



A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht: 1. Introduction, the Monuments and Topography

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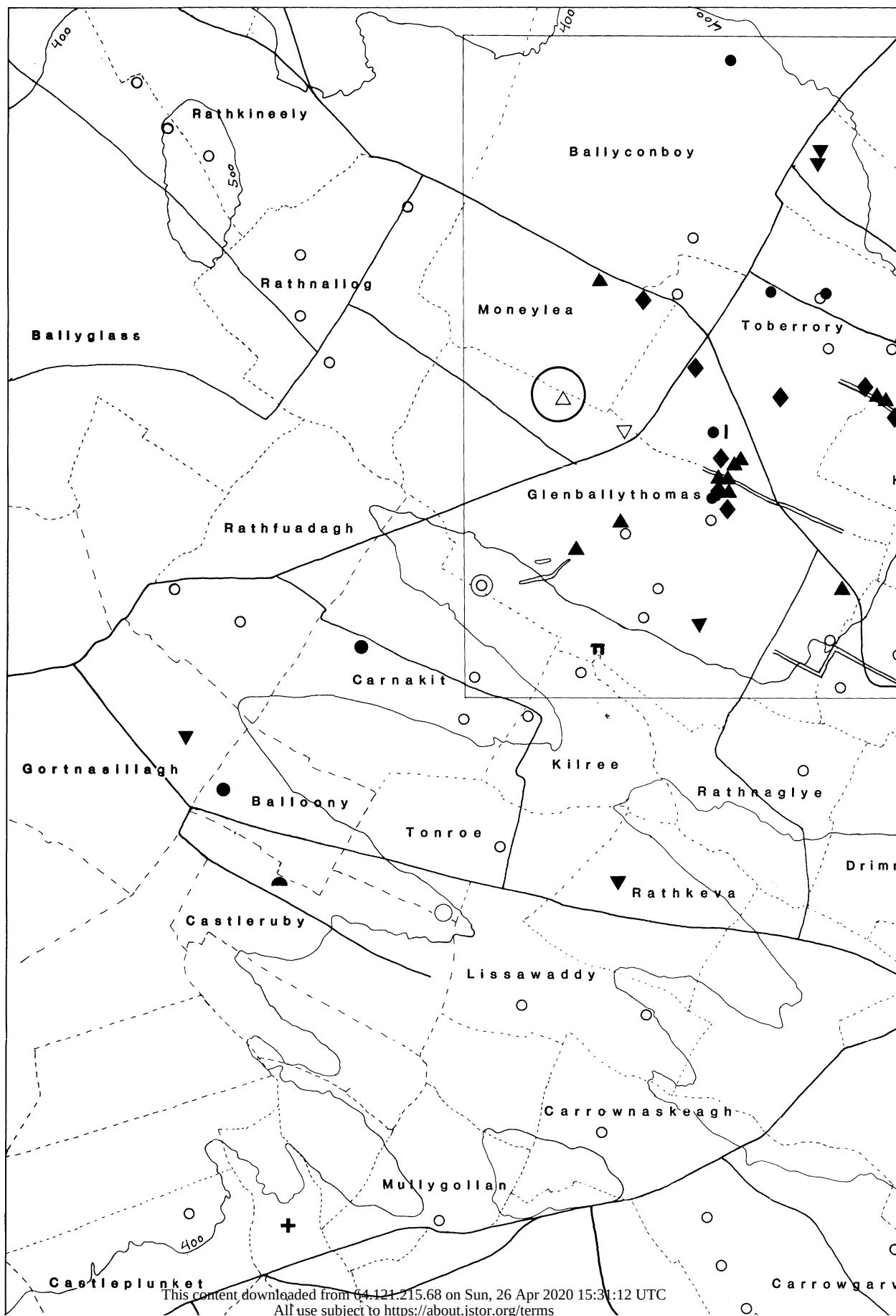
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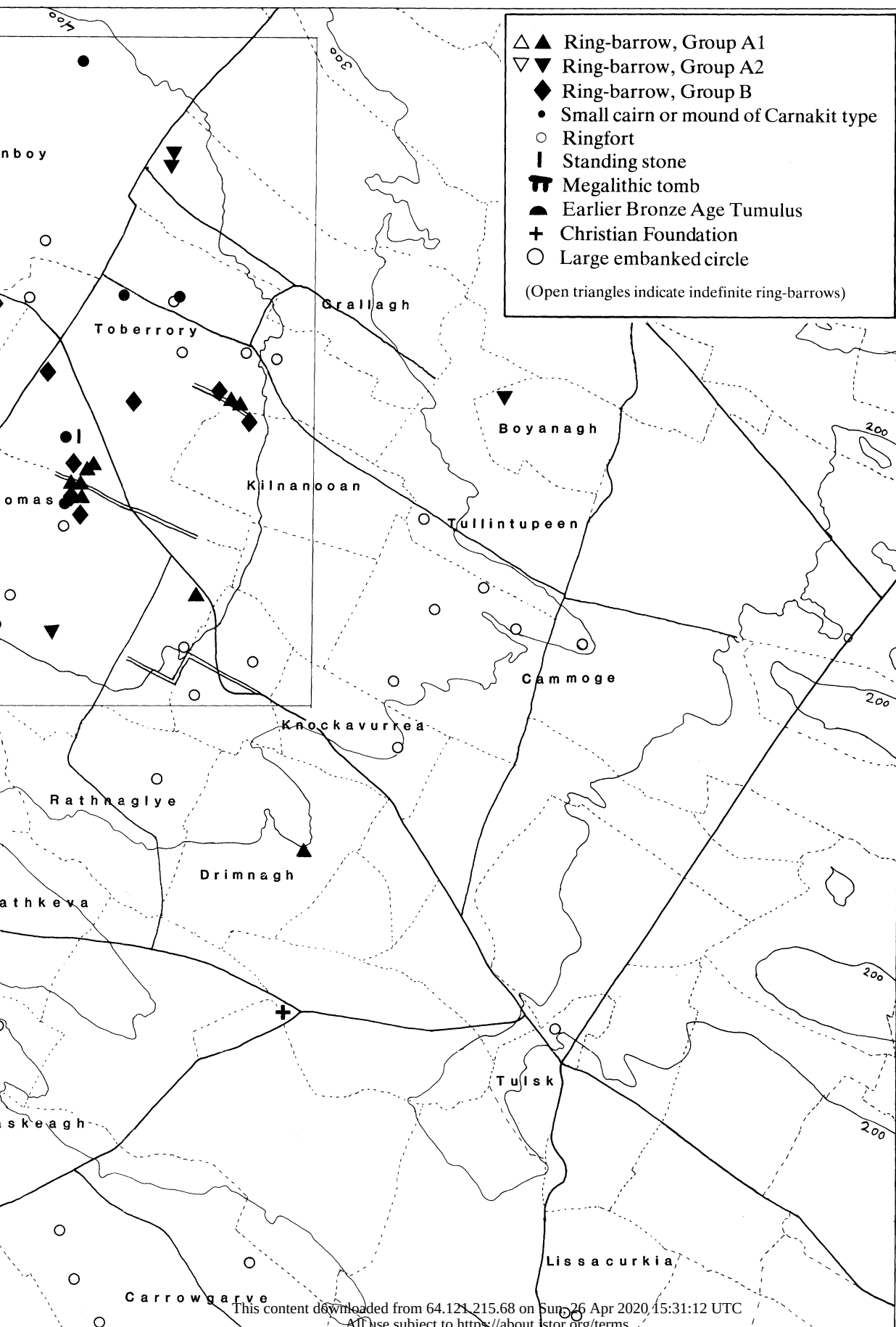


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Fig. 34 Map of Cruachain and Carnfree area.





