



## Danny's Celtic Kids

"Ireland is where strange tales begin and happy endings are possible"

Newsletter Issue 8 March 2005



### Danny's Corner

Hello, once again, to all my friends. Are you getting ready to enjoy Saint Patrick's Day on March 17th? Here in New Orleans, we always look forward to Saint Patrick's Day. It's a day that should combine quiet reflection on a remarkable man, Saint Patrick, with having lots of fun, like going to parades and having parties.

Do you know why St. Patrick's Day is always celebrated on March 17th? Well, according to tradition, St. Patrick died on the 17th of March in 493 A.D. The reason I say "according to tradition" is because after 1,512 years, there are many, many different stories and legends about St. Patrick. True history and legend have become so mixed together, it is hard to separate them and to know which is which.

In this issue of the newsletter, we are going to talk about the legend that St. Patrick drove all the snakes out of Ireland. Now, it is absolutely true that there are **no** snakes in Ireland. None at all! But why aren't there any snakes there? The legend says that St. Patrick is the reason there aren't any. It is a wonderful story, and we are going to tell it to you, but we are also going to tell you the scientific explanation of why there are no snakes in Ireland. Then, you will know both stories, both fact and fiction. If you ask me what I believe, I'll tell you. My heart believes the legend and my head believes the science. The two go together very nicely, and I think they are both important.

Have fun with this issue and on St. Patrick's Day!

**Danny**



### A Traditional Irish Proverb

As spring arrives, the Earth turns green  
just as the Emeralds Isle.

So everyone, around the world,  
may be Irish for awhile.



## Saint Patrick and the Snakes

While traveling around Ireland, Patrick noticed that the pagan people he was trying to convert to Christianity believed snakes to be powerful symbols in their religion.

To Saint Patrick, the snake was the symbol of Satan and evil, because in the Bible story about the Garden of Eden, a snake convinced Adam and Eve to disobey God's command to never eat the fruit from the tree that grew in the middle of the garden. When they listened to the snake and ate the fruit from that tree, God punished them by making them leave the beautiful garden.

So, Saint Patrick decided that it would be best if he got rid of all the snakes, because that would mean that he would get rid of the pagan religion and any evil left in Ireland, all at the same time.

One day he climbed up to the top of a tall hill. When he felt the power of God strong within him, he held out his staff and began to drive the snakes toward the sea. There are some storytellers who say that as he drove the snakes, he beat very fast on a small drum, which scared the snakes even more and kept them moving.

Finally, all the snakes were gone except for one, the king of the snakes. He just wouldn't go. Saint Patrick decided he would trick the old snake. He made a box and invited the snake to get in it. The snake said the box was too small. They argued about the box for a few minutes. Tired of arguing, the snake decided to prove he was right, so he crawled into the box to show Saint Patrick that it was too small. As soon as he was stuffed in the box, Saint Patrick slammed the lid shut. That was the end of the last snake in Ireland.





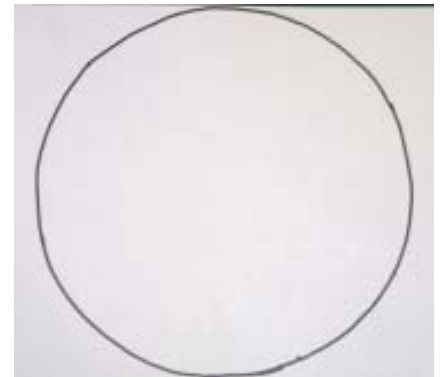
## Make you own snake for Saint Patrick's Day

### Materials needed:

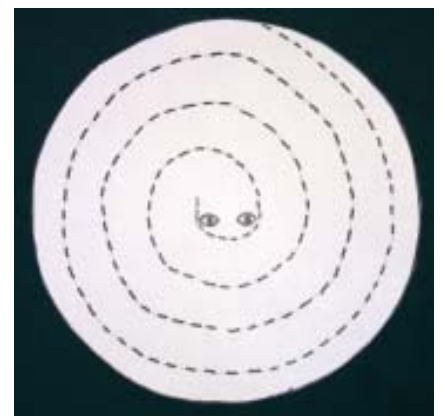
- A light-weight paper plate or a sheet of heavy, white paper.
- Crayons or markers
- Scissors

### Instructions:

1. If you are using a piece of paper, draw a large circle on the paper. If you are using a paper plate, you already have your circle.



2. Working from the outside-in, draw a line in a spiral. Start thin and get thicker as you work toward the center. When you get to the center, that will be the head of the snake. Draw two big eyes on one side and a mouth on the bottom.



3. Draw your favorite designs on the snake and color it on both sides. Make the snake any color you choose. Be creative with your designs.
4. When you have finished coloring, carefully cut along the line you drew, starting from the outside and working in toward the head.
5. Hold the snake by its head and tail and help it uncoil. Now you have your Saint Patrick's Day snake!



