

Ireland's Last Ice Age - the coming of Man

Much of Ireland's landscape today is a direct result of the last ice age, which ended about 10,000 years ago. The last ice age began some 30,000 years ago. Sea level was almost 400 feet lower and Ireland was joined with the rest of Europe. Ireland had little vegetation and probably no animal life.



As the ice melted, sea levels rose, till northern Ireland was still connected to Scotland by glacial ice. Southern Ireland still maintained a bridge to southern England. The Irish Sea was trapped, forming a fresh water lake supplied with fresh water from the continued melting of the glaciers. Ireland became a plain of grass and was populated with deer and elk from the continent.

As the glaciers continued to melt, rivers and lakes resulted. The sea levels continued to rise finally cutting off the southern route to Europe and allowing the Irish Sea to be inundated with salt water from the oceans. The mountain tops were either sheered off or rounded by the intense pressure of the glacial movements or the unrelenting action of the melting water running off. All the ice was gone by 10,000 years ago.

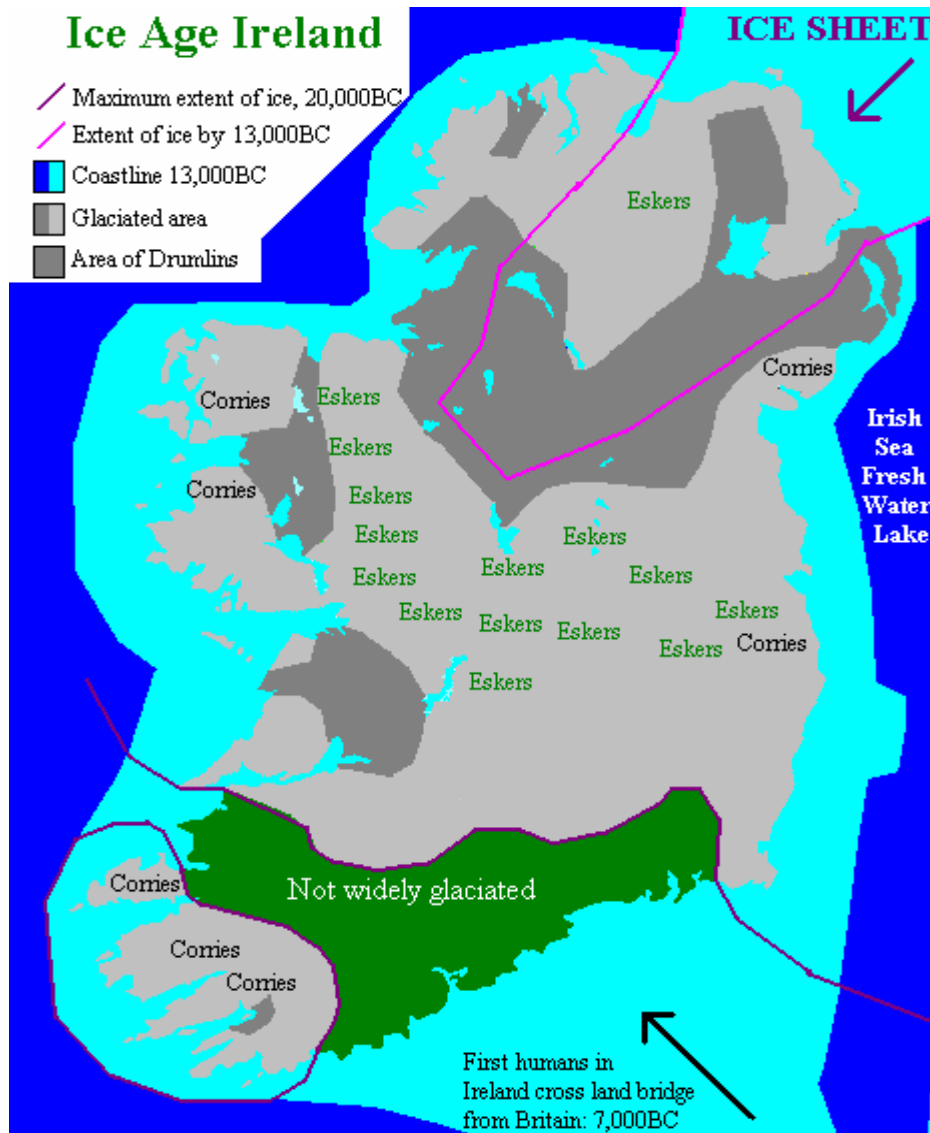
The first humans are thought to have arrived in Ireland about 8,000 B.C. Some scholars believe Ireland was still connected to Scotland by a land bridge, others believe they arrived by raft or boat.

