

# Newcastle Walk No.4

**Length:- 14 Kilometres (9 Miles)**

**Time:- 4+ Hours**

This walk follows many narrow boreens and old bog tracks to the area of the Mass Rock near Doonageeha - Fort of the Wind. You will essentially be following the river valley of Gleann a Cath - the Glen of the Battle. It is wet underfoot in places.

## Places of Interest

**A** Newcastle. The name Caisleán Nua na Siúire is derived from the 12th century castle erected by Maurice Prendergast and the ruins of which you see in front of you. Maurice Prendergast was a Norman and participated in the invasion of Ireland led by Strongbow, Earl of Pembroke. Described as 'a right valiant captain and a hushe and bardsman', he landed in 1116, commander of a small colony of knights and 200 archers. His family were granted the Lordship of Newcastle in the year 1230 and were in residence for the following 500 years. The family were involved in various wars over the centuries, opposed Cromwell and suffered when their lands of 3000 acres were seized and castles demolished by the same forces. The Perry family were subsequently granted lands and took over the role of landlords. Newcastle Church. The ruins of an old mediaeval church can be seen. This was attached to the Prendergast castle nearby and was of the Franciscan order. Tradition has it that the entire church was once set on fire by a Prendergast, while mass was being said inside and there was only one survivor. The oldest legible gravestone in the cemetery is that of Denis Morison who died aged 55 in 1755. The Prendergast family tomb is also here. The present church back in the village, was rebuilt in 1879 by Rev. Thomas Finn, known as Firey Finn because of his regular renunciations of evil. It is a handsome Romanesque church having a beautiful high altar. There is a fine stained glass window in the apse depicting the immaculate conception.

**B** Boithrin/ Boreen. The word Boithrin means a road in Irish and Boithrin is a small road or lane. There are a great many boithers and boreens as the words have become anglicised in parts of rural Ireland. This network of old tracks mostly derive from 1700 - 1800, when the population of Ireland was c. seven million. There was a high density of cabins for housing in many parts and these boreens linked the many houses and villages. People walked or rode on horseback in those days and so the boreens are often narrow and twisting by nature. Famine in the mid 1800's and emigration in this century have seen to a fall in the population to about three million. The car has taken over as a means of private transport, leading to some boreens becoming tarmacadamed whilst many others have simply become overgrown and impassable.

**C** Sean Séipéal/ The Old Church. The ruins of an ancient church lie in the upper corner of the field above the ford on the river. All you can see now are the wall foundations of what was probably a tiny thatched church. There are a couple of holy wells beside the footpath, just as you reach the ford. Tradition has it that people were baptised here, sometimes by total immersion in the holy waters. From the far side of the river, it is very pleasant to follow the path up the river bank for c.10 min. to some waterfalls on the river.

**D** Mass Rock. The Reformation split the Christian churches into several factions, chiefly the Roman Catholic church on one side and the Protestant churches on the other. Irish religion was and is chiefly of the Roman Catholic persuasion. However, the British ascendancy had largely gone over to Protestantism and following the Cromwellian wars in the sixteenth century, they wished to stamp their convictions on their subjects in Ireland. Various laws, loosely labelled as 'The Penal Laws' came into force, which effectively discriminated against Catholics in many ways. One law banned the saying of Catholic masses in public. As a result, the Catholic religion was driven underground and became inextricably linked with the Irish cause for freedom. Local communities could not meet for mass in churches so they often resorted to meeting at 'secret' locations in the open air on specified days. Prominent features such as large rocks were often designated as meeting places, hence the term - 'Mass Rock'. Tradition has it, that this is one such Mass Rock and you will note the various bottles lying around, used for collecting holy water. There is still an annual mass said here in July. The Mass Rock lies on private property with access currently forbidden.

**E** Inspector Potter. A short detour to your left along Bohernagaul will bring you to the house where Inspector Potter of the Royal Irish Constabulary was held for a short period on the 22nd April 1921 before being shot dead at Clonea Power. This occurred during the War of Independence, when the IRA ambushed a British lorry convoy near Clogheen. Two British soldiers were killed, the lorries were burned and prisoners taken. Inspector Potter happened to be driving in the area that day and came on the remains by accident. 'Had he passed on, no one would have known who he was... but seeing the remains of the burning lorries, he pulled up. Downey, who when he found he had no matches to light his pipe, stepped out and asked Potter for a match... he noticed a revolver lying on the seat of the car and guessed that Potter was an enemy officer of some kind. So he placed him under arrest'. He was taken prisoner and brought to this house by the IRA column. Realising that he was an officer, an attempt was made to exchange him for an Volunteer Thomas Traynor, who was under sentence of death in Dublin. The British refused. Traynor was hanged and Potter was then later executed by way of reprisal.

# Deisc



## 1. START:

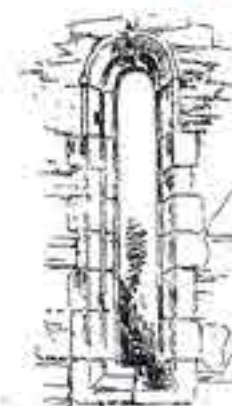
Park at the church. Take Clogheen road and shortly after crossing a stream, turn left up a narrow lane - Bohernagaul.

## 2

Reach a junction close to the river. Continue up the road for a short distance, turn left along a path to ford the river. Follow a path along the river bank to reach the waterfalls. Return by same route & continue up rocky track to reach a better track. Turn right and follow this to a forest. Continue along a grassy track by the river to reach the far edge of the forest. The track turns away from the river and soon climbs steadily uphill through a saddle to reach another forest and a road.

## 3

From the junction, continue straight across to follow a dirt track around the hillside and back towards your earlier route. On reaching a black gate, turn left uphill to follow the edge of the fields via an indistinct path. Reach the top of a wooded boreen - the Boithrin Dorcha or 'dark boreen'. Descend this to reach the road and your outward journey.



Window in Church at Newcastle.