

## CAVE NOTES CO. CLARE AND CO. GALWAY, IRELAND

by

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes cave explorations in Co. Clare that have taken place since the publication of *The Caves of Co. Clare and South Galway* in 2003 and the previous paper of this kind in 2005.

### INTRODUCTION

The Society's publication, *The Caves of Clare and South Galway* (Mullan, 2003) described all the caves and cave passages known at the time of its publication. Further discoveries have been described in these *Proceedings* by Boycott and Mullan (2005) and by Bunce (2007). This paper describes the results of exploration in the area since 2005. The Society intends to publish further papers of this type during the lifetime of the book and would be grateful to receive any additional information. This paper is ordered in the same manner as the book and new discoveries are listed under the relevant chapter headings.

### DOOLIN HARBOUR AND DOOLIN POINT

#### THE REEF CAVES AND THE HELL COMPLEX

Length 750 m. plus

Grid Ref. R 0552 9734 (Hell)

A tight 2.5 m crack in the floor of a long bedding plane passage in Hell close to the seaward end has been passed to reach Robertson's Cave in the Reef Cave complex, thus linking the two systems. Approximately 70 m of new passage has now been mapped in this area, including a further entrance, Newt Hole, north of Robertson's Cave. The extensions to the Reef Cave complex are shown in Figure 1.

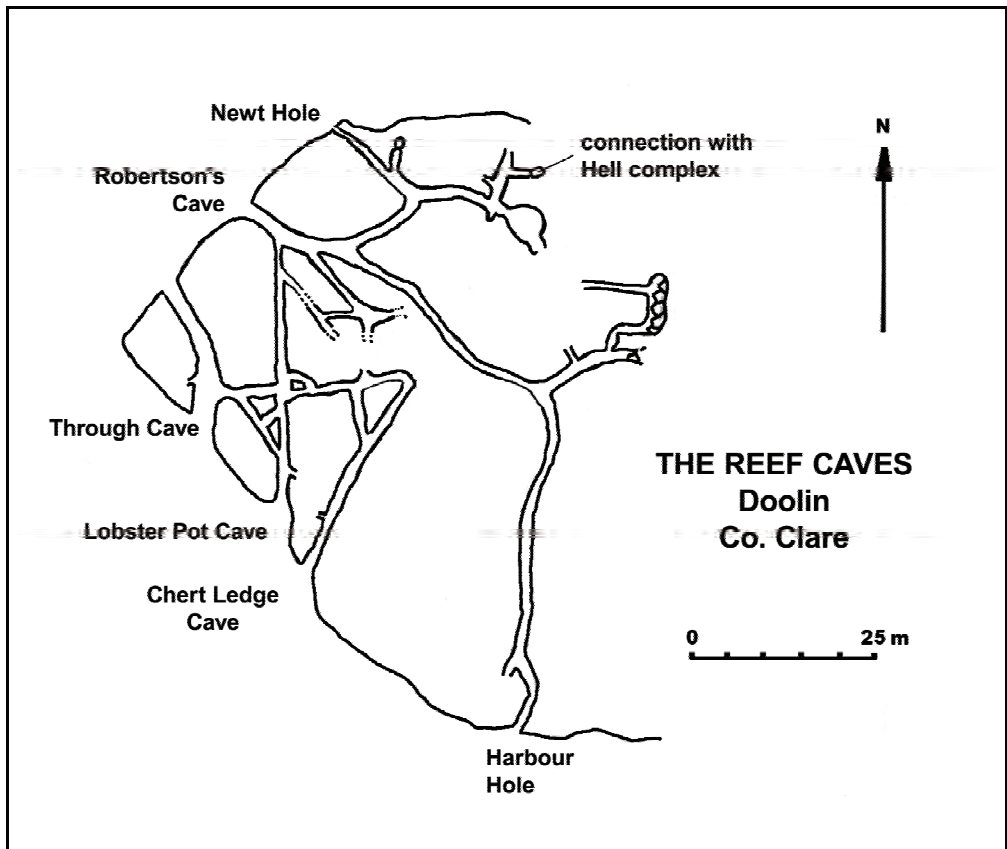
#### MERMAID'S HOLE

Td. Ballaghaline

Length: 1600 m. (estimated)      Altitude: -10 m.

Grid Ref: R 0565 9750

The right-hand passage at the junction which was the previous limit of exploration has been followed for a further 90 m to a new terminus at 1025 m from base. The depth has eased to -5 m but the final section of passage is very badly silted reducing visibility to a minimum. See Figure 2 for further detail.



