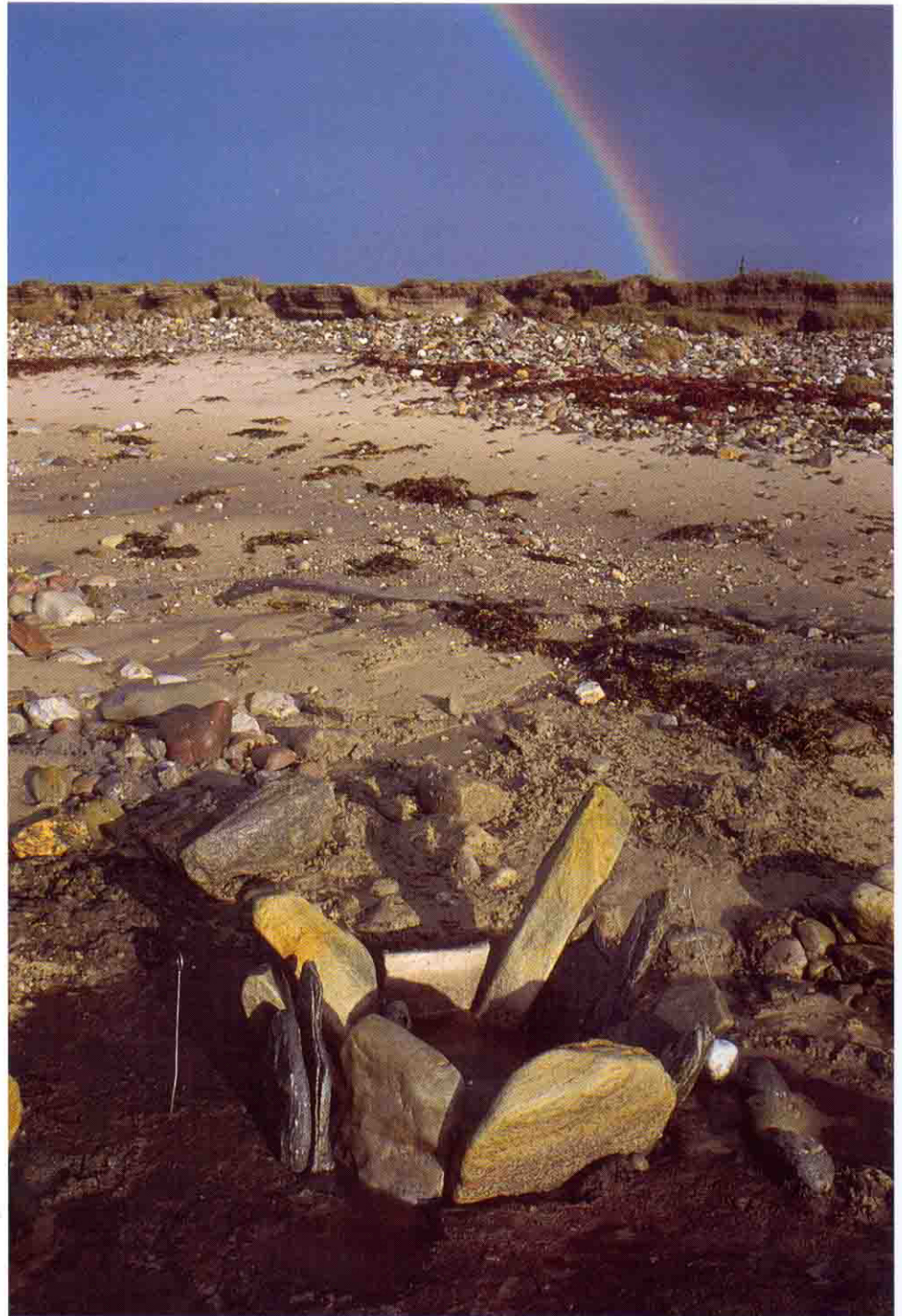


Cist by the ocean

The golden beaches of north Mayo are an idyllic place to spend a lazy summer afternoon. However, during the winter storms this sandy paradise frequently becomes a dynamic landscape of shifting sands. At the beginning of October this year an unusual stone structure was uncovered on the shores at Dooyork, near Gweesalia, Bangor, Co. Mayo. The storms had shifted sand-dunes, and a stone box structure was now exposed, partly sunken into a layer of bog that extended underneath the nearby dunes. At first sight the scenario seemed obvious—the structure, probably an Early Bronze Age cist, had been inserted into the sand-dunes onto the layer of bog below. The recent storms had now removed all the overlying sand and exposed the cist to the elements. However, to our surprise, the bottom of the cist contained a layer of fine grey sand. This meant either that the structure had been constructed on a sandy beach or that it had previously been stripped of its sand-dune mantel by the sea, only to escape destruction and be covered again by the dunes shortly afterwards.

However, we were amazed to find a coin of 1803 in this grey sand at the bottom of the cist. Could it be that our stone cist had already been exposed by the sea at the beginning of the nineteenth century, losing its contents in the process, and that some curious passers-by left this coin as a 'votive deposit'? Or was the structure actually built at the beginning of the nineteenth century? We would be very interested to hear from anyone who knows of stone cist-like structures built on the seashore during the nineteenth century and why.



This structure was excavated because it was awaiting destruction by the forces of nature, but it is simply one of many archaeological sites that are actively destroyed by the winter storms that ravage our coastline. The extent of such destruction has never been quantified, and no attempt has been made to devise a long-term strategy to deal with such a loss of the archaeological resource.

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