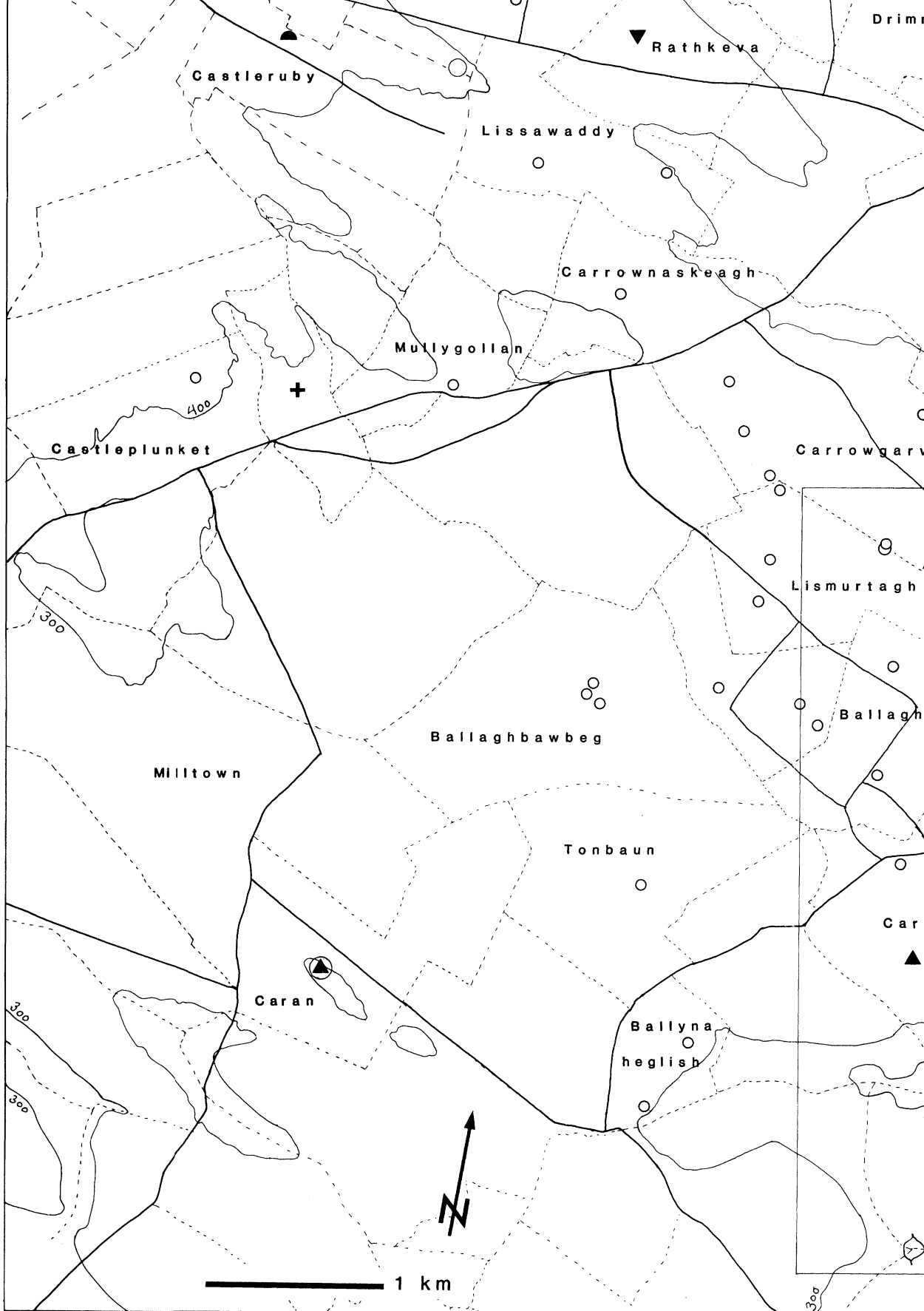
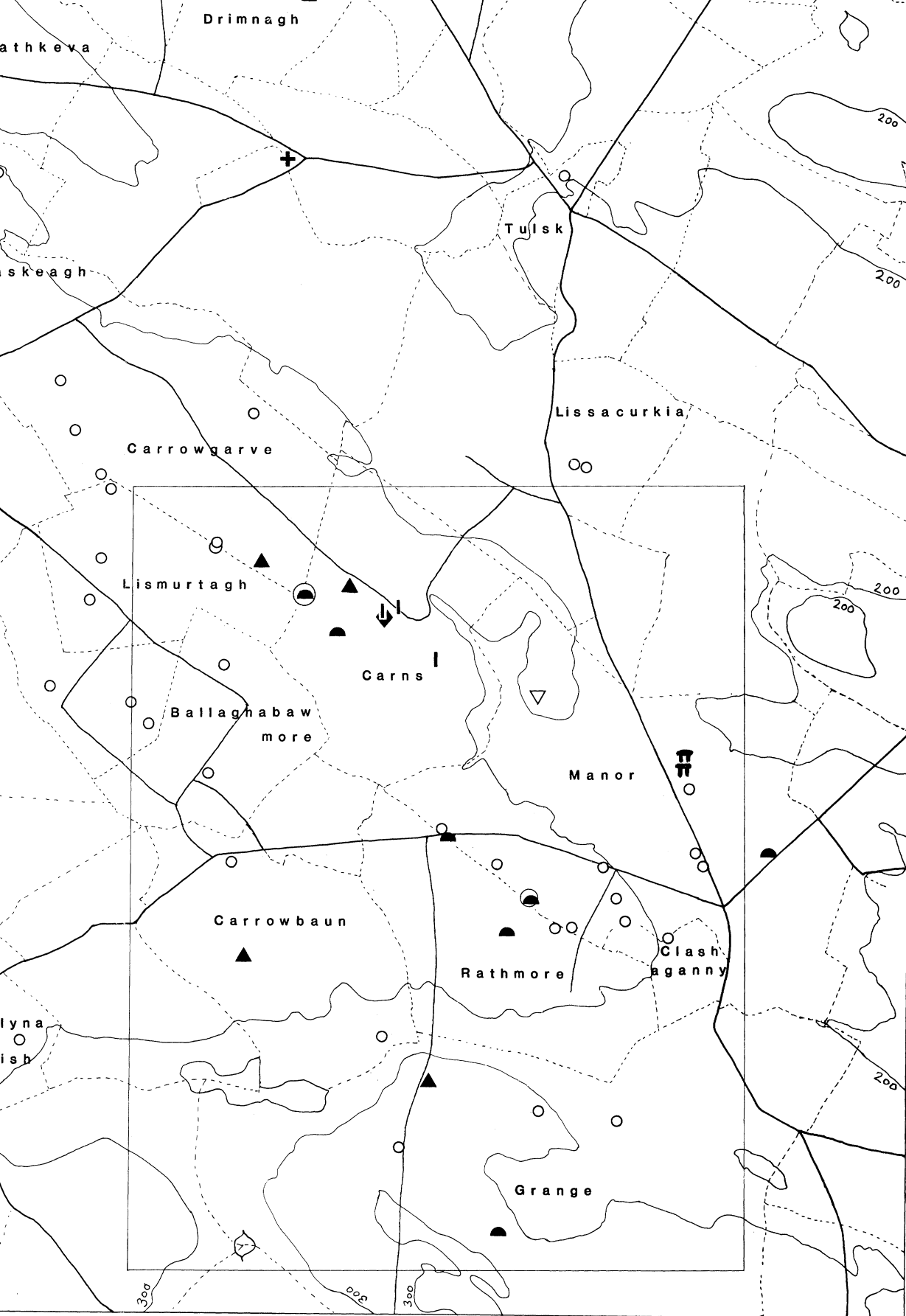


Fig 34 Map of the study area showing pre-Norman monuments. T



ing pre-Norman monuments. The areas in figures 36 and 37 are framed.

A Survey of the Royal Site of Cruachain in Connacht

1. INTRODUCTION, THE MONUMENTS AND TOPOGRAPHY

Michael Herity, *Fellow*

The first results of detailed field survey undertaken during recent years in an area surrounding the adjacent sites of Cruachain and Carnfree in county Roscommon are presented here. The limits were set to include the area of 100 sq. km in which archaeological monuments were most densely distributed and which had a definable topographical character (Fig 34). Outside it, the density of monuments is lower, there are no concentrations of ritual monuments like those at Cruachain and Carnfree and the land is in general more low-lying and more poorly drained.

Since 1838, John O'Donovan's record of the traditional names of some prominent sites in the neighbourhood of Rathcroghan has been available on the Ordnance Survey Six-inch maps and the attention of antiquarians and archaeologists has been largely concentrated on these sites. Knox, however, published plans and sections of a number of sites at Rathcroghan and Carnfree, noting at least thirty-eight pre-Norman monuments in the study area (1911, 1914, 1916, 1918). In recent articles Wailes (1982) and Waddell (1983) have dealt with totals of twenty-six and forty-nine archaeological monuments in the immediate area of Rathcroghan. The present article is based on 149 pre-Norman monuments, of which sixty-eight appear to be mainly ritual in character (Appendix 1). By spanning a larger and yet topographically homogeneous area, searching for new monuments, making measured surveys of the individual monuments and classifying them, especially those which appear to have had a ritual function, this survey seeks to bring the archaeology of the area into sharper focus towards an assessment of its chronology and cultural significance.

The project was based on the Ordnance Survey Maps and on the following series of aerial photographs: Air Corps Photographs, Department of Defence, Dublin, c. 1950, scale 1:10560; collection for the Committee for Aerial Photography at the University of Cambridge, Professor J. K. St Joseph, 1951 — , various oblique and vertical photographs; Geological Survey of Ireland, 1973-77, scale 1:30,000; Ordnance Survey of Ireland, 1983 — , 1:4000.

