

Celtic Life & Heritage
Foundation

presents

Irish Legends
An Introduction

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Beginning of Time

Long ago, when gods and goddesses roamed the earth, the Goddess Danu was Ireland's earth Goddess...

It is said that the Tuatha de Danan were human descendants of the Goddess.

They came to Ireland over 4000 years ago.



pron. Thoo a de Du-non

Tuatha de Dana come to Ireland



The Tuatha de Danan came to Ireland aboard ships. Once they arrived they burned their ships creating great clouds of smoke. They now had no way to return to their homelands. They had to be successful in this new place.

Tuatha de Danan come to Ireland

The indigenous Irish, the Firbolg, only saw the great clouds of smoke and people coming through them. They thought them to be gods and goddesses.

The Tuatha de Danan defeated the Firbolg and took control of Ireland. They allowed the Firbolg to rule in the province of Connaught. Next were the Fomorians.



Balor

Balor, king of the Fomorians and of the sea, had a poisonous eye that would kill anything it saw.

Balor was given a prophecy that he would die by his grandson's hand.



The Battle

During a battle with the Fomorian's, the Tuatha de Danan's had a champion in Lugh, who was Balor's grandson.

Using a slingshot Lugh struck Balor's eye so hard the eye went through his head and shown on Balor's army behind him. All were turned to stone and Balor was killed as well. The Tuatha de Danan won the battle. Legend has it, the stones found on the battlefield are the remains of the Fomorians.



Children of Lir

Around the 5th Century BC, a Tuatha de Danan nobleman, Lir, had four children. Their mother died and his new wife became jealous of the love he lavished on them.



One day, on the shores of Lough Derravaragh, she cursed the children turning them into swans for 900 years.

Curse Details

For the first 300 years the swans lived at Lough Derravaragh (1). The next 300 hundred years in the Straights of Moyle (2), and the last 300 years on the Isle of Inish Glora (3).

The curse would only be lifted when a king's daughter from the south and king's son from the north married.

Swans were forbidden to be killed in all of Ireland.



Milesians

While the children were at Lake Derravaragh, the Milesians arrived on the coast of Ireland having sailed from Spain.

They had difficulty finding Ireland among the magical mists. Then the Tuatha de Danan created a hurricane to disperse and kill their fleet.

But the Milesians found a way to land and met the Tuatha de Danan on several battlefields. The final battle was held in modern day Teltown. The Milesians won.



Origin of the Faery People

Legend has it, the defeated Tuatha de Danan were given a choice: be exiled or stay but live and rule underground.

The Tuatha de Danan decided to stay. Using their magic, they became invisible and are the faery people we know of today.



Next 300 years

It was time for the Children of Lir to move on to the Straits of Moyle in the Northern most part of Ireland for their next 300 years. The waters were cold and harsh. The swans were miserable.



