## Temple-na-Skellig and St Kevin's Bed

Temple-na-Skellig and St Kevin's Bed cannot be safely accessed. They are reviewed in detail in a Heritage Guide dedicated to the two sites (see Heritage Guide 94, *Glendalough: Temple-na-Skellig and St Kevin's Bed* (forthcoming)).

Temple-na-Skellig ('the church of the rock') is the most remote of the Glendalough churches (SMR No. WI023-020). Excavations in the 1950s by Françoise Henry found settlement evidence from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and possibly also from the ninth century, on platforms immediately to the west.

St Kevin's Bed is an artificial cave in a cliff-face above the lake (SMR No. WI023-021), reputedly a place of retreat and prayer for Kevin. The 'cave' is too small to stand up or lie down in and is best suited to meditation. The Bed was a retreat for famous figures, such as St Laurence O'Toole whilst he was archbishop of Dublin in the twelfth century. In the nineteenth century it became part of the tourist circuit.

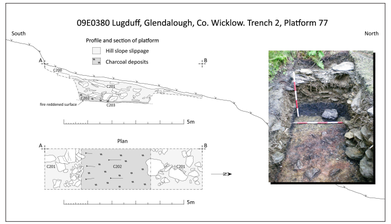
## Charcoal production platforms

The most frequent archaeological monument at Glendalough has nothing to do with religion. Over 100 charcoal production platforms are found on the slopes surrounding the lakes. These platforms were cut into the hill slope, with the spoil thrown forward to create a flat space 5–7m in diameter. This was used for stacking, covering and firing wood to create charcoal, which was then transported out for the iron-working industry (Fig. 12).



Below: **Fig. 12—Excavations at a charcoal production platform in 2009** (© UCD School of Archaeology).

Bottom: **Fig. 13—Upper Lake area of Glendalough valley, looking west, *c.* 1865–1914; note the tree-covered caher, cairns and cultivation ridges** (image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).




This industry dates from *c.* 1650–1730. At this time some woodlands were carefully managed for charcoal production but this was not the case in Glendalough, where native forests of oak, holly and birch were stripped from the hillsides. The bare hills seen in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century artworks show a deforested landscape resulting from colonial exploitation and the impacts of industry. Today's forests have regrown since that time. To the south, the deciduous woodland is (semi-)natural regeneration with some planting. To the north, the pine trees were planted for pit-props for the lead mines.

Forestry activities continued near the Upper Lake, with plantations and a wood mill east of the lake in the early 1900s. This area was also cultivated in the late nineteenth century (Fig. 13).



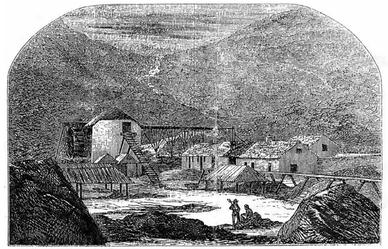

Left: **Fig. 14—Aerial overview of mining complex from the south** (after *Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland Journal* **12** (2012), fig. 35, with modifications).

Below left: **Fig. 15—Glendalough mines dressing floor in 1860, showing the Cornish rolls crusher, overshot waterwheel, tramway and associated buildings** (*Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland Journal* **12** (2012), fig. 12).

Cover: **Excavations at the Upper Lake, including the stone path** (© UCD School of Archaeology).

## Glendalough lead mines

At the head of the Glendalough valley are the well-preserved remains of a lead-mining complex, active from the early nineteenth century and discontinuously into the mid-twentieth century (Figs 14 and 15). The mining 'village' is accessed by the Miner's Road on the north of the lake, and the remains of several sets of mining cottages are visible at the roadside. At their height in the 1850s the mines employed 200 people and produced 120 tonnes of ore per month. The surviving industrial archaeology is amongst the best preserved in Ireland.



Luganure Lead Mine, County Wicklow, Ireland.

**Further reading and online resources:**


Corlett, C. 2017 *Glendalough*. Coles Lane.

Discovery Programme 3D models: https://sketchfab.com/discoveryprogramme.

Doherty, C., Doran, L. and Kelly, M. (eds) 2011 *Glendalough: city of God*. Four Courts Press, Dublin.

Glendalough Heritage Forum: https://glendalough.wicklowheritage.org/.

Glens of Lead project: https://glensoflead.wicklowheritage.org/.

Kavanagh, J. (ed.) 2003 *The Glen of the Two Lakes—Glendalough: a pictorial history*. Glendalough Book Committee, Laragh.

Manning, C. 2016 *Glendalough and its churches*. *Archaeology Ireland* Heritage Guide No. 72. Wordwell, Dublin.

