

# HERITAGE TRAIL



# EXPLORE INISHOWEN

Inishowen is exceptional in terms of the outstanding beauty of its geography and in the way that the traces of its history survive to this day, conveying an evocative picture of a vibrant past. We invite you to take this fascinating historical tour of Inishowen which will lead you on a journey through its historical past. Immerse yourself in fascinating cultural and heritage sites some of which date back to early settlements, including ancient forts, castle's, stone circles and high crosses to name but a few. Make this trail your starting point as you begin your exploration of the rich historical tapestry of the Inishowen peninsula. However, there are still hundreds of additional heritage sites left for you to discover.

For further reading and background information: *Ancient Monuments of Inishowen, North Donegal*; Séan Beattie. *Inishowen, A Journey Through Its Past Revisited*; Neil Mc Grory. [www.inishowenheritage.ie](http://www.inishowenheritage.ie) [www.curiousireland.ie](http://www.curiousireland.ie)

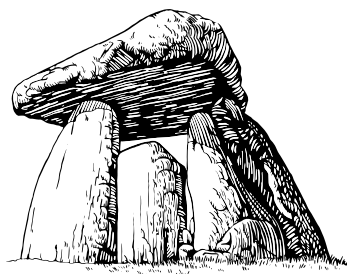
Images supplied by: Adam Porter, Liam Rainey, Denise Henry, Brendan Diver, Ronan O'Doherty, Mark Willett, Donal Kearney.

Please note that some of the monuments listed are on private land, fortunately the majority of land owners do not object to visitors. However please respect their property and follow the Country Code. For queries contact Explore Inishowen, Inishowen Tourist Office +353 (0)74 93 63451 / Email: [info@govisitinishowen.com](mailto:info@govisitinishowen.com)

As you explore Inishowen's spectacular Heritage Trail, you'll discover one of Ireland's most beautiful scenic regions. Take in the stunning coastline; try your hand at an exhilarating outdoor pursuit such as horse riding, kayaking or surfing. World - class golf, endless white sandy beaches, great food, and lively entertainment, where a warm welcome awaits you.

*Cover images courtesy of Adam Porter (front cover) and Liam Rainey (back cover).*

*With special thanks to John Hegarty for his assistance.'*





## 01 AN GRIANÁN OF AILEACH, BURT

**GPS:** 55.023834, -7.427674

**Directions:** 4km from Bridgend on the N13 in the direction of Letterkenny. At Burt Circular Chapel (St Aengus'), turn left at the signposted road and continue up to the hill summit. This monument is well signposted.

A prehistoric enclosure built of dry stones on Grianán Hill, which rises to a height of 808ft (246m) and commands views over Lough Foyle as well as an extensive panorama covering at least four counties. The hill we know as an Grianán Ailigh has dominated the Inishowen landscape for upwards of 4000 years. The Neolithic burial chamber, uncovered during restoration work in the 1870's, dates from 2000BC. When the sons of Niall of the Nine Hostages moved North in 395AD to conquer new lands, Prince Eoghan (Owen) is said to have made the site of Elaghmore (AileachMor) castle (about 3 km north east of Burt) his power base, and gave his name to Inishowen (Island of Eoghan) and Tyrone (land of Eoghan). The way of life for this warrior - based society was changed forever with the arrival of Christianity brought by St Patrick who baptised Owen at the well of 'The Grianán Aileach', (The sunny place of Aileach).



## 02 ST MURA'S CROSS, FAHAN

**GPS:** 55.083139, -7.460814

**Directions:** Take R238 south from Buncrana for 7km toward Fahan. Situated in the graveyard of the old abbey on the left side of the road. This monument is well signposted.

Fahan is the site of the ancient Abbey of St. Mura who was born in County Down circ. 550 AD and died around 645 AD. He became the Patron saint of the 'Cineal Eoghain' of Inishowen and Tyrone and his feast day is celebrated on the 12th of March. On this day the 'Cineal Eoghain' would make a 'turas' to Fahan Mura and pray at his 'Holy Well' at the foreshore close to the monastic site which is preserved still in situ. Founded in the early 7th Century, the abbey has been used for religious activities for over 1000 years. Sited in the graveyard is St. Mura's Cross/Slab. Local tradition states that this stone, in the shape of an ordinary gravestone, marks the saint's grave. The cross is decorated on both sides and inscribed with interlacing patterns displaying a high level of craftsmanship. Its design pre-dates the high crosses of Ireland. Also on this site is the grave of Agnes Jones, a contemporary of Florence Nightingale who set up the first nursing training school in Liverpool.



