

COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

A walker's illustrated guide to the Grand and Royal Canal Greenways and Blueways in the County

In the following pages you will find directions and commentary on 120km of canal side walking routes within Co. Kildare.

Once corridors of commerce the canals are now avenues of amenity. Pleasure boaters and canoeists enjoy the still waters while on the banks anglers, artists and walkers find pleasure and relaxation in the tranquility of the canalside environment.

This booklet gives practical directions on how to make the most of the canal side walking routes. As well as guidance on the best paths to follow the text points to the engineering and architectural heritage of the waterways - the legacies of the canal builders of a bygone era. The canal towpaths are safe and accessible for people of all ages and levels of fitness.

Family groups looking for ideas for short strolls on Sunday afternoons or experienced long distance walkers keen to cover many miles on flat terrain will find the following paragraphs full of ideas on how to enjoy these waterside walks. Here the fresh air is free and the landscape ever changing. So lace up your walking boots, pack your sandwiches, take this guide into your hand and set off on the **Towpath Trails**.



Old Gas Works,

The Canal Network in County Kildare

Still canal waters form liquid roads across one hundred and twenty kilometres of Co. Kildare. Rich in reminders of when the canals were a transport artery and a corridor of social contact, the canal network is now one of the county's most valuable assets, appreciated for its contribution both to the natural environment and to the built heritage of the county. Although artificial in construction, the canals complemented rather than dominated nature and their waters and banks sustain plant life, fish, birds and mammals in a habitat of attractive diversity.

The following routes cover the entire Grand Canal and Royal Canal networks throughout the county:

The Royal Canal





Leixlip/Maynooth/Killcock
(13.5 km / 8.5 miles)

The Grand Canal

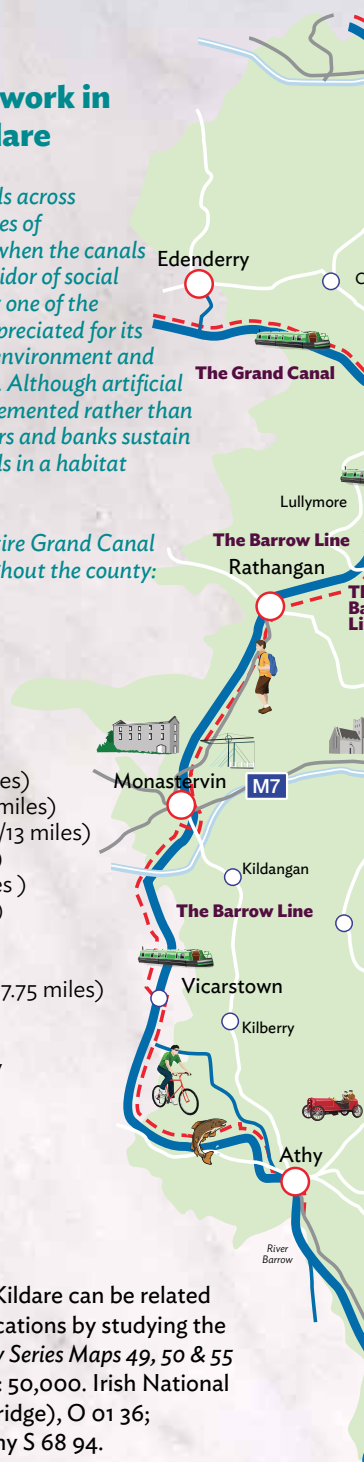
Hazelhatch/Sallins (13 km / 8 miles)
Sallins/Robertstown (11.5 km / 7 miles)
Robertstown/Edenderry (21 km / 13 miles)
Sallins//Naas (5.5 km. /3.5 miles)
Naas/Corbally (7.25 km /4.5 miles)
Milltown Feeder (8 km / 5 miles)

The Barrow Line

Lowtown/ Rathangan (12.5 km / 7.75 miles)
Rathangan/ Monasterevin
(10.6km / 6.5 miles)
Monasterevin/ Vicarstown/Athy
(22.5 km /14 miles)

-  Tow Path Trail
-  Canal
-  Railway
-  Lock No.

The waterway networks in Co. Kildare can be related to the road system and town locations by studying the *Irish Ordnance Survey's Discovery Series Maps 49, 50 & 55* which are printed at a scale of 1: 50,000. Irish National Grid reference: Leixlip (Cope Bridge), O 01 36; Lowtown Junction, N 78 25; Athy S 68 94.





Follow the Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
 - Guard against all risk of fire
 - Leave all gates as you found them
 - Keep your pets under close control and clean up after dogs fouling
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
 - Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
 - Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Put something back - support the rural economy by using local shops, pubs and restaurants



Kildare Sports Partnership

Kildare Sports Partnership is delighted to have facilitated the production of the booklet. Kildare Sports Partnership is a Sport Ireland initiative and is part of Kildare County Council. The remit of KSP is to increase participation in sport and physical activity to all age groups and abilities within the county and this booklet will help to create an awareness of the important resource our canal infrastructure is to the health and wellbeing of the county. The canals are also important in terms of tourism, heritage and wildlife and we would like to thank all who contributed to this publication.

This booklet is an updated version of the original 'Towpath Trails' publication produced in the early 90s by the County Kildare Sports Advisory Committee, which included reps from Cospóir, County Kildare VEC, County Kildare Fáilte, Kildare County Council as well as Liam Kenny and Eamon Sinnott. We would like to thank this Committee for their work and the detail and accuracy of the information at the time, which meant the updating of this booklet was a speedy and simplified process.



Kildare County Council





Barrow Blueway

Kildare County Council in conjunction with Laois County Council and Waterways Ireland are providing a multi-use shared leisure route connecting Lowtown to Athy in County Kildare, a distance of 46km of off-road, flat, accessible, public space. The trail will pass through the towns of Rathangan, Monasterevin, Vicarstown and Athy.

This top tourist attraction is due to be completed in late 2022 and will not only offer a huge economic boost, positively influencing economic growth opportunities, it will also increase that sense of community, create exciting opportunities for both recreation and ways to experience many of the community's interesting places from new perspectives.

Before You Start

An attractive feature of the canal bank long distance walking routes is that people of virtually all ages and levels of fitness can enjoy them. With no hills and many landmarks there is little risk of becoming tired or lost. As the towpaths parallel the waterway they are self-guiding and do not demand the knowledge of navigation techniques or physical fitness required for long distance walk routes in remote and mountainous areas. That said a degree of preparation is important for comfort and enjoyment.

Planning Your Route

This book describes the best route along the canal bank for walkers. It should be noted that the underfoot conditions along any given stretch can be variable, ranging from a narrow grassy track to a surfaced public road. In the text we have indicated significant changes to the towpath characteristics but inclement weather can change a normally accessible grassy bank into a difficult muddy stretch. Footwear appropriate to the time of year is important.

There are one hundred and twenty kilometres of canal channel wholly within Co. Kildare, Our leaflet describes three major sections: the Royal Canal, the Grand Canal, and the Barrow Line. It divides the latter two into shorter sections of about thirteen to twenty kilometres in length, which will help with walk planning. A walking pace of about five kilometres per hour is a good planning average. The towpaths can be tackled in all but the most severe of weather. Do remember that sections on the bog ramparts have little shelter so in a bad weather conditions, warm clothing is a must. Do take along a flask and sandwiches because some of the more remote stretches have little in way of shops.

Keep a close eye on children near deep water such as the lock chambers and also on the public road sections of the route



Direction Description

For the purpose of clarity we have used compass notation rather than left/right when describing the directions on the towpath. This facilitates the use of the leaflets when walking in the opposite direction from that the text, which, again for clarity, assumes that the walker is heading in a westerly or southerly direction. For the Royal Canal and Grand Canal (main line) the banks have been named 'north bank' and 'south bank' reflecting generally their compass position while on the Barrow Line, Milltown Feeder and Naas Branch the respective banks are termed 'east bank' and 'west bank'.

-The authors or publishers cannot be held responsible for any injury, damage or loss sustained by anybody following the towpaths.

-Although the towpaths are vested in State ownership and are almost always accessible without restriction, their depiction in this leaflet does not imply any right of way.

Accommodation/Tourist Information

There is a rich availability of quality hotel and B&B accommodation in the county. Local enquiry will help identify facilities in the towns and villages along the canal route which will serve the walker spending a couple of days in the area. Local hostelries, hotels, pubs, shops and cafes can cater for all dining and picnic needs.

For further tourist information on the county:

www.intokildare.ie





Transport

Public transport services close to the canals in the county are very good. The Royal Canal towns of Leixlip, Maynooth and Kilcock are well served by commuter rail and bus with stops directly adjacent to the canal making it convenient to make a Leixlip/ Kilcock walk without having to retrace your steps. A commuter rail service parallel to the Grand Canal from Hazelhatch/Celbridge to Sallins/Naas stations allows a lengthy section of towpath to be tackled. West of Sallins public transport options are sparse but Robertstown, Allenwood Cross, Rathangan and Edenderry have bus connections while both Monasterevin and Athy have bus and rail links. A study of the transport company timetables will help you plan your itinerary detailed below

Useful Transport Links.

<https://www.buseireann.ie>

<https://localinkkildaresouthdublin.ie/>

<https://www.irishrail.ie/>

Signs and Maps

The walking routes described here are complemented on the ground by the brown signs erected at most bridge crossings indicating 'The Grand Canal Way' and the 'The Royal Canal Way'. Take note that in a few exceptional cases we have for reasons of safety or convenience recommended in the text a route slightly different from that indicated by the signs. Small black posts with a walking figure, which you may encounter, were erected to indicate the separate Kildare Way walking trail, which takes in bogland, open country and woods as well as some canal sections. The tow paths on the main canal corridors in the county are an integral part of the National Waymarked Trails Network.





The Authors

Liam Kenny is a local historian with a particular interest in Kildare's transport history. Eamon Sinnott is a graphic designer, artist and illustrator with an extensive portfolio of heritage, civic and corporate work. Both have combined their skills as writer and illustrator on a number of heritage publications covering local history, industrial archaeology and County Kildare's engineering heritage.

Sport Ireland Trails

Sport Ireland Trails conduct Education and Training Programmes such as:

- Walking Trail Planning • Walking Trail Development
- Introduction to Walking Trail Survey, Design and Specification
- Introduction to Walking Trail Construction Techniques
- Practical Trail Surface Construction and Repair
- Local Trail Inspection and Maintenance Planning
- Recreational Cycle Route Planning & Development
Cycle Route
- Information on all the courses can be found on www.irishtrails.ie/education_training



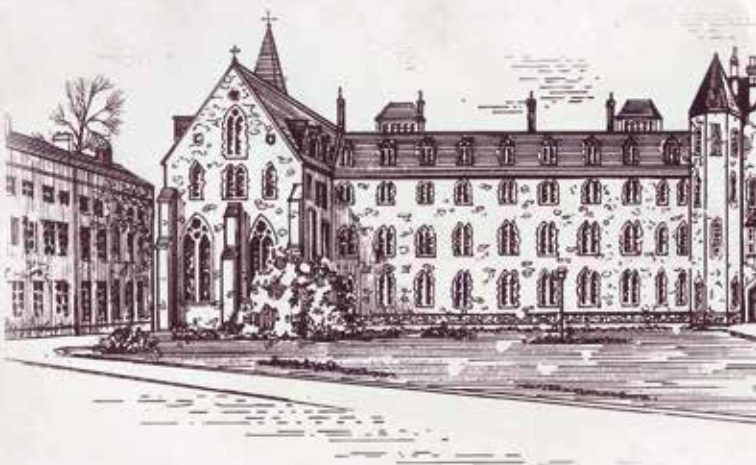
COUNTY KILDARE

THE ROYAL CANAL

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Royal Canal, sometimes called ‘the Shoemaker’s Canal’ from a story linking one of its early promoters with such a craft, always played second fiddle to its better known cousin, the Grand Canal, which takes a more southerly route across the midlands. The Royal was fourteen years behind the Grand in making the link between Dublin and the Shannon in the early 19th century; it never carried the same volume of traffic; and it had effectively ceased to be used as a commercial waterway in 1951 while there was still some level of traffic on the Grand.

However what it lacks in its commercial history compared to the Grand it more than compensates by its route, which is rich in the landmarks of history. The massive aqueduct over the River Rye near Leixlip, Maynooth’s fine harbour against the background of a university town and the walled demesnes of the great estates of Carton and Castletown are as impressive a backdrop as any to be found on the waterways.

