

CAVE NOTES CO. CLARE AND CO. GALWAY, IRELAND, 2015

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* (Mullan 2003) and the previous cave notes papers in 2005, 2008 and 2011.

INTRODUCTION

The Society's publication *The Caves of Co. 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), Bunce (2007), and Boycott *et al* (2008, 2011). This paper describes the results of exploration in the area since 2011. 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.

In this paper, all grid references are quoted in ITM alone. The data is derived from GPS instruments reading ITM and WGS84, or converted from published readings in various other formats. The Irish Ordnance Survey online converter can be found at http://osi.ie/calculators/converter_index.asp?alias=/services/gps-services/co-ordinate-converter. Useful online mapping, which, unfortunately, lacks any grid for quick visual reference or any indication of altitude, can be found at: <http://maps.osi.ie/publicviewer>.

THE WEST COAST

CLIFF CAVE

Td. Ballyryan

Alternative names: Mirror Wall Cave, Pollaillte

Grid Ref: ITM 508866 702839

Length 2800 m (est). Altitude -13 m.

During exploration of this exposed section of the north Clare coastline, searching for a cave previously noted by open water divers, a submarine cave entrance was located that opens into a low sinuous sump. This meanders for 1 km to airspace. The sump is generally between 3 m and 5 m wide and 1.5 m high, with several boulder and silt constrictions, and generally 8–10 m deep. Ahead, the sump continues west a further 300 m descending to a greater depth than the main passage. From the airspace, a dry passage can be followed north for 1 km to where further progress through a low bedding plane is presently obstructed by boulders. Several low inlets and avens in the dry passage remain unexplored. Unlike Mermaids Hole, which is thought to be formed by local percolation water, the passage

development in Cliff Cave appears phreatic with some joint control and some submerged stalagmites have been noted. (Kelly, 2014 a, b and c; Warny and Marek, 2014)

Exploration of this site can only be undertaken during extended periods of calm sea conditions; it is entirely possible for the ill-prepared to become trapped in the cave for a protracted period.

FRAGGLE ROCK

Td. Glasha Beg

S10d

Alternative name: Fraggles Rock Resurgence,
 Grid Ref: ITM 507196 699718
 Length 95 m. Altitude 8 m.

This obscure ancient resurgence is situated in the terraced cliff a little way south of Lackglass Cave. It is formed on a horizontal joint in the bedding where an unknown amount of movement has occurred, with slickensides visible in the calcite fill and beddings. Deposits encountered during digging contain frequent igneous and metamorphic pebbles and cobbles, almost certainly derived from glacial deposits from Connemara, suggesting that the cave developed prior to the Munsterian Ice Age, circa 130,000 BP - 300,000 BP.

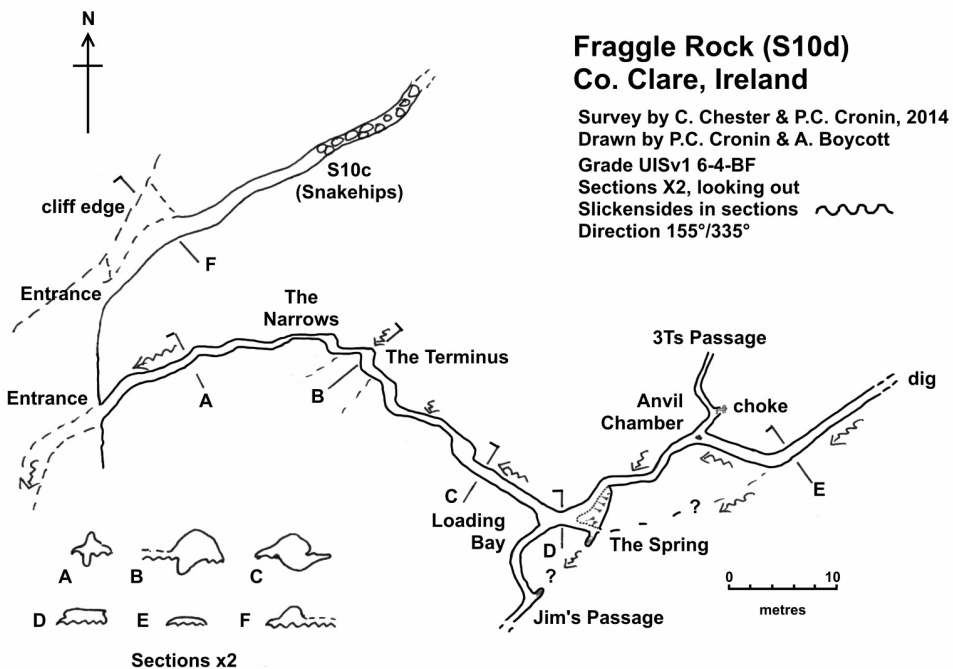


Figure 1. Plan survey of Fraggles Rock.

