



Via Columbani News

September/October 2025

Welcome to the newsletter of the Via Columbani Partnership!

These news items will also be published on the website of the Partnership.

<https://viacolumbani.com/en>

In this edition, we feature highlights of the last few months:

Development of the trails. The Via Columbani pilgrimage trails link the many towns and regions across Europe where Columbanus is remembered. An initiative is underway to make them more accessible for shorter-distance walking, i.e. for one or several days. The Kolumbansweg, our Swiss partner, has taken the lead. **Page 2**

Celebration in Leinster. This year, the Columban's Day celebrations were held in Southeast Ireland, in the town and county of Carlow. A particular focus was on the village of Myshall where, according to Mary McAleese, ex-President of Ireland, Columbanus was born and brought up. **Page 3**

Making music. The cultural and educational programme of the Partnership continues to develop, thanks to our partnership with the Peregrinus project. This article recounts, in particular, the visit from a group of young Northern Ireland musicians to the Italian town of Briga Novarese, and the joyful atmosphere that was generated. **Page 4**

A welcome centre at a pilgrimage crossroads. The town of Luxeuil-les-Bains is an important destination for visitors and pilgrims on the Via Columbani. A welcome centre has recently opened in the Abbey that was founded by Columbanus, featuring the Saint's heritage, including the Via Columbani trails across Europe. **Page 5**

The aim of the Via Columbani Partnership is to bring together the numerous communities across Europe that celebrate the heritage of Saints Columbanus and Gall. All are welcome to join the Partnership; the sole conditions being 'to work in a spirit of openness, tolerance and respect' and 'to encourage partnership, peace and reconciliation'. <https://viacolumbani.com/en/information/17-The-Charter>

New walking circuits in Switzerland and Liechtenstein



The Via Columbani stretches thousands of kilometres, over nine European countries. For hikers looking to get a taste of the pilgrimage trail over shorter distances, the Partnership is creating a set of one- to several-day hikes or circuits. Each offers accommodation options; and in each case, the walkers can return to their starting point on foot or by public transport.

These trails are part of the 'Local and Regional Trails' offering to hikers, tourist offices, hotels and other service providers.

<https://viacolumbani.com/en/information/26-Local-and-regional-trails> . They have been described and mapped in detail, and are available to the public via the Via Columbani online application. Trails are being developed in every country of the Partnership.

Several are already being promoted in Switzerland and Liechtenstein along the Kolumbansweg, a 500 km (20 days) hiking trail that also includes parts of Austria. <https://www.kolumbansweg.ch/>. Hikers can now sample four one-day stretches, each different from the other, each combining landscape, culture and history. They include:



St. Gallen-Arbon-Rorschach: An attractive walk from the historic town of St. Gallen to the shores of Lake Constance. The downhill trail takes you through forest and farmland, offering magnificent views of the lake, to Arbon, a distance of approximately 17 km; then 8 km further to Rorschach, with its attractive church of Saint Columbanus. Return is possible from Arbon by bus, and from Rorschach by train.

<https://viacolumbani.com/en/trek/23727-26.-Region-St-Gallen-Bodensee>

Wattwil-Flawil: This hike starts in the Toggenburg valley, before climbing up through Alpine pastures and green forest to the Wasserfluh Pass (848m), then along the Necker Valley, past the mountain hamlet of Moos (860m), to the historic Abbey of Magdenau, above the town of Flawil. The abbey was founded by a community of pious women in 1244. The nearby Verena church was built in the 10th to 11th century. The sisters offer accommodation for walkers.

<https://viacolumbani.com/en/trek/23731-28.-Wattwil-Magdenau-Flawil-region>

Balzers-Landquart: The trail begins in Balzers, Liechtenstein, before passing through one of Europe's oldest wine-growing regions. These are the landscapes of the legendary fictional character Heidi. Approaching Chur, and the mountains, the valley narrows, revealing a concentration of historical and heritage treasures that have endured the centuries.