Drumlins: A **drumlin** or **druim** - rounded hill are common throughout Ireland is an elongated whale-shaped hill deposited by glacial run off . Drumlins usually have layers , which may be of sand, rock or gravel.

Eskers: An esker is a relatively low-lying ridges composed of sand, gravel and boulders; deposited by water flowing beneath a glacier, at the end of the last ice age, around 10,000 years ago. The Esker Riada (esker meaning divide and riada meaning road) is a collection of eskers, that crosses Ireland's mid section from Dublin to Galway. Because the slightly higher ground it provided a route through the peat bogland of the Irish midlands, connecting both sides of Ireland. In ancient times its old name was 'An

Slí Mór', meaning 'The Great Highway' one of the Five Roads of Ireland.

Corries: Corries are armchair-shaped hollows, which are found high up on the sides of hills. They are often formed as the ice moves downhill eroding the underlying rock, producing a corrie.



Unlike the rest of this site, this map is declared to be in the public domain.

The division between the two shades of blue indicates the approximate coastline in 13,000BC.

The dark purple line shows the maximum extent of the ice 20,000 years ago.

The light purple line shows how far the ice had retreated by 13,000BC

Mesolithic Ireland - Early Stone Age

Scholars believe the first humans in Ireland crossed from Scotland, around 8000BC. There is a continuity between the mesolithic remains found in north Ireland and southern Scotland. Ireland was one of the last parts of western Europe to have been settled by humans.

These early hunters concentrated their activities on waterways, foraging on the shores of the sea, lakes and rivers. The earliest concrete evidence of mesolithic activity in Ireland is to be found in Antrim, Derry and Sligo. Near Mount Sandel in Co. Derry archaeologists found the remains of mesolithic huts and charcoal from cooking fires, dated to between 7000BC and 8,000 B.C. Near 'The Curran', Larne, Co. Antrim archaeologists have found examples of flint tools. In county Offaly, archaeologists uncovered evidence of a Mesolithic settlement at Lough Boora.

The final part of the Mesolithic era is marked by a decline in the population, as climate got wetter at this time, and many of the lakes in western Ireland began to turn into the bogland. This may have caused a decline in the population that the land could support.

The people of Mesolithic Ireland were nomadic hunters and gatherers of food. They lived along the shores of the sea, the rivers and lakes. Their shelters were made from animal skins draped on wooden poles, that could easily be moved from place to place. There was little or no competition for a specific location and little weaponry has ever been discovered from this period. They hunted, birds, deer, boar and fish.

The Neolithic - New Stone Age 4000 B.C. to 2500 B.C.

The Neolithic, are commonly called New Stone Age and existed in Ireland between 4000 to 2500 BC. Neolithic people were Ireland's first farmers who raised animals and cultivated crops. The Ceide Fields in Co. Mayo is a fine example of a Neolithic settlement. There was an extended community, working together building structures and dividing fields with a quarter of a million tons of rock and stone. The building of walls, helped in clearing the land for cultivation and division on an ownership basis. The use of Irish Stone Axes was common during Neolithic times, but stone axes had been in use from the earliest mesolithic period. Neolithic pottery, similar to that in Britain, has also been found in Ireland, suggests migration from Britain before or during this period.

The Bronze Age 2500 B.C. - 1200 B.C.

The discovery of copper marked the end of the stone age. Early people could easily shape it and make tools and vessels, however it is soft and was not good to hold an edge or for weapons. Copper, on the otherhand mixed with tin made bronze a much

more useful metal. Tin was not plentiful in Ireland, but gold was available. Gold was traded with Cornwall in exchange for tin which was then used to make bronze. With the bronze they could now make spears and swords, ploughs and scythes and vessels of various shapes and sizes.

The Iron Age 800 B.C.

In Ireland, the Iron Age lasted from about 800B.C. to the 5th century . Many scholars credit the Celts with bringing the iron sword with them, and this is possible since the iron age began earlier on the continent than when it was widely occurring in Ireland.