

**TOPOGRAPHY:** This distr. encompasses one half, the eastern portion, of the wide N. shore of Lough Corrib &, N. of this, a roughly square tract of country running, on the W., close to Clonbur & thence northwards to include the southeastern corner of L. Mask, a few mls of the S.E. coast of this lake & then eastwards in an almost direct line passing within 1m. or so southwards of B'robe, to within 2m. of Kilmaine - then, roughly, directly southwards again to the N.E. extremity of L. Corrib. Several islands of both lakes are included. Amongst these are Inchagoill, Ardillaun & Inishcongla on L. Corrib, & Inishoght & Inishgleasta on L. Mask. Inishowen, Inishcoog & Inishmaine on this lake are now joined together & connected with the mainland owing to subsidence of the waters, & are also included.

The distr. is located on the eastern fringe of the Joyce Country & of Connemara, & possess many scenic attributes of those regions, though these characteristics are greatly modified in some respects, principally in that of timber, for the vicinity of Cong, & indeed a very extensive area, is thickly planted with remarkably fine trees. It is also noted for the great wealth of archaeological evidences of antiquity, significant of some important early battle or other incidents, & for the curious freaks of nature - defects in the limestone sub-stratum - which abound in this neighbourhood. But it is as a place of immense interest & appeal for the sportsman that it has achieved most fame, for the angler

## TOPOGRAPHY (contd.)

few opportunities of better sport in the midst of such exquisite scenery, whilst the woods around Cong are long reputed the best coverts in this country for woodcock. When the Mayfly rises, usually about mid-May, there is a mass convergence of anglers, male & female, young & old, on the lake & everywhere there is the finest bustle of preparation, & everything - from the normal chatter of everyday conversation to the non-angling guests at the hotels (these must make room for the fishers if they have not booked months ahead) - is swept aside to be replaced by fishing talk & fishing people.

The finest scenery consists of innumerable views of both lakes, Corrib & Mask, particularly the former, the N. shores & islands of which are adorned with splendid sheltering trees, & of the great ranges of mtns to the W., S. & N. Within the limits of the district itself, the scenery of note is concentrated almost entirely around the shores of the two lakes & in the narrow strip of land which separates them. Some of the prettiest spots are found within the confines of the Ashford Estate, & are mentioned with the description of the grounds.

The Islands: It is asserted locally that there are 365 islands in L. Corrib, one for each day of the year, but the correct number, including several that are no more than mere earth-cropped rocks, is 145. The lake is the second largest in Ireland, next in size to Lough Neagh, & is 22m. in its greatest length & 9m. broad at the widest portion. After leaving the tree-lined mouth of the Cong River at Ashford, in a boating expedition to the lake, Inishcong (Cong Island) is passed, & then, very shortly, a succession of other rather similar islets, all crowned with a luxuriant arboreal plumage & mostly steep-banked & blunted on the W. side, a peculiarity due to the prevailing W. wind. The planting of these islands was very successfully accomplished by the Guinness family & represents a splendid enrichment of the scenery which might quite well be extended to other islands at the southern end of the lake, which, by contrast, are bare & unornamental. Loch Corrib is said to take its name from that celebrated though perhaps mythical navigator, Mannanan Mac Lir, who was also called Orbsen Mac Alloid - the name Corrib being a corruption of the old Irish form, Loch Oirbsen. The lake is furnished with a great number of navigation marks which remain since the days, up to some yrs ago, when steamers plied a regular trade on this great waterway between Galway City & Cong & other little harbours along the shores.

Inchagoill, 5m. overwater from Cong, is by far the most interesting on account of the archaeological treasures it holds. Like the other islands hereabouts, Inchagoill is wooded, & on the W. side is a lovely smooth golden strand, very suitable for bathing. From near here a good view of a long stretch of L. Corrib's W. shore is obtained - southwards past Oughterard & Moycullen - the vision extending over intervening groups of smaller islands.

The Corrib, generally, is calm & navigable even for the inexperienced, but for expeditions to distant parts it is advisable to have some person in the boat who is acquainted with the lake for, though at times it may be smooth as glass, it can also be exceedingly rough & dangerous, & rocks & shallows may prove dangerous to the careless boatman.

Golden Bay, to the W. of Cong, is popular with bathers during summer time, since it has a strand of fine soft sand & is nicely sheltered, with a good view

## TOPOGRAPHY (contd.)

of the lake & islands.

