

WICKLOW - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	West Avoca		
Other names used for site	Ballygahan, Ballymurtagh		
IGH THEME	IGH15 Economic Geology		
TOWNLAND(S)	Ballygahan, Ballymurtagh		
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Avoca		
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	35		
NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE	719512E 681596N		
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	62	GSI Bedrock 1:100,000 Sheet No.	19

Outline Site Description

West Avoca occupies a hillside site above the Avoca River and an extensive grassy site on the river bank. The site is surrounded on three sides by pasture and forestry. The Rathdrum–Avoca road runs through the site.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The bedrock is part of the c. 455 Ma Ordovician Avoca Volcanic Formation which comprises an interbedded sequence of strongly deformed and altered volcanic and sedimentary rocks. Massive, disseminated and vein-hosted sulphide mineralization (chalcopyrite, pyrite, galena and sphalerite) is found mainly within distinctive chloritic tuffs.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The West Avoca site incorporates two major 19th-century mine sites, Ballygahan and Ballymurtagh. The former became the locus of the 20th-century underground mine as well as the Pond Lode open pit. At its height between the late 1950s and final closure in 1982, the site contained a large ore mill, workshops, mine offices and dormitories. Houses built in the late 1950s along the Red Road south of the site to accommodate mine managers still exist. Access to the underground mine was via a large portal into the Knight Tunnel. The flat area on the east of the site along the riverbank is the former emergency tailings pond, now covered by a thick layer of grassed soil. There are significant remains of 19th-century mining, especially on the high ground on the western and northern parts of the site. They include several engine houses with intact chimneys, the Tramway Arch, part of the inclined plane railway built in the 1840s to carry ore to Arklow, and various capped shafts. The open pit at Ballymurtagh, described in the 1850s as the then largest in the world, was backfilled with tailings and soil in the 1970s.

Site Importance – County Geological Site

The site was the heart of modern, 20th-century mining at Avoca but little trace of this era remains. The open pit, used as a municipal dump in the 1980s and 1990s, is now infilled and grassed over. Of the modern buildings only the mine offices are intact if derelict. The principal interest on the site is the cluster of conserved 19th-century engine houses and the unique Tramway Arch.

Management/promotion issues

The site of the 20th-century mine is now a recycling centre and access is largely restricted. The engine houses were conserved in the 1990s but in recent years have become almost inaccessible following unchecked growth of trees and shrubs. The western and northern part of the site could be incorporated into a future mine walking trail but the unchecked growth of vegetation around the engine houses would first have to be addressed. The site is unsafe and should not be accessed in its present state by the general public.



View of West Avoca from Mount Platt in Cronebane. The grassed area (middle, left) is the site of the former open pit. The mine spoil of Ballymurtagh can be seen on the right.



The Tramway Arch at Ballymurtagh with the bed of the 1840s railway clearly defined on top.



Former mine offices at West Avoca, proposed as a mine heritage centre in the past, now derelict.



