

# *Glendalough* *Co. Wicklow*

Midlands-East Tourism  
IRELAND



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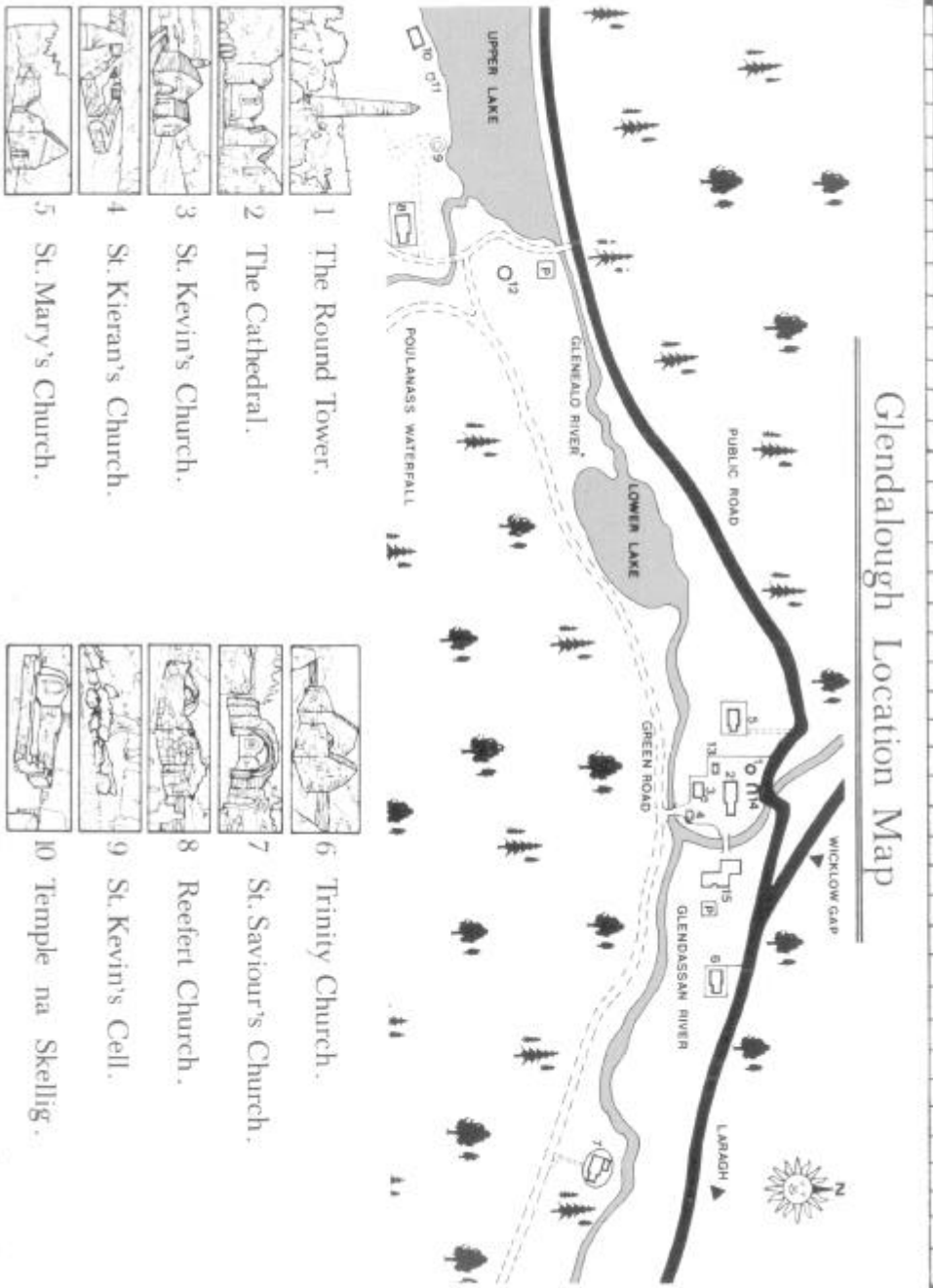


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### Glendalough Location Map



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## GLENDALOUGH

Celebrated the world over for its unspoilt beauty, Glendalough still exudes the sense of timelessness and spirituality that has attracted visitors for generations. Famous for its Monastic city founded by St. Kevin, Gleann-da-Loch (the Valley of two lakes) lies 1.5 km west of the village of Laragh, in the centre of County Wicklow, the Garden County of Ireland. Surrounded by the towering peaks of the Camadery, Lugduff and Derrybawn Mountains, visitors can today be inspired by the same aura of tranquility which must have attracted St. Kevin and his small group of followers 1400 years ago. Popularly known as "the Valley of Seven Churches", there are in fact the ruins of eight shrines, the foundations of the latest having been discovered by the Office of Public Works in 1876.

### ST. KEVIN

The Valley seems to have been deserted for centuries before Kevin arrived, initially as a hermit, in the sixth century. Born of Royal blood in 498 AD, his father Coemlug was a descendant of Cu-Corb, King of Leinster. His education commenced at an early age under St. Petroc of Cornwall and further studies followed under the guidance of St. Eugenius at Kilnamanagh, County Dublin. However, when it was suggested that Kevin should take charge of the monastery there, he fled, dreading the responsibility. A number of years as a hermit living in strict and severe isolation followed, before he founded his monastery in the glen, a place he was seldom to leave before his death in 617 AD at the reputed age of 120!



