

LAOIS - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

NAME OF SITE	Clonaslee Eskers
Other names used for site	The Clonaslee Esker, The Kinnitty-Clonaslee Eskers
IGH THEME	IGH7 Quaternary
TOWNLAND(S)	Clonlyon, Coolagh, Garryhedder, Castlecuffe
NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE	Clonaslee
SIX INCH MAP NUMBER	2
ITM CO-ORDINATES	625300E 711500N (centre of main esker segment)
1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER	54 GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 15

Outline Site Description

The Clonaslee Eskers and surrounding deposits include a large accumulation of sands and gravels deposited both under the ice sheet and at its margin as the ice withdrew westwards across north Laois, north of Slieve Bloom, at the end of the last Ice Age.

Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The Clonaslee Eskers and surrounding sands and gravels are formed along the line of suture between the Devonian Old Red Sandstones of the Slieve Bloom Mountains, and the Lower Carboniferous limestones of the lowlands surrounding them.

The eskers themselves are Quaternary in age, having been deposited either under or at the edge of the westward-retreating ice sheet during deglaciation, approximately 14,000 years ago.

Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

Where present the esker ridges are striking features, standing proud of the flat landscape of till (boulder clay) upon which it was deposited. Intact portions just north of the main R421 road west of Clonaslee, and within Coolagh Townland, are especially impressive. In both localities the esker is comprised of a haphazard arrangement of raised, elevated ridges of sands and gravels. Some of the hollows between the ridges are remarkably deep and wide.

The esker feature is important in that it records faithfully the ice movement across this area of northwest Laois, where the ice flow swept around the Slieve Bloom Mountains. As the glacier retreated across the area north of the mountains, the margin began to break up and the irregular, hummocky topography of these eskers records this 'dead ice' environment. Associated sands and gravels in Garryhedder and Coolagh Townlands, flanking the esker, are probably part of associated ice marginal fans. The sands and gravels within the feature are comprised chiefly of limestone clasts, but with significant portions of shale and sandstone also.

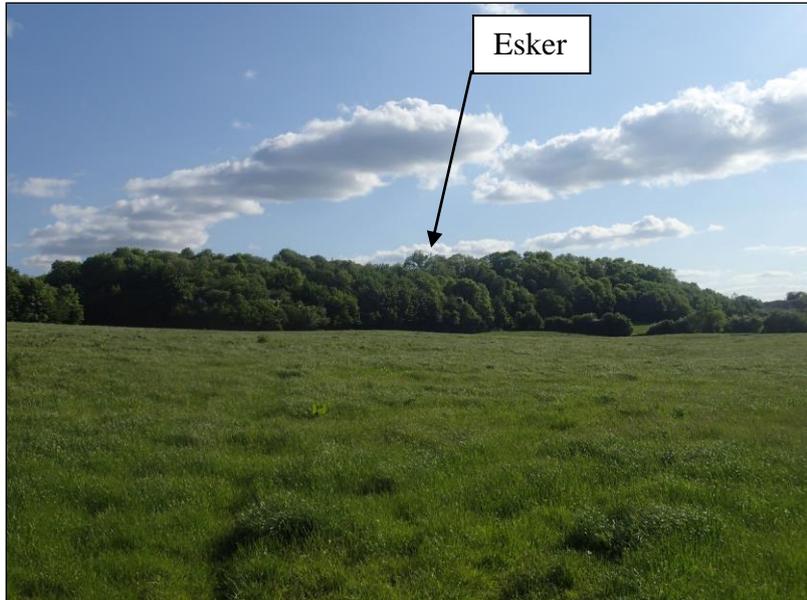
Site Importance – County Geological Site

The features are haphazardly arranged, high, striking examples of dry sand and gravel ridges, and stand proud of the surrounding landscape. These eskers and their associated sands and gravels in the locality are a good example of a deglacial, meltwater-deposited complex, with portions deposited under the ice, and portions at the ice margin.

Management/promotion issues

This system comprises a well-defined landform sequence and should be listed as a County Geological Site. The eskers and their adjacent area across Derry Bog have been designated a pNHA and SAC (sitecode 000859) and all of this area, including the portion of Derry Bog, is proposed here as a County Geological Site. The esker ridge segments themselves, and the bog, are not worthy of pNHA status geologically or geomorphologically.

A signboard along the R421 road west of Clonaslee, where the features can be well seen, might help promote the features.



The main Clonaslee Esker, looking north, across Coolagh Townland.



Looking north across haphazard esker topography and the flanking Derry Bog, in Coolagh.



Some of the hummocky terrain where the esker and fans meet, in Garryhedder.



An exposure into the main esker ridge in Coolagh.

