

Digging Around Listowel

The Archaeology of the N69 Bypass

Banner image: Excavating a burnt spread at Garryantanvally



Thatched vernacular farmhouse, Lisselton, Co. Kerry (1938)
© National Folklore Collection A015.18.00759
(photographer: Caoimhín Ó Danachair)



Drone image of 19th-century house site at Curraghatoosane



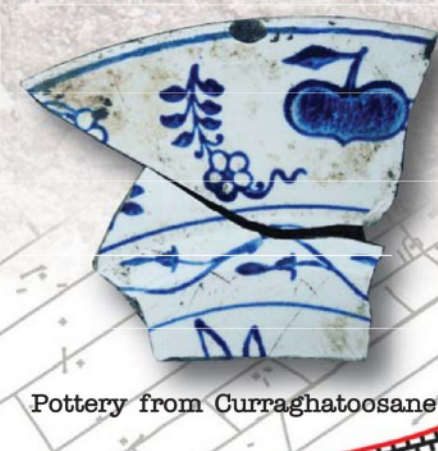
AMS archaeologists at work on the N69 Listowel



View of back-filled test trenches in Garryantanvally on the N69 Listowel (2019)

An Old House at Curraghatoosane

At Curraghatoosane we found the remains of a traditional two-roomed thatched house that was occupied from the early 19th century until the 1950s. The house was typical of many in the area at this time and had walls built from stone and mud with earthen floors and a large central hearth. The house was surrounded by neat cobble-lined drains that channelled water away from the walls. In the twentieth century the earthen floors were replaced with more modern concrete floors. We found a large quantity of artefacts belonging to the inhabitants of the house including pottery fragments, buttons, nails from the roof, a thimble and a child of Prague statue. Using historical documents, including the 1901 and 1911 censuses, we were able to establish that the house was occupied by the O'Connor family from the 1850s to the 1950s. The last occupant of the house was William (Bill) O'Connor. He is still remembered by many neighbours in the area.



Pottery from Curraghatoosane 1

Archaeological Test Excavations

The purpose of archaeological test excavations is to identify whether previously unknown archaeological sites are present in an area prior to development. Testing of largescale road projects like the N69 Listowel Bypass entails archaeologists excavating a series of trenches within the greenfield areas of the project with a tracked excavator. The testing establishes the nature and extent of any archaeological remains present. This enables strategies to be put in place to mitigate the impact of the development on the archaeology before construction commences.

Making Medieval Charcoal

At Coolnaleen Lower 2 we found three charcoal-production pits. Charcoal was an important fuel for metal working because it can reach the high temperatures needed to smelt ores. It is made from burning wood in an oxygen-controlled environment. Wood was stacked in the pit, covered with vegetation and earth, and burned over a number of days to make charcoal. Charcoal from two of the pits were radiocarbon dated to cal. AD 1048–1222 and cal. AD 1030–1158.



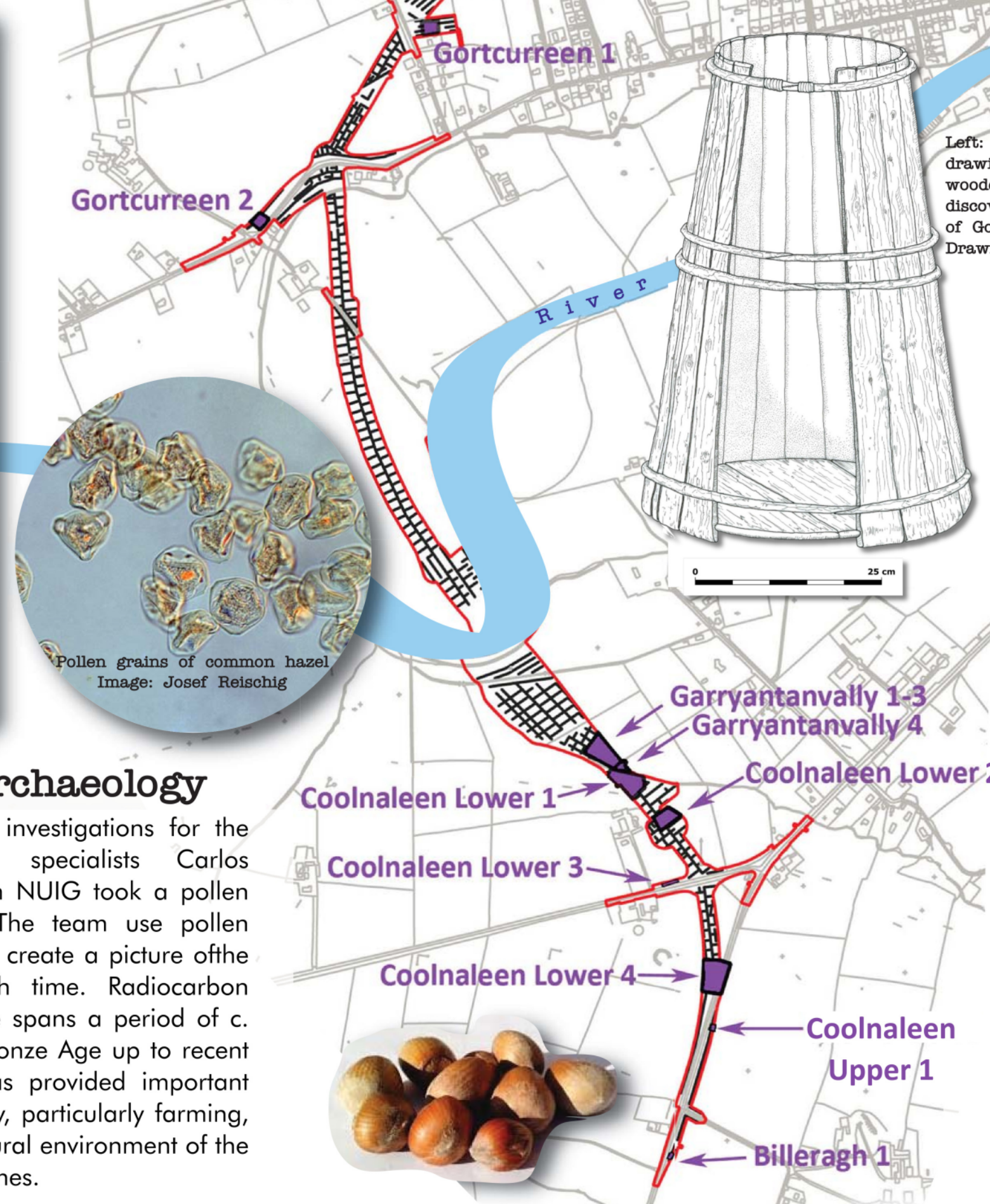
Fulachtaí fia - boiling water, building community



