

A Guide  
to Undertaking a 'Landscape Circle' Study  
*(in seven easy steps)*

*Terry O'Regan*



*A Landscape Alliance Ireland Initiative  
in support of the European Landscape Convention*

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## **Landscape Alliance Ireland**

Following a call for a national landscape policy, Landscape Alliance Ireland (LAI) was founded in 1995. A small NGO committed to landscape quality, it has influenced many through 7 national landscape forums and their proceedings, surveys, a website, research projects and partnerships; encouraging and fostering an awareness of landscape as a unifying sustainable framework for environmental, heritage, social and economic concerns.

As an interface between the authorities and the people, LAI engages with communities, introducing innovative approaches, moving landscape up the national agenda and seeking to ensure that all legislation is landscape-proofed. LAI has worked with the Council of Europe and was a major influence on the Irish decision to sign and ratify the European Landscape Convention in March 2002. In June 2005 LAI forged a unique partnership with government, heritage and landscape bodies to have Ireland and Cork 2005 European City of Culture host the Third Meeting of the Council of Europe European Landscape Convention Workshops.

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*"The individual desire to understand, as much as any difference in acuity of the senses, brings each of us to find something in the land others did not notice.*

*Over time, small bits of knowledge about a region accumulate among local residents in the form of stories. These are remembered in the community; even what is unusual does not become lost and therefore irrelevant. These narratives comprise for a native, an intricate, long-term view of a particular landscape. And the stories are corroborated daily, even as they are being refined upon by members of the community travelling between what is truly known and what is only imagined or unsuspected. Outside the region, this complex but easily shared 'reality' is hard to get across without reducing it to generalities, to misleading or imprecise abstraction.*

*The perceptions of any people wash over the land like a flood, leaving ideas hung up in the brush, like pieces of damp paper to be collected and deciphered. No-one can tell the whole story."*

**Barry Lopez, Arctic Dreams, 1986**

Cover Photo: The Castlefreke/Rathbarry Landscape, nr Clonakilty, West Cork

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*"Our treatment of our landscape reflects our collective approach to ourselves, to our social organisations, to our place in the land."*

**Freda Rountree, (1996), Chairperson of the Heritage Council, Irish Landscape Forum – The Second Landfall**

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*“...the land and the landscape, and all that goes with them ...should have, a deep significance to all thinking people,”*

**Robert Lloyd Praeger. The Way That I Went**

## Preface

The landscape of Ireland is everything you see throughout and around the island and its offshore islands. But it is not merely a two-dimensional picture or even a three-dimensional model, it is multi-dimensional, reaching deep into the soil and rocks of the ground, under the water and up into the sky. It embraces all of our heritage; the diversity of nature and the diversity of the marks and manifestations of humans. It is experienced through all our senses.

Your landscape is not just the land that you may or may not occupy, but the place or places that are important to you, that figure in memories of the past, in your sense of the history of your landscape, your consciousness of well-being and belonging in your present landscape and your vision of its future. You might say that you own your landscape, but it is deeper than mere ownership - you are part of your landscape and it is part of you - a relationship that is very organic and close.

You can however be torn from your landscape or it can be torn from you. You never entirely lose it, but it can lose characteristics that are rich and rewarding, that are important to you, only to have it replaced with surroundings that are impoverished, dispiriting and alienating – resulting in degraded and diminished landscapes.

In the past as a largely agricultural society we depended on our landscape in obvious ways. Today we still depend on it, but we have lost the innate comprehension to recognise this. The balance of dependence has shifted - our landscape is now also dependent on us. If we could understand its language we would hear its call for reciprocation.

Change in our landscape is as inevitable as the seasons - annual cyclical change. It can be naturally slow - the growth of trees and bushes, naturally gradual - changes in crops and farm animals produced. It can also be naturally abrupt - storm damage. Our actions can respond to and contribute to such natural changes - global warming. Man-made landscape change can also be slow - occasional new buildings, gradual - regular new buildings and abrupt - ‘overnight’ housing estates, wind farms, motorways, shopping malls etc.

Prior to the 1963 Planning and Development Act, the ordinary citizen had very little say in landscape interventions by others. Since then in theory the ordinary citizen has a democratic role to play in the process. This planning role is perceived as being very limited and citizens often feel powerless. The processes of landscape change are complex and often far from transparent. Playing a constructive, responsible, participative role requires a structured, informed, strategic community response.

Whether you are an ‘ordinary’ citizen, a community group, transition year or third level student; undertaking a landscape circle study is your opportunity to respond to the call of your landscape. You can make it as simple or as comprehensive as you wish. We can however guarantee you that if you undertake a ‘Landscape Circle Study’ of your landscape you will at the very least enrich your life and equally importantly be in a more informed and empowered position to actively engage in the management of your landscape.

## Introduction

Decisions that profoundly affect the quality of your landscape are invariably being taken in offices very far from where you live. Politicians, administrators, developers and businesspeople taking those decisions are more likely to demonstrate sensitivity towards landscape quality in a society that intimately knows the landscape in its own circle. Undertaking a 'Landscape Circle' study will assist you in being party to those decisions.

We tend to take our landscape for granted – whether we regard it as good or bad. However, in most of Ireland we have been fortunate to inherit a landscape of an exceptionally high quality. As with many things that come easy we have not always appreciated our good fortune. We have left it to its own devices, running free. That might have been fine in times past when the pace of change was leisurely and the landscape healed its own wounds. The times have changed dramatically in the past 50 years. And problems arise when someone decides that as we put no value on it they will take it from us, to replace it with something very inferior. As we have failed to honour the responsibilities of ownership we are in a weak position to repel or at least put manners on the invader.

This guide is intended to assist all those who would wish to recapture their 'runaway' landscape, be they individuals, groups, communities, organisations, societies, clubs or schools by undertaking a 'Landscape Circle Study' of their area. A landscape circle study involves selecting a circle of landscape and studying and recording its history, its evolution, its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and the actions and actors who might respond to those characteristics. The guide offers advice on ways to undertake and complete a successful landscape circle study.

You do not need to be an expert to undertake the study. You will not require specialised terminology and the depth of the study is at your discretion. All that is required is an interest in your landscape and a desire to influence the nature and extent of the changes it undergoes in your lifetime and beyond. As with all successful human ventures you should however draw on expert knowledge where possible.

The quality of landscape is decided by its ingredients, natural and human-made, the extent of their representation and distribution and most importantly their overall composition in the landscape.

It is easy to forget the urban landscape with so many books written about the rural landscape. Yet we increasingly live in an urban landscape and the landscape circle works just as well in the city as in the countryside.

It should be possible for anyone to undertake an effective landscape study using this handbook and the Council of Europe publication '*The European Rural Heritage Observation Guide*'. LAI will also organise workshops to assist those undertaking 'Landscape Circle' studies.

The key outcome of the study will centre round a report documenting the scoping of the study area, its evolution, its landscape elements, an in-depth analysis of its characteristics and an action plan for the future management of the circled landscape.

The study report will provide the basis for many other powerful initiatives such as exhibitions, DVD's, web sites, planning submissions, proactive engagement with developers, etc.

All studies are open to accusations of subjectivity and indeed most if not all studies reflect a degree of subjectivity. The more systematic and thorough the study is the more it will overcome this potential weakness. Testing the conclusions of the study with the residents of the area is useful in validating and reinforcing the report. The fact that everything in the circle, good and bad, must be considered is in itself a significant defence against subjectivity.

