My Burren - a priceless treasure

Bishop William Walsh  
Burrenbeo Trust Patron

When I was growing up my father used to go to Lisboonvarna for a week with some farmers after the harvesting was completed. On his return he would report on his holiday to his less widely travelled colleagues. He always expressed sympathy for the farmers in North Clare - "I don't know how they make a living, sure 'tis all rocks, you wouldn't feed a snipe on it". I imagine my Dad was no more or no less knowledgeable about the treasures of the Burren than the vast majority of his colleagues.

It was much later in life, when I came to live in Clare, that I gradually got to know and enjoy that unique landscape with its dolmens and turflocks, its cairns and ringforts. The Burren stone, its flora and fauna speak much to the geologist, the botanist, and the antiquarian. But the Burren speaks to us, non-specialists in these areas, through the sheer solidity of its rock formation, the beauty of their patterns, the shades of their colouring.

The late and much loved John O'Donoghue was a Burren man to the core. His best known works, Anam Cara and Benedictus, inspired people worldwide. I found perhaps greater inspiration in his lesser known "Tabernacle of Stone". For me he gave life to the Burren stone. What my Dad saw as barren rock John saw as a living record of human, animal and plant life still speaking to us today.

For those who are interested there is a lifetime of exploration and study. From Ballyvaughan to Corofin, from Doolin to Kinvarra, from Mullagh Mor to Slieab Elva there is an extraordinary variety of treasures to be investigated whether your interests are flora or fauna, underground caves or dolmens, monastic settlements or pre-Christian places of worship.

I still delight in driving to the top of Slieab Elva to enjoy the sight of the “golden ring” of Fanore – fáinne óir – suddenly revealed far below with Galway Bay and the Aran Islands in the background. We have indeed a priceless treasure in “our Burren”. This product of nature’s work over endless time deserves special respect and care from all of us who are simply passers-by.

Letter to the friends of the Trust

Brigid Barry and Stephen Ward
Editors

In this issue of Burren Insight, as is usual when dealing with the Burren, we span a vast time range. David Drew and Ronán Hennessy look at it in geological time. Marion O’Dowd presents photos of cowries and other jewellery worn by those who lived here long, long ago; drilling holes in tiny shells would be a challenge now, so how did they do it then? Clare’s rich folklore and oral history is recalled by Caoilte Breatnach. In Irving memory we join a small boy helping his Dad to shoe horses. Whilst at the other extreme, Michael Starrett of The Heritage Council imagines what the future could bring, with a little help from us all, with his concept of a Burren Charter.

Since the last issue of Burren Insight in 2009, Cafebeo and the Burrenbeo Trust Centre have been revamped to offer substantial space for engaging people in a learning environment; over 650 people attended our monthly walks and talks in 2009; these were complemented by the weekly walks in the Burren during the summer; we continue to develop the Burren’s most used website www.burrenbeo.com and inform 3000 people through our monthly e-newsletters.

We are delighted with the success of our first year of operation and we are especially grateful to all our members. Everyone has something to offer, and something to gain, from the Trust. So please do renew your membership and encourage others to join.
A Charter for all

Imagine all the people...

The Burren has for countless generations provided support and sustenance for many families. It has provided the hard won soil and water of quality to support them and provide a quality of life in a wonderful setting that many envy. It has at the same time provided inspiration for writers and poets and visitors who marvelled at the dynamic and changing nature of this landscape. For all of them, just as it has done for its residents, the Burren has provided strength and inspiration through its ever-changing vistas and the feeling that this is at the same time the harshest and most rewarding of places to live in, to work in or to visit.

The variety of plants and animals that this landscape supports has long been recognised as of international significance and the Burren is undoubtedly one of our most iconic landscapes. This international recognition accorded to the Burren, and the richness of its cultural/people’s landscape extends interest in its future well-being well beyond the narrow confines of our shores.

It's just imagination...or is it?

Now, close your eyes and imagine that an agreement is in place that provides the opportunity for everyone who values the Burren to work together and put together an agreed action plan to save guard its future for everyone. That action plan when implemented would bring benefits of an economic, social and environmental nature to all those who live in, work in and visit the Burren. That programme would (if you close your eyes for even longer) have dedicated support structures and human and financial resources to make it happen. It would have regular reviews and evaluations to make sure it was doing just what it was supposed to in the way that people want. Imagine even more. This action plan, this programme, the benefits derived from it, the structures and resources to be given to it have not been imposed on those who live, work or play in the Burren, but have been provided because the people want them and a framework exists at a national level to bring people together (if they want) and then to support them when they do. This level of empowerment and enabling of such regional and local communities to manage and conserve their landscapes requires a whole new way of working, and indeed thinking, and yet its conception is so simple.

I hear you singing the words of John Lennon’s song Imagine and the line “They may say that I’m a dreamer.”

My riposte is equally quick with “Well, I’m not the only one...” and my earnest commitment is that now that we have opened our eyes with a bit of imagination, that with the help of some leadership, the new way of working is only just around the corner. Heaven knows that there have been enough economic, environmental and social upheavals in Ireland in recent times to suggest we have to do something differently. The Burren can take the lead.

It is in this context that the idea of a Burren Charter has been conceived. Many groups and individuals are carrying out excellent work in the Burren, all of which has an impact on the management and conservation of their landscape and of course the people who live in, work in and visit that landscape. Whilst all of these groups do their level best to communicate effectively they experience many frustrations. Much of the good and benefit to be derived from their work is threatened by the fact that they are only working on short-term and often fragmented projects. Their funding from Europe or other sources is only short-term and the main energy has to be directed not to doing the work that is required for the benefit of everyone in the long-term, but in wondering where the next source of funding might come. Ireland really has gone beyond such a hand-to-mouth type of existence and there are proven ways of ‘doing things better.’

Another way

The framework for a Burren Charter is in its very early stages of development. The Heritage Council has, over the last couple of years, been involved in supporting a wide range of initiatives through its grants programmes and, at the same time, has met with and discussed the possibility of such a Charter with representatives of a range of groups including the local authorities, the Burren IFA, Burrenbeo Trust, Burren Connect, Shannon Development and government Departments. The EU BurrenLIFE project has also shown what is possible and had the Council’s support. Notwithstanding the current economic situation The Heritage Council has, once again, secured resources to allow the concept of a Burren Charter to develop further in 2010 and perhaps even move to a much more practical stage.

A variety of surveys and reports have been carried out locally to test the water and my overwhelming sense is that people are supportive of the idea and we now need to capture the imagination and make it a reality. However, if The Heritage Council is to be true to its principles regarding the desire to enable and empower regional and local communities, to truly devolve responsibility and allow those communities to identify and agree what they want for their landscapes, this Charter cannot be imposed. It has to be requested and everyone must see and subscribe to its value for all. The value and need for it has to be recognised locally and regionally. All The Heritage Council should do is provide encouragement and facilitate, ensure the mechanism exists to make it happen and allow others to use it - if they can all agree on what they want.

Such a change in how we go about doing our business together cannot be rushed. It needs confidence in common goals to be built, goals that extend beyond the current fragmented and sectoral approach. It requires real and meaningful levels of participation in the process. The Burren can be in the forefront of this development if its people want. There is of course ultimately the need for leadership at a national level if such mechanisms and structures are to be sustainable.

Looking for national leadership

The Government’s commitment to have a National Landscape Strategy in place during 2010, a commitment reiterated at The Heritage Council’s landscape conference in Tullamore in October 2009, can provide that leadership. The Burren is not alone in needing such a new and integrated and indeed imaginative approach. Each area has its own needs but the common issue is the fact that our existing structures and legislative frameworks may not be the appropriate ones to deal with current complexities, whether those complexities are economic, social or environmental. A Burren Charter, developed within the existing frameworks could show what is possible and point the way to the National Landscape Strategy of just how landscape management and conservation measures can play a central role in sustaining us all. We have certainly seen in the last 12-18 months the end result of unsustainable development.

Let’s hope we can all benefit from such a new approach.

The Author: Michael Starrett was appointed to his current post as Chief Executive of The Heritage Council in 1996 and has over 30 years of experience in the planning, management and conservation of landscapes throughout Europe. On being elected the first Irishman to be President of the EUROPARC Federation (www.europarc.org) 2002-2005 he travelled extensively to examine different legislative systems and structures aimed at assisting the implementation of the European Landscape Convention.

"this charter cannot be imposed. it has to be requested..."
“...the Burren can be something different for everybody, and so perhaps the question is not “What is the Burren?”, but rather “What does the Burren mean to you?”

As Clare’s Biodiversity Officer, I always try to show the links between biodiversity and other aspects of our natural, built and cultural heritage, a lesson I learned growing up on our family farm in Blackhead. A little while back, I was told that there was a fulacht fiadh (ancient cooking place) in Blackhead, but it took me a long time to figure out exactly where it was. Now I know what they are before you ask, and I know every inch of the land, so what took me so long?

There is a spring in Blackhead, Tobar na Lice (well of the flagstone), which is a source of water for the livestock (natural heritage), and which acts as a landmark when we’re giving directions at home (cultural heritage). The thing is, I’ve always associated the term fulacht fiadh with archaeology, a relic of the past, but Tobar na Lice is part of our living farm and still serves an important purpose. I didn’t see it for its scientific value, but for something much more.

Another message I’m always keen to get across is that biodiversity is not a science that people should be afraid of, but something we’re part of and which should be embraced and enjoyed. There’s no doubt that long before scientists recognized the anomalies associated with the Burren flora, there were people enjoying it simply for its beauty, not to mention the farmers who relied on it as part of their livelihoods; and what’s more, even after the science becomes fully understood, people will continue to enjoy the Burren simply for its beauty. In much the same way, the entire Burren can, and should be viewed, not as a multitude of scientific disciplines, but as to how it contributes to the lives of its inhabitants and visitors. All too often, scientists and academics overlook local knowledge and local people, simply because, like me in the example above, we see beyond the science.

