

## CAVE NOTES: SOUTHERN AND WESTERN IRELAND

by

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### ABSTRACT

This paper brings together all corrections and additions to the cave descriptions found in *Caves of Mid-West Ireland* (Mullan, 2019) and *Caves of southern Ireland* (Mullan, 2022) that have been noted since the publication of the update by Bunce *et al.* (2023).

### INTRODUCTION

The publication of the books *Caves of Mid-West Ireland* (Mullan, 2019) and *Caves of southern Ireland* (Mullan, 2022) does not mean that work on documenting the caves in these areas has stopped. New finds are regularly being made and improvements and corrections are continually being made to the data. This paper brings together all such data collected since the previous such paper (Bunce, *et al.* 2023). The changes and additions are listed alphabetically by county and then alphabetically by cave.

In addition to the substantive changes given here, work on correcting the grid references of sites across the area continues. Not all changes of this type are listed here, but the most up-to-date information will be found on our GIS site database. Details can be found at [https://ubss.org.uk/research/irish\\_caves/](https://ubss.org.uk/research/irish_caves/). The Geological Survey of Ireland has recently revamped its Karst Database, with new IDs being generated for every entry. Both old and new are given here for numbered sites.

### CO. CLARE

#### AILLWEE CAVE

Td: Ballycahill

Alternative name: McGann's Cave.

GSI No: 1119NWK087 (old) IE\_GSI\_Karst\_40K\_651 (new)

Length: 1500 m (approx.)

Altitude: 92 m

ITM: 523367 704904

The published description of this cave (e.g. Mullan, 2019) was incomplete. A fuller description is given here; the previously published survey is included here (Figure 1) for reference, although it, too, is incomplete. The cave was developed as a show cave in 1976, and access to the further reaches is by arrangement with the cave management.

From the reception building, the entrance tunnel, enlarged by blasting, leads after 60 m to a junction. To the right is the enlarged connection through St. Patrick's series to St. Bridgid's Cavern and the end of the Marine Blast Tunnel (see below).

Straight ahead, the show cave continues through three chambers: Bear Haven, Mud Hall and Cascade Chamber, the latter is 9 m high and contains a large cascade of soft flowstone. 30 m beyond Cascade Chamber, the way on has been excavated through a massive boulder choke to reach the large Midsummer Cavern. Near the start of Midsummer Cavern a low, wet crawl, C.B. crawl, leads off at roof level on the right. This crawl has been followed for