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Topography

The whole area is underlain by limestone (Geological map of Ireland, 3rd edition, 1962) and the soils are grey-brown podzolics (Ireland, General Soil map, 1st edition, 1969). The area can be divided into two main topographical units lying north and south of a line from Tusk to Castleplunket.

The northern part is dominated by the Rathcroghan plateau, 26 sq. km in area, above 400 feet, rising to just under 500 feet at the focal site of *Ráth Cruachain* and having extensive views to the south and east. The complex of monuments surrounding *Ráth Cruachain* is sited entirely above the 400 foot contour with the exception of part of the trackway near Cahernabavalody on the south-east and part of the Mucklaghs and Cashelmanannan on the south-west. The land slopes to the east and its lower slopes are drained by several small streams which flow towards the Shannon basin. There are several wells on the plateau, many of them with special *Tobar* (well) names: *Toberorry*, which gives its name to a focal townland, *Tobercroghoor* in Kilnahooan townland, *Tober caoch* in Carrowgobbadagh townland. The fact that *Oweyaniska* (*uimh an uisce* = the cavern of the water), possibly a natural limestone cave with a ring-barrow beside it in Moneylea townland, was also given a special name suggests the importance of drinking water for cattle in this prime grassland area.

In this northern area the plateau is ringed by narrow bands of land at 300 feet, in which the east-west strike of the land is further reflected by an indented contour, and at 200 feet. In places close to the highest point on the plateau there is a very light covering of soil over the limestone underneath; this is visible at the quarries immediately north of *Ráth Cruachain*. Natural drainage on the plateau is fair but in places on the 300 and 200 foot contours, particularly where it is sheltered by ridges of higher land, the ground is very marshy and has areas of standing water in winter and spring.

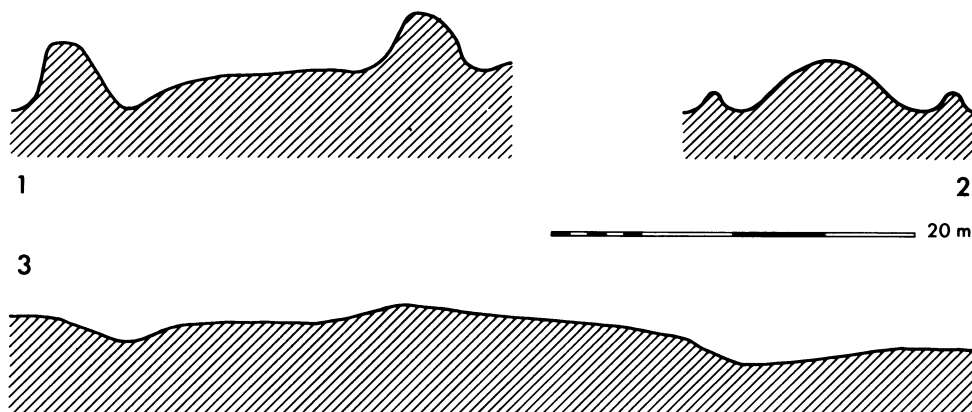


Fig 35 Ring-barrow profiles, Groups A1, A2, B.

1. Carrowgarve (Group A1), vertical scale x 5
2. Glenballythomas 27 (Group A2), after Knox, vertical scale x 2
3. Glenballythomas 8 (Group B), vertical scale x 5

At the south-west, Carnakit and Castleruby occupy westward projecting ridges of the plateau. Carnakit is named after a small cairn prominently sited on the most northerly. Along the ridge of Castleruby is a group of monuments extending east to the large earthen ring lying in Castleruby and Tonroe townlands.

The southern area comprises a comparatively flat but undulating landscape above 300 feet and rising to 400 feet at the focal monument, the inauguration mound of Carnfree, which dominates the landscape from a point enjoying wide views to east, south and west. On the south-east side of the study area is a belt of land at 200 feet which encompasses Shad Lough and Loughanasool, the only permanent lakes in the whole area, and the stream which flows through Shad Lough in a west-east direction. The natural drainage is poor; low-lying parts of the area are liable to floods and are therefore artificially drained. The imposing monument on Caran is on a small isolated ridge rising to 400 feet at the south-west end of the study area.

Two wells belonging to Christian foundations lie on the boundary between the northern and southern areas: *Toberogulla* in Ogulla townland and *Toberelva* in the townland of the same name near Castleplunket. A third holy well, dedicated to St Colmcille, is associated with Aghclare church in Carrowbaun townland, immediately north of Shad Lough (Knox 1915, 23).

Classes of Monuments Represented

The problems of identifying archaeological monuments from field inspection alone are well-known. It is fortunate that many in this area are in a reasonable state of preservation because they are on land given over to grassland rather than tillage today. There are some apparently unique monuments, like Caran; many others have analogues on other Royal Sites or belong to classes of which a proportion have been excavated. It is necessary to face the problem that some of the monuments in the area may be composite, having features of different periods, like the funerary monument at Longstone, county Tipperary, excavated in 1973-76 by Danaher, which was comprised of elements from the Early Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age (Herity 1983, 142-3).

Three megalithic tombs of the Stone Age, one probable Court Tomb in Glenballythomas and two Passage Tombs in Sheegeeragh, have been recognised in the area (de Valera and Ó Nualláin 1972, 35, 141-2, Sites A, B). There appear also to be a number of Early/Middle Bronze Age tumuli, one at Grange excavated (Kavanagh 1977, 86, 87), and several ring-barrows, a number of which are probably of later prehistoric date; one, *Daihi's Mound*, has yielded a radiocarbon determination of 170 ± 25 b.c. (GRN-11220; Waddell 1983, 31). Five earthen rings of large diameter, one encompassing Carnfree, others encircling the Caran and Manor 5 monuments, may be later than the monuments they encircle and of similar later prehistoric date. The Rathcroghan complex also includes three trackways or avenues, two of them apparently earlier than associated ring-barrows, and the apparently unfinished parallel linear earthworks of the Mucklaghs. In the southern part of the area are the exceptional monuments of Carrowgarve/Lismurtagh, a pair of conjoined rings, and the imposing ridge-top circular embanked platform of Caran.

No comprehensive survey of Irish ring-barrows has been done. The type appears

to occur in all parts of the country and is found at the Royal Sites of Tara and Eamhain Macha and at other important sites like Clogher, county Tyrone (Evans 1966, 200). Ring-barrows in Ireland appear to extend over a large part of the prehistoric period (Herity and Eogan 1977, 244; Ó Ríordáin 1979, 138-42) but most excavated examples are apparently of late prehistoric date (Raftery 1981).

The ring-barrows so far identified in the study area can be considered as belonging to two main groups. The simplest and most numerous are rings of diameter up to 21m consisting of a low bank with internal fosse; these number seventeen and are assigned to Group A1 (Appendix 1). Group A2 ring-barrows are sited on a knoll or ridge, incorporating it in their structure, and are normally larger; they number eight. Group B ring-barrows are those resembling either Group A1 or A2 and having a central feature like a small mound; these number nine. Six small mounds or cairns of less than 12m in diameter in the area may be late prehistoric burial-mounds; one is sited immediately south-west of a Class B ring-barrow, Glenballythomas 8, in the Ráth Cruachain focus.

The large number of ringforts in the area (81) presumably relate mainly to the first millennium A.D. Some ecclesiastical sites, Carns, Ogulla, Toberelva and Aghclare, were probably founded in early Christian times. The survey also revealed extensive remains of the Norman, later medieval and post-medieval periods. There were castles at Tulsk, Castleplunket and Castleruby, the latter only recently destroyed. Medieval churches survive at Tulsk (a Dominican foundation) and Grange, while in Milltown there is a fine moated site. Some townland names, Grange (of which there are two), Manor and Castleland, for example, reflect the Norman presence. Over large parts of the study area old field boundaries were observed on aerial photographs and on the ground. In view of their extent, preservation and clear stratigraphical relationships, these systems deserve to be fully mapped and analysed.

The Area in Pre-Christian Tradition and Early History

The Middle Irish tract, *Senchas na Relec*, identifies Crúachu, Brugh na Bóinne (Newgrange) and Tailtiu (modern Teltown, county Meath) as the chief ancient cemeteries of Ireland before Christianity, referring to the ritual *oenach* (assembly) held at each of these centres. As George Petrie put it in his translation (1845, 102):

Fifty mounds, I certify,
Are at Oenach na Cruachna,
There are under each mound of them
Fifty truly-fine warlike men.

The three cemeteries of Idolaters are
The cemetery of Tailten, the select,
The cemetery of the ever-fair Cruachan,
And the cemetery of Brugh.

