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Edited by George Fletcher  
Excerpt  
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## CONNAUGHT

### ANCIENT GEOGRAPHY

THE oldest source of information that we possess regarding the ancient geography of Ireland is contained in the work of the second-century Alexandrian Ptolemy.

He gives fewer names for the region now called the province of Connaught<sup>1</sup> than for any of the other provinces of Ireland. He names three rivers, the *Libnios*, the *Ausoba*, and the *Senos*. The last should be the Shannon, by its name, though, if so, Ptolemy

<sup>1</sup> The spelling *Connaught* was good enough in its way when it was first invented, though it possesses no advantage over the proper native spelling *Connacht*. It is now, however, misleading, and might with advantage be abolished; for as English is now pronounced it tends to a slurring over of the guttural sound which is essential in the word (as in the English word *naught*; *i.e.* the name becomes *Con-nawt*, an ugly and meaningless corruption, instead of *Conn-acht*, its proper form). Similarly the spelling of *Lough* for *Loch* should be entirely abandoned, as well as the still worse *Knock* for *Cnoc* in the names of mountains. In the latter word the initial C should be sounded, but under the influence of the English word *knock* it has almost disappeared, thanks to the barbarous spelling now current. A further consummation devoutly to be wished for would be the wiping off from the map of the hideous prefix *Bally* (properly *Baile*); this, in a large proportion of the names in which it occurs, has no right to be there at all.

has erred in the position to which he has assigned it. The identification of the other rivers is not yet finally settled. He further names three tribes, the *Magnatai*, who seem to have occupied the north coasts of Mayo and Sligo, with a town *Magnata* (Moyne ??); the *Auteinoi*, with a town *Regia*; and the *Ganganoi* who appear to have inhabited Clare. All these names are very problematical. It is tempting to identify Magnata with the immense fort of Moghane in Clare, though such an identification would imply an unexampled blunder on Ptolemy's part; but it must be admitted that the omissions of Ptolemy are sometimes as inexplicable as the places he mentions.

The original territory of the *Connachta* was rather wider than the modern province of Connaught, in that it included the modern counties of Clare and Cavan, now reckoned to Munster and Ulster respectively. The chief tribal sub-divisions of the province were as follows: the *Ui Fiachrach*, reputed descendants of Fiachra, son of Eochu Muigmedon, king of Ireland A.D. 358–365: in the north of Co. Mayo the *Conmaicne Mara*, one of several branches of the Conmaicne, or descendants of Conmac, son of Fergus and Medb, queen of Connaught: these inhabited the modern Connemara, which still preserves their name in a corrupt form: the regions called *Gno Mor* and *Gno Becc*, Great and Little Gno, west of Loch Oirbsen (now Loch Corrib). The tribe of the *Luigne* were situated in Co. Sligo; the modern barony name of Leyney is a corruption of their name. The *Ciar-raige*, or descendants of Ciar, another son of Fergus and Medb, had territories in Mayo and Roscommon, as also in Munster, where they gave their name to the modern county of Kerry. The *Sil Muire-*

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*daig* were an important sept in Roscommon; they were said to have been descended from Muiredach of Mag Ai, king of Connaught, who died A.D. 700; the O'Conors, Mac Dermots, and other local clans are derived from them. The *Ui Briuin*, descendants of Brian, king of Connaught, had various territories; the *Ui Briuin Breifni* or Ui Briuin of the territory called Breifne, occupied the modern counties of Leitrim and Cavan. The *Ui Maine Connacht*, so called to distinguish them from a similarly named tribe in what is now Westmeath, were a very important tribe occupying parts of Roscommon, Galway, Clare, and King's County. In the south of Galway, the modern barony of Kiltartan represents the ancient territory of Aidne, where a branch of the Ui Fiachrach were domiciled.

Connaught was granted to the De Burgos at the coming of the English; but like so many of the Anglo-Norman families, these developed sympathies with the Irish rather than with the English, and the province practically remained out of English jurisdiction altogether. Save that it seems to have been divided into two, called Connaught and Roscommon respectively, there was no attempt made to bring it under English forms of jurisdiction till the time of Elizabeth. Between 1566 and 1580 Sir Henry Sidney, the deputy, divided it for judicial purposes into shires, four in number; Leitrim, which was not subdued till 1583, was naturally not included in his scheme. Being anxious for administrative purposes to reduce the size of Munster, he annexed Thomond (*Tuad-Mumha*, North Munster) to this province, renaming it the County of Clare; it was however restored to Munster at the Restoration.

**POPULATION**

The people of the province of Connaught are the darkest in hair and eye of the inhabitants of Ireland. Even in Cong, Co. Galway, and its neighbourhood, where the fairest people in the province are to be found, the proportion of dark to fair is double that in Dublin. The darkest people recorded in Ireland are those of Clifden in Connemara. In stature the population of the south and west of Ireland are slightly taller on the average than those of the east and north. The *cephalic index* (see *Ireland* volume in this Series) ranges from 79.4 to 80.4. The heads of the Connaught people are distinctly broader than are those of the Munster men.

