

## CAVE NOTES: COUNTY MAYO, IRELAND

By

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### ABSTRACT

The 2014 expedition continued ongoing UBSS survey work in the Cong area. The most notable site worked on was Ballymaglancy Resurgence cave, with a survey and description presented in this report. Several other notable caves in the area have also been surveyed.

### INTRODUCTION

The caves of County Mayo, Ireland, have been known to a number of caving groups for (over?) 100 years. The principal area in question here is the isthmus between Lough Mask and Lough Corrib, mostly in the vicinity of the villages of Clonbur and Cong. Although numerous individuals and groups have undertaken survey work and research in the area, no modern compilation of surveys and descriptions of the caves exists.

For this reason, the Society has undertaken two previous expeditions to County Mayo in order to complete the surveys of known caves, to follow numerous leads in the area, and document new discoveries. The Society intends to update and add to a previous publication, *The Caves of County Clare and South Galway* (Mullan, 2003), with information on the rest of County Galway and Southern Mayo, by 2019, the Society's centenary year.

The material presented here is from the third expedition to County Mayo in 2014. With water levels in the caves at the lowest yet observed, numerous caves documented by Podesta (2014), have been re-visited in the hope of extending their known limits. The caves detailed here are as follows; Ballymaglancy Resurgence cave, Kitten's Hole (*Pollnapuisin*), Cat's Hole (*Pollnagot*), Bunnadober cave, and two new sits in Cong, named Cong Road Cave and Cong Bridge Hole. Details on the caves include location, access, surveys and dye testing results.

Podesta (2014) provides summary notes on the geology and hydrology of the area in his paper and this should be referred to as required.

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](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 notes are presented according to their location and are divided into three areas; Cong, Clonbur and Ballinrobe. Information on further cave sites in Ballykine Woods, near the southern edge of Lough Mask and near Castle Lough has kindly been provided by Tony Boycott. It should be noted that although the entrance to Ballymaglancy Resurgence Cave is actually in Co. Galway, much of the cave is under Co. Mayo.

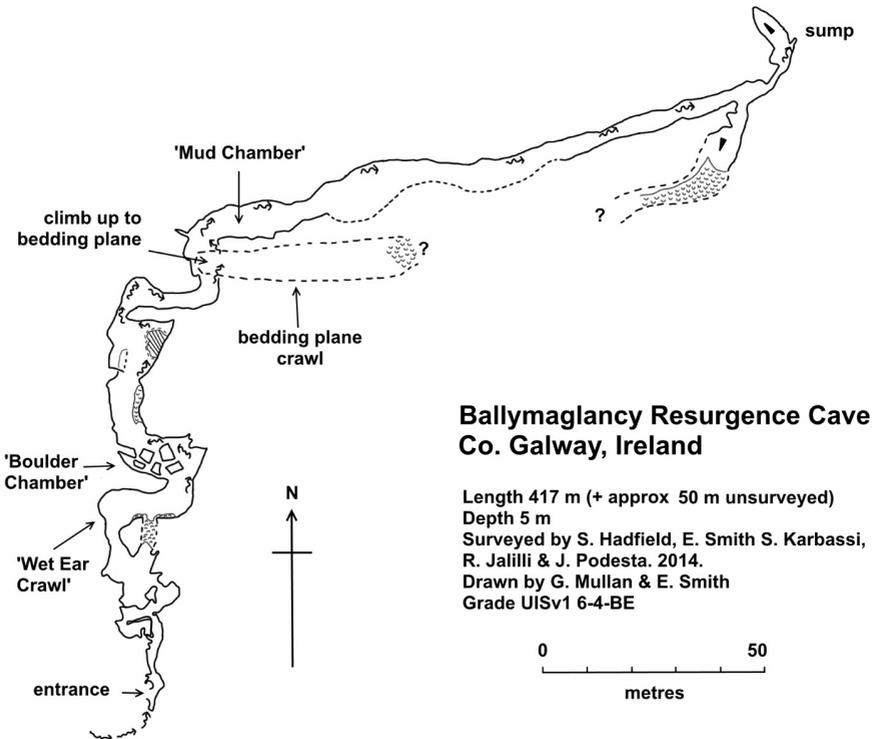
## CLONBUR AREA

## BALLYMAGLANCY RESURGENCE CAVE

Grid Ref: ITM 511529 255152

Length 417 m (+ 50 m unsurveyed). Depth 5 m. Altitude 22 m.

