreak** butterfly is found here too (look for them on sunny evenings).

Climb to where the path joins a hairpin bend, the so-called "S-Bend," and look some more for all of the above. Carry on 'til you overlook the Pollanass ravine; walk up to the top, turn left and make your way back down to the valley floor:

The Green Road

Leave the Upper Lake car park, walk to the Information Office and, turning left, join the Green Road, which here corresponds to the Wicklow Way. Head for the Lower Lake, the round tower and the Seven Churches. Along the way, keep an eye out for **Jay**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Bullfinch**, **Siskin**, **Treecreeper**, **Blackcap**, **Redstart** and **Grey Wagtail**, while at the lake you may find **Little Grebe** or (rarely) **Garden Warbler**. It is best not to stray from the path, but dipping into the wood may increase your chances of finding

Sparrowhawk and Great Spotted Woodpecker

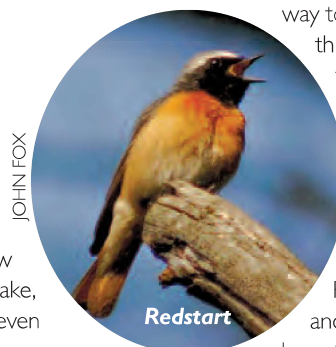
You soon pass the main visitor centre on your left, followed by the ruins of St Saviour's Church. You may decide to retrace your steps at this point, but you have the option of taking a right turn and winding your way uphill to a parallel path which you can follow back to Pollanass, from where you can descend to the Upper Lake car park. The upper path runs through semi-open upland heath and some conifers and offers views of the valley.

Miners' Village Walk

Leave the Upper Lake car park and make your way to the Education Centre to begin this popular walk. Head west along the shore of the Upper Lake through some lovely old Scots Pines. Look for **Red Squirrels** in the trees; there is also a chance of seeing **Otter**, **Pine Marten** and **Stoat** along here.

The trail follows the Glenealo River uphill to disused lead mines and the derelict Miners' Village. The dramatic cliffs in this area hold nesting **Peregrines** and **Ravens** and they look ideal for **Ring Ouzels**, now sadly a very rare visitor.

The trail then becomes steep and rugged: be warned, it is a strenuous climb to the open mountain, so you could decide to turn back at this point.





Vale of Glendalough area, showing various walks. **Map:** C  il  n MacLochlainn

Legend: The Wicklow Way: Deciduous woodland: Coniferous plantation:

If you continue to the Glenealo valley, you may be rewarded with sightings of deer: this area is inhabited by a herd of hybrid **Red Deer/Sika Deer**.

There is a footbridge in the upper valley which gives you the option of crossing the river and looping back to the car park via the Spinc ridge: this would be a long and arduous walk.

The Spinc Walk

To reach the Spinc Walk from the Upper Lake car park is a strenuous climb up through some conifers to the open mountain, but once you reach the top you are rewarded with stunning views of the vale of Glendalough.

The climb begins above Pollanass and follows a narrow boardwalk up through the forest. When you gain the ridge, continue west along the boardwalk with conifers to your left. Do not stray from the path: there are dangerous cliffs in this area.

You may see **Meadow Pipit**, **Stonechat**, **Raven**, **Kestrel** and **Irish Mountain Hare** along here and, with luck, **Crossbill**, **Merlin** and **Red Grouse**.

You may now retrace your steps or continue on to a left turn that loops back to Pollanass. However, if you continue on as far as the footbridge in Glenealo valley, you can return to the car park via the Miners' Village – a long and strenuous walk.



FRANK VASSEN

Tree Pipit

St Kevin's Way

For an alternative walk, take the St Kevin's Way from the Education Centre and make your way up through open Scots Pine forest, overlooking Glendalough. This is the kind of habitat which, in the valleys of Wales, supports migrant **Tree Pipits**, and they could occur here.

This walk leads to the Glendasan valley, where **Whinchats** and **Wheatears** are found in summer, and **Ravens** all year.

Brockagh

Join the Wicklow Way in Glendasan and head uphill in the direction of Laragh. The forest on this walk holds many

Siskins, and **Tree Pipits** could occur.

When you reach some open hillside you get a great view of the vale of Glendalough.

Ballard Wood, Laragh

Ballard Wood, just south of Laragh, is a beautiful old oak woodland which holds **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**. **Common Redstarts** have also been recorded here.

Derrybawn Wood, Laragh

Head out of Laragh on the Rathdrum Road (R755) and take a right turn onto the Military Road. On either side of you rise the tall, majestic oaks of ancient Derrybawn Wood. Stop and listen for **Wood Warblers** and **Pied Flycatchers** in early summer. **Woodcock**, **Jay** and **Red Squirrel** are also found here.

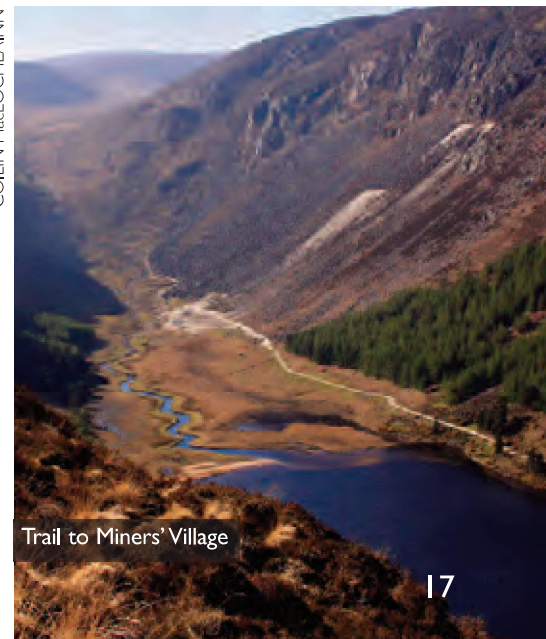
Derrybawn Mountain

To walk part of the way around Derrybawn Mountain, begin at Derrybawn Lodge and make your way through the forest until you are overlooking Glendalough from a height. Work your way around the north flank of the mountain, and then the west flank.

You may see **Siskins**, **woodpeckers** and **Crossbills**. A herd of **feral goats** frequents the area. Look also for **Tree Pipits** in the more open woodland in early summer. Though not known to breed in Ireland, this is very suitable habitat for them (for more information, see Dick Coombes' Summer Diary, page 6).

Whinchats have been seen on the west flank of Derrybawn Mountain and may breed here regularly. Keep an eye out also for **Merlin**.

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Trail to Miners' Village