SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BALLYBETAGH BOG

SITE CODE: 001202

Ballybetagh Bog includes three separate areas of marshland situated approximately 5km north-west of Enniskerry. The north-western and middle bogs lie in a small valley which is an old glacial spillway. These sites are dryish grassy fens which are spring-fed and drained by a large cut in the centre. The south-eastern bog is in a flatter and more open part of the site. There is more surface water evident in this part of the site and this is reflected in the vegetation.

Some fen species which have been recorded from the site include Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*), Early Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*), Marsh Lousewort (*Pedicularis palustris*) and Grass-of-parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*).

Ballybetagh Bog is renowned for the number of skeletons of the extinct Giant Irish Deer (*Megaloceros giganteus*) that have been dug from it. The first was discovered during Famine times when the large drainage ditch was dug as a relief project. Several collections were made in the years after this discovery, the major ones in 1878 and 1913. The middle and south-eastern bogs were extensively dug and yielded the remains of 60-100 Giant Irish Deer and some Reindeer bones. Further excavations in 1880 and 1934 examined the whole range of fossils of the period about 11,000 years ago. This gave an idea of the vegetation and environment in which the deer lived. Further work was carried out in the 1970s and 1980s.

Although the site contains samples of fen and marsh vegetation, the main interest lies in its historical value. Ballybetagh Bog has become a classical site of quaternary studies due to the intensity of research. The bones of Giant Irish Deer have been found in upwards of 150 sites in the country, but nowhere else have their surroundings been subjected to such intense investigation.

Areas of the site have been lost to agricultural development and afforestation. It is important that any further development, especially the insertion of drains, is prevented for it would damage the remaining vegetation of interest. More importantly, if the surface layers were to dry out the peat would begin to oxidise resulting in decomposition and destruction of fossil remains. Disturbance of these deposits would reduce their usefulness for Quaternary environmental history analyses.

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