

Walk of the week: Bray to Greystones Co Wicklow

By Christopher Somerville

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'When the train whistles in and it takes me away, you know I won't look back at all...'

Whoever chose [Eamonn Bonner's](#) Climbing Out Of The Window as the Poets' Corner display in my [Dart](#) carriage chose well and wisely. Rattling out of [Dublin](#) on the way to Bray, looking forward to shaking the winter grime of the city from my psychological shoes, the poem's railway-flavoured themes of regret-free leaving and renewal chimed exactly with my mood.

I said as much to Jane, but she was more intent on what was outside the window -- black-backed gulls crammed on to the long tongue of [Boosterstown](#) sandspit, a kingfisher-blue sky over distant Howth, and a dolphin's fin making a brief dark cut in the heavy viscous silk of Killiney Bay.

Bray Harbour yielded one of those instantly vanishing seen-from-a-train cameos: an old man feeding a score of swans and a cloud of herring gulls with fragments of biscuit from a paper bag. We disembarked at Bray station with its bright commemorative murals, and went down to the windy seafront. The house at the seaward end of Martello Terrace where James Joyce lived as a boy stood modestly by the sea, within sound of the waves slapping up against the harbour steps. Along the promenade couples strolled arm in arm. The sea grumbled and growled against the shingle, and a shaft of sun moved a gold bar across the dark lump of Bray Head.

Up on the cliff path, it was sheer blowy magic. The walkway snaked back and forth, clinging dramatically to the face of the cliffs, with breathtaking views over the low wall down to a succession of tunnels into which the serpentine green Dart trains vanished, to wriggle through the headlands of Bray Head and Cable Rock.

The Dublin, [Wicklow & Wexford Railway Company](#) knew a good thing and a captive audience when they saw it, and it was they who built both walkway and railway in the 1850s. It was not all plain sailing: after only 20 years of operation the magnificent Brabazon Tunnel at the very edge of the sea had to be abandoned, and another parallel one dug further inland because of sea erosion and rock falls.

Looking down from our eyrie on the trains and the tunnels was one species of thrill; another was the wide and beautiful prospect of coast and sea from hunched Howth and tree-smothered [Killiney Hill](#) to the steeping rock strata of the cliffs at our elbows, then on south to where the construction cranes were endlessly dipping and swinging over Greystones Harbour.

"All I can say," said a man we met as he frowned down at the vast development, "is that we should enjoy the places we've loved all our lives while we can still recognise them."

Winter storms had crumbled the low clay cliffs near [Greystones](#), forcing us and the path inland. Jane walked ahead in her scarlet balaclava. From Little Red Riding Hood it was a short jump to Beauty and the Beast -- namely, a ginger puss curled on a windowsill, lapping up the sunshine, while a huge Alsatian howled mournfully in the living room on the other side of the glass. As the hound watched through the window like a disconsolate lover, the cat got up, stretched with elastic self-satisfaction, leaped lightly down and led us off towards Greystones and the Dart. It must have been reading Bonner, because I'm damned if I didn't hear it purring:

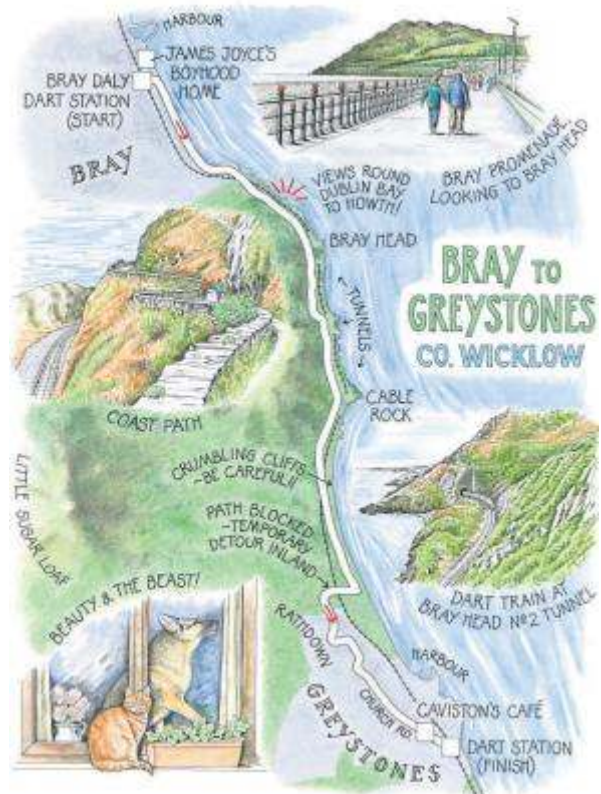
"I've just climbed out of my window, I've just stepped out of my mind, and I'm catching the last train at midnight and leaving my old life behind."

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MAP: OS of Ireland 1:50,000 Discovery 56; downloadable map/instructions at discoverireland.ie/walking.

TRAVEL: Rail (irishrail.ie): [DART](#) to Bray; return from [Greystones](#). Bus: 84 or 184 (www.dublinbus.ie).

WALK DIRECTIONS: Left out of [Bray Daly](#) station, right over railway, right along seafront promenade, up onto cliffs. Follow cliff path to Greystones DART station. At present Greystones Harbour development blocks path at Rathdown -- notices point inland. Cross DART, up lane; opposite 'Rockfort', left into Rathdown housing estate. Follow road round right bend; left after bend; bear right across wide green, down cul-de-sac marked 266-280. Along laneway on right of yellow house; on along road. At fingerpost 123-147, left between bollards. Follow several doglegs towards sea to reach Centra garage. Forward along Church Road to station.

LENGTH: Six miles -- allow three hours.

GRADE: Easy/moderate.

CONDITIONS: Cliffs approaching Greystones are crumbling and potentially dangerous. Line of path may change owing to landslips.

DON'T MISS: View back round [Dublin Bay](#); disused Brabazon Tunnel far below cliff path; creamy seafood chowder in Caviston's.

REFRESHMENTS: Caviston's Café, Church Road, Greystones (01-287 7637).

INFORMATION: Bray Cliff walk to Greystones leaflet from [Bray Tourist Office](#), Main Street, Bray (01-286 7128; visitwicklow.ie).