For many, the Burren provides the perfect retreat for healing, meditation and inspiration. Even our own little piece of the Burren proved an inspiration for Luke Kelly when he ‘saw Blackhead against the sky, where twisted rocks they run down to the sea’ in his ‘Song for Ireland’. Indeed the Burren and North Clare have a long history of producing renowned musicians, poets and writers, and perhaps one reason for this is that away from the congested tourist routes, and off the beaten track, the Burren retains an inherent sense of wilderness.

Often the miles of criss-crossing stone walls provide the only infrastructure, with an odd erratic or solitary bush acting as landmarks. It’s here that I’m often reminded of the Christy Moore lyrics ‘to a hidden beach where boats can’t go, where wild abandon fills my soul’, and yet the Burren is far from abandoned. There is an interdependent, symbiotic relationship between the Burren and the farmer, but there’s more to it than general good husbandry; there’s the knowledge of the land.

When herding across several hundred acres of a Burren winterage, it helps to know the land inside out, and where the livestock are likely to be. For many Burren farmers, this knowledge is etched into the memory from early childhood and passed from generation to generation which engenders a unique sense of belonging.

This brings me on to one final point. Having grown up in the Burren, and farmed with my family in Blackhead, it means more to me than any of the above; it means I’m home.
On a beautiful, bright Burren morning at the beginning of February, a group of twenty people gathered at Slieve Carron Nature Reserve to create their own little slice of history in the management of the Burren. Young and old, male and female, students and bank officials, travelling from as far away as Cork, this eclectic gathering represented the very first day out for the Burren Conservation Volunteers.

The Burren Conservation Volunteers, organised through the Burrenbeo Trust, were formed to address some of the pressing conservation issues in the Burren from scrub encroachment to rebuilding of stone walls. On this occasion, this group spent six hours removing hazel bushes from an area of orchid-rich grassland, using a mixture of loppers and hand saws, leaving in their wake an impressive heap of brashings. For some of those present it was an opportunity to get some fresh air, good exercise and good company, for everyone it was a chance to get away from thinking and talking about the Burren and to do something proactive instead.

The work was done under the supervision of staff from the NPWS and the BurrenLIFE project. The volunteers came away from the day tired but happy, ready to gather again for whatever this monthly conservation outing throws at them in future.

If you want to be part of the Burren Conservation Volunteers, actively working together as a community and making a real difference to the Burren, please contact trust@burrenbeo.com or call 091-638096 to register your interest.

Less talk and more action...
Glencurran Cave, in the heart of the Burren, has been the site of important archaeological discoveries since 2004. The oldest material recovered consists of a single bear bone, a scapula, which was radiocarbon dated to about 8,000 BC. This is the oldest bear bone known from Co. Clare and an incredibly important and interesting find. The cave was used as a place of ritual veneration in the Bronze Age (1,500 BC to 600 BC) at which time a series of offerings were placed on the cave floor including bone and shell beads, pottery vessels, amber beads, stone tools, human bones and young animals that had been sacrificed. A Viking necklace of much later date was also discovered. The necklace is the largest to have been found in Ireland, composed of 70 glass beads covered with gold foil. This stunning piece of jewellery can be dated to the mid 9th century AD. Its discovery in the cave is somewhat of a mystery, though it may have travelled from Scandinavia to the established Viking settlement at Limerick and from there traded to Gaelic chieftains living in the Burren.
The Burren provides most of Ireland’s butterflies with a home. Twenty-nine out of a national total of thirty-five butterfly species occur in the region and this includes two of Ireland’s scarcest species, the Wood White (*Leptidea sinapis*) and Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria euphrosyne*), neither of which have been recorded as breeding anywhere else in Ireland. Yet as I stand here in February looking out on a landscape of grey stone and leafless scrub the butterfly billing given above looks like false advertising. Where are the butterflies at this time of year?

There are butterflies present even in this exceptionally cold and frosty Burren winter. Three of our showiest species - the Peacock (*Inachis io*), Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) and Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni gravesi*) are hibernating as adult butterflies. The Brimstone has hung itself up for the cold season in clumps of ivy, in low growing, scrubby bramble or in common holly. The Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell take refuge in caves, beneath slabs of limestone or in dense woodland, especially in the case of the Peacock. Though three of our butterflies are migrants from warmer climes; the Clouded Yellow (*Colias croceus*), Painted Lady (*Cynthia cardui*) and Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), and are hundreds or even thousands of kilometres to the south during our winter, the occasional Red Admiral spends the winter here. During the winter, the rest of the Burren butterflies are in their immature states - in the egg, larval and pupal stages. Like adult butterflies these are awaiting the arrival of warmer weather.

A warm, calm day in early March rouses overwintering butterflies. They seek out early wild flowers especially primroses, violets, dandelions and willow. Temperatures are often low at this time of the year so butterflies spread their wings to the fullest extent in order to absorb the maximum sunshine and warmth. The moment spring sunshine is interrupted temperatures plummet and butterflies return to hibernation sites where they will remain if winter returns.

By April warmer conditions will see the three butterflies that spent the cold months in the adult state out of hibernation seeking nectar and mates. Butterflies that hibernated in the pupal stage emerge to join this search. During a warm April I love to walk the Burren’s green roads, boreens and sunny sheltered areas. The lemon yellow primrose, bluish purple violets and rich deep gold of common dandelions brighten these areas. Butterflies soon appear...
Fast forward a few weeks and a number of other species will be on the scene. Prolonged unseasonable weather will affect emergence times to some extent and butterflies can be seen outside flight times stated in texts.

By mid-May the cryptically-coloured aptly-named Dingy Skipper (Erynnis tages) can be seen flying around yellow-flowered bird’s foot trefoil on which it nectars and lays its eggs. The rare and dainty Wood White probably occurs nowhere else in Ireland except in the Burren and is to be seen fluttering around the edges of scrub and hedgerows adjoining limestone. The Wood White has an odd courtship: the male alights opposite the female, faces her head on, uncoils his proboscis [tongue] and sways his head from side to side, waving his tongue! Impressed by what looks bizarre to us she bends her abdomen to meet his and mating occurs.

A Burren exclusive, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary emerges in May and flies until mid-June. This butterfly is bright orange with a chequered black patterning on its upper surfaces. It frequents clearings in scrub that grows sparsely on limestone.

The endangered Marsh Fritillary (Euphydryas aurinia) flies from May to the end of June and is found in damp grassland where its foodplant, devil’s-bit scabious grows abundantly. Its stained glass window patterning features brick red, yellow, cream and black.

The final butterfly to emerge in summer is the Grayling (Hipparchia semele). This master at concealment is disturbed by walkers on limestone pavement and flies swiftly for a few metres and, on alighting, appears to melt into the rock.

May sees the emergence of common species like the Common Blue (Polyommatus icarus), Small Copper (Lycaena phlaeas) and Large and Small Whites (Pieris brassicae and rutae respectively).

As mentioned before, three migrant species the Burren regularly. The Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow occur from about May to October in varying numbers. The reliable and often the most abundant migrant is the Red Admiral although the Painted Lady reached the Burren in huge numbers in 2009. The Clouded Yellow occurs in numbers about twice a decade.

Ireland’s most dramatic grassland butterfly is the Dark Green Fritillary (Mesoacidalia aglais). It appears in June and usually flies until mid-August. This magnificent aerial acrobat flies directly into strong winds on exposed areas such as cliffs with its striking flight complementing its bright orange coloration. The Silver-washed Fritillary (Argynnis paphia) emerges later in June and can extend its flight time into early September. The Silver-washed Fritillary is also a showy, eye-catching species.

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Why are butterflies so abundant here? Visitors to the region often ask this question and the answer lies in the quality and size of the habitats. The Burren boasts high quality wildflower meadows, scrub, limestone pavement, wetland and native woodland with warm, sheltered clearings. The presence of native plants for butterflies to lay their eggs on and the superabundance of nectar for adult butterflies to fuel their flight makes the Burren ideal. The farming carried on here is a vital ingredient in maintaining these habitats. There is little application of grassland fertiliser and the extensive cattle grazing practised in the Burren preserves the habitats’ quality. Another reason for the Burren’s status as Ireland’s most dramatic grassland butterfly is the Dark Green Fritillary (Mesoacidalia aglais). It appears in June and usually flies until mid-August. This magnificent aerial acrobat flies directly into strong winds on exposed areas such as cliffs with its striking flight complementing its bright orange coloration. The Silver-washed Fritillary (Argynnis paphia) emerges later in June and can extend its flight time into early September. The Silver-washed Fritillary is also a showy, eye-catching species.

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One note of caution must be struck. For this favourable situation high quality, large-scale habitats and a range of habitat types, including rare butterflies that are restricted to very specific habitats, fragmentation inevitably leads to extinction for all sorts of wildlife and Western Europe habitats have become disconnected. Habitat breeding sites within a reasonable distance. Elsewhere in Ireland breed in and need to be able to disperse and locate mates and new 

premier butterfly (and moth) haven can be appreciated when you take in the views on any of the Burren’s high points. The Burren is a large area that has continuous habitats. Many species of lepidoptera (the order butterflies and moths belong to) need a sizeable area to breed in and need to be able to disperse and locate mates and new breeding sites within a reasonable distance. Elsewhere in Ireland and Western Europe habitats have become disconnected. Habitat fragmentation inevitably leads to extinction for all sorts of wildlife including rare butterflies that are restricted to very specific habitats. The Burren is excellent for butterflies because it has continuous, high quality, large-scale habitats and a range of habitat types.

One note of caution must be struck. For this favourable situation to continue traditional farming must be continued. There is also a need for some periodic scrub control as some species need open grassland habitat with some scrub but grassland butterflies cannot tolerate cooler, shadier conditions that a strong build up of scrub produces.

To appreciate the Burren’s butterflies this year, walk, in warm sunshine, along the green roads and boreens that have wild flowers at the edges, along hedgerows with flower-rich margins that face south or west or sheltered meadows adjoining scrub/limestone pavement that are bathed in sunlight. Bring a good guidebook with you and you’ll soon be able to identify the butterflies. Enjoy observing their activities and appreciate how these gems beautify our world and contribute to pollination, to the food web and to our understanding of the workings of the natural world.

