

The Barrow Way

Section 1 Grade: Easy

The Barrow Way

Trail Overview

The Barrow Way is a 114km, long-distance walking trail. It is divided here into 10 sections each representing a half days walking. The trail starts in Robertstown and ends at St. Mullins. To view the complete trail click on the map on the right hand side.

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 3.5km road, 10.5km grassy path. The road section can be busy

Standard of Marking

Good

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheets 49 and 55. Guide to the Grand Canal of Ireland – The Waterways Service & Inland Waterways Association of Ireland The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

This section heads south-west with the canal, past Ballyteigue Castle into the open flatlands of Kildare, and on to the old town of Rathangan. It is a great route for a brisk walk on a summer's morning, when the herons, hawks and kingfishers which frequent the canal-side are active. Just outside Rathangan the road parts company with the canal, and loops around past a late Georgian farmhouse with a fine doorcase and fanlight to rejoin the canal again. To the south, stark against the sky, the Hill of Allen with a tower on its summit comes into view, with its western flanks eaten away by quarrying.

Heritage

Along this section one finds Ballyteigue Castle is reached. It is said that Silken Thomas, the rebel son of the Earl of Kildare, took refuge here in 1535 shortly before his capture and eventual beheading at Tyburn.

Parking

At Start: On street in Robertstown - At End: On street in Rathangan

Section 2 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 1.5 km road and 9 km grassy track; Canal bank can be walked through Rathangan, Way goes under Shepherd's Brook Bridge coming to Monasterevin

Standard of Marking

Good except marker missing at Spencer Bridge

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheet 55. Guide to the Grand Canal of Ireland – The Waterways Service & Inland Waterways Association of Ireland The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

Crossing to the right-hand side of the canal after the bridge into the town, follow it south-westwards along a grassy towpath. The grey-slated roofs of Rathangan are clustered on the far side of the Slate River to the right, which is hidden from the canal bank by an overgrown meadow. Beyond, stately Georgian houses rise from the trees above the town. Watch out for plentiful numbers of hares, herons and hawks. The towpath soon deteriorates into a path, winding through long grass which in summertime, although rich in wildflowers can be very wet. From some points along the route Dunmurray Hill can be seen to the east while the Slieve Bloom mountains and the cooling tower at Portarlinton are quite clear to the south-west. From Umeras Bridge looking to the south-west Ballythomas Hill and Kildeale Hill, the first of a string of limestone hillocks, are in sight.

Heritage

Rathangan takes its name from the original ring fort or rath beside the old church. Occupation by the Clan Ui Failge as early as the 16th century is recorded. The present town was built up during the construction of the Barrow Canal line 1791. Beside McCartney's Bridge is a cluster of cottages dating from 1784

Parking

At Start: On street in Rathangan
At End: On street in Monasterevin

Section 3 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 1.5 km road, 3.0 km track, 7.5 km grassy track; Road section very quiet

Standard of Marking

Good

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheet 55. Guide to the Grand Canal of Ireland – The Waterways Service & Inland Waterways Association of Ireland The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

Heading south, the route crosses Moore's bridge to the right bank of the canal before meeting the main Limerick road, after which it reverts to the left bank. Soon the noise of the traffic is left behind as the path becomes a grassy track decorated with daisies, yarrow and mint, and passes from Co. Kildare into Co. Laois. Along here the western bank is thickly wooded, with hazel, willow and ash trees heavily overhanging the canal. The thick living quarters provides living quarters for many shy herons. Less than 2.5km after crossing the aqueduct the towpath reaches Vicarstown. Formerly a canal harbour of some importance, as the picturesque group of disused stone warehouses suggests, Vicarstown is today a pretty hamlet, with two fine pubs, Turley's & Creans, one on each side of the canal.

Heritage

Monasterevin takes its name from a monastery founded in the 6th century by St. Elvin of Cashel, one of the ruling Eoghanacht sept of Munster. At Fisherstown Bridge the road that crosses the canal is said to follow one of the ancient routes across Ireland. The ruined fortress of Dunamase was the scene of many sieges and battles until destroyed by the Cromwellians in 1650.

Parking

At Start: On street in Monasterevin
At End: On street in Vicarstown

Section 4 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 2.5 km road, 0.5 km track, 8 km grassy track

Standard of Marking

Good

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheet 55. Guide to the Grand Canal of Ireland – The Waterways Service & Inland Waterways Association of Ireland The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

After Vicarstown Killeale Hill and Hewson Hill are clearly visible to the right, while ahead, tree-covered Bawn Hill rises from the flat countryside. After Bert Bridge, across rich farmland and the hidden Barrow can be seen the broad expanse of Bert House, a seven-bayed Georgian mansion

Heritage

Vicarstown was formerly a canal harbour of some importance. Hewson Hill was named after the commander of the Cromwellian force that de-roofed Dunamase castle.

Parking

At Start: On street in Vicarstown
At End: Car park at 27th Lock

Section 5 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 1.5 km track, 8.5 km grassy track ;Take care crossing lock gate at 28th Lock

Standard of Marking

Good

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheets 55 and 61. Guide to the Barrow Navigation of Ireland – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and Waterways IrelandThe Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

After a railway bridge the towpath follows the canal and it is at this point that there is a broad thistle-covered island between the river and canal teeming with goldfinches and reed warblers. A counter-weighted lifting bridge gives access to the island, shortly after which the canal rejoins the river after dropping through the Ardleigh Lock. The towpath to Levittstown Lock for a while becomes a pleasant breen with a screen of young trees separating it from the canal. Meganey Bridge is a fine seven-arch stone construction, with granite-ringed circular niches over each buttress.

