

## UTILITY AND SYMBOLISM ON ACHILL ISLAND PROMONTORY FORTS: GUBADOON AND DUN BUNNAFAHY

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Promontory forts are a type of coastal monument that were constructed by building a complex of bank and ditch defences across the narrow neck of a natural headland. The ways in which promontory forts initially functioned, and the periods to which they date, are not well understood. I tested two promontory forts on Achill Island, Co. Mayo using phosphate analysis to determine possible uses of the defended headlands. Phosphate analysis is a geoarchaeological spatial soil analytical technique that can identify areas where organic debris was discarded or collected in the soil. Phosphate patterning is used to differentiate between areas where debris was deposited and areas that were kept clear of debris. This information is then analysed to create use-of-space models, help determine land-use patterns over sites and aid the archaeological interpretation of site and social dynamics. The two tested forts are geographically distinct, differing in natural factors such as size, formation, height of sea cliffs and character of the surrounding landscape, as well as proximity to inhabited areas. Patterning on Dun Bunnafahy, the smaller fort, indicates that use of the fort was highly regulated and ritualised; patterning on Gubadoon, the larger fort, points to a more utilitarian function. Access to both promontory forts was controlled through the use of bank and ditch complexes, but phosphate analysis shows that these features were employed in very different ways. This presentation will discuss the functions identified on the two tested forts, how use of the forts varied, what factors may have led to diversity in the role of promontory forts and how phosphate analysis can be used to narrate these differences.