



Achill Archaeological Field School,
Archaeology Centre, Dooagh,
Achill Island, County Mayo, Ireland.

THE ACHILL ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL 1991 - 2012

The **Achill Field School** was established in 1991 as a Training School for students of archaeology, Anthropology and related disciplines. The Field School is based at the Archaeology Centre in Dooagh, the Deserted Village of Slievemore and upslope on Slievemore Mountain at the site of a group of Bronze Age Round Houses and field walls, all situated on Achill Island in County Mayo on the west coast of Ireland. Located in County Mayo, Achill is also the westernmost point in Ireland and is widely known for its beauty, majestic cliffs and mountains. Achill Island, Achill Beg island and the Corraun peninsula comprise Achill Civil Parish and have a rich archaeological heritage that spans the entire spectrum of Irish history from the remote Neolithic to the nineteenth century.

Beginning in 1991, Achill Field School has undertaken research on many different aspects of the Island's archaeology that has included excavation of selected sites and extensive digital surveys. Theresa McDonald's book ' Achill Island: archaeology – history – folklore' (1997. Reprint 2006), documented the history and archaeology of the island from the Mesolithic to the Post Medieval period. Former students of the Field school have also carried out research on the Iron Age promontory forts (Dr. Hanna Ullrich), ceramics from the Deserted Village (Dr. Shannon Dunn and Elizabeth Davis), Napoleonic Towers (Stuart Rathbone); Emily Collins is currently writing up her research on Water Management and Lazy Bed (potato ridges at Slievemore) while Kelly Hall's survey of the famous Boycott house at Keem Bay is on-going. Many undergraduate projects were also undertaken on various aspects of the archaeology of Achill and submitted to the student's respective universities as part of their degree award/s. Historically the field school has catered to students from North America and Europe interested in academic and practical fieldwork components over the course of our 2-week, 4-week and 6-week modules, which come with 3, 6 and 9 Semester hours of academic credit from the National University of Ireland Galway.

What we do

The Field School offers a comprehensive list of courses. These include a number of 1-week Introductory course, a 2-week Bare Bones course, a 'new 3-week Dig-Draw-and-Digitise course, as well as the 2-week, 4-week and 6-week modular courses outlined above that come with Academic Credit, plus Spring and Autumn Break (10 days) courses. The School also offers a variety of Guided Tours of archaeological and historical sites in Achill, in Counties Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon, Galway and Offaly. Our staff are all highly qualified archaeologists with many years of fieldwork experience and extensive knowledge of Irish archaeological sites.

Background

Achill Field School was set up with the specific aim to provide hands-on training for archaeologists, anthropology and archaeology students and members of the general public with an interest in heritage. In 2011, the Field School celebrated 20 successful years in training students in archaeological methodology; a hallmark of the School is our reputation for the quality of our training and this same mission statement remains at the centre of everything we do. We offer an exceptionally high level of training, above and beyond that which is offered by similar projects elsewhere. The key to our training is that we cater for small group sizes with all instruction delivered directly by highly experienced archaeologists and environmental scientists. In this way we ensure that each lesson is explicitly covered and delivered in great detail. Our policy is to work with each student until we are satisfied that the particular subject matter has been understood correctly. In addition, students in each module are assigned a particular area of the site in which to work, which they then have to complete from start to finish. This means that each student is involved in all aspects of the excavation, from taking off the topsoil, moving through the different phases of excavation and recording and finally backfilling the area and reinstating the ground at the end of the excavation. We also take the time, on a daily basis, to discuss the excavation strategy with the students so that they can

understand the choices that have been made, what other approaches could have been chosen and why they were not chosen. At the end of the course our students have a thorough understanding of excavation methodology that will form a very sound foundation for a career in academic archaeology and/or fieldwork. Whilst the conditions students work in and the archaeology they will deal with will change from site to site and location-to-location, the principles of excavation remain the same.

