

The CSA Group



Kildare County Council

County Kildare Walking Routes Project

FINAL REPORT



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DOCUMENT ISSUE SHEET

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

County Kildare is well endowed with a good range of recreational walking routes in towns, forest parks and along canal tow path trails with significant natural and built heritage of interest to tourist visitors and citizens of Kildare alike. The routes are accessible to all levels of walker by virtue of being lowland walks along way marked ways that do not require specialist navigation skills or mountaineering equipment. An objective scoring system to evaluate the development and promotional status of each route has been designed and applied in this report. A development plan and promotional strategy for the top ten of the highest scoring walks are provided. The recommended promotional themes are St. Brigid pilgrim trails, the tranquil waterways, peatland conservation and the thoroughbred county.

Most of the routes are in public ownership and therefore benefit from regular maintenance and development. The present level of promotion would benefit from involvement by the private sector that would see commercial advantage in increased use of the routes. According to Bord Failte statistics in 2000 walkers and hikers spent €140m in Ireland.

A number of national and local strategies impact on walking in County Kildare but a co-ordinated walking trails strategy for the county is required. Promotion is the last stage in a cycle of evaluation, development and maintenance. For instance County Waterford has a walking strategy. County Cork has established a walking forum and Co. Donegal has appointed a walking officer. A Kildare Walking Task Force with representatives of key stakeholders should be established to implement the strategy.

Kildare is the fastest growing county in the country and has become the new home of many commuters to Dublin. Sallins increased in population between 1996 and 2002 by 242%. More than 53% of the population are born outside Kildare. This new young suburban population has an interest in, active walking for health, the natural environment and the local history of their new home area. Some routes are accessible from rail commuter stations and could be promoted in partnership with Iarnród Eireann. The grafting of heritage onto existing Slí na Sláinte routes and the provision of heritage training to walking leaders in co-operation with the Kildare Sports Partnership is another recommended promotional strategy.

The objective of Kildare County Council should be to generate an increased awareness of Kildare's walking routes and heritage, promote greater use of existing walking routes through a development and maintenance programme and do this as part of a co-ordinated walking trails strategy for County Kildare in partnership with tourism service providers, community groups, walking clubs, semi state bodies, state agencies, private sector companies and wealthy benefactors.

1. Introduction

Kildare County Council, in co-operation with the Heritage Council, County Kildare Failte and Kildare Sports Partnership, wish to conduct a study of recreational walking routes in County Kildare with a focus on heritage.

Kildare County Council has contracted CSA Group Ltd. to identify the full range of established recreational walking routes in the county to assess their overall quality, character, management status and potential for creating awareness and appreciation of the county's heritage.

The Irish Sports Council (ISC) has commissioned Coillte Consult Ltd to conduct an audit of promoted walking routes across the country (Irish recreational Trails Audit 2005) as part of the research being carried out for the National Trails Strategy. The audit will capture and provide baseline information on all developed and managed recreational walking, cycling horse riding and water/paddle trails in County Kildare.

The consultants brief for this project has three distinctive components:

- (i) Phase I of this project will expand on the results of the audit for County Kildare and identify the full range of established recreational walking routes in the county. These established routes will then be evaluated against a set of agreed criteria.
- (ii) Phase II will identify other potential walking routes through out the county and conduct an evaluation of these routes against the established criteria.
- (iii) Phase III will develop a promotional strategy for the established and developed routes in the county (phase I) and a development plan, including recommendations for the development of potential routes identified in phase II, which will bring these routes up to the necessary standard, required for promotion.

This is the final report of the project.

2. Methodology

The methodology has three phases, consultation, map based audit and physical audit. The ISC Trail Audit is the starting point for the walking route evaluation. The section on Kildare was reviewed. Consultation with members of the Steering Committee identified any significant routes that may have been omitted. The evaluation was undertaken in a phased process that identified the routes with the greatest potential for promotion and development.

Through research, face to face interviews and consultation with stakeholders, a subset of the existing walking routes was scored and graded under the key evaluation headings to test the selection process. There was an ongoing and iterative analysis of results and routes were scored based on the evaluation criteria developed by CSA and approved by the Steering Group. The research involved review of publications on Kildare local history and heritage, investigation of websites related to tourism and community development in Kildare and collection of promotional literature related to walking in Kildare. Interviews and consultation with Kildare Sport Council, Coillte Teoranta, Kildare County Council, Kildare

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Failte, Newbridge Library, Naas Town Council, Inland Waterways Ireland, KELT, and IPCC were conducted.

Recreational walking routes in County Kildare can be divided into three types, canal bank walks, forest walks and town walks.

Walking routes were examined under the headings of nature and characteristics of the route. Based on maps compiled for the County Development Plan (CDP), the nature and characteristics of the routes were scored against:

- Landscape characterisation
- Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Sites and Monuments records
- Landscape robustness factors
- Landscape sensitivity factors
- Topography and ridgelines
- Scenic routes and view points
- Protected structures
- Special Amenity Areas
- Proposed Regional Park along the Liffey Valley

Other maps such as Noble and Keenan, Alex Taylor's and early Ordnance Survey maps of Kildare were examined in parallel with the consultation and analysis.

The second part of the map audit reviewed the sites and monuments records, the proposed and protected structures database and the architectural conservation areas identified in the CDP. Documentary sources referred to included historical maps of County Kildare, Lewis' Topographical Dictionary (1832), the archaeological inventory of county Kildare and other sources held in the County Council library and heritage offices. The routes were scored for the variety of landscape, built heritage and archaeology, SACs and NHAs along the route and how the route links between villages, town and countryside.

The map based audit was followed by a physical audit. For the selected walks a review of the natural, built and historical heritage along the course of the walk were examined under the headings of 'nature and characteristics' and 'physical attributes of the route'. Suitably scaled maps for each walk, using GIS data sourced from the Kildare County Development Plan, have been prepared and are included in Appendix 2.

The Evaluation Criteria acted as a checklist. Using a map, compass, field notebook and reference books¹, the consultants walked each route noting access, flora and fauna, underfoot conditions, accessibility, condition of signage, stiles and map boards, health and safety, escape routes, accommodation, cafes, pubs, restaurants, pottery, craft shops etc along the route. Relevant public transport routes, bus stops and train stations were investigated. Certain characteristics of the route, such as the level of community involvement and co-operation from landowners and the diversity of natural flora and fauna, were assessed. The audit included informal interview of other walkers, landowners and service providers along the route. A list of amenities such as picnic areas, public toilets and public playgrounds were identified. The presence of fishing locations, berthing facilities and car parks were identified.

¹ eg Collins Complete Irish Wildlife by Derek Mooney / Reading the Irish Landscape by Frank Mitchell / Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape, etc

3. Results

3.1 Review Audit of Walking Routes & List Established Routes

Following the completion of Phase I and the commencement of site visits it was found that several of the walks listed in Appendix 2 of the Phase I Report were in fact repetitions and others when visited on the ground were not established walks but badly overgrown. A revised list is given below.

Table 1: Listing of Trails in Co. Kildare

Trail Name	No	Km	Start	End
Athy Town	1	2.6		
Donadea Forest Park	2	10.9	Donadea Forest Car Park	
Barrow Way 1	3	23.0	Lowtown	Monasterevin
Barrow Way 2	4	13.6	Athy	Vicarstown
Celbridge/Lexlip	5	7.0		
Derrinturn	6	3.3		
Grand Canal Way 1	7	10.7	Sallins	Hazelhatch
Grand Canal Way 2	8	13.0	Robertstown	Sallins
Kilcock	9	5.5		
Kilcullen	10	5.1		
Killinthomas	11	4.0		
Moore Abbey	12	5.0		
Mullaghreelan	13	3.0		
Naas	14	9.4		
Newbridge	15	8.0		
Royal Canal	16	21.7	Leixlip	Kilcock
Clane	17	4.5	Clane	
Grand Canal 3	18	5.5	Sallins	Naas
Grand Canal 4	19	8.0	Robertstown	Pollardstown Fen
Rahin	20	4.0		
Maynooth Heritage	21			
Kildare Heritage	22			
Moat of Ardscull	23	6.0	Moat of Ardscull	Gordon Bennett Memorial
Carbury Bog Walk	24	6.0	Windmill Ruins	Mucklon
Lullymore Island	25	30.0	Robertstown	Lullybeg
Blackwood Feeder	26	8.0	Bonyngge Bridge	Ballynafagh Lake

These twenty six walks were selected for evaluation. Due to budget and time constraints twelve of the walks received a map based and physical audit with stakeholder consultation. The remainder of the walks received a map based audit with stakeholder consultation.

