

A watercolor illustration of a stream. The scene is dominated by various shades of green, from light lime to deep forest green, representing foliage and rocks. Brown and tan tones suggest the presence of rocks and the streambed. The water is depicted with soft, blended washes of light blue and green, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall style is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a gentle, atmospheric quality. The composition is framed by a thin, dark line, possibly representing the edge of a page or a simple border.

streamscales | catchments

The River Feagle

An Foghal: A backwater
current in a tidal stream

'To Know a River' workshop

'To Know a River' is a river educational workshop for schools run by Clochán Uisce. The workshop is an indepth look of the river system from its water quality to its biodiversity . The workshop's principal focus is to instill a connection and a sense of custodianship to the river through the process of understanding the river cycle and its ecology.

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Flag Iris
Feileastrum

Foreword

Dear Feagle and Argideen Family,

We are used to describing ourselves as coming from the town of Clonakilty or from Cork or to say I'm Irish, but to say that we are from the Feagle or Argideen watershed is much less common or even barely used. At the same time, it's a reality whether we are aware of it or not: we are also part of a river family where water is shared like a bloodline. To what extent we take care and participate healthily in this river family is up to us. In general, we take care of what we know and love. So in order to take care of what takes care of us, our waters, we will need to experience our waters, deepen our understanding and thus grow our love. This will form the base for us to value and care for our waters. Gnóthi sauton is one of the Greek wisdoms or philosophical maxims it means to know oneself (or in Irish féin- (self) + aithne ("knowing, recognition"). So, to get to know oneself by getting to know one's river, we might describe it as Abhainn + aithne. Local river groups, like Clochán Uisce, who have created this book and the workshop 'to know a river', engage in our citizen science programme that the Drinkable Rivers movement has created, and thus stimulate these water experiences and our Abhainnaithe.

Streams of love,

Li An Phoa,

Founder of Drinkable Rivers,
www.drinkablerivers.org

Co-author of 'Drinkable Rivers,
How The River Became My Teacher.'

Introduction

Clochán Uisce is a river group based in Clonakilty West Cork which advocates for clean healthy rivers. Our ethos is that all rivers have the right to run clean and unobstructed from source to sea with a thriving ecosystem along its course. We promote community river interaction through citizen science workshops, 'To Know a River' school education workshops and as a rivers hub and data collectors for international NGO Drinkable Rivers. This book is an ode to the small but powerful River Feagle which has not only shaped the history and the people of Clonakilty but us as a river group too. What this river has taught us over the past few years has been invaluable to our collective consciousness and has inspired us to protect it and share its story. It is a story that is part of us and needs to be experienced by us as we journey the Feagle from source to sea.

Paul McCulla
Clochán Uisce



Sea Trout
Breac Geal

Ecology of the River Feagle Catchment

RON DE BRUIN, ECOLOGIST

The River Feagle and its Catchment are the defining natural features of the town of Clonakilty and its surrounding townlands.

As an ecologist I look at the natural and man-made features of a catchment or a river section and see what habitats exist there, how rich and diverse the plant life is, and what species of fish, birds, insects, mammals and other animals may live there. I then study the relationships between the habitat quality and the population quality of those animals and plants. This often helps us humans to understand how our actions and decisions influence nature around us, of which we are part!

Recently I had been asked to do a survey on the river Feagle and its catchment. I had to ask landowners, such as farmers, permission to access the length of the river through their lands. I used skills such as plant

identification, kick-sampling for invertebrates and listening to birds singing (every bird has a unique song or sound it makes, so it's easier to find them that way than to actually see them). I had also used some online information that has been gathered by others who surveyed the river before me, for example the inland fisheries agency who gather information on fish stocks in rivers.

