

Troubled Soil: Border Leakages at a Site of Mineral Extraction

Testimonies Script

Video: 23'

Case Study: Dalradian Gold Mining Site near Greencastle, Tyrone County.

Cormac Mc Aleer The land - the site down at Curraghinalt where they are exploring, there was a previous Irish company that had done an exploration back in the early 1990's. A different company, but I think they have some links, some connections. They got an old man, an old landowner, to sign a lease to them, and he signed this lease but it was for 999 years - this lease for two patches of land - one bit of land is north of this [E1] and another one right here, a patch that was for an air vent (...) They wanted to renovate the old family homestead that is beside the air vent and they started working on the roof, but the stone building (...) but then Dalradian saw that the family were putting the roof on the house, and they told the authorities in Belfast to stop them. This was February 2014. We found this out through Freedom of Information request, and they told the department that if they didn't stop that they would bring them to the high court. (...) But because of Dalradian pressure, even though it was brought to two different planning appeals, the family had been ordered to take the roof off it. There is a court case currently going on. The family are trying to use the bats in the roof as a reason. Dalradian does not own the land, they have no lease on it, but they were able to direct the planners.

E1 See Map of the Sperrins Area with leased areas marked, used by Cormac Mc Aleer and Marella Fyffe.

Bordering: Sacrificial Divisions

James Orr It's fascinating how borders should be places of connection but it's actually a place of separation. Separation from the land and from the water, and obviously the North pollutes the South and the South pollutes the North, but there's never been any transboundary convictions or prosecutions. Companies exploit that. It's almost a deliberate strategy, a lot of companies do it – identifying the border as the place to do business. When fracking companies came here, the two preferred sites were right on the Irish border. That didn't happen by accident. It happened deliberately because they can place one jurisdiction off against another [E2] and use it as a sacrifice zone.

E2 See "Future of the Land Border with the Republic of Ireland" Oral Evidence Report. Section describing continuing problematics in relation to double jurisdiction highlighted.

Sophie Thompson So along borderlands generally, because they're almost like a grey area, and it sounds horrible, but the idea is that

nobody really cares about them and government because government is in this city, or whatever, that's central. And then you have this periphery that nobody really thinks of or cares about, in a sense, that's a prime case for companies to exploit for environmental damage and degradation. So whether that's fly tipping and dumping, or just generally making the place unpleasant, or using it to frack and mine and disrupt the area and its natural beauty, because it's on the periphery and nobody in theory really cares about it, apart from those who actually live there, and that's where most of the damage is going to be, and those people are going to feel most marginalised and be the worst affected by that industrial activity. So, again, potentially about having a physical or harder border, you're setting that up as a prime location, as a no man's land where it's a bit iffy what side you're on, who you're really affecting, what laws apply and companies can sort of monopolize and exploit that area, that sort of doubt.

James Orr And you've got this diesel laundering that is highly toxic, where they add chemicals to petrol to change the colour. A lot of that is on the border. And somebody reported that that's where they used to bury bodies, or used to dump bodies. It's exactly where they are dumping the toxic sludge from the diesel launders. It's in the Belfast Telegraph.

Amanda Slevin The broader approach within the UK has been influenced by neoliberalism. You can see that in the break-up of BP, you can see that through other incentives to companies that began to develop. And that has been an influence in the UK as well, particularly in Northern Ireland. In terms of how this has impacted on extraction, I imagine that it has had a big impact. Everything with the absence of open conflict certainly would have made Northern Ireland a much more attractive place to exploit resources. I think is quite interesting with Tamboran Resources would have licences in Belcoo and the South as well - and I'm sure eventually the plan was too...you know, resources of course are not constrained by territorial borders.

James Orr *Walk About Resources* said a few weeks ago that Northern Ireland has more illegal quarries per hectare than any other country in the world... we're a so called sophisticated country with lots of environmental laws, the same laws that apply all across Europe, apply here at the minute – pre-Brexit – and yet, it's just a sacrifice zone for illegal quarries. And you probably didn't hear too much of that because Greencastle [People's Office] is concentrating on the big story of a

E3 See Printed Map showing prospecting licences held and under application, located both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

E4 See annotated Geologic Survey Report concerning geological prospectivity, mineral development acts, and mineral licensing procedures in Northern Ireland. According to this report "Northern Ireland is one of the most prospective areas of the United Kingdom for base metal mineralisation."

A9 Refer to the item no 9 in the archive with memorabilia from conference held in Canada for mining prospectors titled "Ireland Open for Business"

A7 For more details, refer to Tommy Greene's article "Green and orange, sand and gold - an environmental free-for-all in Northern Ireland" available at the archive table.