Artist's impression of a burnt mound in use. Image Eoin Whelehan/AMS (left). A shale axe from Coolnaleen Lower 1 (right)



Pollen coring at Derra West Bog, Listowel, Co. Kerry



Environmental Archaeology

As part of the archaeological investigations for the bypass, palaeoenvironmental specialists Carlos Chique and Karen Molloy from NUIG took a pollen core from Derra West Bog. The team use pollen trapped in the layers of peat to create a picture of the changing environment through time. Radiocarbon dating has shown that the core spans a period of c. 4500 years – from the Early Bronze Age up to recent times. Analysis of the core has provided important insights into how human activity, particularly farming, has altered and shaped the natural environment of the Listowel area since Prehistoric times.

From the Bog: Worked Timbers and Wooden Vessel



At the site of Gortcurrane 1, a group of worked structural timbers and the remains of a stave-built wooden vessel were discovered in boggy ground. All of the timbers appear to have been dumped here in the past and were preserved in the peat. The most significant of the timbers were three large structural beams containing numerous mortises along their lengths, representing possible wall plates from a large structure. Dendrochronological analysis indicates the trees used for four of the structural timbers were felled in the ninth century AD (early medieval period). The stave-built vessel comprises 25 staves, part of a wooden binding hoop and most of the wooden base. The binding hoop, made from a half-split yew, was radiocarbon dated to cal. AD 774–950 (early medieval period).

Five burnt mounds, or fulachtaí fia, were discovered in Coolnaleen Lower and Garryantanvally. Burnt mounds are the most common prehistoric site type in Ireland and most date to the Bronze Age (2500–800 BC). They consist of mounds of heat-shattered stone and charcoal-enriched soil, usually located in low-lying, marshy areas close to a stream or spring. Troughs (for heating water), as well as hearths, stakehole alignments and pits, are often found next to or beneath the mounds. They are generally thought to have been cooking places but may also have served other functions. Multiple purposes are certainly indicated at Coolnaleen Lower 1. A small number of stone artefacts, including a shale axehead, were also found at this site. Radiocarbon dating of three wood-lined troughs, which could have been used to cook joints of meat, has shown that these features were in use from the Early Bronze Age (1875–1628 cal. BC) extending into the Late Bronze Age (1012–837 cal. BC). Also recorded were a large pit that may have functioned as an open-air bathing pool with a wood-and-stone bench situated at one end, and the foundations of a post- and stake-built structure. Radiocarbon dating of the large pit puts its use in the Early Iron Age (774–515 cal. BC and 775–515 cal. BC), and two Early Iron Age dates were also returned from deposits with the foundations of the structure (747–403 cal. BC and 732–400 cal. BC).



Mini-documentaries

Two mini-documentaries were created as part of cataloguing the archaeological works on the N69 Listowel Bypass Project. Click on the QR code to watch. Each video lasts for just over 10 minutes.

