



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David



Croagh Patrick

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Sacred Site – A Definition

- ‘A sacred site is a place in the landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice or likely religious observance’
 - Nineteen Characteristics of a Sacred Site
 - ‘It is, or is founded upon, a natural topographical feature, e.g., a mountain, mound, rock, cave, tree, grove, forest, spring, well, river, lake, the sea, an island, etc.’
 - ‘It is a focus of past or present special visits of religious observance or pilgrimage’

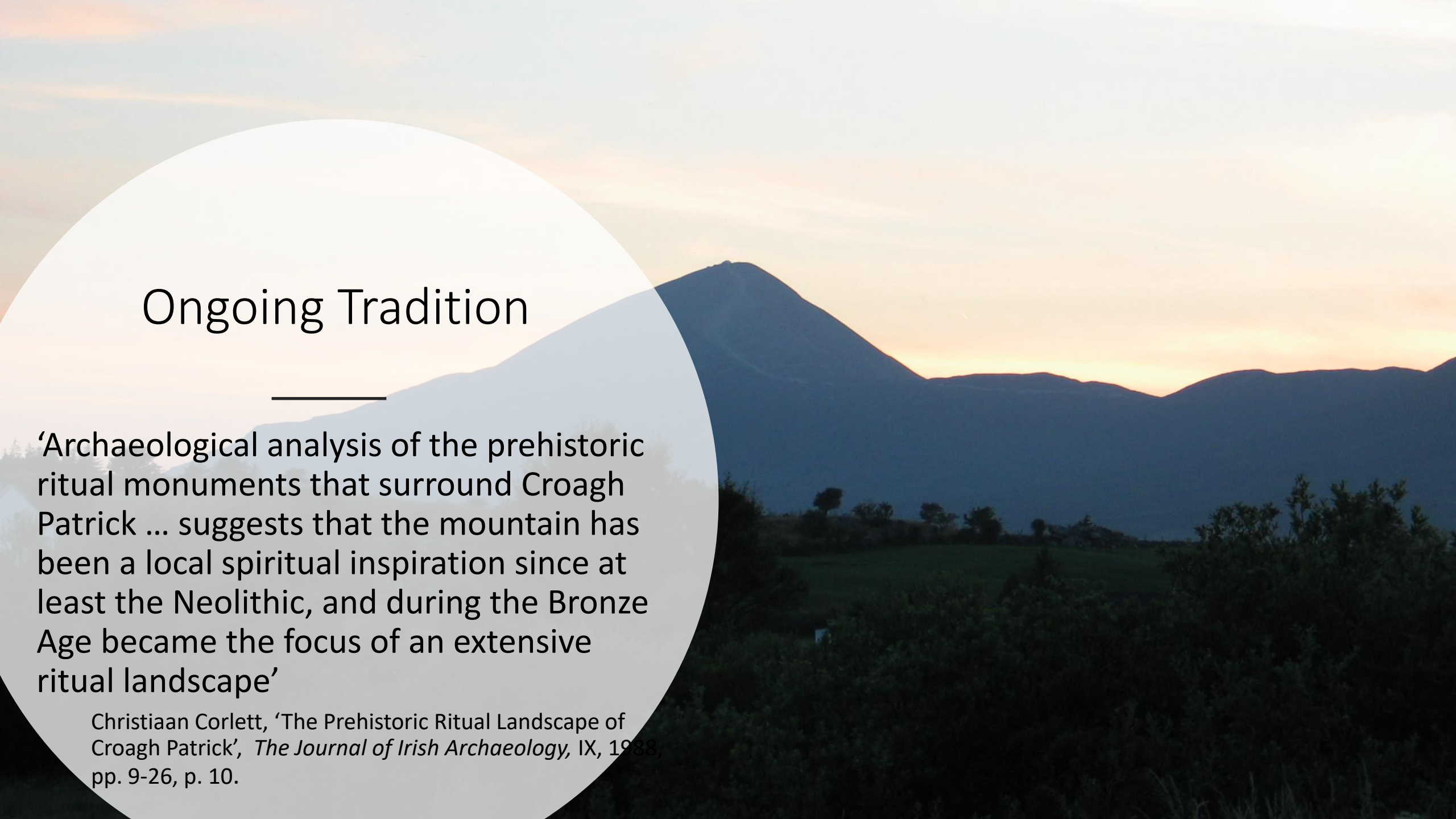


Otherworld

‘The psychological experiences gained by the writer in having visited almost 300 prehistoric sites...provide a degree of empirical evidence for the existence (in the mind of this climber at least) of an intangible “other world” as one ascends from a lowland landscape onto the summits of hills and mountains (where many of the passage tombs and related sites are located).’

Frank Prendergast, *Linked Landscapes: Spatial, Archaeoastronomical and Social Network Analysis of the Irish Passage Tomb Tradition*, 2011





Ongoing Tradition

‘Archaeological analysis of the prehistoric ritual monuments that surround Croagh Patrick ... suggests that the mountain has been a local spiritual inspiration since at least the Neolithic, and during the Bronze Age became the focus of an extensive ritual landscape’

Christiaan Corlett, ‘The Prehistoric Ritual Landscape of Croagh Patrick’, *The Journal of Irish Archaeology*, IX, 1988, pp. 9-26, p. 10.

