

Megalithic Ireland

Megalithic Monuments.

Ireland's ancient legends are a combination of fact and fiction. Tales of great deeds, an almost superior race, defy comprehension, however when you visit and explore some of our ancient monuments, you come away with a different understanding.

The first settlers to Ireland arrived somewhere between seven and eight thousand years ago. Some say they crossed a land bridge from Scotland. Others believe they arrived on primitive rafts or boats. Regardless of how they arrived they certainly left a mark.

The first evidence of human habitation is found in Northern Ireland, where they were nomadic and lived as hunters and gatherers of food. As time passed they founded settlements and farmed the land. As these settlements grew they erected structures for protection and to honor their dead. The most extensive and earliest monuments found in Ireland lay to the west, long the Atlantic seaboard. From the Burren of Co. Clare, extending north to the area around Cong, Co. Mayo and north to Sligo at Carrowmore and Carrowkeel, are a vast

collection of ancient monuments, erected by these neolithic people. Near Ballina Co. Mayo is evidence of one of Ireland's oldest settlements, at least 5,000 years old, at the Ceide Fields. Here walls were built to define specific areas for farming, and was home to a large community. The Stone Age dwellings indicate a developed social order for hundreds of families at Ceide Fields, and thousands throughout North Mayo. They belong to a common west European farming tradition which began before 6000 BC in the Near East. The forest had to be cleared before farming could begin and dividing the landscape into fields required a community effort working together in arranging a quarter of a million tons of stone to build the walls.

Bru na Boinne in the Boyne Valley and Loughcrew are slightly more recent, dating back to approx 3500 B.C. Here was a far more developed civilization where Europe's largest collection of megalithic art is to be found. The architects of these monuments were far more advanced than most appreciate, for each of the main megalith sites have significant archaeoastronomical significance. Newgrange and Dowth have Winter solstice solar alignments, while it is claimed Knowth has an Equinox solar alignment. In fact many of the ancient cairns were aligned and oriented to an important date or festival. Throughout all Ireland you can easily find many more examples of the long since past. The dolmen was an burial chamber, which could be reopened and was covered by a mound. It

could be used for multiple burials. Ireland had these dispersed widely throughout the land.

Why not plan to visit one or more of the following:

Passage Graves of Ireland

Newgrange Bru na Boinne Co. Above the entrance to the passage at Newgrange there is an opening called a roof-box. Its purpose is to allow sunlight to penetrate the passage and chamber at sunrise around the Winter Solstice. Built over 5,000 years ago, before Stonehenge, before the pyramids even before the invention of the wheel.



Knowth, Bru na Boinne Co. Meath This passage tomb was built over 5,000 years ago, probably after the construction of Newgrange and before the construction of Dowth. The Great Mound at Knowth is similar in size to Newgrange and is surrounded by 18 smaller satellite mounds. The Great Mound has two passages with entrances on opposite sides

Fourknocks, Co. Meath. Fourknocks is a Passage Chamber Tomb built about 5000 years ago..Only the main tomb has been excavated and is open to the public.

Loughcrew Co. Meath "Spring Equinox" Several Megalithic Cairns are scattered around hills at Loughcrew, the main concentrations are on Carnbane and Carnbane East where Cairn T is the centrepiece.

The Mound of Hostages,,The Hill of Tara, Co. Meath. has a short passage which is aligned with sunset on the true astronomical cross quarter days of November 8 and February 4, the ancient Celtic festivals of Samhain and Imbolc.

Dolmens of Ireland

Poulnabrone, Co Clare. There are over seventy megalithic tombs in in The Burren , over 90% of them are Wedge Tombs. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the burials took place here between 3800 and 3200 BC. the best known is Poulnabrone.

Proleek Dolmen, County Louth. The dolmen at Proleek, located in the Cooley Peninsula, Co. Louth. It is one of the finest examples in Ireland. . Nearby is a wedge tomb, or gallery grave.

Brown's Hill Dolmen, Co. Clare. It was built between 4000 and 3000 BC. It contains one of the largest cap-stones in Ireland..

Gortnavern, Co. Donegal Somewhat difficult to find monument, often called 'Diarmuid and Grainne's Bed', is located close to the town of Rathmelton.

Legananny Dolmen, County Down. This ancient burial site is located on the southern fringe of the Slieve Croob mountain range.

Kilclooney Dolmen, County Donegal. Beside Kilclooney are two dolmens within the remains of a 82 ft.long cairn.

