

**CARRAN CHURCH**  
**SITE ASSESSMENT REPORT**



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**(Updated February 2015 to include Visitor Survey data)**

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## 1. SITE DESCRIPTION

### 1.1. LOCATION

The GeoparkLIFE demonstration site at Carran Church is situated in Zone 2, the central zone as defined by this project. This zone attracts informed tourists who take an active interest in the heritage of the area. The demonstration site is in the townland of Poulacarran, to the east of the R480, c. 3km south of Caherconnell Stone fort and Poul nabrone Dolmen, two well-known and visited tourism attractions. The R480 route runs through the centre of the Burren and has an array of prominent attractions and natural and cultural heritage sites along its length. The route is used by coach tours and individual travellers, mainly travelling by car.



Figure 1; Location of Carran Church (indicated with red circle)

## 1.2. LAND DESIGNATIONS

All the site is located within the East Burren Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC 001962).

This large SAC incorporates all the high ground in the east Burren in Counties Clare and Galway, and extends south-eastwards to include a complex of calcareous wetlands. The area encompasses a range of limestone habitats that include limestone pavement and associated calcareous grasslands and heath, scrub and woodland together with a network of calcareous lakes and turloughs. The site exhibits some of the best and most extensive areas of oligotrophic limestone wetlands to be found in the Burren and in Europe. The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (\* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

- [3140] Hard Water Lakes
- [3180] Turloughs\*
- [3260] Floating River Vegetation
- [4060] Alpine and Subalpine Heaths
- [5130] Juniper Scrub
- [6130] Calaminarian Grassland
- [6210] Orchid-rich Calcareous Grassland\*
- [6510] Lowland Hay Meadows
- [7210] Cladium Fens\*
- [7220] Petrifying Springs\*
- [7230] Alkaline Fens
- [8240] Limestone Pavement\*
- [8310] Caves
- [91E0] Alluvial Forests\*
- [1065] Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*)
- [1303] Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*)
- [1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

(Ref: [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie) )

Carran Church, the remains of a fortified medieval Church is a Recorded Monument on the Record of Monuments and Places compiled by the National Monument Service.

### 1.3. FEATURES OF VISITOR INTEREST

#### 1.3.1. Built Heritage

Carran Church consists of the ruin of a 15<sup>th</sup> century fortified parish church, set along the north boundary of a rectangular graveyard where burial still occurs. The church is orientated east-west and retains many original features of interest. The agricultural field in which the church and graveyard are located also contains the remains of three house sites, associated field walls and 5 cairns.<sup>1</sup>

Within the demonstration site four monuments are listed on the Record of Monuments and Places maintained by the National Monument Service (NMS, 2014). These are

Church	CL009-075001
Graveyard	CL009-075002
House (indeterminate age)	CL009 - 075011
House (indeterminate age)	CL009 – 075010

The field walls, five cairns and one of the house sites are not recorded in the Records of Monuments and Places maintained by the National Monument Service.



Figure 2: Aerial image of Carran Church, graveyard and surrounding archaeological complex

<sup>1</sup> Dowd, A., B. Crumlish, O’Gorman D. 2007 ‘A Landscape Survey of Carran Church in the Burren, County Clare’ Unpublished Thesis Masters of Landscape Archaeology NUI Galway.

### **1.3.2. Natural Heritage**

The Carran Church demonstration site is located within a field of reseeded grassland which is grazed by cattle. The soil cover is thin and beneath is limestone pavement which protrudes to the surface in places.

The site overlooks the geologically important closed Carran Meggah Depression, which extends for 2km to the northeast below the church site and covers an area of approximately 7km<sup>2</sup>. It is a spectacular example of a large complex doline and is one of the oldest geomorphological features in the Burren. The rocky slopes and cliffs surrounding the depression are, in places, buried with boulder clay indicating that it is older than the last glaciation. It is suggested that the depression began to be formed when this whole area was covered in shale and a surface river cut down through the shale and into the limestone, eventually disappearing underground. The resulting valley would have acted as a focus for runoff, enlarging the depression by dissolution. Carran Church is situated on rocks belonging to the Ballyelly Member of the Slievenaglasha Formation – some of the youngest limestone layers in the Burren. The stones used in the construction of the Church were most likely sourced locally. (Ref: Geological Survey of Ireland, Clare County Geological site reports)

## 2. SITE CONDITION

### 2.1. Access

The Carran Church demonstration site is located on the R480, which is the main tourism route through the centre of the Burren.

