

Glendalough lies in the heart of the Wicklow Mountains and is only one hour south of Dublin.

Established by St. Kevin in the 6th century, it grew into one of Europe's most important centers of learning. It is hard to imagine that this island, what we now know as Ireland, was considered an "Island of Saints and Scholars" while the rest of Europe was digging itself out of the doom and despair of the "Dark Ages."

"Monastic settlements" sprung up all over Europe during the 6th-12th centuries. Technically sponsored by the Catholic Church (aka Rome), these monasteries were designed to provide peace, education, shelter, and divine direction for scholars who had dedicated themselves as followers of Christ.

As you wander the grounds here at Glendalough, imagine it filled with men tending crops, transcribing scripture, posed in meditation, and involved in worship. Additionally, the monastic settlement was an active and fully-functioning community with its own kitchen, brewery, defenses, bunkhouses, and men involved in everyday life. The age of all the buildings here at Glendalough is uncertain; however, most date from the 8th to 12th centuries. Many were restored during the 1870's, but even that was a long time ago!

In the Irish language, "glendalough" means "valley of the two lakes." The main group of ruins lies on the upper end of the "lower lake" (closest to the Visitor's Center). There are well-maintained trails leading to all the sights. A visit here requires at least a couple of hours, but it is possible to spend an entire day wandering around the ruins and enjoying the mountains. The older buildings are situated around the "lower lake" about 500 yards beyond the Visitor's Centre.

The Visitor's Centre offers guided tours (approximately \$4 per person) and a fine exhibit and film about the site. They also have inexpensive maps and free information for visitors. It costs nothing to walk through the ruins and visit the site.

St. Kevin died in 618 AD but the monastery thrived until the English's "Dissolution of the Monasteries" in 1539. After St. Kevin's death, Glendalough became a pilgrimage site attracting visitors from all parts of the world.



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GLENDALOUGH

St. Kevin at Glendalough

Born c.498 at the Fort of the White Fountain, Leinster, Ireland
Died 3 June 618 of natural causes.

Following his ordination, he lived as a hermit for seven years in a cave at Glendalough, a Bronze Age tomb now known as *Saint Kevin's Bed*, to which he was reportedly led by an angel. He wore skins, ate the nettles and herbs, and spent his time in prayer. Word of his holiness spread, and he attracted many followers.

St. Kevin founded the monastery at Glendalough, which included relics brought back during a pilgrimage to Rome. This house, in turn, founded several others, and around it grew a small town. St. Kevin served as abbot for several years. Then, when he saw that the monastery was well established, he withdrew to live as a hermit.

Four years later, he returned to Glendalough, at the request of his monks, and served as abbot until his death at age 120. King Colman of *Ui Faelain* entrusted Kevin with raising his son. He was noted as a man who did not always like the company of people, but was at home with the animals, as some of the legends surrounding him show:



During a drought, Kevin fed his monks with salmon brought to him by an otter. When one of the monks considered making gloves out of the otter's pelt, the otter left and never returned.

Once during Lent, while he held his arms outstretched in prayer, a blackbird laid an egg in St. Kevin's hand. He remained in that position until the baby bird hatched.

A cow, which habitually licked Kevin's clothes while the saint was in prayer, gave as much milk as 50 other cows.

Lacking milk to feed the son of King Colman, Kevin prayed for help. A doe arrived to provide for the baby. When the doe was later killed by a wolf, Kevin chastised the killer; the wolf then provided the milk herself.

A young man with severe epilepsy received a vision that he would be cured by eating an apple. There were, however, no apple trees about. Kevin, seeing the lad's need, ordered a willow to produce apples; twenty yellow apples appeared on the tree.

In his old age, King O'Tool of Glendalough made a pet of a goose. As time passed, the goose also became aged and weak, and finally unable to fly. Hearing of Kevin's sanctity and power, the pagan king sent for him, and asked that he make the beloved goose young. Kevin asked for a payment of whatever land the goose would fly over. As the goose could no longer take flight, O'Toole agreed. When Kevin touched the bird, it grew young, and flew over the entire valley that was used to found the monastery of Glendalough.

A boar was being pursued by a group of hunters with their dogs. It ran to where Kevin sat praying under a tree, and covered beside him for protection. When the dogs saw the saint in prayer, they laid on their stomachs, and would not approach the boar. When the hunters decided they would ignore the man and kill the boar, a flock of birds settled in the tree above the praying saint. The hunters took this as a sign, and left man and beast alone.

<http://saints.sqpn.com/saint-kevin-of-glendalough/>