WESTMEATH - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	**Split Hill and Long Hill Esker Complex**
Other names used for site	Split Hills and Long Hills Esker
IGH THEME	**IGH7 Quaternary**
TOWNLAND(S)	**Skeheen, Ballybrown, Gneevebrack, Ballinlaban, Cappaduff, Killard, Greenan, Toorlisnamore, Teernacreeve, Aghyrassy, Cumminstown, Rahinmore, Garryduff, Ardmorney, Ballymachugh, Newtownlow, Kilcloghan, Cornaher**
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	**Kilbeggan**
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	**38**
ITM CO-ORDINATES	**638030E 736120N (Long Hill Esker Woodland)**
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	**48 GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 15**

Outline Site Description
A prominent and scenic feature on the landscape, the esker ridge is host to fine exposures of glaciofluvial deposits, semi-natural woodland, pastureland, and a large sand and gravel pit.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type
The esker was deposited on Lower Carboniferous (Mississippian) limestone bedrock. The esker and flanking fan sediments are Quaternary in age and were deposited towards the end of the last glaciation, around 14,000 years ago, either under or at the edge of the westward-retreating ice sheet during deglaciation.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest
This is a fine example of a long, straight, single crested esker that includes two esker systems (Split Hills and Long Hill) and is herein considered as one esker for the purposes of geological heritage conservation. The esker is one of the longest wooded eskers in the country, and extends northwestward for a distance of 10 km from Swallow Lough and the M6 motorway at Newforest.

The Split Hills and Long Hill Esker is part of the greater Clara Esker Complex [Ballinasloe-Split Hills-Clonmacnoise-Clara Esker] that extends into neighbouring counties to the south and west. At the southeastern end of the esker, having been drained in recent decades, Swallow Lough no longer holds water, ? with a remaining body of water Cornaher Lough at its southern end.

Site Importance – County Geological Site; recommended for Geological NHA
An important County Geological Site, this long, high, ridged and almost continuous esker, together with other midland esker systems, contributes to the interpretation of significant meltwater flows at the end of the last glaciation. The esker exhibits important geodiversity and biodiversity value, and was recorded in the Areas of Scientific Interest (ASI) list for Westmeath. The site is a designated SAC (Split Hills and Long Hill Esker SAC 001831), and noted for its mature woodland (Hazel, Ash, Hawthorn, Whitebeam and Oak) and grassland.

Management/promotion issues
The Long Hill Esker Wildlife Habitat is accessible from the R446 (previously N6) road cutaway on the Kilbeggan to Tyrrellspass road. This cutaway exposes gravels and cobbles on the north side of the road, although the sediments are gradually being naturally vegetated. An information board here makes reference to the origin of the eskers. North of Kilbeggan, the esker ridge has been quarried for aggregate at Toornalismore and Teernacreeve. The quarry site is operated (2018) by Gannon Concrete, Split Hill Quarries, Kilbeggan. Immediately opposite the quarry entrance, the Westmeath Way walking route follows the route of the esker ridge (L11225) eastwards for over 1 km to where the River Brosna bisects the esker. Road cutaways along this section expose a variety of glaciofluvial sediments from boulders to sands. A large quarry section is also visible from the Westmeath Way. The preservation of the integrity of the esker landforms should be considered in light of any future new quarrying sites.

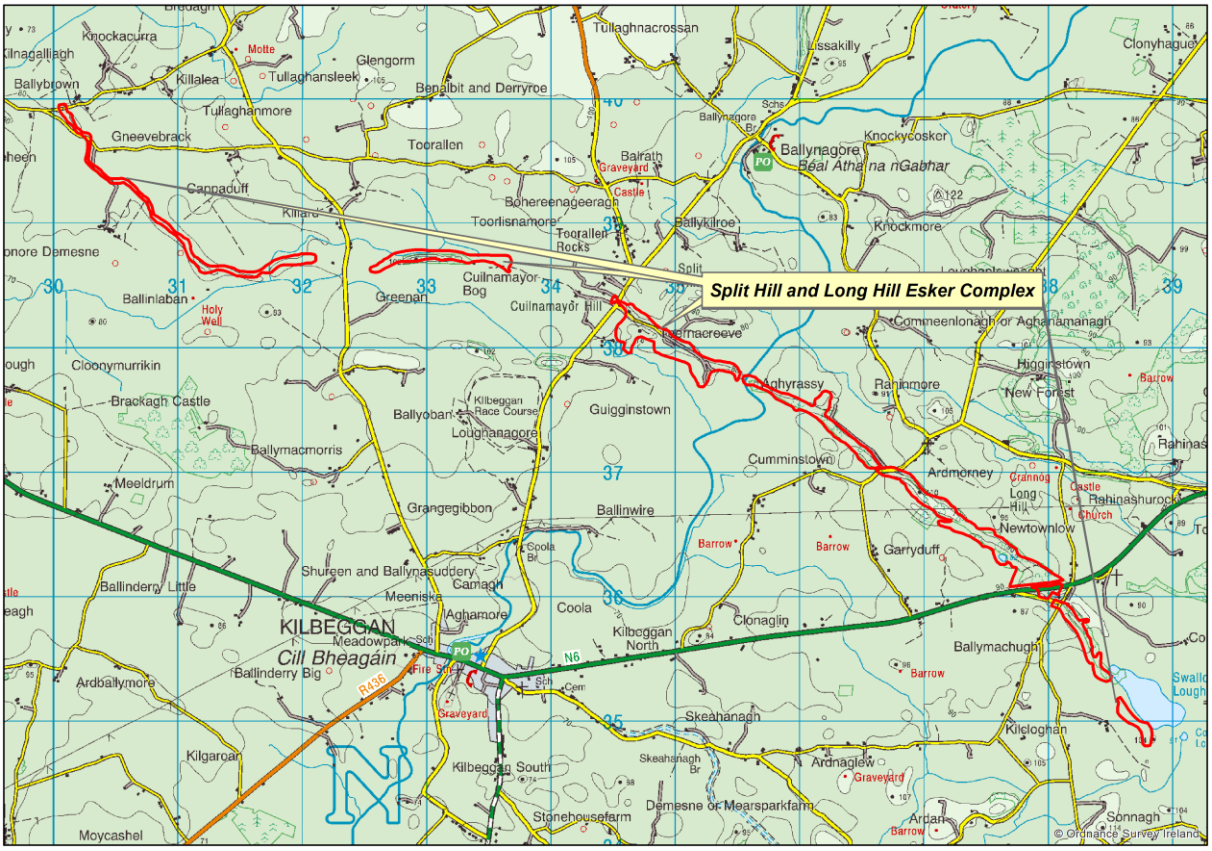
Cornaher Lough at the south end of the now drained Swallow Lough depression.

