

TIPPERARY - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Slieve Ardagh coalfield		
Other names used for site			
IGH THEME	IGH 15 Economic Geology		
TOWNLAND(S)	Ballingarry, Ballynunty, Ballyphilip, Blackcommon, Earlshill, Gorteen Upper, Knockanglass, Lickfinn, Lisnamrock, Mardyke Ballingarry		
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Ballingarry		
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	48, 49, 54, 55		
ITM CO-ORDINATES	623200E 648400N (southwest), 631500E 653800N (northeast)		
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	67	GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO.	18

Outline Site Description

The Slieve Ardagh coalfield underlies the Slieve Ardagh hills in north County Tipperary, a series of rolling hills incised by several streams and tributaries. The land is predominantly grassland, mostly used as cattle pasture. The main part of the coalfield forms a 13 km-long zone between Ballynunty in the southwest and Commons in the northeast.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The Slieve Ardagh coalfield is hosted by an outlier (younger rocks surrounded by stratigraphically underlying older rocks) of Upper Carboniferous (Pennsylvanian) sandstones, siltstones and shales that sit on the surrounding Lower Carboniferous (Mississippian) limestones. The nine mapped anthracite coal seams are within the Westphalian or Coal Measures sequence, the uppermost part of the Pennsylvanian succession.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Slieve Ardagh coalfield is one of Ireland's three main historic coalfields and as such it is a significant importance in the context of Irish geology and mining. Coal was mined in the Slieve Ardagh district since at least the mid-17th century. Until the early 19th century mining was the preserve of individuals who mined outcropping seams to shallow depths using shafts sunk directly along the outcrop (bassets) or bell pits but relatively few traces of these can be discerned with any certainty today. In 1826, the Mining Company of Ireland (MCI) established a colliery at Mardyke, along with miners' houses, a school, offices and police barracks. MCI also established operations at Foilacamin, Commons and later Earlshill and Ballyphillip. By the end of the century, however, mining had almost ceased apart from the activities of individuals who continued to extract coal from bassets. The need for indigenous economic resources during the Second World War led to the opening of Ballynunty by Mianraí Teoranta in 1941 and a second era of systematic mining began, which included collieries at Ballingarry-Copper (1948-1972), Gorteen (1957-1972), Commons (1962) and Lickfinn (1978-1982), as well as opencast operations at Knockanglass and Ballyphillip.

A feature of Slieve Ardagh that is not seen in the other coalfields is the preservation of 19th-century mine buildings, including the superb quadrangular chimney at Copper and the unique powderhouse at Earlshill.

Site Importance – County Geological Sites

The best sites are described individually in their respective CGS reports.

Management/promotion issues

All sites are on private land and not all are suitable for promotion owing to safety or other concerns. Most of the extant 19th-century mine buildings require conservation if they are to be preserved in the long-term. The Old School Mining Museum in Commons, run by knowledgeable and committed volunteers, could be the basis for any mine heritage or geotourism initiatives in the district.