



Turas Columbanus

Re-discovering Irish
monastic heritage



Knights of Saint Columbanus, assisted by David Ward-Perkins & Associates,



From the 6th to the 10th Century, Irish monasticism grew and flourished in a form uniquely developed in and around Ireland. The monasteries were at the heart of society, guardians of ancient Irish traditions and recognized European centres of learning.

Columbanus

Columbanus was born near Mount Leinster in the year 543. He grew up in the time Kevin of Glendalough and Brendan the Navigator, and was a contemporary of Colmcille (Columba) of Iona and of Ciaran (Kieran), founder of Clonmacnoise.

He traveled from the south to the north of Ireland over a period of 10 to 20 years, at a time of great expansion and exchange between monastic communities.





Turas Columbanus allows visitors to re-discover this extraordinary age of Irish monasticism, whose many traces can be found in the Irish country side.

The journey primarily crosses the central and eastern areas of the island, which have been called 'Ireland's Ancient East'.

Along the way the traveler will rediscover this 'golden age': the ruins of great monasteries; churches founded in the period; the traces and histories of the great saints that followed the time of Patrick, such as St. Brigid and St. Finian of Clonard; but also of the great pre-Christian sites that would have shaped and still shape the rural landscape of Ireland.



This journey takes one through the heart of Ireland and through some of the richest early monastic heritage, dating from the 5th to 8th centuries.



Turas Columbanus is, on the one hand, a **tourism product**: a voyage of discovery by car or by bicycle.

It corresponds to more 'intelligent' forms of tourism: exploration of the island through historical traces and landscape.



On the other hand, it is a **pilgrimage trail**, from the birthplace of Saint Columbanus to the point where he sailed for continental Europe.

It is a discovery of the landscapes and sites of early Christian Ireland, and the lives of the early saints.