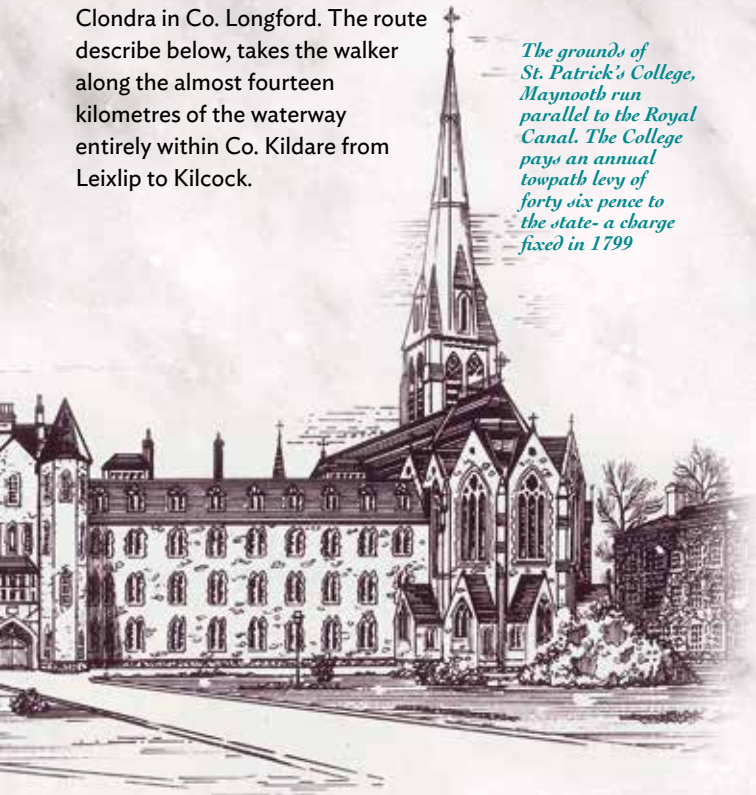


THE ROYAL CANAL

The Royal's strongest asset in modern times is the fact that the development of North Kildare and West Dublin has put it centre stage as an amenity and environmental asset for the thousands of new residents of the commuter belt. While the Grand Canal passes through countryside which is relatively sparsely populated, the Royal has some of Ireland's fastest growing towns such as Leixlip and Maynooth along its banks.

The fact that bus and rail routes with frequent services serve the same corridor means that the North Kildare stretch from Leixlip via Maynooth to Kilcock is extremely convenient, saving walkers from having to perform major logistical feats to organize transport at either end. Take a suburban train to Leixlip and walk to Maynooth where the rail station is beside the canal or continue to Kilcock, which is served by both bus and rail. The Royal Canal runs for 145 km from the River Liffey at Dublin to the Shannon at Clondra in Co. Longford. The route describe below, takes the walker along the almost fourteen kilometres of the waterway entirely within Co. Kildare from Leixlip to Kilcock.

The grounds of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth run parallel to the Royal Canal. The College pays an annual towpath levy of forty six pence to the state- a charge fixed in 1799

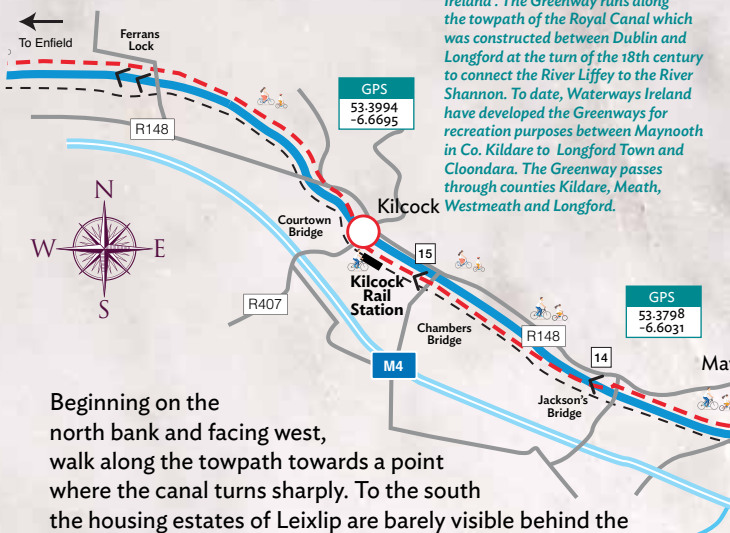


THE ROYAL CANAL LEIXLIP TO KILCOCK

13.5KM / 8.5 MILES

The starting point for the Kildare section of the Royal Canal walk is at Cope Bridge beside Confey Station, Leixlip. To get to the starting point from the centre of Leixlip, walk up the steep hill known as Captain's Hill until you come to the canal bridge. Some city bus services travel to Confey although rail is the most convenient option.

The Royal Canal Greenway, at 130Km is the longest off-road Greenway in Ireland. The Greenway runs along the towpath of the Royal Canal which was constructed between Dublin and Longford at the turn of the 18th century to connect the River Liffey to the River Shannon. To date, Waterways Ireland have developed the Greenways for recreation purposes between Maynooth in Co. Kildare to Longford Town and Cloondara. The Greenway passes through counties Kildare, Meath, Westmeath and Longford.



Beginning on the north bank and facing west, walk along the towpath towards a point where the canal turns sharply. To the south the housing estates of Leixlip are barely visible behind the canal-side hedges while, to the north, the landscape is surprisingly rural given its proximity to the suburbs.

The waterway bends sharply as if to tease the walker for a moment by concealing an engineering marvel. This is the point where it crosses the Rye Valley- a dip in the landscape, which at first looks mundane but on closer inspection can be seen to alter the contours of the land so much that the waterway has to be carried across on the massive earthen embankment.

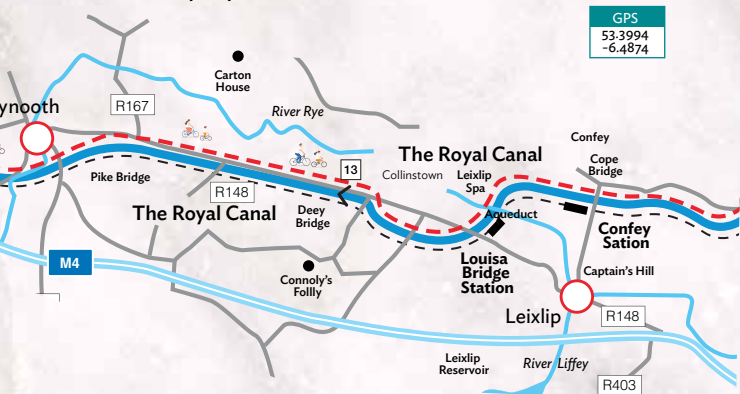
THE ROYAL CANAL



To get a true appreciation of the construction follow a path just past the ruined watch house at the embankment and pick your way down among the worked out pits that were dug out by the 18th century labourers in their construction of the aqueduct. A waterfall generated by canal overspill tumbles down the embankment particularly after heavy rain.

Cope Bridge at Confey- an ideal starting point for your Leixlip/ Maynooth Towpath Trail.

The aqueduct is more of a tunnel than a bridge-like structure. The stones, which form its massive vault, seem to strain under the weight of the millions of tons of earth above. Its construction brought about a crisis for the Royal Canal Company in the 1790s.



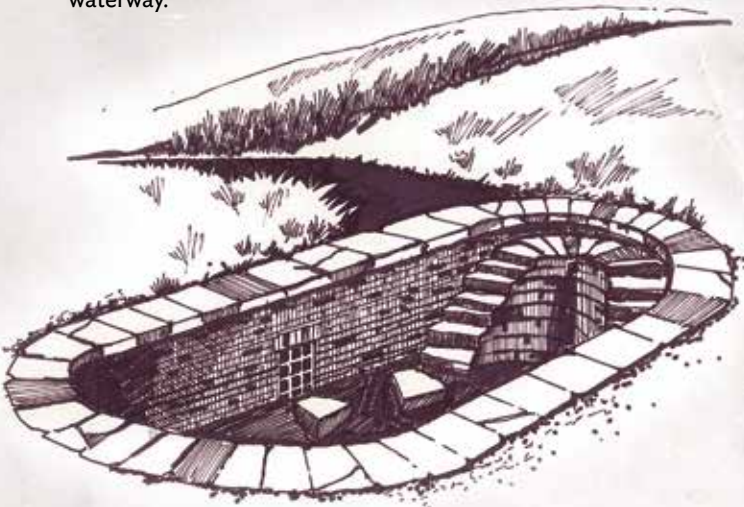
Hundreds of workers spent six years pouring material into its foundations and for a time it looked as if the canal project might founder on the difficulty of crossing the Rye. The canal could have taken a less troublesome route but the Duke of Leinster who wielded great influence is said to have insisted that it should serve his demesne at Carton near Maynooth.

COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

Walk on over the aqueduct where the canal narrows. Looking up the river valley the large brown outline of the massive Intel computer chip factory is visible - an interesting contrast with the legacy of the canal builders who were considered the leading engineers of their time.

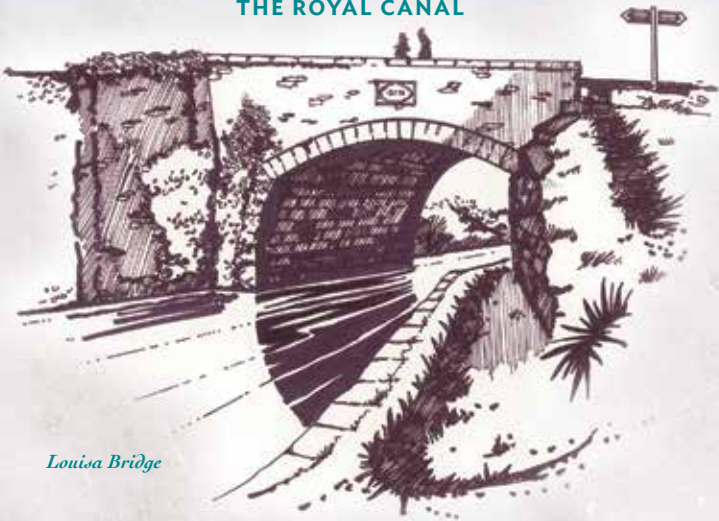
Continue on towards Louisa Bridge. Just before reaching the bridge turn right, still within sight of the Rye Valley, to a little park within the shadow of the canal embankment. Walk back towards the river to discover a deep bath-like structure with a set of stairs at both end and grids for letting water in and out. This is all that remains of the once famed Leixlip spas, which, in their time drew crowds from the city to take advantage of the mineral springs. Back nearer the entrance to the park is a hexagonal basin of a similar purpose. Both features were restored in the late 1970s and a small park created around them.

Continue on under Louisa Bridge, which formerly carried the busy main road to the west. Soon after the towpath passes under a modern bridge notable for its span of twenty beams of reinforced concrete which carries a link road from the M4 motorway to Leixlip. After a short distance the towpath is pleasantly over-shadowed by trees and takes an unusually elevated course well above the level of the waterway.



Leixlip Spa, a natural spring- restored in the 1970's

THE ROYAL CANAL



Louisa Bridge

Walk past Deey Bridge with its lock and adjacent level crossing. Here the canal is sandwiched between road (out of sight) and railway. The route continues straight to Pike Bridge where a restoration scheme rebuilt the wharf, which served Carton Estate, the estate of the Dukes of Leinster who were the premier peers among the Irish nobility. A well-placed seat here gives an opportunity for a rest about half way between Leixlip and Maynooth. A curious structure to the south of the canal is the Connolly Obelisk - an extravaganza of arches and spires built in 1793 in honour of Speaker Connolly of Castletown House near Celbridge.

Connolly's Folly



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

Maynooth Rail Station & Harbour



A spire also dominates the skyline as you approach Maynooth signaling the presence of St. Patrick's College which is co located with Maynooth University, a thriving campus offering courses to lay and religious students in disciplines including arts, sciences, finance and theology. Founded in 1795 as a seminary it became a symbol in Irish history for the reputed influence of the Catholic Church in national affairs. A diversion from the canal towpath to the town to view the imposing FitzGerald castle and the college campus itself would be well rewarded. Maynooth has a vast range of eating places.

The towpath leads into the impressive harbour of Maynooth—another 18th century feature greatly enhanced by a restoration scheme. The triangular shaped basin has been dredged and bordered with stone walls and pathways. A small island has been left in the middle as a sanctuary for wildlife.

Continue on the north bank with the by-now familiar companion of the railway tracks on the south and after going under Bond Bridge, the walls of the Maynooth College grounds mark out the border edge of the towpath. An easy walk along a firm path takes you to the engineering curiosity of Jackson's Bridge.



