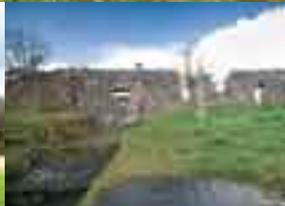


Explore - Discover - Enjoy

North Sperrins Heritage Trail



North Sperrins
Heritage Trail



North Sperrins
Heritage Trail



North Sperrins
Heritage Trail

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North Sperrins Heritage Trail

Welcome



Explore—Discover—Enjoy

Welcome to the North Sperrins Heritage Trail. The Sperrins area has a rich collection of archaeological sites and a strong cultural heritage, tales of myths and legends, charms, cures and superstitions.

This booklet is a guide to the North Sperrins Heritage Trail. It is a guide to the trail and a companion for visitors that can act as an introduction to the culture and heritage of the North Sperrins region.

Acknowledgements:

This trail is a project of Feeny Community Association and Limavady Borough Council.

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Carnanbane Court Tomb



MONUMENT TYPE
Megalithic tomb

PERIOD
Neolithic

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C671 058

TOWNLAND
Carnanbane

ACCESS
From lay-by



The trail has been devised as a driving trail. It closely follows a section of the North Sperrins Scenic Drive and provides easy access to a number of interesting field monuments and early Christian sites.

The route is relaxed and allows visitors the option of completing the entire trail in one journey or with planned excursions from a central base. You may start your trail at any point and plan your route to suit your own itinerary.

The trail has been developed to showcase the range of field monuments found across the dramatic North Sperrins landscape.

This grave is a court tomb or horned cairn, which dates to the early Neolithic period, c3500BC. Court tombs are so called because they incorporate in their structure a ritual roofless court. The area of this court is usually marked by a wall constructed of upright stones. The chambers of court tombs would appear to have been about 2m in height. The cairn covered the chamber and filled the area between the kerbs, the front of the chamber and the court. Court tombs were generally built with their entrances facing east. Of the three hundred and ninety or so known court tombs in Ireland these occur almost exclusively in the northern half of the island!

This particular court tomb is located in the townland of Carnanbane, which means 'little white cairn'. The tomb is the remains of a long two chambered grave, the cairn is much disturbed.

The grave has two portal stones and a curving façade at the north end. The portal stones stand 1.2m high. The entrance is 55cm wide. The horns are of small stones, 2.7m long and the other 2.85m. the first chamber is 3.6m long and 2.4m broad, separated from the second chamber by jamb stones 1.2m high, set eccentrically. The second chamber is 3m long and 2.1m broad. The side walls are formed of long stones on their sides. Some stones have been removed including the end of the chamber. Only one capstone remains and it has fallen into the first chamber. The length of the chambers including the horns is 7.05m. A circle of standing stones 12m in diameter is believed to have surrounded the cists.

Court tombs are generally situated on or near fertile ground and Neolithic settlements probably existed in the vicinity of these tombs.

Aughlish Stone Circles



MONUMENT TYPE

Stone circle and alignments

PERIOD

Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age

OS MAP

Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE

C662 043

TOWNLAND

Aughlish

ACCESS

Limited parking along hedgerow



An excellent example of late Neolithic stone circles and alignments. The site contains no less than five stone circles and five alignments. Stone circles consist essentially of a circle of stones enclosing an open area. Many of these stone circles have alignments associated with them, these are usually placed tangentially to the circle. Not all the stones are uniform in height and there is a tendency to have one or more taller stones, which may be aligned with the rising or setting sun. Stone circles are found in upland regions and the alignments that accompany them tend to be in areas commanding a wide view and are usually run in a northwest-southeast direction.

The Aughlish Stone Circles complex is situated on ground sloping gradually down from north to south. The most southerly circle is the most prominent being the most complete. It is 12.6m in diameter and consists of a total of 42 stones. The perimeter is defined by a continuous line of low set stones on average 35cm high. At the south a tall pillar stone 1.5m high is set within the perimeter, while at the north a large stone of 1.4m height is set just outside the line of the perimeter. Within the interior of the circle are placed a number of small stones some of which seem to represent an internal circle. Along the eastern edge of the circle a single row alignment of five stones runs in a north-northwest direction. 25m northwest of the main circle is the partial remains of a smaller circle, which has been bisected from north to south by a stonewall townland boundary.

The wall may have indeed been built using stones from this complex as the eastern half of the circle does not survive. Running tangential to the western edge of this circle in a north-south direction is a single alignment of small stones. 15m west of this second circle are the remains of two small circles with a double alignment running between them. This double alignment is 18m long and runs in a northwest-southeast direction. 10m northwest of these is the fifth circle complex. This is oval shaped with the perimeter well defined except at the east where some stones have been removed. The perimeter survives as nineteen stones averaging 20cm in height. Running in a north-south direction to the western arc of this circle is a double alignment.

The large row at the east consists of nine stones averaging 50cm in height. The largest stone stands 1metre in height and marks the southern end of the alignment. The small parallel row to the west is marked by five low stones averaging 15cm in height.

