



## Westport to Connemara Drive

### **(174KM/109MLS) Westport - Louisburgh - Delphi - Leenane - Maam Cross - Clifden - Letterfrack - Leenane - Errif Valley - Westport**

From Westport Town take the coast road (R335) out by The Quay towards Louisburgh. This coast road gives superb panoramic views of Clew Bay and its multitude of islands including Clare Island (the one with the large hill at one end) and Achill Island.

8km from Westport is Croagh Patrick, the holy mountain locally known as 'the Reek' and site of pilgrimage from pre-Christian times. The starting point for climbing is a carpark on the left of the road in Murrisk. Almost opposite is the National Famine Memorial, a beautifully crafted bronze sculpture of a 'coffin ship' with skeletons strewing the rigging. Behind the memorial, nearer the sea is a fine ruin of a 15th century Augustinian Friary.

Continue on the R335 through Lecanvey and look out to the right for a small wooded hill. This is Old Head which has a picturesque fishing pier and a delightful sandy beach. (There are other lovely beaches in this area too - Carrowmore, Silver Strand and Carrownisky.)

In Louisburgh town (13 mls from Westport) drive straight through and over the bridge. As you leave the

town turn left following the signpost for Leenane and R335. Now you have left the coast the scenery changes completely to windswept bogland, with the reassuring bulk of Croagh Patrick in the distance to the left. The narrow road now winds towards the mountains ahead - the Sheaffry Hills to the left and the Mweelrea Mountains to the right. (Take care while driving, sheep on the road are very common.)

8 miles from Louisburgh you will pass Doolough Lough, a long shimmering lake set in a stunning valley location. On the left is a small stone monument to a group of 400 people who died during the famine of the 1800s, having walked from Louisburgh in a vain search for assistance. The road passes right down by the lake, watch out for fishermen in action both on it and later on the river to the left.

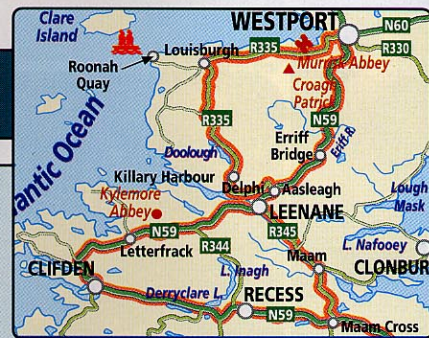
Continue along this scenic valley to Delphi, named for its similarity to the Greek Delphi. Pass over Bundorraha Bridge and soon you will see a superb view of Killary Harbour's north shore. This location was featured in the film 'The Field' starring Richard Harris and Tom

Beringer. After Aashleigh Falls, a pretty waterfall, turn right (N59, signposted Clifden and Leenane), the waters of Killary stay on the right until you reach the picturesque village of Leenane. Turn left as you enter the village, taking the R336 for Maam.

Now you are driving through wild Joyce Country towards the towering Maamturk Mountains. Maamean, signposted to the right is a pilgrimage route followed annually by the devout. This is a Gaeltacht or native Irish speaking area. At Maam Bridge (8 miles from Leenane) turn right over the Failmore River. This brings you to Maam Cross a reasonably large junction, where you turn right again, onto the N59 signposted Kylemore Abbey.

This attractive road brings you past Deryclare Lake, through Recess and Ballinahinch and on to Clifden, the 'capital of Connemara'. Again, there are many lovely beaches in this area.

At Clifden take the road to the right just before the town signposted 'Kylemore Abbey and Inishbofin'. About 3 miles further on is the turn



off to the left for Cleggan and the Inishbofin ferry. Keep right at this junction following the signs for Westport and Kylemore Abbey. 5 miles further on pass through Letterfrack village and watch out for Connemara National Park to the right. After another 5 miles you will come to Kylemore Lough and the beautiful Abbey which is visible from the road.

This road brings you along the other side of the Killary Harbour, with the water on the left. The Killary is actually Ireland's only fjord, a feature usually associated with Scandinavia. Things should begin to look familiar now, as you approach Leenane Village. Pass straight through Leenane, following the N59 back into Mayo and towards Westport. This route takes you back to Westport through the Errif Valley, over the Errif River with the Partry Mountains (right) and Sheaffry Hills (left) as an impressive backdrop. On this road, Westport is just 14 miles from Leenane.