

## CAVE NOTES: COUNTY MAYO, IRELAND

by

SIMON HADFIELD

### ABSTRACT

Details are presented of the cave sites investigated by the Society on a visit to Co. Mayo in June 2012. A survey, description and location information for Ballymaglancy cave and location of one newly investigated potential cave site are included.

### INTRODUCTION

Many of the caves of Co. Mayo, Ireland, have been known for a number of years, but although some have been described in print on a number of occasions (see especially Gilhuys and Parker, 1972) no systematic work has been carried out in the area since the publication of J.C. Coleman's report in 1955 (Coleman, 1955). It was decided, therefore, that the Society would undertake the necessary fieldwork to enable the caves of this area to be properly described and published. Unfortunately, a week long stay in June 2012 coincided with some of the worst summer weather recorded in the area, making a number of sites impassable or nearly so, and thus preventing most of the planned underground survey work being carried out. A full survey of Ballymaglancy Cave was finally completed by team members transferring from Co. Mayo to Co. Clare at the end of the visit, but almost no other work could be completed. One new potential cave site, Toorbuck Sink at NGR M 0703 8152, was found to have been back-filled by the landowner.

### BALLYMAGLANCY CAVE

Alternative name: Pollwalter.

Length: 726 m.

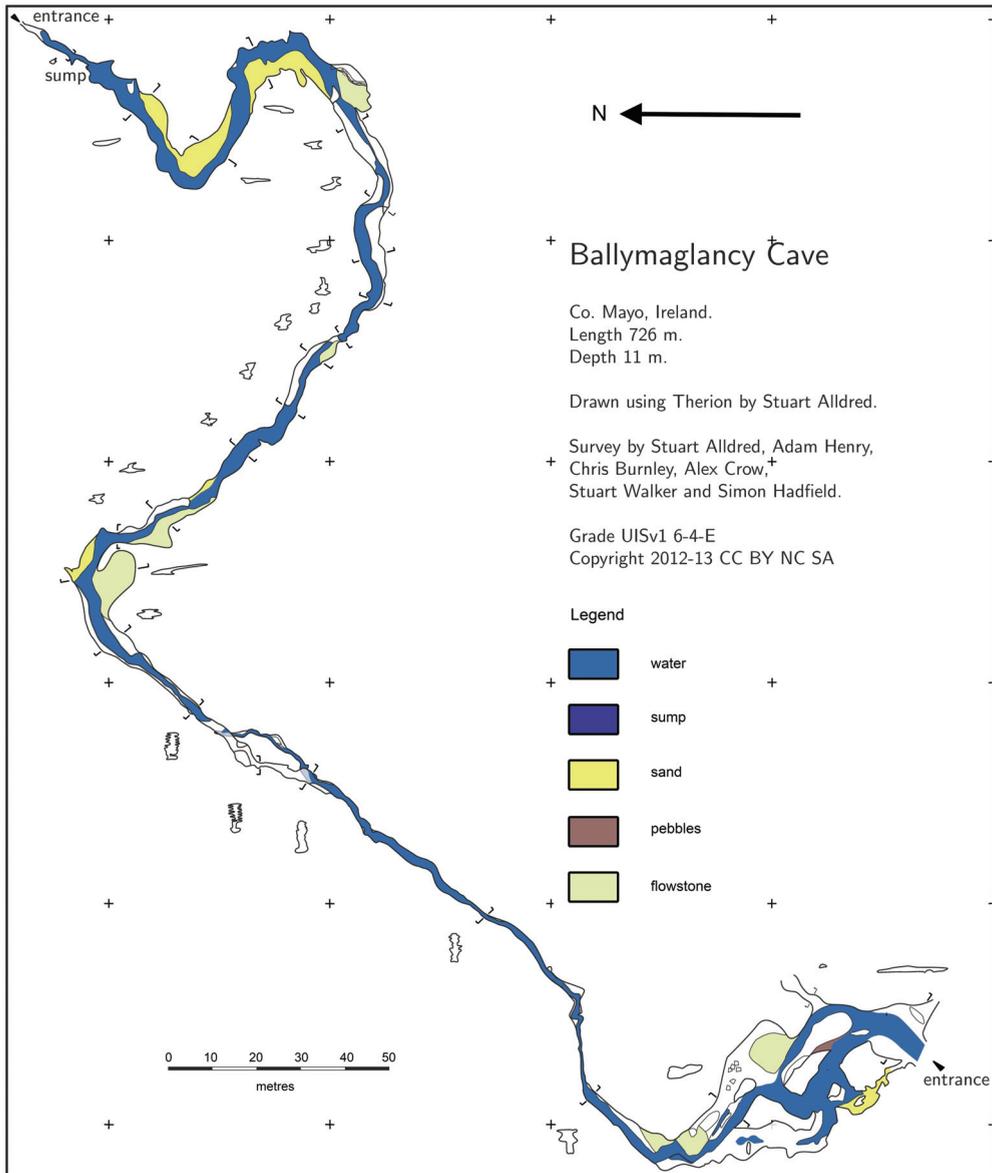
Grid Ref: M 1132 5492

Depth: 11 m.

