

Lough Derg Fact Sheet



Background

Lough Derg itself, is a large freshwater lake, located on the River Shannon. It is home to St. Patrick's Purgatory, a pilgrimage site that dates back to the 5th century. The Island is called Lough Derg, meaning Lake of the Cave and also Purgatorium Sancti Patricii (St Patrick's Sanctuary). Just next door, Saint's Island is home to the early monastery in the 400s, however, the island is entirely overgrown and isn't accessible now. Station island is the place of the pilgrimage and is named after the 'stations, which are the rounds of prayers surrounding the pilgrimage.



St Patrick

Saint Patrick is famous for spreading Christianity to Ireland during the 5th century. British born, he was enslaved by the Irish, until he eventually escaped. Then, later on in his life he had travelled back to Ireland to preach to his former enslavers. According to ancient texts, in the 5th century, God showed Saint Patrick a pit on Station Island, which was said to be the entrance to hell. The location of this site was spoken about in the Annals of Ireland in 784 AD and was actually included as a location on the world map in 1492. Patrick's disciple, St. Dabheog, established the monastery on Saint's Island and this is how Christian tradition links Patrick to Lough Derg.



Pilgrimage

The site has been and still is a very popular pilgrimage destination. It has been receiving pilgrims for well over 1,000 years. Today, around 35,000 pilgrims will come each year aiming to do penance for their sins or for providence, whether that be through curing illness, meeting a partner or even passing an exam. The pilgrim season takes place within the summer months and there is a traditional Three Day Pilgrimage, deemed to be much more intense and includes prayer, fasting, walking bare footed and undertaking a 24 hour Vigil. There is also a Day Retreat, designed for those who were unable to do the Three Day Pilgrimage, whether that be due to health or other reasons.





LOUGH ERNE — PILGRIM WAY



Lough Erne is home to many religious sites, places of gathering, learning, worship, and burial. Today, we can trace these places along the lough as they quietly sit as timely reminders of a once thriving early Christian community.

1
Galloon

2
Aghalurcher

3
Balleisic

4
Cleinish

6
Derryvullian

7
Ola Rosorry

8
Decenish Island

9
Killadeas

11
Davy's Island

12
White Island

10
Inshmaeainn

14
Caldrough

13
Kenagh