



Ireland's Living Landscape:

THE IRELAND FUNDS ARE HELPING THE BURRENBEO TRUST PRESERVE
AND PROTECT THIS UNIQUE AND FRAGILE IRISH LANDSCAPE.

The Burren

On the mid-western coast of Ireland,

straddling County Galway and County Clare, there is a place of great natural beauty rich with ecological and cultural significance. The Burren is an area of Ireland comprising some of the country's most unusual and rich ecological landscape. Endowed with 70% of Ireland's native flora, the Burren, with its gray limestone rock and caves, exists in stark contrast to the typical green rolling hills seen in other parts of Ireland. The Burren—or Boireann, meaning "place of stone" in Irish—is home to many familiar sights to those touring Ireland. The iconic Poul nabrone Dolmen, for example, one of 90 'Mega-lithic' (giant stone) tombs that date back over 4,000 years, lies in the centre of the Burren.

The Burrenbeo Trust is a nonprofit organization that is made up of over 500 members and 120 volunteers who have channeled their love for this special landscape into a commitment to preserve it. As Ireland's first—and only—landscape charity, the organization promotes education and awareness of the Burren by supporting the local farming community, teaching children about the importance of the landscape, and working with volunteers to conserve it. The Trust also promotes the Burren as a center of eco-tourism, something which strengthens the local economy and provides numerous benefits for the Galway and Clare counties. However, like many of Ireland's most iconic landscapes, the Burren stands in danger of being over-developed and under-maintained without purposeful care.

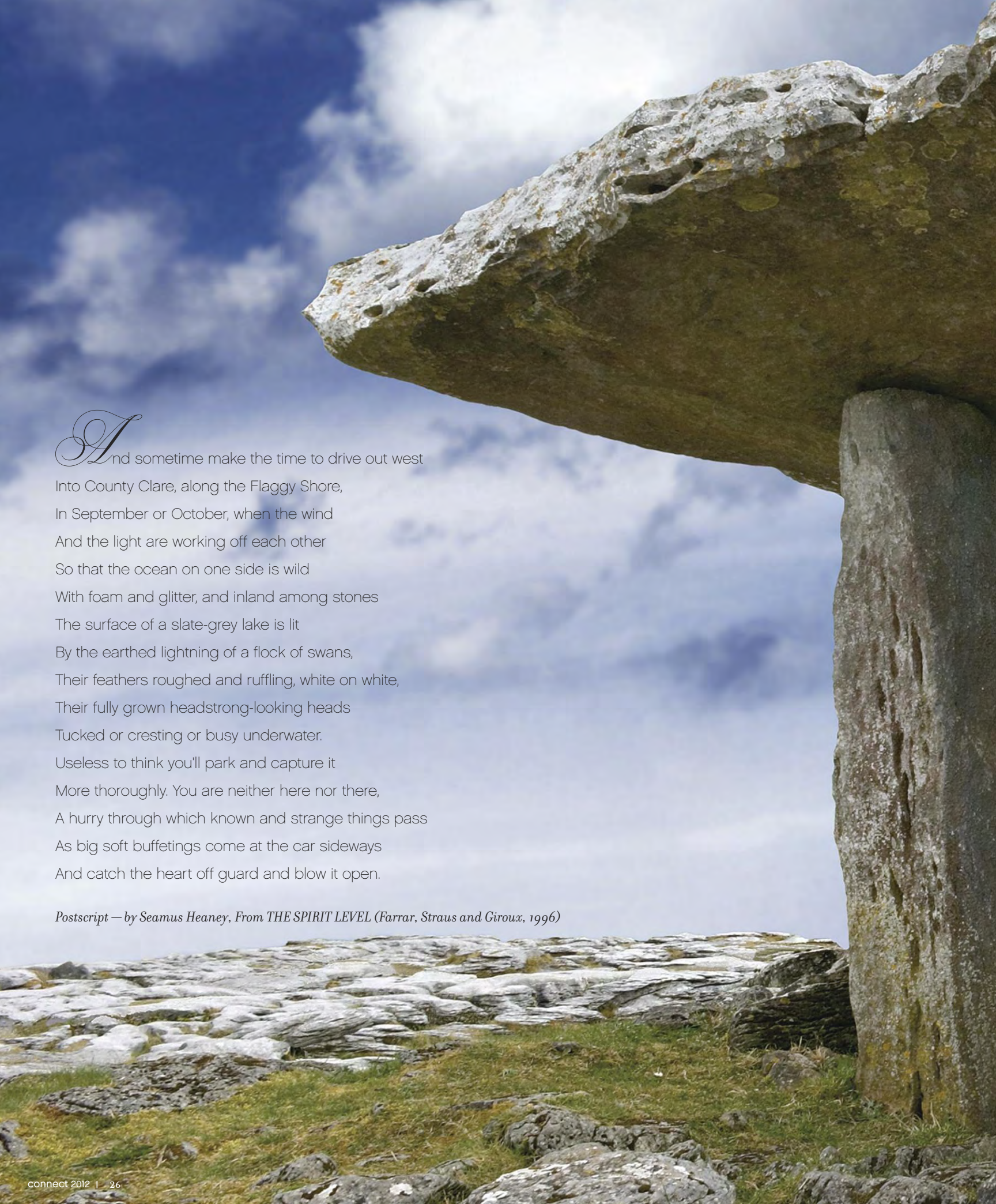
Brigid Barry, Burrenbeo Trust Coordinator, spoke of how first impressions can be misleading when it comes to this area of Ireland. "When you first come to the Burren, all you see is rock. But amongst these stones is found the most diverse selection of plants anywhere in Ireland, featuring rare orchids, as well as Arctic, Alpine, and Mediterranean flowers growing side by side, the only place in the world where you see this." Brigid went on to explain the farming systems that sustain the Burren, "One of the things that is unique to

