

GALWAY - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Inishark
Other names used for site	<i>Inis Airc</i> , Inishshark, Shark Island
IGH THEME	IGH 15 Economic Geology, IGH 6 Mineralogy, IGH13 Coastal Geomorphology, IGH7 Quaternary
TOWNLAND(S)	Inishshark
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Cleggan (ferry)
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	9
ITM CO-ORDINATES	448983E 764764N (centre of island)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET No. 37	GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 10

Outline Site Description

Inishark is an uninhabited island approximately 7.5 Km off the northwest coast of Galway.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The rock comprising the island is of Precambrian (4,600-541 Ma) age, with some metagabbro and diorite intrusions of Caledonian age (490-390 Ma). The form of the island was shaped within the Quaternary (Ice Age) Period, with much of the coastal erosion and *in situ* weathering of the bedrock having occurred since then, in the post-glacial, or Holocene.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Inishark is only 2.5 km long and 1.2 km wide, so the island can easily be circumnavigated on foot within a day. On such a walk, relatively low cliffs are seen all around the island, with narrow inlets between headlands, and many small coves and sea stacks. Sea caves and arches are present along the northern shoreline also.

The rocks on Inishark are some of the oldest in the Connemara region and belong to the Dalradian Supergroup, consisting largely of Neoproterozoic to Cambrian age sedimentary rocks that were metamorphosed during the Ordovician Grampian Orogeny (~470–460 Ma). These rocks consist of a variety of clastic sedimentary rocks that were deformed and metamorphosed to varying degrees.

Soapstone is a metamorphic rock, composed mainly of talc and other minerals which can be cut, sawn or carved, and was used for mould-making since the Bronze Age period, and in the nineteenth century for the removal of grease from woollen items. On the northeastern portion of Inishark island, talc, in the form of steatite, crops out and may have been extracted on a local scale historically. The deposit occurs as part of serpentinised ultramafic rocks adjacent to the Renvyle-Bofin Slide. Several varieties of intrusive dykes of differing ages also occur on Inishark, with the dolerite dykes all trending east-west.

Along the southern shoreline of Inishark several metres of till have been deposited by glacier ice, with the basal portion of this exhibiting beautiful glaciotectionised transition zone bedrock, and ice wedge casts hosted within this material just below ground surface.

Site Importance - County Geological Site; may be recommended for Geological NHA

Inishark is a textbook locality for the recognition of coastal erosion features, and the occurrence of talc is also noteworthy. The ice age tills are some of the westernmost Ice Age sediments in Europe.

Management/promotion issues

The fact that the island is uninhabited means it is difficult to access, and visitors are rare. An information board along the cliffs at the southern sides of the island, where boats land, and detailing the unusual geology, would prove a worthy addition to the site. The site is already an SAC and proposed NHA (000278, Inishbofin and Inishark) for biodiversity reasons and the exceptional geodiversity of the locality should be highlighted in any promotion of this.



Inishark Island, viewed from the east.



View west from the highest point on the island.



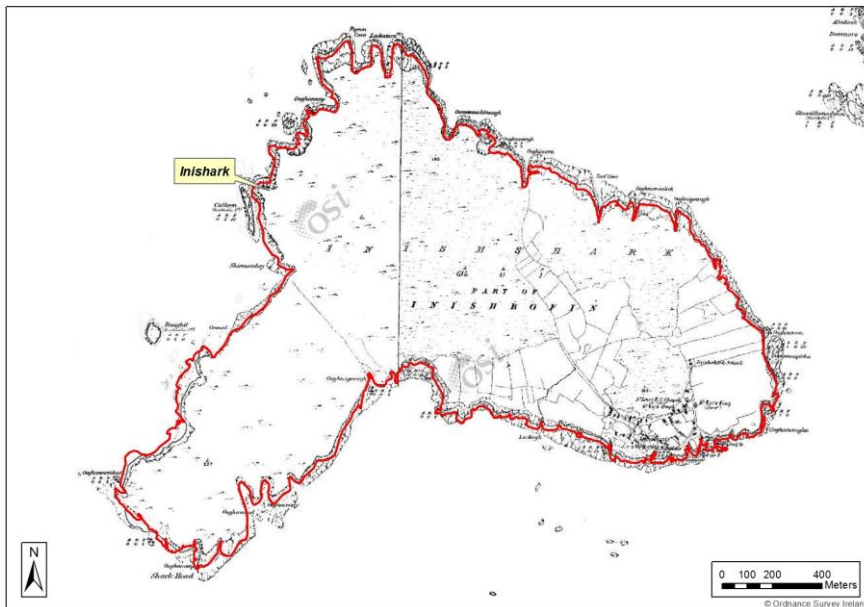
Steatite (talc) exposed along the northeastern coastline of Inishark.

