

ROSCOMMON - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Ballinasloe-Split Hills-Clonmacnoise-Clara Esker System
Other names used for site	Clonmacnoise esker, Split Hills esker, Clara esker, The Pilgrims Road, The Eiscir Riada
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary
TOWNLAND(S)	Tulrush, Culliaghmore, Culliaghbeg, Cloonfad, Cornaveagh, Cloonburren
NEAREST TOWN	Ballinasloe, Shannonbridge
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	53, 56
NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE	193210 227170 (centre of features)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	47 1/2 inch Sheet No. 15

Outline Site Description

This is a long, beaded, often high, sinuous esker ridge system that traverses a lateral distance of just under 70 kilometres across the Central Midlands, including counties other than just Roscommon.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The esker is formed on bedrock which is Lower Carboniferous limestone. The feature itself is Quaternary in age, having been deposited at the base of the ice sheet moving west to east during early deglaciation after the last Ice Age.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The esker system is one of the finest examples of a long, wide tunnel-deposited esker in the country. The ridge also has many associated fan, delta, and sandur (a plain formed of glacial sediments deposited by meltwater outwash at the terminus of a glacier) features associated with it. This ridge is one of the three major conduit systems that subglacially drained the melting ice sheet in the Irish Midlands. It crosses Roscommon between the Suck and the Shannon Rivers and follows the R357 road for most of its course. It is generally oriented in an east-west direction and has many small and large pits, both currently in use and disused, cut into it. The feature interfingers with many flanking fans and deltas, with a pronounced kame-kettle topography in places.

The esker is comprised chiefly of limestone clasts which have been derived from the bedrock around the site within the Irish Midlands. These were carried by ice, released into the meltwater conduit at the base of the ice, and rounded in a subglacial river before being left upstanding as the esker when the ice melted.

Site Importance – County Geological Site; recommended for Geological NHA

The esker is probably Ireland's best example of a tunnel-deposited esker.

Management/promotion issues

This is a superb feature and should be designated as a geological NHA. It will be put forward by GSI for designation by National Parks and Wildlife Service in the future. Signage along the roadside along the R357 road, especially near the church at Oldtown, might help in the promotion of the feature. A colour leaflet on 'The Eskers of County Roscommon' could also be produced.



One of the esker beads in Cloonburren Townland.
See the steep sides on the ridge.



The esker, poking through bogland and viewed from the west, at Cloonburren.
The long, sinuous nature of the feature is clearly seen.



The esker winding east towards the west, also at Cloonburren.