Driving and Cycling

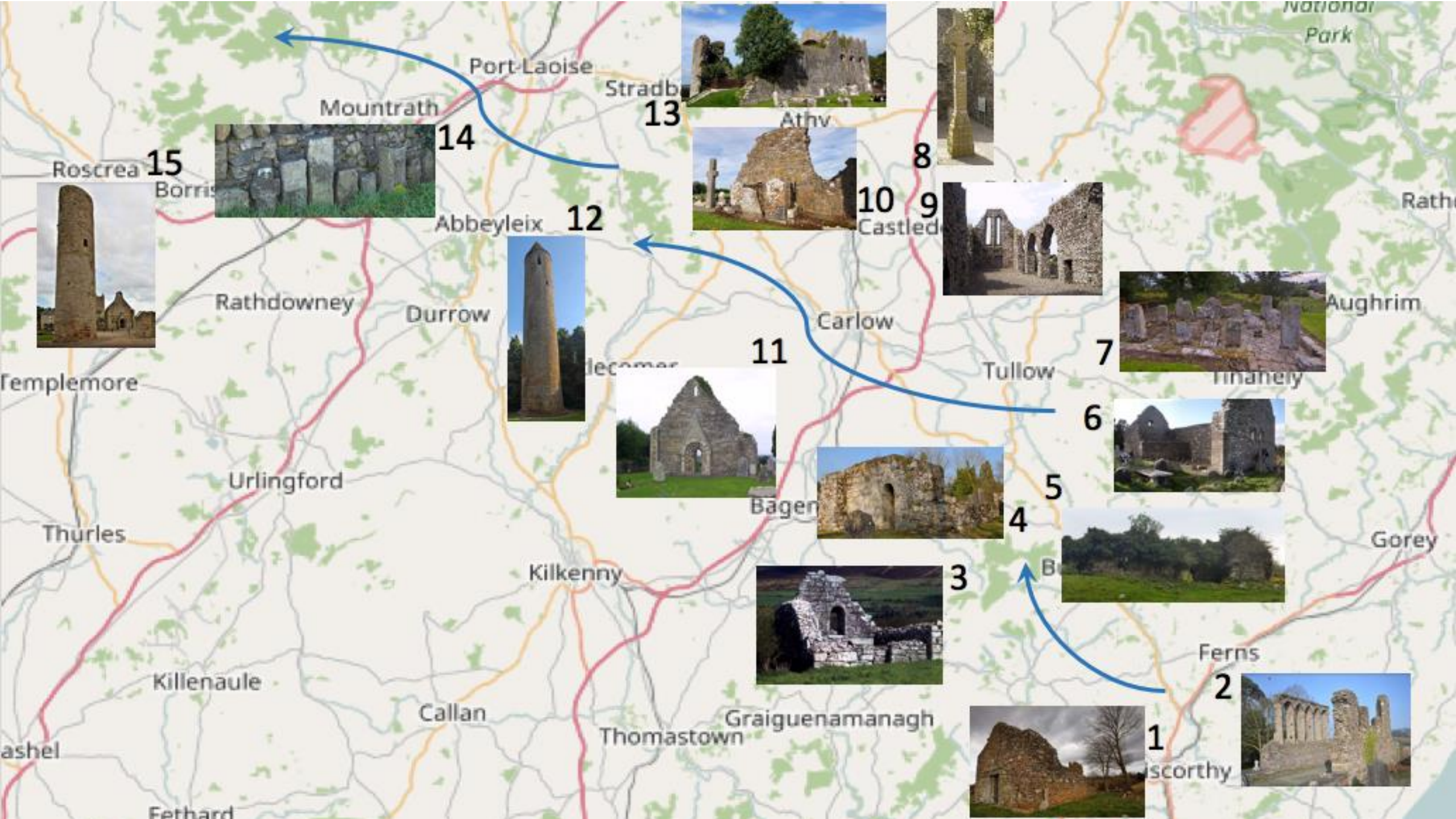
The tourism product

The following slides show the tourism assets along the journey from south to north.



South-East Heartland

From the Wicklow Mountains to the Slieve Bloom Mountains, on hills and in valleys, in forests and farmland, the visitor discovers traces of an older civilisation.

