

# A walk around Ireland - County by County

This article can do little justice to the beauty and splendor that is Ireland. As we ramble around the country we will briefly mention the places that are of little acclaim - but should not be missed, to the more widely recognized locations you will find in any travel guide. These are the spots this writer has visited and will visit again, but in no way meant to suggest as the best or worst places spend a while.



**Ireland consists of four provinces: Leinster , Munster, Connacht and Ulster.**

**This is Leinster - Cúige Laighean.**

**Dublin City Co. Dublin**, the largest city in Ireland, founded by the Vikings over 1,500 years ago. Being the political and commercial capital of Ireland, you will find the Presidential Residence in the Phoenix Park - the largest city park in Europe, over 1750 acres, within the city limits. Here also are many of the offices for governmental affairs, Trinity College - with the Book of Kells and Brian Boro's harp, the General Post Office - G.P.O., a key site from the 1916 rising and a host of museums, theaters and home to Ireland's most famous export Guinness - at St. James Gate, where you will be able to sample the freshest pint of Guinness on the planet. Pub life is one of Ireland's attractions and you will find an endless selection of locations to visit - but perhaps start at the "Brazenhead" one of Ireland's oldest, licensed in 1666 but said to date from the 1300's. There are a host of pubs connected with Dublin's writers and you will often find little has changed since these men of words patronized their favorite drinking establishments. Visit Christ Church, built from wood in 1038 by Sitric the Viking and later reconstructed from stone by "Strongbow" - in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Its crypts were once the home to two taverns called Paradise and Hell - how appropriate. Dublin City is divided by the river Liffy - be sure to cross the Half-Penny bridge in the city center, an age old toll bridge for foot traffic.

**Co. Louth** is located just north of Dublin. It is the smallest county in Ireland, and was located within the Pale - an area dominated by Norman influence following the invasion in 1169. The Cooley Peninsula is an area in the northern part of the county with a rich heritage of Irish mythology and legend. It was here, Cuchulain was born and grew up to become the greatest warrior Ireland had ever known, defending Ulster single handedly, as he fought to defend the Brown Bull of Cooley against Queen Maeve of Connacht and eventually tying himself to a stone pillar so he could die facing his enemy. Near Ballymascanlan you will find - Proleek Dolmen and a host of stone-age tombs. During Ireland's monastic period many famous monasteries were built here including, Mellifont, built around 1142. In Drogheda, another Viking town, visit Branigan Woolen mills, where famous Irish Woolens are still woven in an age old tradition. Also in Drogheda, in St. Peter's Church you can see the embalmed head of martyred St. Oliver Plunkett, who was hanged, drawn and quartered on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1681 by the English.

**Co Meath** Plan to spend some time here as you visit such places as **Bru na Boinne** - Ireland's Valley of the Kings, with over 40 megalithic sites. Just down the road you will find the Hill of Tara, where for ancient Kings of Ireland ruled from for almost 2000 years. The hill of Slane where St. Patrick lit the Pascal Fire and plucked the shamrock is another important site of interest. During Ireland's monastic period many famous monasteries were built here including, Kells made famous for the Book of Kells, now on display in Trinity College. Also Dulleek, said to have been founded by St. Patrick, the remains of an ancient Celtic Cross are located in an old graveyard. During the Norman

occupation of Ireland much, if not all Co. Meath was within the Pale. The walled towns of Kells, Athboy, Navan and Trim were all Norman strongholds. Donore still has it's Ten Pound Castle". During the reign of Henry VI in 1429, Henry offered a grant of Ten Pounds for the construction of any castle built within the Pale with walls 20' long 16' wide and 40' high. Just up the road in a place called Oldbridge is where Ireland's history changed as the forces of William of Orange defeated the army of James I in The Battle of the Boyne. Another place of interest, near Athboy is Rath Cairn. Established over 70 years ago as another Gaeltacht area which hosts drama and storytelling festivals with Gaelic Language courses for both young and old.

### **Co. Longford**

is located between Co. Meath and the Shannon, Co. Longford is probably one of the least appreciated counties in Ireland. It consists of pastureland and bogland with no mountains to speak of. Corn hill is approx 600 feet high and is the highest point in the county. Longford does however have many interesting places to visit including the Dolmen at Aughnacliff and the trackway at Corlea, near the village of Kenagh, an Iron Age bog road which was built in the year 148 BC to traverse the bog, this oak road is the largest of its kind to have been uncovered in Europe. Abbeysrule and Abbeydery boast abbeys first built about 1,000 years ago. Each August a Harp Festival is held at Granard, the site of the highest Norman Motte in Ireland is also of interest. Longford was home to two writers Oliver Goldsmith and Maria Edgeworth. Tenelick in Co. Longford was the home to Lord Annaly, Attorney General of Ireland, in the 1700's and later had a mill for making McCanns Oatmeal, on the banks of the River Inny. In Ardagh St. Patrick founded a monastery and placed his nephew St. Mel in charge. Mel Gibson's mother lived here and this is where Mel Gibson got his name. In the early 1800 the Royal canal was built and traverses Longford with a series of aqueducts, locks and bridges on it's way to the Shannon. Ballinamuck was the site of a battle fought here in 1798 during a failed rebellion.

