

Cycle Series: Bloomin' great route in the midlands

The Slieve Bloom mountains have everything, are accessible yet are under-explored

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Turlough O'Brien



Accessible from all parts of Ireland, the Slieve Blooms are conveniently located along the Laois/Offaly border

... **T**his is a special route. The **Slieve Bloom** mountains have everything: great climbs, great descents, mountains, valleys, pretty villages, waterfalls, forests and blanket bogs. Accessible from all parts of **Ireland**, the **Slieve Blooms** are conveniently located along the Laois/Offaly border, yet are totally under-explored. They are a place of peace, solitude and bird song.

Turn right out of the car park in the Quaker village of **Rosenallis** and take the road signposted for Glenbarrow. After you leave the village, in the high banks along the roadside is a profusion of ferns and gorse. The road is narrow and quiet. Turn right after 1.5km and then left in another 1.5km. This will bring you to the source of Ireland's second longest river, the Barrow. The road in from this point is poor and needs resurfacing, but it is only a short distance in and is worth the effort.

There is a small car park before entering the forest walk that takes you to the waterfall at Glenbarrow; you can bring your bike in and cycle or walk most of the way to the falls. The path is covered in a dense layer of pine needles, and I recommend locking your bike to one of the trees and proceeding the short distance on foot because it becomes rocky.

This is one of the most scenic areas in the Slieve Blooms with its waterfall and steep valley. Give yourself an hour to enjoy this hidden gem.

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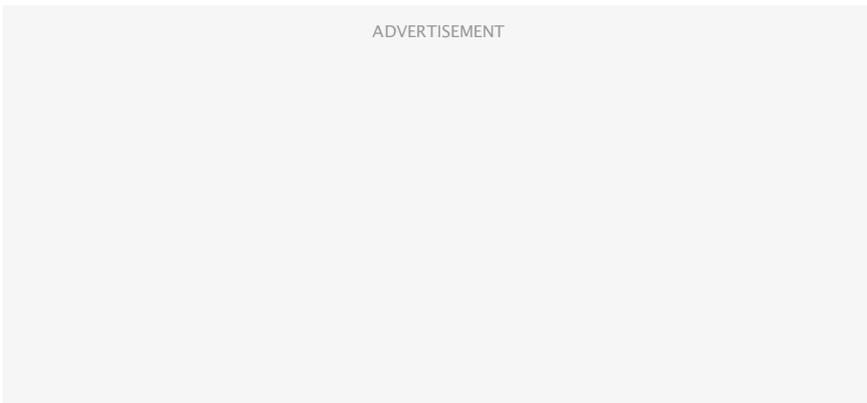
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Descending the Slieve Bloom mountains and heading towards Kinnitty, Co Offaly

Resume your route by cycling back out to the T-junction, where you turn left. It's an easy 10km to the edge of Clonaslee. Our route will take in three peaks -- The Cut, The Wolftrap and Glendine.

Take a left-hand turn just as you approach Clonaslee, and this road will lead all the way to the top at the place called The Cut. There are great views on the way up and the gradient is kind to the top, which is 439m high. It is said that on a clear day you can see as far as Armagh from here.



Valley floors

Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine dominate most of the coniferous woodlands of the Slieve Blooms, the largest cover of forestry in Ireland. Broadleaf species like birch and willow grow profusely along the valley floors; and oak, alder, rowan and holly are also common. The trees in places form a wonderful canopy over the roads, giving great cover and making the route all the more enchanting.

The descent down from The Cut is on a great surface and there are a number of hairpin bends to enjoy.

When you finally reach a T-junction, Burke's Cross, turn right in the direction of Kinnitty, Co Offaly. The views are spectacular and as you reach the uplands the landscape changes to extensive blanket bog. This is considered to be one of the best and least disturbed areas of blanket bog in the country and is a Special Area of Conservation. The highest point is 456m.

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The descent into Kinnitty is spectacular with a fabulous surface and exhilarating switchbacks. This attractive village is a good stopping-off point and home to Kinnitty Castle. There is a 10th-century high cross in the grounds of the castle.



Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine dominate most of the coniferous woodlands of the Slieve Blooms, the largest cover of forestry in Ireland

Turn left in Kinnitty and continue on a level road for about 5km before turning left to head back into the hills: follow signs for Glendine. Slowly but surely the road begins to rise from pretty farmland into forestry. This is a very remote stretch and quite isolated. It's a long climb which peaks at 449m followed by a very steep descent with gradients of 10 per cent in places.

Pretty village

Follow the signs for [Camross](#), another pretty Slieve Bloom village. At the crossroads just outside the village continue straight on to the L1036. Stay on this road for 7km until it meets the R440. Turn left, then shortly afterwards turn right onto another minor road, the L1075, heading for [Ballyfin](#).

This road joins with the R423. Keep straight and cycle past Ballyfin Demesne, the luxury hotel voted the best in the world by *Condé Nast Traveller* in 2016 – hard to imagine it was formerly a Patrician Brothers boarding school. The road curves around the boundary of the demesne and, when it straightens out, turn left onto the L2095. In 7km turn left onto the R422, which will bring you back to the car park 2km away.

Edited extract from *Cycling South Leinster - Great Road Routes* by [Turlough O'Brien](#), published by The Collins Press, €14.99. Available in bookshops and online from collinspress.ie

HIT THE ROAD



Location: Counties Laois and Offaly

Distance: 92km

Duration: 5-5½ hours

Grade: 5

Height Gain: 1,363m

Verdict: Fantastic climbing and wonderful scenery crossing the Slieve Bloom mountains, Co Laois

START/FINISH

Rosenallis is situated 15km northwest of Portlaoise. Exit the M7 at any one of Junctions 16, 17 or 18 into Portlaoise. Follow the N80 to Mountmellick and from there the R422 will take you to Rosenallis. There is parking available on the R422 just around the bend after the Catholic church.

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