

= Geography of Ireland =

Ireland is an island in northwest Europe in the north Atlantic Ocean . The island lies on the European continental shelf , part of the Eurasian Plate . The island 's main geographical features include low central plains surrounded by coastal mountains . The highest peak is Carrauntoohil (Irish : Corrán Tuathail) , which is 1 041 metres (3 415 ft) above sea level . The western coastline is rugged , with many islands , peninsulas , headlands and bays . The island is bisected by the River Shannon , which at 360 5 km (224 mi) with a 102 1 km (63 mi) estuary is the longest river in Ireland and flows south from County Cavan in Ulster to meet the Atlantic just south of Limerick . There are a number of sizeable lakes along Ireland 's rivers , of which Lough Neagh is the largest .

Politically , the island consists of the Republic of Ireland , with jurisdiction over about five -sixths of the island ; and Northern Ireland , a constituent country (and an unconfirmed " practical " exclave) of the United Kingdom , with jurisdiction over the remaining sixth . Located west of the island of Great Britain , it is located at approximately 53 ° N 8 ° W. It has a total area of 84 421 km² (32 595 sq mi) . It is separated from Great Britain by the Irish Sea and from mainland Europe by the Celtic Sea . Ireland and Great Britain , together with nearby islands , are known collectively as the British Isles ; as the term British Isles is controversial in relation to Ireland , the alternative term Britain and Ireland is increasingly preferred .

= Geological development =

The geology of Ireland is diverse . Different regions contain rocks belonging to different geologic periods , dating as far back almost 2 billion years . The oldest known Irish rock is about 1 7 billion years old and is found on Inishtrahull Island off the north coast of County Donegal and also at Annagh Head on the Mullet Peninsula . The newer formations are the drumlins and glacial valleys as a result of the last ice age , and the sinkholes and cave formations in the limestone regions of Clare .

Ireland 's geographic history covers everything from volcanoes and tropical seas to the ice age . Ireland has been formed by two distinct parts and slowly joined together , uniting about 440 million years ago . As a result of tectonics and changes in latitude the sea level has risen and fallen . In every area of the country the rocks which formed can be seen as a result . Finally the impact of the glaciers created the views that we see today . This variation in the two areas along with the differences between volcanic areas and shallow seas gives Ireland a range of soils as well . There are wide bogs and free draining brown earths . The mountains are granite , sandstone , limestone with karst like areas and basalt formations .

= Physical geography =

= Mountain ranges =

Ireland consists of a mostly flat low lying area in the midlands , ringed by mountain ranges such as (beginning in County Kerry and working counter clockwise) the Macgillicuddy 's Reeks , Comeragh Mountains , Blackstairs Mountains , Wicklow Mountains , the Mourne , Glens of Antrim , Sperrin Mountains , Bluestack Mountains , Derryveagh Mountains , Ox Mountains , Nephinbeg Mountains and the Twelve Bens / Maumturks group . Some mountain ranges are further inland in the south of Ireland , such as the Galtee Mountains (the highest inland range) , Silvermine and Slieve Bloom Mountains . The highest peak is Carrauntoohil , 1 038 m (3 405 ft) high , is in the Macgillicuddy 's Reeks , a range of glacier carved sandstone mountains . The mountains are not high ? only three peaks are over 1 000 m (3 281 ft) and another 457 exceed 500 m (1 640 ft) .

== Rivers and lakes ==

The main river in Ireland is the River Shannon , 360 @. @ 5 km (224 @. @ 0 mi) , the longest river in Ireland as well as both the islands of Ireland and Britain , it is a river that separates the boggy midlands of Ireland from the west of the island . The river develops into three lakes along its course , Lough Allen , Lough Ree , and Lough Derg . Of these , Lough Derg is the largest . The River Shannon enters the Atlantic Ocean after Limerick city at the Shannon Estuary . Other major rivers include the River Liffey , River Lee , River Blackwater , River Nore , River Suir , River Barrow , River Bann , River Foyle , River Erne , and River Boyne (see the list of rivers in Ireland) .

