

Radiocarbon dated episode of Bronze Age slope instability in the south-eastern Burren, County Clare

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Abstract

While previously reported evidence from lacustrine sediments has linked Burren soil erosion to anthropogenic forest clearance, there have been no previous accounts of dateable episodes of prehistoric slope instability based on evidence from terrestrial sites. Described here is the occurrence of charcoal buried to a depth of c. 2m within diamicton at a site on Knockanes hill close to Mullach Mór hill in the south-eastern Burren. An AMS radiocarbon date places the formation of this charcoal in the Bronze Age, contemporary with exceptionally high rates of soil erosion and forest clearance in a nearby lake catchment. EMS images indicate that the charcoal is of fine grained deciduous wood, most probably hazel (*Corylus avellana*) but perhaps birch (*Betula* spp.). Results of analyses of diamictons present in the vicinity of the charcoal support the view that the pattern of occurrence of diamictons in the present day Burren landscape is in part the product of prehistoric mass movement.