The recreational walking routes in County Kildare can be divided into three types, canal bank walks, forest walks and town walks.

The evaluation criteria and scoring system with comments is shown in Appendix 1.

3.2 Evaluation of each Route by Established Criteria

Each of selected routes was evaluated against the established criteria. Each is described in summary below, with results also on Table 2. Detailed heritage descriptions and scorings, together with a series of maps for each route, are presented in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 1: Athy Town

This 3.0km *town* and *canal* walk combines an established Sli na Slainte and a town heritage trail that includes a town park, canal bank and riverside walk. Athy is a designated



Heritage Town with exceptional built heritage. The route includes a stretch of the Barrow River which is a Special Area of Conservation and the Grand Canal which is a Natural Heritage Area in the Draft County Development Plan for Kildare. The walking route can be enjoyed by people of all ages and fitness. The route is well signposted. Public transport and local services are excellent. Management and access comes under the control of Athy Urban District Council and Waterways Ireland. There are plenty of eating places in the town.

Toilets, seating and picnic tables are provided. The walk is promoted by local tourism agencies and several well established community groups operate in the area. There is potential to promote the walk in association with established local visitor attractions. Other activities such as bird watching fishing and cycling can be enjoyed along the route.

- 🚦 Route 1 scored 189 out of a potential total of 250 (75%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 2: Donadea Forest Park

This *forest* route consists of 10.9kms of forest road and walking paths in a mixed



woodland park that contains the ruins of a magnificent castle, a church, a tower, an eighteenth century ice house and 17th century walled garden. There is also a 9/11 memorial in the Park which attracts international visitors. The site is a designated Natural Heritage Area (NHA). There are 7.6kms of forest road and 3.3kms of nature trail. The walking routes can be enjoyed by people of all ages and fitness. The paths are well signposted.

There is a significant range of natural and built heritage in the Park. Although public transport and local services are restricted the management and access comes under the control of Coillte. There is a coffee shop, toilets, seating and picnic tables provided. The walk is already well promoted by regional and national tourism agencies and several well established community groups operate in the area. There is potential to develop the walled garden as an additional visitor attraction. Other activities such as bird watching fishing and cycling can be enjoyed in the Park.

- 🚦 Route 2 scored 196 out of a potential total of 250 (78%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 3: Barrow Way 1 (Lowtown to Monasterevin)



This *canal* route consists of 5kms road and 19.5km grassy path along the *canal bank* through three landscape character areas with flat terrain and low lying vegetation allowing long distance and extensive visibility. The route can be enjoyed by people of all ages and fitness. The towpaths are self guiding and do not demand the knowledge of navigation techniques or physical fitness levels required for long distance walking in remote and mountainous regions. There is a significant range of natural and built heritage along the

route. In fact the route is proposed as a Natural Heritage Area in the County Development Plan. Although public transport and local services are restricted the management and access comes under the control of Waterways Ireland. The walk is already well promoted by regional and national tourism agencies and several well established community groups operate in the area. Two successful visitor attractions occur close to the route and other activities such as fishing and cycling are well promoted along the route which improves the potential for promoting tourist packages.

- 🚩 Route 3 scored 177 out of a potential total of 250 (71%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 4: Barrow Way 2 (Vicarstown to Athy)


This *canal* route consists of about 2.5 km road, 0.5 km track, 8 km grassy track. The road section is not busy with local traffic only. Walking time is about 3.5 hours. The route passes through two landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the Southern Lowlands and the River Barrow Valley. The route starts in County Laois and the Castlecomer Plateau breaks the flat terrain to the west. The land use on either side of the route is dominantly tillage. The route can be enjoyed by people of all ages and fitness. Although most of the route lacks significant natural and built heritage the town of Athy at one end of the route is a heritage town. Public transport to Athy is excellent with regular bus and rail services. Local services and accommodation in Athy are also very good. Management and access to the route comes under the control of Waterways Ireland. The walk is already well promoted by regional and national tourism agencies. There are successful visitor attractions close to the route in Athy and other activities such as fishing and cycling are well promoted along the route which improves the potential for promoting tourist packages.

- 🚩 Route 4 scored 174 out of a potential total of 250 (69%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 7: Grand Canal Way 1 (Sallins to Hazelhatch)


This *canal* route consists of 10.5km of towpath tracks, including c. 2.5km of local vehicular access. Walking time is about 3 hours. The route passes through the Northern Lowlands, along the Grand Canal 'landscape within a landscape'. This comprises flat pasture & tillage, with stud farms, in very pleasant and quiet rural area. The prominent ridgeline of Lyons Hill between Kill and Newcastle lies c. 2km to the southeast, with the hills of the Eastern Uplands visible in the southeastern distance. The canal landscape, with well developed hedgerows, encloses a haven of solitude despite being so close to the Greater Dublin metropolis.

Geologically, the canal route straddles the southwestern margin of the Dublin Basin with complex northwest faulting of the bedrock. Ash, whitethorn, willow and elder trees edge the canal, with mixed deciduous trees in adjacent hedgerows reflecting the presence of local demesnes. The Lyons Estate fringes the walk near the 13th-14th locks and presents a significant example of eighteenth century landed estate built and landscape heritage. Excellent examples of canal industrial heritage are presented in locks, bridges, cottages and ancillary features. The route can be enjoyed by people of all ages and fitness. Public transport to Sallins and Hazelhatch is excellent with regular bus and rail services, but is limited at weekends. Local services and accommodation in Sallins and Hazelhatch are moderate, but excellent services are available in nearby Naas. Management and access to the route comes under the control of Waterways Ireland, and the walk is already promoted by regional and national tourism agencies as part of the overall canal package of walks.

-  Route 7 scored 160 out of a potential total of 250 (64%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 9: Kilcock (Slí na Sláinte Variation)

This is a *town (Slí na Sláinte)* route and consists of 5.5kms of country road and some village streets with interesting architecture. The route is characterised by flat terrain and open pasture with some woodland. Built and natural heritage along the route is limited. The road is busy and narrow in places. It is well served by public transport and there is an active community with an interest in the walking route. The canal harbour is a pleasant amenity area and the walk could be promoted as a spur off the Royal Canal (W 16). The route is under the control of Kildare County Council and promoted by the Irish Heart Foundation and the Kildare Sports Council.


-  Route 9 scored 137 out of a potential total of 250 (54%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 10: Kilcullen (Slí na Sláinte Variation)

This is a *town (Slí na Sláinte)* route and consists of 3.5kms of country road and rural village street with 1.5km of gravel and grassy path along a scenic stretch of the River Liffey. The



River Liffey bisects a landscape of undulating topography with classic meander formations, some of the finest in Ireland. The route passes through natural woodland, open pasture and shady country roads with significant natural and ecclesiastical heritage. The route through the village picks out unusual industrial and built heritage. There are good local services including regular public transport. The route is not currently managed by any one group and depends on voluntary work for maintenance. There are active community groups involved.

-  Route 10 scored 162 out of a potential total of 250 (65%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 11: Killinthomas Wood

This route is a *forest* walk with 5.7kms of forest paths. The signage is good with an information board at the starting point and colour coded signs throughout giving a choice of four different walks of varying lengths. The route is through coniferous and mixed woodland with views across the Snipe Bog. Curlew and snipe may be seen on the bog. Rabbits and squirrels can be seen in the wood with evidence of badgers and foxes. There is limited built heritage along the route but the site is under the management of Coillte. There is a history of co-operation between Coillte and the local community.

- ✚ Route 11 scored 143 out of a potential total of 250 (57%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 13: Mullaghreelan (Proposed)

This route is a *forest* walk of 4.5kms linked to the 12th century Kilkea Castle, the oldest continuously inhabited castle in Ireland with a well maintained walled garden. The mixed forest surrounds an Iron Age hill fort with spectacular views across Co. Kildare. The built heritage combines Iron Age, Medieval and 19th century estate architecture associated with the Fitzgerald family and St. Laurence O’Toole. Part of the trail that links the forest with the estate needs to be developed. Improved signage and information boards would greatly improve the route. Co-operation between Coillte and the owners of Kilkea Castle Hotel has the potential to promote this route as a first class heritage trail.