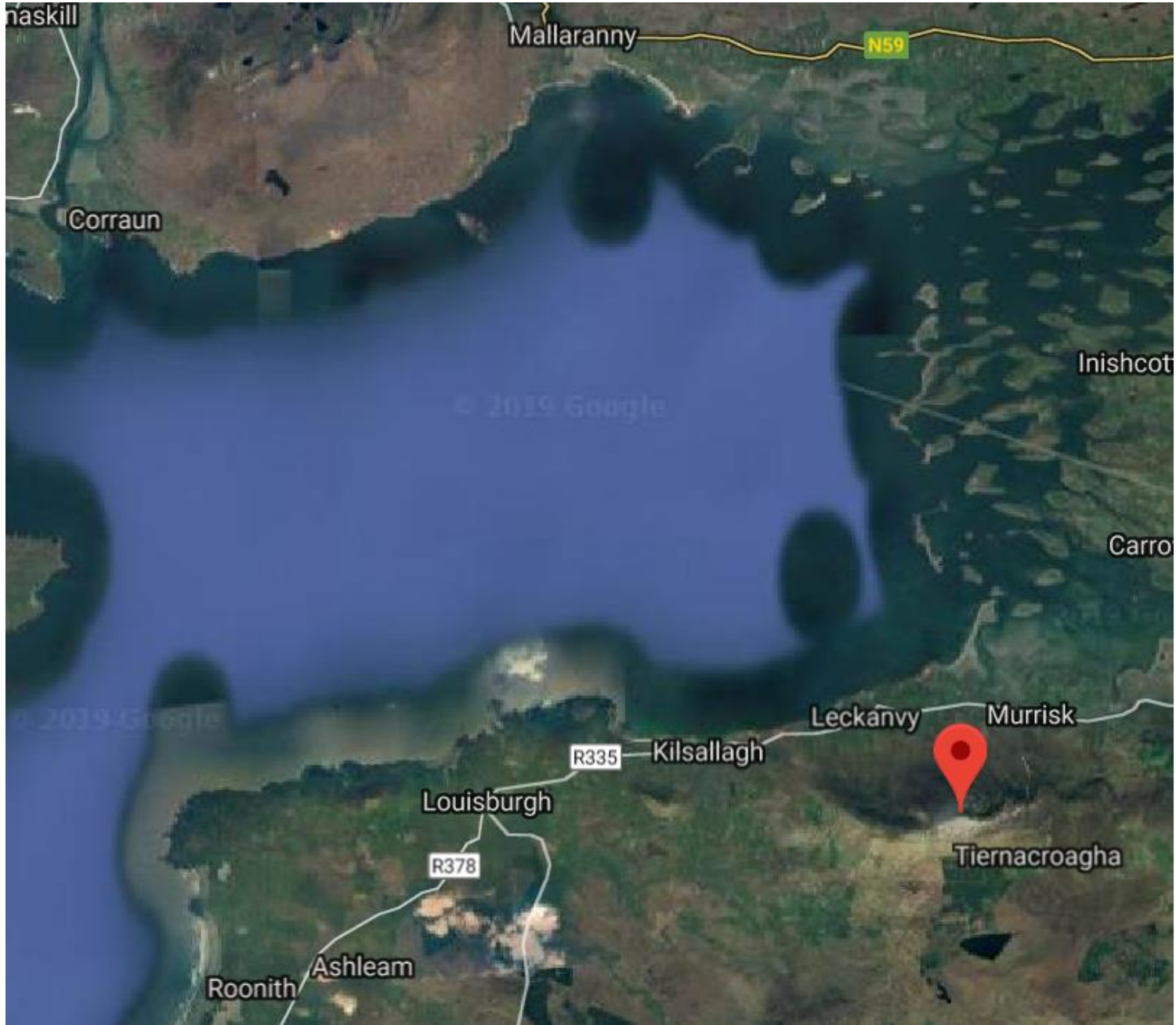
Agenda

- The Mountain
 - Physical Characteristics and Environment
- St. Patrick
- Ongoing Tradition
 - Neolithic
 - Bronze Age
 - Early Christian
 - Medieval
 - Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries
 - Twenty-first Century
- Pilgrimage





The Mountain



The Mountain – Physical Characteristics

- Known locally as ‘The Reek’ (translation of Cruach)
- Pyramid shaped, quartzite summit
- Mostly surrounded by bog
- 764m on the Southern shores of Clew Bay on the Atlantic Coast of Ireland
- Over 200 islands – drowned drumlins
- View of water from all sides
- Southern slopes skirted by the Owenree River which flows towards Boheh and whose source is Lough Na Corra to the South



Brú na Bóinne





Lough Na Corra

- Only visible from the mountain
- 'Lake of the Serpents'
- Pagan deity
- Christian demonisation
 - The demon Corra is defeated by Patrick at the lake
 - Corlett, 1997, P. 9

St. Patrick

TÓCHAR PHÁDRAIG
ST PATRICKS CAUSEWAY

Statue of St. Patrick at start of Tóchar Phádraig



St. Patrick

- Patron saint of Ireland – strong nationalist symbol
- Feast day – 17th March – celebrated all around the world
- In 2019, more than fifty countries turned their public buildings green



St. Patrick

- Legends, folklore – oral tradition
- 5th Century
 - Brought to Ireland as a slave from Britain
 - Escaped after seven years
 - Dreams of the Irish calling him
 - Returns twenty-five years later as a bishop
- Converted the Irish to Christianity
 - *Confessio*
- Said to have died on 17th March
 - Tierchán, *Book of Armagh*