To find out more about Irish butterflies and about the best sites to find the Burren’s butterflies a publication Discovering Irish Butterflies & their Habitats (by Jesmond Harding) priced at €12 is invaluable. The book contains over 150 original photographs and describes habitat creation, each butterfly’s life cycle and distribution and contains a site guide. It is available from Cafélebo, Kinvara or directly from the author who may be contacted at deniseharding@eircom.net.

All photos in this article were taken by Jesmond Harding

Workshop
Monitor Butterflies of the Burren

As mentioned by Jesmond in the above article, the Burren is home to the rarest of Ireland’s butterflies, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary, the Brown Hairstreak and the Wood White. Not only are they rare, but the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and the Brown Hairstreak are under threat of extinction in Ireland and in Britain. These butterflies need conserving and monitoring. And we’re asking you to help!

The Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme is seeking volunteers to monitor these species and help inform their conservation. Weekly walks will be undertaken during their flight period and the number of butterflies seen counted. Monitoring will take place in April and May for the Pearl-bordered Fritillary and August and September for the Brown Hairstreak.

If you’re interested in getting involved, there will be a training workshop on Saturday the 24th of April at the Burrenbeo Trust Centre in Kinvara from 10.30am-4.00pm. No butterfly experience is necessary. For more information contact: mwalsh@biodiversityireland.ie

Eugenie Regan
Ecologist, National Biodiversity Data Centre
The Burren Green’s main flight season is from mid-July to late August, so we set up a trap on the 8th August. However, Mikey remembered something Mr Raymond Haynes, once an annual visitor, had said about the behaviour of the Burren Green and this led us to try a different approach to finding it. Armed with Mikey’s high-power lamp we ventured on to an area of coastal grassland, turned the lamp on and ‘bingo’, half a dozen or so freshly emerged Burren Greens sat half-way up the grass stems. Despite our delight, it is hard to appreciate them when it is pitch-dark, so two moths were collected and transferred to the trap for a better look in the morning. On opening the trap the next day, these had been joined by two more Burren Greens as well as 17 other species of moth.

The Burren Green is a truly stunning moth. At roughly 2cm, it is not particularly big, but it is overall green and surprisingly furry. In fact, it looks as if it is wearing a waistcoat of green fur! After taking some photographs, all the moths were released unharmed.

As is often the case, you wait a long time to see something but once you have, it turns up again quite quickly … a bit like buses! One week later, in Poulnalour, on a bright sunny day I was lucky enough to see a Burren Green flying quickly and then landing to feed on the flowers of devil’s-bit scabious and common knapweed – an unusual sighting of this normally night-flying moth.

So, later this year, arm yourself with a good torch, find a nice area of Burren grassland and venture out on a warm, cloudy night between mid-July and late August at about 10.30 p.m. and see if you can spot this elusive Burren gem … failing that – leave your bathroom window open, the light on and hope!

**Note:** These moths are rare and delicate. If trapping, treat with care and release after viewing.
made by the flocks of wildfowl careening above the turlough, their panic sometimes initiated by a hunting falcon or harrier.

The great bare basin or polje in which the turlough lies was, in prehistoric times, covered in woodland. We know this from the scientific examination of tree pollen extracted from the bed of the turlough. Birch, which dominated after the end of the Ice Age, was replaced by Scots pine and hazel and ultimately by oak, elm and alder - which are now scarce in the Burren. Ash and yew eventually became established and remain today, though the latter is artificially scarce due to removal, it being poisonous to cattle.

The many wooded gullies, dolines and dry valleys near Carron are wonderful dels replete with moss-covered boulders, ferns and copiced hazel. These ‘Yeatsian retreats’ have a magical quality in spring enhanced by the strong odour of wild garlic, the spangled colours of violets, anemones and orchids and the constant, pleasing hum of hoverflies and bees. Birds found here include great tits, goldcrests, blackcaps and meadow pipits but occasional summer visitors such as the wheatear or endangered. The commonest birds are the skylark and field mice, on the other hand, are abundant; their tiny burrows and caches of end-opened hazel nuts in the mossy ground cover testify to this. However, their nocturnal habits mean that they are not often seen.

Apart from farmers on a bovine mission or the odd sortie by an archaeologist or naturalist, few venture out across the expansive craglands around Carron: the lack of trails and the dangerously eroded and broken surface are prohibitive to all but the most fortunate, they can be seen, even near Carron village, at dusk. The village, with its scattering of houses, old and new, supports some of the birds, but even more elusive, are scrub dwellers like a few of the orchids, are scarce as one might suppose given the bounty. Field mice, on the other hand, are abundant; their tiny burrows and caches of end-opened hazel nuts in the mossy ground cover testify to this.

In winter the crag is the domain of the hooded crow and the yellowhammer, now on the decline throughout ‘cultivated Ireland’, of wild garlic, the spangled colours of violets, anemones and orchids and the constant, pleasing hum of hoverflies and bees. Birds found here include great tits, goldcrests, blackcaps and meadow pipits but occasional summer visitors such as the wheatear or endangered. The commonest birds are the skylark and field mice, on the other hand, are abundant; their tiny burrows and caches of end-opened hazel nuts in the mossy ground cover testify to this. However, their nocturnal habits mean that they are not often seen.

In the wider context Co. Clare once held other lost birds. Bones of great-spotted woodpeckers were found in limestone caves near Ennis more than a hundred years ago. Recent carbon dating has shown them to be from the Bronze Age, more than three thousand years ago. Another bird known to have been formerly a widespread Irish resident, the turkey-like capercaillie, has also been identified through prehistoric and historic bone evidence, though not to date in Co. Clare. However, a reference by Mac Brody to ‘wild cocks and hens’, in the woods of Co. Clare may well be to the capercaillie, perhaps even in the Burren.

Badgers are quite unpredictable, but no less delightful for that. Badgers are quite widespread in the Carron region but they favour dense hazel and locations with thick soil deposits for their setts. Pine martens, though even more elusive, are also scrub dwellers but, (if you are fortunate), they can be seen, even near Carron village, at dusk. The village, with its scattering of houses, old and new, supports nesting starlings, jackdaws, and swallows. Bats, which haw for insects in summer along the main road, may have a nursery in the roof-space of one of the old stone buildings in the village.

Negotiating Spaces: Negotiating Spaces investigates life cycles and growth found within the landscape of the Burren. It is represented by a 2m x 1m nest constructed from culled hazel, dried grasses and leaves as well as a series of polygonal nest boxes constructed for blue tits. The building of both nests have been filmed and are played side by side as a video diptych.
The Famine Road

The old road clings to the side of the hill. No foot ever travels over it. No wheel ever runs over it. The only feet to use it were those that built it and, for today only, as a special privilege – ours. We make our way down on to it through the unsurfaced mud and sod following the footsteps of cattle. Once on its surface, it is a massive feat of engineering – a rampart twice the height of a man, heaved from the rock and covered with rough cobbles which, as grassland creeps across, are steadily being reclaimed by nature. The reason nothing ever comes this way is that this road begins and ends in the middle of nowhere. So when and why was it built?

The green-road on which we stand is steep even by today’s standards and too steep ever to have been traversed by horse-drawn carts. The famine road cuts a new line across the hill with a gentler incline. The question then focuses on why it was never finished. There is no record, but Bill surmised that it was not that the money ran out but probably that the famine eased and the incentive to complete the road simply evaporated. Piles of broken rock remain from the day when the builders downed tools and, no doubt relieved to be able to abandon such gruelling work, walked off-site.

We continued up the green-road to the point where the famine road would have intersected. Here, the owner of the land, Tom Burke, kindly opened a gap in his wall so that we could make our way down, following in the muddy hoofprints of his cattle until we found ourselves standing on the never-travelled road. To think that people on near-starvation rations had succeeded in building a road which, even by today’s standards, would require powerful machinery was deeply moving. Years ago, Bill’s vision had been to develop a sculptural trail depicting figures building the road – a dream never realised. But the road to nowhere will endure down the centuries as a monument to those who built it.

For the Burrenbeo Trust walks, we suggest the following:

• Wear comfortable and sensible walking shoes. Much of the Burren’s terrain is uneven, please ensure you have the correct footwear on.

• The walks generally take 2-2.5 hours. They are held in the afternoon so that each individual has the chance to have a good hearty lunch before heading into the great outdoors!

• The underwater Burren is likely to be a muddy quagmire, so bring waterproof footwear!

• The weather in Ireland is variable and can change fast. So come prepared with warm clothes and waterproofs. In case of good weather, do not forget sunscreen and a hat as the rock reflects the sunshine and can cause sunburn.

The Burrenbeo Trust is continuously developing the heritage walks and talks series. The walks are the first Sunday of each month at 2pm and the talks are the third Thursday of each month at 8.30pm in different locations throughout the Burren. Below are the events organised at the time of going to print; however, please look up the events page on www.burrenbeo.com or phone 091 638696 for more details on any of the below or the events organised thereafter.