*St. Kevin's Cross*

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Remembered throughout Ireland as "St. Kevin of the Miracles", the stories of his curing the afflicted and providing for the destitute are manifold. It is also told how he unwittingly attracted the love of the fair Kathleen. Two versions of the story are recorded. He was forced to scourge her with nettles to distract her amorous attentions. His unusual methods worked; she is said to have pledged herself to the religious life and became a devoted follower. A darker tale is more widespread. As she wandered lonely near the Lake of the Serpents, the saint's hound chanced along, following it, Kathleen discovered the rocky chamber. Finding Kevin asleep she was about to fulfil her hearts desire when he awoke and in a thoroughly unsainted act flung poor Kathleen into the lake from the rocky ledge known as the "Lady's Leap".

An interesting legend explains why, to this day, no lark can be heard to sing in the valley. It is told that when the Cathedral was being built the labourers agreed to work long hours "to rise with the lark and lie with the lamb". However, within a short time Kevin noticed the workers were weary and unable to work. Inquiring, he discovered that the larks in the valley commenced singing at an unusually early hour and consequently the labourers were overexerting themselves. The saint relied on the power of prayer to solve his dilemma and from that date the song of the lark ceased to be heard in the Glen.

## LOCATION

Surrounded on three sides by mountains, Glendalough provides an imposing spectacle, encircling as it does the two lonely stretches of water that give the valley its name. An atmosphere of serenity and spirituality constantly pervades the Glen, leaving a lasting impression on visitors and having endowed a sense of renewal on pilgrims for nearly 1500 years.

Today, the ruins are concentrated in two distinct groupings. At the open, eastern end of the valley lie the more impressive remains of the monastic

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city. These include the Gateway, Round Tower and St. Kevin's Cross and Church, amongst others. Further to the west and straddling the shores of the Upper Lake lie the ruins of the earlier site, where Kevin first established himself on his arrival. Legend has it that an angel sent from God directed Kevin to proceed to the Eastern site, telling him that "many thousands of happy souls shall arise with you from that place to the Kingdom of heaven and a great city will rise to the glory of God". The angel then lead Kevin over the waters of the Lower Lake until the appointed spot was reached.

## DEVELOPMENT

For a century and a half following Kevin's death Glendalough flourished. But things changed dramatically from the eight century. The Annals tell of frequent raids, plunderings and deaths being suffered at the hands of the Vikings and indeed, native Irish attackers. It was as a result of the ferocity of these attacks that construction of the Round Tower was commenced during the early tenth century. However, following their crushing defeat at the hands of Brian Boru at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, the Viking threat receded into insignificance.

Despite the grim picture of constant threats which the Annals portray, the monastery flourished as a centre of piety and learning. The twelfth century saw Laurence O'Toole as Abbot, Ireland's first canonised saint and who, after Kevin, is the most famous of Glendalough's many distinguished sons. The son of a Chieftain (Maurice, Lord of Hy Murray), St. Laurence was captured as a youth and held hostage by Diarmaid McMurrough, (later to become infamous as the person who brought the Normans to Ireland). Eventually being released, he was to rendezvous with his father at Glendalough, but while awaiting the re-union was overcome with a desire to remain. His father agreed, and within a short time, at the tender age of 25, Laurence was appointed Abbot. Nine years later he was transferred to the See of Dublin as Archbishop, following the Norman invasion in 1169, the Archbishop was to the forefront of those advocating union amongst the Irish in the face

