

# Care of Earthen Monuments

A FARMING RATHCROGHAN MODEL



**Farming  
Rathcroghan**



Funded by  
**An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council**



Comhairle Com  
Bailtí Comhairle  
Roscommon  
County Council



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## FARMING RATHCROGHAN INNOVATIONS

- ① SCRATCHING POST
- ② VERNACULAR GATE
- ③ DRY STONE WALLING
- ④ RESTING FRAME
- ⑤ HEDGE-LAYING
- ⑥ NATIVE FLORA

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# Preamble

The Farming Rathcroghan project is delighted to build on direct learnings achieved through the *Farming Rathcroghan European Innovation Partnership (EIP)* Project 2019-2023. This brings a bespoke guidance booklet to farming families and communities throughout Ireland to help manage and care for earthen archaeological monuments in the farming landscape.



The Royal Site of Rathcroghan is an archaeological and cultural landscape of outstanding value and importance to the heritage of the island of Ireland. Forming one of six Royal Sites, the ancient landscape of Rathcroghan is part of the Royal Sites of Ireland grouping, as listed on Ireland's Tentative World Heritage List (2022) for UNESCO World Heritage property inscription. The Royal Sites of Ireland form a globally unique and unparalleled group of Iron Age archaeological ceremonial, religious and funerary complexes.

Rathcroghan and its extensive range of monuments serve to physically demonstrate the extent, strength and continuity of a late-prehistoric and early medieval society, that remains to the present day, an integral part of our Irish cultural identity. The intangible heritage of our stories, our mythology and our symbology from the area, continues to be recognised throughout the world.

The pride attached to this unique heritage has been demonstrated by the very custodians of that monumental heritage: our farmers. The Farming Rathcroghan EIP has successfully delivered archaeological support, advice and advocacy directly to the farmers of Rathcroghan since 2019.





A bird's eye artistic view of an early medieval óenach (assembly) at Rathcroghan.

*Image credit: © JG O'Donoghue, courtesy of Rathcroghan Visitor Centre*

New innovations were trialled, equipment developed and participating farmers were financially rewarded for their efforts. By the end of the EIP project, 75% of the Rathcroghan archaeological plateau has been actively managed with a cultural and natural heritage focus, involving forty-five farmers. Given this success, the Farming Rathcroghan project continues to grow, thrive and build on this important work, and is currently supported by the Just Transition Fund.

This booklet aims to capture the essence of this success by offering easy but effective archaeological care guidance on where and what the monuments are, and why they are fragile, vulnerable and susceptible to change in modern times.

Although of direct relevance to the Rathcroghan landscape, this guide offers easy to follow tips on what we can do on a day-to-day basis to continue the success of preserving our heritage anywhere in our Irish farming landscapes. Our pride and legacy can thrive on through our children and future generations in time to come.



**An artistic depiction  
of Queen Medb.**

*Image credit: © Brendan  
Boyle and Rathcroghan  
Visitor Centre*



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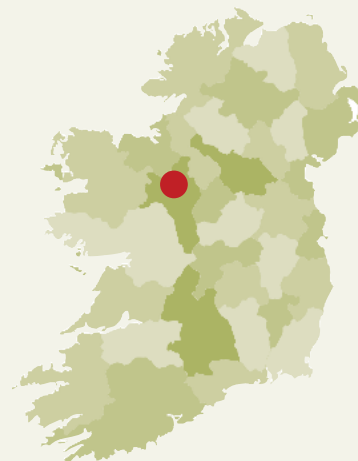
# The archaeological landscape of Rathcroghan

Rathcroghan or *Rath Cruachan* meaning ‘fort of the mound’ is located between the towns of Roscommon, Strokestown, Elphin and Castlerea, c. 2km northwest of the village of Tulsk at the centre of Co. Roscommon.

Situated at an altitude of c. 120m above sea level on a carboniferous limestone plateau, west of the River Shannon, the Rathcroghan archaeological landscape commands extensive views across the grazing plains known during the medieval period as *Machaire Connacht* or the ‘Plains of Connacht’.

The remains of many archaeological monuments, constructed over several thousand years, can still be seen within the landscape, with many more identified below the ground through geophysical surveys and aerial photography. There are at least 240 recorded archaeological monuments in the area, including extensive field systems. This is testimony to the rich pastoral farming legacy of the area, first established during the Neolithic period some 5,500 years ago, around 3,500BC.

General location of  
the Rathcroghan  
Archaeological Complex,  
Co. Roscommon.



