

THE SAMHAIN CAILLEACH TRAIL

Step into the ancient heart of the kingdom this October for the Samhain Chiarraí Festival, a magical celebration dedicated to the Cailleach Chiarraí (pronounced “Kyle-ock Kear-re”), Ireland's Goddess of Winter. As the autumn leaves turn to gold, follow the footsteps of the daughter of the Sun across County Kerry's most breathtaking landscapes — from the towering peaks of the Hag's Glen to the wild Atlantic cliffs of Dunmore Head where folklore says her journey began, and now also by way of the woven willow effigy that keeps her story alive at Tralee Bay Wetlands. Against this backdrop of spectacular, mist-shrouded scenery, you will experience the legendary warmth of a true Kerry welcome, complete with fireside storytelling, traditional music, and atmospheric mountain trails.

The Six Stops

Stop 1: Dunmore Head (Teach Mór) — Dingle Promontory

- **The Adventure:** Walk the dramatic headland loop at Dunmore Head and look out over the Blasket Islands from the edge of the continent.
- **The Lore:** In classical Irish poetry, this wild headland is celebrated as the ancestral home (An Teach Mór - The Big House) where the Cailleach Chiarraí lived through several lifetimes, outliving husbands, clans, and entire civilisations. Local tradition holds that it was from this exact western horizon that she first emerged, a primal personification of the winter season and the raw power of the Atlantic.
- **Logistics:** Park at the designated Sleah Head Drive pull-off; the grassy walk to the tip is short but steep. Allow 1 hour of walking.

Stop 2: Tralee Bay Wetlands — the Willow Cailleach

- **The Adventure:** From Dunmore Head, drive north-east to Tralee Bay Wetlands Ecology & Activity Park. Follow the trails to find the Willow Cailleach — a large woven effigy of the Veiled One — now standing within the park's ‘Iontas an Saileach / Wonders of Willow’ area.
- **The Lore:** The Willow Cailleach was originally hand-woven by the community during the Samhain Chiarraí Willow Weaving Workshops, shaped from living willow in the same tradition used to make Samhain lanterns. Rather than being returned to the earth after one season, this effigy was given a permanent home at the Wetlands, where she now watches over the reeds and waterways — a living link between the festival's ritual craft and the landscape itself.
- **Logistics:** A gentle, mostly flat walk suitable for all ages and fitness levels. Allow 45 minutes to 1 hour, more if combining with the wider Wetlands trail and Cafe break. Confirm opening hours before travelling.

Stop 3: The Hag's Glen (Com Caillí) — MacGillycuddy's Reeks

- **The Adventure:** Hike the 8km return trail into the majestic glacial valley of the Hag's Glen, walking alongside Lough Gouragh and Lough Callee (The Hag's Lake).
- **The Lore:** This valley was said to be the Hag's mountain stronghold, where she commanded the fierce winter storms that regularly battered Ireland's highest peaks. Legend says she met her demise here after trying to leap across the chasm from Carrauntoohil, falling into the dark depths of the lake that still bears her name.
- **Logistics:** Allow 2.5 to 3 hours from Cronin's Yard. Good hiking boots and rain gear are essential.

Stop 4: The Wailing Woman Rock — Iveragh Peninsula

- **The Adventure:** Drive the rugged coast of Iveragh to locate the striking, jagged coastal outcrop known as The Wailing Woman.
- **The Lore:** Local folklore tells us this stone spire is actually the petrified body of the Cailleach, frozen in time as a punishment or a permanent protection for the coast. She stands frozen mid-cry, eternally watching over the Atlantic and the sacred Skellig Islands, weeping for the passage of her youthful days.
- **Logistics:** Best visited at golden hour; pull safely off the coastal road to view the formation. Stay overnight in Kenmare or Sneem.

Stop 5: Cailleach Beara Loop — Bonane (Sheen Valley)