Crúachu was thus conceived of as both a cemetery and a place of assembly of the same importance as Tailtiu. In the *Dindshenchas* Crúachu is regarded as a place of assembly and a royal residence.

Early texts set the scene for the meeting of the pagan and Christian traditions in the area. Tírechán relates how St Patrick came to the well called *Clebach* on the east slopes of *Crochan* before sunrise and met the daughters of Loígaire, King of Tara, Eithne the Fair and Fedelm the Red (Bieler 1979, 142). The story goes on to tell how they were baptised by Patrick, received the Eucharist and then died. When the days of mourning came to an end, they were buried by the well of *Clebach* within a circular fosse like a *ferta* (L. *tumulus*), in the manner of those made by the Irish and the Heathens. The story ends: 'and in that place he made an earthen church' (*ecclesiam terrenum*). Was the burial within a circular fosse a ring-barrow?

The very early ecclesiastical foundation of Baslick (*Basilica Sanctorum*) 8km away to the west, may have been sited close to Crúachu as Ard Mhacha (Armagh) was beside Eamhain Macha. Ogham stones now incorporated in the souterrain at *Oweynagat* may have formerly stood near this place: one appears to mention the names of Fraích and Medb (VRAICCI . . . MAQIMEDVVI, Rhys 1898, 230). The early Irish tale *Echtra Nerai* features the Cave of Crúachu as the gateway to the Otherworld; this appears to be the limestone cave north of Oweynagat (Meyer 1889, 212). This area is the setting for the beginning of the early Irish saga, the Táin Bó Cúailgne, the place-names Caiseal Manannáin, Milleen Meva and Mioscán Meva, and Daithí's Mound and Stone mentioning Manannán Mac Lir, Medb and Nathí appear to reflect episodes from the Mythological Cycle, the Ulster Cycle and the Cycle of the Kings, or myths which were later enshrined in those literary compositions.

The area demonstrates the remarkable continuity of Irish tradition in that Feidhlim Ó Conchobhair was inaugurated as Rí at Carnfree as late as 1310 (A.C. s.a. 1310).

Antiquarian and Recent Accounts

Since the early eighteenth century Rathcroghan and, to a lesser extent, the Carnfree area have attracted the attention of antiquarians and archaeologists, resulting in the sporadic publication of descriptions of individual monuments and groups of monuments. Until John O'Donovan's visit to the area in 1837, however, interest was largely confined to three of the monuments, the mound of Ráth Cruachain, the enclosure of Relignaree and the 'cave' at Oweynagat. Charles O'Connor of Belanagare in his *Dissertations on the Ancient History of Ireland* (1753; 1766) described Ráth Cruachain itself and the site of Relignaree, identifying the latter as a pagan royal cemetery, an identification which has remained unquestioned in the literature until recent years (Waddell 1983, 31). In 1779 Gabriel Beranger, engaged by William Burton Conyngham to plan and describe antiquities with Angelo Bigari in the west of Ireland, visited the area and produced a plan and section of Ráth Cruachain as well as two water-colour views now preserved in the Royal Irish Academy. The views are of interest in that they show the smaller mound on the summit of Ráth Cruachain, which is now barely discernible, still clearly defined in 1779. William Wilde in his *Memoir of Gabriel Beranger* (1871, 244-54) reproduced Beranger's account of Rathcroghan and the 'cave' at Oweynagat and also availed himself of the opportunity to describe the inauguration mound of Carnfree, the mound of Dumha Sealga and the standing stone and earthen ring of Cloch fhada na gcarn, with illustrations of Carnfree and Cloch fhada na gcarn.

The Grand Jury map of 1817 showed about eighty monuments in the area but named only a few. It remained for John O'Donovan of the Ordnance Survey to identify and name the monuments of Rathcroghan and Carnfree (Ordnance Survey Letters, county Roscommon, 1837). With the assistance of Matthew O'Connor, grandson of Charles O'Connor of Belanagare, and four of his family, O'Donovan located and identified twenty monuments in the vicinity of Rathcroghan as well as the Carnfree inauguration mound, the *Dumha Sealga* and *Cloch fhada na gcarn*. He also related in his letters an account of the opening of one of the small 'tumuli' in Relignaree by an uncle of Matthew O'Connor and the discovery of a square chamber and some bones.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, ogham inscriptions at Oweynagat were recorded by Sir Samuel Ferguson (1864) and R. R. Brash (1879). Ferguson's reading of the inscription and his description of Oweynagat were presented to the Royal Irish Academy in 1864 (1864) and he later published a description and plan of Relignaree, with a sketch of Daithí's burial mound (1872). With these exceptions, however, the work of John O'Donovan and the Ordnance Survey was not advanced until the publication of a series of articles by H. T. Knox on Rathcroghan and Carnfree (1911, 1914, 1916, 1918). Until recently Knox's work remained the only attempt at a full survey of the monuments of the Rathcroghan area, including, in the 1914 article, a map based on the Ordnance Survey Six-inch maps, showing the positions of thirty monuments, descriptions of the sites and plans or sections of twenty-five pre-Norman ones. In all Knox located and described thirty-eight pre-Norman monuments in the study area, giving plans, sections or photographs of thirty-four of these.

More recently, Wailes in an article on Irish Royal Sites briefly considered the Rathcroghan focus, producing a map showing the positions of some twenty-six monuments and discussing Rathcroghan, Relignaree, Oweynagat and the complex of 'avenues' in the area. He eliminated Rathcroghan from his final analysis because 'lack of clear morphological comparability of surface features and an almost entire lack of (published) excavations prevent comparison' (1982, 19). Waddell on the other hand, in the most comprehensive listing of monuments at Rathcroghan to date (1983), sees Rathcroghan as affording some comparison with sites such as Tara and Carnfree (1983, 43-44). His work, the first to incorporate the results of modern aerial photography, has increased the grand total of monuments in the Rathcroghan area to forty-nine.

CARNFREE, RATHMORE AND GRANGE (Figs 36, 41)

A group of eight monuments around Carnfree, sited on the hilltop just above 400' at the north-west end, dominates the southern part of the area. All are apparently ritual in character. Carns 1, the Carnfree inauguration mound, 12.50m in diameter, is sited on the highest point and is encircled by a bank (Carns 2), c. 80m in diameter, which is faintly defined from the north-east through west to south. A bowl barrow (Carns 4), 21m in diameter with wide external ditch, stands 285m away to the south-east; it has been given the name *Duma Sealga* on the Six-inch map since 1924. A further 275m away east-north-east is the large ringbarrow 36m across, marked on the Six-inch Map as *Cloch fhada na gcarn* (Carns 5). Within this, in an eccentric