The majority of archaeological sites at Rathcroghan are likely to date to the Iron Age and Early Medieval periods (c. 400 BC – 1100 AD) (c. 2,400-900 years ago) and these include domestic ‘living’ sites such as ringforts, enclosures, souterrains (underground passages and chambers) and field systems. However earlier site types such as megalithic tombs, standing stones and barrows (all likely to mark prehistoric burial places) also exist within the complex and many are likely to date to the Bronze Age (c. 2500 BC – 1000 BC) (c. 4,500 – 3,000 years ago). The combination of all of these site types, ranging in date from the earliest times of settled farmers, all located at the same relatively small area, is a rare survival, and is of considerable archaeological significance on a national and international level.





An aerial view of Relignaree and ancient pastoral field systems, at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon.

*Photo credit: ©Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland.*





Celebrations at Rathcroghan during the community festivities of the Táin March.

(Photo credit: © Mick McCormack)

Pastoral farming is at the heart of Rathcroghan. The continued pastoral use of the lands at Rathcroghan has meant that the archaeological monuments have largely remained intact, undisturbed and visible in the landscape. The presence of livestock in the fields provides a tangible connection to the most famous story of Rathcroghan, the epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (Cattle Raid of Cooley). Relatively untouched, the fields continue to be grazed by livestock in the open landscape, amongst dry stone walling and ancient earthworks.

There is a long history of studying and researching this landscape from the eighteenth century onwards. From the 1980s up to the present day there have been many archaeological and scientific surveys carried out, all of which demonstrate its interest and importance as one of Ireland's major late prehistoric Royal Sites.





Biodiverse plant life thriving on vernacular stone walls. These walls can also offer a suitable and safe habitat for small mammals. If you are interested in learning more, why not consider taking part in the Farmers' Wildlife Calendar to record, via a citizen science initiative, Ireland's evolving changes in wildlife behaviours in response to climate change.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



An example of vernacular dry stone field walling at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. The repair, conservation and re-use of our vernacular heritage has been an important approach of the Farming Rathcroghan project.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*

**Why not take part in the Farmers' Wildlife Calendar to record, via a citizen science initiative, Ireland's evolving changes in wildlife behaviours in response to climate change.**



See more here: <https://biodiversityireland.ie/surveys/farmers-wildlife-calendar/>

# Where are the monuments?

Whether in Rathcroghan or elsewhere in Ireland, the most accurate and efficient way of locating recorded archaeological monuments is online, through an interactive mapping system *Historic Environment Viewer* (HEV) managed by the National Monuments Service. Here you can zoom to your geographical area or search by address or townland. There are also Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) maps (produced in the 1990s) available to consult at your Local Authority office or public library.

All recorded archaeological monuments in Ireland form part of an overall dataset known as the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). New archaeological monuments are found all the time, and so the SMR register is continuously updated. Archaeological monuments are protected under the provisions of the *National Monuments Act 1930-2014/Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023*. Any proposed works on or near such monuments require advance notice and approvals from the National Monuments Service.

The Heritage Officer or Archaeological Officer in your Local Authority will be able to assist you with locating archaeological monuments in your area or on your land. Together with the National Monuments Service they can also offer advice regarding statutory requirements that relate to any proposed works.

On the HEV, you will find the archaeological monuments indicated by red dots, and a county-based SMR identification number, along with the monument class/type. However it must be noted that many archaeological remains can survive hidden below the ground surface. Geophysical surveys undertaken in the Rathcroghan area has shown the extent of such surviving features that are otherwise not visible to the naked eye.



See more information here: <https://www.archaeology.ie/monument-protection>



## WHAT WE CAN SEE TODAY



Aerial view of Rathcroghan Mound, Co. Roscommon.

*Photo credit: ©Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland.*



## WHAT WE CAN SEE UNDERGROUND



Results from a magnetic gradiometry geophysical survey of Rathcroghan mound and immediate environs has revealed a substantial (levelled) circular enclosure, 360m in diameter, that surrounds the upstanding central mound.

Other features included the foundations of large circular timber structures on the summit of the mound and a circular building or enclosure (26m diameter) to the north of the mound. Two eastern approach avenues to the mound and the northern enclosure were also identified.

