



Crab Cottage

Ballinaclogh
Mill Cove, Rosscarbery
West Cork, Eire

**THE NOT-SO-ROUGH GUIDE
TO WEST CORK**

INTRODUCTION

West Cork is a magical tranquil place that really does instil a sense of well-being; beautiful scenery with fabulous beaches, open roads and a mild climate due to the effects of the Gulf Stream. People are friendly, love to chat and have a relaxed attitude to life that rubs off on the visitor. There are plenty of interesting things to do and see for the casual visitor and terrific water sports and outdoor activities for the enthusiast. For food lovers it has some of the best natural produce anywhere in Europe. In my opinion in spite of having visited a fair few countries, on a sunny day there is nowhere in the world that is better. The abundant ranges of wild plants and birdlife are a revelation compared with the overpopulated UK.

I have been visiting Mill Cove for over 35 years, the last 18 with my wife and now with our two children too. It is beautiful, peaceful and secluded yet it is only 7 minutes' drive from Rosscarbery with its restaurants, pubs, shops and beaches. It is no surprise that West Cork it is now very fashionable, with the 'Great and the 'Good' such as Jeremy Irons, David Puttnam, Carol Vorderman and Baroness Jay all owning houses (or castles!) locally.

LOCATION

Ballinaclogh comprises about half a dozen houses on the West side of the tidal section of the Roury River at Mill Cove. Mill Cove is a beautiful tiny shallow estuary with a small stone jetty and moorings for about 25 boats. It is just west of the much bigger Rosscarbery estuary. The sides of the Roury valley are steeply shelving and the cottage is perched high above it, giving us magnificent panoramic views. You can see the sea, Galley Head lighthouse, Long Strand and Mill Cove slipway to the south, the river valley to the east and the valley, Coppinger's Court and distant Dunmanway mountains with their wind-farm to the north from various windows *and all at the same time from the garden!*

Rosscarbery town is 7 minutes away by car to the east. The next estuary around the coast travelling west is the up-market sailing centre of Glandore 10 minutes away. The largest towns in the area are easily reached and are Clonakilty ('Clon', to the East – 15 minutes) and Skibbereen ('Skib', to the West – 20 minutes).

GETTING THERE

- Air

Cork Airport is an hour away by car and 1 hour 15 minutes' flight from Stansted. Ryanair flies from Stansted and Gatwick. There are sometimes bargains with Aer Lingus from Heathrow. Flights are also available to Cork from many other UK regional airports such as Bournemouth and Southampton.

Cork airport's new terminal (2007) has sped up baggage reclaim and transit through to the car parks.

- Sea

Ferry and catamaran crossings to Rosslare in Ireland can be made from either Fishguard with Stena Line (www.stenaline.com), or from Pembroke with Irish Ferries. (www.irishferries.com). Crab Cottage is approximately 3 hours by car from Rosslare, on good roads.

Alternatively, arrive at Dun Laoghaire in Dublin by ferry and make use of the much improved road network from Dublin to Cork. Dublin to Crab Cottage is approximately 4 hours by road.

THE COTTAGE

We bought Crab Cottage on an impulse on a summer's day in 2003 and have spent two years on what became a total renovation project. It is a two-storey stone cottage with a slate roof and is approximately 150 years old, so combines the aesthetics of the old and practicalities and comfort of the new.

From the front door, a porch with double French doors leads into a large open plan living space. There are two sofas and an armchair around a wood/peat burning stove; dining table and chairs, TV and DVD player. The kitchen area at the other end of this room comprises teak worktops, electric range oven and extractor and inset double ceramic sink. Appliances comprise dishwasher, Smeg fridge and Dualit toaster and kettle. Guests who enjoy cooking (like us) will be pleased to find the kitchen excellently equipped with a good range of quality utensils and cookware.

Beyond is a back lobby leading to the utility room (hardwood worktops, Belfast sink, washing machine, tumble drier, microwave and plenty of storage space for outdoor clothing and shoes), a spacious bathroom (large bath with central taps, basin and heated towel rail) and separate toilet. Two doors give access to the garden from here. From the back lobby there are stairs leading to the three bedrooms, one double and two twin bedrooms. The double bedroom has a huge picture window, giving it the feel of a 'lookout'. All bedrooms have views of the sea. There is a small bathroom upstairs with built in shower, basin, toilet and heated towel rail.

Retained original wood beams throughout contrast with white walls, modern lighting and furnishings. Windows are wood-framed and double-glazed and there is oil fired central heating with a large hot water tank.