This double row alignment is perhaps the most significant in the whole complex as it points directly at a natural break in the hilly horizon – called Barnes from the Irish meaning 'gap'.

The use of these stones has frequently been discussed and it does appear that they were used as observatories or as centres for sun worship. In Celtic times the stone circles were used by the Druids for their own ritual practices.

King's Fort



MONUMENT TYPE
Rath

PERIOD
Unknown

OS MAP
Sheet 8

GRID REFERENCE
C744 167

TOWNLAND
Kilhoyle

ACCESS
Limited parking
on Gortnarney Road

Tandragee Fort



MONUMENT TYPE
Rath

PERIOD
Unknown

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C634 050

TOWNLAND
Drumcovitt

ACCESS
Through Field

Very little is known about the King's Fort. The Fort is a substantial earthen structure overlooking the hamlet of Drumsurn. It is nestled just below the summit of Donald's Hill commanding fine views of the Sperrins. There is evidence that the rath was once surrounded by a protective moat. The earthen enclosure rises steeply in places and may have been planted with gorse, blackthorn and other impenetrable scrub species.

The site is very defensive and prominent, suggesting that it was inhabited by important people during the period of history when Ireland was a warrior-led civilisation. Rathes were usually linked to other rathes and settlements of the same tribe. These were built in turbulent times and often, as is the case here at King's Fort, had moats and souterrains to allow protection and escape from raiders.

According to local tradition the stone that can be seen from the fort is known as the

witches stone. Legend has it that a local giant, having finally grown tired of being taunted by the witch, lifted this stone and threw it at her burying her underneath it. Benbradagh Mountain stands dominating the landscape from King's Fort, it is 465m high. The mountain is an important geological feature. It is mainly basalt but contains some limestone and significantly it has a rare vein of chalk and Hibernian greensand. The western face is mostly perpendicular and naked rock so cultivation is impossible. The other sides are covered in deep bog. The name Benbradagh has been translated from Benn Bradrudh meaning 'cliff or hill of the robbers' and may point to the area's history of highwaymen and outlaws. However, an alternative name has been suggested; that of Ben Braddan meaning 'rock of the salmon', which would seem quite possible as the River Roe is a salmon river and the salmon appears on the Coat of Arms of the O'Cahan family.

A fine example of a rath, the remains of these field monuments can be seen in their thousands scattered across the Irish countryside.

The rath known as Tandragee Fort measures 40m north to south and 30m east to west. At the northeast the bank is earthen and stands at a height of 1.9m. At the north the bank stands at a height of 1.6m with a width of 1.9m. Some stones are placed on certain sections of the bank reminiscent of a cashel, although it is possible that they may have been placed on the bank at various times in the past. The entrance is at the southeast and measures 2m in width and is well defined with stone blocks.

It is impossible to date these ring forts as they were in use in Ireland from the Neolithic right up to Celtic times.

There is evidence, however, that the Tandragee Fort is pre-Christian dating to the later Bronze Age.

The name has been translated as fort of the king and like King's Fort in Drumsurn provides an indication of the importance of these rathes. Given the defensive and prominent locations of these sites they were believed to be inhabited by kings or important people.

The fort is situated on high ground in a defensive position, overlooking the Altcatthen Water, which has reminders of Ireland's linen industry in the form of flax mills situated on the stream. Flax cultivation spread with the development of the linen industry during the eighteenth century and was increasingly concentrated in Ulster. Hasson's Mill on the Altcatthen Glen is very well preserved.

Gortnamoyagh Inauguration Stone



MONUMENT TYPE
Ceremonial Stone

PERIOD
Unknown

OS MAP
Sheet 8

GRID REFERENCE
C805 149

TOWNLAND
Gortnamoyagh

ACCESS
Short walk through
Gortnamoyagh Forest



Errigal Old Church



MONUMENT TYPE
Ecclesiastical Site

PERIOD
Med/Late Christian

OS MAP
Sheet 8

GRID REFERENCE
C811 149

TOWNLAND
Ballintemple

ACCESS
Access from lay-by



This is an unusual ancient monument, but not unique as there are other inauguration stones to be found throughout Ireland. It is known locally as the Saint's Tracks after Saint Adaman or Shane's Leap and the Giant's footsteps.

The actual stone consists of two 'footprints' (roughly size 8 and some small circular hollows forming a cruciform carved on a basalt outcrop).

These stones were used during inauguration ceremonies. It is believed that this stone was used up until the 16th Century. The local chieftain or Gaelic ruler stood in the footprints with his spear resting in one of the circular hollows as part of his investiture ceremony, symbolising his right to follow in the foot steps of his forefathers.

Other local stories state that the footprints on the stone were caused by Saint Adamnan when he used the stone as a place to pray.

It is more likely that the stone markings date from the Irish Iron Age and have since been given the Christian significance.

