

National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

Keem Bay



**Fáilte
Ireland**

Turasóireacht Náisiúnta
An tÚdara Eorbartha
National Tourism
Development Authority

National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

Report for Keem Bay 2025

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KEEM BAY – INTERESTING FINDS

Interesting Finds

Keem Bay was named as one of the top 100 beaches in the world by travel publisher, Lonely Planet. It was the set for the 2022 film 'The Banshees of Inisherin', directed by Martin McDonagh. The old house and ruin overlooking the beach provided the set for the home of the main character from the film and have since become an attraction for visitors to the site.



Features of the Site

- Parking is available at two upper and one lower car park. Two small viewing areas located at the centre of the site also provide space for a small number of cars.
- Toilet facilities are located next to the upper car and lower car parks.
- A food truck and coffee van is present at the lower car park.
- Benches and rubbish bins are present beside the lower car park.
- Lifeguards are present daily during the summer months.
- A warden is employed by Mayo County Council during the summer months.
- Informative signage is available throughout the site.

Habitats

- Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)
- Sand shores (LS2)
- Dry-humid acid grassland (GS3)
- Shingle and gravel shores (LS1)
- Dense bracken (HD1)
- Wet grassland (GS4)
- Eroding/upland rivers (FW1)
- Poor flush (PF1)
- Eroding blanket bog (HH3)
- Marram dunes (CD2)

Key Recommendations

- The formalisation of the two informal grassy paths that are present at the site should be considered to prevent habitat degradation in these areas and to facilitate improved access of pedestrians.
- The treatment of the stand of giant-rhubarb (*Gunnera tinctoria*) at the site should be prioritised to prevent the further spread of this species.
- Additional signage should be considered to inform visitors about the two SACs (Achill Head SAC and Croaghan / Slievemore SAC) in which the site is located, and about the biodiversity that is present at the site.
- The expansion of instructional signage discouraging camping and campfires should be considered to outline the risks associated with these activities e.g., degradation of surrounding European sites and natural habitats, risk of wildfires.
- The feasibility of a designated campsite area should be explored to reduce associated pressures (uncontrolled campfires, habitat degradation, littering etc.) of wild camping in the area.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Roughan & O'Donovan (ROD) was appointed by Fáilte Ireland to conduct Visitor and Environmental Surveys as part of the National Environmental Surveying & Monitoring Programme. Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of tourism on the receiving environment.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas: The Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. This 2025 National Monitoring report builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015 and to date (excluding the 2025 data), the surveys have monitored a total of 70 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 31,000 visitors at a range of popular sites, including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points.

The environmental surveys and monitoring in 2023 followed the methodologies used in previous years. Following the completion of the 2023 surveys, a review of the methodology was undertaken. In developing the survey methodology used in 2024 and 2025, ROD considered the methodology for gathering the data, the presentation of the data, and the usefulness of the data gathered. The review also considered the time required to gather the data.

Eight sites were surveyed in 2025. Figure 1-1 below shows the locations of these sites. This report is for Keem Bay, Co. Mayo.



Figure 1-1 Environmental Monitoring Programme 2025 locations. Basemap provided by Google.

1.2 Aim of the Report

The purpose of the monitoring programme is as follows:

- To gain insight from an environmental perspective at amenity and recreation sites across Ireland;
- To obtain data on path and trail conditions etc. for each site;
- To obtain data relating to habitats, flora, and fauna for each site;
- To identify observable trends or variations among the sites;
- To make recommendations where appropriate for site management for the benefit of the site, the visitor, and the natural environment.

1.3 Site Description of Keem Bay

Keem Bay is located along the Atlantic coast on Achill in Co. Mayo. It is accessed from the R319, which connects the area to the nearest settlement of Dooagh and further to the mainland of Co. Mayo. The area being surveyed for this report (“the site”) consists of the car parks, the road and paths leading from the car parks to Keem Beach and the surrounding area. The site extends from the southern end of the beach to the second carpark, presented in Figure 1-2 below. Directly North of the beach is the end of the R319 and a carpark, and 500m along the road is the second carpark and a toilet. There are five car parks at Keem Bay, as shown in Figure 3-6. Two of the car parks are on unbound granular material, and three are paved. Combined, the car parks can hold approximately 85 cars. Public toilets, informative signage and bins are available. There are bicycle parking facilities at the smaller upper carpark.

Visitors can see the sandy beach surrounded by stunning cliffs at this remote beach, and enjoy water sports, lounging and swimming. The beach holds a Blue Flag award and is popular for water sports activities. Lifeguards are present on certain days and times during peak bathing season.

The site is located within the Achill Head Special Area of Conservation (SAC) [Site Code: 002268], Croaghan/Slievemore SAC [Site Code: 001955], and the Croughaun/Slievemore Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA) [Site Code: 001955].

