

Blanemore Forest Walk

Moygownagh, in North Mayo

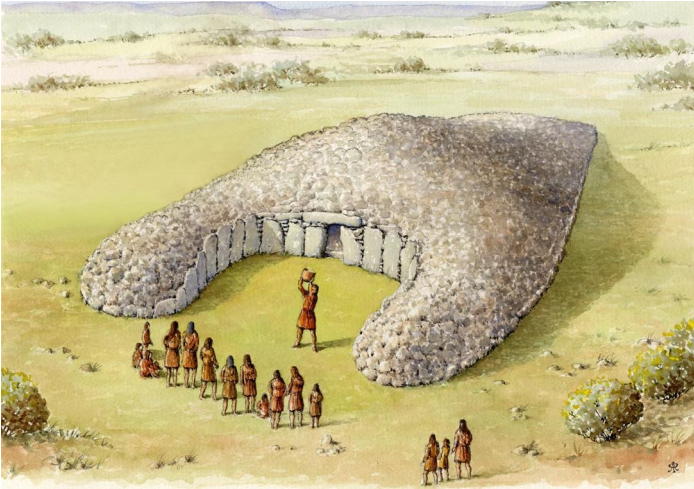
“Six thousand years of history lie in this conifer woodland, set on a gravel ridge above the wild and ancient bog-lands of North Mayo. Explore the sacred tombs and field walls of our first farmers. Walk among the mysterious standing stones of the Bronze Age and sit with the brooding dark beauty of Lough Naweela. This is a unique walk through Blanemore Forest and our shared human history.”

Blanemore Forest is near Moygownagh village, on the R315 road between Crossmolina & Ballycastle. The walk is managed by Moygownagh Community Council with Coillte. Keep to the signed paths & take adequate care while visiting, as this is a working, commercial woodland. Info: email moygownaghe@eircom.net or tel: +3539631066. Visit www.blanemoreforest.com for directions, guides & download a **FREE SELF-GUIDE SMARTPHONE APP** or scan this **QR Code**.



Neolithic & Bronze Age Farmers

Image of a Court tomb ritual courtesy of 'Paint the Past', philarm.com



The first farming community at Blanemore was part of the early Neolithic farming settlements in North Mayo, of which the **Céide Fields**, 16km away - is the best known. Pollen analysis of the adjacent bog of Garrynagran (just east of the entrance gate (at **stop 1**) reveals this deep bog was already growing here circa. 3800 BC, which trapped pollen spores from the grass fields these first farmers created, as part of an extensive clearance of the woods of pine, elm and oak from the surrounding uplands. This was an intense period of pastoral farming where field walls (**stops 2a,b,c**) were built using rocks lifted from the topsoil - creating field systems designed for cattle rearing. The two large megalithic Court-Tombs on the walk (**stop 2b & 5b**) were also constructed, using split granite boulders and cairns of stones and soil. As at **Céide Fields**, the community here flourished for some 500 years before a change to a wetter climate, leaching of the soil and growth in the bog over the pastures, resulted in settlement decline and then abandonment circa 3250 BC.

An abrupt change to a warmer, drier climate circa. 2800-2700 BC, saw the shallower peat bogs dry out, with the eventual growth of the pine trees onto the peat. This is reflected in the thousands of pine stumps (known locally as “Bog Deal”) found by locals when cutting turf for fuel, in the nearby Garrynagran bog today. Taking advantage of the drier soil, human settlement returned to the Blanemore ridge in the early Bronze Age circa 2600 BC, when small-scale farming and woodland clearance resumed, but never on the scale of the original Neolithic farmers. It is likely the standing stone (**stop 3**) and stone row (**stop 5a**) were erected at this time, showing a continuity of ritual here by generations of people, thousands of years apart. This warm, dry interlude lasted only few hundred years and the familiar colder rains returned, so by 2150 BC the uplands of the West, including Blanemore, were being engulfed once again by the widespread growth of bogs - preserving the ancient landscapes underneath. Since then, Blanemore was only used for rough summer grazing down to modern times, with horses in particular stocked here, until Coillte purchased the land from locals. With the considerable depth of bog, seen especially south of Lake Naweela, more field walls and other prehistoric monuments are likely to lie underneath, on the pre-bog, Neolithic & Bronze age surfaces of the first farmers of Blanemore.



The Walk through Blanemore Forest

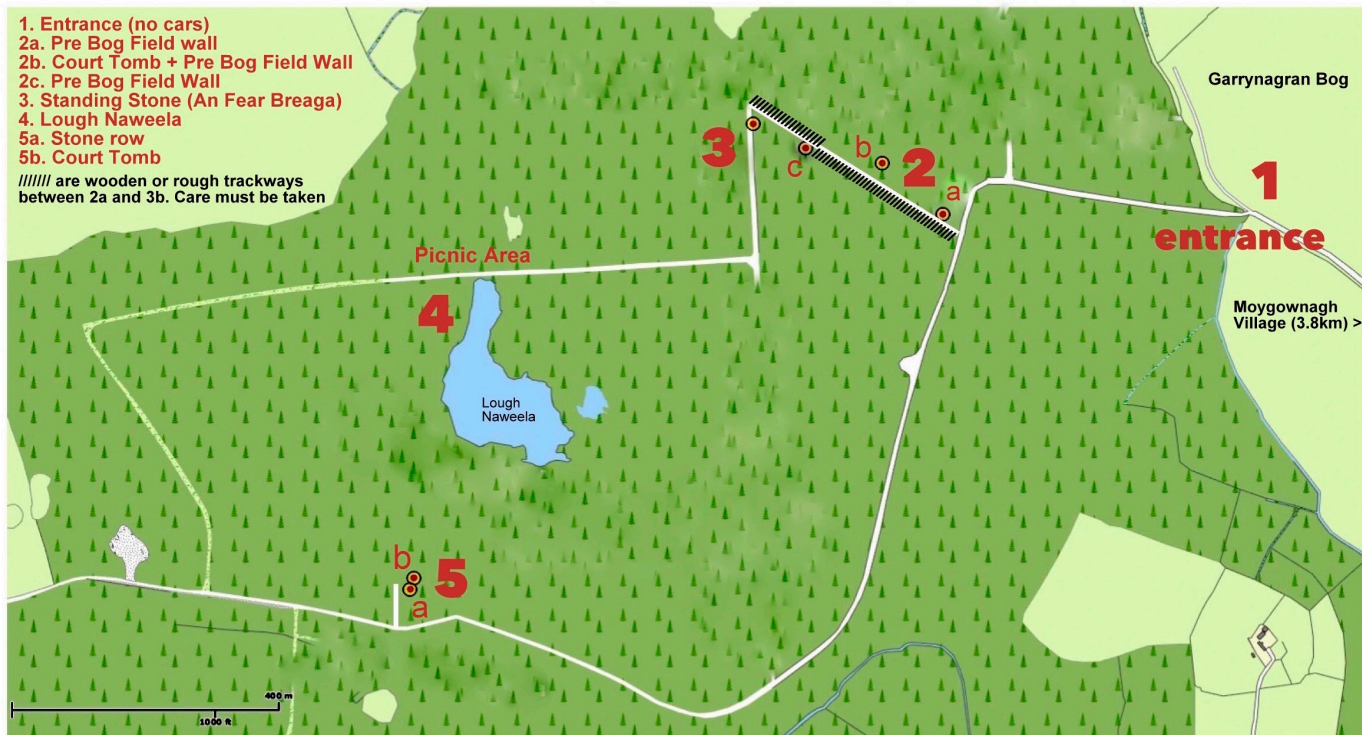
Blanemore Forest is a commercial, conifer wood of pine and spruce, planted on a gravel ridge, above the surrounding bogland, near Moygownagh village in North Mayo. It contains ancient monuments dating back to the Stone Age and Bronze Age, which were originally surveyed in the early 1960's by visiting archaeologists, as the trees were first planted. They were then "lost" and only rediscovered in 1993, by local students; Liam Alex Heffron and Noel Kelly, (then working in the nearby **Céide Fields** Visitors Centre) on one of their impromptu field trips. Since then, the local community of Moygownagh has led the development of the 4.7km loop walk through Blanemore wood, to showcase these archaeological monuments and the scenic landscape surrounding them. The trail is provided with way-markers, informational displays along the paths and a specially constructed boardwalk of old Polish railway sleepers, and a non-slip rubber mat surface - originally designed for cows!

