

Towards a geology training and outreach centre in western Ireland

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An outreach and education centre is in the initial phases of development for the coastal area of County Clare, western Ireland. The high Carboniferous sea cliffs of the Loop Head area provide a rich training ground for geoscientists from industry and academia. The cliffs offer a unique, margin-scale perspective of a sedimentary basin fill succession that developed during the height of the Late Palaeozoic glaciation. The rocks, about which there is a long legacy of research, record several glacial cycles, associated with significant eustatic changes in sea level. For geoscientists working with or in industry, the value of the area lies in its analogy with hydrocarbon-bearing, deltaic to deep-water sedimentary successions on several continental margins, such as Miocene and Pliocene successions in the Gulf of Mexico. A programme of behind-outcrop drilling involving UCD and Statoil has acquired over 1350 m of core from 12 boreholes behind the sea cliffs. This core is already being used in training and research both in UCD and at Statoil. The coastal cliffs are also visited by tourists and special interest groups, such as birdwatchers. It is envisioned that the centre will involve the local community and wider public, facilitating links between geoscience, energy and environment. Transport of cores and training materials to the centre, where they will be made available to visiting field parties, is planned for this year. Progress to date, including public engagement activities with schools and at conferences as well as audience research and public consultation, and future plans will be outlined.