

# Slievemore

THE MULTI-PHASE LANDSCAPE OF SLIEVEMORE MOUNTAIN HAS LONG ATTRACTED HUMAN SETTLEMENT, EVIDENCED BY A PALIMPEST OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES FROM MEGALITHIC TOMBS THROUGH TO THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE OF THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

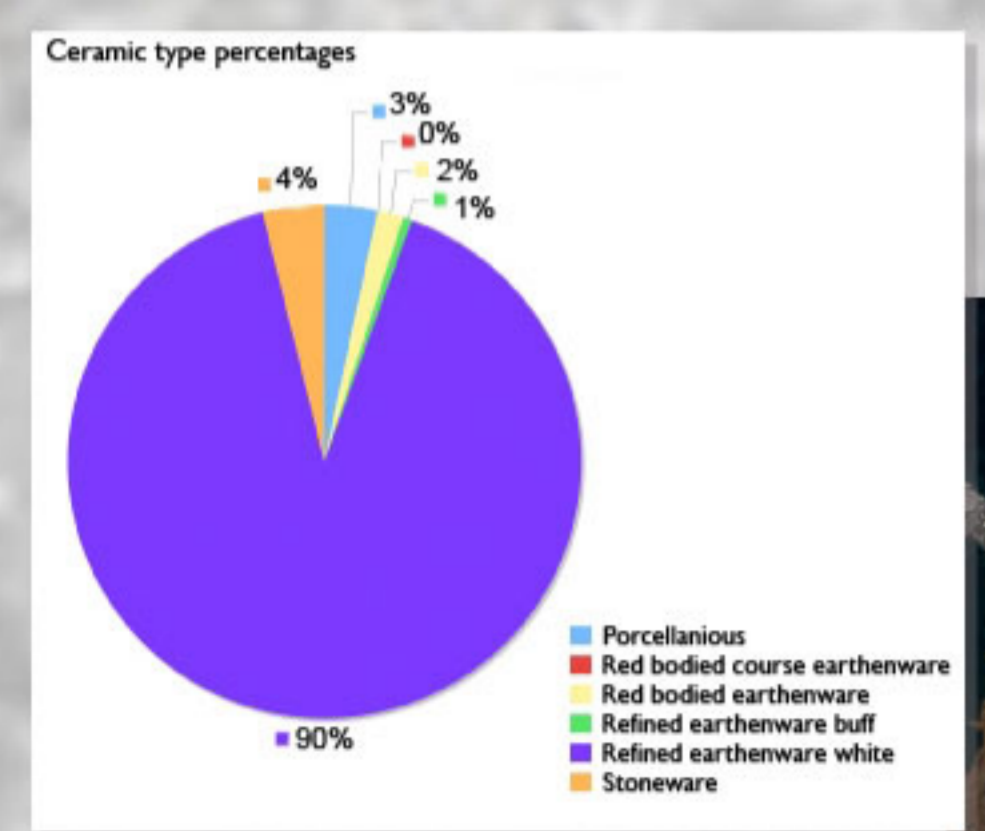


## The Deserted Village Project

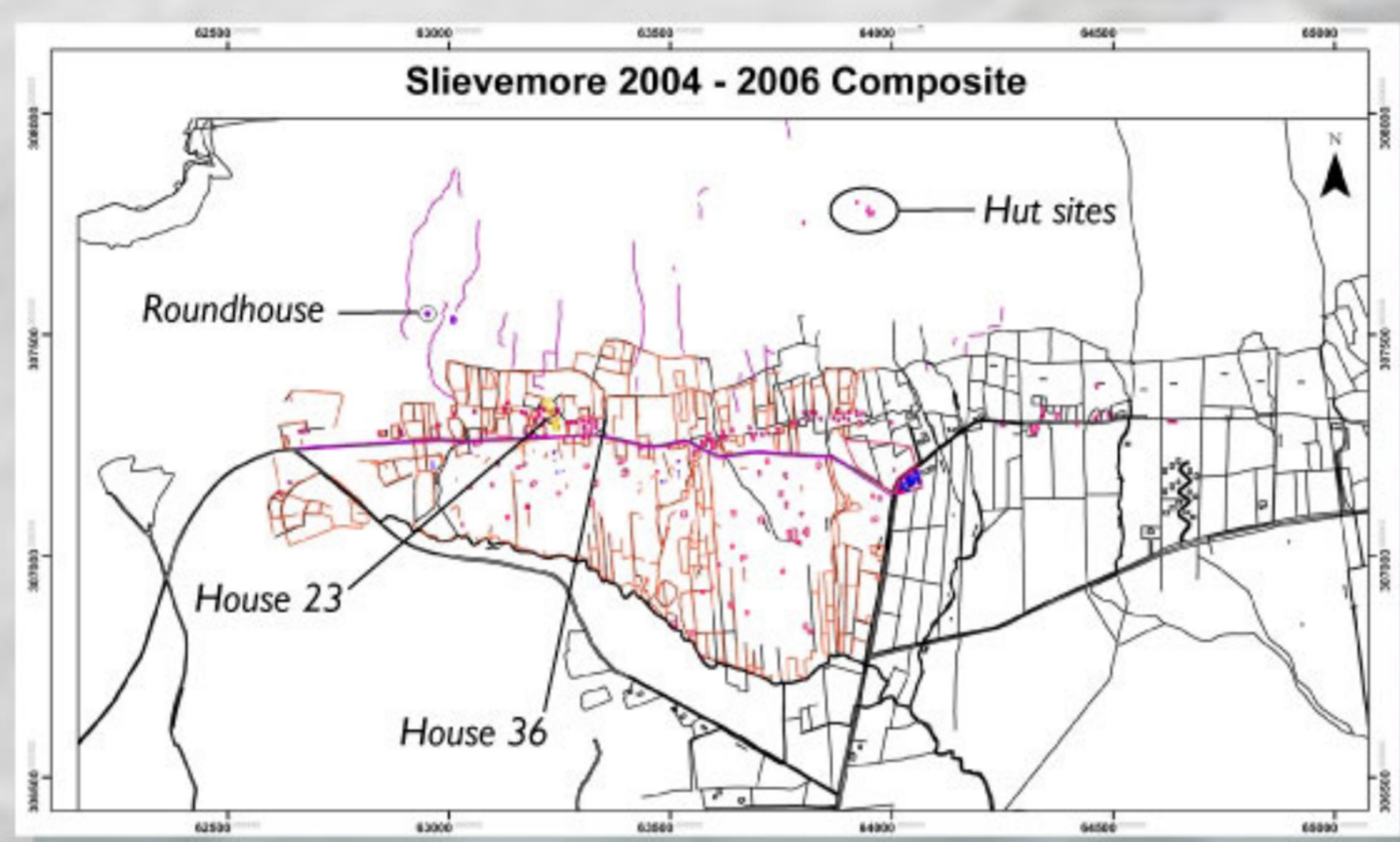
The Deserted Village Project commenced in 1991 under the auspices of the Achill Archaeological Field School. The site consists of some 84 houses and field walls, out of an original 135, divided into three distinct groups, spread over an area of c.2km<sup>2</sup> along the 200 ft contour on the southern slopes of Slievemore and represents the latest phase of settlement on the mountain.

## House #36

Excavation of House #36, a rectangular structure measuring 7.60 m x 4.65m with its long axis orientated north/south and associated garden produced a substantial collection of ceramics, glass, organics and stone artefacts. The ceramics collection largely confined to refined earthenware with the limited number of coarse earthenwares, possibly indicating that other materials such as wood and metal must have been in use for dairying and other domestic purposes. Over half of the ceramic collection consists of the more expensive decorated wares encompassing a wide variety of decorative techniques, patterns, designs and colors within each type.