A meandering streamway some 1.2 m high and 1 m wide passes several minor wet weather inlets. After 60 m a passage enters from the left carrying the main stream. To the right, the main passage continues as a wriggle over ancient stream deposits for 8 m to where the way on becomes too choked to follow. Back at the junction, to the left, a lowering ceiling creates a crawl for 17 m into Anvil Chamber. The obvious bedding, carrying the stream, continues for 10 m to the current working face (at the beginning of January 2015), obstructed by large limestone blocks and accumulated stream debris. To the left of the bedding, a small passage can be followed for 3 m before it becomes completely choked with what appears to be sea cobbles. Here on the left, 3T's Passage is a tight wriggle for 16 m to a choke. The entire cave was filled with alternate compacted stream and sea debris. Enthusiastic digging continues (Kelly, 2013).

It is inadvisable to enter Fraggie Rock during rough sea conditions as waves often break across the wide terrace, entering the cave for significant distances.

The associated but smaller phreatic tube, S10c, is 8 m to the north on the same bench. It can be followed for 25 m to a choke. The passage has formed in the slickensides layer but has no associated trench, and has been named Snakehips by the diggers.

The large sea cave, Lackglass Cave collapsed during the storm of 5th January 2014 along a vertical calcite joint. One of the boulders has a 15m long portion of phreatic tube on its upper surface. (Cronin, 2014)

UISCE GÉATA

Td. Ballyvoe

Alternative name: Watergate

Grid Ref: ITM 507046 699454 (Seaside entrance)

ITM 507070 699431 (Oubliette entrance)

Length 80 m. Altitude 0.5 m (Seaside). 3 m (Oubliette).

The small, low entrance is located at the southern limit of the wide limestone bench that extends south from where the path from the car parking at the end of the track just north of Aran View Hotel meets the dry valley running seawards from Pollnafearbui. As this entrance, Seaside, is regularly submerged, a second, previously boulder-choked, entrance, Oubliette, was created in the small bay some 30 m further south. From Seaside a crawl slopes gently down meandering for 15 m to a junction. To the north a low crawl can be followed for 11 m to a choked cross joint, where daylight can be seen through narrow beddings. From Seaside junction, the passage continues for 12 m to where the state of the tide produces a short duck. Beyond the duck Oubliette entrance chamber is reached. This sunlit area narrows swiftly to form a beautiful scalloped phreatic passage, between 1-3 m wide and 2-4 m high, heading east, directly inland. After 20 m the passage terminates in a diggable choke of small sea cobbles (Kelly, 2013).

Almost half the cave can be explored via Oubliette. This entrance is accessed by walking south along the top of the cliff from the dry valley below Pollnafearbui for 250 m until a small bay is encountered. Descending the obvious crack keeping westward, is an exposed route requiring a bold step to reach the top of a lower terrace. Continue the descent, almost to sea level, then turn east to cross the slippery boulder field. Oubliette is located at the bottom of the obvious cliff face at the rear right hand side of the boulder field. The cave is entered through a tight vertical wriggle. The use of a short 3 m ladder and a long tether is recommended.

Entry via Seaside is problematic; a minor swell, even during low spring tides, can cause the unwary explorer breathing difficulties. A successful trip requires local knowledge. Before entering Seaside it is wise to rig Oubliette as an emergency exit, and doing so also

ensures it has not become blocked by sea debris. High spring tides and rough conditions can also submerge Oubliette.

Oubliette Entrance is currently (March 2015) blocked after the winter storms and is unlikely to be easy to clear. Seaside Entrance should only be attempted in calm weather at extreme low spring tides as no emergency exit is available.

The detached house-sized boulder just north of Seaside entrance has 11 m of enterable cave passage at its base, where two entrances combine and lead to a choke.

UISCE GÉATA 2

Td. Ballyvoe

Alternative name: Watergate 2

Grid Ref: ITM 507058 699469

Length 10 m. Altitude 1 m.

A crawling entrance 20 m north of Watergate Seaside entrance on the same bench leads to a junction after 5 m Right is too tight after 3 m, straight on is choked after 2 m.