*Image credit: © Archaeology - University of Galway*

## WHAT WE CAN IMAGINE IT TO HAVE BEEN



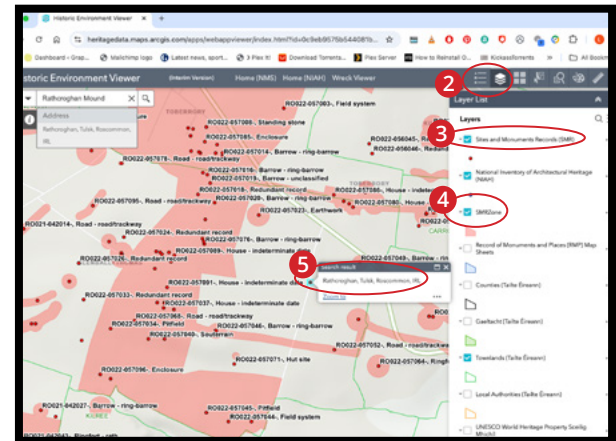
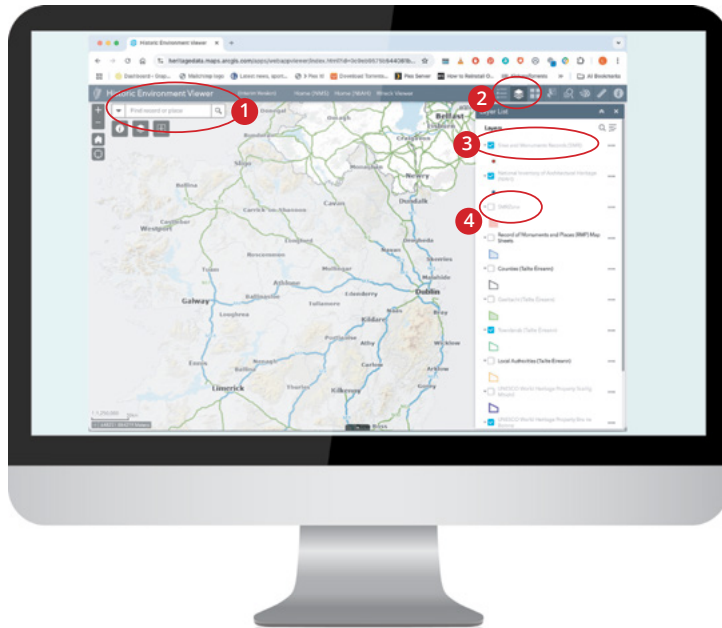
Can you find  
any monument  
connections on  
your farm or  
homestead  
area?

An artistic reconstruction of Rathcroghan Mound as it might have looked in the Iron Age, based on the extant upstanding features and the evidence of sub-surface features revealed through geophysical survey.

*Image credit: © JG O'Donoghue, commissioned by Roscommon County Council*

## BELOW IS AN EXAMPLE EXTRACT FROM THE ONLINE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT VIEWER

- 1 Type your location
- 2 Select Layer List
- 3 Click on Sites and Monuments
- 4 Click on SMRZone
- 5 Monument site is then shown



An SMR Zone has been applied around each monument as an aid to understanding the sensitivity of sub-soils and ground surfaces around archaeological sites. This feature can be selected as a mapping drop down option on the Layers List of the HEV and is displayed as a pink wash area surrounding the red dot.

Although the SMR Zone is not a definitive indication of the sub-surface extent of archaeological features, it is

worth bearing in mind that our monuments are often connected, as evidenced at the archaeological landscape of Rathcroghan. They can be intervisible or related to one another across the landscape. Often, they are related to each other across time or a specific function, and connected by a hidden network of field systems, avenues and trackways.

Available at:



<https://heritagedata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=0c9eb9575b544081b0d296436d8f60f8>

Map source: *Tailte Éireann*



# What do the monuments look like?

Archaeological monuments can take many different forms and occupy various area extents, as well as employing varying construction methods and use of building materials (stone, earth, timber, etc.).

Earthen archaeological monuments are the most prevalent type in the Rathcroghan farming landscape, often with associated earthen banks and cut ditches. Many comprise what is termed 'enclosures' (such as '*Relignaree*' The King's Graveyard, or '*Rathnadarve*' *Rath na dTarbh*), or 'ringforts' and 'mounds', all of which are generally circular in plan. Some ringforts retain associated underground passageways known as 'souterrains'.

There are extensive linear earthworks too, most notably the Mucklaghs and a wide range of earthen relict field systems throughout the Rathcroghan area.

Identifying these monuments from aerial photography or mapping is generally easy if their banks are still upstanding and/or ditches still largely intact. In cases where there is no above ground surface trace, however, we must rely on the documented evidence from the RMP, SMR and HEV.

Similarly, upstanding banks can be traced at ground level, on foot, by carefully walking, following and interpreting the layouts within today's modern field systems. A written description of the monument can also be found in the SMR monument entry on the HEV, as compiled by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland.



Rathcroghan Mound and surrounding landscape. Note the scale and extent of both upstanding and low-level archaeological monuments in this area that indicate extensive ritual activity, settlement and farming, over an extended period of time. This settlement and land usage has continued to the present day, as demonstrated by the later field system, defined by drystone walls.

Photo credit: © Joe Fenwick, University of Galway







# Why are the monuments vulnerable?

It is clear that our archaeological monuments deeply enrich our landscapes, and act as a tangible connection to our farming ancestors. Not only do they help us understand our past through their material remains and artefacts, but they also set out where we have come from as a society and so, form part of our overall cultural identity.