Parkes (1989) makes reference to this cave being found immediately to the east of the Ballymaglancy Cave resurgence. Although first reported by Bird (1989), the Galway Caving Club reportedly undertook the first exploration of the cave in 1988 after digging open the entrance. Members of the Galway and Mayo Institute of Technology, Castlebar Caving Club re-entered the cave in 2009 and carried out the first published survey of the cave (Walsh, 2014). The limit found during these trips has established the end of the cave and numerous leads within. Attempts to dye trace the Ballymaglancy cave stream were made, but the results proved inconclusive.



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

Access to the cave is not restricted, although the landowner has asked that anyone intending to enter the cave lets him have their full details. To reach the cave, you can park in a lay-by at the end of the road to Ballymaglancy. The entrance to Ballymaglancy Resurgence

Cave is easily found by those familiar with Ballymaglancy Cave (*Pollwalter*). Walking back along the road from the lay-by, the path to Ballymaglancy Cave is first passed. The owner's house is on the left of the road. [Follow the road for another 300 m, to a drop along the left of the roadside. Follow the road to a gate on the left]. Upon entering the field, go down the slope to a marshy hollow, with numerous paths. The stream is then found to flow 15 m due east from the resurgence to its sink beneath a face of limestone approximately 4 m high. Rather than follow the stream, look to the left of this rock face to find the entrance to a low, wet crawl. Alternatively, a more entertaining trip can be undertaken via a through trip of Ballymaglancy cave and a short over-ground excursion from the second entrance next to the resurgence to the entrance of Ballymaglancy Resurgence Cave. For details of Ballymaglancy Cave, see Hadfield (2013).

It must be borne in mind that the cave is liable to flood. It is thought to be inaccessible in all but low water conditions, due to likelihood of the entrance crawl filling to the roof. The entrance crawl goes left, for less than 20 m. The roof is low in most places, with water flowing beneath you at all times. Moving a few cobbles makes the subsequent return more pleasant. The crawl enters the first chamber, approximately 15 by 10 by 3.5 m, underneath a wall of flowstone. To the left, the chamber has numerous bat guano deposits and a muddy floor. Continuing straight from the crawl, over a number of large boulders, gives two options: to the left is Wet Ear Passage, a hands and knees crawl following the stream before a crawl through a pool with a low roof; the other is to the right of Wet Ear passage and is a 'pretty loop', with dried gour pools and flowstone walls. Care must be taken not to damage the formations. From Wet Ear Passage, the stream curves to the left, with a dry crawl along the inside wall. The 'pretty loop' enters from a crack in the flowstone to the right. Again, care needs to be taken not to damage the calcited floor in this area.

Following the stream, a hand and knees crawl continues to Boulder Chamber. The impressively high roof and numerous white calcite features are notable. There is a short, muddy loop to the left upon entering the chamber. Continuing downstream, a large gour formation is easily passed by climbing onto the ledge on the left. The passage then takes on the aspect of a typical vadose stream cave and becomes walking size. This opens up into the next small chamber. A few mud banks are present and can be passed to reach a climb up into a bedding plane. The surveyors followed this for some distance, before being blocked by formations. The passage appears to join a later section of the cave. Continuing from the small chamber, Mud Chamber is reached. The stream follows the wall to the left, but the way on is found by following the worn path through the mud on the right. There are numerous off-shoots through partially mud filled passages in this section, typically going in an up-dip direction.

From Mud Chamber, follow the stream to the next section of passage. This low crawl is fairly entertaining for those with an affinity to mud, although rather cold and tiring. The passage varies from a low crawl through the streamway, to above elbow-depth cloying mud. A rock wall to the left continues for about 100 m, with mud banks of varying extent to the right. At this point, a short uphill and extremely muddy crawl reaches a higher section of passage. That this passage has numerous formations and cannot be accessed without causing damage. The further reaches are also later blocked by formations. In the streamway, the passage continues to a low duck before reaching the terminal sump. Whilst surveying was in progress, the water level rose considerably and the final reaches of this last section have not been mapped. Be very aware of the water level and proceed with caution.

