

landscape and the built environment

Formation of the West Cork Environment

Travelling from Kinsale to Castletownbere, the rolling hills of lush agricultural lands become steadily more pronounced with rock outcrops and bog.

What forces underlie the creation of this appealing landscape?

How have people left their mark over the centuries?

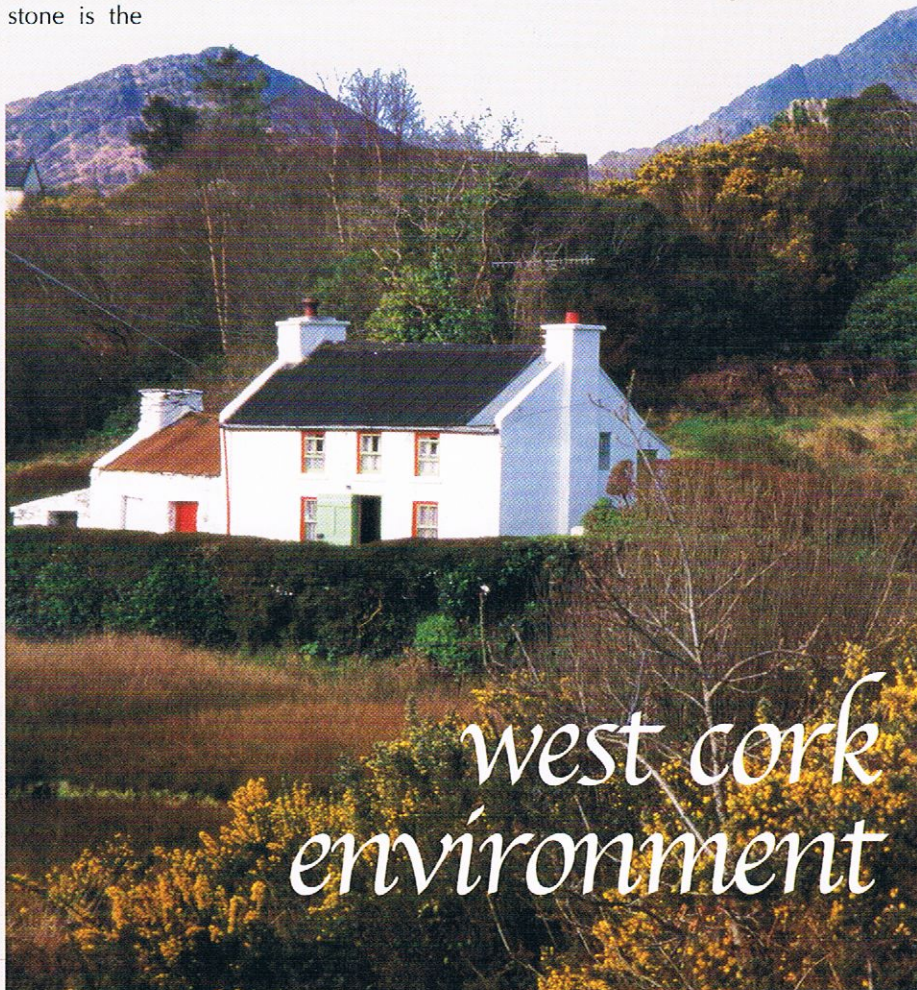
The landscape of parallel ridges and valleys running west south west in West Cork is among the best examples of major folding in Ireland. This occurred during the Devonian period (400 to 350 million years ago) as continents collided and Ireland moved northwards with the rest of Europe. The Devonian period also witnessed intense erosion and deposition during which Old Red Sandstone was laid down. This is now the dominant bedrock of West Cork.

In the Carboniferous Period which followed, Ireland lay under warm tropical seas, the organic deposits from which were eventually compacted to form limestone. Carboniferous limestone is the

bedrock of most of the country and is found throughout West Cork.

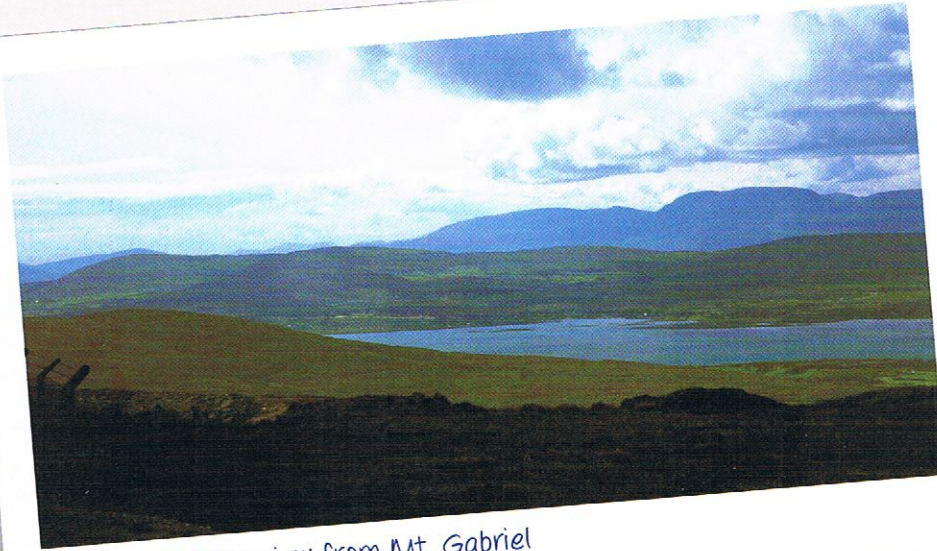
In the time since the folding occurred, erosion has removed much of the upper carboniferous layer, exposing the sandstone in hilly areas. The valleys are still lined with shale and limestone, as in the Bandon River valley.