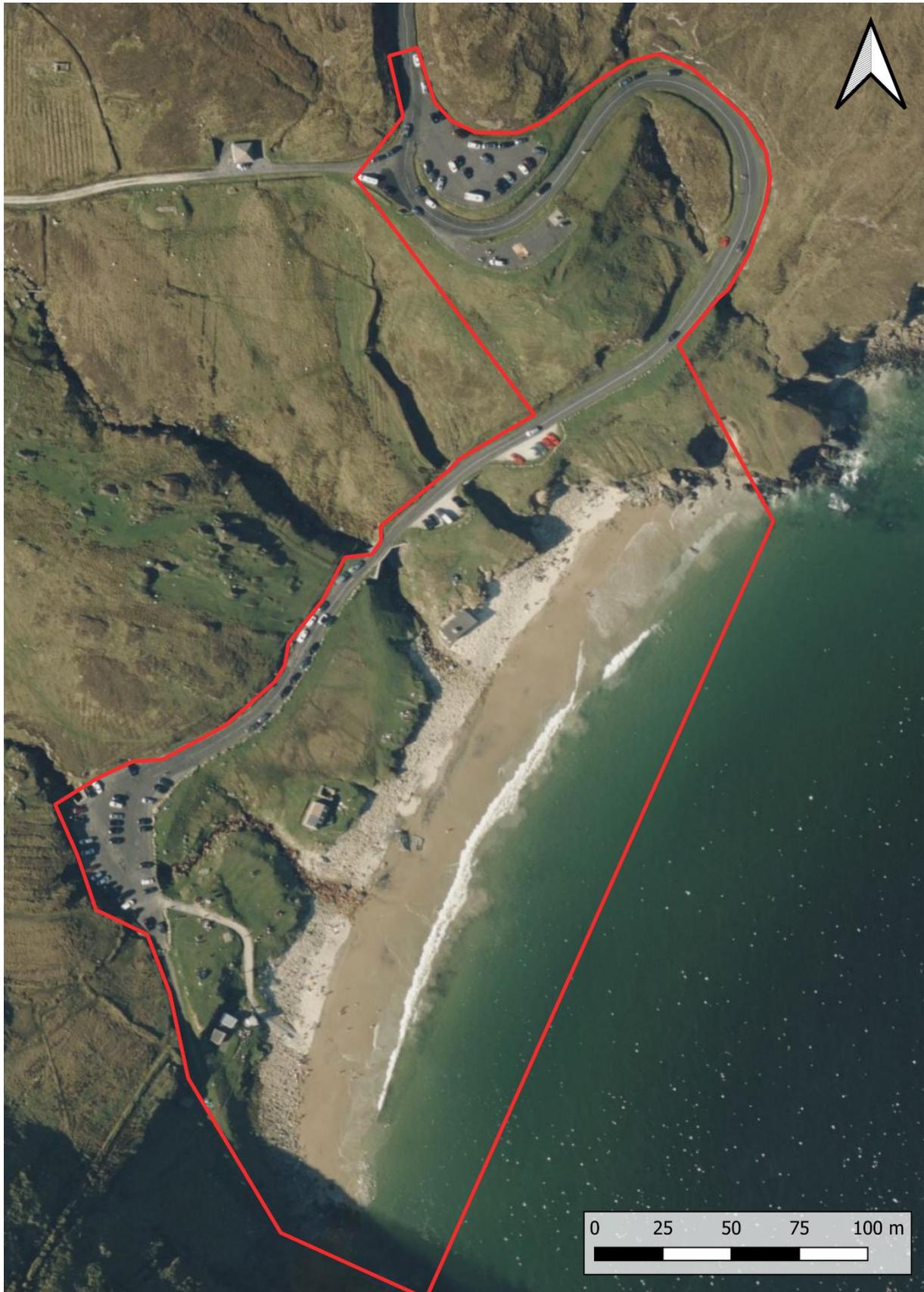


Figure 1-2 Site boundary outlined in red. Basemap provided by Bing.

1.1 Critical Infrastructure

Table 1-1, Table 1-2 and Table 1-3 below provide information on the infrastructure at Keem Bay. Uisce Éireann's website was used to access information on the Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment Capacity Registers for County Mayo (Uisce Éireann 2025a, b).

Table 1-1 Keem Bay Wastewater Infrastructure

Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toilet facilities are available 70m West of the northern carpark. • Temporary toilet facilities are available in the lower carpark. • There is no WWTP onsite. • The nearest settlements with a WWTP are located in Keel/Dooagh (WWTP Reg #D0072) and Doogort (WWTP Reg #D0367). 	There is potential spare capacity available at Achill Island Central WWTP and Doogort WWTP.

Table 1-2 Summary of Drinking Water Infrastructure at Keem Bay

Drinking Water	Water Resource Name (WRZ)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
Nearest serviced settlement to the site is Keel-Dooagh.	Achill	Potential capacity available (level of service improvement required).

Table 1-3 Summary of Transport Infrastructure at Keem Bay

Nearest Settlement	Current Transport Infrastructure	Comment
Dooagh village	Keem Bay is accessed by the R319 road. There are carparks located directly by the beach and 150m inland from the beach.	There is no public transport directly to Keem Bay on Achill. The bus Éireann No. 450 Bus stops in Dooagh village, connecting Achill Island with Westport and Louisburgh.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following surveys were undertaken:

- Habitat survey
- Pathway condition survey
- Survey of the features, signage and hazards

The survey at Keem Bay was undertaken on the 7th of July 2025. The weather conditions were slightly overcast, with some drizzle and light wind. The sub-sections below present the methodology used.

2.1 Habitat Conditions Assessment Methodology

The habitats within the site were classified and mapped in accordance with *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000) and *Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Surveying and Mapping* (Smith et al. 2011). Notes were taken on species composition and habitat condition. Fossitt habitats corresponding to Annex I habitats were noted using the *Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats* (EC, 2013). A desktop study was also undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of each site. Incidental sightings of birds, mammals, reptiles, etc. were also recorded during the site surveys.

The condition of the habitat in each polygon or line were noted, including any damage and the likely cause of the damage. The areas along pathways are outlined by the pathway condition assessment in Section 2.2 below. The following criteria were used to assess habitat condition:

- Extent of habitat degradation;
- Impact of habitat degradation (localised or widespread);
- Potential for the habitat to recover; and
- Whether or not intervention is required.

2.2 Pathway Condition Assessment Methodology

The main pathways were defined during the site visit and a desk study which included a review of the Strava heat maps (www.strava.com/heatmap), and a review of the previous site monitoring reports, if available. Typically, the main paths are formalised waymarked trails or heavily trafficked pathways that are not formalised. These paths usually link the site entry points and car parks to a destination or feature of interest. The pathways were categorised into sections by type and composition. The different types of pathway are described in Table 2.1 below.

Each path section is described as 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory' based on the condition of the path and whether or not it could accommodate the current levels of use. Indicators that a path was not suitable for the current levels of use included the presence of wet areas, erosion, trip hazards, damaged pavement, braiding, path widening and habitat loss along the path. Paths that generally facilitated unobstructed movement between locations were deemed as 'satisfactory'. It should be noted that the methodology outlined here is independent of and not linked to the trail registration and management process run by Sport Ireland Outdoors.

Table 2.1 Pathway Types

Pathway Type	Description
Paved Car Park	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is paved, usually with tarmacadam.
Gravel Car Park	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is gravel or crushed stone.
Paved Road	A road that is paved with tarmacadam or similar hard material.
Gravel Road	A road consisting of gravel or crushed stone, with no grass in the middle.
Gravel Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. Tracks are normally paved with gravel and can have grass in the middle
Grassy Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. These tracks are not paved and are used primarily by tractors, quads or small numbers of private vehicles.
Paved Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic. Paved paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Gravel Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Gravel paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Grassy Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Grassy paths are found in less developed areas, often beyond feature of interest, and are used less frequently.
Bare Ground Path	These paths occur where the vegetation had been eroded by foot traffic and is bare ground, or damages vegetation. These paths are often widespread on sites where formal waymarked trails are not provided.

2.3 Features, Signage and Hazards

Signage, features of interest, and hazards were recorded, photographed and mapped. Features include built heritage, sculptures as well as temporary toilets and bins. Hazards including unstable walls, broken fences or unprotected cliff tops

3. RESULTS

3.1 Habitat Condition Assessment

Habitats were surveyed during the optimum habitat survey season i.e., April to September (Smith et al., 2011). Habitats were classified according to *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000). Table 3.1 lists the habitats identified at Keem Bay along with their corresponding Annex I habitats. Plate 3-2, Plate 3-3 and Plate 3-4 display examples of the habitats found at Keem Bay. A habitat map is presented in Figure 3-1. It should be noted that having a corresponding Annex I habitat does not mean the Annex I habitat is automatically present.