**Co Westmeath** The Hill of Uisneach was the seat of the High Kings of Ireland for 200 years prior to the coming of St. Patrick, home of the Bealtaine festival, a celebration of purity and fertility. Uisneach is located near the town of Ballymore, where the Catstone, Ail Na Mearainn, a huge boulder is said to mark the center of Ireland. Legend says that the Mother Goddess Erui who gave her name to the island of Ireland (Eire) is buried underneath the cat stone.

The village of Fore is said to have Seven Wonders. Perhaps the eighth is that so few people are aware of it! . Between 771 and 1169 Fore Abbey was burnt 12 times by Vikings. In the 13th century the Hugh de Lacy, a Norman landlord built a Benedictine priory in the valley nearby. Many of the buildings that remain today (in ruins) are from the 15th century . This priory was dedicated to St Feichin. Its 13th century church still has some decorations and graceful cloisters . **The Seven Wonders include:**

The monastery built upon the bog.

The mill without a race - Lough Lene water flows from the hill

The water that flows uphill.

The tree that will not burn.

The water that will not boil.

The anchorite in a cell

The lintel stone raised by St. Fechin's prayers.

In the town of Kilbeggan you will find Locke's Distillery, makers of Kilbeggan Whiskey, which claims to be the oldest operating Pot Still in the country. Crookedwood, seven miles from Mullingar dates back to the time of Na Fianna, an ancient band of Celtic warriors. Lake Derravaragh is where the Children of Lir, an ancient legend, spent 300 years as swans before St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland. The Bealin High Cross, said to date from 800 or later is to be seen at the Twyford Demense. In 530 St. Riach founded a monastery at Inishbofin. It is referred to in ancient Annals of 750, 809 and 916 A.D. If its something more current you are there to see The Mullingar Batchelor Festival may be of interest.

**Co. Offaly** Kings County is where you will find Clonmacnoise. Clonmacnoise was founded in 545 by St. Ciaran for its location on top of Esker Riada, an ancient road crossing Ireland, on the banks of the Shannon. It became a popular burial spot for Kings from both Connacht and Tara. Two very famous high crosses are located here, The Cross of the Scriptures and the Southern Cross. The round Tower was built by Turlough O'Connor in 1124. Closer to Tullamore is Durrow Abbey, founded in the middle of the 6th century by St Columba. Originally called *Daru* (plain of the oaks) is the location of some of the only remaining pre-mediaeval oak in Ireland. The line of oak trees which lines the fields to the side of Durrow Abbey are believed to run alongside one of the Five Roads of Ireland. The Book of Durrow is possibly the oldest extant complete illuminated gospels. The text includes the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It is believed to date from the 7th century. The Cross of Durrow is located here. This magnificent High Cross depicts biblical scenes including the Fall of Man, Cain & Abel, and the Sacrifice of Isaac. The choice of scenes and the style of work suggests that the artist was responsible for Muiredach's Cross at Monasterboice and the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnois. Clara is a small town, on the Brosna River, where you will find for ten days in August the "Queen of the Heather" festival. Well worth a visit is Birr Castle, the grounds are open to the public and there is a famous observatory here having the largest telescope in the world at the start of this century. That large expanse of brown dirt is the "Bog of Allen" the largest peat bog in Ireland spanning several counties. It resulted from thousands of years of vegetation laying on the surface and being covered and compacted with repeated cycles of the same. In Ireland the first written records of peat being used as a source of fuel date back to the 7th century but evidence suggests that peat was being used before then.

**Co Laoise** - Leix - Queens County Standing to attention is The Rock of Dunamase and is one of the most historic sites in Ireland . It appears on a Greek Map from 140 A.D.Its ruins date back many hundreds of years and was ideal as a defensive . On N80 between Stradbally and Portlaoise. Emo Court , was built in 1760 and was designed by James Gandon. It was occupied by the Earl of Portarlington. To the poor Irish “**it was an obnoxious and disgusting display of oppulance.**” Col. James Maloney. At the beginning of W.W.I the family left for England, the house remained unoccupied and the land , over 20 square miles, was sold to the Land Commission for distribution to local farmers.

Vain transitory splendour could not all, Retrieve the tottering mansion from it's fall,  
Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart, An hours importance to the poor mans heart.”

Oliver Goldsmith.

**Co Kildare.** Kildare has many associations with St. Brigid. She was born around 451 in Faughart, Co. Louth, the daughter of an Irish Chieftain named Dubhtacht. She founded many monasteries but her major foundation was in Kildare. round the year 470, she founded Kildare Abbey, on the plains of *Cill-Dara*, "the church of the oak", Stop by **Newbridge**, famous for it's silverware and crystal factory, for over 70 years. The town of **Maynooth**, Co. Kildare was the seat of the Fitzgeralds, Earls of Kildare. Maynooth is the historic educational center of Ireland and St. Patricks College was established to provide "for the better education of persons professing the popish or Roman Catholic religion". The College acted solely as a Catholic Seminary for over 150 years. **The Curragh** is a flat open plain of almost 5,000 acres in Co. Kildare . This area is well-known for Irish horse breeding and training. The National stud is located on the edge of Kildare town. **Monasterevin** (*Mainistir Éimhín*) is the site of the 6th century Moore Abbey founded by St. Evin.

