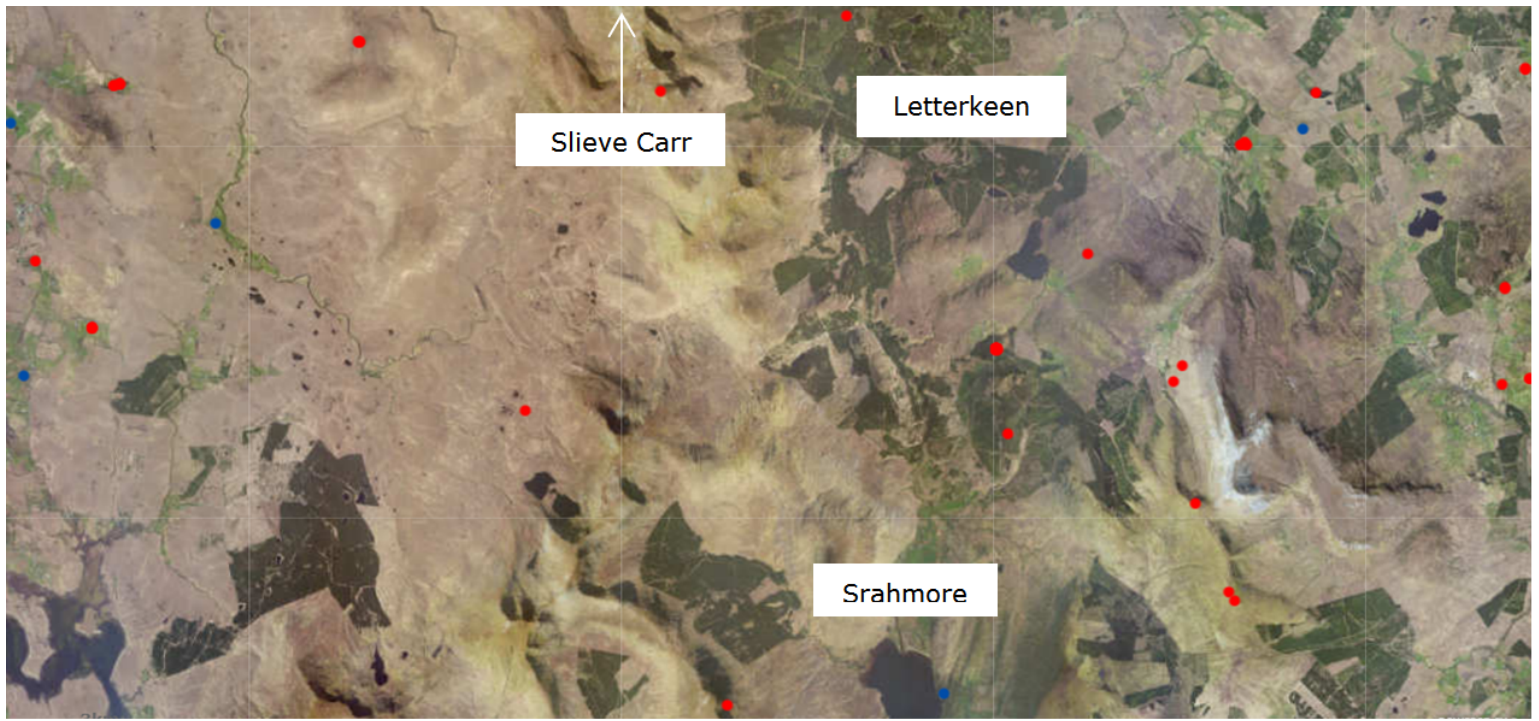


WILD NEPHIN NATIONAL PARK MONUMENTS & MYTHS

Michael Chambers

Wild Nephin National Park and surrounds are located in a region with a wealth of archaeological and historical sites, highlighted in the map below. The red dots represent the sites on the National Monuments database. Detailed information of these sites can be accessed on www.archaeology.ie



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Lios Na Gaoithe

Beneath the shadows of the Nephin Beg Mountains, hidden by the large conifer forest of Letterkeen (now part of the National Park), stands Lios Na Gaoithe (the windy fort). Lios Na Gaoithe is one of the best preserved ringforts in the area. The high embankment around the fort would have protected the inhabitants and their livestock from wild animals, including wolves that roamed these areas up until the 18th century.

An excavation of Lios Na Gaoithe revealed a much earlier burial site underneath the ringfort dating back to the Bronze Age, fully intact and undisturbed graves, exactly as they had left some 3,500 years ago. Earthenware food vessels were found in each grave. The circular fort itself is of a much later time, maybe from Christian times, although it is one of the strongholds that feature in the Táin Bó Flidhais, the tale of the Mayo cattle raid.



Lios na Gaoithe Ringfort © Darren Moran - Firefly Photography

Fairy Fort

A local story that has passed down through generations refers to a place close to Derrybrook Lough. A stone fort like structure at this site is known locally as a fairy fort and called Crinn an Sí (the fairy tree). It was said of this fairy fort, that some time ago, a number of Srahmore men took stones from the site. That same night all the animals of the village were troubled, the women were uneasy and no man got a wink of sleep. The next morning the women ordered the men to return whatever stones they had taken from the fort. Like all good men, the Srahmore men did as the women instructed; and when they did this, peace once again descended on the valley.

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Cránnog

There are a number of other historical sites and monuments throughout the area, which include promontory forts and crannógs. These include the cránnog that features in the image below, located south of Letterkeen Hill.



Letterkeen Cránnog © Darren Moran - Firefly Photography

Daithí Bán

North of the ringfort, Lios Na Gaoithe, is the large cairn at the summit of Slieve Carr; once said to be the location of Daithí Bán fort. There are various stories associated with this mythical character but legend has it that Daithí was a troublesome giant. One story tells of three monks that set out to put an end to his ways, challenging him to cross a lake at Bellacorick. This was a trick and when Daithí waded out into the soft boggy bottomed lake he got stuck and drowned. He was buried on an island on the lake and to this day the lake is known as Daithí Bán lake (Lough Dahybaun). Many believe that the cairn on Slieve Carr is the actual burial site of a once great local chieftain and Lios Na Gaoithe may have been his home. It is said that he may have died in battle fighting against an army lead by three monks on the shores of lough Dahybaun, and that his beloved people buried him close to the stars so he may look down on his kingdom for evermore. It has also been speculated that Daithí Bán of Slieve Carr could be Great Daithí the last pagan king of Connacht? Giant or King, who every Daithí was, he left a lasting impression on the stories and landscape of the region



Cairn on Slieve Carr © Michael Chambers