



Baltimore Ringfort



Ráth Dhún na Séad

Dúchas an bhaile
The Importance of Place



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RÉAMHÁ

This information booklet has been put together by various members of the Baltimore Ringfort Subgroup Committee, as well as others, as a way to engage the wider community with the ringfort itself, its special location, as well as its heritage. However, it also strives to give people access to our wider local heritage, both built and linguistic, encouraging us all to engage and participate with what heritage we have in our beautiful surrounds. We do hope you enjoy it!

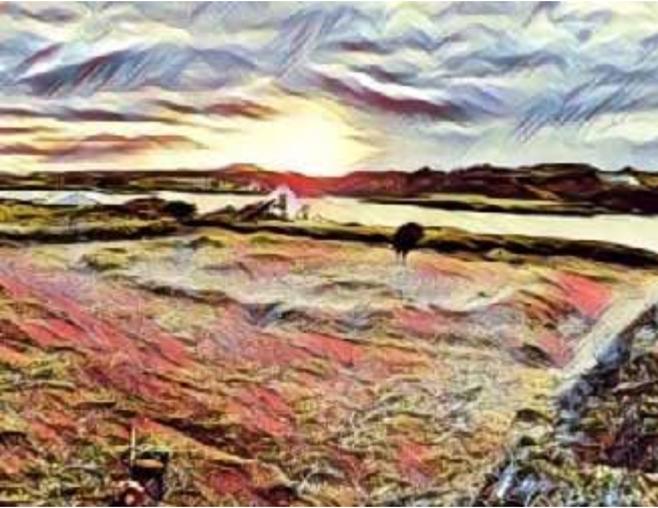
Please note that we are all volunteers and have done our utmost in terms of research and cross-referencing, in an effort to give the most accurate of information, which we believe we have done. Nonetheless, we welcome any discussion around any of the subsequent topics, especially around placenames, as they can be the most elusive.

Míle buíochas to the following: All the current and former members of the committee who have helped in various ways; Special thanks must go to Maura Collins and Josephine Leonard for their content input and support, Charlie Crowley for his Interactive Maps and support, and Sharon Rose Mc Keever for her creativity and design input. A huge thanks to Sophie Pentek of Pentek Design & Illustration too for her patience in creating the design.

Buíochas chomh maith le foireann na scoile, Ráth Mhór, leis an gceistiúchán Idirghlúine a chur chun cinn i measc phobail na scoile. And of course buíochas mór ó chroí to the students and families of the locality who participated in the Intergenerational survey itself. Hopefully it will be of interest for you to see some excerpts from it and encourage you to investigate the immense heritage of your locality further. Ní neart go cur le chéile!

Tá súil agam go mbainfidh tú taitneamh as!

Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin. Community Participation Lead. August 2022



*Artist impression of Baltimore Ringfort
by local artist Sharon Rose McKeever*

PART ONE

Νοχταδὴ Ράτῃ Δῆν νᾶ Σέᾶδ The Rediscovery of Baltimore Ringfort

The 'rediscovery' of what is known locally as Baltimore Ringfort/Ráth Dhún na Séad occurred in 2020. Many locals had known that it was there, and some recall playing in and around it as children up until the 1970s. However, sometime in the last number of decades, the site became overgrown and many locals had never seen it with their own eyes, although they had heard of its existence from others. Fresh strimming of the high grass and ferns revealed the circular structure to the world again.