National Museum of Ireland exhibition of artefacts from Glendalough: https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Collection/Glendalough-Power,-Prayer-Pilgrimage.

Seaver, M., McDermott, C. and Warren, G.M. 2018 A monastery among the glens. *Archaeology Ireland* **32** (2), 19–23.






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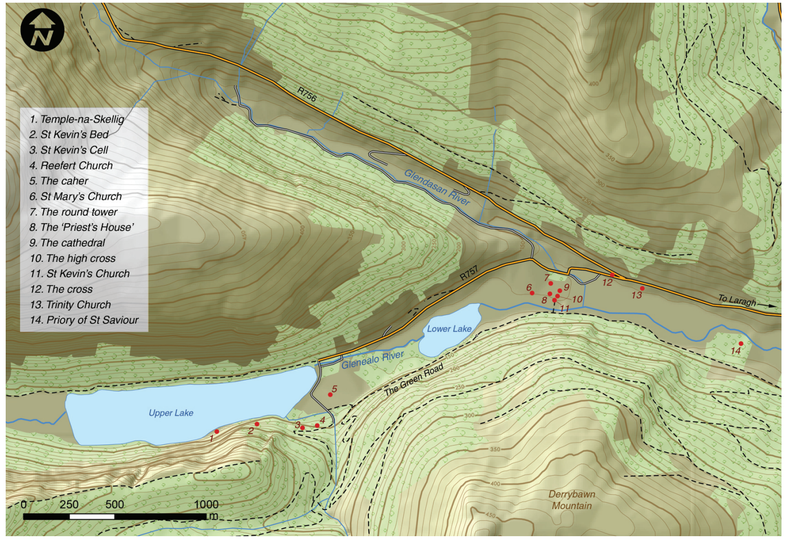
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# Glendalough: the Upper Lake




Archaeology IRELAND

Heritage Guide No. 92




## Introduction

Glendalough (*Gleann Dá Loch*, 'Glen of the Two Loughs') in the Wicklow Mountains is a beautiful landscape, famed for its cultural and natural heritage. It is the place that St Kevin (Cóemgen) adopted as a spiritual retreat, to be close to nature, and where he founded a celebrated monastery, probably in the late sixth century.

There are two archaeological complexes as well as dispersed features (Fig. 1). The main monastic complex lies east of the Lower Lake, adjacent to the OPW Glendalough Visitor Centre, whilst a range of sites are found to the east of the Upper Lake. The Upper and Lower Lakes are separated by an alluvial fan, sediment carried into the valley from the uplands draining into the Poulanass River to the south.

The complex stories told in the Latin and Irish lives of St Kevin suggest that the monastery was initially focused on the Upper Lake. As it grew in importance and influence, it expanded down the valley to the location of the main monastic complex. Recent UCD excavations have provided evidence for significant monastic activity at the main site by the eighth century.

There is important monastic archaeology at the Upper Lake, including across Dísert Cóemgen, 'Kevin's desert/hermitage', referring to retreat and solitude. Few of the surviving remains are contemporary with the earliest phases of the monastery, but there is evidence for the later development of the Glendalough ecclesiastical landscape, as well as for the impacts of industry, forestry, agriculture and tourism.

## The 'caher'

The so-called 'caher' is a subcircular enclosure (SMR No. WI023-025) *c.* 20m in external diameter, defined by a stone-faced wall with an earth core. The monument was originally interpreted as a caher, an early medieval settlement form more common in the west of Ireland. Early maps show two enclosures, one of which has since been destroyed. These features may indicate settlement



Top: **Fig. 1—Map of key archaeological sites associated with the monastery at Glendalough; the mining complex is at and beyond the western end of this map** (courtesy of the Discovery Programme).

Above: **Fig. 2—Aerial view of the caher during excavation in 2013, showing trenches outside the caher** (© Séamus Ó Murchú).



Left: **Fig. 3—Section of the ditch on the eastern side of the caher during the 2013 excavations; note the 'ankle-breaker' slot at base** (© UCD School of Archaeology).

Below left: **Fig. 4—External ditch and original early medieval caher wall exposed in 2013, looking west** (© UCD School of Archaeology).

at or near the time the monastery was founded. Work in the 1980s questioned any early date and considerable uncertainty surrounded the caher. Early eighteenth-century maps show that the enclosure formed part of pilgrimage practice and was called a 'penitential circle'.

