

# WESTMEATH - COUNTY GEOLOGICAL SITE REPORT

<b>NAME OF SITE</b>	<b>Hill of Uisneach</b>
Other names used for site	Uishneach, <i>Ushnagh</i> , <i>Usnagh Hill</i>
<b>IGH THEME</b>	<b>IGH1 Karst, IGH7 Quaternary</b>
<b>TOWNLAND(S)</b>	<b>Kellybrook, Ushnagh Hill, Mweelra</b>
<b>NEAREST TOWN/VILLAGE</b>	<b>Ballymore</b>
<b>SIX INCH MAP NUMBER</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>ITM CO-ORDINATES</b>	<b>629100E 748775N (centre of hill summit)</b>
<b>1:50,000 O.S. SHEET NUMBER</b>	<b>48 GSI BEDROCK 1:100,000 SHEET NO. 12</b>

## Outline Site Description

The Hill of Uisneach is a prominent hill rising from an otherwise gently undulating landscape of midland raised bogs and low-lying pasture.

## Geological System/Age and Primary Rock Type

The hill is cored by limestones of Lower Carboniferous age, formed around 340 million years ago. The hill has been blanketed by a veneer of glacial till sediments and many erratic boulders which are Quaternary in age, having been smeared and/or dropped across the top of the hill by ice between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago.

## Main Geological or Geomorphological Interest

The Hill of Uisneach, like many of the other, higher hills in County Westmeath, may be a remnant of tower karst. The karstic nature of the limestone bedrock forming the hill is easily seen upon a traversal of the feature, with many small areas of limestone pavement, localities of limestone bedrock outcrop and subcrop, dry valley features, erratic boulders of limestone, and small depressions, all visible across the summit.

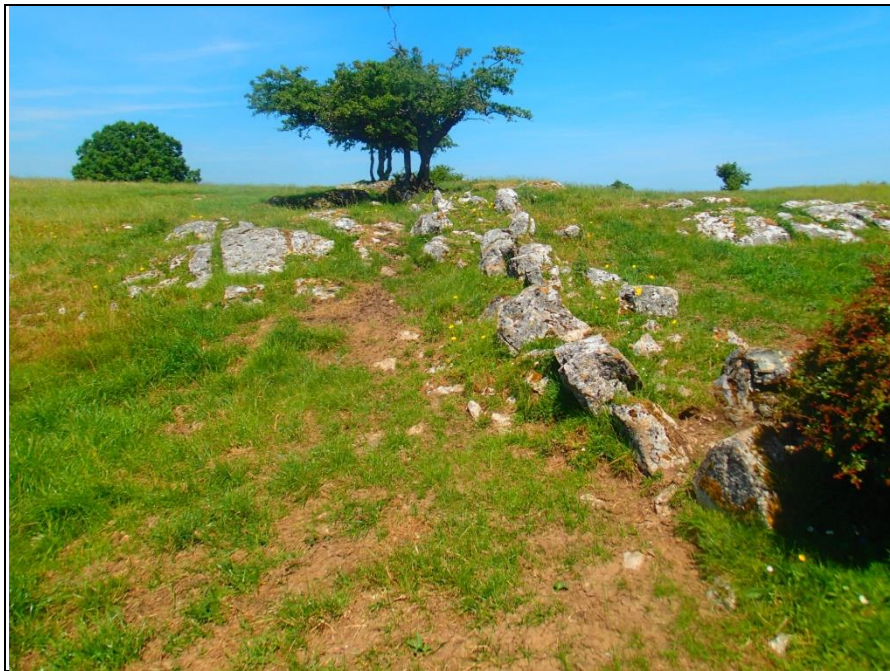
The most striking erratic boulder on the hilltop is '*Ail na Mireann*', or the 'Stone of the Divisions' (which is also called 'the Catstone'), on the western shoulder of the hill. This huge boulder weighs several tonnes and has split upon deposition on the hillside, as it fell or was dropped from glacier ice. Legend has it that this erratic symbolises Ireland, united in its divisions, and that the stone also marks the centre of Ireland where the provinces came together. Legend also states that it is underneath this stone that *Éiru*, after whom the country is named, was laid to rest.

## Site Importance – County Geological Site

This is an important County Geological Site in terms of karst geology, particularly in this region of the low-lying midlands, which is predominantly underlain by Carboniferous limestones either covered by glacial till or bog. The site should be recognised as a geological site owing to the good and extensive areas of bedrock outcrop and subcrop across top of the hill, as well as the fact that one of the most famous archaeological features on the hill is a glacial erratic.

## Management/promotion issues

The site consists of a set of monuments and earthworks spread over two square kilometres, including the remains of circular enclosures, barrows, cairns, a holy well and two ancient roads. The hill is open for walks to the public and is also the home of Uisneach Guided Tour company, whose tours examine the archaeological heritage (and also mention aspects of the geology). Some specific geological leaflets for distribution on these tours might be a worthwhile addition to the site.



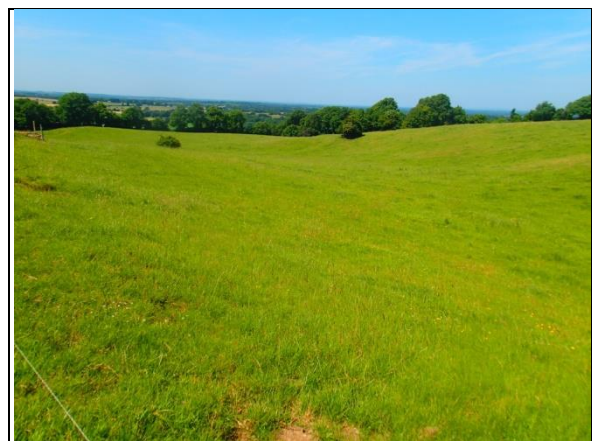
Limestone pavement on the summit of the Hill of Uisneach.



'Ail na Mireann', or "The Stone of the Divisions" (also called 'The Catstone'), which is a large erratic boulder which has split upon deposition on the hillside.



The small pond at the northeastern end of the Hill of Uisneach site.



The shallow surface channel, which may be a karstic dry valley, at the western shoulder of the hill.