COOLAGH RIVER VALLEY

POULFAOIC AISLEAN

Td. Ballynalacken

Alternative name: The Cave below the Castle

Grid Ref: ITM 510030 700458

Length 0 m. Depth 2 m. Altitude 110 m.

Digging here has ceased at the request of the landowner, as the extent of the collapse threatened to engulf both the road and the diggers, and the site has been backfilled.

POULNAGEE

Td. Poulmagun

B12

Grid Ref: ITM 510930 700465

Length 325 m. Altitude 122 m.

The narrow rift at the entrance has been passed to enter a short passage leading to a 3 m pitch into approximately 300 m of cave ending in a boulder choke. There are several inlets and two sumps. (Cooper, 2012; Kelly, 2012) The boulder choke has recently been passed to regain open passage. A 5 m free climb regains the stream which sumps after 25 m (Q. Cooper, *pers com.* 2015).

THE NORTH CENTRAL BURREN

CHRISTY'S CAVE

Td. Poul nabrucky

Grid Ref: ITM 521910 701442

Length 12 m. Altitude 135 m.

This small cave ends in a collapse with a voice connection to the surface. There is a shell midden and a low wall close to the entrance. (Lavender-Duncan *et al*, 2013)

J R CAVE

Td. Gleninsheen

Grid Ref: ITM 524561 704137

Length 5 m. Altitude 220 m.

A short relict cave at the south end of the depression immediately south of the main Mill Sink depression, runs for 5 m to a bend to a second collapse entrance, only passable by small dogs.

MONEEN CAVE

Td. Killoghill

Alternative names: Killoghill Cave, "The hole in John Davoren's wall"

Grid Ref: ITM 525607 706993

Length 20 m. Altitude 166 m.

Following the finding of a human skull, an antler hammerhead and pottery fragments by the cave diggers, this site was excavated in 2011 by archaeologists from the Sligo Institute of Technology. The antler has been dated to 2139-1895 BC and the pottery proved to be Bronze Age. The rest of the skeleton, found separated from the skull, proved to be an adolescent boy and dated to between 1450 and 1800 AD. There is no evidence of permanent occupation (Casserly and Dowd, 2011; Dowd, 2013).

STURGADDY CAVE

Td. Eantybeg North

Alternative Names: Sturgadan Cave, Sturgaddre Cave, Robbers Cave of Sturgaddy

Grid Ref: ITM: 52447 69992

Length: 0 m. Altitude: 120 m.

This cave is reputed to be at the southern end of the gorge containing Poulawillin Cave (Mullan, 2003, p180) and is mentioned in Westropp (1911, 1999) in passing as if it were a well-known landmark. It is marked on the 19th century historic 6 inch maps, from which the exact grid reference was measured, but it does not appear on the Cassini map or the 25 inch map. A determined search by the authors and enquiries of the landowner has revealed nothing. The grid reference is in a sloping area of boulders in mature hazel scrub with no sign of cave passage. The site may be a lost souterrain, but the description Robbers Cave by Westropp might imply something larger than an emergency hideout.

NORTHEASTERN BURREN

ST. MAC DUACH'S CAVE

Td. Keelhilla

Grid Ref: ITM 32862 04225

Length 4 m. Altitude 160 m.

This is a pseudokarst cave in poorly-cemented scree against a large boulder, width 2 m, height at entrance 2 m. It is a scheduled archaeological monument, along with a small oratory and well associated with St. Coleman MacDuagh, who is reputed to have lived here as a hermit for seven years around 620AD (Fahy, 1911).

SOUTHEASTERN BURREN

DAITHI'S CAVE

Td. Sheshodonnell West

Grid Ref: ITM 525313 695819
 Length 30 m. Altitude 110 m.

This remnant cave is well used by badgers. The two entrances lie in a limestone mound in a particularly dense area of hazel scrub (Lavender-Duncan, J. *et al*, 2013).

POLL GONZO

Td. Rannagh East

Grid Ref: ITM 528286 700708
 Length 450m Depth 89m Altitude 116m

The cave is located 4 km north of Carron village. The entrance is a collapse doline and is difficult to find in hazel scrub. It is named after one of the landowner's dogs. The extensions on the southern side have been described in Boycott *et al* 2011. On the northern side, a short passage leads to a very loose boulder choke, which has been dug vertically for 10 m to enter a low crawl to a small, well-decorated chamber after 20 m. A small dry stream course can be followed for 6 m to a junction; right leads to a bedding cave that becomes too tight after 6 m, left leads to two small chambers, but again both close down (Bunce, 2013a, b, c).