Fundamentally however, we must remember that archaeological monuments are a non-renewable resource. Any loss, harm or damage to a monument cannot be undone, and its archaeological integrity is lost forever. This vulnerability has long been recognised, with statutory protection for archaeological monuments having been in place in the Irish State since 1930.

As our modern world adapts to Climate Change, we must also protect our monuments against the challenge that this presents. As well as extreme weather events, increasing rainfall and higher temperatures, archaeological earthen monuments (both upstanding and sub-surface) are very vulnerable to the needs of modern farming practices.

Challenges concerning grazing (grass sward health), soil erosion (livestock), soil compaction and drainage issues (heavy machinery, wet weather conditions) as well as encroachment by scrub and woody vegetation species are all relevant in this regard.

Together we can strive to safeguard and care for our archaeological heritage, so that future generations can enjoy the legacy of our past, as we do today.



A schools visit to Rathnadarve, Co. Roscommon, facilitated by Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates, Mike McCarthy, Rathcroghan Visitor Centre and the National Monuments Service.

*Photo credit: © John Cronin & Associates*

Local Roscommon school children enjoying a visit to the Rathcroghan archaeological complex on a snowy day.  
*Photo credit: © John Cronin & Associates*





# What can I do to care for the monuments?

As farmers and communities, and with the recent success of various agri-environmental schemes throughout Ireland, we are continuously learning new approaches to sustainably manage the landscape.

The current *Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-27* refers to Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAECs). Of direct relevance to the care of archaeological monuments is GAEC 8 (the retention and maintenance of non-productive features and areas to improve on-farm biodiversity).

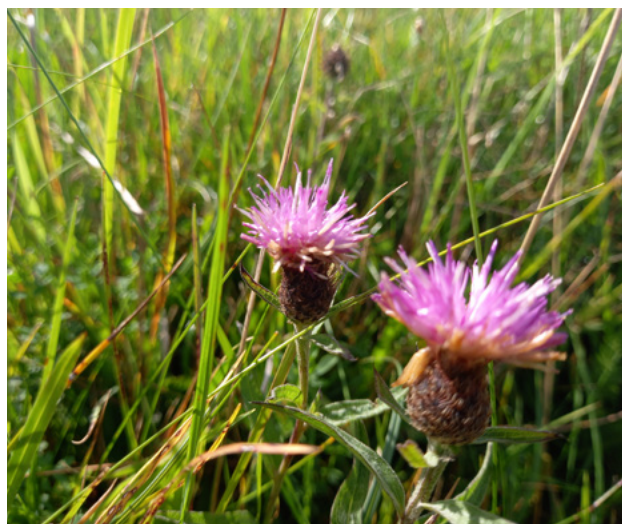
The Agri-Climate Rural Environmental Scheme (ACRES) has set out Specification (2023) which directly refers to the protection of archaeological monuments in both arable ground and grassland, as well as for the maintenance of traditional dry stone walls. Of particular relevance is the detailed specification for grassland (earthen) monuments, which aims to effectively control young tree saplings and invasive woody or problematic plants at an upstanding monument.

## Find out more on GAECs and ACRES specifications here:

-  <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/e11a2-conditionality/>
-  [www.gov.ie/en/service/f5a48-agri-climate-rural-environment-scheme-acres/#specification-for-acres-tranche-2-november-2023](https://www.gov.ie/en/service/f5a48-agri-climate-rural-environment-scheme-acres/#specification-for-acres-tranche-2-november-2023)

The archaeology care tips outlined below for grazing practices, managing soils and vegetation, re-thinking the use of farm-machinery and maintaining farming vernacular heritage, based on result findings from the *Farming Rathcroghan EIP (2019-2023)*.

These evidence-based insights offer direct, quick and very effective results, whilst working on the farm.



Red clover in bloom at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. This naturally occurring native species provides the benefit of fixing nitrogen levels soils and improving soil fertility. This reduces the need for artificial fertilisers to meet the demands of silage yield on the farm.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*





Typical archaeological earthen monuments and associated field systems at Rathcroghan displaying a well grazed regime in the winter sun.

*Photo credit: Petra Kock-Appelgren, Farming Rathcroghan EIP*





# Grazing at Monuments

The monuments at Rathcroghan were an integral part of an early pastoral farming community, the surviving remains of which form the unique archaeological complex we see and enjoy today. Pastoral farming continues to be an important and integral component of monument preservation for the future.

Grass cover at earthen monuments provides a protection layer for all archaeological remains below the sod. Both over-grazing and under-grazing can pose damage risks to the monuments.

High livestock densities, over prolonged periods of time, and especially in wet weather, can be detrimental to these monuments. Soil poaching and erosion of earthen banks can often be a challenging concern in this regard.

Similarly, under-grazing a monument poses challenges with the relatively quick onset of scrub encroachment and tree sapling growth. The root activity of dense vegetation can be very damaging to the features of our monuments that survive below the ground.