It is expected that studies will vary in scope and depth depending on whether they are individual studies or group studies. Landscape Alliance Ireland expects that in time communities undertaking studies will meet other communities to compare results, experience, challenges and solutions. This will further refine and improve the process.

As LAI are working also promoting a universal European Landscape Circle template, there may well be international gatherings in the future. LAI intends to facilitate such gatherings. There will certainly be Irish gatherings.

*"Cities are losing their distinct identities. Identification often goes no further than supporting the local football team. . . Making cities fit for people to enjoy is one of the great tasks ahead. They should allow us to live and work locally: we need multi-centred cities with streets for working and streets for walking. We must also take into account the other forms of life that increasingly inhabit our cities - so that they are a fit home for all species."*

**Herbert Girardet, 1992, The Gaia Atlas of Cities,**

## Summary

The landscape circle template is intended to encourage and assist individuals and groups to undertake an in-depth analytical study of their landscape incorporating a dynamic landscape photographic observatory and resulting in a landscape management action plan. It should also be of use for academics undertaking more large scale studies.

It involves 7 integrated steps and can be completed in 6 to 12 months. We recommend 12 months to allow for seasonal patterns. Completing such a study will heighten and inform your awareness of your landscape and place you in a very strong position to participate in the inevitable processes of change taking place in your landscape.

**Step 1 - Scoping the Study Area:** using the Ordnance Survey Ireland (Osi) Discovery Series Map (1:50,000), a landscape circle is selected for the study area. (Permission to copy/reproduce is required from the Osi – see ‘copyright’ in appendix 4). The radius of the circle is likely to be around 1 km for urban studies, 2 - 3 kms for a small town or village plus its hinterland and up to 5km for rural landscapes of low complexity. It is better to start with a small circle and enlarge it if necessary.

LAI has devised a simple tool that will assist in carrying out this step – see page 11.

**Step 2. Research:** There are three interrelated sections to researching your study – 1. - understanding landscape, 2. - understanding the Irish landscape and 3. - understanding the landscape of your selected circle. This will involve visits to book shelves at home, in libraries, bookshops, local authority facilities, newspapers, television and the internet. The research should result in a written description of the history and evolution of your landscape.

**Step 3. Creating an Image Observatory:-** source old images of your landscape and compare them with photos of the same landscape today. In addition, compile a current representative photographic portfolio of the existing landscape; recording the details for replication in subsequent years to visually record landscape change.

**Step 4. Information gathering:** The objective of the identification process is to list the elements of the landscape in the circle that define the landscape of the study area, ideally separating them into landscape strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (see Step 5). Whilst some of this work can be carried out indoors using maps, photos, reference material and your memory, most of the recording will take place outdoors. A specific location for each element should be identified on the map, although for dispersed elements it may be adequate to refer to a particular quadrant of a circle.

The identification of landscape elements will range over the built (old and new), the natural and archaeological heritage as well as ‘non-heritage’ elements. It also adds its own important component – an understanding of the composition of the landscape and the interrelationship between existing built and natural heritage and present-day interventions, e.g., construction work, changed land use practices etc.



The extent by which landscape elements are common, occasional or rare must be recorded and the pattern of their occurrence should be indicated by shading or cross-hatching a map section.

**Step 5. Evaluating your landscape:** Because the landscape is a composition of many elements or 'jigsaw pieces' an analytical process is required. The LANSWOT analysis (Landscape Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is highly suited to evaluating and prioritising the diverse elements in the context of their role in defining and deciding landscape quality.

It avoids the complexity of deep scientific analysis, whilst still inviting individuals and communities to adopt a structured, critical approach in their assessment of their landscape. It has the added advantage of enabling communities in different locations to compare and contrast their conclusions within a common framework.

**Step 6. Identifying Landscape Management Actions and Actors:** Landscape Management involves identifying/recording the actors and the actions involved or required in response to the prioritised lists produced by the LANSWOT analysis, encouraging best practice; where possible leading to the conservation of landscape elements (or at least a continuity of these elements within the landscape); and determining the character of interventions in order to - reinforce the strengths, address the weaknesses, capitalise on the opportunities and avert or mitigate the threats.

This stage is about identifying with the landscape and participating actively, rather than passively, in the landscape management process, in a manner appropriate to the scale involved.

**Step 7. The Landscape Study Report and other Outputs:** A landscape study report will feature the following:

- An introduction to the study identifying the study area – the selected circle
- A description of the landscape of the selected circle and its evolution
- A landscape observatory of the circle
- A prioritised list of landscape strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats
- An associated list of the landscape management actions and actors involved
- An action plan to publicise and give effect to the conclusions of the study

Completing a landscape circle study report will achieve much in informing and alerting you about your landscape. We recommend you to take some further important steps to communicate and validate your work to your immediate and greater community by progressing to one or more measures and thus become a landscape active community and/or individual.

The seven step process for undertaking a landscape circle study is described in detail over the following pages.

*“Thus we, personally, cumulatively, communally, create and recreate landscapes – a landscape being not just the terrain but also the human perspectives on it, the land plus its overburden of meanings.”*

**Tim Robinson. Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara and other writings**

## Step 1 - Scoping the Study Area

The use of the circle to scope a landscape study derives from many influences including the many circles that mark the Irish landscape – ring forts, stone forts, stone circles, crannog's, beehive huts, motte's and bailey's scattered throughout the island. The circle has a simple inescapable logic in the landscape. If you stand in a flat landscape like an Irish bog or on top of a hill such as the symbolic Hill of Tara in the Central Plain of Ireland, the limit of your vision is a circle. The landscape circle provides an accessible route for citizens into the complexities of professional methodologies such as landscape character assessment.

Using the readily available Discovery Series Map (1:50,000), a landscape circle is selected for the study area. (See note in appendix 4 re obtaining permission to copy or reproduce Osi maps). Your choice of study area will depend on your objectives – you may simply want to study your home place, or you may wish to study an area that is important to you, whether it is facing threats or not. You should write out your objectives and develop a brief for your study – what do you want to achieve and how do you intend to realise your objectives.

Our initial research suggests a radius of around 1 km for urban studies and a typical radius of 2 - 3 kms for a small town or village plus its hinterland. Rural landscapes of low complexity could have significantly higher radii.

You can choose to work from a chosen centre point, but it is easier to concentrate on the landscape to be enclosed in the circle. We suggest that you draw a series of circles of different radii from 1 to 5 km with a narrow permanent marker in a sheet of clear plastic (reuse some excess packaging material – first draw the circles on a sheet of paper and then trace them onto the plastic). You can then move the plastic sheet over the map rather than drawing and re-drawing circles with a compass.

The circle chosen should be small enough to be studied having account of the time and resources available, but must be large enough to encompass a range of landscape diversity – your local knowledge will guide the choice. The study itself commences at the centre of the circle and works out in concentric bands and may be enlarged or reduced in response to the progress of the study. The boundary of the circle as interpreted on the ground is not rigid and could have a tolerance of plus or minus 25m or more.

In a sense the circle recognizes the scale at which communities work best – the village, it little matters whether it is a village in the accepted sense – a small physical settlement or the dispersed 'village' that often distinguishes the Irish rural landscape or one of the urban villages that form the 'honeycomb' of our towns and cities.

