Ogam (or Ogham) Markings:
Ancient Celtic Stone Writings

Ogam (or ogham) markings were a form of marking meant to be scratched into wood or stone to indicate phonetic sounds and thus form words much like an alphabet. Unlike runes (which are carved onto the flat parts of stones or in wood) or letters (which are painted or drawn on the flat surface of parchment or paper), ogam markings are carved or cut on the stemlines or edges where two flat planes meet. The earliest written forms of the Irish language are found on ogam stones during the Old Irish period. The oldest form is called "Orthodox Ogam" and it dates back to the fifth-seventh centuries. The most common form is the so-called "Scholastic Ogam" used from the eighth century onward. Other Celtic peoples also used their own variants of ogam, and archeologists have found ogam inscriptions in Wales, the Isle of Man, Devon, and Cornwall. Below we see samples. Figure 1 shows the ogam characters in their traditional vertical format. To the right of each character is its phonetic value as confirmed by bilingual transcriptions. Figure 2 shows the typical horizontal disposition of those characters.

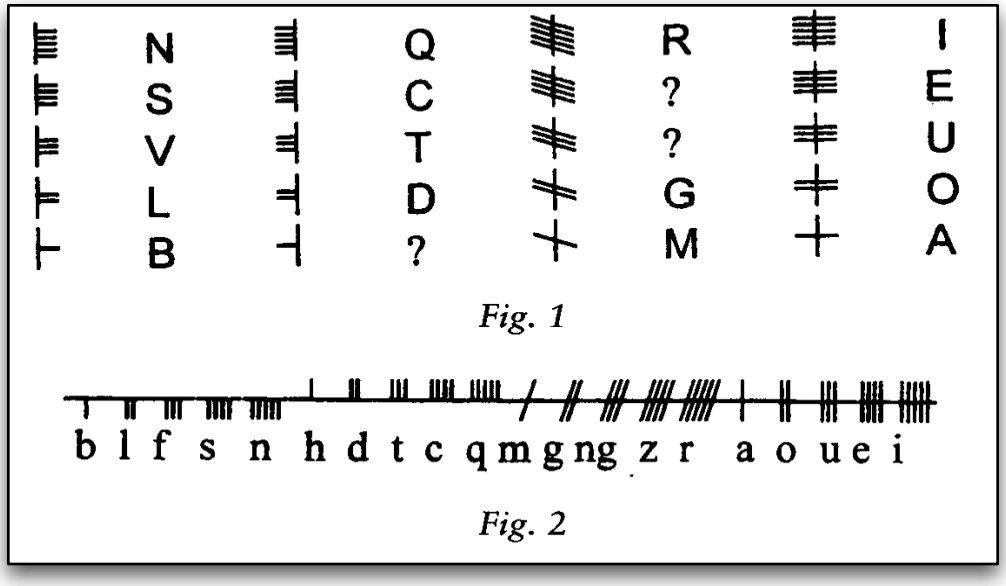
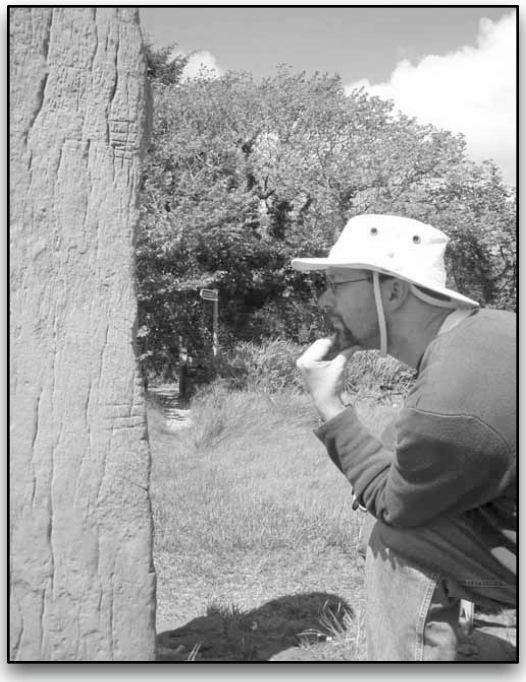


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Above: Figures 1 and 2 taken from Damian McManus' *Ogam Stones at University College Cork* 2004. University Heritage Series. Cork: Cork University Press, 2005. Page 2.



Right: Photograph of Dr. Wheeler looking at an ogam stone in Kerry County, Ireland. Summer 2007.