St. Patrick

British-Roman

Identified as a Roman citizen
From Bannavem Taburniae
Son of Deacon Calpornius, a
senior Roman administrator
who held the office of
decurion

Father owned a villa

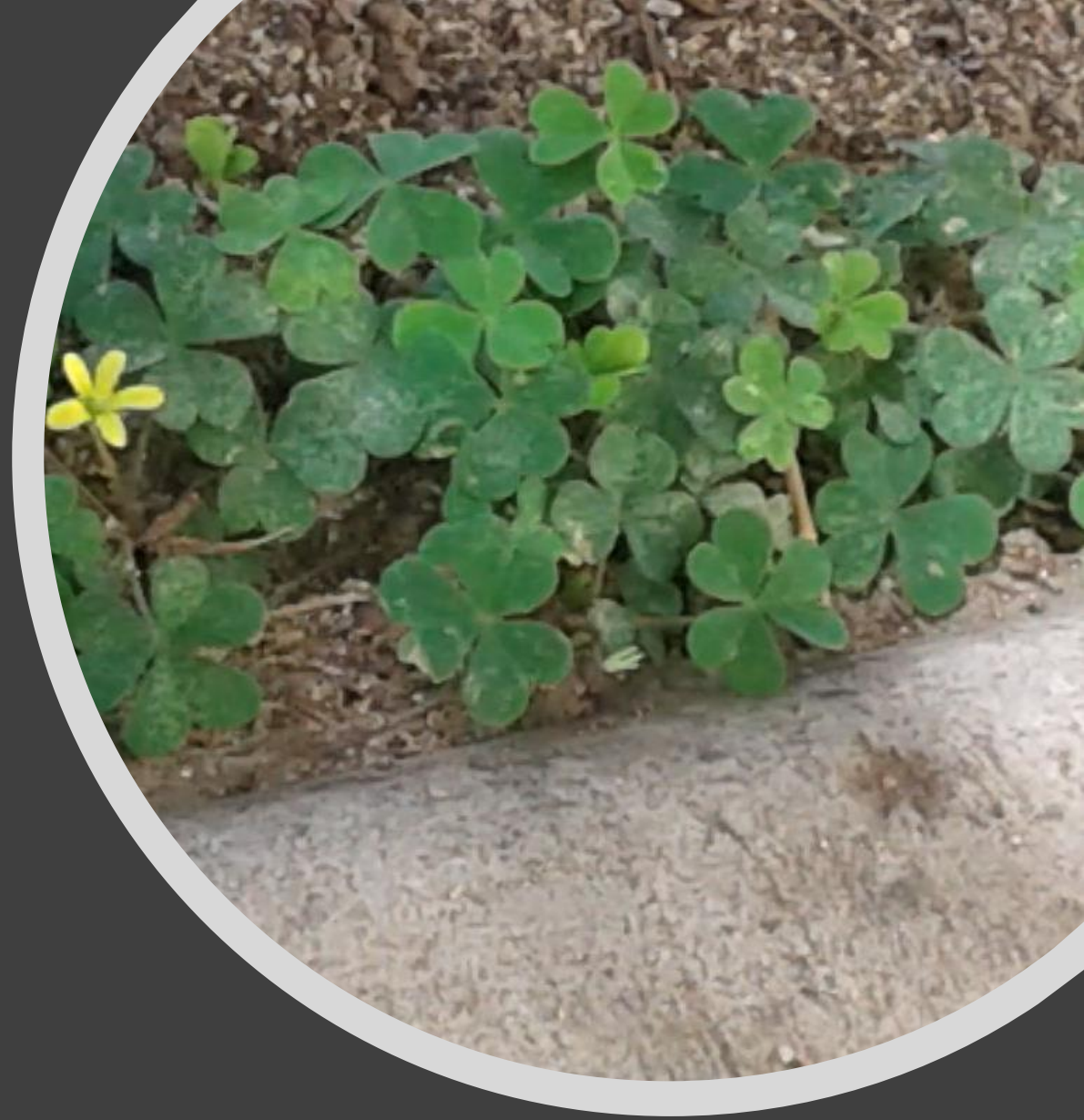
‘Must have been south of
the Pennines’

Latin was not his first
language

- *Confessio*

Snakes, Shamrock and Fire

- Lit the Pascal Fire on the Hill of Slane
- Used the Shamrock to explain the Trinity
- Drives the snakes out of Ireland
- Associated with several places in Ireland
 - Croagh Patrick
 - Fasted there for forty days and forty nights of Lent 441
 - Confronts demons
 - Tierchán, *Book of Armagh*





Crom Dubh

- AKA Crom Cruach
 - Crom = stooped or bent over
 - Cruach = mountain
 - Dubh = black
- Mountain traditionally associated Crom Dubh and Lughnasadh
 - Mulveen, p. 167
- Lughnasadh – the festival of Lugh, one of the most important deities in Irish mythology
 - Hutton, p. 327
- Represents Christianity's pagan rivals
 - Macneill, 1962, p. 107-112
- Late seventh century – Christian Church associates the mountain with St. Patrick in order to promote him
 - Harbison, 1991, p. 70



Crom Dubh

- In some places Crom's Eve, the last Sunday of summer replaced Lughnasadh
 - Sayers, 1985, p. 36
- Association with Pluto
 - Melia, 1967, p. 372
- He lived in the underworld throughout winter, emerging on 1st August to claim the 'first fruits', in the form of Eithne the corn maiden
- He lifted her on his back (hence his stoop) and brought her down to the underworld
 - *Stair na hEireann*,
<https://stairnaheireann.net/>



Crom Dubh

- At one point the chief god of Ireland
- Pre-dates the Tuatha da Danaan
- Gold idol in Mag Slecht surrounded by twelve stone idols
- Possibly a standing stone
- Human and animal sacrifice
- Attracts Patrick's attention
- Legend states St. Patrick destroyed the idol
 - Sayers, 1985, p. 36.