Walks and Talks 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What event</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>walk Easter flowers</td>
<td>Stephen Ward and Sharon Parr</td>
<td>Sleve Carron</td>
<td>4th April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk New perspectives on old stones</td>
<td>Ronán Hennessy</td>
<td>Kinvara</td>
<td>15th April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk Searching for botanical ghosts</td>
<td>Cillian Roden</td>
<td>Fanore</td>
<td>2nd May</td>
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<tr>
<td>talk Flowers of a limestone landscape</td>
<td>Matthew Jebb</td>
<td>Ballyvaughan</td>
<td>20th May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk Wildflower hunt</td>
<td>Matthew Jebb (10.30am &amp; 2pm)</td>
<td>Mullaghmore</td>
<td>22th May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk Butterflies of the Burren</td>
<td>Jen Mond Harding</td>
<td>Gortleka Cross</td>
<td>6th June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk Biodiversity in the Burren</td>
<td>Maria Long</td>
<td>Carron</td>
<td>17th June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk The heritage around us</td>
<td>Michael Killeen and Frank O’Grady</td>
<td>Corofin</td>
<td>4th July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk Protected area planning in Ireland</td>
<td>Noel Healy</td>
<td>Kinvara</td>
<td>15th July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk Archaeology around the harbour</td>
<td>Christine Grant</td>
<td>Belharbour</td>
<td>1st Aug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk Burren through literature</td>
<td>Paul Clements</td>
<td>Ballyvaughan</td>
<td>19th Aug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walk folklore in the Burren</td>
<td>Patrick McCormack</td>
<td>Carron</td>
<td>5th Sept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talk The underwater Burren</td>
<td>Tadhg O’Brien</td>
<td>Doolin</td>
<td>16th Sept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Trust also runs guided introduction to the Burren walks every Wednesday at 3.30pm from beginning of June till the end of August. Meet at the Burrenbeo Trust Information Centre, Main Street, Kinvara. Everybody is welcome! All Burrenbeo Trust walks are free to Trust members and a £5 minimum donation for non-members.
Nationally the sport or pastime of walking is on the increase. Whether it is our need to lead a healthier lifestyle or just to enjoy the countryside, there’s no doubt that walking has huge benefits for us, both physically and mentally.

The Burren landscape with its unusual rock formations, fascinating archaeology and renowned flora and fauna provides a spectacular terrain which will delight and surprise the walker all year round. The unique scenery continues to fascinate visitors and makes its exploration on foot so compelling.

During the past few years there has been a big increase in the number of people walking in the region. This is due, in part, to the greater number of walking opportunities available and to an increased awareness of what this spectacular area has to offer.

The walkways
The Burren Way, a linear 114km waymarked route, has been established for a number of years. It includes some of the Burren’s ancient “green roads” and small country roads. It is clearly marked and well maintained and has attracted many tourists to the area over the years. Furthermore, four looped walks have recently been developed in the Burren. Three of these loops are completed; the Ballyvaughan wood loop, the Carron loop and the Caher Valley loop. Hopefully the Blackhead loop will be available for the coming summer season. These looped walks, range from about 10km to 26km, offering the walker a clearly marked route to follow whilst enjoying some of the most spectacular scenery in Ireland. From Spring right through to Autumn the wonderful flora to be experienced on these walks could be described as walking through Europe’s largest rock garden. A memory that will last in the visitor’s mind long after they have left the area.

Walking groups
The Burrenbeo Trust hosts monthly walks covering all aspects of heritage in the Burren. These walks are fun, social occasions where the general public and the Burren enthusiast get access to very special places in the company of Burren farmers and specialists on a variety of heritage topics.

Another walking opportunity is to go with the popular local walking club; Fanore Ballyvaughan Walking Club. The club organise walks every Sunday throughout the year. It draws its membership from all around Co. Clare and indeed from much further afield. The walks, led by a club member, are off the beaten track and explore some of the more remote areas of the Burren. The club also organises a marathon and walking festival each year. There are also the opportunities to enjoy guided walks with one of the many expert guides resident in the Burren, who will share his or her knowledge and passion for this remarkable area, or there are plenty of walking and guiding books to go at it alone.

So, there is now no excuse not to walk and experience the magic of this place called The Burren.

Please note that the majority of the Burren is privately owned. When walking treat the land with respect; don’t leave rubbish, don’t leave gates open; leave it as you found it - if landowners don’t want you walking on their land, respect their wishes and stick to the waymarked ways (see page 28 for trails map).

Blue moor grass (Sesleria caerulea), also known as fear boirne or Burren grass. One of the earliest flowering plants in the Burren this grass has a lovely metallic blue (or rarely pale green) flowering head.

Blue moor grass (Sesleria caerulea), also known as fear boirne or Burren grass. One of the earliest flowering plants in the Burren this grass has a lovely metallic blue (or rarely pale green) flowering head.
Walking possibilities in the Burren have been greatly enhanced recently, with three new mostly off-road looped walks. The **Blackhead Loop** (26 km) travels along the old green road from Fanore to Gleninagh, affording spectacular views over Galway Bay. The **Ballyvaughan Wood Loop** (8km) and the **Carran Loop** (9km) offer scenic, mostly off-road shorter walks. Please refer to the map in the centre-spread for these and other walks and trails in the area.

The walks are rated easy, moderate or difficult according to ability and are insured by Irish Public Bodies Insurance through Clare County Council. Their development has been made possible with funding from the Fáilte Ireland Loop Walks Programme and Shannon Development through their Shannon Region Trails programme.

But the biggest single factor has been the support of local landowners who, through the Walks Scheme funded by the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, now receive bi-annual payments to inspect, maintain and enhance their sections. They clear pathways, improve drainage, maintain and repair stiles, bridges and waymarkers. This brings employment into the area, and the improvements benefit both walkers and landowners.

Co. Clare has a dedicated Rural Recreation Officer employed by Clare Local Development Company, and a Walks Officer employed by Clare Trails Steering Group. Your comments, suggestions, ideas and queries in relation to any of these walks, or walking in general in the county, are welcomed.

Eimer McCarthy, Rural Recreation Officer, Co. Clare
emccarthy@cldc.ie

Cyril Killeen, Walks Officer, Co. Clare
cyrilkilleen@hotmail.com

Information on this walks can be found at www.shannonregiontrails.ie
BURREN WAY
Trailheads: Lahinch, Doolin, Lisdoonvarna, Ballyvaughan, Carran andComman.
Distance: Approx. 114km (including East Burren Loop and links to Lisdoonvarna and Ballyvaughan).
Time: Approx. 4 days. Each section represents approximately a half day’s walking.
Difficulty: Moderate to difficult
Terrain: The Way follows a mix of green road, pathway, minor roadway, and grassy/rocky track, with an initial steep climb out of the Caher Valley and steep descent to Feenagh Valley.
To Suit: Average fitness, casual walkers.

More information on this walks can be found at: www.shannonregiontrails.ie

BLACK HEAD LOOP
Trailhead: Fanore Beach Carpark, Co. Clare
Dist/Time: 26km/8-9 hrs
Difficulty: Difficult
Terrain: Mix of minor roadways, green roads, mountainous pathways.
To Suit: Higher than average levels of fitness.

CAHER VALLEY LOOP
Trailhead: Fanore Beach Carpark, Co. Clare
Dist/Time: 14.5km/3-4hrs
Difficulty: Moderate
Terrain: Mix of minor roadways and green roads.
To Suit: Medium level of fitness.

BALLYVAUGHAN WOOD LOOP
Trailhead: Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare
Dist/Time: 8km / 2hrs-2.5hrs
Difficulty: Easy
Terrain: Surfaced roadway, green roads, tracks, cross country.
To suit: Medium level of fitness, casual walkers.

CARRAN LOOP
Trailhead: Cassidy’s Pub, Carron Village, Co. Clare
Dist/Time: 9km/3-4hrs.
Difficulty: Difficult
Terrain: Mix of minor roads, animal tracks and green lanes.
To Suit: Higher than average levels of fitness.

DROMORE WOOD LOOP
Trailhead: Dromore Wood NR, Ruan, Co Clare
Distance: 6km
Time: 1hr 30mins - 2hrs
Difficulty: Easy
Terrain: Mix of laneways, lakeshore and wooded tracks.
To Suit: Medium level of fitness.

DOOLIN CYCLE HUB – 4 CYCLE LOOPS
Loop 1 is the shortest tour (18km – takes 1.5-2 hours), it goes from Doolin south towards the Cliffs of Moher.
Loop 2 (26/30KM, takes 3 to 4 hours) visits the south west corner of North Clare taking in some amazing coastal views.
Loop 3 (43 KM, takes 4 - 4.5 hours) guides cyclists inland towards Kilfenora and the Burren.
Loop 4 (21/47KM, takes 4.5 - 5 hours) takes cyclists north from Doolin along the coast road with spectacular views of the Aran Islands.

More information on this walks can be found at: www.shannonregiontrails.ie
Ecotourism is an activity, a philosophy and a model of development that unites conservation, communities and sustainable travel to minimise environmental impact, to provide positive experiences for visitors and host community and to provide direct financial benefits for conservation. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as:

**Responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local people.**

The concept of ecotourism is not new. The special character and nature of the Burren and the potential of tourism to place stresses and strains on its environment and communities has been recognised since the 1970’s. Burren Connect was established in 2006; it is supported by a range of agencies* and works with local organisations and groups to implement a programme involving traffic management, information provision, environmental education for businesses, conservation projects and the development of an ecotourism network of accredited businesses. During 2007, Burren Connect commissioned an extensive survey which canvassed the views of visitors, accommodation providers and the managers of visitor centres in the Burren on a range of issues. The survey also assessed the level of interest in developing the Burren as an ecotourism destination. 97% of accommodation providers and 80% of visitor centre managers surveyed believe that the Burren should be developed and promoted as an ecotourism location. Almost all believe this would have a potentially positive economic impact on the area.

TIES would concur with Burren businesses on the economic potential of ecotourism. It maintains that ecotourism is growing at least 20% per annum since 1990. Its potential as a market and a developmental philosophy has also been recognized by policy makers in Ireland. In its Programme for Government 2007-2012, the Government stated that it will “Seek, with the Tourism Agencies and Local Authorities, suitable areas to develop and promote eco tourism”. The 2009 Economic Renewal Framework stated that “We will develop a nationwide strategy for ecotourism and associated marketing campaign”. In 2007, Fáilte Ireland made a commitment to undertake research into the potential of the ecotourism market, to provide appropriate support for the development of ecotourism, to promote standards for ecotourism, and to establish ecotourism networks (Environmental Action Plan 2007-2009). Both the upcoming County Development Plan and Shannon Development’s strategic development policy support the development of ecotourism in the Burren.

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Countries which have established themselves as popular ecotourism destinations; Estonia, Sweden, New Zealand, Norway, all have accredited ecotourism standards. The result of extensive research undertaken by Fáilte Ireland on examining the attitudes of holidaymakers towards landscape and natural environment found that: Where accreditation is concerned, those who have an interest in ecotourism award it the greatest importance.