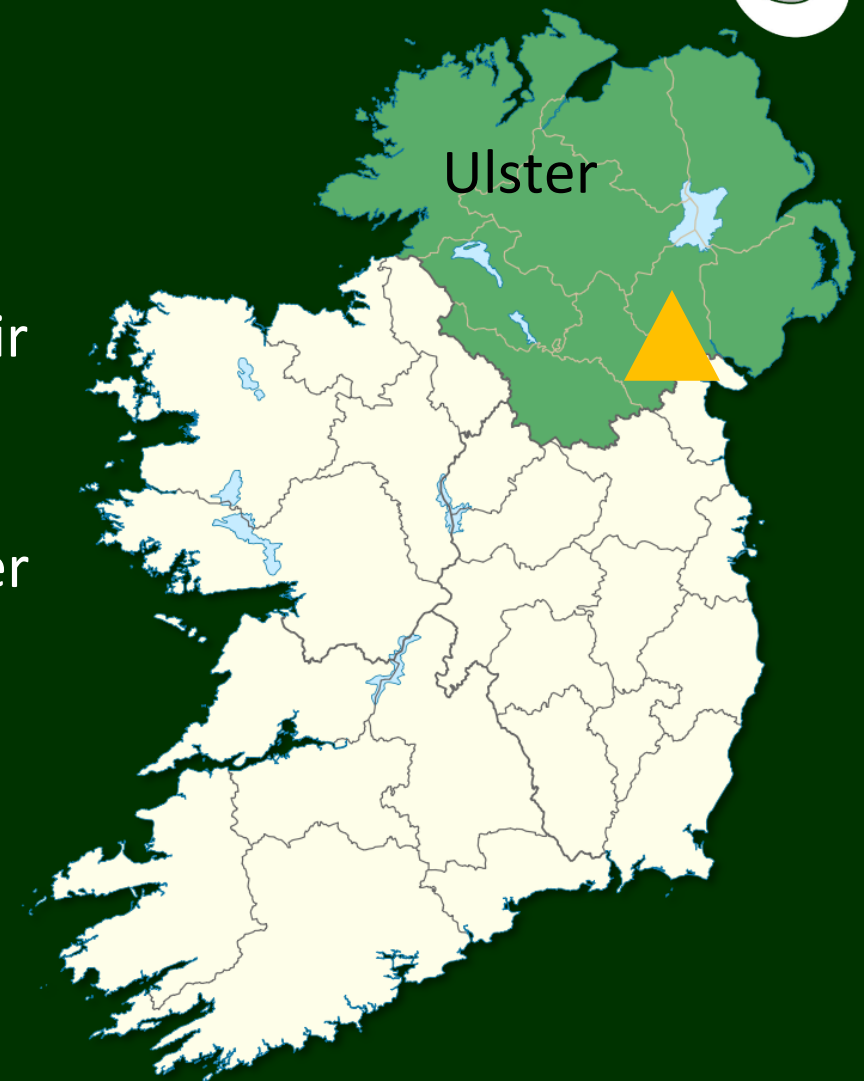
Cu Chulainn



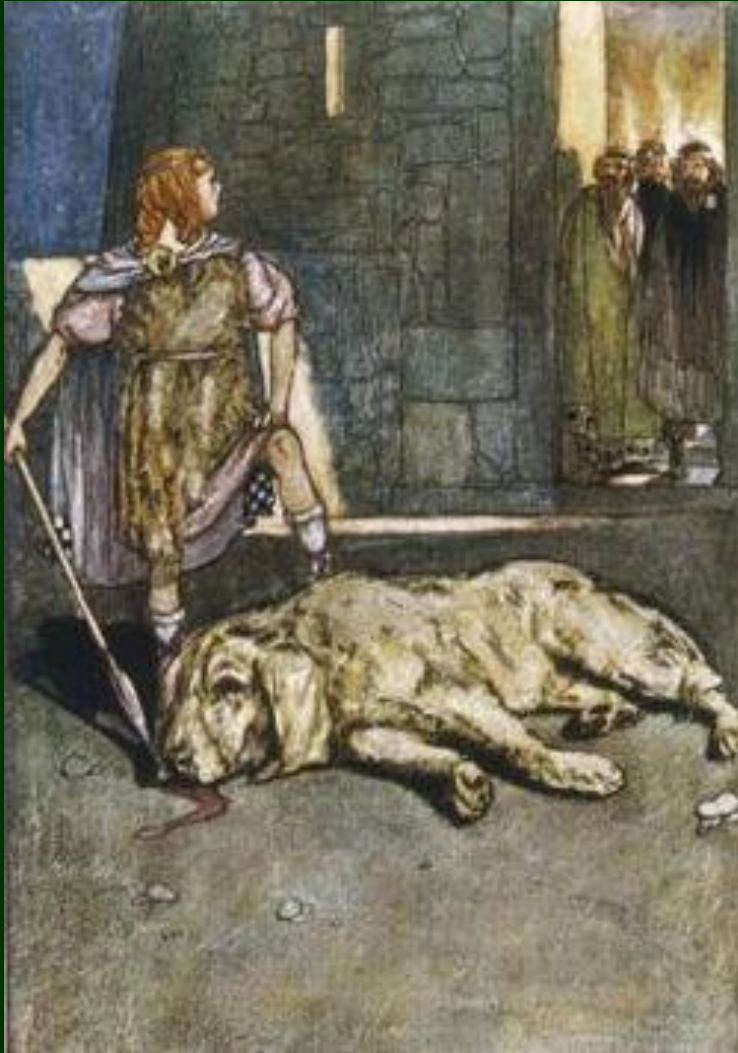
Around the time the calendar changed from BC to AD, the swans were halfway through their time in the Straits of Moyle.

