



## Connemara History and Heritage Trail

Connemara in County Galway is one of the most scenic areas of Ireland, in a wildish way. As with most of Galway, Connemara's history goes back thousands of years. The first inhabitants of the Galway region were there over 5,000 years ago. Celtic colonisation of this area thereafter explains the presence of sites of this period. With the arrival of Christianity, many monasteries were built in the area, for example in Roscam on the island of Inchagoill and on the lakes *Corrib* and Annaghdown.

Galway city developed more after the invasion by the English and Welsh and the Irish quickly took possession of their city again.

The Claddagh (*Cladach*) means a stony foreshore, and a settlement of fishermen seems to have existed here since the earliest times. The city walls never enclosed the Claddagh, which retained its own customs, a large degree of self-government and its own 'King'.

Local archaeologist, Michael Gibbons describes finding a Bann spearhead in Streamstown dating 7,000 years old. It was a rare and wonderful find as the people of that era were known to be nomadic hunter gatherers. Other sites found in the area suggest the change over from the nomadic lifestyle to that of farming communities.



Picture 1 - Kylemore Abbey

**Kylemore Abbey and Victorian Garden**, Letterfrack – a romantic 19<sup>th</sup> century house nestled in between the shores of Kylemore Lough and the heavily wooded hills, Kylemore Abbey is a serenely peaceful place and is currently occupied and home to the Benedictine order of nuns. Built by a wealthy English textile tycoon, for the love of his life, it has many sights including a Gothic Revival Church, a mausoleum, partially restored Victorian garden and hatchery. The original house is now an abbey and former girl's school which is open to the public, the main attractions are the beautiful buildings, the engineering feats of

the day, the walks and the opportunity to sponsor and plant your very own indigenous Irish tree to assist with restoring Connemara to its former wooded splendour.

**Open:** 7 days a week, all year round.

**Directions:** From Galway take the N59 Clifden road, just past Recess turn right onto the R344 and follow signs for the abbey. From Clifden, take the Westport road. Kylemore is 5km after Letterfrack village.

**Cost:** Adults - € 9 (winter) / € 12 (summer). Seniors - € 7 (winter) / € 9 (summer). Children under 10 go free. Student, family and group rates available. Guided tours available. Entry includes visit to the abbey, gothic church and 1000 acre estate.

**Tel:** 095 52000 **Web:** [www.kylemoreabbeytourism.ie](http://www.kylemoreabbeytourism.ie)

**Pearse's Cottage, Rosmuc** – Patrick Pearse (1879 - 1916) was the leader of the Irish Rising and his summer residence is now restored and contains an exhibition about his life and has a unique collection of his personal mementoes.

**Open:** Easter (21 - 25 April): Thursday – Monday from 10.00 - 17.00

Open daily 26 May - 31st August from 10.00 – 18.00. Open 1 - 18 September weekends only. Last admission 45 minutes before closing. Allow approximately 45 minutes for your visit.

**Directions:** Inbhear, near Rosmuc Village, Co. Galway.

**Costs:** Adults - € 3. Seniors / group rate - € 2. Child / student - € 1. Family ticket - € 8.

**Tel:** 091 574292 **Web:** [www.heritageireland.ie/en/West/PatrickPearsesCottage/](http://www.heritageireland.ie/en/West/PatrickPearsesCottage/)



Picture 2 - Cnoc Suain

**Cnoc Suain, Spiddal** – a reconstructed 1691 Irish village of thatched and slated stone offers a fantastic opportunity to revisit good auld Ireland.

**Costs:** Connemara Gaelic Culture Tour - € 30 per person including transport from/to Galway City. Scheduled departure from Galway Coach Station at 10.00 every Wednesday, Friday & Saturday from March to October. Return approx. 13.00.

**Tel:** 091 566566

**Web:** [www.galwaytourcompany.com](http://www.galwaytourcompany.com)  
/ [www.cnocsuain.com](http://www.cnocsuain.com)

**Connemara Heritage & History Centre** (Dan O'Hara's Homestead), Lettershea – gives the visitor an insight into the life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Connemara tenant farmer. The restored pre-dated famine cottage and farm guides visitors through the history of the region with demonstrations of traditional farming techniques. Also on the property are reconstructed examples of a prehistoric island home (a crannóg), a ring fort and a corbelled dry stone hut (a clochán).