Altitude: 36 m.

This cave was first explored and surveyed by J.C. Coleman and N.J. Dunnington in 1951 (Coleman, 1955, 1965). Subsequent exploration has reached a sump and also opened a second entrance just above the sump (Farr, 2002.). Later dye tracing work described by Gilhuys and Parker (1972) shows that the stream that rises and then sinks again by the second entrance is indeed the cave stream, and it has also been traced through the caves of Pollpuisin, Pigeon Hole, Wolves' Hole and Pseudo-Priests Hole on the way to its eventual rising at or near Cong.

There are two tracks that meet the road through Ballymaglancy close to the cave entrance. There is ample space to park on the verge on the south side of the road. It is recommended that visitors to the cave call at the cottage approximately 100 m to the east of the entrance to inform the landowner that they are visiting the cave. Starting from where the more westerly track meets the road head east. After crossing the river it is possible to enter the corner of a field by crossing a dry stone wall where the fence that runs along it ends. Walk northwards along the river bank for approximately 150 m through a gateway and the river can be



**Figure 1.** Plan survey of Ballymaglancy Cave.

seen flowing into the cave. Whilst this cave is thought to be less flood prone than other caves in the area it still floods to the roof on a regular basis and should not be entered in wet weather.

At the cave entrance, the river spreads out over a gravel floor in a wide, low-roofed bedding plane. There are a number of possible routes through this section of the cave. The simplest is to follow the river downstream until a more definite channel is reached. The channel gradually deepens to approximately waist depth and the noise from a small waterfall can be heard.

Historically, a wooden platform was constructed in this part of the passage to enable visitors to view the cave. Sizeable wooden planks can be found in multiple locations further downstream and it is likely that these are the remains of the platform.

As the stream gradually descends into a more incised channel it is possible to continue either at the level of the stream or by traversing at a higher level. Continuing to follow the stream leads to a 3 m high waterfall. Progress further into the cave can be made by climbing down the waterfall, or at several points immediately beyond it, and following the course of the stream. It is possible to continue along the passage at a higher level for approximately 40 m before calcite flows prevent further progress. These formations are best viewed from stream level and care must be taken when passing through this area of the cave.

Progress is made by continuing to follow the water downstream. The vertical limestone walls of the incised channel are fretted into a series of almost interlocking fragments of rock with occasional spurs and shelves completely crossing the fissure.

There are many pools and mud banks and progress down parts of the streamway is hampered by the presence of numerous small pots and ribs of rock crossing the channel that have the potential to cause twisted ankles and potentially send the unwary caver face first into the water.

The passage is well decorated in parts, principally by pale flowstone that cascades down the sides of the passage. Care must be taken to avoid damage to the formations as progress is made downstream.

The stream eventually descends into a water chute while the main passage continues as a dry oxbow that rejoins the stream further down. It is possible to continue to follow the stream down the water chute to a sump. Immediately preceding the sump a hole in the ceiling leads into the dry oxbow.

The passage height gradually decreases and the passage begins to take on the appearance of a bedding plane cave with the stream meandering between mud banks. Flood debris can be observed at roof level throughout much of the lower part of the cave.

The original description of the cave noted a series of grooves running parallel to the stream in one of the mud banks. These are likely to be the result of scouring that took place when water levels were higher.

As progress continues further into the cave, the stream becomes deeper and slower and it is necessary to wade. Eventually the stream sumps and a diving line can be observed disappearing into the murk. This sump, a low bedding with some obstructions to be avoided has been passed after about 25 m to reach daylight at the resurgence. Leaving the stream at the start of the sump, a short narrow muddy passage continues to the surface. This small entrance is almost immediately above the resurgence and some 4-5 m higher. The stream sinks again almost immediately. The second entrance is 250 m north-east of the primary entrance in a wooded area at the side of the road. It is usually covered by flagstones, to protect stock.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The members of the expedition, Stuart Alldred, Alex Crow, Amy Matthews, Adam Henry, Anya Keatley, Stuart Walker, Simon Hadfield, Sarah Rae, Cameron Burren and Chris Burnley are grateful to the Tratman Fund of the University of Bristol and the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund for financial assistance. They would also like to thank David Drew for the provision of much useful information about potential new sites in the area.

## REFERENCES

- COLEMAN, J.C. 1955. Caves in the Cong Area of Galway and Mayo. *Irish Geography*. **3**. 94-106.
- COLEMAN, J.C. 1965. *The Caves of Ireland*. Tralee. Anvil Books.
- FARR, M. 2002. A Ballymaglancy through-trip. *Descent*. **168**. 9.
- GILHUYS, D. and PARKER, R. 1973. Caves in the Cong Area. *Irish Speleology*. **2**. 2. 19-31.

S.Hadfield  
U.B.S.S.  
simon.hadfield@live.co.uk