*Aerial view of the ringfort site north of Baltimore, West Cork.
Ringfort located in the left middle ground. Photo credit: Oisín Creagh*

KEY POINTS

- **Ráth Dhún na Séad is north of Baltimore Village, West Cork, close to the Lifeboat station.**
- **It is considered a small ringfort as it is roughly 73 metres in circumference. Its diameter varies from 19 to 21 metres.**
- **It is only 15 metres above sea-level. It appears to have no souterrains or underground tunnels.**
- **It was recently 'rediscovered' in 2020 after several decades of being overgrown.**
- **The site is a national monument, reference SMR CO150-037.**





A freshly strimmed Ráth Dhún na Séad in June 2022. Credit to Sam Burch



An Iáthair Fhéin The Physical Site

The monument is located north of Baltimore Village, near Church Strand Bay, with Baltimore Lifeboat station just 150 metres northwest of it. Although it is only 15 metres above sea-level, it commands significant views all around, including as far as Oileán Cléire and Mount Gabriel. At the beginning of 2020 the site was overgrown. Following community involvement, the site has been strimmed to reveal what is believed to be a ringfort site. The site consists of a single circular embankment of roughly 73 metres and has a varying diameter of between 19 and 21 metres. The enclosing bank varies in height from almost 2 metres to as little as 0.5 metres. A variety of large stones are visible within and around the ringfort, as well as some significant holes. Their significance as well as more information has recently been revealed to us through a Geophysical Survey conducted by The Discovery Programme in June 2022.

*Ráth Dhún na Séad in the evening sun in 2021.
Photo credit: Sheelagh Broderick*





The site is a national monument, reference SMR CO150-037. This means that it is recognised nationally by the state as a monument of significance to the state. The term 'national monument' as defined in Section 2 of the National Monuments Act (1930) means a monument 'the preservation of which is a matter of national importance by reason of the historical, architectural, traditional, artistic or archaeological interest attaching thereto...'

Community Engagement is crucial in creating awareness in our communities around important monuments such as Ráth Dhún na Séad, and thus preserving them for generations to come. With this in mind, the Ringfort subcommittee decided to reach out to the local national school, aptly named Scoil Náisiúnta, Ráth Mhór, who facilitated the Bi-lingual Intergenerational survey in 2021. This survey engaged pupils from 3rd to 6th class inclusively, who in turn engaged with their parents and /or grandparents around the theme of ringforts, their local built heritage, linguistic heritage, as well as folklore around the sites. 26 families participated, which is a significant amount, considering the size of our community.

Local children running along the ditch in thick vegetation on the eastern side of Ráth Dhún na Séad 2022. Photo credit Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin.



Students of local school Scoil Náisiúnta Ráth Mhór at Ráth Dhún na Séad in 2022.

KEY POINTS

- A ringfort was usually a farmstead or home which was round in shape.
- Ringforts were enclosed by a raised earthen bank and a ditch.
- People lived in timber-framed houses within the ringfort.
- People generally kept cattle or sheep, as well as often working with iron.
- Ringforts were common from the 5th until the 10th Century A.D., during the Early Christian Period.

PART TWO

RÁCHANNA AGUS A Muintir Ringforts and Their People



Impressive remains of ringfort at Ballinard, between Baltimore and Loch Hyne, with bank and ditch almost fully intact. Credit to Martin Kelleher for aerial photo.

A ringfort is a circular structure within which people and their families, usually farmers, lived during the Early Christian Period. Ringforts usually have an earthen bank, of between 20 and 60 metres in length, formed by material thrown up from a fosse or ditch immediately outside the bank. Within the ring, people lived in timber-framed huts which had a thatched roof and a hearth. Most family groups were pastoral farmers, who kept cattle or sheep. However, many excavations show evidence of iron work, indicating that a forge was a common feature of ringfort life.

A small proportion of ringforts have two or more rings of protective banks and ditches and these are believed to have belonged to the upper grades of society. The vast majority of ringforts had a single protective bank. Ringforts existed as part of a society that was hierarchical and research indicates that ringforts were often linked to





other ringforts, not only in terms of families, but in a wider societal context, of which the Rí, or king, was the leader.

The earliest ringforts were built around the same time as the arrival of Christianity to Ireland, in the 5th century and continued to be used up to 10th century. Most had ceased to serve as habitation sites by the 12th century.

Opposite is a visual timeline of history starting from the Stone Age 7000BC up until 21st Century AD. This was provided by Scoil Náisiúnta Ráth Mhór, Baltimore's local primary school, giving us an idea of when ringforts were built. The Early Christian Period is in the fourth line.



