



An Taisce

The National Trust for Ireland

A REPORT ON BALLYTEIGUE BURROWS, CO. WEXFORD
AND THE CASE FOR ITS PRESERVATION.

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Ballyteigue Burrows: Scientific importance and the case for its preservation.

Introduction:

Ballyteigue Burrows is one of the largest sand dune systems in the south of Ireland. It stretches for about 9 km, west of Kilmore Quay, Co. Wexford (Grid Ref. S 93 06). Behind the dune system is a lagoon, known as the Cull. Together they comprise an area of 440 hectares (An Foras Forbartha, 1981). The sand dune system has built up on an ancient shingle ridge, the product of long-shore drift. The lagoon formed behind it is shallow, brackish and fed with fresh water from three rivers; each entering at a different point in the lagoon.

These dunes are very well developed and show all the usual features associated with natural undisturbed coastal sand formations. They contain a series of dune slacks separated by sand ridges with a shingle foreshore and saltmarsh and mud flat bordering the lagoon. Some disturbance has occurred, especially along the eastern edge where cattle grazing takes place. However further west the vegetation is less affected by human and animal disturbance.

The important scientific habitats are outlined below:

1. Sand dunes. Many regard this dune system as being by far the best example of its kind in Co. Wexford. It contains a wide range of plant species, some of which are rare throughout Ireland. A list of the most notable plants is given in Appendix 1. During the last century, Asparagus officinalis, the wild asparagus, was first found in Ireland on these dunes. Today it is so rare that it has been afforded protection under the Wildlife Act of 1976. Its distribution is now restricted to a very few similar sites in the south-east. In addition, it is the only known Irish locality for a lichen, Fulgensia subbracteata. Other declining or rare members of the dune vegetation are Trifolium campestre and T. scabrum, two species of clover, Glaucium flavum, the yellow horned poppy and Rubus caesius, the dewberry.

2. Grassland. On sites where the influx of sand has been slow and where cattle grazing has been carried out since historical times a grassland vegetation has developed. This vegetation is very species rich and contains many plant species which are of interest, some with marked southern distributions in Ireland. Several species of orchid have also been recorded here.

3. Dune slacks. Between the sand ridges low-lying slacks occur that have developed characteristic vegetation types containing such species as Carex otrubae, a sedge.

4. Salt marsh. Around the Cull salt marsh vegetation is well developed, particularly where the margins have not been embanked. A good salt marsh vegetation exists around Cull island, near the eastern end of the spit. This island is an important roosting site for waders and wildfowl at high tide. At the base of the sand dunes a fringe of Festuca rubra, red fescue occurs outside of which a large zone of the glasswort Salicornia herbacea grows. Of particular note is the occurrence of Arthrocnemum perenne (Salicornia perennis), the perennial glasswort. Webb (1977) notes that this species is very rare in Ireland and confined to this location. It has been recorded near Duncormick and towards the western end of the spit. It is also a protected plant.

5. Mudflats. This habitat supports a large population of waders throughout much of the year. Due to the development and reclamation of other similar areas throughout Ireland, the Cull is of increasing importance as a wild bird refuge. An Foras Forbartha (1981) record a total of 3,800 wading birds including dunlin, oystercatcher and golden plover. During migration time less common species such as ruff, spotted redshank, curlew sandpiper and little stint are frequently seen.

6. Open water. At high tide a large area of the mudflats is covered by water providing feeding sites for other wildfowl, particularly ducks, including mallard, teal and widgeon. Other notable wildfowl include the brent goose, mute swan, shelduck and red-breasted merganser.

Present trends in landuse.

Due to limited access the development of Ballyteigue Burrows has been slow. Recreational use is confined to occasional horse riding and on-shore fishing. The shingle beach is unsafe for bathing. However the main present use of the sand spit is agricultural. Large numbers of cattle are over-wintered here, resulting in some over-grazing effect on the vegetation. They are also fed on hay and molasses during winter which does, to some extent reduce the damage. The surrounding landuse is primarily tillage.

Evaluation.

This site must be regarded as being of national, if not international scientific importance. As there is only one good access route to the sand spit, this has ensured the preservation of the region in a state that must be regarded as being almost fully natural. Containing two nationally threatened plant species its preservation must be ensured. Being situated close to Wexford, a large urban centre, its potential educational use is great. It is essential that these natural habitats be preserved for the future so that its scientific importance is safeguarded.

Brief Recommendations.

1. That the area be acquired by the state for preservation. This could best be done by its purchase by the Forest and Wildlife Service as one of its national network of nature reserves.
2. The present limited access should be maintained to safeguard the natural habitats.
3. Research on the current landuse of the spit should be carried out to determine its impact.
4. We suggest that Wexford County Council consider the application of a Special Amenity Area Order for the region, to include also the valuable sites at Lady's Island and Tacumshin Lake.

Appendix 1.

Notable plant species recorded at Ballyteigue Burrows
and the Cull.

Calystegia soldanella
Erodium maritimum
Carlina vulgaris
Trifolium scabrum
T. campestre
T. occidentale
Galium verum
Glaucium flavium
Asparagus officinale *
Ononis repens
Rosa pimpinellifolia
Rubus caesius
Euphorbia portlandica
Scirpus tabernaemontani
Potamogeton pectinatus
Zannichellia palustris
Myriophyllum spicatum
Carex otrubae
Salicornia herbacea
Arthrocnemum perenne *
Limonium humile
Festuca rubra
Plantago maritima
Cochlearia officinalis
C. danica
C. anglica
Spartina sp.
Viola canina
Solanum nigrum
Anchusa arvensis
Hyoscyamus niger
Carduus tenuiflorus
Beta maritima
Chrysanthemum segetum
Glaux maritima
Ammophila arenaria
Epipactis palustris
Centaurium pulchellum
Equisetum variegatum
Blackstonia perfoliata

* Protected plant species under the Wildlife Act of 1976.

References.

An Foras Forbartha, 1981. Areas of Scientific Interest in Ireland. An Foras Forbartha, Dublin.

Webb, D.A., 1977. An Irish Flora. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk.

Ordnance Survey, 1978. South Wexford map, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to the mile. Sheet 23. Ordnance Survey, Dublin.