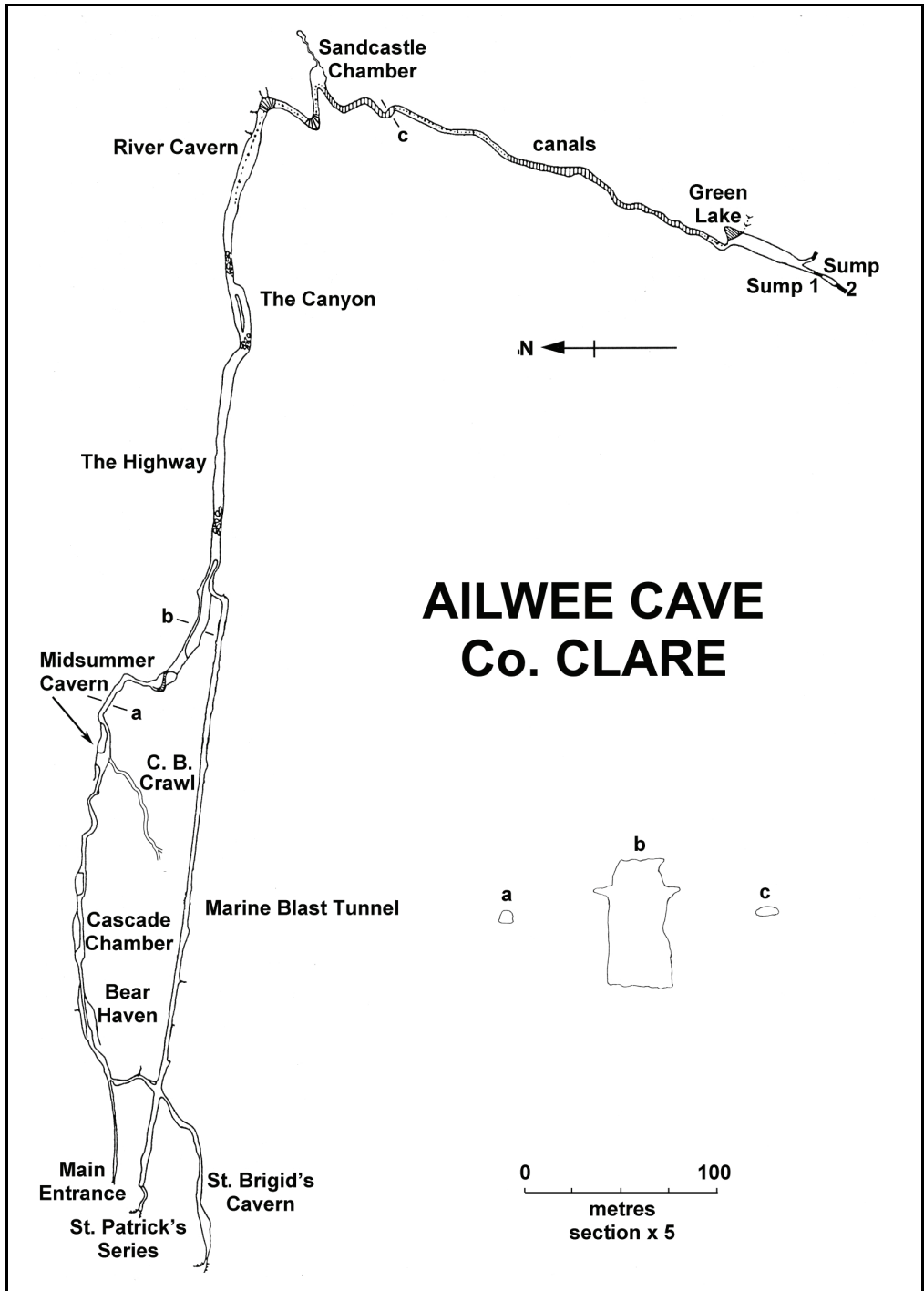


Figure 1. Survey of Aillwee Cave.

100 m to a mud choke.

The main passage continues from Midsummer Cavern as a large meandering tube for 40 m to the top of steps leading down into the Highway, this is a straight passage up to 9 m wide and 16 m high. Near the start of the Highway a waterfall enters on the right hand side from roof level and can be accessed via an awkward 15 m climb to an ascending rift which has been followed for 100 m horizontally and 50 m vertically to a boulder ruckle. 100 m along the Highway the show cave path turns south to enter the artificial Marine Blast Tunnel.

Beyond the show cave, the passage is followed over and under boulders until a scramble up and down a boulder slope enters the roomy River Cavern, where a sizeable stream sinks at the western end of the chamber. Under normal water conditions this stream rises from fissures half way up the wall at the eastern end of the chamber above a prominent clay wayboard; in wet weather the stream also rises from the sumps at the far end of the cave. A climb out of River Cavern leads to walking size passage for 50 m to Sandcastle Chamber, to the left a narrow rift leads to the foot of an awkward climb up to a sand choke. To the right is the 3 m wide and 1 m high phreatic tube of canal passage. This is 200 m long and in wet-weather sumps for much of its length. The minimum airspace at the far end is usually 0.2 m.

Canal passage emerges into a large chamber oriented north-south. At the northern end is a deep pool which can act as a rising. At the southern end the passage forks; to the left the cave ends in a tight descending crawl, to the right is sump one. This is 3 m long and 1 m deep and constricted. Beyond is 30 m of low, wet streamway that leads to Sump Two. This was dived for 60 m but has been drained and shown to be completely choked. The water comes from between boulders.

Turning right the junction, 60 m into the cave from the reception building, leads into a small chamber after 20 m of enlarged meandering passage. To the left is the west end of the mined Marine Blast Tunnel (see below) and on the right is St. Patrick's Series an enlarged passage that leads to a blocked surface connection and which contains a large bat roost. Straight ahead at the small chamber is St. Brigid's Cavern which leads to an alternative locked exit. This passage contains a 5 m deep rift in the floor (covered with a locked grill) and a mined passage to the left (south) that intersects a low, muddy tube that has been pushed for 10 m until it becomes too tight.