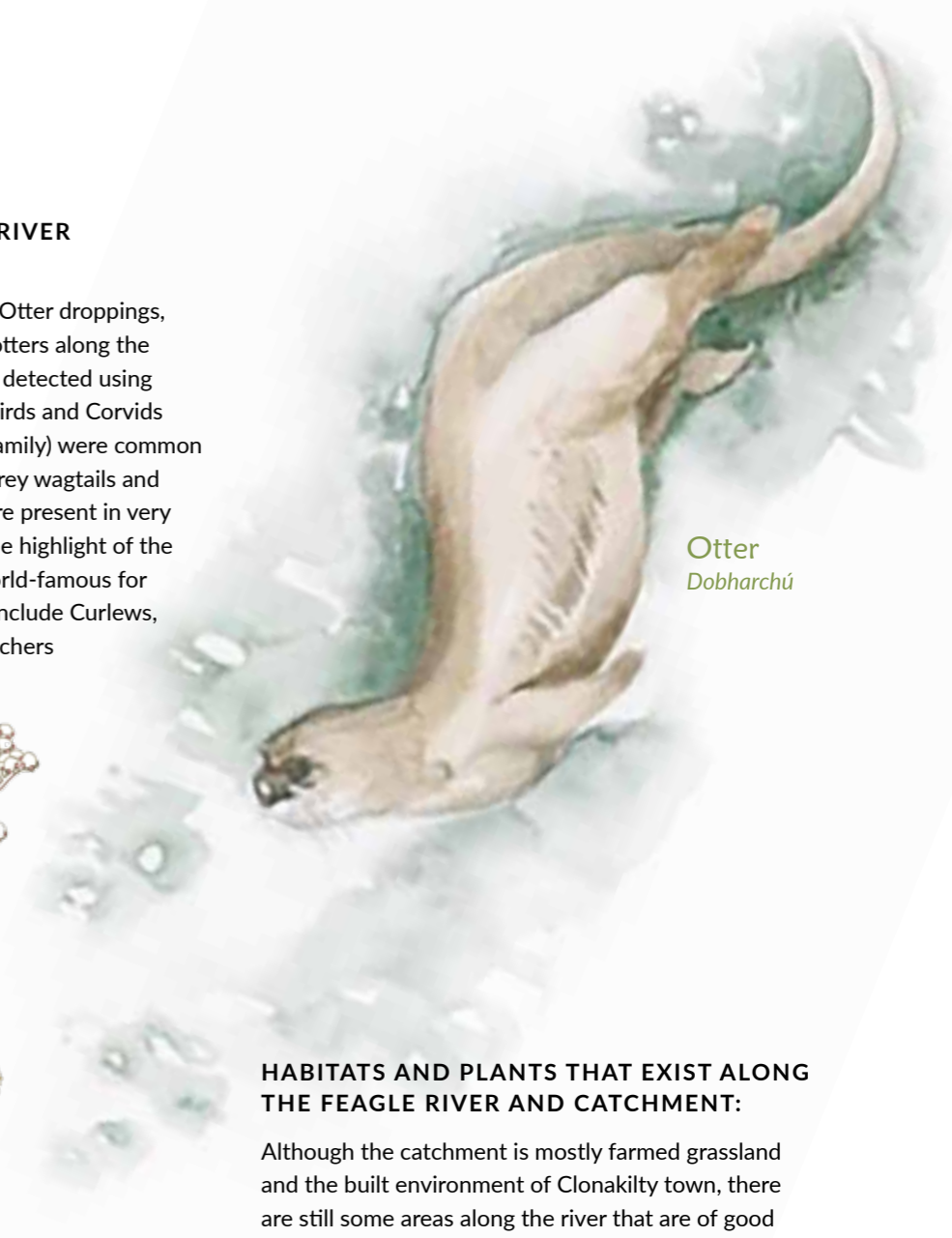
The Feagle is a 'Coastal' river- that means it is not part of a greater inland catchment like the Bandon or the Lee, but has a relatively short course that flows straight into the sea. It is also greatly influenced by the tides. The Feagle has three main Tributaries (see map) one starts near the village of Bealad, one in the townland of Tullyniskey, and one near Darrara.

The estuary, which you can see along the roads to Inchdoney and Ring is 'tidal' part of the river, and at low tide you can see the course of the river channel and where the Darrara tributary joins, near Ring harbour.

The highest point in the catchment is 100 meters above the sea level and the river flows for about 4500 meters from that point to reach sea level, which is quite quick! Indeed when we looked at the river-floor in those higher areas, we found it was quite stony and gravelly, which is typical for more 'upland' rivers. Where the river 'levels-up', close to the town of Clonakilty, it showed riverbed features that are more typical of a 'lowland' river, or a floodplain river: muddier and siltier, no stones.