An example of sheep grazing at the Mucklaghs, Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. Lighter sheep breeds, in low numbers, can be useful for controlled grazing, by preventing ground poaching at earthen monuments.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



## TIP 1 - GRAZING PRACTICE

- Graze earthen monuments at low stocking levels, with lighter cattle, or sheep, where possible.
- Maximise dry conditions for controlled grazing at monuments. Use of *non-ground intrusive temporary fencing equipment*, as developed by Farming Rathcroghan is particularly effective in managing grazing at earthen monuments.
- These grazing practices will directly aid the enhancement of a robust and protective sward at the monuments, thereby continuing to offer long-lasting protection for the archaeological integrity of the landscape.



Example of an area of regeneration at the Mucklaghs as a result of effective and managed temporary fencing. Each electric post is mounted onto a weighted foot (recycled plastic), with the fencing alignment anchored by timber posts, set into a concrete filled and up-cycled tyre.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



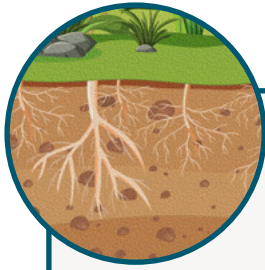
# Soils at Monuments

Soil structure and archaeological features at a sub-topsoil level, are at highest risk when monuments are intensively grazed by high stocking levels and heavy animals, particularly in wet conditions. This is especially true of high livestock traffic areas (like water sources, shelter areas, access gates) and stock paths where soil exposure and erosion as well as ground poaching can be a challenge.



Typical beef farming stock at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb,  
John Cronin & Associates*



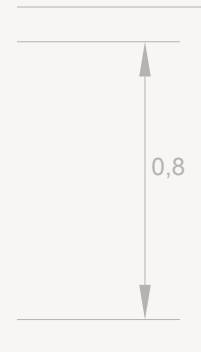
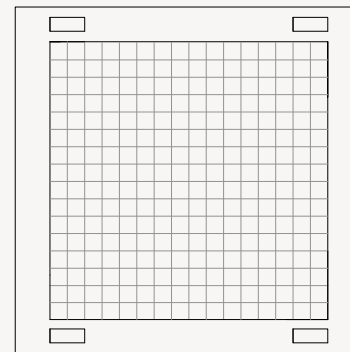
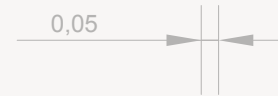
## TIP 2 - SOIL MANAGEMENT

- Halt damage at discrete areas that are beginning to show signs of soil erosion by temporary use of a *Resting Frame*, an equipment solution developed by Farming Rathcroghan. This is especially useful for banks and slopes and will allow the affected area to naturally rest and regenerate with a protective sward cover. If the frame is connected to an electric source such as a solar battery, this will also prevent curious attention from livestock.
- Use of *temporary non-ground intrusive fencing*, at areas of exposed soils will also help to manage poaching and erosion issues at earthen monuments. By temporarily fencing-off locations that are favoured for shelter, scratching or stock paths this will allow the areas to rest and regenerate. Regular maintenance inspection will be needed to ensure power is connected to the fencing. Solar powered portable batteries are a good, low-maintenance and reliable tool in this regard.



Example of a Farming Rathcroghan Resting Frame in situ, protecting a discrete area of soil erosion from further damage.

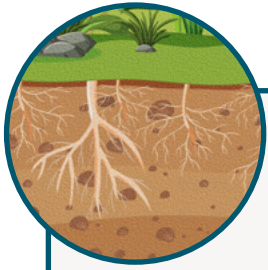
Photo credit: © Petra Kock-Appelgren, Farming Rathcroghan EIP



Rathcroghan Resting-Frame Design: Simple grid with loop-holes (to facilitate inter-connection via means of an adjustable rubber strap or equivalent tie).