- ✚ Route 13 scored 191 out of a potential total of 250 (76%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 14: Naas Town

This route is a combined *town and canal* walk of 6.4kms linked to the linear park of the Grand Canal towpath which is a designated NHA with rich natural heritage and accessible wildlife. The built heritage combines Iron Age, Medieval and 19th century ecclesiastical, urban and industrial architecture associated with the administrative capital of Kildare. The route is well served by public transport and is suitable for all levels of walker included the disabled. Signage is well developed and the route is promoted by sports bodies and local history group. All services are available in Naas and the town has a lively nightlife. There are other well established visitor attractions that could be

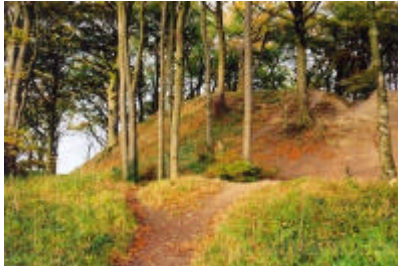


jointly promoted.

- ✚ Route 14 scored 181 out of a potential total of 250 (72%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 23: Ardscull Moate (proposed)

This route is a country road walk of 13kms that includes a stretch of bogland, mixed forest and a Norman Motte of national importance on a high point affording scenic views of the Barrow Valley and the foothills of Wicklow. There is a wildflower garden and memorial to the 1903 Gordon Bennett motor race on the route. The route is well served by public transport and is suitable for all levels of walker included the disabled. Signage is well developed and the route is proposed by an active local community group. Although the entire route is along roadway including the busy N78 stretches are along pleasant country road. There is evidence of erosion of the Motte from the number of people climbing to the top.



- ✚ Route 24 scored 151 out of a potential total of 250 (60%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 25: Lullymore (Proposed)

This route is a combined *Canal Bank and Bogland* walk of 30 kms. It is indicated in the County Development Plan as one of the long distance walking routes proposed for the Robertstown Countryside. The circular route links the Grand Canal with the Barrow Navigation and encloses a monastic settlement with connections to St. Patrick on an island surrounded by bog. The route links the rich natural habitats of canal banks and bogland with very the ancient ecclesiastical settlements associated with Lullymore Island and the modern villages of Robertstown and Rathangan. There are two well established visitor attractions on the walk, The Bog of Allen Nature Centre and Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park. Several public and private organisations are responsible for sections of the walk and a coordinated approach will be required to develop the route to its full potential.



- ✚ Route 25 scored 195 out of a potential total of 250 (78%). See detailed scoring in Appendix 2.

**Table 2: Summary Scoring of Selected Walks relative to Established Criteria
(Max. score 250 points)**

Trail Name	No	Km	Score	1	2	3	4	5	%
Athy Town	1	2.6	189	45	57	41	28	18	75
Donadea Forest Park	2	10.9	196	46	59	45	23	23	78
Barrow Way 1	3	23.0	177	48	59	39	23	16	71
Barrow Way 2	4	13.6	175	38	49	39	28	21	69
Celbridge/Lexlip	5	7.0							
Derrinturn	6	3.3							
Grand Canal Way 1	7	10.7	160	50	41	39	16	14	64
Grand Canal Way 2	8	13.0							
Kilcock	9	5.5	137	26	38	36	22	15	54
Kilcullen	10	5.1	162	49	48	33	24	8	65
Killinthomas	11	4.0	143	27	49	40	18	9	57
Moore Abbey	12	5.0							
Mullaghreelan	13	3.0	191	41	52	42	36	20	76
Naas	14	9.4	181	42	54	40	29	16	72
Newbridge	15	8.0							
Royal Canal	16	21.7							
Clane	17	4.5							
Grand Canal 3	18	5.5							
Grand Canal 4	19	8.0							
Rahin	20	4.0							
Maynooth Heritage	21								
Kildare Heritage	22								
Moat of Ardscull	23	6.0	151	32	45	39	20	15	60
Carbury Bog Walk	24	6.0							
Lullymore Island	25	30.0	195	46	52	44	34	19	78
Blackwood Feeder	26	8.0							

Notes:

The scores are broken down under the different headings

1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route (maximum score 60)
2. Physical Attributes of the Route (maximum score 70)
3. Management and Organisational Structure (maximum score 55)
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route (maximum score 40)
5. Marketing and Sales Issues (maximum score 25)

4. Conclusions

- (i) There are twenty six (26) recreational walking routes in County Kildare which can be divided into three types, canal bank walks, forest walks and town walks.
- (ii) The methodology as proposed provided an objective means of scoring existing and proposed routes with respect to their heritage content and promotional value.
- (iii) The routes that combine public sector management with significant natural and built heritage scored highest and will require the least effort by Kildare County Council to develop, maintain and promote. However significant public private co-operation will be required to develop and promote the best routes.
- (iv) The development plan and promotional strategy for the top ten scoring routes have common issues but each walk should be developed and promoted separately by a partnership of local stakeholders, with overall direction by Kildare County Council maintaining common standards through the planning process.
- (v) Promotional themes associated with Kildare that impact on walking include the St. Brigid Cult (Pilgrim Trail), the tranquil inland waterways and the “Thoroughbred County” (stud farm country). Themes to be explored include military routes and the conservation of peatlands (and associated archaeology).
- (vi) The National Waymarked Ways Advisory Committee “Guidelines for Developing and Marking of Waymarked Ways” should be adopted for all walks in Kildare.

5. Development Plan and Promotional Strategy

There are general county-wide and also walk specific recommendations for development and promotion of walking routes in Kildare. There are a number of strategic plans produced by different organisations that include walking and heritage in County Kildare². Walking in County Kildare is well promoted by Kildare Fáilte and East Coast and Midlands Tourism. Coillte and the Irish Heart Foundation are actively promoting recreational walking in the County. A co-ordinated walking trails strategy for County Kildare is required.

The recommended objective of Kildare County Council’s development plan for walking routes in the county is to:

- a) Generate an increased awareness of Kildare’s walking routes and heritage as an attractive and unique recreational and educational amenity.
- b) Promote greater use of existing walking routes, including assistance in upgrading and management.
- c) Do this in partnership with tourism service providers, community groups, walking clubs, semi state bodies, state agencies, private sector companies and wealthy benefactors.

Promotion is the last stage in a cycle of evaluation, development and maintenance. To be successful the objectives must be achieved through an integrated approach by a **Kildare Walking Task Force**. The Tourism Strategy Group as proposed by the County Kildare Tourism Task Force that includes representatives from Kildare Failte, the Regional Tourism Authority (MERTA), Kildare County Council and KELT, to represent Kildare on

² Co. Kildare Tourism Task Force 2002-2006, Kildare Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2004-2006, Waterways Ireland Marketing & Promotion Strategy.

any inter-county tourism committees is an example of the type of task force that could be established to develop and promote walking in the county. The Walking Task Force would include representatives from tourism service providers, community groups, walking clubs, semi state bodies, state agencies, private sector companies and wealthy benefactor. The Walking Task Force could co-ordinate promotion of walking with MERTA and Kildare Failte, influence the national tourism spend on walking in County Kildare, liaise with Bord na Móna, Waterways Ireland, Kildare Sports Partnership, Irish Farmers Association and Coillte, inform the tourism service industry of developments and receive feedback and ideas from the private sector. This is in keeping with walking initiatives in other counties such as Co. Donegal that have appointed a walking officer, Co. Waterford, that have a walking strategy and Co. Cork that has established a walking forum.