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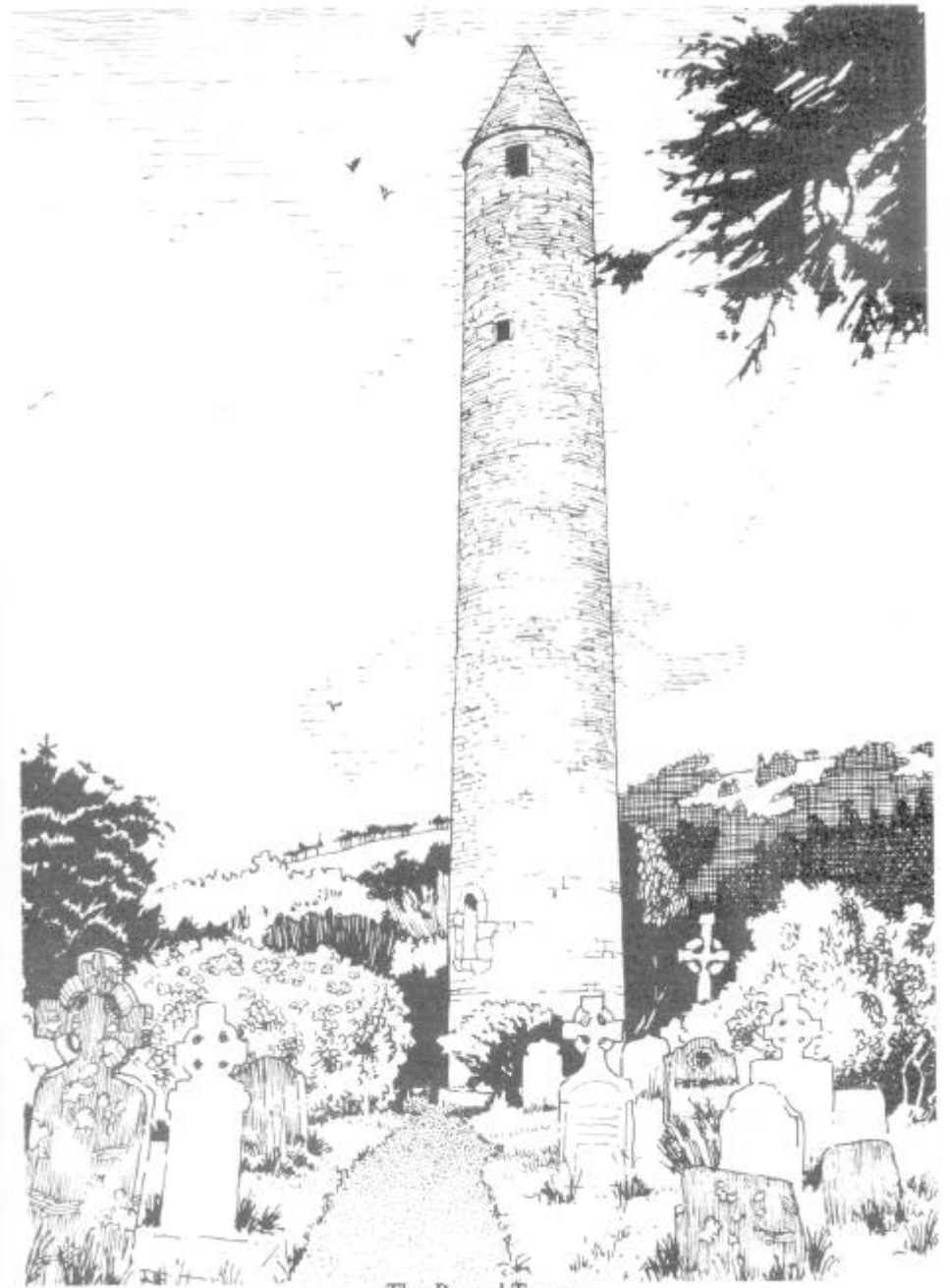
of the foreign adversary. He followed King Henry to Normandy to plead his country's cause but was banished into exile and never allowed to return. Heartbroken and lonely he died soon after in 180 AD and his remains are venerated in Normandy, save his heart, which is preserved at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin.

## DECLINE

The Norman invasion sealed the fate of Glendalough. In 1173, Strongbow granted the monastery to his clerk, Thomas, yet, despite his powerful patronage, the Valley was plundered by Norman adventurers three years later. In 1214 King John united the See with that of Dublin and from thence onwards the monastic city went into irreversible decline, until the final spoliation of the monastery by English troops in 1398. However, the remoteness of this situation and the subsequent lack of accessibility meant there was little royal control over the area. The Pope re-established the See of Glendalough in 1400 in the hope of providing a bishop more acceptable but the local Gaelic inhabitants of the O'Byrnes and O'Tooles. The scheme met with only limited success. In 1497, the last Bishop of Glendalough, Denis Whyte, again surrendered to Dublin. A few Abbots were intermittently appointed until the general suppression of the monasteries by King Henry VIII followed, but the title had lost all real significance. By this stage the unused buildings had already begun to crumble and decay. The glorious beacon which St. Kevin had lit for the Christian world had long since flickered and died.

## TODAY

The noble ruins of Glendalough continued to decay in eerie isolation until the late 19th Century. The beauty of the valley enticed many eminent writers and antiquarians to visit, most notably during the 1800's when Edgeworth, Scott, Wordsworth, Pearse and Petrie all departed deeply influenced by the pervading sense of timelessness. Lead was also discovered in the valley and to this day, the ruins of the old mines which for a time were



*The Round Tower*

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a tremendous source of employment in the area, can still be seen above the Upper Lake at the western end of the valley. Following disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 the site was then vested in the Office of Public Works and restoration work commenced in 1875, concentrating initially on Trinity and Reefert Churches, the Cathedral, the Priory of St. Saviour, the Priest's House and the Round Tower. Further improvements to the other monuments were conducted in 1911/12.

Today, Glendalough attracts many hundreds of thousands of visitors annually who flock to see one of the chief glories of Ireland's early Christian era. In 1989 an Interpretative Centre was opened to provide information and interpretation of the monastic system and the inhabitant of the city from the earliest times.

Visitors can also avail of a guided tour of the monastic city which departs from the visitor centre regularly, during the summer months and, on request, during the rest of the year.

## FOREST WALKS

A network of forest paths traverse the entire valley and provide access to the heavily wooded western regions surrounding the Upper Lake. These walks provide a glorious opportunity to see the wonderful diversity of flora and fauna in the Glen. Nature trails have been marked out by the Office of Public Works with eighteen vantage points, each providing its own particular features of interest and allowing the visitor to be captivated by the rugged splendour of the towering peaks of the Wicklow mountains. Guided nature trail tours and childrens activities can be arranged by staff of Wicklow mountains National Park office.