03

## O'DOHERTY'S KEEP, BUNCRANA

**GPS:** 55.139804, -7.462873

**Directions:** 1.5km north of Bunrana Tourist Office, located near Castle Bridge at the mouth of the Crana River.

The O'Dohertys were the Gaelic lords of late medieval Inishowen after the departure of the Normans who in turn, had defeated the McLaughlins (original Cineal Eoghain) at the battle of "Cameirg" in 1241. This small tower house on the Crana River was of secondary importance to their main strongholds at Elagh and Burt. Of Anglo-Norman influence, the exact date of the original two storey structure is uncertain (probably 1410-1430). Its third storey and other modifications were added towards the end of the Nine Years War, around 1602, for the young Sir Cahir Rua O'Doherty, the last Lord of Inishowen. Following Cahir's failed rebellion and death in 1608 the English crown's Lord Deputy, Arthur Chichester, secured most of Inishowen for himself. In the Plantation of Ulster (c.1610) he leased the 'Keep' and its lands to Captain Henry Vaughan, an English army veteran. Vaughan's grandson Colonel George Vaughan built the nearby manor house; Bunrana Castle, between, 1716 -18.



04

## ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH, STRAID, CLONMANY

**GPS:** 55.265296, -7.429022

**Directions:** 12km south west of Clonmany village on the R238 on the right hand side before the Waterfall at the Glen House.

As well as being the perfect vantage point from which to appreciate the natural beauty of Cluain Maine (Maine's meadow), St Columba's Church, (or The Old Church, as it is known locally), is steeped in local history. The original 7th century monastery on the site became the centre of the parish system in the middle ages. In 1610 the established Church acquired the site and the present structure, commissioned by the Earl Bishop of Derry, was built in 1772. In the 18th century, its Rector Donal Mc Laughlin resided in a magnificent mansion, while his brother, Peadar, a poor Franciscan friar, hid out in the nearby hills. In the graveyard, the ancient families of Chichester and O'Neill, Planter and Gael lie side by side with infamous landlords, local poets and the ordinary Catholic and Protestant people of Clonmany.



## 05 CARRICKABRAGHY CASTLE, ISLE OF DOAGH

**GPS:** 55.316003, -7.372384

**Directions:** Take the R238 north from Ballyliffin for 2.5km. At the junction turn left. Follow the road then turn left at the Famine Village junction. Continue till the Castle is clearly visible from the road.

During the Viking era Carrickabraghy was an important administrative centre, ruled by the Mc Fauls (Ó Maolfhabaháil). The Annals of the Four Masters (1636) record (sometimes with Viking names, indicating that they had intermarried), that they were lords of Carrickabraghy between 834 A.D and 1200 A.D. Carrickabraghy Castle, built in the 16th century is strategically situated on a rocky outcrop, overlooking Trawbreaga Bay. It is one of four remaining O Doherty Castles in the Inishowen peninsula and it was occupied by Phelim Breaslaigh O Doherty in 1600. It was here in 1608 that Cahir O Doherty, the last Chieftain of Inishowen, planned his ill-fated rebellion. Following his execution, the plantation of Ulster ensued and in 1610 the original keep was enclosed by adding the circular tower and a bawn wall for protection. The Castle has been uninhabited since 1665.



## 06 THE MARIGOLD STONE, CARNDONAGH

**GPS:** 55.249874, -7.272825

**Directions:** Next to the Carndonagh High Cross, inside the adjacent Church of Ireland cemetery, stands the 'Marigold stone'.

It is located at the centre of an ancient 'Double Ditch' that typically surrounded monastic sites of St. Patrick's era. The west face bears a flabellum (a liturgical fan) consisting of a large circle with a seven petalled marigold inside it. Below the flabellum are two loops used for either holding the fan or hanging it up. On each side of the handle are two figures, each one holding what may be a crosier or staff and carrying a satchel, generally thought to represent pilgrims and below is a cross of arcs (often associated with pilgrimage). The east face shows a crucifixion scene depicting the figure of Christ upon an equal armed cross but unusually, his head protrudes above the pillar stone. A band of interlace represents the shaft of the cross, finishing with a tripartite knot. At either side is a figure that may represent Longinus and Stephaton. Below the knot is another equal armed cross with interlace carving.





07

## DONAGH CROSS, CARNDONAGH

**GPS:** 55.249924, -7.272109

**Directions:** Take R238 from Ballyliffin for 9.5km. Just before the town centre along the roadside on your left, beside the Donagh Church

Dating from the 7th century, antiquarians consider St Patrick's cross to be one of the finest remaining examples in Ireland of low-relief carved monuments. Carved out of a single stone of hard, laminated sandstone, it has a simple shape with short arms gently curving from the shaft. Its unusual decoration is combining bands of interlaced ribbon with simplified figures in low relief. The central image may depict the Crucifixion scene or the Transfiguration and the body- flanking figures could either be Mary and John, the two thieves or possibly soldiers. The figures flanking the head are thought to be angels. Below are three figures wearing cowls and long robes, perhaps representing the holy women who visited Christ's tomb after the resurrection. The pillar stones on either side of the cross are covered with figures and other biblical images. The cross now stands adjacent to Donagh Church having been removed from its original site across the road.



08

## WEE HOUSE OF MALIN, MALIN HEAD

**GPS:** 55.368169, -7.317768

**Directions:** Take R242 from Malin for 8.5km. At the junction, take 2nd right. Pass Mullin's Shop by your left and continue for 2km until junction with sharp left turn. 'The Wee House of Malin' is signposted at this junction and is situated on the shore side at the bottom of a steep hill ahead.

The 'Wee House of Malin' refers to a cave, where folklore has it that no matter how many people enter it will accommodate all. The cave and holy well (located in a cavern underneath the large rock on the shore in front of the cave) were originally associated with the belief in the sanctity of water. In front of the cave is a monastic foundation and local tradition claims that the original foundation was built to exorcise evil from the area. The well is believed to have been blessed by St Muirdealach. The traditional holy day, 15th August, was celebrated with masses and a community celebration including prayer, entertainment and a pilgrimage to the well and continues to the present day. A stone head removed from the gable of the church ruin is now housed in the National Museum in Dublin. This enchanting site has a colourful history.



## 09 CLONCHA HIGH CROSS, CULDAFF

**GPS:** 55.275963, -7.141118

**Directions:** Take R238 for 1.5km south from Culdaff, at St Mary's Church turn left. Continue approximately 1.8km along this road, it is in a field on the left. It is well signposted

Cloncha is the site of one of the most important foundations in the development of Christianity in Inishowen. It was a significant centre from the sixth century onwards, favoured by bishops as a final resting place. The glory of Cloncha is the striking high cross, standing 4m tall, in the field just beside the church ruin. There is another partially complete cross, but fallen, in the same field. Inside the ruined 17th century planter's Church (which replaced the older church) are some beautiful carved stones. Cloncha was the centre of conversion for a large part of Inishowen. The original monastery was much larger and some of the stones and crosses are now held in the National Museum. Its influence was great and the close proximity of Carrowmore and another foundation at Culdaff, indicates that this area was a great seat of skill and learning.

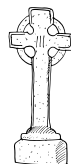


## 10 CARROWMORE HIGH CROSS, CULDAFF

**GPS:** 55.256384, -7.189454

**Directions:** (See Cloncha Cross). Continue from Cloncha Cross for a further 1.8km. Carrowmore Crosses are in a field on the left. This site is signposted from the main road.

Two high crosses stand on a sloping hill at Carrowmore. They are all that now remains of the monastery believed to be 'Both Chonais'. This foundation pre-dates Cloncha and the "Double Ditch" located in 2014, indicates this to be a monastic site of St. Patrick's era. The crosses are less ornate than those at Cloncha, but there is something dramatic in their form, echoing the older form of the standing stone. Only traces of the actual monastery now exist - but the crosses, slab and cross-inscribed rock suggest that a more expansive centre existed. All of the original buildings on the site have disappeared and the actual site itself is divided in two by a modern road. Close by, a holy well links this Christian settlement with the Celtic past.