**Figure 1.** *the Reef Cave Complex, Doolin Point.*

#### JOE'S CAVE

Td. Ballaghaline

Alternative names Tir fo Thoinn, Hot Tip Cave

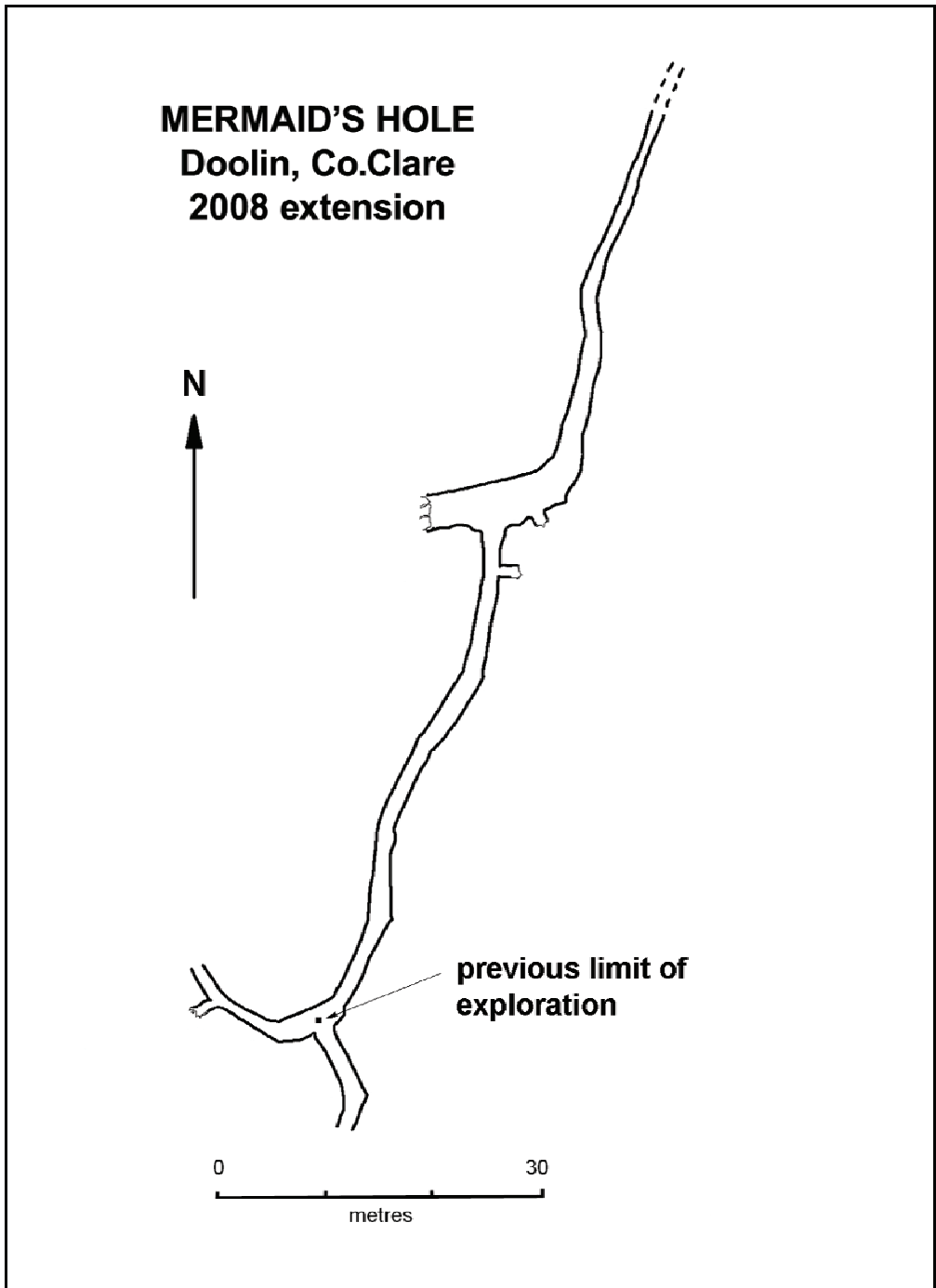
Length: 130 m.

Altitude: -10 m.