The Marine Blast Tunnel connects St. Brigid's Cavern with the Highway and was dug to provide a round trip, easing congestion in the show cave. The tunnel follows a small natural passage for much of its length and has intersected a 5 m high aven with a waterfall. Several small passages lead off from the tunnel. Starting from St. Brigid's cavern these are: a small passage on the south side ending in a duck with 6 cm airspace; a 7 m long passage on the north side parallel to the tunnel wall which ends in a sand choke; a 1.5 m high canyon on the south side which meanders for 45 m to a too tight but draughting corner; a canyon whose wall forms the north wall of the tunnel for 15 m but then runs parallel to the tunnel rejoining after 10 m; a tube on the south side which can be followed for 7 m to a junction, where the passage on the left is a choked connection back to the tunnel and the passage on the right becomes too tight.

#### CONSIDINE'S CAVE

Td: Poulmagun

Alternative name: B14

Length: 40 m

Depth: 29 m

Altitude 126 m

ITM: 510840 700325

Digging has now ceased at this site; the entrance shaft has been secured with a grill and unlocked lid. The northern half of the surface rift has been dug to a depth of 26 m where a

lateral passage was dug out for three metres to it met a parallel rift, down which one of the streams flowed. The southern half of the rift reaches 29 m where, again, it became too tight.

### *Western Slieve Elva*

Significant work has been conducted at several sites in this area, attempting to discover more cave, elucidate details of local drainage and update modern map referencing of previously recorded sites. Further to previous work, this project has, thus far, recorded seventy two sinks, caves and other sites across this privately owned landscape.

#### HALLIDAY'S HOLE

Length: 20 m

ITM: 514543 705067

Td: Faunarooska

Altitude: 270 m

Halliday's Hole is an eight metre diameter conical depression into which a small stream flows. A narrow rift opens into a small chamber, which appears to be collapsing up toward the surface. The stream sinks in a narrow terminal rift.



**Figure 2.** *Shale axe, exposed by water action. Pluais Gabhar, western Slieve Elva.*  
**Photo: P.C. Cronin.**

## PLUAIS GABHAR

Td: Ballyelly

GSI No: 1119NWK121 (old) IE\_GSI\_Karst\_40K\_1477 (new)

Alternative names: A1a, Goat Hole

Length: 7 m

Depth: 7 m

Altitude: 265 m

ITM: 514567 705164

In the 1960s, there was a small depression at this site, in which goats were once found tethered (Tratman, 1969) it was possible to enter a small chamber at 5 m depth. Set among a featureless landscape, this site was mistakenly identified, believed to have been backfilled and levelled. It has been recently relocated. A small stream is visible in the bottom of a narrow rift. Digging into the low stream bedding, "Boycott's Bedding" is in progress. Above this rift a shale axe, 15 cm in length, was discovered at the back of the small chamber. After its precise position was surveyed, the axe was removed and deposited with the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

## PLUAIS PORTACH

Td: Ballyelly

Length: 0 m

Altitude 285 m

ITM: 514643 705077

Pluais Portach is a large depression in the peat in which flowing water may be seen. The material base of the sink is of waist deep peat. It is thought that the water may flow to Pluais Gabhar. Work continues.

## POLL AN TOBAR

Td: Ballyelly

Length: 96 m

Altitude 280 m

ITM: 515019 705329

The downstream entrance (ITM: 514932 705110) and associated surface sink, E1, have been lost under backfilling. The upstream entrance and at least one of the subsidiary entrances ('Happy Heather Hole') remain accessible.

## POULBRUÍÓN

Td: Faunarooska

Length: 6 m

Depth: 6 m

Altitude: 250 m

ITM: 514461 705150

A shaft is being sunk vertically through clay and boulders filling a substantial rift. The sound of flowing water has been heard from open clefts in the rift. Work continues.

## POULFANTAISEACH

Td: Faunarooska

Length 25 m

Depth: 8+ m

Altitude: 268 m

ITM: 514520 705059

A 6 m deep shaft has been dug through clay and boulders in a rift where a stream sinks. At this depth, a one metre high, half metre wide passage leads off west and then south for about 6 m. A low bedding passage with a narrow meandering canyon above has been followed for approximately 17 m around several tight bends. Further narrowing hinders progress.