KEY POINTS

- **A ringfort was built by digging a ditch and using the earth and stone to build a round raised bank or wall.**
- **A timber or a wattle fence was built on the bank.**
- **Houses were covered with mud to keep out the wind and rain.**
- **The roof was thatched with straw and rushes.**

Photo on right: Ballinard Ringfort: The bank remains intact and is an impressive height which is certainly needed for this exposed site.

Photo credit to Charlie Crowley.

CONAS Δ ΤΗΘΥΤΑΙ ΙΔΘ? Construction

Ringforts were built by digging a ditch and using the earth and stone to form a circular bank (wall). A timber or wattle fence was constructed on the bank. Inside the ring, one or two houses were built that had timber frames, wattle and daub walls, thatched roofs and a hearth in the centre of the floor. Smaller buildings in the ringfort were used for storing food or sheltering animals.



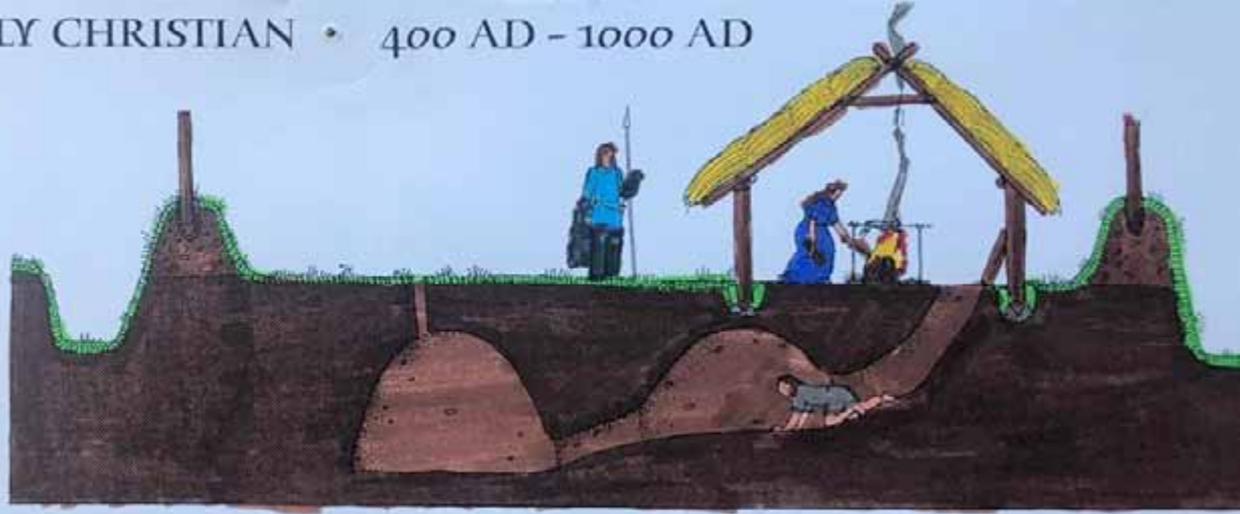


A student's impression of an Early Christian Ringfort, from Scoil Náisiúnta Ráth Mhór.

Many ráthanna had underground passages known as souterrains. The National Monument Service describes the souterrain as 'an underground structure consisting of one or more chambers connected by narrow passages or creep ways, usually constructed of drystone-walling with a lintelled roof over the passages and a corbelled roof over the chambers'.

The true purpose of the souterrain (from French 'sous' meaning 'under' and 'terre' meaning ground) could have been for storage or refuge, or perhaps a combination of both. Refuge was needed from raiders, marauders and wild animals that roved the countryside, such as wolves, and storage of grain, meat, dairy etc.

EARLY CHRISTIAN • 400 AD - 1000 AD



If the ringfort was attacked people hid in underground hide-outs called souterrains. Souterrains often had air vents so that people inside them could breathe fresh air.