Errigal Old Church was founded by St Adamnan in the mid 7th Century. Adamnan (c625-705) was Abbot of Iona after St Colmcille (Columba) and wrote the Saints biography. It is believed that this site was used prior to the church being built as place of worship by pagans during the Iron Age.

Legend has it that St Adamnan wanted to build his church in the townland of Lisnacreaghog. However, during construction the walls kept falling in. While praying for guidance to his problem St Adamnan fell asleep and was awakened by an eagle, which flew off with his prayer book. The eagle dropped the book on the current site leaving St Adamnan with the inspiration to build there.

The souterrain was excavated in 1933 by Messer's A Mct. May and DC Cooper.

They found that the structure is roughly cruciform, 50ft long by 24ft wide, with six chambers and two passageways known as creeps (or crawls) approximately 8ft below ground level. The entire structure has been dug out of basalt. The entrances are very narrow, forcing intruders to crawl along on their bellies thus leaving them vulnerable to attack. Excavation revealed evidence that the chambers were probably last used in 1640s when part of a shoe form that period was found. Other items included a blade sharpening tool and a wooded club. These hint at its probable use as a refuge in time of danger.

According to tradition the Church was taken over by the English during the Plantation of Ulster and was destroyed in the rebellion of 1641.

(Please note that there is no public access to the souterrain).

Banagher Old Church



MONUMENT TYPE
Ecclesiastical Site

PERIOD
Late 11th Early
12th Century

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C676 066

TOWNLAND
Maghermore

ACCESS
Car park and
lay-by available

The Residence

Just outside the graveyard gate is the lower part of a small rectangular building, known from 19th Century views to have been a 3-storey tower with narrow windows and a door at first level. Traditionally known as the residence of the Abbey, it is believed to be the place from where St Muireach appeared to the people or, more prosaically, a dwelling. The most likely explanation is that this was a strong house, secure accommodation for the rector and church possessions, but there is no clear evidence for its date.



The Church

The earliest part is the nave, which originally stood alone without a chancel. It is built of sandstone. The door arch probably dates from the first half of the 12th Century, which must be the date of the whole nave. There are only two close parallels to the door, at Maghera only 12 miles away and at Aghowle in Co. Wicklow.

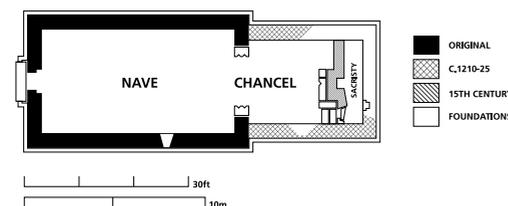
The chancel had three windows to the east, north and south. The Banagher window is datable from its detail to 1210-1225.

Continued...



Many early churches were prominently sited on hilltops and Banagher stands on a glacial hill, partly now quarried for sand and gravel. Banagher's recorded history begins violently with an annal entry in 1112: the king of Ciannacht was killed by his own kinsmen in the centre of the cemetery of Bennchar. We do not know whether the church was recently founded then or long established. Local tradition sees it as one of St Patrick's foundations in the area of the River Faughan, and the mason who carved the inscription, 'this church was built in ye year of God 474' on the west door in 1739 clearly thought it was founded by St Patrick. Local tradition also ascribes its foundation to St Muireach O'Heany, but he does not appear in any early source and even the date of his festival is not recorded.

In the absence of other evidence it is probably best to regard Banagher as a late 11th or early 12th Century foundation. Traditionally St Muireach was led to the site by a stag from another church. Banagher was chosen as one of Archbishop Colton's bases during his visitation of the Derry diocese. He is recorded as sitting before the high altar hearing cases there, and from Banagher he travelled to Dungiven to reconsecrate the cemetery at the Priory. It is uncertain exactly when the church went out of use, but it was ruined by 1622, when a survey of churches was made, to re-emerge as a subject of antiquarian interest in the 19th Century, when Bishop Reeves claimed it as the most interesting of all ecclesiastical ruins which remain in the diocese. The ruin passed into state care from the church Temporalities Commissioners in 1880 and during the early 1970s the church was excavated and underwent a full conservation programme.



Termon Crosses

In and around the graveyard are finely carved gravestones and slabs. A small rough cross is situated east of the church and a second across the road to the northwest on the townland boundary. Traditionally these are the remaining two of five, which once marked the edge of termon land, which marked the boundary of the church land. This practice of erecting stone crosses to mark ecclesiastical boundaries has a long history with provision being made for it in seventh century legislation. It is likely that the Banagher Crosses performed this function, but as they are very simple in design they are not easily dateable.



Mortuary House

Southeast of the church is a small structure which must contain or cover the most illustrious of Banagher's burials. Traditionally it is the final resting place of St Muireach O'Heany. It is of the same date as the chancel and resembles a miniature church or house. The gable wall has a framed panel depicting an ecclesiastic with a crosier and hand raised in blessing (this has been slightly damaged). A saint's relics were a valuable asset to a church, attracting pilgrims and revenue and the importance of the Banagher relics is perpetuated in the still living tradition of 'Banagher Sand'. It has always been held to bring good luck to members of the O'Heany family and is believed to hold especially true for luck in sporting events.