*Jackson's
Bridge*

THE ROYAL CANAL

This unique bridge with its five arches spanning canal, rail, river, cattle path almost seems it was specially designed with walkers in mind with its pedestrian underpass.

The towpath continues with its peaceful environment disturbed only by the sound of the traffic on the motorway running parallel but out of sight to the south. A farm over bridge has been clad in unsightly manner with concrete but fortunately Chambers Bridge, a little further on, has been rebuilt with stone in the traditional manner.

The lead-in to Kilcock brings the towpath back to the margin of the old western road. Kilcock's role as stopping off place on the main road west has now disappeared with the building of a by-pass but the village's canal side is a gem. Kilcock harbour was the flagship of the Royal Canal restoration campaign.



Kilcock Harbour

In full view of what was then a busy road its restoration helped trigger public awareness of the canal's scenic potential and inspired other canal side communities to take a fresh look at the waterway.

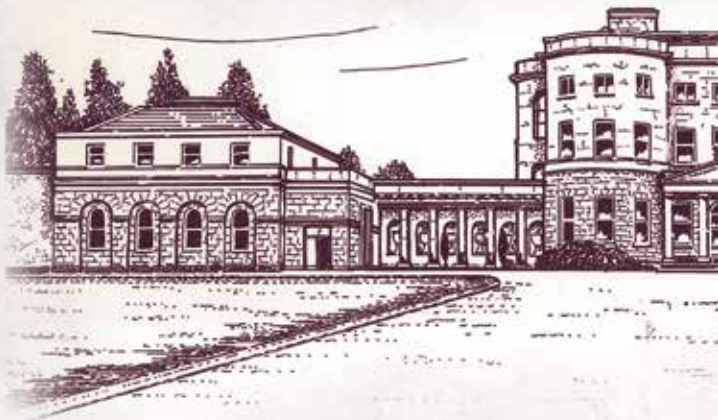
Kilcock's pubs and coffee shops are as good an incentive as any to finish the walk and replace some of the carbohydrates lost on the trek from Maynooth. Across the canal, Kilcock's rail station is a handy option for a return journey. Enfield, (Co. Meath), eight miles away, is the next town with public transport services as the canal heads to the west.

THE GRAND CANAL

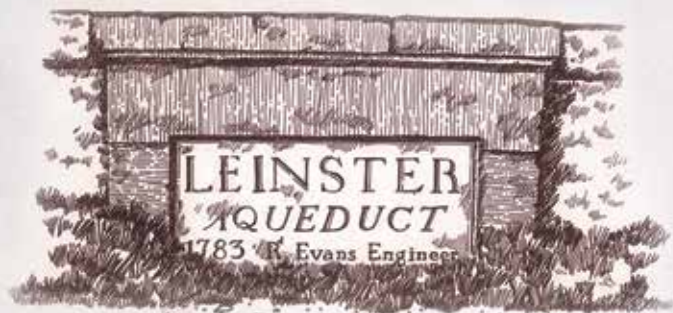
A BRIEF HISTORY

Work began on the Grand Canal in 1756. In fact the first sods were turned near the starting point of our walk at Hazelhatch. However engineering difficulties and mistakes by the builders in the early stages meant that progress was slow. The tempo picked up during the last twenty years of the 18th century and although thwarted many times by the difficulties of engineering a canal across the Bog of Allen the canal company managed to make the link with the Shannon in 1803.

The important branch to the river Barrow had been completed a decade earlier. Passenger boats used the waterway until the 1850s and cargo boats until 1960. The big, broad-beamed barges laden with porter, coal or grain were a familiar sight to generations of canal-side dwellers. After their closure to commercial traffic in 1960 the future for the waterways seemed bleak (although the Grand, unlike the Royal, remained navigable). However the vision of the inland waterways activists encouraged a more enlightened attitude by Government.



THE GRAND CANAL



Canal Engineer Richard Evans commemorated by this plaque on the parapet of the Leinster Aqueduct near Naas

Some branches were restored (for example, Naas in 1987) and the canal environment improved - a process which continues as the role of the canals for water and land based recreation and tourism is increasingly valued as a national asset as well as a source of amenity for canal side communities.

The main line of the Grand Canal is 132 km in length from Dublin to the Shannon of which forty lie within Co. Kildare. Our description gives guidance and historical commentary for this section of the canal within the county. The description also covers the forty-five km Barrow branch from Lowtown in mid-Kildare to Athy as well as the Naas & Corbally branches and the Milltown feeder.

Lyons House designed by Richard Morrison in 1805



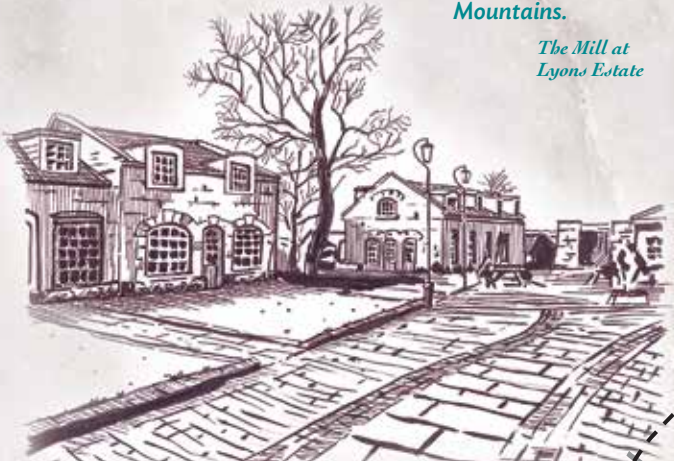
THE GRAND CANAL

HAZELHATCH TO SALLINS

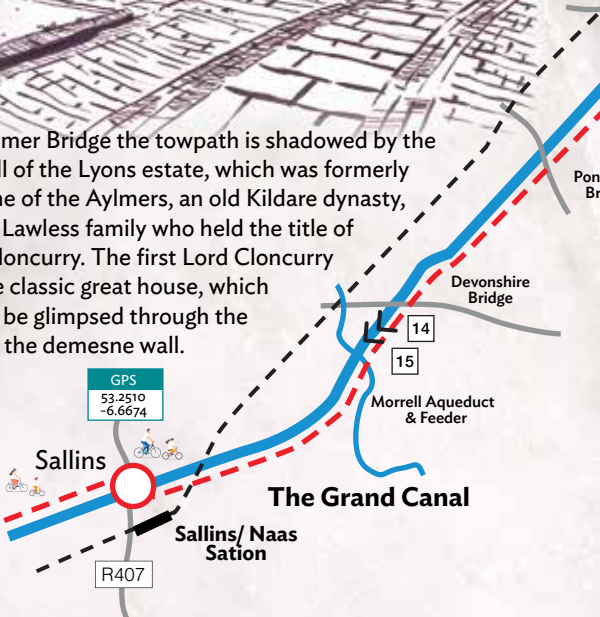
13KM / 8 MILES

The starting point at Hazelhatch Bridge is less than a kilometre to the east of the Hazelhatch & Celbridge railway station on the Celbridge to Newcastle Road. This is a favourite mooring spot for boat owners away from the built-up areas of the city. Begin your walk on the south bank of the canal and stay on this side all the way to Sallins. There is a firm surface between here and Aylmer Bridge as you head west. The view to the east is dominated by the Dublin Mountains.

The Mill at Lyons Estate



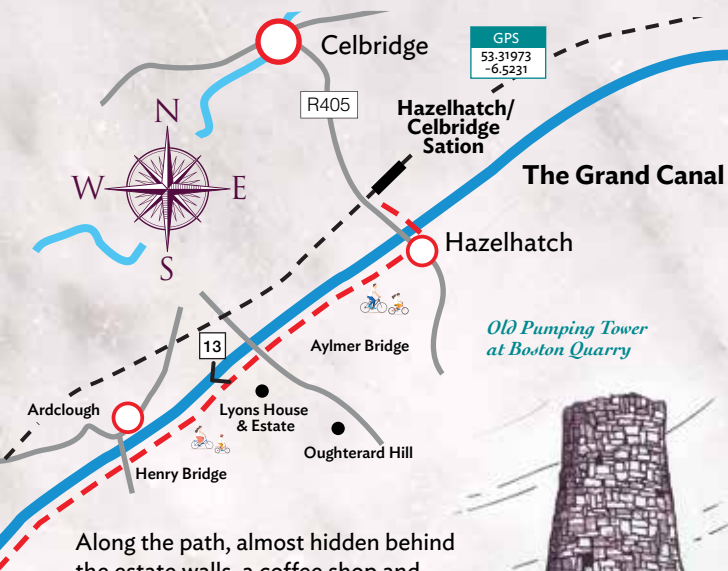
Past Aylmer Bridge the towpath is shadowed by the high wall of the Lyons estate, which was formerly the home of the Aylmers, an old Kildare dynasty, and the Lawless family who held the title of Lords Cloncurry. The first Lord Cloncurry built the classic great house, which can just be glimpsed through the gates of the demesne wall.





Liffey Bridge at Celbridge

Here the towpath trail coincides with the Arthur's Way trail which links the towns of Leixlip and Celbridge associated with the brewing magnate, Arthur Guinness, with his grave in the ancestral burial place on Oughterard Hill to the east.



Along the path, almost hidden behind the estate walls, a coffee shop and restaurant are to be found nestled in a collection of restored old stone buildings which echo to the sound of a gushing millrace.

The towpath continues past Henry Bridge and along a pleasant road towards Ponsonby Bridge. An old pumping tower stands off the canal to the east indicating the location of the large Boston limestone quarries, now flooded. The stump of an early Christian round tower may be glimpsed on Oughterard Hill in the background. Indeed the hill echoes many footnotes to the past - it was on this slope in 1815 that Daniel O'Connell and John D'Esterre fought a pistol duel, with mortal result for the latter.

Old Pumping Tower at Boston Quarry



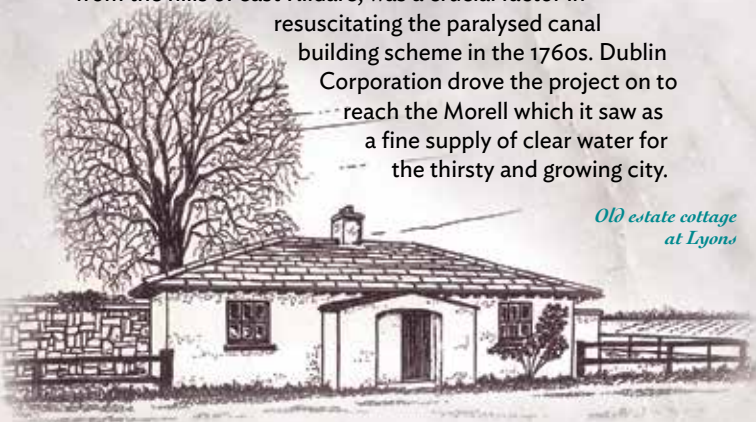
COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

Letting the mind dwell on such colourful historical memoirs is an antidote to the rather plain nature of the canalside on this stretch but do look out for the old Ardclough church now converted to a residence and the adjacent former schoolhouse.

The stretch from Ponsonby Bridge to Devonshire Bridge is rural in nature but patience is rewarded west of Devonshire Bridge where two locks - 14th and 15th in proximity - and the waterworks associated with the Morell feeder form an interesting diversion. This vigorous stream, which tumbles from the hills of east Kildare, was a crucial factor in

resuscitating the paralysed canal building scheme in the 1760s. Dublin Corporation drove the project on to reach the Morell which it saw as a fine supply of clear water for the thirsty and growing city.

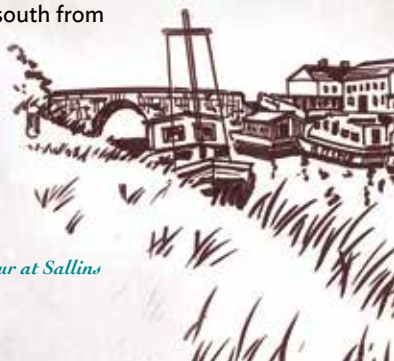
Old estate cottage at Lyons



The old sluice house at the 15th lock is ruined but the nearby aqueduct is a noteworthy structure being almost a scale model of the much larger Leinster Aqueduct south of Sallins.

The topography changes on the way into Sallins with the canal curving through sandy hills at Kerdiffstown where it is bridged by the Dublin - Cork railway line. As mainline trains thunder overhead pause for a moment and reflect on how this spot marked a watershed in Irish transport history in the last century. In the 1840s as the rail route was being built towards the south from Dublin the canal company directors tried to stop their faster and more spectacular competitor by refusing the rail company permission to build a bridge across their canal.

