

# Southwest

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Climbing Carrauntoohil, the highest mountain in Ireland, on the classic **Coomloughra Horseshoe** (p108)
- Exploring the tip of the **Sheep's Head** (p130), the most isolated peninsula in the southwest
- Discovering the wonderfully serrated coastline around Slea Head on the **Dingle Way** (p100)
- Challenging yourself with scrambles along the knife-edged ridges of the **MacGillycuddy's Reeks** (p110)

Highest peak in the region: Carrauntoohil, MacGillycuddy's Reeks, 1039m

Southwest Ireland is a region of superlatives. It boasts the country's highest peaks, receives its greatest volume of overseas visitors, and offers months of walking to challenge enthusiasts of all persuasions. Encompassing counties Cork and Kerry, the region is split into a series of peninsulas, each very different in character. The Sheep's Head in County Cork is the most remote and untouched by tourism, and is a place where solitude is still possible. The Beara Peninsula, on the border between Cork and Kerry, has a wild, craggy landscape juxtaposed with colourful and picturesque villages. The Iveragh Peninsula has the highest and most challenging mountain range in Ireland. Finally, the Dingle Peninsula draws walkers hoping for a clear day to climb majestic Brandon Mountain or to experience an iconic coastal landscape that has starred in several Hollywood films.

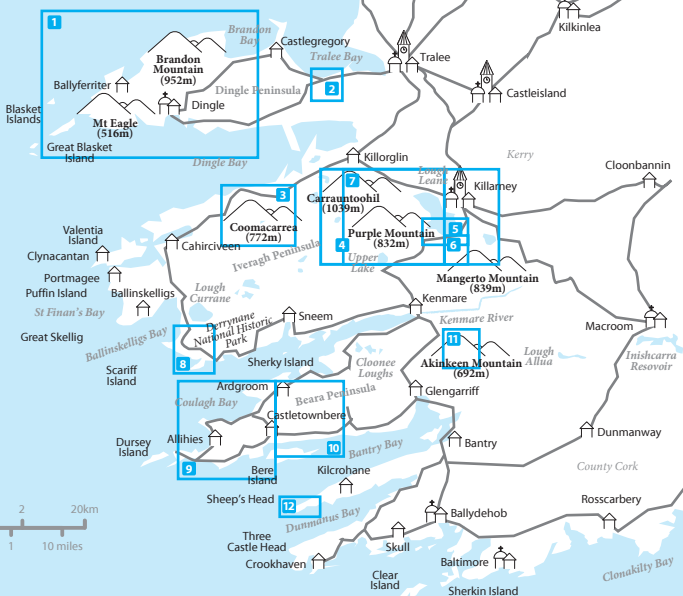
Each peninsula has its own Waymarked Way, offering excellent long-distance paths, as well as a wide selection of shorter, easier walks. Besides the stunning scenery, the main attraction of the region is the opportunity to experience Irish culture both past and present. From its numerous standing stones, *clochans* (beehive-shaped, dry-stone huts) and other historic relics, to the friendly pubs that so often provide the focal point for celebrations after a good day's activity, the southwest can be hard to beat.



## SOUTHWEST

## Southwest Maps

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## HISTORY

The landscape of the southwest is littered with evidence of its early history. Numerous promontory forts, stone circles, stone rows, mounds and cairns can be dated as far back as 5000 years.

By the 8th century the Vikings had arrived on the peninsulas, raided them and settled in Smerwick Harbour near Dingle. Four hundred years later it was the Normans turn to settle in the area, intermarry with locals and adopt the language. Soon after this, the area's recorded history becomes a series of battles against the English. In 1601 the Irish and Spanish fought the English at Kinsale, and O'Sullivan Beare's stronghold at Castletownbere, County Cork, was besieged.

The English forces were victorious, and a harsh regime of penal laws was put in

place by 1695. Many Catholics were forced into the hills to worship; the many 'mass paths' in the region testify to this period of Ireland's history. It wasn't until the 19th century that a Kerryman, Daniel O'Connell, changed the course of Irish history when he successfully campaigned for Catholics to be emancipated. His ancestral home in Derrynane is featured on one of the routes in this chapter (see p120). O'Connell died in 1847 in the middle of the Great Famine. Other legacies of this traumatic period appear in the form of famine roads, mass graves and deserted villages.

During the early 20th century the countryside was further depopulated as young men and women emigrated abroad. More recently this displacement has been offset by a gradual influx of European settlers,