5.1 Recommended Promotional Activities

The recommended activities to be addressed to meet the stated objectives are:

- a) **Advertising.** The walking routes in Kildare are currently advertised by Kildare Failte, East Coast and Midlands of Ireland Regional Tourism Authority, The Irish Sports Council, The Kildare Sports Partnership, The Irish Heart Foundation, Coillte, Waterways Ireland and others. There is a growing awareness of Kildare's walking routes in the international and national tourism market. There is a growing local awareness of walking routes in Kildare. However, the capacity to deliver what is expected on the ground in terms of signage and services is sometimes disappointing to the intending walker. An example of an advertising campaign would be to promote all the walks along the Arrow commuter train route by train advertisements and distribution to passengers of canal tow path walking route guides at the train stations.
- b) **Sponsorship** by the private sector and semi state bodies has the capacity to deliver more advertising and improved delivery of services. The Tourism Strategy Group could work with potential private sector sponsors who have significant commercial activities in the county to identify well developed walking routes with significant community involvement. These routes may require some upgrading in signage and facilities that sponsors could integrate into environmental management and community support activities.
- c) **Event Management.** Kildare County Council regularly sponsors events. Other funding agencies such as KELT also sponsor events. Co-ordinated advice and assistance with the management and hosting of walking events should be part of the development plan. Events such as Feile Bríd, National Heritage Week and 9/11 at Donadea are examples of events that can be linked to walking route promotion. However, the balance between successful event and environmental impact at sensitive heritage sites should be considered.
- d) **Media Management.** Continuous pro active media management through press briefings, development of relationship with key tourism correspondents and journalists, press visits to sites and press launches of walking initiatives is required. The publishing of articles in newspapers, trade journals, in-flight magazines and radio and TV interviews on walking in County Kildare is the most effective form of advertising.

- e) Periodic **market research** and dissemination of results is useful to target promotion and advertising and measure the success of the promotional strategy. Involving third level institutes (e.g. NUI Maynooth) is a cost effective way of achieving results.
- f) The continuous **updating of information** on walking in Kildare on national and regional websites, both public and private, is required. Kildare walks do not currently appear on many of these sites (for example Kildare heritage towns do not appear on http://www.heritageisland.com/visitor_attractions.asp.) This could be addressed by IT administrative assistance to the tourism development officer, who could also forward uploads of relevant information to Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, walking sites etc.
- g) **Information Leaflets.** There are a very significant number of publications and brochures on walking routes in Kildare. Many of these are out of print. A review of existing material and their effectiveness and a plan to update and reprint earlier publications should be considered. For example an update and reprint of "*Towpath Trails – A Walkers Guide to the Canal Towpaths of County Kildare*" originally produced by County Kildare Vocational Education Committee and Cospóir is an achievable first step that will introduce these walks to an influx of new residents in North Kildare who are looking for walking routes in their area. Information leaflets and walking guides could be distributed through petrol filling stations, hotels, guesthouses and tourist information centres, as well as through schools and colleges.
- h) **Standardisation of the Walking product/service.** The National Waymarked Ways Advisory Council has established national guidelines that effectively deliver a recognisable brand for walking trails anywhere in Ireland. Kildare County Council should adopt this "brand" in planning guidelines and advice to walking route development in the county and make it a condition of funding support. A standardised Heritage Town Walk map, guide and signage would increase the attractiveness of these routes to visitors.
- i) **Joint Promotional Activities.** Kildare County Council will be informed of planned activities by Bord na Móna, Kildare Sports Partnership, Waterways Ireland, Coillte, MERTA and private tourism sector service providers through the Tourism Strategy Group. Where appropriate Kildare County Council can choose to contribute and/or manage joint promotional activities to achieve maximum impact. Kildare County Council could co-operate with the Kildare Sports Partnership to develop heritage aspects of the Slí na Sláinte routes. The leaders could include heritage appreciation in their training schedule with new walkers. A joint promotion with a petrol distribution company, for example, could include support for the production of county walking guides with distribution from filling stations in County Kildare to reach a non-traditional walking audience.
- j) **Promotion of Heritage.** Kildare County Council could build on the above activities by forming a stronger alliance with the Heritage Council to promote the unique built and natural heritage of County Kildare. Significant strides have been made to achieve this through the office of Heritage Officer. However, new walking routes such as Pilgrim routes linked to the cult of Brigid (Dara) could be initiated and The

Curragh's unique archaeological heritage³ and recreational access could be enhanced in the public eye through increased collaboration with the Heritage Council.

- k) As a first step in the development and promotion of walks in Kildare, Kildare County Council could enter into discussions with the Kildare Sports Partnership to expand the Slí na Sláinte walk leader training to include an appreciation of natural and built heritage along their local route. The leaders could include heritage appreciation in their training schedule with new walkers. This initiative would be particularly effective where KELT has already supported the publication of heritage walk maps. It could be a pilot project to test the effectiveness of the new walking task force and the ability of interested stakeholders to work together with direction from the heritage officer of Kildare County Council.

³ See Archaeology Ireland 'The Curragh' supplement, Autumn 2005.

5.2 Funding of Activities

A number of agencies provide supports for walking routes development and maintenance.

- ✚ Government Departments with responsibility for developing and promoting walking routes and heritage trails include the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Environment, Local Government and Heritage and the Office of Public Works.
- ✚ The Office of Public Works and the Department of Environment, Local Government and Heritage publish promotional documents that include walking tours.
- ✚ A niche product marketing group for walking is supported from a designated budget disbursed by Failte Ireland. The Midlands and Eastern Tourism Authority is responsible for marketing walking to the domestic market.
- ✚ Tourism Ireland Ltd. is responsible for promoting Ireland overseas as a tourist destination.
- ✚ The Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs operates the Rural Social Scheme that will fund projects such as maintaining and enhancing waymarked ways, agreed walks and bog roads.
- ✚ The Kildare Leader Company KELT funds a number of community development projects that involve walking routes.
- ✚ Walking in Kildare is promoted by associations such as Walking Cycling Ireland and the Irish Sports Council.
- ✚ A number of associations such as Heritage Towns of Ireland (no Kildare towns included) and Heritage Island (includes Japanese Gardens) market Irish heritage walks.

However no co-ordinated strategy for promoting walking in County Kildare exists. There is a need for focus and inter agency co-operation that could be provided by a County Kildare Walking Task Force under the guidance of Kildare County Council.

Clearly there are a number of budgets available to finance the activities outlined above. Kildare County Council can work with and support the promotional and development activities of other groups by using available funds to leverage a higher level of spend on walking route development and promotion. This is best addressed at project level because each walking project will have a different mix of private, public and community involvement.

The estimated cost of the general activities to support promotion and development of walking routes by the responsible agencies could be in the region of **€80,000** per annum (see Table 3 below).

Kildare County Council could make a contribution of seed money to targeted activities of the responsible agencies and other groups to ensure that development activities are standardised and promotional activities are co-ordinated and in keeping with the County Development Plan.

The cost of upgrading walks to a level suitable for promotion will need to be calculated for each individual walking route.

		(€)
1	Advertising (local radio, newspapers)	15,000
2	Sponsorship of Events (contribution to private sector co-sponsorship)	10,000
3	Media Management (in partnership with Regional Tourism Authority)	15,000
4	Promotional Material (update and re printing of existing material in partnership with RTA)	20,000
5	Updating of Information (website maintenance by part time IT officer)	10,000
6	Market research and result distribution (in association with e.g. NUIM)	10,000
	TOTAL	€80,000

5.3 Monitoring & Evaluation of Impact

The monitoring and evaluation of the walking routes should be part of an overall management plan that is part the ongoing work plan of the county council engineering department.

The success of the activities above will depend on the contribution of agencies and government departments outside the control of Kildare County Council. Furthermore base line data such as current usage of walking routes is not available to measure future success. Other indicators will have to be found. Failte Ireland attitude surveys to walking, local market surveys (e.g. periodic questionnaires at Donadea Forest Park and other high profile locations), number of walking enquiries to Kildare Failte Office and other tourism information centres in Kildare, surveys among service providers (e.g. accommodation providers), sales statistics from walking equipment suppliers, entrance fees to forest parks and publication sales, level of funding to walking related projects and level of media publicity generated (press cuttings file) are some of the indicators that could be used.

The most cost effective means of monitoring and evaluating the impact of the strategy activities is to form a relationship with a marketing college that will carry out an annual survey developed in partnership with Kildare County Council as part of its teaching programme.

5.4 Individual Development Plans and Marketing Strategy

A Development Plan and Promotional Strategy for the top ten of the highest scoring walks are provided below.

Donadea Forest Park (W1): This route received the highest score of 196 out of a potential total of 250 (78%).