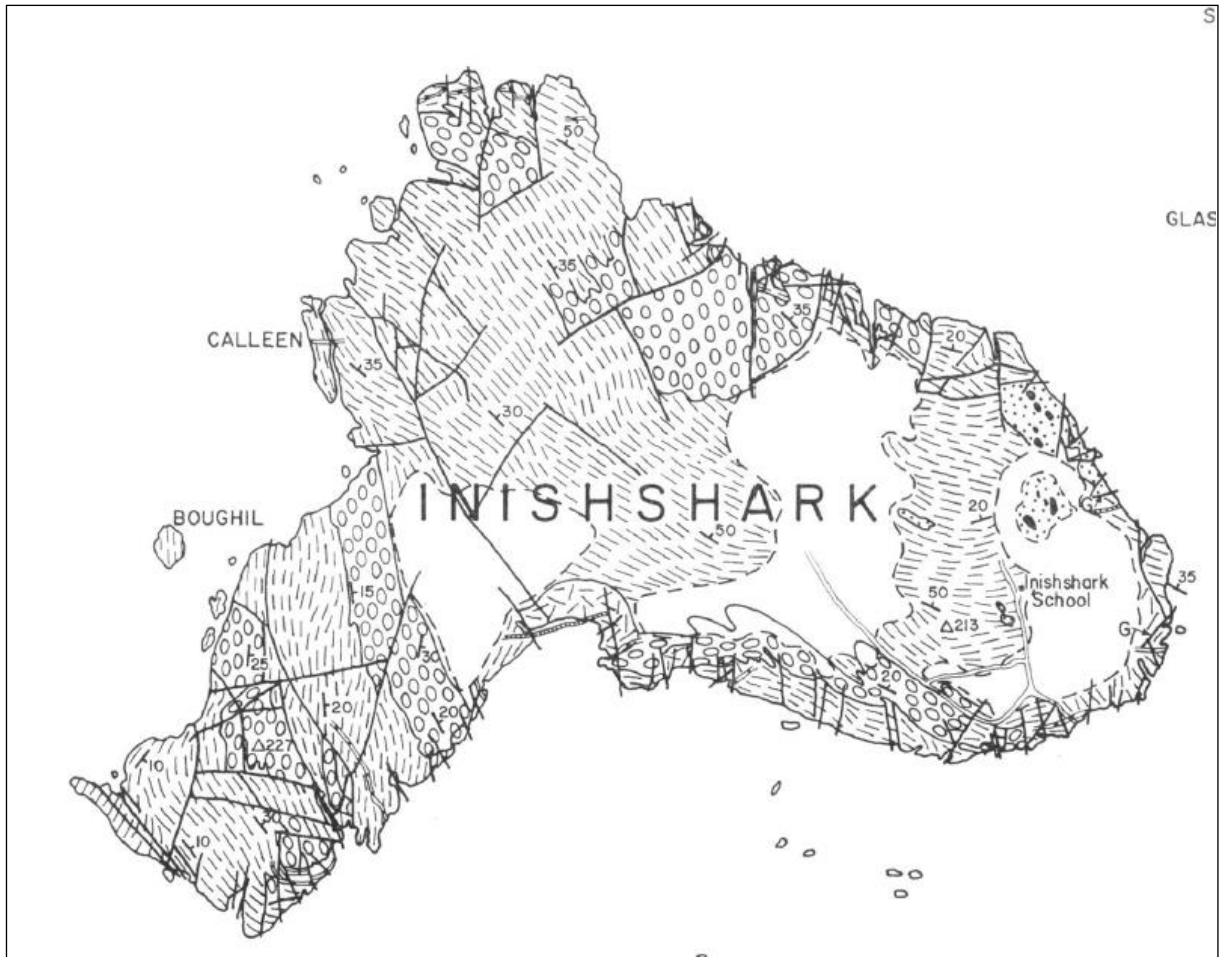


A dolerite dyke, approx. 20m across.



Till over glacioteconite till near landing jetty.





Detailed geology of Inishshark, from paper by Cruise and Leake (1969).