The lands of Blanemore were bought in the 1960's from local farmers, by the State Forestry Board (now Coillte) for growing commercial timber. Aside from the wild plants and insects that now also make their home here, the wood is populated with fallow deer, pine martins, a variety of birds, and the occasional otter (known locally as 'water dogs') around Lough Naweela (the lake of the seagulls). This lake, **(at stop 4)** though landlocked, was stocked with small rainbow trout, at least to 1998, which attracted mink, as well as wild ducks and geese, which still are seen on the waters. Some red deer occasionally visit Blanemore, probably from the wild herds on the Ballycroy National Park, to the southwest. Blanemore Forest Walk, was officially opened on 25th August 2018, by renowned **Professor Seamas Caulfield** (of award winning **Céide Fields** fame), who described it as a ***"fascinating example of the deep history of North Mayo with evidence of generations of farming communities, in the striking setting of a conifer wood and Lough Naweela"***. The walk is a culmination of the efforts of historian Liam Alex Heffron, with the local community employment scheme, under the management of Moygownagh Community Council. We are also thankful for the assistance of Mayo County Council, Cllr. Michael Loftus, IPB Insurance, the Heritage Council, Fiontar Chomhraic and Mayo North East LEADER Partnership. The walk is maintained by the local community with Coillte, and has been awarded national recognition by Sport Ireland and www.irishtrails.ie


Blanemore Forest

BlanemoreForest.com

Research & design by Liam Alex Heffron 1993-2015



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 National Monuments Service
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

4.7km Archaeological Walk

Welcome to Blanemore Forest Archaeological Walk*

(1)



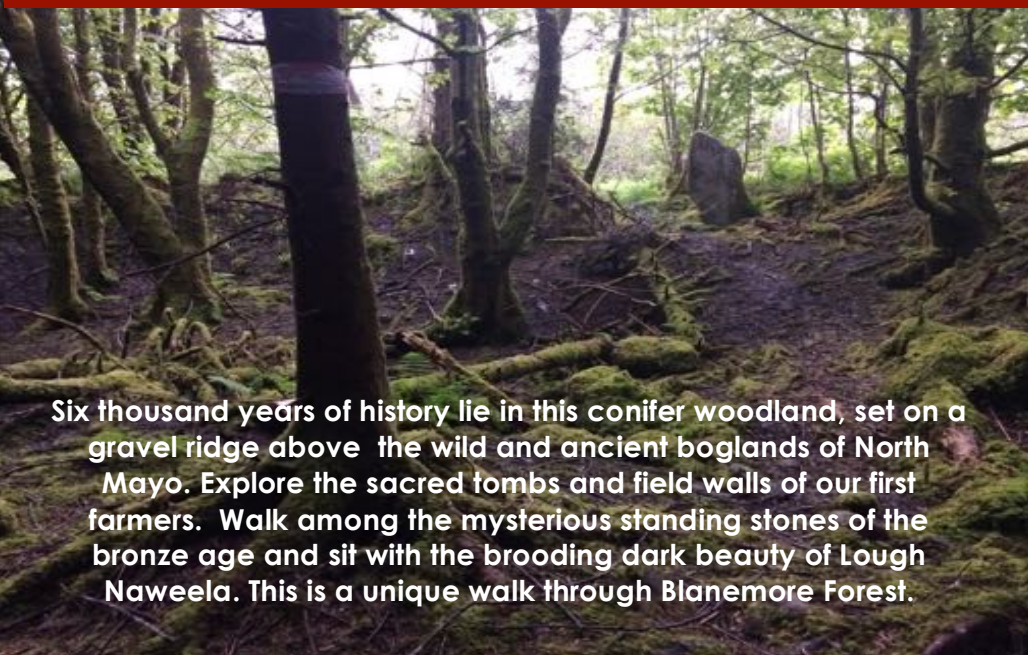
Trail grading level: moderate (walking) as per irishtrails.ie guidelines.

Please keep to the track-ways and care must be taken on the wooden causeways as underfoot conditions may be boggy, wet & slippery. Do not litter or light fires. Do not disturb plants, wildlife or archaeology. No digging or moving of in-situ rocks or stones. It is very advisable to wear insect (midge) repellent.

NOTE THAT YOU ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK. THIS IS A COILLTE OWNED, WORKING WOODLAND FOR TIMBER HARVEST AND DILIGENT ATTENTION TO HAZARDOUS TERRAIN IS ESSENTIAL.