A student from Scoil Náisiúnta Ráth Mhór coloured and supplied the above illustration.





PART THREE

ḴίοςΑ Ḵάρ η-Οιδηρεαχτ Ditches of Heritage

Ringforts are the most visible archaeological monument found on the Irish landscape with over 45,000 examples recorded. There are many remains of ringforts around Ireland, which we often see today as grass-covered banks surrounded by shallow ditches, as seen in the photo to the left of the ringfort at Ballinard.

These enclosures would protect the family within and prevent livestock from escaping. It is most likely that fencing of some form (wattle and post being the most used at the time) would have been placed at the top of the outer boundary to strengthen the defences.

Photo Credit to Charlie Crowley.



KEY POINTS

- **There are many remains of ringforts around Ireland.**
- **Ringforts are the most visible archaeological monument in Ireland.**
- **Today we see their grass-covered banks surrounded by shallow ditches.**
- **A gap in the bank shows where the entrance was.**

Opposite: Summer sunset from the ringfort of Ráth Mhór, Baltimore, looking north over the Ilan River, Mount Gabriel, the islands and Roaring Water Bay. Photo credit to Josephine Leonard.



Ringfort in Dún na nGall on Reengaroga Island, Baltimore in 2022.



1st Map: Maps the ringforts/townlands referenced in Intergenerational Study, where local people believe there is or was a ringfort located. Please click the link below.

[Click here](#)



2nd map: Maps documented ringforts within a local area. Please click the link below.

[Click here](#)

KEY POINTS

- **Ráth, Lios, Dún, Cathair and Caiseal can all mean ringfort.**
- **Ráthanna and Liosanna were commonly found around the country using mixed materials to create the wall, such as earth. Therefore, they are commonly found in placenames.**
- **Cathair (Caher) and caiseal (cashel) are forts made almost exclusively with a stone wall.**
- **A Dún can refer to many different types of forts/fortified houses and sometimes can refer to a ringfort.**

PART FOUR

ÁR nDÚCHAS TEANGA Our Linguistic Heritage

Ringforts are uniquely Irish and they are known locally as, ráth, lios, dún, cathair and caiseal. The word Lios originally appears to have referred to the space around the houses, which is enclosed by the bank or rampart, while the word Ráth referred to the whole settlement unit, although down through the years, both appear to mean the entire ringfort. The word Dún is used to refer to various fortified dwellings or sites, including ringforts. In Irish heroic literature, Dún usually referred to a fort of higher status, usually the dwelling of a Rí or leader. Dún na Séad, an old name for Baltimore, means the Fort of the Jewels, which probably refers to the fortified house which currently still stands. However, could there have been an earlier dún in the area? We cannot be completely sure.