**Co. Wicklow - The Garden of Ireland** The road from Rathfarnham Co. Dublin to Aghavannagh was built by the British Army to help them control the rebels in the Wicklow mountains following the Rebellion of 1798. **The Glencree Center for Peace and Reconciliation** was built along side the ruins of one of the British Forts built here during that period. Today you can cross the Wicklow Mountains using the **Wicklow Way** - a long distance walking trail. The Wicklow Mountains have another claim to fame - the source of the water used to brew Guinness. Nearby in **Glendalough** , Gleann Da Loch, is the ruins of a monastery founded here in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by St. Kevin. It was destroyed by Norman forces in 1398. The **Vale of Acoca**, celebrated by the poet, Thomas Moore describes the beauty of this spot where Abhainn Mhor and Abhainn Bheag meet, in his poem “The meeting of the Waters” but you won't want to take his word for it, you must experience this for yourself. Very strange, but in **Glencree is a German War Cemetary** .There are 134 graves. Most are Luftwaffe (air force) or Kriegsmarine (navy) personnel. Six deaths date from World War One, they were prisoners of war held by the British. Alongside the German Cemetery, on the bank of

the Glencree River, a **Mass Rock** is located. It may be reached by a narrow riverside path.

**Co Wexford** has a mix of cultures Irish, Viking, Norman, Welsh and Flemish. Most were mercenary soldiers at one time or another. Many Wexford men maintained a seafaring tradition and it comes as no surprise that the Father of the American Navy, **Coadjutor John Barry**, was from these parts. Co. Wexford also lays claims to the Ancestral home of **President John F. Kennedy**, near New Ross. Ferns castle was built in the 13th century. It is one of a number of historic sites in Ferns. Others include St. Mary's, a 12th century Augustinian Priory; the remains of a 13th century cathedral, St. Peter's, a small nave and chancel church; and some High Crosses and parts of crosses, which stand in the cathedral grounds. In the year 510 St. Senan founded a monastery in Enniscorthy and in the 1205 the Normans built a castle overlooking the Slaney River.

**Co Kilkenny**.: Cill Chainnigh meaning "Cell or church of Cainnech / Canice" Kilkenny began with an early sixth century ecclesiastical foundation. Following the Norman Invasion, **Kilkenny Castle** and a series of walls were built. Kilkenny was chartered as a town in 1207. By the late thirteenth century Kilkenny was under Norman- Irish control. In 1609 King James I granted Kilkenny a Royal Charter giving it the status of a city. . Kilkenny was a Norman merchant town in the Middle Ages, and a famous brewing centre from the late seventeenth century, the home to **Smithwicks Ale**. North of the city is the **Dunmore Cave**, a spectacular limestone cavern and was the site of a Viking massacre in 928 A.D. In the Annals of the Four Masters the cave was recorded as Dearc Fearná "The Cave of Alders" and was one of the three darkest places in Ireland. . In 1999, a hoard of 43 silver and bronze items was discovered in a rocky cleft deep in the cave. The hoard was dated to 970 AD. To the south-East of Kilkenny City is where you will find the ruins of Jerpoint Abbey, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian abbey founded in the latter half of the 12th century by Donal MacGillapatrik, King of Ossory in 1158. Kilkenny is famous for hurling, one of Ireland's national sports.

**Co Carlow**. One of Carlow's most notable landmarks is the **Brownshill Dolmen**, situated on the Hacketstown Road, believed to be dated to 2000 B.C. Its capstone weighs almost 100 tons. **Carlow Castle** was probably built between 1207 and 1213 by William Marshall on the site of a motte erected by Hugh de Lacy in the 1180s. Only the western wall and two towers now survive. It is located on the banks of the River Barrow near Carlow town centre. **Carlow Courthouse** is situated at the end of Dublin Street. It is built of Carlow granite and gives the impression of being a temple set on a high plinth. The basement contains cells and dungeons. Milford is a green area on the River Barrow approx 5 miles outside of Carlow town. It is notable as its home to **Milford Mill**, which was the **first inland hydro-electrical plant in Ireland**. It began supplying Carlow town with power in 1891. On Thursday, 2 July 1903 the **Gordon Bennett Cup** ran through Carlow. It was the first international motor race to be held in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It was held in Carlow because the laws in England would have made it illegal.

## This is Munster - Cúige Mumhan

### Co. Cork

During the megalithic period, stone age man visited and built stone circles in **Drombeg**, Co. Cork. Drombeg is one of the most visited megalithic sites in Ireland. During the monastic period, St Finbarr founded a monastery at **Gougane Beara** before going downstream to the location where Cork City stands today, and founded a school here in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Much of what is now Co. Cork, was once part of the Kingdom of Deas Mumhan, later anglicised to Desmond. The powerful McCarthys built a castle here at **Blarney** in the 10<sup>th</sup> century before the arrival of the Normans. It was a wooden structure. Around 1210 A.D. this was replaced by a stone structure. In 1446 the third castle was built by Dermot McCarthy, King of Munster of which the keep still remains standing. You can climb this castle to **Kiss the Blarney Stone**. There are approx 128 steps to the top but what a view. In 1601 the decisive **Battle of Kinsale** took place in Co. Cork, which was to lead to English domination of Ireland for centuries. Co. Cork was officially created by a division of the older Co. Desmond in 1606. **The first steeplechase** was run at Buttevant in 1752, when riders raced from the church to Doneraile, 5 miles away, using the Doneraile Church Steeple as their guide. During the famine years, much of the emigration from Ireland, left through Cobh in Cork Harbor. There is an excellent **Emigration Museum** here today. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Cork was a centre for the Fenians. The county was a hotbed of guerrilla activity during the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921). The centre of Cork city was razed to the ground by the **British Black and Tans**, in December 1920 as were many other towns and villages around the **county**. At this time many Cork residents moved to Liverpool, in England, among them the ancestors of John Lennon and Paul McCartney. During the Irish Civil War (1922–23), most of the IRA units in Cork sided against the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Michael Collins, a key figure in the War of Independence, was born near Clonakilty and assassinated during the civil war in Béal na Bláth, both in West Cork.

