

APPENDIX C

Monuments at Lough Gur, Co. Limerick

Lough Gur lies some twelve miles south-east of Limerick city. The principal approach to the lake and to the monuments is by the Limerick-Kilmallock road, turning off along a by-road to the left at Holycross. From Dublin the most direct approach is by way of Cashel, Tipperary and Emly, but after Emly there is a network of by-roads to be negotiated. The lake lies on the edge of the dairying country of the Limerick plain. It is surrounded by low scarped hills which break through the glacial drift and provide on their upper slopes a light soil lying directly on the limestone. On the lower slopes there is a sub-soil of glacial till. The hills are grass-covered to their summits and provide grazing for the bullocks and dairy cattle which are the staple of the economy of the district. Sheep are rarely grazed in this region.

The lake itself is at present horseshoe-shaped, curving around the rugged and steep hill of Knockadoon which now forms a long peninsula. Formerly the water almost completely ringed this hill, but drainage work of the mid-19th century has considerably lowered the water-level. An island (Garrett Island) has for many years been a bird sanctuary, and birds in great variety breed in the vicinity. There is some account of the district in Praeger, *The Way that I went*, and a short note on its unusual flora in Praeger, *Natural History of Ireland*, p. 126. Pike and other coarse fish are caught in the lake, which is much frequented for this purpose by visitors from the surrounding districts and from Limerick city.

There is an interesting account of the social life of the district in O'Brien, *The Farm by Lough Gur*. Two short papers on traditional house-types in the region have been published in *The North Munster Antiquarian Journal*.

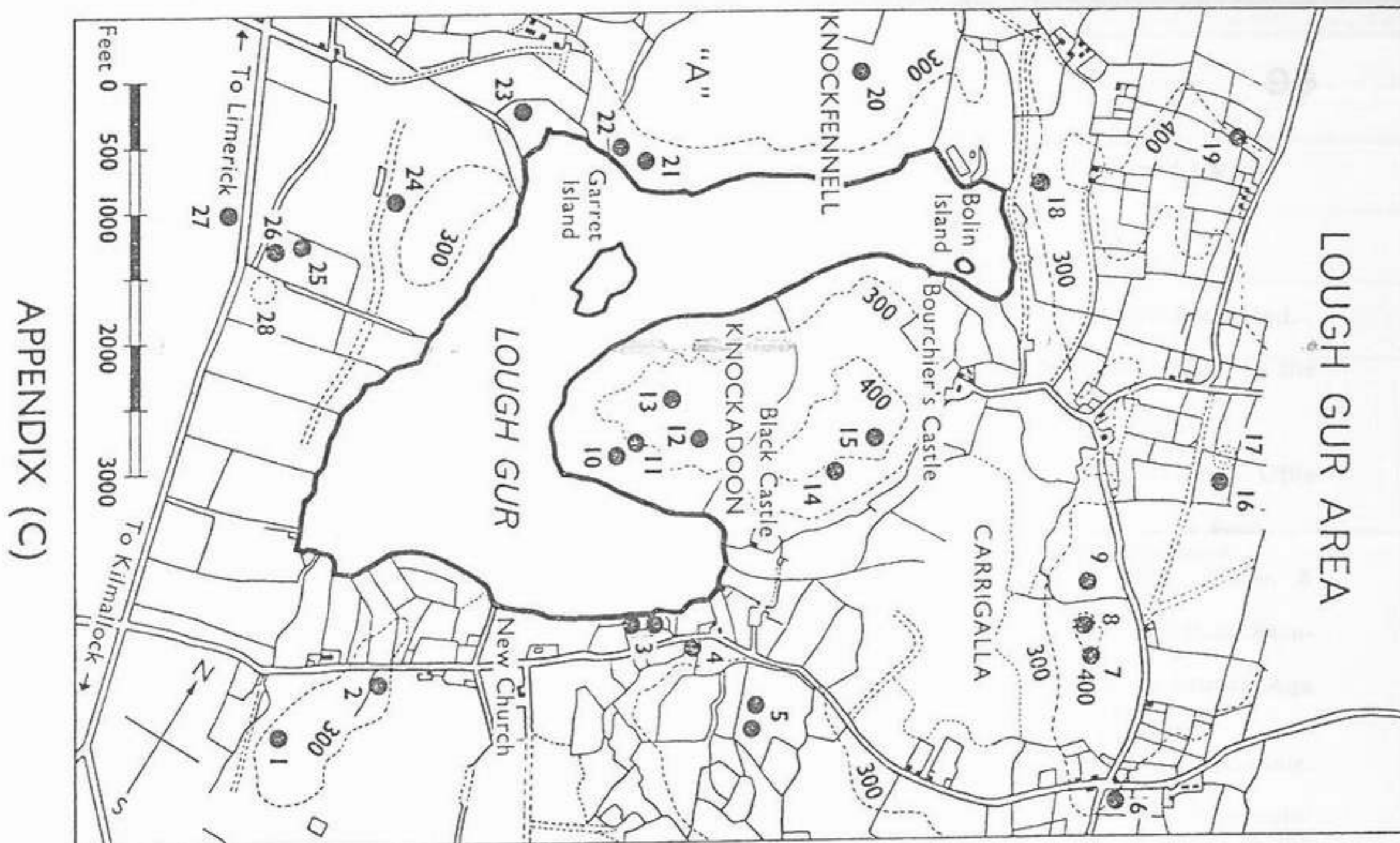
When the lake was drained in the 19th century a number of antiquities came to light, and the interest of antiquaries was attracted. There were some remarkable field antiquities to be seen in the neighbourhood and Windle, the first holder of the Chair of Archaeology in Cork, came to make a survey of the visible monuments. A more recent and more detailed survey was made by Professor O'Kelly, also of Cork, and was published in NMAJ.