ANIMALS OF THE FEAGLE RIVER CATCHMENT:

In my survey I found evidence of Otter droppings, which indicates the presence of otters along the feagle. Horseshoe bats were also detected using a sonar detector. Common songbirds and Corvids (birds from the Crow and raven family) were common along the river system, dippers, grey wagtails and kingfishers are a rarer sight but are present in very small numbers too, but for me the highlight of the Feagle is the Estuary, which is world-famous for its population of Waders. These include Curlews, Dunlins, Redshank and Oystercatchers



Otter
Dobharchú



Meadowsweet
Airgead Luachra



Knapweed
Mínscoth

HABITATS AND PLANTS THAT EXIST ALONG THE FEAGLE RIVER AND CATCHMENT:

Although the catchment is mostly farmed grassland and the built environment of Clonakilty town, there are still some areas along the river that are of good quality naturalness. These include: Dry meadows: a mixture of grasses such as Cock's foot and broadleaf plants such as Knapweed and Meadow vetchling.

Wet grassland and Marsh: Wetter areas near the river with purple moor Grass and Greater tussock sedge as well as Yellow Iris and Cuckoo flower

Riverside woodland: From single tree-stands to bigger clusters of Grey willow and Common Alder .

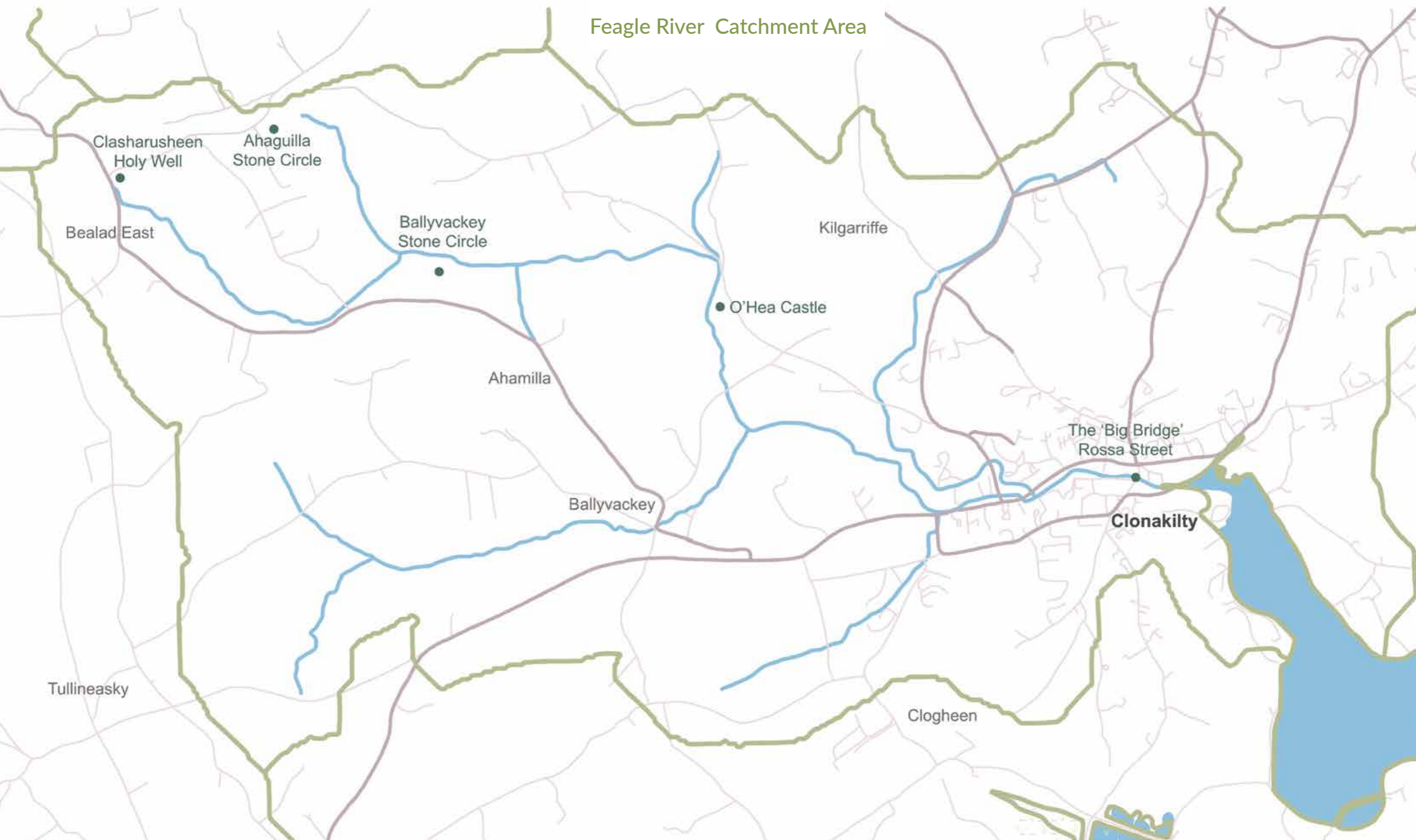
Watercourse vegetation: Common water-crowfoot, Hemlock water-dropwort and Meadowsweet.