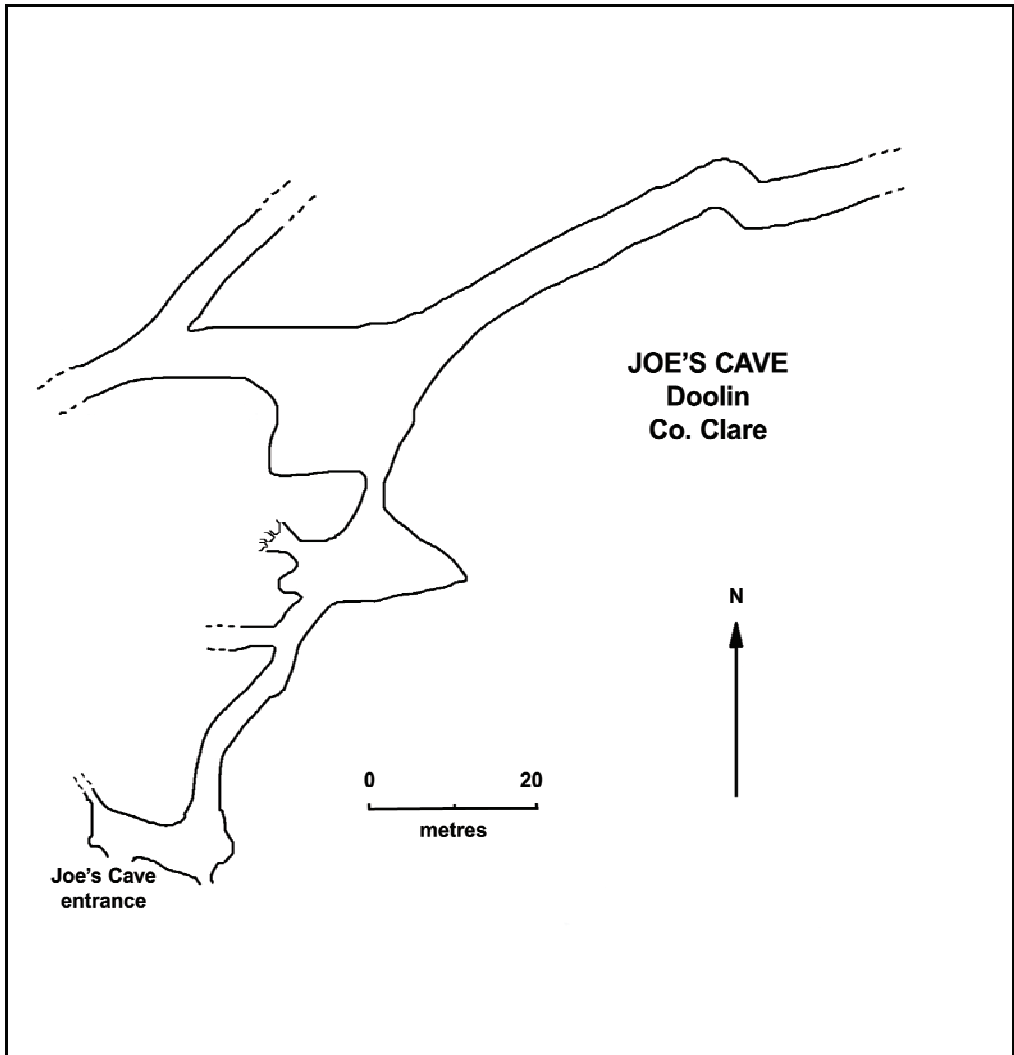
Grid Ref: R 0572 9769

This cave has now been pushed and surveyed for a total of 130 m. The cave predominantly trends northeast veering eastwards towards its end. It generally lies at shallow depth, is 5-6 m wide and only 0.5 m high. It is complex and has three entrances. A plan is shown in Figure 3.

There is some confusion around the name of this site. It is believed that the location and original description also apply to "Hot Tip Cave", although this is shown at a different location on the map in Mullan, 2003 (page 52). It is not unknown for the same cave to be recorded under different names by various explorers at different times. It is further possible that the grid reference given for Hot Tip Cave may have been corrupted at some point. Subject to a further discovery at the site indicated for Hot Tip Cave on that location map, it should be accepted that these are the same site, on the north side of Boodaun Bay.



**Figure 2.** *Mermaid's Hole, 2008 extension.*



**Figure 3.** *Plan survey of Joe's Cave, Doolin.*

#### THE DOOLIN VALLEY

FITZ'S CROSS SINK.