Accreditation will ensure the quality of the experience or package on offer. The basic standards for an ecotourism experience or product are that:

- It has to be delivered in an environmentally friendly way (consider waste, water, energy)
- It has to be based in nature and allow visitors to have a personal experience of nature
- It has to involve education/interpretation of the environment
- It has to promote local heritage and culture
- It has to be marketed responsibly
- It has to contribute to conservation
- It has to directly benefit the local community

Greenbox, a region covering parts of Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Donegal and Fermanagh, is to date the only destination in Ireland to have developed accredited ecotourism practises and is sought after for advice and training. In 2008, a number of businesses involved in Burren Connect’s advisory and working committees visited Greenbox and met with members of its business network. Subsequently a workshop in Kilfenora introduced more Burren businesses to the concept of ecotourism accreditation. At a public meeting attendees agreed to establish an Ecotourism Working Group. Its members are:

Businesses: Boghill Centre, Burren Beef and Lamb Producers’ Group, Burren Centre, Burren Coaches, Burren Ecotourism Co-Op, Burren Fine Wine & Foods, Burren Outdoor Education Centre, Burren Painting Centre, Burren Smokehouse, Cassidy’s Pub & Restaurant, Clare’s Rock Hostel, Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience, Corofin Hostel & Camping, Doolin Activity Lodge, Doolin Language Centre, Oregan’s Castle Hotel, Farm Heritage Tours Co-Op, Fr. Ted’s Teas, Heart of Burren Walks, Roadside Tavern.


Aside from developing a vision statement, terms of references, development strategy, business and marketing plans and a label/brand for the group, an important part of the work programme was to seek training and support from Fáilte Ireland to develop the Burren as an accredited ecotourism destination. During 2009:

- 13 businesses achieved a Certificate in Ecotourism from Sligo IT, funded by Sustainable Tourism Skillnet and the group became a Fáilte Ireland Pilot Project to test the Greenbox model for the accreditation of ecotourism destinations.
- Greenbox undertook an audit of training and mentoring needs. Out of this audit a support programme was developed, tailored specifically for the businesses and focusing on achieving accreditation.
- The training will run through to March 2010. The pilot will inform agencies and funding bodies of the level and nature of the support required to deliver their stated policies on ecotourism development in an authentic, ethical and sustainable way.

The impact in the Burren will be a self-sustaining network of informed, well-trained and committed businesses who will be ambassadors for ecotourism. They will mentor future businesses interested in joining the network and will have the skills to market, manage and develop the network to the level where there is a sufficiently critical-mass of businesses involved to change the nature and increase the potential of tourism in the Burren.

In achieving the vision of the Burren Ecotourism Working Group to establish the Burren as a premier internationally recognised eco-tourism region ensuring the future economic and social growth and sustainable development of its communities, environment and heritage the network will be making an important and positive contribution to the future management, conservation, understanding and appreciation of the Burren.

For more information visit www.burrenconnect.ie

Interpretation, Governance and Conflict: A Critique of Protected Area Planning in Ireland

Noel Healy
PhD Candidate, Department of Geography, NUI Galway

Ireland’s natural environment is increasingly packaged, commercialised and exploited for tourism purposes. This research explored the relationship between environmental protection and tourism by comparing two controversial developments in the Burren – the proposed Mulaghmore development (which was not subsequently built) and the new Cliffs of Moher visitor centre. A comparison of their respective planning processes enabled speculation about lessons learnt (if any) from the institutional and political flaws of the early 1980s, and to establish whether the top-down style of Irish planning has changed.

Conflicts over visitor centres reveal serious gaps in Ireland’s approach to protected area planning which are impediments to the development of sustainable tourism. Recent efforts towards participatory tourism planning have been weakened by the prioritisation of scientific ‘expertise’ over local knowledge, a lack of research on hosts’ and visitors’ attitudes and behaviour, a fragmented inter-agency style of governance and serious gaps in legislation, policy and management.

The connections between tourism and Irish political and democratic traditions and decision-making structures make protected area tourism planning and governance conflictual. Key factors which exacerbate conflict include ‘the chasing of funds’, the regulation of nature for economic purposes, political interference in planning, and a lack of research and development. Moreover, Irish governance is highly fragmented whilst protected areas are managed in an uncoordinated ad hoc manner. Ireland’s protected area governance is further complicated by social, cultural and historical factors such as the legacy of colonialism, land ownership, a strong attachment to land, a weak protected area system and an ensuing antipathy to external regulation. Therefore, unresolved historical events such as the ‘Land Question’ can affect contemporary planning.

Previous conflicts in the Burren reveal that reliance on regulation, enforcement and exclusions of locals and traditional farming methods is costly and often fails. There is a new understanding of the link between nature and culture - that conservation cannot be undertaken without the involvement of those people closest to the land, such as Burren farmers. To this end, there should be institutional reform to facilitate full and inclusive participation of all stakeholders, particularly local communities and visitors.
To rest one’s eyes upon the bare limestone landscape of the Burren is akin to peering through a window into the Earth’s distant past. Whilst the present shape and mould of the Burren is a relatively recent adornment in the geological history of Ireland, the foundations of the Burren landscape represent fossilised environments that prevailed in this region long before man, mammals or even the dinosaurs first evolved. From the vast exposures of limestone throughout north Clare and south Galway, we can look into a world that existed long, long ago. From its origins in the warm tropical waters south of the Equator some 320 million years ago, the Burren has journeyed across the face of the planet to its present location on the eastern edge of a great and widening expanse of ocean. Ever susceptible to the forces of nature throughout the aeons of time, the rocky landscape we see today serves as a window into Earth’s geological past. And it is upon this rocky landscape that humans established a culture which continues to this day. Recognised far and wide as a region of unique beauty, the Burren has long attracted visitors. Tourism based around the attractions of the natural landscape is a resource that can help the local economy. Over the past decade local communities in Ireland and in Europe have seen the establishment of a fresh and successful approach to sustainable tourism in the model of a European Geopark.

To appreciate the inherent symbiosis that exists between humans and their environment, we need look no further than the bounds of the Burren. Its dual character is often described as comprising a cultural and natural persona. ‘Cultural’ – in that it has long been managed and shaped by man; ‘natural’ – in that so much of the surficial cover has been stripped away revealing the solid foundations of the landscape. The rich and extensive archaeology is testament to the continued existence of humans in this region for over 6000 years. In the recent millennia, inhabitants of the Burren have learned to adapt the environment to suit their needs, whilst simultaneously adapting their ways to suit their environment.

Against the backdrop of a slowing economic pulse we face the challenge of infusing fresh vitality into the future prospects of our local communities. Recognition of the landscape as a valuable natural resource from which we can generate economic activity is one place to start. Appreciation of the unique environment and landscape of the Burren can allow for informed decisions to be made when it comes to the economic development. The European Geoparks Network is one such organisation that promotes a cohesive approach to regional sustainable economic development based around the geological and natural heritage of a region. Geoparks play an active role in the economic development of a region through the enhancement of the visitor’s experience of the natural landscape in that region, and in the wider support of geotourism or ecotourism.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Geopark status for the Burren would represent a sustainable tourism and education model with a management plan. Geoparks within the European Geoparks Network (EGN) are recognised as important visitor regions throughout Europe. There are presently 35 Geoparks in 13 Europe countries, and many tourists that visit Ireland come from these countries. The existence of a recognisable and quality-assured tourism label in the Burren would serve to assure those familiar with Geoparks that the Burren is worth a visit.

The European Geoparks Network was established in 2000. It owes its existence to the efforts of two geologists, Guy Martini (France) and Nicolas Zouros (Greece), whose aim it was to help conserve geological heritage, enhance public understanding of our Earth’s science and our dependence on its resources, and to use these to promote sustainable economic development on a regional level. Geoparks are not solely about geology – they are equally about ecology, archaeology, farming, history, and local culture.

The use of the word ‘park’ in the term Geopark stems from the European sense of the word. Geopark does not mean the establishment of a specific region, area or park in the way we might perceive a national park. A Geopark refers to “a territory which includes a particular geological heritage and a sustainable territorial development strategy supported by a European program to promote development” (www.europeangeoparks.org). The proposed Burren Geopark would comprise of a network of individual sites, deemed to be Geosites.

Geopark status is not a legislative designation and, as such, carries no statutory obligations or restrictions. Because of this non-legislative basis, Geopark status cannot affect planning decisions or agricultural practices. The status is intended to allow day-to-day management of local land to continue “as normal”.

Geology is but one chapter in the story of the Burren. Together with other chapters that include the flora and fauna, archaeology, history, farming traditions, food, music and literature of the region, the great story of the Burren is one that can certainly inform and inspire local people and visitors alike. Geoparks celebrate the region they represent, by informing and educating about what is special and unique about the landscape, and its people. The Burren is surely worth celebrating.

An application for UNESCO geopark status for the Burren region is currently being compiled by the Burren Connect Project, with the support of the Geological Survey of Ireland, Shannon Development and Clare County Council. For more details contact Dr. Ronán Hennessy at rhennessy@burren.ie
THE UNDERWORLD

Caves of the Burren

David Drew
Senior Lecturer of Hydrology, Trinity College Dublin

To the casual visitor to the Burren and indeed to many visitors with specialist interests, the major attraction is the wild, rocky landscape abutting the coast together with the richness of the flora, the archaeological sites and the culture. However, there is another, literally hidden, Burren beneath the ground. This comprises a great network of caves, that conduits rainwater funneled from the surface of the ground towards springs mainly located at the periphery of the Burren – for example those on the banks of the River Fergus near Kilnaboy and the springs in Ballyvaghan Bay. Despite having in excess of 1.5 metres of rain annually the Burren has almost no permanent surface streams – the rivers are underground and the cave passages are the ‘valleys’.

The only contact or knowledge most visitors have of this underworld is if they visit one of the commercial caves in the area – Aillwee Cave and Doolin Cave. Yet, almost by definition caves that are accessible to the general public are rarely typical of ‘wild’ caves which to explore properly involve climbing, wriggling and receiving a thorough soaking.