The Banagher House has been described as being the most sophisticated of a small group of mortuary houses, extending from Down to Donegal. The nearest other example appears at Bovevagh Old Church but is slightly more ruined than that at Banagher.



Dungiven Priory



MONUMENT TYPE
Ecclesiastical Site

PERIOD
Early Christian–medieval
–post medieval

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C692 083

TOWNLAND
Dungiven

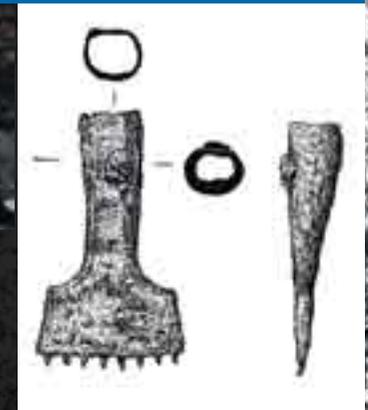
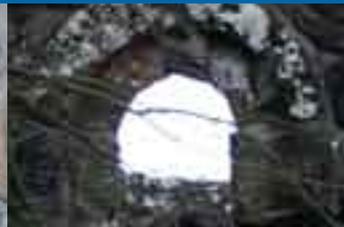
ACCESS
Pedestrian access
from road

The church is built on a naturally strong promontory, high above the River Roe. Early churches were often close to rivers and important routes, and this one is no exception. This strong site was chosen in the medieval and Plantation periods for a fortified dwelling, but the modern town grew up from the early 18th Century further to the northwest.

It seems certain that there was a pre-Norman monastery here, but its history is very obscure. A saint called Nechtán, from Alba in Scotland, is commemorated on 8th January in a calendar of saints written in about 800, and a later note adds that he was at Dungiven.

This may be the Nechtán who died in 679, according to the Annals of Ulster. Although there are strong traditional associations with St Patrick, these are not attested in early sources. From the 12th Century onwards a priory of Augustinian Canon stood here, but its beginnings are also surrounded by uncertainty. It was traditionally founded by the O'Cahan family in 1100, but there is no evidence for Augustinians in Ireland as early as that, and the O'Cahans did not control the area until later in the 12th century.

Foundation in the mid or later 12th Century is much more likely, and if there was indeed a church here in 1100 it must have belonged to the old pre-Norman monastery.



Dungiven Priory

The Augustinians were Regular Canons, living a communal life and following a rule based on St Augustine's teaching. Their regime was less strict and their routine more flexible than the orders of monks, and they were active in pastoral work, preaching, teaching and caring for the sick and needy.

The order was, like the Cistercians, introduced during the reforming movement of the 12th Century and it became the most numerous in Ireland. Augustinian foundations were often at or near pre-Norman monasteries, and this seems to have been the case at Dungiven.

In 1397 Archbishop Colton of Armagh visited Dungiven, at the request of the Prior and Canons, to reconsecrate the church and cemetery, which had been polluted by bloodshed (we do not know exactly what happened).

Monastic life ended in the second half of the 16th Century and in the late 16th Century the site was held by the O'Cahans as a military stronghold against the English. In 1602 an English garrison was installed and by 1611 Sir Edward Doddington had built an English-style house next to the church, which was refurbished for Protestant worship. The buildings formed a fortified enclosure or bawn. Doddington remained as company agent when Dungiven was granted to the Skinners Company in 1613, but he died in 1618. His widow continued to live in the house, surviving its brief capture in 1641. Excavation has shown that the house became derelict and burned down in the later 17th Century. Parish worship moved to a new church in the town in 1711, but the old graveyard continued in use gradually burying the remains of the bawn and house. The house was uncovered by excavations in 1982-3.

Dungiven, *dun-gaimbean*

Fort of the Hide or Skins

Dungiven a plantation town built by the Skinners' Company of London, is situated at the northern approach to the Glenshane Pass where the rivers Roe, Owenrigh and Owenbeg meet. The whole area is full of reminders of ancient Irish history.

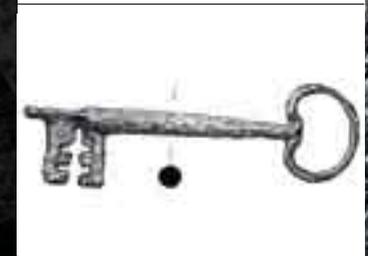
The Nave

The earliest part of the standing remains is the Nave, which originally stood alone, without a chancel. The walls are built of carefully dressed sandstone blocks. One original round-headed window in the south wall is marked externally by a boldly projecting frame, closely paralleled at nearby Banagher Old Church. Excavation suggests that the nave was once shorter: the line of an earlier west wall has been found by excavation. The nave probably dates from the earlier 12th Century and must be pre-Augustinian.

