

CONAIR STAIRE
CHARN TÓCHAIR



CARNTOGHER
HISTORY TRAIL

Carntogher History Trail

Guide & Map

including walking trail maps
of Carntogher Mountain and
Drumnaph Wood.

CONAIR STAIRE CHARN TÓCHAIR
MAGHERA, CO. DERRY



CARNTOGHER HISTORY TRAIL

Trail Length: 17.5km

Highest Point: 464m

The Carntogher area near Maghera in County Derry contains a wealth of sites of archaeological and environmental importance which have been linked together under the banner of the 'Carntogher History Trail' facilitating a greater understanding of our past and tracing man's impact on the local environment from the neolithic period to the present day.

It should be noted that there are waymarked walking trails at Carntogher Mountain and Drumnaph Wood which can be visited at any time independently of this trail. If possible stay locally and allow yourself two to three days to complete the trail. This will give you plenty of time at the individual sites.

Further information can be obtained from the tourism information point at An Carn Centre in Tirkane, Maghera.

Conair Staire Charn Tóchair



CARNTOGHER HISTORY TRAIL

- Carnatogher History Trail
- Tracks
- Seefin Trail
- Skelp Trail
- Carnatogher Way
- Parking
- Landmark Buildings
- Woodland
- Ancient Monuments
- Coniferous Woodland
- Marsh
- Road
- Town
- Lough or Pond



CONAIR STAIRE CHARN TÓCHAIR

1 St. Luragh's Church

1 St. Luragh's Old Church

Ráth Luraigh

Note: The key at Maghera Recreation Centre



St. Luragh's Headstone



Carved door lintel

St. Luragh, patron saint of Maghera, was of the royal line of the Uí Tuirtre, the sept which dominated mid-Ulster in the early Christian period. He founded his monastery in the sixth century, around which the settlement of Maghera grew up. In Irish the town is called Machaire Rátha Luraigh, 'the plain of Luragh's fort'. St. Luragh's headstone, a cross-inscribed upright slab and the earthen ramparts of his ráth, can still be seen in the old graveyard to this day. The beautiful carvings of the crucifixion which adorns the stone doorway, dating to the eleventh or twelfth century AD, has been described as the most important single Romanesque (12th century) monument in Ulster.

The church has a long and chequered history. One of its monks, Fearghas, was abbot of Finglas around 800 AD and a leader in the Céile Dé sect which flourished at this time. In 831 AD the monastery was plundered by Vikings led by Turgesius. In 1135 it was attacked again, this time during inter-dynastic warfare. The year 1150 AD saw Maghera become the diocesan seat with Muireach Ó Cofaigh, a native of Carntogher, as bishop. During the wars between Irish and English forces in the 17th century, when the tower was added, the church was attacked three times. Tobar Luraigh, St. Lurach's Well, was located in an entry off Main Street and it was said that anyone who drank from this well would always wish to return to Maghera.

2 Tirnony Dolmen

Cromleac Thír
an Omhna



This impressive monument is four to six thousand years old and stands one mile north-west of Maghera. It is a burial tomb and in it our ancestors would have placed the cremated remains of their dead. At one time it would have been covered, or at least partially covered, by a cairn of small stones. The word dolmen comes from a Breton word meaning 'stone table'. These monuments are now known as portal tombs because of the two large uprights upon which the capstone rests at its highest end which form the entrance to the tomb. In the small field to the south there is rumoured to be a souterrain, or artificial cave.

Normally associated with ringforts, these sites were constructed as a refuge in times of danger or as a store for food, between the sixth and twelfth centuries.

This portal tomb or dolmen is one of five types of megalithic (from the Greek mega lithos, meaning 'large stone') tomb. The others consist of court tombs (considered to be the earliest type of megalithic tomb, as at Knockoneill), passage tombs (as at Newgrange, Co. Meath), wedge tombs (considered to be the latest type, as at Slaughtneil) and unclassified tombs. Six portal tombs are located in County Derry.

3 Tirkane Sweat House

Teach Allais
Thír Chiana



This unusual dry-stone structure was used to cure fevers and pains up until the end of the last century. It is impossible to date but was probably constructed no earlier than medieval times; certainly many similar sites around the country were built in the 18th and 19th centuries. These sites are known in Germany as Irish baths which would suggest that sweat houses were introduced to that country by Irish missionaries who travelled to Europe during the Dark Ages.