The Irish language as spoken in Connaught is characterised by a much more emphatic observance of the delicate distinctions between the pronunciation of the consonants with different vowel combinations than the Irish of the other provinces; thus making the pronunciation of Irish more expressive and more musical in this province than elsewhere. The census returns show a decline in the language, due no doubt largely to the fact that it is Connaught and Munster which suffer most from the leakage of emigration. In 1891 there were 22,071 people in Connaught who could speak Irish only. This dropped in 1901 to 12,103, and in 1911 to 9367. The total number of speakers of Irish was 274,783, or 37.8 of the population, in 1891; in 1911 it was 217,087, or 35.5 of the population.

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THE province of Connaught occupies the middle portion of the western half of Ireland. Its northern limit is marked by the line, founded on no conspicuous natural features, which forms the northern and eastern edge of Co. Leitrim, where it abuts on Ulster. The southern limit is the sinuous southern boundary of Co. Galway, where it marches with Munster. The eastern end of both these lines rests on the Shannon, which forms the eastern boundary.

Connaught as a whole is essentially a grazing country, low limestone pasture prevailing in the inland parts and mountain pasture and moor in the hilly marginal areas.

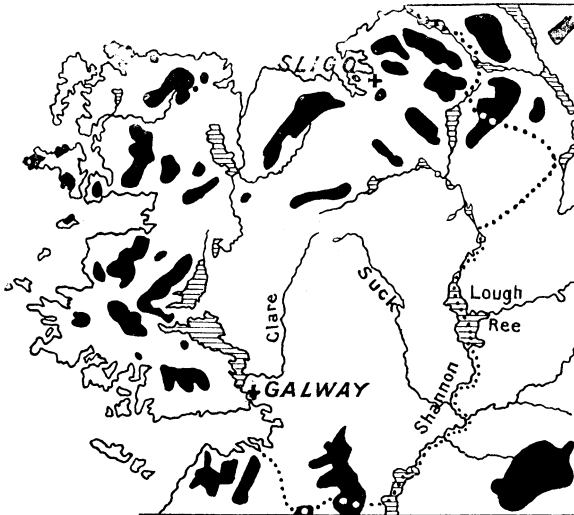
Washed on three sides by the warm waters of the Atlantic, over which sweep the prevailing winds, it has a climate mild and insular in type—warm in winter, cool in summer; and condensation from the ocean winds produces much cloud and rain. About half the winds of the year are from the west (north-west to south-west). As regards rainfall, the 40-inch line, running north and south, corresponds roughly with that of the Shannon—in other words with the eastern edge of the province. Eastward the rainfall decreases, westward it increases. The 50-inch line coincides practically with the line of the Corrib-Mask-Conn chain of lakes, which is also the eastern edge of the Galway-Mayo highlands. A rainfall of 60 inches is reached halfway across the mountain region, and in wet spots among the hills west of this the precipitation reaches

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70 or 80 inches, and probably more. On the most westerly points of land—the islands lying off the coast—the rainfall is not so great as on the adjoining hills of the mainland. As regards temperature, the effect of the ocean and the ocean winds is very marked. Frost,



Connaught

*(Land over 500 feet elevation shown in black)*

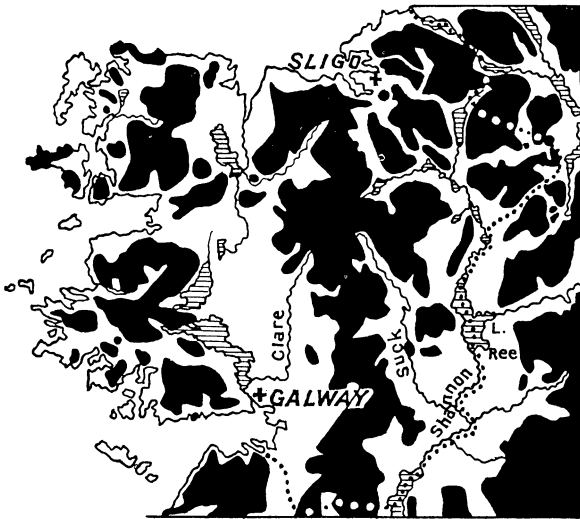
almost unknown in the extreme west, is rare in the east. In January, the isotherms of  $40^{\circ}$ ,  $41^{\circ}$ , and  $42^{\circ}$  F. follow one another in quick succession as one goes west from the Shannon, the lines running nearly north and south. In July, the warmest month, on the other hand, the temperature falls as one goes west from the Shannon, from  $60^{\circ}$  to  $58^{\circ}$  F. along the coast. The amount of cloud is great, and the degree of humidity high. Along

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the coast the rainfall is distributed over more than two-thirds of the days of the year. The vegetation bears witness in many ways to the permanence of moist conditions, and the constant bend of the trees towards the east, even in the Shannon valley, keeps one in mind



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*(Land over 250 feet elevation shown in black)*

of the prevalence and force of the westerly winds, which in the maritime districts renders the growth of trees impossible except where some local shelter prevails.

