

Finding Ireland's Holy Places

Use www.google.com to discover what you are searching for! An abundance of literature is also available.

HOLY WELLS

It is estimated that there are approximately 3000 Holy Wells in Ireland! Each diocese has its own share of them. While some are no longer tended, others are well maintained and celebrated annually. Tobernalt – Tobar an Ailt -- on the shores of Lough Gill in Co Sligo, is well conserved and worth googling. Google www.google.com 'Holy Wells of Ireland' for details of wells near you. You might, with a bit of support, undertake the restoration of a forgotten well!

HOLY ISLANDS

These include St Patrick's Purgatory near Pettigo; Our Lady's Island, Wexford, Inis Mor (Aran) and Skellig Michael. Inis Cealtra – Holy Island -- in Lough Derg, County Clare, spans some 7000 years of Irish History and is listed as one of the Top 10 Sacred Places in Ireland.

HOLY MOUNTAINS

These include Croagh Patrick in Mayo, Mount Brandon in Kerry and Slemish in Antrim. They are places of pilgrimage.

MASS ROCKS

There are many Mass Rocks – Carraig an Aifrinn – but they are found only in remote places. Why? During penal times from the 1690s to 1750, discovery of Mass being said could be followed by the execution of the priest. See <http://www.findamassrock.com/> for a listing county by county.

PILGRIM PATHS

See <http://www.pilgrimpath.ie/> There are 11 of them in Ireland. John G. O'Dwyer's *Pilgrim Paths in Ireland*, with maps, photographs and concise directions (Collins Press (RRP €11.99)

BEEHIVE CELLS - Clochain

Many of these are found in the Southwest of Ireland. They were built from the seventh century on. Drystone architecture ensured that the cells in which monks lived and prayed were fairly watertight. Skellig Michael offers stunning photos of its six beehive cells.

MONASTERIES

Google's 'List of Monastic Houses in Ireland' is a vast storehouse of knowledge about our monastic sites. They are listed by county: Antrim alone has some 50 sites; Mayo and Dublin have 76. If we take 50 sites as average per country, 50 x 32, this yields a minimum of 1600 sites across the country. We stand on holy ground indeed.

ROUND TOWERS

There are 65 Round Towers remaining in Ireland; 13 are complete, others less so. Only seven counties have none. Round towers were built near monasteries, served as symbols of the faith and were also bell towers. They housed the treasures of the monastery. See catholicireland.net

HIGH CROSSES

There are some 30 extant. They date back over 800 years, and have been described as 'sermons in stone'. They were focal points for celebrations of the faith.

'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground' (Exodus 3:5)