Guide books available at Mitchell's Shop & on our website: www.BlanemoreForest.com
For Emergencies call 096 21422 - Ballina Gardai (Police).

*provided by the voluntary efforts of Liam Alex Heffron & Moygownagh Community Council with the kind support of Fiontar Chomhraic teo, Mayo County Council, Mayo North East LEADER Partnership & Coillte Teo.



Six thousand years of history lie in this conifer woodland, set on a gravel ridge above the wild and ancient boglands of North Mayo. Explore the sacred tombs and field walls of our first farmers. Walk among the mysterious standing stones of the bronze age and sit with the brooding dark beauty of Lough Naweela. This is a unique walk through Blanemore Forest.



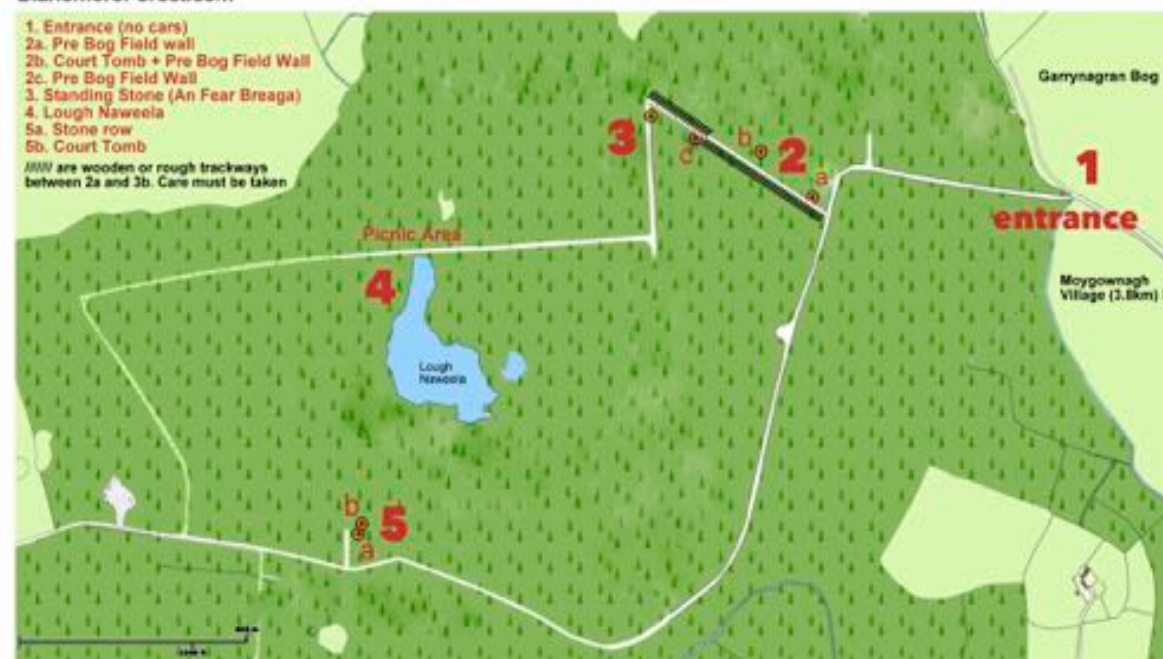
Walking through six thousand years of history...

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4.7km Archaeological Walk

Blanemore Forest is a Coillte owned, commercial, conifer wood of pine and spruce, planted on a gravel ridge, above the surrounding bogland in the townland of Tawnywaddyduff. It contains ancient monuments dating back to the stone age which were originally surveyed in the early 1960's as the trees were first planted. They were then "lost" and only rediscovered in 1993, by a local student Liam Alex Heffron (who was then working in the nearby Ceide Fields visitor centre) with Prof. Seamus Caulfield, Noel Dunne & Noel Kelly.



Soil erosion from Neolithic farming was believed to have contributed to the degrading of the grasslands into peat, leading to the eventual disappearance of the settlement here – but now we also know the climate had been getting wetter and cooler (which facilitated the bog growth) since before the Neolithic – so bog growth over the North Mayo uplands was therefore, inevitable.



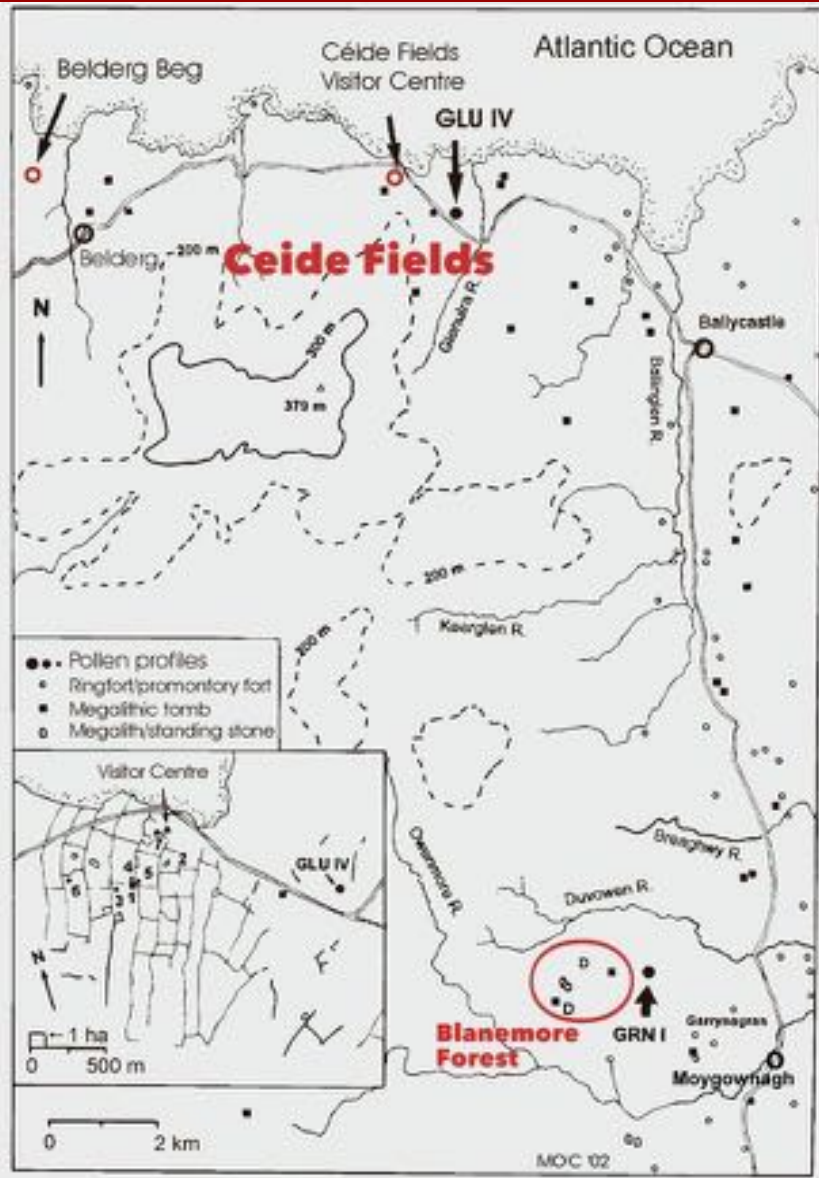
The Farming community at Blanemore was part of the extensive, early Neolithic farming settlements in North Mayo, of which the Ceide Fields, 16km away - is the best known. Pollen analysis of the adjacent bog of Garrynagran (LEFT: at the site GRN I, just east of the entrance gate to Blanemore Forest) reveals the deep history of the locality. The bog, which was already growing here circa. 3800 BC, recorded the pollen spores from the grass fields these first farmers created, as part of an extensive clearance of the surrounding woods of pine, elm and oak from the drier soils. This was an intense period of pastoral farming where field walls were created using rocks from the topsoil. These fields are believed to be designed for cattle rearing. Large megalithic tombs were built using split granite boulders and cairns of stones and soil. As at Ceide, the settlement here flourished for some 500 years before decline and then abandonment circa 3250 BC.