A fire of turf or wood was lit inside the structure and the entrance closed, so that heat built up and the stone walls became very hot.

Then some rushes were spread on the floor and water thrown on the stones to produce steam. The patient then sat in the sweat house for as long as they could before emerging to bathe in the small spring nearby. It is one of only five such monuments in the county.



4 Carntogher Mountain

Carn Tóchair

Note: See detailed map of 'Carntogher Way'

This ancient place, mentioned in the iron age saga "Táin Bó Cuailgne", preserves a rich variety of historical remains.

At the top of Carntogher Mountain (Carn Tóchair), there are a number of distinct archaeological sites. At the side of the track, at its highest point, there is a cairn of small stones; emigrants travelling to the port of Derry by this ancient road would leave a small stone at this spot which gave them their last view of home before leaving for the new world.

To the left of the track at this point there are four stone markers known as 'Shane's Leaps' which commemorate three extraordinary jumps made by the famous 18th century raparee Seán Crossach Ó Maoláin when escaping from his redcoat captors.

they contained treasure. These tombs are so-called because of their shape. They number 13 in County Derry.

Two cairns of possible archaeological significance are located seventy metres to the west and four hundred metres to the north of the wedge tomb respectively. A standing stone is also located one hundred metres to the south-east.

Any one of these three sites could be the elusive Sleacht Néill, the monument to Niall from which the townland is named. The Niall in question was probably Niall Glúndubh Ó Néill who was killed fighting the Vikings near Dublin in the 10th century, although an alternative tradition states that this Niall was a prince of the Mac Lochlainns, who died in the battle of Cáiméirge in the year 1214 AD fighting against the Ó Néills, as these

On the mountain top itself, about 500 metres north of the track, there is a large bronze/stone-age burial cairn partially covered by heather and coarse grasses. It is from this cairn that the mountain receives the first element of its name. The second element, *tóchar*, refers to a type of roadway made of oak planks and used for crossing areas of wet ground, perhaps the bit immediately to the west of the emigrants' cairn.

One and a half kilometres to the east of the summit, on the mountain track leading from Slaughtneil, a well preserved cist grave dating from the Bronze Age can be seen.

In the vicinity of the Sceilp, a small cliff on the eastern side of Carntogher, there is a zone of glacial moraine known as 'The Legadooeys'. Recent research has indicated a possible prehistoric village site, a court tomb and an ancient trackway nearby.

On Crockmore, a rocky, heather-clad hill on the eastern shoulder of the mountain there are a number of sites of interest. The path up to Crockmore goes through Hugh Cassidy's place. Hugh was a strong believer in the power of the fairies or gentle folk. If a twig were to fall from the fairy thorn in the field above the house it would have to stay there out of respect for them. Hired as a farm labourer by a childless couple called McEldowney while still a boy, the farm was left to him after their death and he spent the rest of his life working these fields. He died on the hillside in 1982 in his mid-seventies. It is possible such fairy thorns mark former ring fort sites

Fairy lore is thought to be a re-interpretation of the gods of pre-Christian Ireland, known in the mythology as the Tuatha Dé Danann, the followers of Aine, a personification of the land goddess who is remembered in the placename Lios Aine (Lissan near Cookstown). Pre-Christian religions are also evidenced locally in the name Lough Neagh, Loch nEachach, Eochaidh being the horse god of the Irish Celts. Two hundred metres further up the path is the remains of a lime kiln used for producing lime to reduce the acidity of the soil. At the top of the hill the first monument we reach is another 'Giant's Grave', a wedge tomb once covered by a cairn of stones. This monument was robbed, as were many others in the nineteenth century, in the belief that

two powerful branches of the Uí Néill vied for control of the dynasty. Our confusion about this Niall is most likely the result of propaganda put about by the victorious Ó Néills seeking to secure their title to the chieftancy. The picture is further complicated by discovery in the early 19th century of an iron sword in a stone lined grave discovered under another cairn some seventy metres from the wedge tomb. Perhaps this burial is the most likely candidate as a monument to a Gaelic chieftain.