Sea Trout
Breac Geal



I think that the River Feagle and its Catchment contain precious habitats and waters of incredible potential that we have responsibility to protect and restore. The Journey of understanding what to do starts with learning through observation of, and reading about, the wonderful nature that surrounds us, backed up by community action, which anyone can do, so let's start!

The River Feagle



The River Feagle Through Time - A History

CON O'NEILL

The river is only 9km from source to sea but it packs a punch from a historical perspective with activity from the Bronze Age, early and late medieval period and being central to the development of the town of Clonakilty since its foundation in 1613.

HOLY BEGINNINGS

Knockalady, at 146 meters above sea level, is the highest peak of a long and flat ridge from which the River Feagle has its origins. The hill is made up of the townlands of Clasharusheen, Bohona, Sleveen, Ahaguilla, Kilbree and Cashelisky. Along its ridge is a myriad of one lane roads, many of which likely follow the paths of ancient highways/trails over the high and dry ground on which people have travelled for millennia.

The source of the River Feagle is a holy well known as 'Clasharusheen Well' located off a narrow boreen which descends from Knockalady Hill near the crossroads at Lyon's Pub in Bealad. Amanda Clarke, author of Holy Wells of County Cork, visited the well in 2016 finding a modern circular concrete pipe, full of water, with a handmade pump device inside. Carefully clearing the overgrowth, Amanda first uncovered an old ornate gate lying on its side and behind it the original well which was dry due to the modern structure adjacent. Difficult to see in the overgrowth, Amanda describes that it 'seemed to have a chunky lintel, one large slab covering a semi-circular stone wellhouse'.

In c.1984, the modern concrete pipe was put in place to divert the water from Clasharusheen Holy Well to the Grotto in Bealad out of which it flows in a steady stream of water before continuing back to the original river channel.

TOPOGRAPHY

Utilising place-names, local lore and archaeological investigations, it is possible to reimagine the landscape through which the river flowed in the early medieval period, over one thousand years ago.

There was a vast marsh across all the low-lying ground on the flat of the town and along much of the river valley. The area near the tidal zone was likely a salt marsh with

knee-high rushes which would have been difficult to traverse. An example still exists in the closest inlet to Clonakilty, behind Moloney's Strand, east of the town.

Away from the tidal zone, the marsh may have turned to reeds and grass on which animals grazed. There is also evidence for a wet woodland here. In June 2018, Rubicon Heritage, on behalf of Ward & Burke Construction Ltd., the OPW and in conjunction with Project Archaeologists AMS Ltd., excavated four burnt mounds (*fulachtaí fia*) dated to the early to middle Bronze Age (1744-1619 BC to 1623-1503 BC) in the townland of The Miles, close to the riverbank immediately west of Dunnes Stores. An examination of charcoal remains suggests an alder dominated wet woodland in the area at that time containing willow, ash and alder. A different woodland type containing oak, hazel, probable hawthorn and holly may also have been present locally on dryer ground.

The area is synonymous with woodlands being sited at the end of a strip of woodland believed to have run from Enniskeane southwards to the sea called 'Túath na gCoillte' meaning 'Land of the Woods'. Indeed, the Irish name for the town itself, 'Cloch Na gCoillte' means 'Castle of the Woods'.

Tomás Tuipéar, translated Feagle as from the Irish word *Fogha* meaning a backward tidal current along the seacoast or riverbanks. The high tide point where this phenomenon ends is recorded at the bridge on Rossa Street where three townlands meet. Immediately adjacent to the bridge, on the upstream side, is an ancient fording point of the river.

To the south of the river is the townland of Youghals which hugs the inner bay along the Inchdoney Road. In Irish, *Eochaille*, translates as yew wood with yew being a native evergreen tree that can live up to 900 years. One must imagine an ancient forest which adorned the hills above the bay.

Looking north to Rossa Street and McCurtain Hill, the eastern side of the street is within the townland of Scartagh. In Irish, *Scairteach*, translates as a scrub or a thicket, which is apt given that the western side of the street is the townland of Tawnies, in Irish, *An Tamhnaigh*, which has been translated as arable ground surrounded by arid ground.