E3 See "To Mine or To Mind?" Friends of the Earth Spring 2019 Newsletter for a more detailed account of anti-mining community work in the Sperrins.

massive mine, but it's all the small mines [E3, E4] which combine to be, I think, as much of a problem as the cyanide mining in the Sperrins."

James Orr and Lynda Sullivan 25% of Northern Ireland is covered by mining licences. 25% has been sold for £7,200. £7,200 [for exploratory mineral licences] is given to these international mining companies, that's all we're charging them. And most of them don't pay tax anyway. So there's no economic benefit. [A9]

James Orr I think the Good Friday Agreement was sterilised at a moment in time, it never grew [A7], it never matured, it never became the process it was meant to be. It became a settlement.

Lynda Sullivan Peace was seen as a moment, it wasn't seen as a process. There is more peace for us now, than there was during the conflict. Our communities still live separately, go to separate schools, children may live most of their young lives without having a friend or meeting people from the other side. There is no state support for integrated education or integration of social housing. So until those things happen, our society will remain divided. And there will remain that fear of the other side which drives the conflict. So the conflict still exists it's just simmering beneath the superficial peace.

Legacies of Conflict in Tyrone County

Cormac Mc Aleer This area traditionally was an area that was Irish. Even the Irish language was spoken here when I was small in this community. I grew up here. The language, the phrases that we use are still from the Irish language. I speak Irish and quite a few people here would. And there is a revival of Irish here. And even the fields, the names of the town lands, they're all Irish. This area, we don't see ourselves as British. We are very clear on that. Even the border. People say this is Ireland.

Lynda Sullivan In Tyrone, they didn't have to go through the process of learning that the authorities weren't there to protect them, because they already knew that. And their community was stronger, I suppose, because of that absence of state protection. [E10]

Marella Fyffe This community here during the Troubles was a very active community. They were nationalists, would have been...many of the folk who were in illegal organizations may have lived around here, may have

come from here. Again I don't know what's truth and what's real about any of that but it was always 'oh that's the hive of terrorism activity'. Always. So they also think because they gave the British government such a hard time here and from this particular community at that time the government had decided 'yeah, let's open a gold mine, we don't care really', you know. And really they don't care. Northern Ireland might as well be the last outpost of Europe for the British government. We literally don't exist, you know.

Tommy Greene A lot of environmental issues - legal issues - have been turned into a political football about certain parties as well. There are certain groups, certain funds, that have been set up that have been defunded by the DUP and by...it goes both ways, I suppose, and similarly, in terms of trying to mobilise people politically against the destruction of the environment here, you always have to be weary of how destabilising that whole sectarian discourse is. Even the Woodburn example with Sammy Wilson was an example of that. The way you can divide communities along the sectarian lines is still very powerful.

Lynda Sullivan It's a very well oiled strategy that they use across the world, you get in, you divide communities, you divide families, you mine the community and then you mine the land.

Sophie Thompson But quite often because the area they were in was more of a Nationalist area, generally, there are not so many Protestant communities around them. They were often depicted as being a Republican movement, so they were very much about, "Oh, we are working with this side, because we want to be in this side, and almost linked to dissidence. But even as well they were also depicted as being violent and belligerent and associated - the sense I got - was almost that people were associating them with terrorism, which is completely ridiculous... But another interesting facet of that, as well, so within society generally, back when it was really bad in The Troubles, you would have known not to go to certain areas because that was the other side and you'd lose your knee caps. But within there, narrative and the discourse around the movement against mining in Tyrone, that's almost reproduced between communities that oppose and support mining, which I find really interesting and it really struck me immediately, as soon as I started to dig into it and speak to people. And because they'd say, "Oh, we are from Green Castle and we oppose mining, but we know not to go to a pub or a shop in this village because they are for the mining, and we don't feel welcome there. Which I found fascinating, because it's this same dynamic that we had in the 80's, but about environmental

issues.

Bog Palimpsests: Layerings of Colonial Violence

Marella Fyffe There are also another... bunch of the population who see their link with unionism as being part of parcel of who they are. That's the Protestant community, and they always feel threatened. And that would have been handed down from generation to generation genetically to them, because, really, back in the day, people came here and took people's land off. They were brought over. 'Come on over from Scotland, we will give you a farm in Ireland'. They know they were wrong, but they were part cut at that time, so they are living in a place of guilt, generation after generation, which makes them very defensive, which makes them very afraid, which makes them unable to trust the other side. Intrinsicly, deep in you, at a genetic level, you know that your people have done something and the next generation inherits them, and the next generation inherits it. And it takes a long time for those memories to go, you know.

James Orr A farmer told me, every field where he lives has got a colour. It's a Protestant field or a Catholic field. Nobody will ever settle to the other side. So the landscape, the trees, the rivers are all imbued with all this cultural legacy of division and fear."