**KITTEN'S HOLE**

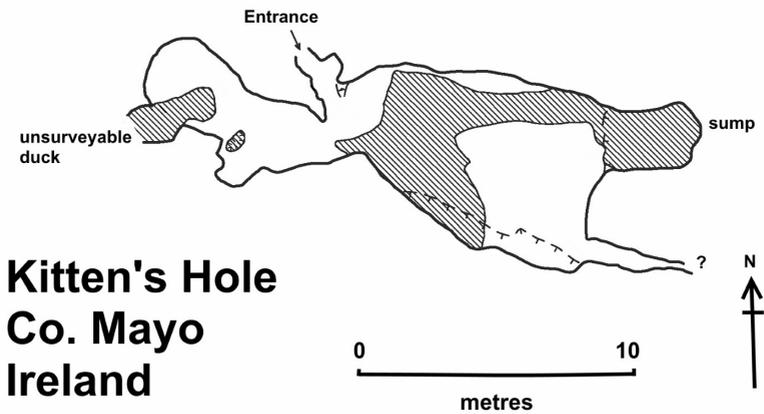
Alternative name: Pollnapuisin

Grid Ref: ITM 511705 755336

Length 28 m (surveyed). Depth 5 m.

Altitude 30 m.

Parkes (1989) mentions this cave and the rough extent of its passage. On first visiting the cave, no obvious extensions were to be found. On returning, the cave was found to have flooded, with no more than the entrance remaining above water. For this reason, the survey presented is considerably less than the full extent of the cave. For a more complete account, refer to the survey of Gilhuys and Parker (1973).



Length 28 m, Depth 5 m.

Surveyed by R. Fishwick, S.Karbassi, J.Podesta, 2014

Drawn by Therion. Grade UISv1 6-4-AF

**Figure 2.** *Plan survey of Kitten's Hole.*

Access to the cave is not restricted. Park in the same place as for Ballymaglancy (see above) and continue past Ballymaglancy cave and the Ballymaglancy Resurgence cave, and approximately 20 m past the gate to the Ballymaglancy Resurgence cave, in the wooded hedge on the right, is a low wall which can be climbed over. A fairly obvious track can be found along an old trail following a clearing in the wood. Carrying along this path, a clearing in the woods is reached after about 150 m and the cave is to be found to the right, in a small outcrop.

The entrance is a steeply inclined, muddy boulder slope that descends to a flowing body of water which appears still in high water conditions. A ledge on the right leads back to a bedding plane and a muddy crawl, which becomes an unpleasant duck in wet conditions. Forward from the entrance the main route follows the stream along the left wall of the entrance chamber, but this was sumped at the time of our visit. At the back of the chamber directly opposite the entrance, there is a calcite chimney in the roof, but this quickly closes down.

