

# ***WALKING IN CONNEMARA***

Connemara Tourism Association



*Shorter walks to explore the Hidden Connemara*



*Text and Maps by Dave Hogan, Connemara Field Studies Centre.*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Walking in Connemara; the bogs, shores, mountains and *bóithríns*! Here we have the perfect landscape for walking. The sheer variety of terrain which may be experienced in a couple of hours has attracted walkers for many years. Walkers of all varieties, all shapes and sizes, come to Connemara simply to enjoy the hidden landscape, the sense of being immersed in a beauty skimmed over by the motorist. Hikers and serious walkers have, in the past, been the focus of several publications; excellent guidebooks and descriptions of the more demanding mountain walks are freely available. This modest publication, however, hopes to fill an identified need or gap. Up until now, no guidebook was available for the vast majority of walkers; those for whom an afternoon or evening's walk meant considerable pleasure without being over-tiring. We hope this guide to some of the less demanding walks through Connemara's hidden landscape fills the gap.

No mountain climbing is required on these walks. At your leisure, you may explore as guided or take time out for personal investigation. Most of the walks described here take less than 4 hours to complete. But the times indicated are walking times. If you like to linger or meditate on lakeshores or wild flowers, then you must allow extra time accordingly.

The extraordinary variety of the Connemara landscape reflects a complex history of natural and human processes. Where possible these themes of natural and cultural history (and pre-history) have been touched upon, hopefully to bring alive the space through which you walk. You will not find an exhaustive treatment of Connemara's heathers or Bronze Age stone alignments; but their shadows dot the landscape and are alluded to in the relevant walks.

Once you get used to the maps why not explore further; only a fraction of the potential walks are described. Some of the paths shown on the maps are on private property, some are fallen into disrepair (old farm or estate roads, no longer in use) and are quite wet. Ask permission if you want to explore these roads. If you stray off side-roads or tracks, be sure to wear waterproof or strong boots, especially if the weather has been wet. It is recommended that you bring several layers of light clothing and a carrybag. In this way you will always be comfortable walking. Bring a light rain-shell; the Connemara weather may surprise!

We recommend that you follow these simple principles when walking in Connemara:

- \* Always walk on the right-hand side of the road, **facing** oncoming traffic.
- \* Always obtain owners permission before going onto private land.
- \* Shut all gates behind you - they are there to control sheep and cattle.
- \* Do not bring dogs near cattle or sheep. These are the farmer's livelihood and worrying the animals can cause serious losses.

Common sense and concern for others will make you welcome everywhere.

# THE MAPS










The maps are drawn to a large enough scale to enable most detail to be shown. Each map covers a larger area than the walks indicated. Hopefully, after following the maps for the recommended walks, confidence will be gained and the rest explored.

**Abbreviations** found on the maps are as follows:

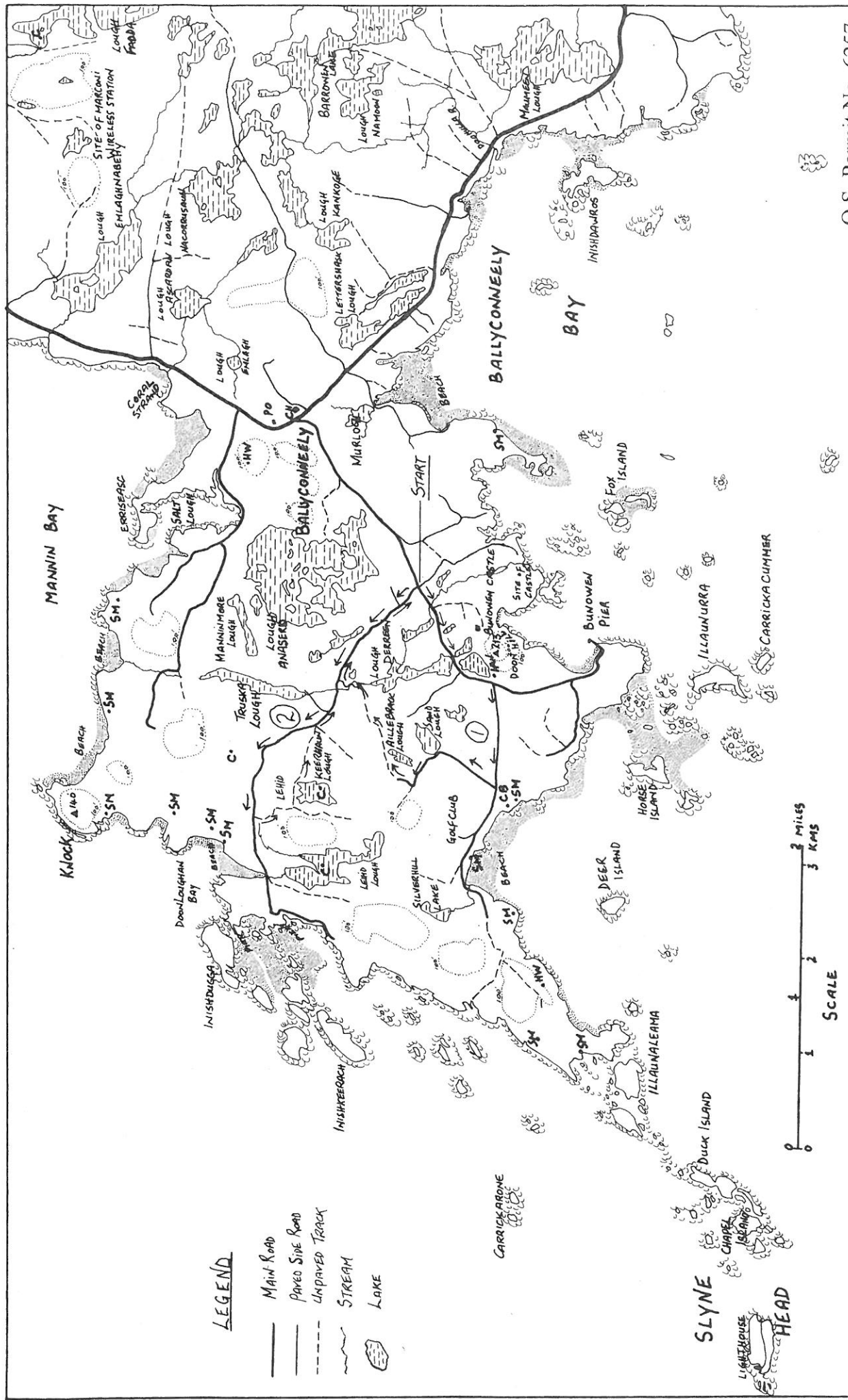
C	Crannog or Lake Dwelling
Ca	Cashel or Stone Fort
CB	Children's Burial Ground
CH	Church (noted if ruined)
CT	Court Tomb
E	Stone Enclosure (perhaps a Cashel)
HW	Holy Well
MT	Megalithic Tomb (unclassified)
PO	Post Office
PT	Portal Tomb
S	Standing Stone (sometimes in pairs)
SA	Stone Alignment
SM	Shell Midden
WT	Wedge Tomb

## Map Legend

### LÉGENDE

	Primary Road
	Secondary Road
	Other Paved Road
	Path or Boithrín
	Townland Boundary
	River/Stream
	Lake
	Contour with Summit in Feet
	Cliff

## MAP 2: Ballyconneely



## 2. BALLYCONNEELY

### Walk No. 1 Aillebrack and Emlagharan

Side-roads; 4 miles / 6.5 kilometres; 1 to 2 hours

This walk begins about 1.5ml. from Ballyconneely Village, at the road just before the old ruined seaweed factory. Ahead of us rises the mass of Doon Hill, the basalt plug of an ancient volcano, the outer cone of which has now eroded away. Traces of the foundation of a Celtic ringfort, or *Dún* (from which the hill and the area are named) can be seen on the summit. The landscape which we pass through here is one of rocky outcrops, with many lakes and marshy areas which support a rich and interesting flora. The geology of this peninsula is very different from the acid rock structure of most of Connemara, and this supports the diversity in plant life. Our route passes the ruin of the seaweed factory on the right and we soon reach the shell of Bunowen Castle on the left. Begun in the latter half of the 18th century, and expanded two generations later, this building remained unfinished when the Geoghegan estate went bankrupt in the 1850s. Further on, we take the right turn at the sign for the golf club. Ahead lies a landscape different from the rocky, marshy area we have just passed through. This short-grass vegetation, called *machair*, is typical of exposed coastal areas and is underlain by the sands of ancient dune systems which are now protected by younger dunes closer to the modern shore. The flora here is rich and diverse, and especially colourful in May and June; and ground-nesting skylarks and lapwing are common. Our route turns right, following the boundary fence of Connemara Golf Club. Before turning here, looking away to the left, you can see the tower of Slyne Head lighthouse in the distance. Ahead, as you walk, lie the mountains of Connemara, with those of Mayo slightly to the north. The road passes between the golf course and the shore of Sand Lough, into a landscape of small walled fields and abandoned ruined homesteads. The road becomes a track and an older, traditional farm landscape can be glimpsed beneath the modern veneer for about the next mile. Again, this area has an interesting flora. The route follows the road right at the junction and we again pass through the rocky landscape of heather and gorse back to our starting point. **If you begin and end this walk in Ballyconneely village you can add approx. 3 miles / 5 kilometres (about 1 hour) walking.**

## Walk No. 2 Lehid and Keerhaun South

Side-roads, track; approx. 4 miles / 6.5 kilometres; 1 to 2 hours

This walk begins at the same starting point as walk number 1. But rather than proceeding towards Doon Hill, this time we take the turn northwards. Our route passes for about 2km through an area of rocky outcrops, coloured in August with the purple of heathers and the yellow of dwarf gorse. The intervening, lowlying places are waterlogged and marshy with colonies of reeds and yellow-flag iris. At the stone sign for Lehid and Keerhaun our way follows the right fork which soon reaches the *machair* and sand-dune system on the western reaches of the Slyne Head peninsula. Rich in wildflowers and birdlife, this is an area worth exploring. Keep a careful watch or you may miss our turn left. This track swings back and we enter a beautiful farming landscape which has probably changed little for 150 years. The track rises onto the side of the hillock, looking back over the sand-dunes, the rock outcrops and small cliffs ablaze with wildflowers in May and June; the mountains of Connemara and Mayo a magnificent distant backdrop. Our route soon passes a lake on the right and here we can just see a small artificial island or *crannóg* - a Celtic Iron Age or early Christian fortified lake dwelling. Further evidence of ancient peoples can be found in the middens among the dunes beneath us to the west. Old ruined farmhouses, some now used as barns, show us the style of building here early in the last century. Our way brings us back to the townland marker for Lehid and Keerhaun and from here we re-trace our way back to our starting point. **If you begin and end this walk in Ballyconneely village you can add approx. 3 miles / 5 kilometres (about 1 hour) walking.**

**CÁRNA**







### 3. CÁRNA

#### Walk No. 1 Roisín na Maineach

**Road / dry unpaved track; 4.5 miles / 7 kilometres; 1 to 2 hours**

Head east 1km from the village of Cárna and turn right in the direction of Cill Chiaráin. Take the second track on the left, turning up by ACM Teo. Soon you leave the industrial estate behind and emerge onto blanket bog; the track bounded by European Gorse with its spectacular display of yellow flowers in early summer. Ahead lie the hills of *Dúleitir* (meaning 'black wet hillside') rising as a backdrop to the spread of peatland and granite outcrops - a typical spectacular south Connemara landscape. Along the route, Dwarf Gorse can be seen hugging the drier sites among the heath and boulders; in autumn, a rich golden colour. Old cutaway bogs are seen on each side of the track, a common feature indicating the long history of cutting turf in Connemara.