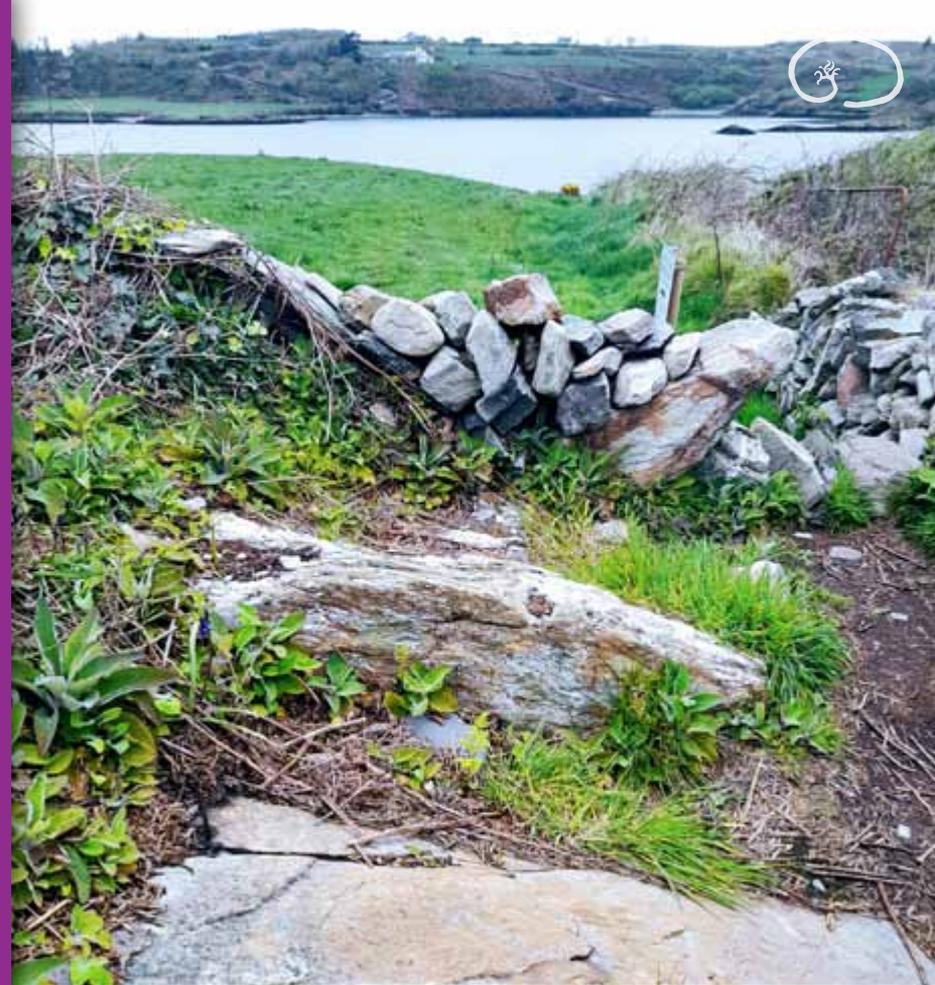
Donegal (Dún na nGall: Fort of the Foreigners) on Reengaroga Island nearby is one other local example, as well as Aughadown, which is across the Ilen River, which is Achadh Dúin: Field of the Fort.



Cashel or Caher: Caiseal nó Cathair: In areas where stone was plentiful, some of the structures would have been built with stone and their remains are sometimes still visible. In the west of Ireland and other stony areas, a large stone wall enclosed the farmstead instead of the ditch and bank. These settlements are known as a Caiseal or Cathair. However, over the centuries the stones from many of these cashels or cahers have been taken for reuse in walls, roads and other structures. Cashels are not as common in Cork as Liosanna and Ráthanna.



Example of a reconstructed caiseal at KnockDrum, Castlehaven, Co. Cork. Photo credit: Tuatha. See www.tuatha.ie



Stone wall entrance to Ráth Dhún na Séad 2022. Photo credit Sharon Rose Mc Keever

LOGAINMNEACHA AGUS LÉARZAS

Our Hidden Heritage Unlocked

As highlighted previously, Lios, Ráth and Dún are all logainm which can refer to a circular fort with a bank of some description. Below are some examples of each of these three logainm in our immediate locality.

Please note that when interpreting Irish placenames, there are certain conditions which make it difficult to determine the original meaning. The most important factor is that most placenames were created in the Irish language. However, unfortunately, they are no longer available to us in their original form, as most of them were anglicised when written down in. It is from these written records and any available local knowledge with which we interpret their original meaning. Therefore, it can sometimes be difficult to be completely sure of the original words. Thus, many placenames are interpreted rather than translated. We have endeavoured to do our best, using the expertise available to us, including the useful resource of www.logainm.ie.



*Signpost at entrance to
Ráth Dhún na Séad*

KEY POINTS

- **Lios, Ráth and Dún are found in placenames which can refer to a ringfort.**
- **Dún, however, can refer to several other types of forts, e.g. promontory fort, a hill fort or a fortified house.**
- **All these are found in placenames in our locality.**
- **Most of Irish placenames have been anglicised.**
- **An anglicised Irish placename is a name which was originally in Irish but was written down by an English speaker, often without any understanding of its sounds or meaning.**





Looking south from Ráth Dhún na Séad, with view of Spain Tower and the ridge on which it stands. Photo credit Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin.

