

# The Mourne Towers



Slieve Commedagh Tower

NI Water would like to acknowledge its partners in this project.



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas



Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe  
Fáirim an Kintara Foelérin



This project has been part-funded through Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Tourism Development Scheme. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in rural areas. The Rural Development Programme 2007 - 2013 is part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Images courtesy of, W.H.Carson., *The Dam Builders*, Newcastle: Mourne Observer Press.

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Johnny Cousins, Stone-Mason on the Meelmore Tower

Robert Skillen, Master Mason in charge of Meelmore Tower, with his niece Eileen and his Aunt Fanny Robinson

## The Stone-Men

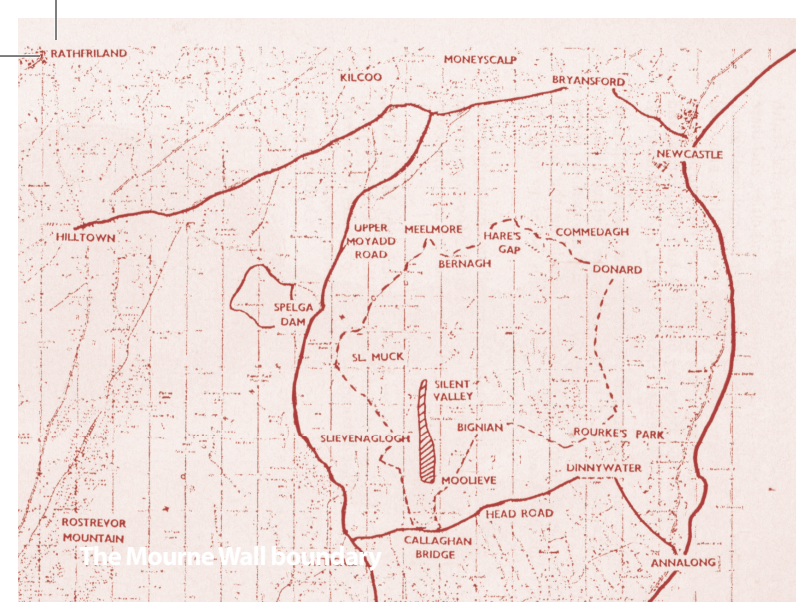
The Mournes provided a challenging environment for the Stone-Men. Many of the men had to walk to work and contend with ice, snow and driving rain.

Due to conditions on the mountains building work began in March and ceased in mid-October each year, when the light began to fail.

Robert Skillen was the master mason in charge of the building of the Meelmore Tower, and he was helped by Johnny Cousins, Willie Hamilton of Mourne and Dave Martin.

Many of the stone-men were extremely proud of their craft and Eileen Taylor, niece of Robert Skillen remembers "When I was a child he often took me for a walk on a Sunday afternoon up Meelmore to look at the Tower, and sit for a while in the quiet coolness inside."

The initials R.S (Robert Skillen) and J.C (Johnny Cousins) can be seen on either side of the lintel on the Meelmore Tower, testament to the effort and pride the Stone-Men had in their craft.



## The Mourne Wall

The building of the Mourne Wall was part of the first stage of the Mourne scheme. This scheme aimed to bring water from the Mournes to Belfast, to meet the needs of this rapidly expanding industrial city.

In 1904 work began on building the impressive wall designed to define the boundary of the 9,000 acres (3,600 ha) catchment area for the scheme.

The wall at 22 miles long (35km), stands up to 8 feet high (2.44m) and measures, on average, 3 feet wide (0.9m). It was built mainly from granite rocks lying about the mountains, alongside blocks cut from adjoining quarries.

The wall crosses 15 mountains across the Mourne range, and took approximately 18 years to build, with completion in 1922.

The wall was referred to as "The Black Ditch" by the stone-men who built it but now it is commonly known as the "Mourne Wall" by hillwalkers.



Slieve Meelmore Tower



Slieve Donard Tower

## The Towers

Three distinctive stone Towers were also built as part of the Mourne Wall. These Towers sit on or near the summits of Slieve Donard, Slieve Commedagh and Slieve Meelmore.

The Towers are thought to have been built as shelter to protect the stone-men as they toiled against the elements to complete the wall. The Towers are still a welcome refuge for walkers today.

The Meelmore and Commedagh Towers are both the same in shape and size but the Donard Tower is a different style.

In the 1950s the pyramidal roof of the Donard Tower was removed to make way for a concrete triangulation pillar. These pillars were used by Ordnance Survey to map the country and the information used to create the OS maps we still use today.

Each of the Towers has an engraved date over the door commemorating the completion date: 1910 Slieve Donard, 1913 Slieve Commedagh, 1921 Slieve Meelmore.