

CORK - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Cloyne Cave		
Other names used for site	Cloyne Caves		
IGH THEME	IGH1 Karst		
TOWNLAND(S)	Cloyne Demesne		
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Cloyne		
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	88		
ITM CO-ORDINATES	592100E 568020N (dry entrance)		
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	81	GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO.	22, 25
GIS CODE	CK034		

Outline Site Description

This site comprises a cave system with an entrance in a low escarpment on well-drained farmland in Cloyne Demesne.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The cave may have been formed in either the Neogene or Quaternary periods, or even partially in the early Holocene (post-glacial) period, and is of karstic origin, formed in pure bedded, Waulsortian limestones. The limestones themselves are of Lower Carboniferous (Mississippian) age (359-323 million years ago).

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Cloyne Cave is the longest cave system in County Cork and has been known of for thousands of years, lending its name to the town itself (Cloyne in Irish is *Cluain Uamha*, or *Cave of the Meadow*).

The cave has a dry entrance visible from the main road through the town, but also a stream entrance where a stream sinks into the cave floor. The cave system largely consists of phreatic mazes formed along weaknesses in the jointing of the limestone rocks. These complex mazes result in a cave which contains several kilometres of passage yet covers a very small area, of approximately 3.2 hectares.

The exact lengths of the cave passages are unknown as the cave system has yet to be fully surveyed, despite several years of continuous surveying by local cavers in the early 1980s. Estimates of the entire length of passage have ranged from 2.5 km to 7 km. A further system of unexplored caves is known to exist under the town itself, since a section of the main street collapsed into a cavern several times in the mid-20th century, and again in 2021 and 2022.

The caves are generally flooded for much of the year and are not accessible to the public. However, surveys and explorations of the caves by members of the Cork Speleological Society have mapped grand features including the 'Pyramid', the 'Grand Canyon', the 'Sphinx', 'Tortoise Chamber', 'Straw Hall', and the 'Stepping Stone Chamber'.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

As the longest network of cave passages in County Cork, and a particularly complex network of passages, Cloyne Cave is a unique feature and is worthy of recognition as a County Geological Site.

Management/promotion issues

The cave system entrance is on private farmland and is unsuited to general access or promotion but should remain the province of scientific cavers and cave archaeologists with appropriate permissions and should be protected from disturbance or damage.



Looking south across the low escarpment east of Cloyne Main Street, where the cave entrance sits.