Td. Toomullin

Length 0 m.

Altitude 22 m.

Grid Ref. R 0780 9690

In the next field behind the Hotel Doolin, adjacent to the wall and between two bushes some 30 m from the road, a stream sinks into a loose shale deposit. The ground here is obviously very unstable.

## FITZ'S CROSS POT

Length 4 m.

Depth 6 m.

Td. Toomullin

Altitude 20 m.

Grid Ref. R 0765 9690

Several collapses, mostly minor, in the proposed car park of a building site opened into an obvious drainage conduit. The sink for this stream is in the field to the east between two obvious bushes (see above). The largest collapse had no solid rock visible anywhere in the shaft, which has a conservative estimated depth of 6 m. The surrounding "soil" seemed to be a loose matrix of shale fragments. There is a sound of falling water equal to that at the sink. This hole was about 20–30 m south of the Doolin Cave streamway. A drainage pipe has now been installed along the line of the collapses; the large collapse was opened to an unknown depth and large diameter concrete pipes installed. Planning permission has been granted for a building directly above this pot.

During the working of the mine at Toomullin an open hole also quoted as being about 20 feet deep was recorded, adjacent to the explosives store, next to the road.

## POULLIATHUISCE

Depth 4 m.

Altitude 14 m.

Td. Doonmacfelim

Grid Ref. R 0715 9675

This small sink is located in the bank of the Aille river upstream from Fisherstreet bridge; Doolin. To reach this uninspiring cavity approach the river from the green lane that runs past Doonmacfelim Castle; turn downstream for some 15 m. The entrance is on the left bank (looking downstream) beneath a small tree and is covered by small boulders to inhibit bank erosion. It can be easily located by the sound of falling water. The original descent was achieved by sandbagging the entrance from the low flow conditions of the river which were made up of river water and the residual outfall of a grey water source. Any other explorer would be advised to use sandbags as only 10 mm depth of water falling into the pot made breathing during digging a little difficult.

First noticed as a small fist sized hole, the entrance crack was enlarged to admit access into a man sized shaft formed on a short narrow rift. A 4 m pot drops into a bedding plane with a stream crossing the rift from north to south. Concerted digging at the bottom of the pot reached a smooth rock floor clearly exposing a bedding plane passage that is too small to enter.

## NORTHWESTERN SLIEVE ELVA

## POLLBEAGNACOILLTE

Length 20 m.

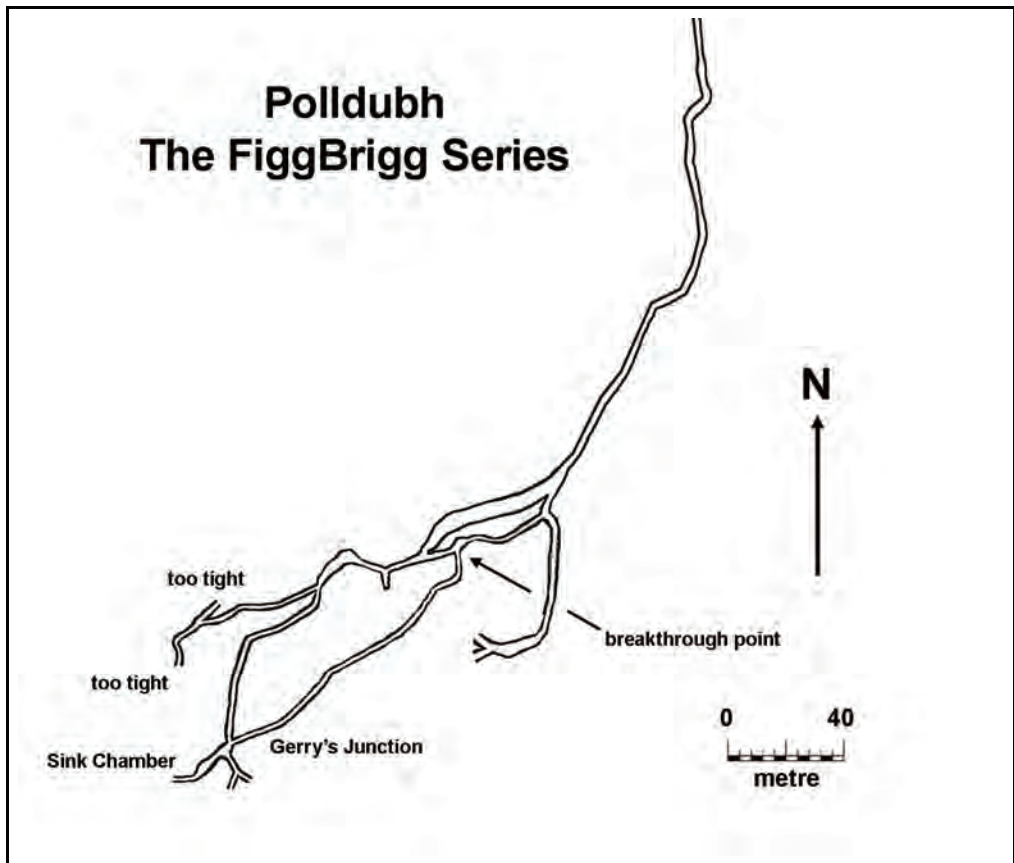
Depth 3 m.

