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*My*Inishowen  
An Iconic Experience



## Heritage Trail





## INTRODUCTION

**Inishowen is unique in terms of the outstanding beauty of its geography and in the way that the traces of its history survive to this day, conveying an evocative picture of a vibrant and unfolding past.**

We invite you to take this fascinating 14 stop historical tour of Inishowen which will take you on a journey through Inishowen's historical past. Immerse yourself in the inspiring cultural and heritage sites some of which date back to early settlements, which include ancient forts, castle's, stone circles and high crosses to name but a few.

This trail will be your starting point as you begin your exploration of the rich historical tapestry of the Inishowen peninsula. However, there are hundreds of additional heritage sites left for you to discover.

**For further reading and background information please consult various works.**

Ancient Monuments of Inishowen, North Donegal; Séan Beattie,  
Inishowen, a journey through its past revisited; Neil mc Grory,  
[www.inishowenheritage.ie](http://www.inishowenheritage.ie)  
[www.curiousireland.ie](http://www.curiousireland.ie)

**Images supplied by:** Adam Rory Photography, Mark Mc Laughlin, Carol Gilroy, Claire Withy, Emmet Mc Laughlin

Please note that some of the monuments listed are on private land, fortunately the majority of land owners do not object to visitors, however please respect their property and follow the Country Code.

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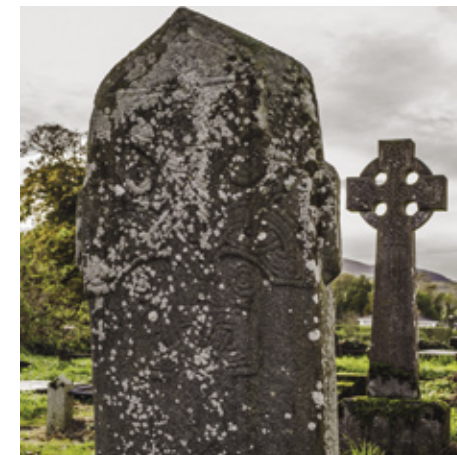
### 1 AN GRIANÁN OF AILEACH BURT

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.023834, -7.427674

**Directions:** 4km from the village of Bridgend in the direction of Letterkenny, take the signposted road at Burt Circular Chapel and continue up the road to the hill summit. This monument is well signposted

**Description:** A prehistoric enclosure built of dry stones on a hill called Grianán, that rises to a height of 808ft and commands views down Lough Foyle as well as extensive panorama covering five counties. The hill we know as an Grianán Ailigh has dominated the landscape of the Northwest for upwards of 4000 years. The Neolithic burial chamber uncovered during the restoration work in 1870's dates from 200BC.

When the sons of Niall of the Nine Hostages moved North in 395AD to conquer new lands Prince Eoghan (Owen) is said to have made the existing site of Grianán his power base, giving his name to Inishowen (Island of Eoghan) and Tyrone (land of Eoghan). The way of life of this warrior - based society was changed forever by the arrival of Christianity brought by St Patrick, when he was baptised at the well of Grianán.



### 2 ST MURA'S CROSS FAHAN

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.083139, -7.460814

**Directions:** Situated in the graveyard of the old abbey which lies alongside the main Buncrana to Derry Road in the village of Fahan. This monument is well signposted.

**Description:** Fahan is the site of the ancient Abbey of St. Mura. St. Mura was born in Donegal circ. 550 AD and died around 645 AD. His feast day is celebrated on the 12th of March. Founded in the early 7th Century, the abbey has been used for religious activities for over 1000 years.

Sited in the graveyard is St. Mura's Cross/ Slab. Local tradition states that this stone, in the shape of an ordinary gravestone, marks the saint's grave. The cross is decorated on both sides and inscribed with interlacing patterns displaying a high level of craftsmanship. Its design pre-dates the high crosses of Ireland.

Also on this site is the grave of Agnes Jones, a contemporary of Florence Nightingale who set up the first nursing training school in Liverpool.





### 3 O'DOHERTY'S KEEP BUNCRANA

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.139804, -7.462873

**Directions:** Located near the mouth of the Crana River in Swan Park.

**Description:** The O'Dohertys were the Gaelic lords of late medieval Inishowen. This small tower house on the Crana River was of secondary importance to their main strongholds at Elagh and Burt.

