

THE CAUSEWAY COAST

Sonia Chant

Following Dr John Arthurs' talk in May 2005 on the geology of the North Irish coast, I was lucky enough to be setting off just a couple of days later to spend a holiday in a cottage only half a mile from the Giant's Causeway. I hope this will whet your appetite for the field trip which Dr Arthurs plans to lead in 2006.

The formation of the Causeway began 61 million years ago, with three separate volcanic eruptions which forced up through the chalk beds, and rapid cooling of the basalt lava produced polygonal shaped blocks each about a foot across. These are mainly hexagonal, but some have 4, 5, 8 or 10 sides, (*photographs 1 and 2*).



Photograph 1: Causeway



Photograph 2: Causeway

Much later, at the end of the ice age, the coast was eroded back to form the Causeway we see today, creating the Grand, Middle and Lower Causeways, and forming weird and wonderful formations which have been given names like 'Chimney Stacks', 'The Giant's Wishing Chair' and 'Aird's Snout'. Blocks protruding from the shore are anything from a few inches to 20 feet high, but on the cliffs, a footpath climbs to the 'Organ Pipes' a spectacular formation towering 40 feet high, (*photograph 3*).



Photograph 3: Organ Pipes

Also within the cliffs is the band of red laterite, formed by weathering of the lower basalt during a quiet period between eruptions. Within this band are strange circular formations known as the 'Giant's Eyes', a process of the weathering, (*photograph 4*).



Photograph 4: 'Giant's Eyes' Weathering in laterite

The nearby chalk bays, with their fabulous sea arches and stacks (*photograph 5*), form a stunning contrast to the dark basalt, and less than 10 miles away is Carrick Island with cliffs of volcanic bombs and tuffs, accessible by the Carrick-a-rede rope bridge (*photograph 6*), strung precipitously across a 65 foot wide chasm.

Elsewhere, dramatic castles sit on volcanic plugs, and white sand beaches stretch for miles. It is all quite breathtaking.

Watching the sun set over the Causeway Coast is something I shall never forget.



Photograph 5: Sea arch near Portrush White Rocks Bay



Photograph 6: Carrick-a-rede rope bridge

GEO SNAPSHOTS FROM CRETE

Vicki Griffiths



*Folded pelagic platy limestones from
Agios Pavlos, southern Crete*

WOW - compression or what?

