

## **CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

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#### **Heritage Council launches new publication on Ireland's prehistoric rock art**

*Examples of this enigmatic ancient art can be found throughout the country*

When it comes to knowledge of Ireland's prehistoric art, the megalithic art of Ireland's world-renowned passage grave cemeteries, Newgrange and Knowth in the Boyne Valley, have dominated. However, archaeology enthusiasts do not have to travel to Meath to experience Ireland's rich rock art – it can be found on rock surfaces and outcrops throughout the country. Irish rock art is the subject of a new, richly illustrated booklet published by the Heritage Council. Written by archaeologist, Clare Busher O'Sullivan, 'Rock Art' explores the art form; where it can be found; what it means; and how it can be protected.

Rock art is carved, drawn, painted, engraved, or incised imagery on natural rock surfaces. This art is found world-wide in various forms and from different periods, and includes the cave paintings of southern France and northern Spain, the passage tomb art of the Neolithic Age and the many examples of Bronze Age rock art in Atlantic Europe. Ireland is home to 'open-air' Atlantic rock art, a carving practice that was widespread across Atlantic Europe, including in Scotland, England, France, Spain and Portugal. Unlike megalithic art, which is associated with monuments, open-air Atlantic rock art is typically found on boulders and outcrops. The Atlantic tradition dates to the Later Neolithic / Early Bronze Age period (c3000-1500 BC). In Ireland, examples of this ancient art can be found in clusters in Carlow / Wicklow; Louth / Monaghan, Fermanagh and Donegal. However, the densest concentration can be found in the Cork / Kerry region.

Commenting, Head of Conservation at the Heritage Council, Ian Doyle said: "In Ireland, the most common motif in Atlantic rock art is the 'cup-mark', which is a circular human-made depression in the rock surface. The cup-mark is often surrounded by one or more concentric rings. The art is referred to in Ireland and Britain as 'cup and ring art'. The rock art is located in rural landscapes, often in open valleys or the foothills of mountains and almost always in close proximity to water sources."

He added: "There are many theories to explain the purpose and the significance of Atlantic rock art, but they are difficult to confirm due to its abstract nature and prehistoric date. Some researchers believe that the placement of rock art marks boundaries and routeways within prehistoric landscapes, while another theory is that rock art marks places of worship and pilgrimage in prehistoric society. However, there is no definitive explanation for the art."

An element of archaeological heritage, rock art is protected under the National Monuments Act. Perhaps one of the best-known examples of open-air rock art in Ireland is the Boheh stone in Co Mayo, from which on 18<sup>th</sup> April and between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> August, the sun can be seen to set on the summit of Croagh Patrick and then roll down the northern shoulder of the mountain. The Boheh stone is a national monument in State care. In recent years, archaeological surveys and receding blanket peat have revealed several previously unrecorded rock art panels throughout Ireland, most notably on the Iveragh Peninsula in Co Kerry. Meanwhile, more than half of the known examples of rock art from Louth / Monaghan occur at Drumirill townland in Co Monaghan.

Mr Doyle added: 'While this form of open-air art is widely known to archaeologists, it is not well known to the general public. We hope that this publication on Atlantic rock art will bring this internationally important but enigmatic form of prehistoric art to a wider consciousness and that walkers and landowners will be able to identify more of it and be aware of the need to care for it. This new publication also includes the Rock Art Code, which provides guidance for members of the public visiting rock art sites and interacting with decorated panels and the landowners.'

The Rock Art booklet can be found on the Heritage Council website. Information on visiting rock art locally can be found on the Historic Environment Viewer on [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie).

## ENDS

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### Notes for Editors:

- Ian Doyle is available for interview, on request.
- Examples of where open-air rock art can be found include:
  - **Wicklow:** Concentrations to the west / south-west of Roundwood in Co Wicklow, in close proximity to Lough Dan. There is another high concentration in Ballykean, between Kilbride and Redcross, and some scattered examples between Aughrim and Avoca.
  - **Carlow:** Rock art panels concentrated in multiple townlands around Borris.
  - **Louth:** In Louth, clusters occur to the north of the county between Kilcurly and Inishkeen, to the west of Dundalk.
  - **Donegal:** In the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal, the townlands of Carrowreagh/ Craignacally and Magheranaul have very high concentrations.
  - **Cork/Kerry:** They are quite scattered on the Mizen Peninsula in Cork. However, in Kerry, the townlands of Letter West, Kealduff Upper and Coomasaharn are quite close to the townland of Glenbeigh and Kells on the Iveragh Peninsula. On the Dingle Peninsula, the townland of Kilmore has a very high concentration of rock art.

- The publication also includes high quality imagery of rock art from the National Monuments Service archive, photographer Ken Williams, Clare Busher O'Sullivan, and others, which are available on request.

**About the Heritage Council:** The Heritage Council was established under the Heritage Act 1995 with responsibility to propose policies and priorities for the national heritage. It works in co-operation with a range of agencies, communities, and individuals to promote education, enjoyment and understanding of our national heritage. For further information, visit: [www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie).