



**University of Guelph
Department of History**

MA Thesis Defence

Student: Nick Bridges	Date: Tuesday, December 13, 2016
Time: 9:00 am	Place: MacKinnon Extension, Rm. 2020

Title

“Curious Caverns”: Cave Tourism in Nineteenth-Century Ireland

Abstract

Caves were sites in Ireland’s developing tourist landscape during the nineteenth century. In this study, St. Kevin’s Bed, Co. Wicklow, the caverns around Cong, Co. Mayo, and the Mitchelstown caves, Co. Tipperary, are examined to illustrate how these destinations were incorporated within mass tourism, from approximately 1830 to 1914. The tourism industry which developed during the nineteenth century highlighted caves and promoted them as both supernatural and natural spaces within wider landscape tours. As supernatural places, caves expressed Irish myth and folklore. Other sites prompted tourists to consider aspects of Irish history. As the century progressed, interest in, and knowledge of, geology expanded, and caves became destinations where tourists could learn about new scientific developments and experience geological wonder. Caves were prefigured as dynamic destinations able to fulfill the diverse desires of many tourists. However, developments in infrastructure were necessary for travelers to reach these sites. Steamboats ferried tourists across the Irish sea onto the island and an ever-expanding network of railways snaked their way across Ireland. The case studies featured here were all integrated into different tourist networks. St. Kevin’s Bed was a marker within Glendalough’s wider landscape, an established eighteenth century site. Cong was integrated into the developing post-Famine Connemara tour. The Mitchelstown caves were a new landscape features in the South of Ireland, discovered in 1833 and appealing primarily to the scientist. Ireland’s caverns were at once supernatural and natural spaces, often signposted as valuable stops on tourist itineraries.

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