The late Professor Ó Ríordáin of University College, Dublin, conducted excavations of various sites at or near Lough Gur over a period of twenty years ending in 1954, and these excavations have produced much information of importance for the prehistory of Ireland. Of this information the most important has related to the Neolithic occupation of the lake shores. In the early thirties it was still doubtful if the Neolithic phase of culture had occurred in Ireland at all. The excavation of megalithic tombs in the northern half of Ireland dispelled this doubt. These, however, are sepulchral monuments, and the main body of information about the life of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age inhabitants of Ireland has come from Lough Gur. Among the most important sites in this respect were site 10, which produced a very great quantity of Neolithic pottery, and site 11, where a rectangular Neolithic house was excavated. A number of double-walled enclosures,

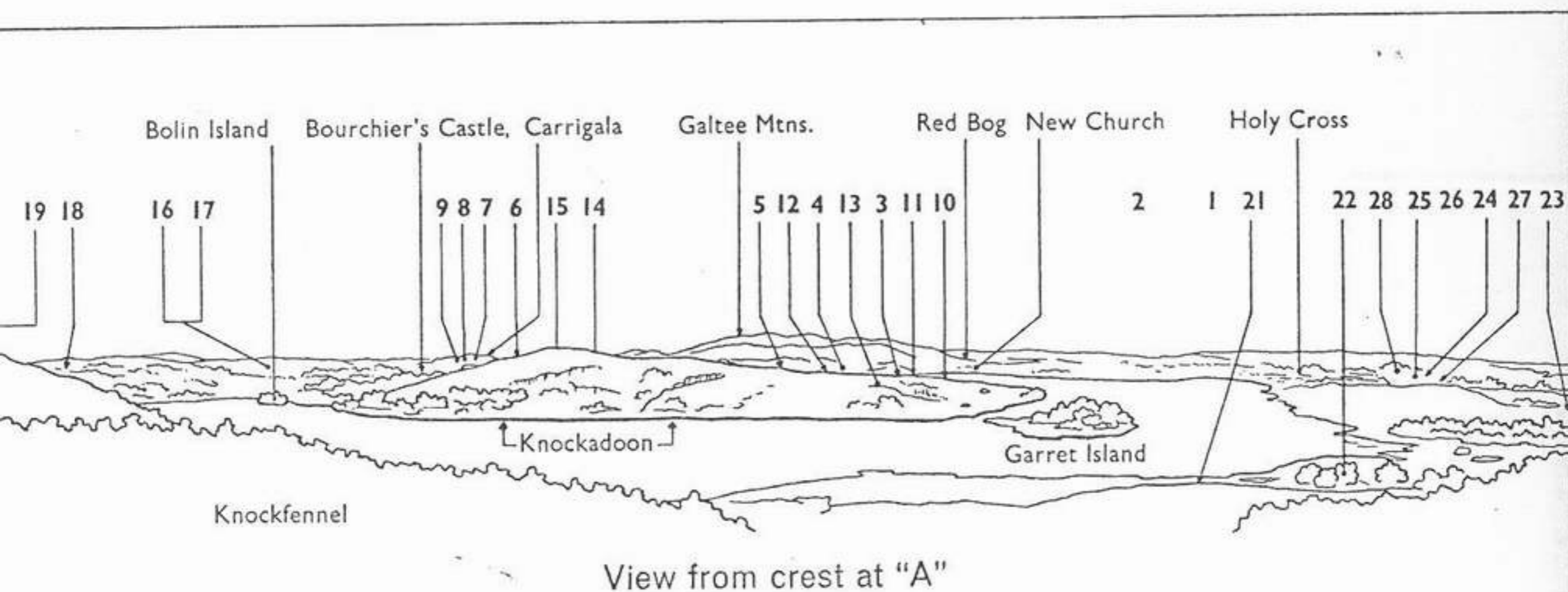
formerly thought to be Stone Circles, were shown to be enclosed dwelling-sites, while inhumed Neolithic burials were also excavated. The occurrence of Beaker pottery in the later levels of most of the dwelling sites, and the occasional occurrence of metal in the upper layers, showed that at Lough Gur the Neolithic was succeeded by the Early Bronze Age without sharp cultural break.