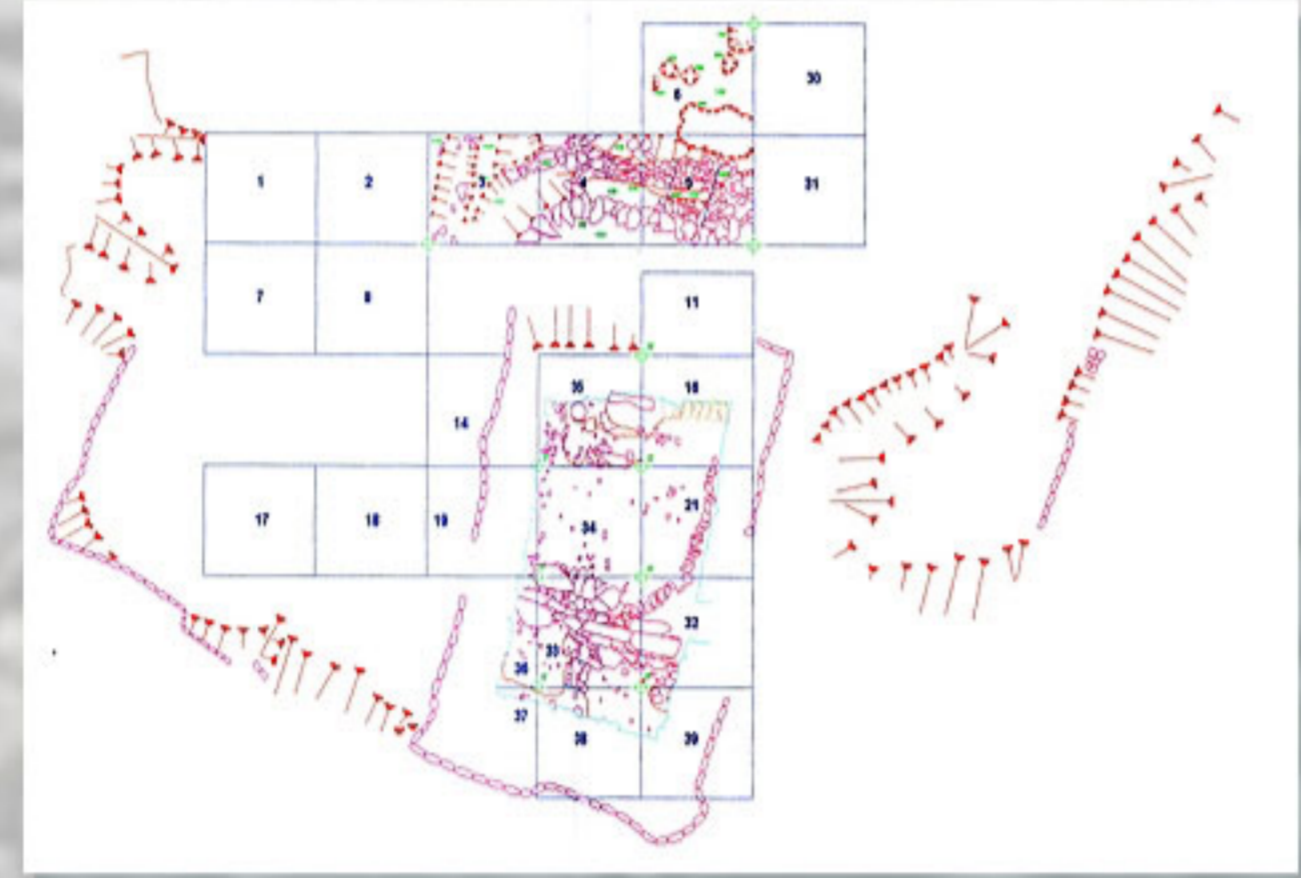


Excavated Flagstone floor House 36



## Digital Survey

The digital survey of the deserted village and field systems was carried out using a Leica TCR 700 series total station and was undertaken in order to establish fixed datum points tied into the national grid and to provide a digital base map to serve as a management and interpretative tool as part of a Geographic Information System (GIS).



## House #23

House 23, initially thought to be a single unit measuring 6.3m in length by 3.25m in width but as the northern gable was not tied into the eastern wall of the house, the subsequent discovery of second chamber to the north almost doubled the length of the house bringing it into line with other nearby dwellings that also exhibited evidence of downsizing. The southern chamber was split by the east/west drain, delineating the areas of human and animal occupation and clearly is of 19th century origin.