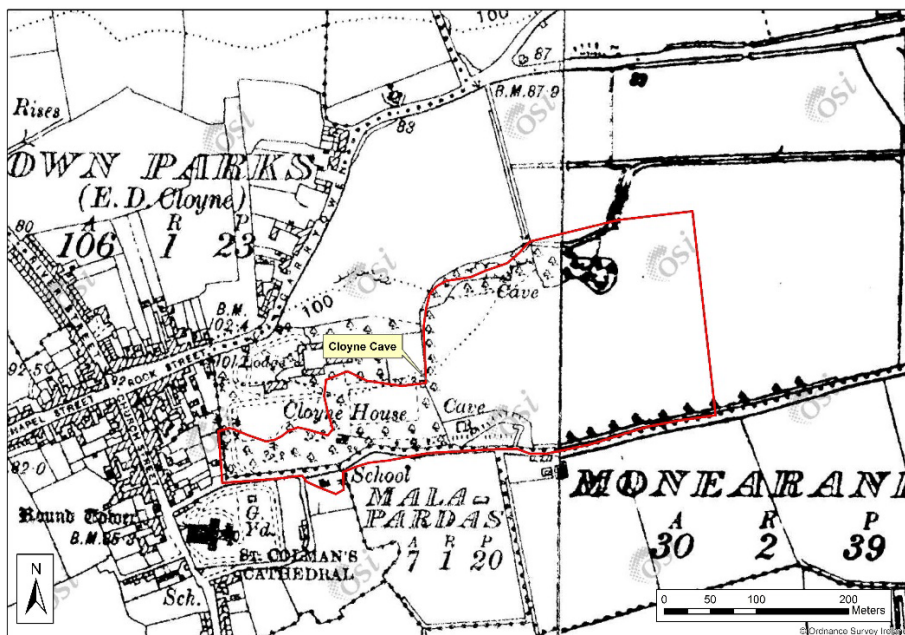
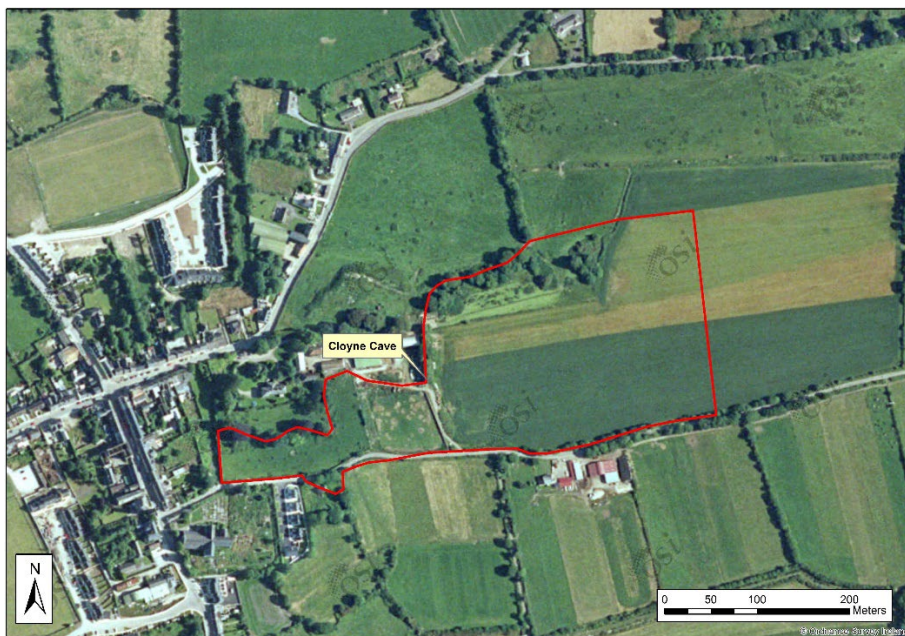
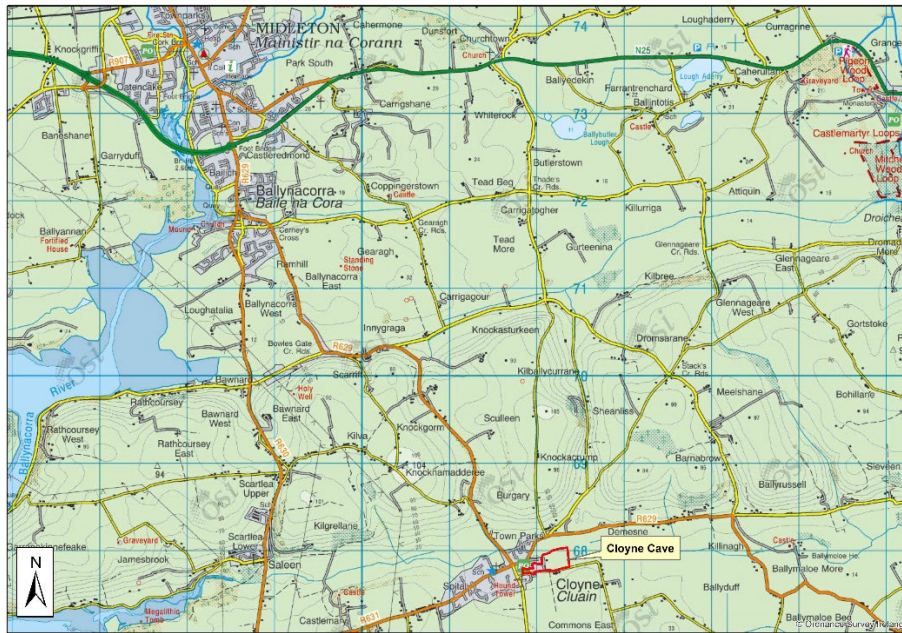
The 'wet' entrance where the stream sinks, at the edge of a wetland area.