## TWO TREE SINK

Td: Balliny South

Length; 2 m

Depth; 2 m

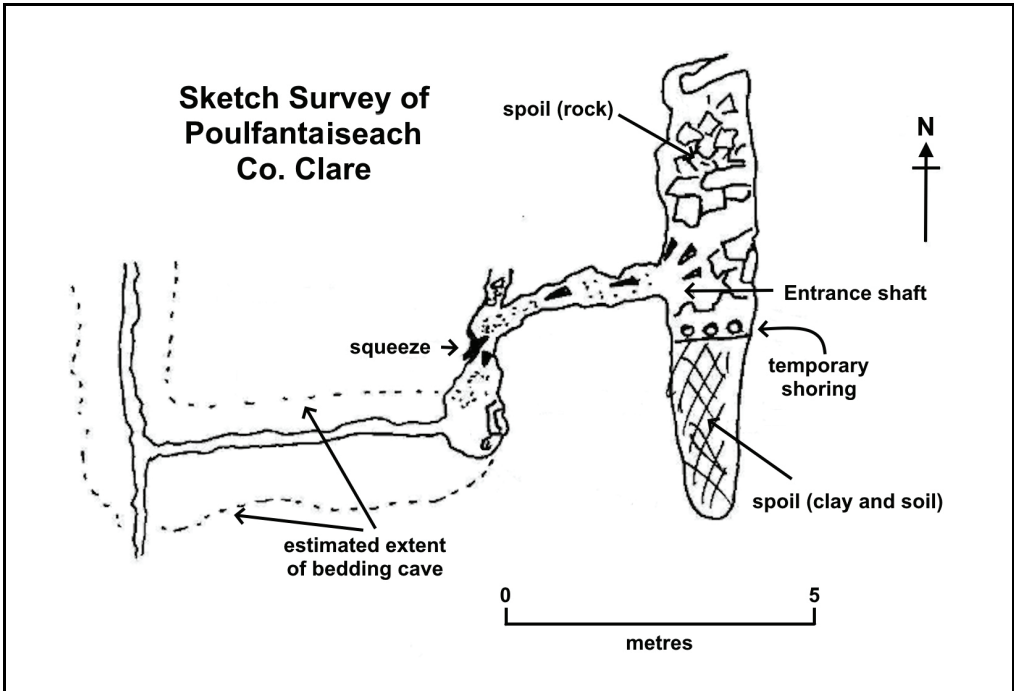
Altitude: 243 m

ITM; 513921 704522

This is a small sink developed above, and adjacent, to the Faunarooska streamway beneath.

### *Eastern Slieve Elva*

The Caherbullog section of the Sliabh Eilbhe project has looked at an area which is predominantly beneath dense tree canopy; accordingly the map references must be treated as approximate. To ascertain a secure fix of the entrances a survey between each entrance was conducted, based on the entrance to Pollbinn. Several sinks have been recorded along the west side of the track. All these sites, may, most probably, feed into the Poulmagolum system.



**Figure 3.** Sketch survey of Poulfantaiseach.

#### CASTAWAY POT

Length: 12 m

Depth: 6 m

Td: Caherbullog

Altitude: 250 m

ITM: 515905 703792

A small opening in a shallow drain channel drops three metres into a narrow rift, which leads to a small chamber, from which a dug rift leads to a cross rift from which other rifts require digging.

#### PIPEWORK POT

Length: 0 m

Td: Caherbullog

Altitude: 250 m

ITM: 515896 703800

A dry stream channel extends downstream from Pollbinn, in flood the stream sinks at three points. The most obvious is a low, impassible, bedding cave. Adjacent the main sink, and a mature tree, is a partially choked bedding, "The Overflow", which may respond to digging.

**POLLBINN COLLAPSE**

Length: 2 m

Depth: 2 m

Td: Caherbullog

Altitude: 250 m

ITM: 515880 703837.

Just upstream of Pollbinn, on the shale boundary, an area of active subsidence is forming directly above the Upper Poulmagollum Passage.

**TOMBSTONE POT**

Length: 5 m

Depth: 5 m

Td: Caherbullog

Altitude: 250 m

ITM: 515914 703781

A small hole in the pine needle covered ground drops almost 3 m to a 3 m diameter chamber with a narrow rift heading off.