the Burren, is its dependence on a farming system known as 'winterage' that has existed for thousands of years in the area. Local farmers bring their cattle to the uplands of the Burren in the winter where they eat back the rank grasses, herbs, and scrub. Then in spring and summer, once the animals are removed, unique plant combinations can flourish because of lack of competition and the absence of livestock. Today, with Burrenbeo's help, Burren farmers are being recognized, and supported, as custodians of this special place. Other landscapes in Europe are now looking to what happens here and are seeking to adapt it as a model of farming for biodiversity and for conservation."

Interestingly, in the downturned economy there is a new appreciation for the Burren. Brendan Dunford, co-founder of Burrenbeo (with his wife Ann) offered his theory, "The recent changes we've had in the economy are serving to show people that there is more out there to appreciate—things that are quintessentially Irish and unique to us are once again growing in importance, like our heritage and our landscape, but they need looking after. People are increasingly anxious to re-connect with their place and their past and the Burren is the ideal landscape in which to do this."

The Ireland Funds are helping the Trust as they develop their first volunteer program. "We have many people here that cannot give money but are happy to give their time and energy. The grant from The Ireland Funds is helping us harness that energy into a structured volunteer program. Thanks to this grant, we have over 100 people meeting monthly to volunteer and learn how to give back to the Burren," said Brendan.

"The Burren is the soul of Ireland. It is like a book written in stone. It has the most amazing music and culture; it is of huge significance for its archeology, botany, and ecology. But we have to create the awareness and help people to appreciate these special and irreplaceable values."



*A*nd sometime make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
Their fully grown headstrong-looking heads
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

Postscript — by Seamus Heaney, From THE SPIRIT LEVEL (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996)



Poulnabrone Dolmen—
a portal tomb structure
over 5,000 years old



"The people, the culture and the heritage are what make us special. We have 6,000 years of history and you can just walk out into it and immerse yourself in it. The Ireland Funds give us a sense of belief in what we do. The support shows us that what we're doing is valued by people beyond the Burren. With these resources, we are going to realize the potential of this place."

— Brendan Dunford — co-founder of the Burrenbeo Trust



"The people, the culture, and the heritage are what make Ireland special. We have 6,000 years of history and in the Burren you can just walk out into it and immerse yourself in it. The Ireland Funds give us a sense of belief in what we do. The support shows us that what we're doing is valued by people beyond the Burren. With these resources, we are determined to work hard to realize the potential of this place."

Brigid spoke about the importance of the program, "Our volunteers are made up of all different types of people: from university students, to local community members who know they are living somewhere important and want to contribute. The assistance from The Ireland Funds enabled us to put together the Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers. We help elderly farmers maintain their land; because there are thousands of miles of stone walls that need constant rebuilding and maintenance. The Ireland Funds have also made it possible for us to develop courses for volunteers, building their skills as they assist archeologists, geologists and botanists in the collection of important data that will be used to sustain the long term future of the Burren. This isn't just a living landscape; we also see it as a learning landscape."

The Ireland Funds' help creates awareness and allows Burrenbeo to confidently build a structure of care for this, a very special and uniquely Irish landscape.

BURRENBEO TRUST CO-FOUNDER BRENDAN DUNFORD EDUCATES CHILDREN ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BURREN



The Ireland Funds' support will continue to create awareness and build a structure of care for this most-Irish of landscapes so that the treasure can be enjoyed by generations to come.