The ruins of Glendalough are largely concentrated in two areas; the more modern and impressive lie at the open, eastern end of the valley, the original and more primitive remains straddle the shores of the Upper Lake further westward up the valley.

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## UPPER VALLEY

### ST. KEVIN'S BED

A man-made cave dug into a cliff-face and overlooking the Upper Lake from a height of 10 metres, it is probable that this cave predates Kevin's arrival. It is likely that the saint used it as his sleeping quarters, it being too small and cramped to be of further practical use. Centuries later it was used by St. Laurence O'Toole as the site of his annual Lenten penance and following the failure of the 1798 rising it was used as a place of refuge by Michael O'Dwyer, the famous Wicklow rebel. Today it is highly dangerous to approach St. Kevin's bed from Lugduff mountain and visitors are warned to be content to view the cave from the opposite shore.

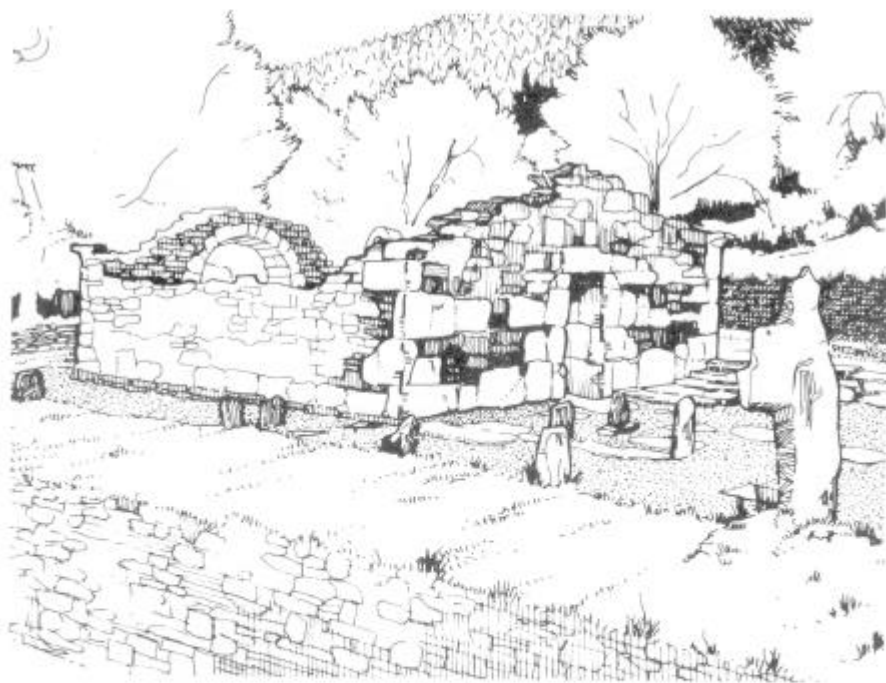


*Temple na Skeilig*

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## TEAMPALL NA SKEILIG

This, the most westerly of the ancient churches, is situated on a small ledge 8 metres above the Upper Lake. Though modified over the centuries, the style of the surrounding original eastern twin-window suggests great antiquity and it is possible the Church was associated with St. Kevin himself in the seventh century. Excavations conducted here at the beginning of the century led to the discovery of much ash, charcoal and debris, lending further credence to the belief that this was originally a complete monastic settlement, with the church having been surrounded by the huts and other buildings of the monks.



*Reefert Church*

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## REEFERT CHURCH

Meaning “the burial place of kings” from the Irish “Rioghheart”, for centuries this church was the burial place of the Chiefs of the O’Toole Clan. While some still hold to the original view that it may date to the sixth century, more recent expert opinion suggest it to be of eleventh century origin. Standing at the eastern end can be found two ancient crosses standing on square bases.

## ST. KEVIN’S CELL

High above Reefert Church lie the remains of St. Kevin’s Cell, where he spent four years of severe austerity living the life of a hermit when he first arrived at Glendalough. Now roofless, the cell was originally beehive in shape. A small crude cross can be seen in the centre of the cell. It is recorded that during Kevin’s time here he remained barefoot, even during the harshest weather, and survived on the roots, fruits and berries which he collected nearby.

## CAHER

Over 20 metres in diameter, the remains of this stone fort are the main evidence for the Valley having been settled centuries before the arrival of Kevin. The style of fort suggests it was built about 3,000 years ago, during the late Bronze or early Iron age.

## LOWER GROUP

### GATEWAY

The Gateway to the old monastic city is the only surviving one of its kind in the country. Originally comprising of a keeper’s house and a small tower, the principal remains now consist of two semi-circular archways supported by granite piers. The gateway is of later origin than the other buildings of the lower group, it having been part of the surrounding defensive wall which was constructed to secure the city from attack.