A new hero was born in the Ulster region of Ireland. ▲

His name was Setanta. His childhood dream was to become a warrior for the king of Ulster.



Cu Chulainn



As a young child, Setanta set out for Emain Macha to join the training school for warriors.

On the way to a dinner with the king and a smith named Culainn, Setanta killed a guard dog in self defense.

Setanta pledged he would take the place of the wolfhound until a puppy could be trained.

Setanta became known as hound of Culainn or Cú Chulainn .
(*pron.* Cu Cullen)

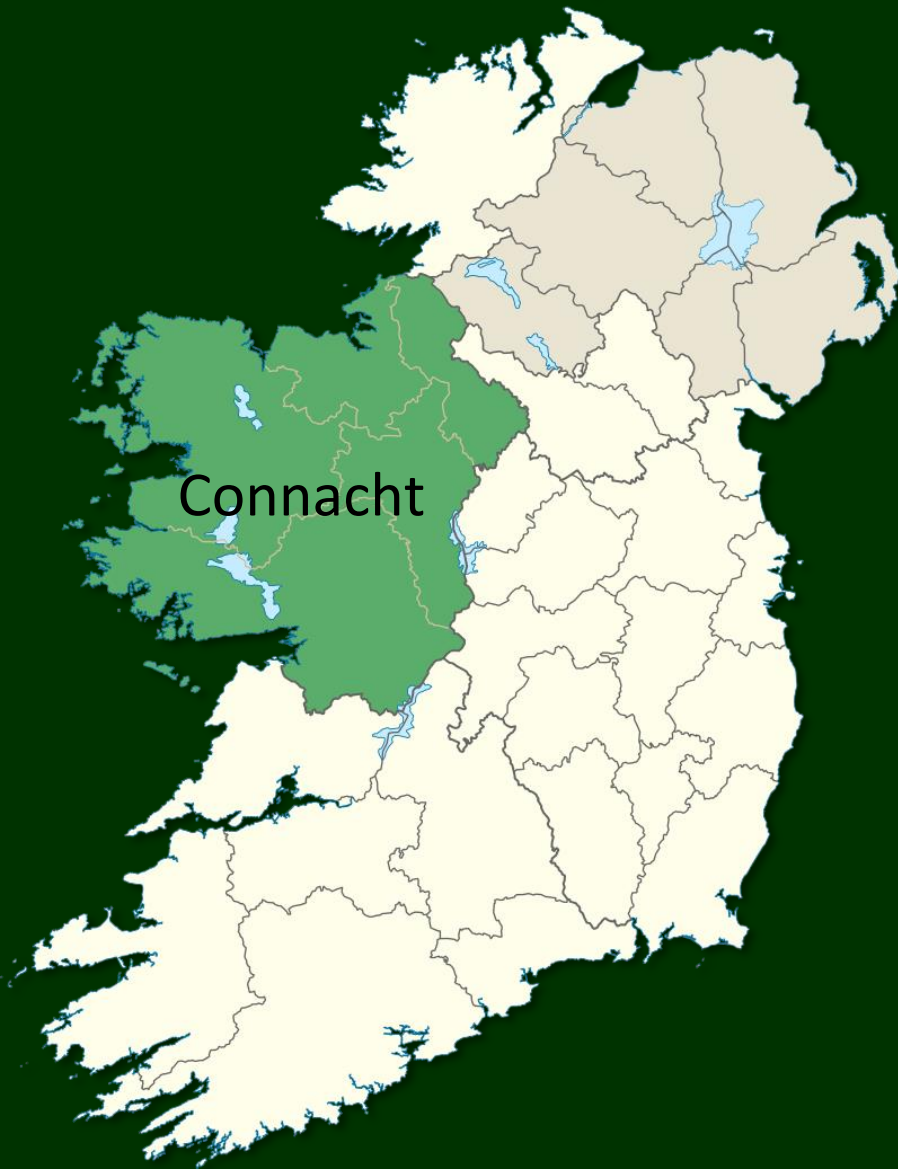
Cú Chulainn



Cú Chulainn became a mighty warrior and hero with many legends.