Table 3-1 Fossitt (2000) habitats and links to Annex 1 habitats

Fossitt 2000 Habitat	Corresponding Annex I habitats (Natura 2000 code)
Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)	None
Sand shores (LS2)	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide (1140) Annual vegetation of drift lines (1210)
Dry-humid acid grassland (GS3)	*Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas in continental Europe) (6230) Calaminarian grasslands of the <i>Violetalia calaminariae</i> (6130)
Sheltered rocky shores (LR3)	Reefs (1170)
Dense bracken (HD1)	None
Wet grassland (GS4)	<i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>) (6410)
Eroding/upland rivers (FW1)	Watercourses of plain to montane levels with the <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitriche-Batrachion</i> vegetation (3260) Rivers with muddy banks with <i>Chenopodion rubri</i> p.p. and <i>Bidention</i> p.p. vegetation (3270)
Poor flush (PF1)	None
Eroding blanket bog (HH3)	None
Marram dunes (CD2)	Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ("white dunes") (2120)

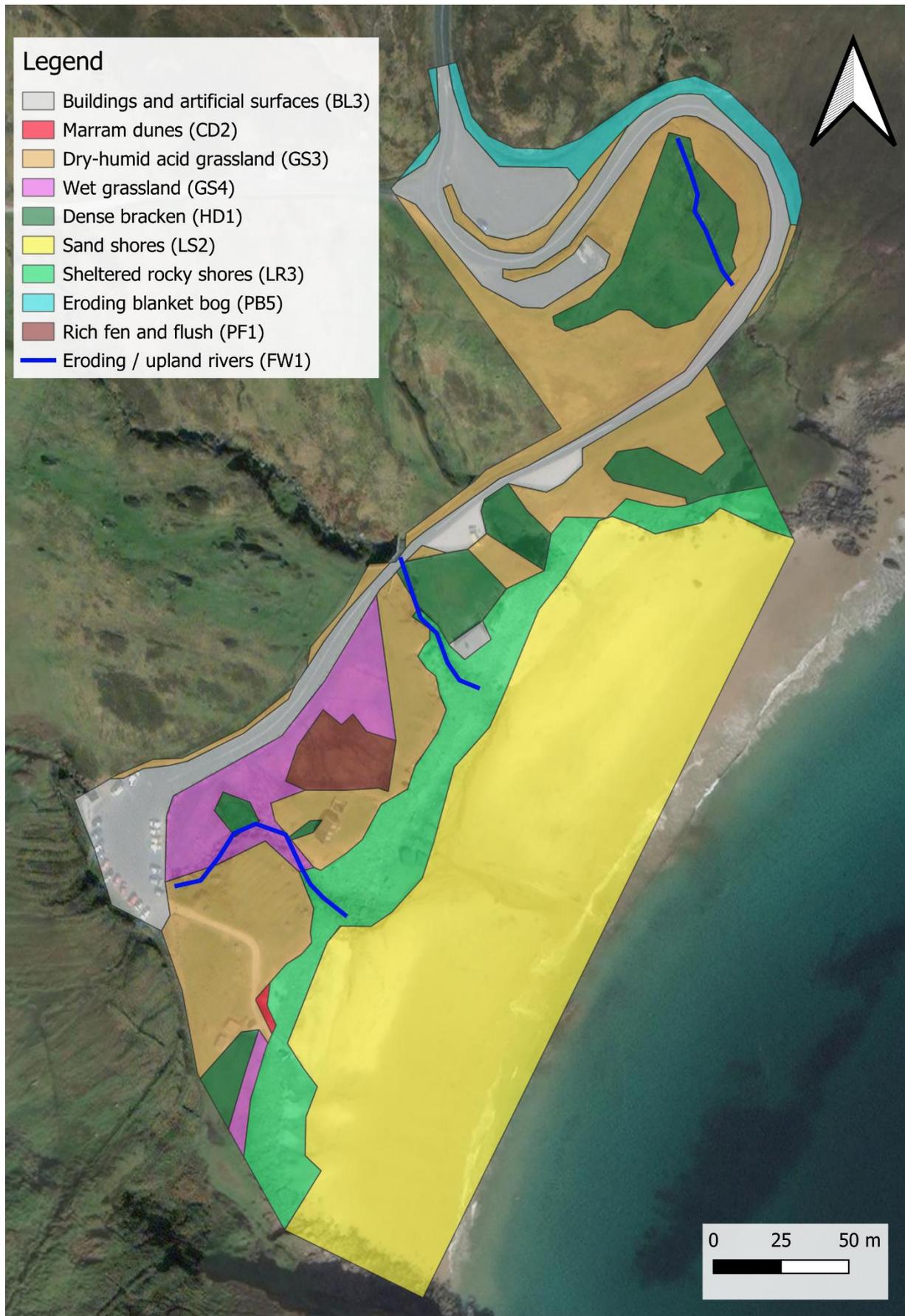


Figure 3-1 Habitat map of Keem Bay. Basemap provided by Bing.

Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)

This habitat is found throughout Keem Bay. It comprises the road, parking areas, and buildings located within the site. This habitat is not of any biodiversity value.

Sand shores (LS2)

This habitat is the largest habitat at Keem Bay. It comprises the sandy beach located between the sea and the rocky shore area. No vegetation was recorded in this habitat. This habitat is shown below in Plate 3-2.

Dry-humid acid grassland (GS3)

This habitat is found in the area between the upper car parks and the road leading down to the lower car park. It also forms a mosaic with various other habitats between the road and the beach area. It is largely grazed by sheep. Species recorded in this habitat include borage (*Borago officinalis*), broadleaf plantain (*Plantago major*), common chickweed (*Stellaria media*), common daisy (*Bellis perennis*), common scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium discolor*), crested dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), lesser spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*), spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), smooth meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*). This habitat is shown below in Plates 3-2 and 3-3.

Sheltered rocky shores (LR3)

This habitat is located along the northern extent of the beach area. It is largely comprised of small boulders. Species recorded in this habitat include buck's-horn plantain (*Adharcia fia*), common stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), fat-hen (*Chenopodium album*) and sea-beet (*Beta vulgaris maritima*). This habitat is shown below in plate 3-2.

Dense bracken (HD1)

This habitat is found throughout Keem Bay in a number of small patches. It is comprised of dense stands of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*). This habitat is shown below in plate 3-2.

Wet grassland (GS4)

This habitat is located east of the lower car park, forming a mosaic with Dry-humid acid grassland (GS3) and Poor flush (PF1) habitats. Another small strip is located southwest of the lifeguard hut. Species recorded in this habitat include, common daisy, common knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), common sorrel, jointed rush (*Juncus articulatus*), marsh horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*), marsh thistle (*Cirsium palustre*), meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), ragged robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), ribwort plantain, soft brome (*Bromus hordeaceus*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), sweet vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), water mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and wild thyme (*Thymus drucei*). This habitat is shown below in plate 3-2.

A single stand of invasive giant-rhubarb was recorded in the strip of wet grassland southwest of the lifeguard hut (shown below in Plate 3-1). This plant is listed on the third schedule of the European Union (Invasive Alien Species) Regulations 2024 S.I. No. 374/2024.



Plate 3-1 Giant-rhubarb (*Gunnera tinctoria*) in an area of wet grassland southwest of the lifeguard hut.

Eroding/upland rivers (FW1)

This habitat comprises three narrow, unnamed streams flowing in a southerly direction from the upland areas at Keem Bay towards the beach area. Species recorded within this habitat were colt's-foot (*Tussilago farfara*), marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) and water-cress (*Nasturtium officinale*). This habitat is shown below in Plate 3-2 and Plate 3-3.