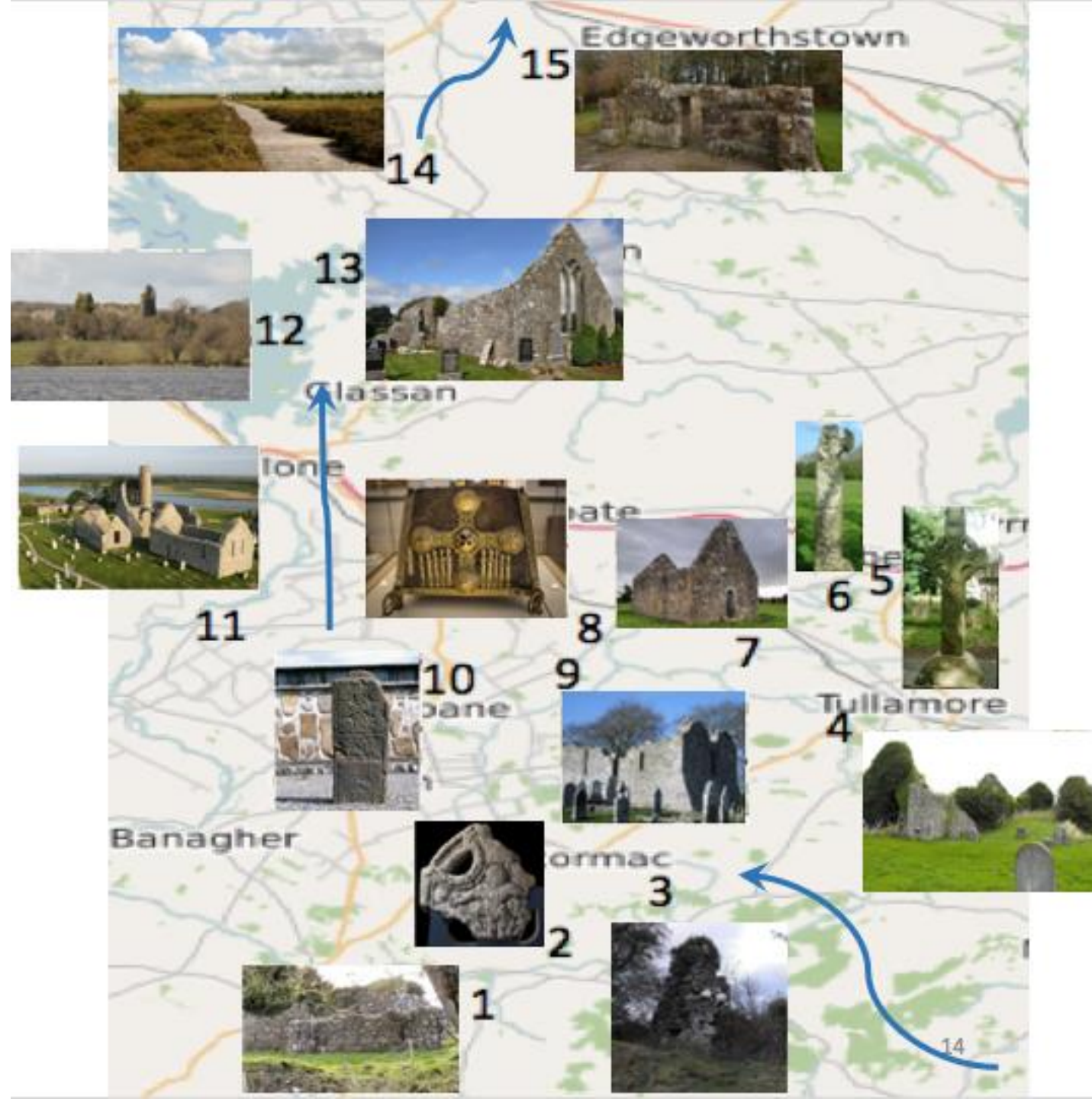


Sites

1. Ferns Monastic site
2. Clone Church
3. St. Finian's Church
4. Barragh Church Ruins attached to Cranavane Holy Well
5. Killoughternane Church and Well
6. Aghowle High Cross and Church
7. Clonmore Monastic Site and Holy Well
8. Moone High Cross
9. Castledermot Monastic Site
10. Sleaty Church and Crosses
11. Killeshin Romanesque Church
12. Timahoe Round Tower
13. Oughaval Church
14. Clonenagh Site

Shannon & Midlands

The great river was a highway linking the early centres of learning. In the adjoining hills and plains to its east were founded some of the greatest monasteries of the age



