

CAVE NOTES: COUNTY CLARE, IRELAND

by

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ABSTRACT

The details of the findings of the Society's expedition to Co. Clare in September 2016 are presented. Survey work was carried out in Cullaun Zero, Cullaun Zero-One, Cullaun One and Carren Mine Cave. Weather conditions did not allow further survey work in the Coolagh River Cave during the trip.

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective was to continue the work of resurveying the Coolagh river cave from the previous year's expedition (Gregg and Podesta, 2016) but unfortunately this was not possible. Recurrent rain resulted in the cave flooding frequently and becoming either too dangerous or impassable throughout the duration of the expedition. Efforts were instead focused in western Poulacapple on part of the Cullaun series of caves; Cullaun Zero-One, Cullaun Zero and Cullaun One. The numbering system starts in the north-north-west, travelling south-south-east. As Cullaun One was discovered first in 1951, the numbering system was obliged to go 'backwards' when Zero and Zero-One were discovered some years later. The water from both the shallow streams of Cullaun Zero-One and Cullaun Zero feeds into Cullaun One, which resurges at Killeany Rising. Presented here are detailed surveys and descriptions for these caves. The re-survey of Cullaun One is approximately half complete, covering the upstream section and downstream as far as the first pitch.

A small amount of work was also carried out in the south-eastern Burren, updating information for Badger Hole, Carran Mine Cave and Tullycommon Cave. These descriptions are presented here together with the survey produced of Carran Mine Cave.

SURVEY TECHNIQUES AND PRESENTATION

Many of the caves in this area were first surveyed in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, reliable clinometers which could be easily read to small angles were not readily available. This fact, allied to the low gradient of the caves, meant that slope angles were either estimated or ignored. This is particularly so for the Cullaun series of caves. That this deficit can easily be remedied using Distox instruments and modern data collection techniques, see for example Mullan and Atkinson (2013) is one of the reasons that a full resurvey of these caves is desirable, but is by no means the only one. In the section on cave survey in the Society's first book on the area, Tratman (1969) explained that the surveys there presented were "more than just simple line-surveys" and needed to be read in conjunction with the large numbers of sections also drawn. The justification was that to produce a plan drawing showing any meaningful amount of detail was counter-productive. The example given was of Cullaun 3 where a plan showing the passage width at 1/10 of an inch would be 15 feet in length.

This situation is no longer as relevant to publication as it then was. While the caves have not noticeably changed in size, the way in which the survey can be presented has. Therion, the program currently used by the Society's surveyors, will output drawings in pdf format. These drawings are produced as raster files which means that they scale up and down on screen without loss of detail through pixellation. Thus a single file can show the entire cave, as more or less a single line, but can also show specific areas in significant detail.

Obviously, the files cannot be published within a paper such as this. A decision has therefore been taken to publish, in these papers full surveys of only smaller, less extensive, caves and for the linear stream caves to only print relevant screen shots to highlight specific points. The full surveys will be made available, as pdf files for download on the Society's website. For this paper this is the case for Cullaun Zero-One and Cullaun Zero. The links for each survey are given in text below, or they can be found from our index page at http://www.ubss.org.uk/cave_survey_archive.php

The Cullaun One survey and the re-survey of the Coolagh River Cave will be made available in the same way once they have been completed.

WESTERN POULACAPPLE

CULLAUN ZERO-ONE

ITM 518100 703223

Altitude: 240 m.

Alternative name: Gaffer's Gulch

Total Length: 82 m.

Depth: 5 m.

Heading north along the road from the Cullaun Zero entrances, take the first right. At the point when the road flattens out a number of bushy hollows will be visible north of a wall. The entrance lies within the nearest hollow. There are several parking spaces at intervals along the side of the road.

A somewhat muddy 4 m entrance pitch is easily free-climbed, into the stream-way. Upstream is a small (5 m) section which becomes impassably tight. Behind the waterfall, downstream leads to around 80 m of passage. This starts as crawl, before the upper part of the canyon passage opens, allowing crab-walking. The passage eventually becomes impassably narrow.

The completed plan survey of this cave may be found at:
<http://www.ubss.org.uk/resources/surveys/survey/CullaunZeroOne.pdf>

CULLAUN ZERO

ITM (Entrance 1) 517975 702578

Altitude: 222 m.