Urban or rural, we recommend that you start small and enlarge the study rather than the reverse – it is a less wasteful strategy. The circle can be given the identity of the settlement or place-name located closest to the centre of the circle.

Disciplined scoping is desirable - the study area may have landscape of consistent character and distinctiveness, or there may be a number of centres of intense landscape character and distinctiveness which will wax and wane from area to area.

If the study is undertaken by a group and involves a large, complex area, it may be decided to select a number of overlapping circles, requiring thought and discussion on the different landscapes considered to exist in the study area. We would still recommend that one circle be selected and its study completed before commencing a second or more. Where there are a number of adjoining circles, it is recommended that they overlap to ensure full coverage of the study area and they may well extend to places outside the targeted study area. In this case each circle can again be given the identity of the settlement or place-name located closest to the centre of the circle.

If the area being considered is very large and diverse and a range of interlaced landscapes is involved, spreading into neighbouring areas, this requires separate studies, creating the exciting possibility of neighbouring communities undertaking concurrent studies. This may however require the assistance of a co-coordinator. LAI will in so far as is possible assist in seeking funding and suitable personnel. Neighbouring communities undertaking independent studies should, wherever possible, also overlap each other's circles.

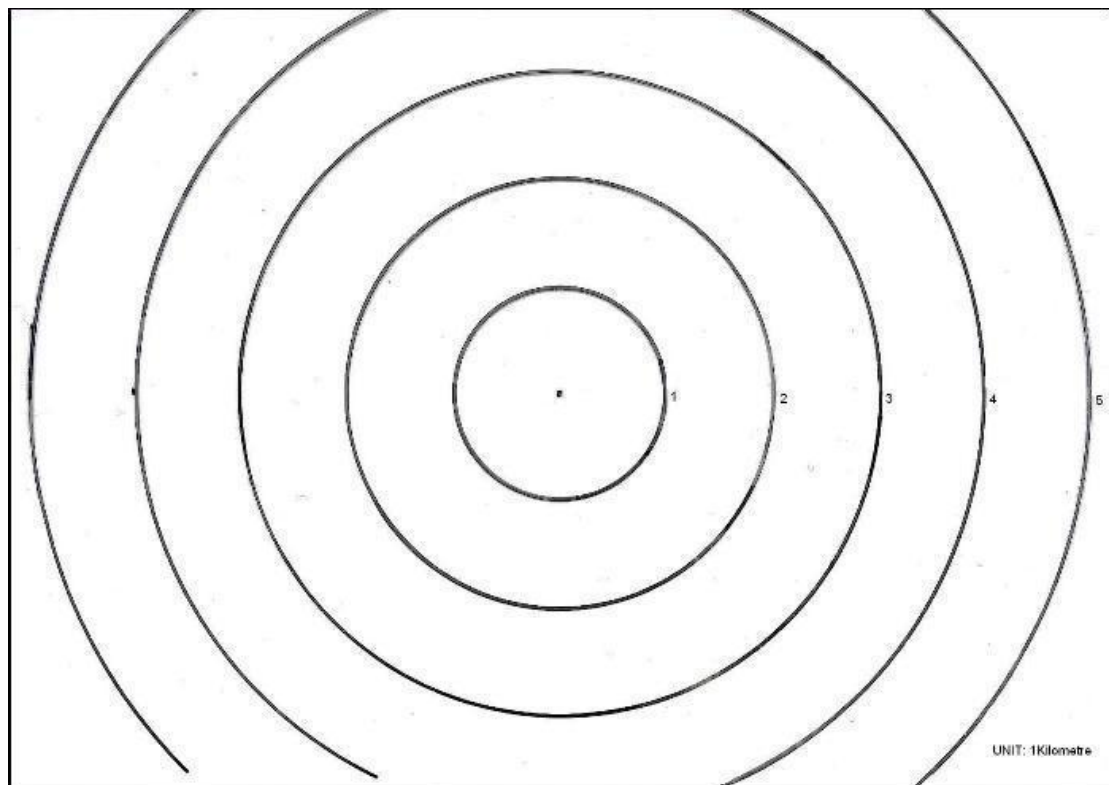


Fig 1. Template to assist in selecting landscape study circle.

*"The decentralised village-based tradition is not only an important resource to salvage from our history, but also a crucial alternative to the relentless and unsustainable growth of the centralised mega city. Countless urban as well as rural neighbourhoods today are attempting to regain the character of a sustainable village in the shadow of bigness and pollution."*

**Tom Hayden, The Lost Gospel of the Earth,**

## **Step 2. Research**

There are three interrelated sections to researching your study –

1. - understanding landscape in general,
2. - understanding the Irish landscape
3. - understanding the landscape of your selected circle.

You can be systematic and work through from 1 to 3, or in reverse from 3 to 1. We believe that the best approach is to engage with all three levels concurrently from the start of the study.

The best way to research landscape is to experience it in a state of alert awareness and then read the books. It would be easy to get bogged down in the research alone and some of the published ‘expert’ material on landscape is not as accessible as it ought to be – the jargon merchants have been very busy.

Research guidance may be provided to a study group by a trained and experienced facilitator, but may also be gleaned from many publications.

The Heritage Council, The Council of Europe, local authorities, libraries, bookshops (new and second hand), newspapers, television, relevant government departments and the internet will all be invaluable sources. There are many web sites from Ireland and elsewhere with extensive free material on landscape. (See appendix 3)

A general understanding of the meaning of landscape will be gained from reading the European Landscape Convention and particularly the explanatory notes.

The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

Understanding the practical meaning of landscape in a European context will be provided by the internet-available European Rural Heritage Observation Guide – CEMAT - a recommended text, speaking clearly of reading the landscape.

Landscape relevant legislation is listed in Appendix 1, due to a lack of political commitment and understanding it has not been particularly effective to date in Ireland, but we believe that the emergence of landscape circle studies and the associated informed communities will change this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

To gain an understanding of the Irish landscape, we are now spoiled for choice with some extraordinary old and recent books by authors such as Robert Lloyd Praeger, E. Estyn Evans, Frank Mitchell, John Feehan, Michael Viney, Tim Robinson and Fred Aalen to name but a few.

We highly recommend ‘The Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape’ (Aalen, Whelan & Stout, 1997) for a comprehensive transparent overview of the Irish landscape.

But many writers and poets will enrich your understanding of landscape and cannot fail to enthuse and inform you with their sense of landscape - space, place, time and belonging.

Some of them may even have homed in on your landscape circle.

You must also research images in homes, libraries and public galleries such as paintings, postcards, drawings and photographs - old and new to gain a visual understanding of the process of change or evolution in your landscape.

Increasingly there is useful information to be found in county and city development plans. We also recommend the excellent landscape character assessment publication 'Northern Ireland Landscape Character 2000' (to order online: [www.corpdocs.co.uk](http://www.corpdocs.co.uk)).

*"It is absolutely necessary to encourage greater public awareness of the significance of landscapes. Landscapes and changes within them require greater study, control and management at national, regional and, most crucially, local levels. Local communities should be educated, motivated and aided to safeguard their landscape heritage. They should study, record and monitor their landscape, identifying its economic, social, cultural and ecological values, and defining its overall character and the appropriate design for new developments to enhance diversity and distinctiveness. Landscape history should be included in the training of architects, agriculturalists, foresters, engineers and planners, and other disciplines relevant to landscape management. Landscape should be treated as an environmental resource in the planning process. There should, however, be acceptance of the inevitability of landscape change and understanding of its causes and consequences. A distinctive landscape coherently defines natural and cultural processes and is therefore an appropriate scale for studying the interactions between people and their environment. It is also a suitable framework for environmental policy and management."*

**John Feehan, Educating for Environmental Awareness**

### Step 3. Creating an Image Observatory

An Image Observatory might be called a landscape photograph album - but it is much more than that.

