

Ard na Mona Woods Walk (Purple)

Distance/Time: 2km - 45 minutes / Terrain: Forest path / Grade: Easy to moderate

Follow this truly enchanting trail through mature oak woods carpeted by spongy mosses, that leads past a secret bay on Lough Eske's shore.

Start/Finish Point: Ardnamona Forest Reserve Carpark

Points of Interest: Ardnamona West Gatehouse, Ardnamona hydro-electric turbine house, The Fairy Glen

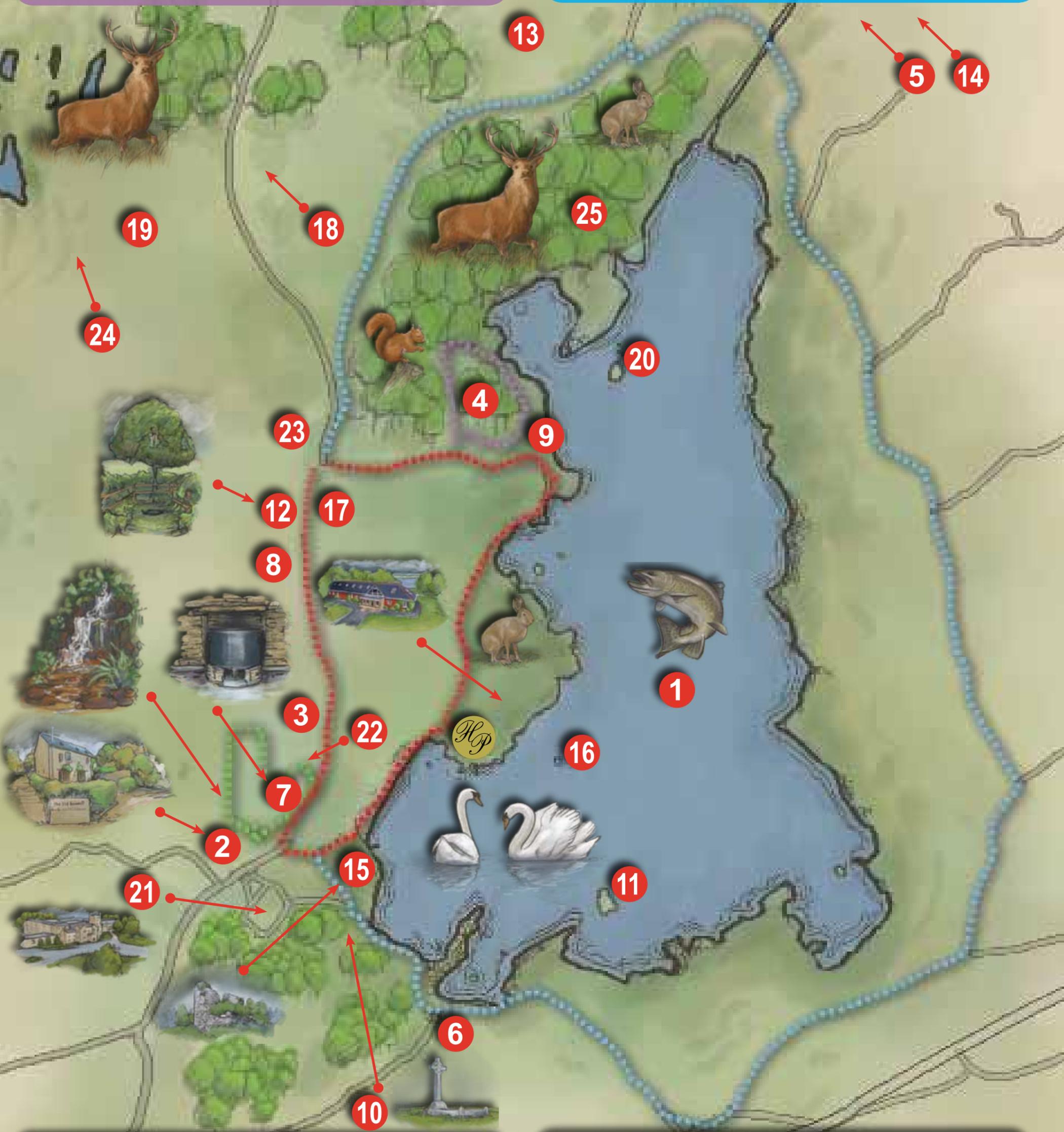
Lough Eske Walk (Blue)

Distance/Time: 14km - 4 hours / Terrain: Country roads / Grade: Easy to moderate

Enjoy picturesque views from every aspect of Lough Eske on this half-day walk along country roads (take a drink and snacks with you).