The view from some of the islands, or from a boat on either lake, often excels even the finest to be had from the mainland. Across the wide sheet of water, dotted with green-treed island oases, the land slopes to the water's edge, seldom steeply or from a great height but frequently under a heavy covering of tall trees & dense shrubberies. Approaching Ashford from L. Corrib, the prospect is exceedingly pleasing. The lake margin is well wooded on both sides & the long range of the castle bldgs, comprising the original Chalet-like house with flanking & intermingling towers & mock battlements, occupies one of the most delightful sites imaginable on the right bank of the Cong R. where it enters the lake.

Counties Galway & Mayo unite in the vicinity of Cong, the boundary following a zig-zag course from the mouth of the Cong R. northwards for over a mile, thence westward to Clonbur & N. again to L. Mask - Ashford Castle, part of the demesne & a small S.W. section of Cong parish are in Co. Galway & in the Joyce Country, whilst the remainder is in Co. Mayo.

N. & E. of Cong, as in other localities throughout this area, the ground is rough & broken, being littered with limestone rocks & boulders, & a bleak & barren appearance is presented. Often the bare limestone beds crop up over the ground level in huge blue-grey terrace-like patches. The carboniferous rock is penetrated by a great many caverns or fissures beneath which the subterranean waters are sometimes seen or heard gurgling or roaring. Most, if not all, of these vertical holes have been named, the name usually being suggested by the appearance of the cavern, its location, or through some person, incident or legend connected with it. They are always a source of astonishment or interest to visitors by virtue of their very remarkable appearance or, in some cases, because of the fanciful legends or historically true episodes related about them. The principal caverns are described under "Geology".

The numerous pools scattered here & there, all connected underground with the waters flowing from Moch Mask into the Corrib, & the streams similarly connected & sometimes flowing for only a very short distance before plunging downwards again into the bowels of the earth - tend to confuse & amaze the visitor, unless he seeks the services of a guide. In periods of drought, many of the streams & pools dry up completely, but in winter & times of flood the waters are oftentimes swirling & turbulent.

Elevated vantage points from which to scan the surrounding scenery are plentiful, & hills & hillocks, towers within the Ashford Demesne, the summit of L. Mask Castle, the Giant Cairn at Killower & various other sufficiently lofty heights enable the sightseer to survey scenes of inspiring grandeur & beauty. Beneath an ever-changing sky, generally of huge rolling white, silver, grey, blue or darker clouds, the western mtn ranges assume a variety of shades & hues - purple, blue, green, brown & black - whilst the great lakes beneath are now dark & choppy, now calm & glossy, according to the dictates of the elements. The waters of Lough Corrib change surprisingly, with the sudden springing up of a strong fresh breeze, from a mirror-like smoothness to a choppiness equal to that of the open seas. But the supplementary - or complementary - charm of the woods cannot be over-emphasised. The broad fringe of luxuriant trees along the edge of L. Corrib & the fine plantations on the islands, with which that lake is studded are, indeed, an especial feature to delight the

## TOPOGRAPHY (contd.)

eye & without which the scene would lose much of its very pleasing character. Sir Wm. Wilde, in a footnote to the section on Woods & Mtns in "Loch Corrib" (pp. 27 & 28), says that amongst the natural woods now remaining in the extreme W. are Dun, Gleann, Eanach, Bilberry Island, Gort Darach, Coille Beag & Coill Rua, upon or around Loch Corrib, Baile Uí Cadhain (Ballykine) & Coill Bride on Loch Mask. "Their timber consists chiefly of oak, hazel birch, mountain ash, yew, holly, wild apple & white & black thorn. But in most of those localities other timber has been introduced, especially alder, poplar, larch & spruce, etc." Great quantities of the timber have been felled during the emergency, to fill a variety of requirements apart from fuelling; hundreds of trees were taken for the manufacture of matches.

E. & N.E. of Cong, the country is commonplace enough with little to distinguish it but for the frequent views of lake & mtn, the occasional clump of trees or deep wood, marking the presence or former site of some attractive villa or farmhouse or, perhaps, some mansion of former importance, the abundant evidences of early ecclesiastical or monastic glory to be found in the several ruined churches & abbeys, & the wealth of cairns, souterrains, stone monuments & other archaeological remains, the history of which is unknown - unless the theoretical historical juggling of Sir Wm. Wilde be accepted at its face value. Wilde identified the plain, which is almost enclosed within the triangle formed between Cong, Cross & The Neale, as the battlefield of Moytura South, but, though he writes convincingly enough & in all good faith, his efforts to establish his claims leave many puzzling uncertainties.