## CAT'S HOLE

Alternative Name: Pollnagot

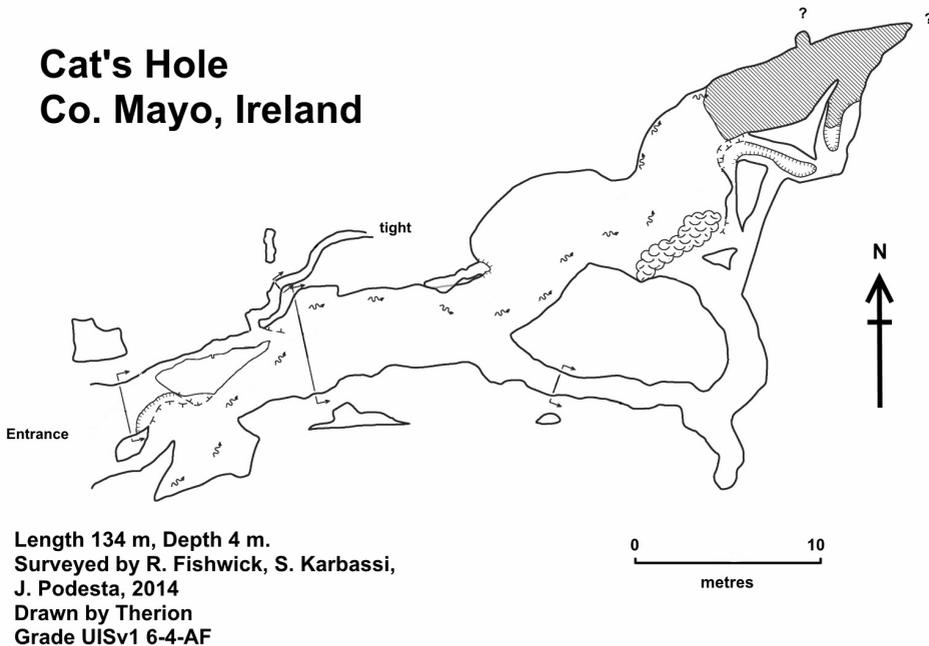
Grid Ref: ITM 511772 755409

Length 134 m (surveyed). Depth 4 m.      Altitude 30 m

Cats Hole was first surveyed by Gilhuys and Parker (1973) and a more modern survey is presented here.

To find the cave, continue along the path from Kitten's Hole for about 90 m. The entrance to Cat's Cave is approximately 6 m wide and 2 m tall and is found in a depression encircled above by a low dry-stone wall. Two ill-defined routes into the cave meet after a few metres. The largest and most obvious is the left one which includes the obvious chamber and the narrow passage leading down to the streamway. An offshoot on the left wall eventually chokes. The right hand way is crawling passage and can be entered immediately at the entrance or between two boulders in the initial chamber. This quickly joins the streamway. From this point the streamway continues as stooping or crawling passage, with two muddy loops on the right, the latter ending above a large gour formation in the main passage which must not be crossed for reasons of conservation. To the right, facing the formation, a further short crawl leads to a final walking loop which accesses the end of the main passage to the left, an alternative way to the lake to the right and to the gour formation via a high route back over the crawl.

The lake at the end of the main passage can be followed by swimming after the first few metres and has previously continued a short way past a duck, which was sumped on our visit.



**Figure 3.** Plan survey of Cat's Hole.

## CONG AREA

## CONG ROAD CAVE

Grid Ref: ITM 514488 755602

Length 45 m. Depth 5 m. Altitude 15 m.

This previously unreported cave is visible from the main road out of Cong, and as a result the entrance contains a lot of rubbish. It lies just north of the road a short distance to the east of the bridge. This cave is entirely dry and generally inclines upward from the road entrance. From here a rubble-filled passage tapers off to the right. The main route continues at a low stoop or crawl for about 10 m before entering a low bedding plane, with the route onwards continuing up to the right, which soon opens out into the woods. This cave is notable for large amounts of moonmilk throughout the passageway.



**Figure 4.** *Plan survey of Cong Road Cave.*

**CONG BRIDGE HOLE**

Grid Ref: ITM 514406 755601

Length 5 m. Depth 5 m. Altitude 15 m.

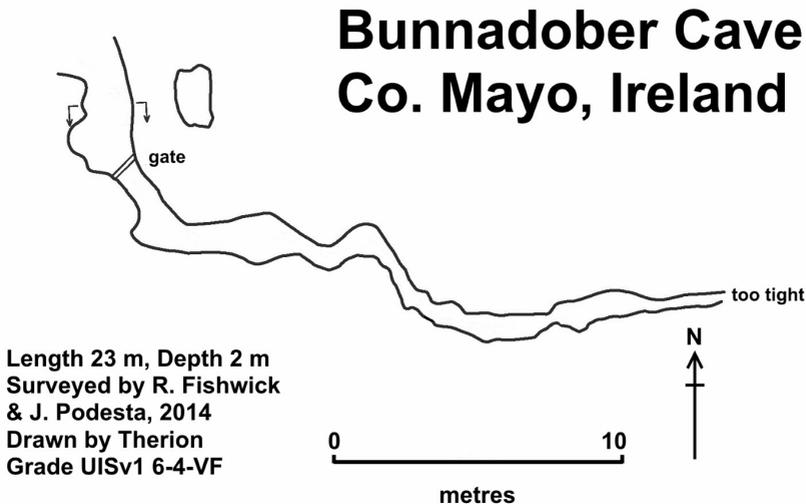
The largest of a number of holes near the bridge out of Cong. The entrance, just west of the bridge and a short distance south of the road, is a steeply inclined rubble slope, roughly 5 m deep. A pond at the bottom is visible from the surface. There is little evidence that the cave has any further potential.