PRE HISTORIC ACTIVITY

While we will never know the reasons why pre-historic peoples chose specific sites for their monuments, that they choose the landscape around the long flat ridge with its highest point at Knockalady Hill is not surprising. After rising on the hill, the River Feagle flows for over 4.5 kilometers along the base of the long and flat ridge forming a natural boundary in the landscape which was used as such from at least the medieval period through to modern times. Secondly, along the flat ridge of the hill runs an ancient highway, possibly pre historic, which connected the Clonakilty area with a fording point on the River Argideen known as *Béal na hUidre* near Bealad with monuments visible to passersby. Pre-historic monuments in the vicinity of the hill may include two stone circles, a stone row, two boulder burials, a *fulacht fia* and a standing stone.

There are two stone circles close to the banks of the River Feagle. Stone circles are a form of megalithic monument which date to the Bronze Age and while their exact purpose is unclear, suggested uses may include astronomical, religious or cultural. The first stone circle is located in a shallow u-shaped valley which is close to the source of an early tributary of the River Feagle in Ahaguilla. Only three stones survive and the diameter has been estimated at seven meters.

The second stone circle is less than 1.5km away and is located on flat pasture near the river at Ballyvackey. It originally consisted of nine stones but only seven survive and has an internal diameter of 8.5 meters approx.

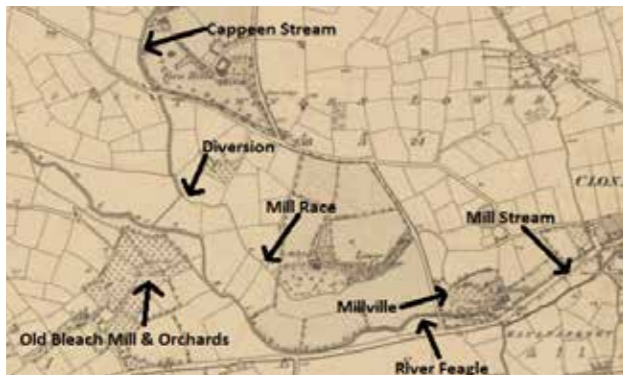
Approximately 50 meters away is a possible boulder burial, a monument type which has been dated to the Bronze Age and to its side was an upright standing stone measuring 0.5 meters high. Five Bronze Age *fulachtaí fia* along the banks of the river are further suggestions of settlement here during the Bronze Age.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Possible early medieval activity near the river includes numerous ringforts, holy wells, the church site in Kilgariffe and burial grounds in Kilbree and Cashelisky. It is the river as a boundary during the period that will be the focus of this paper. From close to Ballyvackey Stone Circle to where the river reaches the townland of The Miles, it forms the boundary of the baronies of Carbery East and Ibane & Barryroe. Baronies were defined during the sixteenth century, replacing cantreds which were formed following the Anglo-Norman invasion. Some have their origin in the pre-Anglo Norman period.

The Kingdom of Corcu Loíge in the early medieval period is believed to have covered an area from the Beara Peninsula to Timoleague and possibly beyond at its height. The kingdom was divided into three *trícha cét* and further subdivided into *tuath*. The same portion of the river that defined the baronies above as it flows from its source and weaves a path at the foot of the hill has been interpreted as the possible boundary of two local *Tuath* from the first quarter of the twelfth century, namely, the *Túath Ó nDúngalaig* and the *Túath Ó bhFithchellaig* (Boazman, 2015).





In mythology, the ruling families of the Corcu Loídge claimed descent from Ith, who on arriving from Spain with an invading force, was slain by the Tuatha de Danann. His son, Lughaidh, organised a force to come to Ireland to avenge his father's death and started the Milesian invasion. Lughaidh Laidhe, from whom the Corcu Loídge was named, was nine generations from Ith, and Dunghalach from whom the Túath Ó nDúngalaig was named, was eleven generations from Lughaidh Laidhe. O Dunghaile was taoiseach of this tuath and amongst its hereditary leaders was the Ua hAedha of Cluain-da-maeal. Ua hAedha is now O'Hea and Hayes, and Cluain-da-mhael may be an ancient name for Aghamilla where the O'Heas would later build a castle, although other locations are also suggested by academics (Collins, 1946).

THE O'HEA CASTLE

On a rocky outcrop above the River Feagle, where Aghamilla meets the townlands of Kilgarrieffe and Cashelisky, stood the castle of the O'Heas. The family were survivors. The O'Heas would submit to the Barrys of Rathbarry following the arrival of the Anglo Normans in the 13th century and built a small castle in Aghamilla in the centuries that followed. The site is strategic controlling the ancient highway as it rises to the hill at

Cashelisky. The primary reason they built here may have been due to the river itself.

