

GALWAY - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Ballinasloe Esker
Other names used for site	The Ballinasloe-Split Hills-Clonmacnoise-Clara Esker System, The <i>Eiscir Riada</i> , The Clonmacnoise Esker, The Pilgrim's Road, The Long Road
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary
TOWNLAND(S)	Highfield, Cappagh, Northbrook, Derradda, Knockglass, Balynamockagh, Perssepark, Pollboy, Kilcloony, Tobergrellan, Portiuncula Hospital
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Ballinasloe
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	87, 88
ITM CO-ORDINATES	583400E 731300N (central portion of feature)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET No. 47	GS1 BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 15

Outline Site Description

The Ballinasloe Esker and surrounding sands and gravels includes an exceptionally large accumulation of sands and gravels deposited both under the ice sheet and at its margin, as the ice withdrew westwards across eastern Galway and the general western Midlands area at the end of the last Ice Age.

The esker forms part of the larger Ballinasloe-Split Hills-Clonmacnoise-Clara Esker System, which extends from Galway, through Offaly and into Westmeath, and is the traditional route defined as the '*Eiscir Riada*' in ancient Irish Folklore.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The Ballinasloe Esker and surrounding sands and gravels are formed entirely on Lower Carboniferous limestone rocks, across the lowlands of east Galway. The eskers themselves are Quaternary in age, having been deposited either under or at the edge of the westward-retreating ice sheet during deglaciation, approximately 14,000 years ago.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The esker ridge is formed from a number of segments, which are striking features, standing proud of the flat landscape of till (boulder clay) upon which they were deposited. In many places the eskers have been surrounded by post-glacial alluvium or peat deposits in the Holocene, since the Ice Age. This is especially impressive in Perssepark and Kilcloony to the west of Ballinasloe Town, and at the western extremity of the feature in Highfield and Northbrook. In Ballinasloe Town itself, the esker grades from a singular ridge of coarse gravels to a more haphazard, hummocky topography.

The esker feature is important in that it records faithfully the ice movement across this area of Galway during the final phase of deglaciation. Wide belts of associated sands and gravels both to the west and southeast of Ballinasloe, flanking the esker segments themselves, have long been recognised and are part of associated ice marginal fan and delta systems. The sands and gravels within the esker are comprised chiefly of limestone clasts.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

The feature is a haphazardly arranged, high, striking example of a dry sand and gravel ridge, and stands proud of the surrounding landscape. This is the longest esker system in the country and is a superb example of a relict subglacial conduit system. The Ballinasloe Esker pNHA (site code 0001779) covers only a portion of the entirety of the site defined here.

Management/promotion issues

The extraction of esker sand and gravel for development continues on many eskers throughout the Irish Midlands. A large quarry cutting through part of the western portion of the esker has been in operation for several years. The preservation of the integrity of the esker landforms should be considered in light of any future new quarrying sites. A signboard at the Famine Remembrance Park at the western end of Ballinasloe, where the esker passes by, might be a suitable location for a signboard.



A high, partially wooded segment of the Ballinasloe Esker in Kilcloony, west of Ballinasloe.



The steep-sided esker ridge approaching the outskirts of Ballinasloe.



A small segment of the esker protruding through reclaimed peat at Kilcloony.



The beginning of the longest esker system in the country, in Highfield Townland.