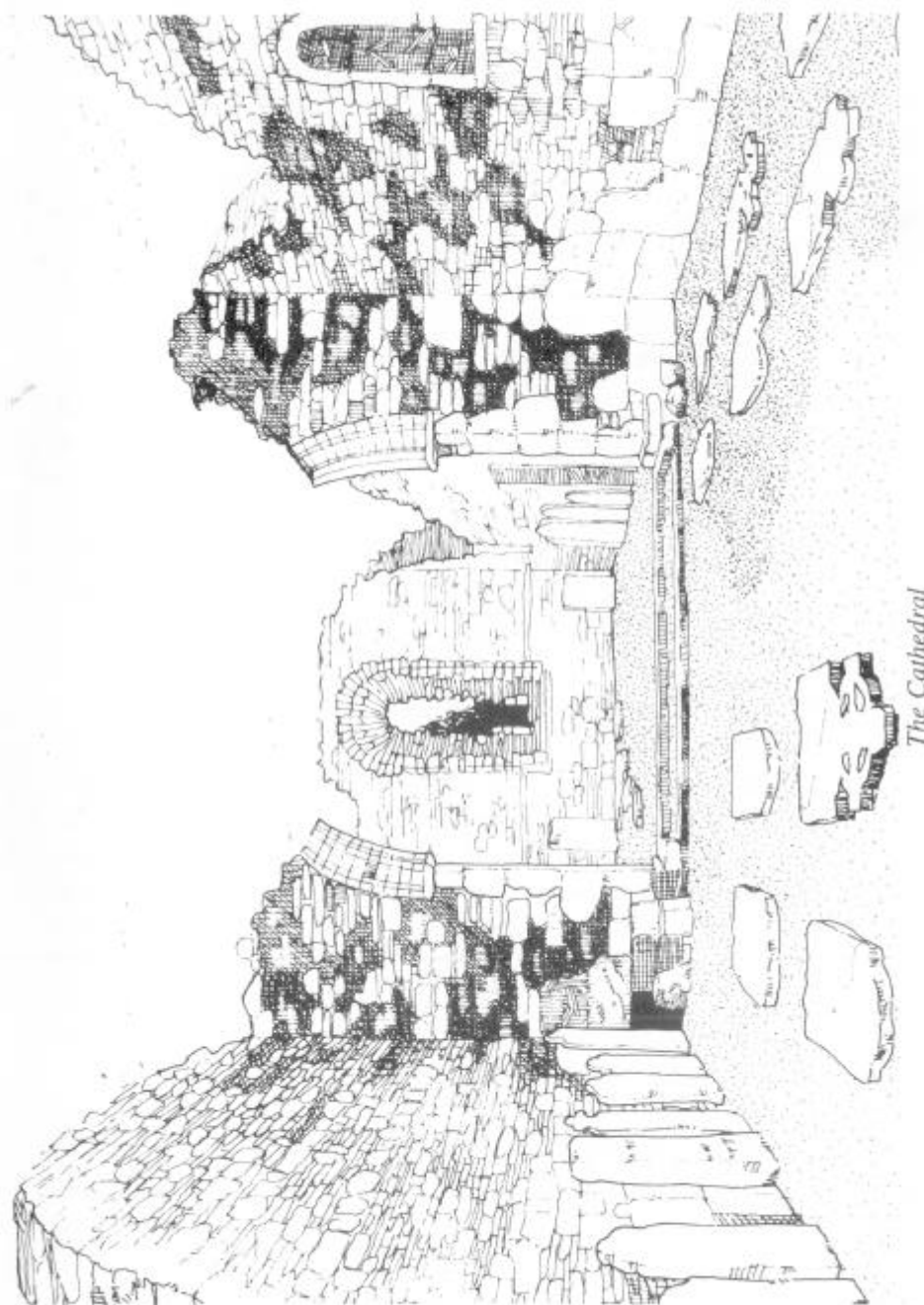
*St. Kevin's Cell*

## ROUND TOWER

For many, Round Towers have come to be seen as a symbol of Ireland and a direct link with the glories of the monastic era. The Glendalough Round Tower is probably the finest surviving example in Ireland. Over 40 metres in height and with a circumference of 16 metres, access is through a doorway 3.5 metres above ground. Built for the dual purposes of serving as a watch-tower and place of refuge during the period of the Viking invasions, the tower was restored in 1876, the conical cap being rebuilt with the original stones which were found scattered at the base.

## CATHEDRAL

Dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Paul, the Cathedral is the largest surviving ruin and it occupies the most prominent position in Glendalough. Originally dating to the time of Kevin himself, it underwent many alterations over the centuries and now closely resembles a tenth century-style structure to which a chancel was added two centuries later. The width of the nave is exceptional, and at 9 metres is probably the widest of any of the early Churches in Ireland. The Church ceased to serve as a Cathedral when the Diocese of Glendalough was united with Dublin in 1214 AD.



*The Cathedral*



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## PRIEST'S HOUSE

To the south-west of the Cathedral lie the ruins of the Priest's House. A twelfth century, Romanesque style building, it has been partially reconstructed but remains roofless. The recess in the Western Wall has become known as the wishing stone; however, the origins of such a name remain obscure.

## ST. KEVIN'S CHURCH

Popularly known as "St. Kevin's Kitchen" and consisting of a church, cell and watch-tower, this is the most interesting and best-preserved of the church-remains at Glendalough. Boasting a remarkable corbelled stone roof, it has been traditionally associated with having been built by Kevin himself, as an oratory and dormitory, in the sixth century. Analysis of the style of architecture, however, tends to suggest that considerable alterations may have been undertaken during the eight and ninth centuries.