*“One picture is worth ten thousand words”*. The word-value of appropriate landscape images is beyond measure. Images of the same landscape over time further multiply the value and provide the best understanding of landscape, its evolution and the processes of change. The Observatory will serve as an invaluable visual aid to assist communities in understanding, and communicating the concept of landscape quality and monitoring the process of change taking place in their landscape.

The creation of an Observatory involves sourcing old landscape images in different media to provide the basis for a time-series of images. Old maps and written descriptions of the landscape will also be useful.

A current photographic portfolio of the existing landscape must also be compiled. Ideally this should comprise key indicator landscapes within your particular circle experiencing, or likely to experience, active change and, where possible, earlier images should be replicated with present day images.

The study will involve selecting and carefully recording in detail a number of key photographic viewpoints, the combination of the images recorded will capture the cumulative essence of the local landscape and by repeating the photographs at the same time, from the same locations each year you can record and track the changes taking place, in the process creating a wonderful local planning and landscape heritage resource.

Study areas that enjoy distant panoramic views to landscape features located outside the study area may require an outer `vista ring`.

We must stress that viewpoints and camera positions must be carefully mapped and described for future recording of the landscape on a systematic basis.

*Landscape is not matter nor merely nature, rather it enjoys a luminosity. Landscape is numinous. Each field has a different name and in each place something different happened. Landscape has a secret and silent memory, a narrative of presence where nothing is ever lost or forgotten. In Tom Murphy's play 'The Gigli Concert' the unnamed man loses this sense of landscape and loses the ability to connect with himself simultaneously".*

**O'Donohue, John, Anam Cara, spiritual wisdom from the Celtic World, Bantam Press, 1997**

#### **Step 4. Information gathering – listing the landscape ingredients in the circle.**

Landscape Identification is about seeing the landscape with fresh, perceptive eyes.

We often move through our landscape blind to our surroundings – it is a blur outside the train window of our busy lives. Identifying and listing the elements of our landscape is a way of drawing back the curtain or cleaning life's window.

The objective of the identification process is to list the elements of the landscape in each circle; a specific element location should be identified on the map, for dispersed elements it may be adequate to refer to a particular quadrant of a circle.

The identification of landscape elements will range over the built, natural and archaeological heritage as well as 'non-heritage' elements. It also adds its own important component – an understanding of the composition of the landscape and the interrelationship between existing built and natural heritage, and present-day interventions, e.g., construction work, changed land use practices etc.

We recommend a 12 month time-frame for the study to allow for seasonal influences – deciduous plants, flowering and fruiting, day length and sun height, air clarity etc

The extent by which landscape elements are common, occasional or rare must be recorded and the pattern of their occurrence must be indicated (by shading or cross-hatching a map section).

In time, reference lists of the landscape elements that might occur in different areas will emerge as a by-product of the process.

We provide a general list in Appendix 2, but a locality specific list might be prepared for each study area as a customized response to match the distinctiveness of each local landscape.

*“The landscape is an open book. From an educational viewpoint it is a resource book of incomparable richness, though we have been accustomed to consult only a few pages. It belongs to all of us, and it cannot survive unless all of us care, because particular pages are in the keeping of individuals who may not understand what they possess.”*

**John Feehan, ‘Laois - An Environmental History’**

## **Step 5. Evaluating your landscape– the LANSWOT analysis – prioritising the lists.**

Because the landscape is a composition of many elements and ‘jigsaw pieces’, an analytical process is required. LAI has always advocated a critical analysis approach to landscape management. The LANSWOT analysis (Landscape Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is highly suited to analysing the diverse elements of our landscape in the context of their role in defining and deciding landscape quality.

It lends itself to community use in avoiding the complexity of scientific jargon-led analysis, whilst inviting communities to adopt a structured, critical approach in their assessment of their landscape. It has the added advantage of enabling communities in different locations to compare and contrast their conclusions within a common framework.

### *Categorising Landscape Elements into the LANSWOT columns*

Landscape assessment involves classifying and ranking the elements in order of their importance. This is about understanding the landscape. The reason why a landscape is distinctive may not always be immediately obvious. Elements will be important because of the extent to which they shape and define the landscape, for better or worse. They will be very important where they add to or remove distinctiveness from the landscape.

*A landscape strength adds to or enhances the quality of the landscape.*

*A landscape weakness needs to be restored/reinvigorated/reinstated..*

*A landscape opportunity involves a new situation with the potential to create a new landscape strength.*

*A landscape threat is poised to damage or destroy existing landscape quality by removing existing strengths/weaknesses and not compensating with new strengths.*

A keynote element identifies or characterises a landscape on its own and influences our perception of landscape, even when it is not very obvious: it has a presence in the landscape. It may be an old or a new building, a church with spire or tower. It may be an iconic mountain or hill - Ben Bulbin in County Sligo or Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo are classic examples. On some of our ‘flatter’ landscapes less imposing hills and even chimney stacks take centre stage.

A landscape pattern relates to a recurring element such as hedgerows, stone walls, the very Irish stone and sod ditches (often combined with Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* hedges) or even stud farm paddock fencing. Land use activities create their own patterns in the landscape; agriculture is the main influence that we are familiar with in Ireland, with distinctive field patterns being associated with different crops and farm animal enterprises.



A particular style of wall construction or an ensemble of buildings may define a landscape, or the design consistency of a particular artifact. A busy craftsman may have influenced the building styles in an area and thereby defined the distinctive landscape character of an area – ornamentation in concrete on houses in North Kerry and West Limerick are cases in point.

Threats might include the homogenising effect of replicated building designs, which are now creating a new characteristic Irish landscape, peppered with Irish bungalows and trophy mansions. The introduction of urban inspired front boundary walls, entrances and gates have led to an unsettling, sporadic, suburban mirage in the Irish rural landscape (urban crawl?). In common with the cities and towns of the developed world the ubiquitous ‘Tiffany Downs’ housing estate and all its clones have come to characterise our new suburban edge, toy town landscape.

A native or, more commonly, introduced plant species may define the landscape – *Fuchsia riccartonii* from South America is now so characteristic of the West Cork landscape that it has been adopted as the trademark for the products of the area ([www.fuchsiabrands.com](http://www.fuchsiabrands.com)). However, many other introduced plants are visually and ecologically alien in the landscape, the distinctive ‘pus’-shade of green of *Griselinia* hedging being a good example.

The composition of a landscape is very important. Two different landscapes could have a similar list of elements, but one could be more pleasing than another because, intentionally or otherwise, it is more successfully composed or strategically arranged. New interventions must be assessed in relation to their wider impact on the composition of the greater landscape.

Landscape composition is often defined by the public face of the private realm – a fact not always easily acknowledged. For example, a large private building (a mansion or industrial plant) located on private property, in a prominent location, can influence the landscape character of a large tract of land.

The importance attached to landscape elements may have local, district, county, regional, national, European or international significance.

