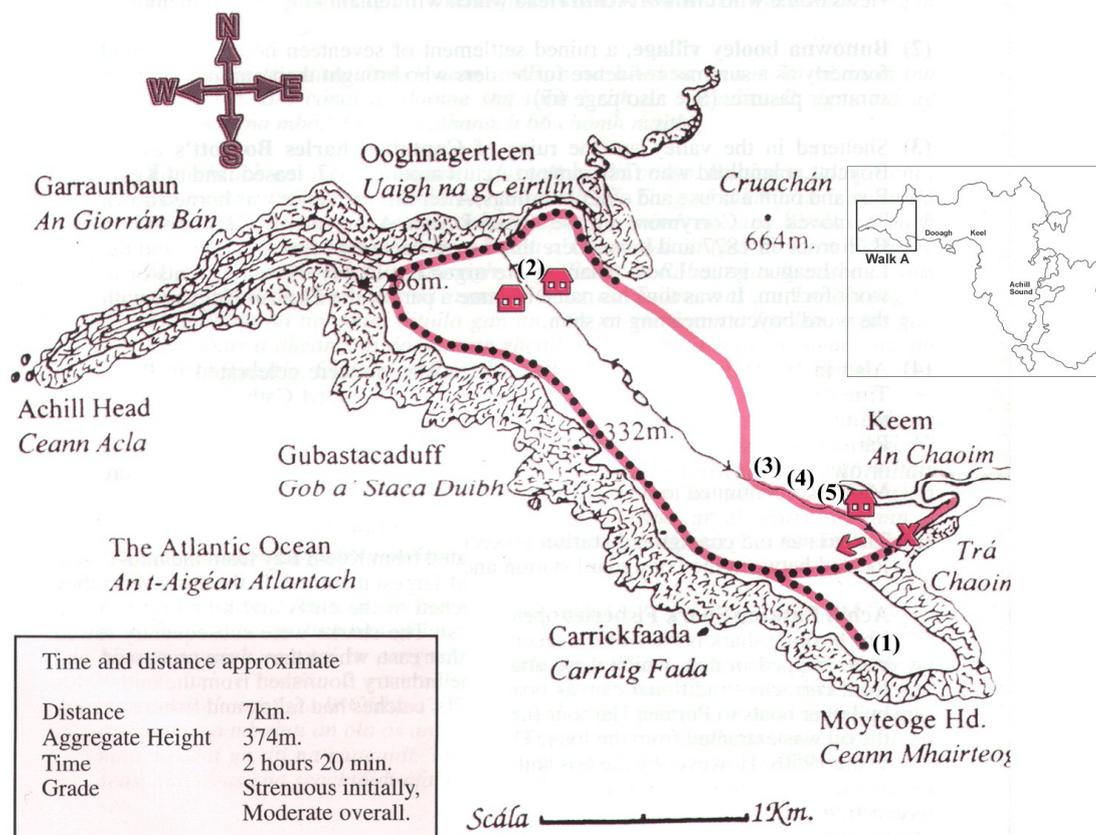# Walk A – Keem Valley

From the lower car park at the beach at Keem, follow the sod fence to the west (walking parallel to it). The steep climb is well worth the effort and takes you to the cliff top where the view is spectacular. The quartzite peaks of Croaghaun (to the north), Slievemore (to the north-east) and the Minaun Cliffs (to the south-east) can all be seen clearly.

Once at the cliff top a diversion to the left will allow you to visit a former coastguard watch-house (1) located at Moyteoge Head, 198m above sea level. From the watch-house travel north-westwards along the cliff following the intermittent sod fence (keeping a safe distance from the edge). At the north-western extremity Achill Head juts out into the Atlantic. After admiring its rugged beauty allow your eye to wander north-eastwards and absorb the view in the direction of Saddle Head.

Travel north-eastwards following the line of the cliff. The booley village of Bunowna (2) can be seen inland. Cross the river and continue on for another 250m or so to gain height above the small river valley. From here turn inland and walking parallel to the river's course but at a higher elevation travel back in the direction of Keem, where there are a number of interesting features (3, 4, 5). This takes you back to the car park at Keem.

Time and distance approximate	
Distance	7km.
Aggregate Height	374m.
Time	2 hours 20 min.
Grade	Strenuous initially, Moderate overall.

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Points of Interest:

(1) The **watch-house** at Moyteoge Head was used to monitor warship activity off the coast. **Saddle Head**: In his book 'The Way That I Went' (1937), Robert Lloyd Praeger described this walk as follows: "You will obtain changing and ever-wonderful views of the wild cliffs of Achill Head which will remain long in your memory."

(2) **Bunowna booley village**, a ruined settlement of seventeen houses, was used formerly as a summer residence for herders who brought their animals here for summer pasture.

(3) Sheltered in the valley are the ruins of **Captain Charles Boycott's** estate. Boycott, a landlord who first came to Achill around 1857, leased land at Keem Bay and built a house and other buildings. After this residence was burned down he moved to Corrymore House (near Lough Accorymore). He moved to Ballinrobe in 1877 and it was here he encountered Michael Davitt and the Land League issue. Local tenants were urged not to pay the unfair rents or to work for him. It was thus his name became a part of the English language with the word 'boycott' meaning 'to shun'.

(4) Also in the valley is a **Penal Altar** where Masses were celebrated in Penal Times by the Catholic clergy. The Penal Laws prevented Catholics bettering themselves economically or socially. Roman Catholics were excluded from Parliament and from any kind of government service. They could not buy land or own a horse worth more than £5. Bishops and priests were forbidden to say Mass, but continued to do so in remote areas.

(5) There is an old **coastguard station** at Keem. The remains of the old village are located between the coastguard station and the Penal Altar.

Achill Basking Shark Fisheries operated from Keem Bay from the mid-1940s. The basking shark is the world's second-largest mammal. In the early years they were trapped in nets which were attached to the cliffs and killed by harpoon from currachs (traditional canvas boats). The sharks were subsequently towed by larger boats to Purteen Harbour further east, where they were processed, and the oil was extracted from the liver. The industry flourished from the mid-1940s to the 1950s. However by the 1960s and 1970s catches had fallen and fishing ceased.

Safety Notice
Please observe caution when walking on cliffs and keep a safe distance from the cliff edge. Check weather conditions before setting out on your walk. The weather can change suddenly with mist falling quickly on the mountains. Sturdy boots and suitable clothing are advisable. It is best to wear layers of clothing as they can be altered to suit the prevailing conditions. Waterproofs should be carried. A nutritious packed lunch is recommended to supply energy. Always let someone know where you are going and when you should be expected back.