Plate 3-2 Dry-humid acid grassland (left foreground/middle ground), wet grassland (right foreground), eroding/upland rivers (right middle ground), dense bracken (centre middle ground), sheltered rocky shores (right middle ground/background) and sand shores (background).



Plate 3-3 Eroding/upland rivers and dry-humid acid grassland.

Eroding blanket bog (PB5)

This habitat is located on the sloping terrain which is adjacent to the upper car park and access road in the north of the site. It comprises areas of eroded peatland and exposed underlying bedrock with vegetated patches containing black bog rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), ling (*Calluna vulgaris*), cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*), gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), tormentil and white clover.

Poor flush (PF1)

This habitat is located between the access road and the beach, behind the old house. Species recorded in this habitat include black sedge (*Carex nigra*), bog pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), common spike rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), changing forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*), common cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), hoary willowherb (*epilobium parviflorum*), jointed rush, marsh horsetail, marsh bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), ragged robin, red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), water mint and white clover.

Marram dunes (CD2)

A very small area of this habitat is found directly adjacent to the access path to the beach. It is comprised of bare sand and dense tussocks of marram (*Ammophila arenaria*). This habitat is shown below in Plate 3-4.



Plate 3-4 Marram dunes.

3.2 Pathway Condition Assessment

Figure 3-2 presents Strava heat maps for the site. Strava aggregates data from users on its app who opt-in to share their activities and locations. The pathway condition assessment map is presented in Figure 3-3 below.



Figure 3-2 Heat map of visitor movements classed under “Foot Sports” (left) and “Water Sports” (right) at Keem Bay (Strava, 2025).

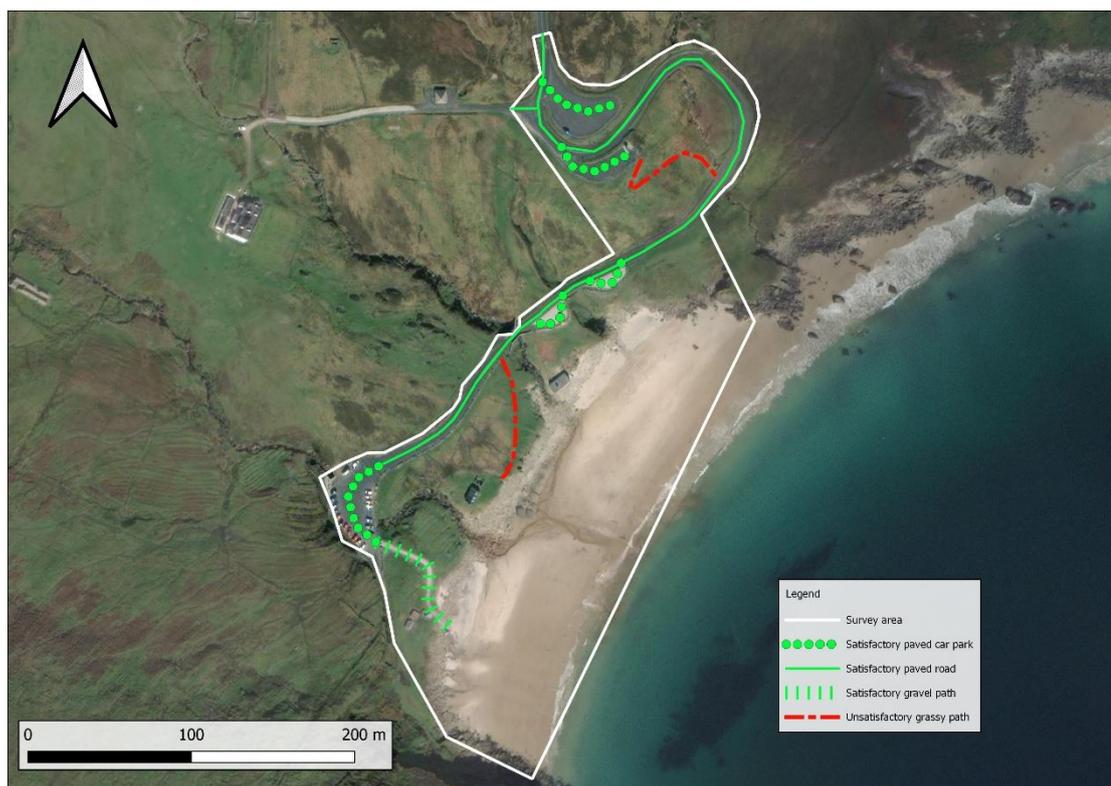


Figure 3-3 Pathway types and conditions present at Keem Bay

At Keem Bay, a paved road connected to the R319 at the north of the site winds southward from the upper car park down to the lower car park. From this area, access to the beach area is provided by a paved gravel path. Both the road and the gravel path are in a satisfactory condition. Two small, paved areas overlooking the bay are located at the midpoint of the access road into the site. These areas are in a satisfactory condition and function as viewing areas and as car parks for a small number of cars. Two informal grassy paths are present at the site, which are desire lines that allow pedestrians to take shortcuts without having to follow the winding road between the car park and the beach. The first of these paths travels from the upper car park down to the road. The second path travels from the bridge area to the old house/ruin beside the beach. Neither of these paths have been formalised and are likely a result of pedestrians trying to travel to old house/beach area as directly as possible (i.e., avoiding the road). As such, both of these paths are in unsatisfactory condition due to the trampling of vegetation which has caused some erosion and degradation of the grassland habitats through which they travel (see Plate 3-5 below). There are also numerous areas where trampling was evident in the acid grassland behind the beach.



Plate 3-5 Informal grassy paths in unsatisfactory condition due to erosion leading to slippery conditions.

3.3 Features Signage and Hazards

3.3.1 Features and Signage

Bicycle parking facilities are available at the upper car park area. Toilet facilities are located west of the upper car parks and within the lower car park area. A coffee van and food truck are located at the lower car park area, along with several picnic benches. A lifeguard hut is located on site, with life buoys present along the beach. Figure 3-6 illustrates the features and signage present at Keem Bay.

