

LONGFORD - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Ballymahon Esker		
Other names used for site			
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary		
TOWNLAND(S)	Keel, Calliaghstown, Carricknagower, Milltown, Harrystown, Dungolman, Ballynacorra		
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Ballymahon		
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	22, 26		
NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE	617770E 752410N (centre of feature)		
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	40	GSi BEDROCK 1:100,000 Sheet No.	12

Outline Site Description

An elongated ridge of sands and gravels deposited under the ice sheet at the end of the last Ice Age, Ballymahon Esker extends from Ballymahon town to Dungolman, Co. Westmeath. The crest of the esker carries a road along much of its length.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

An esker ridge formed on Lower Carboniferous bedrock. The feature is Quaternary in age and formed during deglaciation of the ice sheet towards the end of the Ice Age, between 22,000 and 14,000 years ago (Devensian).

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Ballymahon esker is one of a series of north-south oriented eskers that lie just north of the east-west oriented central Irish Midlands esker system. Ballymahon esker comprises 12 kilometres of ridge segments (beads); each a narrow, sharp-crested ridge of coarse-grained sediments which trends southeast (down-ice direction) from Ballymahon town, and gently uphill, terminating in a wide, flat-topped, fan-shaped area. The esker runs east of and parallel to the Dungolman River.

The esker formed from meltwater deposits that were laid down within an ice-walled channel in a slowly receding ice sheet, which had occasional stillstands, at the end of the last deglaciation (22,000 to 14,000 years ago). The sediments within the esker segments indicate sequential deposition as the ice margin retreated.

The esker lies along the western edge of a hummocky moraine that spreads over 10 km east-northeast from Lough Ree.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

The sand and gravel ridge, standing proud of the surrounding low-lying landscape, is a fine example of a beaded esker. The landform lends important evidence to the understanding of the nature of the deglaciation of the Irish and British ice sheet – suggesting a gradual recession rather than a widespread collapse of the ice sheet.

Management/promotion issues

As with many eskers on the Irish landscape, the ridge carries a road across otherwise low-lying land, and the route is most likely a very ancient track-way.



Ballymahon Esker at Keel (road along ridge top, by telephone poles) looking south.



Rounded boulders from esker in stone wall along the ridge road.



Sand and pebble sediments in quarry along the side of esker.



Ballymahon esker (ITM 618590 751100) looking south. Road along ridge hidden by hedges.