Anglicised or Local Name	Location	Irish Name	Meaning
Baltimore	West Cork	Dún na Séad or the later name of Baile an Tí Mhóir	Fort of the Jewels or the later name of Townland of the Big House
Donegal	Reengaroga	Dún na nGall	Fort of the Foreigners
Dromadoon	Loch Hyne	Drom an Dúin	The Ridge of the Fort
Dooneen	Skibbereen	An Dúinín	The Little Fort
Aughadown	Aughadown	Achadh Dúin	Field of the Fort

Achadh Dúin
AGHADOWN

Cnoc na Rátha
CHURCH CROSS



Anglicised or Local Name	Location	Irish Name	Meaning
Rathmore	Baltimore	An Ráth Mhór	The Large Ringfort
Knockraha	Aughadown	Cnoc na Rátha	The Hill of the Fort
Rahine	Aughadown	Ráth Eidhinn or Ráth Choin	Fort of the Ivy or Fort of the Hound
Murrahin	Aughadown	Máigh Ráithín	The Plain of the Little Fort
Raheen	Skibbereen	Ráithín	Little Ringfort
Ardra	Myross	Ard Ráth	High Fort

Anglicised or Local Name	Location	Irish Name	Meaning
Gortaliscaw	Reengaroga	Gort Lios Cáithe or Gort Lios Scátha	The Field of the Fort of the Chaff or The Field of the Shady Fort
Lisheen	Aughadown	Lisín	Little Ringfort
Lissaree	Aughadown	Lios an Fhraoigh	The Fort of Heather
Lisheenacrehig	Aughadown	Lísín an Chriothaigh	Small Ringfort of the Gallows
Lios Ó Móine	Oileán Chléire	Lios Ó Móine	Ringfort of the Boggyland
Lissarankin	Skibbereen	Lios an Ruacháin or Lios Rancaín	The Fort of the Rocket (plant) or Rankin's Fort
Lisheenroe	Skibbereen	An Lisín Rua	The Red Fort
Lissanoochig	North of Skibbereen	Lios an Uathaidh	Unclear Meaning
Lisheenapingina	North of Skibbereen	Lisín na Pingine or Lisín na nPincíní	Little Fort of the Penny or Little Fort of the Minnows/Gillyflowers
Lasannaroe	North of Skibbereen	Na Leasanna Rua	The Red Forts
Lissalohorig	North of Skibbereen	Lios an Lotharaigh	Lotharach's Fort



Map 3: Local placenames which refer to ráth, lios or dún. Please click the link below.

[Click here](#)



PART FIVE

Ḃéaloideas 7 Piseoga Folklore and Superstition

Piseog, as Gaeilge, translates simply to superstition. For many, the Irish word has been preserved and is often associated with ancient Ireland and the evidence of it in our landscape.

References to invisible and imaginary people such as fairies, pookas, banshees and leprechauns formed part of a strong oral culture; piseoga that were rife in the past, can still be found today.

It was widely held that fairies inhabited the thousands of ring forts scattered throughout the country, and the wrath of the fairy people would be incurred if those fairy fort remains were disturbed. Building along fairy paths or disturbing the hawthorn or fairy bush also carried a heavy price, according to ancient lore.

Some of these piseoga are so deeply ingrained in the national identity that we follow them without even realising we still do so. The survival of many of our ringforts is thanks to these piseoga, as in general, farmers and land owners did not disturb these from their land.



As folklorist Kevin Danaher put it in 1964:

"The ordinary country people were restrained by the old tradition that these places were inhabited by the beings of the other world. In fact, we may claim the fairies as the best protectors of ancient monuments the country has ever seen..."