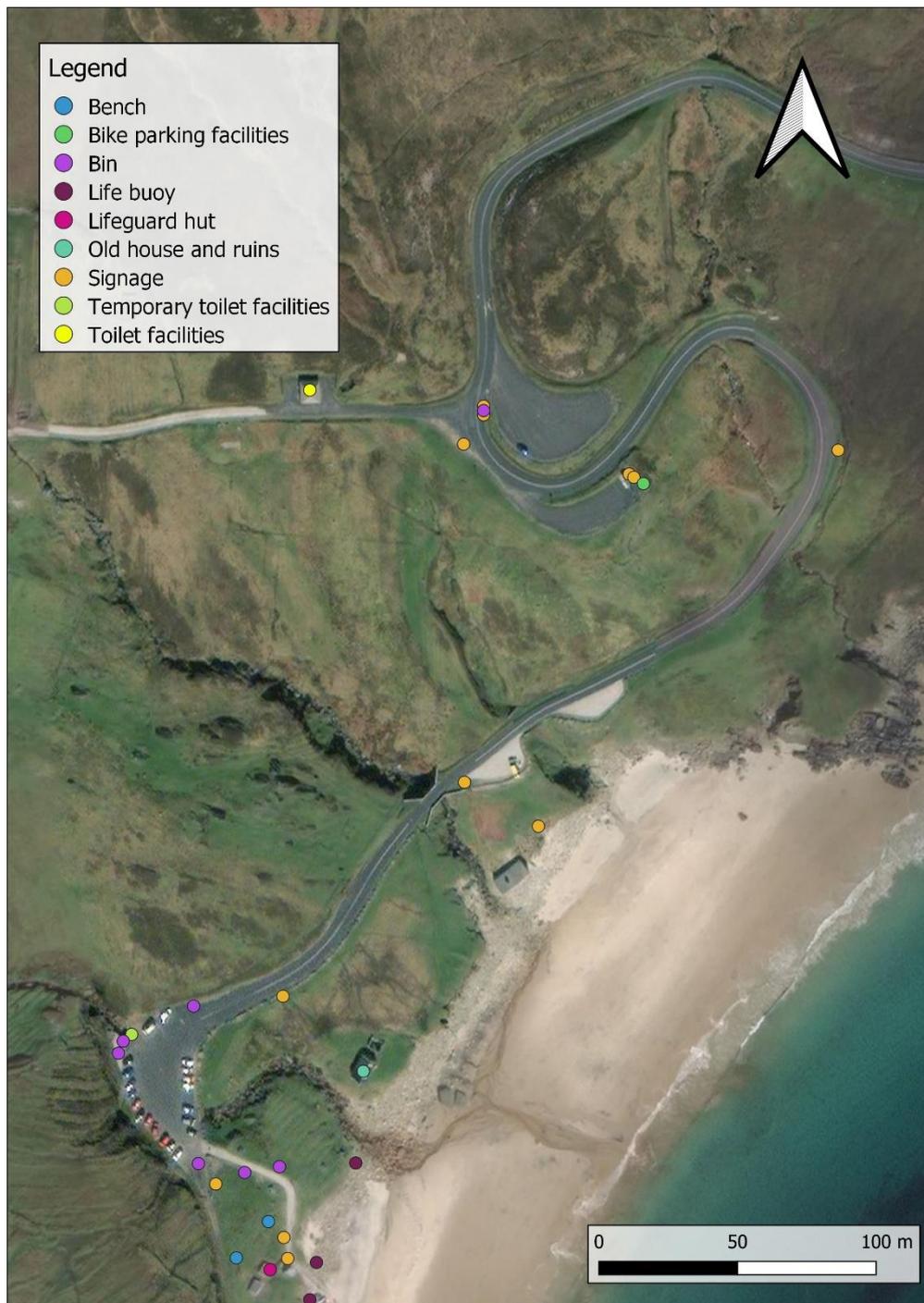


Figure 3-6 Features and signage mapped at Keem Bay. Basemap provided by Google.

A total of 7 No. bins are located throughout the site, which was notably litter-free at the time of surveying. A sign instructing visitors to pick up litter with an accompanying litter picker and waste bag is located in front of the lifeguard hut (shown below in Plate 3-6). A warden is employed at the site by Mayo County Council during the summer months.



Plate 3-6 Signage instructing visitors to remove litter with an accompanying litter picker and waste bags.

Informational signage regarding the history of the site, walking and cycling trails in the vicinity and information on the Achill Island Blueway are located at the car park areas. Signage instructing visitors against overnight camping, parking camper vans, lighting campfires, the removal of beach material and walking dogs off leads are located throughout the site. Signage outside the lifeguard hut provides information on the lifeguard flag codes and advises visitors to seek information from the lifeguards before entering the water. An old house/ruin is located to the west of the lower car park. At the time of the survey, a number of visitors were noted camping in front of this house and at the north end of the beach. Plate 3-7, Plate 3-8 and Plate 3-9 below show some of the signage at the site and the old house/ruin.



Plate 3-7 Informational signage at the upper and lower car parks.



Plate 3-8 The old house/ruin and instructional signage near the lower car park.



Plate 3-9 Instructional signage located throughout the site.

3.3.2 Hazards

Given the nature of the site, the open water in itself could be considered a hazard, however, a lifeguard is present on site during the bathing season, along with life buoys and signage relating to water safety. No additional hazards were identified at Keem Bay.

3.4 Ecological Constraints

3.4.1 Protected Sites

A desktop study was undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of the site. There is one European site (SACs / SPAs) and no Nationally Designated Sites (NHAs / pNHAs) within the site boundary. Information on these sites was obtained from the NPWS website and their respective Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms. These sites are described in Table 3-2 below.

Table 3-2 Designated sites within 2 km of the Keem Bay site

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
European Designated Sites			
Croaghan / Slievemore SAC [001955]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> [4010] European dry heaths [4030] Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060] Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130] Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (<i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galeopsietalia ladani</i>) [8110] Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220] 	Within the site boundary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grazing (H) Invasive non-native species (H+M) Restructuring agricultural land holding (H) Peat extraction (M) Outdoor sports and leisure activities, recreational activities (L) Paths tracks, cycling tracks (L) Sand and gravel quarries (L)
Achill head SAC [002268]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140] Large shallow inlets and bays [1160] Reefs [1170] 	Within the site boundary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fishing and harvesting aquatic resources (H) Hunting, fishing or uncommon collecting activities (H+M) Pelagic trawling (H) Demersal seining (L) Human intrusions and disturbances (L) Trampling, overuse (L) Invasive non-native species (H)

			• Storm, cyclone (H)
Nationally Designated Sites			
Croaghan / Slievemore pNHA [001955]	No site description available. Refer to Croaghan/Slievemore SAC above.	Within the site boundary.	No site description available. Refer to Croaghan/Slievemore SAC above.

3.4.2 Incidental Species Recorded

Table 3-3 below presents the bird species recorded during the ecological surveys at Keem Bay, along with their Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status (2020–2026) (Gilbert et al., 2021)

Table 3-3 Incidental Species Records & BoCCI Status.

Scientific Name	Common name
Green List	
Great Black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Hooded crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>
Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla yarelli alba</i>
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Amber List	
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Lesser Black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Red List	
Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>

3.4.3 Records of Rare, Protected and Invasive Species

Records of rare, protected, and invasive species from the past ten years within 2km² of the site were obtained the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) online database (Grid References: F5504 and F5604). These records are presented in Table 3-4 below.

Table 3-4 Rare protected and invasive species recorded in the past decade from Hectads F5504 and F5604 from the NBDC database.