Sites of the Beaker period which are of considerable archaeological interest include the Wedge-shaped megalithic tomb, 4, and the great Stone Circle, 28 (not yet in State care), at Grange.

The Lough Gur group of monuments, which is compact and well defined, includes remains of much later periods; so that the visitor can, in the course of an afternoon's visit, enjoy the pleasant pastoral scenery of the lake and its hills and study to the best advantage the evidences of human occupation, continuous in the district since the third millennium BC.



APPENDIX (C)



Panoramic view of Lough Gur, Co. Limerick
showing locations of monuments

The monuments as shown on the maps on pp. 108 and 109 are listed below.

- 1 Cairn.
- 2 Partly destroyed megalithic tomb—'*Leaba na Muice*'.
- 3 Stone Circles (?). Doubtful site.
- 4 Wedge-shaped megalithic tomb. Early Bronze Age. Excavated.
- 5 Standing Stones (?). Doubtful site.
- 6 A large slab-like Standing Stone, at Lough Gur cross, by the roadside.
- 7 'Carraig Aille 2'. Stone Fort. Viking Period. Excavated.
- 8 'Carraig Aille 1'. Stone Fort. Viking Period. Excavated.
- 9 Hut sites on Carraig Aille. Viking Period. Excavated. Little remains to be seen.
- 10 Habitation site. Neolithic. Excavated. No remains to be seen.
- 11 Foundations of a rectangular Neolithic house. Excavated.
- 12 A large double-walled enclosure with a Standing Stone. A Neolithic cemetery. Excavated.
- 13 A large double-walled habitation-enclosure. Neolithic. Excavated.
- 14 An enclosure of stones against a rock-face. Early Bronze Age habitation site. Excavated. Approach and access difficult.
- 15 Remains of a hilltop cairn, with traces of a kerb.
- 16 Flat-topped cairn, retained by a kerb; it contained urn burials. Bronze Age. Excavated.
- 17 A large double Stone Circle, the outer ring set against an outer retaining bank. Excavated. No dating evidence (similar to the Early Bronze Age circle at Grange).
- 18 'The Spectacles'. Hut-sites, marked by stone foundations, and an accompanying field-system. Early Christian Period. Excavated.
- 19 A Standing Stone.
- 20 Small hilltop cairn. Excavated.
- 21 Platform type ring-fort. Early Christian Period. Excavated.
- 22 Incomplete small Stone Circle.
- 23 'Crock Island'. A small crannog, now connected to the shore by marshy ground.
- 24 A large Standing Stone.
25. A small Stone Circle.
- 26 A small segment, all that remains of a large Stone Circle.
- 27 Remains of a destroyed megalithic tomb.
- 28 A very large and impressive Stone Circle, with the stones set against a high outer bank. A ritual site of the Early Bronze Age. Excavated. (Not yet in State care).

Other monuments, marked on the map but not in State care, include a second crannog (Bolin Island), a fine well-preserved Tower House of c AD 1500 (Bourchier's Castle), remains of a 13th century castle with parts of the keep and curtain wall (the Black Castle), the site of another castle (Desmond Castle) on Garrett Island, and a ruined 17th century church (New Church), as well as further enclosures and habitation sites on Knockadoon.