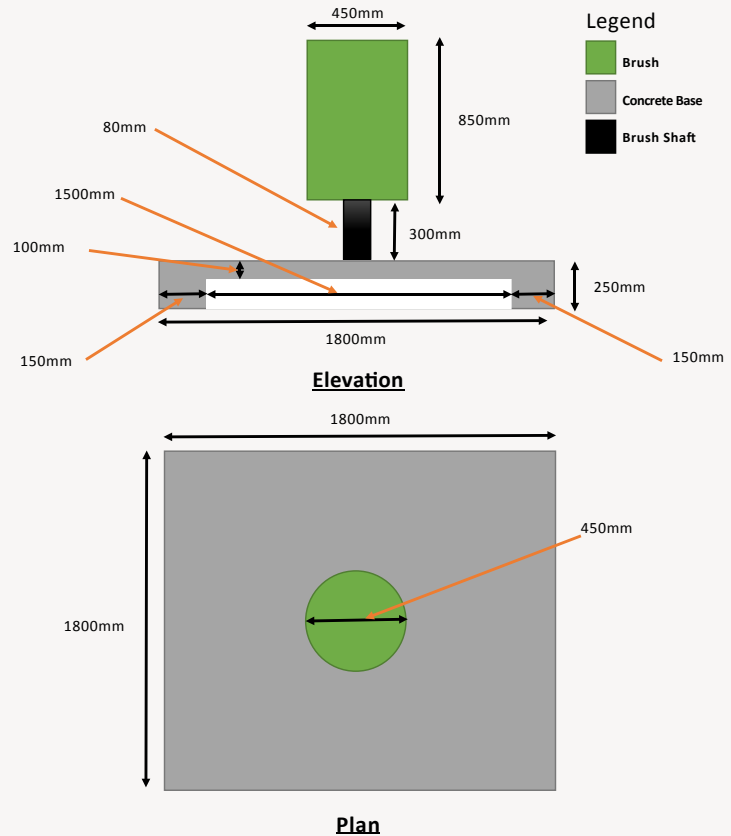
Image credit: © John Cronin & Associates





## TIP 2 - SOIL MANAGEMENT *continued*

- Provide alternative areas for shelter and scratching away from the earthen monument. Consider the benefits of planting native hedge species such as hawthorn as a field boundary at non-sensitive archaeological areas, instead of post-and-wire fencing; and/or the use of a portable Farming Rathcroghan livestock *Scratching Post*. A *Scratching Post* is a mounted upright zoo-grade brush head arrangement set into a concrete plinth. The plinth is of suitable weight and dimension for ease of movement by a standard tractor front-loader. Strategic placement of the *Scratching Post* in non-sensitive areas can offset any potential ground poaching damage that might otherwise occur at an earthen monument.
- Try to ensure that water or feeding troughs are placed well away from any monuments, in non-sensitive archaeological locations. Where this is not feasible, contact the National Monuments Service for advice. In some cases, sited away from monuments, there may be other solutions to prevent ground poaching, such as supporting the ground surface with a base layer of porous geotextile covering, with loose gravel stone chips on top.



Farming Rathcroghan design detail of a zoo totem brush head mounted onto a portable and bespoke concrete plinth. This design specification was innovated by Farming Rathcroghan farmers Tommy Farrell and Martin Dowd.

*Image credit: Tommy Farrell and Martin Dowd*  
© Farming Rathcroghan EIP





Example of a Farming Rathcroghan portable Scratching Post strategically placed away from a monument and near existing trees that provide shelter, as well as close to a re-sited water trough. This arrangement has been hugely effective in meeting livestock needs as well as protecting the archaeological resource.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



# Vegetation at Monuments

Root growth activity by unmanaged scrub and young trees or saplings, once established, can cause severe damage to sub-surface archaeological remains. Further, excessive scrub growth atop an earthen archaeological monument can significantly detract from a site's overall presentation and its landscape setting.

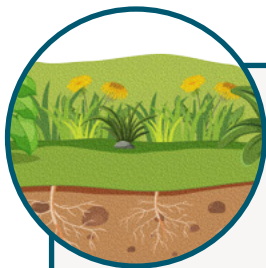
An example of established hawthorn tree growth at a ringfort in the Rathcroghan landscape.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



- 1 A hawthorn hedge in full summer and autumn bloom at Rathcroghan.
- 2 As well as pollinators, these native trees are an abundant food source for birds and small mammals.
- 3 New growth on an old hawthorn tree at Rathcroghan. The extensive lichen growth on the branches shows how such species can support remarkable eco-systems at our monuments.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



## TIP 3 - VEGETATION CONTROL

- Cut established scrub growth at its base using hand-tools, and carefully treat stumps with a suitable brush-application or ecoplug herbicide. It is important that no digging takes place and this will ensure no damage or interference with the monument, per statutory and legislative provisions.
- Retention of established and existing healthy mature trees at a monument can have ecological co-benefits. If needed, seek advice from the National Monuments Service or the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Should there be a risk of tree-fall during storm damage, felling affected trees (such as ash die-back diseased trees) at monuments can reduce any further sub-surface damage that may occur by uprooting. Consult in advance with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) Forestry Service regarding felling licence requirements. See more here: [www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/forestry/advice/Felling-and-Reforestation-Policy.pdf](http://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/forestry/advice/Felling-and-Reforestation-Policy.pdf)
- Top rushes at a monument and spot treat, only, if necessary (>25% coverage), with hand-held equipment.
- Be mindful of bird nesting season when carrying out any vegetation clearance (avoiding 1 March – 31 August inclusive).
- Consider meadow-making at the monument, by avoiding silage cutting or grazing for the summer months. This will help native wildflowers to establish and seed, with year-on-year notable changes to the biodiversity score of the overall monument.

