Fenit - A Fossil Walk

Fenit, Co. Kerry

Fenit within (the island) and Fenit without (the peninsular village area) are underlain by Waulsortian Limestones.[1] This generally pale-grey limestone was formed during the Carboniferous Period approximately 350 million years ago. [2] Today millions of years later the rocks provide us with insights into the many creatures that lived in Ireland all those years ago.

[1] Spatial Resources – Bedrock Geology 100K. Geological Survey Ireland. Source: https://dcenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=a30af518e87a4c0ab2fbde2aaac3c228

[2]Geology of Ireland. Geological Survey Ireland. Source: https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/geoscience-topics/geology/Pages/Geology-of-Ireland.aspx

Fossils can be described as impressions or traces of remains of ancient organisms (animals or plants) from a past geologic age.[1]

Fossils are rocks with the impressions of former organisms. Fossils are not the ancient organisms themselves.[2]

On a coastal walk in Ireland most of the fossils evident in rocks are of marine animals without a vertebral column (invertebrates), such as sea-lilies, corals, and bivalves.[3] In the Fenit area Crinoid Columnals and Ammonite are numerous.

[1] Fossil Definition. Source: https://www.britannica.com/science/fossil
[2] Fossil Definition. Source: https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/fossil/
[3] The Strange Creatures that Lived in Ireland Millions of Years Ago. RTE – Brainstorm, 2019. Source: https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/1113/1090543-the-strange-creatures-that-lived-in-ireland-millions-of-years-ago/

Given the beautiful surrounds of Fenit it is not surprising that we might forget to look under our feet! On the Wild Atlantic Way, Fenit village and its surroundings look out on the iconic Little Samphire Lighthouse, the breathtaking beauty of Tralee Bay, Barrow Harbour, Fenit Island, the Maharees, Slieve Mish Mountains, Brandon Range, and Kerry Head.

A lesser-known feature of Fenit are the coastal rocks adorned with fossils.[1] Fascinatingly, 'over 350 million years ago, Ireland was south of the equator, and the rocks that we see today in Fenit, Barrow and Banna, were once part of a tropical sea with a thriving marine wildlife full of corals, gastropods, brachiopods and squids.'[2]

[1] Fenit - A Walk in the Wild Place – A Picture Guide to Fenit & Surrounds. A submission for National Heritage Week Projects 2020.
[2]The Story of the Pebble. Kerry Geo. Source: https://www.kerrygeo.com/the-story-of-a-pebble (*Note: Well worth a read!*)