The Tower

At some time in the later Middle Ages a four-storey tower was added to the west end of the nave, but only its base remains. It may have been built for church use, but by the early 17th Century it was regarded as the 'old castle' of the O'Cahans, suggesting that it served as a tower-house. The tower was repaired and occupied by Doddington and excavation has revealed fragments of a fine plaster ceiling, which once embellished it.

Continued...



Cooley-na-Gall O'Cahan's Tomb



20

The most striking feature of the chancel is the magnificent tomb in the south wall. Though heavily restored this is still the grandest tomb of its kind in the north. An armed figure in a quilted garment lies under a splendid canopy of openwork flamboyant tracery. On the front of the tomb chest stand six small figures, similarly dressed with arms at the ready. It is more usual for saints or other religious subjects to occupy this position on a tomb, but these figures are clearly 'gallowglasses', Scottish mercenary warriors, whom their lord was keeping close to him in death as in life.

This is traditionally the tomb of Cooley-na-Gall O'Cahan who died in 1385, but the style and details suggest the late 15th Century. The Scottish connection may go further than the use of gallowglasses: the tomb figures are so close in style to figures on late medieval tomb slabs in the West Highlands that the Dungiven tomb can reasonably be seen as the work of a stone carver trained in a western Scottish tradition.

The Chancel

The Chancel was added in the 13th century. The nave's east wall was pierced with an arch, and although much altered, its line can be seen south (right) of the present opening. Though ruined the chancel is spacious and still impressive. A blocked door in the south wall once led to a room south of the chancel, perhaps a sacristy for books, vessels and vestments. The chancel would have been furnished with an altar, wooden stalls for the choir and probably a screen to divide the canons from the lay worshipers in the nave. Despite its ruined state the chancel remains the most impressive and accomplished work of its period in mid-Ulster, an interesting reflection on craftsmanship and patronage in this area in the Middle Ages.

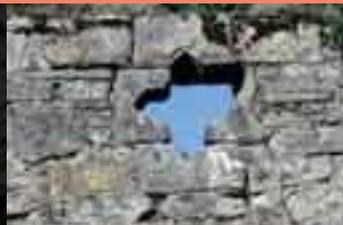
21

The Plantation Buildings

The complex of Doddington's buildings is only partly uncovered. The bawn was rectangular, with the church and tower forming its north side. On the west stood Doddington's house, a 2½ storey building and excavation has uncovered the two ground floor rooms, separated by a large chimney base which must have contained two fireplaces. Traces of burned wooden joists, and floor boards were found, as well as roofing tiles and slates, hinges, keys and locks, window glass and lead, decorated floor and wall tiles and small personal items. A stone floored scullery led to a rear cobbled area and behind the house was a kitchen garden.



Dungiven Castle



MONUMENT TYPE
Castle and fortification walls (traces)

PERIOD
Post medieval and 19th Century

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C693 090

TOWNLAND
Dungiven

ACCESS
Walls can be viewed from car park

The impressive Tudor, gothic style castle was built between 1836 and 1839 by Robert Ogilby. The castle was built on the site of an earlier castle known as Lady Cooke's castle. Lady Cooke was the widow of Sir Edward Doddington, chief tenant of the Skinner's Company and the man who built the fortified bawn on the site of Dungiven Priory. Doddington died in 1618 and Lady Cooke built a new castle or Bawn closer to the town of Dungiven to replace the earlier one on the priory site that was abandoned towards the end of the 17th Century. It was the ruins of Lady Cooke's Castle, which Robert Ogilby restored in the 1830s.

Part of the original bawn walls remain intact and are a scheduled monument today. They can be seen from the car park. The castle of today has been restored on a number of occasions. It has had uses from a private residence, to GI accommodation during the Second World War. In the 1950s and 60s it was a popular dance hall before falling into disrepair. It was restored in 2000 and used as hostel accommodation and a tourist information centre. The castle has once again been refurbished and has recently reopened as guest accommodation and a restaurant.

Traditionally the castle is located on the site of the ancestral home of the O'Cahan Clan who ruled in the Dungiven area from the 12th to 17th Century. The bawn or fortified dwelling was built here in the early 17th Century, although it was mostly destroyed by fire.

Ballydonegan Sweathouse



MONUMENT TYPE
Sweathouse

PERIOD
Unknown

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C627 023

TOWNLAND
Ballydonegan

ACCESS
Through farmyard

The sweathouse was used to cure fevers and pains and was used as late as the end of the last century. Sweathouses are notoriously difficult to date as there is evidence that they were in use in Ireland in the 7th Century. It is likely that the Ballydonegan sweathouse dates from the 18th or 19th Century although it is impossible to say for sure. The sweathouse is located in the townland of Ballydonegan on the east side of the Clougherna Burn at the foot of Mullaghash Mountain. Ballydonegan has been defined as the townland of the O'Donegans, however, it is unlikely that the area was ever owned by an O'Donegan. And it may be more likely that the name was derived from Donnchuan or Donchadh, the origin of the name Donaghy.

