



Garron Plateau

The Garron Plateau is the biggest area of intact blanket bog on the east coast of Ireland. The site is rich with varieties of plants and wildlife.

Garron Plateau has undergone an extensive restoration project.

Access from Cargan village, 10 miles north of Ballymena on the Glenravel Road (A43) and eight miles south of Cushendall. Car parking is available at Dungonnell Dam, near Cargan village.

Slieveanorra & Croaghan

Slieveanorra and Croaghan is an important area of largely intact blanket bog. Slieveanorra Mountain shows the different stages in the formation, erosion and regeneration of peat.

A variety of plants and upland birds can be spotted, as can the common lizard.

Mountain Slieveanorra was the site of the Battle of Orra in 1583. Eight US airmen lost their lives on the mountain when their bomber crashed in 1942.

Access via the Milibern and Breen Forest self guided walks. Parking is available at Altarichard car park, Altarichard Road, accessed via the Orra Scenic route. There is also limited parking on the road at the entrance to Slieveanorra summit.

Threats to blanket bogs in the Glens of Antrim and beyond

Drainage to aid extraction affects vegetation and water logging which are crucial for the formation

a fungus-like pathogen that damages and kills

Overgrazing leads to erosion. This is one of the biggest challenges facing Development such as urban expansion, communication masts and renewable energy production can encroach on peat lands.

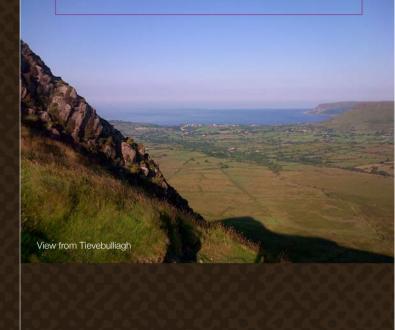
Burning can cause the loss of key plant species, breakdown of peat structure, or increase erosion.

Recreation such as walking routes can result in habitat loss through trampling and erosion.

Climate Change could lower the water table, dry peat, and cause the loss of peat forming plant species.

2

This upland area contains shallow peat. A rare rock known as porcellanite was harvested here during the stone age and exported throughout Europe.





A US B17 Flying Fortress aircra on Slieveanorra October 1942 William Fuller / Shutterstock.com

> Modern methods of peat extraction use machinery over large areas causing significant damage

Agricultural reclamation involves drainage, removal of peat and fertilisation.

Afforestation has led to bog drainage and ploughing to support conifer trees.

Rhododendron encroach on peat lands which changes species composition, habitat structure, and hydrology.



Red grouse breed in the upland heather moorland Their population is

Snipe breed on the uplands and on the lowland wetlands. Their population is in decline.



Hen harrier are

found on the upland areas.

Viviparous lizard is the only native species of reptile to Ireland. Peat

land is a favoured habitat.



Early people and peat

Peat, also known as turf, is deep-rooted in our culture. Let stroll through the





The Story of the **Antrim** Hills: People and Peat



Most of Ireland was

such as scots pine,

the Neolithic period

oak, ash, hazel, birch,

rowan and willow. During

(4000-2500BC) the first

create farmland, Neolithic

people began clearing

the wooded landscape.

The easiest areas were

cleared first, which was

temperature was warmer

than today so crops and

livestock could be raised

often in the uplands.

At that time Ireland's

at higher altitudes.

farmers planted crops

and kept animals. To

covered in native trees

Early People

The earliest known settlement in Ireland is at Mountsandel in Coleraine. It dates to around 10,000 years ago. At this time, Mesolithic people hunted and gathered wild food. They tended not to stay in permanent settlements as they relied on seasonal food. They used wood as fuel and to make tools, weapons and shelters.

TOP RIGHT Tievebulliagh (Cushendall) and Rathlin were the centre of Neolithic porcellanite

axe production in Ireland he axe heads were exported to Britain and Europe Courtesy of Ballymoney Museun



Water logging and leachin of soil



Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust The Old Bank 27 Main Street Armoy Ballymoney Co. Antrim BT53 8SL

Opening Hours

Mon - Thurs: 9am - 5pm Fri: 9am - 4pm Sat & Sun: Closed

028 2075 2100 info@ccght.org

Cover Image Courtesy of Coleraine Museum



Bog mosses, known as Sphagnum, can hold between 16 and 26 times their dry matter weight in water Aateusz Sciborski

The high water content

slowed down the decay

leading to the formation

of peat. Although some

blanket bogs began to

form 10,000 years ago,

most range from

5,000 - 6,000 years.

of vegetable matter,

Why and how did peat form?

Tree removal changed the soil structure. This coupled with climatic cooling and increased rainfall led to water logging and leaching. These conditions encouraged the growth of bog mosses, known as sphagnum, which holds a great deal of water.

