The Scalp comprises a deep channel that was formed by meltwater erosion on the southeastern flank of the Dublin Mountains. The channel is oriented generally north–south, and extends for a distance of approx. 700m.

The feature is formed in an area of bedrock outcrop and subcrop, and bedrock crops out along the majority of the channel sides, giving the feature its 'scalped' appearance. The feature was etched out by meltwater during deglaciation at the end of the last Ice Age, about 12,000 years ago.

The bedrock in the locality is dominated by granite, but the southernmost portion of the channel is etched into mica-schist.

The Scalp channel is up to 70m deep and has a U-shaped profile, typical of meltwater channels. The base of the channel is dry, although a drainage ditch has been dug along most of its length to channel excess surface water during heavy rainfall.

Much of the sides of the channels are very steep, and littered with (often huge) boulders, some in quite precarious positions above the R117 road, which passes through the feature. This makes the site a popular mountain climbing destination. This also means many of the huge boulders have interesting names, such as ‘Quartz Crag’, ‘Eugene’s Pinnacle’ and ‘Rothery’s Rocks’.

This is a site with good teaching potential on glacial meltwater erosion, as the feature is accessible, quite spectacular, and easily viewed from roads. The site is definitely of County Geological Site importance but may be considered to be of national importance.

The roadside location of the channel means it is easily accessible, although the flanks are located presumably in private ownership or in commonage. However, there is no parking nearby and it is difficult to stop safely on the road. A good impression of the feature can be had by driving through it on the R117 road, but the view from the Old Connaught to Enniskerry road, to the south, is better.
The Scalp, viewed from the south.

Left: Large boulders along the eastern flank of the Scalp.
Right: One of the huge boulders along the R117 road.

The Scalp, viewed from the north.
An old photograph of The Scalp from the late nineteenth century, which was used as a postcard from the locality (David Cotter Postcard Collection).

George Victor du Noyer’s sketch of The Scalp, viewed from “near the Dargle”.