

Introduction

Gleninchaquin Scenic Park is located in the northern foothills of the Caha Mountains, on the northern side of the Beara peninsula, South County Kerry. It comprises approximately 600 hectares of stark mountain landscape containing glaciated mountain features, a spectacular waterfall and various habitat types, and is adjacent to the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) No. 1342, Cloonee & Inchaquin Loughs and Uragh Wood. The scenic beauty of the area attracts many visitors each year, and the owners of the park are eager to catalogue and conserve the cultural and natural heritage features of their land and also to promote these values to their visitors, so that a greater appreciation of this heritage is achieved. To this end, a survey of the habitats, flora and fauna of Gleninchaquin Scenic Park was initiated in March 2005, supported by the Heritage Council. This report details the findings of field visits carried out during the period March to October 2005. The species recorded are listed in Table 1. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive and should be added to as new species are sighted. Many of the species listed are covered by individual species accounts and others are included in accounts that deal with groups of species as appropriate. Time did not allow for the inclusion of every species in the accounts, but most are covered.

Looking north from Gleninchaquin

Lough Inchaquin with Uragh Wood to the west. In the distance the Macgillycuddy Reeks of the Iveragh peninsula can be seen.



Geology of Gleninchaquin



The rock of the Gleninchaquin valley is Old Red Sandstone, formed by the aquatic erosion and deposition of sandy material during the late Devonian period approximately 400 million years ago. The mountains of Kerry, including those of this valley, were formed when tectonic movements caused the collision of the 'Old Red Continent' with Gondwanaland, about 300 million years ago, and the resultant pressure caused the rocks to be thrust upwards into folds.

About 2 million years ago the Pleistocene Epoch began, with successive waves of global cooling and expansion of the polar ice sheets. Several ice ages later, the northern hemisphere was again in the grip of glacial and peri-glacial conditions during the so called 'Midlandian Glaciation' which lasted from 120,000 – 10,000 years ago. It is not thought that all of Munster was under ice during this time; the lowland areas probably had a tundra-like environment. In the uplands however, ice-caps grew from compacted snow close to the various mountain peaks. As these grew in size they exerted great pressure on the rocks below them and gradually gouged out deep, bowl shaped depressions called 'corries'.

The glaciers eventually spilled out of their corries, leaving striations on the bedrock with smaller pieces of sharp rock that they plucked as they travelled downhill. Cumeenadillure lough is a corrie lake from which sprang such a glacier which then travelled down the Gleninchaquin valley to the sea.



Today, the area is dominated by upland habitats over acid podzols and blanket peats. Some fragments of semi-natural woodland remain, and more recent afforestation with both conifer and native broadleaved species has also increased tree cover in the valley.

Habitats in Gleninchaquin

During this survey, time did not allow for comprehensive mapping of the habitats present. A short summary of the gross habitat types found is given below.

1. Woodland

Within the park there are various small areas of woodland. Along the river walk there is remnant oak-birch-holly woodland (WN1) with some larch planted along the edges (WD4). There are also small stands of conifer woodland (WD4) to the south of the valley, with a mixture of scots pine and larch. In addition, an area of recently planted conifers has been fenced and will develop into WD4 woodland. Hedgerows (WL1) are present in the lower parts of the park.

2. Grassland

The grasslands present within the park include improved grassland (GA1) in the centre of the valley and more extensively unimproved wet grassland (GS4) which mosaics with exposed siliceous rock (ER1), dense bracken (HD1) and blanket bog (PB3).



3. Blanket Bog

Atlantic (lowland) blanket bog (PB3) is probably the most abundant habitat type in the park. It is dominated by purple moor-grass, black bog rush, and sedges with some heather and dwarf shrub cover.



4. Aquatic Habitats

There is a wide variety of freshwater habitats to be found within the Park. These include the large freshwater lake, Lough Cumeenadillure (probably FL2), the ponds and rock pools near to the river walk (FL8), upland river (FW1) and of course the famous Gleninchaquin Falls. The larger valley also contains the Cloonee Loughs.