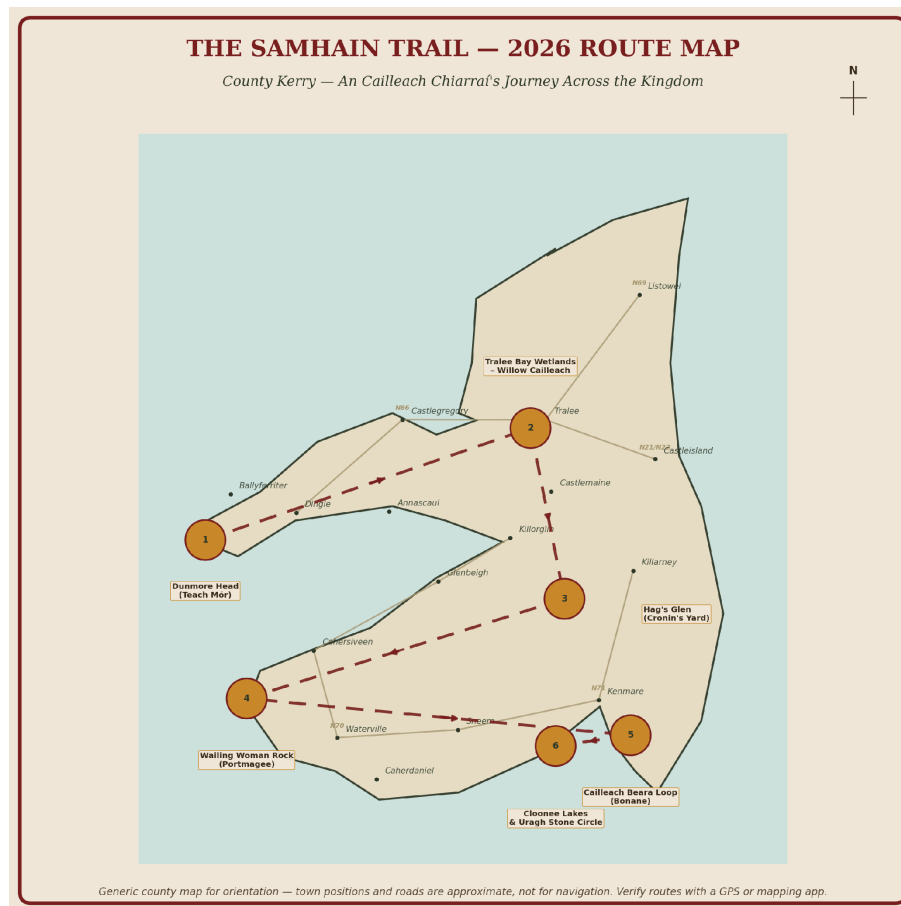
- **The Adventure:** Tackle the rugged, 4-hour mountain loop trail starting near Molly Gullivan's Traditional Farm.
- **The Lore:** This ancient terrain is believed to have been physically sculpted by the Cailleach, who dropped giant boulders from her magical apron as she strode across the mountains. The area's megalithic ruins are tied to her alignment with the winter solstice, marking the exact time of year her power over the landscape reached its peak.

- **Logistics:** Ensure you have a trail map or GPS tracking downloaded before setting off. Given its length, this is best suited to the Leisurely 3-Day format or a shortened out-and-back on the Intensive route.

Stop 6: Cloonee Lakes & Uragh Stone Circle — Tuosist

- **The Adventure:** Walk the serene lakeshore of the Cloonee Lakes and finish at the breathtaking, atmospheric Bronze Age Uragh Stone Circle.
- **The Lore:** The lakes were famed as a site of total rejuvenation, where the aging crone would submerge herself in the water to shed her winter form. Upon emerging, she was transformed back into a beautiful young maiden, bringing about the green growth of the summer season.
- **Logistics:** Easy walking; bring a small cash honesty box entry fee (€2–€3) for the farm pathway leading to Uragh.

Route Map



Pin List

Pin 1 (Dingle Peninsula): Coumeenole Beach / Dunmore Head

Pin 2 (Tralee): Tralee Bay Wetlands Ecology & Activity Park — Willow Cailleach, 'Iontas an Saileach / Wonders of Willow'

Pin 3 (MacGillycuddy's Reeks): Cronin's Yard (The Hag's Glen Trailhead)

Pin 4 (Iveragh Peninsula): Portmagee Marina (Wailing Woman Rock viewpoint)

Pin 5 (Bonane Mountains): Molly Gullivan's Farm (Cailleach Beara Loop)

Pin 6 (Tuosist Valley): Uragh Stone Circle (Cloonee Lakes)

Disclaimer: This itinerary has been independently formulated for informational and cultural purposes. Due to the remote nature of these mountain and coastal locations, participants travel entirely at their own risk and are advised to verify local trail accessibility and site opening hours in advance. Given that County Kerry experiences highly unpredictable autumn weather systems and rapidly declining daylight hours during October and November, visitors must exercise extreme caution, monitor meteorological forecasts, carry essential safety equipment, and ensure all outdoor excursions are concluded well before dusk.