

**The Lough Corrib Marine Archaeology Project**  
**for**  
**Galway Community Heritage Site**

**Shallow Graves: Discovering Lough Corrib's**  
**Ancient Maritime Past.....By Accident**



**The Annaghkeen Boat, a contemporary of Stonehenge and the Pyramids**

**(Photo Ciaran O'Murchu)**

*The chance discovery of a beautiful 4500 year old craft has led to the identification of a fleet of astonishingly well-preserved vessels dating from the Stone Age to the present day buried in the soft, shallow silt of an Irish lake.*

With a worrying clatter, the fixing bolt of the wheelhouse door of *Burlesque*, Trevor Northage's 21ft survey boat, fell off and bounced across the aft deck.

Trevor pulled the throttle back and stepped out onto the deck to find the bolt and screw it back into place. A minute or two later he swung back into the wheelhouse and looked at the sonar screen. There, spread across the screen, was the unmistakable outline of a massive prehistoric vessel, an ancient canoe of immense proportions, which would become known as the *Annaghkeen Boat*.

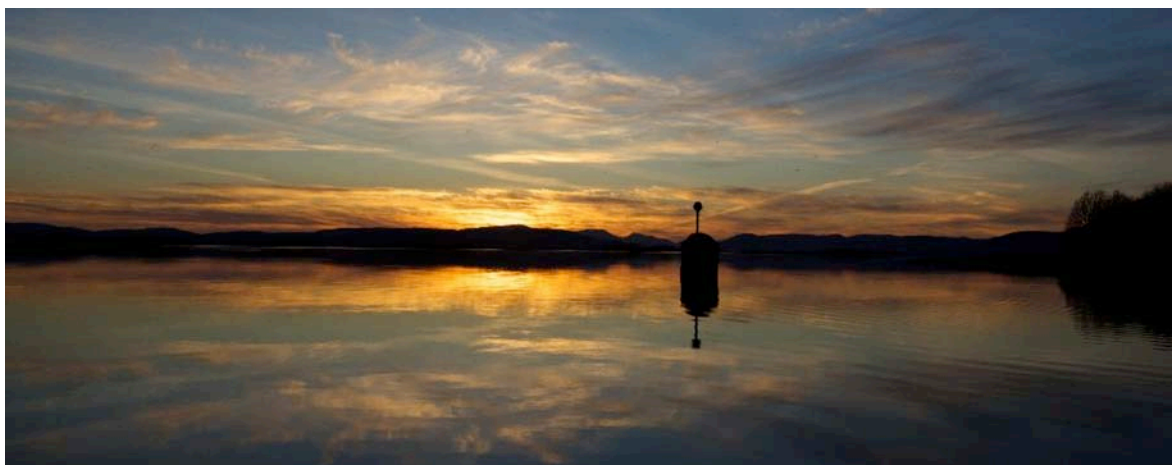
Trevor had, for the previous 4 years, been surveying the 34-mile long Lough Corrib in the West of Ireland to make new navigation charts. He fitted an off the shelf side scan sonar unit in 2011 to give him a better idea of the geological structure of the lakebed. This would allow him to find obstructions and isolated dangers that he would include on his charts. After finding the *Annaghkeen Boat*, he looked back through his records and realized he had captured several other anomalies on the sonar that needed more investigation. Trevor set about trying to determine exactly what he had found.



**Burlesque at work. (Photo Ciaran O'Murchu)**

It wasn't long before a drop camera made from a *Go-Pro* connected to a submersible video camera was added to the *Burlesque's* equipment. With this remarkably simple and low cost arrangement, Trevor, over the next three years mapped and filmed over forty ancient vessels spanning five millennia. To date the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Irish National Monuments Service has excavated several of these craft, and Trevor's discoveries have provided many amazing artefacts that have been recovered and made public.

Trevor frequently gives presentations on The Lough Corrib Marine Archaeology Project. He asks, "Who wanted to be an explorer when they were a child?" Unsurprisingly there is generally no shortage of previously aspiring Indiana Jones' and Lara Crofts in the audience with most thinking they had to go to the jungles of the Amazon or the ice of Antarctica to do it. "Not at all," he tells them; he is seeing landscapes never before seen and discovering amazing archaeology that last saw sunlight thousands of years before. There is an undiscovered frontier right on our doorstep under the tea coloured waters of Lough Corrib.



