

The Ring of Gullion

A Newsletter for the Ring of Gullion
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and
The Landscape Partnership Scheme



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Digging into our Past at Glassdrummond Castle

In partnership with Queen's University Belfast's Centre for Archeological Fieldwork (CAF), the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership is planning to undertake a new programme of archaeological investigation at the site of the O'Neill's medieval castle at Glassdrumman and there are going to be plenty of opportunities for the local community to be involved "digging into our past"!

A branch of the O'Neills of Tyrone had successfully established themselves in Fews by the mid 1400s, having wrestled the territory away from the Anglo-Irish of Louth and Meath. Glassdrummond Castle was probably built either in the later decades of the 15th century, or by Henry O'Neill and his son Turlough in the mid 16th century. It was built as means of providing the new landowners with a suitable seat from which to rule. The castle continued in use through the mid 1600s when it was burnt down, and by the 18th century the building was in ruins, its last stones used (in the words of Mac Cuarta) to make a "piece of a road".

Our new project now aims to uncover the story of the castle.

Work will commence in April 2016 when the CAF will undertake a geophysical survey on the site where the castle once stood. There will be an Open Evening during the course of the work when members of the public can come along and meet the archaeologists carrying out the survey. The objective of the survey is to identify where the walls of the castle were once positioned, which in turn will allow the archaeologists to identify suitable locations to place their excavation trenches. CAF will present the results of their work to the community during the Open Evening on site.

The archaeological excavation will then take place over 3 weeks in May 2016 and it's at that point that we will want your help with the work! We want all the local schools to sign up and come along, participate in the excavation, and help us uncover the past at this important local monument. We want the grown-ups to help out as well! We want your local community groups, your historical society, your friends, family or anyone who has an interest in the history of our area to come along and lend a hand as volunteers, or just to watch as the archaeologists uncover secrets that have remained a mystery for hundreds of years. Get in touch to book your or your school's place.

When the work is completed all the results will be shared with the local community through our website www.ringofgullion.org.



Bloomin' marvellous! Wild plants defy the cold in the Ring of Gullion New Year Plant Hunt.

The Ring of Gullion team and volunteers, Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland members and John Faulkner from County Armagh Wildlife Society overcame the weather to take part in the first New Year Plant Hunt in the Newry and Ring of Gullion area on 2nd Jan.

The group visited different sites in the area and recorded any plants which were in bloom. Sites included Victoria Lock, Daisy Hill Woods, Derrymore House, Camlough Lake and Quarry. The survey finished in Slieve Gullion Forest Park for a well deserved warm drink.

The team recorded 38 plant species in flower which included commonly recorded plants such as Daisy and Dandelion, which we would expect to be flowering at this time of year.

The New Year Plant Hunt rules state that recording can only take place for a maximum of 3 hours with the clock stopping between sites. Groups across Ireland and the UK took part in their own area. Overall 612 species were recorded this year in Ireland and Britain, this represents about a quarter of the species that occur regularly and is up compared to the 368 species recorded last year.

This is a fun way to learn about wildflowers growing in your area and is part of a NIEA Challenge Fund project. The team are planning to make this annual event. If you are interested in wildflowers and would like to get involved in surveying, please get in touch with the team.

Train to be a Ring of Gullion Ambassador

The Ring of Gullion needs more Ambassadors and now you can get training and lots of support to share your interest in our natural, built and cultural heritage and perhaps increase your business or set up a part-time business.

Even if you would just like to give tours and presentations for your community, your school or other groups, this short Ring of Gullion Ambassador course will help you to build up your knowledge and stories and also give you the techniques, confidence and practical skills to lead a group as well as entertain





Organisations unite for a brighter future for woods and trees

The Woodland Trust is leading 47 organisations from across the UK in a call to celebrate, and secure the future of, our trees and woodland by creating a Charter for Trees, Woods and People.

Our country's woods and trees are facing unprecedented pressures from development, disease and climate change. They risk being neglected, undervalued and forgotten. And the message from the partners is simple: we need to act now before it's too late.

The charter will be rooted in individuals' stories and memories; it will provide guidance and inspiration to shape government policy; and will seek to enlist Charter Champions who will inspire and rally friends and communities to stand up for trees and woodland.

Trees and woods are hugely valuable for our health, happiness and our children's development. Research shows that having trees close to residential areas encourages increased outdoor exercise; yet we have limited access to woodland in Northern Ireland

The Trust is on the lookout for Charter Champions, throughout the country, who will ensure their community is represented in this ambitious project. For more details and to book a place, visit www.treecharter.uk



Pine Marten verse Squirrels - what's the link?