Harbour at Sallins



THE GRAND CANAL

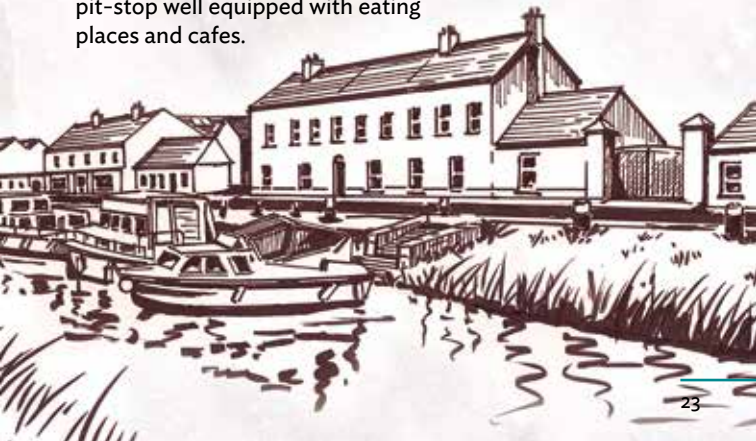


Approaching the 15th Lock

After the case went to the highest levels of government, the rail company prevailed in the dispute thus giving the green light to the expansion of the railway system to the rest of the country.

Sallins is a gem of a canalside village. Boats, converted barges and cruisers, are moored here in large numbers with modern berthing facilities. The fleet of craft recaptures the spirit of the times when cargo barge traffic to the former Odlum's mills brought bustling quayside activity to the village.

Nowadays a boat hire business offers trips to the landmarks of canal engineering within a short cruise from the village. The historic structure of Sallins was that of a 19th century transport hub defined by the corridors of waterway and railway. It was in effect a village between two bridges. In modern times housing estates extend into the Kildare countryside, evidence of the vibrant and cosmopolitan place which Sallins has become. Its growth has been driven by the commuter rail service to the town's 19th century station – a facility which offers the walker the chance to return to Hazelhatch or Dublin by rail. Sallins is an ideal pit-stop well equipped with eating places and cafes.



THE GRAND CANAL

SALLINS TO ROBERTSTOWN

11.5 KM / 7 MILES

The Grand Canal from Sallins to Robertstown covers some of the most picturesque and, from an industrial heritage aspect, some of the most intriguing sections of waterway. Beginning on the north bank from Sallins bridge the towpath follows a road for the first 2km out of Sallins.

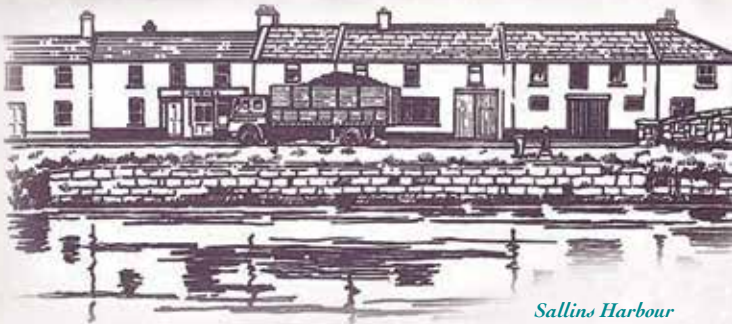
On the way, across the canal, is the three-legged junction with the impressively scenic and historic Naas & Corbally branch of the canal.



Leinster Aqueduct Plaque

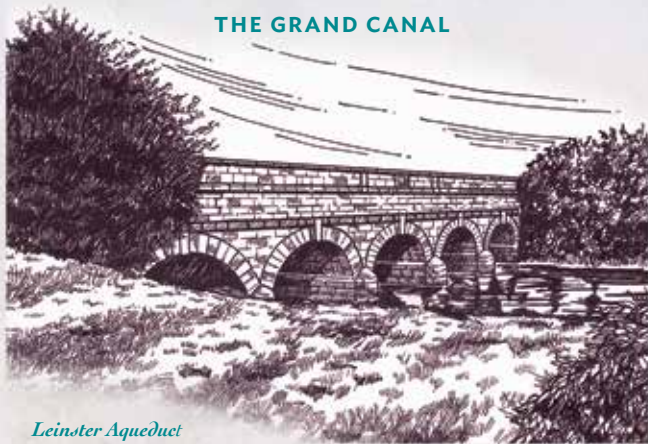


The triangular island at the junction is known locally as “soldier’s island”. Some say the name comes from the ghost of a soldier who perished there; more likely it refers to the location of a guard post during the 1798 disturbances when the canal barges were often raided by rebels. As with so many of the canal’s spectacular features, the Leinster Aqueduct steals up suddenly. There is no sense of traversing a major landscape feature yet the Aqueduct was a huge challenge for the canal builders and still inspires awe.



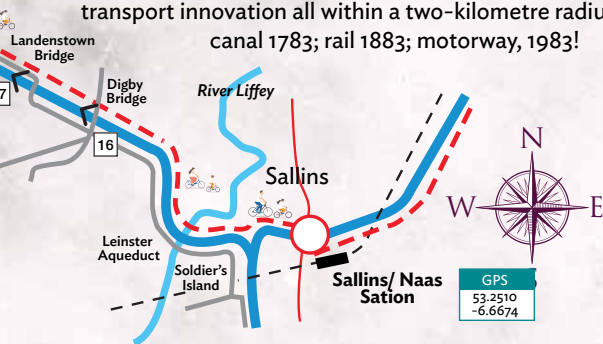
Sallins Harbour

THE GRAND CANAL

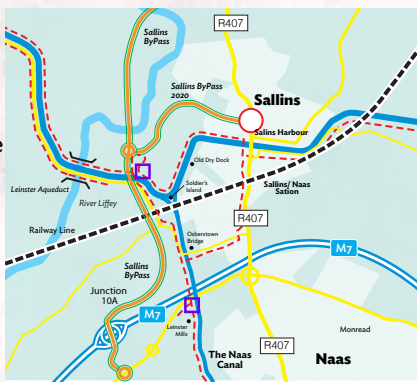


Leinster Aqueduct

Sit on the low wall (take care, of course!) and look down at the fast-flowing waters of the Liffey spanned by the mass of the Aqueduct. A plaque proclaims that Richard Evans, engineer, completed it in 1783. The Leinster Aqueduct is the first step in an entertaining coincidence of transport engineering in the immediate locality. A kilometre to the east, the Osberstown Rail Bridge bears the date 1883 while close-by the M7 motorway bridge over the Naas canal was completed in 1983. Thus a striking sequence of transport innovation all within a two-kilometre radius: canal 1783; rail 1883; motorway, 1983!



The completion of the new Sallins By-Pass saw the construction of two new bridges over the River Liffey, a new Viaduct over the Grand Canal and a cutting under the railway line.



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

Continuing on the main line of the canal the landscape could be described as lush Leinster pastureland with the gentle gradients relieved only by a hill crowned by a prehistoric earthwork on the south bank of the canal. As Digby Bridge comes into view an intriguing structure just off the towpath defies explanation. Commonly thought of as being an overflow control device, its concentric walls with tunnels and culverts seem highly elaborate for such a routine purpose.



Overflow Chamber

Sandymount House to the right of Digby Bridge seems to have been built to face the canal rather than the road. At the bridge, keep to the north bank and continue along the canal tow path. As you approach the 17th lock at Landenstown Bridge, take time out to study the pair of quaint gate lodges at the entrance to Landenstown House (out of view behind trees on the South bank of the canal).



THE GRAND CANAL

Follow the road for just under a mile until the canal swings to the southwest leaving the road, which has been a constant companion since the Leinster Aqueduct. The 18th lock may seem like any other but it has a special significance - it is the last step to the summit level of the main line of the canal. From this stretch, 279 feet above the old Ordnance Survey sea-mark in Dublin Bay, the headwaters of the canal divide to the east and the west.

The buzz of racing engines at the nearby Mondello motor racing track can often be heard forming a contrast to the otherwise quiet ambience of canal and farms



Gate lodge at Landenstown House

After the 18th lock the towpath continues into a pleasant flat grassy path way along the water's edge which is over-shadowed by high banks and scrub. On passing under the next bridge - officially titled Burgh Bridge but invariably known as the Cock Bridge - the character of the walk changes sharply for the better. The towpath cuts through the Hill of Downings and on to Bonynghe or Healy's Bridge. In high summer and autumn this particularly delightful stretch is luxuriant with blackberry bushes.

*Canal bank
fishing competition
stand marker.*



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

Through the eye of Healy's Bridge you will see the dead-end of the filled in Blackwood feeder canal which linked the waterway with Ballynafagh Reservoir which is located two miles to the north. Cross Healy's Bridge to the south bank. After a few paces the canal scenery changes again- this time revealing a vista of cut-away bog, forest, and whin bushes which will be a constant theme for the remainder of the canal's course across the bogs of West Kildare. For the first time since leaving Sallins, the canal is carried on a high rampart. This elevation was caused both by the need to build the canal on an embankment over the bog and by the effect of decades of cutting of the peat on either side of the waterway. Canal historians record that the entire canal project nearly floundered in the morass of bog over the one-and-half miles between Healy's Bridge and Robertstown



The Grand Hotel at Robertstown

Just as you are beginning to wonder if the relaxing but unchanging cutaway bog landscape is going to be your lot for the rest of the walk, a structure, large and rusty pink in colour, appears at the end of the stretch from Healy's Bridge like some sort of midlands mirage. Draw closer and the solid outline of the former Grand Canal Hotel at Robertstown becomes clearer. An unusual place to find a hotel on this island in the Bog of Allen but it was no doubt a welcome sight for boat passengers and crews battered by bad weather on the slow journey from Dublin.

The Hotel was built in 1804 and was closed in 1849. However the building continued in use for various purposes including a constabulary barracks and, in the the 20th century, a hostel for turf workers.

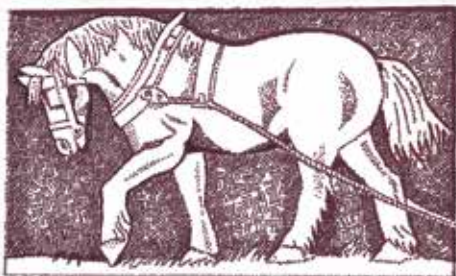


Pleasure boats moored at quayside

In the early 1970s, the building became the hub of an imaginative community project to capitalise on Robertstown's canal heritage. Seizing on the tourist potential of the village's waterside location, the locals set-about restoring the hotel and recapturing the village's period atmosphere. Period banquets in the hotel, barge cruises, and a week of canalside festivity marked a resurgence of Robertstown, this time as a tourist venue. The momentum was difficult to sustain and the hotel while remaining an impressive backdrop to this picturesque waterside village is now closed. However Robertstown retains its charms not least its traditional pubs and new coffee shops which continue the tradition of hospitality to the canal side traveller.

Robertstown is one-half of the pair of locations which together form the centre-of-gravity of the Grand Canal system. The other half, Lowtown Junction, is another mile along the road. Cross the bridge at the west end of the village (Binn's Bridge) to the north side of the canal and keep to the canal bank road where it diverges from the main road.

Barge Horse plaque on gable end

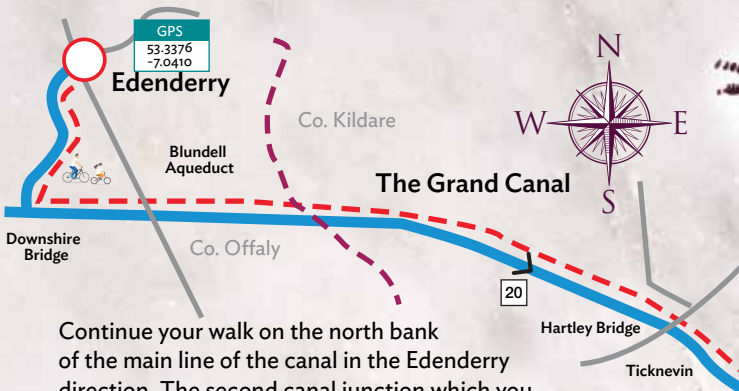


THE GRAND CANAL

ROBERTSTOWN TO EDENDERRY

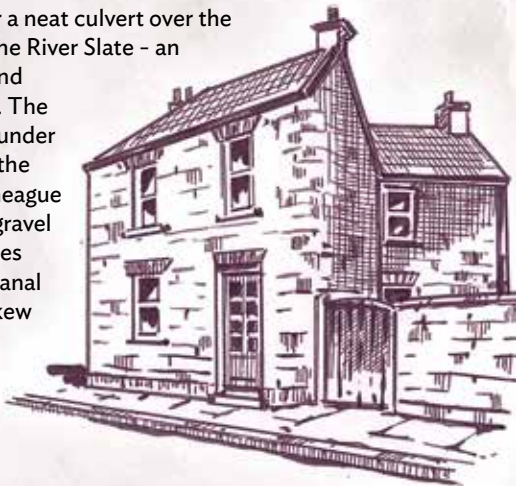
21 KM / 13 MILES

This route takes you to Lowtown Junction, a triangular link between the main line of the Grand Canal, which continues west and the beginning of the 45km Barrow branch of the canal. Lowtown once served the canal system as a stable for barge horses and as a coal yard. Today it is akin to an inland dockyard. There, distant from any town, is a focus of vessel servicing and waterways maintenance within an island of canal links.