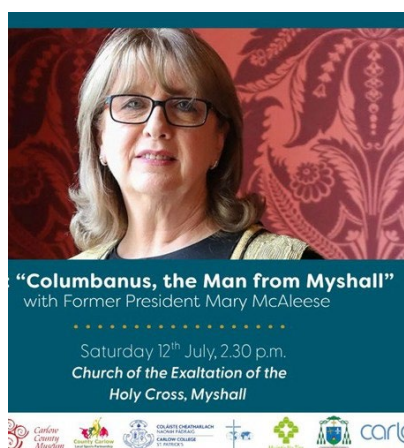
<https://viacolumbani.com/en/trek/23733-27-Balzers-Landquart-region>

Bivio-Lake Columban: This one-day (11 km) hike close to the Italian frontier takes you to the highest point of Columbanus' journey across the Alps. Starting at Bivio, this challenging hike leads you to the 'Leg Columban' (Columbanus Lake). You can return the same way or continue on a 18 km loop (1,075 m of ascent and descent) connecting the Lake, Fuorcla da la Valletta (2,585 m), Forcellina (2,671 m) and the Septimer Pass (2,310 m). This extension requires a good physical condition. <https://viacolumbani.com/en/trek/23724-25.-Bivio-Lake-Colomban-Bivio-region>

Myshall and Carlow host Columban's Day

From July 11th to 13th July 2025, the 26th International Columban's Day celebrations were held in Myshall and Carlow, Ireland. The area around Myshall, in the foothills of the Blackstairs Mountains, is recognised as the birthplace of Saint Columbanus.

The organising committee, led by Bishop Denis Nulty, comprised many signatories of the Columban Charter of Partnership, including Carlow County Council, Carlow Tourism, the Columban Fathers, the Friends of St. Columbanus ROI (coordinators of the Turas Columbanus), the Friends of Columbanus Myshall, the Knights of Columbanus, and Carlow Museum.



On the Saturday afternoon, Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland, gave an inspirational talk entitled 'Columbanus, the man from Myshall'. He was, she claimed, very much an Irishman; however one who was able to rise above the petty differences of tribe and nation, in the course of his mission. She emphasised the relevance of his life and work to the challenges of contemporary Europe.

For Bishop Nulty, "The marking of Columban's Day allows us to live out the Columban Charter of Partnership, signed in nine countries, that keeps alive the footprint of Columbanus on the European Continent."

Over the three-day festival weekend, more than 3,500 people attended thirteen events at seven locations in Carlow Town and around the village of Myshall. Visitors, guests, and dignitaries attended from across Europe, including France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and all parts of Ireland.

Organised events comprised a Columbanus-themed exhibition, a lecture and workshop, official receptions in Carlow College, Carlow Cathedral concert, cross-ecumenical services, and a procession in Myshall.



A highlight of the weekend was a 10km walk by over 350 pilgrims from the Nine Stones mountain viewpoint to the village of Myshall, followed by a well-deserved lunch, prepared and served by the local residents, at the Myshall Community Hall.

The Nine Stones Neolithic site is the official start for The Turas Columbanus/Via Columbani pilgrim trail across Europe, leading northward from Myshall towards Cleenish Island, where Columbanus trained

as a monk, then Bangor (Northern Ireland), where he studied, before leaving on his mission to mainland Europe. <https://carlowtourism.com/thecolumbanway/>

The weekend events ended on the Sunday with a Pilgrim Mass at Carlow Cathedral and a Pilgrim Lunch. The overall theme was “Pilgrims of Hope”, celebrating the legacy of St. Columbanus and his teachings through shared cultural heritage, friendship and spirituality; also honouring the many places and communities that are connected across Europe by the Via Columbani.

Musical exchanges between Ireland and Italy

The Via Columbani Partnership’s international cultural programme continues to expand, thanks to our collaboration with the European Peregrinus project.



