

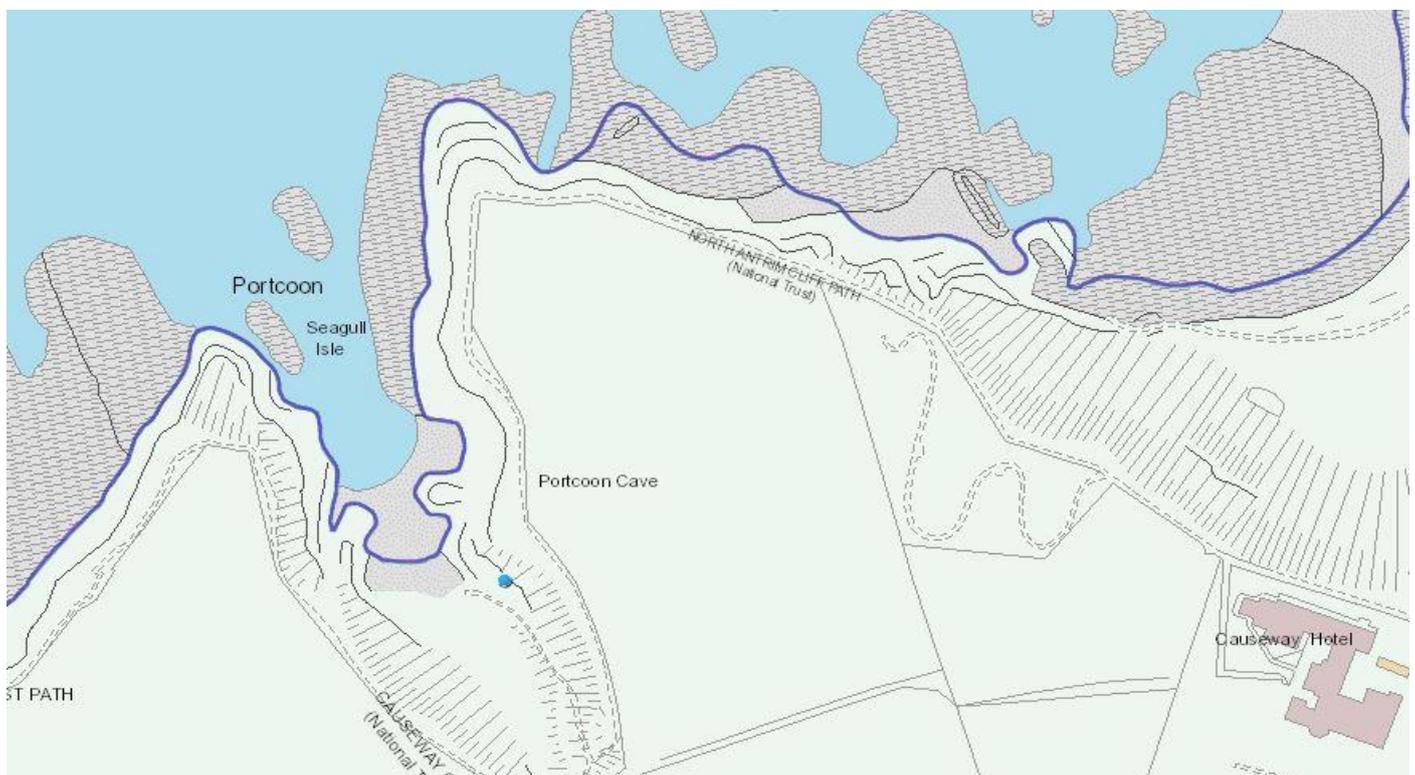
Great Sea Caves of Antrim "Portcoon Cave" by Andy McInroy

I found the cavern of Port Coon very difficult of access, and was obliged to jump from rock to rock at the risk of breaking my arms and legs, in order to reach a frightful fissure in one of the sides of the immense cave. The sea entered it on the left, and the boiling waves dashed close to me with a noise resembling thunder. I penetrated to the right, without reflection, beneath the threatening excavations where wind and tide were running riot. Impelled by enthusiasm, and unable to restrain myself, I did not hear my guide crying with all his might, "Go no further, come back!" His voice was lost amid the roaring of the sea. Suddenly I felt myself seized by the arm, "Do you wish, then, to perish!" said the affrighted David, "the tide is rising, we shall not be able to retreat, already the water is gaining on us."