Academic Credit

The Field School offers academic credits for our 2, 4 and 6-week Modular courses, with transcripts issued by the National University of Ireland Galway with whom the School is formally associated. Three semester hours are available for the 2-week module, 6 semester hours for the 4-week module and 9 semester hours for the 6-week module. We have successfully transferred academic credits to a very large number of American and Canadian Universities. Please see the list of North American universities on our website at: www.achill-fieldschool.com

Training and Research

What distinguishes the Achill Field School from other field schools is a combination of in-depth training and a focus on state-of-the art archaeological research. From an original focus on post-medieval archaeology at the world-renowned Deserted Village in Slievemore, we have in recent years extended our research area upslope to include some of the prehistoric sites that are sealed underneath the blanket bog on Slievemore Mountain. To date, our students have helped excavate two of the largest and best-preserved prehistoric Middle Bronze Age buildings ever found in Ireland, as well as working on a series of associated, smaller but equally well preserved buildings that have been covered over by the bog for several thousand years so that the state of preservation is truly exemplary.

In 2011, the field school undertook a large-scale excavation of a series of artificial terraces that contain a complicated array of buildings, field walls and pathways. Excavations in 2010 investigated a single building

in this complex, revealing a circular building with a small internal area but surprisingly large walls. The building was connected to a series of field walls, was approached via a well-laid flagstone path and was overlain by a fascinating series of secondary occupation deposits. In 2011, the spectacular archaeology located on these terraces produced yet more surprises in the form of a stone-lined firebox that may be related to glass making, a technology that has yet to be positively identified in Ireland. Blue and white glass beads were found within the structure that is thought to be part of a necklace that belonged to a high-status individual and probably date to the Early Medieval period (pers comm. Mags Mannion, PhD. Candidate NUI Galway). We have continued a survey of a series of massive pre-bog field system that commenced in 2005. This work continued in 2011 and will be finalised in 2012 after which a detailed map will be produced of this most interesting landscape. This work and the previous work at the Deserted Village has illustrated the complexity and uniqueness of this landscape, elements of which date back to the Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age periods, followed by a series of modifications and additions in the intervening periods that culminate in the Deserted Village, a site that represents that latest phase of settlement on Slievemore Mountain.

In addition to the work on the prehistoric landscape at Slievemore, we are also working on some very interesting 18th and 19th century transhumance sites, continuing Achill Field School's long-standing association with post medieval archaeology. In 2012, we shall be returning to continue work at a transhumance site in Annagh, a remote and beautiful valley, and c. 3 miles north west of Slievemore, where groups of local people spent the summer months, pasturing their livestock on its lush summer pastures. The transhumance sites on Achill are exceptionally well preserved and our investigations at these sites are setting new standards in recording and excavation procedures, the results of which will form the basis of a major publication in the near future.

Between 1991 and 2006 the focus of the research was on the famous Deserted Village at Slievemore, a

massive 18th and 19th century settlement strung out along the lower slopes of Slievemore Mountain. Two of the houses were fully excavated along with numerous investigations of surrounding features such as garden plots, a mysterious passage and chamber and a finely laid metalled roadway showing two phases of usage. Since 2006 the focus of the Field School has gradually shifted to the prehistoric landscape, preserved underneath the blanket bog above the Deserted Village, and since 2009 this has been the main focus of the archaeological excavations.

The prehistoric landscape on Slievemore consists of Neolithic Tombs, massive stone-built Bronze Age Roundhouses, smaller circular and oval shaped buildings of early medieval date and a complex system of field walls. New discoveries are being made constantly and we expect the list of known sites to increase considerably over the next few years. This is because stone was the building material of choice, and sites were remarkably preserved beneath the blanket bog. Continuing Achill Field Schools tradition of being at the leading edge of post-Medieval archaeological research in Ireland in 2012 excavation will also continue at the transhumance village in Annagh, an area known as the 'Back of Beyond'. Annagh has a large set of wonderfully preserved 'Booley Houses', the lowest corrie (Ice Age) lake in Ireland and scenery that has to be seen to be believed! The Field School offers a very high standard of training, based on small groups of trainees that receive all their instruction directly from highly experienced archaeologists. Each group of trainees work on a specific area of a site and excavate that area from start to finish, involving the participants in all aspects of the excavation. The excavation strategy is frequently reviewed with the trainees so that they can understand the choices that have been made, what other approaches could have been chosen and why particular decisions were reached. In addition each Wednesday there is a fieldtrip around the spectacular archaeological sites of Achill and other parts of Mayo. The field trips are more than simple guided tours and students are taught how to examine and interpret the landscape with the eyes of an archaeologist. A series of weekly Evening lectures by invited guest speakers provide students with detailed

knowledge of current research in Ireland. At the end of the course students have a thorough understanding of the principles of excavation and the nature of archaeology in Ireland that will form a very sound foundation for a career in either archaeology or anthropology.