There is a wooden deck beside the house and hardwood garden table and chairs. The back garden is mainly grassed with a small gravelled area and is bounded by a combination of dry-stone walls, mature trees and an old ruin. We have a small herb garden by the compost bin. If travelling with young children or dogs, please bear in mind the garden is not enclosed.

There is a selection of books available including walking guides, cookery books and books on local natural history. A selection of DVD's and games are available, including some suitable for children.

We are confident that you will find Crab Cottage to be a great holiday house combining a beautiful location and a quality interior with all the modern utilities and appliances necessary for a relaxing stay. Having rented houses in the area for our own holidays for so long, we know just how hard it is to find somewhere with this combination (even just some decent kitchen knives!) so are certain you will enjoy your stay.

Almost all the information on the following pages is from personal experience rather than lifted out of guidebooks and has been updated for 2017.

SHOPPING

Clonakilty and Skibbereen have almost everything you are likely to need, plus a number of interesting specialist shops and galleries.

FOOD SHOPPING

“Foodies” will not be disappointed with the fabulous local produce available in west Cork, but starting with the basics:

Local

The ‘Centra’ in Rosscarbery is pretty good for most staple items (including peat briquettes for the fire) and is open long hours, as is Ryan’s petrol station at the top of the hill out on town on the Clon road.

Most of the petrol stations in the area have a surprising array of produce for sale, including hot foods, which are great if you forgot to sort out a picnic before setting off for the day.

Almost all petrol stations seem to sell lovely ice cream with all sorts of toppings and sprinkles as optional extras!

Supermarkets

‘Field’s’ in Skib is a nice place to shop and is right in the middle of town, with a (very busy) car park behind it. If you are a shellfish fan the local Roaringwater Bay oysters are inexpensive and really good, plus they often have excellent scallops in December and January.

The biggest supermarket in Clon is ‘Supervalu’ at the east end of town, which has a vast range, and is particularly good for hot food and salads for lunches. However, we prefer the smaller, cheaper but still very good Dunne’s Stores at the Rosscarbery end of the town. It is also useful for children’s clothes and beachwear.

There are Lidl supermarkets in both Clon and Skib.

Fuller’s is a handy small supermarket in Union Hall.

Seafood

The seafood in the area has always been sensational, but getting hold of it was the problem until comparatively recently! Short of catching our own, it was a question of having a beer at Haye’s Bar in Glandore, binoculars in hand waiting for the trawlers to return to Union Hall across the bay, and then racing down there with some cash! Now it’s possible to buy fish and shellfish in the conventional way and there is only one place to go!

Glenmar Shellfish (used to be ‘Antcar’) runs a wet fish shop adjoining the fish processing plant on Main Street in Union Hall – telephone 028 88 33818.

www.irishprawns.com. Everything is displayed attractively and the quality is fabulous, plus they open regular shop hours. Peter is the ‘main man’ there and will be sure to look after you. Lobster is always available and is reasonably priced.

One word of warning though: they do sell some farmed sea fish such as salmon, bass and gilt head bream, which never taste as good as their wild cousins so if in doubt, ask!

There is also fishmonger cum deli next to Ryan's petrol station outside Rosscarbery. The fish is lovely, (most coming from Glenmar) and is also used for the fish and chip stall in town (see below) as they are both owned by the same people.

There is an oyster knife plus lobster picks and crackers at the cottage.

Irish smoked salmon is exported worldwide but again, it pays to know a little to make the right choices:

The best is made from wild fish –now under threat so there are some ethical issues with buying it, plus it is eye-wateringly expensive. The best of the best is made by Sally Barnes of Woodcock Smokery near Castletownshend. She supplies Covent Garden and Harvey Nicholls in London.

Ummera Smokery – telephone 023 88 46644 or see www.ummera.com

Run by Anthony Cresswell at Inchy Bridge, Timoleague is really very good. They use organically farmed salmon. You can buy direct from the smokery, which is up a rough track by the fishing hut right next to the bridge; it is also sold in some supermarkets.

There are other smokeries around including the one in Union Hall, but their quality is noticeably inferior to those above.

Farmers' & artisans markets

There are regular Saturday morning markets in Skib. Bread, olives and local cheeses (such as Gubbeen and Durrus) are readily available. There is a fish stall and others selling coffees, waffles, crepes and other things to nibble.

Deli/organic

Lettercollum Kitchen Project is at 22, Connolly Street in Clon – telephone 023 88 36938. (They used to run a sensational restaurant in Timoleague - which was mentioned in the book 'McCarthy's Bar' by Pete McCarthy). This sells wonderful foods on the healthier end of the spectrum. The little Pastel de nata (Portuguese tarts) are wonderful but quickly sell out. Closed Mondays. They also run cookery classes outside the summer months.