Td. Knockaunmountain

Altitude 210 m.

Grid Ref. M 1330 0265

This site is located within the pine forest to the south-west of Blakes Bridge, 20 m north of the site B4. A shallow gully has three minor depressions that appear to cross the conjectured line of drainage from the Pouldubh system. All three sites were dug, the middle one being the point of access. An awkward narrow entrance rift drops onto confined tight bedding the entry into which is difficult for a long legged or tall person. Four metres of squeezing gives way to a wider area of mud deposit, a route through this was excavated in order to afford further progress. The bedding continues for another 16 m until it meets a boulder choke. This is presently being dug; lack of stacking space is making progress difficult.



**Figure 4.** *Polldubh, the FiggBrigg Series.*

POLLDUBH SOUTH, FiggBrigg Series

Length 2140 m.

Grid Ref. M 1358 0333

Depth 43 m.

Td. Blakesmountain

Altitude 244 m. (B1f)

A chance breakthrough through a shale bank on the right of the Polldubh streamway, some 30 m downstream of the, then, final junction has led to the exploration of an additional several hundred metres of, generally, low bedding caves. The furthest point reached is less than 20 m from the rising at B4. The newly discovered passages can be reached from three points from the old cave, two low beddings on the right and via a dig through the previous terminal shingle choke. The previously know passage to the east has also been extended. The precise layout of the passages is shown in Figure 4. The excavated entrance into the series is 30m along the western passage downstream from the (old) terminal junction, on the right hand side. A five metre squeeze enters a parallel passage. To the north the passage becomes a very low bedding and can be followed for 45 m back to the Pouldubh streamway. To the south the meandering passage is followed ultimately to a four way junction with a stream that runs from

north (left) to the south. En route an obvious muddy passage on the right leads off. Once the squalid mud has been passed a stalactite grill obstruct the passage forcing the explorer into a filthy pool, shortly after the passage enters a small streamway that enters from the north, too tight to follow. Downstream the active streamway is followed to another streamway which also becomes too tight to follow. This part of the system is less than 20 m from the rising at B4.

From the four way junction (Gerry's Junction) the left or northern passage can be followed by swimming through shingle floor for some 20 m to enter the downstream area of the lower end of the passage that can be followed back to the breakthrough point. Straight across at Gerry's Junction a passage enters into a chamber, the main chamber, formed when a large block of limestone dropped out the roof. From the chamber the left hand passage drops into an area of mud where a stream enters and leaves beneath the floor. The right hand passage from the chamber becomes low and connects via a small hole down into the terminal chamber (Sink Chamber).

From Gerry's Junction the right hand passage, down stream if a stream is present, can be followed in a similar way to upstream, by swimming through shingle fill for some 10 metres to a wriggle beneath some boulders. This area sometimes requires digging out. Beyond the passage increase in size to Sink Chamber. Here the stream disappears into a low bedding. Directly above the chamber a small hole above leads via the low bedding back to the main chamber.

The full centre-line survey of the cave has been incorporated in the *Survex* 3D survey model available at <http://www.ubss.org.uk/resources/surveys/survex/Burren.3D> on the Society's website.

## EASTERN POULACAPPLE

### POULACAPPLE POT

Depth 31 m.

Altitude 268 m.