Achill Archaeological Field School offers a number of programmes in association with the Department of Archaeology, NUI Galway, each comprising three distinct courses. A Spring Break programme is also on offer during March and April 2012 and an Autumn Break in October. Optional weekend excursions are available for students who wish to see more of the archaeology of Ireland and include overnight trips to see the world famous archaeology of North Mayo, Galway and the Sligo Bay areas. An additional Irish Midlands Tour was added to our programme in 2011 and the success of this tour has encouraged us to add it to the 2012 programme. The Irish Midlands tour includes a visit to four of Ireland's most famous archaeological sites - Clonmacnoise in County Offaly, Rath Croaghan, Roscommon Castle and Boyle Abbey in County Roscommon, Corlea Bog in Longford and Clonfert Cathedral in County Galway.

2012 programme and dates.

Introduction to Irish Archaeology (1-week), the **Bare Bones** (2-weeks) and the **Dig-Draw-and-Digitise** are offered on varied dates throughout the year. There are two offerings of Modules 1, 2, 3, 4 and one offering each of Modules 5 and 6.

2012 Programme	March 26 - April 4: 10 Days Spring Break programme	April 9 and April 16: 1-week: Introduction to Irish Archaeology 1 and Introduction to Irish Archaeology 2.
April 9 - 20: 2-weeks Bare Bones 1	April 16 – May 4: 3-weeks Dig-Draw-and Digitise 1	May 14 – June 22 (Mod 1) May 14 – June 8 (Mod 3) 6-weeks and 4-weeks
June 11 – 22: Module 5 programme (2-weeks)	July 2 - August 10 (Module 2) July 2 – 27 (Module 4) 6-weeks and 4-weeks	July 30 – August 10: 2-weeks Module 6
August 13- September 1: 2-weeks Bare Bones Course 2	September 3- 14: 2-weeks Bare Bones Course 3	October 8 or by arrangement: 10 Days Autumn Break

Introductory Courses: 1-week Introduction to Irish Archaeology and a 2-weeks Bare Bones Course.

These are beginners' courses for students looking for an introduction to practical aspects of archaeology, featuring a 'hands-on' approach in excavation methodology and recording procedures, combined with lectures and a field trip.

The 1-week course includes tuition in excavation methods, using the Harris Matrix, stratigraphic interpretation, single context recording, planning, soil identification and analysis, data processing and lectures on research strategies. This course includes is a Guided 1-day Field Trip to archaeological sites on Achill Island. Accommodation is available from Saturday to Saturday. Fees include tuition and materials, self-catering accommodation and local transport.

Bare Bones Course: 2-weeks course in excavation and survey methodology.

The Bare Bones course includes tuition in excavation methods, using the Harris Matrix, stratigraphic interpretation, single context recording, planning, soil identification and analysis, data processing, introduction to AutoCAD and GPS, plus lectures on research strategies. This course includes Guided 1-day Field Trip to archaeological sites on Achill Island. Accommodation is available from Saturday to Saturday. Fees include tuition and materials, self-catering accommodation and local transport.

Dig-Draw-and-Digitise: 3-weeks course for International undergraduate and graduate students. In late 2010, the Field School developed a new 3-week Field School course, entitled 'Dig-Draw-and-Digitise' which had a very successful outing in 2011. This course was designed primarily for participation by Irish and British students but open to others who may want to upgrade their current skill levels or complete a mandatory fieldwork as part of their degree course. It is also suitable for students undertaking their own archaeological research, and it is ideal for post-graduate students preparing for dissertation research (and even ambitious undergrads!) or members of archaeological interest groups looking to expand their field skills. This 15-day field offering allows students of archaeology to learn basic field techniques at the