#### 2.1.1. Approach Road

The site is approached from a north-south axis on the R480. The road is narrow and problems can occur when large coaches are passing in opposite directions.

#### 2.1.2. Directional Signage

The church is signposted from the field entrance gate with a brown fingerpost sign, carrying the former Dúchas<sup>2</sup> logo and the inscription 'Carran Church' in English and Irish. The signpost is in good condition.

It was noted during the visitor observation study carried out at this site in September 2014 as part of this report (Appendix I) that several visitors were unsure as to where the entrance to the site was, as the signpost is quite a distance from the available parking space. This confusion led to several visitors entering through a gateway and onto a private access lane to the north of the church site.



Photo 1: View of Carran Church from roadside entrance

#### 2.1.3. Parking

Limited and unofficial parking exists in front of the Fitzgerald's family home, which is on the opposite side of the road from the site. This area can accommodate 3-4 cars. If coaches park here they create traffic congestion. During the visitor observation study no coaches were recorded parking at this site.

Also during this study, it was noted that some visitors approaching from the north (Ballyvaughan direction) parked in the roadside gateway entrance to the north of the church, thereby blocking the entrance to a private dwelling access laneway.

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<sup>2</sup> Dúchas Heritage Service was an amalgamation of the National Monuments Service, the National Parks & Wildlife Service and the Office of Public Works in the 1990s. It has since been disbanded.



Photo 2: Car parked in private access gateway to north of Church

### 2.1.4. Site Entry

The finger post sign at the road entrance stile points to the church and graveyard.

The site is entered over a stone stepped stile adjacent to a small iron gate, approximately 50m to the south of the parking lay-by. The gate is kept locked, except when burials are taken place within the graveyard.

A slightly worn grass trail leads from the gateway to the graveyard boundary wall. At this point the visitor enters the graveyard over a high stepped stone stile. The adjacent gate in the graveyard boundary wall is locked, except when burials are taking place. During the observation study, it was noted that the height of the step into this stile caused problems for some visitors.



Photo 3: Roadside entrance

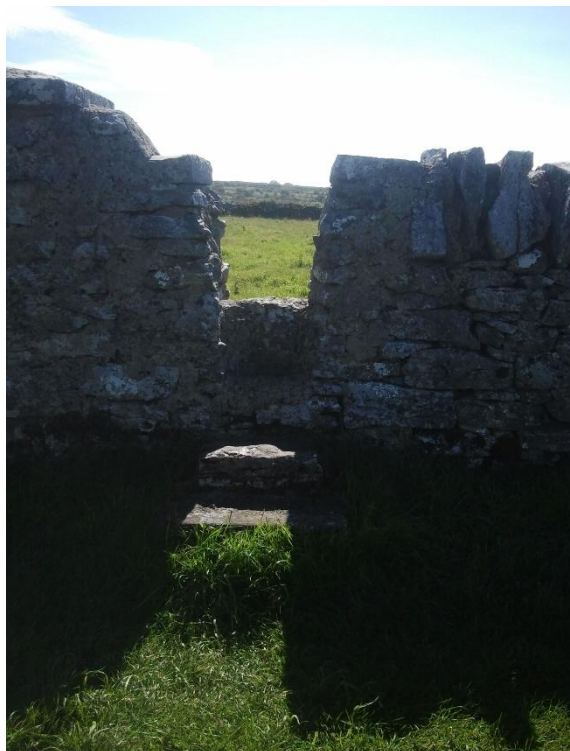
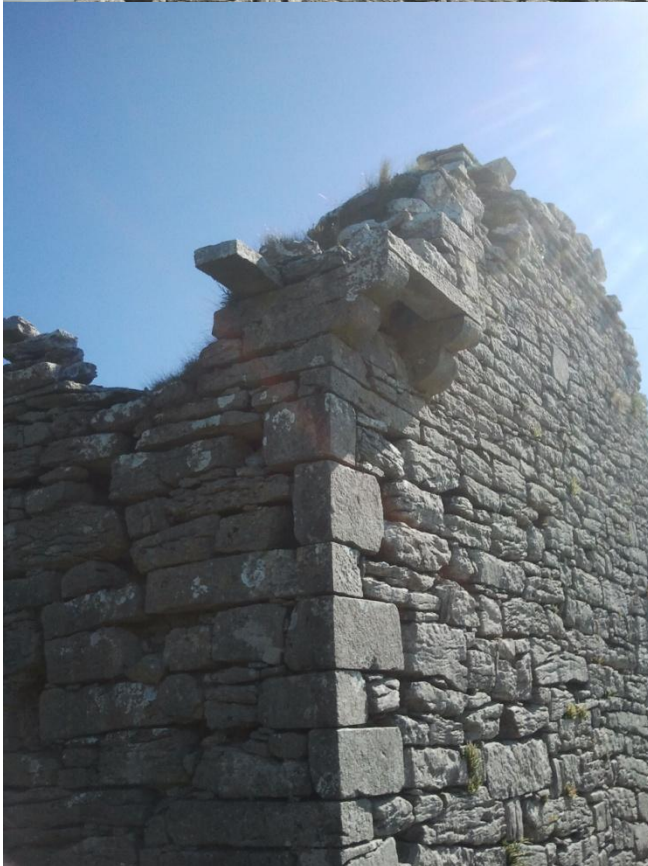