Of Anglo-Norman influence, the exact date of the original, two storey structure is uncertain (probably 1410-1430).

Its third storey and other modifications were added towards the end of the Nine Years War, around 1602, for the young Sir Cahir Rua O'Doherty, the last Lord of Inishowen. Following O'Doherty's failed rebellion and death in 1608 the English crown's Lord Deputy, Arthur Chichester, secured most of Inishowen for himself. In the Plantation of Ulster (c.1610) the 'Keep' and its lands were leased by him to Captain Henry Vaughan, an English army veteran. Vaughan's grandson Colonel George Vaughan built the nearby manor house, Bunrana Castle between 1716-18.



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

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.265296, -7.429022

**Directions:** 1.5km from Clonmany on the right hand side before the Waterfall at the Glenhouse.

**Description:** As well as being the perfect vantage point from which to appreciate the natural beauty of Cluain Maine (Maine's meadow), St Columba's Church, (or The Old Church, as it is known locally), is steeped in local history.

The original 7th century monastery on the site became the centre of the parish system in the middle ages. In 1610 the established Church acquired the site and, the present structure, commissioned by the Earl Bishop of Derry, was built in 1772. In the 18th century, its Rector Donal Mc Laughlin resided in a magnificent mansion, while his brother, Peadar, a poor Franciscan friar, hid out in the nearby hills. In the graveyard, the ancient families of Chichester and O'Neill, Planter and Gael lie side by side with infamous landlords, local poets and the ordinary Catholic and Protestant people of Clonmany.



### 5 CARRICKABRAGHY CASTLE ISLE OF DOAGH

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.316003, -7.372384

**Directions:** Follow the main road to the coast. At the junction at the Famine Village turn left. The Castle is clearly visible from the road.

**Description:** During the Viking era and before the O Doherty Clan took over Inishowen, Carrickabraghy was an important administrative centre, ruled by the Mc Fauls (Ó Maolfhabaháil). The Annals of the Four Masters (1636) record that they were lords of Carrickabraghy between 834 A.D and 1200 A.D., sometimes with Viking names, indicating that they had intermarried.

Carrickabraghy Castle, built in the 16th century is strategically situated on a rocky outcrop, overlooking Trawbreaga Bay. It is one of four remaining O Doherty Castles in the Inishowen peninsula and it was occupied by Phelim Breaslaigh O Doherty in 1600. It was here in 1608 that Cahir O Doherty, the last Chieftain of Inishowen, planned his ill-fated rebellion.

Following his execution, the plantation of Ulster ensued and in 1610 the original keep was enclosed by adding the circular tower and a bawn wall for protection. The Castle has been uninhabited since 1665.



### 6 DONAGH CROSS CARNDONAGH

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.249924, -7.272109

**Directions:** On the main Carndonagh - Ballyliffin road just outside the town centre along the roadside on your left. Beside the Donagh Church.

**Description:** Dating from the 7th century and has stood sentinel over Carndonagh for almost 1500 years. Antiquarians consider it to be one of the finest examples in Ireland of low-relief carved monuments remaining from ancient times. The cross, carved out of a single stone of hard, laminated sandstone has a simple shape with short arms gently curving from the shaft. Its decoration is unusual, combining bands of interlaced ribbon with simplified figures in low relief.

The central image may depict the Crucifixion scene or the Transfiguration and the body- flanking figures could either be Mary and John the two thieves or possibly the soldiers. The figures flanking the head are thought to be angels. Below are three figures wearing cowls and long robes, perhaps representing the holy women who visited Christ's tomb after the resurrection. The pillar stones on either side of the cross are covered exclusively with figures and other biblical images. The cross now stands adjacent to Donagh Church having been removed from its original site across the road.



## 7 WEE HOUSE OF MALIN MALIN HEAD

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.368169, -7.317768

**Directions:** Situated 4km from the junction at Bree, travelling from Malin on the coast road continue, straight at the junction passing by the right hand gable of the shop and continue until junction with sharp left turn. 'The Wee House of Malin' is signposted at this junction and is situated on the shore side at the bottom of a steep hill.

