

Burren National Park

Nature Trail





**DO NOT
KNOCK
WALLS**



**KEEP DOGS ON
LEAD**



**DO NOT
MOVE
ROCKS**



**DO NOT PARK
ON ROAD VERGES**



**DO NOT
SCARE
ANIMALS**



**TAKE LITTER
HOME**



**DO NOT
PICK PLANTS**



**TAKE RAIN
GEAR AND BOOTS
WITH YOU**

www.burrennationalpark.ie
www.npws.ie



**An Roinn
Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta**
**Department of
Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht**



16

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

STOP 1

Our first stop is an area where **ling heather** is abundant. This is one of the reasons why the Burren has such a fascination for botanists. Heather which is a lime hating plant would not normally be expected to grow on limestone as it is here.



Further along the track, we can see **Mountain Avens**, a low shrub with cream flowers, growing over the rocks. It is a true Arctic-Alpine plant which flowers mainly in April with a second lesser burst of flowers later in the summer.



STOP 2

You are entering into a *doline*—a hollow probably resulting from solution of the limestone or the collapse of an underground cave. This hollow is now dominated by mature hazel and willow. The bottom of the hollow is a turlough – a disappearing lake – that is filled from springs at the edge of the doline.



STOP 3

The ash trees here have been coppiced: they have several trunks growing from one root because the main trunk was cut for firewood or used for building materials.



The bark of the ash and hazel trees is covered in lichens that produce a distinct jig-saw pattern on it. Lichen is actually a fungus and an alga growing together as a single unit. There are many different kinds.

STOP 4

The path now rises out of the hazel wood onto open limestone pavement. There are many blocky stones of *chert* on this stretch of pavement. Chert – an impurity found in limestone - differs from it as it is composed of silicon. This comes from organisms such as sea sponges and diatoms. It is acidic and often supports vegetation that differs from the usual lime-loving plants.



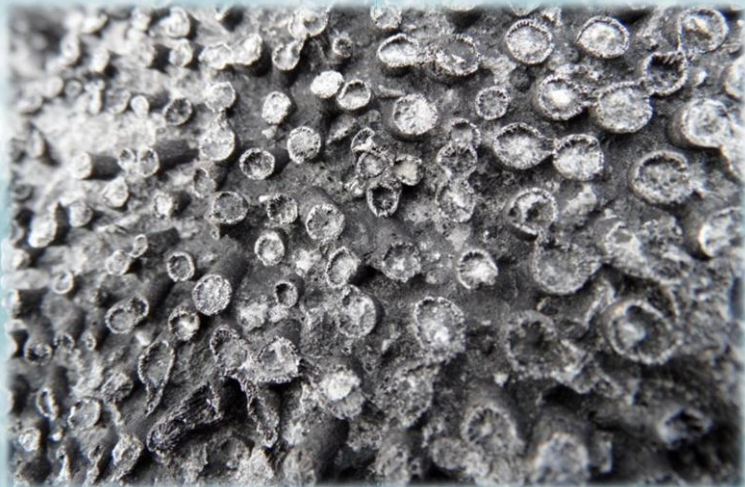
Here we see the characteristic grass of the Burren, **Blue Moor Grass**, growing on the bare rock. This is a short stiff grass with boat-shaped leaves that flowers very early in the year.



Another prominent plant here is the **Burnet Rose**, a small cream-coloured rose.

STOP 5

Once you cross the wall, you will notice a change in the rock. You are now walking on what was once a **coral** reef. You will see many examples of fossilised corals in the rock under your feet. Although the coral is easy to spot here, limestone rock is also full of many other kinds of fossils.



STOP 6

This rock is a *Glacial Erratic*—a rock that was carried here by ice moving during the last ice age. The landscape around you has been shaped by the movement of enormous glaciers which left the limestone pavement and large deposits of boulders and gravel that now form the green hills that are dotted through this part of the Burren.

This is our first view of Mullaghmore; in the foreground we can see a single ash tree growing directly on the limestone pavement. The tree is surviving but it is stunted because of the wind and lack of soil to get nutrients.