The Ring of Gullion area has been picked as an area for a research project to look at the role of the Pine Marten (*Martes martes*) in the conservation of the native red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). The project is funded by the People's Trust for Endangered Species to investigate this question and provide quantitative data on the subject. To do this a project officer working with Queen's University is investigating seasonal diet variation in pine martens. This project will be running over the course of a year and work will also be carried out in Antrim and the Mournes.

Recently there has been a trend in the literature, catalysed by the media to promote the idea that the return of the pine marten and its increasing distribution may be linked to anecdotal reports of increasing red squirrel numbers.

Although this is a very nice and popular narrative, this link is currently tenuous at best. There are some that think martens create a so called "climate of fear" in invasive grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*), in which fear of the pine martens suppresses reproduction and foraging in grey populations. Others think that due to greys larger weight and terrestrial nature, they are easier to catch and therefore are an easily accessible prey source for martens. There is currently a lack of evidence either way and it is hoped that this project will provide evidence in regards the relationship.



them. The Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership has commissioned specialist trainers, to deliver the courses in south Armagh and participants from this community are particularly welcome.

The Ambassador classes and site visits will run from May to September over a combination of Saturdays and weekdays. This course is open to everyone from young people hoping to improve their CV's, to tourism businesses to retirees and people just wanting to try something different. No previous qualifications or experience is required. On completion you will receive an Accreditation, First Aid Certificate, a Ring of Gullion Ambassador Certificate and have insurance to

lead walks for your community. These can be a first step to further qualifications.

Full details are available on the Ring of Gullion Website. Places will be limited so please register your interest as soon as possible, the course costs £65. Please book by calling into Crossmaglen Community Centre Mon-Fri 9-5 and ask for anyone in the Ring of Gullion team.

Knowing more about our heritage and passing on that knowledge is also of vital importance to communities and our sense of place. This course will help you to explore your heritage, build up a collection of stories and share them with your own community as well as visitors.



Youth Rangers

Calling all 14 to 17 year olds!. Do you have an interest in the environment? Would you like to give something back to the local area and have fun doing it? Then we have the programme for you.

Our exciting two-week volunteer Youth Rangers programme will be running from 18th July to 29th July (excluding the weekend). It is a fantastic opportunity for you to get out and explore the Ring of Gullion during your summer holidays. We use the Slieve Gullion Forest Park as a central drop-off and collection point, but each day will take you to a different part of the Ring of Gullion. You will have the opportunity to learn first aid, zombie apocalypse survival skills, canoeing, practical conservation skills and much more. All we ask from you in return is your enthusiasm and a willingness to participate in the programme.

The programme is free; however we ask successful applicants for a £50 refundable deposit to secure a place. Deposit will be returned as long as you attend eight out of the ten days. For full details and an application pack, please visit: www.ringofgullion.org.

The closing date for applications is Tuesday 31st May 2016.

Get involved in conservation

If you would like to make a difference, improve your health & wellbeing, learn new skills and enhance your CV, get back into work, make friends and boost your confidence become a Ring of Gullion Conservation Volunteer – details on our website, www.RingOfGullion.org.

Slieve Gullion scoops top award

Slieve Gullion Forest Park has been awarded the 'Best Outdoor Recreation for Families' Award.

The extremely popular 'Families First Awards' took place in the Armagh City Hotel and gave parents their say in recognising the products, people and brands their families love across the Island of Ireland.

Nestled in the Ring of Gullion, the Slieve Gullion Forest Park has something to offer for all the family and is open 7 days a week.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Chairperson, Councillor Micky Ruane said, "I am delighted that Slieve Gullion Forest Park won this prestigious award.

"The park offers the unmissable opportunity to experience tranquil woodland trails and fairy walks as well as an action packed Adventure Park, duck pond and walled garden.

He added, "The park also boasts stunning views across the Ring of Gullion, Mourne Mountains, Cooley Peninsula and Armagh Drumlins."

This is yet another incredible award to add to Slieve Gullion Forest Park's burgeoning trophy cabinet, along with awards such as the Green Flag in 2014, the Green Apple Environmental Award and NITB's Best Green Partner Initiative Award.

Pictured: Chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Councillor Mickey Ruane with Michelle Boyle, Tourism Officer and Therese Hamil, Ring of Gullion Officer.



Please note the Slieve Gullion Park and Ride will be operational over Easter; 31st March to 10th April, every weekend until 26th June and then daily until September. The park and ride is clearly signed from Slieve Gullion Courtyard and from Junction 20 on the motorway. Buses will leave Jonesborough, Jade Centre Carpark park from 10am and last bus will leave Slieve Gullion at 6pm. Over busy periods it is advisable to go to Junction 20 and exit on the Motorway and follow the signs to Slieve Gullion Park and Ride. Park and Ride will cost £3 per car.