Lough Neagh , in Ulster , is the largest lake in Ireland and the UK . Legend has it that a giant , Fionn mac Cumhail , was fighting with another in Scotland , and enraged , scooped out a lump of earth , which he threw . It fell into the Irish Sea , creating the Isle of Man , while the hole filled up with water to become Lough Neagh . Other large lakes include Lough Erne and Lough Corrib .

== Inlets ==

Beginning with County Donegal , Lough Swilly separates one side of the Inishowen peninsula . Lough Foyle on the other side , is one of Ireland 's larger inlets , situated between County Donegal and County Londonderry . Further round the coast is Belfast Lough , between County Antrim and County Down . Also in County Down is Strangford Lough , actually an inlet partially separating the Ards peninsula from the mainland . Further down the coast , Carlingford Lough is situated between Down and County Louth .

Dublin Bay is the next sizeable inlet , while the eastern coast of Ireland is mostly uniform until Wexford Harbour at the mouth of the River Slaney . On the southern coast , Waterford Harbour is situated at the mouth of the River Suir (into which the other two of the Three Sisters (River Nore and River Barrow) flow) . The next major inlet is Cork Harbour , at the mouth of the River Lee , in which Great Island is situated .

Dunmanus Bay , Bantry Bay , Kenmare estuary and Dingle Bay are all inlets between the peninsulas of County Kerry . North of these is the Shannon Estuary . Between north County Clare and County Galway is Galway Bay . Clew Bay is located on the coast of County Mayo , south of Achill Island , while Broadhaven Bay , Blacksod Bay and Sruth Fada Conn bays are situated in northwest Connacht , in North Mayo . Killala Bay is on the northeast coast of Mayo . Donegal Bay is a major inlet between County Donegal and County Sligo .

== Headlands ==

Malin Head is the most northerly point in Ireland , while Mizen Head is one of the most southern points , hence the term " Malin head to Mizen head " (or the reverse) is used for anything applying to the island of Ireland as a whole . Carnsore Point is another extreme point of Ireland , being the southeastern most point of Ireland . Further along the coast is Hook Head while the Old Head of Kinsale in is one of many headlands along the south coast of Ireland .

Loop Head is the headland at which County Clare comes to a point on the west coast of Ireland , with the Atlantic on the north , and further inland on the south , the Shannon estuary . Hag 's Head is another headland further up Clare 's north / western coastline , with the Cliffs of Moher along the coastline north of the point .

Erris Head is the northwesternmost point of Connacht .

== Islands and peninsulas ==

Achill Island , in the northwest , is the largest island off Ireland 's coast . The island is inhabited , and is connected to the mainland by a bridge . Some of the next largest islands are the Aran Islands , off the coast of southern Connacht , host to an Irish @-@ speaking community , or Gaeltacht . Valentia Island off the Iveragh peninsula is also one of Ireland 's larger islands , and is relatively

settled , as well as being connected by a bridge at its southeastern end . Omey Island , off the coast of Connemara is a tidal island .

Some of the best @-@ known peninsulas in Ireland are in County Kerry ; the Dingle peninsula , the aforementioned Iveragh peninsula and the Beara peninsula . The Ards peninsula is one of the larger peninsulas outside Kerry . The Inishowen peninsula in County Donegal includes Ireland 's most northerly point , Malin Head and several important towns including Buncrana on Lough Swilly , Carndonagh and Moville on Lough Foyle . Ireland 's most northerly land feature is Inishtrahull island , off Malin Head . Rockall Island may deserve this honour but its status is disputed , being claimed by the United Kingdom , Republic of Ireland , Denmark (for the Faroe Islands) and Iceland . The most southerly point is the Fastnet Rock .