**CO. CORK****BARNHEALEY CAVE**

Length: 23 m

Depth: 7 m

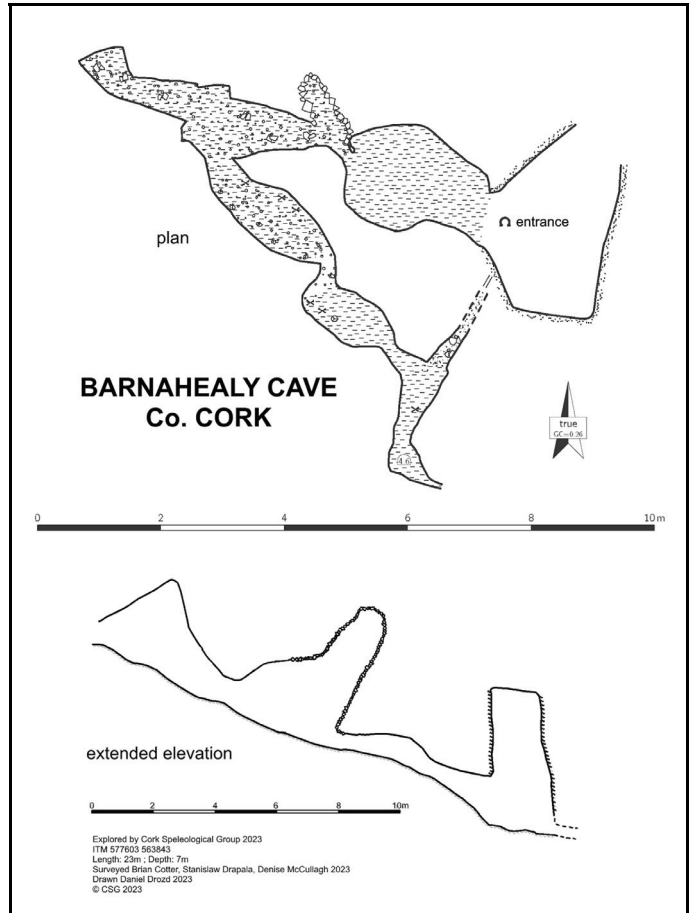
Altitude: 10 m

ITM: 577603 563843

Td: Barnahely

Barnahealey Cave was discovered during archaeological excavations carried out as part of the preparations for the construction of the M28 motorway. Members of the Cork Speleological Group (CSG) were requested to explore and survey the caves uncovered by these works.

The cave was an extension of a souterrain within an early medieval settlement. The entrance is situated at the base of a 4 m high fractured rock wall. The low entrance leads to a first chamber approximately 4 m in diameter. This chamber is relatively stable, but the remainder of the cave shows much instability and collapse. The floor of the entrance chamber has a mud infill in which bone fragments and charcoal deposits were found. Beyond the entrance chamber, tight downward sloping



**Figure 4.** Survey of Barnahealey Cave.



squeeze through collapsed boulders leads to the lower parts of the cave. Beyond the squeeze, a chamber is reached with a solid cave wall. A number of passages can be followed including one directly ahead which rises back towards the surface until blocked with rock breakdown and mud infill. Continuing along the cave wall in the same direction, the floor becomes wet and muddy with the passage becoming too tight to follow further. The passage doubles back parallel with the entrance passage through a muddy squeeze. A low and muddy crawl is passed where bone fragments and crustacean shells were found on the mud surface. This area skirts around the sediment run-in from the entrance chamber. The crawl opens after a few metres to reach another, tighter squeeze. Passing this constriction, a larger chamber of standing height is reached where large fragments of charcoal and bone were once again encountered on the mud surface. As with the previous chamber, this splits into two directions. To the left, the corridor narrows very quickly, preventing further exploration, while to the right, through a tight rift, a further small chamber can be accessed that leads upwards towards the surface. The cave has potential for further exploration.



**Figure 5.** *Excavating in Vatican Chamber, Mogeely Cave, June 2024.*

**Photo:** P. Kenny.

The cave is not on the direct line of the planned motorway but it will be covered by an embankment and will not be accessible. All archaeological material was documented and its location marked on the cave survey before being handed over to the archaeologists for further analysis. Archaeological investigation indicated that the deposits at the entrance chamber had been dumped from above.



