The Irish Quaternary Cycle is a cycle ride along the length of Ireland. It will promote Ireland’s Quaternary landscapes as part of the celebrations for the INQUA 2019 congress.

What is INQUA?
The International Union for Quaternary Research (INQUA) holds an international congress every four years. In 2019 the congress is being held in Dublin.

What does 'Quaternary' mean?
The Quaternary is a period of geological time, from 2.6 million years ago right up until today!
Quaternary Landscapes

The Quaternary period (the last 2.6 million years) has been characterised by cycles of extreme change in the Earth’s climate.

The Earth’s temperature has cycled between times of relative cold, ‘glacials’, and times of relative warmth, ‘interglacials’. Today we are in an interglacial, but the last glacial in Ireland lasted until as recently as 10,000 years ago.

The landscapes that we see today in Ireland were shaped by an ice sheet that covered the whole of Ireland during the last glacial period.

This ice sheet, and other before it, helped to carve out spectacular mountain passes like the Gap of Dunloe, produced ‘ribbed moraines’ near Westport, deposited winding esker ridges in Galway and eroded the steep upland corries of Joyce Country.

Once the climate warmed, around 10,000 years ago, it quickly started to look like the land that we know today, covered by rivers, lakes, forests and peat bogs.
The Route

Finish - Malin Head

Start Date: 15th March, 2019
Days of riding: 13

Kilometres cycled: 1000
Metres Climbed: 9000

Start - Mizen Head
Francis Synge

Francis Synge was a pioneering Quaternary geologist from Dublin. He studied at Trinity College during the 1940s, publishing his first academic paper on the glacial history of Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, in 1946.

Francis' seminal work on the Trim Esker complex in Co. Meath (1950) was ahead of its time and paved the way for future generations of geologists, many of whom he was to mentor over the next 30 years. Francis Synge travelled widely across Ireland, the UK and Europe visiting geological sites, collecting data that helped him to understand the natural processes behind their formation.

As a young geologist he travelled to these sites mostly by bicycle. In May 1950 Francis travelled from Dublin to Oslo, a trip that included one day where he covered an epic 300 km across Denmark! Francis' dedication to field geology was inspirational and is the main motivation behind this trip.

Follow us on Twitter at #IrishQuaternaryCycle as we ride across the huge variety of terrains that make up the Irish landscape. We will be looking at the geological features we find and talking about the forces that have created and shaped them during the Quaternary Period.