The Olive Branch. Spiller's Lane Clon, is also very good for premium produce and health foods.

The English Market in Cork City is fabulous and well worth a visit. It is an indoor market crammed with stalls selling fresh and cured meats, game, fish and deli produce such as cheeses, olives, sun-dried tomatoes etc. It is similar to the Covered Market in Oxford or the large food markets in London. Look out for Irish specialities such as tripe, white and black pudding, drosheen (smooth textured black pudding) smoked eel and salted cod and pollack plus cured 'corned' beef, which originated here.

Black and white puddings

If this is your cup of tea then be sure to only buy the classic 'Clonakilty Black Pudding' (now exported widely) from Twoomey butchers on the Clon main street. Avoid the stuff in the shrink-wrapping as it's just not as good as the fresh sausage. They will cut off piece for you if a whole 'ring' is too much.

EATING OUT

Used to be limited but now an explosion of choice – we try to keep up to date! In general eating out in West Cork is fairly expensive so it pays to do some research.

Light lunches/tea

- The Coffee Shop. Myross Union Hall. Tel 028-33809. Just up the hill from Fuller's supermarket. This is a grand place! Nice relaxed atmosphere. Great coffee and waffles, French toast, pastries etc. Perfect for brunch and a read of the papers.
- The Glandore Inn and Haye's Bar are two famous pubs in the tiny yachting village of Glandore. The food is very good and you have the added advantage of eating at outside tables while admiring the wonderful view of Glandore Bay below you.
- Puffin café. This is right on the western edge of Long Strand. The views are magnificent and the air full of ozone due to its proximity to the surf. The building is painted a modernist and appealing matt black. An excellent stop.
- Field's – Skib. Great lively spot with good galleried area. Gets busy and noisy with chatter!
- Mary Anne's – Castletownshend – telephone 028 88 36146. You cannot beat this for a good lunch stop, particularly on a cold day. Atmosphere similar to an English pub. Small terrace at the back in summer time. Fine for children. The seafood chowder is good.
- Church restaurant – in an old church on the main street. Nice place for a coffee or seafood chowder for lunch and is also open for dinner. Beautiful stained glass windows and galleried 1st floor.
- The Glebe Gardens Café – Baltimore. You can just stop here for lunch without visiting the gardens – fantastic fresh garden produce turned into delicious lunches, eaten outside, weather permitting. On the right side of main road just before you get to Baltimore from Skib – telephone 028 88 20232. A Bohemian / artistic atmosphere.
- The Courtyard - behind the Eurospar in Clon. Nice 'honest' place for lunch. Good food with large portions. Outdoor seating.

- English Market and Crawford Gallery Café (Emmet Place - Telephone 021 427 4415 - in Cork city (see below))
- The Islander's Rest hotel on Sherkin Island, off Baltimore, does good lunches. We recently had a wonderful fish and chip lunch (monkfish!) sitting out in the garden overlooking the mouth of Roaringwater Bay basking in the sunshine – fabulous. Take the 10-minute ferry journey from Baltimore quay and then a 5-minute walk to get to the hotel. Better still; combine it with a walk around the island.

Dinner

- Mary Anne's in Castletownshend – see for lunches too. Really good food in the evenings. Last visit was in 2014 was excellent and reasonable price. I like this place, but avoid the tables upstairs as they lack atmosphere compared to the ground floor.
- Glandore Inn – great place for a pub supper and good value.
- Haye's Bar – serves tapas in the evening during the summer months
- Casey's Bar – Union Hall. Nice pub with good 'fried fish of the day'. I really like the atmosphere of this pub. Small outdoor terrace overlooking the (rather muddy) lagoon.
- Puffin Café (www.thepuffincafe.com) Wonderful location beside the surf beach of long Strand. Serves pizza from their wood oven in the evenings. Only open Thursday – Sunday evenings in winter.
- Deasy's - Ring, Clonakilty. Good but fairly expensive. Quite an esoteric menu. Fine fish and a lovely location – telephone 023 88 35741.
- O'Callaghan Walsh – Rosscarbery. Celebrated but dated and expensive fish restaurant. The last visit was underwhelming.
-
- Pilgrim's Rest in Rosscarbery. Expensive for what it is I think.
- Lily House – good Chinese restaurant in Rosscarbery. Take-away just as good and much cheaper than eating in. Telephone 023 88 31811.
- Fish and Chips – Rosscarbery. A fairly new venture run from a static van beside the old Courthouse Bar on the main road shortly after the Celtic Ross Hotel (if going west) The fish is very fresh. Take-away only. Excellent and popular.
- Island Cottage Restaurant – telephone 028 88 38102. This is a tiny but famous restaurant on Heir Island in Roaringwater Bay. A boat ferries you (10 mins each way) and fellow diners back and forth from the mainland for a communal and no-choice, but impossibly romantic, one-off dining

experience. At our last visit, the food was exceptionally good and excellent value too. Don't let the over-enthusiastic owner put you off. Tables hard to come by as it gets booked up weeks in advance.