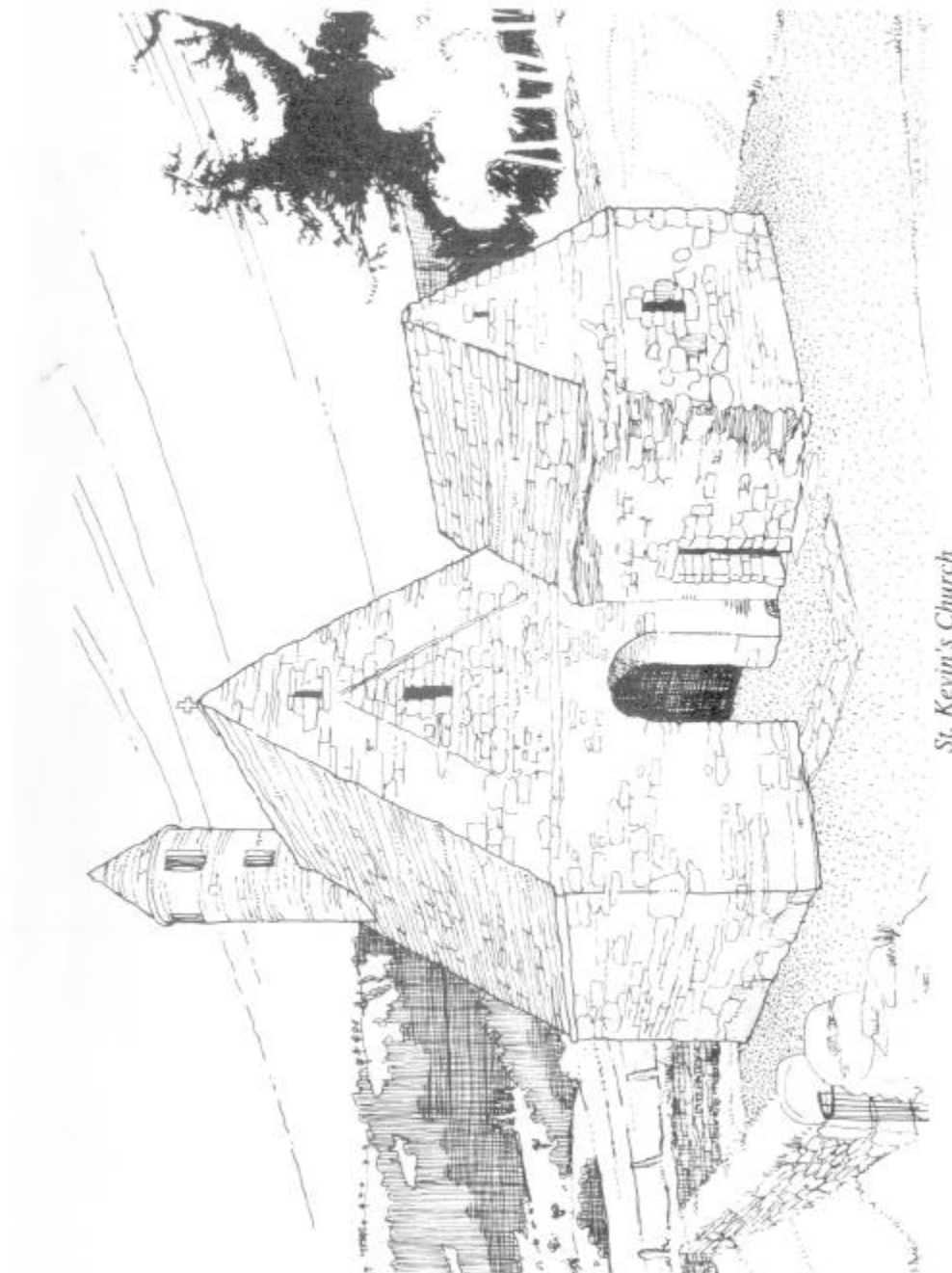
## ST. KIERAN'S CHURCH

Built on a miniature scale, these ruins remained undiscovered until 1876. St. Kevin was a close friend of St. Kieran. When hearing of Kieran's impending death he hastened to Clonmacnoise to be with his friend to the end, but he arrived too late and found Kieran laid out for burial. However, by heavenly dispensation Kieran's beatified spirit returned to his body so that he could bid farewell to his dearest friend. Kieran died in 547 AD at the age of 33, just seven months after founding his famous monastery on the banks of the Shannon. On his return Kevin founded this church in Kieran's honour, though it is possible the present remains may have replaced the original structure around the ninth century.