Photo 4: Entrance stile to graveyard from interior



### 2.1.5. The Church

The ruins of the Medieval church are in a deteriorating condition. There has been significant structural movement in the NW corner beneath a machicoulis and it would appear that this structure is in danger of collapse. There are several stones lying in the field beneath this corner. Mortar has been washed out of joints of the walls in several areas. Stones in the north-east corner wall have been pushed outwards.



Photos 5 & 6: Cracks in wall in NW corner shows structural movement.

## 2.2. Visitor Facilities

### 2.2.1. Interpretation

Adjacent to the inside south wall of the graveyard, to the left of the stile, a standard (labelled with a Dúchas symbol) interpretive lectern panel, which is used at most OPW managed sites, provides information on the history and structure of the Church building.

The text and graphics of the panel are faded. This site is not managed by the OPW, but by Clare County Council and this panel may have been placed here in error.



Photo 7: Interpretive Panel at Carran Church

### 3. Current Visitor Use of Site and Resulting Impacts

In September 2014, a number of GeoparkLIFE initiatives were undertaken to provide baseline data on visitor numbers at each of the demonstration sites and to develop a methodology to determine how visitors' behaviour is impacting on the natural and built heritage of sites. Previous to this baseline information was either non-existent or very sporadic.

#### 3.1. Visitor Numbers

As part of the *'Buses in the Burren 2014 – A study of the Impacts and Issues'* (Saunders, J. 2015) a study commissioned by the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark, the access routes and direction of travel of buses in the Burren was determined for July 17, 2014 by undertaking a driver/guide survey at the Cliffs of Moher and combining the results with data from a Clare County Council Road Traffic Census carried out on the same day. The results showed that 48 buses travelled along the R480 on this day (10 public day trips, 38 private tours). There are no details available as to the number of buses that stop at Carran Church but the number is likely to be very low due to the lack of parking facilities.

Through the GeoparkLIFE initiative a footfall counter was installed at this site on September 11, 2014 to measure visitor numbers and times of visit. It was placed inside the stile, which is the entrance from the road to the field in which the monument is located. This counter will remain in place for the duration of the GeoparkLIFE project and results will be collected and analysed by the GeoparkLIFE team and shared with relevant site managers

The following numbers were recorded between September 11, 2014 and February 13, 2015:

Carran Church Visitor Numbers	
Month	Numbers Recorded
September 2014	259
October 2014	101
November 2014	152
December 2014	32
January 2015	41
February 2015	37
Total (9-9-14 to 13-2-15)	622

Table 1: Footfall data recorded at Carran Church September 2014 – February 2015

#### 3.2. Visitor Attitudes Survey

A Visitor Survey was conducted at Carran Church between 5<sup>th</sup> September and 11<sup>th</sup> October 2014 as part of a wider survey of the GeoparkLIFE demonstration sites by Millward Brown Ltd. A Surveyor were placed at the Church. 45 people were interviewed. The purpose of this survey was to record visitor's attitudes to the infrastructure at these sites and to the Burren. The results indicate:

- 61% of visitors interviewed gave a rating of between 8-10 for signposting to the site (1 being poor and 10 high):
- 44% rated physical entry between 8 and 10
- 11% rated parking facilities between 8 and 10
- 98% arrived by car to the site
- 64% noticed the information; 69% read them entirely and 22% partially; of those that read the boards 63% felt that they added to their understanding of the Burren.