= = Climate = =

The climate of Ireland is mild , moist and changeable with abundant rainfall and a lack of temperature extremes . Ireland 's climate is defined as a temperate oceanic climate , or Cfb on the Köppen climate classification system , a classification it shares with most of northwest Europe . The country receives generally warm summers and mild winters . It is considerably warmer than other areas on its latitude , because it lies in the northeastern Atlantic Ocean , and as a result is warmed by the North Atlantic Current all year .

The influence of the North Atlantic Current also ensures the coastline of Ireland remains ice @-@ free throughout the winter ? unlike for example the Sea of Okhotsk and the Labrador Sea which are at a similar latitude . The climate in Ireland does not experience extreme weather , with tornadoes and similar weather features being rare .

The prevailing wind blows from the southwest , breaking on the high mountains of the west coast . Rainfall is therefore a particularly prominent part of western Irish life , with Valentia Island , off the west coast of County Kerry , getting almost twice as much annual rainfall as Dublin on the east (1 @, @ 400 mm or 55 @. @ 1 in vs. 762 mm or 30 @. @ 0 in) .

January and February are the coldest months of the year , and mean daily air temperatures fall between 4 and 7 ° C (39 @. @ 2 and 44 @. @ 6 ° F) during these months . July and August are the warmest , with mean daily temperatures of 14 to 16 ° C (57 @. @ 2 to 60 @. @ 8 ° F) , whilst mean daily maximums in July and August vary from 17 to 18 ° C (62 @. @ 6 to 64 @. @ 4 ° F) near the coast , to 19 to 20 ° C (66 @. @ 2 to 68 @. @ 0 ° F) inland . The sunniest months are May and June , with an average of five to seven hours sunshine per day .

Though extreme weather events in Ireland are comparatively rare when compared with other countries in the European Continent , they do occur . Atlantic depressions , occurring mainly in the months of December , January and February , can occasionally bring winds of up to 160 km / h or 99 mph to Western coastal counties ; while the summer months , and particularly around late July / early August , thunderstorms can develop .

The table shows mean climate figures for the Dublin Airport weather station over a thirty @-@ year period . Climate statistics based on the counties of Northern Ireland vary slightly but are not significantly different .

= = Political and human geography = =

Ireland is divided into four provinces , Connacht , Leinster , Munster and Ulster , and 32 counties . Six of the nine Ulster counties form Northern Ireland and the other 26 form the state , Ireland . The map shows the county boundaries for all 32 counties .

From an administrative viewpoint , 21 of the counties in the republic are units of local government . The other six have more than one local council area , producing a total of 31 county @-@ level authorities . County Tipperary had two ridings , North Tipperary and South Tipperary , originally established in 1838 , renamed in 2001 and amalgamated in 2014 . The cities of Dublin , Cork and Galway have city councils and are administered separately from the counties bearing those names . The cities of Limerick and Waterford were merged with their respective county councils in 2014 to

form new city and county councils . The remaining part of County Dublin is divided into Dún Laoghaire , Rathdown , Fingal , and South Dublin .

Electoral areas in Ireland (the state) , called constituencies in accordance with Irish law , mostly follow county boundaries . Maintaining links to the county system is a mandatory consideration in the re @-@ organisation of constituency boundaries by a Constituency Commission .

In Northern Ireland , a major re @-@ organisation of local government in 1973 replaced the six traditional counties and two county boroughs (Belfast and Derry) by 26 single @-@ tier districts , which , apart from Fermanagh cross the traditional county boundaries . The six counties and two county @-@ boroughs remain in use for purposes such as Lieutenancy . In November 2005 , proposals were announced which would see the number of local authorities reduced to seven . The island 's total population of approximately 6 million people is concentrated on the east coast , particularly in Dublin and Belfast and their surrounding areas .