The sweathouse itself is in reasonable preservation. The entrance is at ground level and is becoming blocked up with earth. The interior is 8ft by 3ft and 6ft high.

Four stone flags form the roof, however, one of these has begun to slip. There is a fireplace of loose stones at the back with a stone beam situated above it and a small exit for smoke at the back. The house is built against the rising ground above the stream. Evidence of damming the stream to create a plunge pool still exists in the form of a number of large boulders.

It is believed that the sweathouse was used like a Turkish bath or sauna. A fire was lit inside until the walls were hot. Rushes were spread over the floor and then water was thrown over them to produce steam. The patients then sat inside with the entrance sealed. After remaining in the steam for some time the patient then bathed in the stream.

Another example of a sweathouse exists at Tirkane on the slopes of Carntogher Mountain near Maghera.

Drumcovitt House



MONUMENT TYPE
Listed Building

PERIOD
18th Century

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C639 058

TOWNLAND
Drumcovitt

ACCESS
Private, can be viewed
from lay-by



Drumcovitt House is a very impressive Plantation House. A listed Georgian house built in 1796 onto an existing 100-year old four-storey farmhouse on lands owned by the Fishmongers' Company of London.

The Fishmongers were granted lands mainly at Ballykelly but also lands to the south including those around Feeny.

The land agents and representatives of the Fishmongers were often guest at the house being warmly welcomed and entertained by the family.

The Anglican Bishop of Derry, the Fourth Earl of Bristol, Frederick Hervey of Musseden Temple fame, was a frequent guest at Drumcovitt when travelling between his Bishopric in Derry and Downhill Estate.

According to tradition the Bishop enjoyed the fine views from the house, but fearing the Parish Church was becoming obscured from view, he paid for a tower and

octagonal spire to be built onto the 18th Century church. (see Places of Worship).

The farm at Drumcovitt covers an area of approximately 240 acres containing arable, grazing crops, copses, a wooded glen and a small area of bog containing examples of semi-endangered plants. The mature beech trees surrounding the estate were planted in the 1800s to celebrate the victory of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

The farm buildings and stables were converted during the Second World War and used to house American troops who manned the anti-aircraft guns in the surrounding hills.

The name Drumcovitt stems from the Irish druim coimead meaning 'ridge of the watching' and it is believed to describe the place for watching along the main road that was frequently used by highwaymen in the 17th Century.

Tannyranny Church Ruins



MONUMENT TYPE
Ecclesiastical Site

PERIOD
Penal Period

OS MAP
Sheet 8

GRID REFERENCE
C725 125

TOWNLAND
Gortgarn

ACCESS
Car parking available
at Galvin school site
approximately 1km from
road up a track

The ruins of this small church are thought to date to the 18th Century. It was built of local mountain stone and probably had a low thatched roof. Its modest structure and remote location, hidden by trees from the road, suggest it was built during the Penal Period (1691-1801) - when it was illegal to publicly celebrate or teach the Catholic faith. The name Tannyranny does not refer to the townland, but only to the small green space in which the church ruins stand. It comes from the Irish words tamnach, meaning 'good pasture ground surrounded by rough land', and rannai, meaning 'ridge on a slope'.

There were at least three successive churches in Gortgarn Townland. The earliest was this one high up on the hill; its successor was on the roadside below and is now an abandoned dwelling place; and the third was built in the 1840s, later used as a school and recently restored as Gelvin

Community Centre, where the remains of the graveyard can still be seen.

The earliest record of the church is taken by Thomas Fagan for the Ordnance Survey of Dungiven Parish in 1835:

'There stand in the townland of Gortgarn and grazing of Edward McElvare and company, on the west of Benbradagh, the ruins of a very ancient Roman Catholic Chapel. It stood 38ft in length from out to out and 20ft in breadth from out to out... the walls was built with stone and lime of a very good quality and stand 2ft in thickness...it was surrounded by the ruins of a native wood. There is still remains a thicket of various kinds of stumps of trees and bushes on the premises. The site is altogether beautiful.'

The site was still used as a place of worship by local parishioners until the 1930s, but unfortunately the mass rock that stood here can no longer be seen.

Feeny, *fiodhnach*, The Woody Place

Feeny is a small, quiet village located in the parish of Banagher, in the Sperrins Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is a largely rural area and as a result farming is the predominant industry.

Near to the village is the General's Bridge spanning the Owenbeg River. It is traditionally the site of a famous ambush by the highwayman or outlaw Shane Crossagh, who in the early 18th Century tricked the English officer, General Napier.

Crossagh learnt that the General and a small troop of soldiers would be transporting some gold to the garrison in Derry. Under the cover of darkness and through the cunning use of broom handles and old sacks to look like armed men, Crossagh successfully held up the General and made off with the gold.

There are many tales as to how the local hero finally met his end but it is widely believed that he is buried in the graveyard of Banagher Old Church near the tomb of Saint Muireach O'Heany.

