

Blanket Bogs

Image courtesy of Nicola Carroll/NPWS



Ballycrois National Park in Co. Mayo is made up of 11,000 hectares of Atlantic blanket bog and mountainous land.

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What are blanket bogs?

Blanket bog is the name given to large areas 'blanketed' by bog. 8% of the world's blanket bogs are found in Ireland. There are two types: Atlantic Blanket Bog; which occurs in low lying coastal plains and mountain valleys, and Mountain Blanket Bog; which occurs higher up in mountains. Blanket bogs get their moisture only from the rain and are very acidic and nutrient poor. Very little evaporation occurs, which means they are very wet year round.

Where in the world are they found?

Blanket Bog is mainly found in the Northern Hemisphere: in Europe, Russia and North America. In Ireland the rain falls along the west coast more than anywhere else in the country, and so here blanket bog can grow over mountains all the way to the sea. This is where Atlantic Blanket Bog is found. Mountain Blanket Bog is found inland and on all the coasts.

Left: Yellow Flag Iris, a plant found in bogs.



How is a blanket bog formed?

Thousands of years ago Ireland (and Europe) used to be covered in forests.



Sketches courtesy of Robert O'Dwyer

Humans arrived and cut down most of the trees. The climate at the time was getting much warmer, and there was a lot more rain. With few trees to hold the soil in place, all the iron was washed down through



it making a solid layer so no further rainwater could get through. The soil became very wet and only plants like moss could grow.

When these plants died they didn't break down fully because there wasn't enough oxygen in the wet soil and it was very acidic. The dead plant matter then built up forming what's called peat.



After thousands of years and over very large areas you got blanket bog.

One metre of peat takes 1000 years to form! In Ireland the depth can be 1.5 to 7 metres thick.

Protection/Conservation

As we know blanket bog takes thousands of years to grow. But did you know that the peatlands of the world contain twice the amount of carbon as all the forests? If a lot of this carbon was released by burning the peat as turf the world would be a much hotter place, with many important plants and animals that need the bog to live dying out.