## No Snakes in Ireland-- Why?

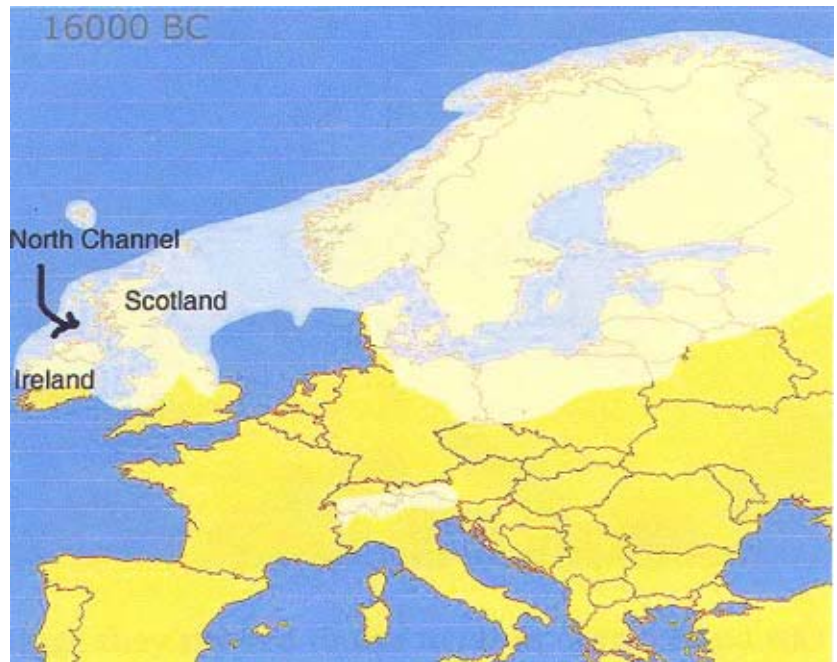
Snakes evolved from lizards about 100 million years ago, just about when T. Rex first appeared. These snakes never made it to Ireland because Ireland was under water at that time.

Snakes cannot survive anyplace where the ground is frozen. They can't live in the polar regions, or high up on mountains. Snakes are "cold blooded". This means

that a snake's body temperature is determined by the temperature of its surroundings. In icy cold weather without a burrow to provide insulation or warmth of some kind, a snake freezes. This kills it.

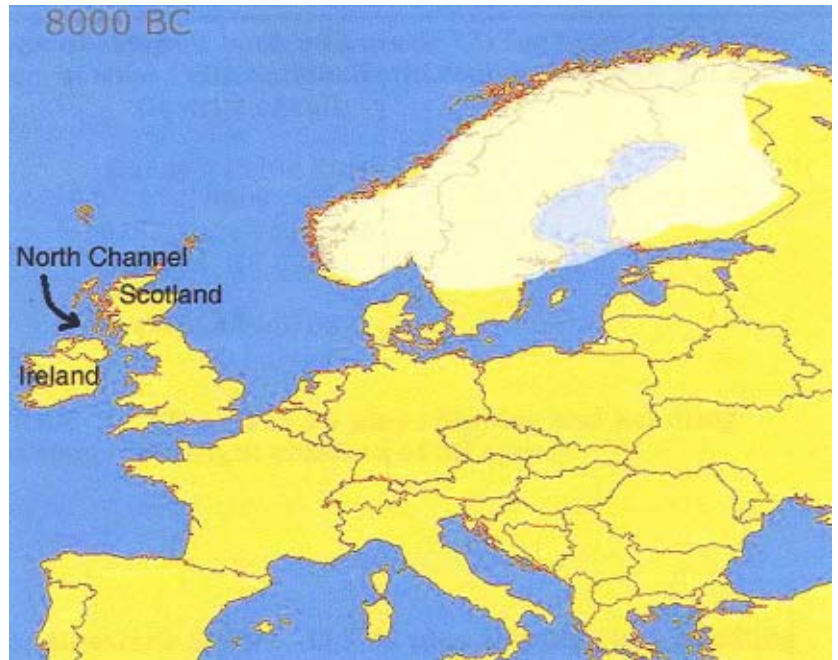
Today, Ireland is an island. It is separated from its nearest neighbor, Scotland, by miles by miles of deep ocean water. This water is called the North Channel. But, Ireland wasn't always an island. 100 million years ago, land bridged across the channel to Scotland and Europe. All kinds of animals and humans used these land bridges to cross over onto Ireland. But, wait a minute! If other animals and humans crossed over, why didn't snakes? The answer to that question is- they did!

So where are their descendants? Why aren't there any snakes in Ireland now? Is it because Saint Patrick removed them? The scientific answer to that is "no". Saint Patrick didn't remove the snakes, ice did. About 2 million years ago, a series of huge ice caps, or glaciers, formed over Northern Europe. Glaciers covered North America, too. They reached as far south as what today is Missouri. These glaciers buried the land under deep sheets of ice. No snake could have survived that! Any snake that had managed to get onto Ireland would have died.





The last glacier disappeared from Ireland about 18,000 years ago. But, even though the glacier was gone, the land stayed frozen for several hundred years longer. Then about 15,000 years ago, the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean began to warm Ireland to the point where snakes could live there. However, by that time, the land bridge they needed to use to cross onto Ireland was buried under the freezing water of the North Channel which had been created by the melting ice.



Snakes can't migrate across water. There are no snakes on New Zealand, either. It is a much larger island than Ireland. (Have Mom or Dad help you find New Zealand on a map.) New Zealand is located across the Tasman Sea from Australia. There are no snakes on New Zealand because the water off the Pacific Ocean cut New Zealand off from Australia long before snakes evolved 100 million years ago.

**Below:** A Celtic Snake and Bird design. Can you find the snakes and the birds?





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