

WESTMEATH - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Rock of Curry and Hill of Mael
Other names used for site	Hill of Moat
IGH THEME	IGH12 Mesozoic and Cenozoic
TOWNLAND(S)	Curry, Carlanstown, Robinstown, Littlewood, Bigwood, Balrath
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Castlepollard
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	3
ITM CO-ORDINATES	644835E 776325N (centre of site)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	41 GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 12

Outline Site Description

The Rock of Curry and the Hill of Mael are adjacent, relatively low hills, partly joined by a saddle. They are slightly isolated hills which rise from a surrounding plain.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The isolated, combined ridge of the Rock of Curry and Hill of Moat are comprised of bedrock of Carboniferous limestone. It is believed however that they represent an erosional landform from the Palaeogene Period (65 to 23 million years ago). .

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The Rock of Curry and Hill of Mael ridge is believed to be a remnant of a tower karst landscape, similar to those that can be seen today in parts of China and SE Asia. At some time during the Palaeogene Period, which began about 65 million years ago, Ireland was subject to intense subtropical weathering. The landscape of the Midlands of Ireland was Carboniferous limestone but it was probably significantly higher relief, and subject to karstic weathering processes. During the Pleistocene, or Ice Age, Ireland was subject to intense glaciation. Much rock, and previously weathered rock deposits were removed and the landscape lowered through erosion. In a few locations around the country isolated hills like the Rock of Curry and Hill of Mael are interpreted as the remnants of previous tower karst, remaining after glaciation.

In a caving newsletter from 1991 Mike Simms reported a series of small caves in the Rock of Curry, which are segments of a rectilinear maze cave, typical of saturated, phreatic conditions, but at least 50m above present day water table. The caves must therefore predate the present landscape considerably.

There are similar hills, such as Mullaghmeen and two unnamed summits, to the northeast which could be part of a remnant tower karst complex, but which are not clear enough to define as such, and be confident of this explanation.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

The steep sides, rock cliffs and general character of the ridge mean this is a good example of suspected remnant tower karst and worthy of CGS recognition. Further comparative work on all such features would be required before the ridge would be considered as a nationally important example for NHA status.

Management/promotion issues

There is a NHA designation covering a large part of the Rock of Curry and the Hill of Mael, but it is a biological designation and does not relate to the entire landform. A boundary at the approximate base of the isolated hill defines the geomorphological integrity. There are some forest paths providing routes close to the Rock of Curry and onto the Hill of Mael but access is not clear and permission should be sought from landowners. This is especially the case for the Rock of Curry cliffs for rock climbing, where access stipulations are detailed on Irish rock climbing websites.



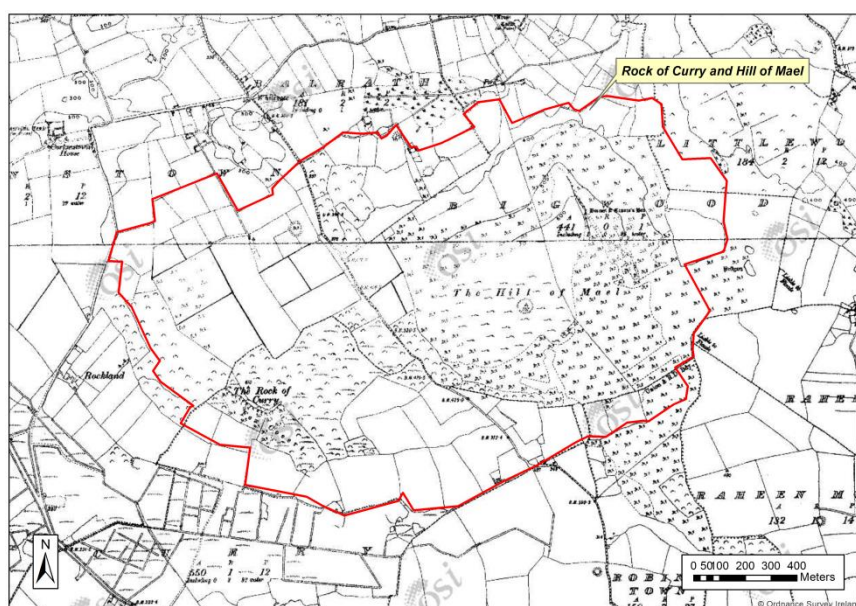
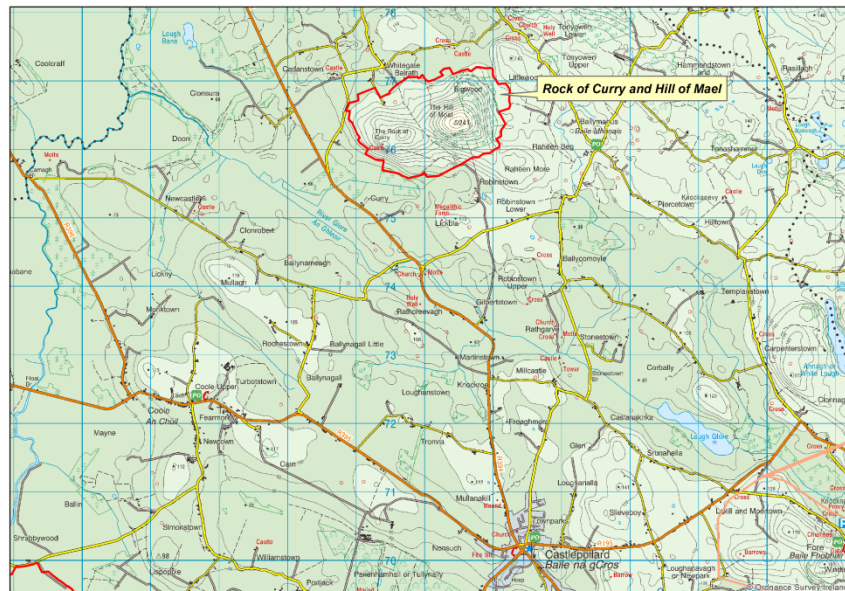
General view of the Rock of Curry, looking north from the adjacent road, just beyond the southern boundary of the site.