The Three Kingdoms: England, Scotland, Ireland

Charles Victor P. Arlincourt, 1844

A million visitors pass through the Giant's Causeway visitor centre every year. Yet, within a ten minute walk of the cafe there is a dark and secret place that very few people know about. This hidden gem of the north coast is Portcoon Cave, a 40 foot high, 150 yard long sea cavern of cathedral-like proportions which is arguably more impressive than the Causeway itself.



Location of Portcoon Cave PRONI Map

I discovered this cave while researching some of the old writings, photographs and etchings of the North Antrim coast. My aim was to recreate some of the old cave views that captivated our Victorian ancestors. Here are some of the old writings, etchings and photographs that inspired me to dig deeper.



Early etching of Portcoon Cave

First by T.M. Baynes from "Ireland Illustrated", George Newenham Wright, Published 1831

Second from "Ten Thousand Wonderful Things", Edmund Fillingham King, Published 1860

Portcoon cave was occupied in the olden times by a gaunt hermit, who retired from the world with a vow that he would spend the remainder of his days on earth in prayer and fasting and that he would never accept food from human hands. Often was he tempted by women swimming in on the flowing tide who offered him food, but without avail. As the cold arms of death were almost clasping him in their last embrace from exhausting hunger a seal came into the cave with food in her mouth. With insinuating graciousness she invited him to partake of the food and live, as she had no human hands to tempt him to eat, and from that moment until his death the seal supplied him with a sufficiency of food for his simple life.

Rev. Canon Hugh Forde. M.A., LL.D., T.C.D.

The Giant's Causeway and Dunluce Castle, Published c1920

..the innermost recess has been compared to the side aisle of a Gothic cathedral; the walls are most painfully slimy to the touch; the discharge of a loaded gun reverberates amid the rolling of the billows, so as to thunder a most awful effect; and the notes of a bugle, we are told, produced delicious echoes.

**Edmund Fillingham King,
Ten Thousand Wonderful Things, Published 1860**



**Early photo showing boatmen at the entrance of Portcoon cave
Lee of Portrush (probably Alexander born 1870)**

Every few minutes a swell came rolling in, that would fill up the mouth of the cave, leaving us in total darkness, and rushing forward with most impetuous fury, as if ten thousand times more mad for its confinement, and it seemed impossible to escape it. The next moment it all lay in fleecy whiteness at our feet, shrinking back in haste and modesty, as if asking pardon for such intrusion.

**Calvin Colton
Four Years in Great Britain, Published 1836**

Now let's fast-forward to October 2007.....

Intrigued by this old material, I took a trip to the Giant's Causeway and discovered the cave hidden behind a ridge of rock in one of the secluded nearby coves. The cave was very dark, but as I progressed inward I could see the light of the main cavern ahead (this being merely a small side entrance). Already I could hear the thunderous boom of the waves crashing in the cave mouth and see the thick sea mist generated.

Exploring alone, I will admit to being spooked by the place. The roar of the incoming swells was tremendous and the view down the tunnel of light was quite superb. However, as I started to photograph, thereby turning my back on the pitch black recess of the cave, thoughts of ghostly hermits entered my mind and I braced myself for a bony tap on the shoulder. Thankfully it never came.



Portcoon Cave
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Our thanks to Andy for this excellent contribution to our Heritage Newsletters. If you would like to discuss further with Andy his research please email him at andrew.mcinroy@gmail.com

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