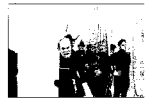




North Clare NEWS

With Tara King



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Group really digs Caherconnell

NORTH Clare's Caherconnell Stone Fort is to have its second archaeological dig during heritage week, commencing on August 24.

Owned and operated by the Davoren family, the Caherconnell fort is based in the Burren and has attracted tourists since its opening in March 2003.

The excavation is to be spearheaded by Dr Michelle Comber of NUI Galway and archaeologist Graham Hull of Crush-eeen-based organisation TVAS. A team of academics and specialists will also be on hand to study whatever archaeological evidence arises from the dig, which aims to investigate and date what appears to be an underground passage known as a souterrain attached to this high-status fort.

Key insights into the status and use of Caherconnell Stone Fort were unearthed in the 10-day archaeological excavation undertaken during Heritage Week 2007.

Described in academic studies as "a perfect fort", Caherconnell Stone Fort is twice the size of the standard cashels that are now under study in the Burren. One of Ireland's best preserved stone forts, Caherconnell is 40 metres in diameter compared to the average of 20 metres in other forts.

According to Dr Michelle Comber of NUI Galway, who is currently researching early medieval settlements in the Burren, the thick stone walls rising to over three metres in parts of the Caherconnell Fort "show that considerable resources, particularly labour, would have been needed to build the cashel".

Artefacts discovered during the first ever excavation of the site evidenced the "greater importance" of Caherconnell.

The uncovered artefacts in question included two disc-shaped quernstones of the rotary type, used to grind cereals, and an iron arrowhead three inches in length and with barbs at its base. The iron arrowhead is the only one of its type to be found in Britain or Ireland.

Last year's excavation was supported by volunteers from NUI Galway and specialists from Queens University Belfast.

Overall, the results demonstrated that the fort was likely to have been occupied well into the medieval period.

Archaeologist Graham Hull stated that last year's excavation had exceeded their expectations and had produced a lot of information that was previously unknown.

Speaking about the upcoming dig, Seán Davoren of the Caherconnell Stone Fort team, expressed his enthusiasm and voiced his hope that support for the event would continue.

"We are delighted that Dr Michelle Comber of NUIG and Graham Hull of TVAS have decided to embark on further excavations.

"Last year's excavation exceeded everyone's expectations both in terms of the quality of artefacts found and how much our visitors enjoyed seeing and talking to the archaeologists as they worked.

"The work the archaeologists have carried to date has been amazing and their enthusiasm infectious. We look forward to an exciting week and hope that the state and other interested bodies will support us in continuing this very exciting project."

A public lecture has been scheduled to take place at the visitor centre attached to the stone fort at 1pm on Friday August 29. Delivered by Graham Hull and Dr Michelle Comber, the lecture will include a presentation of the highlights from last year's excavation as well as information from this year's dig.

The dig at Caherconnell takes place from August 24 to 31. Visitors can observe the dig during those days from 10am to 5pm.

For more information, please visit www.burrenforts.ie.



■ Graham Hull examines a spear head at the dig in Caherconnell.

Photograph by John Kelly