Architectural features include opposing east-west doorways, a built hearth and stone bench (hob) and unusually for the houses at Slievemore corbelled in both the south/west and north/west corners indicating an earlier architectural style. A long, narrow internal drain runs north/south from south/east of the hearth, curving towards the east/west drain, which it partially underlies.

Unlike House #36, there was no evidence of a flagstone floor. With the exception of several sherds of North Devon coarse earthenware dating to the 17th and early 18th centuries, all excavated materials date to the 19th and early 20th centuries

Excavation in the garden area revealed a shift in agricultural practice, a phenomenon also seen in the garden area at House #36, where new beds on an east/west orientation truncated the north/south orientation of the 'lazy beds'. North of the house, a pit measuring 1.46m by 0.79m with a depth of 0.58m yielded two sherds of refined white earthenware and the fragmentary remains of an ovis aries (sheep) mandible. A stone with a rich vein of blue ore, possibly malachite, and an amethyst crystal may have been keepsakes or ornaments as was probably the fragment of hematite recovered from a pit at House #36. A blue glass bead constitutes the first non-utilitarian object found within house #23

## Semi subterranean structure

This structure consists of an orthostatic chamber and curvilinear passage with an initial interpretation as a souterrain, bolstered by a 5th to 7th century C14 date from burnt material immediately south of the passage.



Robbed in antiquity, followed by blocking of the entrance in the 1940's, the artefactual evidence was sparse: a convex flint scraper, a thumbnail scraper, fragments of worked quartz and 19th century ceramics and glass. Although only providing a terminus post quem, the scrapers were recovered from layers appearing to pre-date the structure. No evidence of medieval activity was uncovered. A single layer of cairn material covered the structure, with no definite evidence of kerbing. While a cut was found on the west side, close to the junction of the chamber and passage, subsequent excavation of a box section to the rear of the chamber failed to identify a cut, suggesting that a) the layers built up adjacent to the structure after its construction or b) the structure was packed tight into the cut with no intervening fill.

## The Roadway

The semi-subterranean chamber physically lies partially underneath a 19th century roadway which passes through the Deserted Village but recent excavation revealed a second, underlying roadway, separated from the first by about 0.5m of compressed sand. A sherd of North Devon suggests a human presence on the site in the 17th or 18th century but the date of construction of the roadway is unknown. The construction of the 19th century roadway suggests central planning as the roadway was widened and upgraded, possibly to accommodate wheeled transport such as carts.



## The Roundhouse

A group of roundhouses are situated some 300m NW of House 23 at an elevation of 150m OD. Two of them are separated by a gap of 50m, with an undated curvilinear field wall running N/S between them. The western example, currently undergoing excavation measures 12.5m E/W by 11.1m N/S externally and 8.15m E/W by 7m internally, with construction of dry-stone walling. Surviving banks suggest a wall thickness of from 0.9m to 1.3m in breadth. The entrance doorway faces E-S-E, is relatively complex and includes three to four surviving upright portal stones, one pair on the exterior and one on the interior, the distance apart being some 2m. Identification of high phosphate levels determined the positioning of the two external excavation trenches (1 and 2) with trench 3 positioned inside the structure. The stratigraphy in trenches 1 and 2 differed significantly: the former indicated unrestrained peat growth interspersed with episodes of sterile sand and silt, while trench 3 contained three layers of peaty silt with high levels of organic material covering clayey sand from which charcoal and stone artifacts were recovered. The charcoal produced a C14 date in the Middle Bronze Age (95.4% 1411-1210 cal BC). As few stone Bronze Age houses are known from Ireland, only two of which are circular, the importance of this structure and the associated platforms cannot be overstated

## The Hut Sites

A group of enigmatic stone chambered structures lie upon two recessed platforms at 200m OD on the eastern end of Slievemore Mountain with almost 360-degree view-shed concealment and panoramic views of Achill Island and Clew Bay. The site is enclosed in a microbiological habitat typified by ferns, blade grasses and heather. Eight structures have been identified, four of which survive in an excellent state of preservation, with corbelled chambers, lintelled entrances facing south/east and elevated platforms. Two of the structures are conjoined (Structures 1 & 2) and measure 1.5m by 1.5m in each case.



Artifacts recovered from the excavation were confined to quartz debitage, some of which appeared to have been worked.