Lent 441 CE

- St. Patrick spends forty days and forty nights on Croagh Patrick during Lent 441
- Aim – to confront Crom Dubh
- Hopes to convert him
- Attacked by demon birds
- Tormented by Caorthannach, the devil's mother, who had assumed the shape of a serpent
- She is the most terrible of the demons
- Patrick banished Caorthannach, to the lake
- She escapes to Lough Derg where he killed her with his crozier
- In another version there is no lake but the fight is so violent it causes the lake to spring forth

A landscape photograph featuring a large, conical mountain peak in the background, silhouetted against a sunset sky with soft orange and yellow hues. The foreground is filled with dark, silhouetted trees and bushes. A small white building is partially visible on the left. A dark circular overlay with a white border is positioned in the upper left corner, containing the text "Ongoing Tradition".

Ongoing
Tradition



Neolithic Era – The Boheh Stone

Boheh Stone

- Stone 2m high
- Artwork carved as early as 3800 BCE
- Added to over the years
- Cup and ring
- 264 motifs recorded
 - Van Hoek, p. 11.





Artwork



Rolling Sun

<http://www.carrowkeel.com/sites/croaghpatrick/reek3.html>

Boheh Stone

- Sun sets on the peak of Croagh Patrick
 - 18th April
 - 24th August
- 122 days from 18th April to 24th August
- 122 days from 24th August to 21st December
- Splits the year into three parts



Other monuments aligned towards Croagh Patrick

‘Therefore, the view of Croagh Patrick from 20 out of a total of 23 monuments within the immediate landscape of the mountain represents a deliberate decision to include the mountain within the visual field of those monuments’

Corlett, p. 17



Croagh Patrick and the Sun

- At least two bronze-age monuments note the setting of the Sun over Croagh Patrick at different times of the year
- *Confessio*
 - St. Patrick denounced the sun worship associated with the mountain
 - Twice compares Christ to the Sun



Croagh Patrick and the Sun

‘That same night, when I was asleep, Satan assailed me violently, a thing I shall remember as long as I shall be in this body. And he fell upon me like a huge rock, and I could not stir a limb. But whence came it into my mind, ignorant as I am, to call upon Helias? And meanwhile I saw the sun rise in the sky, and while I was shouting ‘Helias! Helias’ with all my might, suddenly the splendour of that sun fell on me and immediately freed me of all misery’

Confessio



Croagh Patrick and the Sun

‘For this sun which we see rises daily for us because He commands so, but it will never reign, nor will its splendour last; what is more, those wretches who adore it will be miserably punished. Not so we, who believe in, and worship, the true sun---Christ---who will never perish, nor will he who doeth His will; but he will abide for ever as Christ abideth for ever, who reigns with God the Father Almighty and the Holy Spirit before time, and now, and in all eternity.’

Confessio





Cormac MacAirt

- High King of Ireland
 - 2nd to 4th century
 - Appears in the myths of the Fenian Cycle and the Historical Cycle
 - Father in law of Fionn MacCumhail
 - Died by choking on a salmon bone
 - May have been vengeance of Crom Cruach for becoming a Christian
 - Directed that he should not be buried at Bru na Boinne as his sun-worshipping Pagan ancestors were
 - Asked to be buried at Rosnaree on the south bank of the Boyne facing the rising Sun
 - Ferguson, p. 120

Cormac MacAirt

‘Spread not the beds of Brugh for me
When restless death-bed’s use is done
But bury me at Rosnaree
And face me to the rising Sun’

‘The Burial of King Cormac’, *Lays of the
Western Gael*

‘The struggle between the powers of light and
darkness for the possession of the king’s body’

- Ferguson, p. 120



Bronze Age

- Four cairns on the shoulder of Croagh Patrick
- Range from 6m-12m across and 1.7m-2.5m high
- Early Bronze-Age
- Roilig Mhuire (Mary's Graveyard)
 - Christianisation
- Used as a station
- Oriented towards Lough Na Corra
 - Waddell, p. 122.



Christian Tradition

- 7th Century CE – earliest known reference
 - First known association of the mountain with St. Patrick
 - Political Reasons - Christianise the mountain
 - Croagh Patrick already a powerful symbol
- Earliest recorded pilgrimage 1113 CE
 - Mulveen, p. 170



Journey to a sacred place

Hardship

Multiple interpretations

Ritualised motion at the site

Individual Experience

Personal context

Profound Experience

Encountering the transcendent

Reason

Atonement

Special intention

Cure

Indulgence

Coleman and Elsner (1995)

Pilgrimages





Reek Sunday - Pilgrimage and Penance

Last Sunday in July

Also known locally as 'Garland Sunday'

Rynne, p. 149

100,000 in 2016

20,000 on Reek Sunday 2016

<https://www.osi.ie/blog/croagh-patrick-reek-week/>

Stations of The Reek

Places for reflection and prayers at certain stages of the mountain

At the foot of the mountain.