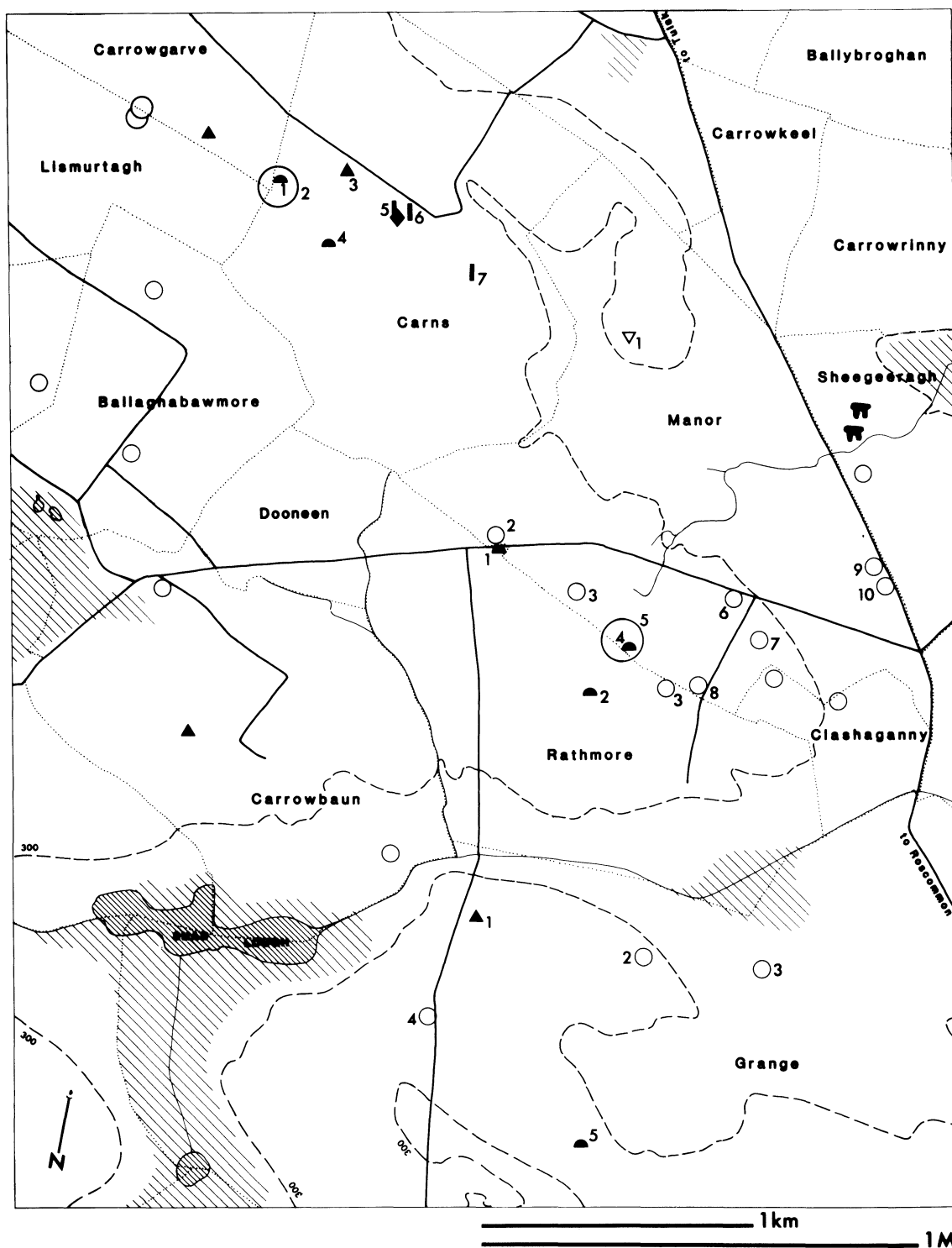


Fig 36 Map of Camfree, Rathmore, Grange areas. Shaded areas indicate land covered by water in winter and spring. Symbols as in key to Fig 34.

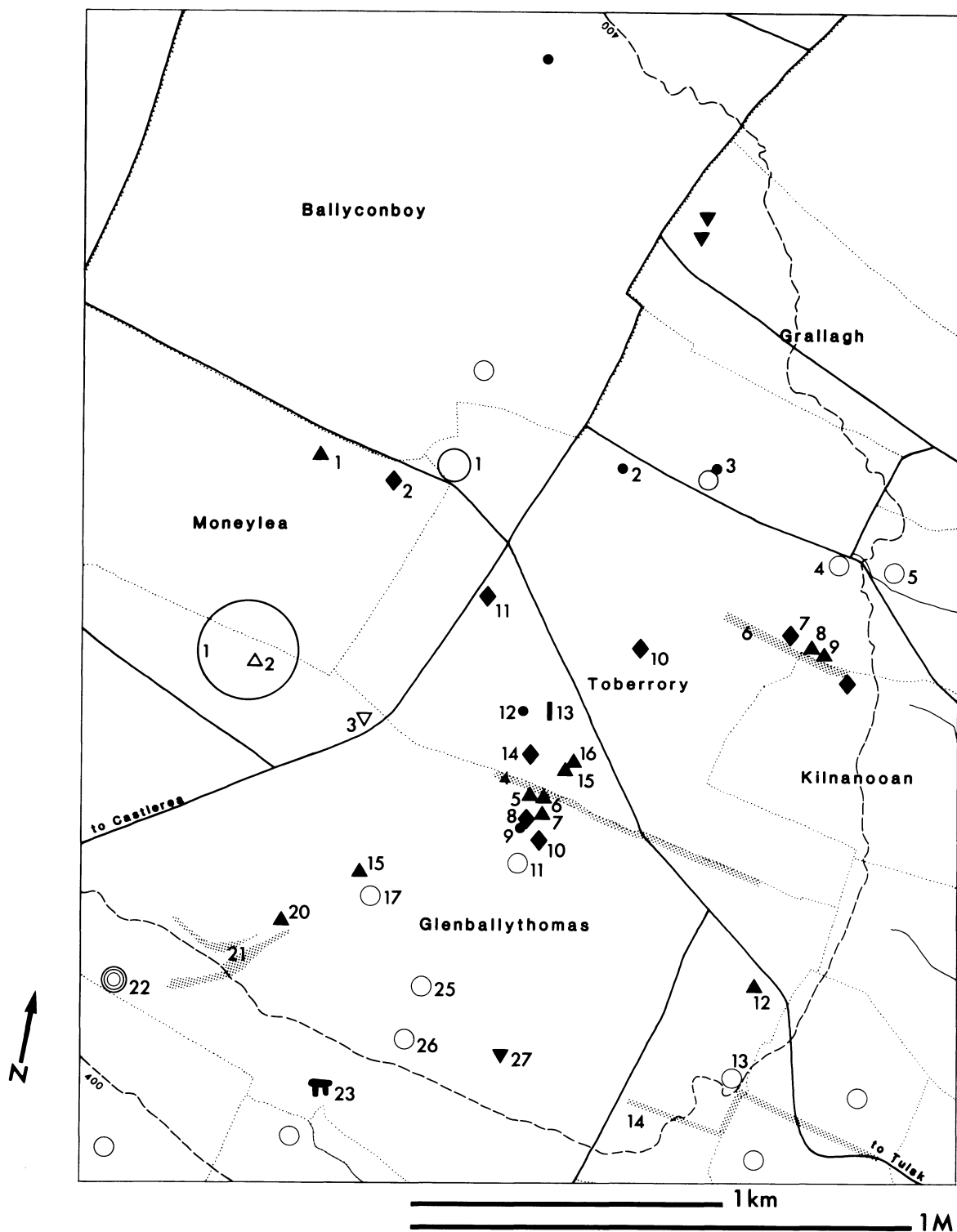


Fig 37 Map of Rathcroghan area. Symbols as in key to Fig. 34.

banked circle 13.50m across, is a standing stone, 2.95m in height; a second (Carns 6), 3.60m long, is now fallen 20m on the east side of the monument. A small ring-barrow of Group A1, Carns 3, lies 270m north of Carns 4. There is a ring-barrow of Group A1, 20m in diameter, in Carrowgarve, 300m north-west of Carnfree and, on the boundary between Carrowgarve and Lismurtagh, a further 280m west, a pair of large conjoined rings, 50m and 60m in diameter, the larger, more southerly one having a raised area to north of centre. This pair of monuments compares well to the conjoined enclosures of the Forradh and Teach Cormaic at Tara (Ó Ríordáin 1954).

A second knot of similar ritual monuments stands in Manor and Rathmore townlands on the next ridge to the south-west above the pair of Passage Tombs in Sheegeeragh (de Valera and Ó Nualláin 1972, 141-2, Sites A, B). The central mound, Manor 4, surrounded by a wide ditch and 29.50m in total diameter, stands at the highest point of its ridge at 378' and resembles earlier Bronze Age types. This, like Carnfree, stands within a circular earthwork, Manor 5, the largest in the area, consisting of a bank with outer ditch, now largely defaced on the north and east sides, and originally 140m in diameter. South of this, at a distance of 210m, is a barrow apparently of bowl type with external ditch (Rathmore 2), 21m in diameter, resembling Manor 4. The mound numbered Rathmore 1, 570m north-west of Manor 4, appears also to be of this type; it too is sited on the highest ground in the immediate area at 345 feet. A similar mound with a tiny central cairn on top stands alone at 278 feet on the highest ground on the south-west border of Sheegeeragh td; it is 23m in diameter (de Valera and Ó Nualláin 1972, 141-2, Site D). A circular ditched enclosure, 30m across, in Manor townland (Manor 1), may belong to the same family as the ring-barrows of Group A2.

Three further monuments sited in a dispersed pattern on the ridges north and east of Shad Lough complete the ritual monuments in this group. Two, in Carrowbaun and Grange (1), are ring-barrows of Group A1. The third is the only monument of the study area to have been completely excavated: this is the Bronze Age barrow in Grange (5), excavated by Ó Ríordáin in 1966-67. This was 20.50m in diameter. The primary burial was associated with two Food Vessels and a Pygmy Cup. A secondary burial had the oval bone pommel of a grooved six-riveted dagger associated with a cremated burial under an inverted Enlarged Food Vessel Urn (Kavanagh 1977, 36-37; Hardaker 1974, 28-29).

The ritual monuments of this area extend in use from the Stone Age Passage Tombs of Sheegeeragh to the inauguration mound of Carnfree. One classic Bronze Age burial mound is attested at Grange; others of this general family can be identified at Rathmore, Carns, Sheegeeragh and Manor. Four classic ring-barrows of Group A1, probably of late prehistoric date, are identified at Carns, Grange, Carrowbaun and Carrowgarve.