**Description:** The 'Wee House in Malin' refers to a cave, where folklore has it that no matter how many people enter it will hold all. It predates a monastic foundation and Holy Well. The cave and holy well were originally associated with the belief in the sanctity of water and local tradition states that the original foundation was built to exorcise evil from the area.

The "Saint" venerated was St. Muidhealach. He supposedly blessed the well (located in a cavern underneath the large rock directly in front of the ruins of the church). The traditional religious day is still celebrated here on the 15th August, with masses and a community celebration. Past celebrations included prayer, entertainment and a pilgrimage to the well. This enchanting site has a colourful history and a stone head associated with the gable of the monastery is now housed in the National Museum in Dublin.



## 8 BOCAN STONE CIRCLE CULDAFF

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.272339, -7.14823

**Directions:** 2km from Culdaff in the direction of Moville. Take the first left past the Parochial House. Stands atop of a hill in a field beside the Parochial House at Bocan.

**Description:** Bocan Stone Circle when seen from afar appears insignificant, lost behind trees and dwarfed by more modern structures, but it is only when viewed right up close that its full glory comes to life. Situated on the hill of Bocan with magnificent views from Sliabh Snaght to Trawbega Bay right to Glengad which are impressive especially if seen at sunrise or sunset.

It is suggested that stone circles were original sun temples. Many of the stones (originally numbering 30 in all) were removed during indiscriminate land development so that one has to imagine partially the circular form. The remaining stones are up to 7ft tall and it is easy to imagine sacred rites being performed, and wonder as to what type of religion was being practised. What people built this structure for is unclear but dates of its construction have been suggested as between 1500 - 3000 BC.



## 9 TEMPLE OF DEEN CULDAFF

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.269587, -7.146621

**Directions:** 2km from Culdaff in the direction of Moville and situated on top of the low hill of deen, which is on the opposite side of the road to the Bocan Stone Circle. Just a few metres past the road taken to get the Stone Circle there is dirt track to the right. This monument stands in a field to the right approximately 0.5km along this dirt track.

**Description:** A wedge-tomb, it appears to have been covered with a cairn of small boulders which means that the structure remaining would have been only the central chamber of a huge monument. Since no proper excavation has ever taken place at either Deen or Bocan it is difficult to figure out whether these monuments were constructed at the same time or by the same people.

However, it would seem from the experience elsewhere that they were constructed by the same race but possibly at distinct periods (sometime during the Bronze Age).

But what seems likely is that their proximity and records of other notable monuments in the same area would suggest that this area was important or significant in spiritual terms for the people of that day.



## 10 CLONCHA HIGH CROSS CULDAFF

**GPS Co-ordinates:** 55.275963, -7.141118

**Directions:** 3km from Culdaff, off the Culdaff -Moville road. Approximately 1.5km along this road on the left, there is easy access and it is well signposted

**Description:** Cloncha is the site of one of the most important foundations in the development of Christianity in Inishowen. It was a significant centre from the sixth century onwards, favoured by bishops as a final resting place.

The glory of Cloncha is the striking high cross in the field just beside the church, standing 4m tall. Only one other cross stands upright, another lies only partially complete, but fallen, in the same field. Inside the Church (the older church was replaced by the planter's church in the 17th century) are some beautiful carved stones.

Cloncha was the centre for conversion of a large part of Inishowen. The original monastery was much larger (some stones and crosses are now held in the National Museum). Its influence was great and the fact that Carrowmore and another foundation at Culdaff were so near, would have made this area a great seat of skill and learning.





## 11 CARROWMORE HIGH CROSS, CULDAFF

GPS Co-ordinates: 55.256384, -7.189454

**Directions:** 6km from Culdaff, just off the main Carndonagh - Moville road. This site is signposted from the main road.

**Description:** Two high crosses stand on a sloping hill at Carrowmore. They are all that now remains of the monastery believed to be Both Chonais. This foundation would pre-date Cloncha, and tradition holds that it was founded by St. Patrick himself.

The crosses are less ornate than those at Cloncha, but there is something dramatic in their form, echoing the older form of the standing stone. Only traces of the actual monastery now exist - but the crosses, slab and cross-inscribed rock suggest that a more expansive centre existed.

