

LONGFORD - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Corlea Trackway
Other names used for site	<i>Bóthar Chorr Liath, the Danes' Road</i>
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary, IGH15 Economic Geology, IGH16 Hydrogeology
TOWNLAND(S)	Cloonbreaney
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Keenagh
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	22
IRISH GRID REFERENCE	610205E 762540N (trackway in visitor centre)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	40 GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 12

Outline Site Description

The Corlea Trackway is an Iron Age trackway, or *togher*, near the village of Keenagh, which was constructed from oak planks in 148–147 BC.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The Corlea Trackway is situated within an area dominated by bedrock of Lower Carboniferous limestone. The trackway itself is set in peat which is Quaternary in age, having formed as an extensive envelope of the landscape in the area since deglaciation, and mostly approximately 7,000-10,000 years ago.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The trackway is situated in an area harvested for peat on an industrial-scale by Bord na Móna, principally to supply the peat-fired power stations of the ESB. While today a generally flat and open landscape, the locality was covered by bog, marsh, quicksand, and ponds in the Iron Age, and surrounded by dense woodlands of birch, willow, hazel and alder. Higher ground was underlain by mineral soil, some distance away, and was covered by oak and ash. The terrain was dangerous and impassible for much of the year.

In 1984, timbers recovered from Corlea were radiocarbon dated to the Iron Age (rather than the Bronze Age as had been expected), and an archaeological project was established under Professor Barry Raftery of UCD to investigate the site before it was destroyed by peat-digging. Excavations to 1991 revealed 59 *toghers* in an area of around 125 hectares, and further work has raised the total to 108 with a further 76 in the nearby Derryoghil bog. Dating has shown that the Corlea Trackway was itself constructed in a single year.

The Corlea Trackway was approximately 1 kilometre long and ended on a small island, from which a second trackway connected to dry land on the far side of the bog. The purpose of the trackway is uncertain, but may have served to get to or into the bog, perhaps for ritual purposes, rather than merely to cross it. Whatever its purpose, the roadway was usable for only a few years. This disappearance of the feature gives the site its geological interest, as it was gradually covered by the rising bog, and sank under its own weight into it within a decade.

The site has a visitor centre where audio-visual records of the trackway and its archaeological excavation process are shown, along with an actual preserved section of the trackway. Other features of peat interest are included within the site boundary, such as intact and drained peat, industrially-cutover peat, peat cut by locals, wetlands, and recovering peat.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

As the various forms of peat are all accessible within a small locality, and as the trackway (and its visitor centre) exists due to the geological and hydrogeological process of peat growth, the locality is ranked as a County Geological Site.

Management/promotion issues

The Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre is run by the Office of Public Works. The geological aspects of the feature could be highlighted more in some of the promotional material.



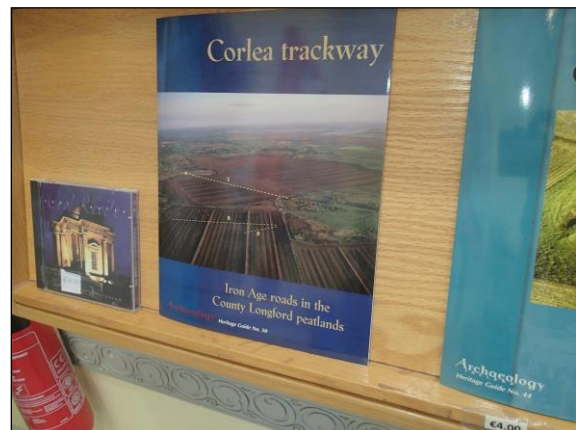
The preserved portion of trackway inside the visitor centre.



Recovering peat in wetlands adjacent to the centre.



Stacked peat on plots harvested by locals.



Some of the promotional material on the trackway on sale inside the visitor centre.