The forest reclaimed the grasslands facilitated by a change to a warmer, drier climate circa 3300 BC, where much of the shallower peat bogs dried out. This drier climate saw the eventual growth of the pine trees onto the peat circa. 2800-2700 BC and is reflected in the thousands of pine stumps (known locally as "Bog Deal") found when cutting turf for fuel in the nearby bogs today.

However settlement was not to return here until the early bronze age circa 2600 BC, when small-scale farming and woodland clearance resumed but never on the scale of the original farmers. It is likely the standing stones were erected at this time, thus showing a continuity of ritual here by generations of people, thousands of years apart. The warm, dry interlude had lasted only few hundred years when the colder rains returned, so by 2150 BC the uplands of the west, including Blanemore, were being engulfed once again by the widespread growth of the bogs - preserving the ancient landscapes underneath.

Blanemore was probably only used for rough Summer grazing from circa. 400-800 AD when farming once again expanded in Ireland. In fact this is how the gravel ridge was used down to modern times with horses in particular grazing here until Coillte purchased the land from locals and planted the commercial timber in the 1960s. Ironically the landscape looks more like Bronze age times now again – with small farming homesteads and pine trees once again growing on the drained bogs.

(L.A. Heffron 2015; based on Jennings 1997 & M O'Connell 2001)



2(a) & 2(c) Pre-Bog Field Walls



Above: (Seamas Caulfield 2001) Plan of the Céide Fields Field systems under the bogland and below: Pre bog walls in Blanemore Forest, revealed through the harvesting of the planted trees over them (2c)



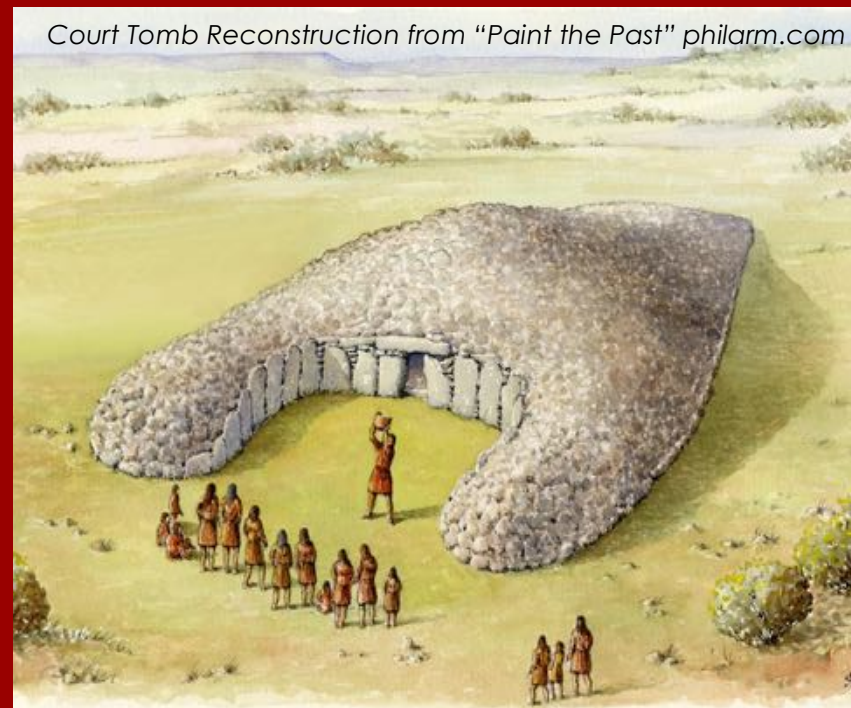
The discovery of the nearby Céide Fields originally began in the 1930s, when schoolteacher Patrick Caulfield noticed piles of stones, which were uncovered as he cut away peat for fuel. In these piles he saw a design that could not have been haphazard. Caulfield noted that people must have placed the stones there, because their configuration was clearly unnatural and deliberate. Furthermore, the stones were positioned below the bog, which meant they were there before the bog developed, implying a very ancient origin. He had discovered the field boundaries of an extensive farming settlement spanning thousands of acres and running in consistent patterns in construction, thus indicating a high level of planning and community cooperation. The unraveling of the true significance of this discovery did not begin for another forty years when Patrick's son, Seamus, having studied archaeology, began to investigate further. He revealed a complex of fields, houses and megalithic tombs concealed by the growth of blanket bogs over the course of many centuries. It is now recognised that the Céide Fields is the most extensive Neolithic site in the world and contains the oldest known field systems dating to nearly six thousand years ago, when the first farming communities arrived in these islands. Blanemore is contemporary with the Céide Fields and thus belongs to the first farming communities in these islands - beginning circa 3800 BC.