*“When we have reached a stage where tillage is concentrated in drier south-east Ireland, the dairy herds are on the good grasslands, overgrazing has been eliminated and forests have been established wherever they can form profitable wood, what is to become of the rest of the landscape and of its people?”*

**Frank Mitchell, Reading the Irish Landscape, Mitchell & Ryan 1997.**

## **Step 6. Identifying actions and actors linked to the prioritised lists.**

Landscape Management involves identifying/recording the actors and the actions involved or required in response to the outcome of the LANSWOT analysis, encouraging best practice; where possible leading to the conservation of landscape elements (or at least a continuity of these elements within the landscape); and determining the character of interventions in order to:

- Reinforce the Strengths
- Address the Weaknesses
- Realise the Opportunities
- Avert or mitigate the Threats

This stage is about identifying with the landscape and participating actively, rather than passively, in the landscape management process, in a manner appropriate to the scale involved. On the larger scale, the activities of the major forces for change in the greater landscape can give rise to profound and widespread change across a large area. In such cases, the actors may be remote from the landscape concerned, and are likely to be faceless government and company officials.

On a smaller scale the immediate local landscape can be dramatically changed by quite small interventions, such as the demolition of a prominent building, the construction of a new prominent building, the felling of a few large trees, the clearing of a large thicket, the clear-felling or conversely the planting of a small area of woodland/forestry. Here the actors may be very local, even a neighbour.

The cumulative impact of many small actions can also significantly change the overall character and quality of a landscape; for instance the growing of certain plants by many individual gardeners can change the character of a landscape in quite a short time.

Actions to mitigate impacts on landscape would involve a balanced mix of landscape preservation, protection, planning, design, creation and restoration. Interventions in the landscape might be guided in such a fashion as to enrich and enhance the landscape, whilst reducing or avoiding ill-considered developments which can take from or homogenise the character of the landscape.

The forces for landscape change must be landscape-sensitised at an early stage: this template provides communities with the foresight, understanding and confidence to engage in that process. Individual and community activists must not only identify the actions and actors, but also the mechanisms and communication channels, legislative and otherwise, available to the local citizen and the community to influence the actors.

The discipline of carrying out an audit on landscape interventions is useful. The balance sheet for proposed change in the landscape may show a loss, gain or a neutral outcome. The LCT provides the data base for landscape auditing and is intended to result in a very healthy landscape balance sheet.

*"Nothing less than the whole of the past is needed to explain the present, and in this difficult task we cannot afford to neglect the unrecorded past."*

**E. Estyn Evans, Irish Folk Ways,**

## **Step 7. Completing the Report, Publicising/Communicating its Conclusions and becoming a Landscape Active Community.**

Completing a landscape circle study report will achieve much in informing and alerting you about your landscape. We recommend you to take some further important steps to communicate and validate your work to your immediate and greater community by progressing to one or more of the following:

**Questionnaire:** as a survey of the views of other members of the community this might form part of the project and/or subsequent feedback – a representative response from the community would be valuable in reinforcing the credibility of the study findings.

**Exhibition:** involving posters with outcome of SWOT analysis, images/photographs illustrating the character and distinctiveness of the local landscape, photographic/image sequences over time illustrating landscape change and evolution and photographs if possible of successful interventions in the landscape. Illustrations of unsuccessful or damaging interventions in the landscape need to be presented diplomatically to avoid unproductive alienation/conflict/litigation.

**Booklet:** a booklet can be costly if printed in large numbers and become dated, but they are a reassuring ‘product’. Print to order, rather than printing large quantities which may tie up scarce funds and storage space.

**Video/DVD:** more ambitious but versatile and ideal for landscape.

**Web Site:** more ambitious again, but great for reaching a wider audience - is likely to require updating. LAI may set up a separate Landscape Circle page on its web site.

**Note:** all of the above measures as outputs of the study have a long term historical landscape value but unless they are reviewed and updated their role in having an on-going active impact on landscape interventions may have a limited ‘shelf life’ of as little as 1 to 3 years. Reviewing and updating would not be an onerous task if undertaken on a regular basis (every 3 years is suggested)

### **Further Landscape Circle Outputs**

Implementing a Landscape Circle Study enables Landscape Management Actions to be undertaken in an informed and effective manner as follows:

- Creating landscape awareness via normal community social contact
- Providing informal advice to prospective actors
- Participating in the processes of City & County Development Plans, Local Area Action Plans, and Village Design Statements etc.
- Intervening in planning applications
- Lobbying politicians

- The study sets a benchmark for the quality of the local landscape
- A Landscape Circle Archive - the studies could form the basis of a county or city landscape archive – a historical and dynamic landscape management resource

*'We share a land of extraordinary variety, rich in buildings, landscapes, people and wildlife, with old and new cultural associations. That richness of local diversity is under siege. Mass production, increased mobility and forceful promotion of corporate identity have brought us uniform shop fronts, farm buildings, factories, forests and front doors. Intensive farming has created an increasingly bland countryside. New estates offer the 'Cheviot' or 'Purbeck' house in any part of the country.*

*'This erosion of difference and bleaching of identity, detail, craftsmanship and meaning affects us all, emotionally and culturally. It impoverishes the spirit and often our resolve to do something about it.'*

**Angela King and Sue Clifford**

'Common Ground, Introduction to the Deeds and Thoughts,'  
Common Ground, 1990.

## Case Study: The Rathbarry/Castlefreke Landscape Circle

With a radius of approximately 2 km, the Rathbarry/Castlefreke Landscape Circle demonstrates that a relatively small circle can contain a landscape of considerable diversity and high distinctiveness, and yet be manageable for a small group, or even an individual, as a study area.

The Rathbarry/Castlefreke Landscape Circle contains many of the landscape elements common to the coastal areas of South West Cork: a small village, a gently rolling, agricultural landscape featuring fields (enclosed by stone walls, stone and earthen ditches, and some hawthorn hedgerows), coniferous and deciduous woodland, streams, a small river, a lake, wetlands and reed-beds. The coastal section features an exceptional sand and shingle beach with dunes and rocky headlands, including the dramatic Galley Head to the south east.

It features a less common, open landscape in the vicinity of Castlefreke Castle: a former demesne landscape, crowded with ghosts, featuring the remains of an extensive *rath* (ring fort), a possible Norman fortification and the location where Randal Oge Barry is said to have built his castle during the early part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a formidable and virtually impregnable structure (the castle, then in the ownership of the Freke family, is on record as having withstood a 35 week siege during the uprising of 1642). The *rath* is now covered with a dense thicket of tall-growing bamboo!

The castle continued as the centre of the Freke estates into the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a focal point for the horse riding and hunting activities of the local gentry. The structures that have survived at Rathbarry include stables and a large courtyard, overlooked by the crest of the Lords of Carbery. To the south east stands the abandoned Protestant Parish Church of Rathbarry, built in 1825. Beside this church are remains of an earlier Roman Catholic Church and graveyard.

The dominant feature of the landscape today relates to the ruins of the rambling, castellated, gothic style mansion, Castle Freke (formerly in ruins, now partially restored) - built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the later seat of the Lords of Carbery. The structure is a curious mixture of the not very ancient and fairly modern (1900's). It was severely damaged by fire on at least two occasions - so rebuilding has been an almost constant process.

The demesne also gave rise to the stone lodges at the entrances and other stone buildings in the vicinity, excepting the Irish vernacular village pub in Rathbarry. The location for Castle Freke was obviously chosen to command a sweeping view of the surrounding landscape with Rosscarbery Bay to the Southwest and Galley Head to the Southeast.