**Co. Kerry** One of the most scenic areas of Ireland, with the **Lake of Killarney** and the **Ring of Kerry**. The gigantic Macgillycuddy Reefs are the highest in Ireland- though not high by other standards the rapid ascent give them enormous perspective. The drive to **Dingle** - one of Ireland's Gaelic Speaking areas is spectacular and interesting. Along the drive you encounter stone age structures mixed with monastic bee-hive huts, used by early monks, beautiful coastal vistas and Conner Pass. Tralee, better known for the **International Rose of Tralee** Beauty Pagnant held in August was also home to the Earls of Desmond and Geraldines. Further west, beyond Valença are **the Skelligs**, rugged steep rocky islands in the Atlantic Ocean about 9 miles from the coast. Here in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and for 600 years the island was a centre of monastic life for Irish monks. You will need to get there by boat. One of Ireland's oldest fairs is **Puck Fair**. The most widely mentioned story relating to the origin of King Puck, associates him alerting the inhabitants of the approaching danger.

**Co. Limerick** On the banks of the Shannon estuary Limerick City dates from about 812 when the Vikings established a settlement on the of the islands in the river. In the

12<sup>th</sup> century the Normans built King John's Castle here to fortify the position. During the civil wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the city played a pivotal role, besieged by Oliver Cromwell in 1651 and by the Williamites in the 1690s . Just south of the city is Lough Gur, an important stone age site dating to about 2000 B.C with crannogs, stone circles and gallery graves. Directly to the west is an Augustines Abbey built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century at Adare. Further west at Rathkeale, is Castle Matrix, where Edmund Spenser met Sir Walter Raleigh.

**Co. Clare** The **Burren** estimated to be over 300 million years old. Here the landscape has been reconfigured by the shifting of the earth's plates, carved by the glaciers, weathered by the elements and altered as a result of human occupation. This area is constantly changing. "*Burren is a country where there is not enough water to drown a man, wood enough to hang one, nor earth enough to bury him....*". The Burren is rich with historical and archaeological sites. There are more than **90 megalithic tombs** here including, portal dolmens , **Poulnabrone Dolmen**, a celtic high cross in the village of Kilfenora, and a number of ring forts - among them the triple ring **fort Cahercommaun**, and the exceptionally well-preserved **Caherconnell Stone Fort**. **Corcomroe Abbey** is one of the area's main scenic attractions. The region supports arctic, mediterranean and alpine plants side-by-side, due to the unusual environment. Clare is the ancestral home of the O'Brien clan and this is where **Brian Boru** had his palace at Kincora, near Killaloe during the 10<sup>th</sup> century. At **Dysert O'Dea**, near Corofin is a wonderful archaeological center with a 15<sup>th</sup> century castle, an 11<sup>th</sup> century round tower, a 7<sup>th</sup> century monastery and holy wells. Along the Atlantic seaboard are the famous **Cliffs of Moher**, towering some 700' above the crashing waves that continually alter the coastline. Here the Irish Tradition is alive and well. **Doolin** the capital of Ireland for traditional Irish music and nearby every September the **Lisdoonvarna Matchmaking Festival** should not be missed. **Bunratty Castle**, with Medieval Banquets nightly and a folk park offer a wonderful opportunity to step back in time.

**Co. Tipperary** The **Rock of Cashel** towers over the town on a 200 foot high outcrop of limestone and was once the seat of the Kings of Munster. It was visited by St. Patrick in 450 and Brian Boru was crowned King of Ireland here in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Granted to the church in the 1100s by the O'Briens, the Rock of Cashel became the seat of the archbishop and it was at this time that Cormac's Chapel was built. In 1647 the Rock of Cashel was ransacked by Cromwellian forces . To the south, **Cahir Castle** stands on a 3<sup>rd</sup> century stone fort. Near Thurles you will find **Holy Cross Abbey** founded in 1180 on the banks of the River Suir and believed to have a relic of the **True Cross**. Tipperary is famous for its horse breeding industry and is the home of **Coolmore Stud**, which is one of the largest thoroughbred breeding operations in the world. **Mitchelstown caves** were discovered in 1833. There are three caves and contains a spectacular 30' high formation called **The Tower of Babel**. The Manor House at Carrick on Suir is one of the region's Tudor buildings. The remains of 15<sup>th</sup> century Carrick Castle is reported to be the birth place of **Ann Boleyn**.



**Co. Waterford. Waterford City** founded by the Vikings, was the site of a massacre by **Strongbow**, Earl of Penbrooke, in the very early stages of the Norman invasion . Waterford is world famous for its crystal although it's future is in question. One of the city's most famous landmarks is **Reginald's Tower**. It is a circular tower, part of the town's defenses, built in the beginning of the 13th century. It was also used as a mint, prison and military store. The magic of rails golden age has been brought to life at **Kilmeadan**, Co Waterford. A heritage narrow gauge railway follows over 4 miles of the route of the abandoned Waterford -Dungarvan line. All the way on the other side of the county is Lismore. **Lismore Castle** was built by King John in the 13th century. It was subsequently acquired by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1589. Also nearby is **Lismore Cathedral** ,the site of a double monastery established by St. Carthach in the 7th century.