**Address:** Lettershea, Galway Road, Clifden, Co Galway, Republic of Ireland

**Tel:** 095 21246 / 21808 **E-mail:** [danohara@eircom.net](mailto:danohara@eircom.net) **Web:** [www.connemaraheritage.com](http://www.connemaraheritage.com)

### **Connemara Pony**

The only breed unique to Ireland, the origins go back some 2,500 years to when Celtic warriors brought their dun-coloured ponies onto the island and used them to draw war chariots and carts along the beaches and river plains. While the history is obscure, folklore tells us that the tribes of western Ireland were mounted in battle and used horses in everyday life. One legend says that in the 16th century, when the Spanish Armada sank off the Galway coast, the horses swam to shore and bred with the ponies running wild in the mountains. They learned to thrive on the sparse vegetation and to survive the hardships of their habitat.

From all accounts, any Connemara Pony became part of an Irish family. She would pull a plough, a cart, and work from dawn to dusk at whatever task was needed under extremely harsh conditions. Fitted with baskets called creels, she carried a heavy load. She moved tons of rocks to clear the land. She carried seaweed from the shore which was used to fertilise the barren fields. And she carried turf cut from the bogs - her strong, sturdy legs able to manoeuvre through muck which might swallow a different type of horse. Never a day of rest, she also carted the family to Mass on Sunday and she competed equally in local races with the larger Irish Hunters and thoroughbreds.

Over time, the breed evolved into one that was distinguished by its hardiness, stamina and gentle disposition. In 1923, to conserve and further develop the breed, the Connemara Pony Breeders Society was founded in Clifden.

The Connemara is the largest of the pony breeds, ranging in height from 13 to 15 hands, with 14 to 14.2 hands as the average. Full maturity is at five years of age, sometimes older, and they can live well into their 30's. The most common colours are grey and dun, but there are blacks, bays, browns, chestnuts, palominos, and an occasional roan.

### ***The International Connemara Pony Show***

The largest display of the finest Connemara Ponies in the world takes place in Clifden, Connemara on the third Thursday of August of every year. The Show has been organised by the Connemara Pony Breeders Society since 1924 and more than 500 ponies travel from all over the country to take part.



**Picture 3 - The Connemara Pony**

Cashel House is home to the Justice Connemara Pony & Irish Sport Horse Stud Farm and Showing Yard. The yard boasts numerous Champions in both Show Ring and Show Jumping. We stand between 4 and 6 resident Connemara stallions at the hotel. The stud also consists of 12 Connemara Brood Mares and 4 Irish Sport Horse Brood Mares, whose progeny are bred for performance.

The yard is located within the hotel grounds so guest can view the horses, and perhaps even bring their ideal Connemara home with them! We are in an ideal location to visit one of the numerous Horse Shows which take place every weekend during summer months, culminating in the Galway Races in July and the Clifden Show in August.

**Address:** Cashel House Hotel, Cashel, Co. Galway

**Tel:** 095 31001 **Web:** [www.cashel.house.hotel.com](http://www.cashel.house.hotel.com)

**Ross Castle, Roscahill** – Built during the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ross Castle is a listed building set in an extensive garden with beautiful views over Lough Corrib. Fully restored this building has been elegantly decorated and visitors are welcomed during the summer season.

**Address:** Ross Castle, Roscahill, Moycullen, Co Galway

**Tel:** 091 550183 **Email:** [rosscastle@eircom.net](mailto:rosscastle@eircom.net) **Web:** [www.rosscastlegalway.com](http://www.rosscastlegalway.com)



Picture 4 - Hen's Castle

**Hen's Castle, Maam** (*Cáisleán na Circe*) - located on Lough Corrib between Maam and Doon, free from islands except for the rock on which the ancient Hen's Castle of the O'Connors and the O'Flaherty's stands. The castle was home of the great pirate Queen of Connemara, Grace O'Malley, who lived in the time of Queen Elizabeth 1 of England. The Lord Justice, in 1225, caused Odo O'Flaherty to give up Kirk Castle to Odo O'Connor, King of Connaught; for assurance of his fidelity.

