

Archaeological Finds

Peatlands have been a very important source of archaeological material in Ireland. Artefacts found both under and within peatland deposits have provided detailed information about communities who lived in the early periods of our history as well as about the food, clothes and tools which were used from the Stone Age to recent times. If an unusual object is found during turf cutting, it should be covered immediately with wet peat to exclude the air and thus preserve it. If the object is left exposed to the air, for even a short period of time, it is very likely to be destroyed and be of no value to the archaeologist. Any finds should be reported immediately to the National Museum, Kildare St., Dublin 2. (Phone 01- 6777444)

Why does peat preserve artefacts?

Objects are preserved in peatlands because of the acidity of peat and the anaerobic environment (i.e. deficiency of oxygen) which exists within peatland deposits. Due to these very unusual properties, many objects have been preserved for hundreds or thousands of years which would have decayed if they had been buried in mineral soils or had been left exposed to the aerobic environment

Pre-bog stone age sites

Peatlands have been extremely important in preserving pre-bog stone age sites in a number of locations in Ireland. Such locations were used by early communities for camping (mesolithic site, Lough Boora, Co. Offaly) or for farming (neolithic site, Ceide Fields, Ballycastle, Co. Mayo). These sites had to be abandoned due to waterlogging and the early formation of peat. Subsequently, extensive peatlands covered these areas for thousands of years.



A sculpture made from bog oak which has been preserved for thousands of years

The final depth of peat was approx. 3 and 8 metres respectively and this cover preserved them to the present day. A total of c.1600 finds have been recorded to date from Irish peatlands. These finds include many tighers or trackways which were used to convey people safely across the perilous peatland regions. The trackways range from narrow pedestrian tracks to wide structures. They were built mainly from timber materials. Most artefacts recovered from peatlands are stray finds, but there are a small number directly associated with trackway sites.