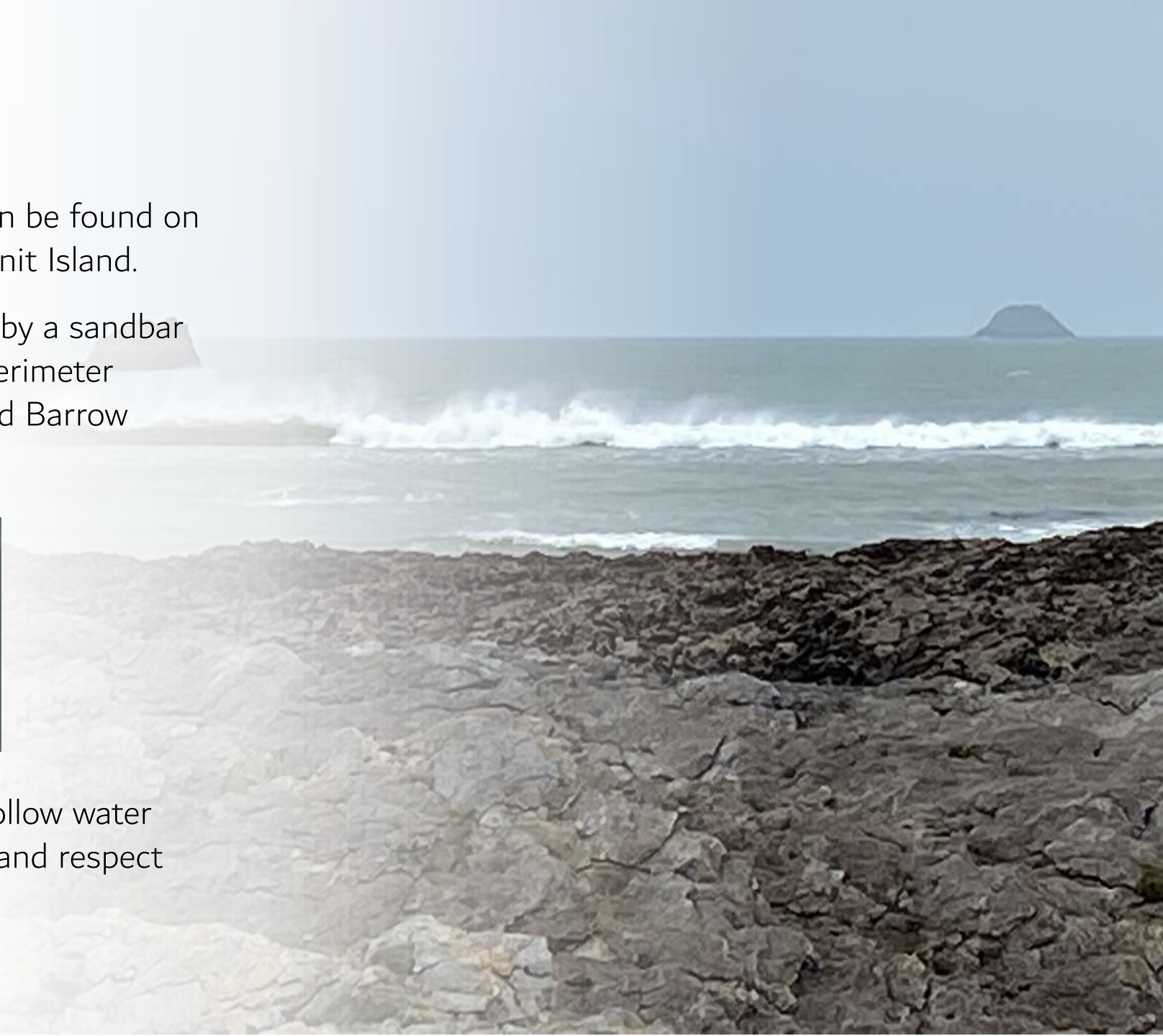
A little about the coastline…

Some of the densest displays of fossils can be found on a shoreline walk on the Atlantic side of Fenit Island.

Fenit island is connected to the mainland by a sandbar (tombolo). The island has an eight-mile perimeter surrounded by Tralee Bay, the Atlantic, and Barrow Harbour. The island lands are private.

Adapted from Google Maps

While walking the tidal shoreline always follow water safety sense, be aware of the tidal phase, and respect private lands.



Fenit – A Fossil Walk in the Wild Place

Illustration of the Fenit area adapted from Google Maps

A mosaic of Fossils
Under Your Feet

In some areas under your feet looks like a patterned carpet or mosaic of shapes of ancient creatures.

The Fenit area is on a bedrock of Waulsortian Limestone, predominantly pale-grey, dating back to the Carboniferous Period.




Ancient creatures from approximately 350 million year ago preserved in all their beauty in the form of rock impression (fossils)!




Fossil Finds

The coastline is ever changing. Sands and rocks shift continually but most noticeably after storms or high tides. Such events can expose rock fossils previously buried, and cover fossils previously exposed. This is true of some beautiful fossils in the rocks by the steps at Lockes Beach Fenit (the main beach by the carpark and playground). When sand levels are stripped from the beach, the bedrock exposed contains Ammonite and Crinoid fossils.

Like shells, small fragments of ornate fossils can be found on the shoreline. Fossils finds (both loose fragments and those embedded in the bedrock) are more likely when you walk the road less travelled - on a rocky shoreline instead of smooth sandy beach areas. Some say fossils appear more vivid when wet making a fossil walk a fun thing to do on a rainy day or on a receding tide.