Td. Poulacapple

Grid Ref. M1870 0411

The entrance shaft is surmounted by a timber pallet for hauling purposes which should be treated with suspicion. The southern wall of the entrance rift is contained by concrete blocks; to climb on them would be unwise. The entrance pot has a 3 m aluminium builder's ladder in place, which should not be trusted. From below the hauling platform a natural belay can be used to secure a 10 m electron ladder. About half way down the shaft a constriction is passed. Just below this a narrow rift leads off to the north, hence Northern Series, for 5 m to a squeeze. Beyond this squeeze the area opens into a small chamber at the head of the next 9 m pitch. This very narrow pitch requires a ladder for assistance. At its base, the original exploration broke through a false floor, as this is approached the explorer needs to shuffle sideways to position themselves over the excavated hole. Once through a small chamber is entered with loose boulders. The third pitch leads off from here and once again is very constricted. At the bottom a pool of water, 1 m x 0.6 m, was explored using drain rods. The feel of the area was that it closed down even further. The drainage pipe system has been reconfigured and directs water along the upper passage to discharge it over the second pitch. This is to allow digging to continue at the bottom of the entrance pot. A section through the cave is shown in Figure 5.

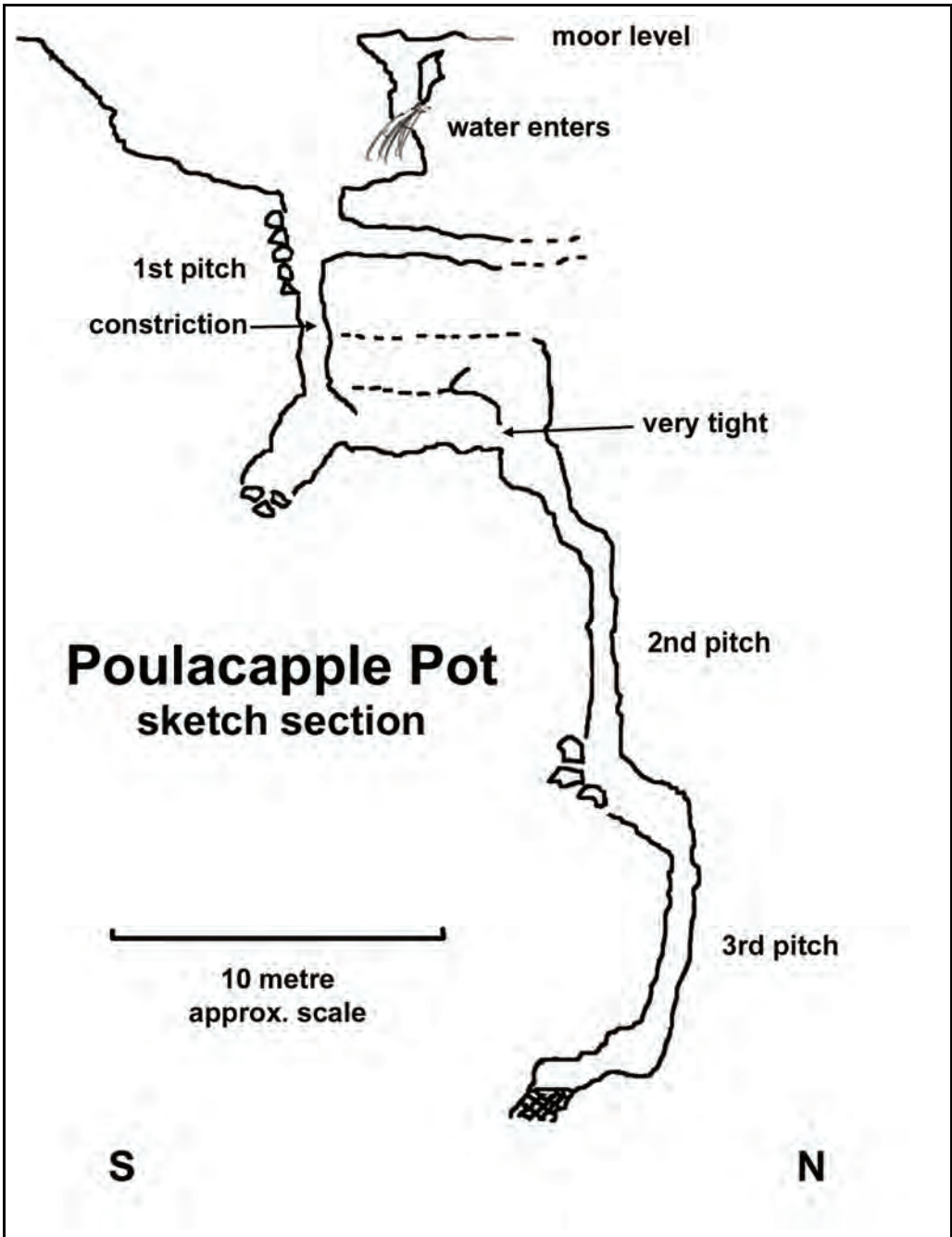


Figure 5. Sketch section of Poulacapple Pot, viewed from the East.



