

LEITRIM - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Poll na mBéar
Other names used for site	Cave of the Bears
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary, IGH1 Karst
TOWNLAND(S)	Largy, Creevelea
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Manorhamilton
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	3
ITM CO-ORDINATES	580280E 846420N
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER 16	GS1 BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 7
GISCODE LM025	

Outline Site Description

A small cave on the escarpment of the large area of upland plateau at Largy, overlooking Glenade.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The cave is formed within the Dartry Limestone Formation, which is of Mississippian (Lower Carboniferous) age, but the cave itself is probably not of Holocene or post-glacial development, but is more likely a fossil remnant of a pre-glacial karstic system in the Glenade area, now much modified by glaciation.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Largy – Gorteenaguinnell is the most extensive plateau karst doline field in Ireland and is described as a separate County Geological Site. Its northern margin forms a steep cliff. In this cliff there are a small number of caves overlooking the Glenade Valley to the north.

Poll na mBéar was investigated by cavers in 1997 and descending a 6m deep pitch, they discovered a small chamber 3m high and 15m long. This, and other small caves nearby, are likely to have formed under much different hydrogeological regimes prior to the last Ice Age. Valley glaciation during this time probably truncated the underground drainage.

The chamber was strewn with numerous bones, which upon excavation by a team including experts from the National Museum of Ireland, the Ulster Museum and Marble Arch Caves, were found to be those of brown bears. As well as well-preserved adult bones, there was a good number of very juvenile bones. Palaeoenvironmental analysis suggests that the cave was a bear nursery, where sadly the juvenile bears were unable to make the climb out, and perished in the den.

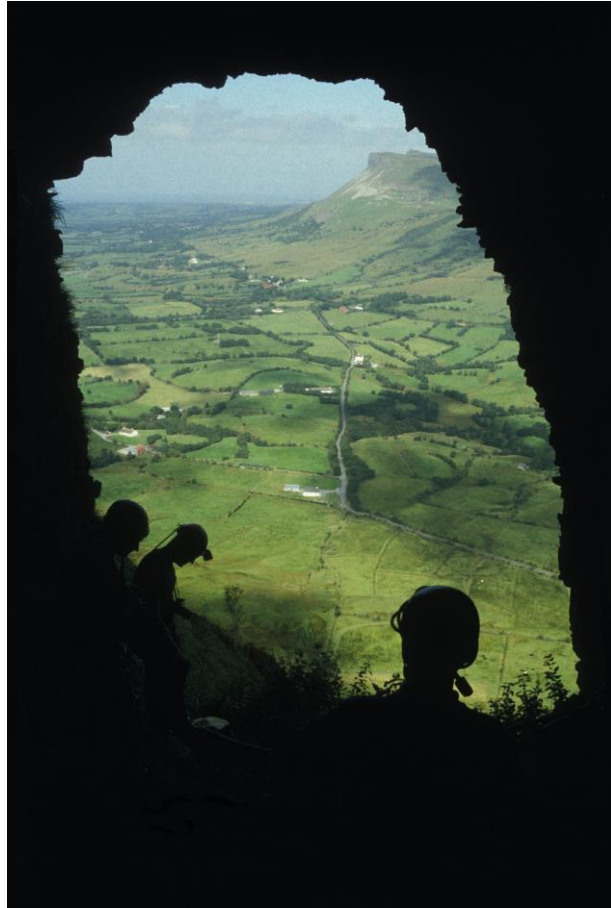
The bear remains have been dated to the Middle Neolithic (4520 ± 37 BP). They have also played a significant role in genetic studies that suggest all living Polar Bears worldwide are descendants of an Irish Brown Bear.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

Although it falls adjacent to the Largy – Gorteenaguinnell County Geological Site, and is a cave, the more important post-glacial story of the Brown Bear habitation indicates that it is best treated as a County Geological Site in its own right.

Management/promotion issues

The cave is especially unsuitable for visiting, even providing a challenge to experienced and properly equipped cavers. It is in a loose and precipitous cliff, 200m above the valley floor. The excavated bones are in the collections of the Natural History Museum in Dublin.



View from the shallow cave beside Poll na mBéar.



The cliffs above Poll na mBéar and Peakadaw.