During the Ice Age, ice sheets up to 1 km high spread across Ireland, forming such landscape features as the corries and U shaped valleys found in the uplands on the Beara Peninsula and the Shehy Mountains. The ice melted 12,000 years ago leaving large amounts of silt, sand and gravel



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Ridge and Valley view from Mt. Gabriel

estuary, demonstrates how land and sea levels have changed since then.

West Cork, along with South Kerry and mid Ulster, is noted for its high concentration of stone circles. They are likely to date from the Bronze Age (2500 - 500 BC) and are generally regarded as ritual sites where ceremonies took place.

Ogham stones are thought to date from the second century AD to early Christian times.

The Iron Age (500BC - 350AD) was the time of the Celts and the legendary Fianna. Late Celtic sites include the promontory forts that exist along the coast between Cork Harbour and the Beara Peninsula.

The more recent Christian monument, like the Franciscan friary at Timoleague, are well marked on the OS Discovery Series (for West Cork choose

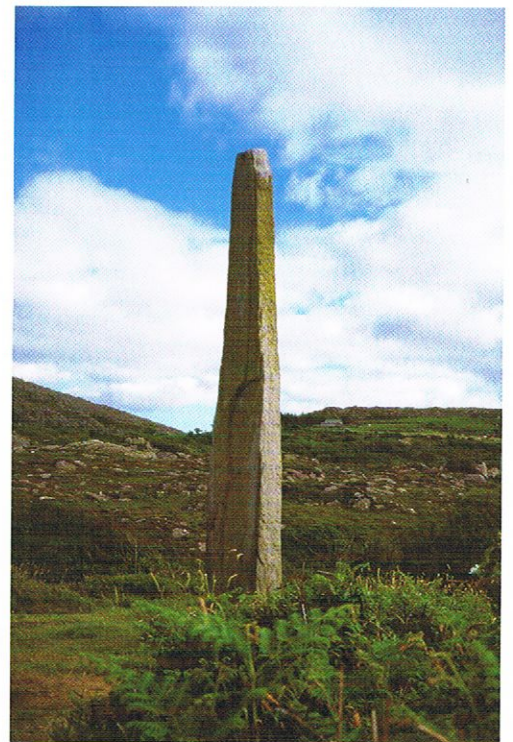
deposits in the form of eskers, moraines, sand and gravel pits. These important natural resources give rise to commercial activity in the supply of building materials.

Melt water from the ice sheets eroded overflow channels or glacial spillways. These are now often dry or contain small streams, such as in the Pass of Keimaneigh, utilised now by the Bantry - Macroom road.

After the Ice Age, grasses, wildflowers and trees colonised Ireland. Then people arrived almost 9000 years ago.

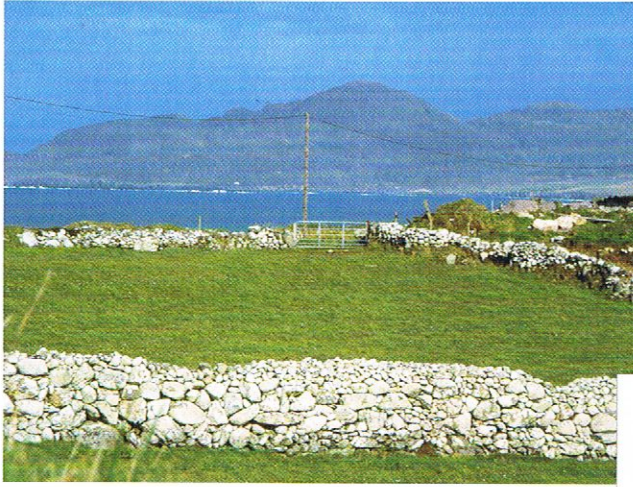
Footprints on the Landscape

The earliest remaining evidence of human activity dates from the Neolithic or New Stone Age era (5000 - 2000BC). They were farmers and they began the process of clearing native woodlands which continues to this day. It was these people that built tombs, like the small passage tomb at Ringarogy Island near Skibbereen. The fact that the tomb is now almost completely covered at high tide in the lln



The Ballycrovane Ogham stone near Eyeries is the tallest in Europe at 4.7m

Stone walls built as fields are cleared, a feature of the western part of the region.



way bridge in Ballydehob is a local monument to the days of railways in the region. The well drained gravel tracks now support grasses and wildflowers. Some of these have been made into cycle and walking tracks, like from Carrigaline to Crosshaven and at Timoleague. The Clonakilty Model Railway shows a birds-eye view of the area of about 50 years ago.