= = Natural resources = =

= = = Bogs = = =

Ireland has 12 @, @ 000 km ² (4 @, @ 633 miles ²) of bogland , consisting of two distinct types , blanket bogs and raised bogs . Blanket bogs are the more widespread of the two types . They are essentially a product of human activity aided by the moist Irish climate . Blanket bogs formed on sites where Neolithic farmers cleared trees for farming . As the land so cleared fell into disuse , the soil began to leach and become more acidic , producing a suitable environment for the growth of heather and rushes . The debris from these plants accumulated and a layer of peat formed . One of the largest expanses of Atlantic blanket bog in Ireland is to be found in County Mayo .

Raised bogs are most common in the Shannon basin . They formed when depressions left behind after the ice age filled with water to form lakes . Debris from reeds in these lakes formed a layer at the bottom of the water . This eventually choked the lakes and raised above the surface , forming raised bogs .

Since the 17th century , peat has been cut for fuel for domestic heating and cooking and it is called turf when so used . The process accelerated as commercial exploitation of bogs grew . In the 1940s , machines for cutting turf were introduced and larger @-@ scale exploitation became possible . In the Republic , this became the responsibility of a semi @-@ state company called Bord na Móna . In addition to domestic uses , commercially extracted turf is used in a number of industries , especially electricity generation though peat is being combined with biomass for dual @-@ firing electricity generation .

In recent years , the high level of bog being destroyed by cutting has raised environmental concerns . The problem is particularly acute for raised bogs as they yield a higher @-@ grade fuel than blanket bogs . Plans are now in place in both the Republic and Northern Ireland to conserve most of the remaining raised bogs on the island .

= = = Oil , natural gas and minerals = = =

Offshore exploration for natural gas began in 1970 . The first major discovery was the Kinsale Head gas field in 1971 . Next was the smaller Ballycotton gas field in 1989 , and the Corrib gas field in 1996 . Exploitation of the Corrib project has yet to get off the ground because the controversial proposal to refine the gas onshore , rather than at sea has been met with widespread opposition . Gas from these fields is pumped ashore and used for both domestic and industrial purposes . The Helvick oil field , estimated to contain over 28 million barrels (4 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 m³) of oil , is a 2000 discovery . Ireland is the largest European producer of zinc with three operating zinc @-@ lead mines at Navan , Galmoy and Lisheen . Other mineral deposits with actual or potential commercial value include gold , silver , gypsum , talc , calcite , dolomite , roofing slate , limestone aggregate , building stone , sand and gravel .

In May 2007 the Department of Communications , Marine and Natural Resources (now replaced by the Department of Communications , Energy and Natural Resources) reported that there may be volumes over 130 billion barrels (2 @. @ 1 × 10¹⁰ m³) of petroleum and 50 trillion cubic feet (1 @, @ 400 km³) of natural gas in Irish waters ? worth trillions of Euro , if true . The minimum ' guaranteed ' amount of oil in the Irish Atlantic waters is 10 billion barrels (1 @. @ 6 × 10⁹ m³) , worth over ? 450 billion . There are also areas of petroleum and natural gas on shore , for example the Lough Allen basin , with 9 @. @ 4 trillion cubic feet (270 km³) of gas and 1 @. @ 5 billion barrels (240 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 m³) of oil , valued at ? 74 @. @ 4 billion . Already some fields are being exploited , such as the Spanish Point field , with 1 @. @ 25 trillion cubic feet (35 km³) of gas and 206 million barrels (32 @, @ 800 @, @ 000 m³) of oil , valued at ? 19 @. @ 6 billion . The Corrib Basin is also quite large , worth anything up to ? 87 billion , while the Dunquin gas field contains 25 trillion cubic feet (710 km³) of natural gas and 4 @. @ 13 billion barrels (657 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 m³) of petroleum .

In March 2012 the first commercial oil well was drilled 70 km off the Cork coast by Providence Resources . The Barryroe oil well is yielding 3500 barrels per day , at current oil prices at \$ 120 a barrel Barryroe oil well is worth in excess of ? 2.14bn annually .

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