After reaching the high point on this section of the walk, our way soon bears sharply right. As a small aside our route takes us straight ahead close to two beautiful lakes. 100m on, *L. Síodúch* is visible on the right. Ancient tree stumps are exposed on the right in a wet, cutaway, boggy hollow. These are the physical remains, about 4,000 years old, of a Scot's Pine woodland that once covered much of Connemara. Swamped by the growing bog, all that remains of the trees are these stumps preserved in the peat. A wooded island is also visible in the lake from near here. This is probably a *crannóg*, or artificial fortified island, dating from the Celtic Iron Age or early Christian period. On the left side of the track here, at the base of the large granite outcrop, are the multiple entrances of a main badger sett - come back at dusk to observe the animals. 200m further on, we crest a small rise and see *Loch na Scainnimhe* (gravel lake), with its magnificent stone-fortified, Iron Age *crannóg*.

Retrace your steps back to the main track and bear left, continuing towards the main road. As you crest the rise you have a view of the sea ahead; *Fínis* island with erosion evident on the sand dunes; *Maighinis* island away to the right. The distant countryside is Lettermullan, with the Aran Islands in the background. Turn right onto the road and it is nearly 4km back to *Cárna*.

## Walk No. 2 Caladh Mhaínse to Cill Chiaráin

**Road / side-road; 6.5 miles / 10.5 kilometres; 2 to 3 hours.**

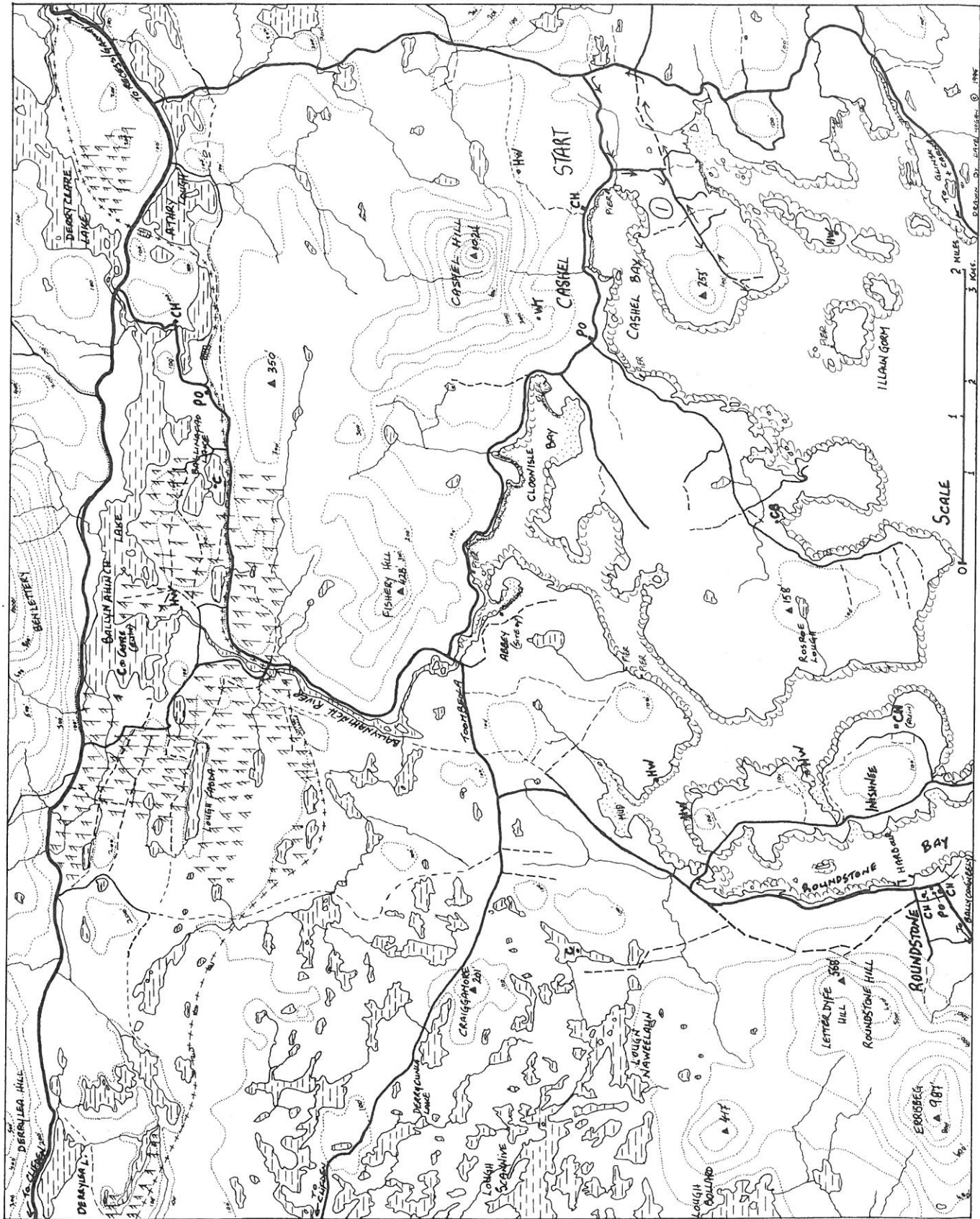
Our walk begins turning first left after *L. Troscán*, beside the old stone building with grass growing in the old thatch. (Note the ancient Pine root in the garden). Rising above *L. Troscán*, on the left you can see the pump house and storage tanks for the local water scheme. The walk passes both modern and traditional homes and farmsteads as it rises. *L. na Scainnimhe* becomes visible on the left, as does the stone *crannóg* (see walk No. 1). Ahead the hill is called *An Ghualainn* (the shoulder). We soon leave the private lands behind and emerge onto the open land with granite outcrops interspersed between the grazed heath and boggy hollows. The road bears right and soon overlooks *L. an Iarainn*, the lake of the Iron. The buildings above the lake are local waterworks, set in a bleak peaty landscape, with granite outcropping frequently. We soon pass a turn to the right. (Take this if you wish to cut short your walk, back to Leavey's pub in *Árd Mór*, giving a total of 3.5ml/5.5km walking). Cresting the hill you now see *L. an Óir* (lake of the gold) with its outflow stream dammed to ensure water supplies. The hill to the right is *Binn Bhuí* (the yellow peak), and we soon begin our descent overlooking *Cill Chiaráin* Bay, with Lettermore and Carraroe away in the background. As we drop beneath the hillside, some tree growth has been possible in the shelter. We reach the main road in the village where, straight ahead past Conroy's pub, brings you to the harbour beyond the seaweed factory. Our way is to the right, back towards *Cárna*. The road soon overlooks the salmon farms in the lee of *Fínis* island, and we can pick up those who shortened their walk in Leavey's in *Árd Mór*. The last part of the walk passes, on the right, a good example of the traditional pattern of stone-walled fields and houses typical of this part of Connemara.

## Walk No. 3 A longer alternative

**Side-roads; 12 miles / 19 kilometres; 4 to 5 hours; bring lunch !**

The *Cárna - Glinsce - Leitreach Árd* circle. Starting from *Cárna*, the way is northward through the open blanket bogs and forestry of *Cnoc Buí* turning west at Glynsk House Hotel (this is another good starting point for the circle). Walking west overlooks Bertraghboy Bay and Roundstone Hill before turning south through *Leitreach Árd* and *Maoras* returning to *Cárna*.

**CASHEL**



MAP 4:  
Cashel

## 4. CASHEL

### Walk No. 1 Leathanach

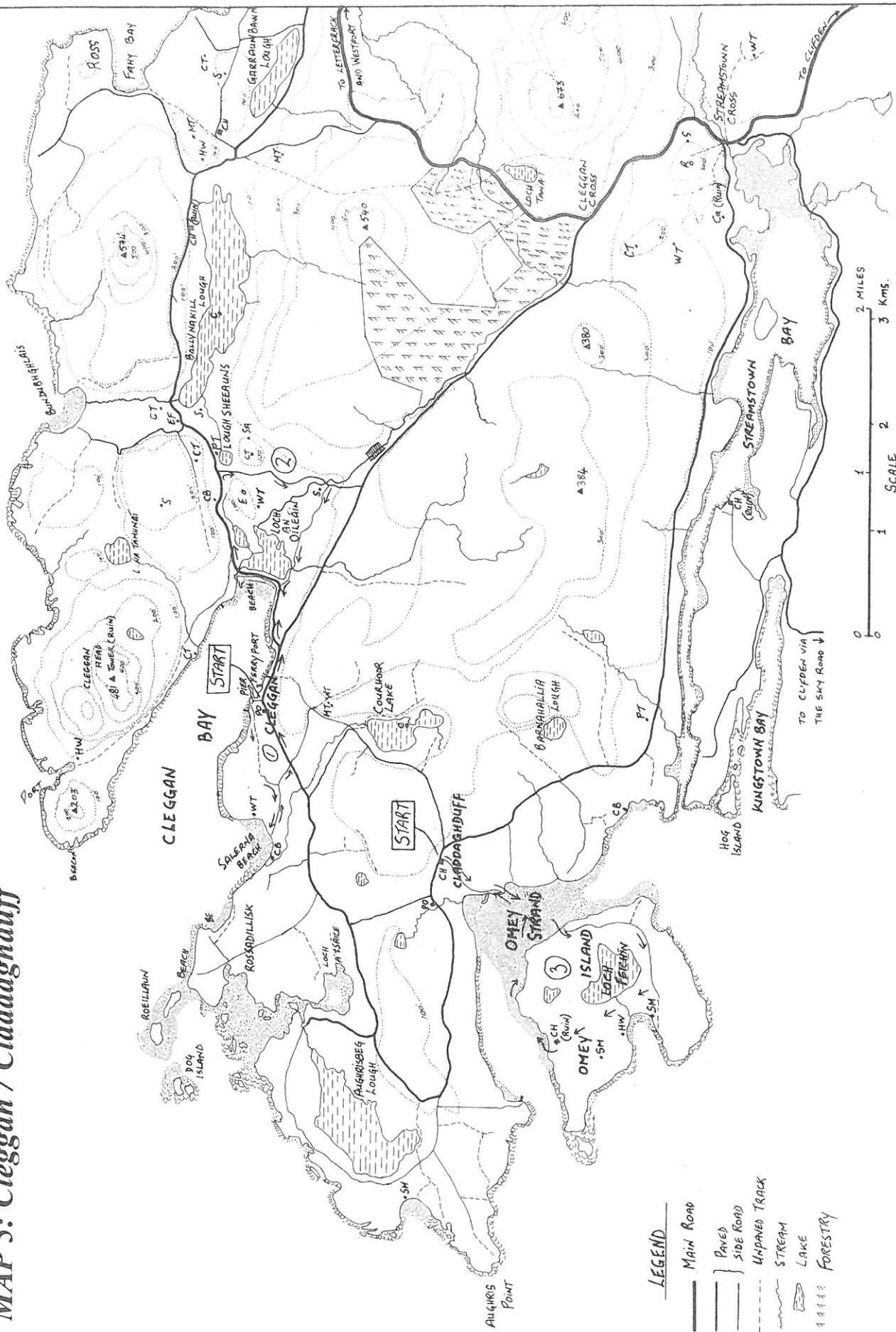
**Paved side-road/ track /path; 4 miles /6.5 kilometres; 1 to 1.5 hours**