Lough Corrib, giving up its secrets. (Photo Ciaran O'Murchu)

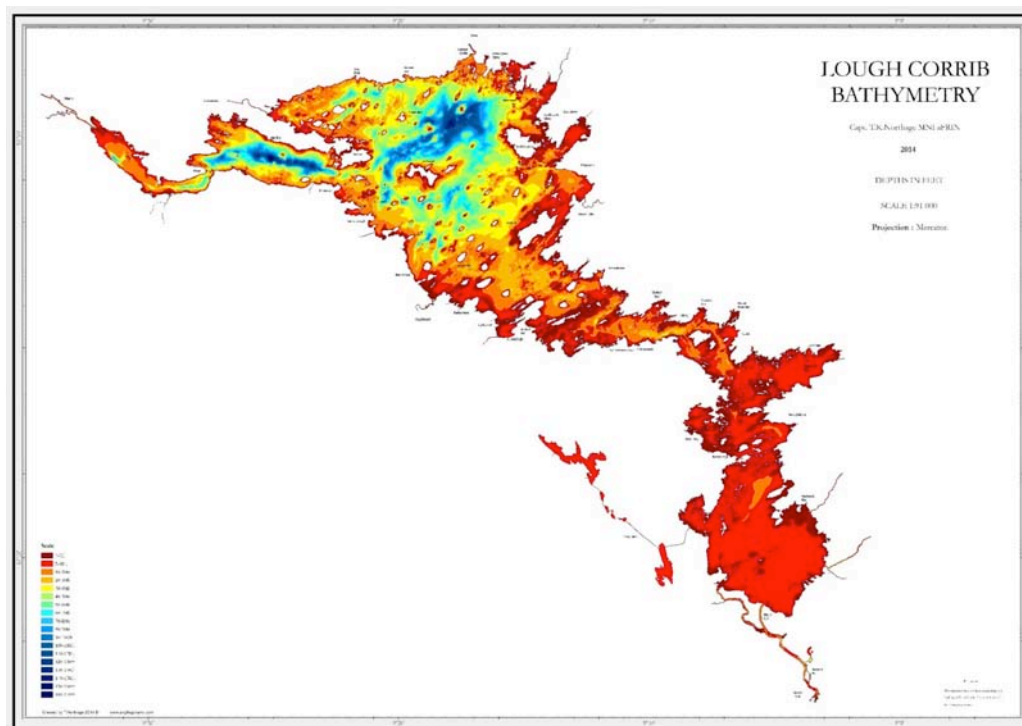
Trevor's work has not merely been focussed on the wrecks beneath these waters, but upon using them to enable the entire ancient Corrib landscape to be understood. This was a landscape enriched by massive Neolithic oak forests, that provided the immense tree for the *Annaghkeen Boat* and by the now submerged prehistoric shoreline and beautiful limestone pavements trodden by the first inhabitants of what is now known as Ireland.

He has uncovered previously undiscovered evidence of the immense forces that existed under the ice sheets during the last ice age when this part of Ireland was deep under glaciers. Known as Swallowtail holes, they sit there, huge underwater pits, off the southwest corner of many of Corrib's islands carved by water at unimaginable pressure under millions of tons of ice.

But it is the wrecks that hold a special place in Trevor's heart. His "day job," as he calls it, is that of a ship's captain, commanding huge ships sailing to the four corners of the earth. Captain Northage has a mariner's understanding of a wreck, and he will tell you that the story of a wreck today is seldom a happy one. We know so little about the people who created the majority of these astonishing and beautiful craft that now lie buried in Corrib's soft silt. It seems very likely that a number of these boats were actually deliberately sunk, perhaps as offerings to the sun or moon, or perhaps as talismans of some kind. Modern day folks are not the only people to practice strange and inexplicable superstitions!

## Lough Corrib

Thirty-four miles long, eight miles across at its widest point, and covering 44,000 acres, Lough Corrib is the largest lake in the Republic of Ireland. Located between Counties Galway and Mayo in the west of Ireland, at Latitude 53.5N Longitude 009.3W it drains via the short River Corrib into the Atlantic Ocean through Galway Bay.



Lough Corrib Bathymetry. T.Northage (AnglingCharts).

It is recognized as one of the finest Wild Brown Trout fisheries in the world, a seat of early Christianity in Europe, and is now revealing itself to be a marine archaeological site of international importance. The marine archaeology has, until very recently, been almost completely un-investigated, and nobody had any clue as to the extent, richness, and diversity of this maritime cultural landscape.

## **Irish Law**

Under Irish law Ireland's National Monuments Service must be notified of all discoveries 100 years of age or older. The Lough Corrib Marine Archaeology Project is indebted to the Service's Underwater Archaeology Unit (UAU) for their continuing cooperation and support.