In the mountain portion of Ballyknock townland to the west of Seefinn, there is what appears to be the remains of a settlement dating from famine times. It consists of a well preserved rectangular house site known as 'the bothóg' [Irish for hut] and marked with a sign showing 'boith – bogh', with the possible remains of a bronze age cairn and a small field site containing cultivation ridges or 'lazy beds' a few metres away to the east. Adjacent to the cairn is another rectangular house site, this one with two large stones marking the entrance. There is another house site a few metres to the south of the bothóg; this one seems to have two internal walls while a fourth lies some 500m further up the mountain to the west. All these features are connected by a network of tracks.

Higher up the mountain approximately 1km from the bothóg and to the east of the small feature known as Mickey Neilly's Hill, a well preserved bronze age cairn lies uncovered by turf cutters. This place is known locally as 'Fiddler's Green.'

At the bottom of Altavaddyvacky glen at a place called Tanageeragh [Tamhnach na gCaorach-sheep field] there is a partially preserved c19th lime kiln.

The glen, now deserted, takes its name from a story which relates how an old woman was trapped there one winter by a severe snowfall. Late one night she heard a scraping sound at her door. When she opened it she found a wolf lame in one paw. She examined the paw, found a thorn lodged there and removed it. Every morning after that as long as the snow lasted she would find a dead rabbit, grouse or hare outside her door. When her neighbours returned to the glen after the snow melted, they were amazed to find her alive and well.

5 Knockoneill Court Tomb

Tuama Cúirte Chnoc Néill



A megalithic tomb, dating to the Neolithic or New Stone Age (2000-4000 BC), is found in Knockoneill. It gets its name from the semi-circular forecourt of upright stones which lead to a gallery. In most cases the dead would have been cremated and their remains placed in the gallery together with some belongings and food for their journey to the after-life. This gallery consists of two chambers. It is known locally as the 'Giant's Grave', a common name applied to such monuments. This court tomb is unusual in that it has a subsidiary chamber at the back of the gallery which is entered via a passage in the side of the tomb. More unusual is the fact that the backstone of the main gallery is used as a side stone of the subsidiary chamber. The tomb was used in the Bronze Age (approximately 2000-250 BC) for burial. Excavations at the site in 1948, 1977 and more recently in 1984 produced charred bones and an urn dating to the Bronze Age located to the south of the tomb and in the forecourt respectively. Laurence Flanagan, one of the excavators,


suggests the possibility that a cairn was superimposed on the site at the time, the line of the perimeter of the possible cairn surviving outside the forecourt of the tomb to the north and north-west, however others argue that this feature is the remains of a wall which enclosed a much later childrens' burial ground. The majority of court tombs are found in the north of the island of Ireland with the majority of those with subsidiary chambers found in mid Ulster and north Connacht. Seven court tombs are located in County Derry.

Ireland was a much different place during the Neolithic period. There was very heavy forest cover and no sign of the fields and hedges that we see today. Most settlement was on the fairly high ground between the lowlands and the mountains where the soil was lighter and there were fewer trees. These early farmers cleared the trees and grew primitive kinds of cereals and kept livestock. The uplands were different to today because the bogs had not begun to grow and the climate was slightly warmer.


6 Drumnaph Ancient Wood



Seanchoill Dhroim nDamh

Note: See detailed map of 'Drumnaph Wood' 



The name of this ancient hazelwood  is derived from the Gaelic 'Droim nDamh' meaning Ox Ridge and consists of a core area of woodland and wetland. This is formed from four distinct habitats of old wood, rush meadow, fen, and new woodland planting, with the associated areas of Lough Bran to the west and Carrowmenagh raised bog to the east creating a rich mosaic of high conservation value.