Begin this walk opposite the Zetland Hotel, passing the community centre and hand-ball alley on your left. The rhododendrons dotted here among the hawthorns, willows and holly are evidence of a nearby 'big house'. Rhododendrons were widely planted in the gardens of such houses in the last century and now they are self-seeding into the surrounding countryside and becoming a problematic weed. Both of the nearby hotels had their origin as big houses in the last century. Note the first turn on the left at about 500m ! This is where our walk will turn upon returning from the shore. Beyond these hedgerows the road comes onto open grazed rocky heathland typical of many parts of Connemara. Dwarf gorse, which will flower in August, is common on the drier rocky areas. The larger European Gorse, part of the hedgerows and strewn haphazardly about the place, flowers yellow from May onwards. As on other walks, we see here traces of people long gone; the intricate pattern of small field walls and the abandoned ruins tell of a once higher population. As we crest a rise in the road, we see directly down Bertraghboy Bay ahead. The road is now a track, which continues 500m past the farm gate at the end, keeping right on to the shore. From here there are fine views over *Leitreach Áird* on the far side of the bay. After absorbing sufficient sea views and air, retrace your steps to the turn mentioned above. Our route turns right here, along the old bog track amid the bogs and boulders and solitude, across to link up with the Carna-Cashel road. Turn left here through this vast spectacular expanse of blanket bog and granite outcrops. After half a mile we turn left once again towards Cashel and our starting point.

**Alternative** starting points along Cashel Bay will lengthen this walk. If you start from the Post Office the journey will be 7 miles /11 kilometres and will take a little over 2 hours to complete



MAP 5: Cleggan / Claddaghduff



O.S. Permit No. 6257

## 5 CLEGGAN/CLADDAGHDUFF

### Walk No. 1. Knockbrack to Salerna Beach

Dry footpath, track & paved road; 3 miles /5 kilometres; 1 hour.

This walk begins in Cleggan Village, turning right towards the harbour which was begun in 1822 by Alexander Nimmo, and extended in 1908 at the height of the lucrative mackerel and herring fisheries of that period. Our way turns left beyond the Pier Bar and the track rises up on a ridge of sand and gravel deposited here as the glaciers of the last ice-age melted 10,000 years ago. These gravels are free draining and more fertile than the surrounding lands and they support better quality farmland. On your right is Cleggan Bay with Cleggan Head on the opposite (north) shore. Cleggan (correctly *Cloigeann*, a skull) takes its name from the domed shape of Cleggan Head. At its summit you can make out the ruined remains of a watchtower, part of a signalling system built along the west coast in the first decade 19th century to warn of approaches by the French fleet. As you crest the rise the spectacular sea-scape with Inishshark, Inishbofin and many smaller islands, becomes visible. The route then passes some modern houses and the bears right on the unpaved track at the T-junction. This brings you to Sallerna beach. Exploring along the shore, you will discover a *Cillín* (children's burial ground where unbaptised infants were buried in times past) at the west end and the wedge tomb (Neolithic burial place, *circa* 4,000BC) at the east end. Retrace your way back along the track passing your original path on the left. Bear left on the paved road towards Cleggan village. 200m on the right, the large black and white buildings were once an old coastguard station. As you approach the village, the bay appears again on your left and, away in the distance, the Twelve Bens, Diamond Hill and the line of Kylemore Valley.

### Walk No. 2 Cleggan and Sheeauns

Paved side-roads; 4 miles / 6.5 kilometres; 1 to 1.5 hours.

Begin, leaving Cleggan village behind you with the bay on you left. Take the first turn left, following the line of the bay which is dominated by Cleggan Head on the opposite shore (see walk no.1). Low sand and gravel deposits are also visible on this far shore; left behind as the last ice-sheets melted away 10,000 years ago. Our route follows the road across the head of the bay and Cleggan Beach. This

road is built on a natural storm beach of cobbles and boulders thrown up during stormy weather. On the right is *Loch an Oileáin* (the lake of the island), which was naturally impounded as the storm beach impeded drainage. The lake is now brackish and supports vegetation and more wildfowl than many other acidic lakes in Connemara. As we leave the bay behind us, the road passes near a field of drumlins on the right. These are hills of glacial gravel left behind by the melting ancient ice-sheets, indicating that the glaciers retreated away from the bay along the line of the Ballynakill valley. These drumlins are in the townland of Sheeauns (*Sídhán*, meaning fairy hills) and some older people recall the superstitions associated with this place. As you pass along, try and spot the circular enclosure atop one of these *Sídhán*. This is an ancient enclosure, possibly Celtic Iron Age or early Christian in date, which was 'restored' for use as a sheep pen. As you pass the first drumlin watch out for the Children's Burial Ground (*Cillín*) on the left. It is the oval raft of strewn boulders in the sloping field. Our way takes the next turn right, into the heart of the townland of Sheeauns and among the Drumlins. The circular stone enclosure becomes very visible away on our right. As we pass, on the left, an unoccupied two-storey house, a Bronze Age stone alignment becomes visible along the ridge. (Do not enter private property without permission). This area is rich in prehistoric remains which probably contributed to the origin of the name Sheeauns and the old associated superstitions. As our route bears around to the right, the bay again becomes visible with Inishshark and Inishbofin floating on the sea. We also see, in the pattern of small fields and old ruins, evidence of a larger community on these gravel-based soils in the last century. Such gravels are exposed on the left side of our route in a small quarry. The road descends to the river, and our route takes a right turn immediately after the bridge. Here we see a white quartz standing stone, a Bronze Age ritual stone, in the field on the right. The route follows under some dry sheltered scarps, where willow and hazel can thrive. As we regain the shore of the lake, we meet an area of hazel scrub through which a small waterfall cascades spectacularly following rains. We descend towards the beach road again, turn left and retrace our steps along the bay back to Cleggan village.

### **Walk No. 3 Omey Island (low tide only)**

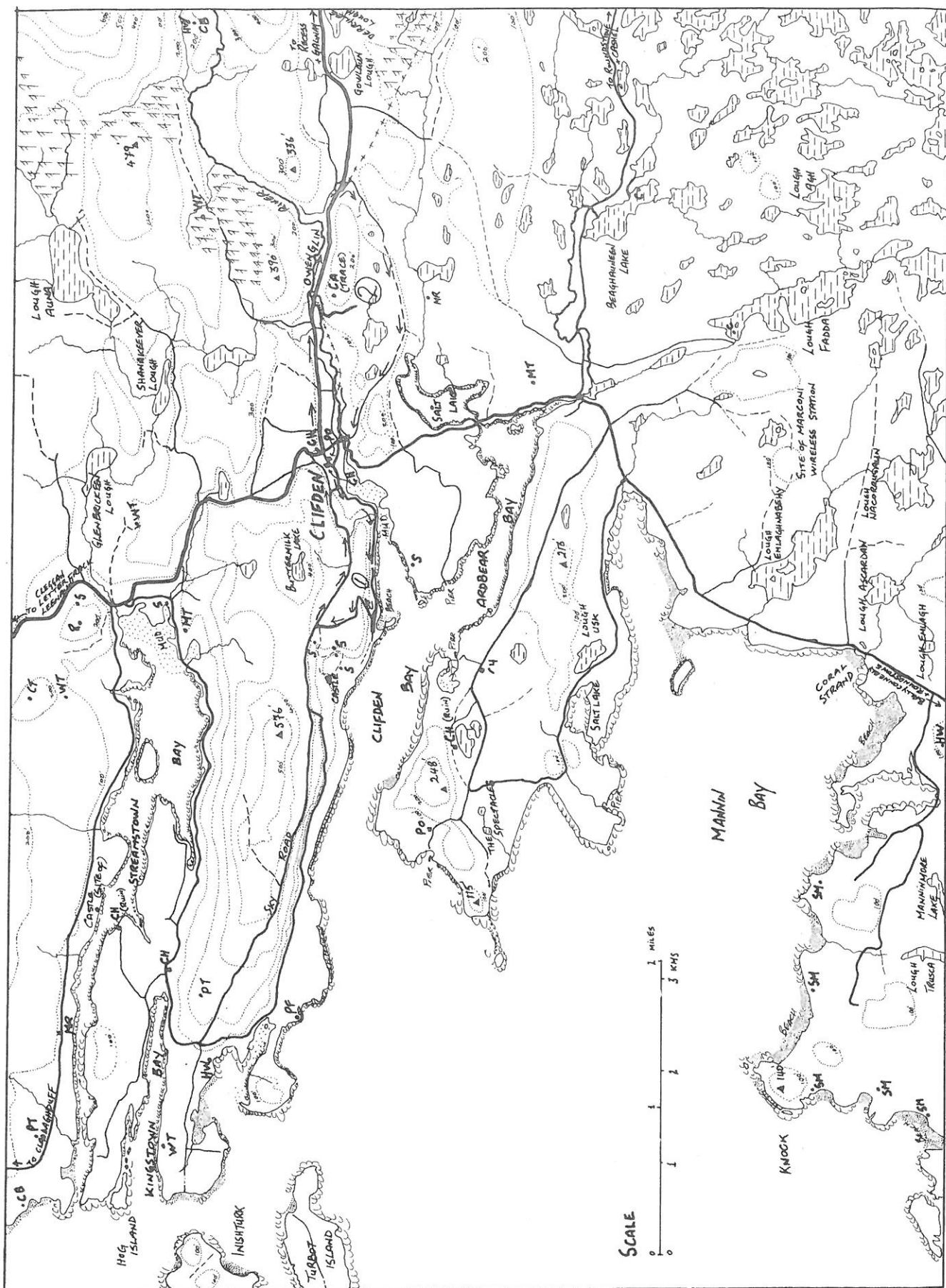
**Road, track, strand; 4.5 miles /7 kilometres; 1.5 to 2 hours.**