Native wildflower species Ragged-robin growing at Rathnadarve, Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. This is a foodplant for bumblebees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths; as well as a caterpillar food plant for the Campion (*Sideridis rivularis*) and the Lychnis (*Hadena bicrurus*) moths. Ragged-robin is no longer as common as it once was in Ireland due to the draining of marsh and wet grasslands.

*Information source: National Biodiversity Data Centre.*

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



Available at: <https://biodiversityireland.ie/app/uploads/2023/07/Species-Profile-20-Ragged-Robin.pdf>



# Farm Machinery at Monuments

Knowing where an archaeological monument is located, including its likely sub-surface extent is important in the day-to-day operations of a farm.

This knowledge will avoid any risk of disturbance or wheel rutting damage at sensitive monument locations, for both above and below ground archaeological features.



## TIP 4 - USE OF FARM MACHINERY

- Always avoid the use of farm machinery at or near archaeological monuments.
- Consider using a slurry umbilical system at or near earthen monuments. This will reduce the risk of ground compaction and rutting by farm traffic, and will help avoid spreading slurry directly onto monuments, that can affect archaeological sub-soils and biodiverse value.
- Consider the use of low-impact farm vehicles and equipment, including the use of flotation tyres. This will not only be beneficial to vulnerable archaeological monuments, but also favour soil quality and drainage, by avoiding soil compaction issues.

An aerial view of Rathbeg at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon.

*Photo credit: ©Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland.*



Example of a slurry umbilical system with flotation tyres at Rathcroghan as demonstrated to Farming Rathcroghan farmers during a training event facilitated by Kieran Kenny, Teagasc. This is particularly useful on the farm when working near sensitive archaeological monuments.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates.*





# Vernacular built heritage

Our farming built-heritage infrastructure is one of the key aspects that characterises the Irish rural landscape. As well as traditional farm buildings, vernacular thatch cottages and wrought iron gates, the extensive patterns and systems of dry stone field boundary walling across the landscape are particularly important.

Dry Stone Construction has been formally recognised as part of Ireland's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and the art of dry stone construction, knowledge and techniques has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*.

Application of traditional skills such as drystone walling and hedge-laying are very important in the farming landscape on a biodiversity level, and have the direct benefit of improving the landscape setting of archaeological monuments.

There are also several examples of traditional vernacular farm wrought-iron gates, as well as fine square-plan gate piers, stone wall stiles, and sheep passes throughout the Rathcroghan landscape. This farming infrastructure significantly contributes to the integrity and functionality of the cultural heritage landscape.



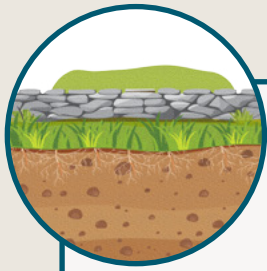


A team of hardy farmers taking part in a Farming Rathcroghan dry stone wall training workshop close to Rathmore archaeological monument, Rathcroghan Co. Roscommon. This event was facilitated by the Dry Stone Wall Association of Ireland (see more here: <https://www.dswai.ie/>).

*Photo credit: © John Cronin & Associates*







## TIP 5 - MAINTAINING FARMING VERNACULAR HERITAGE

- The maintenance and repair of dry stone field boundaries can offer a low-maintenance, cost-effective and aesthetically pleasing aspect to modern farming. Consider replacing the use of post-and-wire and/or electric field boundary fencing with longer term sustainable dry stone walling, using locally sourced quarry stone.
- Try to remove old and defunct timber posts and wire when maintaining field boundaries.
- Consider if there is an opportunity to develop innovative building techniques to include the incorporation of stiles, or looped 'pegs' within the stone coursing through which to thread an electric wire. The latter can help to dissuade cattle from rubbing or pushing against the walls and so prevent potential topple damage to the dry stone construction.
- Consider providing dry stone lean-to (sheep) shelters at non-sensitive archaeological locations. Such interventions could reduce rubbing/ground poaching/ sheltering issues at archaeological monuments. Further advice can be sought from the National Monuments Service.
- The crevices in traditional dry stone field walls are host to a wide range of flora and fauna and are a valuable means of enhancing biodiversity and habitat values of a landscape. See can you observe these changes and seasonal variations whilst working on the farm.