Along the path – a moment to catch your breath.

At the ridge – a moment to rest.

On the summit – a moment to bow your head.

On the way down – a moment to let go.

<https://www.catholicireland.net/read/reek-sunday/>



Pilgrimage – The Date

Medieval Era – 17th March
Annals of Ulster

Local Tradition

15th August

Last Friday in July (Aoine
Chrom Dubh - the Friday of
Crom Dubh)

MacNeill, p. 83.

Present Day

Last Sunday in July

Since 1907

Services available on the
summit on those three days

Tóchar Phádraic (St. Patrick's Road)

- A stone built causeway – pilgrim's path
- Irish tóchars date from Middle Bronze-Age
- Most provide access to an important site



Tóchar Phádraic (St. Patrick's Road)

- An ancient pilgrimage route, leading from Ballintubber Abbey (1216) to Croagh Patrick (about 20 miles)
- 'A "pilgrimage" route existed in the early historic period, but the stone-built tóchar was not constructed until the late twelfth century, when the Church established itself politically in the area.'
 - Mulveen, pp. 167-168
- Probable that Ballintubber Abbey took control of it
 - Corlett, p. 18



Tóchar Phádraic (St. Patrick's Road)

- In local folklore it has pre-Christian origins
 - Hill of Tara, Rathcroghan – strongly linked to Croagh Patrick
 - Only small sections can be found today
 - Pre-historic monuments along the ancient route – Christianised names
- Did the monuments influence the siting of the road or was the road built on an ancient sacred route?
 - Mulveen argues the latter



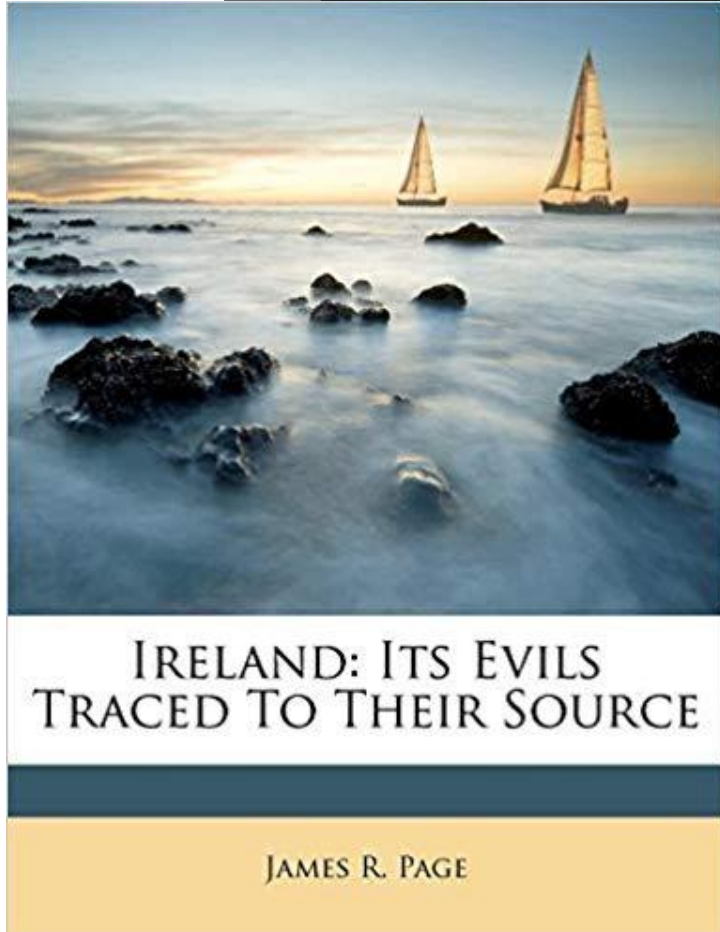
Tóchar Phádraic (St. Patrick's Road)

- 'Therefore, it seems likely that Christian pilgrim road is in fact continuation of an earlier pre-Christian route to Croagh Patrick, dating to Age. A local storyteller, James Berry, believed that a road was built by the 'monarchs of Ireland' from the Hill of Tara in County Meath to Croagh Patrick, and there are other local stories of a route to Croagh Patrick from Cruachain in County Roscommon, the royal site of Connacht since pre-Christian times.'

- Corlett, 1997, p. 11



Nineteenth Century



‘There is another station on the north side called Patrick’s Bed. All the devotees do not go there; none but those who are barren; and the abominable practices committed there ought to make human nature, in its most degraded state, blush. The station course is forty yards in circumference: round this they go seven times, take up some small pebbles, and bring them home in order to prevent barrenness, and also to banish rats and mice.’

Page, p. 72

Indulgence

27th May 1833

Pope Leo XIII granted in perpetuity the following indulgences applicable to the souls in Purgatory:

A Plenary Indulgence to be gained once during the months of June, July or August, on the day to be fixed by the Ordinary. The conditions being: Confession, Holy Communion, and a visit to the chapel on the summit of the Reek, prayers being said there for the Propagation of the Faith and for the intentions of Holy Father.