The Forest Park has significant visitor numbers and could be further developed to increase its amenity and heritage value to local, regional and international visitors. The Development Plan should address the following:

1. The walled garden could be developed as an additional visitor attraction with an associated garden centre shop. At Strokestown House in Co. Roscommon the nineteenth century walled garden on the estate was successfully refurbished as a

- major attraction in its own right. A local community group has submitted a plan to develop the garden.
2. The ice house at Donadea is in a derelict state at present and is not signposted. The structure is of architectural and historical interest. At Florencecourt House near Enniskillen the National Trust has restored a similar ice house and included it on the nature trail.
 3. The coffee shop could possibly be expanded and an additional craft shop added selling local arts and crafts and wood based artefacts.
 4. A soil section exposed by development work could be preserved and included as a geological feature on the nature trail.
 5. The number of events hosted in the Forest Park, such as Bat Walk and Talk in Heritage Week, should be increased to expand the visitor base and introduce more people to the amenity.
 6. Discussions with the private sector in relation to franchising the coffee shop, art and crafts shop and a future garden centre should be considered.
 7. The 9/11 Memorial has given Donadea international importance which should be encouraged by advertising the annual commemoration nationally and internationally.

The development of the amenity could be achieved through the continuing partnership between the Tír Na Móna Community Group, Coillte, Kildare County Council and Kildare Failte and should include discussions with the private sector involved in the coffee shop, craft shop and garden centre business.

The Forest Park is already well promoted. Local service providers should be encouraged by Kildare Failte to make reference the Forest Park in all their promotional material. The Coillte Forest Guide and Nature Trail booklet should be available at the entrance to the Park or in the coffee shop.

The walking route is at a sufficient level of development for immediate promotion.

Lullymore Island (W25): This proposed route scored second receiving 195 points out of a potential 250 (78%). It is a proposed route that combines established canal bank walks, a peatland conservation centre and an important ecclesiastical site. The combination of successful and committed public and private stakeholders in the area adds to the potential of the route. Bord na Móna, the Irish Peatland Conservation Council, Waterways Ireland, Lullymore Heritage Park and local farmers all have an interest in seeing a successful walking route developed. The Development Plan should include the following:

1. A meeting of local stakeholders at the invitation of Kildare County Council to discuss co-operative development and promotion of the walking route is required. A development committee of stakeholders chaired by Kildare County Council is one possible approach.
2. Some agreement on rights of way may need to be addressed.
3. An integrated approach to trail furniture, signage, information boards, picnic tables and the supply of services will need to be developed. Sponsorship might be obtained from quarrying interests in the area.
4. The development committee should estimate the cost of upgrade and integration and obtain advice from Kildare County Council on the most appropriate funding strategy for implementing the development.

5. The development committee will agree the ongoing maintenance programme with the stakeholders responsible for each section of the route and co-ordinate an annual promotional programme.
6. The possibility of re-opening a youth hostel in Robertstown or Lullymore should be considered in consultation with An Oige, the Irish Youth Hostel Association.

If the development plan for this route meets with approval and involvement by local stakeholders, the lessons learned should be applied to the development of a peatland walking route from the Bord na Móna facility at Kilberry to the proposed NHA on Derryvullagh Island which has the combined attraction of a conservationist and pilgrim route.

The area of the Lullymore route is well promoted at present by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council, Waterways Ireland and Lullymore Heritage Park. The development of the route will increase visitor numbers to the area and benefit local service providers. A co-ordinated promotional strategy with the walking route at its core will provide better value for money from the individual promotional budgets of each of the stakeholders.

Investment in signage and trail furniture is required before the walking route can be promoted.

Mullaghreelan (W13): This proposed route scored third receiving 191 points out of a potential 250 (76%). It is a proposed route that combines an existing forest route with nearby Kilkea Castle Hotel. Mullaghreelan Forest is a well established local picnic and walking amenity. The Hotel and Golf Course attracts a national and international visitor base. The proposed development of the walking route combines these factors to provide a high class amenity of international importance. The Development Plan should include:

1. Discussions between Kildare County Council, the owners and managers of the Kilkea House Hotel and Golf Club and Coillte to decide how to jointly develop and promote the existing walking route in Kilkea demesne.
2. Improvements to signage, the supply of information boards, additional picnic tables and integration of services such as food, toilets, accommodation and entertainment.
3. Coillte should be encouraged to extend the overgrown path to the northwest to meet with the rear entrance to Kilkea Castle and appoint a local person to maintain the route, perhaps through LEADER's RSS scheme.
4. Responsibility for heritage sites on the estate needs to be addressed and additional excavations may be appropriate in the church yard.
5. The establishment of a small exhibition area/ interpretative centre that exhibits local heritage artefacts, demonstrates their significance and explains the importance of the site in Irish history, should be considered. The site contains all the elements of a heritage park similar to Ferrycarrig in Wexford.
6. An annual medieval pageant (jousting competition) and country fair that would involve retired estate workers and professional actors should be considered as part of the promotional package.

An opportunity exists for the Kilkea Castle Hotel and Golf Club to increase visitor numbers and bed nights by promoting walking as an additional outdoor pursuit for its guests, particularly for the off-season and midweek breaks. This opportunity requires the walking route to be upgraded and promoted jointly with Kildare County Council and Coillte.

Agreement on a joint development plan and investment in signage and trail furniture is required before the walking route can be promoted.

Athy Town (W1): This route had the fourth highest score of 189 out of a potential 250 (75%) due to its combination of heritage town, canal bank and riverside walk. There are two maps in print, a heritage walk and a Slí na Sláinte route map. Signage is good and the presence of the Heritage Centre in Emily Square acts as an information point for walkers. This route could be promoted without any further development. Enhancements could include the installation of a numbered trail for heritage highlights, more frequent litter collection and regular maintenance of route furniture.

Naas (W14): This walking route scored fifth highest with 181 out of a potential total of 250 (72%). The addition of information boards on natural heritage along the canal would be an advantage. The out of print tourist trail booklet should be updated and republished with a new map based on the Slí na Sláinte route before the route is promoted.

The Canal Routes **Barrow Way 1 (W3)**, **Barrow Way 2 (W4)** and **Grand Canal Way 1 (W7)** all scored within the top ten. Updating and reprinting of the “Towpath Trails – A Walkers Guide to the Canal Towpaths of County Kildare” is required. Discussions between Waterways Ireland and Kildare County Council could address the underfoot conditions along some sections of the towpath which are overgrown and unsurfaced. There are several dumping black spots that require attention by the relevant authority. Improved road signage, including speed limits along road sections that intersect the canal would improve health and safety. The routes are already well promoted on www.ireland.ie, <http://walks.iwai.ie/grand> and the www.walkireland.ie websites. Once the towpath guide is republished and available from Kildare Fáilte, and other outlets, a promotional campaign by advertising on the Arrow commuter train service would introduce these routes to a growing suburban population with an interest in walking for exercise and a desire to learn more about the heritage of their new home district. The promotion campaign could be a joint effort of the Irish Heart Foundation, Waterways Ireland, the Kildare Sports Partnership, Kildare Fáilte and Kildare County Council.

Kilcullen (W10): This is a town walk that was established by a community group with assistance from the public and private sector. It scored number nine out of ten with a 162 points out of a possible 250 (65%). The riverside walking route has not been maintained and littering needs to be addressed. There is no one management structure in place. Existing information boards need to be upgraded and replaced. Additional signposting and repair of existing route furniture (stiles) is required. The financial support of wealthy local benefactors to upgrade the walking route should not be ruled out. However community groups do not have the continuity or resources to maintain a walking route. Investment in upgrade and repair and the appointment of a resourced management structure for the walking route is required before it can be promoted.

Moat of Ardscull (W23): This proposed route scored number ten out of the top ten. It is mainly a road walk with associated bogland, a Norman Motte and vintage car racing promoted by an active community group. Signposting will be required and additional information boards to include a map board. The wildflower garden is in need of maintenance. A map guide with associated numbered sign posts would be an advantage. A speed limit and signs alerting drivers to the presence of walkers would address health and safety concerns along the route. Litter is a problem along the bog road sections and

needs to be addressed before the walk can be promoted. If the route is restricted to quiet public road it could be managed by Kildare County Council. The addition of an associated bog road walk could involve Bord na Móna. Significant investment in upgrade, clean up and the appointment of a management structure is required before the walk can be promoted.

