Brú na Bóinne

Brú na Bóinne is the name given to one of the world’s most important archaeological landscapes. In recognition of this importance UNESCO has designated the area a World Heritage Site. The most spectacular monuments are the passage tombs, which remained a focus for activity and tradition long after their formal use as burial places ended.

Kerbstones

Despite damage, slippage and interference much of the original 85-metre diameter kerb can still be traced. About half of the kerbstones are visible and 15 of these are carved. The most dramatic of these is kerbstone 51, sometimes referred to as the Stone of the Seven Suns.

Burial Chambers

There are two burial chambers in the mound within 25 metres of one another. The passages are considerably shorter than those found at Newgrange and at Knowth but the chambers are as large and contain some of the biggest stones found at any of the sites.

Excavation

In 1847, a large cutting was made into the mound. The aim of those who dug this trench was to find a central chamber. There are few surviving finds from this work but it is known that human and animal bone were found as well as a number of objects from Early Christian times. There has also been quarrying on the western side of the mound. The large crater on top of the monument is as a result of this interference.

The monument was taken into State Care in 1882 and the mound was surveyed and studied in detail by M.J. and Claire O’Kelly in the 1970’s.

Several thousands of years after Dowth was built people living on or near the mound constructed a souterrain within the kerb and linked it to the passage of Dowth North. It was below ground and invisible from the surface. Such souterrains were used for the storage of important commodities and the provision of a safe refuge in time of danger.

Dowth

Dowth is one of the three great passage tombs of Brú na Bóinne. Although larger in Neolithic Age footprint and size than Knowth and Newgrange, it is less well known and has not been excavated in recent times. Constructed in the Neolithic Age about 5,000 years ago the mound is surrounded by a kerb of an estimated 115 stones and two burial facing embankments. There are smaller banks in fields to the east and south east of the large mound.

Mythology

The text of a medieval manuscript known as Dindsenchas explains how Dowth (Dubad) got its name. They tell how all the men of Ireland were commanded by the King to come together for a day to build a tower that would reach the sky. They worked hard all day and built a huge mound. When it was almost finished a young girl walked over the mound. The King saw this and stopped the work. He named the place Dubad (darkness) because there would be no light. The work on the tower was abandoned and the men returned to their homes.

Dowth North

This is the smaller of the two tombs at Dowth. There is a sill stone at the end of the short (3.3m) passage, which leads into an almost circular chamber with one recess. The roof of this chamber is a modern, concrete one but the original was possibly corbelled. The recess to the right is separated from the main chamber by a sill stone.

Dowth South

Remains of the passage and entrance to the original 12-metre chamber have been revealed beneath the surface of fields to the south east of the large mound. The lintels are made of stone and of these two are carved. Of the original 12-metre chamber 7 survive and contain a small chamber.

Carving on orthostat in Dowth North

Mythology:

The text of medieval manuscripts known as Dindsenchas explains how Dowth (Dubad) got its name. They tell how all the men of Ireland were commanded by the King to come together for a day to build a tower that would reach the sky. The King’s sister secretly stopped the sun in the sky by magic so that there would be an endless day. As time wore on the men of Ireland became exhausted and realised they had been tricked. However the magic spell was broken when the King and his sister slept together. The work on the great mound was abandoned and darkness fell. It was said that Dubad (darkness) would be the name of this place from that day.

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