

All in a Day's Work

Connie Kelleher—Underwater Archaeologist

Hello, my name is Connie Kelleher and I am an underwater archaeologist with the National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage

www.archaeology.ie



Connie and Mr Tumnus at the beacon, Baltimore, Co Cork.

Where do you work?

My office is in Killarney National Park, in the OPW National Monuments Depot, so I am lucky to be surrounded by nature, with Killarney lakes nearby.

Has this work always interested you?

I have always been interested in two things – the outdoors and old things! I guess archaeology allows me to indulge in both. I have also always been drawn to the coast and the sea, so my work enables me to experience the beauty and wildness of Ireland's diverse coastline.

What training did you do for your job?

I studied archaeology in University College Cork, both for my primary and master's degrees and then did my doctorate in Trinity College Dublin. As an underwater archaeologist, I also had to train as a commercial diver, which I did in Scotland. Under the diving regulations in Ireland, you have to be commercially trained in order to work underwater.

What is a day in your life like?

I have two strands to my work – as a member of the team in the National Monuments Service's Underwater Archaeology Unit dealing with such cases as new discoveries, survey or excavation and then also as district officer, where I liaise with OPW colleagues on the management and conservation of the national monuments in State care in the southwest. So depending on what is needed, I could be doing one or both on any given day.

What is your main aim?

My aim, in line with the main priority of the National Monuments Service, is the protection of our cultural heritage. This is particularly important for our underwater cultural heritage, which is so finite. All too often because sites are covered by water they can be easily overlooked or considered of less importance because folk cannot visualise them. A ship that was lost essentially vanished in a single moment in time – the term 'time capsule' is often used – and it is trying to relay what that momentary event means culturally that is both exciting but also a challenge.

What is the best thing about your job?

There are several 'best' things – certainly knowing that it is helping to protect our cultural heritage for future generations is fulfilling. I also get to meet so many amazing people who are passionate about Ireland's archaeology. The range and diversity of our heritage here in Ireland also never ceases to amaze me – and of course, when new discoveries are made, that is always special.

What is the worst thing about your job?

Sometimes I have to deal with sites that have been damaged by treasure hunters and that is always upsetting. Wanton destruction of heritage that belongs to everyone is an injustice to all.

Do you enjoy your work?

Yes, absolutely. It is the variety that I enjoy. I can be in the office or out on inspections or in the water, while at the same time engaging with folk on cases or issues to do with archaeology. I also love diving, have done from an early age when my brother taught me to dive.

What equipment do you use?

For diving we use a variety depending on the type of site. We always dive as part of a team and can use scuba if in fairly benign water, but if in deep water or highly dynamic sites, or undertaking underwater excavation, we would use surface supplied

equipment with full dive helmets. Our dive supervisor controls everything from the surface, so safety is the main thing.

Where does your work take you?

All over Ireland as an underwater archaeologist, both in freshwater and in the marine. As districts officer my area is the southwest, so parts of Cork, Limerick and all of Kerry dealing with sites like Tullylease, Ballinskelligs Abbey or Gallarus Oratory. Some of our most iconic national monuments.

Do you work alone or as part of a team?

For diving we always work as part of a team. For inspections on land or as part of my districts work I would generally work alone. So again, there is a good mix.

What would you do if you weren't doing what you do?

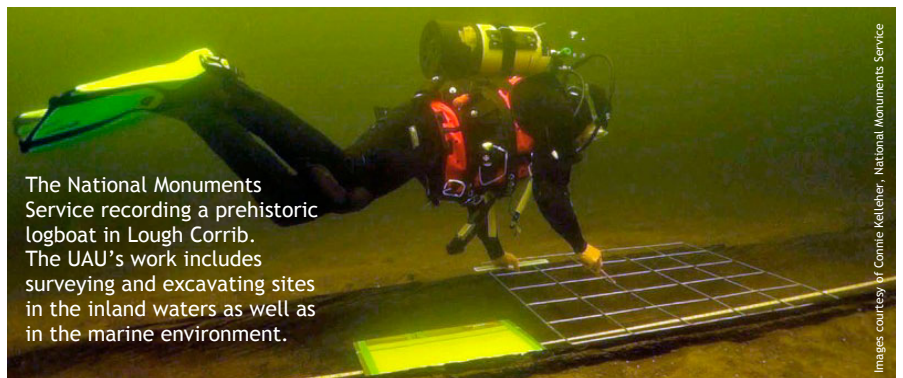
I think I'd be involved in culture, either archaeology or history somehow, it's part of who I am. My parents and grandparents were always telling tales of the past, so it was in me from the start. And the sea – that would be in there too for sure. I love the sea.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever had?

Believe in yourself and don't be afraid to ask.



Gallarus Oratory national monument, Dingle, Co. Kerry.



The National Monuments Service recording a prehistoric logboat in Lough Corrib. The UAU's work includes surveying and excavating sites in the inland waters as well as in the marine environment.

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