The development and promotion of the remaining walks are discussed under the headings Town walks, Canal walks, Forest Walks and Bog Walks.

TOWN WALKS

The establishment of Slí na Sláinte routes in Kildare towns has introduced walking to a new audience and provided a nationally recognised brand. Kildare County Council can build on this by adding the heritage trail concept to the existing Slí na Sláinte routes. A standardised heritage map, signposting, information boards and trail furniture should be established for the county based on the best practise nationally. Management of the walking routes should reside with the relevant local authority in association with other responsible bodies such as Waterways Ireland where canal towpaths are involved. The town walks can be promoted by local hotels, guesthouses, petrol filling stations, on train advertising and tourist information centres by distribution of route maps and guides.

Maynooth Heritage (W21): There are five self guided historical walks around Maynooth. The combination of the Royal Canal and Rye riverside walks, Carton Avenue with its Lime Trees and the Maynooth College walk is unique. A single long route could be developed combining elements of each of the five routes already defined. A numbered tourist trail and map would be an advantage. Information boards and signage would enhance the walking route. A standardised heritage town guide, map and route signage would improve the attractiveness of the routes to visitors by providing the assurance of quality that branding provides. The updating and reprinting of “Exploring Maynooth – Five Self Guide Historical Walks” would be a first step to promoting walking routes to the local population.

Kildare Heritage (W22) and **Clane (W17)** are established heritage walking routes with published maps. Kildare has the added advantage of a Heritage Centre in Market Square and an Irish Historic Town Atlas produced by the Royal Irish Academy. Furthermore the Kildare Town Heritage Trail includes the Curragh Plains, which is rich in archaeological sites and could be part of a county wide archaeological trail. The **Newbridge (W15)** walking route also includes a 2km portion of the Curragh Plains. The presence of the military camp and ranges restricts the ability to develop an appropriate walk across the Curragh at present. Discussions with the Department of Defence in relation to the development of the Military Museum at the Curragh could address military walking routes through Kildare and a circular route around the Curragh Plains.

Kilcock (W9): This route has the potential to combine an existing Slí na Sláinte route with the built heritage of the town and a very pleasant stretch of the Royal Canal. However a single circular route that includes all these elements is required. Litter is a problem along a section of the route. Improved, standardised signage and information boards are needed. Warning signs for motorists along the country road section would improve health and safety. It is one of the routes that is accessible from the Arrow commuter train service and therefore should be developed as a priority.

CANAL WALKS

The canal network in County Kildare is an exceptional walking amenity managed by Waterways Ireland that is locally well known but under utilised along the sections that join the major towns and villages. Short sections are served by the Arrow commuter train service. The linear nature of the routes is a problem. Co-operation with public transport services to establish manageable day trips with drop off and pick up by public transport at either end of a walk could increase the use of the amenity. Alternatively an established company providing guided mountain walks, and/or ramblers groups, could be subsidised for a period to test the uptake of canal path walking with pick up and drop off to Dublin City Centre.

Most of the routes published in the "Towpath Trails" can be promoted at present without significant upgrading or development. Sections of the Corbally Branch are inaccessible due to overgrowth and cattle are allowed to graze to the bank of the canal causing severe erosion and damage to the towpath. Towpath surface conditions need to be addressed along sections of the Grand and Royal Canals if the full network is to be opened up for walkers.

Grand Canal 3 (W18) links with the **Naas Town Walk (W14)** and illustrates how the canal links town and country adding to the appreciation of the agricultural hinterland of many Irish towns. The route is typical of the canal routes in that the underfoot conditions are generally good, apart from a section under the Leinster Aqueduct which could be improved. Signposting between Naas and Sallins is required and additional information boards on natural heritage would be an advantage. Although this is a short 5.5km walk it does link with the Arrow commuter train service and a bus service back to Dublin and can be combined with the Naas town walk and some shopping to make a pleasant day trip. Unfortunately weekend commuter services are limited.

Grand Canal 4 (W19) is a spur walk to Pollardstown Fen, a designated Special Area of Conservation. In 1970, to mark European Conservation Year, two areas of intact fen were purchased by Bord na Móna. In 1981 Bord na Móna donated this conserved fenland to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Other sections of the fen were purchased by the state and the fen was declared a National Nature Reserve in 1986. While the walking route itself is pleasant the underfoot conditions are difficult in places and the route ends in the remote area of Pollardstown Fen. The Fen is a rare embryonic peatland habitat where a rich diversity of plants and animals is nourished by a calcium rich spring. Increased visitor numbers might have an adverse affect on the delicate habitat of the fen which is quite restricted in its area extent. There is a bird hide which is open to the public. The route could possibly be linked to **Newbridge (W15)** which includes the natural heritage of the Curragh Plains and a Liffeside walk with some interesting built heritage in the town.

Royal Canal (W16) is another example of a canal route of 13.5 kms served by a rail commuter service that links Leixlip Slí na Sláinte (and potential heritage route) with the established Maynooth Historical Walks and Kilcock Slí na Sláinte (and potential heritage route). The route could be combined into a three day walking package promoted by Iarnród Éireann, local tourism accommodation, Waterways Ireland and a walking tour promoter. Walking tour operators have stated that there is no take up of lowland walking in spite of heavy promotion. However the profile of the walking market addressed by these companies is dominated by those who are searching for rugged mountain scenery. A subsidised promotion of this route by a walking tour operator should be considered. A first

test of the viability of the route is to work with a walking tour operator to establish three, one day guided tours based around the natural and built heritage of the Royal Canal, Leixlip (day 1), Maynooth (day 2) and Kilcock (day 3) and invite a press visit to sample the route including accommodation and local entertainment.

FOREST WALKS

Coillte has five forest walk centres with over 33kms of walking routes. The walks are well established and promoted by Coillte and include the very successful amenity at Donadea Forest Park. Signage, furniture and information boards are standardised with the Coillte brand that gives an assurance about the quality of each Coillte Forest Walk. Some forest parks are better signposted than others. Waymarked coloured routes with names of local significance (as has been adopted in Killinthomas and Donadea) should be developed in each of the forest parks to improve the walking experience. The hosting of more frequent events in the forest parks such as orienteering, dawn chorus, tree hugging, bat walks and wildflower trails should be explored by Kildare County Council with Coillte and other interested parties such as the Kildare Sports Partnership, Kildare Fáilte, local community interests, wildlife, educational and sporting organisations.

Two of the highest scoring walks in the county are Coillte Forest Walks. The mixed woodlands on former demesnes, where some built heritage remains, have high amenity value. There is an opportunity for the Office of Public Works and the Heritage Service to collaborate with Coillte and the private sector in the renovation of derelict built heritage such as shooting lodges, forester's cottages, boat houses, ice houses, and other remnants of eighteenth century estate architecture that add value to the forest walk amenity. Where the forest park borders peatland or riverbanks the natural heritage value of the walking route is increased and Bord na Móna or the IPCC could be involved. Although cycling and pony trekking is not permitted on any of the Coillte forest trails it might be worth considering designating certain forest parks for different activities, for example **Rahin (W20)** with its Boyneside track might be designated for trail biking only and **Moore Abbey (W12)** for walking only. The forest parks are generally not served by public transport. They are well known and used by the local communities and Coillte's education programme involves school field trips hosted by forest rangers.

The existing forest walks in County Kildare are suitable for promotion now, but would benefit from a programme of co-ordinated development as outlined above in a partnership between Coillte, Kildare County Council and the Environment and Heritage Service. Promotion of the forest parks is largely confined to the efforts of Coillte at present. The Regional Tourism Authority currently promotes Donadea Forest Park and could include other Coillte forest parks such as Mullaghreelan.