This walk begins by following the side-road from Claddaghduff church towards the shore. Omey Island and the flat expanse of sand lie stretched out ahead. Beyond Omey, the visible stacks on the western end of *Cruach* Island are evidence of the power of the western ocean. Here in the sheltered eastern lee of Omey, the



Atlantic surge is broken, and vast quantities of sand have been deposited in the relative calm. The rock outcrops on this approach to the shore are all granite, unlike most of the rocks of west Connemara. This is the Omey Granite and the distinctive red colour is easily seen, especially in the stone walls. Where the road reaches the shore, the ruins of an old 19th century quay can be seen among the rocks there. Our way now crosses almost 1km of tidal sands which is impassable for two hours on each side of high tide. The route is marked across the sand to the road on the island. The walk follows this road in a westerly direction across the island and, away in the distance, the twin towers of the Slyne Head lighthouse become visible, only one of which is operable today. We pass *Loch Feichín* on the right, named after *St. Feichín* who founded a monastic settlement on the island in the 7th century. Our route turns right on the track across the back of the beach. Here we can see that much of the land of the island is underlain by sand; old dunes that are now protected by more recent sandhills. Sand deposition has been a feature of this island for the past 10,000 years. Broken sea-shells give the sand a high lime content, enriching the overlying soils. The flora of these exposed, short-grass areas (*machair*) is rich and varied, and contrasts strongly with that of most of Connemara. Skylarks and Lapwing nest here in the open and the rare Chough, a red-billed member of the crow family, feeds here in summer juvenile flocks. Follow the track across the back of the dune, by the edge of *L. Feichín*. From the top of the island you can see *Cruach* Island on the left, then the cliffed, almost inaccessible High Island, and the low rock of Friar Island. Soon we reach the end of the fence on our right. Our route is straight ahead, taking the faint right-hand track and, after 200m or so, we descent into a hollow in the dunes by the ruined church, *Teampaill Feichín*. This mediaeval ruin served long after *Feichín* was on the island. However, on closer examination, one gable is clearly of an older, rougher structure and dates probably from the 10th century. Less than 100m away, a now fenced area of the dunes marks the probable location of the original hermitage of *St. Feichín*. Severe erosion had exposed this site which has been excavated over the past several years. Our route descends to the shore and, bearing right for about 1km, rejoins and crosses the expanse of Omey strand, finally ending back at Claddaghduff church.

## MAP 6: Clifden



## 6. CLIFDEN

### Walk No. 1 Clifden Beach Walk

Paved road; approx. 3 miles / 5 kilometres; 1 hour.

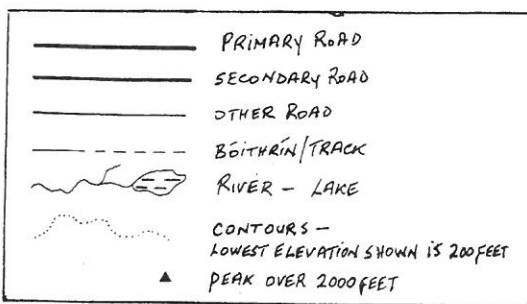
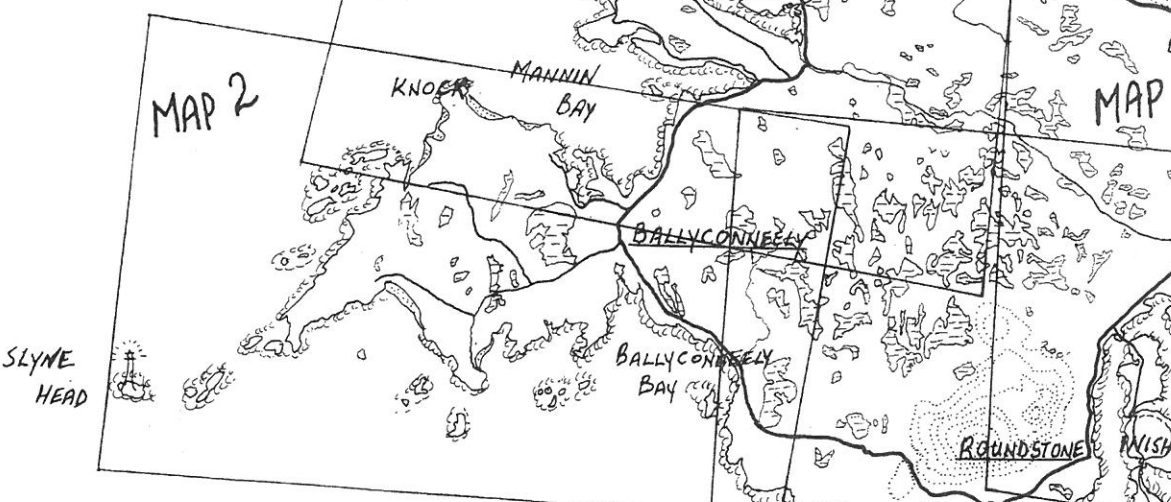
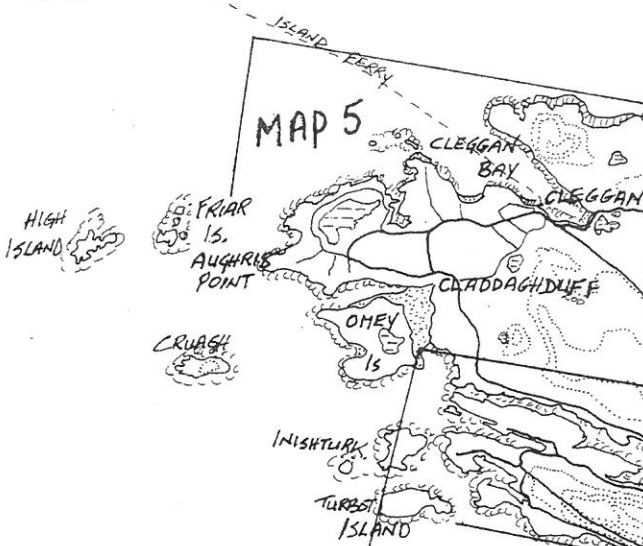
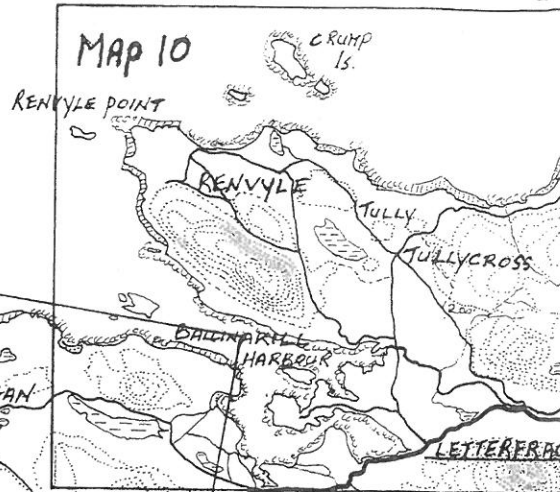
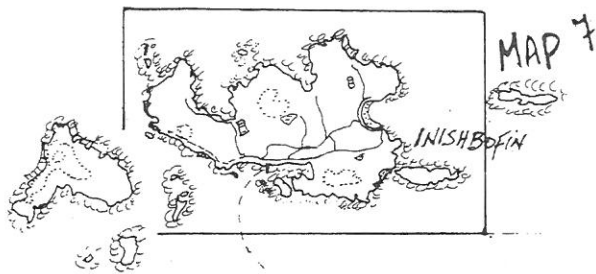
Leave Clifden by the Beach Road, descending towards the quay. Directly ahead on the hill opposite is a monument to John D'Arcy, the founder of Clifden and the builder of Clifden Castle. This monument was long in the building; begun in 1839, the year of his death, it was not completed until the local heritage group undertook the project in 1992 ! Just past the ball alley and the helipad you arrive at Clifden Quay. Alexander Nimmo drew up the plans for the quay in 1822 and it was completed in 1831. Clifden Inshore Lifeboat Station is on the quay and is called out on a regular basis. The Owenglin River empties into the estuary here and the sandy mudflats (at low tide) are the result of material carried by the river in spate. The walk continues along the estuary overlooking Faul peninsula on the far side and, as we continue, a fine vista opens over Clifden Bay. The mouth of the estuary has many hidden rocks and the navigation channel is marked with stone beacons. After about 2km the road widens into a parking area for Clifden Beach. You can linger here or visit the Boat Club 100m on. Our route turns right here, up the hill of Mine Road. Looking back we occasionally get a fine view over the bay and the distant navigation mark (The White Lady) on the south western approaches. A lime-kiln is integrated into the stone wall on the right hand side of the road 800m from the turn. This was used to burn lime-rich rock to fertilise the acidic fields of the Clifden Demesne (D'Arcy's home) on the left side of the road. Soon you come to the Castle gates, the entrance to the Demesne. If you have the time, you could spend an hour exploring here amid the ruins of D'Arcy's splendid home. Our route back to Clifden is to the right at the junction, past the Abbeyglen Castle and into town again.

### Walk No. 2 Clifden - Killymongaun

Paved road /track; 4 miles / 6.5 kilometres; 1 to 2 hours.

This walk heads east from Clifden along the main Galway road. Leaving the town you can see the remains of the old Galway to Clifden railway on your right. All that remains now is part of the embankment on which the track rested. The railway was built in 1895 many years after lobbying began seeking government backing for this enterprise.

