

ARMCHAIR JOURNEY

Castles, Follies & Four-Leaf Clovers

By Rosamund Burton

Allen & Unwin, 270pp, \$24.99

PUT it down to the current obsession with health and exercise. Suddenly the ancient European paths and pilgrims' ways are, in these decidedly secular times, being walked by hordes of people driven by passions worthy of mediaeval religious ascetics.

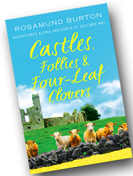
There have been a number of books describing treks along Hadrian's Wall in England and the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. Recently, there has been a fascinating account of walking Russia's Vladimirka Road to the Siberian outposts of Stalin's gulag, as well as the film *The Way Back*, based on a book about walking from Siberia to India.

Now, here's a delightful account of walking the modest route known as St Declan's Way

from Cashel to Ardmore in southern Ireland. At 96 kilometres, that's more my kind of walk.

Rosamund Burton was born in Ireland, grew up in England and has lived in Australia since 1994. Having spent some of her late adolescence living near St Declan's Way, she decides to return and, at a leisurely pace, takes three weeks to walk the historic path.

The result is a gentle, loving homage to all things Irish. Burton loves the warmth of the people, the endless conversation, the deep sense of history, the ancient ruins of castles and churches, the mythology and folklore, the intimacy and



beauty of the landscape, the rain (particularly if it is soft and "Irish") and the feeling that Ireland is a society still lost in time. Almost coincidentally, because Burton has written the book chronologically, this is also a useful travel guide for people planning to walk St Declan's Way. It warns of the possible problems – the mud on certain paths, the poorly signposted false turns – and offers advice and useful historical and cultural background information about many of the special sites and buildings along the way.

Most importantly, this book celebrates the walk. After reading this enthusiastic account, many will want to take this manageable stroll through rural Ireland.
Reviewed by Bruce Elder