



Project Description

Caves have been used for millennia as both a place of refuge and a sacred space, and Ireland's cultural heritage is often intrinsically tied to these places. Irish caves have significantly contributed to our understanding of past peoples and landscapes, with recent archaeological research from a number of caves drastically altering our knowledge of human and animal habitation in Ireland, and upcoming publications expected to advance the scientific record even further. The project 'Digging Into the Past: Preserving Ireland's Cultural Heritage through Cave Exploration' will build strong relationships between archaeologists and cavers and help cavers understand the importance of preserving cultural heritage in any exploration, particularly where digging is involved.

The need for archaeological and cultural considerations when evaluating the significance of caves has been highlighted in the 'Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection (2022)' and one of the key objectives of the ECPC is to generate knowledge about the scientific value of caves and karst, to identify and promote suitable and effective methods of their preservation. In line with this, technical guidance, in the form of a cavers handbook, on how cavers should proceed with cave exploration (particularly regarding sediments), in areas with the potential for significant cultural and heritage impact, will be produced and distributed. This work will be carried out by Cork Speleological Group in collaboration with experts from a number of research institutions, using both archaeologists expertise and cavers local knowledge to help preserve Ireland's heritage.



Image top left and top middle: An archaeological findings by CSG cavers in Castlepook Cave, Cork (Credit: Stanislaw Drapala). Image top right: Exploration of Kilmainham Castle Cave, Cork, by CSG (Credit: Stanislaw Drapala). Images bottom row: Cavers and archaeologists during the two week excavation of Kilmainham Castle Cave, Cork (Credit: Ruth Carden).