(Danaher, Kevin. Gentle Places and Simple Things: Irish Customs and Beliefs. Dublin: Mercier, 1964. 91-93)

The following are some of the scéalta and piseoga found in the Intergenerational survey. It is not surprising that the most common piseog in the study refers to receiving bad luck if you knock down or interfere with the ráth in anyway.

We start with an interesting scéal about a fort in Oldcourt, as well as a reference to a piseog and what happened to someone who 'interfered' with the fort.

"Excavated in 1953 by an archeologist called Concobhar Cullnane and ten other utility men from the parish. They found at least 400 items of interest including cutlery and drinking vessels. They also found a network of small tunnels underground about 2 feet in height. This would indicate that people were smaller in height.

Also people had a fear of touching or interfering with the forts. One story my grandad knows was that not long after the above excavation, Concobhar, during a celebration meal fell off his chair backwards down a stairs and cracked his neck and died."

Interestingly, the following story alludes to how people weren't encouraged to go near ringforts, due to piseoga or otherwise.

It was believed that
fairies lived in ringforts
and you would get bad
luck if you bothered
them or their home!

**PISEOG =
SUPERSTITION**





"My granny lived in Castlehaven. The school she went to was around a quarter of a KM away from the Knocdruma stone fort in Castlehaven. She said she had never been up there. They were never brought up there. She only went up recently."

The following are examples of the most common *piaseog*, that you will have bad luck if you interfere with a ringfort in any way.

*"There is a *piaseog*, that if you enter the fort you will have no good luck or that something bad will happen to you."*

"It was believed that fairies lived in ringforts and generally people would not disturb them in case it brought bad luck. Most farmers respected them."

"If you knock a tree down in a ringfort its bad luck."

"It is unlucky to knock down ringforts."

"If you interfere with them bad luck may come upon you."

"If you interfere with it you or your family will have bad luck."

"I was told never to go near or destroy a fairy fort as it brought bad luck upon your family."

With reference to Lissanuhigh: *"The leprechauns and fairies dance to the autumn moon"*

KEY POINTS

- **Bile pronounced bill-ah means a large or a sacred tree.**
- **A bile was considered important and was not to be damaged.**

*Bile and Bluebells in Summer 2022.
Photo credit Sharon Rose Mc Keever*

*Is the tree opposite an offshoot of the
original Bile Ráth Dhún na Séad?*

An bile The Sacred Tree

The large or sacred tree, known as a 'bile' is common in place names around Ireland. It refers to a tree of ritual or historic importance. Ráth Bhile, Fort of the Sacred Tree occurs several times. Bauravilla in Caheragh, is a local example, which means Barr(ach) an Bhile, the hilltop of the Large/Sacred Tree. Such sacred trees were held in great esteem by their owners or worshippers, and damage to one by an enemy was not taken lightly. In the Annals of Ulster, under the year 1111 AD, the cutting of sacred trees by an enemy was retaliated by Niall Ua Lochlainn in the taking 'a thousand or three thousand cows in revenge for them.'





Local 10 year old student Ava McDonagh's artistic impression of Ráth Dhún na Séad and its Bile.



PART SIX

ΟΙΔΗΡΕΑΧΤ ΝΑ ΛΑΙΤΗΡΕΑΧ Chun Solais The Big Reveal

The Geo Physical Survey 2022

Adopt a Monument Programme

The Adopt a Monument Programme is a scheme to help communities become actively involved in the conservation and interpretation of their local archaeological and cultural heritage sites. Baltimore ringfort subcommittee applied to this national scheme and was one of five successful groups recently accepted into it, and the first Cork group to do so. This means that the group can access advice and expertise when investigating the site and its heritage. As part of this, The Discovery Programme, an all-Ireland centre for archaeology and heritage research, funded by the state, visited the ringfort site in June 2022, to carry out an intensive Geophysical survey, to ascertain exactly what the site is. Is it an Early Christian Ringfort, as many believe it to be? Or is it a much older Bronze Age Barrow, which some archaeologists have suggested that it might be?