## NORTHWESTERN BURREN

POLLNABEANBEAG (Hole of the small woman ) Td Aghaglinny South  
 Length 9 m. Altitude 220 m.  
 Grid Ref. M 1724 1000  
 A phreatic rift 2 m high by 0.4 m wide at the south end of the cliff in the east wall of the large depression, Poll Berrin, has been followed for 9 m past a tight bend to a low crawl.

GULL CAVE Td Aghaglinny South  
 Length 3 m. Altitude 238 m.  
 Grid Ref. M 1727.0948  
 An obvious enticing entrance at the south end of the col between Poll Berrin and the drop to Formoyle east, on the east side, is only a short gull cave, 1 m high and 0.3 m wide.

## THE NORTH CENTRAL BURREN

POULGARRUA Td. Gortboyheen  
 Length 12 m. Depth 10 m. Altitude 70 m.  
 Grid Ref. M 2717 0499  
 This site, not easy to find without the assistance of the farmer, begins as an open rift which was worked for calcite in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The rectangular opening, 8 m high by 3 m wide, descends into an inclined rift. At a depth of 10 m the rift is narrowed by stalagmite deposits. At this point a smaller rift enters from the northeast that also has heavily calcited walls. The narrow point was enlarged to show that the way on is beneath the lowest, narrowest point. The nature of the dig suggests that it is a long term project.  
 A choked 0.7 m diameter shaft a short distance to the northeast of Poulgarrua has been dug to a depth of 2.5m.

## SOUTH CENTRAL BURREN

THE CAVE OF THE WILD HORSES Td Kilcorney  
 Length 1110 m. (plus approx 75 m. unsurveyed) Depth 76 m.  
 Grid Ref. R 2220 9933 Altitude 103 m.  
 In May 2008, the inlet sump on the east side of Lower Gour Passage was found to be open and was passed to the boulder choke, the previous end of the passage. This was also passed to a hands and knees crawl leading to a large rift T-junction. To the left, a further duck led to a section of walking passage ending in a sump, probably the downstream continuation of the Eastern Series passage. To the right, the passage also enlarges and leads up slope to an area of breakdown. This has not yet been passed.  
 On the same trip, a connection was accidentally found between the Lower Main Series and Frog Passage, thus given a further closed loop to the survey. Much of the cave has been re-surveyed, giving the revised length and depth shown above.  
 The Main and Gour Passage pitches have been fitted with stainless steel permanent hangers which should hopefully stand up to prolonged periods underwater (Sheen, 2008).

## THE LOWER FERGUS RIVER AND ENNIS AREA

## COOLORTA ONE

Td Aughrim

Length 10 m.

Altitude 22 m.

Grid Ref. R 3512 9614

The cave is found on the south side of the lough, about 20 m from the water's edge. An initially roomy, 2 m by 2 m phreatic tube, runs east and drops down towards water level before closing down after about 10 m.

## COOLORTA TWO

Td Aughrim

Length 5 m.

Depth 2 m.

Altitude 27 m.

Grid Ref. R 3585 9652

The entrance to this cave is an obvious hole in the pavement about 200 m from the shore of the lough. A climb down through a 1 m square hole drops into a chamber 4 m by 2 m by 1.5 m high. Boulders on floor appear to be from roof collapse. One wall may be waterworn but it is mainly a collapse chamber. There is no obvious way on, except perhaps by digging directly through the boulder floor.

## LOUGH AUGHRIM

Td Kylecreeen

Length 0 m.

Depth 13 m.

Altitude 17 m.

Grid Ref. R 3600 9730

The lough is best reached via the famine road that heads south from the village of Boston. Walk to the dry stone wall that blocks the road and then turn to the south west and walk for 400 m over the rocks. Swimming on a bearing of 280 m for approximately 200 m, a sheer sided descending pothole can be found, of about 16 m diameter. This pot is 13 m deep and ends in a virtually flat floor covered in fine silt. A search of the walls has found no further passages. It seems that water enters the lough through the silt floor to feed the small stream that flows south from the lough.