Continue your walk on the north bank of the main line of the canal in the Edenderry direction. The second canal junction which you pass - across the canal - as you leave Lowtown is another link to the Barrow line. Your walk passes over a neat culvert over the clear waters of the River Slate - an important bogland drainage stream. The track continues under Bond Bridge on the Allenwood-Kilmeague road where the gravel laneway continues onto your next canal landmark, the Skew Bridge.

*Robertstown
Village*



THE GRAND CANAL

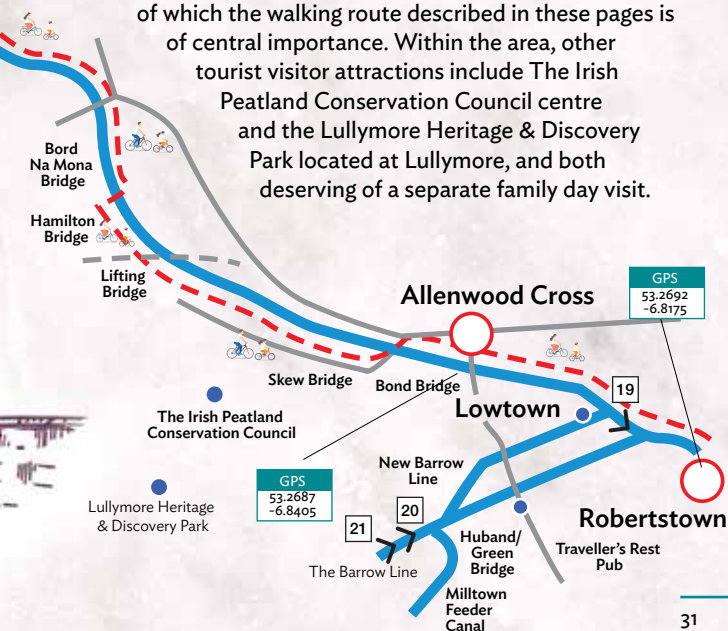
Locals have installed seating and planted trees along the route - a gesture that says 'welcome' to the passing walker.

Once, the big landmark along the route and companion on the skyline for many miles was the cooling tower of Allenwood's ESB Generating Station. Its lines curved spectacularly but gracefully to a height of 286ft, 87m. The station was commissioned in 1952 in an imaginative scheme to produce electricity from the vast peat resources of the Bog of Allen. It was part of a chain of peat-fired power stations and turf processing plants, which were the economic and social powerhouses of the midlands from the 1950s onwards. Today the generating station is no more.

Bond Bridge, Allenwood

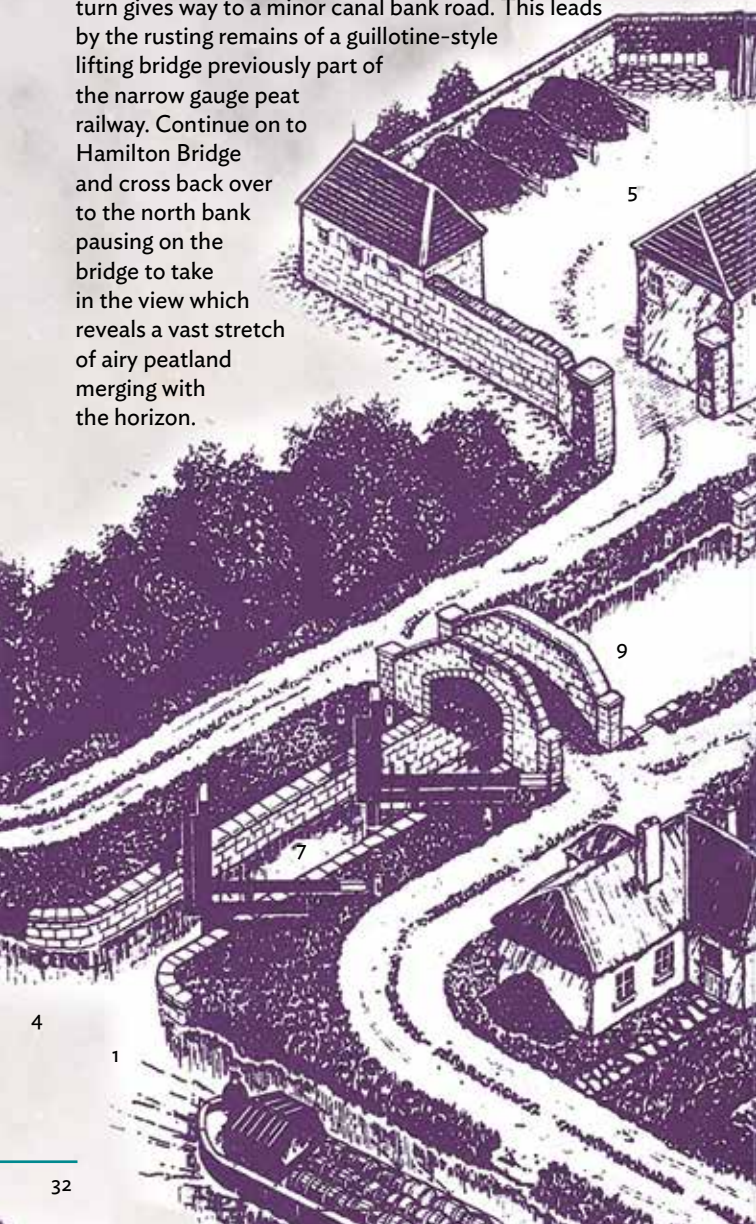


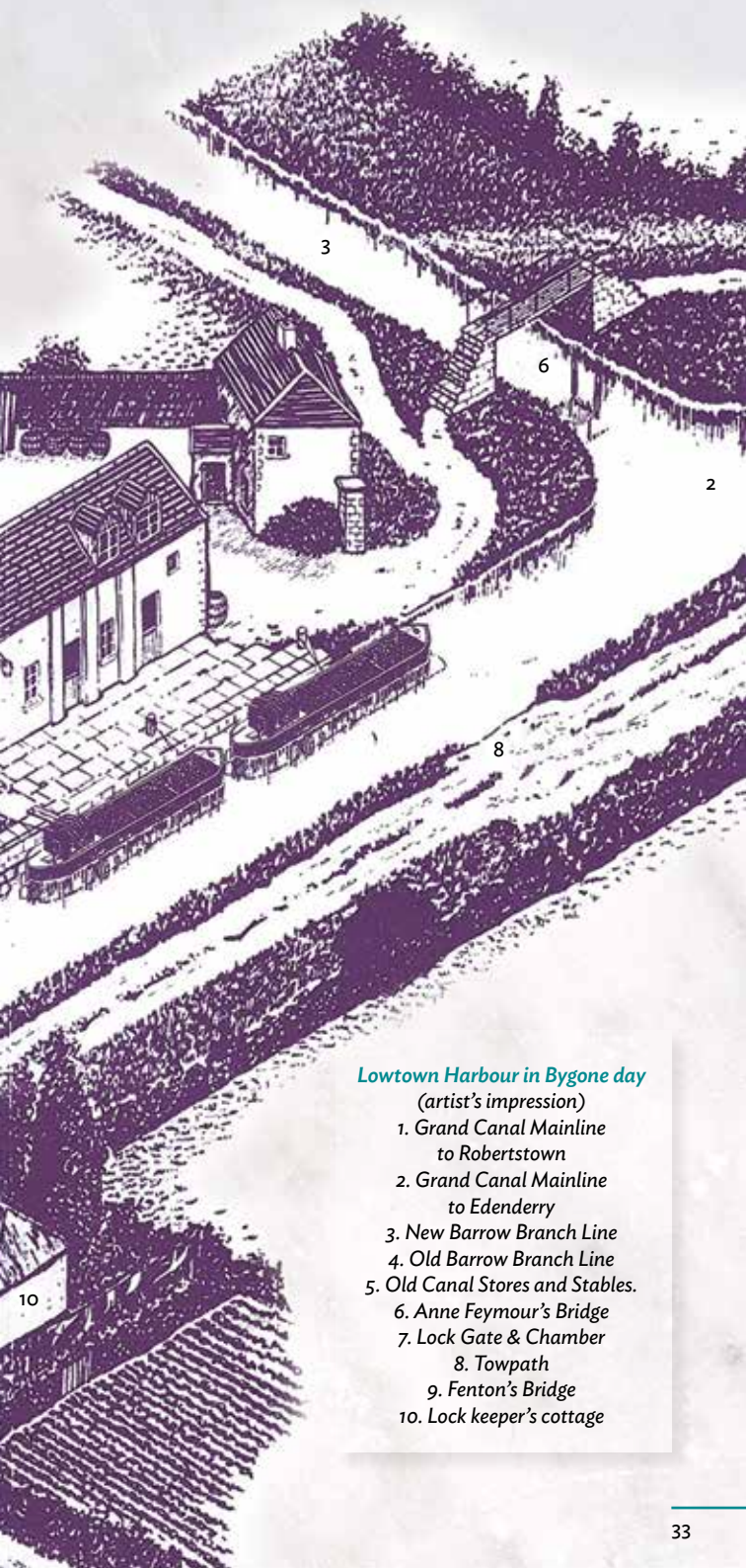
The community, which it once sustained, has long turned to other forms of enterprise - not least tourism of which the walking route described in these pages is of central importance. Within the area, other tourist visitor attractions include The Irish Peatland Conservation Council centre and the Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park located at Lullymore, and both deserving of a separate family day visit.



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

The passes close to the Prosperous - Edenderry road as a curiously angled bridge looms ahead. This is known locally as the 'Skew' bridge (pronounced by locals as 'Scow'). Here ignore the 'Grand Canal Way' signs, which point along the north bank. This in fact would lead on to the busy and fast Edenderry Road. It is more comfortable to cross the 'Skew' bridge to the south bank where after a few paces on a tarmac road you gain a grassy stretch, which in turn gives way to a minor canal bank road. This leads by the rusting remains of a guillotine-style lifting bridge previously part of the narrow gauge peat railway. Continue on to Hamilton Bridge and cross back over to the north bank pausing on the bridge to take in the view which reveals a vast stretch of airy peatland merging with the horizon.





Lowtown Harbour in Bygone day

(artist's impression)

1. Grand Canal Mainline to Robertstown
2. Grand Canal Mainline to Edenderry
3. New Barrow Branch Line
4. Old Barrow Branch Line
5. Old Canal Stores and Stables.
6. Anne Feymour's Bridge
7. Lock Gate & Chamber
8. Towpath
9. Fenton's Bridge
10. Lock keeper's cottage

COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

Continue on a rough track under a narrow modern bridge, passing the redundant Lullymore briquette factory to the left.

Hartley Bridge at Ticknevin comes into view followed shortly by the 20th lock, which marks the end of an 8km stretch without a lock gate but the beginning of an even longer 29km level without locks. It is from this point that the true wilderness of the Bog of Allen comes into its own. For a stretch the canal is bounded by bushy fields followed by forestry plantation but as the channel continues west across the unmarked Kildare-Offaly boundary the trees fall back, the ground falls away and the horizon widens. The canal is carried along on a massive embankment, its height accentuated by years of cutting away of the peat land.

