

The 2020 Annual Fieldtrip of the International Association of Hydrogeologists (Irish Group) to County Louth

‘Hydrogeological aspects of the Annagassan and Salterstown areas’

The year 2020 has been unusual on many counts, in terms of day-to-day living, which proved no different when it came to the IAH Field Trip and the organisation of same.

Early in the summer, when field trip preparations usually begin, co vid 19 restrictions on movement were at their height, with a national lockdown in place. Uncertainty was rife, and the committee decided that, rather than staying away for a night, travelling on a bus collectively, and having a large number of attendees, that the field trip for this year would involve a change of tack.

Following much discussion, a socially-distanced coastal walk was preferred, one which would be restricted to 20 individual households only, plus contributors, on a first-come first-serve basis. The amount of travelling was to be minimised, and following discussion of a number of locality options, it was felt that, as the majority of IAH Members reside in Dublin, that the trip would be to an area relatively local to there. Annagassan in County Louth was chosen, for a number of reasons, no more so than the fact that it provided a nice picnic area where attendees could gather and have a socially-distanced lunch (that they had brought themselves, while driving in their own cars).

Three weeks before the trip, new Government restrictions on outdoor gathering came into force, which meant that we had to restrict attendees even further, to 15 people. This had to include contributors and the Field Trip Secretary; two of the other 12 attendees were, again, from the same household. Emails were sent to all of the first twenty that had signed up earlier in the summer, to ensure that they were indeed coming, but this still meant that there were a few from the original list disappointed. Such is life with co vid 19.

Thus, eventually, this year the Irish Group of the International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH) held their fieldtrip on the Saturday of 12th September. Fifteen intrepid hydrogeologists met in Annagassan for lunch at 1 pm. Hand sanitiser was provided for all and social distance was maintained. During the walk, the expansive beach meant that this social distancing could be adhered to with little discomfort, and discussion over lunch proved vigorous. The weather was pleasant, somewhat dull, but mild and perfect for a brisk walk !

Robbie Meehan initially gave an overview of the landscape geology of the area, including soils, subsoils and climate, and stopped *impromptu* at an exposure into low permeability Irish Sea till not long after the walk down the coast started. This allowed participants to examine the poor percolation characteristics of the till, and the density of one off houses in the area was discussed, having initially been mentioned and commented on by Donal Daly over lunch. This segued nicely into an examination of the local bedrock further down the coast, in Salterstown Townland.

Following a trek of about 3 kilometres southeast from Annagassan, and around a subtle headland, the rocky shore of Salterstown emerged. Here, Russell Rogers of GSI's land mapping unit discussed the bedrock outcrops, where the type site of the Salterstown Formation crops out. The bedrock is intensely deformed and is the only significant example of exposed sulphide mineralization in County Louth - thus, it has been classified as a County Geological Site and may even be recommended as a Geological NHA. John Walsh of ICRAAG aided in promoting discussion (and further learning) on the bedrock sequence. Stunning dykes and amazing structural geology was observed and marvelled at by all.

We then concluded the trip with a visit to the site of St Colmans Well, further south in Salterstown, where Bruce Misstear illustrated this unusual spring emergence, in both it's physical form and hydrochemical signature. After several months of restrictions on field visits, discussion was even more fierce here !

The participants then walked back *via* the road to the car parking places in Annagassan, where hand sanitiser was again available before embarking on the journey home.

Unusually, there was not charge associated with attending the 2020 Annual Field Trip; neither was a Field Guide produced.

The IAH would like to thank Russell Rogers of GSI and Bruce Misstear of TCD for their hard work and time in terms of preparing for and leading such an invigorating, and unusual, field trip for Autumn 2020. Thanks also go to Malcolm Doak for the first of the three following photographs.

Dr. Robbie Meehan, IAH Fieldtrip Secretary



Well apportioned social distancing at the beginning of the trip.



Russell Rogers discusses the Salterstown Formation and its origins.



Bruce Misstear outlines St Colmans Well.