



Eochaill – ‘yew-wood’ or ‘promontory, look-out point’?

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Ceardlann Logainmneacha, DCU, 10 Bealtaine 2024

***Eochaill* in Irish place-names**

- *eochaill* identified in over forty places scattered around Ireland
- usually interpreted as a compound noun: *eo*, ‘yew’ + *coill*, ‘wood’ (Old Irish *caill*), so ‘wood of yews’ or ‘yew-wood’ (*INP* i, 510-11; Flanagan and Flanagan 1994: 84, 262).
- Is this meaning appropriate to all these places? Is another meaning more appropriate in some cases?

Historical Forms

Eochaill – Youghal, Co. Cork

864 <i>Eochaill</i>	ARÉ i, 503
1123 <i>Bealach Eochaille</i>	ARÉ ii, 1017
1234 <i>Ychyll</i>	Cal. close rolls, 1231-4, 523
1234 <i>Yohyll</i>	Cal. doc. Ire., 1171-1251, 324
1256-7 <i>Yohuel</i>	Hist. and mun. doc. Ire., 136
1275 <i>Li Hyochil</i>	Cal. doc. Ire., 1252-84, 199
1286 <i>Yochel</i>	Cal. papal letters, 1198-1304, 541
1287 <i>Yochil</i>	Cal. inq. post mort., Edw I, ii, 430
1306 <i>Yothel</i>	Cal. papal letters, 1305-41, 12
1449 <i>Youghale</i>	Somerset docs, DD/S/SBY/10
1580c <i>Eochuill</i>	Caithréim Dhonn., 512
1626 <i>go hEochaill</i>	Dánta Céitinn, 40

Historical Forms

Eochaill – Oghill,

par. Aghalurcher, Co. Fermanagh

1609	<i>Oghill</i>	Escheated cos. map 8 Magherastephena
1612	<i>Aghill</i>	CPR Jas I 232b
1620	<i>Oghell</i>	CPR Jas I 482b
1628	<i>Oghill</i>	Inq. Ult. (Fermanagh) §2 Car. I
1639	<i>Oghill</i>	Inq. Ult. (Fermanagh) §41 Car. I
1661	<i>Oghill</i>	BSD
1662c	<i>James Nettervill of Ochill County Ferm</i> Court of Claims §412	
1667	<i>Oghill</i>	ASE 162 b 25
1672c	<i>Ohill</i>	Hib. Del. Fermanagh
1675	<i>Oaghill</i>	ASE 231 b 41
1834c	<i>Eochaill</i> “yew-wood”	Donnell Maguire (OSNB) B112

Historical Forms

Eochaillí – Oghillees, par. Burrishoole, Co. Mayo

1610	<i>Aghillie</i>	CPR 178a
1830	<i>Glenbaarnahowhily</i>	Bald map 13
1832	<i>Achellees</i>	TAB §20
1838	<i>Oghyle</i>	Strafford Survey, OSNB ME040, 44
1838	<i>Oghill</i>	Strafford Survey, OSNB ME040, 44
1838	<i>Oyghell</i>	Inq. J I, OSNB ME040, 44
1838	<i>Oaghilleas</i>	Rent Office, OSNB ME040, 44
1838	<i>Oghillees</i>	J O'D, OSNB ME040, 44
1838	<i>s added to form this English plural</i>	J O'D, OSNB ME040, 44J O'D
1838	<i>Eochaillidhe, 'yew trees'</i>	J O'D, OSNB ME040, 44
2014	<i>'yew-woods'</i>	LME i 328

