SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: MITCHELSTOWN CAVES

SITE CODE: 000651

This site is located some 10km east of Mitchelstown in Co. Tipperary. The whole of the Mitchelstown cave system as well as small areas around the cave entrances are proposed for designation as a Natural Heritage Area (pNHA).

The caves are situated in the limestone syncline between the Galty and Knockmealdown mountains. This dips at 35-40° and it is at this angle that the major caverns are formed. The entrance of the new cave has been formed by quarrying but the old cave was opened by the collapse of a joint fissure. All the caves are approximately 2.3km in length.

The invertebrate fauna of the caves is interesting in that it supports a number of true troglodytes (specialist cave-dwellers), including a spider, *Porrhomma rosemhaueri* (*P. myops*), and two species of Collembola (springtails), *Sinella cavernicola* and *Lipura wrightii*. The spider has exceedingly small eyes and is pale orange and yellow in colour, while the other two animals are blind, and entirely white.

Internally the caves display many fine dripstone formations and their present owner has carried out considerable work on the "new cave", installing electric lights and improving access.

The fauna of the caves is maintained by the supply of food washed into them – any modifications to the hydrology of the caves that would reduce this input would threaten the survival of this important invertebrate community.

11.11.2009