A Partial Indulgence of one hundred days, to be gained on any day by those who visit this chapel, and pray there for the intentions mentioned above.

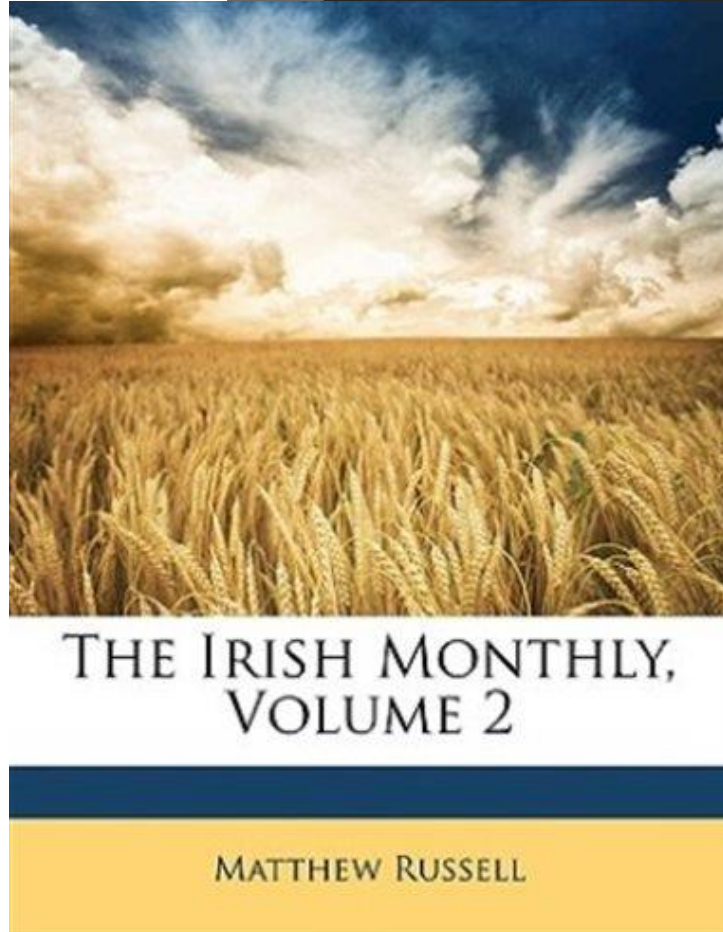
1958

St. Patrick's Day added

<https://www.tuamarchdiocese.org/2009/12/virtual-tour-of-croagh-patrick/>



Early Twentieth Century



‘Taking a stone from the holy mountain, as a most lasting reminder of our pilgrimage, and a few plants also to set in our home garden, we soon found ourselves down once more at Murrisk and its Abbey beside the beautiful bay, with its rippling and golden-yellow sands.’