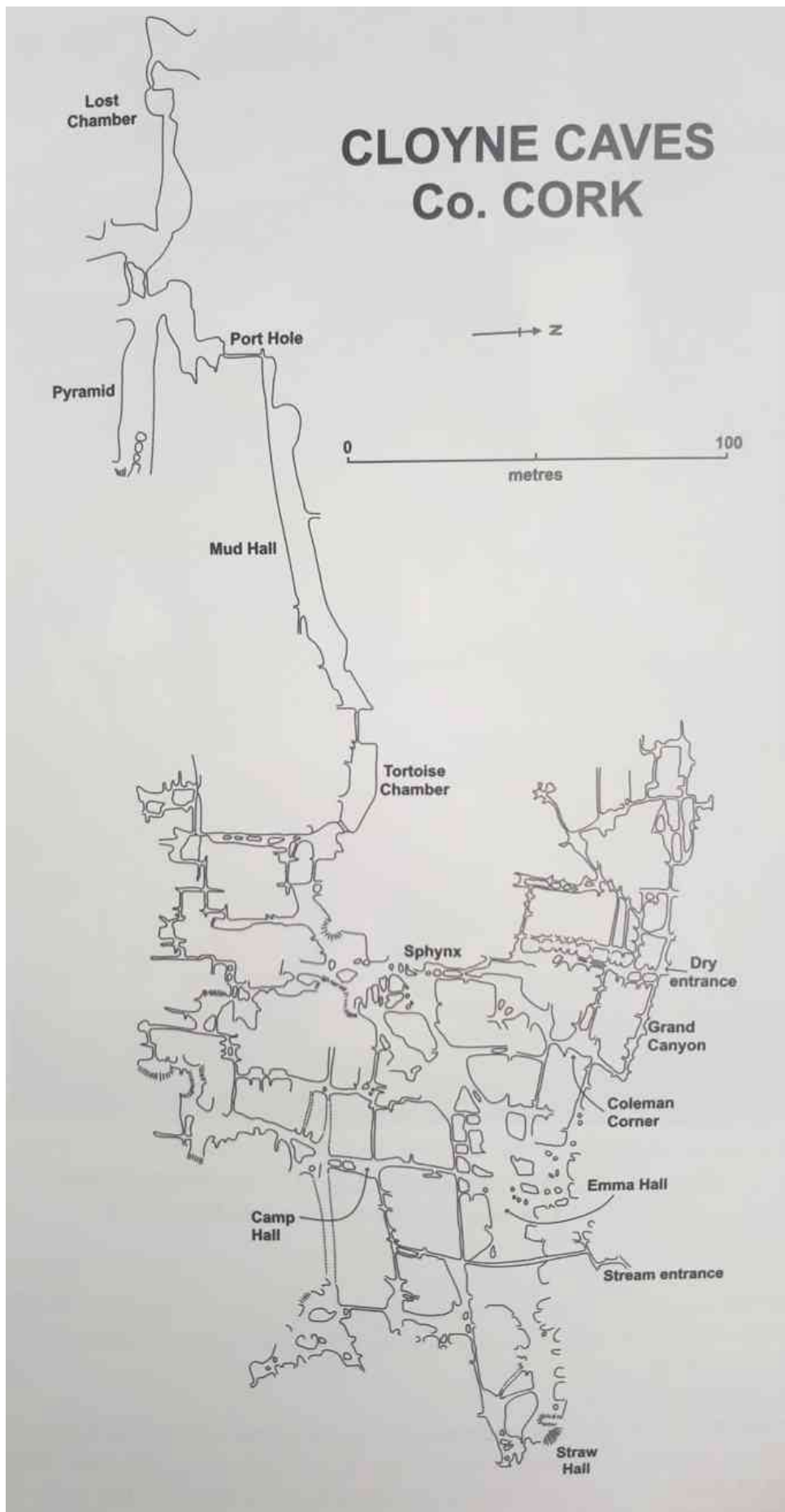


Close-up of the first gallery, with passages branching off into the maze cave system.



The dry entrance to the cave system.





Cloyne Cave system – survey of all explored passages.