- Chez Youen. The Quay, Baltimore – telephone 028 88 20136. Smart & expensive French restaurant, lovely location and ambience. Recommended in the Sunday Telegraph of January 2008 though I have yet to go!
- Kinsale
Internationally renowned centre for cuisine, but quite a trek from the house (75 minutes each way). In general, it tends to cater for the well-healed international traveller so tends to be expensive, plus restaurants here seem to come and go frequently.
However, friends raved about their recent visit to the 'Fishy Fishy Café'. It is only open at lunchtimes and does not take bookings, so it's a question of getting there early or having to queue! Telephone 021-4700415 or see www.fishyfishy.ie

* See also *Glandore Inn & McCarthy's Bar* in "pubs" below.

PUBS

- The Glandore Inn and Hayes' Bar
Sitting beside the wall overlooking beautiful Glandore bay with a Guinness in hand takes some beating. Good sandwiches and soup at lunchtime with a good value menu for supper, plus tapas for nibbling.
- Casey's Bar in Union Hall – with a terrace overlooking the lagoon for summer evenings. We have been there a lot and it has very good fish and chips. Nice atmosphere.
- De Barra – famous bar for atmosphere and live music in the back room every week. Used to be associated with the late Noel Redding of the 'Jimi Hendrix Experience' – telephone 023 88 33381.
- Nolan's Bar – good local spot in Rosscarbery. Occasional traditional music. Big screen TV for watching any 'unmissable' sports events.
- An Teach Beag - 5 Recorders Alley, Clonakilty. Bar with traditional Irish music. A genuine taste of "Old Ireland". Don't be intimidated on entering, as it's cosy to say the least!
- Celtic Ross Hotel – not my favourite spot it has to be said, but the terrace is nice in the sunshine.
- 'The Islander's Rest' on Sherkin Island – great to sit outside on warm day for lunch e.g. monkfish and chips!
- O'Sullivan's – on the quay at Crookhaven. Beautiful location with great fresh crab sandwiches for lunch. Very busy in high summer, so get there early.

BEACHES

These are fabulous and some of the best in Ireland. The water temperature is similar to the UK so a wetsuit can help!

- Warren Strand, Rosscarbery
Safe, very slowly shelving and clean (Blue Flag). Lifeguard usually on duty. Public toilets open in summer.
- Red Strand
Excellent and safe beach. Warmer water. Can get busy (i.e. quite quiet by UK standards!) Popular with families. Public toilets.
- Long Strand
Spectacular but beware as there is an undertow. Popular with surfers at the eastern end. Great for a barefooted walk followed by a coffee or ice cream at the Puffin Café at the western end.
- Inchydoney Strands
Fabulous beaches with lifeguard. The Dunmore and Ring channels are not suitable for swimming and you can get cut off on the incoming tide if you linger too near the Ring side of Inchydoney beach. The posh Inchydoney Spa hotel sits on the island separating the two beaches.
- Barley Cove
Amazingly beautiful with a little river flowing directly into the surf. The river channel is safe and shallow and great for children to play in. It's quite a trek but worth it for a day trip.
- Mill Cove
All the above strands are sandy, very slowly shelving 'surf' beaches. The *best* beach of all of course is the nearest one to the cottage. Walk down the road towards the sea and follow your nose down the hill keeping towards the Cove, and passing Cove Cottage on your right. The road stops and a footpath leads down to a small pebble beach opposite the Mill Cove pier. It is a great spot for peace and quiet or a BBQ and a bit of crabbing. Last summer an otter was playing feet away from me in the middle of the day and actually came nearer for a closer look. It's a bit of a hike back up the hill, but only takes a few minutes. A good place for a swim at high water.
- Sherkin Island
Beautiful Silver Strand has almost white sand. It is to be found on the opposite side of the island from the quay where the ferry docks. A lovely 30 minute walk gets you there along lanes empty of cars. It's like stepping back in time! The water is very cold since it faces the open Atlantic.

