SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: ROCK OF DUNAMASE

SITE CODE: 000878

This site, otherwise named the 'Fort of the Plain', starts on a prominent limestone outcrop 8km east of Portlaoise. It is one in a string of small limestone outcrops in the region.

Surrounding the ruined fort, the grassland present has developed in the absence of invasion by scrub. The grass species include Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*), False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Downy Oat-grass (*Helictotrichon pubescens*).

The more interesting aspects, from the botanical point of view, are the large limestone boulders and the areas of short turf on the very shallow limestone soil. Here, Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Fern-grass (*Catapodium rigidum*) and Heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) grow and a rich bryophyte flora exists with nine species of moss identified. Herbaceous species such as Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and Hedgerow Crane's-bill (*Geranium pyrenaicum*) can also be observed.

A dense Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) scrub, with Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), encircles the rock. The understorey includes Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) and Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) with typical open woodland herbs such as Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), Ground-ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), and Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*).

The site is a local picnic spot and is visited by numerous people during summer weekends. Pathways are all worn but otherwise there is no great impact on the grasslands. The density of Hazel scrub prevents much exploration and destruction.

The Rock of Dunamase is an interesting botanical site including meadow grassland, shallow limestone soil, pasture and Hazel scrub. It is also important archaeologically, geologically and historically.

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