

REVIEWS

The Burren : a 2 inch map of the uplands of Clare. by Tim Robinson Second edition 1999.
Folding Landscapes. Roundstone Co. Galway Price £5 ISBN 09-530509-1-2

Maps are a basic tool for the outdoor enthusiast, but how often does a map capture the essence of the landscape it represents? While the Ordnance Survey produce excellent maps (and the new IOS Discovery series are no exception), because of their standardized format their representation of the Burren's unique landscape (sheet 52) falls somewhat flat. By contrast, maps produced by Tim Robinson's company "Folding Landscapes" use an individualized format to capture a feeling for the Burren's distinctive terrain.

Any landscape comprises a geological skeleton bent by millions of years of erosion, and a skin made by the interplay of climate and vegetation. Man's effect may be to hide this or denude it further. Can all this be represented on paper using only black ink?

Tim Robinson's map details bedrock and drift areas, marks out in great detail the region's characteristic terraced appearance and pinpoints and describes a huge array of archeological and historical features as well as folklore and legends. All this information gives the user a glimpse of this unique landscape without seeming too cluttered; you are left wondering about "the strange field" and "the marks of St. Brigid's knees."

The first edition of the map was produced in 1977, so what has changed? Are we hiding or denuding or both? The obvious changes are social, the last 20 years have seen a massive increase in the prosperity of the area, and how do these translate onto the map? A 45% increase in the number of houses (up to 100% in the Ballyvaughan and Newquay area) appear on the map, but the effects of this on ground water quality obviously cannot be shown. In 1977 guest houses were rare enough to be named individually; this is now impossible as tourism is a major industry in the area. Against these pressures new legislation has developed the Burren national park and two nature reserves that are indicated on the new map. The "Bulldozer age" has hopefully stopped with the introduction of the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) but not before 4% of the area's limestone pavements have been "improved". This is the first map to show the farm roads built over some of the high Burren hills as the new IOS map is actually based on older aerial photography. Even the new age travelers in Cappaghmore get a mention.

Of interest to cavers are the 30 more cave entrances now marked (with the help of UBSS), but also shown are the new plantations of forestry that make finding these entrances more difficult each year.

Other research has also continued through these last 20 years, particularly on the archeology of the area. The number of *fulachta fia* grows annually, often an indicator of hidden springs! Poul nabrone has been excavated and dated to 3800 BC, and up to 80 possible Bronze Age hut sites have been recognized surrounding the hill top cairn of Turlough hill. Another remarkable prehistoric landscape is being unfolded by Caerleton Jones on Roughan Hill overlooking the Fergus River Cave. The quarries where the megalithic capstones were located have been found, although how the slabs were moved remains a mystery.

The new map is drawn to a slightly larger scale, 2 inches to the mile (1:31680) as opposed to the 1.8 inches to the mile of the first edition, but neither is particularly user friendly. A metric scale would have made it more useful to hill walkers as would the inclusion of grid lines.

Do the changes make it worth replacing your old map? Perhaps not from a purely caving point of view as most cavers will have drawn the cave locations themselves on to their old map, but, undoubtedly, yes if you want a document recording the rapid changes in this idiosyncratic landscape. These maps are invaluable to anyone with a deeper interest in landscape and the many facets that give an area its identity.

Colin Bunce

Caves and Karst of the Brecon Beacons National Park, A Field Guide. by Mike Simms. 1998. B.C.R.A. Cave Studies Series No. 7. 32pp. Price £2.50. ISBN 0 900265 20 5

This small volume is one of a series covering topics such as surveying or particular caving areas. They are intended both for sport cavers who are becoming interested in speleology and general readers with an interest in limestone scenery. Its author is an academic geologist with particular knowledge of the southeast Powys and Gwent portion of the outcrop and this is reflected in the distribution of the six excursions detailed.

The first quarter of the book provides an outline of the geology and geomorphology of the region. Generally this is well pitched relative to the intended readership, though the occasional technical term, such as glacial till, is left unexplained. It is interesting to see an absolute age of in excess of 780,000 years BP quoted in the context of cave formation, based on magnetic polarity reversal studies.

The remainder of the volume describes six circular walks. One each covers the Western Black Mountain; Sink y Giedd/Dan yr Ogof and the Hepste/Mellte/Neath basin. The other three deal with the Llangattock Escarpment; Clydach Gorge and Pwll Du/Blaenavon. Each excursion is divided into sites for which a grid reference is given and these cover the points of interest in the particular area fairly thoroughly, though the route between sites is left to the reader's map reading abilities, aided by good sketch maps, which also show the underlying plans of the larger cave systems. The topics considered are the immediate geology (referring back to the introductory section) drainage patterns and the relationship of the features noted to both of these. It is not intended as a cave guide and only the parts of caves accessible to the general public are described.

The coverage is on a sampling basis, not a complete description of the karst in the National Park. Ogof Fynnon Ddu, for example is only mentioned in passing. Indeed I think that there might have been some point in including a contrasting area such as Taff Fechan, where cave development is very restricted and commenting on why this might be. This is still karst scenery, even without the caves. In excursion 6, mention of Garn Ddyrys Iron Works could have made reference to the use of limestone as smelting flux as the reason for the existence of many of the quarries previously described. Despite these criticisms, I feel that a reasonable "taste" of the region is provided.

Production is in an attractive glossy A5 format, with excellent photographic quality. A couple of minor lapses were noted. The limestone stratigraphy diagram misspells Llangattock and the subheading "Pwll Du to Blaenavon" is missing its number "7". However, I believe the guide should succeed in encouraging its intended readers to move onto the more detailed works included in the short bibliography. For those who have already done so, it provides a useful aide memoire to what is there, in compact form.

Roy Musgrove