Start/Finish Point: Harvey's Point Hotel

Points of Interest: Clady River, Ardnamona West Gatehouse, Ellen's Falls, Ardnamona North Gatehouse, Tawnawilly Scenic Viewpoint, Lough Eske Bridge, Major General White's Grave, Lough Eske Castle



The Loop Walk (Red)

Distance/Time: 6km - 2 hours / Terrain: Country roads / Grade: Easy to moderate

Enjoy sweeping views of lovely Lough Eske, visit one of Ireland's largest Famine Pots, and be sure to work up a hearty appetite!

Start/Finish Point: Harvey's Point Hotel

Points of Interest: The Famine Pot, View of O'Donnell's Isle, Stand of Giant Redwoods, The Friars' Well, Ellen's Falls, Ardnamona West Gatehouse, Clady River, Moylederg Island

Famine Pot Walk (Green)

Distance/Time: 1.5km - 30 minutes / Terrain: Forest path / Grade: Easy

Take a leisurley stroll through this forest plantation with a refreshing diversity of tree species including Ash, Birch, Alder, Holly, Hazel and Sitka Spruce.

Start/Finish Point: Famine Pot Carpark

Points of Interest: The Famine Pot, Sculptured waterfall, Forest Hut, Tallest tree in County Donegal (Sitka Spruce), The Old Sawmill

1 The Lake of Fish

The name of the lake comes from the Irish Loch Iasc (The Lake of Fish). Along with Atlantic salmon, sea trout and brown trout, a peculiar fish called char have made Lough Eske their home. They live in its murky depths, grow to a maximum length of 9 inches, and are traditionally caught with nets in the late autumn time.

2 The Old Sawmill

Now a private residence, this old Sawmill dates back to the early 19th century, and was powered by a large wooden mill wheel. In 1911 the large wooden mill wheel was replaced by a turbine which increased the mill's hydro-power capacity and was also used to generate electricity for Lough Eske Castle. A series of three dams and mill ponds, upstream, supplied water to the mill. The national electricity supply grid wasn't connected to Lough Eske Castle until 2007.

3 Mr. Swan's House

This fine two-storey farmhouse, nearby the redwoods, became Mr. Swan's home when he sold Lough Eske Castle in 1972 after 25 years in residence. Look to the field opposite the house and you will notice there are no telephone poles or lines above ground. Mr. Swan had the workers bury the lines underground so as not to spoil his view!

4 Ardnamona Wood Nature Reserve

This is one of the finest remaining examples of a mature oak wood in County Donegal. The nature reserve is home to animals such as native red deer, red squirrels, pine martens and badgers. Killarney ferns are also found here as well as very rare plants such as Whorled caraway and Six-stamened Waterworth.

5 Doonan Waterfall

This mountain waterfall is formed as the Corraber River plunges from a height of more than 80 feet into a narrow wooded ravine, and is best seen and heard from the north side of Lough Eske, following heavy rains.

6 Lough Eske Church

Built in 1846 in the Gothic revival style, its construction was initially funded by Thomas Brooke, then owner of Lough Eske Castle. It is a small but distinctive Church of Ireland located on a hill overlooking Lough Eske.

7 Lough Eske Famine Pot

One of the largest iron cauldrons of its kind in Ireland. It is a poignant reminder of the terrible famine of the 1840's when over a million Irish people died of starvation. The pot was brought to Donegal by the Quakers (Society of Friends), who carried out a lot of humanitarian work in Ireland. The huge cauldron was restored and housed in its current location in 1998 by a local committee to commemorate the 150th anniversary of An Gorta Mór (The Great Hunger).

8 Lough Eske Cromlech

Located directly across the road from the two-storey 'Old Lough Eske Schoolhouse', is a megalithic tomb, now much overgrown. Due to its position and shape, it is possibly a Portal tomb dating from 4'900 to 6'200 years ago. This suggests there were people settled and farming in the area back then.

9 The Fairy Glen

The Fairy Glen forms part of Ardnamona Wood Nature Reserve and is therefore also a protected reservation for the 'wee folk'! It is roofed by tall oak trees and carpeted by mosses with small rocky outcrops and waterfalls, fringed by giant ferns. This enchanting place may well have inspired Donegal's unofficial poet laureate, William Allingham, to pen his famous Victorian poem 'The Fairies'.

The Shores of Sweet Lough Eske

*I see old Ard na Móna, just as I saw it then,
A painter's brush could not describe nor yet
a poet's pen,
It was there upon some well known height,
For hours at length I'd bask;
To feast my eyes on its green woods.*

*Reflected in Lough Eske
by Mary Anne Martin*

10 General White's Grave

One of the most colourful past owners of Lough Eske Castle was General George White. He developed a great love for the area and before his death in 1906, he requested to be buried close to the lake shore. His wish was honoured and a tall Celtic Cross was erected over his grave on the grounds of Lough Eske Demesne.