The pattern of ringfort distribution in this area appears to avoid the ridge-top of Carnfree and concentrate in a north-west/south-east line from Carrowgarve through Lismurtagh to Carrowbaun. Apart from a lone ringfort south of the Grange ring-barrow, the remainder are concentrated in a small area between Manor, Rathmore, Clashaganny and Sheegeeragh, close to the burial mounds regarded as of earlier Bronze Age type in that area.

THE RATHCROGHAN FOCUS (Fig 37)

The Rathcroghan group is found mainly in Glenballythomas townland and in the neighbouring townlands of Toberrory, Kilnanooan, Grallagh, Moneylea, Ballyconboy and Ballymurray. On the highest point, just reaching 500', is Ráth Cruachain itself (Toberrory 14), a natural mound on the north-east/south-west system of ridges, scarped into a fairly regular circular plan and apparently built up around the edges into the frustum of a cone, measuring 65m in diameter at the top. Close to the centre is a small raised mound with encircling ditch and bank, 10m in total diameter, which is represented by both Knox and Beranger as a raised mound. On its east side, 10.50m away is another raised bank in the shape of an arc. This, the largest mound by far in the complex, is probably best classified as a ring-barrow of Group B; it is sited in the most prominent position and is the focus for a large group of monuments. It may be significant that, though a higher ridge exists 3km west of here, with a pair of ringforts in Rathkineely and Ballyglass sited near its summit above 500', the slightly lower plateau of Rathcroghan was chosen for this focal complex of ritual monuments.

Around the great mound of Ráth Cruachain are nine ritual monuments and a fallen standing stone; an ancient trackway runs north-east on its south side. On the north-west side is *Milleen Meva* (Toberrory 12), a low circular mound, 7m in diameter, close to the fallen standing stone 2.80m long known as *Misgaun Meva*. On the east side is a pair of small conjoined Group A1 ring-barrows, the larger one marked on the Six-inch map, 20 and 10m across (Toberrory 15, 16); a second pair of small Group A1 ring-barrows 6m across (Glenballythomas 5, 6) stand on the surface of the trackway to the south-east of the large mound. Immediately south of the trackway is a large Group A1 ring-barrow 54m across (Glenballythomas 7). Two Group B ring-barrows (Glenballythomas 8, 10), one 14m, the other 31m across, stand at the south-east end of this complex. Immediately south-south-west of the smaller of these is the remains of a small mound like *Milleen Meva*, 3m in diameter (Glenballythomas 9).

Three of these monuments, all faintly-defined small ring-barrows of Group A1, have only recently been discovered from the air by Waddell (1983, Nos. 5-7). The arc of a very large ditched circle, c.500m in diameter, shows in new aerial photographs on the south side of Ráth Cruachain (Fig 38).

North-west of this group are *Rathbeg* (Toberrory 11), a ring-barrow of Group B, 28m in diameter, *Little Rathbeg* (Moneylea 2), which is of the same class, and beside *Oweyaniska*, possibly a natural limestone cave high up in a ridge, a third tiny ring-barrow of Group A1 (Moneylea 1).

North and north-east of Ráth Cruachain is another group of ritual monuments and a second trackway running east and west. Nearest to Ráth Cruachain, in Toberrory (10), is a near-circular bank, 36 by 33m, enclosing a higher area on a north-south ridge, on the top of which is a regular depression, 5.5m in diameter. This appears to be a ring-barrow of Group B. At *Rathscreg* (Toberrory 7) to the south-west, a small mound 7.70m across on top of a knoll has two concentric curvilinear banks with outer ditches, diameters 50 and 75m, enclosing it for the greater part of its perimeter on the north-east and south sides. Immediately south of the summit of the knoll an ancient trackway (Toberrory 6) runs east and west. Both curvilinear ditches clearly cut the

banks on either side of the trackway, the inner cutting its north bank at two places, the outer cutting its north bank and running south across the bed of the trackway to cut its south bank at two points 19m apart. This relationship indicates that the trackway is older at this point than the encircling bank and ditch structures of Rathscreg.

West of Rathscreg is a further pair of small Group A1 ring-barrows (Toberorry 8, 9) each 14m across, also discovered from the air by Waddell (1983, Nos. 40, 41). At the west end of the trackway is *Flanagan's Fort* in Kilnanooan, a ring-barrow of Group B, 60m across.

Further north in Grallagh, at the edge of the study area, on the 400' contour are a pair of Group A2 ring-barrows lying close together on a north-south ridge. The first, *Corrauneen*, is 20m in diameter, the second, lying south of it, is somewhat defaced and 30m in diameter. *Crockaunbaun* in Ballyconboy is a tiny cairn or mound only 7m across, its eastern half defaced.

To the south-east of Ráth Cruachain is the third of the trackways, near which are two ritual monuments. The first of these is a Group A1 ring-barrow (Glenballythomas 12), 24m across. South and east is the trackway (Glenballythomas 14), 17.50m across from bank to bank, which takes a straight course from the east as far as the defaced ring-fort of *Cahernabavalody* (Glenballythomas 13), turning south at right angles and resuming its western course 80m to the south. It appears to be aligned on the famous *Daithi's Stone* and the Group A2 ring-barrow on which it stands (Glenballythomas 27), which was investigated by Waddell in 1981 following earlier digging by Macalister in 1920 (Waddell 1983, 31-32).

South-west of Ráth Cruachain, the most prominent earthworks are the *Mucklaghs* (Glenballythomas 21), a pair of roughly parallel earthworks running a curved course and aligned roughly north-east and south-west (Fig 39). The longer east one is a large bank with a ditch on either side, the bank rising 2.60m above the ditch with a width from ditch to ditch of 11.50m. The best-defined length runs for a total of 320m. The shorter north-western earthwork is of larger proportions, 12.50m from bank to bank and 3m high and running for a length of 120m. The shadow of an arc shows on the aerial photographs on the south-east side of the eastern earthwork; the bank and ditch of a later field fence ran north and then north-east from its northern end. Their massive character, together with their name, with overtones suggesting they were rooted up by a mythical pig in the manner of the Black Pig's Dyke (Kane 1909), may suggest that they are of pagan Celtic date or earlier.

To the south-west of these is *Cashelmanannan* (Glenballythomas 22), apparently the remains of a triple-walled fort the stones of which have been removed. It appears to have been in this state since 1837, when it was noted and planned by the Ordnance Survey. North of the eastern Mucklagh, within 60m, is a ring-barrow of Group A1 (Glenballythomas 20), which has not been noted as an antiquity in earlier descriptions, though marked on the Ordnance Survey Six-inch sheet.

On the lower ground south of here is the megalithic tomb marked as *Cloghannagorp* (Glenballythomas 23), identified by de Valera and Ó Nualláin as probably a Court Tomb (1972, 35), possibly the earliest monument in the area.

North-east of the Mucklaghs is the natural limestone cave marked *Caves* on the Six-inch map, described by Beranger in 1779 (Wilde 1870, 247). Close by is a Group

A1 ring-barrow (Glenballythomas 15) and the circular embanked area, 30m across (Glenballythomas 17) with one or a pair of souterrains, in which the ogham inscriptions first described by Sir Samuel Ferguson are inserted as roofstones (1864). The circular monument, possibly a small ringfort, has been cut through by a modern roadway.

Immediately west of the road running south from Rathcroghan crossroads is *Rathnadarve* (Glenballythomas 3), a circular bank with outer ditch incorporating a low, oval, flat-topped knoll. Its diameter from bank to bank is 85m. It seems best to group this monument, tentatively, with the A2 ring-barrows.

This group of mainly ritual monuments is completed by a fourth large embanked ring, west of Rathnadarve, the largest recognised within the study area, which appears to have been 200m in diameter (Glenballythomas 1). It is enclosed by a low bank with a shallow ditch outside, best marked from south-east to north-west, apparently completely destroyed on the north-west side. Within it, close to the south-west side, stood a circular banked enclosure, destroyed in 1983 or 1984, which on the aerial photographs looks very much like a Group A1 ring-barrow (Glenballythomas 2).

Few ringforts are found within this area around Ráth Cruachain, which appears to have been almost completely reserved for ritual monuments. Only one ringfort lies in the immediate vicinity of the central focus; this unnamed monument is sited 100m south of the Group B ring-barrow of Glenballythomas 10. There is thus a zone of avoidance surrounding this focal cemetery similar to that surrounding Carnfree.

Besides Cashelmanannan and Cahernabalady, two other ringforts or related monuments close to the focal area deserve mention. The first of these is *Rathmore* (Toberorry 1), north-west of Rathbeg, based on a small knoll, the curve of which shows at its centre, and with a bank and ditch more marked than usual. Its diameter from bank to bank is 39m. The entrance, on the east side, is across a causeway in the ditch which is apparently unfinished on the north and west sides.