The commune of Briga Novarese, in Piedmont, has been particularly active over the years. In July 2025, the town hosted 20 young and talented Irish musicians and dancers from Bangor, music students aged 14 to 18, members of Ards Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, an award-winning school and performance association. <https://ardscce.co.uk/>

The trip included a visit to nearby Milan, as shown in this lively video; and provided many opportunities for exchanges with young Italians of the town and region.

https://youtu.be/gX3xnPo_qHU?si=y5e5YuWTHtvat0V

For Chiara Barbieri, mayor of Briga Novarese, “The positive impact of these exchanges is massive for the youth of Briga, in terms of opening their horizons to new possibilities and improving their language skills; as well as getting to know this wonderful music and the culture it represents. The exchanges go both ways. Last November, a group of us was hosted in Bangor, Northern Ireland, where we signed the Charter and participated in the activities of the Via Columbani Partnership.”

The heritage ties of the commune to Columbanus are strong. The town is situated close to a hill that is dedicated to the Saint, a pathway no doubt used by monks and other travellers throughout history.

The Via Columbani Partners have been collaborating with the Peregrinus project for many years. A formal agreement has now been signed that establishes Peregrinus as the Partnership’s primary vehicle for developing cultural and educational projects Europe-wide. In 2025, already, half a dozen Peregrinus projects have been launched involving the Partners and carrying the Partnership logo.

The collaboration has also made possible numerous educational exchanges. Emma Coulter of Bangor Academy has worked with Manuela Bertoncini, coordinator of the Peregrinus project, over several years, on educational projects and exchanges between Bobbio, Brescia and Bangor. In 2025, she accompanied a group of pupils to Luxeuil-les-Bains. The objective is to create a network of schools across Europe interested in participating in such exchanges, in all countries of the Via Columbani.

In Luxeuil, a place of welcome for visitors and pilgrims

Luxeuil-les-Bains is a destination for many visitors and pilgrims on the Via Columbani, as well as a crossroads for those continuing on either the *Path of Exile* or toward Switzerland and Italy. The town and its surroundings are home to numerous cultural and archaeological treasures of the early Middle Ages, including the tombs of a Gallo-Roman cemetery and the vestiges of the three monastic communities founded by Saint Columbanus.

The entities responsible for preserving and showcasing this heritage include: the Tourist Office of Luxeuil-les-Bains and Vosges du Sud; the Abbey of Luxeuil, currently under renovation; and the Friends of Saint Columbanus, the largest European association dedicated to celebrating the memory of the saint. The association organizes events, manages heritage sites, and is a founding partner of the Via Columbani. <https://www.amisaintcolomban.org/wordpress/>

These guardians of Saint Columbanus' heritage work together to ensure a warm welcome for visitors and pilgrims following in the saint's footsteps. At the Tourist Office, guides and informational materials are available. Pilgrims may even be accommodated in lodgings within the Abbey precinct.



At the Abbey entrance, the Friends of Saint Columbanus have set up an Exhibition Space, highlighting the many dimensions of this heritage both locally and across Europe. Among them are the pilgrim paths of the Via Columbani, which begin in Ireland, cross nine countries, and end in Bobbio.

The space is made available by the Abbey and managed by the Friends. Its development has been funded by the Gilles Cugnier Foundation. It opened to the public on September 26th, on the eve of the 14th European Round Table on Luxovian Monasticism.

For those wishing to discover the heritage sites around Luxeuil, several walking paths and circuits provide access to historical landmarks. One example is the Chemin des Moines (Monks' Path), an eight-hour hike goes past Annegray, the site of Columbanus' first monastic community, and also the cave where he withdrew for meditation.

<https://vosgesquipeut.fr/randonnee-dans-les-vosges-du-sud-sur-le-chemin-des-moines/>

Another walking circuit has just been added to the Via Columbani map: a loop starting from the centre of Luxeuil, passing by the hermitage of Saint Valbert (595–668), the third successor of Saint Columbanus as abbot.

<https://viacolumbani.com/trek/23723-24.-Region-Luxeuil---Saint-Valbert---Luxeuil>

This new walking route enriches the “**Local and Regional Trails**” of the Via Columbani, a growing number of which are opening to the public in France, Switzerland, Italy and Ireland.

<https://viacolumbani.com/en/information/26-Local-and-regional-trails>