

# The Legend of the Giant's Causeway

by Rachel Delaney

THE BOOK OF KELLS IS AN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT OF THE GOSPELS CREATED IN IRELAND AROUND THE YEAR 800.



ST. PATRICK IS THE PATRON SAINT OF IRELAND. THEY SAY HE EXPELLED ALL THE SNAKES! SEINES ARE NETS.

**IT IS SAID** that many years ago, before the Book of Kells was written and Saint Patrick banished the snakes, a giant named Finn MacCool lived on the northeastern coast of Ireland. There he and his wife, Oona, fished the cold waters and kept fine, fluffy sheep on the grassy cliff tops.

One morning, as the sun rose over the ocean and lit the cliffs like the inside of an oyster shell, Finn kissed Oona goodbye and hauled his nets down to the beach. He shivered as he waded into the surf and slung out his seines. As the tendrils of mist retreated over the sea, Finn made out a tall shape in the distance.

"Oy!" the distant figure called. "Who's there? Who comes near Benandonner's land?"

It was another giant, on the shore of Scotland to the north. He waved an ax in one hand.

Finn thrust out his chest. "I'm Finn MacCool, slayer of Aillen Fire-Breath and catcher of the Salmon of Knowledge. Nice to meet you, neighbor!"

Benandonner's deep belly laughter wobbled over the waves. "Finn MacCool! Ye wee thimble of a lad. How can ye stand over there without drowning?"

Finn gasped. "What're you talking about? I'm the biggest giant in Ireland!"

Benandonner laughed again. "Come over here sometime, and we'll see who's the real giant." He turned and stomped away, his boots pounding on the earth like a slow-beating drum. Finn shook his fist after him.

"Can you believe that?" Finn asked Oona that evening after telling her about Benandonner. "Tomorrow I'll give him a piece of my mind."

"You shouldn't," Oona said as she laid a plate of fried fish and roasted potatoes in front of him. "You say you could barely see him across the water. For all you know, he's twice your size."

"You're right, my sweet shamrock." Finn put an entire fish in his mouth and chewed thoughtfully. He washed it down with a swig of ale. "But he challenged me. I have to accept."

"No, you don't." Oona set the second course on the table. "Just forget about it."

Finn cut into his corned beef. "If only I could get across the water. Say, you're clever. Can you think of a way?"

Oona shook her head. "I can think of at least one. But I'll never tell."

Illustrated by William Brown

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THE SALMON OF KNOWLEDGE? REALLY? WHAT'S THAT ALL ABOUT?



IT'S FROM IRISH MYTHOLOGY... LONG STORY.



“Why not?”

“Because it’s a bad idea,” she said. “That giant could be twice your size and thrice your strength. Just ignore him.”

Finn swallowed a ladleful of cabbage.

“Of course, my lovely leprechaun. You’re very wise. But what if I can’t ignore him? Please tell me how to get across. Just in case.”

Oona patted Finn’s beefy forearm. “Just leave it be. For all you know, he’s twice your size, thrice your strength, and uglier than a banshee in a bog.”

Finn sighed. “I suppose you’re right, my Connemara pony. You’re the wisest wife in Ireland, after all.”

The next day, Finn went to the shore determined to follow Oona’s advice. But Benandonner was waiting for him.

He called to Finn, “Good day, me bonny wee bairn!”

Slinging out his nets, Finn took a deep breath but said nothing.

“What mischief are you up to today, laddy? Riding on your wee sheep?”

THE **CONNEMARA** IS A HARDY BREED OF IRISH PONY. AND SOOOO CUTE!



BUT ARE THEY AS SMART AS THE SALMON OF KNOWLEDGE? ANSWER THAT, ME LOVELY LEPRECHAUN.



... A **BAIRN** IS A BONNY WEE BABY.

Finn ground his teeth.

“Playing with the fairies again? Or are you too timid and small even for pixies?” Benandonner laughed.

“That’s it.” Finn stamped his foot on a rock, driving it deep into the sand. “I’ve had enough of your mouthing!”

“What are you going to do?” Benandonner teased. “It’s too far for a babby like you to swim.” With a chortle he walked away.