INISHSHARK

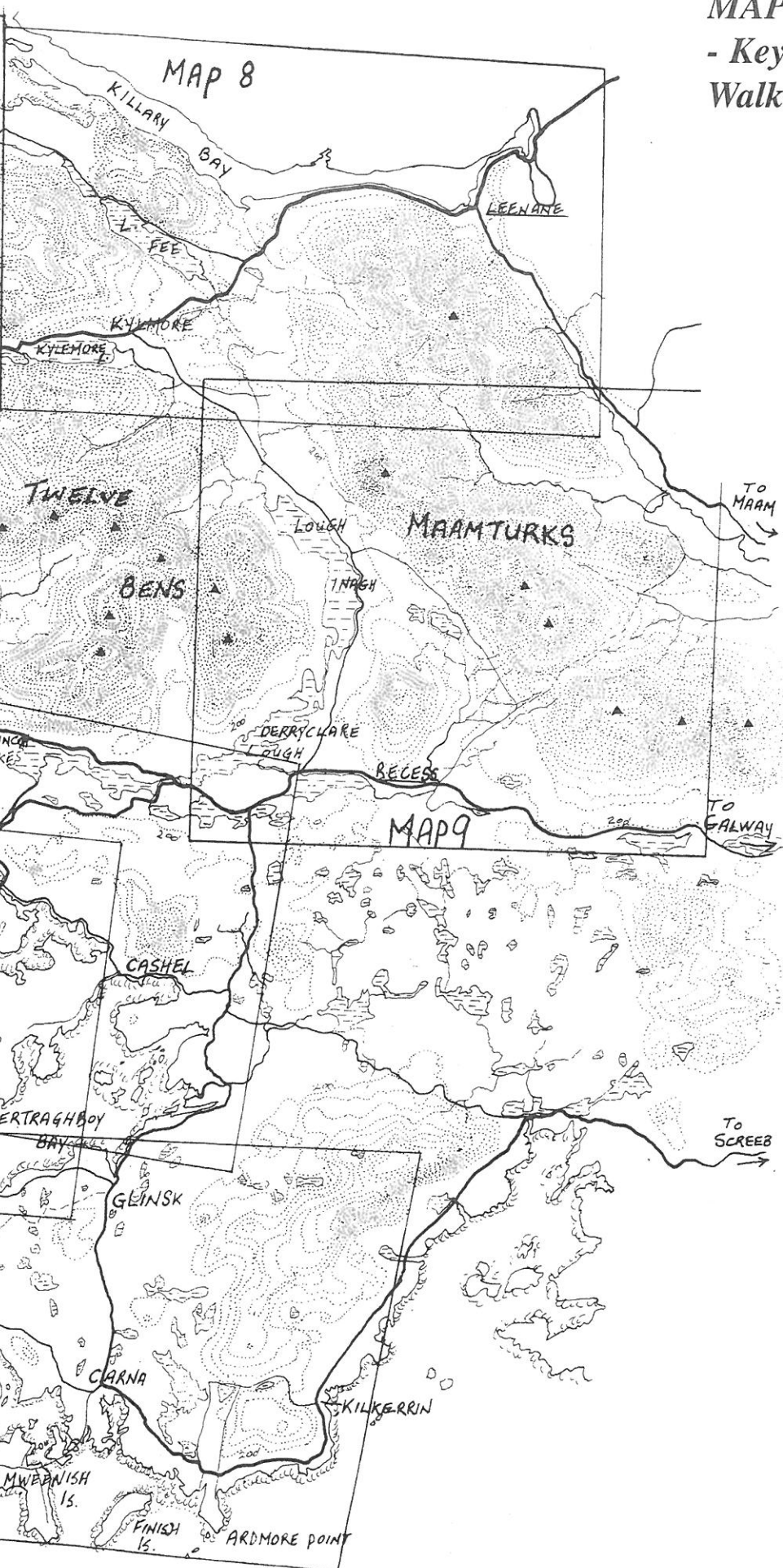


SCALE: 0 1 2 3 4 5 MILES  
0 1 2 3 4 5 KILOMETRES

DRAWN BY D. HOGAN, CONNEMARA FIELD STUDIES CENTRE.



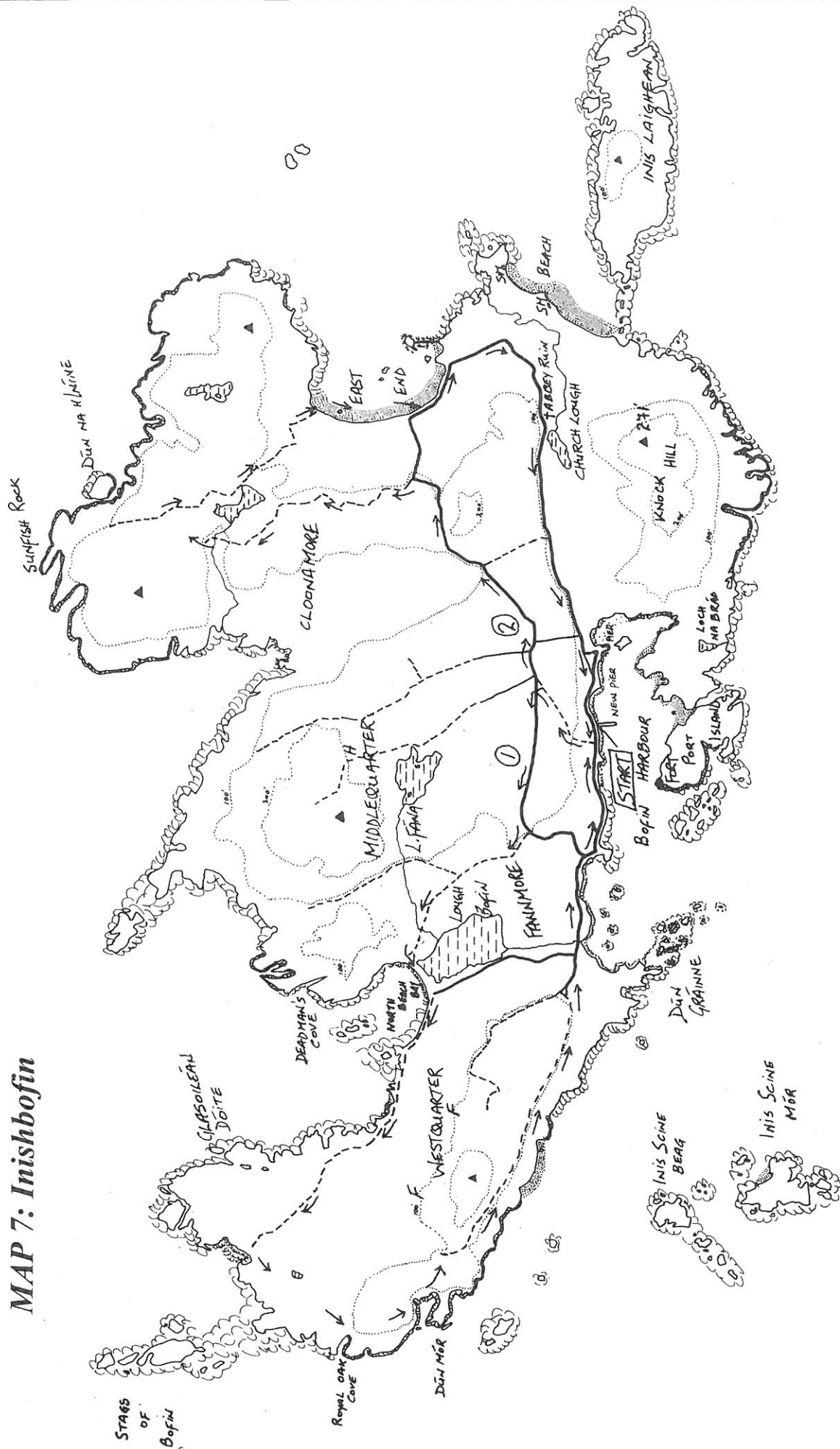
*MAP 1: Connemara*  
*- Key to*  
*Walking Maps*



Unfortunately, economic problems closed the line in 1935. The road crosses the new bridge over the Owenglin River and you notice the turret on the old 'Waterloo Bridge', built in 1818. About 1km beyond the Clifden Glen development our route takes the small road dipping to the right. The base of the old Clifden-Galway railway can again be seen in a cutting on the left side of the main road, and heading east across the bogs as we continue our way. Our road bears sharply right and we are looking out over the vast expanse of blanket bog known as the Roundstone Bog, an area of exceptional scientific interest. The road soon turns to a track which makes its way across an exceptionally beautiful landscape of bog, farmland and lakes. Away to the south, the dark mass of Roundstone Hill rises. About 2km from the turn we overlook The Salt Lake, an almost land-locked arm of the sea that fills and empties at the bridge at Ardbear. The line of floats clearly visible in the water support ropes for mussel cultivation. If you wish, you might explore the little track to the left that brings you down to the stream flowing into Salt Lake. In the last century this stream supported a working mill which is no longer extant. The walk continues another mile or so into Clifden, finally crossing the bridge over the Owenglin River. In spring and early summer, after heavy rainfall, it is not unusual to see salmon leaping up the falls here on their way to their upstream spawning grounds.