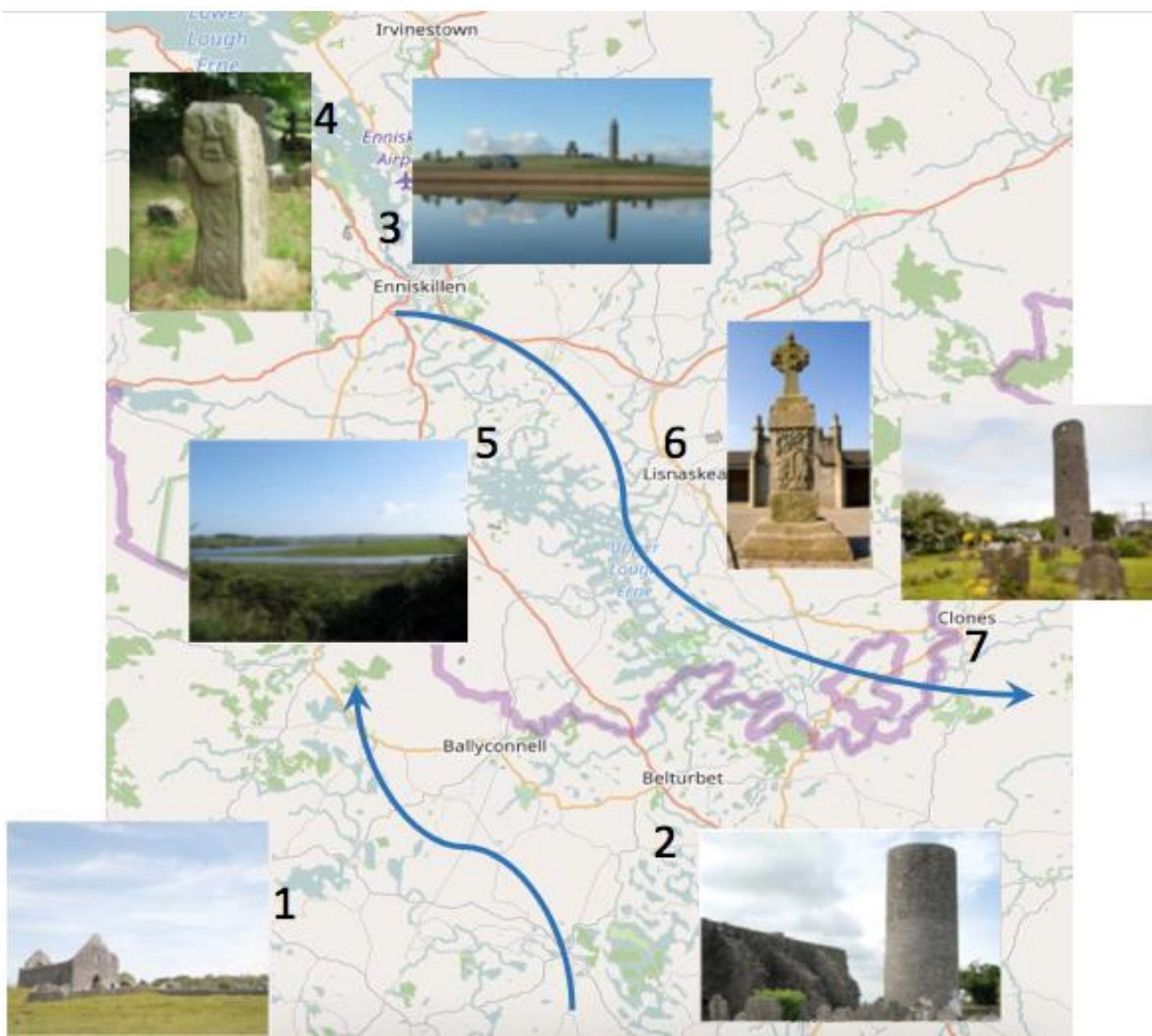
Sites

1. Seir Kieran Monastic Site and Round Tower
2. Drumcullen Monastic Site
3. Letter Monastic Site
4. St. Colman Church, Lynally Monastic Site
5. Tihilly High Cross
6. Durrow High Cross and St. Colmcille's Well
7. Rahan Monastic Site
8. St. Manchan's Shrine - Boher Roman Catholic Church
8. Lemanaghan Monastic Site
9. Gallen Monastic Site
10. Clonmacnoise Monastic Site
11. Inchcleraun Island Monastic Site
12. Saint's Island Abbey
13. Corlea Ancient Trackway
14. St. Mel's Church

The Lakes

Sites:

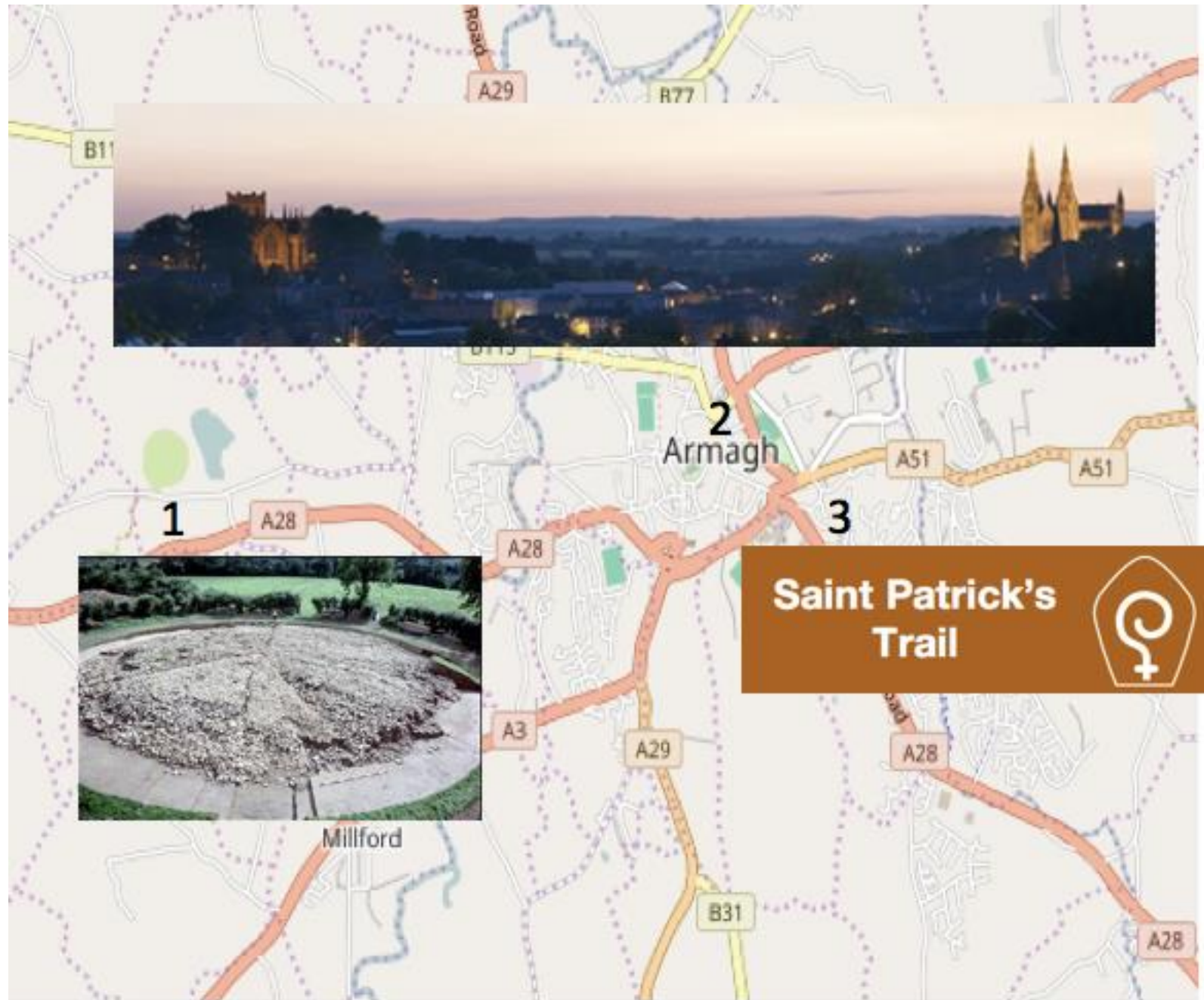
1. Fenagh Abbey
2. Drumlane Church and Round Tower
3. Devenish Island
4. Killadeas Christian Site
5. Cleenish Island
6. Lisnaskea High Cross
7. Clones Monastic Site



Armagh

Sites:

1. Navan Fort
2. Armagh St. Patrick's Cathedrals
3. Start of St. Patrick's Way & Trail



Downpatrick

Sites:

1. Downpatrick High Cross and Cathedral
2. St. Patrick Centre
3. Inch Abbey
4. Saul Mortuary House & St. Patrick's Well
5. Struell Wells
6. Raholp Church



Strangford Lough and Bangor

Sites:

1. Bangor Abbey
2. Stricklands Glen
3. North Down Museum
4. Movilla Abbey
5. Nendrum
6. Grey Abbey



Louth and Mourne

Sites:

1. Dromiskin Round Tower
2. St. Mochta's House
3. St. Mary's Priory
4. Inishkeen Round Tower
5. Hill of Faughart
6. Maghera Round Tower