Spring wildlife in the Ring of Gullion

As the season changes, the world around us wakes up from its cold, dark sleep. Plants start growing, birds start singing and insects begin to emerge. Look out for the early signs of spring in Gullion this year. The first white snowdrops and wood anemone are in flower, but the colour of spring is really yellow with early queen bumblebees focusing on the yellow of dandelions, crocus and the catkins of willow and hazel, putting in visits to 6000 flowers a day in order to brood her eggs. Other animals are also busy breeding, look out for masses of jellylike frogspawn at the Slieve Gullion courtyard pond and why not help our breeding birds by putting out left over wool remnants, animal fur or even fluff from the tumble drier to help them build their nests. If you are interested in finding out more about our local wildlife why not come along to some of our great events, such as our bumblebee training or wildlife gardening workshop. For a full list of our events see www.ringofgullion.org/events.



Tree-mendous tree give-away greens South Armagh

Over 14km of hedgerows and 11,000 saplings were given away at Slieve Gullion in February, to farmers, householders and community groups. The crisp winter's day saw the culmination of the Gullion's Green Woodland Scheme, which is being run by Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership together with the Million Trees in a Day project and the Woodland Trust. More than 20 volunteers helped to organise the mass tree give-away and loaded trees into everything from bicycle carriers to tractors.

Over 120 different planting projects were supported ranging in size from people planting 2 or 3 trees in their back garden to landowners planting thousands of hedge-trees to boost their field boundaries.

Planting advice was given to help people establish their tree saplings and give them the best start in life. A training course is also being organised in the autumn, to train people in how to manage their hedgerows including hedge-laying and coppicing skills.

The Ring of Gullion is one of the least wooded landscapes in Europe, but the Landscape Partnership is aiming to change that and is hoping to organise another tree give away next winter. Anyone who missed the deadline this year should register on our website for our regular updates.



'StreamScapes Gullion' Project Launched

The Ring of Gullion team and local schools launched the 'StreamScapes Gullion' Project in February, which was supported by NIEA's Challenge Fund.

The project raised awareness of the streams and rivers flowing from Slieve Gullion, with the participating students engaging in related 'Eco-Art' projects to share with the wider community. The schools involved were St Paul's High School, St Mary's, Mullaghbawn, Dromintee and St. Joseph's Meigh Primary Schools.

The 'StreamScapes' initiative works with schools, farming organisations, and the local community and voluntary groups to raise awareness of aquatic and biodiversity issues and to empower local communities to manage their own local catchments.

Through the project, students learnt about the wealth of biodiversity that is supported by high quality waters and took field trips to see these wonders along local streams. Students also learnt about the role that clean rivers play in supporting viable and sustainable rural communities.

A dedicated booklet, 'StreamScapesGullion', was distributed to all participating schools and is available through the local communities.

Unusual visitor spotted in South Armagh

A racoon type creature which was recently spotted in South Armagh is believed to be an East Asian Racoon Dog. The animal is highly invasive and could be devastating to local wildlife. Members of the public are asked to be vigilant and report any sightings of the Racoon Dog to the Ring of Gullion AONB by emailing info@ringofgullion.org. If you would like to get involved in tackling invasive species with our conservation volunteers, email volunteer@ringofgullion.org



Student work experience

In January we were pleased to offer a local student, Moragine McParland, the chance to complete her work experience with us. We would like to thank Moragine for her hard work. Here is how she got on:



“The time I have spent with the Ring of Gullion has been one of the most worthwhile experiences of my life. The staff never stop smiling and you will not meet warmer and more welcoming people, who are more than happy to answer your questions. While working with the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership scheme I was provided with the opportunity to improve and learn a host of new skills such as journalistic skills, ICT skills, research skills, problem solving and so many more! I took part in a variety of activities, ranging from updating the website to fieldwork. I discovered a lot about the Ring of Gullion and the local environment such as; the species that live there, the problems they face, how the Ring of Gullion team plan to help native species survive and how they plan to combat the problems threatening our wildlife. I would definitely encourage others to become involved with the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership as the participation of volunteers and the local community are crucial and it is a once in a lifetime opportunity and a fantastic and fun experience that I will never forget.”

If you would like to get involved with the Ring of Gullion team please email volunteer@ringofgullion.org

Townlands Across Traditions

The “Know your Townlands” project is now in full swing, with the first stones being put up along the Newry to Crossmaglen road soon. We will be hosting Townlands across Traditions at 7.30pm on 18th March in Creggan Church, an evening event which will feature music and dance from the Traditional Arts Partnership and fascinating talks by historians Brian Turner and Una Walsh.