## MOGEELY CAVE

Td: Carrignashinny

GSI No: 1707SEK006 (old) IE\_GSI\_Karst\_40K\_281 (new)

Length: 300 m

Altitude: 16 m

ITM: 596603 574682

The Vatican chamber in Mogeely Cave is a large low chamber in the upper part of the cave. The chamber is c.13m E-W by c.22m N-S. Entry is through a low crawl in the northwest corner. The chamber has very extensive formations. The floor level at center of the chamber is lower than around the walls. A deposit of brown silty clay occupies this hollow. The surface of chamber has been observed to contain numerous bones. In June 2024, a limited archaeological intervention was carried out by Professor Helen Lewis of University College Dublin. The aim of the intervention was to record and collect a large sample of the bone from the floor of the chamber. Students from John Moore's University, Liverpool and volunteers from the CSG recorded and collected over 600 animal bones. Three artefacts were also recovered: a probable medieval bone comb, a bone spindle whorl and a bone loom knife. The comb is double sided with regular teeth and plain end plates. There is a regular cross hatch design on the top face of the body with parallel vertical lines running around the sides. The spindle whorl is made from the end of a large femur. The loom knife is carved from the rib of a large animal. The three artifacts were found close to one another in the silty clay deposit in the hollow at the center of the chamber. The artefacts were carefully removed by archaeologists on the team and have been taken for conservation and study.

## SHANNONPARK CAVE

Td: Shannonpark

Length: 19 m

Altitude: 25 m

ITM: 573198 564368

Shannonpark Cave was discovered during archaeological excavations carried out as part of the preparation for the construction of the M28. Motorway. Archaeologists discovered the entrance to the cave after removing the top layer of soil.

The approach to the cave is a small opening between unroofed water-washed limestone walls indicating that there was cave passage above the current ground level which has long since disappeared. The cave entrance leads to a descending narrow rift that leads into a single, relatively straight corridor which descends to a depth of 4 m with a total length of 19 m. Three metres from the end, the corridor widens to form a small terminal chamber which is blocked with fill. A number of small speleothems are present in the passage with some small dripstone formations and rock structures observed. The floor is of clay and sand and some bone fragments were found on the soil surface. Along the length of the cave solution holes are present indicating that water regularly rises from below and sinks again. Archaeologists, working with members of the CSG, excavated a series of trenches in the cave. The excavation reached a depth of 4 m. Three distinct phases of deposition were identified. The upper two phases contained animal bone and charcoal. The deposits of the lowest phase were sterile. These deposits continued below the base of excavation. The passage widened towards the base of the archaeological trench, opening into a c.5 m wide chamber extending to the north and south of the passage. Several sinkholes were noted in the surrounding area. It was noted that during the ducting of overhead electrical lines to the west of the cave several sections of ducting and stone fill were lost in the trench, implying that there might be further unexplored cave passage in the area. However, due to the ongoing construction work on the motorway, no access is possible to the cave.