Cáisleán na Circe (built in a night by a cock and a hen according to legend) is one of the oldest mortared castles in Ireland. This Norman keep, placed in the direction of

the cardinal compass points, was built early in the 12th Century by the sons of Roderick O'Connor, last High-King of Ireland, aided by their then ally, William Fitz-Adelm, the first de Burgo (later Burke). This castle which occupies almost the entire island had a troubled history, being stormed and besieged many times, not the least of which was the celebrated occasion when Granuaile (Grace O'Malley) personally defended it. It continued to be occupied as a castle until it finally succumbed to the Cromwellian soldiers in 1654.

**Black fort, Aran Islands** – Perched spectacularly on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, this is the largest of the prehistoric stone forts of the Aran Islands. It is enclosed by three massive dry-stone walls and a "chevaux-de-frise" consisting of tall blocks of limestone set vertically into the ground to deter attackers. The fort is about 900m from the Visitor Centre and is approached over rising ground.

**Address:** Tourist Information Office, Kilronan, Inishmore (Inis Mór), Aran Islands, Co Galway  
**Tel:** 099 61263 **Web:** [www.aranislands.ie](http://www.aranislands.ie)

**Leenane Sheep & Wool Centre** – For many generations the people of Connemara survived on the wool trade and this wonderful museum gives a unique insight to the history and development of the industry. Demonstrations of traditional spinning, carding and weaving techniques are on display along with information on dyeing and breeding techniques.

**Address:** Leenane, Co Galway **Tel:** 095 42323 / 42231  
**Email:** [leenane@eircom.net](mailto:leenane@eircom.net) **Web:** [www.sheepandwoolcentre.com](http://www.sheepandwoolcentre.com)

**Glengowla Mines, Oughterard** – the 19<sup>th</sup> century silver and lead mines offer an insight of mine life with an underground tour and an exhibition on the history of mining in the area at that time. Building include the restored powder house, blacksmiths workshop and agents cottage.

**Address:** Oughterard, Co Galway  
**Tel:** 091 552021 /552360 **Mobile:** 087 2529850  
**E-mail:** [glengowlamines@eircom.net](mailto:glengowlamines@eircom.net) **Web:** [www.glengowlamines.com](http://www.glengowlamines.com)

**Aughnanure Castle, Oughterard** – stronghold of the ferocious O'Flaherty's, a powerful clan that controlled vast amounts of Co Galway: the 16<sup>th</sup> century castle occupies a dramatic location on what is virtually a rocky island on the river banks close to Lough Corrib. The restored six story tower house has many interesting features including a secret room between the lord's chamber on the top floor and the great hall below.

**Address:** Oughterard, Co Galway **Tel:** 091 552214  
**E-mail:** [aughnanurecastle@opw.ie](mailto:aughnanurecastle@opw.ie) **Web:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

**Renvyle Castle, Renvyle** – home of the fiery 16<sup>th</sup> century pirate queen, Granuaile (or Grace O'Malley) and her husband Donal O'Flaherty. Renowned for her bravery, wrath and lawlessness, she became the scourge of any ship that dared to sail "her" waters. Confident to the last she reputedly sailed to London to meet Elizabeth 1, secure a pardon for her wayward son and a pension for herself.

**Cromwell's Fort, Inishbofin** – situated strategically on the headland opposite the entrance to Inishbofin harbour this impressive structure was built to protect England from French invasion.

**Early Christian sites** (AD 500 – 1200) – High Island and MacDara's Island this heritage has been well recognised and the ancient remains either restored or preserved and much archaeological work undertaken. In many other cases the remains are sadly disappearing or being destroyed through neglect or careless vandalism. Such is the richness of Connemara history that literally there could be a hidden undiscovered treasure beneath your feet! Early Monastic sites are numerous around Connemara and the "great" loughs (Corrib & Mask) basin.