Peat bogs

Lowland raised bogs develop in lowland areas such as valleys. They are raised in the middle like a dome, which gets bigger as the bog grows.

Blanket bogs are areas of wet peat land, where peat depth is greater than 50cm. They tend to occur in higher altitudes and in cool, wet climates. The name 'blanket bogs' refers to how they blanket or cloak entire landscapes. They are one of the most extensive semi-natural habitats in Northern Ireland.





What is peat?

Peat is a waterlogged soil that is made up of compressed, partially decayed vegetable matter.

Courtesy of Coleraine Museur

Carbon – Bog plants capture carbon dioxide. When they die the carbon is stored in the peat that is formed. When bogs lose their surface layer, the carbon store may be lost. This carbon storage is a factor in our climate regulation.





From wood fue to peat fuel

Throughout history, Irish trees have been felled for many uses. Ancient deforestation in the uplands coupled with the local climate created perfect conditions for peat formation.

Gaelic Ireland had an advanced legal system known as Brehon law (An Féineachas). One aspect of this law protected trees and shrubs against over-exploitation.

Under English rule, Ireland woodlands were exploited as a source of timber. Elizabeth I ordered the destruction of all woods in Ireland. This deprived Irish forces and rebels of shelter and provided England with timber resources.

In Ulster, the destruction of forests quickly accelerated after the defeat of the Gaelic leadership and the 16th & 17th century plantation

Tools of the trade The design of turf spades varied from area to area. Different types of spades were used for top layers and deeper digging.

in the Glens of Antrim. Ballygally/Shutterstock.com

The future of peat

Blanket bogs are now recognised as one of the most important habitats in Ireland. They are important agricultural resources, provide drinking water and are home to rare flora and fauna. Bogs also act as a vital carbon store, trapping and storing atmospheric carbon.

Why do we need peat land?

Flood control – Bog mosses store water and release it slowly into streams and rivers.

Grazing – Blanket bogs are needed for grazing. Upland farming is an important part of our rural economy.

period that followed.

This spade was used



Water logging is essential for the formation of peat JRJfin / Shutterstock.com

Biodiversity – Bog land is a unique ecosystem that supports diverse flora and fauna.

Water quality -A substantial portion of high quality drinking water filters through peat. Erosion and drainage of

peat lands has resulted in lower water quality.

1. A 'turf slide car' fo

2. For cooking a griddle, pot or kettle hung above or was placed within the fire. Meat and fish were preserved by smoking with peat





BOVE TOP TO BOTTOM

of the National Library of Ireland [L_CAB_05184]

Extracting peat

In the Glens of Antrim, peat was traditionally cut using peat spades (sleaghán). The top few inches of vegetation were removed. Then, sods were extracted from the darker layers below The peat was then left to dry over the next few weeks. Once dried, it was transported using animals, sledges, carts or baskets. Peat was ideally stored in a sheltered spot to reduce water logging.

Bog of conflict - Battle of Orra

In 1583 an important battle took place between the Gaelic families of Clann Domhnaill (McDonnells) and Clann Mhic Uidhlin (Mc Quillans). The Chieftan of the McDonnells, Somhairle Buídhe (Sorley Boy) won the battle by luring his enemy into a deep bog.

Guiding principles for the way forward

- Reduced amount and least damaging method of peat extraction
- Appropriate sheep grazing levels
- No new drains on any blanket bog
- Block drains where possible
- No clearing vegetation from existing drains
- No planting of trees on deep peat
- Protect upland vegetation from invasive species
- Advise land managers of blanket bog
- Work with and support the
- farming community

Peat Dams on the Garron Plateau Image provided by NI Water



3. The peat fire would have been kept alight all year round for heat, light and cooking. 4. A boy with cut peat on a barrow

5. A woman transporting peat with the help of a donkey and wooden panniers 6. Piles of peat stacked up outside the cottage



What was peat used for?

With the rapid devastation of the great forests of Ulster, a major sustainable heat resource was lost. Irish people came to depend on peat as their source of fuel for cooking, heat and light. Turbary, the right to dig fuel was vitally important to poverty stricken tenant farmers.

Peat has also been popular in horticulture due to its nutrient provision and soil water management properties.

BELOW This image is reproduced courte of the National Library of Ireland [L_CAB_05181]





A shining example

The Garron Plateau was prioritised to ensure one of our best sites was restored and sustainably managed. The project addresses large scale loss and RSPB to restore the of biodiversity. The same approach can be used in other blanket bog areas across the world.

As part of the Sustainable Catchment Area Management Programme (SCAMP), work is being carried out by NI Wate quality of this bog. This will improve the quality of the drinking water and reduce drinking water treatment costs.





A3pfamily / Shutterstock.com

- No fires

- Raise awareness

management techniques