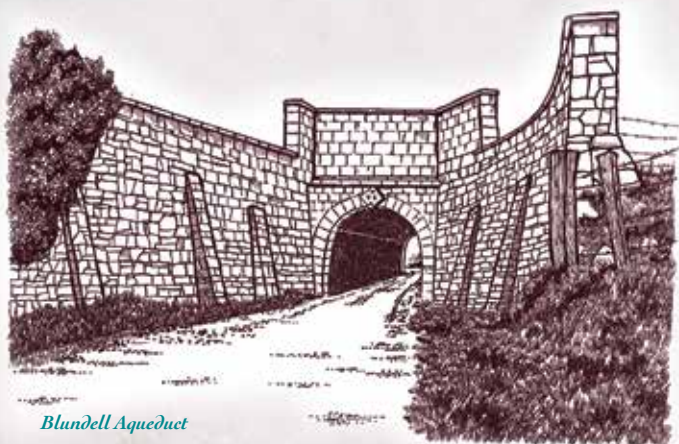
The vista to the south is one of almost unending peat land: the flat horizon broken only by peat-harvesting machinery moving like yellow mechanical insects across a desert of brown. The canal-builders tempted nature along this stretch. It was here that the watery morass almost brought the entire canal project to an end in the late 18th century.

Year after year workers had poured tons of filling into the canal foundations only to find that within the space of each winter the bog swallowed the solid material. It was only after a decade of backbreaking work that construction was possible on the treacherous bog and the canal was able to push on towards Edenderry. However a bog is never a permanently stable foundation and over the years the canal rampart has breached as it's underpinning gave way.

*Horse Bridge
at Edenderry*



THE GRAND CANAL



Blundell Aqueduct

The most serious breaches ever on the canal occurred along this stretch in 1916, and even more spectacularly, in 1989 when just to the west of the Blundell aqueduct a section of bank under the north towpath gave way releasing three hundred million liters of water into the fields below. The embankment was devastated and the canal drained for nearly twenty miles. The damage was repaired by a modern generation of canal engineers who have continued to embark on a rebuilding programme for other vulnerable stretches of canal across the bog. Layers of peat, plastic membrane and special clay are laid one on top of the other to strengthen the old canal formation for another two centuries.

The towpath takes you across the Edenderry-Rathangan road by the Blundell aqueduct (locally 'the tunnel') and the unusual and charming horse-bridge which allowed towing horses cross the leg of canal which branches from the mainline to Edenderry town. Do not cross the bridge (unless you are carrying on further west along the main line) but follow the branch into Edenderry. After walking across so much flat land it is a welcome change in the perspective to find the waterway contouring around a hill, which is crowned by the remains of an old castle. The branch curves into Edenderry's neat harbour, which is, located right beside the town's main street. There is plenty to see in this well planned estate town, which owes its present shape and landmarks to the Earls of Downshire, once the principal landlords in this area. A walk back up the hill towards the castle ruin, which is surrounded by a public park, will give a parting vista over the Bog of Allen and the canal route you have just walked.

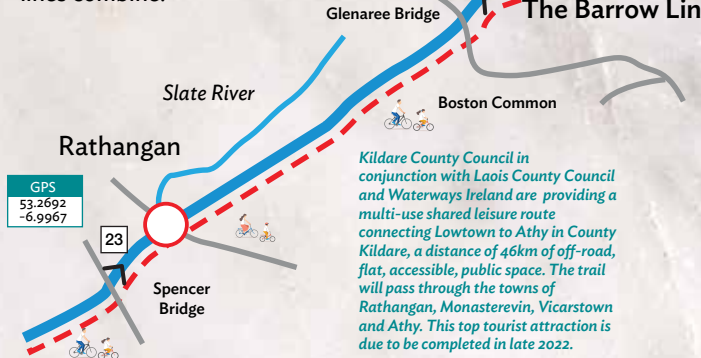
LOWTOWN TO RATHANGAN

12.5 KM / 7.75 MILES

To reach the Barrow line cross Fenton's bridge to the south bank of the Grand Canal just before the old canal coal-yard. Walk in the opposite direction from the yard following the west bank of the 'old' line of the Barrow junction. This is the channel nearest Robertstown as distinct from the 'new' line which diverges from the main course of the Grand Canal which is just west of the marina.

W-

Follow this bank for almost 3.2km (passing the Traveller's Rest Pub at Littletown on the opposite bank) until you come to the junction where the waters of the old and new Barrow lines combine.

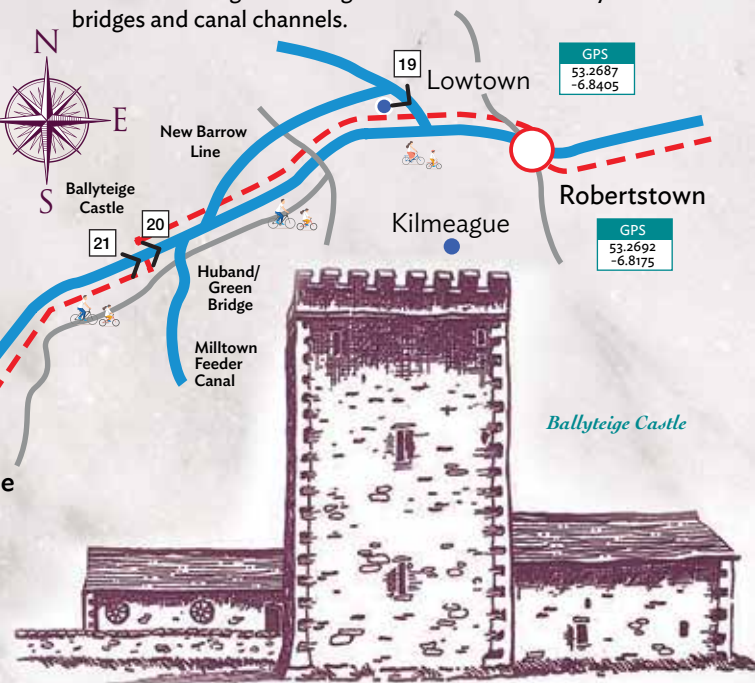


Cross the bridge to the west bank of the now combined canal and continue towards Ballyteige Castle. (If you are heading for the Milltown feeder cross to the east bank at the old 19th lock and double back a few paces to the bridge where the clear waters of the feeder join the main channel. Look out for the plaque on the wall, which recites the history of the old 19th lock.)

The Barrow line links the main line of the Grand Canal with the River Barrow at Athy, some 46km almost due south. The line cuts through bog and farmland in south-west Co. Kildare before running into Co. Laois through farming landscape and then turning towards the south Kildare town of Athy to join the Barrow's peaty tide.

THE GRAND CANAL

For towpath trekkers the Barrow line offers a degree of solitude and, within the limitations of the flat landscape, a variety of scenery ranging from bog, through forestry, and onto canal side towns such as Rathangan and Monasterevin - the latter being something of a Venice with its many bridges and canal channels.



At Ballyteige Castle cross the bridge to the south bank past the 20th and 21st locks. The much-restored castle dates from the late medieval period. The rebel leader, Silken Thomas of the great Kildare Fitzgerald family, is said to have taken refuge there. Unusual, perhaps, to find a castle surrounded by relatively poor land. This is one of many similar tower houses built in the Bog of Allen to offer protection in the disputed 'no-man's land' zone where clashes occurred between the Irish clans who sprang attacks from island strong points in the bog lands and the English garrisons of the Pale.

No more than with the bog land stretch of the canal near Edenderry this section nearly swamped the canal builders of two centuries ago. In the bog land to the east two Bishops of Kildare took refuge during the penal times while in a more recent era a turf camp was established during the second world war. It accommodated men who came from distant parts to harvest peat fuel, which was then ferried by specially constructed barges for stockpiling in Dublin.



21st Lock at Ballyteige

Unusually for Co. Kildare, hills feature on the landscape with a range of hills running almost parallel to the canal to the east. Quarrying is gouging the Hill of Allen, fabled dwelling place of Fionn MacCumhaill and his legendary warriors, but its inverted-saucer shape surmounted by a folly from the 19th century is still distinctive. The tower was built by Sir Gerald Aylmer, landlord of nine thousand acres in County Kildare. The names of locals who worked on its construction are inscribed on the eighty-three steps to the viewing platform. The Hill of Allen is followed by a range of hills, which separate the bogland from the Curragh plains to the east.

After the 21st lock the surfaced towpath gives way to a grassy trail on a pleasant embankment. The canal swings gently to the east and west as if showing off the skills of the engineers who planned its raised curves across the landscape. A gem of a small aqueduct leads across a tributary of the River Slate, which runs parallel to the canal to the west. At Glenaree Bridge, switch to the east bank of the canal which forms a fine and wide grassy path. Here coniferous forest on either side combines with the waterway to form a unique stretch of canal space.



Heron, a constant companion on your walk along the canal.

THE GRAND CANAL

The forestry has the effect of almost completely deadening sound achieving almost perfect isolation from the outside world.

Emerging from the forested stretch the skyline of the town of Rathangan comes into view. Rathangan village is worth a diversion from the canal bank.

A flash point in the 1798 Rebellion it is now known for its strong community spirit as demonstrated in the landscaping carried out in the area of the canal.

Rathangan also has a notable literary tradition. The poet William A. Byrne is commemorated by a plaque near the canal bridge while the 20th novelist Maura Laverty also hailed from the town.



Former grain stores at Rathangan

From Rathangan the canal heads into the watershed of the river Barrow in the southwest extremity of Co. Kildare almost touching the Offaly boundary. The peatlands off its banks have long been the subject of experimentation. At Umeras, south of Rathangan, a factory was set up in 1885 to produce board from peat and, later, peat bedding for livestock. At Lullymore, to the northwest, horticultural experiments were carried out on the cutaway bogs.

Along the way look out for the rope marks cut deep in the stone of bridge arches- a reminder of the heavy strain taken by the barge horses as they hauled the heavily laden boats through the still waters of the canal.

RATHANGAN TO MONASTERVIN

10.6 KM / 6.5 MILES

Resume your walk on the road along the east bank of the canal pausing to admire the double lock followed by Spencer's bridge - the Spencer in question was a hapless local landlord piked to death in the aforesaid Rebellion! Note how the bridge walls have been recessed to give room to the swing beams of the deep gates of the double-chambered lock.



Spencer Bridge and Lock Chamber constructed in 1784

Cross the road keeping to the east bank to begin the walk to Monasterevin. A fine thatched cottage at Umeras bridge and the double lock at McCartney bridge are the main items of interest on this 10km trek to Monasterevin. Just past McCartney bridge, Ballykelly Mill turns its back to the canal. The first mill was built here in 1801 to take advantage of the newly constructed canal.

This mill is soon to see a new lease of life as the Church of Oak Whiskey Distillery, with a multi million euro investment The artisan facility earmarked for the 200-year-old Ballykelly Mills near Monasterevin will have reception areas, tasting rooms and an exhibition space and will be a very welcome addition to the business, tourist and cultural offering of the town.

THE BARROW LINE



Stone plaque on Spencer Bridge.



GPS
53.2692
-6.9967

Rathangan

23

Spencer Bridge

Wilson's Bridge

The Barrow Line

Umeras Bridge

24

McCartney Bridge

River Barrow

Barrow Aqueduct

Church of Oak Whiskey Distillery

RAIL SERVICE

25

Old Mountmellick Branch

Monastervin

Moore Abbey

The Barrow Line

GPS
53.1400
-7.0638

Foot Bridge

To Athy

Milestone marker, note the rope indentations on the stone from two centuries of mooring barges.



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

Any monotony that might have set in will be more than compensated for by the myriad of bridges and engineering features which are a legacy of Monasterevin's halcyon days as a humming town which thrived on distillery and milling enterprises. Across the canal sitting amongst a new apartment development, the three-storey stone faced house which was once a canal hotel, still stands proudly on its quayside location.

However Monasterevin's gem is its lifting bridge - the largest and most elaborate of several examples on the Barrow waterways. Today it is lifted by electric motor but for nearly two centuries was cranked by hand as boat took precedence over road traffic.

Canalside cottage near Monasterevin



Watch out for the nearby 'blind' bridge: its blocked up arches are witness to the original line of the canal to the Barrow. The Barrow aqueduct - a structure rivaling the Leinster aqueduct on the main canal for its structural dignity, replaced it.

Monasterevin has its roots in an ancient monastic community. In modern times its waterways and fine streets gave inspiration to many visitors such as the great tenor, John Count McCormack, who lived at Moore Abbey overlooking the Barrow in the 1920s.

Approach to Monasterevin



THE BARROW LINE



Lifting Bridge

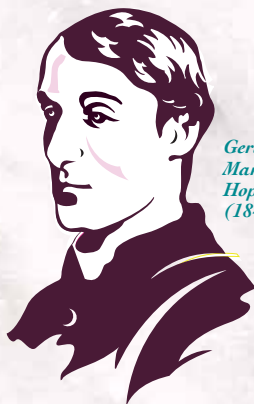
Another learned visitor was the Jesuit intellectual and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins who is the subject of an annual summer school in the town.