STOP 7

You have now entered another area of mature hazel wood. Here you will see many characteristic woodland plants. If you examine the most prominent grass, the **Wood Brome**, you will see that each leaf has a single twist on it.



Other common plants include **Wild Strawberry**, **Wood Sorrel**, a green orchid, the **Twayblade** and in Springtime, **Wild Garlic**.



STOP 8

Emerging from the hazel wood, the track follows a weakness in the limestone rock. On the right, the sloping bed of limestone has been chemically eroded into channels by slightly acidic rainwater draining down the slope of the rock before disappearing into the cracks (*Grikes*) in the rock. This process of solution of the limestone is called *karstification*.



STOP 9

Keep an eye out for the many ant hills that are dotted around. These may not be obvious at first but they occur both on the grassland and on the limestone and are often covered by the purple flowers of **Wild Thyme**.



The **Yellow Ant**, rarely seen above ground, moves large amounts of soil particles to the surface of the rock and has a big influence on the ecology of the area.



STOP 10

This route is a typical example of species-rich, dry limestone grassland. Among the plants here is the **Spring Gentian**, pink **Bloody Cranesbill**, yellow **Lady's Bedstraw** and the yellow **Birdsfoot Trefoil**, so named because its fruiting stalk resembles a bird's foot



Orchids abound here also. Early in the year you will see the **Early Purple Orchid** while later on you will see the **Common Spotted** and **Fragrant Orchid**. This is a sunny, sheltered area where butterflies love to feed.



STOP 11

The apparent colour of the rock is light grey but limestone is generally darker than this. The light colour is because the rock is covered in lichens that also grow through the rock. The small pits in the rock made by the lichens probably accelerate the solution of the rock by rainwater.



STOP 12

This is a good viewing point for Mullaghmore Mountain to the east. The limestone beds in most of the Burren slope gently southwards. At Mullaghmore they have become distinctly folded and tilted as a result of movements in the Earth's crust many millions of years ago.



STOP 13

Rain that falls on the Burren hills drains underground in a south-easterly direction and comes to the surface in a series of springs around the edges of the National Park. Here, the hills of the Burren meet the lowlands of Gort and the ground water is very close to the surface. This gives rise to a system of lakes, turloughs and other wetlands along the eastern edge of the National Park that are of international importance.



One such lake is L. Gealáin, situated at the bottom of Mullaghmore. If you look closely, you will see that the lake has a dark centre. This is an area of deep and permanent water that probably arises from the collapse of an underground cavern. The margins of the lake are lighter in colour and here the water is shallower and seasonal and drains underground through swallow holes.

STOP 14

Before you leave this location, notice the small hollows on the top of the nearby rock. These are formed by water dissolving the limestone. These *solution hollows* are often filled by a blue green alga called *Nostoc*. This releases carbon dioxide which reacts with the water to form a weak acidic solution which in turn, accelerates the solution of the limestone.



STOP 15

Here you can see the ruins of a small shelter. Although the Burren may appear to be a wilderness, man has inhabited the area for over five and a half thousand years. The population of the National Park area reached a peak before the potato famines of the mid 19th century; then the local population fell dramatically. This ruin is an example of how rapidly nature reclaims land that is not actively managed.



STOP 16

You are now entering a Wildflower Meadow on slightly deeper and richer soil. Meadows such as this, on neutral grassland, have become rare due to intensive farming practices. This field once grew silage before it was bought for the National Park. Through careful management we have restored it to a species-rich meadow.



The most characteristic grass is **Crested Dogs Tail**. Among the wildflowers are **Ox Eye Daisy**, **Self Heal**, **Fairy Flax** and **Knapweed**. Plants that are semi-parasitic on other plants, such as **Yellow Rattle** and **Eyebright**, are common here. In early Spring, the field is full of yellow **Cow Slips**.



A number of species of orchid including the **Common Spotted** and the **Pyramidal**, are very abundant here in summer. You can also find **Bee Orchids** and **Fly Orchids**.