A traditional vernacular wrought iron gate lock with decorative twists, still in use, at Rathcroghan Co. Roscommon.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



A view through a built-in sheep creep within a vernacular dry stone wall field boundary, towards the fine platform earthwork of Rathmore, Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



Traditional tools and hazel-rods used as part of hedge-laying skills practice training undertaken by Farming Rathcroghan participants.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*

- Observe if there are any established hedgerows on your farm that could benefit from traditional hedge-laying practices, or, if there are any new hedgerows that can be planted for future laying (see Hedgerows Ireland for advisory support at <https://hedgerows.ie/>).
- Pass on traditional skills such as dry stone walling and hedge-laying to younger members of the family and wider community. This will ensure that such skillsets are not lost and the sensitive maintenance of Irish farm heritage can be safeguarded.
- The salvage, repair and painting of existing farm vernacular wrought iron gates is encouraged, along with possible installation of bespoke farm furniture, such as the innovative Farming Rathcroghan-branded style gates.

Find out more information here:

 <https://nationalinventoryich.tcagsm.gov.ie/dry-stone-construction/>



A newly completed portion of hedge-laying as part of a training exercise training facilitated by Hedgerows Ireland, at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. (See more here: <https://hedgerows.ie/>).

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



Farm buildings and stone walls are an important vernacular feature of the historic landscape and they also provide habitats for wildlife. This nineteenth century farm building in Manor, Tulsk, Co. Roscommon, was repaired under the Heritage Council and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine **Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme**.

*Photo credit: © Aine Doyle, courtesy of the Heritage Council*




# Farming Rathcroghan reflections

The *Farming Rathcroghan EIP (2019-2023)* was the first of its kind in Ireland to have an entirely archaeological remit in delivering good farming practice innovations specifically designed to protect, preserve and conserve a vulnerable archaeological landscape and its monuments. Key to its success has been the empowering of landowners to be active custodians of our heritage, whilst at the same time maintaining a viable livelihood from the land.

The Farming Rathcroghan project continues to actively increase awareness of the significance of the farmed archaeological landscape and the vital role that farmers play in the local community, the regional economy, and the promotion of heritage tourism.

By adopting the best practice measures outlined above, together we can continue to be the key drivers of protecting our archaeological monuments for young and old, and future generations to come.



A fine example of native wildflower regeneration along the banks of Rathnadarve, Co. Roscommon.

Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates





A fine example of the well-presented monument of Rathmore, Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. This is a National Monument in State Guardianship. The roadside boundary wall has been subject to dry stone wall repair and installation of a vernacular gate as part of the Farming Rathcroghan EIP. By enhancing the presentation of our monuments it increases our intangible connections to such sites, for locals and visitors alike.

*Photo credit: © Kate Robb, John Cronin & Associates*



Local community members enjoying a guided Farm Walk at Rathcroghan, as part of National Heritage Week.

*Photo credit: © Nollaig Feeney, Heritage Officer, Roscommon County Council*







# Support contacts

Archaeological monuments are protected under the *National Monuments Act 1930-2014/Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023*. Contact the National Monuments Service regarding relevant procedures for works at or near protected monuments, and for Ministerial Consent concerning works at, or in proximity to, National Monuments in state ownership or guardianship. Report all new finds to the National Monuments Service to ensure their protection.

Finders are obliged to report discoveries of archaeological objects to the National Museum of Ireland (or to a Designated County Museum).

The Heritage Officer and/or Archaeological Officer at your Local Authority is always happy to advise on best practice monument care, including those typically found in a farming context.

For further information on the innovative equipment developed as part of the Farming Rathcroghan EIP 2019-2023 Project, contact the Farming Rathcroghan office.

Detailed step-by-step guidance for the protection of archaeological monuments in grassland areas is set out in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) (2023) Specification for ACRES Tranche 2, and is a useful cross-reference source for CAP Conditionality requirements. Contact your local Agri-Advisor for more information.

## Support links:



**National Monuments Service:** [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie)

**National Museum of Ireland:** <https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Contact>

**Local Authority Heritage Officer Network:** <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/our-work-with-others/county-heritage-officers>

**Farming Rathcroghan Office:** <https://farmingrathcroghan.ie/contact-us/>



An interior view of Oweynagat (The Cave of the Cats), Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. Referred to as the portal to the otherworld and the origins of Samhain/ Halloween traditions, this monument reflects the diverse range of archaeological heritage and mythology that is connected to the Rathcroghan landscape.

*Photo credit: © Hamish Fenton,  
courtesy of Rathcroghan Visitor Centre*



# Useful sources

Below are some useful reading sources and websites that also offer additional relevant guidance literature.

Curley, D.P. & McCarthy, M. 2023 Rathcroghan: *The guidebook*. 2nd Edition. KPW Print Management, Ballinasloe, County Galway.

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# Useful sources *continued*

Below are some more useful reading sources and websites that also offer additional relevant guidance literature.

Historic England. 2004 *Farming the historic landscape - Caring for archaeological sites in grassland*. Available at: <https://thegardenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/EH-Farming-the-historic-landscape-caring-for-archaeological-sites-on-arable-land-2004-1.pdf> [Accessed 08 January 2025]

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# A Farming Rathcroghan Model

