

KILLARNEY NATIONAL PARK

Killarney National Park near the town of Killarney, County Kerry, was the first national park in Ireland, created when the Muckross Estate was donated to the Irish Free State in 1932. The park has since been substantially expanded and encompasses over 102.89 km² (25,425 acres) of diverse ecology, including the Lakes of Killarney, oak and yew woodlands of international importance, and mountain peaks. It has the only red deer herd on mainland Ireland and the most extensive covering



of native forest remaining in Ireland. The park is of high ecological value because of the quality, diversity, and extensiveness of many of its habitats and the wide variety of species that they accommodate, some of which are rare. The park was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1981. The park forms part of a Special Area of Conservation and a Special Protection Area.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is responsible for the management and administration of the park. Nature conservation is the main objective of the park, and ecosystems in their natural state are highly valued. The park is known for its scenery, and recreation and tourism amenities are provided for.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Killarney National Park is in southwest Ireland close to the island's most westerly point. The Lakes of Killarney and the Mangerton, Torc, Shehy and Purple Mountains are in the park. Altitudes in the park range from 22 metres (72 ft) to 842 metres (2,762 ft). A major geological boundary between Devonian Old Red Sandstone and Carboniferous limestone lies in the park. The underlying geology of the majority of the park is sandstone, with the limestone pavements occurring on the low eastern shore of Lough



Leane.

Lough Leane is the largest of the Killarney lakes and contains over 30 islands. Some visitors avail of boat trips to Innisfallen, one of the larger islands on Lough Leane.

The park has an oceanic climate, heavily influenced by the Gulf Stream. It experiences mild winters (6 °C (43 °F) February average) and cool summers (15 °C (59 °F) July average). Mean daily temperatures range from a low of 5.88 °C (42.58 °F) in January to a high of 15.28 °C (59.50 °F) in July. The park experiences high rainfall and changeable fronts, with light showery rainfall being frequent throughout the year. The mean rainfall is 1,263 millimetres (49.7 in) per year, 223 days per annum typically having more than 1 millimetre (0.039 in) precipitation. The mean number of frost days is 40. The geological boundary, the park's wide range of altitudes, and the climatic influence of the Gulf Stream combine to give the park a varied ecology. These ecosystems include bogs, lakes, moorland, mountains, waterways, woodland, parks and gardens. Outcropping rock, cliffs and crags are features of the park. Above 200 metres (660 ft), the mountainous sandstone areas support large areas of blanket bog and heath.

HISTORY



Killarney National Park is one of the very few places in Ireland that has been continuously covered by woodland since the end of the most recent glacial period, approximately 10,000 years ago. Humans have lived in the area since at least the Bronze Age, approximately 4,000 years ago. Archaeologists have found evidence that copper mining took place in the Ross Island area during this period, which suggests that the area was of considerable importance to Bronze Age people. The park has many archaeological features, including a well preserved stone circle at Lissivigeen.

The woods in the park have been disturbed and cleared at different periods since the Iron Age. This has caused a gradual decline in the diversity of tree species in the park.

Some of the most impressive archaeological remains in the park are from the early Christian period. The most important of these features is Innisfallen Abbey, the ruins of a monastic settlement on Innisfallen Island in Lough Leane. It was founded in the 7th century CE by St. Finian the Leper and was occupied until the 14th century. The Annals of Innisfallen, a record of the early history of Ireland as it was known by the monks, was written in the monastery from the 11th to 13th centuries. It is thought that the monastery gave rise to the name Lough Leane, which means "Lake of Learning".

Muckross Abbey was founded in 1448 by Observantine Franciscans and is also still standing, despite having been damaged and reconstructed several times when its inhabitants were raided. "Friars Glen" on Mangerton Mountain is customarily said to have been one of the places the monks would flee to when the monastery was attacked. The central feature of Muckross Abbey is a central courtyard that contains a huge yew tree surrounded by a vaulted cloister.[14] It is traditionally said that this tree is as old as Muckross Abbey itself. The abbey was the burial place of local chieftains. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Kerry poets Seafraidh O'Donoghue, Aogán Ó Rathaille, and Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin were buried there.



After the Norman invasion of Ireland, the land around the lakes was owned by the McCarthys and O'Donoghues. Ross Castle is a 15th-century tower house on the shore of Lough Leane. It was once the residence of the chieftain O'Donoghue Mór. The castle was extended in the 17th century. It has been restored and is open to the public. A 1580s Elizabethan military record describes the Killarney area as a meagrely inhabited wilderness of forest and mountains.

From the 18th century the land in today's park were divided between two great estates, the Herberts of Muckross and the Brownes (Earls of Kenmare). During the 17th and 18th centuries the woods were extensively utilised for local industries including charcoal production, cooperage and tanning. Pressure on the woods intensified in the later part of the 18th century. The biggest cause of oakwood destruction in Killarney in the 18th century was the production of charcoal to fire smelters used in the local iron industry. Approximately 25 tons of oak was needed to produce one ton of cast iron. In 1780 Young famously described Derrycunihy wood as "a great sweep of



mountain, covered partly in wood, hanging in a very noble manner, but part cut down, much of it mangled, and the rest inhabited by coopers, boat-builders, carpenters and turners..."

Woodland exploitation again increased during the Napoleonic era in the early 19th century, probably because of the high prices that oak was commanding at this time. Replanting and management of the oak forests was promoted at this time. There was a large-scale felling of oak trees at Ross Island in 1803, Glena in around 1804 and Tomies in 1805. Tomies was then replanted with three-year-old oak and Glena was coppiced. These activities have increased the relative abundance of

oak in the park in the past 200 years. As most of the oak trees in the woods today are around 200 years old, it is likely that the majority of them were planted, and the oakwoods that have never been disturbed by humans are restricted to a few isolated pockets in remote areas such as mountain valleys.

The Herbert family owned the land on the Muckross Peninsula from 1770 onwards. They became very wealthy from copper mines on this land. Henry Arthur Herbert and his wife—the water colourist Mary Balfour Herbert—finished building Muckross House in 1843. The Herbert's financial situation became precarious in the late 19th century, and the Muckross estate was purchased by Lord Ardilaun of the Guinness brewing family in 1899.