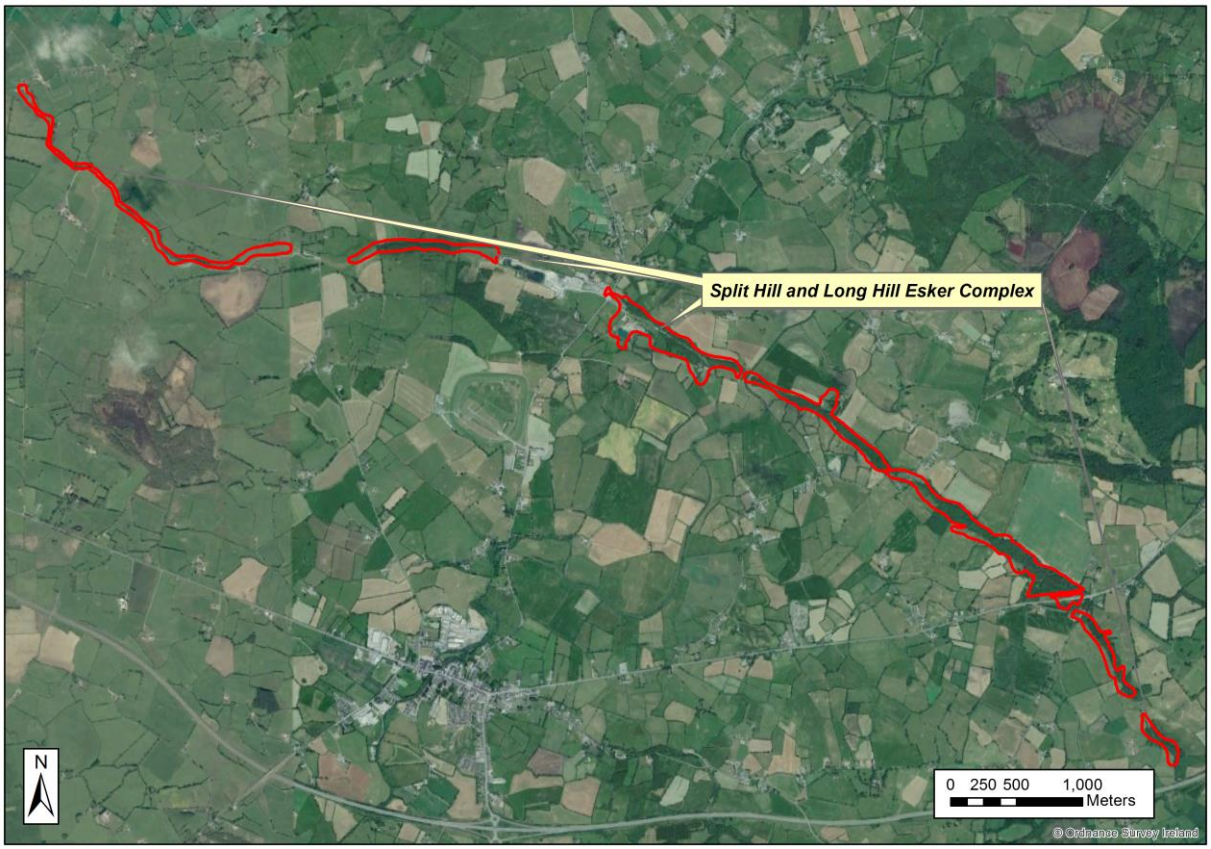
Sand and boulders exposed in road cutaway on the Westmeath Way, Teernacreeve.

Esker section at Grennan. Viewed from L1223 road, looking east.

Sand and gravel pit at Teernacreeve. Looking west.

R446 Kilbeggan-Tyrrellspass road cutting through Long Hill Esker.





Meehan *et al.* 2019. Geological Survey Ireland.