ITM (Entrance 4) 517910 702327

Altitude: 218 m.

Total surveyed length: 387 m.

Depth 7 m.

Owing to the lack of significant landmarks, directions to the entrances are vague and GPS coordinates are of greater use. Entrance 1 is located within the woodland approximately 50 m east of a shallow dip in the road. A clearing with several wooden posts can be found and followed and the entrance is approximately 10 m north of this clearing. A shallow hole in the surrounding moss, entrance 1 is easily missed and is probably best found from inside the cave, as the other entrances are easier to locate.

Upstream of entrance 1 a small stream passage goes for a short distance, with many unroofed sections. Downstream of entrance 1, the stream passage continues for 120 m until reaching entrance 2, which can be found approximately 20 m west of the road. It is an

unassuming muddy slot, from which access to the passage is constricted by a large boulder within the stream below the entrance. The passage continues past a small skylight; Entrance 2a, before reaching an impassable choke. This can be circumvented using entrance 3, which drops in just past the choke.

30 m south of entrance 2, entrance 3 is similar in appearance and drops down a few feet into the passage, which heads south for 100 metres, past many dripping water inlets, to entrance 4, an area of collapsed canyon. The meandering passage has several inches of water running through it and alternates between a low stoop and a crawl.

Entrance 4 is found due north Cullaun Cottage next to a dry stone wall approximately 60 m south-west of entrance 3. Following the stream south, the passage narrows to a sideways crawl. After 10 m the stream disappears under a false floor though the passage may be followed for a further 50 m until a floor to ceiling calcite straw halts any further progress.

The now inaccessible lower section of the cave is said to undergo a change in character, with a 2 m drop and 4 m pitch leading to a small chamber. A further 45 m of arduous scalloped passage leads on eventually to a false floor obstruction (Watson, 1964). It is unfortunate both that this part of the cave is no longer accessible and that no passage directions were recorded by the original explorers as the length given would place the explored end very close to where the water from the cave is next seen, in Cullaun One (see below).

The completed plan survey of this cave may be found at <http://www.ubss.org.uk/resources/surveys/survex/CullaunZero.pdf>

CULLAUN ONE

ITM 518087 702456

Altitude: 228 m.

Alternative names: Pollcullaun, Teenagers' Cave.

Total surveyed length: 1819 m.

Depth: 35 m.

Estimated total length: 2610 m.

There are several parking places on the side of the road near to the cave, north of Cullaun farmhouse. A long grassy mound, which may be the remains of a wall, cuts east through the forest from the road. This should be followed to a clearing and shake hole on the left. Just past this clearing the main entrance can be found down a pothole amongst trees.

A 4 m climb leads down into an unroofed oxbow to the main stream way. A couple of metres upstream is an easy connection, ducking under an arch. The downstream connection is somewhat tighter, but better decorated with calcite. A smaller and muddier entrance to the cave also connects into this oxbow, 15 m south of the main entrance.

The main stream-way consists of a standing height passage with a consistently low water level flowing through it. Upstream, it breaks down into multiple layers of passage, on three levels. These routes interconnect in several places, with some of the lower sections completely full of water. There are also several skylights and alternative entrances throughout the upstream section, however these can be difficult to find on the surface. The upstream section consists of around 400 m of passage.

When travelling downstream, a large boulder has immediately to be climbed over before the passage continues for 60 m to the downstream end of the entrance oxbow. A further 50 m, past a small oxbow on the left, leads to top of a short waterfall which can be climbed down easily in two stages. This opens out to the slightly impressive First Vertical Feature, a 10 m high aven, marking the first major change in the cave's depth.

The stream-way continues south, narrowing again to person-sized width. Almost immediately a large boulder is encountered, which can be easily scrambled over. After 35 m, the start of a large muddy oxbow is passed on the left. This becomes smaller and smaller and is

too tight to pass in its middle. The other end is encountered after 60 m more of walking size stream-way.

