

# In the Footsteps of Columbanus

27 November marks the feast of a great Irish saint and his evangelisation of Europe.

Ambitious plans to include part of Down District in an exciting new Christian heritage walking trail have received a further boost.

The Columban Way is a cultural route that crosses Europe and celebrates the heritage of the 'Irish monastic movement', in which St Columbanus and St Gall played an important part.

Plans for an epic 266-mile trail across Ireland would pass through Newcastle, Dundrum, Downpatrick, Killyleagh, Killinchy and Comber, with Newry, Mourne and Down Council one of nine local authorities involved in the project.

The route is being described as a platform for cultural and scientific exchange, a tourism and economic development initiative and an ambitious plan to create a pilgrimage route that crosses western Europe.

Once completed, the Columban Way will become the second longest pilgrimage route in Europe, after the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

The walking route is being traced out by local authorities and volunteer groups throughout Europe, each identifying secure and attractive trails, off-road as much as possible, as well as the accommodation and other services needed for travellers.

This information is being centralised

on a single 'Geotrek' mapping platform that will allow walkers and other travellers to follow the route, using their computer or smart phone, and also allow local communities to provide information and services, all at no charge.

The Columban Way is becoming the biggest walking route mapping project ever developed in Europe. The two Archbishops of Armagh, John McDowell and Eamon Martin, recently signed the Columban Charter for Partnership.

The charter supports the development of pilgrimage, cultural and scientific activities relating to Columbanus, Gall and their followers in all the European regions and countries where their memory remains alive.

These include Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria and Italy.

Friends of Columbanus Bangor chairwoman, Deborah Girvan, said the Columban Charter for Partnership was launched in Saint Gallen in Switzerland, in July last year.

She explained that since then, thousands of signatures have been collected across Europe to support the important initiative.

'In particular, the Charter supports the development of the Columban



Hillside of Mt Leinster  
and road in Carlow

Way, a pilgrim route which traces the footsteps of Columbanus from Mount Leinster in County Carlow, where he was born in 543, to Bobbio, Italy, where he died in 615. We are delighted that both archbishops are supporting the project by signing the Columban Charter of Partnership. Their joint presence sends an important message of peace and reconciliation to people from all community and religious backgrounds.'

After signing of the charter, members of Friends of Columbanus Bangor and the Turas Columbanus Group from the Republic of Ireland met with the archbishops to give them an update about the progress of the Columban Way in Europe and on the island of Ireland.

In a joint statement, the archbishops said that Pope Francis, in his message

to a gathering of Columban Societies held in late June, reminded them of the contribution made by Columbanus to the evangelisation of Europe at a time when 'the first fruits of the Gospel were in danger of being lost' during what is sometimes called the Dark Ages.

'In today's Europe, much of the full flowering of the Gospel, including many of its ethical implications about the uniqueness and dignity of each human person, is in danger of being lost', the statement continued.

'We pray that this pilgrimage route will provide a means of encouraging twenty-first century Christians to follow in the path of Columbanus, as disciples of Jesus Christ, our companion, our Lord and our Guide.'

*From Catholic Communications*