

South Connemara – Bearna to Slyne Head

[Areas 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7]

The population of this region, with its succession of deep bays and islands, is concentrated on the coastal strip. Behind this lies a wide expanse of unpopulated bog-land and lake, which runs back to the steep rampart of the Twelve Bens. The present population of the coastal region of South Connemara is relatively high in the stretch from Bearna to Cill Chiaráin Bay – more than 15,000 according to the Gaeltacht Local Area Plan¹¹ – with almost 8,000 of those in the coastal strip west of Galway city that includes Bearna, Na Forbacha and An Spidéal. Further west, between Roundstone and Slyne Head, population densities are much lower. This is the quintessential Connemara¹², which occupies such an important place in the Irish consciousness. Its Gaeltacht status reinforces that unique position. Its traditional boat culture, principally associated in the public mind with the Galway Hookers, but including other important boat types, is an important iconographic element in reinforcing that dominant cultural status.

Topography

The coastline is characterised by deep inlets and many islands and reefs, providing an extraordinarily high ratio of shoreline to land area, as can be seen from the maps (Appendix 3). Settlement was – and remains – largely coastal and extends onto the islands and islets, some of which are accessible by foot at low tide. Up to the early decades of the 19th century, transport and access on this coastline was almost exclusively by water.

A feature of the coastline of South Connemara is the bewildering profusion of access points of all descriptions, reflecting the area's close dependence on the sea. Over 200 harbours, piers and slips are shown on the Google Earth map¹³ linked to the Galway County Council web-site, with more than 50% of these in South Connemara.

¹¹ See Reference 8

¹² See References 5 & 10

¹³ See Digital Reference D3



Céibh an Mháimín, Garmna, Curacha Adhmaid & Gleoiteog

Conamara Theas

- Bearna go Ceann Léime [Ceantair 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7]

Tá formhór de dhaonra an réigiún, ina bhfuil go leor cuanta doimhne agus oiléain i ndiaidh a chéile, lonnaithe ar an gcósta. Tá limistéar mór portaigh agus lochanna nach bhfuil cónaí ann agus a théann siar chomh fada le rampar ard na mBeanna Beola taobh thiar den limistéar sin le cósta. Tá daonra an chósta sin faoi láthair réasúnta ard sa cheantar ó Bhearna go Cuan Chill Chiaráin - breis agus 15,000 duine de réir Phlean Limistéir Áitiúil na Gaeltachta¹¹ - agus beagnach 8,000 díobh sin ina gcónaí ar an stráice cósta a chuimsíonn Bearna, na Forbacha agus an Spidéal. Tá dlús an daonra níos ísle níos faide siar, idir Cloch na Rón agus Ceann Léime. Is ceantar é sin a shainaithnítear mar Chonamara¹², áit atá fíor-thábhachtach maidir le meabhraíocht mhuintir na hÉireann. Treisíonn stádas Gaeltachta an cheantar an seasamh uathúil sin. Is gné thábhachtach íocónagrafaíochta, maidir leis an stádas cultúrtha ceannasach sin a threisiú, é cultúr na mbád traidisiúnta san áit, lena shamhlaítear Húicéirí na Gaillimhe den chuid is mó i measc an phobail, ach lena n-áirítear cineálacha eile de bháid thábhachtacha.

Topagrafaíocht

Tá góilíní doimhne agus an iliomad oiléán agus sceir, lena mbaineann cóimheas suaithní ard cladaigh le hachar talún⁵, mar is léir ó na léarscáileanna, ina bpriomhthréithe den imeallbhord. Ba ar an gcósta agus ar na hoileáin agus ar na hoileáiní, roinnt díobh nach bhféadfaí dul chucu ach ag lag trá, ba mhó a ndearna daoine cónaí agus is mar sin atá fós. Go dtí luathbhlianta an 19^ú haois, den chuid is mó, ba ar an bhfarráige a dhéantaí an taisteal agus an t-iompar ar an gcósta sin.

Gné amháin de chósta Chonamara Theas is ea an iliomad pointí rochtana de gach uile chineál atá ann, rud a léiríonn an méid a bhraitheann an ceantar ar an bhfarráige. Léirítéar breis agus 200 calafort, cuan agus cé ar an léarscáil de chuid Google Earth¹³ atá

¹¹ Féach Tagairt 8

¹² Féach Tagairtí 5 & 10

¹³ Féach Tagairt D3



Curach Adhmaid, An Spidéal

Because of the importance of the region and its richness of cultural heritage, South Connemara has been subdivided into six sub-areas, each with its own distinct character:

Cois Fharraige: This is the relatively featureless and flat coastline between the Claddagh, in Galway city, and Cuan Chasla. Boats tend to be concentrated in the harbours formed by Nimmo's piers at Bearna, An Spidéal and at Céibh Bhun na hAbhann in Baile na hAbhann. On the eastern shore of Cuan Chasla is the quay in Baile an tSléibhe and that of Ros an Mhil, now expanded far beyond its original size into one of the major commercial fishing harbours of the west of Ireland.