Lough Gur County Limerick. Inhabited for more than 4,000 years, the ancient farming settlement offers a number of prehistoric remains. The most impressive of these is the largest surviving stone circle in Ireland, made up of 113 stones.

Haroldstown, Tullow, Carlow This interesting megalithic tomb was lived in by a family in the nineteenth century Gaps between the side-stones were windproofed with turf and mud.

Ballylumford Dolmen, Larne, Antrim known locally as the Druid's Altar . Larne used to be called "the port of the Standing Stones" by the Romans due to the abundance of megalithic stone structures in the vicinity.

Aughnacliffe, Longfordb One of a small group of portal tombs which have two capstones .

Knockeen Dolmen Waterford, Co.Waterford A fine portal dolmen with a rectangular chamber roofed by two capstones .

Kilfeaghan Dolmen, Rostrevor, Co.Down This dolmen has a massive granite capstone, estimated to weigh about 35 tons. The tomb, built around 3000-2500 B.C., stands near rectangular stone cairn.

Stone Circles in Ireland

Drombeg Stone Circle, Co. Cork. is locally known as the Druid's Altar. Of the original 17 pillars of smooth-sided local sandstone , only 13 remain. The midpoint of this stone was set in line with the winter solstice sunset .

Carrowmore Stone Circle Co. Sligo. The area is abundant with megalithic remains, with more than 60 tombs, stone circles, passage graves and standing stones. The earliest structures date back some 6000 years. A nearby hill, called Knocknarea or Hill of the Kings, almost certainly contains a passage tomb. Legend has it that it is the burial place of Queen Maeve, the mythical Queen of Connacht.

Glebe Stone Circle, Cong, Co Mayo. The stone circles at Cong are fairly displaced from any others and represent a wide range of styles.

Ardgroom Stone Circle Co. Cork. located on the Beara Peninsula The circle comprises nine standing stones, with another single standing stone close to the circle.

Beltany Stone Circle, near Raphoe town in Co Donegal. This circle consists of 64 stones remaining of a possible 80. Built between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago. The name suggests a connection with the festival of Bealtaine, which marked the end of the spring and the beginning of the summer.

Ancient Palaces

Hill of Tara , Co. Meath. the legendary story naming the Hill of Tara as the capital by the Tuatha de Danann, dates Tara's earliest days to approx. 5,000 years ago, when Neolithic people occupied the land., The custom continued with the arrival of the Celts and this seat became the place from where the High Kings of Ireland and Kings of Meath exercised their influence. It remained the seat of the High Kings of Ireland until the 6th century. At one time there were five legendary roads in Ireland - one from each province that radiated out from Tara. Every three years a feis or festival was held at Tara. It was a time for paying tribute, making laws and celebration.

Emain Macha, Co. Armagh or Navan Fort, Occupied from about the 7th century B.C. until the 4th century A.D. it was the capital of the Ulaid (Ulstermen) in early Irish mythology. It was the Camelot of Ireland, with the earliest structures as round hosed giving way to a massive Circular temple in the first century B.C. Many of Ireland's legends recount the exploits of the Kings and Queens of this site and their warriors The Red Branch Knights.

Grianan of Aileach, Co Donegal was constructed sometime around 1700 B.C. It was the ancient seat of the O'Neills. It is said that St Patrick preached here in 450 AD and baptised Eoghain, founder of the O'Neill clan. It remained the palace for

the Northern High Kings the beginning of the 12th century when O'Brien, King of Thomond, and one of Brian Boru's earliest successors, sacked this place in revenge for a northern raid on Clare.

The Hill of Uisneach , Co. Westmeath. was the ancient seat of the Kings of Meath. Its history dates back into ancient mythology and has been placed in the same league as the Hill of Tara.. Uisneach had also been famous as a meeting place in pre-history for the celebration of Bealtaine, the Festival of Fire. The number of monuments located in and around the hill suggest it's importance during it most prominent period. The most famous feature on Uisneach is the CAT STONE, is a huge limestone boulder which is said to mark the centre of Ireland or the coming together of the provinces.

The Rock of Cashel, Co. Tipperary The legendary origin of the Rock of Cashel dates back to approximately 432 AD. Cashel was once a center of royal and religious power. According to legend, St. Patrick arrived in Cashel in AD 432 and baptized King Aengus, who became Ireland's first Christian ruler.