BIRDWATCHING

I am not a bird watcher but still find the tremendous variety of bird life in the area very interesting. Rosscarbery and Courtmacsherry estuaries are great for waders especially in the autumn when the winter migrants arrive, including a nationally important flock of Golden Plovers. Herons, white egrets, curlews, oystercatchers, godwits and sandpipers are common. Unlike Courtmacsherry, the Rosscarbery estuary is comparatively small and has a single-track road running along its entire length. As a result the birds are always very close and well used to walkers and cars so are not easily frightened.

If you walk from Crab Cottage northwards back down the road to the white house beside the river in the cul de sac, and then follow the river path south (wellies needed) you will come out to the tidal stretch of the Roury river. At low water you can walk quite a long way along the water's edge. It has a magical 'secret' feel there and can be great for seeing birds up close as they whistle along the narrow valley floor calling as they go. There is a fair chance of seeing an otter here at dusk.

A number of years ago, I came across a sparrow hawk in the middle of the road up to the house. It was holding a pheasant chick, which it quite understandably didn't want to let go. However this meant it couldn't take off either - until I got within a couple of feet from it!

We were also very lucky to see a Sea Eagle being relentlessly mobbed by crows at Ring.

Choughs are fairly common and the beach at Ring is also a good spot to find them.

FISHING

One of the reasons we bought Crab Cottage was due to my passion for fishing in the Rosscarbery area, which now spans over 30 years!

To whet the appetite, here is a list of species I have caught within 2 miles of the cottage:

- Salmon
- Brown trout
- Sea trout
- Silver eel
- Thick lipped grey mullet
- Bass
- Flounder
- Dab
- Plaice
- Pollack
- Lesser spotted dogfish
- Greater spotted dogfish
- Garfish
- Ballan wrasse
- Conger eel

- Ling
- Blue shark
- Cod
- Launce
- Mackerel
- Gurnard
- Three bearded rockling
- Coalfish

Shore fishing

Surf fishing for bass and flounder can be exceptionally good but is unpredictable and is in general very dependant upon the weather, even from day to day. Good spots include Rosscarbery channel mouth, Ownahincha strand, Long strand (East end) and Red Strand, plus the Clonakilty (Dunmore and Ring channels) and Courtmacsherry estuaries offer huge choice. The best time of year tends to be the autumn and the prime baits are sandeel for bass and crab for flounder, although numbers of bass are caught locally on plugs and more recently the fly. Beware catching sandeels can be a challenge in its own right. A big landing net with a fine mesh is the best bet.

There are an almost infinite number of rock fishing marks, but behind Rosscarbery pier and the mouth of Mill Cove are good for mackerel, Pollack and garfish plus all the usual bottom dwellers. Midway along Mill Cove can be worth a try spinning if the sea trout are jumping.

The mouth of Rosscarbery channel is now one of the Irish hotspots for catching gilthead bream. Use small hooks and lugworm or shellfish baits.

Rosscarbery is also famous for Golden Grey Mullet.

Inshore boat fishing

Very underdeveloped. I have caught many bass in the Ring channel in Clonakilty. There are 16 foot self drive bass boats available at Courtmacsherry from Mark Gannon for daily hire – telephone 023 88 46427 - which probably give the best chance of a bass if you are desperate to catch one (first catch your sandeels!). Care! – the weather can turn rapidly and the sea of Rosscarbery Bay is unprotected from the prevailing southwesterly winds.

Deep sea boat fishing

Deep sea charters are readily available. Mark Gannon in Courtmacsherry is the most well-known skipper – telephone 023 88 464270 or 087 6381003. Others good skippers are Nick Dent in Baltimore and Tom Collins (www.seaanglingcharters.ie) & Colin Barnes in Union Hall (telephone 028 88 36832 or 086 3273226).

There is a very good chance of a specimen out with any of them. Colin Barnes is interested in targeting the rarities and a friend caught a 140lb common skate from his boat in 2005. Tom Collins also knows some productive marks for skate and blue shark.

Game fishing

A state fishing licence is required for salmon and sea trout, and can be purchased from 'Clon tackle' in Clonakilty – telephone 023 88 35580 or else Fallons in Skibbereen, or on-line (good range of information on www.cfb.ie/fishing).

River Roury

Here at Mill Cove, it holds numbers of small sea trout and brown trout, which readily take the fly but larger sea trout are confined to when the river is in flood, with the very occasional salmon running too.

- Argideen River

This is a little bigger than the Roury and flows into the Timoleague. It is an exceptionally good sea trout river and a night permit can be purchased by meeting at fishing hut at Inchy Bridge at dusk during the summer. The Argideen Angling Club (of which I am a member) is very friendly and welcoming and will offer good advice and good pools to visitors. A national game-fishing licence is also required. There is also a small run of salmon.