UCD excavations (Fig. 2) have shown that whilst it was extensively reconstructed in the mid-twentieth century its origins are early medieval. A ditch, 2m wide and 1.4m deep, not visible on the surface, forms the earliest enclosure (Fig. 3). The ditch silted up, and a later stone enclosure was constructed on top (Fig. 4). This multi-phase monument is clear evidence of an early medieval settlement. The ditch includes a defensive feature of an 'ankle-breaker' at its base, whilst deposits from low in the ditch include iron slag, indicating iron-working nearby. A radiocarbon date of AD 428–593 from lower fills is contemporary with or earlier than St Kevin's arrival in the valley, raising questions about his supposed retreat into solitude.



## Stone crosses and path

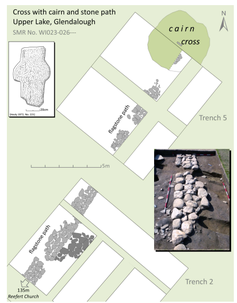
Three simple schist stone crosses set in stone cairns are found on the lawns near the Upper Lake (Fig. 5). The undecorated Latin crosses likely date from the ninth–eleventh century. Their placement in low cairns might mean that they were *leachta*, stations on a pilgrimage route. UCD excavations of one cairn (SMR No. WI023-022) found a twentieth-century pint glass at its base (Fig. 6). Whilst the antiquity of the cross is clear, the cairn is recent.



A stone-laid path of likely later medieval date was also found, aligned between the cross and Reefert Church. This suggests that the cairn was re-erected close to its original location (Fig. 7). Crosses in this approximate position are shown on Beranger's eighteenth-century map, further supporting this idea.

On the northern side of the Glenealo River is a wayside cross (SMR No. WI023-022), probably of the eighth or ninth century.






Top: **Fig. 5—Simple Latin cross and cairn during excavation in 2012, looking north-east** (© UCD School of Archaeology).

Above: **Fig. 6—Lower levels within the cairn, with a pint glass and post-medieval donkey-shoe indicating a recent date** (© UCD School of Archaeology).

Left: **Fig. 7—Stone path identified in excavation, running from the cross in the direction of Reefert** (© UCD School of Archaeology).

## Nineteenth-century hotels



Two hotels operated at the Upper Lake from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, serving the tremendous expansion of tourism. Grant's Hotel, near the Poulanass Waterfall, burned down in May 1920. The location is visible as a level platform cut into the hillside (Fig. 8). Richardson's Lake Hotel was on the north of the valley, east of the car park. Next to the main monastic complex, the 'Royal Hotel' now operates as the Glendalough Hotel.

In the context of the nineteenth-century Gaelic Revival, Glendalough was celebrated as a masterpiece of a distinctively Irish form of monasticism. Since then, tourism has had a profound impact on the site. Today the valley receives almost a million visitors a year and managing this whilst maintaining the character of the landscape is a key challenge.

## Reefert Church

Reefert Church is on the south of the valley (SMR No. WI023-028001) (Fig. 9; see Heritage Guide No. 72). Its nave and chancel were constructed at the same time, *c.* 1100. *Righ Fearta* means 'Royal Burial Place' and the site was probably an earlier focus. The surrounding graveyard includes notable crosses and grave-markers, some decorated/inscribed. The church was reconstructed in the nineteenth century by local miners under the guidance of antiquarian Sir William Wilde (father of Oscar), a guest in Grant's Hotel.

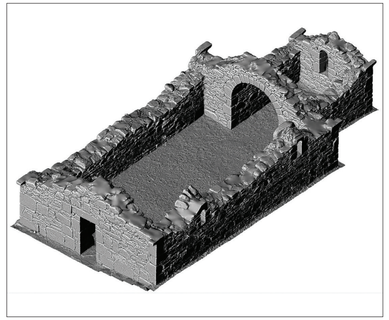


Left: **Fig. 8—Grant's Hotel, Glendalough, adjacent to Reefert Church** (image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

Below left: **Fig. 9—Aerial view of Reefert Church, showing the nave and chancel and surrounding burial-ground** (reproduced from Manning 2016, courtesy of Con Manning and *Archaeology Ireland*).

Below: **Fig. 10—3D model of Reefert from terrestrial laser scans; data capture and modelling by the Discovery Programme** (© Discovery Programme).

Bottom: **Fig. 11—Archive photography of St Kevin's Cell in the early twentieth century** (© Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service).



## St Kevin's Cell

The remains of 'St Kevin's Cell' consist of a curve of drystone walling located on a spur overlooking the Upper Lake, possibly the back wall of a corbelled circular structure some 5m in diameter (SMR No. WI023-029) (Fig. 11). This has been interpreted as a hut type associated with early monastic activity and as being a building which Kevin frequented, although there is no direct evidence to support this specific claim. Early monastic activity at the Upper Lake would have included a range of different buildings and nineteenth-century accounts record features near Reefert, but these cannot be identified today.