All of the original buildings on the site have disappeared and the actual site itself is divided in two by a modern road. Close by, a holy well again links this Christian settlement with the Celtic past.



## 12 COOLEY CROSS & SKULL HOUSE, MOVILLE

GPS Co-ordinates: 55.188839, -7.061632

**Directions:** 0.25km outside the town of Moville and well signposted road off the main Moville - Derry road. This site is well signposted.

**Description:** Cooley Graveyard has a view of Lough Foyle, the name can be spelt Cooly or Cooley and translates as 'The Quarterland of the Woodland'. The old Irish name was 'Maigh Bhile' which translate as 'The Plain of the Ancient (Sacred) Tree'

Evidence shows that this was a Druidic site in the Iron Age and two earthen ring circles were confirmed to enclose the site in 2013.

It is recorded that St. Patrick founded a church here in 442AD which developed into a Monastery by the 6th century and survived until the introduction of the parochial system in the 12th century. A parochial church remained until the 17th century, the ruins of two can be still found. Cooley has a rich collection of Wheel - Head crosses, the High Cross at the entrance and seven other examples inside the graveyard.

An additional free self- guide map of this site is available in local businesses.



## 13 NORTHBURG CASTLE GREENCASTLE

GPS Co-ordinates: 55.205278, -6.975294

**Directions:** Situated in the village of Greencastle on the Shroove Road. It can be easily viewed from the car park on the adjoining building or from the shore path walk that can be accessed from the main village car park.

**Description:** The castle was built by the Norman lord, Richard de Burgo in 1305. His grandson, William succeeded to the Earldom in 1328 but became involved in a quarrel with his cousin Walter who belonged to the Connaught branch of the family. William imprisoned his cousin in a dungeon and starved him to death.

This event is commemorated by a skeleton on the coat of arms of the City of Derry. After the Plantation, the castle was granted to Sir Arthur Chichester but subsequently fell into ruins.



## 14 MORTON GOD DOLMEN MUFF

GPS Co-ordinates: 55.089479, -7.294858

**Directions:** Situated in the middle of boggy land on the a mountain road (L1891) 0.75 km past the church at Iskaheen - a distance of approx. 3.25km from the main Derry - Moville Road (R238) at Muff village. The dolmen is visible from the road on a downward sloping lane on the left and is a distance of approx. 0.25km from the road.

**Description:** The hills behind the village of Iskaheen offer an imposing setting for the largest portal tomb (dolmen) in Inishowen - its capstone maybe weighing 30 tons.

The precise reason for its name is unclear but its purpose is not. Originally referred to as a Druid's alter (albeit incorrectly) it was thought that this type of monument was used for sacrifice or some other Druidic rite, but investigations have shown that these monuments marked burial places and probably even predated the arrival of the Druids.

This tomb is situated in bog land but it is important to note that during the period of its construction, Ireland had a different climate, it was warmer and the present day bogs were forest.

This means that this tomb would have been many feet higher and would have appeared even more imposing. There also appears to be traces of a cairn at its base.



## INISHOWEN HERITAGE TRAIL

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



# Key Sites on the Inishowen Heritage Trail



**1** AN GRIANÁN OF AILEACH  
BURT



**2** ST MURA'S CROSS  
FAHAN



**3** O'DOHERTY'S KEEP  
BUNCRANA



**4** ST COLUMBA'S CHURCH  
STRAID, CLONMANY



**5** CARRICKABRAGHY CASTLE  
ISLE OF DOAGH



**6** DONAGH CROSS  
CARNDONAGH



**7** WEE HOUSE OF MALIN  
MALIN HEAD



**8** BOCAN STONE CIRCLE  
CULDAFF



**9** TEMPLE OF DEEN  
CULDAFF



**10** CLONCHA HIGH CROSS  
CULDAFF



**11** CARROWMORE HIGH  
CROSS, CULDAFF



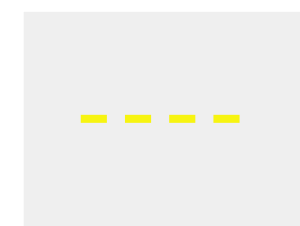
**12** COOLEY CROSS  
MOVILLE



**13** NORTHBURG CASTLE  
GREENCASTLE



**14** MORTON GOD DOLMEN  
MUFF



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