*Measuring out the grids for the survey.
Photo credit Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin.*



Above: Electrical Resistance Metre. Photo credit Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin.

The Geophysical Survey

In preparation for the survey, members of the committee as well as local RSS workers and other volunteers, strimmed and raked the site very tightly to the ground, as per request of the Discovery Programme. This was to ensure accurate readings. In late June 2022, three experts from the programme visited the site. They had decades of combined expertise in archaeology, geo-surveying and geology. They surveyed the site using several methods outlined below, using 20 x 20 metre grids, positioned using a GPS receiver to within centimetres of accuracy. The results of the three methods were then combined to ascertain what the site is. Geophysical techniques are non-invasive methods of finding out what might lie underneath the soil without digging and potentially destroying the site.

KEY POINTS

- Electrical resistance meters are used to detect and map stone features and others below the ground, by using electric currents.
- Electricity is passed underground between two probes.
- Stone features resist electricity.
- Water-logged features such as ditches can conduct electricity.
- This is the most time-consuming survey of all the geophysical survey methods.

Method 1 Electrical Resistivity Survey



Robert and Susan of the Discovery Programme working with the electrical resistivity metre during the Geophysical survey June 2022. Photo credit to Anthony Corns, The Discovery Programme.

Method 2 Magnetometry



*Magnetic Gradiometer.
Photo credit
Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin.*



KEY POINTS

- This method looks for differences in the Earth's magnetic signature which can be recorded in the soil.
- Fires and the building of ditches and walls can change the magnetic signature.
- Magnetometer is the piece of equipment used.
- This is moved over the surface of the site to build a magnetic picture of what is underneath the surface.

Opposite: Susan of the Discovery Programme conducting the magnetometry survey in June 2022. Photo credit to Anthony Corns, The Discovery Programme.



KEY POINTS

- A UAV or a drone is used for this survey.
- The drone is flown across the surface at a low altitude.
- It captures a lot of different images, which provide a very detailed 3-D surface model.
- This is then combined with the other geophysical techniques to ascertain what lies beneath the surface.

Method 3 Detailed Surface Morphology: The shapes we see in the ground.



Drone or UAV. Photo credit Josephine Leonard.



Preliminary Results

As we are awaiting the final report of the site, we can only reveal what was preliminarily revealed to us after the experts surveyed the site.

The site appears to be a ringfort.

It seems to be a smaller than average ringfort, and there does not appear to be any souterrain or underground tunnel. There is a likely entrance in the bank of the ringfort on the northern side, close to where the tree now stands. There was potentially an internal dwelling. The size of the remains suggest that this was its likely use. The holes currently on the site are likely to have been created over the years by animals such as badgers.

There is no evidence of a well or fresh water on the site. There is no evidence of graves or burial sites of any kind.

Clearly, there are many questions yet to be answered. However, we hope that these will all be answered in the near future. It is undoubtedly a special site, with impressive views on almost all sides, which encourages you to sit and gaze out across the water. Although we have not received the report as of yet, we hope to make it available here, or through other media, as soon as we can.

Drone on landing spot. Photo credit Josephine Leonard.



Members of the Discovery Programme present their preliminary findings to a community gathering on site in June 2022. Committee member Stuart Musgrave with microphone. Photo credit Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin.



Baltimore Ringfort Subgroup Committee 2022 onsite with the Discovery Programme team in June 2022. From left: Colin Lyden, Anthony Corns (Technology Manager), Paul O Driscoll, Sharon Rose Mc Keever, Sheelagh Broderick, Robert Shaw (Senior Geo Surveyor), Josephine Leonard, Stuart Musgrave, Charlie Crowley, Siobhán Ní Sheasnáin and Susan Curran (Senior Archaeologist). Missing from photo is committee member Sam Burch.

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Baltimore Ringfort
Ráth Dhún na Séad



This project is supported by the Heritage Council under the County Heritage Plan Funding 2022.



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Cork County Council

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