84 to 89). The maps show, among other things, viewpoints, nature reserves, lighthouses, ringforts, battlefields, named antiquities and cathedrals.

The Archaeological Inventory of West Cork, produced by Dúchas, documents all sites of archaeological interest. Cultural tourism is an important part of the West Cork economy.

Old and New

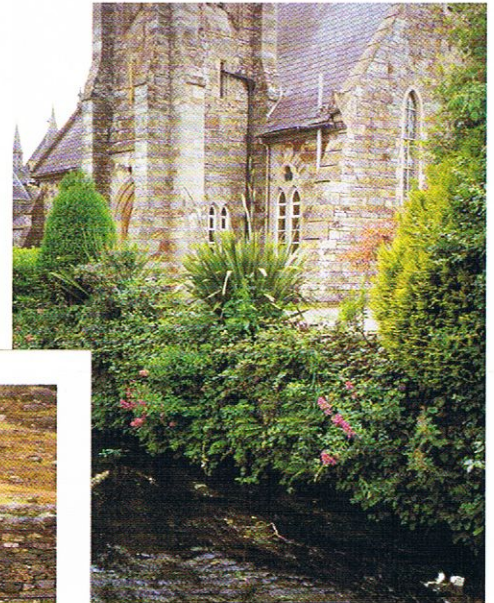
Ditches and stone walls have long been used to define field boundaries and contain livestock. They are still the principle form of field boundary and were used at least as long ago as the walls of Céide Fields in Mayo, dating from 5,000 years ago.

Ditches in West Cork often consist of an earthen or stone wall with earth fill, planted with vegetation to form a hedgerow. Hedgerows and road margins provide valuable habitats for wildlife (see section six) and can be seen in all seasons, sporting the latest colours of blackthorn, gorse, fuchsia and wildflowers. They have cracks and crevices where insects and animals can find shelter.

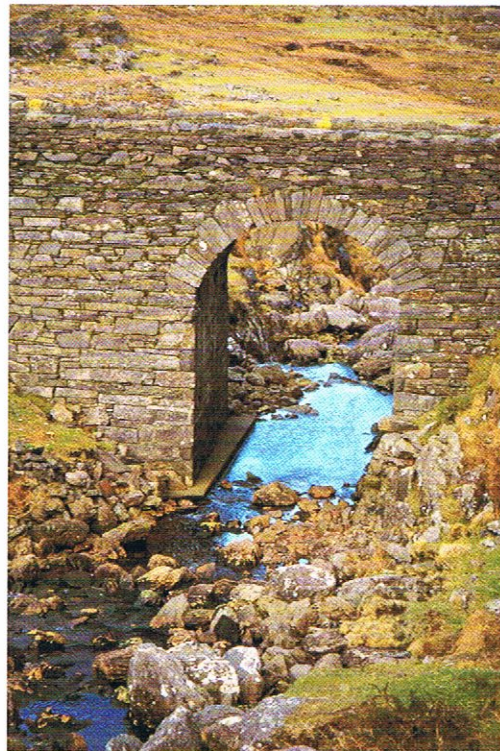
Ivy covered walls provide shelter and food for a host of birds, bees, butterflies and other insects, particularly in Autumn when the small flowers appear.

Travel and Communications

The West Cork Railway, which was closed in 1969, ran from the city to Bantry. The 12 arch rail-



The post office in Clonakilty was a Presbyterian Church before its conversion in 1924.

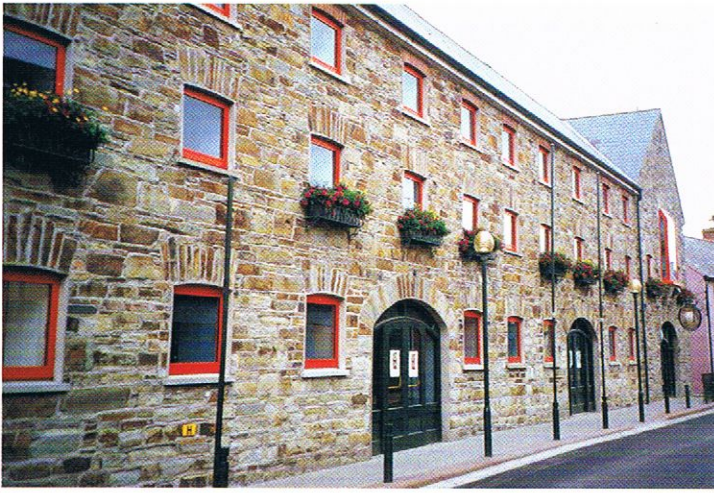


The road down the Healy Pass has become almost part of the landscape. This fine stone bridge frames the stream on its journey along the Healy Pass.