Common name	Scientific name	Date of last Record	Status*
Marine Mammals			
Bottle-nosed Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	04/09/2023	Annex II, IV HD; WA
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	05/08/2023	Annex IV HD; WA
Common Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	05/03/2020	Annex II, IV HD; WA; OSPAR Convention
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	02/11/2020	Annex II, V HD; WA
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	07/02/2020	Annex II, V HD; WA
Minke Whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	26/03/2023	Annex IV HD; WA
Striped Dolphin	<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	20/04/2014	Annex IV HD; WA

Common name	Scientific name	Date of last Record	Status*
Birds			
Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	05/09/2024	Annex I BD; WA; Amber List
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	16/03/2021	WA; Amber List
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>	06/05/2018	WA; Red List
Black Guillemot	<i>Cepphus grylle</i>	14/05/2022	WA; Amber List
Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	14/05/2022	WA; Amber List
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	08/09/2018	Annex I BD; WA
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	30/10/2016	WA; Red List
Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	14/05/2022	WA; Amber List
Invasive Species			
Giant-rhubarb	<i>Gunnera tinctoria</i>	26/06/2015	High Impact Invasive Species; S.I. 477/2011
Mollusc			
Dog Whelk	<i>Nucella lapillus</i>	03/04/2022	OSPAR Convention

* Abbreviations: Annex II/IV/V (non-avian species) = Habitats Directive (HD); Annex I, II, III = Birds Directive (BD); Red/Amber List = Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020-2026 (BOCCI) (Gilbert et al., 2021); Wildlife Act, 1976 (WA).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information collected during the field survey and desk study, the following recommendations are made:

- Consideration should be given towards the formalisation of the two existing informal grassy paths between the upper car park area and the road, and the road and the old house/ruin area. This would prevent further degradation of the habitats in these areas and provide a direct route for visitors to one of the primary attractions at the site. This could be implemented with in-laid stone steps in harmony with the character of the site. An example where this has been achieved is at Sliabh Liag, Co. Donegal (Plate 4-1 below).



Plate 4-1 Pathways at Sliabh Liag, Co. Donegal.

- Treatment of the stand of giant-rhubarb located southwest of the lifeguard hut should be prioritised to prevent the further spread of this species throughout the site.
- The installation of further signage should be considered to inform visitors about the two SACs (Achill Head SAC and Croaghan / Slievemore SAC) in which the site is located. This could be complemented with signage containing information on the biodiversity present the site (interesting/rare species, habitats, plants etc.).

- Consideration should be given to expanding existing instructional signage that discourages camping and campfires to provide visitors with information on the risks associated with these activities e.g., degradation of surrounding European sites and natural habitats, risk of wildfires.
- The feasibility of a designated campsite area should be explored to discourage illegal camping and reduce associated pressures (uncontrolled campfires, habitat degradation, littering etc.).
- Appropriate land management is recommended to promote sustainable farming practices and reduce overgrazing. This would lead to improved habitat quality and resilience.

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APPENDIX A

FÁILTE IRELAND VISITOR CHARACTERISATION SURVEYS



Keem Bay, Achill, Co. Mayo – Visitor Monitoring Assessment

September 2025

Contents

- **1.0 Introduction:**
- **2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:**
- **3.0 Results:**
 - **Prevalence of Group Type**
 - **Prevalence of Transport Type**
 - **Activity Levels**
- **4.0 Observations**

Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes

1.0 Introduction:

Background

Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of tourism on the receiving environment. These surveys have been monitoring 57 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 26,000 visitors to WAW discovery points.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas: The Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. The environmental monitoring builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015, and to date (excluding the 2025 data), the surveys have monitored a total of 70 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 31,000 visitors at a range of tourism sites (including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points).

2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:

- Visitor Characterisation Surveys

The visitor characterisation survey was undertaken by the Fáilte Ireland Wild Atlantic Way team at Keem Bay to supplement and be appended to the National Environmental Monitoring Programme 2025 Report undertaken by Roughan O'Donovan Consulting Engineers. The survey was undertaken on the 3rd of September 2025 from 11.00am -1.00pm on a bright, sunny with occasional cloud cover afternoon. The survey was undertaken at the lower carpark closest to the beach.



Photo 1: Keem Bay beach looking SW towards Moyteoge Head

For the purposes of this assessment a 'visitor' refers to an individual, couple or group who arrive together. The following variables were recorded for each visitor:

- Activity Type
- Group Type
- Transport Type
- Activity Levels; and
- Impact Severity Levels.

3.0 Results:

3.1 Visitor Characterization Survey:

The visitor monitoring survey undertaken on Wednesday the 3rd of September 2025 from 11.00am - 1.00pm on a bright, sunny with occasional cloud cover afternoon. A total of 41 No. visitor groups comprising 97 No. Individuals were recorded. This site during the survey period was most popular amongst the 'couple' group followed by the 'small adult group' and 'elderly couple' groups. Activities predominantly undertaken by groups during the survey comprised of 'Walking, running or cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces' and 'Resting, reading & picnicking' and 'swimming'.

3.2 Prevalence of Group Type

Figure 3 presents the prevalence of group types observed visiting the site. The 'couple' group made up the largest proportion of group type with 59% of visitor groups observed. The next largest group type was the 'small adult' and 'elderly couple' groups both at 12%. The remaining group types observed in order of prevalence were 'Individual Adult', 'Mixed Small Group', 'Individual Elderly' and the 'Mixed large Group'.

Only 4 number groups were observed accompanied by dogs, 2 No. Individual adult and 2 No. couples. 3 of the 4 groups were observed keeping their dogs on a lead with 1 group observed with dogs off lead.