The Community Hall

Built by the Church of Ireland in 1861, this building was originally used as a church for services and ceremonies. The church has since been converted into a hall and an office and is in the care of the Limavady Borough Council. The hall is the centre for a range of community activities and events and Feeny Community Association is currently based in the office.



Saint Mary's Banagher GAC



MONUMENT TYPE
Sports Ground

PERIOD
Modern

OS MAP
Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE
C632 054

TOWNLAND
Drumcovitt

ACCESS
Pedestrian entrance
off Main Street

Gaelic games are an integral part of Ireland's national heritage and a great source of local pride. Gaelic football, hurling and camogie have been described as a physical celebration of ancient traditions and culture.

Whilst Gaelic Football is an old sport, hurling is ancient. Irish mythology is replete with tales of heroes such as CuChulainn, who were expert hurlers. Such myths point to a hurling history some 2,000 years old and the sport's prominent place in Irish traditions.

Through his passion for Gaelic culture, the Reverend Father Patrick McNally initiated a revival of Gaelic football in the Parish with the founding of Saint Mary's Banagher Gaelic Athletic Club (GAC) in 1965. The club name came from an amalgamation of the two previous clubs in the parish, Saint Mary's Park and Saint Joseph's Banagher.

To inspire success the club adopted the maroon colours of the All Ireland Champions at the time, Galway.

The club crest depicts the stag that led Saint Muireach to the site where he founded Banagher Church and the mythical serpent that was banished by Saint Muireach, or indeed Saint Patrick himself, to log-na-peiste, a deep pool in Banagher Glen.

Hurling sticks or hurls are traditionally made from ash wood, which is a native tree species to Ireland and abundant throughout the island. These are similar to hockey sticks with flatter wider bases. Hurling is one of the fastest ball sports in the world.

A tough, physical game makes it very exciting to watch.

Camogie is the female version of the game of hurling.

Places of Worship



28

29

Banagher Catholic Church (Saint Joseph's)

The penal laws in Ireland (1695-1740) prohibited the practice of the Catholic religion. Mass however, was still celebrated in secret at natural features known as Mass Rocks. At the end of the Penal times, very simple thatched structures were built as more permanent places to worship and became known as Mass Houses.

Saint. Joseph's Church was built between 1888 and 1889 to replace the mass house at Fincarn. The new church was described at the time as '*a plain, substantial building of rectangular form, in gothic style*'. A winter storm in 1888 blew the timbers off the roof and delayed the opening until the following year. The church was dedicated and officially opened on the 13th October 1889.

Banagher Presbyterian Church

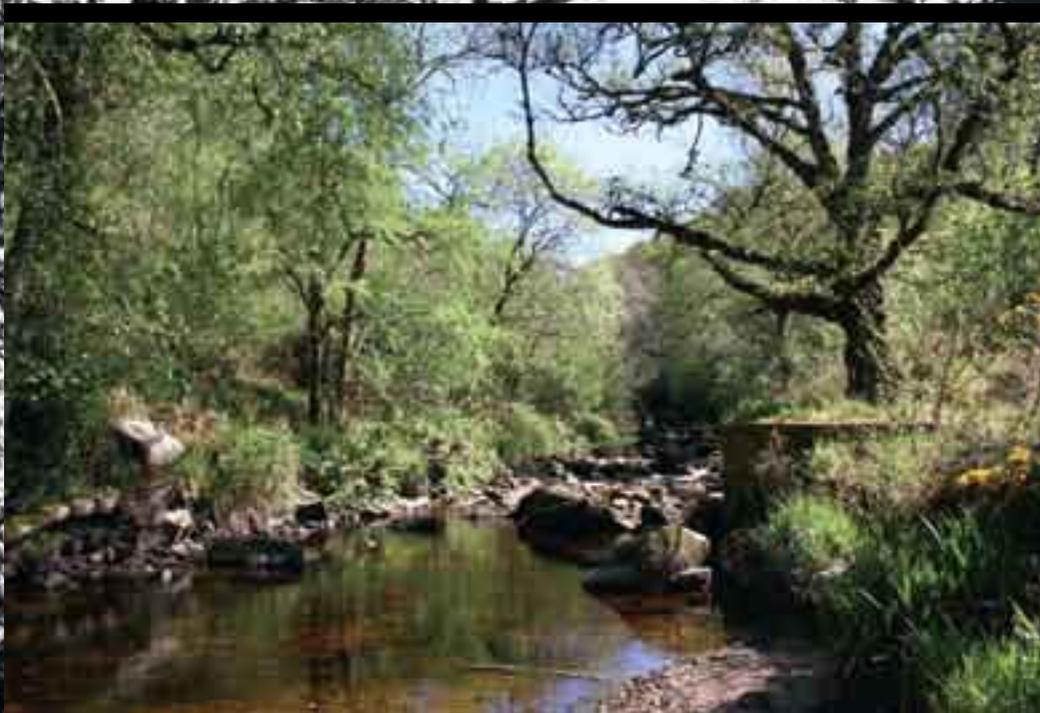
In 1810 a survey of the Estates on behalf of the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers found that the churches both here and at Ballykelly to be in a '*wretched state of repair...*'

The Court of the Fishmongers' Company decided to rebuild the Meeting House at Ballyhanedin approximately one mile westward from Feeny.

