

LAOIS - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Ridge of Portlaoise		
Other names used for site	Portlaoise Esker, Ridge of Maryborough		
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary		
TOWNLAND(S)	Rathleague, Downs, Borris Little, Meelick, Maryborough, Ballytegan, Gorteen, Cooltoran, Knocknagroagh		
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Portlaoise		
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	13		
ITM CO-ORDINATES	647290E 698630N (the Ridge Graveyard, on the feature in Portlaoise Town)		
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	54	GSi BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO.	15

Outline Site Description

The Ridge of Portlaoise and its surrounding sands and gravels include a long, sinuous accumulation of sands and gravels deposited both under the ice sheet and at its margin as the ice withdrew northwards across central Laois at the end of the last Ice Age.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The Ridge of Portlaoise is formed within an area dominated by bedrock of Lower Carboniferous limestones. The esker and flanking gravels themselves are Quaternary in age, having been deposited either under or at the edge of the northward-retreating ice sheet during deglaciation, approximately 14,000 years ago.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Where present the esker ridge is a striking feature, standing proud of the flat landscape of till (boulder clay) upon which it was deposited. Intact portions along Downs Road, southeast of the town, and within Portlaoise Town itself (particularly at the Ridge Graveyard), are especially impressive. In both localities the esker is comprised of a raised, steep-sided, elevated ridge of sands and gravels.

The esker feature is important in that it records faithfully the ice movement across this area of central Laois which is along its orientation, *i.e.* north to south. Associated sands and gravels in Downs, Cooltoran and Ballytegan Townlands, flanking the esker, are probably part of associated ice marginal fans. The sands and gravels within the feature are comprised chiefly of limestone clasts, but some sandstones are also present.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

What remains of the feature is still a high, striking example of a dry sand and gravel ridge, which stands proud of the surrounding landscape. This esker and the associated sands and gravels in the locality are a good example of a deglacial, meltwater-deposited complex, with portions deposited under the ice, and portions at the ice margin.

Management/promotion issues

This esker system comprises a well-defined landform sequence and should be listed as a County Geological Site. The esker ridge has been delisted as a pNHA (sitecode 000876) but all of this area is defined here as a County Geological Site, although the esker ridge segments themselves are not worthy of pNHA status geologically or geomorphologically.

Much of the feature has been destroyed by the development of Portlaoise to the south in recent years. It is important that the balance between development and conservation of this feature is examined in the future.



The Ridge of Portlaoise, looking north from the town boundary at Downs. Note the high, elevated nature of the ridge.



Mature trees and semi-natural vegetation along the esker ridge in Downs.



The Ridge Cemetery in Portlaoise Town.



Some of the dug out esker adjacent to a retail park in Portlaoise.