Heritage

Athy grew up around a ford, and the subsequent Norman fortifications were built to protect this. Beside Athy bridge is White's Castle built in 1506 by the eighth earl of Kildare. Upstream is the 13th century Woodstock Castle. Near Tankardstown Bridge is a Celtic Ring Fort.

Parking

At Start: Car park at 27th Lock

At End: At cross-roads on main road about 100m from Way at shop, pub, etc

Section 6 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 0.5 km road, 1 km track, 7 km grassy track; Almost all grassy river bank, part of road section narrow and remainder on pavement

Standard of Marking

Good except in Carlow town

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheet 61.

Guide to the Barrow Navigation of Ireland – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and Waterways IrelandThe Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

The towpath continues past Meganey Bridge and enters Co.Carlow. Carlow is an ideal centre for exploring the midlands, and has an independent hostel as well as a good range of guesthouses, hotels and restaurants. The Geese and the Lerr tributaries join the river along this stretch and the towpath is carried over them by humped-back bridges.

Heritage

Maganey Bridge was built in 1790 replacing an earlier bridge. The site of Grange Castle is located on the banks of the Guilic river; The castle in Carlow town originates from Hugh de Lacy, one of the invading Normans, who fortified the river here in the 1180's

Parking

At Start: At cross-roads on main road about 100m from Way at shop, pub, etc

At End: In Carlow Town, probable charge or in car park

Section 7 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 0.2 km road, 5 km track and 5.8 km grassy track; Road section is at start on pavement

Standard of Marking

Medium, marking in Leighlinbridge inadequate

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheet 61.

Guide to the Barrow Navigation of Ireland – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and Waterways Ireland
The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

The towpath crosses the county border and enters into Laois, and the river follows a series of wide and lazy meanders. Accommodation can be obtained at a white house called the Locks. Just past here a substantial wooded island divides the river and when the island is passed, Mount Leinster can be seen in the distance straight ahead. Before reaching the Leighlinstown by-pass, the river goes over another weir & the towpath bears round to the right to follow the canal past Rathvinden Lock & under the road to reach the village of Leighlinbridge.

Heritage

Clogrennan Weir is the only naturally occurring weir on the Barrow navigation. The ruins of Clogrennan Castle can be seen on the west bank. Nearby is Cloydagh church, erected by the Rochfort family in 1805.

Parking

At Start: In Carlow Town, probable charge or in car park

At End: On Street in Leighlinbridge

Section 8 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 0.5 km road, 2.5 km track, 10.5 km grassy track; The canal bank can be walked into Bagenalstown

Standard of Marking

Good except markers required in Bagenalstown

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheets 61 and 68.

Guide to the Barrow Navigation of Ireland – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and Waterways Ireland
The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

A few minutes out of Leighlinbridge Mount Leinster appears again off to the left. On the west bank, but not visible from the river is earthen-banked hill-fort of Diann Ri. A short distance out of Leighlinbridge, the roar of the weir is heard, and the river divides again, the towpath following a canal section.

Heritage

The bridge at Leighlinbridge is the oldest on the river, built in 1320 by Maurice Jakis. The hill a short distance downstream of Leighlinbridge on the west side is known as Dinn Righ and is said to have been the ancient seat of the Kings of Leinster

Parking

At Start: On street in Leighlinbridge

At End: On street in Goresbridge

Section 9 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 1 km track, 13.5 km grassy track. Pleasant riverside walking

Standard of Marking

Good

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheet 68.

Guide to the Barrow Navigation of Ireland – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and Waterways Ireland

The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

After Goresbridge and Lower Ballyellan lock are passed the river is forced towards the south-east by the first outcrop of rock of high ground in its way since it turned south at Monasterevin

Heritage

The bridge at Goresbridge was built in 1756. The village takes its name from the Gore family who lived in Barrowmount House. Borris Demesne is the seat of the MacMurrough Kavanagh family, descendants of the kings of Leinster. Near Ballinagrane Lock are the ruins of Ullard House and castle.

Parking

At Start: On street in Goresbridge

At End: On street in Graiguenamanagh

Section 10 Grade: Easy

Walking Route Terrain

On tow path consisting of about 0.5 km road, 1.5 km track, 6 km grassy track. Pleasant riverside walk

Standard of Marking

Good

Maps and Guidebooks

OSI Discovery Series Sheet 68.

Guide to the Barrow Navigation of Ireland – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and Waterways Ireland

The Way-marked Trails of Ireland – Michael Fewer

Surrounding Landscape

The surrounding landscape along this section is dominated by forestry, particularly Bahana Wood and the Scar, farmland and weirs.

Heritage

The bridge at Gruaignamagh was built by George Semple in the 1760's, replacing a 15th century stone bridge. Gruaignamagh is well known for the Abbey of Duiske, founded in 1204, which is a short distance up the town to the west of the river. Tinnahinch Castle, beside the lock, was a Butler Castle built to defend the Ford. Carriglead Lock is the oldest on the Barrow navigation as the masonry on the chamber will indicate.

Parking

At Start: On street in Graiguenamanagh

At End: On riverbank or near Abbey in St Mullins