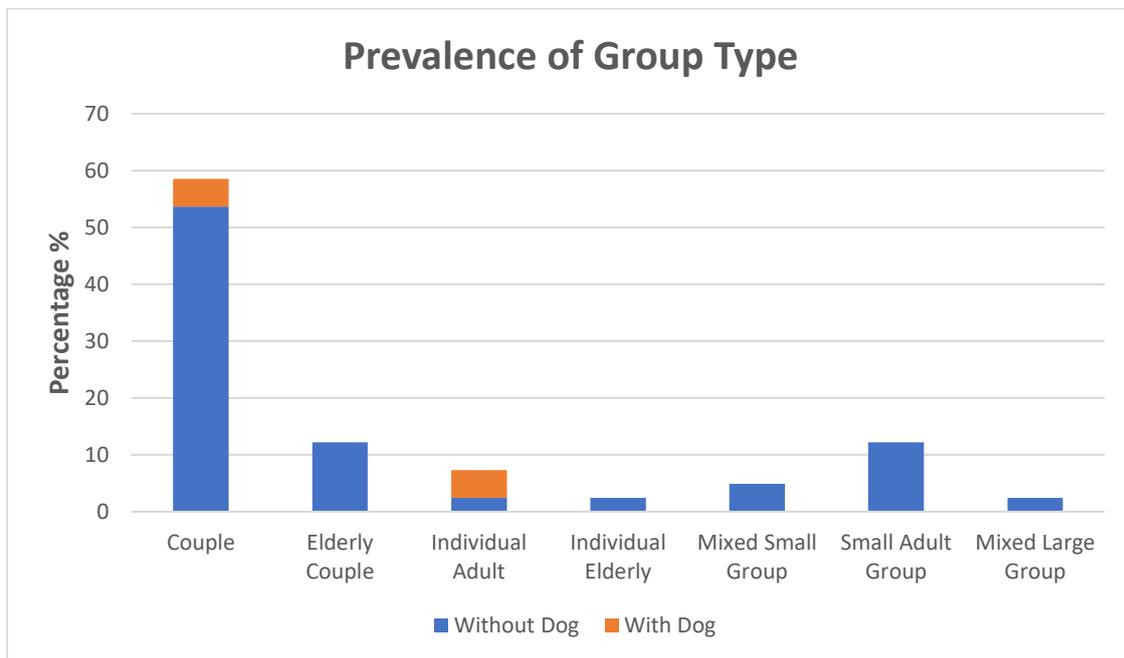


Figure 3: Prevalence of Group Type

3.3 Prevalence of Transport Type

Prevalence of transport type is detailed below in Figure 4, given the remote location of the survey with limited public transport options it is unsurprising that 'By Car' was the main mode of transport observed, accounting for 78% of visitor groups observed visiting the site. It should be noted that in reality, this number is most likely higher with the 20% observed 'By Foot' likely to have arrived by car and walked from upper car parks to the monitoring point in the Lower Car Park.

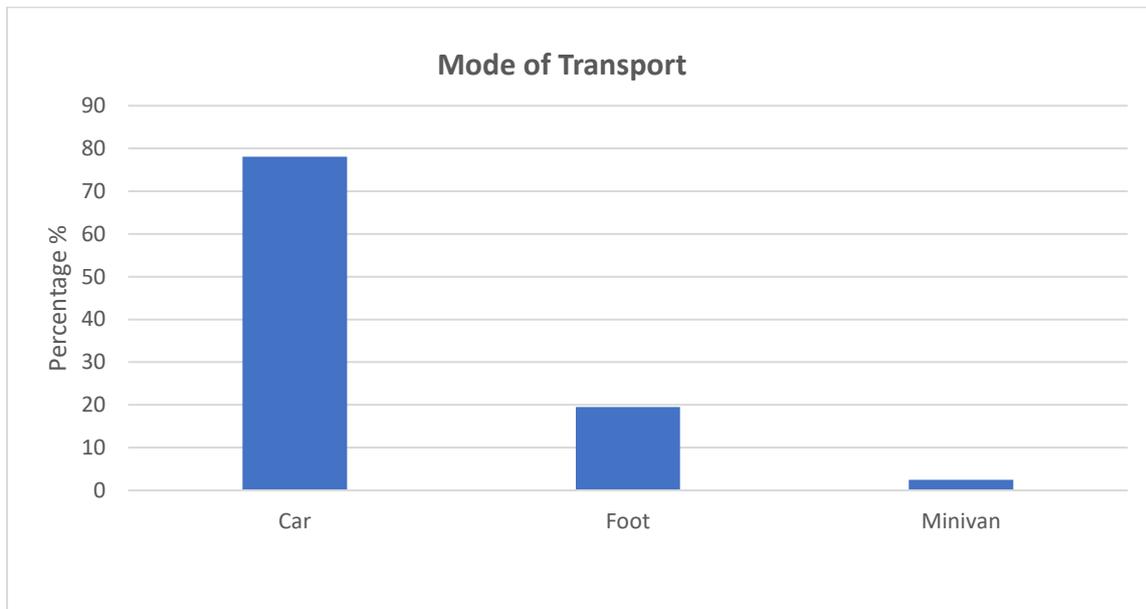


Figure 4: Prevalence of Transport Type (By Group)

3.4 Activity Levels

Figure 5 below presents the activity levels at Keem Bay. A sample of 41 visitor groups' activities were observed. The results from this are shown below in Figure 5. Activity categories are detailed in Appendix I. Activities such as Walking, running or playing on level sands is a low-level activity, whereas disturbing wildlife and picking herbaceous vegetation are considered high level activities. 88% of the activities observed at Keem Bay were considered low level activities with the remaining 12% medium activity levels comprising leaving an existing trail and/or designated paths.

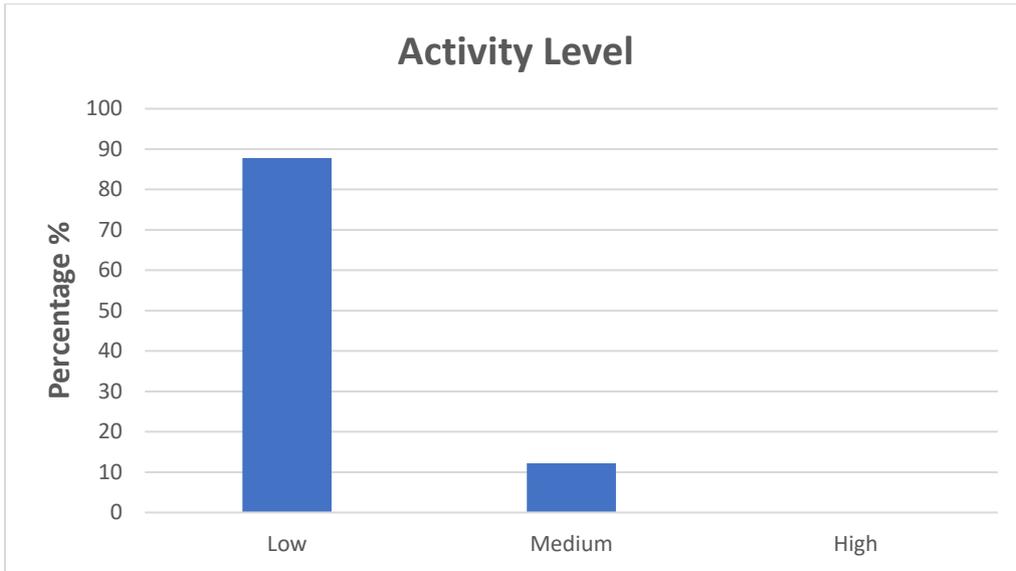


Figure 5: Activity Level

3.5 Impact Severity Levels

Figure 6 presents the impact severity level observed at the site. A sample of 41 visitor groups' activities were observed. Impact severity level relates to the damage of an activity on the site. The levels of impact severity are detailed in Appendix I. Similar to the impact type above, the survey found that 93% of the activities observed had low level impact severity on the site. Low level includes no effects, desire lines on grassy and leafy vegetation and temporary disturbance of wildlife. 7% exhibited medium severity levels comprising trampling on herbaceous vegetation.

