

Undated – Mesolithic/Neolithic/Bronze Age/Iron Age

The Devinish Boat

In June 2013 while we were surveying at the southern end of the main lake we detected an anomaly in just over 5m of water. We had already found several trees in the area, but it was difficult to pin this anomaly down.



The side scan sonar image was created in 2013, the sub-surface currents in this part of the lake are substantial, and the bottom is very mobile. When I last looked at this it was almost completely covered again.

Figure 1 Side scan sonar of the Devinish Boat (T Northage)

A few days later we put the drop camera on the object, this was before we had high resolution available to us, but still we were able to determine that this was not a typical prehistoric vessel, something out of the ordinary had happened to this boat.

We looked at the movies and stills from all angles, and there was no denying it, this boat had been attacked with a large saw.



Figure 2 *Devinish Boat* with saw cuts. Photo T Northage

The vessel at first appeared to be eroded by time and nature until only the bottom of the hull remained, but the saw cuts seem to indicate the boat's sides were deliberately removed, making the age of the boat more difficult to determine by eye, she may not be quite as old as she looks. The boat is approximately 26ft long and is partially buried in silt. There is a very clearly defined area of *scouring* around the boat. This has been caused by the variable deep currents that flow in this part of the lake. These currents are caused by water returning after it has been blown downwind. A strong westerly wind will pile water onto the eastern side of the lake, the water returns to the west side as a subsurface current.



Figure 3 *Devinish Boat* showing prominent scouring around exposed parts of the wreck. Photo T Northage

The *Devinish Boat* poses some interesting questions. The sides were seemingly sawn down through and then snapped off. Did this happen on dry land and what remained of the hull was then carried out to deep water and dumped ? Or did the lake become so shallow that the sides of this boat were exposed above the silt, and they were scavenged for fuel ? The bottom of the hull would have been too thick and heavy for easy scavenging and probably buried in the soft mud or even underwater. I imagine this salvage would have been carried out from another boat or raft if this was the case.

The boat is about 200m from the shore. Currently she lies in 5m of water

although this may not always have been the case.

An alternative scenario to consider is that at some time in the past the lake's normal level was about 5m lower than today, and the boat was simply pulled up on the shore and abandoned, a similar fate to many boats today. At some later time the craft was broken up, and the remaining hull was inundated by the lake when the level rose.

Corrib has an ancient, submerged shoreline 5m down. Could it be possible that this boat dates from the era of this lower shoreline ? At the moment we have no idea of a century or of a millennium when the lake was at this lower level, and for how long it remained at this level, but we may be in for some surprises.

Yet another alternative would be that the boat was deliberately destroyed, or made unusable as part of some ritual, then transported to deep water and ceremonially sunk. This would not in fact be very unusual, and there are several instances of logboats apparently being "killed" and used as ritual offerings. While archaeologists tend to categorize a lot of objects and finds as ritual or ceremonial, I never lose sight of the fact that my ancestors were probably as adept as I am at simply *losing stuff* or *forgetting stuff*.



Figure 4 The *Devinish Boat*, forward end. Photo T Northage

Saws have been around for thousands of years in one form or another, but Bronze Age saws were small and apparently were only had filed teeth, not *set teeth* (the teeth set out from the line of the saw), so it appears unlikely these

wide cuts were made in the Bronze age. During the Iron Age however, from 800 BCE onwards some really useful saws were developed, which would have been capable of making these cuts. These saws had *raked and set* teeth, and they cut on the pull stroke. Today's saws cut on the push stroke, something only possible with the hard tough steels of the modern day. It may be possible to look at this vessel's cuts and determine how they were made. A radiocarbon 14 date from the vessel's wood would give us a reasonable date for the boat. This would be a good start to helping us date one of Lough Corrib's prehistoric shorelines and develop a picture of the landscape of our ancestors.