extensive archaeological landscape of Slievemore and the Deserted Village on Achill Island, the largest island in Ireland. The enigmatic landscape with components from the Neolithic and Bronze Age as well as post-medieval aspects, is one of the best-known archaeological sites in the country. Accommodation is available from Saturday to Saturday. Fees include tuition and materials, self-catering accommodation and local transport. Students take back an illustrated report on the work they undertook at the Field School. AFS staff with extensive experience of Irish archaeology teach these courses. Students will not only take part in excavation and other fieldwork activities, but will attend lectures on Irish archaeology by University lecturers, conduct lab analyses, and take part in local tours of Achill Island sites such as megalithic tombs, a crannóg, ecclesiastical sites, transhumance sites and promontory forts.

The Field School offers Modular courses that come with Academic Credit:

Course Code: SU 409, SU 410 and SU 413: All three are included in Module 1 and Module 2 and are of 6-weeks duration and qualify for 9 semester hours of academic credit.

Course Code: SU 409, SU 410: Module 3 and Module 4 are of 4-weeks duration and qualify for 6 Semester hours of academic credit.

Course Code: SU 413: Module 5 and Module 6 are of 2-weeks duration and qualify for 3 semester hours of academic credit.

Details of all modules are outlined in the Table below

Title	Module 1 and Module 2 (6-weeks duration) –starts 14 May and 22 June respectively
Credits (ECTS)	18 ECTS / 9 Semester Hours
Module Places	24
Module Code/s: Module description	SU 409. SU 410. SU 413
A Module consists of 2-weeks, 4-weeks or 6-weeks academic study and practical fieldwork. The Field School week runs from Monday to Friday. Weekends are free. However, a series of short Guided Tours for students are available during selected weekends throughout the summer months. Lectures are held at the Archaeology Centre, headquarters of the Field School. Each week there are two formal lectures, one	

of which includes an Evening lecture by an invited Guest speaker. Fieldwork takes place on-site at Slievemore and at other sites in Achill. Students enrolled for Academic Credit must complete and submit a 1500 word essay on a topic of choice before the end of their course. A short questionnaire on Irish archaeology, types of sites referred to in lectures and fieldwork undertaken forms part of a short weekly examination. 1-day courses by specialists in environmental archaeology, ArcGIS and AutoCAD are held at various times during the 4-week and 6-week Modular courses. Students have access to the library at the Archaeology Centre and are encouraged to make full use of it for their research. A group of networked computers is available for on-line research and essay composition.

SU 409: Introduction to Archaeology of Ireland

On site work during the first element of the course introduces the student to the basic techniques of archaeological excavation, including laying out trenches, removing overburden, and excavating archaeological deposits with a variety of hand tools. Lectures introduce the Irish Archaeological Chronology whilst a series of workshops develop the students understanding of the principals of excavation.

SU 410: Archaeological Field Studies

On site work during the second element introduces the student to the methods of on site recording of archaeological features and deposits, including section drawing, elevation drawing, horizontal planning, establishing a site grid, surveying, using an auto level and the EDM, and site photography. Lectures complete the Irish Archaeological Chronology whilst workshops focus on post excavation skills such as managing site archives, writing stratigraphic reports preparing AutoCAD drawings and using Photoshop and Illustrator to manipulate images.

SU 413: Data Analysis

On site work during the final element sees the completion of the excavation and its restoration and then introduces the student to a broad range of subjects involving archaeological sites and their setting in the landscape, such as upland surveys, identifying new sites, recording standing monuments and analysing inter-site relationships and morphological settings. Lectures review the development of the discipline of Archaeology in Ireland and the ethical challenges facing the archaeological profession in the early 3rd Millennium whilst workshops focus on preparing the work so far undertaken for final publication.