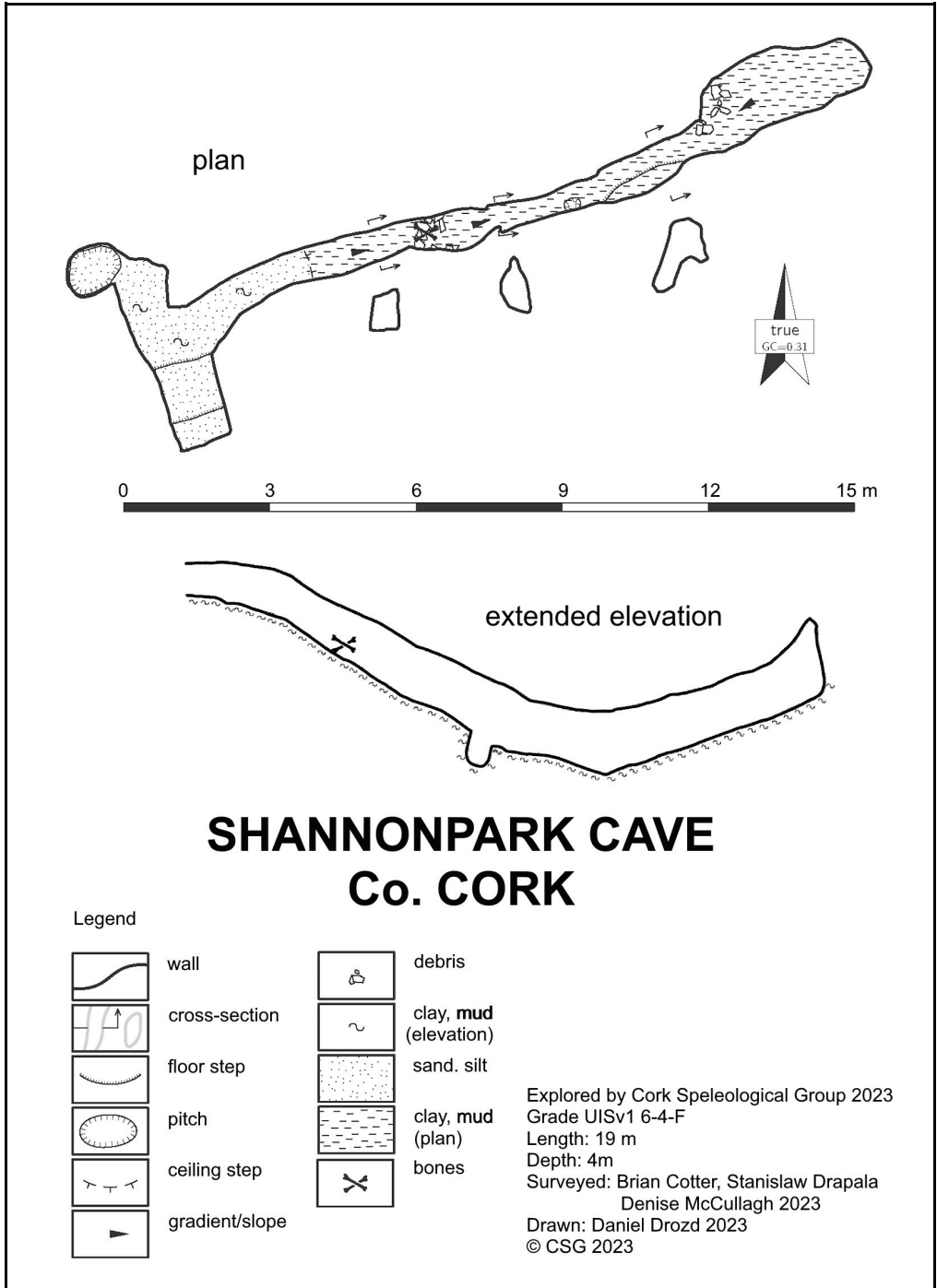


Figure 5. Survey of Shannonpark Cave.

## CO. KERRY

## DUNKERRON 1

Length: 7 m

ITM: 488478 570558

This site is situated to east of the ruined castle, not west as stated in Mullan, 2022.

Td: Dunkerron

Altitude: 10 m

## KILMURRY CAVE

SMR No: KE040-144

Length: 150 m

ITM: 505332 609448

The entrance to this cave, in the bottom of an old quarry, is currently blocked.

Td: Kilmurry

Altitude: 65 m

## REENADINNA CAVE

Length: 12 m

ITM: 496015 586386

This cave is located south-west of Signpost Cave on a limestone ridge to the south of the road and near a deer enclosure. The small, hard to find entrance is an easy climb down into a 3 m high and 5 m diameter chamber, quickly followed by a second similar chamber which leads to another low entrance. Bats are present in winter.

Td: Muckross

Altitude: 30 m

## SIGNPOST CAVE

Length: 35 m

ITM: 496095 586453

Sadly, the large signpost labelled 'Cave' has been removed! The cave is still there, however.

Td: Muckross

Altitude: 23 m

## WITCH'S FINGER CAVE

Length: 33 m

ITM: 475002 619424

Depth: 9 m

Td: Barrow

Altitude: 21 m

The entrance to Witch's Finger Cave is located on the northeast side of a promontory which divides two inlets of Tralee Bay. The entrance is a sheltered, short and narrow horizontal rift partially obscured by gorse bushes, below the crest of the promontory. The rift leads into a c.4 m square entrance chamber, high enough to sit and move comfortably in. A small opening above a fallen stone above the entrance allows light into the chamber. A short low crawl at the rear of the entrance chamber slopes down to a second chamber. This chamber is c.5 m long and is high enough to stand in. An overhang along the current base of southeast wall may indicate further cave passage beyond. Both chambers contain extensive formations.

The floor of both chambers and the crawl is made up of fallen stone in a loose matrix of sandy clay. Much of the floor is sealed beneath a thin layer of flowstone. Several dozen bones were noted in the surface of the floor deposit, many of the bones were embedded in or entirely covered by the flowstone. Several of these bones have been tentatively identified as human.