## **This is Connacht - Cúige Connachta**

**Co. Galway Athenry** was a mediaval town founded in the 13th century by Meiler de Birmingham, who surrounded the town with a curtain wall with towers and a moat, still visable today as you approach the town. Nearby visit the site of **Battle of Aughrim 1691** which was the bloodiest battle in Irish history.

On the way to visit **Connemara** and the **Gaeltacht** follow the coastroad . Beautiful views of **Galway Bay** will enhance your drive. Continuing west takes one into the **Twelve Pins** of Connemara mountain range. **Clifden , Co. Galway**, was the location of the landing of the first Trans-Atlantic air crossing by **Alcock and Brown**. Visit nearby **Kylemore Abbey** and the **Connemara State Park**.

**The Aran Islands** – Perched spectacularly on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic ocean, this is the largest of the prehistoric stone forts of the Aran Islands . Day trips available from Galway and Clare coasts. Visit the cottage where J.M. Synge, the well-known Anglo-Irish author and playwright stayed and took the theme of **The Playboy of the Western World**. Back in the city **Eyre Square** (renamed John F Kennedy Park) the Statue of Paraic O'Connaire ; erected in 1935 in memory of the writer who travelled the roads with his horse and cart. Best remembered for M'asal Beag Dubh. He died 1928 . At Kinvara, **Dunguaire Castle** was built by the O'Hynes in 1520, dates back as far as 662AD when their ancestor **Guaire, King of Connacht**, ruled his kingdom from an earthwork rath close to the present castle site. It is a venue for **Medieval Banquets** and an annual festival to celebrate the **Galway Hooker**. No, they were boats that were used to transport turf in bygone days. **Portumna Castle** , built before 1618 by Richard Burke or de Burgo, 4th Earl of Clanricarde. **Coole Park**, in Gort, was the home of Lady Gregory, a founder of the Abbey Theatre and friend of William Butler Yeats. The house no longer stands, but the garden of the house, with its yew walk and autograph tree is preserved. Carved on the **autograph tree**, are the signatures of John Masefield, George Bernard Shaw and Sean O'Casey and others. Only a short distance away you will find **Thoor Ballylee**, the former summer home of W.B. Yeats this restored Norman tower

house was purchased by Yeats in 1916. County Galway has several locations which were used in the making of the film. **The Quiet Man**.

## Co Mayo

**Ballycastle, Co Mayo.** Beneath the wild boglands of North Mayo lies **Ceide Fields**, the most extensive stone age monument in the world; field systems, dwelling areas and megalithic tombs of 5,000 years ago. Mayo has one of the greatest concentrations of Stone Age tombs in Europe.

**Croagh Patrick** Westport, Co. Mayo Croagh Patrick has been a pilgrimage site for hundreds of years in honor of St. Patrick, Ireland's patron saint, who fasted for forty days on the summit of the mountain in 441 and built a church there.

**Cong, Co. Mayo** A spectacular place to visit, Ashford castle, stone age monuments, Cong Abbey and film location for the **Quiet Man** - The best directed film by John Ford, 1952. John Wayne, the son of Irish emigrants to the U.S. returns to the Ireland we all love. A great story of romance. The courtship and subsequent marriage between John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara under the direction of the matchmaker, Barry Fitzgerald, is magical.

**Ballintubber Abbey** was founded in 1216 by King Cathal near the site of the church built by St. Patrick in 441. **Knock** - An Cnoc, is a small town in County Mayo, where it is claimed the Virgin Mary, together with St Joseph and St John the Evangelist, appeared in 1879. One and a half million pilgrims visit Knock Shrine annually.

**Westport House** is an important part of the turbulent history of Ireland. The Browne family came to County Mayo in the sixteenth century. John Browne III (1638-1711 married Maud Bourke, daughter of Viscount Mayo and great-great granddaughter of the Pirate Queen, **Grace O'Malley** .

A Catholic, John supported the Jacobite cause and from the iron mines on his lands near Westport, he supplied the army with cannon balls and weapons. The defeat of the Jacobite in 1691 brought financial ruin in the confiscations that followed. The Penal Laws which followed left his grandson, John IV, with little option but to convert to The Established Church in the hope of surviving the confiscations . John gradually extended his estate and transformed the old O'Malley castle into modern day Westport House. He became the **First Earl of Altamont**. In 1752, his son and heir, Peter, married, Elizabeth Kelly from Co Galway, whose family estates in Jamaica enhanced the family fortune.

John 3rd Earl of Altamont's son Howe Peter Browne, 2nd Marquess of Sligo, inherited the estate in 1809 . He married Hester, the Earl of Clanrickard's daughter. He was first to emancipate the slaves on the family's Jamaican plantations. A liberal, he was one of the few Irish peers to vote for Catholic Emancipation. He died in 1845 as the Great Famine descended over Mayo.

His son, George, the 3rd Marquess, inherited a terrible legacy. The West of Ireland was worst affected by the famine. Westport House was closed and with no rents forthcoming. George borrowed and spent £50,000 of his own money to alleviate the suffering of the tenants, by importing cargoes of meal to Westport Quay. He wrote tirelessly to the British Government, demanding that they do more to help the famine

victims.

In 1960, the 10th Marquess, Denis Edward, his wife Jose opened Westport House and the grounds to the visiting public. From 5,000 visitors in the first year, Westport House has now welcomed over 4 million visitors.