Marella Fyffe The soil is very acidic and only very specific plants grow on it. When settlers came in, the plantations were given the best land whereas the Irish were pushed to the margins. So this is marginal land, very difficult to fatten animals on it, very difficult to grow anything on it. Acidic conditions. And consequently during the famine there were no reserves, then huge, massive emigration." [E5]

E5 See folder with five maps detailing acidic conditions and distribution of minerals in the soil near Curraghinalt, including gold, silver, arsenic, copper, and lead.

Marella Fyffe All the leaders of the clan were forced to leave Ireland in 1640 and they marched through the green road and out to one of the ports. And they never came back. And this was the end of Ireland having a chance of its own sovereignty. All the leaders of the main clans all over Ireland left Ireland and they marched off this green road. So the Green Road has a terrific association for the people of Ireland.

Amanda Slevin The legacy of colonialism is particularly felt through that area and the continuation of deprivation in that area as well. So, also the sense of foreign companies coming in, imposing their rule on these areas, would have motivated some people to resist. I don't think it was the overarching reason for mobilization, but it certainly made people

feel quite angry. And then the physical displacement and dispossession, present throughout the conflict again, was deeply problematic.

Marella Fyffe That's the mass rock there, supposedly. So I guess people would come out here somewhere the priest to stand and where they could gather and have mass. And yet be safe, looking around and wouldn't be found out and attacked. The statue is a recent addition.

Marella Fyffe We own the first six inches of our land, the first 15 centimetres, but below it is the Crown's estate. So, let's say that's my house, there the van is my house, and there is gold under my house. They can line away with it, I cannot stop them. 4% of everything that comes out of gold goes automatically to the Crown Estate [...]The Crown Estate is something that is left over since Partitions, it is a commercial company.

Statutes and Statues: Movement before the Law

Cormac Mc Aleer What I read was that they were changing the target status of the water to accommodate Dalradian.

Marella Fyffe There would be levels of oxygen in the water, levels of the most basic amoebic life [...] and it would be a whole range of indicators.

Cormac Mc Aleer The purpose of it is to make sure the water quality is kept at a standard that is sufficiently good to enable for the freshwater pearl mussels to survive or to come back through... The department has been working with the company to allow these levels of discharge.

Cormac Mc Aleer We've been told that where they have to go out to take samples, that they're told that if the sample looks like it's going to fail, don't take it (...) the Owenkillew river where the discharge is going from the exploration works is a special area of conservation [E1]. They have this plant for treating the water, but the level of discharge they're allowed to dump into the river... we know that, even high water, they would just release it. We've been told by people who know people working there. They just said it, release it all. [E8]

E1 See Map of the Sperrins Area with leased areas marked, used by Cormac Mc Aleer and Marella Fyffe.

E8 See iPhone available in evidence table displaying media concerning polluting discharge into waters and image of freshwater pearl mussels.

Cormac Mc Aleer The special protection for those rivers is because there is freshwater pearl mussels. They're a globally endangered species - Ireland's only - they're interesting because they lay their eggs on the bottom of the river and then the salmon come along to spawn and they burrow into the gravel and the freshwater pearl mussels embryo attach themselves to the gills of the salmon or the trout and they go for a year, they go away, and then the young join to the bottom of the river again. But if there is any pollution in the river, any at all, then they don't germinate, develop. But everybody knows this, and this is why there is high protection.

Marella Fyffe When they build the processing plant , they are taking heavy metals out of the ground, and it would blow in the wind. So, no matter what they are doing on the ground, they are also polluting the air.

Cormac Mc Aleer Even last week on the radio, the dust from the Sahara blowing over here. And the cars in the morning were covered in dust [E9]. It helped people here realise that what we are saying is the truth, because the company proposed to build a dump of crushed rock and waste on the top of the hill at Greencastle [E6, E7, A5]. There's going to be a 17 storey high - 1km long - and half a kilometre wide. We said 'it's going to blow all over the place.'

E9 Reference and more details available in the "Gold Mining: Facts You Should Know" flyer produced by Save Our Sperrins.

E6, E7, A5 See proposed Gold Mine Site Location Plan and proposed Development and Processing Areas Plan in evidence and archive tables respectively.

Marella Fyffe Statues move in Ireland. And bring people. It becomes a very emotional subject. So this statue moved here two years ago or three years ago or so...and this is one of the areas under threat from Dalradian, and if the statue got moved because of industrial purposes the whole country would be out of it. I guarantee it. (...) This would be here. Folk memory, come back forever. It is a Dalradian memory.

These are all the rocks we brought while singing the choir last week. We were singing over there and it was very windy and we brought all these little rocks to place around.