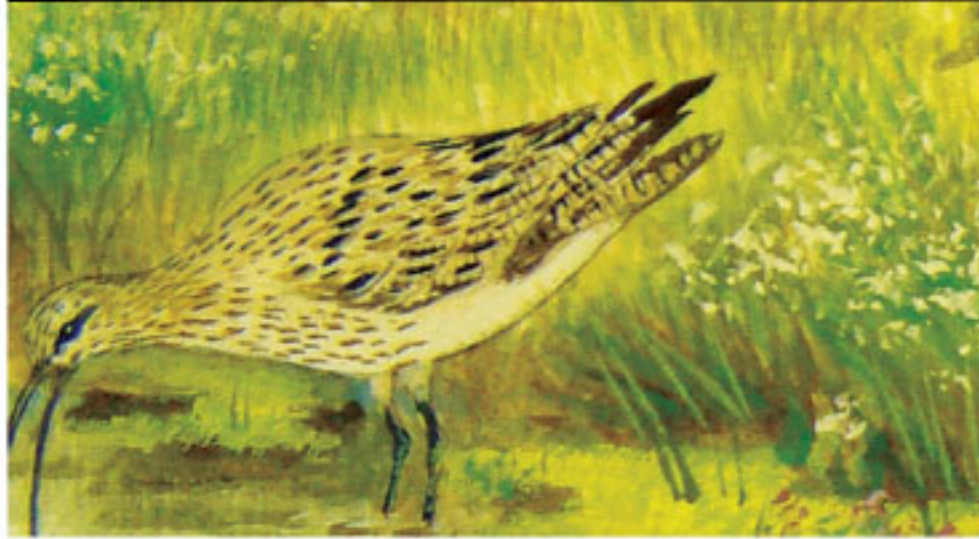
The history of the site can be traced back to the great Forest of Killetra [Coill Íochtarach-lower wood] through evidence gathered from old maps, estate records, scattered moss-covered stones, old oaks and carpets of flora.

There is a rath, an earthen ring-fort dating from the early Christian period, with associated field systems and trackways at the northern end of the site. The earthen banks suggest that the people who lived in this defended farmstead were important members of their society. The banks were topped by a defensive palisade of wooden posts. It was not necessarily a fort in the military sense but more likely a secure dwelling place where a number of timber framed structures accommodated a powerful family and their possessions. These forts were occupied from around the 6th to the 12th centuries AD.