Court Tombs (as at 2b and 5b)

These first farmers also built tombs for their dead known as Court Tombs. They consist of a long rectangular or trapezoidal cairn, at the broader end of which is usually an unroofed forecourt area which gave access to the roofed burial gallery, placed axially within the cairn and divided into two to four chambers. A kerb of upright stones or drystone walling retained the cairn. Evidence indicates that the galleries were used for repeated burial, mostly cremations, over a long period of time - between 4,000 and 3,500 BC. They are common across the West and North of Ireland and Scotland indicating a probable dispersion from west to east. The North Mayo region has the largest clusters of such tombs - reflecting the intensive farming settlement here of the early Neolithic.

Pre-Bog Walls (as at 2a and 2c)

Pre-Bog walls have been revealed in Blanemore Forest during the timber extraction process. One such wall running back into the uncut forestry is seen as the pathway departs the gravel roadway onto the wooden tracks leading to this site (at 2a). The second wall appears as a low moss covered line of stones on a roughly NNE-SSW axis, 2m from the court area of the tomb (2b) and can be traced for at least 20m back into the undergrowth. There is another, more exposed line of a wall (see image to the left (2c)) situated over half way between this tomb (2b) and the standing stone (3) and runs perpendicular to the wooden trackway. These walls have not been surveyed or dated but it is probable that they are the few visible (above ground) indicators of ancient field systems on the pre-bog surface, as at the Céide Fields. If, as is likely, they are contemporary with the court tomb they would thus be the ancient field systems of the early Neolithic Farmers who have been revealed to have intensively farmed here from circa. 3800 BC – 3300 BC (by pollen analysis at nearby Garrynagran Bog).



(2b) Court tomb - SMR No. MA021-044

"... The tomb, though roofless, is well preserved. It consists of a gallery orientated roughly NE-SW, divided by jambs into two chambers and opening from a small court of full-court design. Considerable remains of cairn surround the structure. The gallery contains a great deal of fill and some large stones. The cairn surface is very uneven but it rises to an average height of about 1.00 m. above the surrounding ground. The entrance to the gallery is through a gap, 0.4m. wide, between two well-matched jambs. The more northerly of these is 0.7m high and the other measures 0.6m high. Five court-stones, 0.3m to 0.4m in height, flank the southern entry jamb. The opposite arm of the court consists of six stones. Here the court-stone furthest from the gallery entrance measures 0.6m in height and leans slightly southwards. It is the most prominent court-stone present and probably marks the entrance to the court. The other court-stones on the northern side range from 0.2m to 0.35m in height. Immediately north-east of the prominent court-stone described above is a well-set block, 0.5m high, which may also form part of the court entry. It may well represent a short entry passage analogous to the arrangement found in several other sites. The court measures 3.75m broad and some 2.75m long.

The first chamber is 2m long and 1.5m wide. The more easterly of the two side-stones on the northern side is 0.6m high and the other measures 0.3m high. Both are placed with their flat surfaces inwards. Partly overlying the more westerly of the two is a loose slab, 1m by 0.9m and 0.4m thick, which may well be a corbel, probably somewhat displaced. The side-stones of the more southerly side of the chamber are each 0.2m high. The eastern portion of that nearest the entrance is concealed in the heather-covered peaty soil. The well-matched segmenting jambs are erect and are set 0.55m apart. The more northerly is 0.5m high and the other is 0.45m high. Their flat surfaces face towards the entrance. The second chamber is 2.3m long and 1.6m wide and narrows slightly towards the back-stone. Two side-stones are visible on the northern side. The more easterly of these is a heavy boulder rising 0.25m above the surface. Its northern edge is concealed. The other side-stone placed with a flat surface inwards is 0.3m. high. The more easterly of the three side-stones forming the southern side of this chamber is a very massive block 0.7m. high. The next side-stone measures 0.5m high and the third, adjoining the back-stone, is 0.3m high. All three are placed with excellent flat surfaces inwards. The back-stone is 0.55m high. It also has a flat inner surface and its top is beveled sharply outwards.

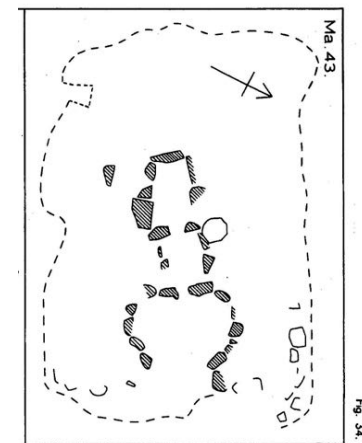


The cairn appears as a rough rectangle about 15m long by 10m wide. It seems to narrow slightly from east to west. Near its edge many heavy stones and hummocks in the heather-covered ground, superficially at least, suggest a straight kerbing along the sides and across the rear. However, in the uneven ground it is impossible to determine which of these stones, if any, really belong to a kerb and many may well be merely heavy cairn stones. The few blocks across the rear of the tomb are among the least convincing and it is not clear where the cairn originally ended. To show on the plan the large number of ill-

exposed and doubtful stones and the hummocks which probably conceal others would yield no intelligible result. With one exception those only at the eastern end are drawn. Of these only the large block 2.5m north of the central stone of the northern arm of the court can reliably be taken as a kerb stone. It measures 0.7 m by 0.45m and is 0.45m high. A second stone, the side of which is exposed near the cairn edge 3m south of the southern arm of the court, is also fairly convincing as a kerb stone. It is 0.35m high. The stone set 1.25m south of the western end of the gallery is 0.35m high. It closely resembles the gallery orthostats and is placed with its flat surface towards the tomb. Its function, if it is a true structural orthostat, is uncertain. If it is a kerb stone a distinct narrowing of the cairn towards the rear is indicated. A small recent cutting about 1m deep has exposed a section through the cairn at the south-west corner. The lower 0.4m consists of clay, apparently the natural soil of the mountain. This is apparently directly overlain by the cairn. The peat cover near the tomb is not deep and the trenches of the sods turned by forestry ploughs show a considerable mixture of sandy soil..."

From the Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland by R de Valera and S O' Nuallain (1964) Ma 43: Tawnywaddyduff

To the left is the description of this Court tomb as it was surveyed in the early 1960's. The original plan of the tomb with the outer court, inner chamber & surrounding cairn can still be discerned on the ground. Unfortunately, this site has since been damaged by repeated planting and harvest of trees from amongst the stones. A strict code of practice now exists for the protection of archaeology within state forestry.