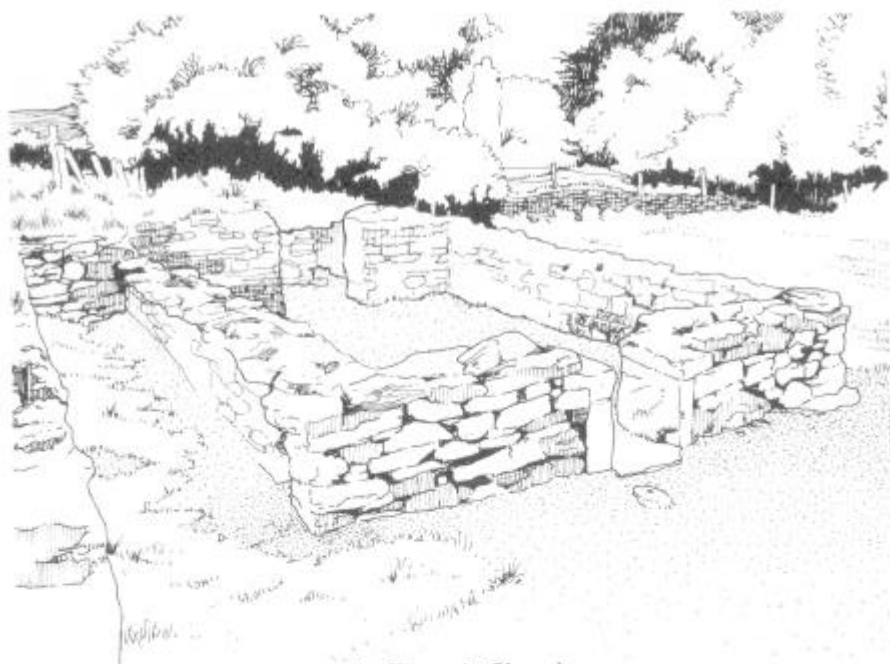
## OUR LADY'S CHURCH

Regarded by some as being the earliest Church erected in the lower valley, Our Lady's Church stands somewhat isolated from the main group of

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St. Kevin's Church



*St. Kieran's Church*



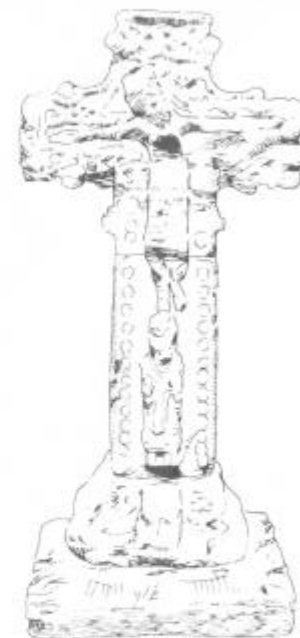
*Our Lady's/St. Mary's Church*

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ruins. For this reason it is thought, as was common in most Irish monastic cities, to have been specially for the use of women or nuns. St. Kevin himself is buried within the walls of this church and he was venerated here on his feast day (June 3rd) until the eighteenth century when religious persecution under the Penal Code forced the practice to come to an end.

### **ST. KEVIN'S CROSS**

A granite Cross, semi-Celtic in style, St. Kevin's Cross stands between the Priest's House and Cathedral. Its position, central to the east wall of the ancient cemetery, suggests it may have been a boundary cross. It dates to the late sixth or early seventh century. An old custom surrounds the Cross, and it is said that anyone who succeeds in encircling their arms around the shaft will have their wish granted.



*St. Kevin's Cross*

### **ST. SAVIOUR'S CHURCH**

Standing in a secluded grove of fir trees by the Glendassan river, 1 km east of the "city" by way of the Green road, the Priory of St. Saviour is said to have been founded in 1162 by St. Laurence O'Toole. The association of the Priory with the saint is borne out by the fact that its location is called Glenlorcan. The Priory has been beautifully restored by the Office of Public Works and is now a much-admired example of Irish-Romanesque architecture.

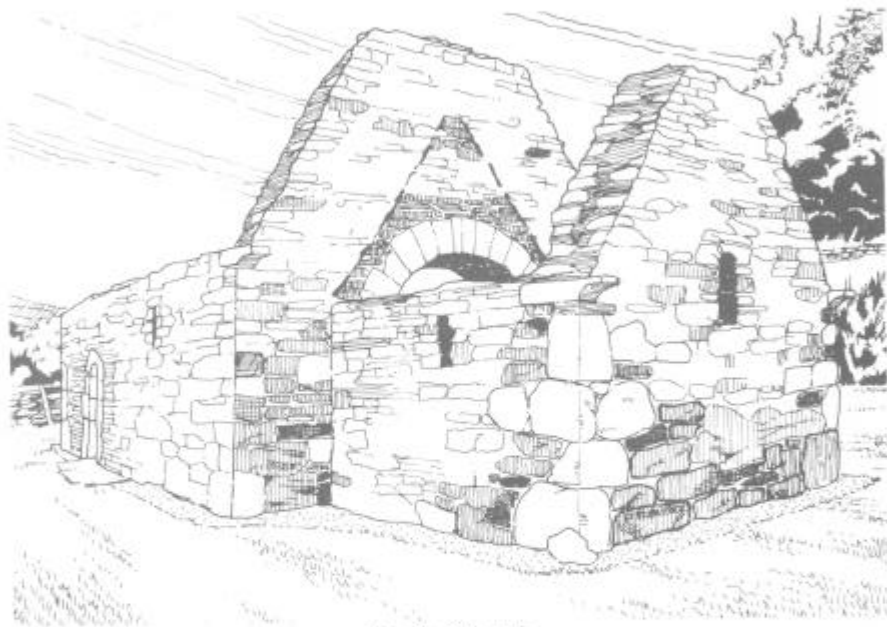
### **TRINITY CHURCH**

Along with Our Lady's Church, this is the oldest Church in the lower valley. Dating to Kevin's lifetime, it is said to have been founded for St.