The cave entrance is about 60 m from a prehistoric shell midden at the base of the promontory. This cave is of great archaeological potential. The location and layout of the cave would have allowed for its use as a shelter, store or ritual space. The probable human remains

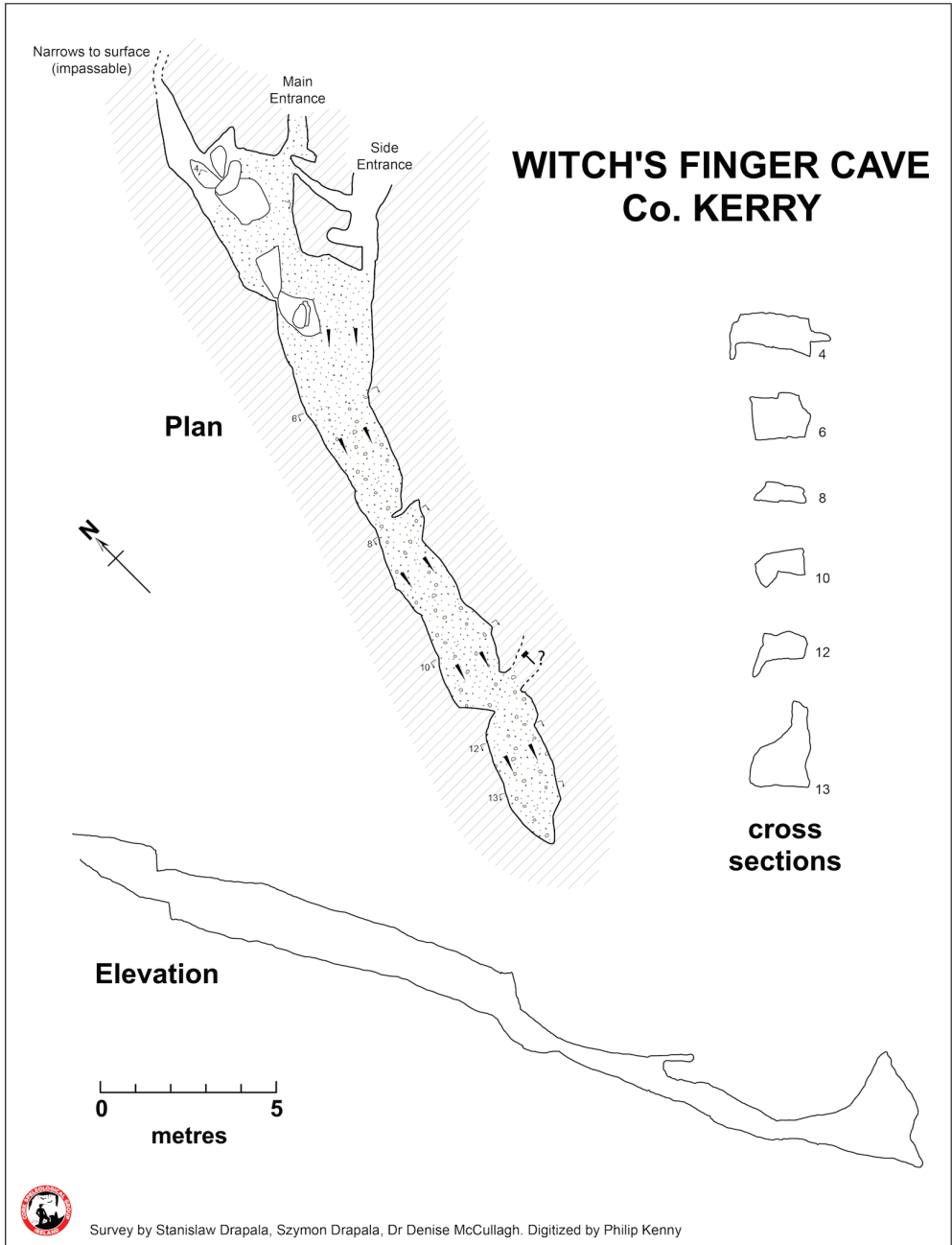


Figure 6. Survey of Witch's Finger Cave.

have not been dated, but the fact that many were covered by flowstone might suggest prehistoric deposition.

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