An Cheathrú Rua: The peninsula of An Cheathrú Rua is a centre of population and services for South Connemara. Cuan Chasla to the east has an anchorage and pier at Sruthán, used by the *Báid Seoil*, as well as smaller piers at Caorán Mór and Pointe, where *Curachaí* and other craft may be found. To the west Cuan an Fhir Mhóir has An Dóilín, Caladh Thaidhg, Cuilleán, Látháí Dubha, Caladh na Seangán, An Ros (Ross Island) and Tuairín which are home to a large number of *Báid Seoil*, *Curachaí Adhmaid* and other craft, throughout the sailing season.

Ceantar na nOileán: Béal an Daingin, on the mainland, where the series of connecting bridges and causeways springs off, is included with the islands; Eanach Mheáin, with Inis Treabhair offlying to the west; Leitir Móir and Leitir Calaigh, with the ports of Sruthán Buí and Brandy Harbour on the northern shore and Céibh na gCasla on its southern shore; Garmna – with Inis Bearachain and the piers at An Cnoc and Uaimíní to the north-west and the piers at Máimín, Tír an Phia (Céibh Ghais na nUan), Trá Bháin, An tAircín, Sáilín, Poll Uí Mhuirinn and Cuan Choigéil on the east and south coasts – is in the heartland of Galway Hooker territory. So also are the two last connected islands, Leitir Mealláin and Fornais. On Leitir Mealláin, Céibh na Stáide and Céibh na hAirde are found on the west side of Cuan Choigéil and Cuan Ghólaim is sheltered inside the headland of Ceann Gólaim. Fornais, at the end of the road, has two piers, Céibh Bharrett and Céibh Phaddy Jack, on its sheltered east side. Daighinis, now uninhabited, lies offshore along with a scatter of smaller islands, facing west, across the mouth of Cuan Chill Chiaráin, to Iorras Aithneach.



An Cnoc, Garmna

nasctha le láithreán gréasáin Chomhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe agus tá níos mó na 50% díobh sin i gConamara Theas.

Mar gheall ar chomh tábhachtach is atá an réigiún agus an saibhreas a bhaineann lena oidhreacht chultúrtha, tá Conamara Theas rointe suas i sé cinn d'fho-cheantair, fo-cheantair a bhfuil a saintréithe féin acu.

Cois Fharraige: Is píosa cósta réidh é seo idir an Cladach i gCathair na Gaillimhe agus Cuan Chasla nach bhfuil mórán gnéithe ag baint leis. Tá formhór na mbád sna cuanta ag céanna Nimmo i mBearna, ag an Spidéal agus cé Bhun na hAbhann i mBaile na hAbhann. Tá cé Bhaile an tSléibhe ar an gcladach thoir de Chuan Chasla chomh maith le Ros an Mhíl, atá anois i bhfad níos mó ná mar a bhí i dtús aimsire agus é ar cheann de na cuanta iascaireachta tráchtála is mó iniarthar na hÉireann.

An Cheathrú Rua: Is ionad daonra agus seirbhísí do Chonamara Theas í leithinis na Ceathrún Rua. Tá leaba ancaire agus cé i gCuan Chasla soir ón gCeathrú Rua ag an Sruthán a úsáideann Báid Seoil agus tá céanna beaga ar an gCaorán Mór agus Pointe, áit a mbíonn Curacha agus báid eile. Má thítear siar go dtí Cuan an Fhir Mhóir, tá an Dóilín, Caladh Thaidhg, Cuilleán, Látháí Dubha, Caladh na Seangán, an Ros agus Tuairín, áit a mbíonn go leor de na Báid Seoil, Curacha Adhmaid agus báid eile, ar feadh an tséasúir seoltóireachta.