Brian will be discussing successful projects he’s been involved in across Ulster, of local communities reclaiming the unique identity of their townlands. He will also look at the psychological significance involved in the ease with which people, (even those with strong cultural interests), were persuaded to be known by a number and road name, rather than preserve one of the most unifying markers of cultural identity in Ulster (and indeed the whole of Ireland). Una Walsh, will also speak about our proposals to mark and reclaim our townland heritage in the Ring of Gullion.

The education outreach linked to our townlands is also well underway, a new education team is in place and is creating an activity booklet for use in primary schools that will also provide a lovely keepsake for homes and will link into our cross generational work. We will be contacting all the primary schools in the area over the next month and will hopefully visit all primary 7 classes before the summer holidays to provide a workshop on their local townlands. The LPS will also present a beautiful townland map for schools to display. The Partnership plans to develop a recorded sound archive of different local accents of the P7’s which will be accessible from our website’s interactive map. The secondary schools will also get a bite of the cherry with secondary workshops starting in September.



Handcrafts and Arts online shop launched – www.ROGHAshop.com

Nearly one year on from the launch of the Ring of Gullion’s new website, visitor numbers have grown, new features have been added, and the website has won an award. Now you can enjoy an exciting new addition from our partners at

ROGHA. ROGHA have launched their new online shop www.ROGHAshop.com in partnership with the Ring of Gullion. ROGHA is a community of Artists from South Armagh inspired by the beauty and unique heritage, majesty and myths of the Ring of Gullion, delivering local hand made Irish Art and Craft.

The website revamps are part of The Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership, a Heritage Lottery Fund programme to conserve and enhance some of the region’s most treasured landscapes. Newry, Mourne and Down District Council are managing the £1.4 million programme. The scheme aims to engage people with the Ring of Gullion Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and surrounding landscape.

Wibble Web Design & Development worked closely, over a number of months, with ROGHA and the Ring of Gullion team to create a modern, aesthetically pleasing and mobile friendly shop that features inspired artistic creations and highly skilled traditional crafts that conveys the beauty and richness of our shared culture and landscape.



Opportunities for schools

Townlands across traditions

Are you a teacher or the parent of a child in P7? Would you like a free interactive workshop delivered for your school focussing on the history of local townlands in the area of the school, if so get in touch and we will be able to organise a visit. All schools will also be given a unique map featuring the townlands of Gullion.

Swimming around

Would your school like to get involved with the 'Fish in the Classroom' or 'Mayfly in the Classroom' projects?

Flying around

This time of year the birds are busy building their nests, and swifts are starting to arrive. We have a unique and exciting opportunity for your school or community group; we have Swift boxes to give away (and we'll even install them). Get in touch if you would like one for your school or community group.

Re-wilding schools

Would you like to have more biodiversity around your school? Get in touch with the Ring of Gullion team, and they can help you draw up plans, fill out funding applications and bring more wildlife to your school grounds.

Digging into our past

If your class would like to have a go at being an archaeologist get in touch to book your slot. The 3 week dig will begin 9th May.

Get in touch at manager@ringofgullion.org to get involved or just to find out more information about the Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Caoilfionn Murphy O'Hanlon Chairperson of ROGHA said, "We want the Ring of Gullion to be as famous for the richness and diversity of its artisans as it is for its unique history, geology and biodiversity; not just an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty but equally an Area of Outstanding Inherent and Natural Creativity! Come to a place you will not forget and take home a piece of art that will keep your memories of your stay alive forever."

Paudie Fearon, owner of Wibble Web Design & Development said, "We are extremely proud of this project. As a relatively small, local business working on such a large website was of huge importance to us. There has been a huge increase in visitors to the site since the re-launch and this will continue as Wibble supports and develops the site along with the Ring of Gullion team."

Who Do You Think You Are?

The Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership, with Pauline Loughran, ran two workshops in February for sixteen enthusiastic participants to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in how to trace family trees and find out who our ancestors are. Participants examined a Crossmaglen family from the 1790's and used this to see how to join the dots with any family

Pauline Loughran said, "Everyone knows more than they think they know! And what we don't know can be 'teased out'."

"A typical example would be knowing your grandfather's/grandmother's name but that's as far back as you can go. Well that's a great starting place. More difficult sometimes can be 'where is my grandfather buried?' A more difficult question but in most cases can be resolved."

During the training Pauline guided the participants through the 1901 and 1911 census, graveyard inscriptions, and what they tell us. Pauline had the inscriptions for Creggan, Cullyhanna, Mullaghbawn, Faughart (old graveyard) and part of Dundalk for participants to peruse.