- 24% were very satisfied with the site and the remaining 67% were satisfied.  
The full results of the interviews at Carran Church are contained in Appendix I.

### 3.3. Visitor Survey and Observation Studies

Two sets of Visitor observations were carried out at the site in September 2014 to determine visitor movement around the site and how visitor behaviour is impacting on the site.

- On September 6, 2014 Visitor Observations were carried out at Carran Church as part of the CAAS Ltd.<sup>3</sup> study to assist GeoparkLIFE to develop a survey methodology for assessing environmental impacts at the demonstration sites. One surveyor was stationed outside the walls of the church with a view of the road and the entrance to the site. 44 visitors were observed during this exercise.

The results indicate that:

- 66% arrived by car – no coaches were recorded
- 48% read the information board
- 77% were involved in low impact activity
- 73% of visitors had no effect on the environment of the site; 4% were involved in light littering and 23% in the movement of material (stones rooted vegetation, fauna).



Figure 3: Surveyor station for visitor Observation by CAAS Ltd. marked in red.

- On September 10, 2014 visitor observations were carried out by GeoparkLIFE between 11am and 4pm. The surveyor was stationed to the south of the church (within the surrounding field) with a clear view of the parking area, site entrance and church.

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<sup>3</sup> CAAS Ltd. 2015 'Pilot Visitor Observation Studies of Environmental Impacts at the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark, Co. Clare'.



Figure 4: Surveyor station for visitor observation at Carran Church by GeoparkLIFE (indicated by red star)

The results of these observations indicate:

- 100% of visitors arrived by car
- 60% read the information board
- 33% of groups observed parked in private residential gateways
- 86% of visitors were involved in low level impact activities with no effects on the environment of the site observed.
- 14% were involved in high impact activity i.e. climbing over boundary walls to gain access to field surrounding site and walking off the designated access track.

### 3.4. Ecological Study of Visitor Movement

As part of the CAAS Visitor Observation Study, EirEco Environmental Consultants were commissioned to carry out vegetation monitoring at the GeoparkLIFE demonstrations sites between October 21, 2014 and December 2, 2014. Vegetation was analysed in 1m<sup>2</sup> quadrats at pre-selected locations identified by CAAS in each site. Five quadrat surveys were conducted at the Carran Church site as illustrated in **Figure**



Figure 5: Location of quadrats for ecological survey at Carran Church (EirEco 2014)

The following is an extract from the ecological survey report for Carran Church demonstration site (EirEco 2014):

*'A well defined track leads from the entrance gate on the R480 to the church. The church is within a walled enclosure and subject to periodic mowing. There is no evidence of impact on the vegetation in the surrounding grassland and the site does not appear to receive a high volume of visitor activity.'*

### **3.5. Conclusions: Site Recreational Pressure Points**

During the field study undertaken as part of this site appraisal the following recreational pressures at the site were identified:

- The church building has some structural areas of concern especially in the NW corner which would appear to be in danger of collapse.
- The only available parking space is the hard shoulder outside the front boundary wall of a residential home. This is not an official parking area and when in use it can accommodate a maximum of three cars parked parallel to the roadside. There is no available parking area for coach traffic. Car parking also takes place on occasion in the private entrance gateway to the north of the site causing blockages to this private entrance laneway which leads to a residential home.
- A finger post directional sign is located at the stile/gate entrance to the field. When visitors park in the available space on the opposite side of the road, this signpost is at such a distance that it is often overlooked by visitors and they attempt to gain access over the field boundary wall or through the private laneway to the north of the site.
- The entrance to the site field and to the graveyard are both via a stone stile within their respective boundary walls. Both stiles are stepped with a narrow gap. This stile design causes access difficulty for the less abled bodied visitor.
- Within the graveyard is an interpretive panel which describes the features of the medieval church. The text and illustrations are faded and difficult to read. The panel was installed by Dúchas, the Heritage Service, an agency that is no longer in existence and who have no management responsibilities for this site.

## 4. SITE MANAGEMENT

### 4.1. Ownership

The church and graveyard is in the ownership of Clare County Council. It is a recorded Monument (No. CL009-075001) under the National Monuments Service and is part of a complex of recorded monuments in the townland of Carron.