There are more than 700 caves known in Ireland, a reflection of the widespread occurrence of limestone in which they are formed. However, the Burren is by far the most important area for caves in the country containing almost 40% of explored caves and almost 70% of all mapped cave passages.

If you would like to explore the Burren caves either visit caves open to the public; Aillwee caves and the Doolin cave, or contact local caving group; Clare Caving Club (clarecavingclub.wikispaces.com). There are caves suitable for all abilities but all caves are potentially hazardous – only visit them in the company of experienced cavers.

A stream cave (Polldubh) excavated by a stream sinking underground at the boundary between limestone and non-limestone rocks on Slieve Elva. A tributary stream cascades into the main river passage and progress is possible only by wading and eventually only by crawling in the water. (Photograph Terry Dunne).

Two types of cave are found on the Burren, those that still contain streams and those that have been abandoned by the streams that carved them and are now ‘fossils’ or relics. It is a characteristic of caves that they persist as voids for long periods after they have ceased to function as drains for rainwater. Nearly all of the stream caves are found in the western Burren where streams, generated on the impermeable, non-limestone rocks that form the highest parts of Slieve Elva, Knockauns and Poulacapelle near Lisdoonvarna, sink underground as soon as they flow onto the surrounding limestone. The minor road running north from Killeany to the Caher valley follows exactly the geological boundary in its middle part and numerous small streams sink underground at the road’s edge. Usually the swallow holes are insignificant-seeming bushy hollows, but in places the rock roof over the cave has collapsed and it is possible to look down (but not descend!) into the big cave passage beneath. Pollnagollum, Ireland’s longest cave at 15km, is a fine example of such a collapse into a cave and is located some 100m west of the road mentioned above (grid reference M 1610 0375 on OS Sheet 51). Just to the south is the equally spectacular entrance to Pollkilla (M 1640 0234) a 30m deep shaft which drops down the further reaches of Pollnagollum cave. Dozens of similar caves may be explored in the western Burren. Usually the stream occupies all the passage and has to be followed down vertical drops and cascades to the limit of exploration – where the passage becomes too constricted for further progress or becomes wholly water-filled.

The second type of cave, abandoned by streams, is found over the remainder of the Burren, where the only rock is limestone. These are the oldest caves. Aillwee cave for example lost its river more than a million years ago and the cave probably originated much earlier still. Because they are no longer swept by underground waters some of these caves have been and still are used as shelter or refuges – by bats for example or by human beings – many Burren caves are of great archaeological interest.

All of the mountains of Ireland are known and all have been climbed. This is not the case with caves. It is certain that there are many cave systems still to be discovered in the Burren - the known unknowns! For example in 2009 cave divers explored several kilometers of enormous flooded cave tunnels between Gort and Khivara in the lowland extension of the Burren. In the heart of the Burren, near Carran, local cavers dug their way into a spectacular cave system containing 70m of vertical shafts and a large underground river dropping into the unknown – this in an area where no caves were previously known. Nowhere else, except in the underworld, is it any longer possible to be the first human being to set eyes on a part of the Burren.

...
Collecting Folklore in the Burren
I recently heard about the County Clare Folklore Project, Cuimhneamh an Chláir. Founded in 2009, this voluntary group is a community-based organisation that aims to record, document, archive and share the memories, experiences, customs, traditions and practices that characterise this county.

When visiting people’s homes, they will be told, as I was, that they are 20 (or even 40!) years too late. Nonetheless they will find, as I did too, that the recounting of life's experience is never too late or out of date. The sharing of memories, in any generation, enriches the mind. It feeds the soul and roots us in our environment. It helps us to recognise the present and to care about the future.

In the early 1900s, Seán Ó Flannagáin, a young man in his mid-twenties decided, instead of emigrating, to go out and collect folklore. When the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC), founded in the 1930s, heard about this voluntary project of his, they offered him a job and so, in time, Seán Ó Flannagáin became a professional collector of people's stories and lore: folklore.

Through his encounters, we get a wonderful glimpse of people’s lives in his native parish of Béithe, near Gort, and across the Galway-Clare border. Farming practices, both tillage and livestock, the gentry and their houses, social customs to do with matchmaking, marriages, wakes and funerals, births, superstitions (piseoga) and the general struggles of life. Between October 1937 and January 1940, the complexities of life in all its forms were the subjects that drew his attention, each day adding more manuscript pages to his collection of some 9,000 pages, mostly in Irish. Around the same time a similar volume of work was collected in Ballyvaughan and in other parts of Clare by a humble farmer, Seán Mac Mathúna, and by the IFC director, James Delargy (1930-45).

Our debt to others

Mac Mathúna walked long distances to collect a story; Flannagáin cycled (at first). "Mostly to the mountain I'd go but I wandered out to the country too". Flannagáin relied a lot on his memory as he didn’t like the ediphone, the recording machine of his day. Putting an ediphone to an old man "was like putting a glass of whiskey to his lips." And he had no shorthand, like Seán Mac Mathúna, who had devised his own type of notesscript, "I'd listen carefully and write everything down word for word the next day..." Like, for example, the riddle he heard one day: "Four stick standers, four belly banders, two crookers, two hookers and a wheel-about." What is it? [a cow].

In the mid-1980s, it was Pat Keane and other old-timers like him, including Eibhlín and Pat McCooke, who introduced me to aspects of past memories in the Kinvara locality. Indelibly etched in their memories were songs, stories and lore about a way of life that is now long gone. Leaving Aughnish on foot at the crack of dawn bound for Loughrea with a carload of dried seaweed, or from Kinvara, as Pat Picker recounted, to the Ennis market with a load of potatoes (or cabbage plants), or indeed fish – these accounts had been recorded for the IFC before my time by Ciarán Bairéad in the 1950s. In Doorus he met Tomás Ó Fatha, a man with a wonderful memory of life in the locality. Another man he recorded in Irish was Colman Keane, and here I was listening to similar versions and other stories, 30 years later, from his son, Pat Keane, then in his eighties.

Engrossed in the urgency of our work we sometimes forget to acknowledge the others who came before us. In my time, Tom Munnelly amassed a huge collection of lore and songs in his adopted home of Miltown Malbay and further afield. Eugene Lambe, who videoed many wonderful musicians, storytellers and characters during his time in Fanore, Lelia Doolin’s contributions on folk medicine in Co Clare, Michael MacMahon’s scholarly work, and many others too, including small local groups working in their own community. Brendan Dunford, who took a passionate interest in the preservation of the Burren, founding the Burrenbeo Trust with other like minded enthusiasts, and so on. We all have much to learn from each other.

Heritage is as much about safekeeping as it is about celebrating memory, the milk that nourishes the spirit. One is reminded, in conclusion, of the old tale about the cow in the Burren that would fill with her milk any vessel and it became a saying in the neighbourhood that no vessel could be found which the Glas would not fill at one milking. In Seán Ó Flannagáin’s version, it was a “fairy cow that was going around long ago (Glas Gaidhneach). She kept giving the milk ever until one day a man went out to milk her into a sieve.”

A Day In The Forge

PJ Curtis
Broadcast and writer

The clear, rhythmic ‘Clang’ of hammer on iron; the deep-bell tone of resonating steel on steel; the arcing, spitting and fiery showering of sparks; the pungent aroma of sweat and burning horse-hoof, the fierce hiss and sizzle of red-hot metal being plunged into a stone-trough of iron-brown water; the stamping of horse hooves on a cobblestone floor and the snorting and bit-chomping of an impatient animal.

These are sounds and smells I remember: a backdrop to men conversing; sometimes in hushed whispers, sometimes loudly and punctuated often by raucous laughter from deep within this old stone-wall building. For a small boy, the whole effect created a strange, complex and fascinating melody. This was the music, a symphony of vibrant sound emanating from some hidden and unknown orchestra, that initially draws me towards this place - the old forge which stood for almost two centuries in our farmyard.

I am two or three years of age and I reluctantly retreat to stand out of harm’s way some distance from the forge door; my father, having seen me pull playfully at the tail of a waiting horse, shoos me away to a safe distance. “Get yourself to a safe spot.” He chides. “You’ll get trampled to smithereens if you sit around under horse’s legs.”

Reluctantly, I move beyond the circle of danger. But never too far to find out and enter into that grown-up world of mystery, noise and activity.

But the old forge, with all its dark, shadowy corners and hidden secrets was, I soon learned, a place of many dangers; a forbidden place where only adult men (even my mother never entered here) conducted some strange ritual on a daily basis. Even as a toddler, I realized that whatever was being transacted within these low stone walls was, as yet, outside my understanding. But I was determined to find out and enter into that grown-up world of mystery, noise and activity.

My father was a blacksmith; his father before him was a blacksmith and his father before him was a blacksmith. Indeed it would seem that the family had been involved in the ‘smithy’ trade when they arrived in Ireland on invading Norman sailing-ships from northern France sometime in the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

It is said that every Curtis family had at least one blacksmith in the clan. It would seem that with this ancient trade traditionally came a more arcane knowledge - the gift of ‘Healing’. In one branch of the family this ‘Gift’ found expression in offering cures - often life-saving - to many human ailments. In our branch of the family it found expression in the curing of animals - especially horses.

In his travels around Clare in the late nineteenth century, the celebrated historian and author T.J. Westrop, became aware of the family’s ‘Cure’ (also called ‘The Charm’). Westrop wrote: “I am told that a Curtis of Kilnaboy, near Corofin, cures liver complaints, bleeding and cows that have swallowed potatoes, he puts his human patients on their backs on his anvil and pretends to strike them with his sledge hammer. The patient then drinks forge water. All the family have the gift of healing. A legend says that St. Patrick’s Horse lost a shoe near Kilnaboy and their ancestor shod it gratuitously. The saint therefore endowed the family with the Power and people even return from America to be cured by the smith.” (‘Folklore of Clare’, T.J. Westrop. Orig. publ., 1910-13. Reprinted Clasp 2000)

My grandfather was the local blacksmith when the historian travelled here. Perhaps Westrop, like so many strangers and travelers in those days, may have had his horse shod in the forge before continuing on his way. My father Pat Joe (who along with a younger sister, survived a TB plague which took three older brothers, a sister and his mother to their graves in 1918 and 1919) was seventeen years of age and preparing to emigrate to the USA.