**Co. Roscommon** Roscommon comes from 'Ros' meaning a wooded, and 'Comán', a saint and first Bishop. Dr. Douglas Hyde, the first Irish president, was born in Co. Roscommon. Near Tulsk, is an extensive megalithic site. **Rathcroghan** was home to the Kings of Connacht and home of **Queen Maeve**, according to a Dindsenchas poem, Cruachan was named after Crochen, the handmaid of Étaín, a sídhe maiden re-born as a mortal. The poem on Carn Fráich describes Cruachan as a stone built fortress. To the northwest of Rathcroghan Mound is **Rathmore** a circular earthwork believed to have been a chieftain's residence, dating to the second half of the first millennium AD.

**Oweynagat** The cave of the cats south-west of the Rathcroghan Mound, is a souterrain leading into a dark, narrow limestone cave. This cave was believed to be a gateway to the otherworld. Two of the stones used to build the souterrain entrance contain

**Ogham** inscriptions, with one of the inscriptions reading VRAICCI MAQI MEDVII, interpreted as meaning Fráech son of Medb. Close to **Reilig na Rí** called Dathí's Mound. Reported to be the burial mound of Dathí, the last pagan High King of Ireland. Excavation, however, shows there is no trace of any burial, and radiocarbon dating indicates it was constructed between 200 BC and AD 200, considerably earlier than Dathí's dates.

In **Boyle** you will find the remains of an old Cistercian abbey built in 1161. Only small parts of the cloister survive, because it was turned into a barracks by the Elizabethans in 1592, and the Cromwellians who besieged it in 1645. In Roscommon town look the ruined **Abbey of Roscommon**. It was founded just over 750 years ago by Felim O Connor, king of Connacht, who was buried in 1265. Although called the 'Abbey', it is more accurately described as a friary, for it was created for the Dominican friars. It was finally suppressed during the reformation. Near Castlerea, visit **Clonalis House** ancestral home of the O'Connors, considered Europe's oldest family. **Strokestown Park House and Famine Museum** is an award-winning museum portrays of the great Irish Famine. Strokestown was the site of the estate of the Anglo-Irish Mahon family from about 1671 until 1982. On 2 November 1847, Major Denis Mahon, landlord of the surrounding estate, was assassinated by several local men for the removal of starving tenant farmers from his estate lands during the Irish Potato Famine of 1845. The killing of Denis Mahon did not halt the evictions, and eventually over 11,000 tenants were removed from the Mahon estate during that period.

**Co. Leitrim** Leitrim It is an unspoiled, tranquil area of great natural beauty, consisting of lofty mountains, deep valleys, pastures, lakes, rolling hills and rivers. In ancient times, Leitrim formed the western half of the **Kingdom of Breifne**, was long influenced by the O'Rourke family of Dromahair. Leitrim was ravaged by the Great Famine and the population dropped over 30% by 1851. The population subsequently continued to decrease due to emigration.

Working of the county's rich deposits of iron ore began in the 15th century and continued until the mid 18th century. Coal mining became prominent in the 19th century to the east of Lough Allen in **Sliabh an Iariann** and also to the west in **Arigna**, on the Roscommon border. The last coal mine closed in July 1990 and there is now a visitor centre.

In the northwest, 11 km from Manorhamilton can be found **Glencar Waterfall**, which was an inspiration to Yeats and nearby are a large collection of megalithic remains. Leitrim offers scenic panoramic vistas of Lough Allen and the River Shannon. The Shannon is linked to the Erne via the **Shannon-Erne Waterway**.

**Co. Sligo - Yeats Country** The drive around Lough Gill will take you to the sites of the **Rock of Dooney**, **Slis Wood** and the **Lake Isle of Innisfree**. Visit Parke's Castle, one of the finest Plantation castles in Ireland. They have an interpretation center here and will help you with directions. Near Tobernalt look for the Holy Well, shrine and **Mass Rock**. A few miles to the east is **Carrowmore**, the greatest collection of megalithic structures in Europe. Up the road is **Sligo town** and the remains of Sligo Castle and a Dominican Friary. Continuing north you will find **Drumcliff**, The Drumcliff Cross and the gravesite of W.B. Yeats, poet. In the distance north that mountain is **Benbulbin**, easily recognised by its flat top.

Further along the road is **Crevekeel Court Cairn** and beautiful vistas of both Sligo and Donegal Bays.

## This is Ulster - Cúige Uladh

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**Co. Donegal Donegal town.** There is evidence for settlements around the town dating back to prehistoric times including the remains of round forts and other earth works. There is a record of an early fortress being destroyed by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, High King of Ireland in 1159. This **Viking settlement** is possibly the origin of the town's name. The town itself contains Donegal castle and the remains of a Franciscan abbey which dates back to the 15th century. The **Annals of the Four Masters** was written in the abbey in the early 17th century. Donegal Town itself was the ruling center of **O'Donnell of Tyrconnell** and whose original homeland lay in the area of Kilmacrenan. After the **Flight of the Earls** in 1607 the castle and its lands were given to an English captain, Basil Brooke, as part of the Plantation of Ulster. Evidence of the Irish Famine still exists including a **workhouse**, and many **famine graves**. Elsewhere in the county you will find many other places of interest including **Killybegs**, a small fishing town on the road west to **Glencolumbcille**. Here in the 6<sup>th</sup> century St. Columbcille founded a retreat. The area is dotted with **megalithic tombs** and structures and there is still a **Gaelic speaking** area remaining here. Further north along the coast an area known as **the Rosses** is famous for its scenery and awesome views of the North

Atlantic. From **Gweedore** directly north, out in the Atlantic, you can see **Tory Island** on a clear day. Home to **Formorians** in prehistoric time, and a monastery founded by Columbcille in the 6<sup>th</sup> century it has been populated for over 4000 years. Inland in the Derryveagh mountains is **Glenveagh National Park**. Near the town of Rathmelton look for **Gortnaverne Dolmen**, but be warned, it's hard to find but worth the search. **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 baptized Eoghain, founder of the O'Neill clan. It remained the palace for the Northern High Kings until the beginning of the 12th century.