- Bandon River

Can be very good for salmon after a spate. Many pools are suitable for fly fishing though banks are not well-maintained and wading is required. Reliable for sea trout in lower pools. Visitor Permits can be purchased through the secretary, Michael O'Regan, Oliver Plunkett Street, Bandon – telephone 023 88 41674. I would recommend a visitor to try the pools in 'The Park' first for salmon and Rough Hole and Rough Stream pools below the town for sea trout. Trout fishing is excellent but fairly overlooked.

- Ilen River

This is a classic spate river. Unlike the Bandon, which I have fished for years, I have little knowledge of the Ilen. The river has interesting slow deep sections just above the town that are good for sea trout. It is better for sea trout than salmon, which is mainly confined to small runs of peel (grilse) during summer floods. Visitor permits can be obtained through Fallons tackle shop or the West Cork Hotel in Skibbereen. Unfortunately there are no evening sea trout permits, so you have to pay the full price for a full day's salmon fishing, which is expensive. The banks are very overgrown, making fly-fishing a challenge.

- Lakes

Shepperton lakes near Skibbereen are stocked with Rainbow trout and require a day permit (surprisingly expensive, on a par with UK reservoirs), obtained at the bailiff's house up the hill on the other side of the main road from the lakes. Otherwise almost all the local loughs have free fishing for wild brown trout. Evening rises can be terrific due to the tremendous fly hatches compared to the UK. Recently suffered from extensive poaching due to proximity to the main road.

Coarse fishing

This is very limited locally, but good pike can be caught at Lough Corran near Leap and rudd at Kilkerran Lake at the back of Long Strand. Silver eels are everywhere but few want to catch them!

I really have too much information about fishing locally to comfortably fit on a page here so if you are a serious angler then please contact me and I will be happy to give you more specific advice.

BOATING

We have a running mooring marked by the buoy second nearest to the pebble beach which guests at Crab Cottage are welcome to use if you have a small boat (we use it for a 3m inflatable). Boats can be launched at the slipway beside the jetty on the other side of the estuary and there is no regulation and no harbour charges. Please bear in mind that the clearance at the mooring at low water is only a foot or so, so you may not be able to get out until the tide floods a bit. Mill Cove is safe but beware that it opens out onto open sea at the mouth where there tends to be a swell, so it is not suitable for small boats unless you are experienced mariners and the sea is flat calm and the weather settled.

BOAT TRIPS & WHALE WATCHING

Baltimore is the main ferry port for Cape Clear and Sherkin Island and seasonal ferries run to Heir Island and Schull. Some ferry operators also offer coastal cruises, see www.baltimore.ie for all ferry trip times. A copy of timetables is usually also at the cottage. Trips to these islands make a great day out and also offer opportunities for picnics/walking/swimming.

Colin Barnes runs regular whale and dolphin watching trips plus coastal excursions out of Union Hall and he has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the sea life in the area – telephone 028 88 36832 or 086 3273226 - www.whales-dolphins-ireland.com). See the Guardian newspaper website and search previous travel articles for an item from 8/10/05 on whales in Ireland entitled 'Whales against Ireland'.

CRABBING

Great fun and guaranteed success for children. The pier at Mill Cove is tremendous as is the small (Nagle's) pier half way along the Rosscarbery channel. There are usually crab lines at the house – hooks are sharp. Use fresh mackerel or else try bacon as bait.

DIVING

A well organised centre is based at Baltimore. They sometimes dive in Lough Ine which is apparently amazing due to water clarity, depth (40m) and its unique invertebrate life.

SURFING

The local hotspot for good surfers is the east end of Long Strand and is very good (take the first right turn after the humpback bridge over the stream emptying

Kilkerran Lake). There is a surfing shop ('Jellyfish') in Spiller's Lane behind the Clon post office for boards, wetsuits and even kayaks.

Also West Cork Surf School, based at Inchydoney Beach -

www.westcorksurfing.com – telephone 086 8695396, the week long surf camps have been very popular with our children. Inchydoney Beach is good for beginners.

WINDSURFING

Inchydoney Strand at Clonakilty is very good. Mill Cove is sheltered and very shallow for beginners.

SEA KAYAKING

This has recently become very popular. Paddling around the rocks between the surf beaches around Rosscarbery would be great for the adventurous. Courses are available locally in the summer (Atlantic Sea Kayaking – telephone 023 88 21058 or www.atlanticseakayaking.com)

CANOEING

Canoes, rowing boats and life jackets can be rented for a paddle around the Rosscarbery seawater lake in the summer time. It is very safe and shallow, so great for younger children – telephone 086 8035686.