The graveyard caretakers are the Fitzgerald family. The field surrounding the graveyard, which contains the remainder of the archaeological monuments is owned by John Marrinan. A report compiled for the Buren Connect project in 2009<sup>4</sup>, states that there is a public ROW through John Marrinan's land from the road to the graveyard gate

### 4.2. Management Actions to date

The deteriorating condition of the church building was highlighted in a report by Risteard UaCróinín, Conservation Officer with Clare County Council in 2005



Photo 8: Ivy growth over south doorway and cracks in wall 2005



Photo 9: Ivy obscuring east window 2005

With permission from the National Monuments Service and under the guidance of Clare County Council's Conservation Officer, supervised cutting back of ivy was carried out in August and September 2009. The building was subsequently assessed as part of the Burren Heritage Sites Report (Burren Connect, 2009) by the firm *Architectural Conservation Professionals, Murroe, Co. Limerick* to determine the methods and materials required to carry out immediate remedial works to conserve the ruin into the future.

The Burren Connect 2009 report states: *'A phased structural works programme to consolidate the building will be implemented over the next few years, pending the availability of funding. A grant application has been submitted for the first phase of works to the Heritage Council under the new Management Grant Scheme. This works programme will be carried out under the supervision of the National Monuments Service and the Conservation Office of Clare County Council'.*

The grant application was unsuccessful and the work did not proceed, due to lack of funds.

The 2009 report undertaken on behalf of the Burren Connect Project (Burren, 2009) states: *A small parking area will be developed across the road from the access stile. Agreement has been reached on the development of this car park with the National Monuments Service, Clare County Council and the landowner, John Marrinan. This will be suitable for up to 3 cars. Coach parking will not be encouraged. The parking area will be developed by the County Council in conjunction with the landowner. Interpretative signage will be developed in conjunction with the NMS.*

This work has not been undertaken to date.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUES	RECOMMENDED ACTIONS
Deteriorating condition of church building	It is recommended that a Conservation Engineers report be commissioned and consolidation work carried out on the north-west corner of the Church which is in danger of collapse and is a safety hazard in terms of visitor access.
Unrecorded monuments	The inclusion of all the archaeological monuments identified under the NUI study on the RMP should be discussed to provide statutory protection.
Lack of parking	A feasibility study should be undertaken to determine the possibilities for parking provision at the site.
Outdated signage and interpretation. Visitor confusion as to entry point to site.	The directional finger post sign to the site should be updated and a similar second sign, indicating the direction of the stile/gate entry, provided opposite the current parking area. The interpretive panel located within the graveyard should be removed and an updated version installed.
Difficulty of entry for some visitors due to stile design	A universal stile design should be researched and developed for installation at the road entrance to the site and at the graveyard entrance.
Potential of increased visitor movement through site	A fixed-point photography monitoring system should be developed and implemented to measure any increase in erosion that may occur along the trackway from the road entrance to the Church due to potential increased visitor usage.

## APPENDIX I

### VISITOR ATTITUDES SURVEY Carran Church 2014 (MWB)

1. How long do you intend visiting this site?

Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	3-4 hours	5-6 hours	Full day
96	4	0	0	016

2

- How would you rate the signposting for directions to this site on a scale of 1-10 (1=poor; 10=very good)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16	2	0	4	7	0	11	36	16	9

2. How would you rate the physical entry to this site (including stiles and footpaths)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	0	4	4	9	9	20	24	18	2

3. How would you rate the parking facilities at this site? (Scale 1-10)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
22	4	7	4	16	16	20	7	2	2

4. Have you noticed any information boards at this site/location?

Yes	No
64	36

5. Have you read the information on them?

Yes	Partially	No
69	24	7

6. Did the information add to your understanding of the Burren?

Yes	No
63	37

7. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your visit to this site?

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
2	2	4	67	24

8. What is the main type of transport you are using to travel within the Burren?

Own car	Hired/rented	Public transport	Motorbike	Coach day tour	Coach guided tour	Private chauffeur tour	Bicycle	Other
18	80	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

## APPENDIX II

### Visitor Observation survey at Carran Church

Surveyor: Zena Hocter

#### 1. Survey Detail

Site Id : CC	Date Of Survey	Day of Week	Duration of Survey	Weather	No of people observed
	10-9-14	Wednesday	11am-4pm (5 hours)	Dry and Sunny	28

#### 2. Number of Observations, gender and group breakdown

Number of people observed	Total number of females	Total number of males	Number of observations	Average group size
28	14	14	15	2