Thomas O'Hea, who died in November 1609, had a castle at Aghamilla and a watermill seized during his lifetime suggesting a commercial interest in the site. The O'Heas would meet their end in the Irish Confederate Wars when they were defeated after taking the town of Clonakilty in 1642. In July 1643, Colonel Myn took the castles of Timoleague, Aghamilla, Rathbarry and the town of Rosscarbery from Confederate forces. Local lore recorded in the 19th century mentions that the people were assembled to dance on a Sunday evening in a nearby field, when the battering from a canon commenced from a hill opposite the O'Hea's castle and being ancient that it fell almost immediately (Collins, 1946).

THE MILLS

There are our identifiable milling sites which utilised water power along the 8km course of the River Feagle. Milling in the late 18th and 19th century was predominantly a local business, with farmers bringing their corn to be milled for their personal use.

The first site in the Feagle's course is the above mentioned mill at Aghamilla. In c.1826, a mill was resurrected on the site, possibly utilising the O'Hea's mill race, with the Bennetts taking out a lease from Rickard Deasy of Deasy's Brewery. The mill race was cut from the River Feagle less than a kilometre upstream to drive the mill wheel with both a corn mill and a tuck mill on the site in c.1841.

The c.1841 6 Inch OS map records an 'Old Mill' south of the River Feagle in the townland of The Miles. The remnant of a mill race feeding the mill building is visible



on the map. It is surrounded by a large orchard and close to a holy well recorded as 'Killeen Well'. The House Book in 1848 records an 'old bleach mill' on the site. The bleach mill is likely linked to the linen industry which collapsed suddenly in 1826. Joseph Hayes who was leasing the site from the Earl of Shannon in 1847 had a lease that started in circa 1826 which likely coincides with the demise of both the mill and the former mill owner with the collapse of the linen industry that year.

There were two milling sites within the town which were powered by the same water source. The millrace initially powered the wheels of what was known as Millville (later known as Tobin's Mill and more recently Bennett's Mill) beside Tobin's Bridge on Western Road in Clonakilty before the stream was turned and ran a course along the route of what is today Pearse Street, to power a corn mill at the bay.

The first mills were likely built in c.1704. In 1712, Ralph Cleare, a joiner from Bandon, received a lease for three mills being two grist (flour) mills and one tuck mill with land in both Tawnies and Scartagh. The deed also refers to a 'Lower Mill' and the 'corner new house'/'Great House'. The author has interpreted the lease as referring to a grist mill, tuck mill and house at Millville in Tawnies while the 'Lower Mill' refers to a grist mill at the bay in the townland of Scartagh.

In 1730 Edmund and Andrew Power are recorded as holding the mills and as having rebuilt them in 1719.

The next known reference is in 1784 when [Markus] Tobin purchased the 'Mills of Towney's' from Bagley. Tobin would remain at the mill until the 1840s operating a flour, oat and tuck mill. The Bennett family would operate the mill from 1860 until 1971 when they sold the magnificent buildings to Lisavaird Co-Operative who demolished them. The 'Lower Mill' at the bay operated until the 1850s when the mill stream was



removed from the main street, much to the delight of the inhabitants who saw the stream as a nuisance.

BRIDGES

The bridge over the River Feagle on Rossa Street is unique. It is the only inhabited bridge in Ireland with just three examples in the UK. Referred to as the 'Big Bridge', the earliest known reference to it is in 1807 when Austin sold to Swiney 'a Dwelling House yd & offices on the Big Bridge'. The bridge likely dates to between 1780 and 1800 with Pulteney Bridge in Bath, built in 1774, a possible inspiration for a habitable bridge with shops.

The reorientation of the town east-west can be dated to the building of the mail coach road from Cork to Skibbreen between 1810 and 1815 by the Grand Jury of Cork which saw traffic arrive via Faxbridge (rather than McCurtain Hill) and continue west out of the town via the newly constructed Western Road and Tobin's Bridge (rather than across the 'Big Bridge' on Rossa Street to head west).

The bridge on Bridge Street was likely built in the first decade of the 19th century as the first of the houses on Emmet Square were being finished. It was later widened on the west side of the bridge. The bridge on Clarke Street and at the library on Kent Street were built between c.1819 and c.1840.