However, the particular landscape impact of the Castlefreke demesne relates to the boundary walls along the roadways and around the estate, which were constructed using a very distinctive, local, slate-like stone, largely set in a vertical alignment.

The walls would have been constructed over three centuries, with the most active construction period likely to have been the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as an

agricultural improvement measure, in association with the enclosure of the land. Some of the work may also have been carried out in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a famine relief project. The Rathbarry/Castlefreke area contains all of the three main rock types found in West Cork, and the distinctive stone used in the walls was quarried from the immediately adjoining fields.

For many years there has been a very active local community in this area and they have had great success in the National Tidy Towns competition. Although some of the improvements have verged on the domestic in the green areas of the village, they have recognised and largely protected the unique quality of the landscape. The community has engaged in on-going works such as woodland footpaths and the restoration of the Sprigging School - originally erected by Lady Carbery to teach young ladies the skills of lace, crochet and needlework.

This landscape illustrates the difficulties of trying to take into account a very marked local landscape characteristic, as new residential entrances inserted into the distinctive Castlefreke roadside walls feature stonework where the stone used is not of local provenance and the building style is not always the most appropriate.

The integrity of the Rathbarry/Castlefreke cultural landscape is vulnerable; it may well be unique on an Irish scale and probably on a European scale. The implementation of a landscape circle study would help to crystallise the local understanding of landscape and assist those contemplating large or small interventions in the area to do so in a manner that is fully cognisant of its very distinctive landscape character.

*“The whole landscape a manuscript  
We had lost the skill to read,  
A part of our past disinherited;”*

**John Montague, poet, ‘The Rough Field’ (1972)**

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### **Landscape relevant legislation applicable in Ireland**

Legislation as it relates to landscape is currently provided for in Ireland by way of legislation and legislation-related measures at national and European level as follows:

The European Communities Environmental Impact Assessment EIA Directive No. 85/337/EEC as given effect by European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 1989 to 1998, - these were given effect in Ireland through Statutory Instrument No. 351 of 1998 – this combined & updated the S. I.'s No's 349 (1989), 84 (1994) and 101 (1996)

*This requires an environmental impact assessment of larger projects including assessment of landscape impacts. The fact that they are limited to larger projects and operate in a very inadequate legislative framework greatly diminishes its usefulness.*

The Strategic Environmental Assessment SEA (Council Directive 2001/42/EC – given effect in Ireland through S. I. No's 435 & 436 from the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2004)

*A recent measure only in its infancy here and it operates in a very inadequate legislative framework greatly which greatly diminishes its usefulness.*

The Planning & Development Act 2000

*In landscape terms it marked a limited advance on the 1963 Act, but again demonstrated a poor grasp of landscape by legislators and their officials, despite the body of wisdom already available from the Council of Europe and elsewhere.*

Draft planning Guidelines on Landscape and Landscape Assessment prepared and circulated by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2001)

*A disjointed document exhibiting an undeveloped understanding of landscape. Overdue being revised and replaced with a version informed by the submissions made after its publication by The Heritage Council and others. Its continued existence is doing irreparable damage to our landscape.*

The Council of Europe European Landscape Convention, (2000) – signed and ratified by Ireland in March 2002.

*This is a visionary convention requiring work and understanding to realize its aims. We signed and ratified in a cloud of blissful ignorance. The cloud has yet to lift.*

Local Authority Development & Local Area Plans

*Landscape has largely figured in vague aspirational terms in past development plans, some now contain greatly improved sections, but specific provision is still lacking.*

## **Appendix 2**

### **Indicative Reference Lists of Typical Landscape Ingredients**

#### **Topography:**

Mountains, uplands, moorlands, valleys, hills, ravines, rock faults, exposed rock, lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, wetlands, mudflats, beaches, islands, the sea, coastal features.

#### **Field Enclosure:**

Earthen banks (ditches), stone and earth banks (ditches), hedgerows, tree-lines, stone walls, fencing, etc.

#### **Vegetation**

Trees, woods, forests, shrub thicket, hedgerows, fields, marsh, fen, bog, sand dunes.

#### **Historical Associations**

Archaeological sites, Ambush sites, battle sites, military campaign routes, pilgrimage routes

#### **Buildings and their curtilages**

Towns, Villages, one-off housing, Heritage ruins, derelict ruins, civic buildings, heritage buildings, farm buildings, town houses, streetscapes, rural houses, industrial buildings, graveyards, gardens

#### **Travel Infrastructure**

Roads, footpaths, bridges, railway lines, stations, signposts, road-markings, vehicles

#### **Productive Land Uses**

Fields for silage, pasture, hay and the farm animals, fields for arable use, stud farms, timber production, orchards and soft fruit.

#### **Productive Sea Uses**

Harbours, piers, shellfish farms, fish farms, boats

#### **Leisure Land Uses**

Gardens, Parks, Golf courses, race courses, playing fields, forest parks

#### **Extractive Land Uses**

Peatlands, Quarries, mines, sand & gravel pits

#### **Waste Infrastructure**

Landfill sites, Civic Amenity sites, sewers, storm water pipes, gullies & drains, manhole covers,

#### **Artefacts**

Stone walls, stone edging, water pumps, gateposts, gates, weirs, quays, steps, letterboxes, bus shelters



### **Communications & Power Infrastructure**

Letter boxes, Telegraph poles, Electricity pylons, Mobile & telecommunications masts, junction boxes, manhole covers,

### **Commercial Manifestations**

Billboards, Advertising signs, Garish Nameplates

### **Distant Views and Prospects**

A landscape may enjoy distant views and prospects located outside of the study area; these are also landscape components/ingredients 'belonging' to the study area.

### **Wildlife Habitats and Designated Areas**

These may form overlays over combinations of other landscape elements. They are a more complex composition in the landscape that further enriches the landscape quality.

They heighten the value of landscape elements that might otherwise be regarded as of a lesser value on a purely two-dimensional assessment.

*“The involvement of local communities in the management of their landscapes, including the setting of long-term objectives and guidelines, is a relatively unexplored area but experimentation is underway in various European countries which may serve as a guide for Irish initiatives.”*

**Fred Aalen in the ‘The Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape’**

### **Appendix 3**

#### **References/Reading List**

**List 1** – essential and readily available – many downloadable from websites\*

European Rural Heritage Observation Guide – CEMAT, Council of Europe\*

F H A Aalen, Kevin Whelan & Matthew Stout, (1997) ‘Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape’, Cork University Press, Cork

The Heritage Council Policy Paper on Landscape and the National Heritage\*

City and County Heritage and Biodiversity Plans\*

Proceedings of the National Landscape Forum

Web Sites:

<http://coe.int/Europeanlandscapeconvention>

<http://landscape-forum-ireland.com>

<http://heritagecouncil.ie>

<http://antaisce.org>

**List 2** – These are well worth seeking out and referring to.

Billy Colfer, (2004), The Hook Peninsula, Cork University Press, Cork

Robert Lloyd Praeger, (1969), The Way That I Went, Allen Figgis, Dublin

Frank Mitchell & Michael Ryan, (1997), Reading the Irish Landscape, Town House, Dublin

E. Estyn Evans, (1957), Irish Folk Ways, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London

Tim Robinson, (1996) Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara & Other Writings, Lilliput Press, Dublin

John Feehan, (2003), Farming in Ireland, History, Heritage and Environment, Faculty of Agriculture, UCD.