After a further 40 m two impassably small tributaries enter on the right, the Two Pissers, off-shoots from the Main Tributary, encountered a further 20 m on. The water from these is the combined streams of Cullaun Zero and Cullaun Zero-One (Mullan, 2003). The Main Tributary can be followed as a wet flat-out crawl It was surveyed for 20 m, and is possibly worth investigating further, as this point lies very close to the end of the nearby Cullaun Zero Cave.

The main stream passage continues fairly uneventfully, passing a large stooping-size oxbow on the right after 180 m which reconnects after 50 m. After a further 130m another long but flat-out crawling sized oxbow is encountered, Scotland. Also of note is that the stream way passage ceiling lowers to a stoop just past this point, and calcite formations begin to appear in quantity.

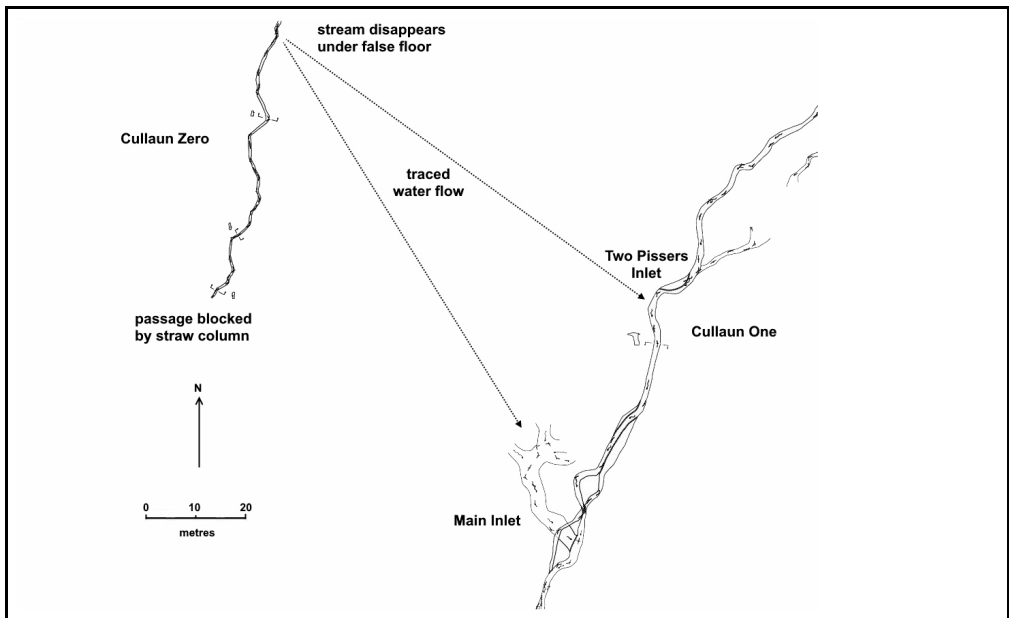


Figure 1. Plan showing hydrological links between Cullaun Zero and Cullaun One.

The exit from Scotland is passed after 40 m, and another 60 m later an inlet on the left is passed, where the water from Jam Pot Swallet enters the cave. This sharp T-shaped crawl was followed for 50 m, and will need revisiting to conclude. A small and tight oxbow links the crawl back to the main streamway, 30 m upstream.

After a further 100 m, passing some impressive calcite oxbow-flows, the Second Vertical Feature is reached, which is an easy climb down a short waterfall. From here the passage meanders for 40 m, with shelving beds, easily traversed over, to the Third Vertical Feature. This aven holds several formations and some old graffiti.

From here the passage lowers to a wet crawl, which is reasonably wide and very well decorated. After 50 m a small oxbow on the right is taken to avoid an impassable duck.

Clambering over and under some boulders links back to the stream which then flows down a 5 m deep pitch, the 3rd Pot. This marks the limit of the resurvey.

SOUTH-EASTERN BURREN

CARRAN MINE CAVE

ITM 527370 698298

Altitude: 149 m.

Total Length: 153 m.

Depth: 3 m.

The entrance can be found just north of a well-used cattle track, with undergrowth partly obscuring the view.

A rectangular, mined, entrance leads into the mine/cave. The passage runs mostly straight and flat for 50 m before a junction is reached with three routes on. A step down to the right leads to a short continuation of mined passage which soon terminates, with evidence of bats inhabiting the cave. A less obvious slot at floor level on the left of the main passage leads to a crawl into a bedding plane. Straight on leads to the rest of the mined passage.