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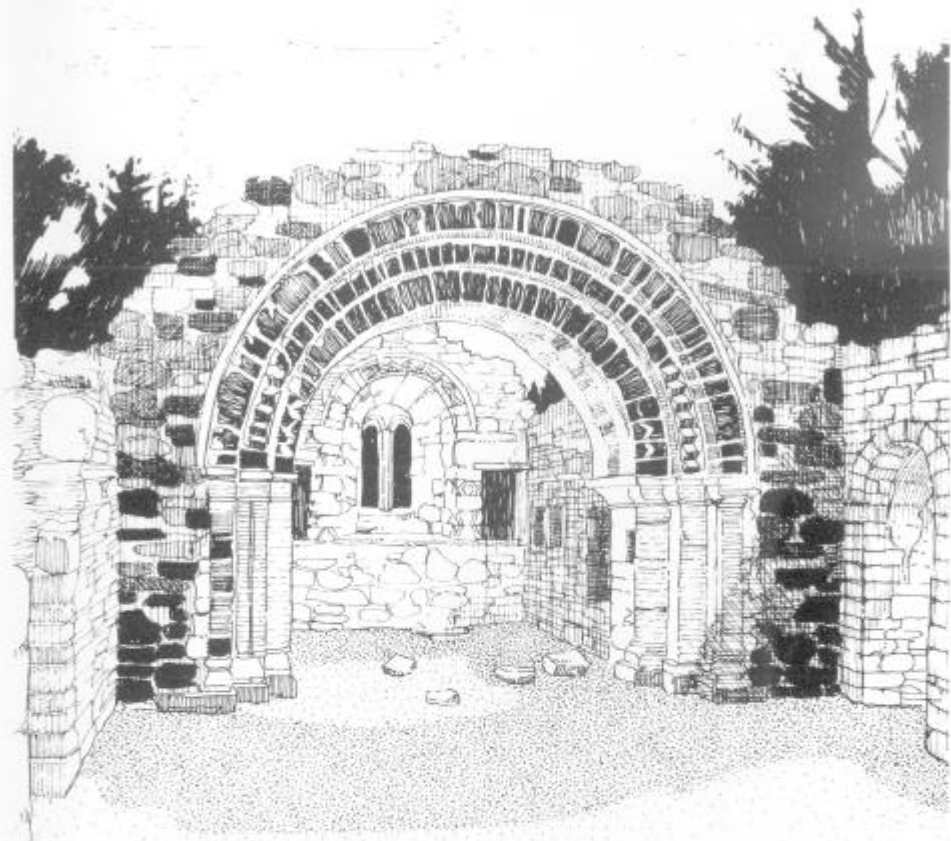
Mocherog, a grandson of Brachan, King of Britain. Mocherog was a close friend of Kevin and was privileged to administer the Last Rites to the founder of Glendalough during Kevin's last moments on earth. Trinity Church was notable for having a 20 metre Round Tower incorporated into its design but, unfortunately, it was destroyed during a fierce storm in 1818. Much has been said about the close similarity in style between Trinity and Reefert Churches, it being most likely that they date to the same period.



*Trinity Church*

## DEER STONE

Located across the Glenealo river from St. Kevin's Kitchen, the Deer Stone is thought to be a baptismal font of great antiquity. When the wife of one of the monastery workmen died during childbirth in the seventh century, Kevin is said to have prayed here and a doe came daily and deposited a supply of milk into the hollow of the stone for the baby. According to legend the child later became a disciple of Kevin.



*St. Saviour's Church*

## MEMORIALS/CROSSES

Granite, the type of stone which predominates in the valley doesn't lend itself well to ornamentation, it being much too hard. Consequently, the intricate designs and exquisite carvings which are to be found on memorials elsewhere (notably Clonmacnoise) are less notable in Glendalough. Nevertheless, the abundance of memorials which have been discovered are of great antiquity. Found both within the various churches and along the roadsides, many are commemorative rather than sepulchral. Apart

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from St. Kevin's Cross, the most famous memorial is probably the Bresal Stone which reclines against the South Wall of St. Kevin's Church. It is of eighth century origin with the Irish inscription "Or do Bresal AD IHS XRS" - "Pray for Bresal, Alpha, Omega, Jesus Christ". Also notable is the Market Cross, a 1.75 metre granite cross which originally stood on the roadside near the Glendalough Hotel. It was removed to St. Kevin's Church many years ago.

## **THE WICKLOW WAY**

The Wicklow Way was the first long-distance walking route in the Republic when it was opened in 1981. In Irish called "Sli Cualann Nua", after one of the five historic roads radiating from ancient Tara, the Wicklow Way runs for over 130 km from Marlay Park in Dublin southwards to Clonegal, County Carlow. Traversing the largest unbroken area of high ground in the country, the path passes through Laragh (1.5 km from Glendalough) and the Glendalough An Oige hostel is a frequent stopping point for travellers. Spectacular views to the north as far as the Mourne Mountains and to the east as far as Wales can be enjoyed on clear days. Skirting spectacular mountain ridges and peaceful glens and valleys, the Wicklow Way affords one of the most enjoyable ways of experiencing the beauty, serenity and tranquillity of Wicklow, Ireland's Garden County.

For further information on Wicklow contact

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