John Feehan, (1983), Laois –An Environmental History, Ballykilcavan Press

Local authority design guides such as the Cork Rural Design Guide (2003) published by Cork County Council

Columns in daily newspapers such as The Irish Times (Heritage & Habitat page on Saturdays) and The Examiner (Outdoors page on Mondays).

## **Appendix 4**

### **Practical Considerations**

Undertaking a Landscape Circle Study involves some serious practical considerations. These are more onerous for a group study than for an individual study, but are equally important for either approach.

#### Expenses

A study can be undertaken at minimal cost, but to produce a ‘professional’ looking report and especially for group studies the following expenses are likely to arise:

- Purchase of Ordnance Survey maps and sheets
- Photographic equipment & materials
- Photocopying
- Printing
- Insurance
- Transport
- Miscellaneous – binding, stationery, CD’s etc

#### Funding

Before seeking funding prepare a brief outline of the project to accompany your applications for funding. The local Heritage Officer will be likely to advise and assist you. Grants may be available from the local City or County Council, the local Leader or Enterprise Company or the Heritage Council.

Local businesses may also provide sponsorship or assistance in kind (see list of expenses above)

#### Insurance

An individual or a couple of friends undertaking a study are unlikely to encounter insurance problems. Larger groups should consult an insurance broker or company about the possible need for public liability and personal accident insurance

#### Maps

We believe that the Discovery series maps should suffice for a ‘Landscape Circle’ study. Subject to permit (see below) these can be copied and enlarged using photocopiers. We do realise that studies undertaken may prove otherwise and there may be a need for more detailed maps such as the 1: 10,560 scale maps for rural areas and the 1:2,500 maps or even 1:1,000 maps for urban areas.

## Copyright

The issue of copyright only becomes relevant if or when you publish and circulate your report, but sources should always be acknowledged in the report.

Maps: To copy maps permission (or a Copyright Permit CP1) must be obtained and fees paid. For a project such as a landscape study it ideally permission should be available free of charge or for a modest fee. LAI will work with Osi to simplify permits for landscape circle studies. Contact Ordnance Survey Ireland, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8, tel - 01 496 6888 [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie)

Images: where relevant, permission to reproduce images (paintings, photographs etc) should be sought from the owners.

Text: It is generally permissible to include short quotations from books provided the source is acknowledged and the details of the publication are included in the report. Permission should be sought from publishers for long extracts and poems.

## Other Legal Concerns

A landscape circle study should largely be based on what can be seen from the public realm and accessible private property – roads, streets, and footpaths, the foreshore, parks, national parks etc. Unfortunately there is currently a very unsatisfactory situation pertaining to access to our landscape in Ireland. But to produce a comprehensive landscape circle study report the question of access to private lands will arise. Private lands must not be trespassed on. In most cases a reasonable request for access will be successful. It is vital that such permission is respected and acknowledged.

A separate and potentially contentious issue relates to the taking of photographs. There should be no problem with landscape photographs taken of streets, villages, towns and rural landscape scenes. Problems might arise with photographs that highlight private property, particularly if in a negative context. Permission should be obtained wherever possible. If in doubt only use such photographs where the context is positive.

In all cases it will be helpful to prepare a short letter explaining your project and requesting permission /co-operation from the land-owners concerned.

## Safety and Health

An interest in landscape can distract one from a sensible regard for one's safety and health. Walking and particularly photographing on Irish roads today can be extremely dangerous. The bright yellow Hi-vis vests are a very worthwhile investment. Clambering over ditches, streams and along shores/riverbanks are all hazardous exercises. Always ensure one's stability and safety before taking photographs. Be very careful stepping backwards! Preferably explore your landscape with a companion or 'minder'. But whether alone or in a group, always let someone know your intended itinerary and time programme and take a (charged) mobile phone with you.

## **Appendix 5**

### **Sample Record Sheets**

Sample record sheets are illustrated on the following pages. They are intended for guidance only.

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are all shown on the one page; in practice they will have a separate sheet or more for each.

The landscape observatory sheet only provides for one image, if you are illustrating landscape change over time with a series of images, you might use one sheet for images and carry the explanatory text on the opposite page.

**Template: Landscape Circle Study Record Sheets**

**Landscape Circle:**

**Recorder: ..... Survey Area: ..... Date: ..... Ref No: .....**

**Note: give brief explanation for listing and categorization as strength, weakness etc**

<b>Landscape Strengths:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>Photo Ref:</b>
<b>Landscape Weaknesses:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>Photo Ref:</b>
<b>Landscape Opportunities:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>Photo Ref:</b>
<b>Landscape Threats:</b>	<b>Location:</b>	<b>Photo Ref:</b>

**Template: Landscape Circle Study Action Sheets**

**Landscape Circle:**

**Recorder: ..... Survey Area: ..... Date: ..... Ref No: .....**

**Note: Because of the number of columns involved these sheets are best set out landscape style**

<b>Landscape Strengths</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Action Recommended</b>	<b>Actor(s) Involved</b>	<b>Image Reference</b>
<b>Landscape Weaknesses</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Ranking</b>			
<b>Landscape Opportunities</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Ranking</b>			
<b>Landscape Threats</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Ranking</b>			