Bronze Age Ritual Monuments - Lunar & Solar Alignments

Right: At Kildangan, near the village of Murrisk (Westport), during the Winter Solstice on the 21st December each year, a very special alignment occurs. There, among many ancient monuments and earthworks, is a Bronze Age stone row aligning with a niche in Croagh Patrick at approximately 1.40pm on the shortest day of the year. On this day the sun sets in this small niche and thus it must have held a significance for the builders of the stone row.

This special celestial event (as at the spectacular Newgrange passage tomb in Co. Meath) marked the end of Winter and the beginning of the coming Spring. Thus for a farming people it held much importance as well as a sacred ritual function. It is now believed that many monuments dating from the late Neolithic through to the Bronze age were constructed specifically to align with such events and provide a dramatic visualization of key moments in the natural and corresponding supernatural cycle, as observed by the local farming communities.



The Bronze Age evidence:

The Bronze age is so-called because it saw the development of the first metal (bronze) implements and tools and thus revolutionised farming, trade and warfare in particular. Pollen analysis of the nearby Garrynagran Bog indicate that after a long absence, farmers returned to this area in the early Bronze age (circa 2600 BC). They began clearing the regrown woods for farming but on a lesser scale than in the early Neolithic (Stone age). The presence of the Standing Stone and Stone Row here at Blanemore also indicates a remarkable continuation of this sacred site for ritual use. It also demonstrates how the Bronze age peoples recognised the non-natural phenomena of the Stone age walls and tombs even though of an age a thousand years older.

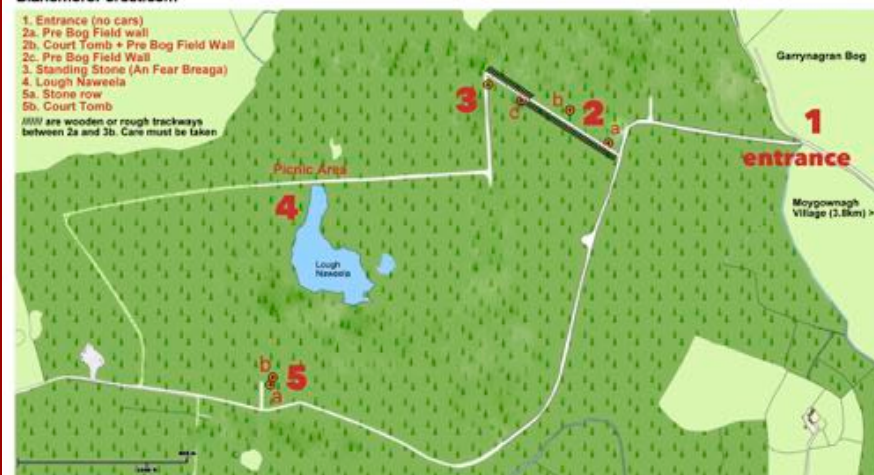
Within a few hundred years, the climate deteriorated. The renewed bog growth probably made farming too difficult, forcing the farmers to move onto the limestone lowlands in the east. Thus Blanemore was likely, largely abandoned to the wet bogs. However the significance of this (shrinking) green, grassy island oasis of sacred monuments within the wild bogland, probably stayed in the collective mythological consciousness, for hundreds of generations.

Above view from Blanemore: The sacred mountain of Nephin, (possibly meaning Heaven or Sanctuary) lies almost directly south of Blanemore forest and it is noted that the stone row of (5a) is aligned in this direction. However due to tree cover, it has not yet been possible to establish if the stone row does indeed align the mountain with a celestial event such as the Winter Solstice.

Blanemore Forest

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4.7km Archaeological Walk

(3) Standing Stone - SMR No. MA021-095



This dramatic standing stone is situated in an expanse of forest covered bogland, 5m to E of a forest track, just below the summit of a gradual ESE-facing slope. The surrounding terrain is now entirely



obscured by trees but originally the location would have offered a broad vista defined on the Skyline to the East by the Ox mountains, and to the South by Nephin and the Nephin Beg range.

This standing

stone was recorded by De Valera and O'Nuallain as they surveyed the court tomb in the valley below in the early 1960s. With forestation its location was lost to be rediscovered by Liam Alex Heffron in 1993 and visited by Professor Seamas Caulfield, Noel Dunne and Noel Kelly in a field trip along with the other monuments (sites 2 and 5). See photo above, then taken at the Standing Stone.

A Standing Stone is one which has been deliberately set upright in the ground, usually orientated on a north-east : south-west axis, although other orientations do occur. They vary in height from 0.5m up to 6m and functioned as prehistoric burial markers, commemorative monuments, indicators of route-ways or boundaries. Standing Stones date from the Bronze and Iron Ages (circa 2400 BC - AD 500) and are also seen as obvious phallic symbols.

In this case, the standing stone at Blanemore likely relates to the Bronze age activity here, for the few hundred years after circa 2600 BC, when there was a small revival in pastoral farming locally. This standing stone is known as the "FEAR BREAGA" (The Lying or False Man) and was used as a marker for locals traversing the bog as it stood noticeably proud on the then, treeless horizon. The stone is set at the head of a valley which looks down dramatically on the site of the court tomb (2b) and nearby field walls , which date to a period probably a thousand years older. The quartz (or "marble") seam running through the stone would seem to have been reason why this specific stone was selected – and erected here for some, now forgotten, purpose.

"... The stone consists of an upright block (H 1.75m; W 0.8m; T 0.4m) of banded granite, with long axis aligned NNE-SSW. The stone narrows towards the top to form an asymmetrical triangular peak, with the apex at S. A narrow seam of quartzite creates a raised white scar crossing the top of the stone and extending down the north-east face, 0.3m from the base. (It is likely that the Stone was specifically chosen for this feature - editor). There is a step fracture (L 0.35m, D 0.04m) on the south east face, 0.3m from the base. The stone leans gently to the SE. A low, roughly rectangular red sandstone clog (0.4m by 0.3m; H 0.1m) is located 0.35m to the SE of the standing stone. This does not appear to be embedded in the ground so its proximity may be fortuitous. Immediately to the SE, a section (max dim. circa 12m) of the natural slope has been quarried out. Approximately 6m to the ENE of the stone there is a level surface spread or concentration (c. 3-4m E-W; c. 10-12m NS) of loose stones, its exact extent obscured by forest debris..."