The Boyne Valley

Sites:

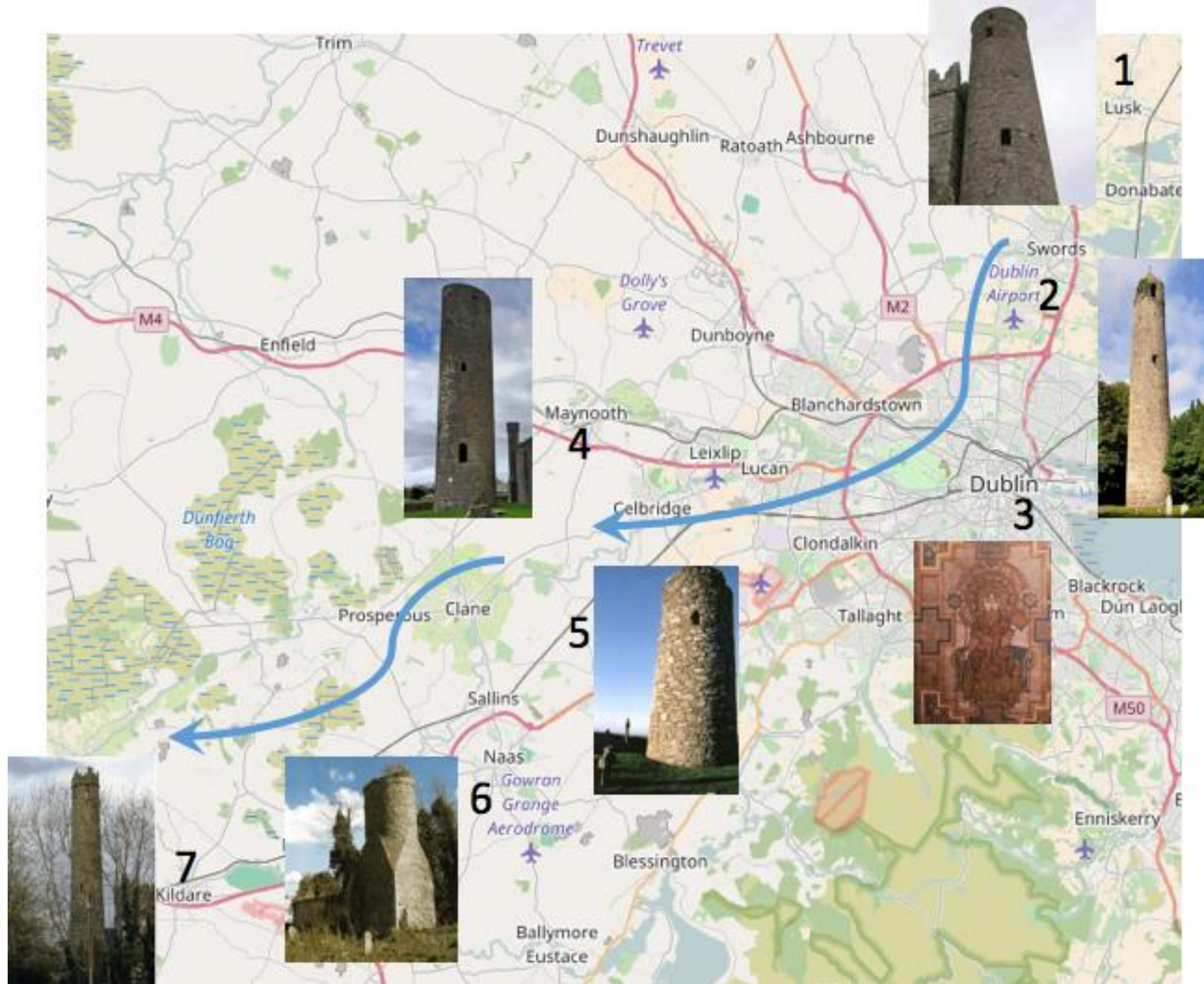
1. Hill of Tara
2. Duleek High Cross
3. Monasterboice
4. Brú na Bóinne Site
5. Hill of Slane
6. Donaghmore Round Tower
7. Kells Monastic Site
8. Castlekeeran High Cross
9. St. Killian's Center



