



Galway team lead dig in the Burren

BY JESSICA HIGGINS

Caherconnell Stone Fort in the heart of the Burren will have its second archaeological dig during heritage week. Owned and operated by the Davoren family, Caherconnell Stone Fort has been the gateway to the forts and tombs of the Burren since its opening in March 2003.

The excavation, from August 24 to 31, is to be headed by Dr Michelle Comber of NUI Galway and archaeologist Graham Hull of TVAS, Crusheen. A team of academics and specialists will also be there to study whichever archaeological evidence survives.

The aim of the dig is 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 is twice the size of the standard cashels which 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. The thick stone walls rise to over three metres in places, which shows that "considerable resources, particularly labour, would have been needed to build the cashel", according to Dr Comber, who is currently researching early medieval settlements in the Burren.

Last year's excavation was supported by volunteers from NUI Galway and specialists from Queens University Belfast. The results demonstrated that the fort was likely to have been occupied well into the medieval period. "Last years excavation exceeded our expectations and has produced a lot of information that was previously unknown," said archaeologist Graham Hull.

"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," said Sean Davoren.

There will be a public lecture at the visitors' centre at 1pm on Friday August 29 by Graham Hull and Dr Michelle Comber, presenting the highlights of last year's

excavation and the information from this year's dig.

The dig at Caherconnell takes place from August 24 to 31, and is open from 10am to 5:30pm. Children are free with an accompanying adult.