SAILING

Nearby Glandore is well known as a yachting centre. It has a well-organised sailing school for children.

Also Courtmacsherry Watersports Centre – www.courtmacsherrywatersports.com – telephone 023 88 44464.

COWRIE SHELLS

These tiny shells are fun to collect but a challenge to see. The fine pebble beach at the east end of Long Strand is the place to find them.

PICNICS

If you have access to a boat then a trip to Rabbit Island (off Glandore) or the mouth of Tralong Bay (the next inlet round heading West, where there is a hidden sea water pool on the side of the beach at high water that is almost unknown) on a sunny day is not to be missed.

PONY TREKKING

Rosscarbery Riding Centre – telephone 023 88 48232.

PLAYGROUND + TENNIS COURT

By the sea water lake in Rosscarbery

SWIMMING POOL, SAUNA AND GYM

Celtic Ross Hotel in Rosscarbery. Swimming hats required. Quite expensive.

'HUNTER-GATHERING'

If you have done this sort of thing, perhaps as a child on a previous holiday then you will have great fun here. We love this aspect of our holidays and the area is great for 'food for free' if you know where to go.

There are delicious mussels in the Rosscarbery channel (pick an area with good water flow and beware the summer months or 'red tide' algal blooms) and cockles at Ring channel. The samphire ("poor man's asparagus") is present at Rosscarbery and free to pick. Prawns in the Rosscarbery channel. Winkles just about everywhere but particularly the rocks at the east end of Long Strand. If you are feeling brave then try a limpet- they are surprisingly good barbequed with garlic butter. Blackberries are everywhere in autumn. Mackerel can usually be caught in summer from the rocks behind the pier in Rosscarbery at high water in calm weather.

WALKING

We recommend the excellent series of walking guides by local man Damien Enright, some of which are available to borrow from Crab Cottage. Our favourites from his books include:

- A walk up Knockonagh Hill at Lough Hyne for a stunning view of the lough from the top.
- A circular walk around Castle Freke and Long Strand
- To the mouth of Rouringwater Bay at Baltimore (careful-sheer drops at the 'pillar of salt' beacon).
- Through the woodland to the headland beyond Courtmacherry – lovely in 2008.
- Walk round Ringarogy Island, in the way to Baltimore.
- Walk around Sherkin Island taking in the fabulous beaches and the hotel near the ferry for lunch.

The beaches are lovely to walk along and do give the opportunity for a bit of beach-combing after a gale too. Long Strand and the two beaches at Inchydoney are particularly good for a walk. The roads along the estuary and around the lake at Rosscarbery are popular with local people.

There are a number of other specific walks in the collection of leaflets and brochures at the house.

For real adventure there is the Sheep's Head Way (a marked coastal footpath), which is quite famous which I keep meaning to do. In addition there is a walk through primeval oak forest above Kenmare, which is highly rated by local friends.

Unlike the UK, footpaths over farmland are rare and please bear in mind that bulls are sometimes left to run with cows in fields.

Day trips to Sherkin Island, Heir Island or Cape Clear also offer excellent opportunities for walking, which can also take in visits to wonderfully secluded beaches.

GOLF

Pitch and Putt for low key fun on the Warren side of Rosscarbery (two 18 hole courses), clubs and balls are available for hire. There are two courses and they really are great fun, and far more interesting and attractive than most. Bandon and Kinsale 18 hole courses for the more serious and The Old Head course at Kinsale where money is no object (apparently 1,000 Euro/4 ball). Lisselan Estate (see below) and also has a beautiful 18 course – telephone 023 88 33249.

Smuggler's Cove Adventure Centre in Rosscarbery
A fun crazy golf course is good value for a couple of hours. There is also a golf driving range next to it.

SPECIFIC THINGS OF INTEREST

Drombeg Stone Circle

Archeologically important Neolithic site. Looks like a mini Stonehenge.

Lough Ine (or 'Hyne')

Between Skib and Baltimore. Europe's second largest seawater lake and a UNESCO 'Site of special scientific interest' and Ireland's first *Marine Nature Reserve*, owing to its unique marine life. Water reaches it via 'the rapids', a small channel in the Southeast corner. This is well worth a look as the water cascades in and out every tide in a spectacular fashion and as certain times the sea can be seen on the horizon well above your eye-line which is weird!

There is a good walk up the wooded hill for a great view down over the Lough and is well marked. There is a beautiful little cove on the seaward side of the Lough.

