



# North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

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YouTube



## CROAGH PATRICK *and the phenomenon of the* ROLLING SUN

Cover image:  
The rolling sun down the slope of Croagh Patrick  
*(image from con-telegraph.ie)*

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Tel: 096 31809 [www.northmayogenealogy.com](http://www.northmayogenealogy.com) Email: [northmayo@gmail.com](mailto:northmayo@gmail.com) Email: [nmhmanager@gmail.com](mailto:nmhmanager@gmail.com)

# THE ROLLING SUN

The townland of Boheh lies six kilometres southwest of Westport, along the road to Leenaun. In this townland is an ancient monument known traditionally as St. Patrick's Chair.

The 1838 Ordnance Survey map of the townland not only marks this rock as 'St. Patrick's Chair and Kneemark' but also shows that the ancient 'Togher Patrick', a pilgrimage route to Croagh Patrick, passed by the site. Some believe that this route originated at Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon. The reference to St. Patrick's knee marks are the clue to the rock's original, or rather, older, claim to fame: the prehistoric rock art carvings which cover the surface of this rock.

The rock is a natural outcrop, measuring 5.2 by 4.8 metres, and more than 2 metres in height, and is decorated on all surfaces with 'cup and ring' motif carvings. Most of these rings are circular, but some touch each other, or overlap. There are also 'keyhole' and cross motifs, and an inscribed cross on the north side which is considered to date to the days of the Penal Laws.

The prehistoric carvings are considered to be one of the best decorated rock art stones in Ireland or Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The Boheh Stone has long attracted attention from visitors, but in the early 1990s, local historian and archaeologist, the late Gerry Bracken, observed a phenomenon which changed the understanding, not only of the Boheh Stone itself, but of the importance of Croagh Patrick in prehistoric times.

Bracken was convinced that there was a solar alignment between the Boheh Stone and Croagh Patrick, on either the summer or winter solstice.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1991, he visited the site to continue his enquiries, and cycling home after what he considered a failed mission, took a glance back over his shoulder.

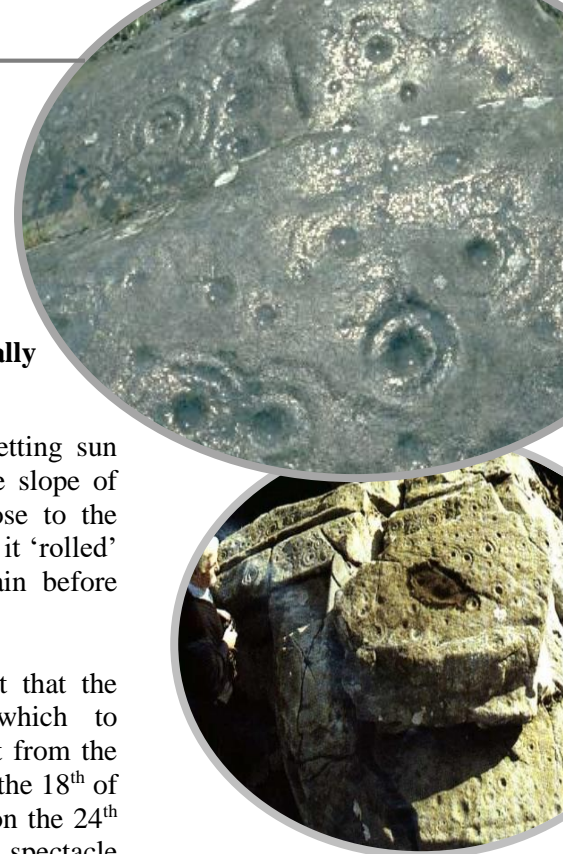
The orb of the setting sun was sitting on the slope of the mountain, close to the summit. As it set, it 'rolled' down the mountain before disappearing.<sup>2</sup>

Gerry worked out that the exact date at which to observe this event from the Boheh Stone was the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, and again on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August.<sup>3</sup> 'The spectacle would have resembled a golden disc rolling down one side of a perfect triangle before disappearing into darkness.'<sup>4</sup>

Taken with the winter solstice, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, the two dates for the 'rolling sun' divide the year into three nearly equal parts. A solar alignment was subsequently observed between a notch on the eastern shoulder of Croagh Patrick and the row of standing stone in the townland of Killadangan, 5 kilometres north west of the Boheh Stone.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, at about 1.40pm, the sun 'sits' into this notch and aligns with the row of stones.

The Boheh Stone is now part of the renowned Clew Bay Archaeological trail, and the 'rolling sun' attracts a crowd of sun watchers every April 18<sup>th</sup> and August 24<sup>th</sup>.



*The Boheh stone with prehistoric rock art visible (images from the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail Facebook page and Carrowkeel.com)*

## REFERENCES:

<sup>1</sup>Morahan, L. 2001. *Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo, Landscape, Archaeology & People*. Croagh Patrick Archaeological Committee, Westport. p.28

<sup>2</sup>Bracken, G. G. & Wayman, P.A., 1992. A Neolithic or Bronze Age Alignment for Croagh Patrick. *Cathair na Mart, the Journal of the Westport Historical Society*. no.12, p.1-13

<sup>3</sup>The Mayo News, the 25-Ju-2001, p.17

<sup>4</sup>Morahan, L. 2001. *Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo, Landscape, Archaeology & People*. Croagh Patrick Archaeological Committee, Westport. p.29