

Siobhan Hehir, Caherconlish, Evelyn Downey, Caherconlish, and Katherine O'Dea, Cloverfield, at Lough Gur (LL)

# Treasure hunt through prehistoric Ireland

CONTINUING our summer series of Out and About in Limerick, NORMA PRENDIVILLE visits Lough Gur

A SENSE of adventure is your best companion when you go to visit Lough Gur, recognised as one of the most important archaeological centres in the country.

Granted, there is ease in plenty to be savoured in a quick visit. And it's actually worth the trip alone, simply to sit on the rocks and look at the lake where Gearoid Iarla, the fourth Earl of Desmond, is reputed to lie buried and from where, it is said, he rises every seven years to ride across the water on his horse. If peace and serenity, away from the hurly-burly of urban life, are what you crave, you won't go away disappointed.

But if you really want to get the best from it, heed the scouts' warning and be prepared. Lough Gur is not your usual, safe, five-minute in and out, "I've now done Stone Age Ireland" job. To really appreciate it, you need a bit of time and you need a certain scouting spirit. With dozens of historic sites spread out over a wide area, the whole thing resembles nothing so much as a giant, neolithic treasure hunt.

At the Visitors' Centre proper, you get your map and if you pop into the museum you get your clues. There, in brief, you will be introduced to the 5,000 years of history that lie all around you. And there are replicas there of artefacts and treasures from practically every age of human existence in the area. But after that, you are very much on your own.

Of course, all along the way, there are diagrams and drawings to explain and illustrate the sites, bringing a seemingly senseless heap of stones to life, making you imagine how it was way back then. But how adventurous you want to be after that is your own affair.

Some of the sites are more accessible than others. It's easy to get to the "Spectacles" for example, a little patch of tiny kitchen gardens, with the remains of houses and hearthstones from a thousand years ago. And standing there, on the terrace above the lake, it's not difficult to see with the eyes of the men, women and children who lived and laboured there, who feared families and



Aisling Enright, left, Old Pallas, and Kathleen Hayes, Pallasgreen, at Lough Gur. (LL)

grew food and feared the invaders.

Likewise, it is easy to sit back and wonder at the mindframe of those who once inhabited Boin Island, a genuine crannog site dating from sometime between 500 and 1000 AD. Tall trees grow on it now, where once fragile stick fences and a tiny strip of water were the only protection against the many dangers that lurked outside. But if you lie back and close one eye, looking across the lack at Knockadoon, you will see much the same scene as our ancestors, when the land was dense with woods, a source of danger and a source of food and fuel.

But many other sites are off the beaten track and you won't get there in a pair of high-heeled shoes. You will need instead, a



Lough Gur... full of history.

determination to get to the top of the hill and a keen eye to pick out the many stone circles, ring forts and neolithic house sites that abound.

Two of the more dramatic sites are easily accessible from the main road, however. One is the Giants Grave, or wedge-tomb, a ritual site of burial, going back 4,500 years. When the site was excavated in 1938 the remains of eight adults and four children were found there, along with examples of "beaker" ware - the dishes and urns of the time.

According to the note attached, a Samuel Hall discovered in the last century that an old woman had lived there for years and at her death, money diggers ransacked the grave. It still stands as a reminder of a different culture, however.

But perhaps the best and most impressive of all of Lough Gur's treasures is the Great Stone Circle. You will find this on your map, on the main road from Limerick to Bruff. It is rightly regarded as one of the finest stone circles in Ireland measuring nearly 47 metres in diameter. Surrounded by an earth bank and encircled by trees, there is a magic atmosphere here, redolent of the times when it was a place for sacred ritual. These rituals may have taken place at dawn on Midsummer's morning, according to the guide notes, for as the sun rises, the first rays of light shine directly through the narrow entrance passageway and into the centre of the circle. The stones that form the circle are massive, the largest nearly eight foot high and weighing nearly 50 tons.

Lough Gur has many other secrets to be found by a discerning and curious visitor. But it yields these secrets gently and instills a sense of reverence for what once was. At a time when the whole notion of interpretive centres is contentious, Lough Gur represents a very careful and sensitive scheme. It will draw you back, again and again, but do try, if you can, to get there at least once.