**Template: Landscape Circle Study Photographic Observatory**

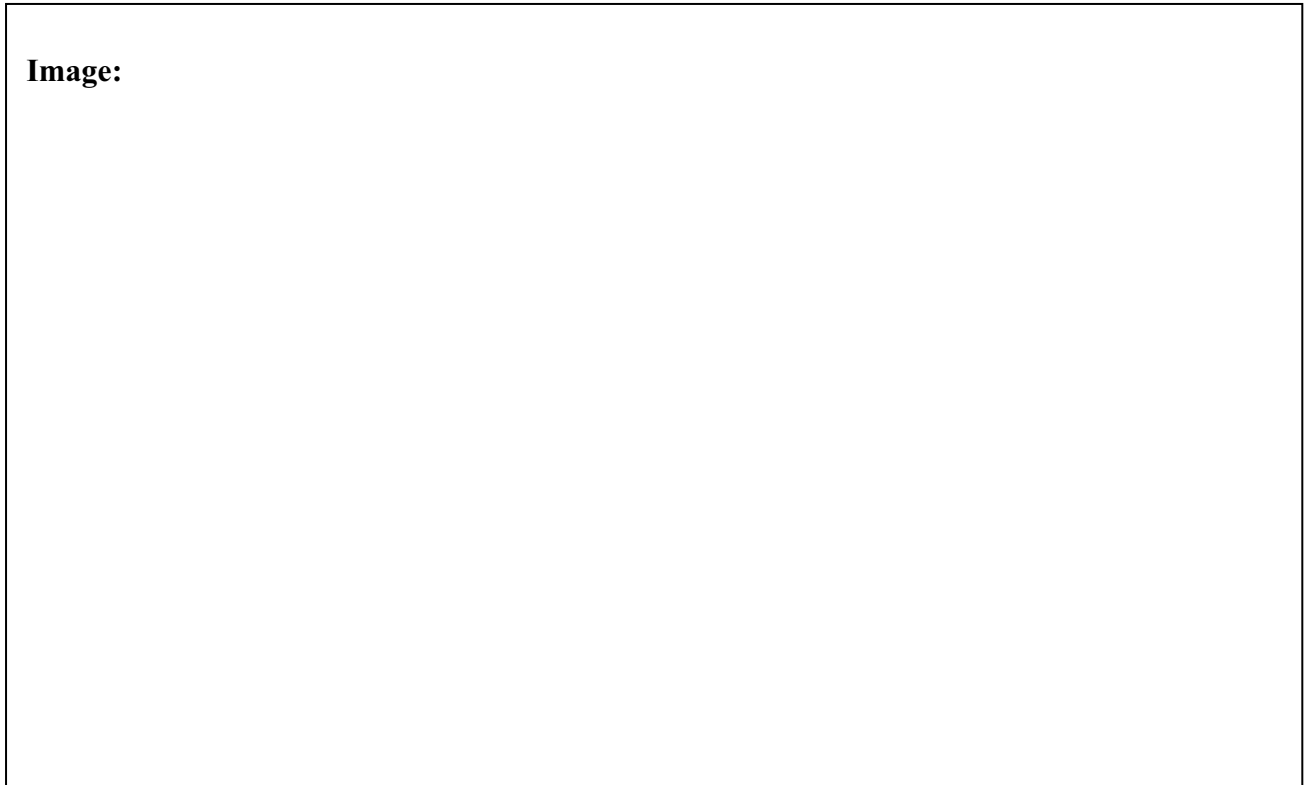
**Landscape Circle:**

**Recorder: ..... Survey Area: ..... Date: ..... Ref No: .....**

**Location: .....**

**Date of Image: .....**

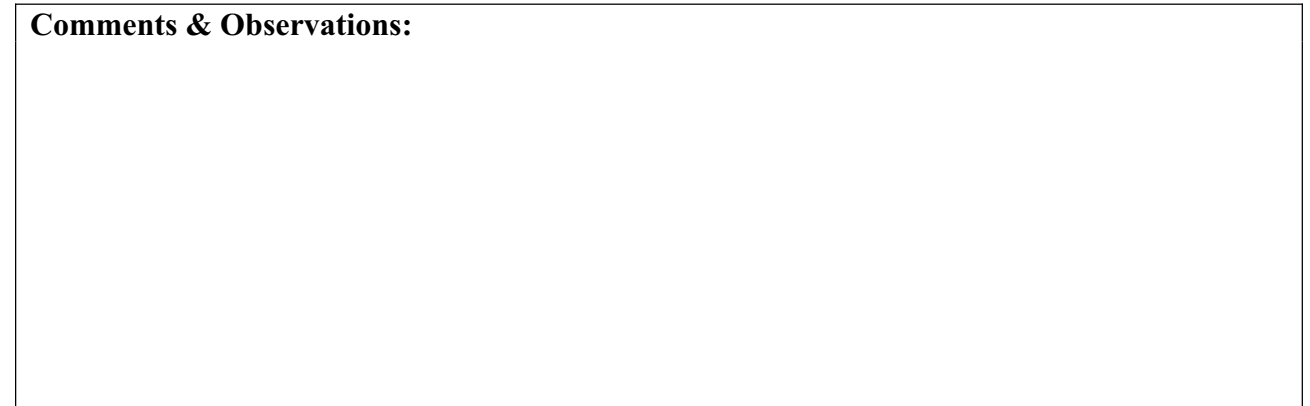
**Image:**



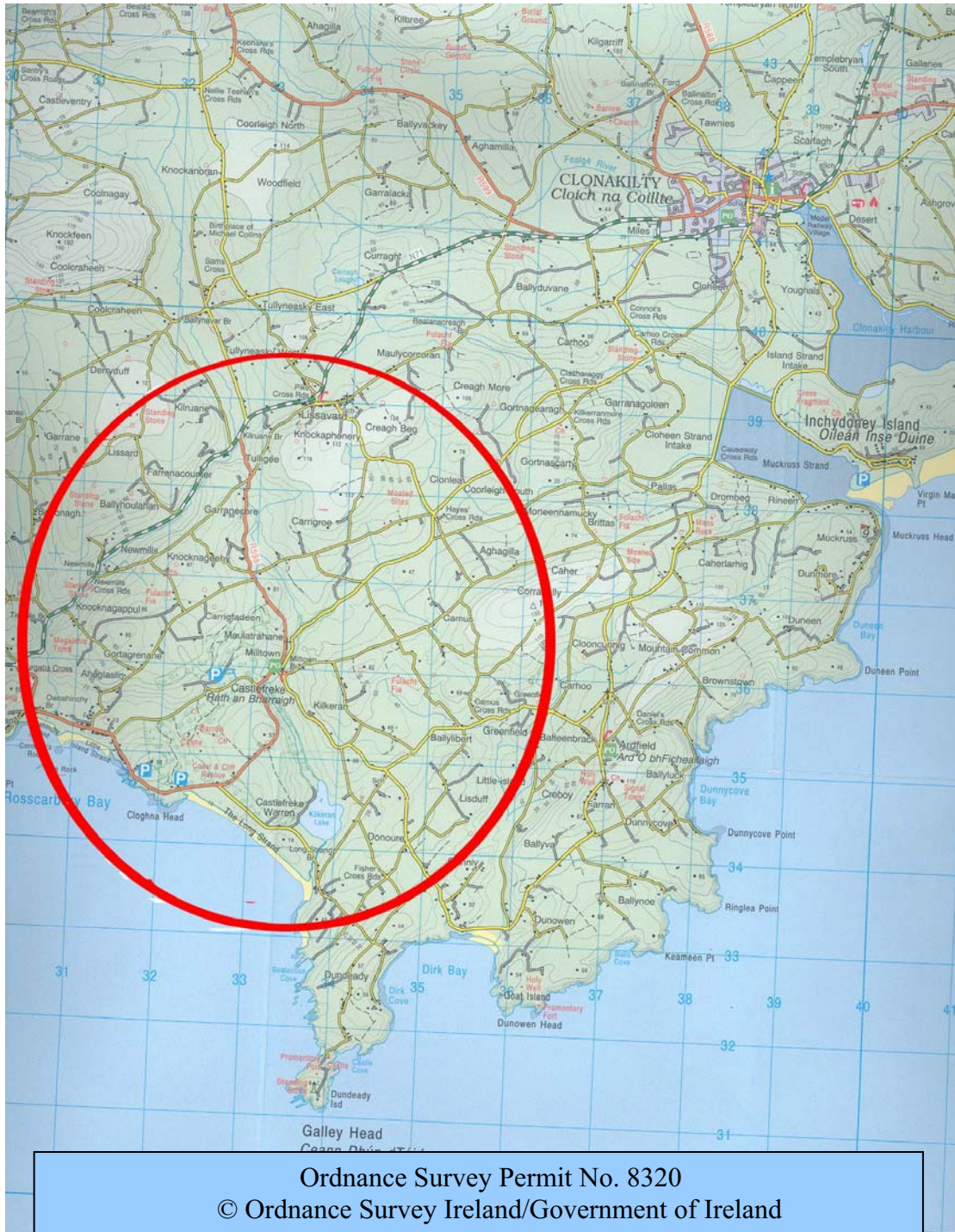
**Viewpoint**

**Sketch Map**

**Comments & Observations:**







‘Rathbarry/Castlefreke’ Landscape Circle on Discovery Map No. 89