**BALINROBE AREA****BUNNADOBER CAVE**

Grid Ref: ITM 516142, 762515

Length 23 m. Depth 2 m. Altitude 30 m.

Located near to Balinrobe, Bunnadober seems to be a relatively well known tourist site despite being gated, relatively insignificant and clearly not regularly visited. The entrance is partially concealed by bushes by the side of the road. The initial 2-3 m of the cave before the gate are walking passage, but beyond the gate it quickly tapers to a crawl which gets progressively tighter for 20 m or so before becoming impassable.



**Figure 5.** *Plan survey of Bunnadober Cave.*

## BALLYKINE WOODS AREA

## QUEALEY'S CAVE NO 2

Grid Ref: ITM 510091 756346

Length 11 m. Depth 2 m. Altitude 24 m.

There are multiple sinks and cracks in a low wooded limestone bluff just to the left of the path through Ballykine Woods to Lough Mask. The only passable one found is a short joint controlled passage between 2 entrances, partially boulder roofed at the western end.

## QUEALEY'S CAVE NO 3

Grid Ref: ITM 510091 756226

Length 6 m. Depth 2 m. Altitude 24 m.

This entrance is in a limestone bluff to the south of the main path. A passage 1-2 m high ends at a pool with a too-tight rift above.

## SOUTHERN LOUGH MASK AREA

The south side of Lough Mask was checked during drought conditions and two major sinks noted.

## BALLINCHALLA SINK

Grid Ref: ITM 514673 761528

Altitude 20 m.

This is a major sink in Carrigeenalough Bay off Lough Mask, associated with a disused fish trap. Estimated flow 200 litres/second. There are choked grikes above the sink up to 25 m to the south east, which could possibly be entered by digging. The last point at which the sound of water is audible is at ITM 514685 761520.

## DRINGEEN SINK

Grid Ref: ITM 511815 757619

Altitude 20 m.

This is a slightly smaller sink, also associated with a fish trap. The flow was estimated at 125 litres/second. A short cave can be entered at the south end of the gully, but becomes choked after 4 m.

## CASTLE LOUGH AREA

The east side of Castle Lough was also checked during drought conditions and several short caves and sinks noted.

**UN-NAMED PHREATIC TUBE**

Grid Ref: ITM 513743 760043

Length 4 m. Altitude 36 m.

A 2.5 m by 1.5 m phreatic tube near the top of the cliff rapidly chokes, but can be followed as a collapse feature on the surface for a further 20 m.

**CHOKED SINK**

Grid Ref: ITM 513769 759833

Altitude 20 m.

This sink is solidly choked with toppled boulders of razor karren.

**FISH WEIR CAVE**

Grid Ref: ITM 513762 759801

Length 6 m. Depth 3 m. Altitude 20 m.

A larger dual sink, 2 short sections of passage are accessible, the northerly one drops down a 3m rift to a choke which can also be accessed from the southerly entrance.

**LARGE SINK**

Grid Ref: ITM 513606 759705

Altitude 20 m.

Here there is no accessible passage, but the flow is estimated to be 5000 litres/second.

**ENLARGED GRIKE**

Grid Ref: ITM 513560 759633

Length 15 m. Depth 5 m. Altitude 25 m.

An enlarged grike in an area of collapsed epikarst over the conjectured line of the sink can be entered cautiously over moss covered razor karren.

**COLLAPSE CAVE**

Grid Ref: ITM 513421 759488

Length 10 m. Depth 5 m. Altitude 25 m.

A short collapse which chokes at its northern end under an overhang.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The members of the expedition, Simon Hadfield, Jacob Podesta, Sara Karbassi, Cara Turner, Elliott Smith, Rob Fishwick, Rosie Tulloch, and Richie Jalilli extend their thanks to the Tratman Fund of the University of Bristol for its financial support. Furthermore, the expedition members owe thanks to the University of Bristol Alumni Foundation and the Oliver Lloyd Memorial Fund for their generous financial support in the purchasing of vital surveying equipment. We are grateful to Tony Boycott for the additional information about cave sites.

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