

1. The Ancient Origins of the O'Dochartaigh (O'Doherty) Clan



Introduction

My name is Jack Doherty, a Kiwi born in Aotearoa (New Zealand) but more importantly for this story, I am a member of the great O'Dochartaigh Clan from Inishowen, County Donegal, Ulster, Ireland. Since March 1993, I have visited Ireland several times and lived there for 18 months, searching for stories that would tell me the history of my clan.

Every journey to Ireland has been a search for the answer to two key questions asked of me by the indigenous Māori people of Aotearoa. *'Jack, who are you?'* and *'Jack, where are you from?'* I've always wanted a serious answer to these two serious Māori questions. Māori identify themselves within a cultural framework of Iwi (family clan), Hapū (family tribe) and Whānau (your extended family).

I did not want my serious answer to be: 'I think I am the grandson of someone who got off a ship sometime in the 1880s.' So, I have attempted to use the Māori framework to answer these two significant Māori questions.

In September 2018, my wife Joanne and my niece Sarah Doherty travelled with me to Ireland to capture our O'Doherty stories, filming them at their actual locations. I have now collected and share the stories discovered from this thirty-year search. I want them to be available firstly to my children, then my grandchildren, and finally my Doherty Clan cousins and all their friends around the world.



Joanne, Jack, and Sarah Doherty - Doherty Keep, Buncrana, Co Donegal

I have been deliberately selective in the history of this story. I only cover certain stories because to tell the fuller story would be too daunting a task, such is the complexity of Irish history. However, I encourage others to explore the internet for more information on the places and people I mention. This will add to their knowledge and to the stories. I have also chosen, where possible, to spell the names of people and places in one version as I have found there are many variations of spelling used in the different sources of information.

I have written eight stories and they follow the framework in the following layout.

Iwi / Clan:	Story 1	The Ancient Origins
	Story 2	The Realm of the High King Niall
	Story 3	The Tale of Two Brothers
	Story 4	A Fox becomes a Dove
Hapū / Tribe	Story 5	The O'Doherty Castles
	Story 6	The O'Doherty Rebellion 1608
Whānau / Family	Story 7	The Wrights and Dohertys
	Story 8	My Granddad Bernard Doherty

In The Beginning

Once upon a time, about 12,000 years ago, the Finn Valley in County Donegal was covered by a melting sheet of ice. About 6,000 years ago it had thawed sufficiently for its first human inhabitants to live there. They were hunter-gatherers, some say from Europe, possibly Spain. I believe they may have carried the very early genes of the O'Dochartaigh Clan. Recently Donegal archaeologists have uncovered stone-age flint tools used by these early inhabitants. I have seen similar tools found on the bank of a nearby Ulster river.



Donegal, Ireland



Flint Tools - River Bann

Eventually, a farming settlement was established in this valley straddling the Finn River. With this subsistence settlement came another development, an Irish culture, incorporating spirituality, music, language, and values. The photo of the roadside grotto represents some of the spirituality of the past and present. The more recent memorial to Mickey Doherty, the fiddler, represents the very old music of the valley. Mickey, a highly respected musician, always acknowledged the influence the fairy folk had on his music.



Roadside Grotto



Mickey Doherty Memorial

The early ancestors slowly moved northwards along the fertile river flats before eventually settling on an island of land, Inishowen, between Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle.

Travelling the O'Doherty Pathway



River Finn

My travelling companions and I drove from the Blue Stack mountain range in southern Donegal and connected with a road following the Finn River. The Finn River starts its journey in Lough Finn and flows under the bridge in the twin towns of Ballybofey and Stranorlar. Next to the bridge is a sculpture called the Matrimony Tree. It is dedicated to the twin towns and represents two grafted trees growing as one. It reflects an old Donegal love story that says, *'lovers who pass through the arch holding hands will love each other for ever.'* Considering my unfolding ancestry holds considerable turmoil, I figured that to start my yarn with a local love story had some benefit.



Matrimony Tree



Inishowen

We continued the journey through the fertile Laggan Valley which includes the parish townlands of the diocese of Raphoe, often mentioned in Clan history. The Laggan takes us closer to the final destination of the O'Dohertys, our own 'promised land' - the Island of Owen, Inishowen.

My O'Doherty Legacy

My early O'Doherty ancestors were a first-nation people who developed a culture of wonderful myths and legends encompassing both the human and the divine. Their stories included mother earth, sea, air and sky, gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, villains, giants, horrendous battles, many invasions, and always the inhabitants of the real world and the underworld. These myths and legends often included the magical, sometimes feared, and very elusive fairy folk. As my clan people migrated towards Inishowen, other significant events were occurring in Ireland especially in the sacred Boyne Valley eastward in County Meath.



Newgrange – Brú na Bóinne

Two of these events were the ancient construction of Dowth, Knowth and Newgrange, (Brú na Bóinne); and the establishment of a Royal residence on the Hill of Tara with its Stone of Destiny. These two sites highlight the sophisticated cultures that made up ancient Ireland. The Hill of Tara plays a significant role in the continuing O'Dochartaigh story.



Hill of Tara

The South West Entrance

After travelling 20,000 kilometres from Aotearoa (New Zealand) we eventually enter Inishowen through the south west entrance. The road is flanked by the medieval castle of Burt (c1560 AD) and the ancient ringfort, the Grianán of Aileach (c1700 BC).



Burt Castle



Grianán of Aileach

These two amazing and unique sentinels await and welcome home all returning O'Dohertys.
Céad míle fáilte.



One hundred thousand welcomes