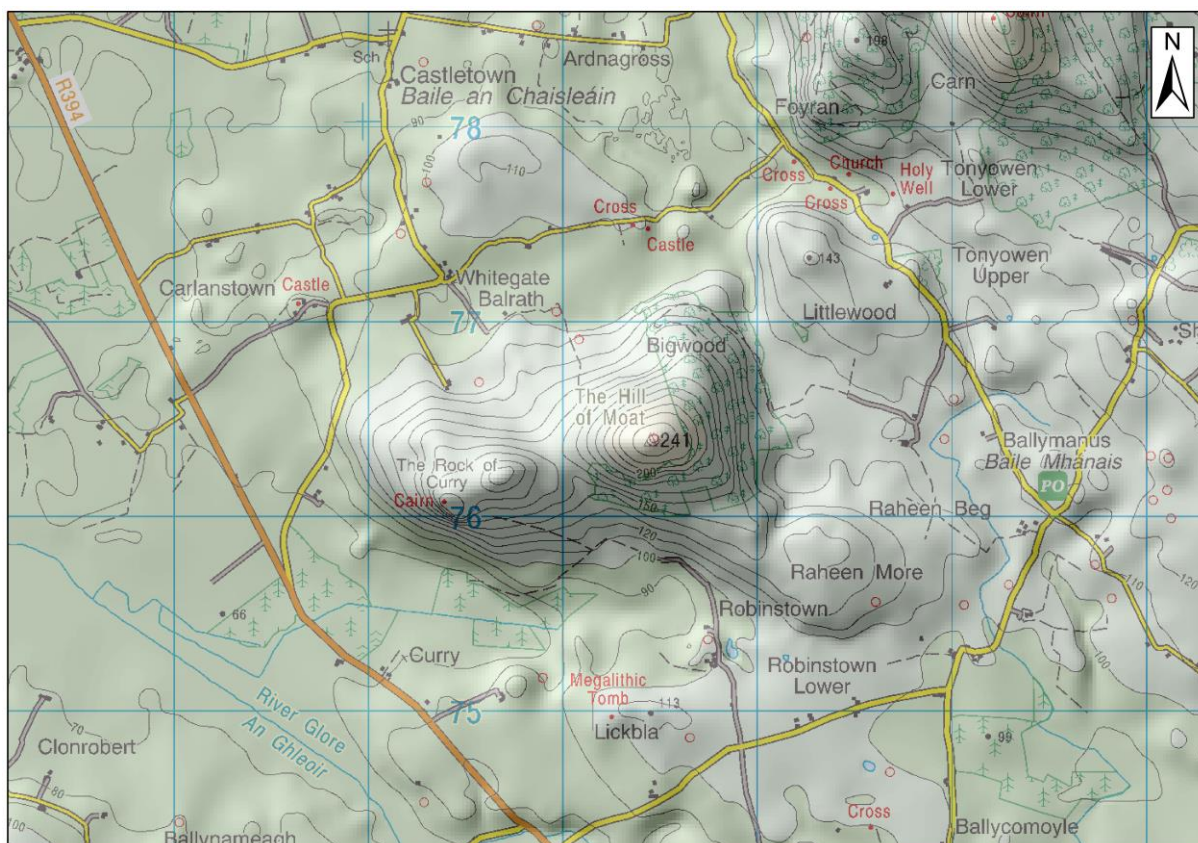


Distant view from the southwest of the Rock of Curry and Hill of Mael, showing their isolated nature.



View of the Hill of Mael, from the south.





Digital elevation model of the Rock of Curry and Hill of Mael ridge, showing its high, 'tower-like' form in the landscape.