RAT TRAP HOLE

Td. Teeskagh

Grid Ref: ITM 528217 796104
 Length 25 m. Altitude 113 m.

A choked phreatic passage 3 m in diameter with evidence of human habitation at the entrance has been dug out through a series of short constrictions to a collapse feature after 25m (O'Connell, T., 2013 and Lavender-Duncan *et al*, 2013).

THE UPPER FERGUS RIVER AREA

GOAT TRAP CAVE

Td. Crossard

Grid Ref: ITM 525817 691366
 Length 8 m. Altitude 60 m.

A 1m high entrance leads south in phreatic passage to a 3m drop to a small choked rift (Lavender-Duncan, 2011).

THE LOWER FERGUS RIVER AND ENNIS AREA

MOYMORE QUARRY RIVER CAVE

Td. Moymore

Grid Ref: ITM 533254 685202
 Length: 20 m. Altitude: 62 m.

A sizeable passage, 10 m high and 5 m wide, has been broken into by the now disused quarry. The entrance, which has been backfilled by the quarry, takes a large stream which rises indeterminately through the quarry floor. The passage can be accessed by ducking under the boulders in the stream, or hanging a 3 m ladder from the highest point of the entrance into 10 m of stream cave which rapidly breaks down into a muddy boulder choke.

THUNDERHOLES

Td. Magowna

Grid Ref: 529690 682564

Length 20 m. Altitude 32 m.

An open rift close to Poulmore Sink in Toonagh, uncovered by the floods in 2010, reaches the stream from the sink after 20m. Further progress will require dry weather (Cooper, 2011).

The probable resurgence is about 1.5 km away, and unnamed on the 6" maps, but locally called Poll na Neagh. It is found at ITM 530460 681950.

EAST CLARE

DANE'S HOLE

Td. Ahaclare

Alternative Names: Poulnalecka, Poll na Leice

Grid Ref: ITM 552867 671970

Length: 50 m. Altitude: 25 m.

This small fossil cave is in the banks of the Ahaclare River in Poulnalecka Wood, located 4 km west of Broadford. It is an important hibernation site for Lesser Horseshoe Bats. The entrance chamber is 2 m wide and less than 2 m high. The cave ends in a sump, but does not appear to flood regularly.

SOUTH GALWAY

POULAGOONA

Td. Derrygoolin North

Alternative Names: Poll an Ghamhna (Hole of the calf), Poulbroderick, Dane's Den, Poll a Mhadra (Fox hole)

Grid Ref: ITM 567615 693278

Length 10 m. Altitude 280 m.

This is a short cave in sandstone on the north bank of a tributary of the Coos River on the south flank of Scalp Mountain. A passage 1 m high by 1.5 m wide can be followed for 10 m to a small low chamber. A low extension into a parallel passage on the left leads back to a choked exit to the surface. The flat floor is currently flooded owing to a build up of turf at the entrance, but has allegedly been used as a place of refuge for centuries, notably by monks from Inis Cealtra in Lough Derg when under attack by Vikings in 836 AD, and various outlaws, herdsmen and priests. It is also associated with a bizarre legend quoted by G.H. Kinahan on his visit in 1861 (Foot, 1863):

On the slope of Scalp, near the detached tract of Silurian country, there is a cave in yellow and reddish sandstone, geologically remarkable, as it does not appear on a line of joint and how it was formed is hard to conjecture. It is locally called Poula Broderick, and is supposed to be the residence of a fairy in charge of a treasure concealed under the water of a lake in the interior. This good person has taken the form of a turkey-cock, who floats at the surface of the lake and if adventurers seek to deprive it of its charge, it immediately rises above the water and with its wings raises a mighty rushing wind, so powerful that it will extinguish the strongest flame that can be lighted. When I visited I had not the pleasure of meeting with the guardian spirit.

The cave was located in local guidebooks written by Gerald Madden, and was shown to us by the author (Madden, 2008, 2010, 2012).

A site marked on the 6" map as Fox Den about 360 m north west of Poulagoona at ITM 567439 693615, altitude 310 m, is a sandstone hillock with several fissures and small caves at its base. One is passable for 4 m, all are in use by wildlife.

The closest parking place is on the rough track running north from Mountshannon at ITM 560915 691900.

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