



# Cloncrow Bog

Study Visit



## Site & trail details

- Cloncrow Bog is a Natural Heritage Area (NHA), some held in ownership by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and some held in private ownership.
- It is located 1km from the town of Tyrellspass in Co. Westmeath
- The site is around 200 hectares in size, with around 132ha of high bog remaining
- ETHOS – Everything Tyrellspass Has, On Show has been involved with the development of trails, the Care-Peat project and educational initiatives on the bog
- The recently opened trail is 3.5km in length beginning at Tyrellspass Castle and passes through privately owned section of Cloncrow bog and continues through the village of Tyrellspass.



## Story of Cloncrow Bog

Like all Midland raised bogs Cloncrow Bog has been growing since the end of the last ice age (10,000 years ago) and still retains much of the unique flora and fauna associated with this vanishing habitat type. Cloncrow developed in a low lying depression surrounded by esker-type deposits and in this post-glacial landscape our village and farming community settled and thrived.

Cloncrow Bog has always been privately owned and escaped the industrial extraction of peat by Bord na Móna in modern times. Peat extraction for local domestic use has been going on for centuries and extensive cut away areas around the fringes demonstrate the importance of this fuel source to the local community. Land drainage during the last century dramatically changed the edges of this peatland into pastureland suitable for livestock grazing and vegetable growing. Hand cutting of peat on Cloncrow stopped in recent years as other bogs in the locality were deemed more suitable for the machine type extraction that began in the 1980's.

The afforestation of parts of Cloncrow has also had a significant impact on the bog's hydrology and adversely changed its character in places causing the disappearance of many of the key highly specialised plants associated with an intact raised bog. A growing awareness of the importance of our raised bogs in mitigating the effects of climate change has led to new and exciting projects and already rewetting of degraded areas is reversing much of the damage caused, and our bog is once again sequestering carbon and restoring its once thriving unique flora and fauna.

## ETHOS - Everything Tyrellspass Has, On Show

ETHOS was founded to explore aspects of our local rich cultural and natural environment 12 years ago. We have a six-person active committee and an extended associate committee of seven. The committee consists of members of the local and wider community who have specific skill sets. Since our foundation we have been organising events related to our built and natural heritage.

Our village, though small, has a rich visible architectural heritage from the Tyrrell Castle on the west side to the planned village green to the east. The surrounding landscape has greatly influenced all aspects of our village's heritage. The village is strategically positioned between two extensive bogs Cloncrow and Tore and the Tyrrells controlled this east west passage across the midlands from the 12th Century. Cloncrow Bog is within walking distance of the village and we have been engaging with our local National and Secondary schools for decades exploring its unique rich biodiversity. Transition year students especially, became involved in modular studies in Science and Geography and in more recent years our ETHOS group embarked on a project to create a link between the Tyrellspass community and the peatlands which surround it. A looped boardwalk linking the village and its associated peatlands has opened up a rich and valuable connection between the village community and its natural hinterland.



### About the project

**Conservation and restoration of our peatlands has been the driving force behind our more recent initiatives. Our engagement with ongoing restoration projects on Cloncrow Bog will allow us to foster a greater understanding of the role of our peatlands in mitigating the harmful effects of carbon emissions from degraded peatlands. The Care-Peat project has completed restoration works in the Cloneyheigue section of Cloncrow and already there is a noticeable improvement in the reduction of carbon emissions.**

We are currently engaged in surveying much of the surviving wildlife on Cloncrow Bog, particularly butterfly, moth and birdlife. The educational potential of giving access to local primary and secondary school pupils to this rich ecological habitat is immense.

We have successfully completed a 3.5km looped walk which links Tyrellspass village with Cloncrow bog. The walk begins at the castle through farmland and onto the bog via a boardwalk. The trail takes you through woodland and meadow then back into the village. We have achieved this by liaising with the NPWS and with key people in Westmeath County Council, particularly our Heritage Officers and Conservation Ranger. They have been an essential part of our success to date.

We are working with local Primary and Secondary schools encouraging active learning strategies on Cloncrow Bog. Transition year students completed a sphagnum moss transfer project on a degraded area of the bog in conjunction with the Care-Peat project and supervised by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council. Establishing a working relationship with the local community has been essential. Members of our committee are also involved with the village Tidy Towns Committee. Working closely with local schools has helped to engage young people in our projects.

Membership in the Community Wetlands Forum has put us in contact with like-minded community groups and this has been enormously helpful.



## Key features

- Our biggest achievement with the bog project has been the construction of a boardwalk across the bog linking it with the village. As we have been organising heritage events for a number of years we have the support of the community in general and had no problems getting access to the privately owned sections of the bog. We had built up a relationship with key people in the County Council particularly our Heritage Officer and our NPWS personnel.
- Our association with the Care-Peat project on the bog was hugely beneficial as it educated us in different aspects of peatland conservation.
- Our membership of the Community Wetlands Forum put us in contact with like-minded people in different communities.
- Our involvement in organising events during heritage week won us national and local recognition. One of our members was awarded the National Heritage Week award in 2018 and last year we won the Westmeath County Award for our heritage week activities.
- Our direct involvement with local National and Secondary schools continues to be very rewarding. We continue to work closely with our local national schools heightening their awareness of the benefits of restoring and conserving all the biodiversity that is present in our immediate environment.

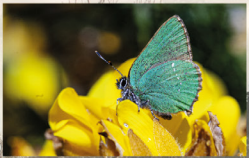
- We also work with the Tidy Towns Committee and they are moving towards a more ecologically friendly approach in their plans for the Tidy Towns Competition.
- We will continue to work closely with the local community and already the boardwalk is having a hugely beneficial effect on the local community. Recreational walking has moved from busy roads to a beautiful and peaceful environment.