BOG WALKS

There are a number of bog walks in the county. The proposed walk at **Lullymore Island (W25)** is one of the highest scoring walks. There is a similar mineral island, Derryvullagh near Kilberry, which is a designated Special Area of Conservation that could be developed in a similar fashion to Lullymore. **Killinthomas (W11)** borders bogland habitat. Bog walks benefit from an increasing international awareness of disappearing habitats and the need for conservation. The Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC, a Dutch NGO) has drawn international attention to Kildare's peatland habitats particularly among young

students of environmental science. Bord na Móna has supported and funded archaeological excavations within Bord na Móna peat bogs as part of the Principles and Agreements reached between the responsible Government Departments and Bord na Móna. The Bord is committed to peatland conservation and to the long-term planning of its cutaway bogs and recognises the importance of peatlands as sites of scientific and archaeological study. There is an opportunity for Kildare County Council to work with the Bord to develop heritage and conservation walking routes on Bord na Móna property where management and access issues are easily addressed.

The establishment of a Youth Hostel, independent or managed by An Oige, the Irish Youth Hostel Association, at Lullymore or Robertstown would attract significant visitor numbers from continental Europe to visit the peatlands, provide voluntary assistance to the conservation work of IPCC and do environmental research. Kildare County Council should consider interacting with IPCC, Bord na Móna and third level colleges with environmental science courses to promote North Kildare walking routes as part of the course field work. Recreational use by back packers will follow on the scientific publications and heightened awareness. Promotion to schools to provide easily-accessed sites for Geographical Investigation for senior cycle geography students should also be considered.

The **Carbury Bog Walk (W24)** offers a variety of terrain along tarred road, minor road, forestry, peatland and railway line. It is promoted by the well established Balyna Rural Enterprise and Development Association (BREDA) and a significant section of the route is on Bord na Móna land. The erection of way markers, information boards and the production of a map guide are required. Bord na Móna could be approached in relation to sponsorship and branding of the route furniture and publications in the same way as Coillte has done for forest walks and Waterways Ireland has done, to some extent, for the canal walks. A sustainable management structure for the route has to be established but shared support by Bord na Móna and Kildare County Council of a community management structure using BREDA and the Rural Social Scheme is one possible way forward. There is a link with an established Slí na Sláinte route at **Derrinturn (W6)** with its interesting old windmill ruins.

The **Blackwood Feeder (W26)** Project is a transnational Interreg IIIB funded initiative involving KELT and partners from the U.K. Spain, Portugal and France. It includes the Special Areas of Conservation at Ballynafagh Lake and Bog. In the 1960s Kildare County Council developed walks around Ballynafagh Lake which have since deteriorated. An inventory of the built heritage and a survey by an expert in walking route development on the site has been carried out. A geotechnical assessment of the fragile lake banks are being carried out at present. There are issues about access, grazing animals along the route, illegal dumping, overgrown stretches of the route and potential hazards for walkers around the lake. There is an active community group Tír na Móna that maintain the route around the lake. There is an appointed Ranger from the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the area.

Significant investment in upgrading of the walking surfaces, provision of signposting, information boards and other route furniture will be required if the access issues can be resolved. Since the majority of the route is under the care of Kildare County Council these issues could be resolved in time. Given the level of funding of the project by Interreg IIIB, the amount of preparatory work already completed and the international partnerships

developed Kildare County Council may be able to encourage the development of a walking route in the area by working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Appendix I

**Evaluation Criteria for Walking Routes
to assess
Quality, Character, Management Status
&
Potential for creating Awareness & Appreciation
of
County Kildare's Heritage**

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR WALKING ROUTES				
No.	Walk Title	Score	Rank	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60		
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10		
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10		
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10		
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10		
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10		
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10		
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		65		
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5		
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5		
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5		
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5		
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5		
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5		
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5		
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5		
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5		
2.12	Car parking available	5		
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5		
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly	5		
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5		
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55		
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5		
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5		
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5		
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5		
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5		
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5		
3.7	Walk Manager identified	5		
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5		
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5		
3.10	Legal structure in place	5		
3.11	Insurance in place	5		
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40		
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5		
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5		
4.3	Accommodation (not necessarily approved) provided on or close to route	5		
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5		
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5		
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5		
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5		
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5		
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		30		
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5		
5.2	Walking route guides published	5		
5.3	Sales plan in place	5		
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5		
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5		
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	5		
TOTAL		250		

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR WALKING ROUTES		
No.	Walk Title	Comments
<i>1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:</i>		
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	The landscape character areas for the county are defined in the Kildare County Council County Development Plan 2005-2011. The criteria identify the landscape character areas that the route passes through.
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	The different habitats along the route are identified eg mixed forest, hedgerow, reed fringe, grassland, raised bog, fen etc
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	There is an element of public transport linking but also how the route educates walkers about the links between town, village and countryside built heritage
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	The County Development Plan has maps of sites, monuments & protected structures. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage has maps identifying built heritage. The criteria identify those sites that are adjacent to the route.
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	Research identifies any land access issues along the route if present.
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	The County Development Plan has maps of SACs/NHAs. The criteria identify those sites that are adjacent to the route.
<i>2. Physical Attributes of the Route:</i>		
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	Refers to type of surface eg single track grass path, gravel path, public road verge, public road footpath,
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	Frequency, amount of information, visibility.
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	This is to address the need to avoid roads (the limit is 20% of road on Way Marked Ways).
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	The Bus Eireann, Iarnrod Eireann and community service transport time tables of service were consulted.
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	Where heritage sites are within 500 metres of a route physical and legal access was assessed
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	Published calendars of events for the county were consulted to identify local festivals
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	The distance, underfoot conditions, slope, condition of stiles, gates fences, presence of services, need for equipment are considered
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	Underfoot conditions, slopes, provision of ramps, facilities for those with poor vision.
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	Presence of footpaths, level & speed of traffic are assessed
2.12	Car parking available	The size and safety of the facilities
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	Signage to identify hazards, ramps, electric fencing, life saving equipment, game shooting, military ranges, bulls, etc
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly	See 2.9 and 2.10
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	Where short loops to for example heritage sites exist they are identified
<i>3. Management and Organisational Structures:</i>		
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	If there is a body that owns & manages the route it is identified
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	See 3.1
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	Is there a published plan in place and is the impact visible on the route
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	See 3.3
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	The level of private sector investment is assessed

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3.6	Public sector role and involvement	The level of public sector investment and oversight is assessed
3.7	Walk Manager identified	Is there an appointed person(s) responsible for the route
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	Was there voluntary fund raised to develop the route. Is there voluntary maintenance of the route?
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	Review of grant awards & community newsletters for evidence of voluntary/private/public sector collaboration.
3.10	Legal structure in place	Is there a company responsible for the route?
3.11	Insurance in place	Is the route covered for public liability
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		
4.1	Walker friendly services present	Eg drying rooms, toilets, picnic tables
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	Is there adequate food and is it served at appropriate times in pleasant surroundings
4.3	Accommodation (not necessarily approved) provided on or close to route	Is there appropriate accommodation within 2kms of the route
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	Are there visitor attractions close to the route?
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	Tour operators willing to promote the route are identified
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	Does the route occur close to tourist venues for other activities eg sailing, fishing and can there be packaged promotion?
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	Are there additional services in the area (eg camping suppliers) that could benefit from the presence of walkers?
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	Is there appropriate, frequent entertainment at night?
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	Is the route mentioned in existing tourist literature?
5.2	Walking route guides published	Is there a specific guide on the route published?
5.3	Sales plan in place	Is the route promoted by tourism service providers?
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	Are a group of service providers providing a walking package?
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	Does a google search provide information on the route?
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	Is the route sufficiently unique to be of international importance?