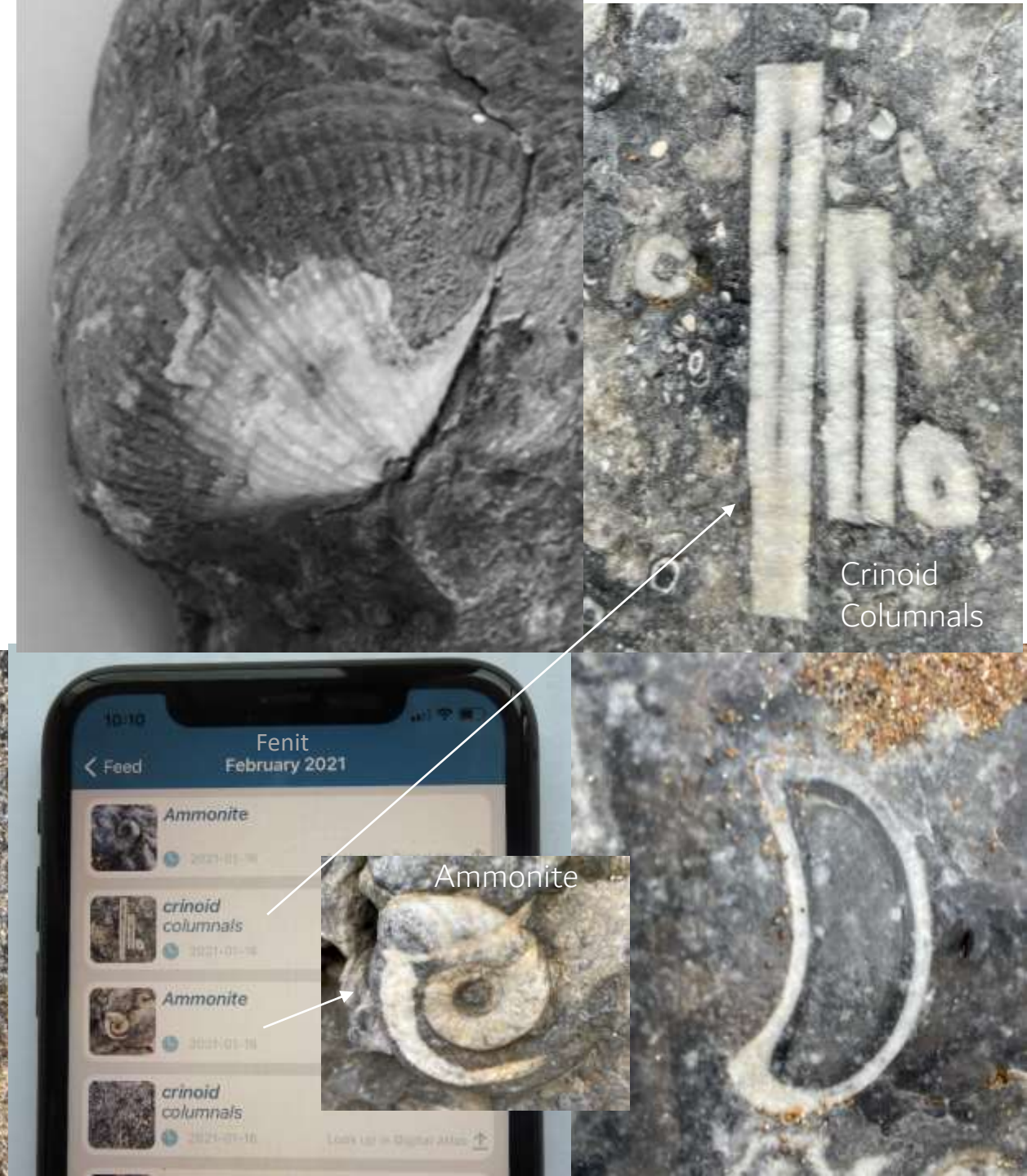
Lockes Beach Fenit - An example of our ever-changing shorelines where storm or tidal events intermittently uncover rock fossils previously buried and cover fossils previously exposed.

Strange Creatures from Millions of Years Ago

Fossil Identification & Mapping

There are many resources on the internet to help identify fossils. For example, look for an atlas of ancient life or download a fossil identification app where you photograph a fossil and submit for identification!

Enjoy a fossil walk in Fenit and the surrounds!



Fenit Fossils

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