Botany of yew

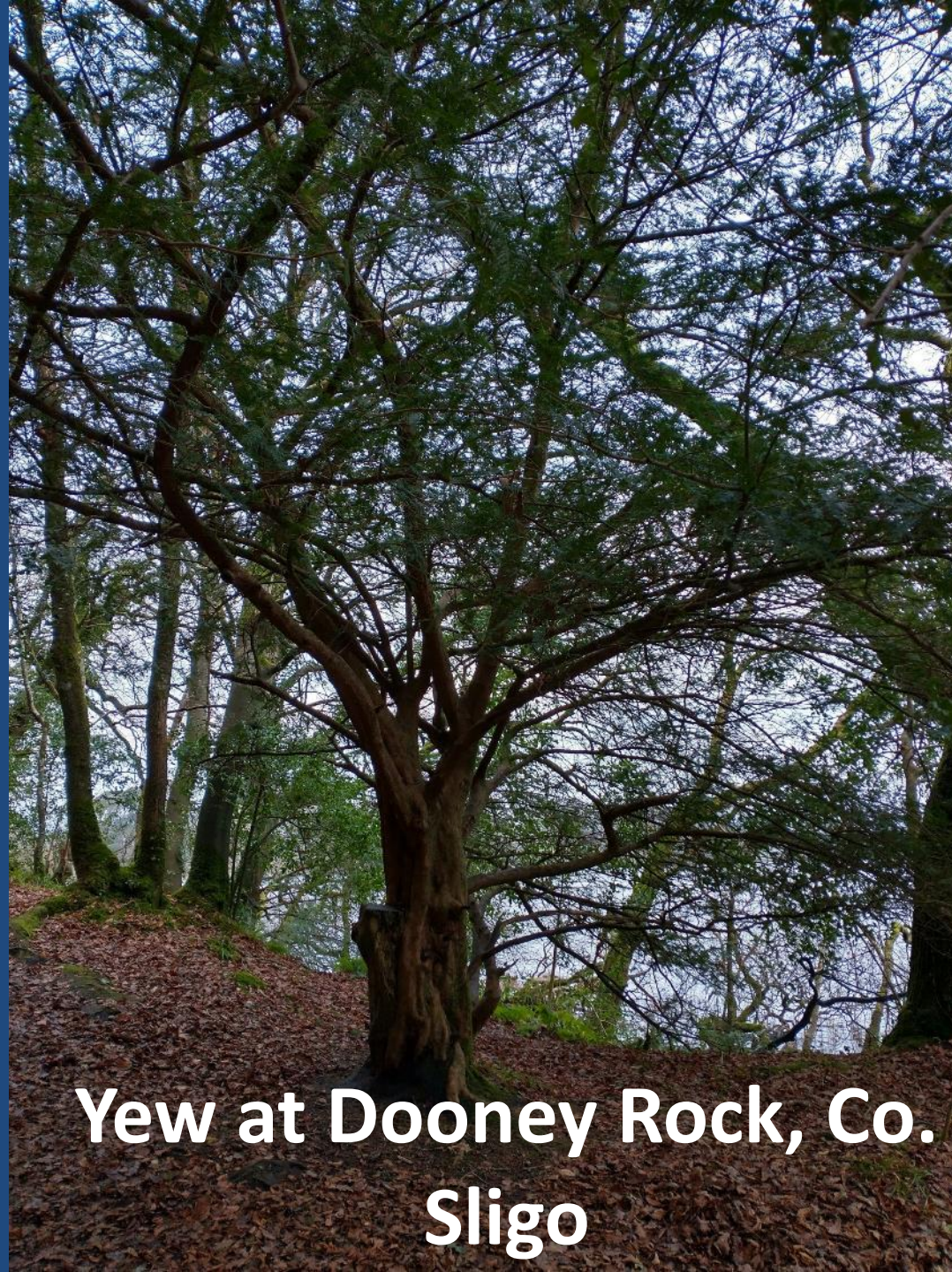
- *Taxus baccata*, yew, evergreen conifer, native to Ireland
- usually grows in small numbers, often singly
- like well-drained soil, favouring limestone, sometimes sandstone
- yew-woods are rare, usually understorey below taller trees
- single-species stands in Europe only in Caucasus and on chalk and limestone in southern England



Female yew with arils,
Barnett Demesne, Co. Antrim, August 2021



**Yew at Dooney Rock,
Co. Sligo (January 2022)**



**Yew at Dooney Rock, Co.
Sligo**



Dooney Rock, Co. Sligo



**Reenadinna Wood, Muckross,
Co. Kerry (July 2016)**



**Reenadinna Wood,
Muckross, Co. Kerry**



**Veteran yew, Kingley Vale, Sussex
(February 2024)**



**Veteran yew, Kingley Vale,
Sussex**



**Yews predominant on chalk
slope, Kingley Vale, Sussex**

Linguistic reasons to question meaning 'yew-wood'

- pronunciation – /jo:/, e.g. Youghal is exception, usually /o:/
- *eo-choill*, realised as *eochoill*, is a rare NOUN + NOUN close compound; also *collchoill* ('hazel'), *leamhchoill* ('elm'), *creamhchoill* ('wild garlic')
- Old Irish *eó* can also mean 'mature tree'; 'yew' in Modern Irish is *iúr*

Environmental reasons to question meaning 'yew-wood'

- few places in Ireland where yew predominates
- altitude makes 'yew' unlikely in some instances
- some locations seem geologically most unsuitable for yews
- meaning 'promontory', 'prospect' or 'look-out point' is well accepted for a group of names (T. S. Ó Máille, 1958)



Eochaillí – Oghillees,
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