From the Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland by R de Valera and S O' Nuallain (1964) Ma 43: Tawnywaddyduff



(4) Lough Naweela (The lake of the sea-gulls)



The name of the lake was first recorded in the 1838 ordnance survey as “Lough na Wheela” (Loch na bhFaoileog) or the lake of the sea gulls. Lough Naweela, as it is now known, is a small land-locked lake about 86m above sea level and of some 20 acres eerily situated in the heart of the Blanemore forest. It supported fish in the past and may have been stocked with small trout as there is no inlet stream running into (or out of) it. A forester related how he would “tickle” the small trout as they were asleep, sun bathing on the surface, to catch them). It is a “Bog Lake”, that is deriving its water from the surrounding bogland. The peat bottom is responsible for the black inky look to the waters. The lake is known to support wild duck and especially otters or “Water Dogs” as they are locally known.

While the lake could only have been formed as the bog-land grew up around it – the site may well have

been very wet during the latter stages of the Neolithic and Early Bronze age. In 1993, a local farmer confirmed he discovered several short posts of approximately 1ft in length, and sharpened at their ends. They were found plunged down into the gravel at the bottom layer of bog, to be discovered during turf cutting not far from the lake. A quern stone used for grinding grain was also found in the bogland.

To the north was the smaller Lough Dubh, or “Gravel Lake” as it was known locally. Unlike Lough Naweela, it’s gravel bottom allowed the local farmers to herd the horses that were grazing on Blanemore – by rushing them into the water and slowing them down. Since drainage associated with the planting of the conifer trees, the lake dried into a marsh and was then colonised by seedlings. Now a stand of pine and sycamore trees grow where the lake once stood.

To the north of this lake, are a series of curious pit-like depressions and the site of another possible megalithic tomb was reported (L A Heffron 1993) but it has since been lost in the subsequent replanting of conifer trees.



Otters (locally known as “Water Dogs”) are widespread in Ireland around the coast, and along rivers and lakes. They construct their home which is called a ‘Holt’ on the bank and the entrance is often underwater. They are nocturnal animals (usually) which means that they hunt at night and tend to rest during the day in their well hidden homes.

Their presence is confirmed by mud slides used in play and by ‘spraints’ containing fish bones mainly, which are deposited on a rock as a mark of territory. An expert eye identifies their site here by the luscious green grass growth on tufts where they defecated after their meal of eels, fish, frogs, small birds, rodents, insects, newts, slugs, earthworms and tadpoles. Occasionally, salmon or trout may be caught. They are accomplished swimmers and can stay under water for four minutes. Their underwater prey is carried ashore between teeth or clasped by forepaws appearing like human hand-clasps.

The otter is still widespread throughout the country, but numbers have fallen somewhat in modern times. The decline is due to poisoning, shooting, netting on our lakes & rivers and pollution. In recent years many of the wetlands used by our toads and frogs (otters’ prey), as spawning grounds have also been lost. Ireland has the densest otter population in Europe and it is one of our oldest mammals, having been here for at least 10,000 years.

Tawnywaddyduff (The field of the black dog)

Blanemore is situated in the townland of Tawnywaddyduff. It is a huge townland of 1352 acres and the locals always named the smaller constituents of it. Thus Blanemore became the name of the gravel ridge which rose like an island out of the surrounding bogland and where the forest now stands. Blanemore itself was rough pasture in living memory where cattle and especially horses were grazed – thriving on the grass of the sandy soils. Blanemore itself means “Blean Mor” or the large nook, referring to some forgotten, landscape feature. The name Tawnywaddyduff itself is rather curious. It is first found translated in the 1838 Ordnance Survey as “The Field of the Black Dog” of “Tamhnach an Mhadaidh Dhuibh”, without any further explanation. The Gaelic speaking farmers had many words describing fields (especially when the quality of them would vary so much) and “Tamhnach” is a particular type of field rendered as “an island of firm (green grassy) land in the midst of a surrounding bog” This can describe Blanemore, as an effective oasis in a “barren” bog landscape.

However, the Gaelic speakers had a much more vivid description of the Black Dog. While not recorded locally, the Black Dog was known as “Cu Sidhe” or “Coinn Iotair” (The Fairy Hound) . This motif is found in folklore all over the world and is essentially a spirit that comes out at night and is often associated with evil fairies or the Christian Devil. Usually it is believed to be a portent of death. Larger than an earthly dog it has large eyes that glow and often associated with storms, ancient pathways, crossroads and places of execution such as a gallows tree. Their origin is lost in the mist of time but throughout the folklore and mythology of Europe dogs have been associated with death and the underworld, often depicted as guardians of the gates. It may also be because of the scavenging habits of dogs, often seen around graveyards or after a battle searching for fresh meat. Thus it may be this reason that the black dog evolved. In Irish and Scottish folklore, the “Cu Sith” or “Cu Sidhe”, is a large and fearsome dog with supernatural powers. They are usually black but may also be green (the colour favoured by fairies) or even white with one red ear and one red eye. They are always large sometimes described as being as big as a calf or small horse.

The Cu Sidhe roam the land performing certain tasks for their fairy masters such as helping in the hunt and abducting human woman to take back to the fairy realm. It was believed that these women were used to nurse fairy babies. The Cu Sidhe are completely silent in the hunt but sometimes they would give three blood curdling howls that could be heard over a great distance. When men heard this sound they would lock up their women to prevent them from being carried off. They are said to have the power to appear and disappear at will. In much the same way the Grim Reaper appears at death to lead the soul to the afterlife, so the Cu Sidhe takes the soul to the underworld. (Arthur Conan Doyle’s “Sherlock Holmes and Hound of the Baskervilles” is based on such a tradition of the Black Dog).

Protection from the “Sidhe”.

It was recorded in this very townland that farmers would protect their animals from the fairies by getting them to drink from a bucket which had some “Sides” added. These “Sides” as they were known in English, were a cloth bag of a collection of small, ancient worked stones of flint and chert that had some special protective powers associated, when added to the animals’ drinking water. Finding them in the soil, these stone scrapers and flints seem to have been attributed to the fairies as they were recognized as being deliberately fashioned. In actual fact many were the stone tools of the Neolithic and Bronze Age farmers. The name “Sides” is a rendering of the Gaelic “Saighead”(s) meaning arrows – thus the “elf-shot” of the fairies. The tradition was that the animals were protected from the poisoned elf-shot by drinking the magical water of the “Sides”. Thus the power of the supernatural and the mysterious stone monuments on the ridge over the desolate bog, must have impressed on locals, the awe and fear of the “other world” creatures roaming the darkened hill.