The bedding plane starts as a flat-out crawl, but quickly enlarges and reaches a junction with three routes on. The middle and right route become standing height before abruptly ending. The left route remains a crawl and also soon ends, but with a badger skeleton, confirming previous habitation by badgers.

The remainder of the mined passage continues for 30 m before bending left. The bottom of an old mine entrance shaft is soon encountered. A large pile of junk and rubbish blocks access to the shaft, but can be passed to reach a couple more metres of passage to the termination of the mine.

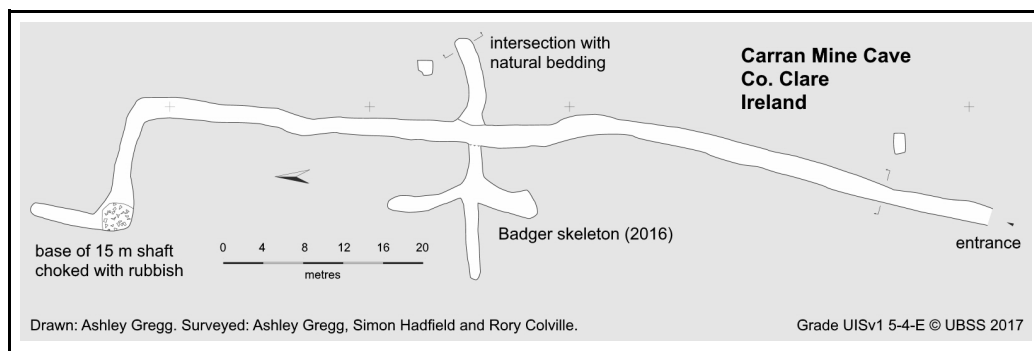


Figure 1. Plan Survey of Carran Mine Cave.

The top of the shaft, which is still open, can be found fairly easily in a field due north-north-west of the entrance by a large spoil heap. The shaft was previously noted as being a 12 m deep entrance to the cave (Mullan, 2003), but now no-longer provides access.

BADGER HOLE

ITM 452888 569624

Altitude 120 m.

Length: 10 m.

A small horizontal slot at the base of a large cliff, Badger Hole can be found by following the Lough Avalla Farm looped trail (purple arrow) towards the given coordinates. Upon reaching the cave it was obvious that badgers continued to inhabit the cave and that

exploration would be inappropriate. It should be noted that the strong draught of previous years (Boycott and Wilson, 1983) was not observed.

TULLYCOMMON CAVE

ITM 528642 696925

Altitude: 150 m.

Length 10 m.

The entrance is a small hole in the side of a 10 m cliff, just above the light forest at the base of the cliff. A watering hole marks the field in front of the trees at the cliff's base.

A crawling passage soon narrows on top of muddy and gritty soil. Digging would be required to gain further progress into the cave which can be seen to continue for a short distance before view is obscured. Traces of goat or sheep bones can be found in the mud.

CONCLUSIONS

A total of 2441m of cave passage was surveyed, despite not being able to continue work in the Coolagh River Cave due to the exceptionally wet conditions. Three complete surveys, for Carran Mine Cave, Cullaun Zero and Cullaun Zero-One, were produced. About half of the resurvey to modern standards of Cullaun One was carried out. Descriptions for the visited caves have been updated. Of particular note is the now inaccessible lower section of Cullaun Zero. GPS coordinates were also updated, to a higher standard of accuracy, which should make finding the caves much easier in the future.

There is still much to be done however. The resurveying of the Coolagh River Cave is a relatively large project which remains to be completed. The lower section of Cullaun One will also need finishing, as well as investigating the Main Tributary and Jam Pot Swallet inlet more thoroughly. It is hoped to complete these projects by 2019 in time for the publication of the next edition of *The Caves of County Clare and South Galway* (Mullan, 2003).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The expedition members, Chris Burnley, Rory Colville, Tom Crowther, Ashley Gregg, Simon Hadfield, Jacob Podesta and James Vallins are grateful to the Tratman Fund of the University of Bristol for financial assistance. The surveying equipment part funded by the Alumni Foundation of the University of Bristol and the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund continues to be put to good use.

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