Monasterevin seems to have had more industry in its hey-day than any other town of its size. It was certainly a strategic place on the country's transport systems with main road, rail and canal structures and railway engineering testifies to the intensive traffic generated by its brewing, distilling and milling industries.



Former canal-side warehouses

A community improvement scheme has created a small park with miniature structures in the space between the aqueduct and the rail bridge where thundering trains form an impressive backdrop to the heritage of transport engineering features. Locals say that from a given point twelve bridges can be counted within the precincts of Monasterevin. How many can you spot as you cross the aqueduct?



*Gerard
Manley
Hopkins
(1844-1889)*

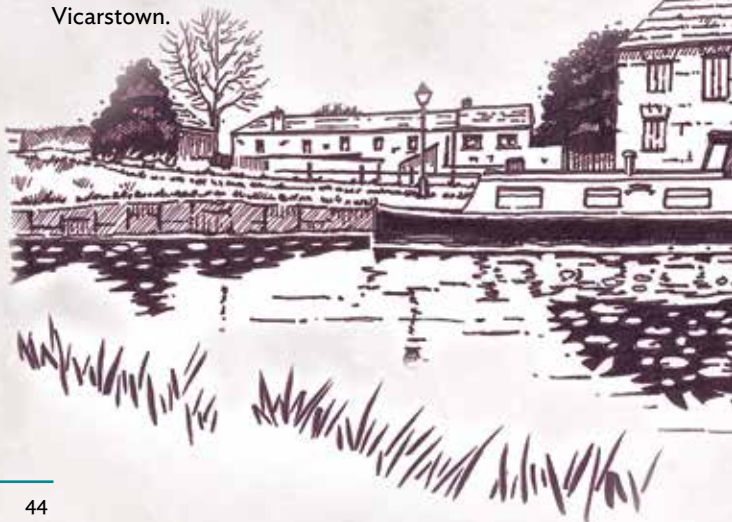
MONASTERVIN TO ATHY

22.5KM / 14 MILES

The walk from Monasterevin to Athy is long and, in terms of scenery, hardly spectacular. But the route is important as it parallels the canal channel, which linked two of the busiest ports on the Barrow Canal. Keep to east bank over the Aqueduct Bridge. Look for the abandoned Mountmellick Branch, which diverges to the west immediately after the aqueduct. Cross to the west bank at the next bridge, known as Moores Bridge. You can cross the road bridge and rejoin the canal by following a short laneway. On regaining the track there is a gravel surface for a short distance followed by a grassy stretch prone to becoming soggy after rain.



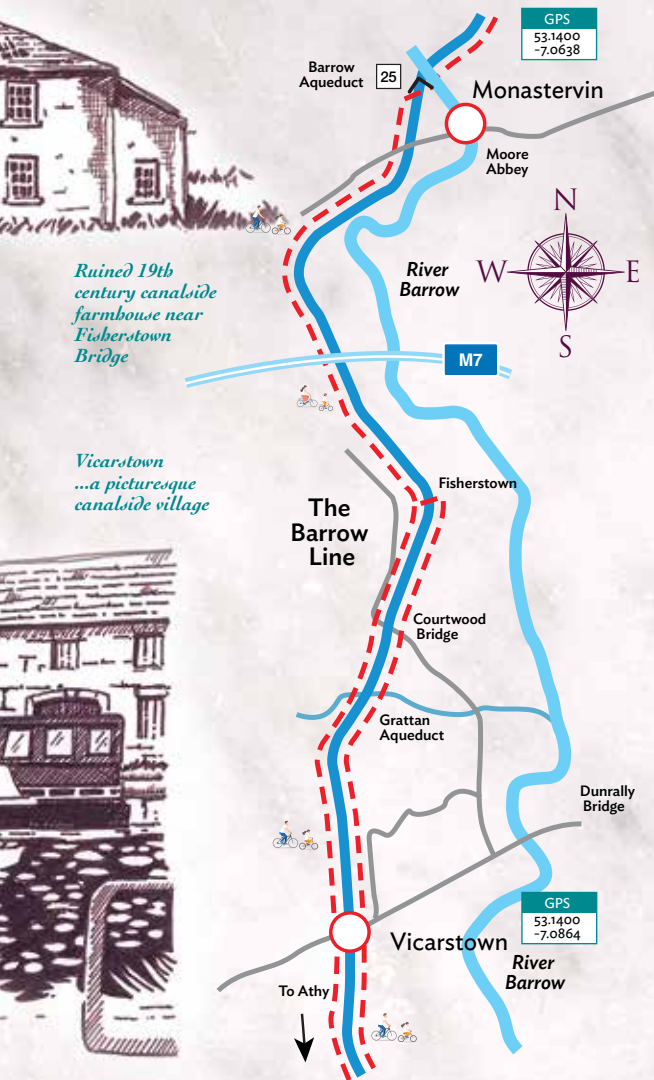
The canal runs parallel to the main road for some distance before curving to the south and following a course through flat and intensively farmed land. A neat farmstead marked by a line of beautiful cherry blossom trees on the canal bank signals the return to a tarmac road. You now have the option of following either the east or west bank tracks to Vicarstown.



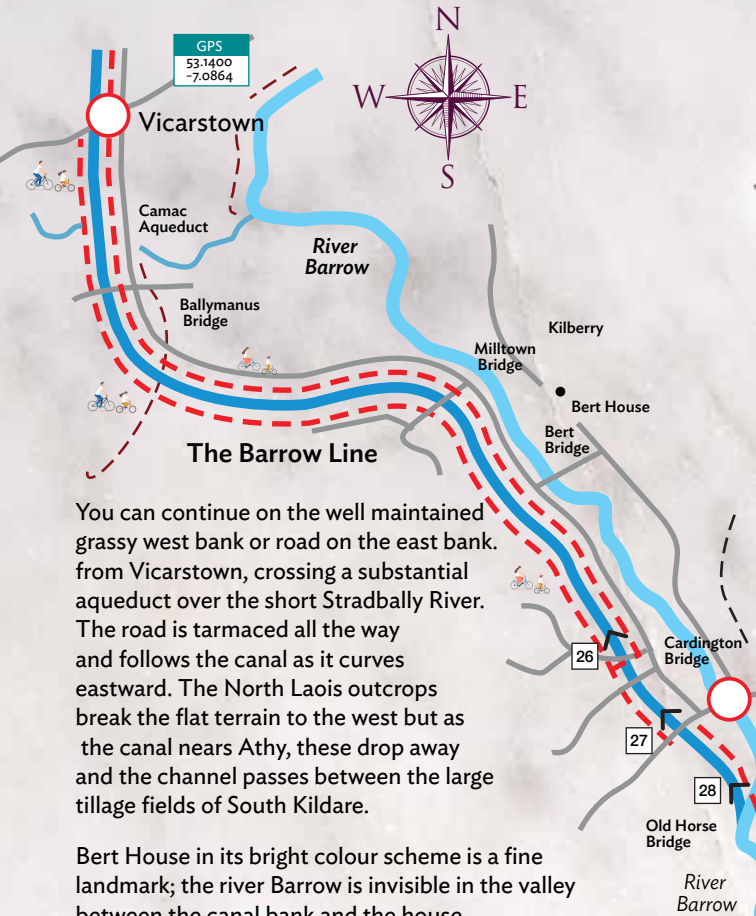
THE BARROW LINE

After Fisherstown bridge there is large scale intensive farming in evidence until Courtwood bridge. The tarmac road gives way to easy grass track taking you to the Grattan Aqueduct, which as the plaque records was built under the supervision of Richard Evans, engineer, in 1790.

The path resumes a tarmac surface again in the run-up to Vicarstown, a picturesque canal side village that is a welcome visual relief after the unvaryingly plain appearance of the landscape over the previous 11kms. The village also has an attractively presented pub waiting to slake the thirst of hot and bothered walkers.



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS



You can continue on the well maintained grassy west bank or road on the east bank. from Vicarstown, crossing a substantial aqueduct over the short Stradbally River. The road is tarmaced all the way and follows the canal as it curves eastward. The North Laois outcrops break the flat terrain to the west but as the canal nears Athy, these drop away and the channel passes between the large tillage fields of South Kildare.

Bert House in its bright colour scheme is a fine landmark; the river Barrow is invisible in the valley between the canal bank and the house.



Workhouse Cemetery, Athy

THE BARROW LINE

Atby Harbour



Passing Milltown Bridge the road diverges slightly from the canal. Make your way on to the towpath, which narrows again to a small margin as the road regains the canal side. At Milltown Bridge you can also use the west bank.

The flat terrain makes Athy seem closer than in fact it is and some perseverance is needed to reach Cardington lock and bridge on the outskirts of the town. Cross to the west bank. St. Vincent's Hospital for the elderly is on the east bank of the canal.

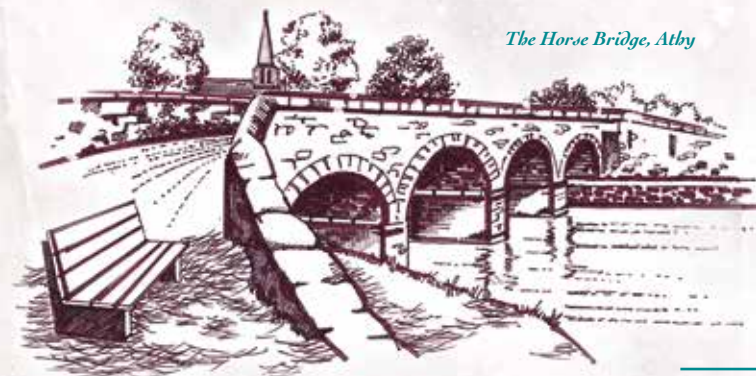
Athy



As you near Athy's harbour its prosperity in the days of canal cargo is well represented by the extensive warehouses and canopy-covered loading bays. Keep to the west bank and thread your way among the warehouses on the approach to the harbour.

The maltings on the west bank is one of the largest in the region even if motor lorry rather than canal barge is now the means of transporting its barley from the rich tillage fields of south Leinster.

The Horse Bridge, Athy



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS



Whites Castle on the River Barrow, Athy

On the opposite sides you will see a large dry-dock feature while nearer the bridge and lock 27 stands a fine canal house. Note the array of mooring rings fixed to the warehouse walls - how they must have clanked as the mooring ropes strained against the gale on a winter's night!

Cross to the east bank over the busy Augustus Bridge and follow the track- to the last lock (lock 28) on the Barrow branch where the canal merges with river. The impressive horse bridge was built to take horses towing barges from the towpath to the bank of the river. Today it affords the walker a route across the river and a return to the town by a riverside path towards Athy's town centre with its striking ensemble of Town Hall, Victorian Courthouse, and Geraldine castle (also known as White's Castle), guarding the approach to the old bridge across the river. You finish your walk in the long-disappeared hoofmarks of the towing horses of bygone days when boats made their way from the canal exit back up against the river's current to dock at the Barrow Quay in the town centre just below the bridge.

Take a while to explore Athy's many landmarks including the impressive bronze statue of Ernest Shackleton, Kildare's famous Antarctic explorer whose celebrated voyage is documented in the Athy Heritage Museum and whose expedition is recalled at the Ernest Shackleton School held each autumn.

SALLINS TO NAAS

5.5 KM / 3.5 MILES

The Naas Branch is appreciated as one of the most scenic and interesting stretches of waterway on the canal network. Lined by majestic stands of old trees its banks reveal many features of engineering and historic interest. Walk from the canal bridge towards Naas (R407). Take the right hand footpath over the railway bridge. Continue to the second right turn after the railway bridge. After two hundred metres take the footpath on the left hand side and cross the old railbridge – erected in 1883 as part of the Sallins-Naas-Tullow branch railway.

Leinster Mills



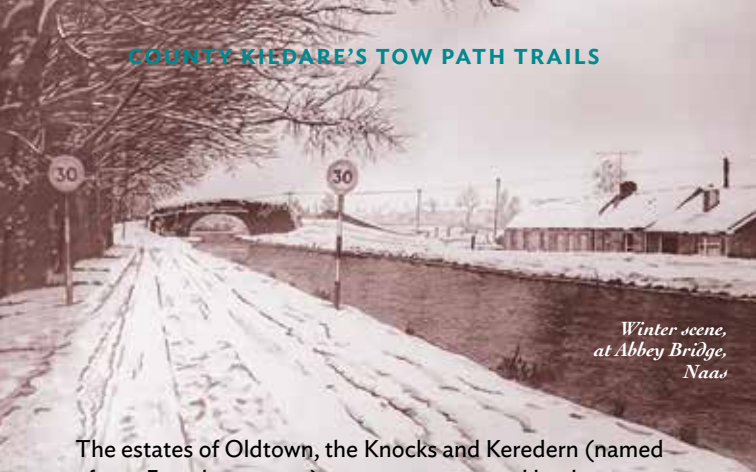
In a short distance you will join the canal, this time the Naas branch from the main channel. Follow it past a set of locks and under the modern motorway bridge to reach the Leinster Mills, which were built in 1790 on the canal bank so that grain-laden barges could easily discharge their cargoes.