## Impact on the wider community

- Since the completion of the boardwalk the village is now connected to the bog. The trail is used extensively by the local community giving them the opportunity to see the bog in a different way. Signs indicating the different plant and animal species on the bog have been installed to engage the community and visitors about bog biodiversity.

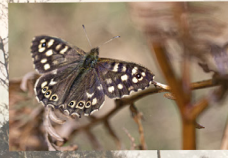
*Butterflies on Cloncrow Raised and Cutover Bog.*



*Green Hairstreak*



*Brimstone*



*Speckled Wood*



*Small Heath*



*Marsh Fritillary*



*Holly Blue*



*Wood White*



*Meadow Brown*



*Dingy Skipper*



*Common Blue*



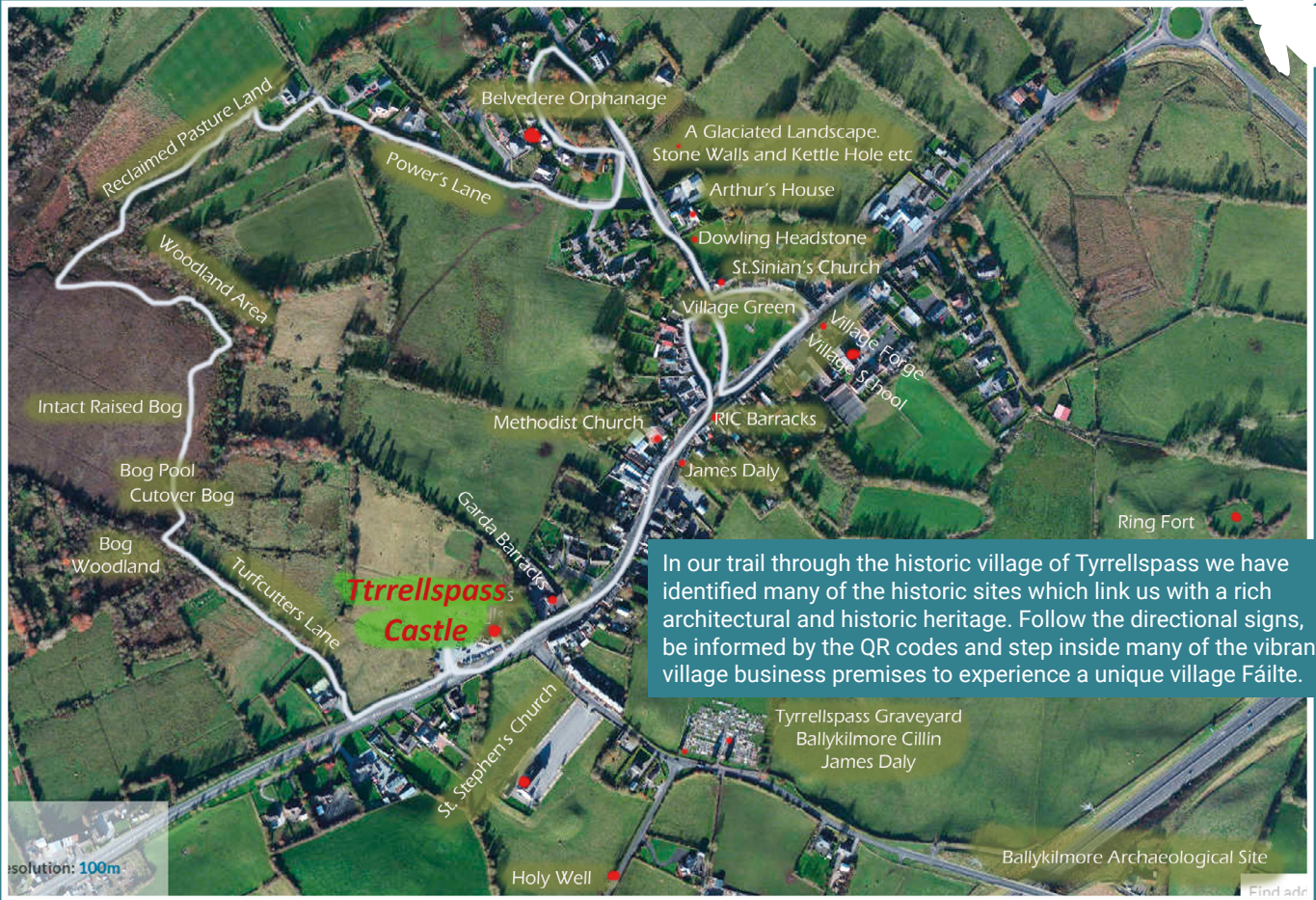
*Silver-washed Fritillary*



*Small Copper*

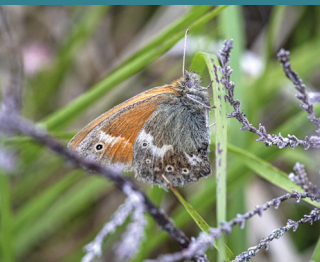


# Cloncrow Bog and Village Trail



## Key challenges

The main challenge we face is keeping the momentum of the project up locally. We are working to strengthen our committee and to get more local people who have an interest in biodiversity to work with us more closely. The future of the project remains in the hands of the people who will take over from the current committee members and see the project into the future for our community to enjoy and to preserve the wildlife on the bog.



## What's Next?

For the moment, we are enjoying the new trail that was officially opened a few months ago. We are letting that achievement settle before moving on to the next stage of our project. We hope to work with other community groups in the area near us to learn from them and to support them on their own bog or biodiversity projects. We also want to work more closely with the Native Woodland Trust. Bolstering more interest in the bog and biodiversity locally is one of our key aims and we will be working toward that more so from now into the future.



Supported by the **Just Transition Fund** & the **Carbon Tax Fund**



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