The second is in the site known as *Relignaree* (Burial-place of the Kings), a name which appears to have caused some confusion. Some of this may derive from the appearance of the monument, which has a well-marked circular bank 105m across with radial divisions. Within this there is a circular ditch with much eroded inner bank 60m across, to the west of which is a lintelled stone opening identified as the remains of a souterrain. This can be interpreted as a ringfort of average character and proportions (Glenballythomas 25), similar to one in the same townland 170m to the south. The outer bank without ditch is of different character, is connected with the late system of earthworks on the north side of it and appears to be later in date than the inner monument. The remains of at least five late rectangular houses are visible in and around the site.

Relignaree was marked on the Ordnance Survey's Fair Plan of 1837, with the designation *Cave* beside the souterrain. O'Donovan noted that digging had revealed a 'square chamber and some bone' under one of several 'little tumuli'. In the Memoranda relating to the printed Six-inch map of 1838, he changed the designation 'Cave' to 'Grave' for the souterrain, apparently on the reported presence of bones and presumably influenced by the name *Relignaree* and the long tradition noted by Charles O'Connor that it was a burial-place (p. 125). It is possible that the site was misnamed.



Fig 38 Aerial photograph of Ráth Cruachain and monuments to the south-east of it. Ordnance Survey of Ireland, scale 1:4000.



Fig 39 Aerial photograph of the Mucklaghs and Cashelmanannan.
Ordnance Survey of Ireland, scale 1:4000.

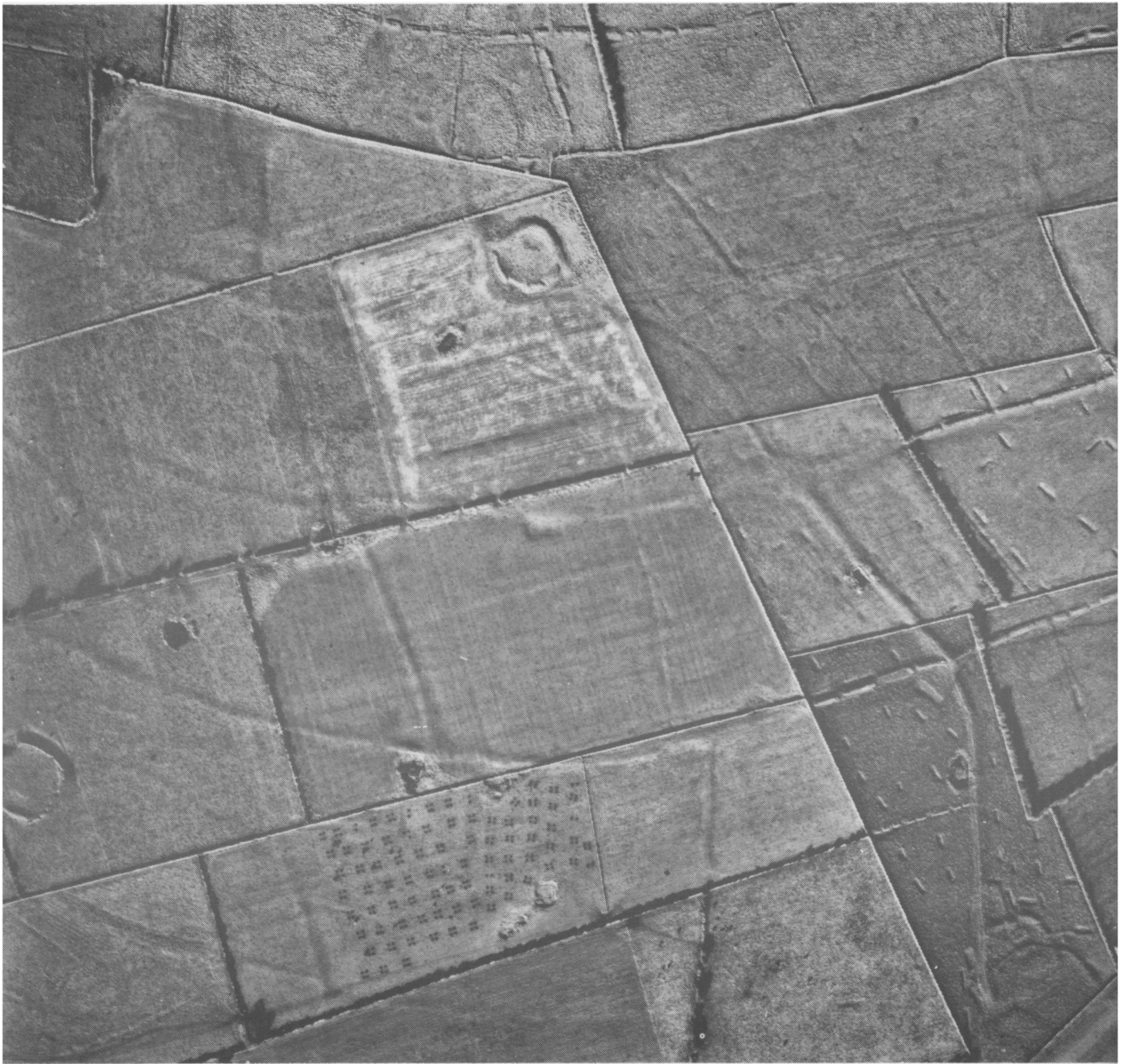


Fig 40 Aerial photograph of ringforts and ancient enclosures in Lismurtagh and Carrowgarve townlands.
Ordnance Survey of Ireland, scale 1:4000.



Fig 41 Aerial photograph of Carnfree (upper r.) Carrowgarve (centre) and conjoined rings, Carrowgarve/Lismurtagh (lower r.)
Ordnance Survey of Ireland, scale 1:4000.

With the exception of Relignaree and Rathmore, the ringforts in the area surrounding Ráth Cruachain appear to avoid the central focus in the same pattern as those around Carnfree. There is a small knot above 500' on the west side on and below the ridge-top of Rathkineely and a group on the east side of the complex where the land slopes away to 300' and below. A group of three just above 300' on the small east-west ridge of Cammoge follow the pattern of another group of three on a similar narrow ridge just above 400' in Carnakit and Kilree to the south-west.

CARNAKIT, CASTLERUBY, TONROE, RATHKEVA

In this south-western area is a pair of ridges running east and west on which a smaller group of monuments is sited, mainly above 400', forming a kind of annexe to the main group around Rathcroghan.

Six ritual monuments lie on these ridges. A round mound in Castleruby, reputed to have yielded human bones in digging by local people about 20 years ago, may belong to the earlier Bronze Age. East of this at a distance of 1km, in Tonroe on the high narrow ridge above Castleruby, is a third large ring, 110m in diameter, consisting of a wide shallow ditch outside a low bank. Further east, at a somewhat lower altitude, is the Group A2 ring-barrow of Rathkeva, overlain on the east side by an ancient field boundary, part of an extensive system in the area. In Carnakit and Balloony are two examples of a type well-represented in the Ráth Cruachain focus, small mounds 10-12m across, possibly of late prehistoric date. North-west of the one in Balloony is a large Group A2 ring-barrow in Gortnasillagh, 45m in diameter.

Three ritual sites lie outside the concentrations outlined above. At the north-east of the study area, in Boyanagh, is a Group A2 ring-barrow, 36m across. On the 300' contour on the lower ground south-east of the trackway in Carrowntoosan is the Group A1 ring-barrow of Drimnagh. Standing alone on the west end of a ridge at 400', at the south-west of the area, in Caran, is one of the most imposing monuments of the whole area. This is a high double-banked platform 40m across, at the centre of which is an oval area with bank on its south side. This central platform resembles the southern element of the double ring in Carrowgarve and Lismurtagh, at the west end of the Carnfree focus. This central set of earthworks is surrounded by an embanked oval with wide ditch outside, 125m across and comparable with those at Carns 2, Tonroe, Glenballythomas 1 and Manor 5.

Only two further monuments attract attention in the environs of the study area because of their size, a large embanked ring at Caldragh, 1.6km north-east of Sheegeeragh, and a massive ringfort, 150m across, at Rathra to the west. This exceptional monument has two great banks flanked by three ditches comparable in size to the earthworks of the Mucklaghs. Within are a souterrain, a low mound, and a circular embanked platform (Knox 1911, 218-20).

ANALYSIS AND COMPARISONS

The sixty-eight monuments of ritual character listed (Appendix 1) come near to equalling in numbers the ringforts, of which eighty-one are identified in the whole area, and outnumber them in the two focal areas (Figs 36 and 37). No similar concentration of prehistoric ritual monuments, apart from Passage Tomb cemeteries, is known in Ireland. Among the sixty-eight, burial tumuli dominate, with

forty-five examples; of these thirty-four are ring-barrows. The traditions which identify the area as a cemetery thus appear to be confirmed by the archaeological remains.