## 11 BOCAN STONE CIRCLE, CULDAFF

**GPS:** 55.272339, -7.14823

**Directions:** Take R238 south for 2km from Culdaff in the direction of Moville. Take the 1st left past the Parochial House. It stands on a hill in a field beside the Parochial House at Bocan.

When seen from afar, Bocan Stone Circle appears insignificant; lost behind trees and dwarfed by more modern structures but when viewed in close proximity its full glory comes to life. Situated on the hill of Bocan it commands magnificent views of Sliabh Sneacht to Trawbreaga Bay to Glengad, particularly impressive when viewed at either sunrise or sunset. It is suggested that stone circles were original sun temples. Many of the 30 original stones were removed during indiscriminate land development partially destroying the complete circular form. However, the remaining stones are up to 7ft tall and easily evoke imaginings of images of sacred rites being performed, and wonderings of the people that built this structure. The date of its construction is unclear but has been suggested at between 1500 - 3000 BC.



## 12 TEMPLE OF DEEN, CULDAFF

**GPS:** 55.269587, -7.146621

**Directions:** Take R238 for 2.5km south from Culdaff. Situated on top of the low hill of Deen, on the right. (Just a few metres past the road taken to Bocan Stone Circle, on the opposite side of the road). This monument stands in a field on the right approximately 0.5km along this dirt track.

A wedge-tomb, which appears to have been covered with a cairn of small boulders suggesting that the structure remaining, would have been only the central chamber of a huge monument. Since no proper excavation has ever taken place at either Deen or Bocan it is difficult to determine whether these monuments were constructed at the same time or by the same people. However, deduced from experience elsewhere, it is likely that they were constructed by the same race but possibly at distinct periods (sometime during the Bronze Age). The close proximity and records of other notable monuments would suggest that this area was important or significant in spiritual terms for the people of that era.





## 13 COOLEY CROSS & SKULL HOUSE, MOVILLE

**GPS:** 55.188839, -7.061632

**Directions:** Take R238 Moville to Derry road till you see petrol station on left. Approx. 60m further take right turn at signposted road. This site is well signposted.

The name can be spelt Cooly or Cooley and translates as 'The Quarterland of the Woodland'. The old Irish name was 'Maigh Bhile' which translates as 'The Plain of the Ancient (Sacred) Tree'. Evidence shows that this was a Druidic site in the Iron Age and two earthen ring circles were confirmed to enclose the site in 2013. It is recorded that St. Patrick founded a church here in 442AD which developed into a Monastery by the 6th century and survived until the introduction of the parochial system in the 12th century. A "Double Ditch" surrounding the monastic settlement was discovered in 2015, affirming this to be an ancient site in the style of a "St. Patrick" site. A parochial church remained until the 17th century, the ruins of two can be still found. Cooley has a rich collection of Wheel - Head crosses, the High Cross at the entrance and seven other examples inside the graveyard. An additional free self- guide map of this site is available in local businesses.

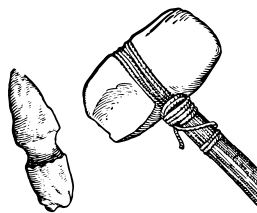


## 14 NORTHBURG CASTLE, GREENCASTLE

**GPS:** 55.205278, -6.975294

**Directions:** Take R241 from Moville to Greencastle. At the National Fisheries College turn right on to the Stroove Road and follow for. Easily viewed from the road or from the shore path walk (accessed via the main village car park).

The castle was built by the Norman lord, Richard de Burgo in 1305. His grandson, William succeeded to the Earldom in 1328 but became involved in a quarrel with his cousin Walter who belonged to the Connaught branch of the family. William imprisoned his cousin in a dungeon and starved him to death. This event is commemorated by a skeleton on the coat of arms of the City of Derry. After the Plantation, the castle was granted to Sir Arthur Chichester but subsequently fell into ruins.





## 15 MORTON GOD DOLMEN, MUFF

**GPS:** 55.089479, -7.294858

**Directions:** Situated in the middle of boggy land. Follow L1891, 0.75 km past the church at Iskaheen - a distance of approx. 3.25km from the R238 at Muff village. The dolmen is visible from the road on a downward sloping lane on the left, approx. 0.25km from the road.

