

WEXFORD - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Hook Head - Overview		
Other names used for site			
IGH THEME	IGH2 Precambrian to Devonian Palaeontology, IGH4 Cambrian-Silurian, IGH7 Quaternary, IGH8 Lower Carboniferous, IGH10 Devonian, IGH15 Economic Geology		
TOWNLAND(S)	Numerous		
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Fethard		
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	49, 50, 54		
ITM CO-ORDINATES	673300E 597350N (below Lighthouse)		
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	76	GSI Bedrock 1:100,000 Sheet No.	23

Outline Site Description

A series of coastal sites on all sides of the Hook Head Peninsula.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The Hook Head Peninsula has rocks ranging from Cambrian in age (Booley Bay) to Devonian (Oldtown Bay to Harrylock Bay, Sandeel Bay) and continuously upwards into the Lower Carboniferous (Hook Head).

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The Hook Head Peninsula contains a wealth of geological heritage of national and some international importance within a self-contained, mostly sea-bound area. The largely flat lying agricultural land away from the coast has virtually no exposures of rocks at all, but the coastal exposure is superb nearly all around the peninsula. The same strata can be seen on the west and east coasts since there is a gentle dip southwards of the Devonian and Lower Carboniferous succession which means that as you go southwards you move onto younger and younger beds in the sequence. The succession exhibits an environmental transition from rocks laid down by rivers on a land surface in the Devonian through to Carboniferous rocks of similar nature, then with a rapid transgression of the sea over the area. This is recorded in a variety of marine deposited rocks, mostly limestone at the Hook Head itself. The geology of Hook Head is well known internationally since the fossils from the limestones are very rich and appear in many museum collections, and include many type species, first described from Hook Head.

The quartz conglomerates of the Harrylock Formation were once really important as a source of millstones, and two sites, Harrylock Bay itself and Graigue Great on the east side were both heavily quarried for millstones. These sites are significant in showing how geodiversity relates to economic activity and industrial heritage.

Site Importance – County Geological Site; recommended for Geological NHA

This suite of sites defines the best sections of geology on Hook Head, and some have already been promoted with/notified to NPWS as sites that should be designated as geological NHAs. When additional resources enable further thematic assessment, then other sites are also likely to be recommended for NHA status.

Management/promotion issues

The coast here is already protected as an SAC and pNHA, but only for marine habitats and other aspects, which includes little definition or comprehension of the geology in the original designations. There is much scope for an improved treatment of the geological and palaeontological interests within the existing framework of protection.

There is scope for a local Fossil Collecting Code, founded in a conservation message, as long as the local community are involved and supportive of it. The Audit report includes discussion and ideas for such a project.