Indicative Learning Outcomes:	On successful completion of those modules, students should be able to understand the processes and methods involved in archaeological survey and excavation and have an enhanced knowledge of Irish archaeology.
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<p>Skills List: Daily Fieldwork/excavation involves trowelling, sieving, planning/taking levels/laying out a grid, archaeological photography, recording finds, soil recognition and description using Munsel colour chart, single context planning, matrix construction, environmental sampling, public education. Students will have an opportunity to acquire all or most of those skills during their stay at the AFS.</p> <p>Surveying: Building recording and analysis, taking profiles across buildings, using the EDM and GPS, ARCGIS and AutoCAD.</p> <p>Laboratory: Finds processing, sorting, identification and curation. Sieving soil samples and preparing content for analysis. Using microscopes to identify seeds, wood and other content from samples.</p>	
Class Content: Modules 1 and 2 (6 weeks):	Lectures: 21.5 hours Fieldwork: 256 hours
Class Content: Modules 3 and 4 (4 weeks)	Lectures: 16 hour Fieldwork: 170 hours
Class Content: Modules 5 and 6 (2 weeks)	Lectures: 9 hours Fieldwork: 84 hours
Workshops	Archaeological Ceramics Environmental Archaeology GPS, ArcGIS and AutoCAD
Specified Assignment(s)	1500 word Essay on a topic of choice. Guidance on subject matter provided by AFS staff
Autonomous Student Learning	Supplementary lecture material and other text and web references will be given.
Assessment(s) Continuous on-site assessment. Weekly written exam and production of 1500 word essay before end of course.	
Maximum marks	100%
Comparative chart: North America and Ireland	Grade A = 4.00 - 70-100% Grade B+ = 3.50 - 60-69% Grade B = 3.00 - 50-59%

	Grade C+ = 2.50 - 45-49% Grade C = 2.00 - 40-44% Grade D = 1.50 - 35-39%
Result	Transcript and grades forwarded to students' home University by NUI Galway

Title	Module 3 and Module 4. Starts 14 May and 2 July Details as SU 409 and SU 410 above
Credits (ECTS)	12 ECTS / 6 Semester Hours
Module Places	24
Module Code:	SU 409 and SU 410
Module description: Introduction to Irish Archaeology Archaeological Field Studies	
Result	Transcript and grades forwarded to students' home University by NUI Galway.

Title	Module 5 and Module 6. Starts 4 July and 30 July.
Module code SU 413	Details as SU 413 above
Credits (ECTS)	9 ECTS / 3 Semester Hours
Module Places	16
Module description: Data Analysis Participation in on-site survey and excavation Attendance at lectures	

Trainee Supervisor Course 1: 30 April - 6 July and 25 June – 31 August 2012
Duration 10 weeks.
Available to former students of the Field School and selected candidates who have attended other

Field Schools and who require a deeper level of training. The course is offered to those students who demonstrated a combination of skills including intuitive understanding of archaeological procedures, good work ethic, the ability to listen to and understand instruction, and the right temperament to become Site Supervisors.

The Trainee Supervisor Course is a unique learning experience that builds on the skills gained in the previous year or at other Field Schools. Candidates are therefore only selected when they have demonstrated a good understanding of the basic principals of excavation.

The field school programme has been re-organised and the schedule for the 2012 reflects a more structured approach to all aspects of Fieldwork. It is as a part of this new programme that the Trainee Supervisor Course has been developed.

The Trainee Supervisors will be responsible for a particular area of the excavation and work with the director to ensure that the area is correctly excavated and recorded. The Trainee Supervisor will lead a team of students through the process of excavation, and be responsible for maintaining discipline, providing training to the students in the basic skills of excavation, and compiling the site archive for their area of the site. Each area will be a new excavation, and so the Trainee Supervisor will oversee the entire process of the excavation from laying out the trench and removing the sod, through to the completion of the excavation. The Trainee Supervisor will then be instructed in the basic procedures of post excavation, learning how to prepare the written and drawn records to be placed into a permanent archive, how to digitise plans in AutoCAD 2007, and how to write a stratigraphic report.

At the end of the course the Trainee Supervisor will have compiled a complete report of their area to full publication standard. When the report is published in 2012 each Trainee Supervisor will be named as the co-author of the section of the report covering their particular area. This level of training leading to a full, peer reviewed, and publication credit is simply unavailable elsewhere, and would provide a major advantage to the Trainee Supervisor during Job Applications or Applications for Post Graduate Study.

Please refer to our website www.achill-fieldschool.com or contact info@achill-fieldschool.com for further details of Courses. Bookings can be made through our secure on-line system at www.achill-fieldschool.com (t) +353 (0) 98 43564 (fax) +353 (0) 98 43595