Communication means more than just travel and transport. The local post offices and schools form an important core in rural communities.

Industry

Old industrial activity has left behind grain drying stores and other old buildings in the towns of West Cork. Many of these have deteriorated badly but the County Council buildings in Clonakilty are a fine example of a sensitive restoration job.



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traditions and the physical surrounds.

The towns and villages of West Cork (see map) have been shaped by three distinct phases, the time of the Normans, the plantation era and under landlord influence. Bandon and Kinsale, for example, were both established in the first phase, by the Normans, as walled market towns. During this time many villages also developed under feudal influence - around a castle or religious centre, as at Glandore or Kealkill.

One aspect of old buildings, often forgotten, is their value to bats and barn owls. Many species of bat roost in old buildings for some or all of the year. As their existing habitat of hollow trees and caves becomes less common, they rely increasingly on old buildings and bridges for suitable shelter. Barn owls can be encouraged to use nest boxes in farm out-buildings and these should be erected in conjunction with protection or restoration of foraging, nesting and roosting sites and reduced or controlled use of rodenticides. The Irish Wildlife Trust have Barn Owl information for people interested in encouraging them to nest in farm or out buildings.

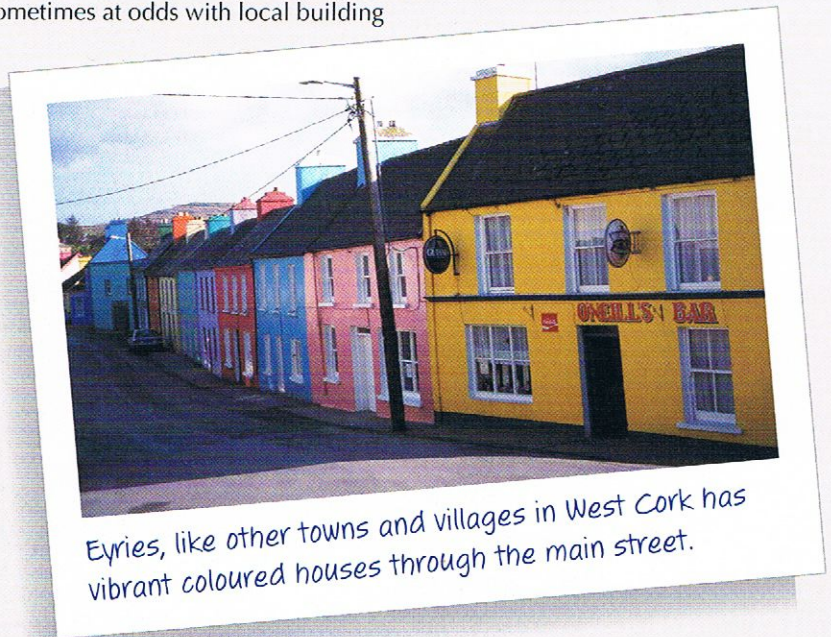
The remains of mining from many periods are scattered around West Cork. The lead and copper mines at Allihies were the most productive. Mine shafts and some buildings remain from the nineteenth century. Also from this period are the slate quarries at Rosscarbery.

Bricks and Mortar

The built environment of West Cork reflects the influences of the landscape and politics throughout our history. The population of West Cork today is still largely rural, living on scattered single farms or houses rather than in villages. Buildings are thus significant visually in the make-up of the landscape, particular-

ly in the use of vibrant colours which highlights them against the green backdrop. From the mid-nineteenth century, as farm sizes grew and poorer farmers emigrated, traditional single storey houses were increasingly enlarged or replaced with more symmetrical two-storey slated farmhouses. In recent decades the most common form of rural housing is the bungalow, this is particularly associated with the increased mobility that has allowed urban workers and retired people the choice of residing in more remote locations. As a feature of the West Cork landscape bungalows are sometimes at odds with local building

The economic growth of the 1960's and '70's saw a break with architectural tradition in our towns and villages, many businesses changed to plastic and aluminium fronting, to project a modern image. However, in the last two decades there has been a recognition of the importance of many aspects of our built heritage and traditional shop fronts have become appreciated. Communities, particularly through the Tidy Towns Committees, have undertaken tree planting and renovation works to brighten up centres of population.



Eyries, like other towns and villages in West Cork has vibrant coloured houses through the main street.