

Goleen, Crookhaven and Mizen

The Mizen Peninsula, at Ireland's most southwesterly point, is worldwide renown for the beauty of its rugged landscape and ancient heritage. A tour of the Mizen Ring gives you the chance to immerse yourself in the various strands that make the Mizen unique. From geology, flora, birds and fauna to the influence of man and his history on the landscape.

Travelling west from Schull you drive along the bog road built originally in the eighteenth century to carry butter to Cork for export to the new colonies.

TOORMORE

As you approach Toormore on your left you will see the Altar Dolmen, a neolithic tomb. On the right just after that is The Altar Church built during the Famine as relief work. In the grounds of the Altar Restaurant a recent find was a Wedge Tomb from the Bronze Age.

GOLEEN

You continue on through the townlands of Kealfadda, Ballyrisode and Ballydevlin until you reach Goleen. This village was built during the nineteenth century at a crossroads where a cattle fair was held. You will see that the street is very wide and all the houses were originally built as shops. There is a hidden harbour down to the left in the village, which gives the village its name 'Goilin', 'little inlet'. Although the harbour dries at low tide, giving great feeding for a variety of wildlife including a fox and a pheasant, there is a deepwater quay at the entrance to accommodate fishing boats and yachts.

CROOKHAVEN

Crookhaven Harbour is as picturesque as it was useful being a large sheltered harbour. You pass the old Roadstone Quarry on the side of the mountain, which provided metallurgy for the roads of Wales until 1945. There are numerous Bronze Age field monuments in the hills around Crookhaven. The Ordnance Survey Discovery Series map 88 will indicate their whereabouts for you. The village of Crookhaven has a distinguished history as the last port of call for ships going to and from America. Over the centuries ships stocked up with provisions here before tackling the Atlantic Ocean. All the shipping lines had agents here to tell the ships in which port their cargo had been sold. At the beginning of the 20th. Century it was said that you could cross the harbour on the decks of boats. 700 people lived and worked in the village against the 29 permanent residents today. Marconi came here to try to get his first radio message across the Atlantic and he fitted the first telegraphic equipment to the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse to communicate with the passing ships.

BROW HEAD

On your way back to Barleycove, you can take the road up to Brow Head from Galleycove beach. Looking back east from the top of Brow Head you can see Roaringwater Bay, Cape Clear and some of Carbery's Hundred Isles. The Signal Tower was part of a chain built in 1804 in fear of a French invasion to give fast communications all round the coast. The original signalling was done with a system of flags and blackballs on masts. Brow Head or Mallavogue was a vibrant mining area in the nineteenth century and you can still see the remains of the mines and the miners' houses.

BARLEYCOVE

Barleycove is a large sandy beach backed by sand dunes. The sand dunes were thrown up in the tidal wave that swept Europe after the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755. Today they have been partially eroded but they are protected like much of the coast round this area as European designated Special Areas of Conservation. The road goes to the east of the beach across a causeway bisecting Lissagriffin Lakes and at the T-junction you turn left to Mizen Head.

MIZEN HEAD

Mizen Head Visitor Centre has been developed by a local tourism co-operative at Ireland's most southwesterly point. They have a lease on the Irish Light Signal Station which was built in 1905 to protect shipping from the cliffs in fog. It is a spectacular location with its folded rocks and high cliffs. The Signal Station is on an island joined to the mainland with a fine example of an Arched bridge. If you have plenty of puff you can go up the 99 Steps but there is a path for the less energetic! At the top of the cliffs near the car park a new building has been added. Here you may buy a ticket, visit the Shop or the Café, experience the exciting exhibits about modern technology and Safety at Sea, the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse, Marconi in Crookhaven and the Automatic Weather Station. Well worth a visit!

Another gem of the Mizen Peninsula is Three Castle Head where the Three Castles, which are three Tower Houses with, curtain walling. Built in the 15th. Century on the site of a Bronze Age Promontory Fort, the Castles stand sentinel beside a cliff top lake. Access is restricted at the moment because of the unstable state of the castles, but it is worth asking if it is possible to visit.

DUNMANUS

Continuing the journey round the Mizen Ring, you take the road back towards Goleen and turn left onto the Coast Road by Lissagriffin Lakes. As you wind up the road the view to the north suddenly opens up

to show Dunmanus Bay, Sheep's Head and in the distance the Beara Peninsula and the mountains of Kerry. Looking down to the sea you pass Dhurode Copper Mine with the round stone built Explosives Magazine. All along the road you will see signs of the mines. You reach Dunmanus Castle, an O'Mahony stronghold from the 15th. Century, beside the little harbour. A short drive from there takes you back onto the Durrus/Bantry road.