Following the loss of almost the entire family in less than two years he decided to stay and follow in his father’s footsteps. This meant farming the land and learning the blacksmith trade - as his father did before him. This also entailed taking on the responsibility of learning the secret knowledge of ‘The Cure’. This he did, excelling and practicing both disciplines until his death in 1980.

Though I had cautiously explored the forge when my father was out in the fields tending the farm, I was probably five or so before I realized that whatever was being transacted within these low stone walls was, as yet, outside my understanding. But I was determined to find out and enter into that grown-up world of mystery, noise and activity.

For a small boy the attractions of the forge were many. To the left of the space where the horse would be tethered was the anvil - bronzed and shining from years of constant usage - seated on a solid block of ancient black oak; very possibly an already aged, living tree when Queen Elizabeth I was still a girl. To the right of the anvil, set underneath the rows of old horseshoes of different shapes and hand-made forge pincers, punches and rasps, was the forge’s centre altar, the raised stone fireplace and chimneystack. Adjacent to the fire was the water-trough, hemmed from solid limestone. (Another stone-trough sat outside the forge door; where, on hot summer days, horses would slake their thirsts while waiting their turns within.) It was said that there was a Cure for warts in the water of this trough and some, considering it a source of iron, drank from it.

But the primary focus of my childish attention was the huge bellows hidden in the deep shadows behind the fire and chimneystack. This massive wood and leather contraption fascinated me as I watched it heave and contract and groan and breath life, like some mythical dragon, to the glowing coal fire, into which my father plunged all manners, shapes and lengths of metals.

However, the most amazing part of this forge, to my mind, was the massive anvil. That massive anvil made of the solid block of ancient black oak was massive in size. The anvil was raised upon a pedestal and was surrounded by a stone wall. The anvil was a massive piece of black oak and was used for forging and shaping metal. The anvil was a large and imposing piece of machinery and required a lot of strength to use. The anvil was a symbol of the blacksmith’s trade and was a central feature of the forge.

The anvil was often used to shape and form metal objects. The anvil was a massive tool that was used to shape and form metal objects. The anvil was a large and imposing piece of machinery and required a lot of strength to use. The anvil was a symbol of the blacksmith’s trade and was a central feature of the forge.

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still-closed forge-door. Pat Joe, his sleeves rolled up in preparation for work, had already arrived in the yard and tying his horse to the sturdy wooden fence-posts. Other farmers arrived with their horses, some harnessed to carts or traps, some saddled and some on tow behind their walking owners. All of them gathered outside the forge where the blacksmith’s bellows and his hammering tools were kept safely under lock and key.

I recall the forge in those days to be a hotbed of activity and of lively conversation, much of it beyond the understanding of a small boy. In these pre-radio or TV days, the forge offered the men-folk of the locality a safe, convivial and neutral space to air opinions and views and to hear and discuss the latest news. Topics discussed ranged from politics - local and national - to the usual country matters: of cattle and pig prices at the market; local fairs, potato, wheat and hay crops, (how long it might take to get the hay saved and safely home, because of the inclement weather, was a common topic) to stories of strange, quirky - and sometimes dark - goings-ons in the locality.

There was news and gossip from town and city and from far-flung lands; often supplied by the farmers’ close relations now living and working in England, in America or in far-off Australia. For many farmers - some married, some bachelors, isolated, lonely and remote for six days of the week - this time spent at the forge in company of my father and other farmers would be greatly valued as a place of vital social contact and of high entertainment. Here, amid the smoke, sparks, clatter and clang - as the Smithy plied his ancient trade - they might renew old friendships, heal fractured relationships and find some solace among their peers.

When Pat Joe was satisfied that the shoe was a comfortable fit, he plunged it into the water-trough to cool before placing it on the hoof and deftly hammering home the nails, clinching and finally tapping them. When the long day was over, I would see the blacksmith walking the horse to the forge for its final fitting. A fitting would follow; the still-red iron shoe being placed on the hoof that, (amid a thick white cloud of acrid hoof-smoke) burned a groove into which it would settle when finally fitted.

Work in the forge was hard, sweaty and backbreaking. (Work that ultimately took its toll on my father’s health.) But he continued to ply his ancient trade with pride and stamina until the horse more of less disappeared from the landscape. By the late 1960’s and early 70’s the horse as a working animal had almost been entirely replaced by the tractor and the motorcar and there was less and less call for the services of the traditional blacksmith. On those rare days when no horses were needed to be shod, there was always other pressing ‘smithy’ work to be done in the forge. Cart wheels had to be mended or shot and a motley collection of plough-shares, horse-drawn mowing-machines, iron gates and other assorted farm-implements - shovels, forks, billhooks, axes and scythes - all awaited repair or shod and a motley collection of plough-shares, horse-drawn mowing-machines, iron gates and other assorted farm-implements - shovels, forks, billhooks, axes and scythes - all awaited repair.
Cry of the Mountain by Tim Dennehy

‘I wrote this song having spent some time on Mullaghmore mountain in the beautiful Burren...’

O wild pulse of beauty and famed ancient rooms! Where the cranesbill and sandwort and spring gentian blooms And the pocaire gaoithe is king of the air.

In the years when I laboured neath an alien sky, Like a lover your absence brought tears to my eyes, When the lowered sky and people and walls fenced me in, The breath of your spirit released me again.

And fond thoughts bridged my mountain in The Burren so fair And I breathed again in your sweet and fragrant air, I bathed in silence, your wildness embraced And felt your spirit seep through me in your holy place.

But of late I’ve been wakened from a turbulent sleep As the roar of the diggers did trundle and creep O’er your rare rugged beauty and ancient retreat, Erasing the Songlines of our ancestors’ feet.

And a gentle voice whispered, “Don’t enslave what is free And do not lay claim to the rock, the hill or the sea. Let love, care and reason be your guiding hand For lonely is the stranger in his own land.”

Oh heed the cry of the mountains; fear Gaia’s deep wrath, Do not package our soul and parade it in cloth, Let our children interpret their world from within As they tread o’er your wild open spaces again.

And let them go to their mountain in The Burren so fair. Let them breathe once again your sweet and your fragrant air, Let them bathe in your silence and your wildness embrace And feel your spirit seep through them in your holy place.

Pocaire gaoithe = kestrel

Tim Dennehy’s Cry of the Mountain is available to listen to on the albums ‘The Blue Green Door’ and ‘Old Boots and Flying Sandals’. For more information go to www.sceilig.com

Quick Quiz 1
Name the common Burren flower whose leaf is shown here.

Quick Quiz 2
Famous people of the Burren
1. The founder of the GAA  was born in a small thatched cottage close to Carron village.
2. Legend has it that  who lived at Lemanagh Castle was thought to have had 25 husbands!
3. Saint  lived as a hermit near Slieve Carron and was thought to be the brother of a famous King Guaire who owned Dunguaire castle in Kinvara.
4. One of Cromwell’s soldiers  famously said that the Burren hadn’t enough water to drown a man, wood enough to hang one or earth enough to bury one, but yet the cattle were very fat!
5. The Bishop of Kilfenora is the
6. The inventor of the submarine John Philip  was born in Liscannor to the south of the Burren.
7. The Irish champion steeplechase runner who was born in Kilnaboy and went on to represent Ireland at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932 was named Sonny ..............

Competition

Send in a drawing, photograph, or short story (1000 word limit) that captures The Landscape or Seascape of the Burren.

The winner will receive a Burrenbeo Trust voucher for Burren books or for Cafébeo. The winning entry will be published in the next edition of Burren Insight. Deadline is the 31st October 2010. This is open to both adults and children. Digital or hardcopy entries welcome. Please send in your entry with your name, address, email, and age (if of school-going age) to Burrenbeo Trust, Main Street, Kinvara, Co. Galway or email to trust@burrenbeo.com

Answers for quick quizzes are on page 47

Burren Insight 2010
The Bumper Book of Nature
by Stephen Moss with line drawings by Nicole Heidaripour / Review by Stephen Ward

This book is a call to nature, to nurture in children the urge to explore, not to deprive them of contact with the natural world. It rebels against ‘computer games, mobile phones and a tv in every child’s bedroom’ and urges a return to playing outside and ‘scrambling over the garden fence and into the woods, exploring nature for ourselves’. The author decodes the fact that in recent decades, ‘we have raised generations of children who are scared to walk in the park on their own, who scream when they encounter a spider or a moth, and who know more about the characters in tv soaps than they do about bluebells and bumble bees’.

It is packed with things for children to do ranging from the adventurous, such as climbing a tree, to learning different ways to tell the age of a tree. Other suggestions relate to heightening the senses and include listening to a tree, going on a ‘blind walk’ (with a guide!), experiencing the sensations of rain and wind, to which I would add sampling the smells of plants which attract insects. Find out how to give bumblebees a helping hand and, if you want to know what that unseen bird is calling from deep within the undergrowth, go ‘pishing’! What’s pishing? You’ll have to buy the book to find out. With this book, either with an adult or on their own, any child can take themselves deeper into the natural world. For those who begin to keep a natural history diary or become a conservation volunteer, it may be the start of a life-long journey. Above all, this book aims to raise in children a passion for the natural world because without it ‘what incentive is there to protect it?’

In a note to children, the author promises those who fall in love with nature that they will never be bored again – and above all, to ‘Have fun!’

