

## WHAT'S THE STORY WITH FÁILTE IRELAND AND ARCHAEOLOGY?

For many years the Irish Tourist Board was at the forefront of the public dissemination of the island's archaeological heritage. Archaeology was considered a central component of the unspoilt attractiveness of the countryside, and the Board provided well-designed signage and a plethora of quality publications, overseen by Peter Harbison amongst others. One of Fáilte Ireland's most recent campaigns to attract visitors to the country is forgetting this tradition of popular scholarship. The website for the 'Wild Atlantic Way' (WAW) offers the prospective visitor a menu of cultural and sporting activities but barely recognises the archaeological richness of the west coast outside of mediated spaces and ecclesiastical monuments in State care. 'Ireland's Ancient East', on the other hand, over-gilds the lily and presents an impression of centuries of settlement through the murky lens of 'wellness', via an ill-informed Junior Certificate History curriculum. While archaeologists are obliged to get the correct information out there in the first place, it's nonetheless surprising that our archaeology isn't at the forefront in attracting visitors to the western coastline, beyond exploiting its photogenic usefulness.

More annoying still are the 188 Discovery Points, erected for €3.5 million at strategic points along the WAW, designed, according to the accompanying press information pack, to allow people to frame their photographs. The Discovery Points are not ugly artefacts in themselves, but sometimes context overrides beauty. From a distance on the horizon they resemble a rusty gallows, with the WAW squiggle helpfully accommodating grooves for four nooses; closer up, writing along the shaft informs you of your location in either of the recognised languages, depending on the rural electoral district. The artist remains unknown, but was doubtless influenced by Warhol's multiples in the execution.

The Discovery Point in the local authority car park beside Rossnowlagh Strand does not detract from a pleasantly cluttered architectural environment. The Discovery Point on Tory Island likewise adds something to the place and requires the passer-by to stop yet again and appreciate a stunning natural environment. In Corca Dhuibhne and on the Iveragh Peninsula local people are not happy at the new signage, which has been erected at viewing points where there is often traffic congestion in the summer months. There was certainly no local consultation in west Kerry, a fact disputed by Fáilte Ireland.

Why are they really there? Can their real purpose seriously be to show tourists where the best photo opportunities are to be had? Are tourists that needful? More cynical observers saw their erection as an indication of an early election, with the number of Discovery Points in each coastal constituency being indicative of the local representative's influence in Dublin. Others looked for evidence of a sudden realisation that vaguely European money had to be spent by a certain date. Many of the Discovery Points are found to be in straight lines and an occult explanation cannot be discounted.

It is hoped that on their demise a representative sample can be preserved *in situ* and afforded some form of statutory protection, while the remainder can be displayed in Irish bars in Latvia with the ultimate purpose of mediating another landscape for those without a guidebook or eyes.