Comment: Group size did not exceed 2

#### 3. Mode of transport, Time Spent on Site and Main activity, group and age demographic

Date of observation	Obs group id	Time spent on site (hours:minutes)	Group type	Age demographic	Mode of transport	Main activity	Observed impacts
10-9-14	CC1	00.15	M/F	Adult	Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	Parked in adjacent farm gate (north)
	CC2	00.11	F/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	None
	CC3	00.10	M/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	None
	CC4	00.17	M/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	Male climbed wall to exit site
	CC5	00.12	M/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	Parked in adjacent farm gate (north): Male and female climbed wall to enter site; walking off track
	CC6	00.10	M/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	Male climbs over wall to enter; walking off track
	CC7	00.05	M/F		Car	Viewing church from road	Walked along farmyard lane to north of church.
	CC8	00.05	M/F		Car	Viewed church from road and took photos	Parked in adjacent farm gate (north):
	CC9	00.02	M/F		Car	Viewed church from road and took photos	Standing in centre of road taking

							photos
	CC10	00.02	M		Car	Viewed church from road and took photos	Parked in farmyard entrance to south; standing in road taking photos
	CC11	00.01	M		Car	Takes photos from parking position	Parks in farmyard entrance to south
	CC12	00.01	M/F		Car	Taking photos from car	Stalls car in centre of road with engine running and takes photos
	CC13	00.10	M/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	First went to farmyard entrance to north before realising entrance was further down the road
	CC14	00.13	M/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	First went to farmyard entrance to north and along access lane before realising entrance was further down the road (saw other couple exiting)
	CC15	00.11	M/F		Car	Viewing site; taking photos; reading panel	None

## Conclusions

Average time spent on site: 8 minutes

## Level of Activity

### 4. Time spent reading Information Boards

Observation group Id	Time spent reading information boards (mins:secs)
CC1	02:00
CC2	03:00
CC3	02:00
CC4	0
CC5	01:00
CC6	00:40
CC7	0 (did not enter graveyard)
CC8	0 (did not enter graveyard)
CC9	0 (did not enter graveyard)
CC10	0 (did not enter graveyard)

CC11	0 (did not enter graveyard)
CC12	0 (did not enter graveyard)
CC13	00:06
CC14	00:03
Cc15	00.01

Average time spent reading panel by visitors who entered the graveyard: 1 minute

### 5. Effects Observed

- Parked in adjacent farmyard gate (5 out of 15 cars observed - 33%)
- Walking along private access road north of site (6 out of 28 visitors observed - 21%)
- Climbing over site boundary walls and walking off the designated track (4 out of 28 visitors – 14%)
- Causing obstruction in road while taking photos (3 out of 28 visitors – 11%)

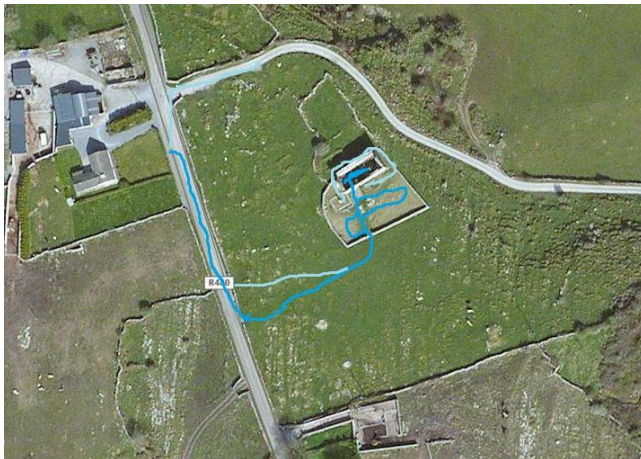
Comment: Sample size is too small to use percentage as reliable result.

### 6. Time of day of arrival at site (observation study duration: 11.00-16.00 hours)

Observer Group ID	Time of Arrival at site
CC1	11.15
CC2	11.35
CC3	11.36
Cc4	11.42
CC5	13.06
CC6	13.17
CC7	13.31
CC8	13.44
CC9	13.46
CC10	13.53
CC11	14.02
CC12	14.06
CC13	14.25
CC14	14.32
CC15	15.18

Comment: Times of arrival indicate a continuous flow of visitors throughout the observation period.

### 7. Visitor Movement Pattern



Observed movement patterns – dark blue line show core movement area; lighter blue peripheral area.