

Celtic Life & Heritage
Foundation

presents

St. Patrick and the
Legend of Caorthánnach

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Beginning of Time

Long ago before Ireland was formed, before there were rivers and oceans, plants and animals, the planet was just a vaporous swirl of mist and dust.



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Birth of Caorthánnach

The earth cooled and the crust formed. In the deep core of the earth Caorthánnach (pron. Queer-ha-nock) was born. She was the angry mother of all demons and sent her offspring into the world of man.



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Man Moves In

The ice melted and the ocean rose. Mankind moved up from the valleys to high and dry land. Ireland became inhabited but life was difficult with tribal wars, illness, and disease.



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Dark Legends

The Irish had to be on constant guard from all sorts of dark mythical and magical creatures and spirits. They seemed poised and ready to strike at any moment.



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More Dark Legends

Life continued as a constant struggle for the people of Ireland, until the day a man came to save them and banish Caorthánach.



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Enter St. Patrick

Although we now know him as Saint Patrick, Patron Saint of Ireland, he was born Maewyn Succat, son of Calpornius a Roman-British army officer and later a deacon.



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He was born around the end of the 4th Century in what we now know of as either Wales or Scotland.

Scotland
Wales
England
Ireland
N Ireland



Captured

When St. Patrick was sixteen, he was captured by Irish Pirates, taken back to Ireland, and sold as a slave.



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Slave & Shepherd

For six years Patrick shepherded sheep for his master on Mt. Slemish. He had plenty of alone time which he spent in prayer and reflection.



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St Patrick escapes

But one day, Patrick escaped from slavery. In a dream he was told his ship was ready. Patrick travelled 200 miles to a place he had never been in order to escape.

When he arrived, the captain told Patrick he could not join them but miraculously changed his mind and Patrick was able to escape.



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Travel from Ireland

It took three days of sailing to reach land, and another 28 days in the wilderness before they saw another human.



It would be another few years until Patrick was able to make his way back to his family.

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Called to Ireland

One night, after Patrick was home with his family, he had a dream. A man was walking towards him holding so many letters they could not be counted. Patrick began to read a letter from the Irish and heard a voice saying:

“We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us.”



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Priesthood

Patrick knew he had to prepare himself before returning to Ireland.

He studied hard in France where he became a priest and then later a bishop.

He never forgot his dream and returned to Ireland many years later.



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Mission to rid snakes



After having lived in Ireland for six years in his youth, St. Patrick knew of Caorthánnach and her demonic children (who took the form of snakes). He was determined to rid Ireland of them.

St. Patrick prayed for guidance and was shown exactly what to do.

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Climbs Croagh Patrick

St. Patrick climbed the steep slope of Ox Mountain (now known as Croagh Patrick).



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Banishes Snakes



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Through the grace and power God had granted him, St. Patrick called forth a powerful whirlwind.

It caught up all the snakes, including Caorthánach in her serpent form. The power flung them to the sea, ridding Ireland of them once and for all.



Battle Atop Ox Mountain

The lesser beings were banished. Only Caorthánach was able to free herself from the whirlwind. She dropped out of the sky and landed on the peak of Ox Mountain face to face with St. Patrick. There they battled for two days and two nights.



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Caorthánach Slithers Away

Suddenly, Caorthánach slithered off the mountain and made a run for her home. St. Patrick knew where she was going: to a cave in Lough Derg which was a portal to hell.



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St Patrick Gives Chase

St. Patrick found the fastest horse in Ireland and gave chase.



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Poisoned Water

But Caorthánach would not be caught. To slow Patrick down, she poisoned all the water in her path.

She hoped St. Patrick might die of thirst before he could catch up.



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Prays for water

St. Patrick made it all the way to where the town of Tullaghan is now. He began to despair, wondering if he would die of thirst after all.



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Well at Tullaghan

St Patrick prayed for water. Just then, his horse stumbled on a rock and St. Patrick was thrown to ground. A well of fresh water sprung up and he was able to quench his thirst. Now on to Lough Derg and after Caorthánach!



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Battle at Lough Derg

The two adversaries met at Lough Derg and another battle raged.



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Patrick is Swallowed Whole



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Some say St. Patrick jumped on her back and they battled until Caorthánnach swallowed him whole, taking him down into the deep abyss.

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Patrick Escapes

But even inside the serpent, St. Patrick continued to fight. Using his crosier, he tore through her belly.

Caorthánnach's dark red blood spilled into the lake giving the lake its name: Lough Derg or Dark Lake.



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Banishes Caorthánnach

Others say St. Patrick stayed on shore. Using the power God granted him, he banished Caorthánnach to a cave on Station Island. This caused a wave to flood the land for a decade.



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Banished to a Cave



Legend has it, although Caorthánnach was defeated by St. Patrick, she did not die. Instead she bides her time until once again she can roam the earth. For now, she must rely on her offspring to influence mankind.

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Cave is Sealed

Never fear. A monastery was built on the site and the cave she was banished to was sealed in the 17th Century.



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Monastic Ireland



As a result of St. Patrick and other missionaries to Ireland, many monasteries were built.

Monasteries, along with the druid lay schools, became the universities of early Ireland.

Some even say, Ireland's monasteries saved Western Civilization!

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St. Patrick Today



Today, St. Patrick is honored as the Patron Saint of Ireland. There are many cathedrals named after him. It is thought St. Patrick died on March 17. His life is celebrated every year on that day, all over the world.

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