E. O’L (1910), p. 594



First Station – Leacht Benain





Image from www.catholicsandcultures.org

LEACHT BENAIN

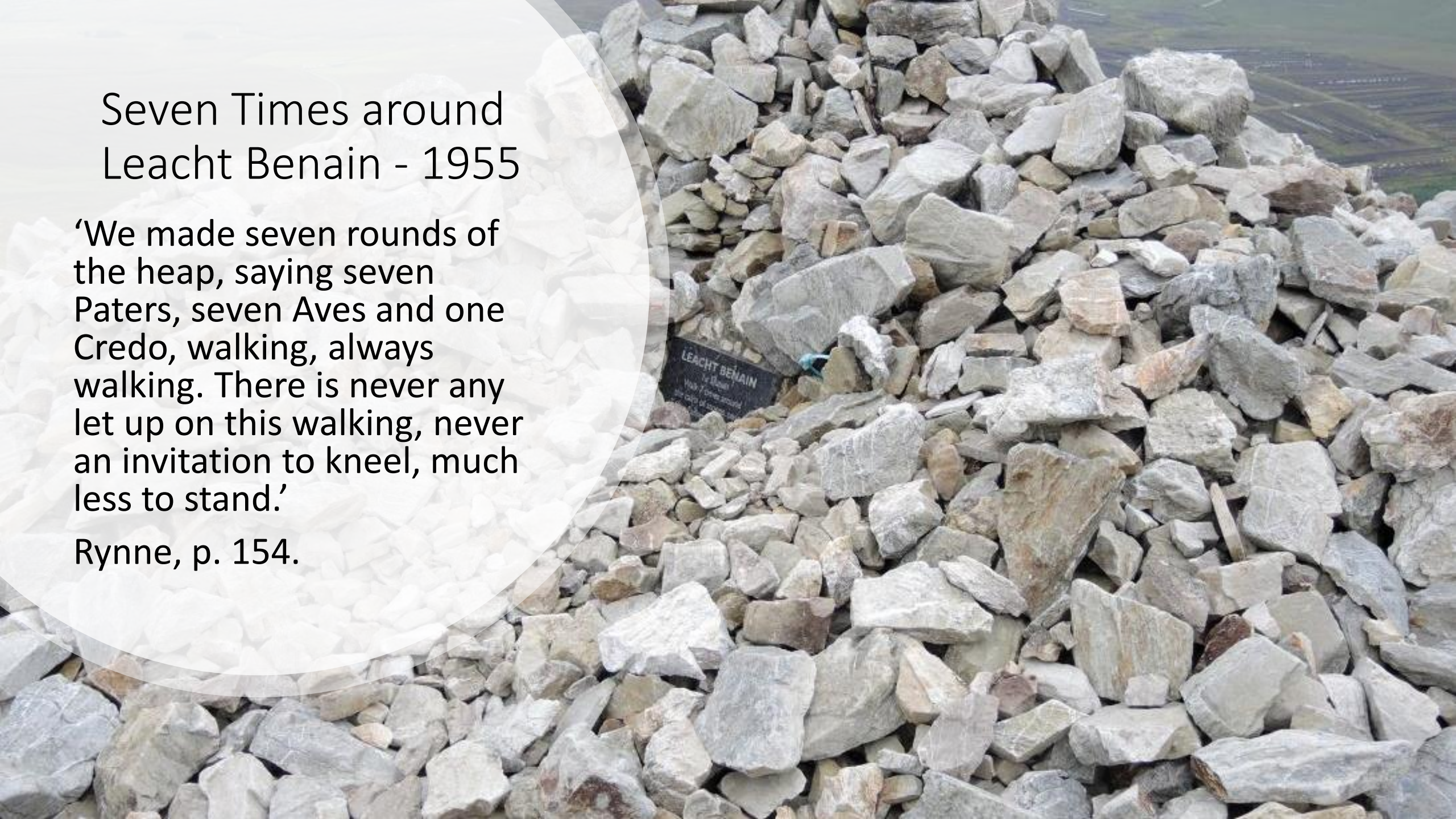
1st Station

Walk 7 times around
the cairn of stones, saying
7 Our Father

Seven Times around Leacht Benain - 1955

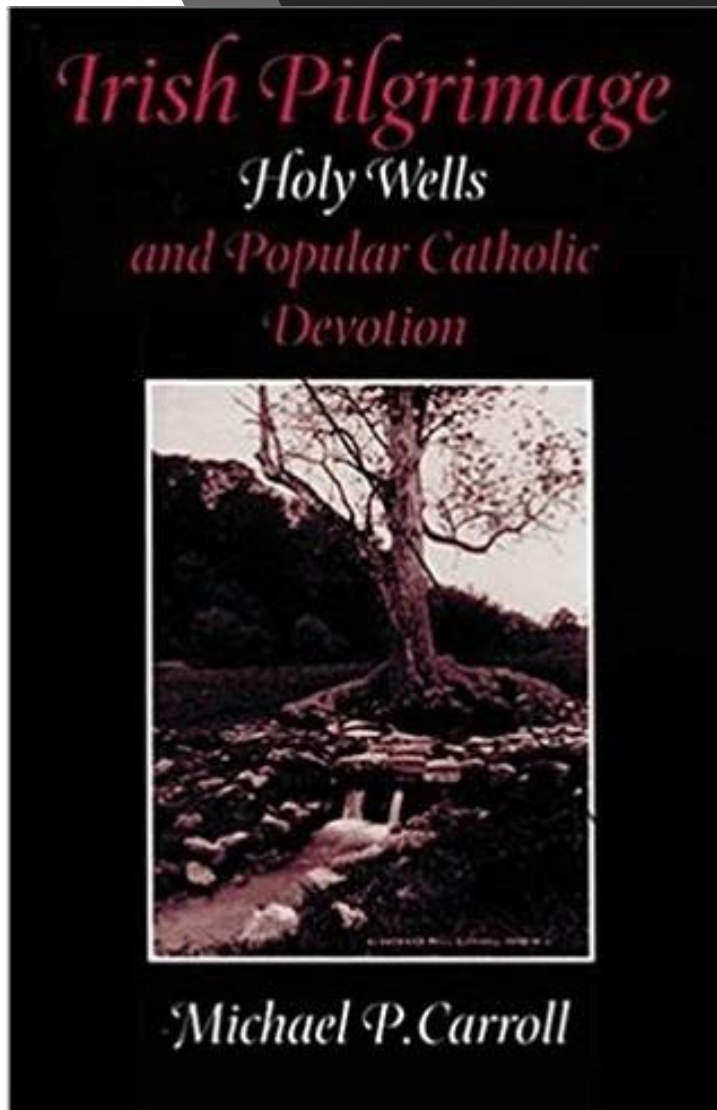
‘We made seven rounds of the heap, saying seven Paters, seven Aves and one Credo, walking, always walking. There is never any let up on this walking, never an invitation to kneel, much less to stand.’

Rynne, p. 154.



Irish Pilgrim Rituals

- Rounding Rituals
 - Circling a saint's 'bed' a specified number of times
 - Three, seven, fifteen
 - Often barefoot or on their knees
 - Recites prayers
 - A post-Reformation invented tradition
- Leaves a personal object behind
 - The sin or the malady that has been burdening them
 - Michael P. Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage: Holy Wells and Popular Catholic Devotion*, p. 42



1955 - A Sense of Place

‘There is, however, something else - something which strikes with the shock of the totally unexpected. The place is holy. The pilgrim, exhausted in body and exasperated in mind, arrives on the windswept, inhospitable mountain top and is immediately aware of spiritual atmosphere. Moving on sharp stones in a chilling fog, caught up in a pressing crowd (some fervent, some frivolous - all famished) at an hour when most reasonable people are still in bed, the pilgrim has a sense of a holy presence. He experiences a feeling of unworthiness, which is extraordinary considering that worthiness has been purchased by the gruelling climb ; he finds himself filled with emotion and on the brink of tears.’