Finn glared. He had to do something. Like most giants, he was a terrible swimmer; he sank like a stone. But there must be another way. If Oona could figure it out, why couldn’t he? Scratching his chin, he looked up at the tall basalt columns of the cliffs.

“Aha!”

His boots squelched in the wet sand as he tore a rock pillar from the cliff and threw it like a spear into the water. It landed straight up on the ocean floor, creating a steppingstone above the water’s surface. He went back for more, grinning to himself. Oona would be so impressed to hear how he had cleverly built a causeway to Scotland and bravely defeated Benandonner. He broke another armful of pillars from the cliffs and trotted along the steppingstones to place them at the end.

The sun was just peeking over the waves when Finn finished his causeway. He jumped ashore in Scotland and trotted along

**The Giant’s Causeway** is an astounding rock formation on the northeast coast of Northern Ireland. Geologists believe it was formed millions of years ago by intense volcanic activity. As lava flowed into the sea and cooled rapidly, it contracted and fractured, creating the Causeway’s 40,000 hexagonal basalt columns. Across the channel, on the Scottish island of Staffa, are similar basalt columns, part of the same ancient lava flow.

The columns look like giant steppingstones extending into the sea, giving rise to the Gaelic legend of a causeway from Ireland to Scotland that was destroyed when the Irish giant Finn MacCool was challenged by the Scottish giant Benandonner.







the sand to Benandonner's house, where he heard a resounding snore through the open window. He peered in. Benandonner lay in bed, his fiery red hair tousled, with one huge, hairy foot protruding from the tartan blanket.

Finn gasped. The foot was twice the size of Finn's feet!

Benandonner groaned and began to open his eyes.

With a yelp, Finn sprinted back to the causeway and pounded across. He may have feasted on the Salmon of Knowledge, but he did not like his odds against a giant that size—let alone a grumpy, half-awake one. As he fled across the stones, Finn glanced

over his shoulder and saw Benandonner's hulking silhouette stomping along the shore. Benandonner swung his ax and roared as only an enraged Scotsman can.

Finn got home, panting. "Oona! I've been an eejit."

Oona emerged from the kitchen, wiping a wooden spoon on her apron. "What is it this time?"

"I challenged Benandonner. You were right, he's twice my size. I won't have a chance! What can we do?"

Oona tapped the spoon against her palm. "We'll have to think of something . . ."

Finn heard Benandonner's footsteps booming across the causeway and started to weep.



The rock known as the Giant's Boot (above). It is said to be a size  $93\frac{1}{2}$ , just right for a giant like Benandonner.



IF THERE'S A  
SALMON OF  
KNOWLEDGE,  
WHY NOT A  
LADYBUG OF  
WISDOM?



DON'T BE  
AN EEJIT!

Oona smacked his muscle-bound arm. "Stop that, ye giant baby!" Then her green eyes sparkled. "Of course! I have the perfect plan."

A few minutes later, Benandonner knocked at the MacCools' door. Oona answered.

"Where's Finn?" Benandonner demanded. "I have a dispute to settle."

Oona put a finger to her lips. "He's just out herding the sheep. Be quiet, or you'll wake the baby."

Benandonner heard a giggle inside the cottage.

"That's our son, waking from his nap," Oona said. "Isn't he a handsome lad?"

Benandonner bent down and peered through the doorway, where the biggest baby he had ever seen lay in a wooden cradle the size of a boat! The baby sucked his thumb and cooed.

"That's—" Benandonner swallowed. "That's Finn's son?"

Oona tickled the baby under his chin. "He'll be just like his father when he grows up, won't you?"

Benandonner's eyes widened. If the baby was already bigger than his mother, his father must be a giant among giants! Without another word, Benandonner turned on his heels and dashed out of the house. As he crossed the causeway, he smashed the rocks with his axe so Finn couldn't follow.

Finn climbed out of his boat and untied his bib and bonnet. He and Oona stood at the window, watching Benandonner flee. One of Benandonner's shoes came off in the sand, and he ran on without it.

To this day, the remains of the Giant's Causeway are still there, along with Benandonner's lost boot. 