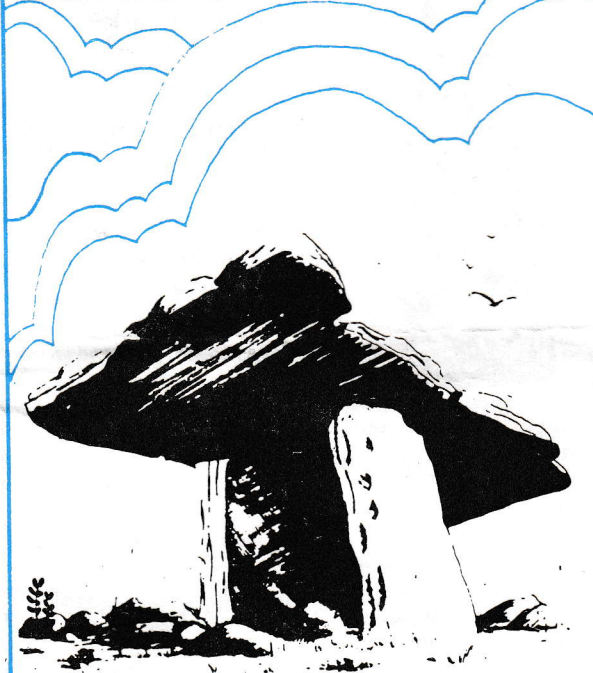


THE

**BURREN**



**DISPLAY  
CENTRE**

A UNIQUE INTERPRETATIVE CENTRE

**KILFENORA**

Coaches Welcome



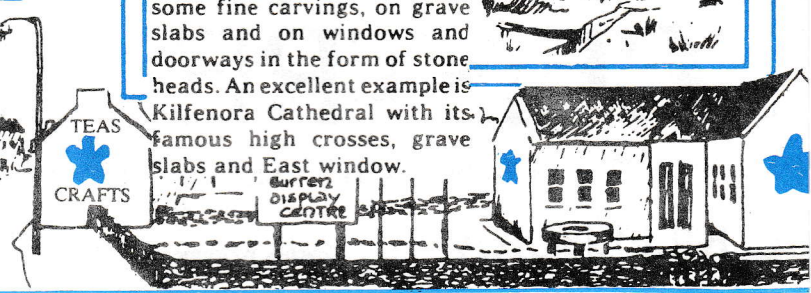
**Stony seaboard fair and foreign,  
Stony Hills poured over space,  
Stony outcrop of the Burren  
Stones in every fertile place...**

The word Burren derives from Boireann which means a rocky place and when one looks at this unique area comprising the North West corner of County Clare it is not hard to imagine why John Betjeman wrote those lines. The Burren began beneath the sea when layer after layer of shells and sediment built up and was compressed into stone under its own weight. This huge mass of rock was then thrust above sea level when great movements of the earth's crust were taking place over 260 million years ago. It was this same movement which caused the parallel cracks that are such a dominant feature of the area. The soft nature of the limestone rock yielded to successive ice ages and weathering thus the hills were rounded and the valleys carved. Rainwater, like a sculptor, created fascinating shapes as it meandered through the rock and disappeared underneath the surface through pot holes and swallow holes gouging out caves and a maze of tunnels. Springs occur as a result of this drainage system and though the surface of the Burren is relatively dry water is everywhere underneath. When the cave or tunnel system is full the water rises up on valley floors creating another of the Burren wonders - the Turloughs - a lake that can appear and disappear in a matter of days. Only one river in the area flows on the surface this is the Caher river which meets the sea at Fanore.



Signs of man the hunter appear as early as 7000 years ago, in the form of axe heads and crude stone implements but it was man as settler who left us with the evidence of his skill in stone, bronze and iron. Stone Age (3,000 - 2,000 B.C.) burial monuments abound in the region, the main types being - wedge shaped tombs, cairns and dolmens. Bronze Age (2,000 - 500 B.C.) ornament is well represented by the famous Gleninsheen collar which can be seen at the Centre. Iron Age (500 B.C. - 500 A.D.) dwellings in the form of ring forts are everywhere, Cahercommaun, Ballykinvarga and Cahermacnaghten being the most famous. Many of these remained in use through the Christian period and even up to the last century.

In the Burren too, the blend of Christian and pagan celtic traditions produced a distinctive art form in stone. The legacy of this; in oratories, churches, round towers, abbeys, monasteries and high crosses (the Tau Cross being unique). The round towers and high crosses usually stood in the grounds of the churches, the latter dating from 900 A.D. to 1150 A.D. The churches are of architectural interest and also contain some fine carvings, on grave slabs and on windows and doorways in the form of stone heads. An excellent example is Kilfenora Cathedral with its famous high crosses, grave slabs and East window.

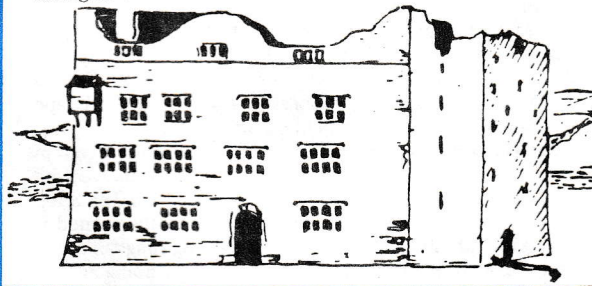




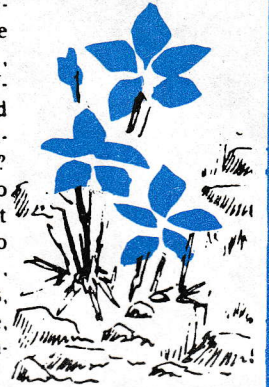
Rivalry between the great clans of the Burren, namely O'Loughlins, O'Briens and O'Connors and the increased difficulty in defending ring forts initiated the move to castles. These tall towers were usually square in shape with narrow windows and other defensive features.