The Feagle - The first river I ever knew

DAMIEN ENRIGHT

The Feagle was the first river I knew and, for the first ten years of my life, I played almost daily in the romance and revelations of its flow. Through the Feagle, I probably learned the virtues and vagaries of water, learned about water, how it works, what it does, how it sculpts its banks, scrubs the riverbed, feeds the living things within it and along its course.

When I first set my feet back in Clonakilty after half-a-century's absence, my first stop was at the Feagle, to take a look. I planted my elbows on the parapet of the bridge beside the Post Office (the Protestant church in the 1940s when I was a boy) and contemplated it, hoping that I would see what I used to see. I was not disappointed.

The year was 1989, and it had little changed. The water had the same clarity and sparkle, the fingerling trout were the same as the generations I'd watched so long ago, ghostly, sinuous shapes against the river bed, their backs so perfectly matched that one could spot them only when they segued from current to current, heads always faced into the flow. Downriver, toward the library bridges, a dipper was bobbing like a praying pilgrim on a midstream stone. It was, I thought, a bird aptly dressed as if for prayer, its black, round body, its white breast rising to a collar beneath its chin. Soon, I knew, it would plunge and vanish into the flowing stream where, it would walk under water – as my father had once, to my childish amazement, assured me dippers always did – before surfacing fifty yards below where they'd started, often with a moustache of captured creatures in their beaks. That very thing it did, and I was still amazed, the more so when it turned its head and bowed to me as if it were an actor on a stage and I the only audience there to see it. A second later, it lifted its stubby wings and flew to another stone where it dived again, no doubt to harvest more freshwater crustaceans with which the Feagle was

replete, lurking and breeding and thriving beneath the stones that littered the floor of that bounteous stream.

I looked for water weeds and found them above and below the bridge, green tresses of water crowfoot, the river's springtime gown, swaying with the currents and all but covering it in quieter places, sometimes already decorated with buds of white, later to become blossom in patterns so simple and fine that they might have been conceived by some great couturier. I couldn't resist photographing it, albeit its spirit would be lost on celluloid.

Moving upriver, I leant on the wall of Catholic churchyard and scanned the calmer water beneath the trees, the insects that hatched and flew above it and the birds and larger insects that hawked them. They were still there, dragonflies, damselflies, stubby-bodied hawkers. At dusk, I'd seen, many times from that same churchyard or from my neighbour's, the Neville's, garden opposite it, the bats and swallows skimming the quiet surface, feeding on the midges, their stings on my bare legs and arms well worth the cost.

It is a beautiful river, the Feagle. It feeding the banks that line it with grasses, ferns and wildflowers. Now, in August, tall meadowsweet, reflect on still waters, stirs in the breeze like scarves of gossamer. Purple loosestrife stands like banners of colour, and even the ragwort, yellow and ragged, host to cinnabar moths with black and red varnished wings, has its place and value.

Clonakilty is blessed by this river. It is surely its loveliest feature, flowing through the country, flowing through the town, carrying its unique character to its marriage with the worldwide seas.

Clonakilty Tidy Towns

The river Feagle that flows through Clonakilty is an integral part of one of the areas we concentrate on promoting and maintaining as part of Tidy Towns activity. When we developed Bennett's Mill Field Biodiversity garden, the river that flows along side is a rich habitat of flora and fauna and aquatic life. We recently introduced 10 mallard ducks into the river at the Field. In the year 2020 we commissioned a biodiversity report by ecologist and now NPWS Claire Deasy. This documented the wildlife living in and around the river and it was great to find out that otters are one of the species living near Bennett's field part of the river. We are currently in the process of developing an easy to read version of this 120 page report so as to make it more accessible to the local schools and general public. Clonakilty Tidy Towns group every year have cleaned the river of any rubbish that has entered the river especially in the lower reaches of the river before it enters the bay area helping to keep the river clean and encourage a sense of pride and care in our local river as it passes through the town center on its way to the sea.