The hills behind the village of Iskaheen offer an imposing setting for the largest portal tomb (dolmen) in Inishowen with a capstone thought to weigh around 30 tons. There appears to be traces of a cairn at its base. The precise reason for its name is unclear. Originally referred to as a druid's altar (albeit incorrectly) it was thought that this type of monument was used for sacrifice or some other rite, but investigations have shown that these monuments marked burial places, probably even predating the arrival of the druids. This tomb is situated in bog land but it is important to note that in the period of its construction, Ireland had a warmer climate and the present day bogs were forest. This means that this tomb would have been many feet higher and even more imposing.



## 16 FATHER HEGARTY'S ROCK, BUNCRANA

**GPS:** 55.148391, -7.4810000

**Directions:** WALKING. From Explore Inishowen Tourist Office head north for 150m. Turn left at Aileach Road. Cross the car park till you meet the Shore Front Walking Path, follow northward for approx. 2.5km or 45 minutes. The grave will be on the right and the rock on the left sides.

In 1709, British Penal Laws forced non Church of Ireland Clergy to take an oath of abjuration or face execution. Subsequently Priests were forced to practice their faith in secret – a perilous risk as there was a £5 reward for a priest's head. When the authorities were alerted to the local priest, Father James Hegarty, he attempted to flee by swimming across Lough Swilly. Tricked into believing he would be spared, he returned to shore where he was immediately beheaded. Some say his head bounced eight or nine times off several rocks before landing, where the patches of land are said to show no signs of greenery since. His body was buried at the site of his death. He is believed to have been the last priest to have been massacred under penal laws. Another source of intrigue is that the rock itself bears a crack in the image of a cross.



## 17 AMAZING GRACE & LOUGH SWILLY

**GPS:** 55.1286000,-7.458213

**GPS:** 55.1369778,-7.461263

**Directions:** Route 1: Amazing Grace Park: Adjacent to Tourist Office rear car park.

Route 2: Amazing Grace Viewing Point: From the beginning of the Shore Path, walk for approx 1km northward.

The hymn is loved all over the world. The remarkable story of 'Amazing Grace' began when a foul-mouthed sailor; John Newton, was caught in a violent storm on the Atlantic Ocean on March 10th 1748. Stranded at sea and close to death, the wind finally changed direction on 8th April and his ship found safe haven in Lough Swilly. Saved from death, John Newton stepped ashore in Inishowen a changed man; believing that God's grace could save even a 'wretch' like him. In England, Newtown was appointed as the captain of a slave ship. But as his faith grew, he became unhappy with his profession. He left his slave ship to join the clergy in 1764. As a curate John Newton wrote the words to the hymn 'Amazing Grace' to illustrate his New Year's Day sermon in 1773. When offered his own church in London, Newton became an influential preacher, a prolific hymn writer and played a vital role as mentor to William Wilberforce in the historic battle against slavery.



## 18 LANDS OF EOGHAN

The Lands of Eoghan festival was designed to celebrate Inishowen's unique Early Medieval landscapes. Using traditional methods, several groups have explored Inishowen's archaeological landscapes at Carrickabraghy on Doagh Island, Straid, Carrowmore, Cloncha, Desertegney and Moville.

In addition, work on early kingship and assembly sites is shedding new light on enclosures at Grianán of Aileach and Elagh Mor. In 2012, The Bernician Studies Group brought its geophysical remote-sensing equipment from Sunderland University.

Using the Fluxgate gradiometer (which detects minute fluctuations in magnetic particles in the soil, often showing where the ground has been disturbed – by the boundaries of monasteries, the foundations of buildings or by burials and can produce startlingly detailed maps of ancient landscapes), at Carrowmore, Cloncha and Cooley. They established early monastic sites. Trial excavations at Carrowmore in 2013 proved that the sites had been occupied from as early as the 6th century. More recently a very complex cemetery has been recorded at Cooley, revealing a group of early Christian memorial stones of international importance.



Malin Head

08

05

Isle of Doagh

Malin

Ballyliffin

Culdaff

Clonmany

04

Carndonagh

06

07

09

12

11

10

Lough Swilly

Leenan Bay

Urris Hills

Fort Dunree

17

16

Ned's Point

03

Buncrana

Lough Foyle

Fahan

02

15

Muff

Inch

Burnfoot

Burt

01

Newtowncunningham

Derry

Inishowen Head

Stroove

Greencastle

Lough Foyle

Moville

Redcastle

13

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