It was described as a handsome, substantial building in the classical Greek style with dressings of sandstone quarried in Dungiven. The Church was built over three summers and completed in 1834.

Banagher Church of Ireland

Banagher Church of Ireland dedicated to Saint Moresius was built around 1775 and is an impressive piece of ecclesiastical architecture. It is located in the townland of Rallagh, approximately two miles from Feeny in the direction of Dungiven. The spectacular spire was commissioned by the Bishop of Derry, Frederick Hervey, and was built in 1782. The interior of the church has a beautiful altar and stained glass window.



Banagher Glen

Near the village of Feeny lies Banagher Glen, designated a national nature reserve. The Glen is the largest surviving intact block of semi-natural woodland in Northern Ireland and contains oak, rowan, hazel, hawthorn and holly. Ferns and mosses thrive in the shady parts and in spring the glen floor is carpeted with wild flowers; bluebells, wood anemone and sorrel. Wildlife includes stoats, squirrels, silver-washed fritillary butterflies and common hawker dragonflies, and birds of prey such as buzzards and sparrow hawks.



MONUMENT TYPE

Reservoir Dam

PERIOD

1920-1939

OS MAP

Sheet 7

GRID REFERENCE

C696 042

TOWNLAND

Teeavan

ACCESS

Pedestrian access from car park, approximately 3km to Dam. The walk is very steep in places along surfaced access road.

The Altnaheglish Reservoir

The Altnaheglish Reservoir supplying the surrounding district and the city of Derry was built between 1920 and 1939 at the upper end of Banagher Glen. It is of mass concrete construction with a curved dam 42m in height from the foundations, making it the highest dam in Northern Ireland and the 8th highest in Great Britain. Repairs carried out in the 1950s have masked the original stepped appearance, but the detail is still preserved beneath. The dam impounds some 2270 million litres of water and supplies approximately 20 million litres per day.

CAR PARKING Limited car parking at bottom of Glen. Main car park open from 9am-9pm: Weekends June, Daily July & August, Weekends September.

The filter house located in Banagher Glen was built in 1937 and went out of use following the building of the new filter buildings at Caugh Hill.



References

The information contained in this leaflet was provided from various sources principally from the work completed by the Banagher History Group and presented in the booklet *Historic Monuments and Sites of Banagher*.

Dungiven Priory and Bawn Guide Card by N.F. Brannon and Ann Hamlin, published by Historic Monuments and Building Branch DoE, 1986.

Banagher and Bovevagh Churches Guide Card by Ann Hamlin, published by historic Monuments and Buildings Branch DoE 1983.

The Parish of Banagher, 1996
Fr Philip Donnelly.

Go Prepared

Please note that visits to many of these sites and features will require an amount of walking across countryside with no formal paths. Suitable footwear and outdoor clothing for changeable weather conditions is recommended.

Accommodation

An up-to date accommodation guide is available from the local tourist information centre. It lists campsites, hostels, B&Bs, guesthouses and hotel accommodation near the trail.

Acknowledgements

The sites have been made accessible through the co-operation and kind permission of the landowners.

Please respect the fact that these sites are within a working landscape and subscribe to the principles of Leave No Trace.

Most of these sites are on land that is used for grazing sheep and cattle, so **DO NOT BRING DOGS** (even on a lead).

www.leavenotraceireland.org

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors



Finding an Archaeological Object

Under Article 41 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995, it is illegal to use a metal detector or deliberately dig for archaeological remains or artefacts at any of these scheduled monuments unless licensed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Occasionally archaeological objects and items of interest are discovered; however, by law these need to be reported to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Maps

Maps covering the North Sperrins region are Sheets 7 and 8 of the *Ordnance Survey Discoverer Series* (1:50,000 scale) and *Ordnance Survey Sperrins Activity Map* (1:100,000 and 1:25,000 scales).

Maps are available directly from OSNI Map shop, Colby House, Stranmillis, Belfast (www.osni.gov.uk) or at Tourist Information Centres and good bookshops.

For further information on the North Sperrins Heritage Trail visit:
www.sperrinsheritage.com

For further information on the Sperrins Area visit:
www.sperrinstourism.com

For tourist information contact:
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7 Connell Street
Limavady, BT49 0HA

Telephone: 028 7776 0307
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Email: tourism@limavady.gov.uk
Website: www.limavady.gov.uk

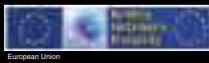
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Website limavady.gov.uk

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THE SPERRINS AREA VISIT**

sperrinstourism.com

sperrinsheritage.com