Céantar na nOileán: Áirítear Béal an Daingin, atá ar an mórhír agus an áit a dtosaíonn na droichid agus cabhsaí cónaisc, ar cheantar na n-oileán; tá Eanach Mheáin agus Inis Treabhair, ar an taobh thiar, Leitir Móir agus Leitir Calaigh leis na calaí – an Sruthán Buí agus an Crompán Mór ar an gcósta thuaidh agus Céibh na gCasla ar an gcósta theas; Garmna – Inis Bearachain agus céanna ar an gCnoc agus ag na hUaimíni siar ó thuaidh agus céanna sa Mháimin, Tír an Phia (Céibh Ghaisneach na nUan), an Trá Bháin, an tAircín, Sáilín, Poll Uí Mhuirinn agus Cuan Choigéil ar na cóstaí thoir agus theas, i gceartlár saol Húicéirí na Gaillimhe. Tá an dá oileán deiridh freisin, Leitir Mealláin agus Fornais. I Leitir Mealláin, tá Céibh na Stáide agus Céibh na hAirde ar an taobh thiar de



Curachs racing

Curachaí ag rásaíocht

Ros Muc: The Ros Muc peninsula is bounded on the east by Cuan Chamais, a narrow and winding inlet which reaches far into the interior to Scríb. On the mainland shore are Scríb, Camas and the graphically named Muiceanach Idir Dhá Sháile, while the peninsular shore has the quay at An Siléar and the offlying islet An Cladhnach. On the western shore, facing into the upper reaches of Cuan Chill Chiaráin are Ros Cíde, An Turlach, Cill Bhriocáin and the offlying island Oileán Mór.

Iorras Aithneach: This long and broad peninsula, lying between Cuan Chill Chiaráin to the east and Cuan na Beirtrí Buí to the west, contains the important centres of Cill Chiaráin and Carna. The *Curach Adhmaid*, used for shell-fishing and seaweed harvesting, is ubiquitous here. To the east Coill Sáile at Flannery Bridge offers a safe anchorage and pier while, to the west, the piers at Aird Mhóir, Caladh Mhaínse, Aird Thoir, Aird Thiar, Más, Damhros, Maíros, Leitreach Ard and the island of Maínis fall within the compass of Carna. This is an area famous for boat-building with the Caseys, Clohertys, Gorhams, O'Donnells, Greenes and Mulkerrins providing dynasties of famous *Saoir Bháid*. The rocky shoreline was unfriendly to the fragile curach so the heavy, wooden *Bád Iomartha* and its variants were the favoured rowing boats here until supplanted by the *Curach Adhmaid* during the 20th century. The best-known offshore islands are Oileán Máisean and Cruach na Cora (better known as Oileán Mhic Dara), where the feast of St. MacDara is celebrated each July 16th with mass at the mediaeval church on the uninhabited island and sailing races for the Galway Hooker fleet.

Roundstone / Ballyconneely: Lying between Cuan na Beirtrí Buí and Slyne Head this coastline changes subtly in character at Roundstone; it is no longer predominantly Gaeltacht; The foreshore is gentler, with more beaches and sand-hills and less seaweed-covered rock; piers and harbours are bigger and more widely spaced, the piers of Roundstone and Bunowen being examples. While Roundstone is an important Galway Hooker port, hosting one of the premier regattas in July, usually after Féile Mhic Dara, fewer *Báid Seoil* make their home ports west of there. The *Curach Adhmaid* is everywhere, used for fishing and pleasure, at Céibh na Mainistreach in Roundstone, Ervallagh, Ballyconneely and Dolan/Aillebrack.



Small *Bád lomartha* or 'Shop Boat'

Bád lomartha beag nó 'Bád Siopa'

Chuan Choigéil agus tá Cuan Ghólaim faoi fhoscadh cheann tíre Cheann Gólaim. Ag deireadh an bhóthair tá Fornais agus dhá ché ar an taobh foscúil thoir, céibh Phaddy Jack agus Céibh Bharrett. Tá Daighinis, nach bhfuil aon chónaí ann, amach ó chladach Phornaise, chomh maith le roinnt oileán beag trasna Cuan Chill Chiaráin agus a n-aghaidh acu ar Iorras Aithneach.

Ros Muc: Tá Cuan Chamais, góilín caol casta a théann isteach chomh fada le Scríb, ar theorainn thoir leithinis Ros Muc. Tá Scríb, Camas agus Muiceanach Idir Dhá Sháile ar chladach na mórhíre agus tá cé na leithinse ag an Siléar agus oileáinín, An Cladhnach amach uaidh. Tá Ros Cíde, an Turlach, Cill Bhriocáin agus an tOileán Mór ar an gcladach thiar i dtreo Chuan Chill Chiaráin.

