

GALWAY - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Cong Springs and Pigeon Hole
Other names used for site	Ellechrissaun Spring, <i>Polltoofil</i> , <i>Pollleibin</i> (singularly), The Hatchery Springs, The Hatchery – Mill Springs, <i>Poll na gColum</i> (Pigeon Hole)
IGH THEME	IGH1 Karst, IGH16 Hydrogeology
TOWNLAND(S)	Cluain na Marbh (Cloonamarve), Clochar (Clogher), Áthe na Fuinseoige (Ashford or Cappacorcorcoge), Creig an Rí (Creggaree)
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Conga
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	27
ITM CO-ORDINATES	514610E 755545N ('Hatchery' springs)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NO. 38	GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 11

Outline Site Description

This site includes a number of complex karst features; caves, springs, dolines (enclosed depressions), outcropping epikarst and limestone pavement.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The caves may have been formed in the Quaternary period or in the early Holocene (post-glacial) period, and are formed in Carboniferous Limestone. The springs and their associated underground connections with Lough Mask are probably Tertiary in age.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The area around Conga is a unique hydrogeological setting, whereby the greatest part of the outflow from Lough Mask to the north 'sinks' and passes subterraneously through the Cong isthmus to emerge at a series of huge springs in and adjacent to Conga Village. Water leaves Lough Mask via a very large number of sinks on the southern and southeastern shores of the lake, particularly between Dringeen Bay in the south and Ballinchalla Bay on the north. Groundwater moves through bedding planes and other fractures in the limestone rock to 'emerge' at the springs at Conga. The stream sinking at Ballymaglancy Cave (a CGS), to the west of Cong, also emerges at Ellechrissaun Spring. There are three main springs or groups of springs at Conga: Ellechrissaun, the Hatchery Springs and Curreighnabannow (which is a CGS in Mayo). The springs are among the largest in the world, discharging at least 17 cubic metres per second under low flow conditions (1.5 million cubic metres per day). The adjacent, southern extreme of the Cong Canal, also forms part of the site.

In the forest walks from Conga Village to the Pigeon Hole cave, along the Pigeon Hole loop, limestone pavement and well developed epikarst is visible in the surface outcrops of limestone. Caves are common, Priest's Hole and the Pigeon Hole being the best examples. Pigeon Hole itself is entered *via* a steep flight of limestone steps, which lead down to the mouth of the cave, which is a large chasm over 4 m across, covered in bushes and ivy where the pigeons for which the cave is named like to nest. Horse Hole and *Pollahostia* are well developed, deep and impressive enclosed depressions which are also part of the site.

Site Importance – County Geological Site; recommended for Geological NHA

The springs are some of the largest worldwide and the area is a microcosm of an intricate and complex karst system. The uniqueness of the locality makes it a superb teaching destination on karst processes also.

Management/promotion issues

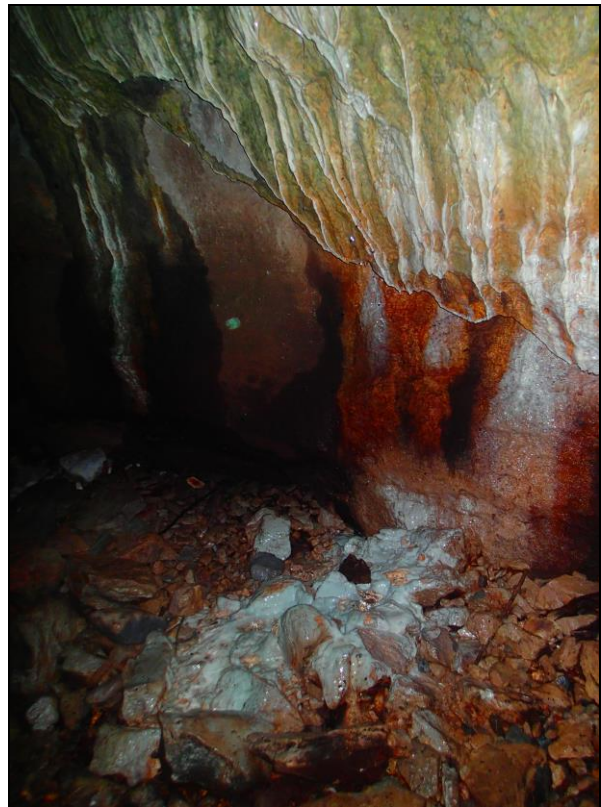
The cave and spring complex is accessible through a network of well developed forest walks, as well as along the main Cong to Clonbur road exiting the village of Cong. Signboards explaining the importance and significance of both the springs and the Pigeon Hole, along the roadside in Cong and near the cave respectively, would prove worthy additions to the site.



The Hatchery Springs at Cong.



The stepped entrance to the Pigeon Hole.



Well-developed flowstone in Pigeon Hole.