**INISHBOFIN**

MAP 7: Inishbofin





## 7. INISHBOFIN

### Walk No. 1 Westquarter.

**Road, track, cross country; 5 miles / 8 kilometres; 2 to 3 hours**

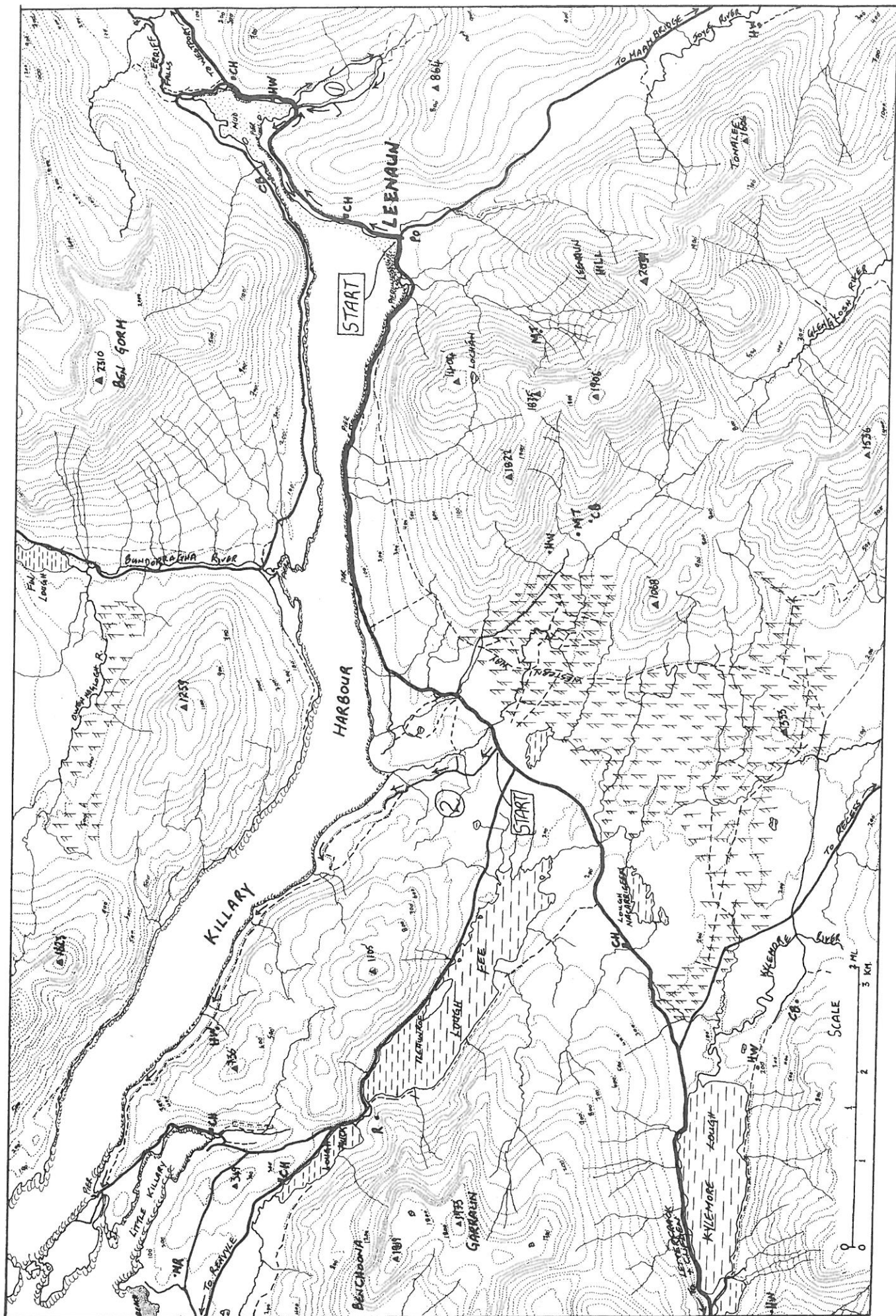
Starting at the new pier, this walk heads west and immediately turns right up the hill of Pound Road. This hill is a great deposit of sand and gravel left behind by the melting glaciers more than 10,000 years ago. Here the crushed rock and freer drainage make this part of the island inherently more fertile than the shallower peaty soils on the acidic rock outcrops elsewhere. We turn west again at the top of the road and now have a fine view over Bofin Harbour. Almost a mile long, this deep anchorage was an important haven for shipping in the age of sail. The imposing ruin at the mouth of the harbour opposite dates from the 1650s when the Cromwellian garrison rebuilt an older structure there. Older fortifications also tell us of the importance of this haven; the flat, vegetation-topped rock at the western mouth of the harbour is called *Dún Gráinne*, Grainnuaile's fort. This is a Celtic Iron Age or Early Christian promontory fort dating approximately from 2,000 years ago; the name (and a mediaeval window moulding) tells us it was also in use as late as the 16th century. Our route now lies on the edge of the poorer, thinner soils that make up the island's commonage, on the right. Turn right, pass some houses, and enter the commonage through a farm gate (close it !). This part of the walk overlooks Lough Bofin, from which the mythical white cow (of the island's name) arises periodically. The area to the right and ahead is rich in prehistoric remains, mainly the foundations of terracing and house sites, probably from the Bronze Age, 3,700 years ago. We pass through the gate onto North Beach, a ridge of shingle thrown up by ancient storms, but continually shifting under wind and sea pressure to the present day. Across the beach we again find a track which takes us to the north west end of the island. When you pass the final farm gate here, look out for a track heading right to the double sea arch, *Poll Tolladh* (the bore-hole). Our route follows an intermittent track heading south, parallel with the shore and rising with the emerging cliffs from Royal Oak Cove to the massive *Dún Mór* promontory fort. All that remains is the base of the defensive wall across the neck of the isthmus. From here our route back is clearly visible. With the sea to our right, we now follow a green road back through Westquarter, passing the Doonmore Hotel, and on to our starting point at the pier.

## Walk No. 2 Cloonamore and the north east

Road, track, cross country; 5.5 miles / 8.5 kilometres; 3 hours

From the new pier, gain the vantage point of the High Road *via* Pound Road behind the small shop. (See walk no.1 for views over Bofin Harbour). Our route heads east, and beneath us we see the safe anchorage of the inner Pond at the head of the harbour. The ruin on the small island opposite the old pier is what remains of a fish-curing station dating from the turn of the century. Our route passes along the spine of the large glacial deposit that underlies the island's meadows and pastureland. Turn sharp left where road begins its descent towards the east end village. On the right we overlook the fertile slopes of Cloonamore (*Cluain Mór*, the big meadow) and the beach at the east end of the island. Away in the distance the mainland mountains of Mayo and Connemara provide a backdrop to this dramatic seascape. The cone of Croagh Patrick rises to the north, behind the Mayo mountains. The track now winds its way out onto the commonage, rough grazings and rocky outcrops. Our route soon requires us to pick a way across land to the eastern track, which is quite visible. Those that have time may wish to explore the cliffs around *Dún na hIníne*, where solitude allows time to slip away. The track brings us onto the beach and a paved road. A right turn at the end of the beach brings us onto the Low Road back towards the harbour. Less than a mile on a ruined 13th century church stands in the grounds of the original 7th century monastery founded by St. Colman. Ancient graves lie close to the modern in this, the island's cemetery. Church Lough, in this fertile valley, supports reedbeds and other vegetation, which in turn provide cover, food and nest sites for a wide variety of birds. Field boundaries and sod walls grow rich with wildflowers along the route here, especially where artificial fertilizer and herbicides have not been used. A detour, left down the short steep hill, could end the walk at one of the island's pubs. Straight ahead, past the post office, is the route to where we started at the new pier (especially if there's a ferry to catch !)

**LEENAUN**





## 8. LEENAUN

### Walk No. 1. Glenagevlagh

Paved road & side-road; 4.5miles / 7 kilometres; 1 to 2 hours.

Our route leaves Leenaun, walking on the Westport road past the Leenaun Cultural Centre. On the left is the upper reaches of Killary Harbour and the tidal estuary of the Erriff River. The sandy expanses seen here at low tide are deposited by the river when in spate. Across the Killary Bengorm rises majestically while Letterbrickaun stands on the right. The parallel patterns seen on some of the steepest slopes of Bengorm are faint traces of old cultivation ridges or 'lazy beds', and they tell of a once more populous countryside. It is a long time since these were used, some perhaps dating to the time of the Great Famine of the 1840s. Ahead, away up the Erriff Valley, you can get a glimpse of Maumtrasna Mountain. Our way now descends towards the Glenagevla River and we cross the bridge before turning right. We follow the road into this lovely sheltered valley, dominated on the left by *Binn Garbh* or the Rough Summit (called the Devil's Mother on most maps). Unusually for Connemara, trees grow well here because of the shelter. Willows and ash are common and give a special quality to this landscape *oasis*. The mountain on the right, Leacan, overlooks a neat and well-maintained farm landscape that contrasts strongly with the surrounding wild lands. As we reach the turn in the road we see the entire valley is protected by a ridge running unbroken from *Binn Garbh* around to Letterbrickaun. This feature is typical of a glacial valley, scoured and scraped and deepened by the moving ice sheet, which had its origin at the head of the valley under the ridge. The road heads back along the river, through the village of Glanagevla (*Gleann na nGeimhleach*, or the Valley of the Prisoners; who or what was captive here is unknown). More 'lazy beds' are evident away up on the left hand side and we recognise that everywhere are signs of a previous population. Ahead we again see Bengorm with the Sheeffry Hills behind and to the east. We soon return to the bridge which we crossed earlier and, turning left, begin to retrace our steps towards Leenaun. As Leenaun Hill comes into view over the village the extent of cultivation in inaccessible places becomes evident - 'lazy beds' are everywhere. Also high on the hillside large walled fields are clearly seen, telling of a past when Leenaun was a great sheep centre. These huge pens were used to hold stock brought to the village for the great pattern fairs of the past. Away ahead, and to the right, the Western Way winds its route over the shoulder of the hill.

