

Time less

There's a huuuge lump of rock a short walk down the coast from us. It's a glacial erratic – a wanderer – a misfit. Once ripped up by, and embedded in, an ice bulldozer a mile thick, then hauled across the Irish Sea and dumped on the present-day North Down shoreline. Here it has sat for 10,000 years, an immovable block of ancient black gabbro, splattered with lichens, and perched on grey, ice smoothed greywacke rock. Others, across Belfast Lough, dwarf ours - the so-called Wrens Eggs, the size of double decker buses. These stray quiescent rocks still carry power, waiting.

Some hundred metres inland, across a field where hares hide and watch, and stonechats stay forever alert, more clues. A stranded wooded cliff line, a product of 'glacial rebound,' still emerging, resisting the sea level rise that's wearing away the dunes that protect the sea front houses nearby.

With only the wind for company, it's easy to imagine the wiry children of stone age settlers who once lived here, scrambling over the rock, playing king of the castle and then drifting to the unknown lands across the water; another day, maybe, bored, graffitiing the sides with ash fingers. On moonlit nights, sheltered from the wind, flames licked, and fleeting shadows danced. Their forebears may have spun tales of retreating ice that reached the sky gods, of icebergs and ice bears, while future generations wove tales of the supernatural and warring giants hurling chunks of mountain.

And now walkers pass, and dogs cock their legs. One bereft dog owner recently left a memorial, a cairn of stones atop the rock, picked up from the sea pink below, and added plastic flowers and a photo of 'poor Hugo' in his prime. Others since, have added more epitaphs and stones, and toy bones. Some have cemented frames of limpet shells around their pooch portraits and graffitied eulogies within painted hearts. 'No longer by my side, forever in my heart' and 'Murphy - the only thing I could not protect you from was time.'

341 words

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