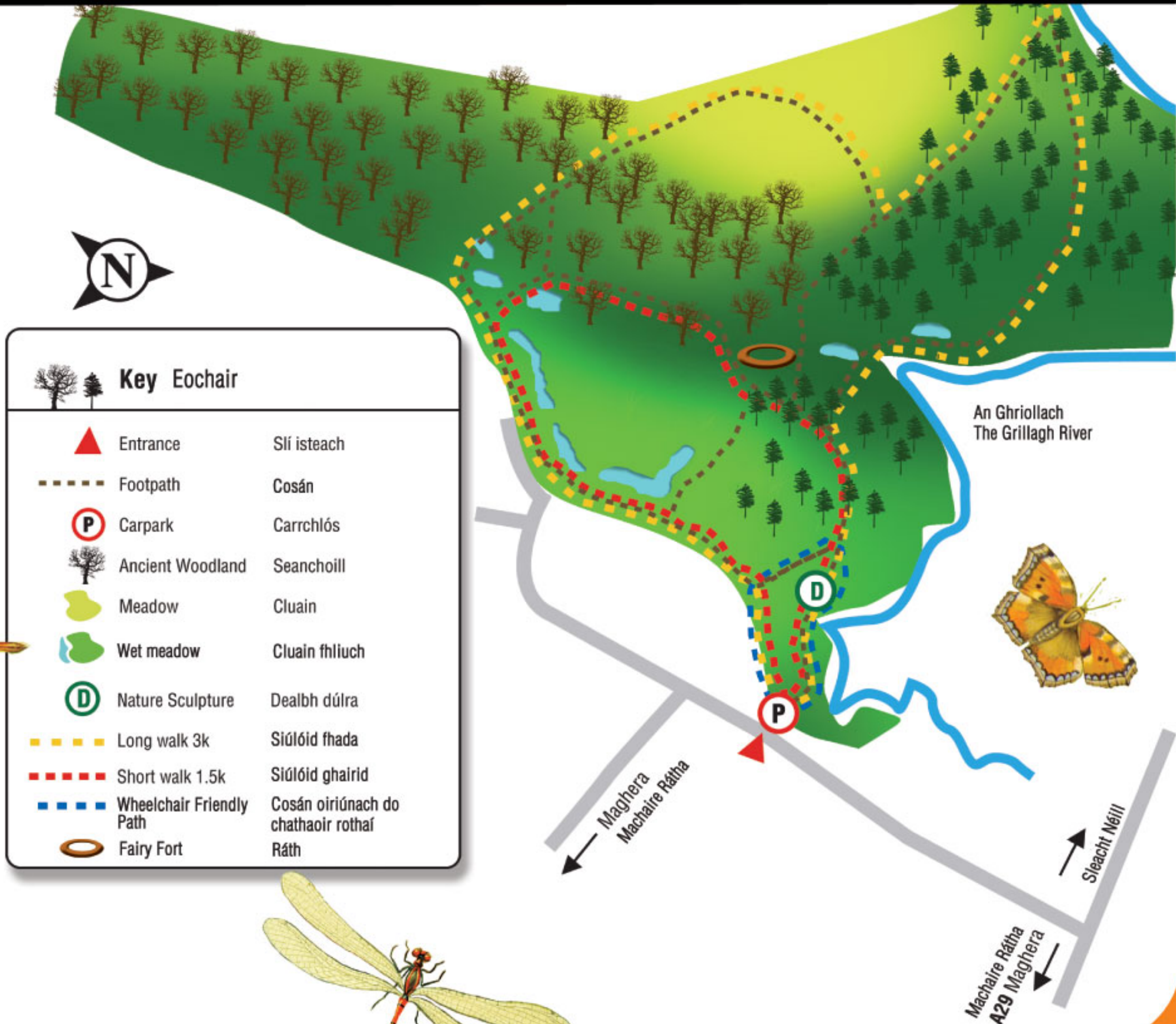
Drumnaph Wood



Coil Dhroim nDamh



Lean na cosáin treoraithe nó siúil go sámh fríd an tearmann.
Follow the waymarked trails or just explore the reserve at your leisure.



Drumnaph is a haven for local wildlife, some of which is shown below.



Fia-Dhúlra Dhroim nDamh Drumnaph Wildlife



1. Sedge Warbler - Ceolaire cíbe
2. Speckled Wood - Breacfhéileacán coille
3. Heron - Corr réisc
4. Wild angelica - Gallfheabhrán
5. Small Tortoiseshell - Ruán beag
6. Bog Myrtle - Raideog
7. Bog Cotton - ceannbhán caolduilleach
8. Snipe - Naoscach
9. Early Marsh orchid - Magairlín luath
10. Ragged robin - Lus na síoda
11. Early purple orchid - Magairlín meidhreach
12. Fox - Sionnach
13. Curlew - Crotach
14. Water rail - Rálóg uisce
15. Sundew - Drúchtín móna
16. Damselfly - Béchuil
17. Orange Tip - Barr buí
18. Spotted Orchid - Magairlín breac
19. Meadow pipit - Riabhóg mhóna
20. Irish hare - Giorria
21. Sedge - Cíb
22. Redstart - Earrdheargán
23. Oak - Dair
24. Buzzard - Clamhán
25. Sparrowhawk - Spioróg
26. Hobby - Fabhcún coille





This mountain walking trail provides access to Carntogher Mountain and its environs situated to the north-west of Maghera town and to the north of the Glenshane Pass. It is made up of three colour coded way marked routes all of which begin at the carpark at the Cotter Row in Tirkane.

<p>SEEFIN TRAIL</p> <p>Length: 4.3km Time: 1-2 hrs Total Climb: 50m</p>	<p>The Seefin Trail follows the Pollan Water from Tullykeeran Bridge below the carpark and loops around Seefin Hill in Ballyknock.</p>	<p>SKELP TRAIL</p> <p>Length: 6.4km Time: 1.5 - 3 hrs Total Climb: 200m</p>	<p>The Skelp Trail takes in the lower part of Carntogher Mountain, following a section of the old coach road and rising to a height of 360m at the view point at the legadooys, returning by the Skelp, a small cliff on the old stone pathway which accesses the Snout, the distinctive feature which forms the summit.</p>	<p>CARNTOGHER WAY</p> <p>Length: 9km Time: 2 - 4 hrs Total Climb: 294m</p>	<p>The full Carntogher Way follows the old coach road continuing to the Snout [464m], then heading northwards along the ridge following an old turf cutters' path to Cnockmore in Slaughtneil, returning to the Cotter Row via a gravel track through 'Back Park' along the foot of the mountain.</p>
<p>On open ground track and minor road. Some wet and uneven conditions along streamside</p>		<p>On minor road, track and open mountain. Some wet, steep and uneven sections on mountainside</p>		<p>On minor road, track and open mountain. Some wet, steep and uneven sections on mountainside</p>	

How to find us



Derry: 45km / 28miles

Belfast: 60km / 37miles


Coleraine: 35km / 22miles

Cookstown: 25km / 15miles

For further information contact:

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