One of the many treasures at Lough Gur. (LL)

Stokes, who had a great game full-back, as did Paddy Hartnett, who moved to midfield. Paddy Stokes, John Hartnett, David O'Neill were our forwards. Overall, it was a solid team performance and can look forward to the semi-final with confidence.

Team — J. Prendergast, English, M. Stokes, L. Purcell, V. O'Neill, J. Hennessy, O'Sullivan, M. Lyons, J. Peck, D. O'Neill 0-2, J. Hartnett, P. Hartnett 0-2, F. Stokes, T. Heffernan, E. Quinlan, Sub. Mark Murphy.

Kilteely-Dromkeen 2-1, Fedamore 1-5. Our hurlers won the East title for the first time when they defeated Fedamore.

We started well, taking some well taken scores by Hartnett, particularly his from a 20 metre free. The time score was 1-6 to 1-1 in favour.

Fedamore started the second half well, scoring three points without reply. However, Hartnett replied with a point from play and 6-5. His brother Pat, scored the goal which was an excellent victory. Hartnett, who finished with 10 points, was our best player, assisted by John Prendergast's goal; Willie McGrath, Lyons, in defence; Pat Hartnett played well at midfield; Mick Stokes, Dave O'Neill, Eamon Quinlan played well in the attack.

The minor footballers have now qualified for the county semi-finals and they will play the winners of the South division. Team: Prendergast, L. Purcell, English, T. Heffernan, O'Neill, M. Lyons, McGrath, P. Hartnett 1-1, Stokes, M. Stokes, J. Hartnett 1-8, J. Peck, M. Murphy, Quinlan 0-1, D. O'Neill 0-1.

AHANE: Our minor hurling team retained the East championship with a convincing 10-0 over Cappamore. Final score: Ahane 10-0, Cappamore 0-0. Team — O. Moran, N. S. T. Byrnes, C. Brown, P. P. E. Hurley, T. Rainsford, Moran, I. Bradley, T. Fitzald, C. Smith, T. Blake, O'Connor, J. Quinn, A. C. Sub. R. Tuohy and D. bins.

Our minor team played the county semi-final of the championship on Friday, August 10, at Cappamore. Final score: Ahane 10-0, Cappamore 0-0. Team: M. Flannery, L. O'Connor, Enright, M. O'Brien, J. P. P. Callinan, E. Hurley, McDonnell, A. Smith, B. S. T. Meskell, G. Murphy, Quinn, N. Byrnes, R. Q. Sub. S. Hassett, C. Smith.

All roads lead to the Gaelic Grounds on Sunday next, August 11, when Ahane and Ballybrown play for a place in the county semi-final. Throw-in 2 p.m.

Fixtures — county u-16 ball semi-final, Ahane v. Ballybrown on Sunday, August 16, at 2 p.m. in Caherconlish.

ADARE: The minor hurlers showed no mercy to their opponents, Knockfierna, in Askeaton when they powered their way to a 10-0 victory. The expected stiff challenge failed to materialise and long before the finish Adare had left their opponents trailing in the wake.

Knockfierna's goals came after just a minute, with a pointed 65 but from a moment of the match, Tony Houlihan, levelled with a classy point three minutes later. It was all downhill for Knockfierna after that, as speculative lob from Tony Houlihan after 15 minutes ended up in the net and Paul Kearney at full forward and corner forward David Butler added further goals. There was just no way back for Knockfierna.

To their credit, though they battled bravely in the second half. This will give Adare great confidence, but I am sure selectors would have preferred a stiffer test. The team's scorers were: Cyril Guinness, Oliver Brennan, Kieran Donohue, Noel Dillon, Noel Kearney, Mark Foley (0-2), J. Foley, Anthony O'Gorman (0-1), Paul O'Keeffe (0-1), Vincent Foley (0-4), Mar Doran, Tony Houlihan (2-2), Edward Scanlon (0-1), P.raig Kearney (1-0), David Butler (2-0). Sub. P. O'Shaughnessy, John Duggan (1-0).

The senior hurlers faced a daunting task on Sunday night at the Gaelic Grounds (3 p.m.) when they take