Continue on the road admiring the wooded Oldtown Estate on the east bank. The road rises slightly past Oldtown lock (Can you spot the 'Burg' name inscribed on the pier of the lock chamber?) and continue on to Tandy's Bridge, which is framed by trees dipping down to the estates on either side of the canal.

Canalside dwelling



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS



*Winter scene,
at Abbey Bridge,
Naas*

The estates of Oldtown, the Knocks and Keredern (named after a French countess) create a mature parkland ambience. Continue past the bridge on the pedestrian way on the west side of the waterway. From there you can view the well-preserved Naas Gasworks house where boats laden with coal once unloaded their cargoes for the town gasworks which supplied Naas householders with light and cooking fuel. Poets and artists have drawn inspiration from this section of canal through the years. The fact that there are five locks within two miles is a challenge for boat crews but adds to the interest of the route for the walker.

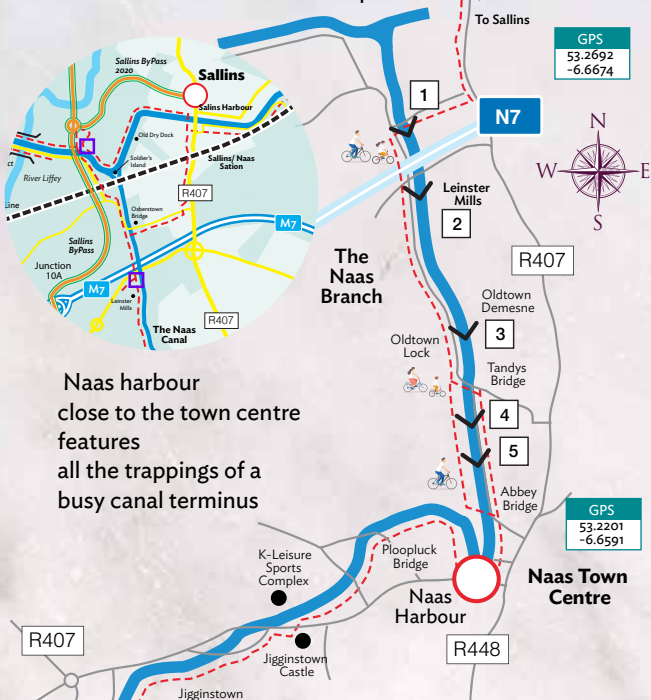
The Old Gasworks, Naas



Cross the bridge nearest to Naas - known as the Abbey Bridge from the story that its stone was re-cycled from an old monastic foundation - and walk towards Naas harbour along a track on the east bank.



Leinster Aqueduct



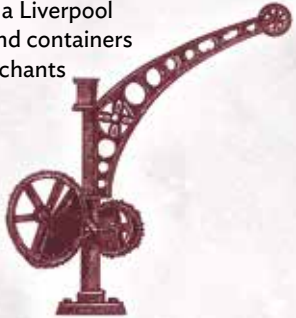
Naas harbour close to the town centre features all the trappings of a busy canal terminus

The restored harbour warehouse with its overhanging roof and loading bay conjures images of barrels and boxes being unloaded from big barges. The beautifully restored crane with the ornate curved jib, made by a Liverpool foundry, once lifted sacks and containers ready for delivery to the merchants of the town. A short walk up

the aptly named Basin Street will take you to the town centre.

Restored Crane at Naas Harbour Stores

Naas Harbour Stores



THE GRAND CANAL

NAAS TO CORBALLY HARBOUR

7.25 KM / 4.5 MILES

The Corbally branch diverges from the Naas branch canal at a junction on the west bank just before the harbour. It was completed in 1810 as something of an afterthought following the completion of the isolated Corbally harbour remote from any population or industry.

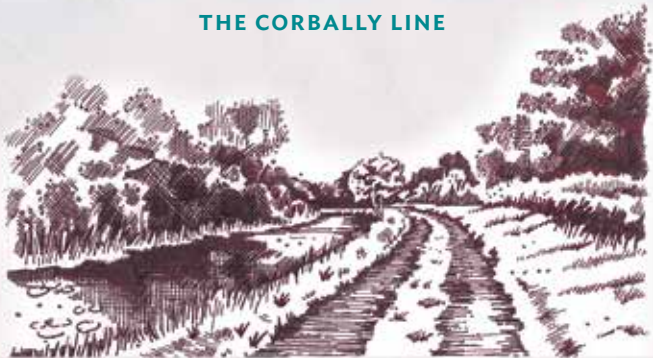


*Connaught
Bridge at Ladytown*

A good starting point for the Corbally walk is the Naas library located at the harbour. Follow the footpath along the canal bank passing housing estates and a park on your left. Continue under the intriguingly named Ploopluck bridge. The path continues under a modern bridge with the K Leisure Sports centre and playing fields, on your right across the canal- a hive of sporting activity all year round. You emerge onto a footpath on the busy R445 Naas to Newbridge road. Take great care and cross over to a footpath on the far side. Turn right on this footpath in the Newbridge direction. On your left is the the 17th century brick mansion known as Jigginstown Castle.



THE CORBALLY LINE



The Corbally canal acts as wonderful sanctuary for wildlife

Commissioned by Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, as a royal residence, alas, the king never visited, the house was never finished and his grand vision gave way to ruination. The site is not accessible pending ongoing restoration.

Past the castle take a left after 200m into Jigginstown, continue though this quiet enclave, keep left onto the tow path before the canal bridge. You are now at the start of the rural section of the Corbally line. Its main traffic in the era of canal transport was malting barley for Reeves's mill at Athgarvan, two miles to the west of Corbally harbour. Local folklore that it was used to ferry the building material for the Curragh camp remains uncertain.

At the next bridge, Connaught Bridge, (supposedly named after the army of labourers that built this canal and who hailed from the west of Ireland) change over to the west bank and follow this side all the way to Corbally. The path soon changes from laneway to open fields following the curved line of the canal under a standing of fine beech trees.

The towpath is clear walking all the way to Corbally. Look out for Hoare's bridge - fifth canal bridge out from Naas - which was widened in 1995 and rebuilt in a manner sympathetic to the original design. Before Mooney's bridge on the right is an old 19th century canalside cottage, its traditional style reflective of a bygone era. The walk ends at the intriguing Corbally Harbour, once a hive of activity as recreated in the artist's impression illustration below.

Corbally Harbour, in bygone days.



THE MILLTOWN FEEDER

8 KM / 5 MILES

The smallest of the canals in the Kildare waterway system it also offers what may be regarded as the most pleasant walk of all. It takes the walker into country away from traffic, offers a variety of scenery, and is the cleanest stretch of all both on the towpath and in its channel where clear water flows from it's source springs at Pollardstown fen.

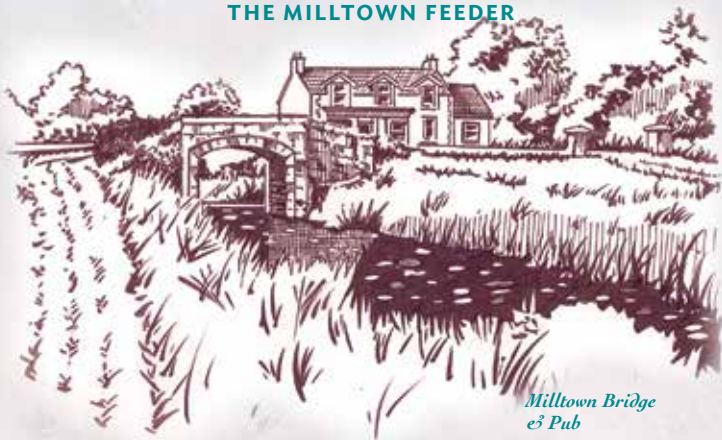
Although strictly speaking the feeder was built as a water supply rather than a navigable canal and therefore had no purpose-built towpath, it was in fact used by some boat traffic over the years and is walkable for its entire 8km course with very pleasant varying degrees of tow path finishes including grassy path, shale track, tarmac lanes and elevated grassy ramparts.

The walk along the feeder begins on the east bank of the 'old' Barrow line link from Lowtown beside the old 19th lock. A bridge (named both Huband and Greene's Bridge) marks the junction of the narrower, shallower feeder with the canal proper. Take the lane along the east bank and continue on an earthen track when the road turns away. The Hill of Allen seems to form an obstacle to the line of the canal towards the east.



Huband Bridge, where the clear waters from the Milltown Feeder feed the Grand Canal on the summit level

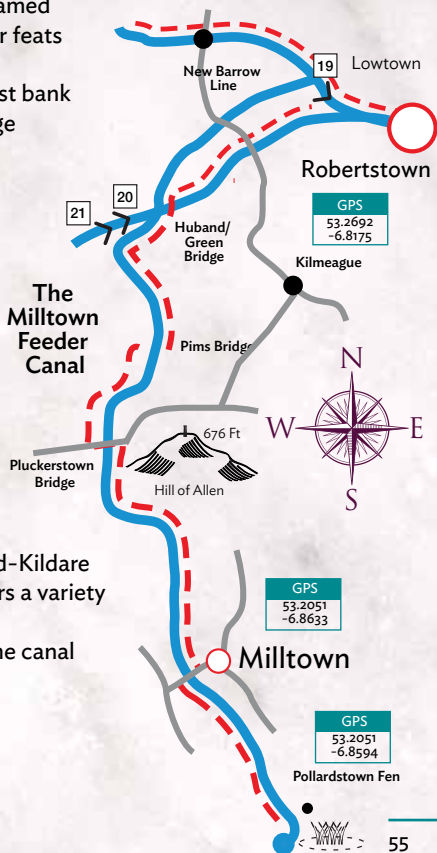
THE MILLTOWN FEEDER



*Milltown Bridge
& Pub*

Cross the feeder at the ivy-covered Pims Bridge to the west bank where an old stone ruin sheltering a limekiln furnace is a noteworthy feature. Continue on the west bank to Pluckerstown Bridge where the Allen to Rathangan road crosses the channel. At this point the view is dominated by the giant quarry on the western face of the Hill of Allen, where, once according to legend, the Celtic warriors roamed as they practiced their feats of skill and strength. Switch back to the east bank at Pluckerstown Bridge and keep on along a gravelled track and later a stock-trodden path as the waterway curves around the foot of the Hill of Allen.

The untouched eastern slope of the 676 feet high Hill is notable and combined with the views of the other mid-Kildare hills to the south offers a variety of landscape not normally seen from the canal banks which tend to avoid hilly country.



COUNTY KILDARE'S TOW PATH TRAILS

The feeder goes into a long curve on a high embankment. Continue past the mill bridge where the shattered bulk of an ancient mill looms on the far side and keep along the easy path, which conveniently delivers the walker alongside the intriguingly named Hanged Man's Arch pub on the Milltown road. The bar keeper will, no doubt, be glad to give thirsty walkers an explanation for such a ghoulish name.

The feeder channel south of the bridge continues into the dip in the landscape surrounded by low ridges known as Pollardstown Fen.

The Pollardstown Fen Bird Sanctuary



To investigate the fen further take the west bank which leads you right into the heart of these wetlands, the canal terminates at a dead end after about 2km. It is a rare habitat peat land where a rich diversity of plants is nourished by calcium-rich spring water which originates in a vast layer of water-holding rock beneath the Curragh plains. Within the twelve thousand year-old fens are more than thirty springs which supply a vast quantity of water to its habitat. This water was channeled by the canal builders into the Feeder canal, which in turn transfers it along 8km course into the summit level of the Grand Canal system.

At a separate location the Pollardstown Fen Bird Sanctuary (GPS: 53.1271, -6.9291) which features a 2km boardwalk and information signage provides an excellent interpretation of these important wetlands and worthy of a separate visit.

The fen's waters once had another claim to fame - feeding the summit level of the Grand canal they were drawn at filter beds at Clondalkin from which Arthur Guinness & Company took a supply for the James's Street brewery. So water from the heart of Kildare was one of the magic ingredients in the world famous brew.