**The Partition of Ireland in the early 1920s was to have a massive direct impact on County Donegal. Partition cut the county off, economically and administratively, from Derry, which had acted for centuries as the county's main port, transport hub and financial centre.**

**Co. Fermanagh Belleek Pottery** established in 1857, situated in the village of Belleek on the banks of the Lough Erne. Visitors can partake in guided tours, take a walk around the on-site museum. There is also a gift shop where visitors can purchase authentic Belleek products. **Enniskillen Castle**, situated beside the River Erne, was built almost 600 years ago by Gaelic Maguires. Guarding one of the few passes into Ulster, it was strategically important throughout its history. In the 17th century it became an English garrison fort and later served as part of a military barracks. **Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark** - at this award-winning attraction, take a guided tour in an underground boat as you journey through this underworld realm of stalagmites and stalactites. **The Shannon-Erne Waterway** If you want to get away from the hustle and bustle then a relaxing barge cruise is the answer. From the moment you step onto one of these luxury barges you enter a world of peace and tranquility. Soak up the sheer beauty of the countryside, villages and towns. Enjoy some of the world's best pubs and restaurants where you will be treated to the finest food, drink and live entertainment.

**Co Tyrone Beaghmore Stone Circles** There are seven of these stone circles and alignments along with several cairns which date from the early Bronze Age. These famous stone circles are situated to the west of Lough. **Ardboe Old Cross** A 10th century cross situated on a rocky height on the shores of Lough Neagh. It is a national monument, which is believed to be the first high cross of Ulster.

**Tullyhogue Fort** The area of Tullyhogue was of regal importance in Ulster before the 16th Century because it was here that the O'Neills were inaugurated as Chieftains of Ulster. Hugh O'Neills inauguration on 1595 was the last to take place at this historical site. **Errigal Kerrogue Cross** Here are the ruins of St Kierans Church, Ballygawley with its very early cross. The church is said to date from 1489 and was a Franciscan foundation. **St Patricks Chair & Well**

Set in Altadavin Forest, this magnificent chair and well is carved from stone. Reputedly built for St Patrick on his journey through the Clogher Valley, the site attracts visitors throughout the year. **Knockmany Chambered Cairn** Just north of Augher, on

Knockmany Hill, at the top, you will find the burial place of Queen Aine, Queen of Oriel, a 6th century kingdom whose centre was Clogher. The cairn is a passage grave dating from Neolithic times. This grave has patterns of concentric circles, zig zags and other designs, which are similar in style in the Boyne Valley, County Meath. Lastly try not to miss the **Grant Ancestral Homestead** Explore the cottage of the Simpson family with close ties to Ulysses Simpson Grant, the Commander of the victorious Union troops in the American Civil War, U.S. Grant served two terms as U.S. President and visited the homeland.

**Co Cavan** According to local lore it has been claimed, that County Cavan boasts 365 lakes and rivers, "One for each day of the year". Cavan's waterways have long been a draw for anglers and with no licence requirement there's instant access to fishing for anglers. **Drumlane Monastic Site**, are the remains of a 6th Century monastery founded by St. Mogue, the Bishop of Ferns. The round tower is one of the most striking features of the site, standing over 36' high. Look for the carvings of birds on the external wall. The church features a number of interesting stone heads, one above the door in the west wall and another three on the external face of the east window. Near the church are the remains of the 12th century Augustinian Priory. **The Burren Forest - The Cavan Way** This prehistoric site, just outside Blacklion, consists of archaeological remains, mainly Neolithic, Bronze Age and early medieval. Here you will find megalithic tombs, cairns, hut sites and pre-bog walls. Opposite this is a path leading to the Giant's Leap Wedge Tomb. One of the roof stones has engravings of cup-and-ring-style art work. **Clough Oughter Castle - Killeshandra** Located on a man-made island on Lough Oughter is accessible only by boat. It was built in the early 13th century by the Anglo-Normans but was captured by the O'Reillys. The castle and lands were granted to Captain Hugh Culme as part of the Plantation of Ulster. **Cohaw Court Tomb** three miles south east of Cootehill on the road to Shercock. The tomb is visible from the road and signposted. Cohaw is a five chambered dual court tomb standing in a 25 metre long rectangular cairn. This may have been a mausoleum for local rulers. It probably dates from 2000 BC. **Kilmore Motte-and-Bailey, Kilmore** Opposite Kilmore Cathedral are the remains of a motte-and-bailey. It was constructed by Walter de Lacy in 1211 as part of a series of fortifications built to secure a roadway to isolate this part of Ulster which was still under Irish control. The motte was dismantled by Cathal O'Reilly in 1226. The de Lacys made various futile attempts to regain their territory in the area. **Ardkill, 'Black Pig's dyke'** "The Black Pig's Dyke" was a series of defensive ditches built between Ulster and Connacht in the 1st century. Three miles east of Ballinagh you can see the dyke on the slopes of Ardkill Hill. **Banagher Grave Complex** High on the slopes of Slieve Glah Mountain, south east of Cavan town on the road to Ballyjamesduff, is a prehistoric site with tombs, stone circles and mounds of earth. It dates from between 2500 BC and 1500 BC., 3 miles east of Ballinagh. **Carrickacroy Dolmen** lies 1.2 miles northeast of Kilnaleck. The remains of a dolmen and stone circle built on the ridge of a hill, thought to be between 3 to 4 thousand years old.

