

WHELAN'S QUARRY CAVE Co. CLARE, IRELAND

by

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ABSTRACT

A survey and description of this newly discovered cave near Ennis, Co. Clare, are presented.

Alternative name: Poullee
Length: 31 m. (+6 m. unsurveyed)
Altitude: 47 m.

Td: Ballyneillan
Depth: 20 m.
Grid Ref: R 3013 7973

DESCRIPTION

Five kilometres north-west of Ennis on the road to Ennistymon is Fountain Cross. Immediately to the south of the road at this point lies Cairn Hill which is the site of Whelan's quarry, a major limestone quarry. At the western extremity of the quarry is a tarmac plant; the



Figure 1. *View looking north from the south end of the cave.*

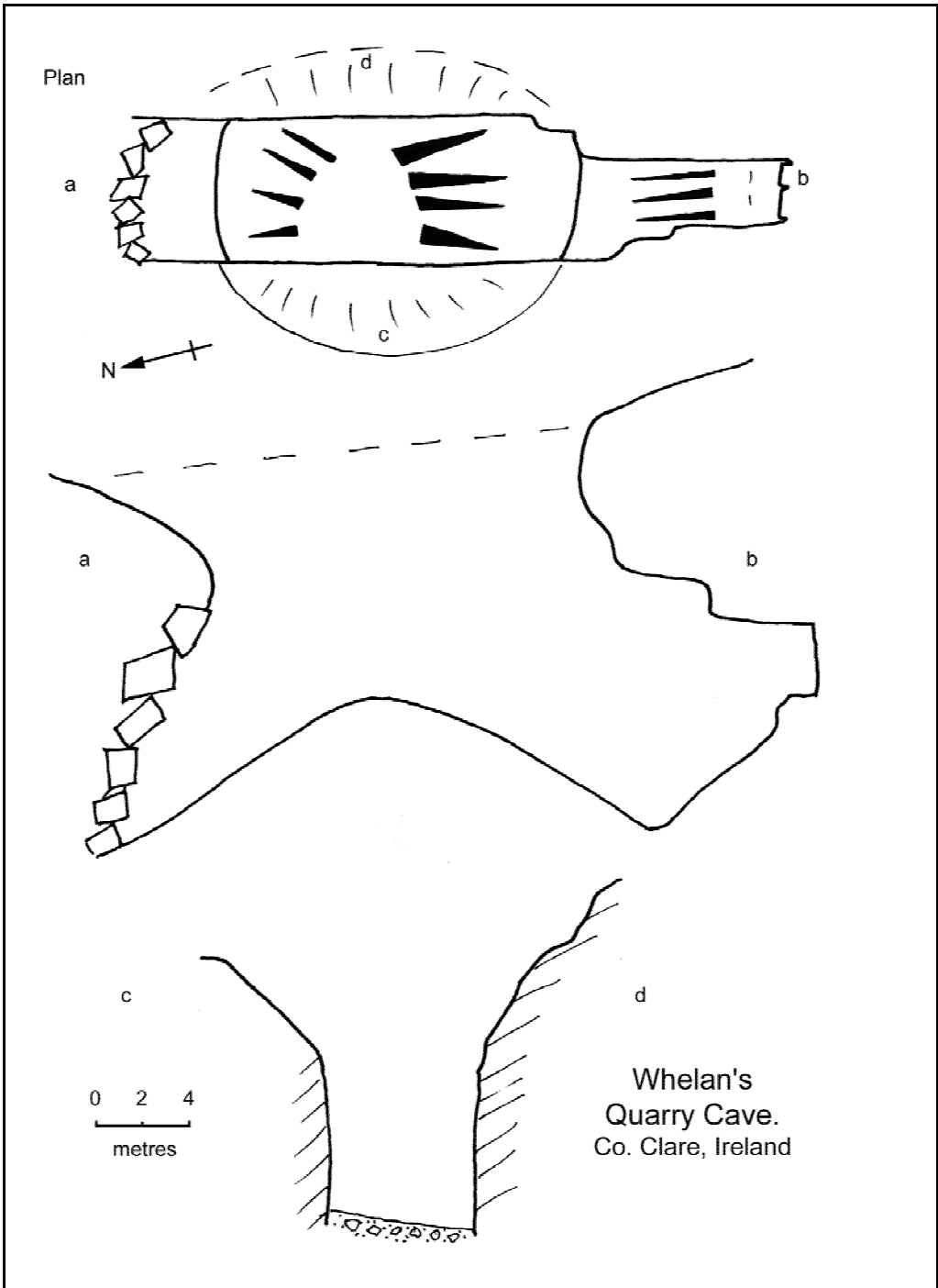


Figure 2. Survey of Whelan's Quarry Cave.



Figure 3. *View looking south from the foot of the entrance pitch.*

cave entrance is situated about 30 m south of Tank 2 of this plant and about 10 m outside the quarry boundary fence.

The entrance is a large pothole, 20 m by 15 m surrounded by several unhealthy looking and dust covered trees. A steep earthy slope leads to the head a 7m entrance pitch, best rigged from trees at the top of the slope. The foot of the pitch is the top of a large talus cone sloping down to the north and south in a vertically sided rift 6.5m wide. To the south the floor slopes down over boulders for 13m, before rising steeply up a sand and gravel slope for 7 m to end at a blank rock wall. To the north of the entrance pitch the floor again slopes down steeply under a roof composed of large calcited blocks for 11m to a boulder choke. It is possible to enter the choke for about 6 m near the eastern wall but the

route becomes blocked with calcite. The direction this route takes is back towards the quarry.

DISCUSSION

This passage is obviously a remnant of a very old cave. The original water route is probably at a lower level and has been in-filled with collapse material, although the sand and

gravel deposit at the southern end shows that this is not far below the collapse material. The orientation is along the main joint direction 195° , but flow direction is unknown.

It is surprising that such a large cave entrance has remained unknown to cavers until now, despite its proximity to a large town like Ennis. Despite its size, the entrance was not shown on the large scale (1: 10560) Ordnance Survey maps, although they record much smaller sites on the Burren, and no record of it has yet been identified in the files of Geological Survey of Ireland (Matthew Parkes *pers. comm.*). No cave features have been reported from within Whelan's Quarry, though that is not say that none have ever been uncovered and subsequently destroyed without being recorded. Cairn Hill is a significant feature with a summit at 104 m. It is entirely formed from Carboniferous Limestone, and may repay a closer investigation.

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