However, the visitor may be entertained with stories of the great battle & by having the different sites pointed out to him by "Wilde" disciples, &, although no other tradition or theory exists as to what event or series of incidents caused the presence of so much archaeological material, the exploration of the various places & objects is a by no means unpleasant occupation but will prove a most interesting pastime.

Killower Cairn, at a height of over 30' above ground level, commands a rare & charming view of the two lakes, Loch Mask being quite close to hand on the W. side. The view extends even to the distant Nephin range, far to the N., which rises to form a magnificent lofty background. The Partry Mtns border on the W. bank of L. Mask - Croagh Patrick's gently-shaped conical peak appearing from behind as the clouds permit - whilst, dividing the two lakes & jealously guarding this eastern approach to the Joyce Country, Benlevi's irregular purplish & green bulk occupies the most enviable site from which to behold the majestic scene.

Relieving the rather nondescript scenery of The Neale vicinity; Neale Park, former seat of Lord Kilmaine, is planted with an assortment of fine tall-growing trees, its plantations lending a welcome splash of colour to enrich the landscape.

Loch Mask Castle, from its topmost battlemented parapets, affords a good view of Loch Mask & its islands, the mtns on the opposite shore & the woods along the edge which lend delightful colour & quality to the vista.

Between the castle & Inishmaine, & in several places hereabouts, there are more of those extensive beds of naked carboniferous limestone which an aspect of wildness to the individualistic nature of the scenery.

Inishowen, which is shown on the Ordnance Map as

TOPOGRAPHY (contd.)

beign 142' above the level of Loch Mask\*- which, in turn, is nearly 40' higher than L. Corrib - features, at its summit, a large earthen fort from which the entire expanse of L. Mask, with its numerous islands, may be viewed. The mtns too present an imposing spectacle &, from Benleve to Maamtrasna & the Partrys, past the level intervening stretch & then on to the great ranges in the N.W., culminating in mighty cone-shaped Nephin, dark shadowy gaps that are openings to deep glens & valleys contrast with the brightly-hued slopes & sparkling waters beneath that catch & reflect the sun's rays.

Writings of Sir Bernard Burke, as quoted by Sir Wm. Wilde:- Whether you its unbounded fertility, the varied beauties of its surface, or the historical events which invest every plain & mtn with an interest peculiarly its own, Cong stands forth to the lover of the wild & beautiful, to the antiquarian & the geologist, as unsurpassed by any portion of the British Isles . . . It represents a varied surface of contradictory elements - streams of barrenness & fertility, exquisite beauty & wild desolation, green valleys & rocky plains, lakes & rivers & huge mtns are so thrown together in wild confusion that it would almost seem as if nature had wandered here in one of her sportive moods, producing on every side such marvellous contrast & variety."

Parkmore, an elevated plateau, about 400 yds N. of St. Cecilia's Well, which is about 1/4m. to the N.E. of Cong, affords a magnificent panoramic view of both lakes, the woodlands surrounding Ashford, part of wild Connemara & the high craggy mtns which surround the northern & western view.

From Ardaun, about 2 1/2m. W. of the vill., another splendid view is obtained embracing a huge expanse of the Corrib, Ashford Demesne & part of L. Mask.

This is one of the really extensive views obtainable in the distr.

The old cemetery on the summit of the hill at Billypark, about 1/2m. from Cong vill., commands an unrivalled view of an immense expanse of Loch Corrib, embracing too, a fine panoramic view over the varied country to the mtns of the W. & N.

A feature of the countryside here, as of most of the western country, is the stone wall or fence by which the fields are divided. Some of these fences are remarkable for their sturdiness & straightness, although most frequently constructed in single-stone width & always unmortared.

**GEOLOGY:** Carboniferous limestone is the principal formation & the cavernous & permeable nature of that stone in the isthmus separating Lochs Mask & Corrib is apparent in the peculiar "swallow holes" & strange curiosities which are visible all around.

Limestone rock frequently crops up over the surface of the ground to the N. & E. of Cong & on the E. shore of L. Mask. It forms extensive beds of smooth bare rock, possessing the phenomenally consistent characteristic of a pronounced dip towards the N. & revealing, where the rock is split or sundered, an invariable north-south inclination or "grain". Water action has given the rock a pitted, honeycomb appearance in many instances, particularly near the lake shores.

On the N. shore of L. Corrib, fossiliferous Silurian rocks occur, & on the lake-side near Cong, gneiss schist & primary limestone are found, with, from that vill. to L. Mask, outcroppings of the carboniferous mtn limestone surmounting the primary rocks.

Yellow sandstone, fossiliferous Silurian, grits, gneiss, conglomerates, igneous rocks & the predominant