When Cú Chulainn was just seventeen, he defended the armies of Ulster from Queen Mebd (*pron* Mave).

Queen Mebd



The high king of Ireland gave his daughter the region of Connacht to rule.

She became Queen Mebd of Connacht, known as a passionate and mighty warrior queen.

Queen Mebd



In Ireland, whoever had the most wealth was considered more powerful in a marriage.

Queen Mebd discovered she was one prize bull lower in wealth than her husband.

So she set out to get the Brown Bull of Culley in order to be equal.

Queen Mebd

Queen Mebd marched her armies up and over into Ulster. The Ulster warriors all came under a strange sickness. The only one standing when Queen Mebd's warriors arrived at the River Dee was Cú Chulainn.

It was decided the fight for the Bull would be in single combat. A warrior from Ulster and a warrior from Connaught.



Queen Mebd

Thousands of warriors were sent one at a time to fight Cú Chulainn, and all were killed. Finally a warrior was sent that was an equal for Cú Chulainn. In modern day Ardee, Cú Chulainn fought for Ulster and his beloved foster brother Ferdia fought for Connacht.

By day they warred, by night they healed and comforted each other by the River Dee.



Queen Mebd

Finally, on the fourth day of the battle, Cú Chulainn went into a supernatural rage and killed Ferdia, winning the battle for Ulster.

Today a sculpture in Ardee marks the battle and Cú Chulainn's sorrow for killing his foster brother.



Queen Mebd



Even though she lost the battle, Queen Mebd stole the Brown Bull of Cooley and went back to Connacht.

Queen Mebd's brown bull and her husband's white bull fought. The brown Bull killed the white but later died of his wounds. The king and queen were now exactly equal in wealth and power.

Children of Lir ~ Inish Glora



About a hundred years later in mid 2nd century AD, the children of Lir travelled to Inish Glora, to live out the last 300 years of their curse.



Fionn mac Cumhail

Around this same time another Irish Legend was a young boy, Fionn mac Cumhail (*pron.* Finn McCool).

He was born in the province of Leinster. Fionn was secretly raised by a woman warrior and a woman druid in modern day Slieve Bloom mountains.



Fionn mac Cumhaill

As he grew, Fionn studied under a druid and poet Finn Eces. After many years, the druid caught the Salmon of Knowledge in the Boyne river. Fionn was cooking it for his master.

It slipped while over the fire and Fionn burned his thumb while saving it. Fionn sucked his thumb to ease the pain and received all the knowledge of the world.



Fionn mac Cumhail

With all the knowledge of the world, Fionn mac Cumhail became a great warrior and leader.

One of his most famous legends is the creation of Giant's Causeway.



Fionn mac Cumhaill

Fionn had heard of a Scottish giant named Benandonner. The two decided to fight to see who was stronger.



So Fionn created a stone causeway between Ireland and Scotland forming a bridge between the two Islands.

Fionn mac Cumhaill



Benandonner came willingly to fight Fionn and was huge. So huge in fact that Fionn became concerned he would die.

Fionn's wife dressed him up as a baby. She tricked the Scottish giant into thinking Fionn was their baby son.

Fionn mac Cumhail

Seeing how large and strong the “baby” of Fionn was, the Scottish giant ran away, back across the causeway. He ripped it up as he ran so Fionn could not cross it and attack him.



Today, only a small part of the causeway remains, a little bit in Ireland and a little bit in Scotland.

Children of Lir

Near the end of the 5th Century AD the Children of Lir had been cursed for their allotted 900 years.

They flew to Allihies, a little town by sea in the province of Munster.



Children of Lir

One day, messengers came looking for the swans. The king of Munster's son was marrying the King of Ulster's daughter, and she wanted swans for her betrothal.

When the messengers tried to take the swans, the curse had been lifted by the marriage and they transformed back into children.



Children's Curse is Lifted



Once changed, they aged rapidly and died. Their single gravestone is marked to this day in the seaside town of Allihies, County Cork.

The End



These are just some of the many legends in Ireland.

When visiting, be on the lookout for signs and sculptures of legends throughout the land.