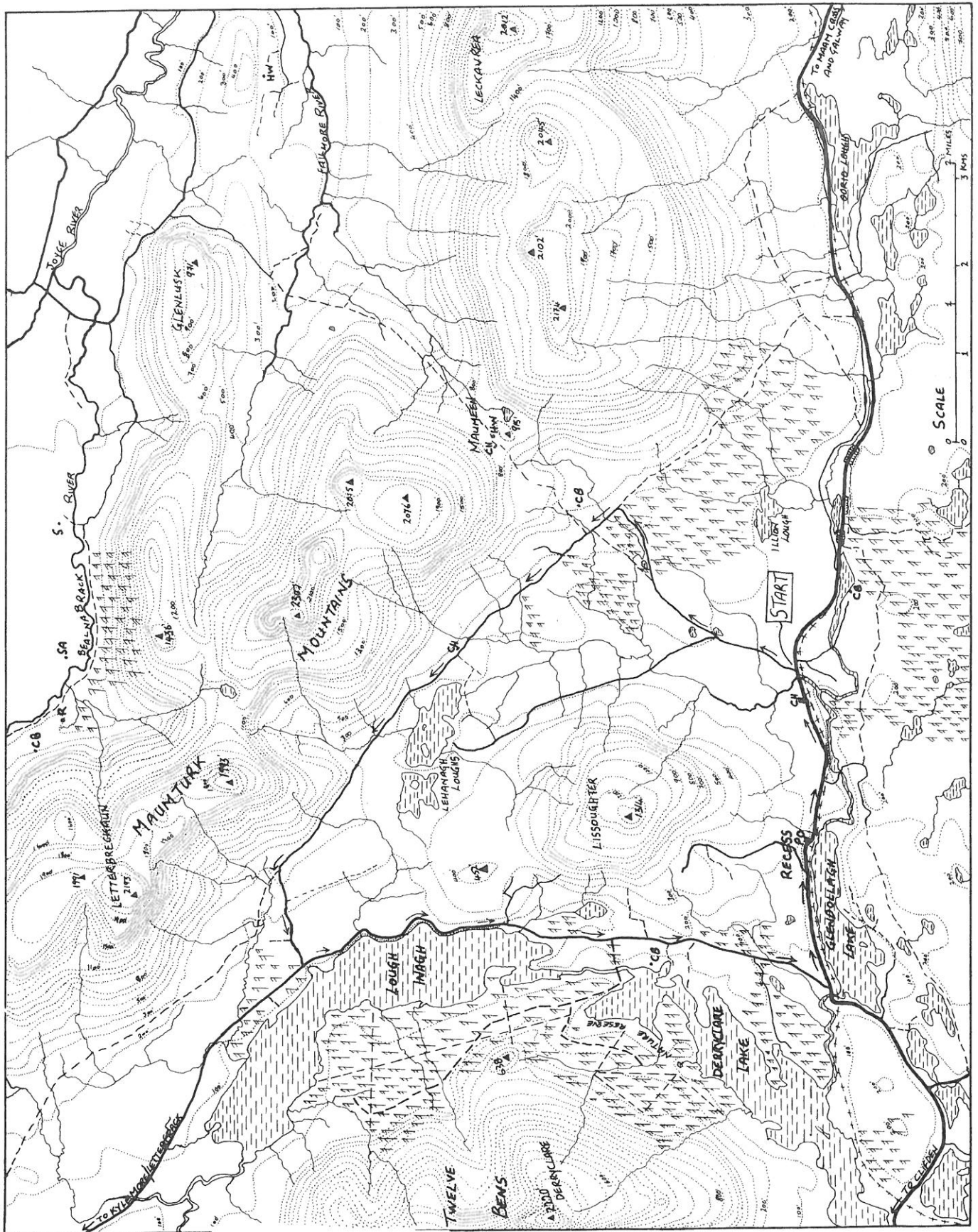
## Walk No. 2 Killary Walk

### Side road & track (often wet); 5 miles / 8 kilometres; 2 hours (one way)

The start of this walk is approximately 5ml (8km) from Leenaun Village, on the right after crossing the bridge over the Owenmore River. This side-road dates from early in the last century when the local landlords, the Thompsons of Salruck, carried out improvements to their *cois-Killary* estate. On the right, as we descend towards the shore, the wooded area in the valley is the work of these earlier landlords. Trees and rhododendrons were favourite plantings and, especially in sheltered areas, the latter now has the status of a problematic weed. Our route brings us past the new service area on the right for the mussel farms. Rafts and lines of blue or black floats support the ropes on which these shellfish are cultivated and, free from bottom currents and predation, they grow faster than if clinging to rocks. The length of the Outer Killary begins to open out before us and the size of this bay can be appreciated. Originally the line of a geological fault, probably shaped somewhat by river erosion, Killary Bay was scoured and widened by glaciers as they poured down the Erriff valley and eventually melted away by the same route. By 10,000 years ago the ice sheets had gone and the shape of the modern landscape had been set. Across the Killary stands the mass of Mweelrea, the highest mountain in Connacht, and the steepness of its slopes can help us judge the depth of the water. Further on we pass some isolated cottages from earlier this century, uninhabited now, but not long ago sheltering the families that worked this relatively fertile oasis. As our walk progresses, we keep to the right-hand track. There is a potential choice within the final two miles but, to stay with the Killary as long as possible, keep again to the right. (It is possible to leave the track and gain the Little Killary *via* a rocky gap on the left). The stone foundations of the old road are in disrepair here, but passage can be easily made. Ahead the navigation marks (beacons) for safely entering the Killary are clearly visible rising up from island and rock. Tucked under the lee of the shore ahead you may just glimpse the floating structure of salmon farm. Bearing round the left, our track passes close by the cottages in the village of Rosroe and we turn right to finish on the pier 100m beyond. The youth hostel here has literary and philosophical connections; as Rosroe Cottage it sheltered Richard Murphy, Wittgenstein, and others.

## Alternative Walking

Leenaun is at the very centre of a spectacular hiking landscape. The **Western Way** passes through on its route from Mayo to L. Corrib. The **Maamturks Walk** is a famous hike along the extended ridge into Leenaun. And the Twelve Bens are nearby. For details of these more demanding walks please refer to the many hiking books available.





## 9. RECESS

### Walk No. 1 Around Lios Uachtair

Paved roads & side-roads; 12.5 miles / 20kilometres; 4 to 5 hours.

Begin this walk by turning left off the main road just west of Caher House. Immediately the way passes through open bogland with the hill *Lios Uachtair*, which this walk will circumnavigate, on your left. Ahead you have spectacular views of the Maamturk Mountains, with the low pass of Maamean, the popular Patrician pilgrimage site, clearly visible. Here, St. Patrick is reputed to have viewed Connemara and, declining to enter this barren country, blessed the inhabitants from afar instead. Occasional farmsteads, with their patterns of green fields, stand out clinging against the darker sides of the mountains. These farms are situated on the rare outcrops of richer rocks amidst the acidic bleakness of the bogs and mountains. Old turf cuttings are seen throughout the flat expanses of bog on both sides of the road, with some recent handcuttings on the left hand side. Soon you can see the pilgrimage path winding its way up to Mamean in the distance. Before the first small lake on the right side of the road, protruding from the wet cutaway bog, you can see the remains of ancient pines. Preserved by the acid peat, these trees grew here probably about 4,000 years ago; now only a testament to the former woodlands that covered Connemara.

Ahead, almost like a grain in the fabric of the mountains, you can discern the original sedimentary strata of these Connemara rocks. Along the sides of the hills, these strata are clearly folded and angled upward in an aspect, very different from the ancient original. The story of the landscape, of upheaval and folding, can be guessed at from these tortured levels.

The way bears left at the forestry, on the paved road, through the straggling settlement of *Bun na gCnoc* (the bottom of the hills). You quickly reach the car park at the bottom of the pilgrimage route and, if you have the time and the inclination, the climb and the view beyond into the Maam Valley are well worth the effort (add extra time for this). From here on our route follows part of the long-distance walking route, The Western Way. Looking ahead, the Maamturks stretch out on the left, facing the Twelve Bens across the wide valley. Away ahead stands the majestic form of Mweelrea, the highest peak in Connacht. Note, the way keeps *Lios Uachtair* to the left. Past the small church the traditional field patterns still cling to the side of the mountain, interspersed with the ruins of the

original habitations. On the left hand side of the route the lake is called *Loch Leathanach*. Notice the wooded island in the lake. In the absence of grazing pressure these trees have survived; an indicator perhaps, of what might have been the natural ungrazed vegetation of Connemara ? A second lake, *Loch Rua*, soon comes into view on the left - again with a wooded island. These islands are common features of Connemara lakes.

As we leave *Lios Uachtair* behind us, Lough Inagh is visible ahead to the left. This lake gives its name to the magnificent Inagh Valley. As our route bears left towards this valley we pass where the Western Way continues northward across the bog to Leenaun. Descending towards Lough Inagh, we begin to realise how common wooded lake islands are. Turning left when we reach the car-park for the Lough Inagh Fishery, we pass the boat sheds and wooden jetties used by the salmon fishermen. As our way heads southward along the valley, we again recognise *Lios Uachtair* on our left. The Inagh Valley Inn is on the narrows between two lakes and we soon come to Lough Derryclare beyond. Looking back across this lake to the right we can see, surrounded by conifer plantations, the Derryclare Oakwood National Nature Reserve.

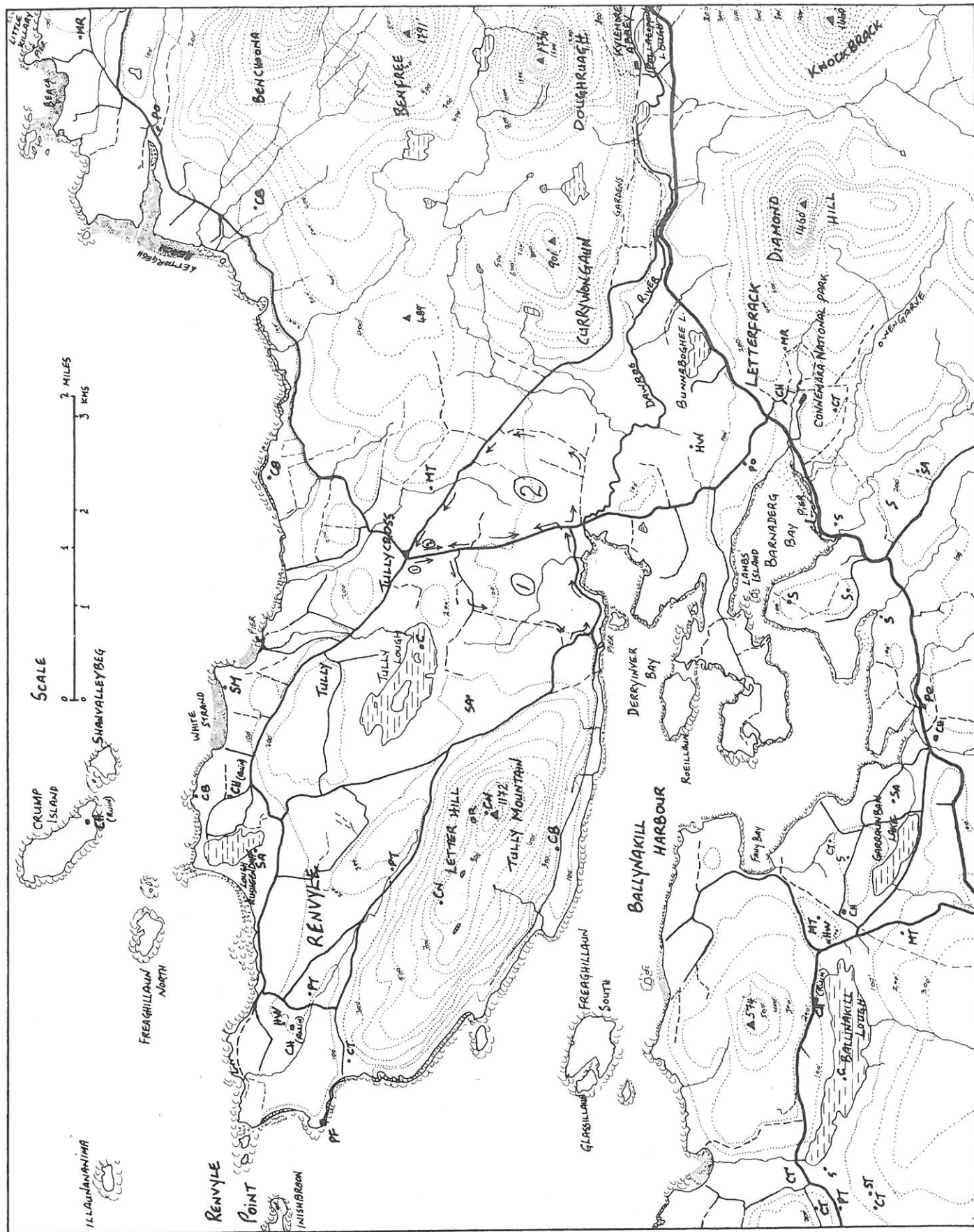
Our route then reaches the main Clifden - Galway road again (if you have a non-walking driver available, this is a good pick-up point after 10ml. / 16km. walking). Turn left and a walk of 2.5ml./4km. brings us back to the start past Paddy Festy's on the left and Glendollagh Lake on the right.

**(Paddy Festy's Pub is a good alternative start/finish point).**

**RENVYLE/LETTERFRACK**

# MAP 10: Renvyle / Letterfrack

O.S. Permit No. 6257



# 10. RENVYLE/LETTERFRACK

## Walk No. 1 Derryherbert and Derryinver

Paved road /track; 3 miles / 5 kilometres; 1 hour.

