



Colmcille's return to Lough Erne 18 – 26 Aug 2013

The Colmcille Curach

The Colmcille, a 38th ft canvas covered traditional curach, would like to make its first inland water expedition on the Erne Waterway in Aug 2013. Given St. Colmcille's origins in South Donegal and the rich evidence of ancient Christian monuments in the area it is felt that the Erne waterway system is a fitting location to celebrate and enjoy this ancient tradition of rowing from place to place rather than navigating the bogs and forest that covered these lands in the 5th Century.

In June 2103 The Colmcille curach played a central role in the 'Return of Colmcille' Pageant weekend, a major celebration in the City of Culture in Derry/Londonderry. This event was led by Frank Cottell Boyce, who scripted the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games in London.

<http://www.thereturnofcolmcille.com/videos>.

The Causeway Coast Maritime Heritage Group

The CCMHG is a special-interest community organisation, proactive in the revitalisation and interpretation of the North Irish seafaring experience and heritage. It built the Colmcille in 1997 to commemorate St. Colmcille's voyage to Iona. Several documentaries of the curach have been made.

The group aims are to preserve and interpret the maritime heritage of the North Irish coast in imaginative and interactive ways, which enable both community participation and personal development.

CCMHG provides exciting opportunities for the local community, educational groups and visitors to experience firsthand the use of traditional boats. It is actively involved in a range of marine-orientated initiatives, which include:

- Restoration and use of Traditional Boats. The Club has built Drontheims and racing curachs.
- High Profile Community-based Expeditions, both domestic and international
- Training on Navigation Skill, Boat Handling, First Aid etc.
- Environmental Education
- Promotion of cross-community activities through maritime events using the largest Irish curach ever built

The Group have been involved in recreating Historic Celtic Voyages of the Saints and in particular Colmcille/Columba. The 38 foot canvas covered Colmcille Curach has travelled to the Scottish Island of Iona in 1997, 2012 and 2013. It has also circumnavigated Ireland (2003) accompanied by the traditional Basque fishing vessel, Amerikataktik, and travelled to Northern France (2000) and Northern Spain (2001/4).

Overview of Erne Expedition

In June 2103 The Colmcille curach played a central role in the 'Return of Colmcille' Pageant weekend, a major celebration in the City of Culture in Derry/Londonderry.



The Pageant required the Colmcille to make a return trip to Iona where St Colmcille settled. It was during this journey that many of the crew realised that the waterways they travelled were once the highways of the UK. As a result, the CCMHG wished to explore the Irish Waterways once the ancient motorways leading to the developments on Devenish Island and the creation of Enniskillen as a town. This is more relevant given the recent TV programme presented by Nicolas Crane on the origins and development of Enniskillen.

In addition, CCMHG was aware that St Colmcille and others would have travelled the Erne waterway system in large curachs similar to the Colmcille. As a result, the club is taking the curach to the Erne waterway system visiting many of the early Christian sites on White Island, Devenish, Inishmacsaint and other locations (18th – 26th Aug). As part of its journey it hopes to coincide with the Beckett Festival who will hold early morning readings on some of the islands.

St Colmcille

Saint Colmcille, sometimes called Saint Columba, was born at Gartan, Co. Donegal, on December 7th, 521, the son of a chief related to several of the princes then reigning in Ireland and in the west of Scotland.

In 546 Echen Bishop of Clonfada ordained Colmcille a priest. Later that year he founded his first monastery in Derry on a site that was given. Colmcille spent the next seventeen years travelling throughout Ireland preaching and teaching. Colmcille worked with great energy and enthusiasm founding thirty churches and other monasteries in Durrow, Kells, Swords and Drumcliff. Colmcille was a renowned scribe and he trained his monks to become expert scribes. It was Colmcille's monks who many years later produced the Book of Kells.

In 561 accompanied by twelve disciples, he left Ireland for the little island of Hy (Iona) and founded a monastery there in 563. Many people were attracted by the lives of the monks on Iona and all kinds of people came to Colmcille for advice. Colmcille and his monks built a fleet of boats and in these they set out in all directions from Iona. They travelled to the mainland and the nearby Scottish islands and the north of England teaching and preaching, building 56 Churches and schools. For this reason Colmcille is called the Apostle of Scotland. Colmcille had a powerful influence on the lives of the people he served. In Scotland he was given the role of naming the king and the coronation ceremony was held in the Church of Iona. With Colmcille's influence the Scots became a strong and united people. He died on 9th June, 597.