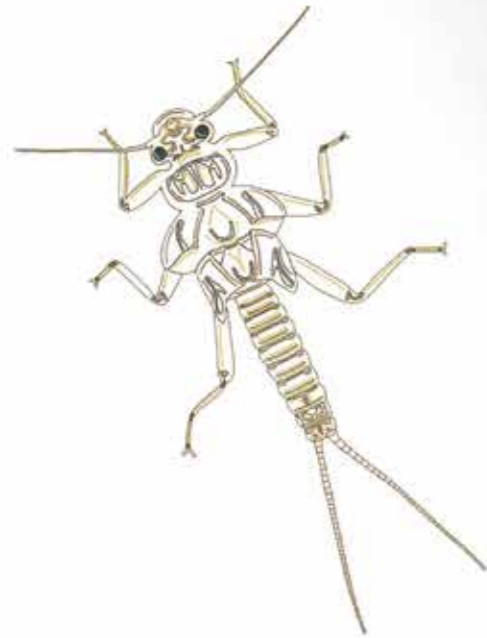


Dipper
Gabha Dubh



Crowfoot
Néal uisce cruinn

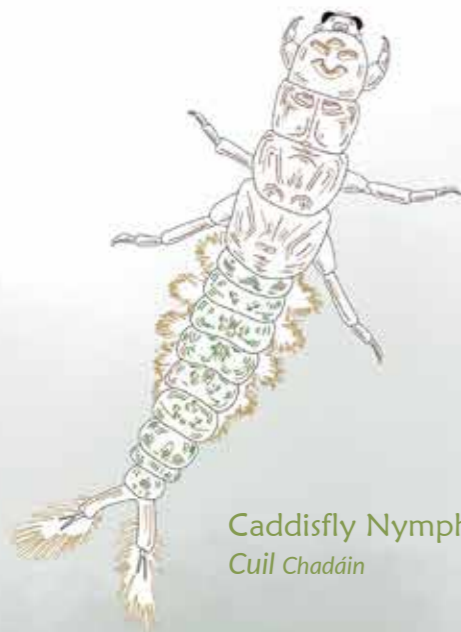
Invertebrates of the River



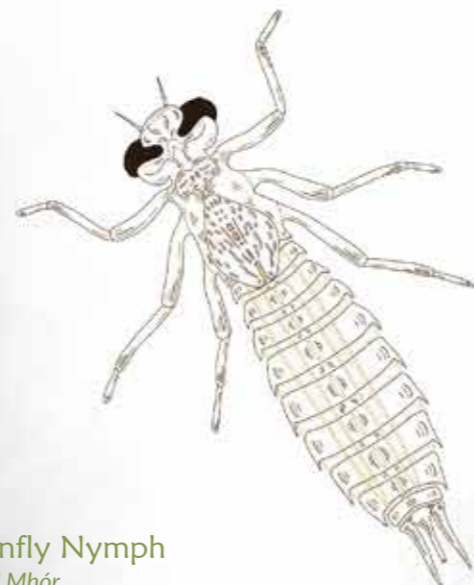
Stonefly Nymph
Cuileoga Clochán



Mayfly Nymph
Cuileoga Bhealtaine



Caddisfly Nymph
Cuil Chadáin



Dragonfly Nymph
Snáthaid Mhór

Best Practice Guidelines

In our pursuit of livelihood, recreation, and household management we have a huge ability to harm, or help, our local Water Quality and Biodiversity. We are dependent upon clean water coming to us from upstream, while other folk, as well as wildlife, depend on the water we discharge being as clean and clear as possible. It can be

helpful to think of our sinks, showers, toilets, and washing machines as tributaries of our local river! Outside, on our farms and in our gardens, we also have a huge capacity to help or hinder water and habitat quality. Here are a few tips to lessen our impacts:

Avoid any Cleaning Products which contain Phosphates or Bleach – they spoil the good work of your sewage treatment/septic tank, leading to aquatic pollution – use eco-friendly products or learn how to make your own citrus- and vinegar-based cleaning agents!*



*see: <https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/living/2020/0422/1134147-10-cleaning-hacks-with-vinegar-lemons-and-bicarb/>



Any common Household Product labelled 'Hazard' or 'Poison' or 'Toxic' or 'Irritant' must be treated as Toxic Waste when disposing of – follow Local Authority Guidelines, and never rinse down sink or into drains; this includes Paint, Antifreeze, Drain Cleaners, 'Air Fresheners', Carpet & Upholstery Cleaners, Toilet-water 'Fresheners'...they're all potentially poisonous!!!

Keep your garden low-maintenance and low water-dependent; use native plants & trees to establish suitable local habitats and assist insects/pollinators, birds, mammals & fish.



Avoid pesticides, herbicides, and application of synthetic fertilisers – they are all enemies of Biodiversity and Soil Health.

Whether digging your garden, preparing a building site, or ploughing a field, remember that Silts & Sediments are one of the biggest enemies of Aquatic Biodiversity...contain them as best you can.



Allow for healthy riparian zones along streams & rivers...these all help to buffer the effects of fertilisers and silts, and enable a flourishing riverside vegetation.

DON'T LET NATURE GO DOWN THE DRAIN