From Tullycross, take the Letterfrack road, descending towards the speed limit sign at the village entrance. Our route turns right just beyond this sign, down the hill to Derryherbert. Ahead we see Tully Mountain (*Leitir Hill*) and the water tank on the hillock to our right. The line of this road follows the edge of this hillock, above the waterlogged bogs on the left. Ash, Hawthorn and other small trees make up the hedgerows here; their success due to the underlying drier soil and the shelter of the hillock. On the left is an expanse of well developed blanket bog, now cut for fuel. Our route takes the first turn left, out across the blanket bog. Tully Mountain is now on our right; Diamond Hill on the left with some of the Twelve Bens visible behind. From the cutaways, some impression is gained of the depth of peat that developed in sheltered low-lying bogs such as this. Ancient pine stumps protrude from the cutaway peat; physical remains of a once extensive woodland. Scot's Pine was the dominant tree here about 4,000 years ago and the number of stumps and fallen boles here indicate that this was once a substantial woodland. Looking to the left, on the ridge-line of the nearby hillock, you can see clearly the stone alignment on the horizon. This is locally known as the *Fairy Fingers*. It is a Bronze Age stone alignment, a ritual site aligned with the setting sun on December 21st, the winter solstice. It is located in close proximity to other pre-historic features and is typical of the rich heritage of the Renvyle peninsula. The track rises onto drier ground and, once past the houses, our route turns left down the hill towards the Derryinver estuary. Keeping left at the bottom we follow the estuary back to the bridge, where salmon leap up the falls into the Dawros River to spawn. At the bridge we turn left for Tullycross and our starting point about 1ml. distant. **(If a longer walk is desired, do not return to Tullycross, but immediately join Walk No.2 described below, adding another two miles)**

## Walk No. 2 Tullycross and Tooreena

Paved road/ track; 3 miles /5 kilometres; 1 hour.

Leave Tullycross on the Letterfrack Road; Tully Mountain (locally known *Leitir Hill*, the wet hillside) is away on the right and on the green hillock closer by is

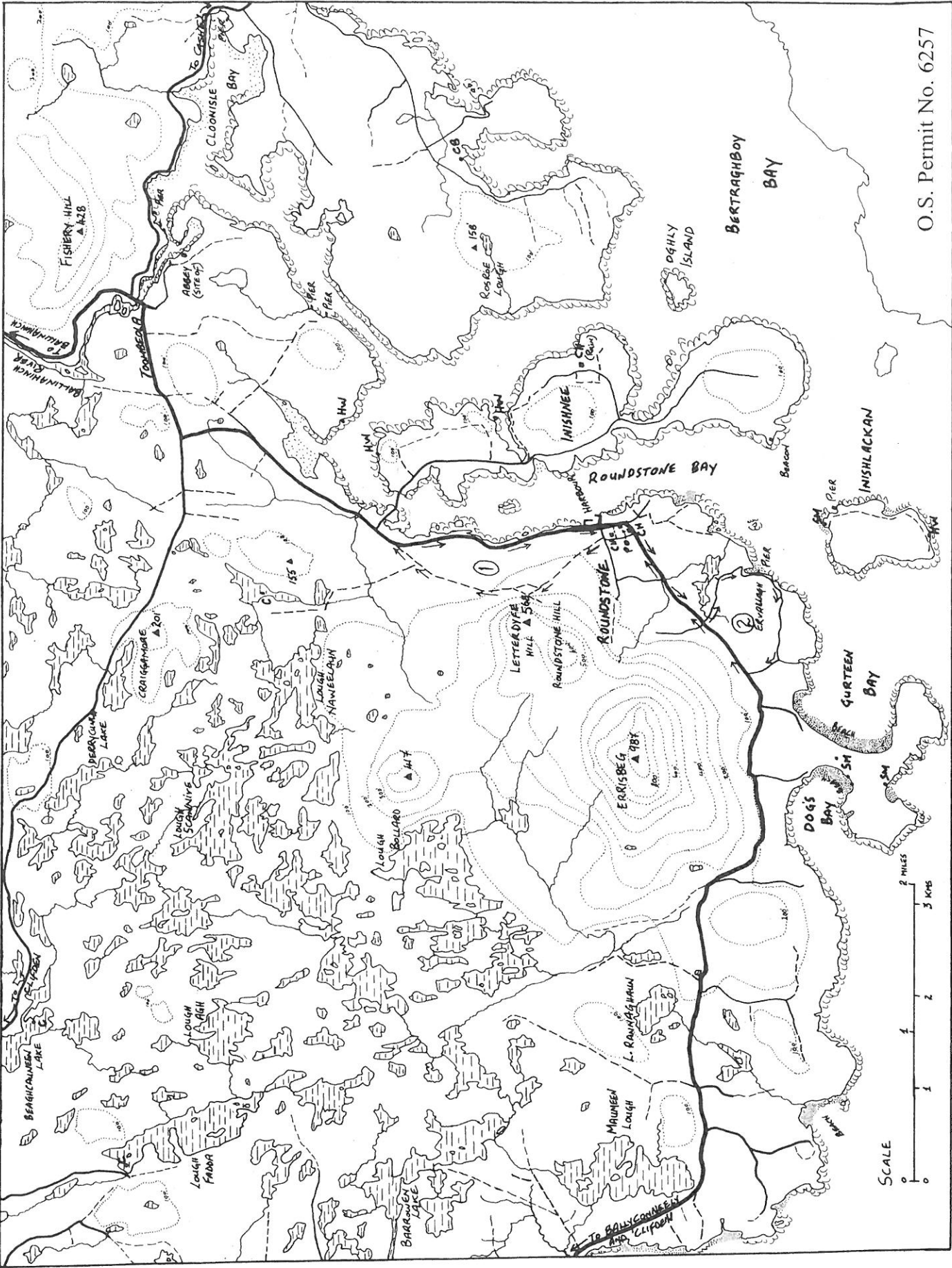


the storage tank for the local water-supply. The road descends for about a mile towards the mouth of the Dawros River, a famous salmon fishery. In spring and early summer, if the conditions are right, you may see salmon jump the falls below the bridge at Derryinver. Ahead, the peaks of Diamond Hill and Knockbrack are in the foreground with Muckanaught (correctly *Macha Nocht*) one of the Twelve Bens, looming behind. Our route follows the track to the left, immediately before Derryinver bridge, by another water storage tank. Up ahead rises Currywongaun, with the dark mass of Doughruagh behind; Altnagaighera and Lettergesh Mountain (Benchoona) are visible away to the northwest. Our route is through an actively harvested blanket bog. Here on the floor of the valley the peat or turf has developed to a considerable depth (up to 3m +) and has been cut for fuel for as long as people have lived here. In the water-logged low-lying cutaways, you can find floating mats of the bog moss (*Sphagnum*), which, as it grows, accumulates increasing depths of peat. In other cutaway areas you will see ancient pine-stumps protruding from the peat. These are remnants of a Scot's Pine woodland that covered much of this valley approximately 4,000 years ago. Our route takes the second turn left and, directly ahead in the distance, rises the summit of Mweelrea, the highest peak in Connacht. The green hillock in the foreground (called Greenmount), contrasting strongly with the surrounding bogland, is a drumlin - a free-draining hill of glacial gravel which gives rise to the better farmland. We turn left on the Currywongaun road and make our way back to Tullycross. As we reach the village sign, we can see, away on the right, Clare Island in the foreground; Achill Island in the distance beyond and Caher Island framed by the bulk of Achill.



# **ROUNDSTONE**

MAP 11: Roundstone



O.S. Permit No. 6257

# 11. ROUNDSTONE

## Walk No. 1 Roundstone and Letterdyfe

**Dry, unpaved track/paved road; 3 miles / 5 kilometres; 1 to 1.5 hours.**

Begin at O'Dowd's in the village, following the road uphill beside the pub. Take the first turning on the right and our route lies between the village and Roundstone hill to the west. We pass initially through an expanse of European Gorse, beautiful in summer-yellow, sheltering a group of stone-walled fields where Connemara ponies often graze. Ahead on the left we see the contrasting heathy slopes of the commonage on Roundstone Hill. The road climbs slightly and we are soon aware of the majestic Twelve Bens and Maamturk Mountains away in the distance. On the right, Cashel hill rises low in contrast. Our way leaves behind us the better fields, closer to the village. Older fields and field patterns can be seen on the left under the hill-slope; old ruined buildings in a location no longer inhabited. Pass through the gate (closing it after us !) out onto the commonage, a grazed heath which in autumn shows spectacular colours contrasting between Dwarf Gorse and several species of heather. On the left, Roundstone Bay and Inishnee make up the foreground. As the track curves to a slightly higher elevation we see the splendid expanse of blanket bog and lake stretching away northward to the mountains of Connemara. The track we are on gives local access to the peat bogs and evidence of past and recent turf cutting is frequent. Away on the right, rhododendrons can be seen in sheltered dips in the rolling bogland; self-seeding from nearby plantings originating in the last century. As the track begins to descend, the northwestern section of the Roundstone Bog becomes visible; an area of scientific interest for, among other attributes, its rare flora and wintering whitefronted geese. Our route takes the track to the right, through the farm gate. (If you have time, the left-hand track here leads you to impressive views and adds about 3ml. /5km. to the length of the walk). Our route turns right at the paved road, back towards Roundstone. On the left we pass the head of Roundstone Bay and, on the opposite shore, the island of Inishnee. Coming closer to the village, past Letterdyfe House, those botanically inclined can search out the unusual Babbington's Leek on the sea side of the wall.

## Walk No. 2    Ervallagh

**Paved road/side-road; 4.5 miles /7 kilometres; 1.5 to 2 hours.**

Leave Roundstone on the Ballyconneely Road, with Errisbeg rising above on the right. Away to the left we glimpse the end of Inishnee reaching out towards the mouth of Bertraghboy Bay. After approximately 1km. we take a left turn just beside a small bridge. Heading now towards the shore, our way passes through a mixture of small fields, grazed heaths and rock outcrops. Dotted here and there among these small walled fields, ruined cottages remind us of a once greater population. The small lake on the left, Cregduff Lough (*Creig Dubh*, black crag - from the outcrop north of the lake) is of interest botanically, with the Slender Naiad growing in its waters. Views across the end of Inishnee to the Carna Peninsula (*Iorras Aintheach*, stormy peninsula) await us, and the beach on Inishlackan becomes visible straight ahead. This once inhabited island lost its last permanent residents in 1985, the population having fallen from a high of more than 200 in the early part of the last century. The road now winds through the picturesque harbour at Ervallagh (*Oir Bhealach*, East Way ?), with a mixture of old stone ruins, restored and modern buildings. As we follow the sea wall, *Cruach na Caoille* (Deer Island) comes into view. The Martin family, old landlords at Ballinahinch, once kept a deer herd here. Leaving the shore behind, we pass some exotic looking plants - New Zealand Flax (*Phormium tenax*) - often planted for shelter in Connemara. The sands of Gorteen Beach are now visible away on the left. Soon you take a right turn at the main road to bring you back to Roundstone.

This guide sets out and maps clearly a wide range of walks throughout Connemara. These walks are easy to find and complete. They are perfect for the casual walker and the person with just a few hours to spare. They are accessible in all weathers and follow paths and old roadways. The landscape and the story of Connemara which opens up to the walker along these paths is clearly described in the text. Walking in Connemara, with its variety of landscapes - from mountain to bog to beach and to shore - is a unique experience. This book is an essential companion on your walk and a captivating read and introduction to Connemara.



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