Gardens

- Lisselan House Gardens. Beautiful old formal gardens set beside the Argideen River. It seems to be infrequently visited.
- The Glebe, Baltimore – a peaceful garden running down to the sea, see under eating out/lunches.
- Bantry House – see below
- Innacullen, Garnish Island, Glengarriff – famed & stunningly beautiful gardens set out on an island in Kenmare Bay. Ferry journeys take 5 minutes – the best one is from the 'Blue Pool' in the middle of Glengarriff town (telephone 027 63040).

Thalassotherapy

Sea water-based health and beauty treatments at the Inchydoney Island Hotel. International reputation, popular with the Ireland rugby team! Pricey.

Antique Shops

Castletownsend is well worth a potter around for the 19th century atmosphere and interesting couple of shops.

Cinema

Park Cinema in Clonakilty

Crafts

Particularly good quality Irish ladies clothes and pottery are available at Hubbert's in Rosscarbery – telephone 023 88 48697 - and The Golden Pheasant in Courtmacsherry – telephone 023 88 46182.

Houses/Museums

- Castletownshend House
Sommerville & Ross wrote the 'Irish RM' at this house and there is a small museum here.
- Castle Freke
Imposing ruin of the family seat of Lord Carbery behind Long Strand, there is a good view of it when doing the circular walk listed in the Damien Enright guide. The last Lord left Ireland in 1943 and became one of the 'White Mischief' set in Kenya. Unfortunately there is no public access to the castle. Tiny museum at Rathbarry Post Office.
- Coppinger's Court
Ruin in the Roury Valley. Coppinger was a general in Cromwell's army and attempted to build a canal up to the house from Mill Cove but the plans were abandoned when the house burnt down soon after completion. It is on private land so ask permission if you would like to have a closer look.
- Skibbereen Heritage Centre (Old Gasworks Building, Upper Bridge Street – telephone 028 88 40900. New Site featuring two parts: one about Lough Ine and the other about the Great Famine of the 1840's as Skib was one of the worst affected areas in the country. The museum is modern and the exhibits are captivating even for children. There is also a Famine Memorial at a mass grave of 6,000 people, which can be found on the edge of the town.
- Charles Fort, Kinsale
Huge star shaped earthworks and most impressive to visit – telephone 021 4772263. Well worth a half day here.

Union Hall pier

Interesting to wander around amongst the fishing gear, looking at the working trawlers. Seals often make a close-up appearance when the boats arrive and start gutting fish.

West Cork Model Railway Village, Clonakilty

A miniature reconstruction of life in the 1940's. Good for young children – telephone 023 88 33224.

Bantry House

A bit far away but the house and gardens are magnificent – telephone 027 50047.

Cork City

It seems to be far away but actually only takes an hour. The centre has been rejuvenated by a recent spell as 'European City of Culture'. The narrow streets and quayside areas are interesting for a wander round. The 'English Market' is sensational for food and produce, and ought not to be missed. A great restaurant is in the gallery above it.

- **The Crawford Art Gallery**
is interesting and houses a café/restaurant run by the famous Ballymaloe cookery school of Darina Allen.
- **City Gaol**
Old Victorian prison now restored with guided tours and interactive exhibitions. Good for a wet day – telephone 021 4305022.
- **Blarney Castle**
kiss the famous Blarney stone here. It is near Cork City – telephone 021 4385252.

EXCURSIONS

Crab Cottage is very close to the southern part of the 'Wild Atlantic Way', one of the longest defined coastal routes in the world. Some of the highlights are:

- The coast road from Ring to Kinsale is lovely, taking in Courtmacsherry (The Golden Pheasant craft shop and coffee at the Courtmacsherry Hotel may be of interest), Timoleague with its spectacular ruined Abbey, bird life in the estuary and endless sea views.
- Mizen Head is Europe's most westerly point, and the signal station there is open to the public – telephone 028 88 35115. The coast road via Crookhaven (see O'Sullivan's) for lunch, and barley cove for a swim, is really beautiful.

- The Beara Peninsula
Fabulous scenery. The Healy Pass over the mountains is terrific in fine weather. Dursey Island at the tip of the peninsula is worth a visit to see the only (and extraordinarily rickety) cable car in Ireland but is going on it is not for the faint hearted!
- The Ring of Kerry
Very famous, although a bit far away. The Connor Pass over the Dingle peninsula is exciting. The Blasket Islands visitor centre is surprisingly good.
- The Sheep's Head Peninsula feels really wild and all but deserted.

N. B. The finger-like geography and narrow roads of the peninsulas make driving frustrating if stuck behind a procession of caravans and camper vans, so get up early!