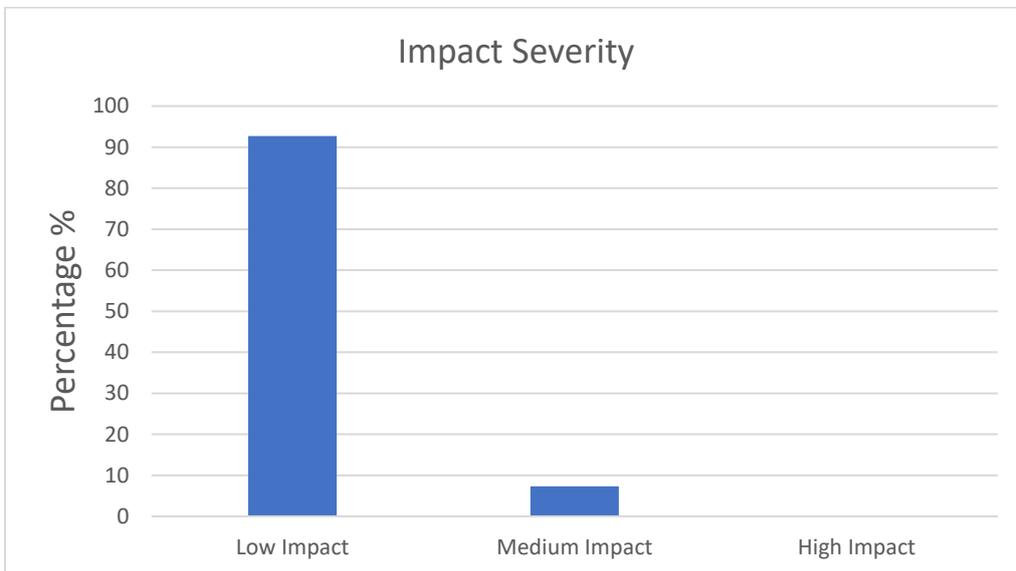


Figure 6: Impact Severity Levels

3.6 Activity Types

Figure 7 presents the activity types observed at the site. 66% of activities observed on site comprised “Walking, running, cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces” with “Resting and picnicking” comprising 15%. “Swimming in the water” comprised 5% with “Any Movement leaving an existing trail or marked path’ comprising 12%.

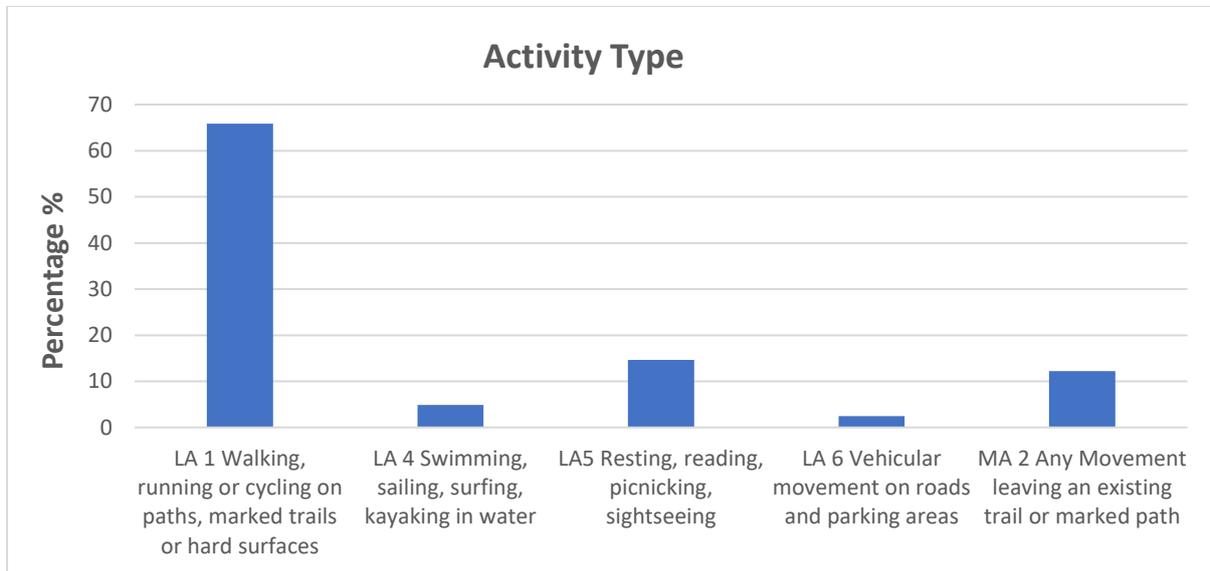


Figure 7: Activity Types

4.0 Observations

The vast majority of visitors parked at the lower carpark, took the path to the beach for a walk or swim and returned via the path. Very few stopped to read the signage.

Some returned to the carpark/road via the rocks, grass and via the Banshees house.

No campervans were observed parked at the lower carpark with 5 No. observed parked in the upper carpark (as per signage request). Campers were parking as directed by signage (i.e. upper car park) and continuing on foot to the beach along the road mainly.

Waste bins were observed well maintained and the toilet block also clean inside. The exterior of toilet ground was observed covered in sheep droppings (see photo) with sheep most likely using the building to shelter from the wind/rain.



Photo 2: Exterior of Toilet block covered in sheep droppings

Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes

Activities		
Category 1 Low Level		
Walking, running or cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces		LA 1
Walking, running, cycling or playing in mown grass, managed grassland or level sand		LA 2
Sitting on benches, walls, mown grass, sand		LA 3
Swimming, sailing, surfing, kayaking in water		LA 4
Resting, reading, looking, picnicking, sightseeing, painting, photographing		LA 5
Vehicular movement on roads and parking areas		LA 6
Watching nature in hedges, woods, streams, pools and intertidal areas		LA 7
Category 2 Medium Level		
Powered movement through water		MA 1
Any movement leaving an existing trail or marked path		MA 2
Any movement leaving a trail through leafy vegetation		MA 3
Any movement leaving a trail through woody vegetation		MA 4
Climbing on walls, loose stones, sand, soil etc.		MA 5
Fishing		MA 6
Category 3 High Level		
Walking through wet/muddy soil		HA 1
Scrambling on steep or loose slopes		HA 2
Off road vehicular movement		HA 3
Disturbance of wildlife		HA 4
Deliberate building or moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand etc.		HA 5
Picking herbaceous vegetation		HA 6

Impacts		
Category 1 Low Impact		
No identifiable effect		LIE 1
Desire lines or trails visible on grass and leafy vegetation		LIE 2
Temporary disturbance (including chasing and feeding) of insects, fish, amphibian, reptiles, insects, birds and mammals		LIE 3
Temporary change of character - due to the appearance or nature of activities (noise, crowds, etc.)		LIE 4
General/light littering		LIE 5
Category 2 Medium Impact		
Desire lines or tracks visible outside of existing trail or marked path		MIE 1
Trampling of herbaceous vegetation		MIE 2
Damage to woody vegetation		MIE 3
Incidentally moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		MIE 4
Addition/alteration of site features, transient emissions, noise		MIE 5
Transient disturbance, emissions, noise		MIE 6
Disturbance of wildlife		MIE 7
Category 3 Severe Impact		
Direct interference with site material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 1
Removal of material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 2
Vandalism or graffiti		SIE 3
Destruction of structures, vegetation or fauna		SIE 4
Heavy littering or dumping quantities of waste		SIE 5
Burning materials or lighting a fire		SIE 6
Injuring, killing or taking wildlife		SIE 7



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