

KILKENNY - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Coolbaun Valley
Other names used for site	
IGH THEME:	IGH 15 (Economic Geology)
TOWNLAND(S)	Coolbaun
NEAREST TOWN	Castlecomer
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	6
NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE	256689 174137 = S 566 741
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	61 1/2 inch Sheet No. 19

Outline Site Description

Disused coal mines within a small valley.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

Upper Carboniferous (Westphalian) shale and coal of the Coolbaun Formation

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

This valley and its mines, 5km from Castlecomer, penetrate into the bedrock of the Coolbaun Formation to expose thin seams of coal within the more dominant shale. Along the two adits that lead into these mines are stream sections, which expose the same shale and, to a lesser extent, coal seen in the mines. Throughout these stream sections an iron sulphide mineral called pyrite (also known as 'Fool's Gold') can be observed.

Site Importance

The mining tradition in this part of Kilkenny has a strong role to play in the local community. This is reflected in the opening of a new mining heritage centre in Castlecomer. These two adits (near-horizontal mine tunnels) represent a period in Irish history when large numbers of people were dependent on the local coal extraction industry. Many locals have expressed their views on the importance of this area becoming a geological heritage site. Old mining structures were observed, which may be of some historic importance. This site is recommended as a County Geological Site for both its geological interest and cultural importance.

Management/promotion issues

This site is accessed along a third class road just east of the townland of Coolbaun. Dumping was observed along the valley's track and if unchecked could become a serious problem. The track appears to be a public walkway but ownership of the land is unknown. This location is not suitable for promotion without the landowner's permission and the proper precautions being taken to prevent unauthorised access to the mines, which are inherently a dangerous environment.



Left: A view inside one of the mine adits: the passageway is approximately 1.5m high but narrows dramatically further in.
Right: Anthracite – a high grade coal, which was mined at this site in the past.

Coolbaun Valley