## KINVARRA - GORT LOWLANDS

## BLACKWATER RISING

Td Prospect

Length 11 m.

Altitude 24 m.

Grid Ref. M 4516 0013

After a dive of only 11 m, the passage upstream from this major rising becomes impassable. Just beyond a squeeze, the water appears from several narrow rifts, all too tight to enter. The source of this river, at Beagh River Sink (M 4585 0024) remains hopelessly choked with fallen trees.

## BLACKWATER SINK

Td Cloghnakeava

Length 280 m.

Altitude 24 m.

Grid Ref. M 4530 0031

This previously undived sink, which drains to the Cannahowna River at Pollduagh has been followed for 280 m.

**LUG NA CUMAR**

Length 260 m.

Depth 24 m.

Td Coole Demense

Altitude 12m.

Grid Ref. M 4432 0612

At the bottom of the entrance pot is a confused area of bedding. A restricted route through boulders, trending south, can be followed for 110 m to another confused area. The average depth during the dive is 24 m.

**POLLDEELIN SPRING**

Length 820 m.

Depth 45 m.

Td Coole Demense

Altitude 15 m.

Grid Ref. M 4510 0567

The river passage leading towards the sink of the Cannahowna River at Polltoophill has now been followed to a point 820 m from base. The depth varies from 30 m at the previous limit of exploration up to 19 m after 415 m where a small hole leads up into shallower water. After about 460 m the passage drops down to 39 m then down again to 44 m before levelling out. The passage continues and rises again until the last 150 m to the current limit of exploration where the passage has levelled out again at about 36 m depth.

**POLLALOUGHABO**

Length 1700 m.

Depth 25 m.

Td Carrowkilleen

Altitude 15 m.

Grid Ref. M 3684 0802

The boulder blockage 500 m upstream from the dive base has been passed and a further 200 m of line has been laid to the current limit of exploration 1400 m from base. Poor visibility and high water levels have thus far prevented further progress in a very challenging sump.

**POLLDUAGH CAVE**

Length 600 m. (approx).

Depth 34 m.

Td Connahowna

Altitude 24 m.

Grid Ref. M 4449 0029

The main sump in this cave has now been dived beyond the 245 m limit and a connection has been proved with the downstream passage from The Churn (M 4488 0021). The total length of the through trip is 562 m. The maximum depth reached is about 34 m. Some progress has also been made upstream of The Churn (Sherry, 2007).

**POLLONORA HOLES**

Length 900 m. (approx.)

Depth 52 m.

Td Coole Demense and Kiltartan

Altitude 20 m.

Grid Ref. M 448 062

**POLLONORA 7**

The sumps at both ends have been dived, downstream for 7 m and upstream for 15 m. Both sumps lead to above water chambers in precarious loose rock with little prospect of further extensions.

**POLLONORA 10**

This previously unknown site in dense undergrowth is a pool of clear water, though with deep silt deposits. Two passages have been found leading off from close to the pool. The eastward trending passage is choked with clay after only a few metres but the westward trending tunnel has been pushed for 840 m and to a depth of 52 m where the way on was lost in a low and confusing passage.

## POLLTOOPHILL MAIN SINK

Length 250 m.

Depth 20 m. plus

Td Castletown

Altitude 15 m.

Grid Ref. M 4595 0475

The main sink for the Cannahowna River has now been dived for 250 m. The passage drops initially to a depth of 47 m before leveling out at 40 m depth. Route finding has been extremely difficult in poor visibility.

## POLLNACLOIGEANN

Alternative name: Pollnageanh

Length 40 m.

Depth 4 m.

Td Carrownamaddra

Altitude 10 m.

Grid Ref. M3383 0940

This site is just 60 m from Pollnageanh, a large collapse filled with vegetation and standing water. A small depression, that forms a pond in high water, has two underwater passages leading off at the base of a small cliff. The upstream passage leads for a total of 10 m through a spacious chamber and a squeeze to a small chamber, with air space, near the entrance. The way on is underwater but is too tight to follow. The route downstream leads through a series of chambers connected by squeezes. The passage is seen to continue.

Although this cave has been given a new name, Pollnacloigeann, Hole of the Skull, to differentiate it from the large depression, locally Pollnageanh is used to describe both sites.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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