Black Dog by Warnick

(5a) Stone Row SMR No. MA020-002



A Stone row is defined as three or more stones erected in a line. Two main types have been recognised - a Cork and Kerry group, in which the row comprises up to six stones, typically about 2m in height, with their long axes usually set in line, and a mid-Ulster group, where the row comprises numerous stones, usually not exceeding 1m in height, often found in association with cairns and stone circles. They are considered to have been aligned on various solar and lunar events and date to the Bronze Age (circa. 2400-500 BC).

The Blanemore stone row probably dates from the early period of the bronze age, when farming settlement returned here circa 2600 BC. As the bog growth here is deep and extensive it may hide further monuments. This stone row appears to be aligned towards Nephin Mountain. It is not now possible with the tree cover to establish if the stone row incorporates an event such as the sun "rolling" down the side of Nephin mountain at a celestial date such as the Winter

Solstice of the 21st December. Such mysterious and important events denoting the end of Winter and the coming of Spring, had huge ritual and practical significance to a farming people of the Bronze Age.

"... Some 21-50 m. roughly SSW of the tomb (5b) two standing stones protrude above the surface of the bog. They are aligned roughly N-S and are set 1.10m apart. The more northerly is 0.5m high, 0.75m long and 0.3m thick. The second is 1.10m high, 1m long and 0.7m thick. Though a small hollow surrounds them they appear to be set at a considerably higher level than the orthostats of the tomb and cannot be taken as connected with it. Immediately south of them, towards the road, a depression in the bog seems to be due to quarrying, perhaps for gravel..."

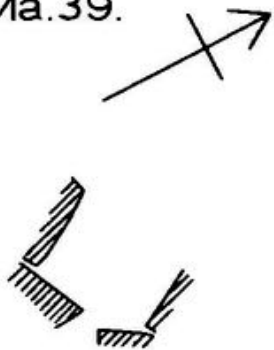
*From the Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland by R de Valera and S O' Nuallain (1964) : 39.
Tawnywaddyduff*

In 1993 two further stones were noted by Liam Alex Heffron, immediately to the N of the two uprights recorded by De Valera and O'Nuallain. The two additional stones are low, barely protruding above the ground cover of moss and pine needle detritus. They appear deeply embedded in the underlying peat and are close to and on the same N-S alignment as the two larger stones. The four stones appear to form a stone row (Total Length 5.85m) graded in height, with the tallest stone at the south end. This tallest stone (H 1m; 1m N-S; 0.55-0.6m E-W) is an upright stone with a pointed top and an angular, roughly lozenge-shaped cross section. It is set 0.94m from the second stone (H 0.65m; 0.7m N-S; 0.35m (E-W) which is an upright stone with a flat E face and a curving W side giving it a roughly D shaped cross-section. The second stone is 0.4m from the third stone (H 0.2m; 0.88m N-S; 0.37m E-W) which is a low stone roughly D-shaped in cross section with the flat side facing W. The fourth stone (H 0.15-0.2m; 0.4m N-S; c 0.65m E-W), 1.3m N of the third, is engulfed in peat and barely protrudes from the ground surface. Its long axis appears to be perpendicular to that of the other three stones but it may be part of the row.



(5b) Court Tomb SMR No. MA020-001

Ma.39.



"... The tomb lies some fifty yards north-east of a new forestry road in a wide expanse of bogland recently planted with trees. Northwards from the site rising ground restricts the outlook but towards the south there is a wide view across the boggy plains, with the ring of mountains from the Ox in Sligo to Nephin and the Nephin Beg range, forming the skyline. About 400 yards north-west of the tomb a gravel ridge—now deeply quarried on its southern side—rises sharply about 100 ft. above the general level of the ground around the tomb. The tomb is almost completely enveloped in peat. No surface indications are discernible on the peat covering, and the only structure visible consists of a pair of jambs and two sides-tones lining three sides of a roughly square hole, some 2m deep, below the surface of the bog. The fourth side consists of an irregular peat face across the northern end of the side-stones. The jambs are set 0.4m apart. The more easterly is 0.85m high and at least 0.6m long and 0.30m thick. The opposite jamb is 1.1m high, 0.35m thick and at least 0.95m long. The backs of both jambs are concealed and the outer ends of each run beyond the southern ends of the adjoining side-stones. The more easterly side-stone is 1m high and at least 1.15 m long and 0.3m thick. Its' northern end is concealed in the peat. It leans slightly inwards. The opposite side-stone is 1. high, 1.25m long and 0.3m thick. The backs of both stones are concealed. All four stones have

excellent flat inner surfaces.

Between the jambs a small tunnel, scarcely 0.3m wide, runs for about 0.75m southwards under the peat cover at a level just below the top of the jambs. It is not possible, without excavation, to examine the few stones partly exposed within it. The flat under-surface of a slab sloping downwards away from the jambs is partially exposed in the top of this tunnel. It may be a corbel or roof-stone. However, save that there is clear indication of the continuation of structure—very probably chamber structure— south of the jambs no further observation is possible. The exposed structure is sufficient to define the monument as a Court Cairn with the main axis of the gallery aligned roughly NNW-SSE but the direction in which the entrance lies cannot be decided. The exposed structure forms an excellently built chamber 0.6m. wide. The present floor consists of peat-filling much of which may have accumulated since the chamber was opened..."

From the Survey of the Megalithic Tombs of Ireland by R de Valera and S O' Nuallain (1964) : 39. Tawnywaddyduff

This tomb, similar to the other monuments, was "lost" as the forest cover grew up around them. Without protection, the cycle of replanting and harvesting threatened to destroy these monuments forever until they were "re-discovered" in 1993. Since the original survey of the 1960s, there has been some erosion of the surrounding peat (perhaps animal activity) and it is now possible to see into the chamber which appears to extend for over a meter to the East. Similarly to the West another cavity may be seen running behind the revealed stones. Thus revealing the potential of this site to be in a very intact condition. Much more archaeology must lie underneath the deep bogland here.



De Valera and O'Nuallain's may have suspected that this tomb had been opened in the recent years of the 1960s when they surveyed the tomb here.

This was confirmed in 1993, by a local landowner. He reported that the capstone had been deliberately knocked by the "workmen's machine" when they were



planting and draining Blanemore for forestry. He admitted that he was curious to know what lay under the "the large flag" of the "Giants Grave" here.

In fairness, if this hadn't happened, the actual site may not have been surveyed and thus never rediscovered later. So this act, while now illegal, actually ended up "saving" the tomb.