For topographical purposes Connaught may be divided into two regions. If from the Shannon we draw two lines due west, one to Galway Bay and one to Clew Bay, and draw a third line joining the heads of these two bays, we enclose a vast area of limestone plain, comprising the

County of Roscommon and the eastern parts of Galway and Mayo. Throughout this region, which comprises some 2500 square miles, only a couple of points rise above 500 feet, and most of the area lies below 250 feet. Grazing land predominates largely. Towards the west the soil becomes very thin, and the limestone comes to the surface with increasing frequency, till along the Corrib-Mask line of lakes the bare grey rock, fantastically carved by the dissolving rain, lies open to the sky over large areas. Sweeping in a semi-circle round this plain the rest of the province presents a great variety of hill-forms—flat-topped cliff-walled limestone hills in Sligo and Leitrim in the north, rugged mountain-groups of slate, quartzite, and granite in the west (Mayo and Galway), and strange grey ranges of bare limestone in the south (Galway and Clare). We shall now take each of these regions in turn.

The Limestone Plain is not a plain in the sense in which Holland or Norfolk is a plain ; it is a gently undulating tract, generally well drained, the surface occupied mainly by grassland and peat bog—grass occupying nearly 60 per cent. and peat 12 per cent. of the whole. The Shannon and its large tributary the Suck, flowing southward, drain the eastern half. A broad, low, barely perceptible watershed runs north and south down the middle of the area. The western half drains, mainly by the Rivers Clare and Robe, into the great chain of lakes—Carra, Mask, and Corrib—which lie along the western edge of the plain and find an outlet at Galway in the River Corrib. One of the most characteristic features of the area is the *turloughs*—depressions in the surface, often of considerable area, which are lakes in winter, and



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sweet green pasture in summer. These are filled by underground channels in the limestone when rains raise the general level of the subsoil waters, and are emptied by the same means when drier weather prevails.

Another characteristic feature is furnished by the *eskers*—those curious winding green gravel-ridges left on the surface by the retreating ice of the Glacial period. By contrast with the flat country on which they extend they often assume a definite importance in the landscape, and from their fragrant thyme-clad slopes singularly extensive views are often obtained.

Towns are few and far between, and factories of any kind almost unknown; the people's wealth is in horses, cattle, and sheep, and the principal occupation in the towns lies in supplying the wide surrounding areas with the necessities and simple comforts of rural life. The Shannon supplies a waterway along the eastern fringe of the district, and Lough Corrib along the western; steamers run on both routes, carrying passengers and goods; but excepting a short branch from the Shannon to Ballinasloe, no canal enters the area. Towards the south, the main line of the Midland Great Western Railway crosses westward from the Shannon at Athlone to the sea at Galway; and the Mayo branch, running north-west from Athlone to the sea at Clew Bay, traverses the plain diagonally, and furnishes the traveller with an excellent epitome of its characters. The roads, being repaired with limestone (the only available rock) are generally bad—dusty in summer, sticky in winter, and rutty all the time.

**MOUNTAINS**

Beginning in the north, we find the hilly coastal area of broken and diversified country extending from the sea at Sligo eastward to the Erne basin, in which several mountain groups of different type may be distinguished.

Fronting the Atlantic boldly between Sligo and Bundoran, Ben Bulbin and its companions stand up conspicuously. These hills are formed of horizontal beds of limestone. Their surface, still retaining much of its ancient levelness, forms an undulating table-land 1000 to 2000 ft. above the surrounding country; their edges, where the onslaughts of weather have been aided by series of natural vertical cracks ("joints") are boldly precipitous. Not only has the exposed western face been carved into imposing cliffs by rain and wind, but, aided by stream action, the forces of denudation have carved two deep gashes through the centre of the mass, forming the lovely cliff-walled valleys of Glencar and Glenade. This area is exceedingly picturesque, and has a special interest for the botanist, on account of the variety of alpine plants which cling to the cliff-walls. Southward, across the beautiful Lough Gill, dark knobby heathery hills contrast with the green grassy slopes of the limestone. The difference is due to change of rock: these hills are a continuation of the great Ox Mountains ridge, which will be mentioned presently. Eastward, the limestone hills continue, but are soon replaced by others of shale and sandstone, which reach their culmination in Slieveanieran (1922 ft.) overlooking Lough Allen. The name signifies the Mountain of Iron, from the occurrence there of iron ore, which was formerly mined extensively. These hills have none of