Rynne, 1955, p. 149



Recent Times

- ‘I know somebody who climbed it three times to guarantee her Leaving Cert (once even in bare feet over that punishing quartzite scree)’
 - Michael Viney, ‘The mountain that's upside-down’, *The Irish Times*, 22nd May 1999

Higher		Ordinary	
GRADE	POINTS	GRADE	
H1	100		
H2	88		
H3	77		
H4	66		
H5	56	O1	
H6	46	O2	
H7	37	O3	
H8	0	O4	
		O5	
		O6	
		O7	
		O8	

April 2018

Forty days and nights of prayer are under way on top of Croagh Patrick. People from all over the country have signed up to climb and do prayer and adoration in 24-hour shifts, for the intention that God will renew Ireland.

Four men, who met through the Legion of Mary and at a rally, felt called to prayer given the situation in Ireland at the moment.

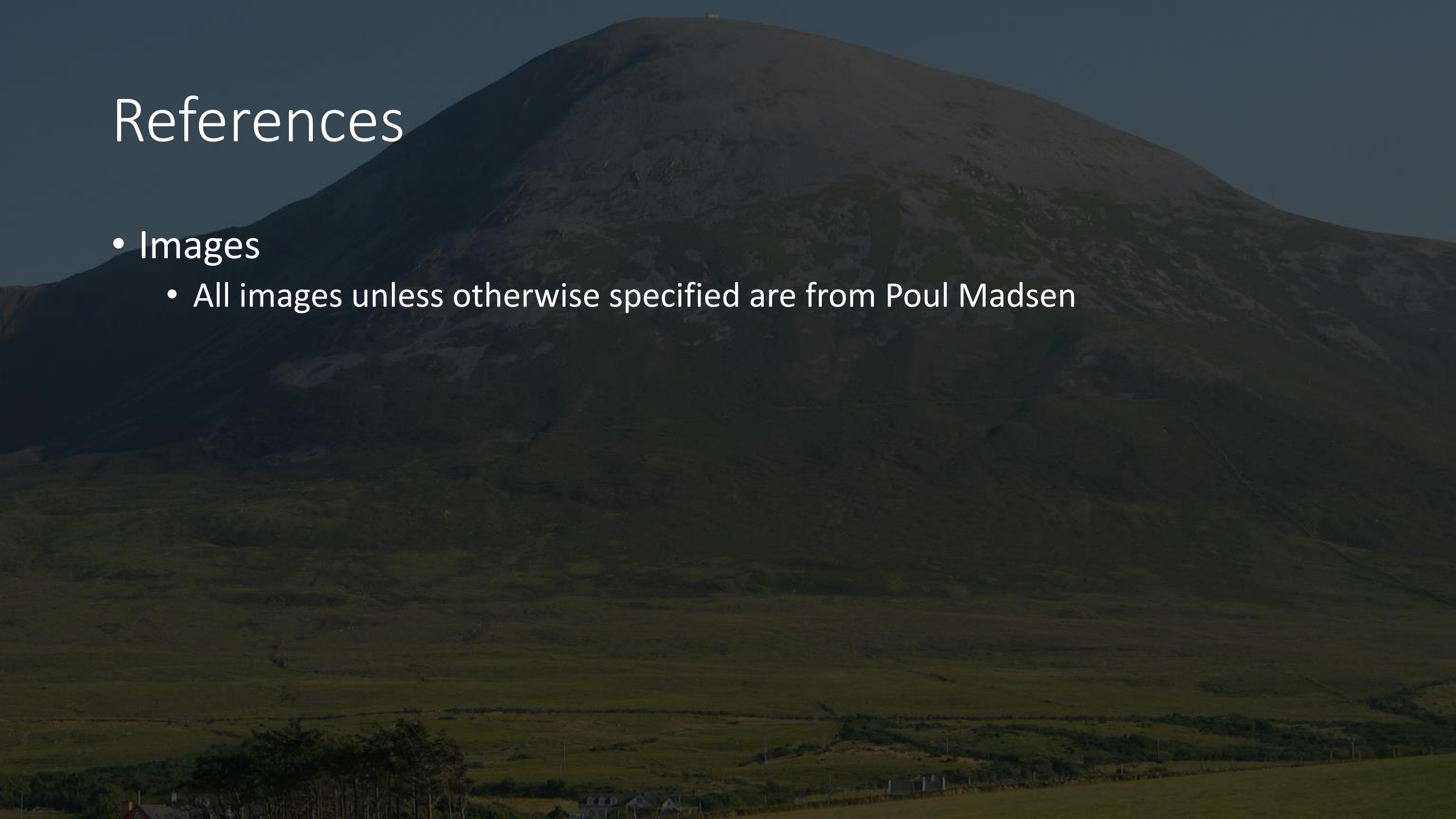
“Jesus himself went for forty days to pray in the desert. As far as we are concerned as Irish Catholics, this is our desert here,” John Carlin said, speaking to catholicireland.net from the top of Croagh Patrick.

They sought a venue and came up with the idea of the mountain where St Patrick himself is said to have spent 40 days and nights in prayer. They have one special prayer intention – the referendum on the Eighth Amendment.

<https://www.catholicireland.net/forty-days-prayer-croagh-patrick-way/>

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- Images
 - All images unless otherwise specified are from Poul Madsen



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