



Viewpoint

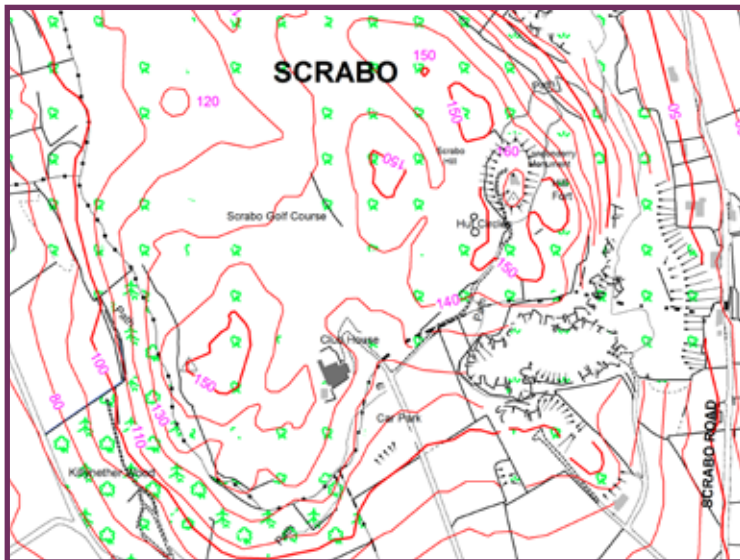
All the eggs in one basket



Time: 15 mins

Region: Northern Ireland

Landscape: rural



Location:

Scrabo Tower, Scrabo Road,
near Newtownards, County Down BT23 4SJ

Grid reference:

NW 60000 26900

From the 'towering' hilltop at Scrabo, take some time to look out at the view over a 360-degree vista. On a clear day, to the west the unmistakable industrial landmarks of Belfast and the Harland and Wolff shipyards are just visible, while Newtownards sprawls below in the north.

Nestled between the rolling hills of DownPatrick is one of over 12,000 loughs (or lakes) in Ireland.

But look closer and you will notice that the water's surface isn't just broken by boats bobbing up and down. Instead the lough is home to a nest of what look like rocky eggs, peeping above the shores.

Why is there a 'basket of eggs' in Strangford Lough?



It is hard to imagine now that this part of the world was once covered in ice hundreds of metres thick. About 12,000 years ago, during Britain's last glacial period, glaciers and ice sheets enveloped the land. This had a massive impact on what we can see today. Ice is a powerful force of nature which can shape and drastically alter landscapes.

One such landscape feature is known as a 'drumlin'. There is still some debate about how drumlins are formed, but the most widely accepted idea is that they were formed when the ice became overloaded with sediment, known as till. The glacier may have lost its ability to carry the sediment for several reasons, including melting of the ice and changes in speed. When the glacier was unable to carry its entire load some was deposited.

If there was a small obstacle on the ground, this too may have acted as a trigger point and sediment would have built up around it.

As the ice melted, sea levels rose, inundating huge areas of land around then British Isles. This combination of events has left the lumpy scene you see before us now – a landscape of drowned drumlins, 'swimming' within the Lough. Drumlins often occur in 'swarms' and they are given the name of a 'Basket of Eggs' formation. Looking at their shape, you can see why!

Besides being interesting additions to the landscape, these drumlins can also reveal secrets of the glaciers that once covered them. If you fancy being a landscape detective for the day, then take a look at the 'eggs' and see which way their steepest side face. They always point to the direction the glacier came from while the drumlins' longer or Lee sides were elongated by the abrasive grinding of the ice's force as it passed over the sediment.

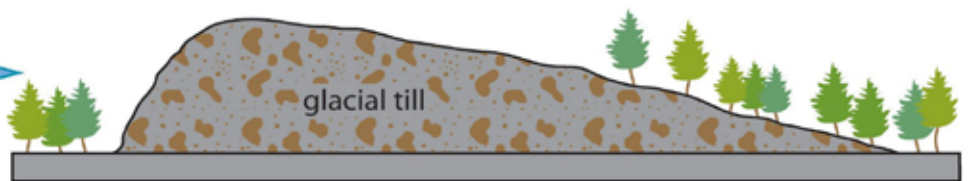
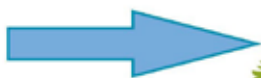
Understanding how past landscapes were created is vital to understanding the Earth of today. Remains of past glacial action show how those areas of the Earth that are currently covered with ice, like Greenland, might look in the future as a result of climate change

So not only do these 'eggs' tell the dramatic story of the forces that shaped the land, they could also provide clues to what some of our landscapes will look like for future generations.

Drumlins

Cross section view

Direction of former glacial flow



Map view (elevation contour lines)

Direction of former glacial flow

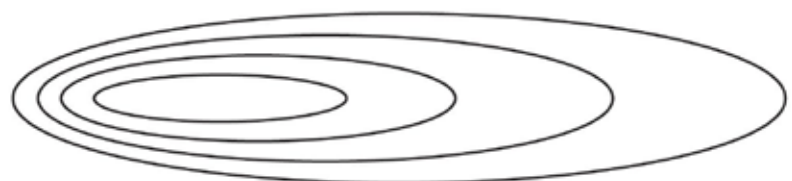
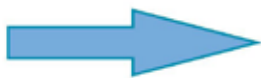


Diagram of Drumlin formation