11 O'Donnell's Isle

This island on Lough Eske served as a late 16th century castle stronghold of the famous O'Donnell clan. They were the ruling Gaelic lords of Donegal until the early 17th century. O'Donnell's Isle also served as an armoury and a prison. Red Hugh O'Donnell was to become their most famous chieftain.

12 The Friars' Well & Franciscan Friary

Walkers are welcome to quench their thirst at this roadside spring well. Local tradition links it to a nearby 16th century Franciscan Friary of which no trace now remains. In 1671, St. Oliver Plunkett wrote that he visited the friary and mentions the presence of 18 friars in the community. Local tradition has maintained that at least part of the Annals of the Four Masters (Ancient Annals of Ireland), were written at Lough Eske Friary during the early 1630s.

13 Irish Language in Lough Eske

One of the last Irish speaking communities in south Donegal was located along the northern shore of Lough Eske and survived here to the mid-20th century. This beautiful, poetic language still survives in local place names such as Clashalairbin - Clais na Lárach Báine (The Gully of the White Mare).

14 Lough Belshade

Local folk tradition has it that the friars' treasures, such as a golden chalice, are lying hidden on an island in Lough Belshade, high in the Bluestack Mountains. Loch Bhéal Seód means 'Lake of the Jewels' in Irish. A huge phantom black cat is said to guard the island's buried treasure, so you've been warned!

15 Castle O'Donnell

Next to the main avenue leading to Lough Eske Castle are the ruined remains of a medieval tower house also connected to the O'Donnells. It was from this castle in 1607 that the historic 'Flight of the Earls' began. This departure of Ulster chiefs and their families signalled the end of Gaelic rule in Ireland.

16 The Islands of Lough Eske

There are six islands in Lough Eske; O'Donnell's Isle, Moylederg Island, Round Island, Roshin Island, Grainne's Island and Pigeons Island.

17 Lough Eske Old Post Office

A green post box is the only remaining sign that Lough Eske Post Office was located in the house behind it. It finally closed its doors in 1954.

18 Casán na mBráthar

Casán na mBráthar is Irish for 'The Friar's Path', which led over the Blustack Mountains, from the hills north of Lough Eske, in the direction of Glenties. Small cairns of quartzite stones and rocks marked the path at intervals of a quarter mile.

19 The Féar Gorta

The Féar Gorta or the 'Hungry Grass' is a traditional belief in the Bluestacks region dating back to famine times. Sheep farmers always carried a reserve slice of wholemeal bread or barley sweets in their coat pocket when out walking the mountains. If they stood upon the Féar Gorta, the energy was drained from their body and only a piece of wholesome bread or an energy sweet could revive them.

20 Moylederg Island

This natural island is situated at the north end of Lough Eske. Moylederg was partially excavated in 1946 and the discovery of flint work and shards of ancient pottery suggests this island has been occupied from the Neolithic into the late medieval period. The island was also used into the 19th century for making illicit spirits (poteen).

21 Lough Eske Castle

Restored and reopened in 2007 as Solis Lough Eske Castle & Spa Hotel. This historic house can date its origins back to 1621, following the Plantation of Ulster. It was rebuilt in 1751 as a country manor house, and again in 1861, when the battlement-style tower elevated it to castle status. Associated families include the Brookes, Whites and Swans.

22 Giant Redwoods

A stand of Giant redwoods measuring over 90 feet in height can be seen a short distance up the road from the Famine Pot. They were imported as seedlings from the U.S. and planted over 150 years ago. Despite their impressive height they are still considered toddlers in their native California! This species include the tallest living trees on earth reaching up to 379 feet in height.

23 Ellen's Falls

This picturesque series of gentle waterfalls, situated just north of Clady Bridge, were named after local woman, Ellen Ward. The Clady River then flows through part of Ardnamona Wood and into Lough Eske.

24 Plane Crash in the Bluestacks

On the night of the 31st January, 1944, an RAF Sunderland flying boat was returning from its German U-Boat patrols in the North Atlantic, when it lost its way in bad weather and crashed in the high Bluestacks. There were 12 crew on board and 5 miraculously escaped the crash and burning wreckage alive.

25 Ardnamona House

Build in the 1790's by Thomas Brooke (Younge), of Lough Eske Castle, for his mother-in-law as a dower house. The gardens at Ardnamona contain a rich variety of exotic species, many of which were planted in the 1880's by Sir Arthur Wallace. He brought seeds back to Ardnamona from the Imperial Gardens in Peking and the Palace Gardens in Katmanadu. The house and grounds are currently private.