Fighting was part of the life and times of these Clans, but they also found time to act as patrons to the church and the arts in general; the law and bardic schools of the region being excellent evidence of their interest.

With the passage of time and changes in fashion the design of the castle changed to a more grandiose and lightsome structure, Leamenagh Castle is a very unusual example of the two different styles side by side. On the battlements of this castle womens lib came to the Burren when the legendary Maire Rua O'Brien disposed of her husband over the side! Though Clans, customs and construction varied considerably over the centuries farming altered little. Here farming is different, as Burren grass is available over the winter, cattle are transferred from summer meadows to hilltop "winterages".



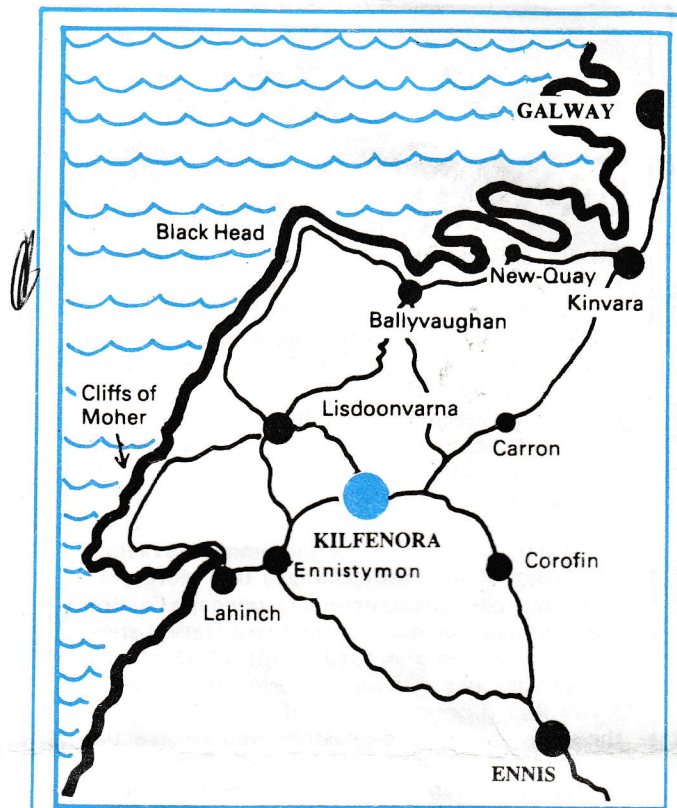
The Burren guards many age old secrets and the most perplexing of these is the mystery surrounding the flowers. Botanists from all over the world have failed to answer why flowers not native to here grow in such profusion, requiring as they do very different climates, why indeed they can grow in such a seemingly bleak and bare terrain? Space does not permit us to name all the rare flowers but the following could not go unmentioned: Gentian, Cranesbill, Mountain Aven, Maidenhair Fern, Rock Rose, Red Helleborine and a profusion of rare Orchids.



The flowers are not the only unusual dwellers of the crags and crevices - for here too are the animals, birds and butterflies for which the Burren is famous. The thick blanket of low hazel which covers a good deal of the area provides food and protection for the pine marten, stoat, badger, fox, squirrel etc., while unusual flowers provide for unusual moths and butterflies - the Burren Green, first discovered in 1949, is a species distinctive to the Burren.

Birds of prey are numerous in the area - Sparrowhawk, Merlin, Peregrine, Hen Harrier and Kestrel can be seen hovering high above the terraced hills, while coastal regions (like the cliffs of Moher) abound with Fulmar, Guillemot and puffin. Though not altogether rare, one of the most majestic sights in the Burren are the herds of sure-footed wild goats. An indication of the pollution free atmosphere of this area is the variety of multicoloured lichen that decorate almost every tree and stone.





The Burren Display Centre is a Community Project founded and managed by the people of the Burren to promote an understanding and appreciation of this strangely beautiful region. The Centre explains in laymans language the complexity and contradictions of the area. This is achieved through a comprehensive audio visual landscape model with commentaries in German, French and English. Afterwards we show a video on the Burren, once again in German, French and English. The Centre, winner of the Carnegie award for excellence, also has a lovely Tea Shop which serves wholesome Burren fare. Recently opened is our new Craft Shop which stocks an exciting range of crafts designed to provide you with that gift to take home at very reasonable prices.

This community project is also involved in other aspects of business as well as the Centre such as turf harvesting and the making of jams flavoured with alcohol.

The Centre is open from March 1st to the end of October from 10 - 5 daily with later opening till 7 p.m. in July and August. Outside these hours the Centre will open by arrangement for groups. There is an admission charge with special rates for families, groups and schools. For further information contact:

**The Burren Display Centre,**  
 Kilfenora, Co. Clare. Tel. 065 - 88030.