

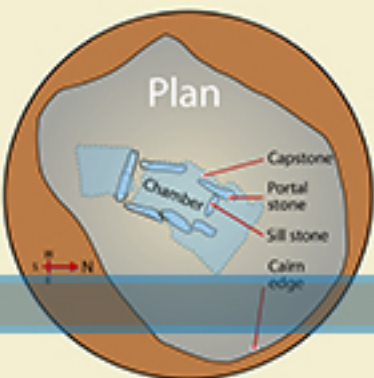
Poulnabrone • Poll na Brón

The Portal Tomb

Poll na brón = Hollow of the Millstone



Poulnabrone is a classic example of a portal tomb with two tall portal stones flanking the entrance to a rectangular stone-lined chamber which is covered by a single large capstone. A low oval-shaped mound (cairn) of loose stone, which helped stabilise the chamber, surrounds the tomb. This cairn would originally have been no higher than it is today, suggesting that the dramatic tomb structure was designed to be the main visual focus.



Archaeological excavations were carried out at Poulnabrone between 1986 and 1988 when the fractured eastern portal stone needed to be replaced (the original portal stone can be seen lying on the limestone pavement just to the north of the tomb)



The excavations revealed that at least 33 individuals were buried in the chamber – infants, children and adults, both male and female. It is likely that the bones, which were highly fragmented, were initially buried or allowed to decompose elsewhere before being transferred to this tomb some time around 3000BC. Personal possessions buried with the dead included a polished stone axe, a decorated bone pendant, stone beads, quartz crystals, chert and flint weapons and implements and fragments of pottery (many of these artefacts are on display in the Clare County Museum in Ennis).

Artefacts found during excavation of Poulnabrone

Quartz crystal



Flint arrowhead



Bone pendant



Stone beads



Head of bone pin



Radiocarbon dating has shown that those buried in the chamber died in the period 4200 – 2900 BC placing them firmly in the Neolithic or New Stone Age. Over a thousand years later (1767 – 1413 BC) during the Bronze Age, a newborn baby was buried in the portico, just outside the entrance to the chamber. This tomb was not just a formal burial place but must also have been a focus for related rituals and ceremonies. The transfer of bones from their original resting place suggests strong links with the ancestors.

The tomb continued to dominate the landscape of later generations as evidenced by the Bronze Age burial. Today it provides us with the opportunity to imagine and contemplate the past.

Conservation message
Please respect the special and fragile nature of this site by not climbing on the tomb or interfering with the monument or its surroundings in any way.