Everyone was able to produce a family tree of three generations of their families complete with dates. Griffith's Valuation, 1848-1864 consists of all occupiers of land and houses in Ireland during this period with maps showing their exact location, participants examined this and also the Householders Index to find out where their particular family name was found. Every time a house or farm changed hands, or was renovated it was noted and is available up until 1930.

Last year saw many exciting developments in family history. GRONI, the General Register Office of Northern Ireland for the first time launched a service whereby, from your own home you can order up a birth, marriage or death certificate for a small sum. Also available now are all the RC parish registers for Ireland. For more information check out the Ring of Gullion website and head for 'Living History' and 'Discover your ancestors'.



What's on!

When	What	Where
Tuesday 1st March – Tuesday 31st May	Applications for Youth Ranger Programme	
Tuesday 31st March 10.30am	Ring of Gullion Easter Coach –Tour	Newry and Mourne Museum, Bagenal's Castle
Saturday 2nd April 11am – 3pm	Col Graveyard Restoration	Jonesborough
Saturday 2nd April 11.00am – 3.30pm	Ring of Gullion Easter Walking Tour	Meet at Ti Chulainn, Newry
Tuesday 5th April 7.00pm – 9.00pm	First Ring of Gullion Outdoor Recreation Forum Meeting	The Pastoral Centre Jonesborough
Saturday 9th April 10am–1pm	Bumblebee Training	The Pastoral Centre Jonesborough
Saturday 9th April 2pm – 4pm	Wildlife Gardening	The Pastoral Centre Jonesborough
Tuesday 12th April 7pm–9pm	Nitrates Workshop	Crossmaglen Community Centre
Saturday 16th April 10.00am–4.30pm	Riverfly Monitoring Workshop	Crossmaglen Community Centre
Saturday 16th April 10am – 4pm	Path Maintenance	Slieve Gullion
Tuesday 19th April	Rushes Workshop	TBC
Wednesday 27th April	O'Neill's Castle Geo-Phys Results Site 'Walk N Talk'	Glasdrumman Lake
Saturday 7th May 5am–7am	Dawn Chorus Walk	Creggan Poets Trail, Creggan Church
Saturday 14th May 11am – 3pm	Col Graveyard Restoration	Jonesborough
Saturday 14th May – Monday 23rd May	O'Neill's Castle Archaeological Dig	Glasdrumman Lake
Tuesday 24th May	O'Neill's Castle Dig Results Site 'Walk N Talk'	Glasdrumman Lake
Friday 10th June	Creatures of the Night Picnic	TBC
Saturday 11th June 10am – 4pm	Path Maintenance	Slieve Gullion
Saturday 25th June 11am – 3pm	Col Graveyard Restoration	Jonesborough
Saturday 23rd July	Moth Night	TBC
Saturday 23rd July 10am–4pm	Path Maintenance	Slieve Gullion
Saturday 30th July 10.30am – 4.30pm	Ring of Gullion Heritage Coach Tour	Newry and Mourne Museum, Bagenal's Castle
August	Lúnasa Festival	www.ringofgullion.org

For even more events, to book and for more information check www.ringofgullion.org

News in Brief

1. The official bird breeding season has now started so it is illegal to cut or trim your hedges from now until the end of August.
2. Camlough Village trail and lots of other interpretation panels are being designed over the summer ready for installation in the new school year.
3. Swift boxes are being installed in 10 schools this month. Keep an eye out for these aerial acrobats about the Ring of Gullion.
4. Volunteers finished the major vegetation clearance in Jonesborough Church of Ireland graveyard; it's now completely passable, with care. We'll be continuing to tidy and improve it over the summer.
5. The Bessbrook tram nears completion: New artwork, 'Bessbrook Shadows', by local Artist Tracey McVerry inspired by old photographs to be created this month, and installed in the tram when complete.
6. Invasive Species Project goes from strength to strength. A new placement student from Camlough has been appointed to continue the work on tackling the problem of invasive species.
7. Creative Writing Classes are well underway. There will be stories from these classes published in the summer. Sign up for our monthly email to read them first!
8. Wildflower book and butterfly leaflet due to be published this spring! Watch out on social media to get the first glance at these fab resources.
9. Signage in south Armagh – a company has been appointed to survey the tourism signage in south Armagh and provide recommendations. Get in touch if you know any gaps in tourism signage.
10. If you haven't yet completed the project evaluation there is still time to do so. Head to our website, click 'About Us' and then click 'Landscape Partnership Evaluation'. Great prizes to be won!

