

Hugh O'Keeffe (b:1930) Some memories of the Bere Island electrification

From 1957 to 1966 I was ESB engineer for West Cork. The ESB's West Cork group included everything from Kinsale to Macroom to Allihies. Our task was the maintenance & development of the ESB distribution system, new supply extensions, post-development work and all aspects of customer service including appliance sales and repair.



I was present at Rerrin pier after the laying of the submarine cable to Bere Island and joined the group assembled around Brendan Murphy's boat, including local crew members & ESB people (one of whom was Noel O' Driscoll who had earlier been the Rural Area engineer who brought the ESB supply to Castletownbere with Jim Carlton). The Cork Examiner has published a fine photograph of the historic occasion on Rerrin pier and I was pleased to be in the forefront of the picture wearing my new Crombie coat! Paddy Higgins, ESB electrician for the Bantry area, accompanied me.

The electrification of Bere Island started in July 1957 and finished in April 1958. In all 359 polls were used and 28 km of line. Paddy Moynihan supervised the work, ably assisted by Jim Lavers. Early in 1958, when Rural Area engineer Jimmy Vale moved to Tralee, it was

arranged that I would travel to Bere Island every Friday to pay the men and to provide any assistance required by Paddy Moynihan. I was pleased to hear recently that my visits to the island are still remembered by a few crew members because I delivered the hard-earned money to the men. Dinner on the island in those days always included scallops.

I was in Rerrin when the first few houses were connected to supply, in Rerrin and Ballinakilla, by a young ESB electrician, Tommy Russell. I often visited Brendan Murphy's home. He was friendly, generous, and maybe slow to forward invoices to the ESB for his work.

An interesting technical feature was the use of stress cones at the terminals of the submarine cable to Bear Island. They were used to prevent insulation failure caused by electricity and heat at the points of connection of the cable to the overhead line.

ESB linesman John O'Gorman lived in Skibbereen and worked all over West Cork. In my time he and his local crew erected overhead lines to the beacon on Bere Island and to the television transposer station on 'Knockoura' and many other post-development locations. It was never known that anyone complained of anything when John was on the job. He made friends everywhere he went, even with little children.

A Post & Telegraph technician in Bantry gave great cooperation to the ESB in locating and getting rid of radio interference occasionally caused by a sparking point on a 10kv line. Widespread storm-related failures of electricity supply in winter in those days affected the Beara peninsula much less than many other areas. In fact, a much-travelled mining engineer I once met in Bantry opined that we had the best winter climate in the world in Glengarriff, "snow all over Europe but no snow in the Glen". About 1958 I met a Canadian mining engineer in Allihies who was assessing the feasibility of further copper mining there. Paddy Higgins and I were given a trip down the mine.

ESB electrician Jack Harte, located in Castletownbere, served both the mainland and the island and did so very well. Years after the Bere Island electrification scheme, Jim Lavers worked with me in Dunmanway. Michael O' Rourke, when last I met him, was serving ESB customers in Skibbereen. Pat Smith later moved to ESB Limerick District to join forces with me. Pat and I previously played for the Dohenys successful junior hurling team in 1958.