Liffey

Sites:

1. Lusk Round Tower
2. Swords Round Tower
3. Book of Kells
4. Taghadoo Round Tower
5. Oughterard Round Tower
6. Killashee Round Tower
7. Kildare Monastic Site



Glendalough

- Glendalough Monastic site
- St. Mary's Church
- St. Saviour's Church
- Trinity Church
- Reefert Church
- Temple na Skellig
- The Caher fort
- St. Kevin's Bed and cell
- Glendalough Interpretation center



Cycling

- The cycling route would roughly follow the same proposed itinerary as the driving routes
- It would use existing cycling paths and lesser country roads
- National and local cycling associations and clubs would aid in route research and suggestions for trails
- This will require a specialist in cycling and route development, to oversee the planning and development.



Next steps for the tourism route

- Evaluate interest and potential support from Tourism NI and Failte Ireland. Could this be a strand of their tourism strategy? If so, how?
- Evaluate potential support from local authorities. Understand how they might like to move the project forward, even at a local level.
- Plan A: Look for funding (European or national) to undertake one or more full studies, with the aim of implementing the driving and/or cycling routes.
- Plan B (assuming Plan A does not move quickly): work with experts and enthusiasts, to build on the material researched so far. Find ways to publicise this material (website, articles, book, conference, etc.).

Pilgrimage

The walking route

Pilgrimage



- The pilgrimage route takes you through the heart of Ireland past historic sites and scenic landscape
- It follows established walking paths or minor roads which walkers can enjoy
- Current trails allow you to walk a certain amount of Turas Columbanus but there are gaps, where appropriate solutions need to be found.

The Suggested Route

In the Republic of Ireland, it could take the following walking trails:

- #2 Barrow way
- #18 Grand Canal
- #23 Miners way and Historic way
- #20 Leitrim way
- #8 Cavan way

In Northern Ireland, it would essentially follow the Ulster Way which includes:
Sliabh Beagh Way & St. Patrick's Way.

This would be a provisional route, enabling walking of Turas Columbanus in the short term.



Benefits & issues

The benefit of this provisional route is that:

- It follows the waterways (Barrow River, Grand Canal, Shannon River);
- It is a route that Columbanus might have taken, passing close to many key monastic sites.

Some of the issues:

- There is no major established trail from Clonmacnoise up the river Shannon to Leitrim
- There is no major trail up the east coast, between Dublin and Louth. Therefore the Boyne Valley cannot initially be part of the trail. A route through Meath would have to be developed later.



Next steps 1. Recruiting support

- Make Turas Columbanus pilgrimage route a priority objective for the Friends of Columbanus (Navan & Bangor)
- Identify pilgrims who are interested in piloting Turas Columbanus, and publishing their experiences.
- Work with local walking clubs for trail recommendations and partnerships in development of new paths.
- Identify local authorities interested in supporting the initiative.
- Build support through churches, cultural associations and local communities.
- Hold events, meetings and walks, involving more and more people.



Next steps 2: Developing Turas Columbanus

- Identify businesses and groups interested in providing accommodation and services.
- Build a reference website, with maps, itineraries, suitable lodgings and hostels, and other advice.
- Build a social media community (e.g. Facebook), to collect and publish the experiences and itineraries of increasing numbers of groups and people.
- Get professional backing from national walking groups and national or regional sports and outdoor foundations.
- Spread the word in the tourism community: at heritage sites, in hostels and in bed & breakfasts.



Next steps 3. Ongoing drive

At the heart of Turas Columbanus, as of Step 2, there will need to be an active group of enthusiasts, with sufficient logistics and administrative skills to organise meetings and events, seek subsidies and lobby local authorities. Ideally, this group would have a strong leader.

It may take some time for this group to form. Meanwhile, preparatory work can be moving forward, as presented in Step 1.