Iorras Aithneach: Tá na lárionaid thábhachtacha, Cill Chiaráin agus Carna ar an leithinis fhada agus leathan seo atá idir Cuan Chill Chiaráin ar an taobh thoir agus Cuan na Beirtrí Buí ar an taobh thiar. Is í an Churach Adhmaid, a úsáidtear le haghaidh sliogasc a ghabháil agus feamainn a bhaint, atá i ngach áit anseo. Tá leaba ancaire shábháilte agus cé thoir i gCoill Sáile ag Droichead Uí Flannabhra agus i gCarna tá céanna san Aird Mhóir, i gCaladh Mhaínse, san Aird Thoir, san Aird Thiar, ag an Más, i nDamhras, i Maíros, i Leitreach Ard agus ar Oileán Mhaínse. Is ceantar é seo a bhfuil cál na saoirseachta bád air le Saoir Bháid mór le rá ag teacht as teaghlaigh mhuintir Uí Chathasaigh, na Clochartaigh, na Guairim, mhuintir Uí Dhomhnaill, mhuintir Uaithnín, agus mhuintir Uí Mhaoilchiaráin. Ní raibh an líne chladaigh charraigeach oiriúnach don churach shobhriste agus ba é an Bád lomartha adhmaid trom agus báid mar é an bád rámhaíochta barrfhabhair nó gur tháinig an Churach Adhmaid ina áit le linn an 20ú haois. Is iad na hoileáin is mó a bhfuil aithne orthu atá amach ón gcósta anseo ná Oileán Máisean agus Cruach na Cora (nó Oileán Mhic Dara mar is fearr aithne air), áit a ndéantar féile Naomh Mac Dara a chomóradh gach 16 Iúil le hAifreann ag an seipéal meánaoise ar an oileán nach bhfuil cónaí air agus le geallta do na Húicéirí.

Historical Development

Nimmo's Piers in County Galway

The Dublin Castle Commission was set up to distribute public and private funds to assist with economic development of the west of Ireland. Its legacy can still be seen in the road network and major piers constructed by its energetic and talented engineer, Alexander Nimmo, between 1820 and 1832¹⁴. The first town on this section of coast, Roundstone, was founded by Nimmo as recently as the 1820s. As the 19th century wore on a large number of smaller roads, piers and causeways were built.

Alexander Nimmo (1783 – 1832), was a civil engineer remarkable for his energy, imagination and achievement. He left his mark on Co. Galway with an impressive list of roads, bridges and piers¹⁵, designed and built. He is sometimes credited, in popular folklore, with having built every pier in Connemara; that is not true, but his legacy includes the piers at Leenane, Derryinver, Cleggan, Clifden, Roundstone, Cloonisle, Garmna (Máimín), Ros an Mhíl, An Spidéal, Bearna, Galway (Nimmo's Pier), Rinville, Ballinacourty, Killeenaran and Dooras, as well as Cill Éinne on Árainn. Nimmo's design for Galway docks was modified and realised by his successor John Killaly.

BOATS AND MEN ENGAGED IN THE FISHERIES—COUNTY GALWAY.

Coast Guard Station.	Coast Guard Officer.	Decked Vessels.			Half-decked Vessels.			Open Sail-boats.			Row-boats.			No. of Fisher-men.
		No.	Tonnage	Men.	No.	Tonnage	Men.	No.	Men.	No.	Men.	No.	Men.	
Claggan	Lieut. C. D. Warren	1	18	4	6	60	24	100	400	80	300	728		
Munnin Bay	Mr. G. Burtchael	...	...	...	3	34	15	12	60	106	530	605	
Innislaken	Lieut. R. Hunter	...	...	...	100	950	450	14	60	250	1000	1510	
Kilkerran	Mr. R. Hooper	...	...	...	...	...	...	130	650	700	2800	3450	
Castle Bay	Mr. J. Williams	...	...	...	2	24	10	60	300	100	500	810	
The Isles of Arran	Mr. E. N. D'Alton	...	...	...	5	57	26	35	175	40	200	401	
Barna	Lieut. J. Kemp	...	...	...	...	...	...	23	115	20	100	215	
Claddagh, in Galway Town	Capt. J. L. Wynd	...	...	...	...	...	...	105	500	80	320	820	
Kilcormac	Lt. M. F. O'Connell	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	No	Return	
		1	18	4	116	1125	525	479	2260	1376	5750	8639		

Table from 1836 Fisheries Report

Tábla ó Thuarisc lascaigh 1836

The area supported a large population, who subsisted through fishing and the cultivation of potatoes, fertilised by seaweed, on the narrow coastal strip. Turf, from the bogs lying behind the coastline, provided fuel. The reports of the Commissioners of the Irish Fisheries, established under an act of parliament in 1819, give detailed reports of boats, tonnages and numbers employed in fisheries around the coast up until 1836. The 1836 Fisheries Report¹⁶, for instance, gives a total of 329 sail and 1,070 rowing boats on this section of coast, with over 6,000 men employed, as shown on the accompanying table.

¹⁴ See References 3 & 4

¹⁵ See Reference 4

¹⁶ See Reference 15