**Inchagoill, Lough Corrib** – situated on an island it is the most extensive and best preserved early Christian ecclesiastical remains. Nothing is known of the early history of the monastic settlement; it contains two churches linked by an ancient road. One of the most fascinating monuments to be found in the area, the inscription on the Stone of Lugaedon is said to be the oldest in Europe done in Roman letters apart from the catacombs in Rome!

**Ballynahinch Castle, Ballinacfad** – residence of O'Flaherty's, the Martin family of which "Humanity Dick" is arguably the most famous and the Maharajah of Nawanager, Prince Ranjitsinhji ensure a colourful history. A superb fishery, the grounds and location offer numerous walks and sights including a fine red brick railway station and ruins of the original castle situated on an island in Ballynahinch Lough.

**Address:** Ballynahinch Castle Hotel, Ballinacfad, Recess

**Tel:** 095 31006 **Web:** [www.ballynahinch-castle.com](http://www.ballynahinch-castle.com)

**Alcock & Brown, Clifden** – the unintended landing site of the two first transatlantic aviators add a more modern historical flavour to the Connemara landscape.

**Marconi Transmission Station** – not far from the landing site, the first trans-Atlantic radio communications station. Having being de-constructed very little of what was a considerable engineering feat remains of the cutting technology edge of the day.

**Cashel House Hotel, Cashel** – situated in very mature and interesting gardens at the foot of Cashel Hill. Owned by a number of keen gardeners over the centuries this property has reputedly the best gardens in Connemara. Both a Prime Minister and French President have spent quiet time here.

**Address:** Cashel House Hotel, Cashel, Co. Galway

**Tel:** 095 31001 **Web:** [www.cashel.house.hotel.com](http://www.cashel.house.hotel.com)

**Kilcummin Parish Church, Oughterard** – built in 1808 and on the most westerly edge of the "civilised" world, the church was used by the local garrison, both officers and privates. One interesting feature is an enclosed area where prisoners sat during the services.

**Coastguard Station, Cleggan** – Connemara was a haven for smugglers during the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Built in Cleggan 1865 this two storey building overlooks the Atlantic. As well as acting as revenue police, they also provided search and rescue. The Cleggan Guild of the Irish Countrywoman's organisation bought one of the houses in the 1940's where regular meetings taught the women new skills.

**Cill Éinne, Spiddal** – built around 1903 this Celtic Revival style church has a splendid interior. It has a low open truss roof and has transepts with double arcades and galleries. The striking stain glass windows are another of the numerous features to be discovered in this beautiful building.

**Clifden Castle** – build by the founder of Clifden almost two hundred years ago, it was the epicentre of social activity around Connemara. Although called a castle it is a large four-bay house with two floors above a basement.

**Address:** Sky Road, Clifden, Co Galway

**Costello Lodge, Costello** – one of the original owners of this property had connections with the most notorious marine accidents of all time – the Titanic. As owner of White Star Line (the Titanic's owner) and also a survivor of the collision he went on to build larger and more palatial ships.

**D'Arcy Monument, Clifden** – erected in memory of John D'Arcy the founder of Clifden town it is also inscribed with the names of some of the citizens who lived and worked there around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Restored in the 1990's the monument is back to its former glory!

**Slyne Head Lighthouse, Ballyconneely** – Situated on the most Westerly point of County Galway and visible from many parts of the coast of Connemara. Originally consisting of two 79 foot towers, both had lights – one fixed and one revolving they commenced operation in 1836.

**Slyne Head Lighthouse** is located at westernmost point of County Galway, about 12 kilometres (7 miles) southwest of Doonlaughan

**Warehouse, Clifden** – this substantial ruin is one of the numerous grain stores which once dotted the Clifden area. At the time of the towns founding in 1812, almost all trade was conducted by sea. Practically everything that was needed for the new town had to arrive on boats and ships of various sizes, so one of the first tasks was the provision of landing and storage facilities.