

Tourism at Brú na Bóinne

Background

Although Newgrange has been publicly accessible for over 300 years, it has only been since the excavation and conservation programme of the 1960's and 1970's that the monument has attracted significant tourism. The potential effects of uncontrolled access by large numbers of visitors to the monument were recognised at an early stage. Even as the excavations were continuing, a guide service was established for the busier summer months and a full time caretaker was employed. These measures provided the public with information on the site, reduced the risk of deliberate damage to the monument and provided structured opening hours.

Problems

Visitor numbers began to be limited in the mid 1980's. Many more visitors wanted to come to the site than could be accommodated and this inevitably led to considerable disappointment.

The increasingly large number of visitors to Newgrange created problems not only in terms of wear and tear on the monument but also in terms of traffic congestion, litter, illegal trading and the need for increased security, parking and toilet facilities.

Solution

In the mid eighties, the Royal Irish Academy called together an ad hoc committee to consider what was to be done. The group recommended the establishment of a park, the concept of which involved the recognition of the area as being of outstanding archaeological interest, the protection of the monuments in their natural setting and the provision of access for visitors to experience and appreciate the monuments in such a way that user damage would be prevented. The key element of the group's strategy was the provision of a Visitor Centre as a means of focusing and controlling visitors.

Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre

Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre opened in 1997. It is located on the south side of the river Boyne, on the other side of the river from the monuments. The primary purpose of the Centre is to manage the flow of visitors to Newgrange and Knowth. This is done by insisting that visitors wishing to visit the monuments must cross the river and use the shuttle bus service provided. The partial but full-scale replica of the chamber of Newgrange at the Centre and extensive exhibition, offer an alternative to visitors who cannot wait to visit the monuments or who arrive after the tours are sold out. The Centre is the starting point of all visits to Newgrange and Knowth. It also offers other facilities for tourists such as local and national touring and accommodation information, a gift and book shop, a restaurant, picnic area and plenty of parking. In 2014 there were 247,051 visitors to Brú na Bóinne Visitor centre including over 9,343 school children under the 'Free Admission for Schools' scheme operated by the OPW. Of these visitors, 139,173 went to Newgrange, 58,883 went to Knowth and the rest remained in the Centre only.