**Co. Monaghan** is the birthplace of the poet and writer **Patrick Kavanagh**, who based much of his work in the county. Kavanagh is one of the most significant figures in 20th century Irish Poetry. Another son of Monaghan was **John Robert Gregg** who devised Gregg's shorthand in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. **Monaghan County Museum**, located on High St, is recognised as one of the leading provincial museums in Ireland, and contains the **Cross of Clogher**, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. South-east of Monaghan town is **Castleblayney** built by English planters "The Blayneys". The two main streets lead to a fine Georgian Courthouse. The town however dates to early Christian times. **Clones** has the remains of a 12<sup>th</sup> century Augustinian monastery with round tower.

**Co Armagh** The name Armagh is derived from "Ard" and "Macha" meaning "High Place of Macha". Macha was the goddess of Celtic mythology mentioned in an ancient text " **The Taking of Ireland**". **Emain Macha** was also the name of an ancient 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 houses 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. In 455, Armagh became Ireland's ecclesiastical capital when St. Patrick founded a church here and it would later become the seat of the Episcopalian Archbishop of Armagh, containing the grave of Brian Boru. In 1838 the Catholic Church built a Cathedral close to here, **St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral**, seat of the Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland. **Slieve Gullion**, Slieve Gullion is the eroded remains of a Paleocene volcanic complex with crater lake. High on its slopes is the highest burial cairn in Ireland, offering splendid views of 9 counties, but only on clear days. **Armagh Public Library** on Abbey Street is rich in 17th and 18th century English books, including Dean Jonathan Swift's own copy of the first edition of his Gulliver's Travels with his manuscript corrections.

**Co Down** An area of County Down is known as **the Brontë Homeland** after Patrick Brontë, father of Anne, Charlotte, Emily, who was born in this region. The Old Inn in **Crawfordsburn** is one of Ireland's oldest hostels, with records dating back to 1614. The inn claims that people who have stayed there include Jonathan Swift, Dick Turpin, Peter the Great, Lord Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, former US president George H. W. Bush, and C. S. Lewis. **St. Patrick** is said to have landed at **Saul** on his return and said his first mass in Ireland here. Later he would be buried at **Downpatrick** alongside **St. Brigid** and **St. Columcille** on the grounds of Down Cathedral. County Down is where, in the words of the famous song by Percy French, "The mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea",

**Co Antrim**. When Henry II was king of England, the Norman John de Courcy had overthrown the kings of the north of Ireland and established his rule from Carlingford.

In 1180 he built a castle to guard the approach to Belfast Lough **Dunluce Castle** Located on the Antrim coast of Northern Ireland, not far from the Giants Causeway, are the ruins of Dunluce Castle. Some of the Castle remains may date back to the 1200s' AD but much of the Castle was built after that time. The early Christians and the Vikings were drawn to this place and an early Irish fort once stood here. **The Giant's Causeway** is truly one of Nature's Wonders. These polygonal, column like structures, were formed about sixty millions years ago when a volcanic rock flow experienced unusual, rapid, and erratic cooling. It was this cooling process that forced the rock to crack, forming the material into hexagons and pentagons. By now you'll be needing a drop... Well, **The Old Bushmills' Distillery** is located on the edge of Bushmill Town. The Town of Bushmill is located not far from the Giant's Causeway and Dunluce Castle. The Old Bushmills' Distillery provides a guided tour of the making of Irish Whiskey. The Distillery is the oldest legal maker of whiskey in the world having received its distillery charter in 1608 AD. While the Distillery can be visited on any day of the week, to see the factory in full action, a visit from Monday to Thursday is best. Now back to Belfast where you will have to choose between venues like **City Hall** built in 1906, or maybe **the Grand Opera House**. **Crown Liquor Saloon**, originally designed as a railway tavern, now in the National Trust is a spectacular Victorian Pub with ornate glasswork and gas lights. **Queen's University**, was designed by Charles Lanyon, who modelled the main building on the Magdalen College in Oxford, with Tudor cloisters. Set amongst 38 acres in the Botanic Gardens are the rose gardens, also coffee, bananas and other exotic plants. Stormont The Northern Ireland Parliament Buildings are located on the Stormont Estate.

**Co. Derry** Derry from the Irish: Doire or Doire Cholmchille meaning "oak-wood of Colmbcille. The city has long been a focal point for important events in Irish history, including the **Siege of Derry**, 1688-1689, and **Bloody Sunday** on 30 January 1972. The most visibly striking historic feature of the city is the **historic walls**. It is the only remaining completely walled City in Ireland and one of the finest examples of Walled Cities in Europe and they have been kept in a splendid state of preservation. **The Tower Museum**, Union Hall Place, tells the story of Derry, chronicling the history of the city from its geological formation through to the present day.