

CORK - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Foley Cave
Other names used for site	The Foley Cave, Cave G
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary, IGH1 Karst, IGH12 Cenozoic and Mesozoic
TOWNLAND(S)	Connaberry
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Castletownroche
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	26
ITM CO-ORDINATES	568515N 601511E (entrance)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	73 GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 22
GIS CODE	CK046

Outline Site Description

Foley Cave is a 24 m long cave set into the eastern, cliffed, bedrock side of a narrow gorge hosting the Awbeg River, just southeast of the village of Castletownroche.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The cave may have been formed in either the Neogene or Quaternary periods, partially even in the early Holocene (post-glacial) period, and is of karstic origin, formed in pure bedded, Waulsortian limestones. These limestones are of Mississippian (Lower Carboniferous) age, but the faunal finds from the cave are of Quaternary age.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Foley Cave is one of eight small caves that penetrate the side of a limestone gorge overlooking the Awbeg River, and the entrance to the cave is high on the side of the gorge, where a low entrance to a small chamber is found at the base of an overhanging wall. The entrance leads to an oval chamber 4 m by 2 m, and from the back of the chamber a passage 2 m in width runs back for 3 m and joins a narrow gallery running into the cliff. This varies in width from 0.5 m to 1.5 m, and is 12 m long. Half way along this gallery, a further narrow passage starts 3m above the floor and can be followed for a further 5 m.

Excavation in the outer fissure and entrance chamber found quantities of animal bones, from both recent and Pleistocene (Ice Age) times. Unlike the bones found from many other caves, the finds from this cave were quite fragmentary. Those from the uppermost stratum also produced charcoal, and animal bones included bear, otter, stoat, hare, pig, bird and fish. Three bone samples from deeper down, those of bear, reindeer and mammoth, have been radiocarbon dated to much older. The bear bones dated to 26,000 years BP, and those of the mammoth and reindeer were 28,000 BP. Interestingly, analysis of the bear bones suggest that they relied heavily on fish for food at that time.

The bones of other species, most notably Giant Irish Deer, Norwegian and banded lemmings, and wolves, were also found from deep deposits in this cave. The only mammoth sample consisted of milk teeth, virtually unique in Ireland. It is possible that much of the Pleistocene fauna from Foley Cave belong to one short time interval during an interstadial in the Ice Age.

Two probable Late Mesolithic flint blades were found in Foley Cave during excavations in 1938 and 1940. The blades are relatively large considering that virtually no flint occurs naturally in this region and thus they were almost certainly brought into the territory from elsewhere.

Site Importance – County Geological Site; recommended for Geological NHA

The mammal finds from Foley Cave are some of the best in Ireland, and the fact that several rare and old (Ice Age) species have been found, and the fact that a number have been radiocarbon dated adds to the significance of the cave.

Management/promotion issues

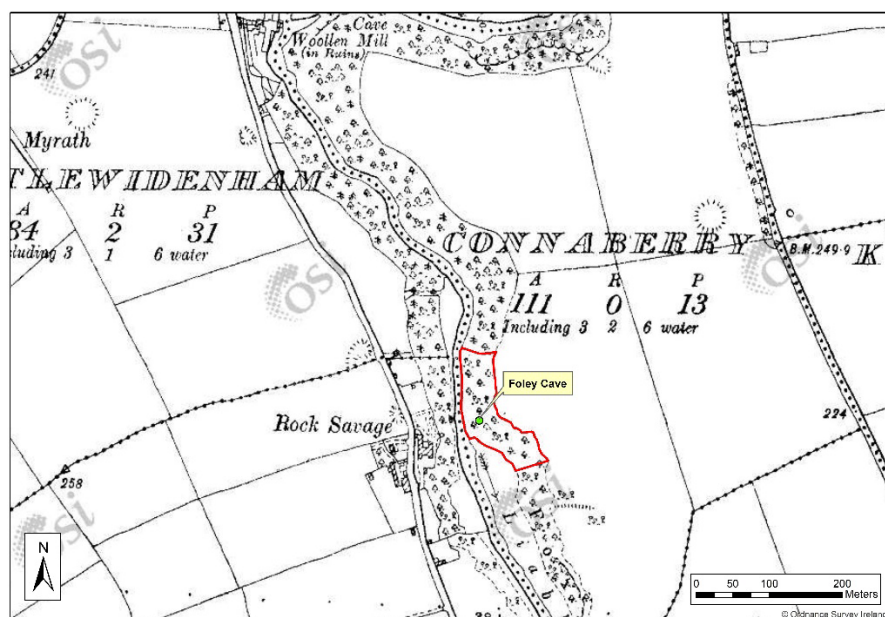
The cave is on private farmland and is unsuited to general access or promotion, but should remain the province of scientific cavers and cave archaeologists with appropriate permissions, and should be protected from disturbance or damage.



The gorge along the Awbeg River, with Foley Cave high in the cliff to the right.



The entrance to Foley Cave.





Late Mesolithic? flint flake (2011) from Foley Cave (Nigel Monaghan).

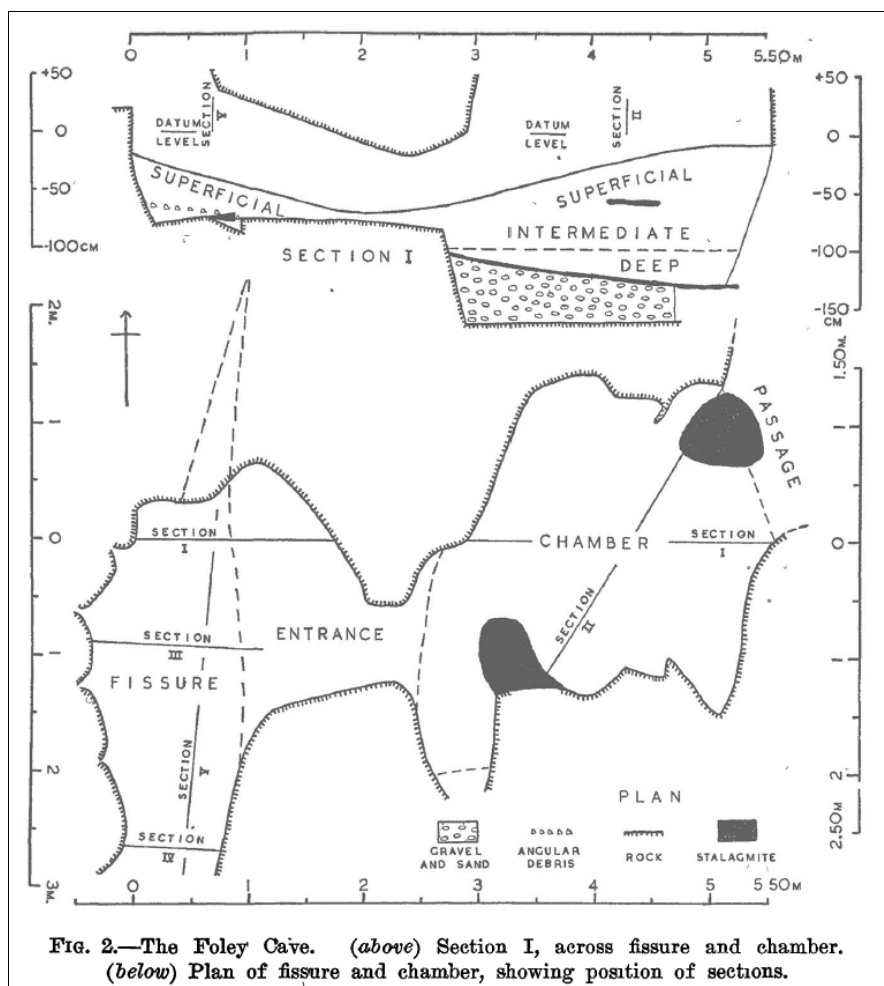


FIG. 2.—The Foley Cave. (above) Section I, across fissure and chamber. (below) Plan of fissure and chamber, showing position of sections.

Plan of Foley Cave, from Gwynn *et al.*, (1942).