Most of the ring-barrows are found in and around Ráth Cruachain and the annexe to the south-west of it, as are all of the seven tiny cairns or tumuli of Carnakit type. The focal monuments of ring-barrow cemeteries, Ráth Cruachain itself and Rathscreg, belong to the *ad hoc* Group B; Carns 5 (Cloch fhada na gcaran) of the Carnfree group belongs also to this class. The large numbers of ring-barrows in the Ráth Cruachain focus, together with the avenues and the linear earthworks of the Mucklaghs which occur there, give it its special character; many of these appear to be of late prehistoric date.

Notable among the monuments of Carnfree and south of it are the tumuli of early Bronze Age type, seven of which are found there. It appears that this area was prominent in early Bronze Age times; links with Wessex are indicated by the finding of a six-riveted dagger with bone pommel at Grange (Hardaker 1974, 28-29). The Carnfree focus includes three ring-barrows (Carns 3, 5; Carrowgarve). Here are also two monuments unique in the area, the conjoined rings of Lismurtagh and Carrowgarve and the embanked platform on the ridge of Caran. Caran, Carnfree (Carns 1) and Manor 4 are each encircled by one of the five large embanked circles.

The Carnfree group has an extensive free space surrounding it, a zone of avoidance apparently eschewed by non-ritual monuments, principally ringforts. Similar zones surround the minor cemetery of Rathscreg and the major cemetery around Ráth Cruachain into which a single ringfort 100m south of Glenballythomas 10 intrudes.

Numbers of ringforts are found on the 300 and 400 foot contours in the whole area, concentrating particularly on the east ends of the ridges, as in Carnakit and Kilree, in Cammoge, in Manor and Rathmore. Three ringforts were erected on the highest point of the area in Rathkineely and Ballyglass. Their absence from the ridge-top cemeteries of Rathcroghan and Carnfree might be explained in terms of the avoidance of areas made sacred by the presence of cemeteries.

The monuments of Cruachain and Carnfree represent an apparently continuous development of the area from the Stone Age to the medieval. The three megalithic tombs so far recognised are followed by bowl tumuli, all but one in the southern part and likely to be earlier Bronze Age in date. Carnfree is apparently a cemetery whose growth began in the earlier Bronze Age; the inauguration-place at its focus may have been built as a tumulus in early Bronze Age times, possibly later faced with coursed dry-stone walling when it came into use as an inauguration-place. The focus around Ráth Cruachain, interpreted here as a cemetery of burial monuments, appears to be in general later; its ring-barrows may follow the trend of most of this class in Ireland in belonging to the later prehistoric. Two of the three trackways at Ráth Cruachain are actually earlier than ring-barrows of Groups A1 and B but may be regarded as also of late prehistoric date since they are respected by and incorporated in the succeeding monuments. The great earthworks of the Mucklaghs and the large circular embankments can also be generally contemporary together with the four standing stones and the ogham stones in their original siting. The exceptional triple-walled stone fort of Cashelmannan, the imposing ringfort of Rathmore and the ringfort of Cahernabavalody may also belong to this era, to be followed by many of

the large number of ringforts in the area, the early Christian sites and the imposing set of medieval monuments and earthworks now recognised.

In its prehistoric beginnings and continuity through the Bronze Age, with an efflorescence in the early Iron Age, and also in the fact that it is recognised as a place of inauguration and assembly prominent in pre-Christian tradition, the Cruachain/Carnfree complex invites comparison with Tara. More detailed comparisons are possible as a result of the survey work outlined above: the Carrowgarve-Lismurtagh rings compare with the conjoined Forradh and Teach Cormaic at Tara; the burial-mounds at the north-west end of the Tara ridge, the Claonfhearta and Ráth Ghráinne (Petrie 1839; Swan 1978, Figs 21, 22, 23a), compare well with the ring-barrows of Group B. Rathmiles, immediately north of the Tara ridge, compares with Group A2 ring-barrows, and the large embanked rings of Roscommon compare with the Ringlestown and Riverstown rings to the west and south of Tara. The comparison of the Cruachain trackways with the so-called Banqueting Hall (*Tech Midhchuarta*) at Tara is close, suggesting that the Tara monument, aligned as it is on the focal monuments of the Rath of the Synods and Mound of the Hostages, with the Lia Fáil standing stone, and the Forradh and Teach Cormaic on the south side of it, may have been a ceremonial trackway, possibly used in rituals connected with the trials and inauguration of the King (Byrne 1973, 63-4). In contrast to Tara, the Cruachain-Carnfree complex is spread over a much larger area than Tara, even when Tara's outlying monuments are included, and neither Cruachain nor Carnfree has a hillfort, unlike Ráth na Ríogh at Tara, and Eamhain Macha, near Armagh.

At both Eamhain Macha and Clogher in Tyrone a Group A ring-barrow is sited on the hill-top, suggesting that this class of monument is closely associated with Royal Sites (Warner 1973, 6).

Two further sites in Meath, prominent as places of assembly in Celtic tradition, have monuments comparable with those at Cruachain and Carnfree. The Hill of Ward, near Athboy, plausibly identified as the ancient *Tlachtga*, had its assembly (*oenach*) at *Samhain* (November). Here, on a hilltop at 390', is a multivallate circular platform with four banks and accompanying ditches, 135m in diameter, surrounding the central platform. Tailteann, named after the goddess Tailtiu, whose assembly was held at *Lúnasa* (August), now has two principal monuments remaining, *Ráth Dubh*, a natural mound 90m across scarped into a circular shape and surrounded originally by a bank and ditch, and the *Knockans*, two parallel banks with intervening fosse running east-west for 90m (MacNeill 1962, 311-38). Comparisons with Caran, Rathnadarve and the Mucklaghs seem to be indicated.

These similarities can be more closely examined when the detailed corpus of the ritual monuments with measured drawings is presented in the next instalment.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF RITUAL AND RELATED MONUMENTS

1. RING—BARROWS

Group A1 (17)

Moneylea
 Toberrory 8, 9
 ? Glenballythomas 2
 Toberrory 15, 16
 Glenballythomas 5, 6

 Glenballythomas 7

 Glenballythomas 12
 Glenballythomas 15
 Glenballythomas 20
 Drimnagh
 Carrowgarve
 Carns 3
 Carrowbaun
 Grange 1

Oweyaniska
 near Rathscreg
 destroyed 1983 or 1984
 east side of Ráth Cruachain
 on avenue south-east of
 Ráth Cruachain
 south-east of
 Glenballythomas 5, 6

west of Oweynagat
 north of eastern Mucklagh

north-west of Carnfree
 north-east of Carnfree

Group A2 (8)

Grallagh 1, 2
 Glenballythomas 27
 Glenballythomas 3
 Gortnasillagh
 Rathkeva
 Boyanagh
 Manor

Group B (9)

Moneylea
 Toberrory 11
 Toberrory 10
 Toberrory 7
 Kilnanoogaan
 Toberrory 14
 Glenballythomas 8
 Glenballythomas 10
 Carns 5

Corrauneen
Daithí's Grave
Rathnadarve

Little Rathbeg
Rathbeg
 north of Ráth Cruachain
Rathscreg
Flanagan's Fort
Ráth Cruachain

Cloch fhada na gcarn

2. SMALL CAIRNS OR MOUNDS OF CARNAKIT TYPE (7)

Ballyconboy
 Toberrory 2
 Toberrory 3
 Toberrory 12

Crockaunbaun

 north of Caran Fort
Milleen Meva

Glenballythomas 9
 Carnakit
 Balloony

Carnakit

3. STANDING STONES (4)

Toberrory 13
 Glenballythomas 27

Misgaun Meva
Daithí's Stone

Carns 5
 Carns 6

within Cloch fhada na gcarn
 beside Cloch fhada na gcarn

4. LARGE EMBANKED CIRCLES (5)

Glenballythomas 1
 Tonroe
 Carns 2

surrounding Carnfree

Manor 5
 Caran

surrounding Manor 4

5. TUMULI OF EARLIER BRONZE AGE TYPE (8)

Castleruby
 Carns 1
 Carns 4
 Rathmore 1

Carnfree
Duma Sealga

Sheegeeragh

 Manor 4
 Rathmore 2
 Grange 5

'Site D' (de Valera and
 Ó Nualláin 1972)

6. OTHER MONUMENTS (10)

Toberrory 6
 Glenballythomas 4
 Carrowntoosan
 Glenballythomas 21

northern avenue
 Ráth Cruachain avenue
 southern avenue
Mucklaghs

Glenballythomas 23
 Sheegeeragh
 Carrowgarve/Lismurtagh
 Caran

Cloghannagorp Court Tomb
 2 Passage Tombs
 conjoined embanked rings
 embanked platform

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