Collins Flower Guide
by David Streeter illustrated by Christina Hart-Davis, Audrey Hardcastle, Felicity Cole & Lizzie Harper / Review by Stephen Ward

Leading walks in the Burren, I am often asked which guide – out of the plethora of those available – I would recommend an aspiring wild flower enthusiast to purchase. Without hesitation, from now on this will be it. Let me explain why. My first thought, on reading of its imminent publication was ‘not another flower guide’! But for someone wanting to become competent and to get seriously involved in recording plant distribution this is by far the best guide I have yet seen. Coming from one who graduated in botany more than 40 years ago, that is high praise indeed. My chief reason for saying this is the presentation of excellent illustrations and brief descriptions interleaved with identification keys, thereby admirably bridging the divide between a technical flora and a pictorial guide. Scientific names, so often a stumbling block for beginners, are of course there but prominence is given to common names.

The fun which can be derived from identifying an unknown flower is described as ‘a kind of detection in which a number of clues are sorted until the identity of the individual logically emerges, and there is always a great sense of achievement when an unfamiliar plant is finally nailed down in this way!’

The guide covers Ireland within the context of northwest Europe and describes over 1,900 species. It covers all flowering plants including trees, shrubs, grasses and sedges, conifers, plus ferns and horsetails but omitting micro-species of brambles, hawkweeds and dandelions, i.e. species which even most field botanists record as aggregates, since to master them would require a specialist apprenticeship rather than a general training. Species introduced to the Burren such as the cotoneasters, wall lettuce and red valerian are included. Distribution of each species is in general terms and, whilst a map of each would seem merited, one has only to look at the enormity of the New Atlas of the British & Irish Flora, on which the outlines of distribution are based, to realise the impracticality of this.

There has never been a more important time for recording the distribution of wild flowers. Their distribution patterns alter over time and reflect such impacts as habitat destruction and climate change. For those who want to go beyond simply identifying a wild flower, but recording its whereabouts, the guide points the way towards the Botanical Society of the British Isles. Within Ireland, this is supplemented by the National Biodiversity Data Centre and locally by the Clare Biological Records Centre.

The guide comes in a format and price range to suit all circumstances and pockets. If you want to carry it in the field – a good idea since the guide says, it is generally better to identify an unfamiliar plant by taking the book to the plant rather than to pick the plant and take it to the book’ – the soft-back is ideal. If, on the other hand you want to enjoy looking at the illustrations at home, the large format is ideal. Or if you want to strike the happy medium, there is always the basic hard-back.

Irish Butterflies and Insects
by Eugenie Regan & Chris Shields / Review by Stephen Ward

An up-and-coming Irish entomologist said recently that ‘insects need the press they can get’. It is a pleasure to welcome this new guide, one of a series on nature and other subjects produced by Appletree, with the emphasis very much on pocket size.

The book itself, however, omit any information on the author and illustrator.

There are hints on the equipment an intrepid explorer will need, when beginning to pursue this overlooked and neglected part of Ireland’s fauna, such as a butterfly net, a jam-jar within which to examine specimens temporarily detained, a lens for an enlarged view and even binoculars for spotting butterflies and dragonflies. The text is succinct with a simple calendar indicating when each species is active. The illustrations are of a high standard. The sexes for some species such as orange-tip butterfly are labelled, but not in other cases such as the blue butterfly. Since this book may serve as a child’s first introduction to insects, and the illustrations vary from life-size for white ermine to many times life-size for the green shield bug, an indication of magnification would have been useful.

Our Limestone Heritage
Edited by Joanne Pender / Review by Stephen Ward

This booklet looks at the impact of two events upon Ireland’s limestone pavements, firstly the passage of ice-sheets and subsequent weathering of the rock by solution and secondly that of man from prehistoric times up to the present day. A map shows the distribution of limestone pavement within Ireland.

In recent decades, and still continuing, limestone pavements – especially those in highly visible locations around the periphery of the Burren – are still being destroyed to gain new land for agriculture. Some is exported to Britain and mainland Europe for use in landscape gardening.

Whilst areas classified as Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive are legally protected from commercial exploitation, they are still at risk in tourism ‘honey-pots’ where cafés and mini-dolmens are built, indicating a lack of awareness of the fragility of this landscape.

This 16-page booklet concludes with a Code of Good Practice; plus contact details for the bodies which sponsored its production - the Irish Wildlife Trust, The Heritage Council, the National Parks & Wildlife Service, the Burrenbeo Trust, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

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A gift that gives back
voucher is a chance to support a local conservation charity. It can be bought over the phone on 091 638096 or in Cafébéo, Kinvara. The receiver can use it towards buying a Burrenbeo Trust membership, Burren books or cDs in Cafébéo, or in the café itself.

Need a gift?
Why not give a Burrenbeo Trust voucher and support a local charity at the same time.

Mount Vernon
Historic House Accommodation
Mount Vernon is the home of Mark and Ally (McHugh) and County Clare’s only historic house offering accommodation. A lovely Georgian home of immense charm and interest built in 1784 on the Burren coasting of County Clare. From times past Galway Bay and the surrounding area. In recent years the house has been carefully restored to provide stylish and luxurious modern accommodation with retaining its original character and charm.

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www.mountvernon.ie

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It is best suited to those with their own transport as there is no public transport to Carron. The village is the birthplace of Michael Cusack the founder of the G.A.A. (Gaelic Athletic Association).

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Burrenbeo Trust Information Centre
Main Street, Kinvara, County Galway
Information & leaflets on the Burren, the environment & what to do in the area. Burren maps, cDs & books are available to buy.

For opening hours go to www.burrenbeo.com/ email trust@burrenbeo.com or phone 091 638 096

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Tel: +353 (0)65 7074432
Fax: +353 (0)65 7074303

www.burrensmokehouse.ie
You or your business could fund a specific part of the Burrenbeo Trust programme and receive acknowledgement for your contribution. Below is a list of projects that the Burrenbeo Trust needs funding for.

**Funding Menu**

**Ecobeo Education Programme**
The Burrenbeo Trust runs a 20-week heritage course in primary schools throughout the Burren. To date, 400 Burren experts between the ages of 9-12 have graduated from the Ecobeo programme in modules of biodiversity, geology, archaeology, culture, history and land use. To continue this fantastic work you could fund a school in the Burren to partake.

€2000 per school

**Burren Conservation Volunteers**
Each month the Burrenbeo Trust coordinates the Burren Conservation Volunteers to tackle an important conservation issue in the Burren region. Each session is led by an expert and each theme relates to an issue that needs to be tackled.

€5000 per annum / €400 per month/donation of equipment

**Children’s Learning Area**
The Burrenbeo Trust Information Centre wants to develop a learning area for children to learn more about the exciting environment of the Burren through interactive games and other methods.

€2000

**Heritage Walks and Talks**
Every month the Burrenbeo Trust carries out a guided walk and a lecture in the Burren. Each event is delivered by a leading heritage expert. Last year over 650 people attended these walks and talks. It is a major way of informing the local and visiting Burren community.

€5000 per annum / €400 a month

**The Burrenbeo Trust needs your help.**
If you would like any further information on any of the above items, contact trust@burrenbeo.com or 091 638096

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**Why not Sponsor the Burrenbeo Trust?**

It is important to make our network stronger both within the Burren and beyond. Can you help us by making professional introductions to further our charity? Can you share any expertise that you may have in fundraising? Can you make a one-off donation of support from our menu of funding areas overleaf? Can you be active in the community by joining the Burren Conservation Volunteers? Can you display our information in your business, local community centre etc? Can you invite us to do a presentation at one of your businesses, committees etc? Can you feed into the Trust network by sending us news and events to the e-newsletter? Can you become a node for the Burrenbeo Trust in your area?

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**Letters to the Editor**

If you would like to send in a letter on an unusual event or opinion for the next Burren Insight, please send to trust@burrenbeo.com of post to Burrenbeo Trust, Main Street, Kinvara, Co. Galway.
New members of the Trust will receive:

- An exclusive members’ pack containing Burrenbeo CD-ROM, Burrenbeo cards and Burren factsheets valued at over €25
- Free admission to the Burrenbeo Trust’s monthly walks and talks programme featuring local farmers and some of Ireland’s leading heritage experts
- Free annual copy of BURREN INSIGHT
- Educational programmes in the Burren such as Ecobeo heritage programme in local primary schools
- Ongoing research work on future sustainable management of the Burren
- The maintenance and enhancement of the Burren’s most used website www.burrenbeo.com
- The delivery of our monthly e-newsletter and annual magazine
- The staffing and overheads of the Burrenbeo Trust office in Kinvara
- The development of strategies for the sustainable management of the Burren

The Burrenbeo Trust is a registered charity dedicated to the Burren and its people. We rely on membership fees and the work of our volunteers to carry out our extensive work programme which includes education, information provision, research, advocacy and much more. Everyone has a part to play in the Trust, so please join us!

To become a member of the Burrenbeo Trust, simply complete the membership form on the opposite page and return to the address given.

**Education**

- Graduated over 400 Burren Experts between the ages of 9-12 from the 20-week Ecobeo heritage programme
- Carried out monthly walks and talks with heritage experts which had over 650 attendees in 2009
- Led weekly Introduction to the Burren walks throughout the summer
- Launched the first ever Burren-specific magazine, Burren Insight
- Developed the Burren Conservation Volunteers to carry out monthly conservation action days
- Developed an informative CD-ROM on the Burren ‘Images of a fertile rock’
- Developed a Burren heritage education programme for adults

**Information**

- Developed the largest and most used website in the Burren, www.burrenbeo.com with over 700 pages and 750 unique visitors a day
- Sends out a monthly e-newsletter to nearly 3000 subscribers on the news and events of the Burren
- Developed multilingual Burren factsheets in four languages for distribution
- Set up the Burren’s first 100% conservation café with all proceeds going directly back into the Trust’s activities
- Created a Burren resource centre at the Burrenbeo Trust Information Centre with free educational materials on the Burren and a gallery space for exhibiting local artists’ work

**Research**

- Worked in collaboration with the Burren IFA to carry out a valuable piece of research on the role of farmers and their viewpoint in the future of the management of the Burren

**Advocacy**

- Works closely with other organisations in the Burren region such as Burren IFA, Burren Connect, Burren LIFE etc
- Organises regular walks with Clare FM prior to each monthly walk and talk
- Contributes regular articles to local newspapers; Clare People, Clare Champion, and Connaught Tribune