Appendix 2

Recreational Walking Routes in County Kildare

Individual Scores Based on Evaluation Criteria

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 1: Athy Town (Map Series 1A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	45	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	6	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	6	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	6	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	9	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	9	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	9	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		65	57	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	5	8
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	5	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	2	8
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	5	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	4	7
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	5	8
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	5	8
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	5	8
2.12	Car parking available	5	5	3
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	4	5
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	5	8
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	3	9
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	41	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	4	5
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	5
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	5
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	4	5
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	2	5
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	5
3.7	Walk Manager identified	5	4	5
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	3	11
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	4	11
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	5
3.11	Insurance in place	5	5	5
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	28	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	4	12
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	4	13
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	4	14
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	4	15
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	3	16
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	3	15
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	17
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	4	18
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		30	18	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	3	19
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	5	19
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	2	19
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	2	19
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	3	19
2.16	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	3	20
TOTAL		250	189	

Comments

1. The route passes through two landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the Southern Lowlands and the River Barrow. The route includes a riverside walk, canal bank towpath, urban landscape and a town park with exotic trees.
2. The river bank walk passes natural woodland with sycamore, elder and ash on Lord's Island. The river is fast flowing at the Railway Bridge weir with grey wagtails and rare kingfishers. Flocks of mallard duck are common. Along the canals are small submerged and free floating plants. Nearer the banks sedges and horsetails stand clear of shallower water. At the edge there are grasses, tall herbs and trees such as alder and willow. The range of habitats supports a wide diversity of wildflowers, trees, shrubs, insects, mammals, fish and birds. The well maintained town park has an interesting collection of imported tree species.
3. Athy is well served by bus and rail connections with regular daily services to Dublin. There is ample car parking at several points along the route including Emily Square, Meeting Lane, the train station and the canal harbour. The walk eloquently demonstrates the link between the urban landscape and its activities dependant on its agricultural hinterland. The canal and rail links along the route show how Athy's commercial activity is linked to the natural hinterland (coal from Wolfhill by railway; export of roof tiles by rail, the canal harbour and warehouses that acted as export point for grain and malt to Dublin). Urban dwellers are very quickly brought into direct contact with natural heritage along the riverbank and canal.
4. Athy is a designated heritage town with its own Heritage Town Trail. Along the route is the late medieval Whites Castle, c. 1575; the five-arch cut limestone classical style Crom a Boo bridge; c. 1796; a burial ground in John's Lane dated from the medieval era with eighteenth and nineteenth century grave markers; rubble stone walls formerly of terrace of cottages, c. 1850, with blocked-up openings; a cast-iron wall-mounted letter box, c. 1905, with moulded frame and Edward VII insignia; a terrace of three-bay two-storey Georgian houses, c. 1810; a section of the Grand Canal (Barrow Line) constructed c. 1790 linking into the Barrow Navigation; freestanding Gothic Revival T-plan Methodist chapel, built 1874; a group of gas works outbuildings, c. 1861; former gaswork manager's house, built 1859; canal harbour with associated warehouse and former hotel; a group of six cast-iron mooring bollards, c. 1800, flanking the canal lock; a malthouse kiln, c. 1860; a reconstructed limestone arch with ashlar voussoirs, originally from the army barracks, c. 1740; octagonal cockpit, c. 1760; a river weir dating from 1920; a precast concrete six-bay railway bridge with concrete parapet walls, c. 1917; a four-bay horse bridge over the River Barrow with elliptical limestone arches on concrete cutwaters built in 1927 on the site of the original 1796 bridge with a balustraded ramp on the east bank and rubble stone river embankments to north and south; a dramatic hyperbolic paraboloid concrete shell roof on St. Dominic's Church built in 1965; the former county jail building c1830; a detached five-bay three-storey over basement early Georgian mansion, c. 1740; a Regency Gothic church on cruciform plan, c. 1840; a three-bay two-storey Victorian Tudor Gothic railway station, c. 1846; a detached three-bay railway water tower, c. 1850, with Victorian Tudor doorcase; a cast-iron lattice railway footbridge, erected c. 1886 by 'Arrol Brothers, Germiston Iron Works, Glasgow; a detached two-storey railway signal box, c. 1950; a Victorian Tudor Gothic gate lodge built as townpark caretaker's lodge, c. 1858; a detached five-bay two-storey mid Victorian Gothic style rectory, built 1860; a detached six-bay single-storey prefabricated parochial hall, built 1909; a multi-denominational cemetery, enclosing a medieval churchyard; a length of coursed rusticated limestone and granite

retaining wall, c. 1845, dividing a split-level street with a flight of granite steps on one side; a granite cattle trough, c. 1900; a Regency villa, c. 1830, used as parochial house since c. 1840; a neo-Romanesque Catholic church, c. 1964; an early Georgian market and court house, c. 1745; a polished limestone carved circular drinking fountain, erected in 1907 and a tudor Revival former corn exchange now in use as court house, built 1858. All of these features are either accessible or visible from the route.

5. The route is confined to public property of Athy Urban Council and canal and river sections under the management of Waterways Ireland. The route incorporates the Slí na Sláinte route approved by the Irish Heart Foundation and Kildare Sports Partnership. Along the canal and river sections life saving equipment is available and signposted. Athy Heritage Company Ltd. has developed a sign posted heritage walk in the town. The management and maintenance of the route is the responsibility of Athy Urban District Council.
6. Athy is a designated Heritage Town. The walk includes a stretch of the Barrow River which is a Special Area of Conservation and the Grand Canal which is a Natural Heritage Area in the Draft County Development Plan for Kildare.
7. Several Festivals occur throughout the year in Athy including the Sir Ernest Shackleton International Autumn School, the Kildare County Show in July, the Athy Water Festival, Athy Medieval Exhibition and the Athy Bluegrass Music Festival.
8. The underfoot conditions are firm to good ranging from hard gravel tow path, blacktop paths to urban public road footpaths. The riverbank walks are well maintained with undergrowth cut back. Signage is good. Information boards are present at the start of the walk in Emily Square, at Barrow Quay and at the Canal Harbour. There are no stiles or gates to negotiate. One section of the route is up a steep slipway. The 3.0km route is suitable for all levels of fitness and most of it is wheelchair accessible. About 55% of the walk is along quiet public road footpaths which are safe. The walk is mainly a designated Slí na Sláinte route approved by the Irish Heart Foundation.
9. The Athy Town walk links with the Barrow Way and the Grand Canal Way, two Great Irish Walks promoted by Tourism Ireland and is a convenient base for walkers that wish to traverse these routes. There are a number of looped walks (W13 & W23) within 5kms of the route in Athy that could be accessed by car.
10. The Royal Canal Way (77 kms), Grand Canal Way (114kms) and Barrow Way (109kms) are three of the forty eight Great Irish Walks (Waymarked Ways) promoted in Tourism Ireland's brochure "Walking in Ireland". This walk is on the Barrow Way.
11. There are established community groups in Athy such as the Athy Community Council, Athy Heritage Company that have developed a sign-posted heritage trail and associated tourism brochure. Kildare European Leader Teoranta (KELT) has funded several projects in Athy. There is a good track record of community projects successfully completed.
12. There are public toilets and picnic tables at Barrow Quay. Seats are available at numerous places along the route and in the Town Park.
13. There is a wide selection of restaurants and pubs serving food throughout the day.
14. There is a quality hotel in Athy, the Clanard Court, self catering accommodation beside the canal at Leinster Lodge and Mill Holiday Homes and approved bed and breakfast accommodation within 2km of the town.
15. Athy is a designated heritage town with numerous attractions nearby including the Heritage Centre in the market square, Kilkea Castle, Moone High Cross, the Gordon Bennett Memorial at Ardscurr and much more. Barges are available for rent locally for

- canal cruising. There is coarse and game fishing in the Barrow and the canal. The Gordon Bennett Motor Rally route is centred on Athy.
16. The route is promoted by the Irish Heart Foundation and the Athy Heritage Centre but so far is not promoted by accommodation providers or tour operators in the area.
 17. Establishments that promote fishing could also cater for walkers.
 18. There are several restaurants to choose from in Athy and a selection of pubs that provide musical evenings.
 19. Athy is advertised on www.ireland.ie (it is actually incorrectly described and confused with Naas on this site), www.goireland.com, and other websites. It also appears in literature produced by East Midland Tourism. The heritage walk and the Sli na Slainte walk are available as printed brochures. There are no co-ordinated sales or promotion plans by local tourism service providers in place.
 20. Athy is of national importance as a designated Heritage Town. It has international recognition as the centre for the Gordon Bennett Vintage Motor Rally and the birthplace of Ernest Shackelton, the polar explorer. It links with the spiritual (Dominican and St. Johns monasteries), military (former barrack town) and waterways (grand Canal and Barrow Navigation) theme for Kildare.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 2: Donadea Forest Park (Map Series 2A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	46	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	7	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	7	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	6	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	8	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	9	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	9	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		65	59	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	5	8
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	5	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	5	8
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	2	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	4	7
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	5	8
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	5	8
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	5	
2.12	Car parking available	5	5	3
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	4	5
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	5	8
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	5	9
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	45	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	4	5
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	5
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	5
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	4	5
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	3	5
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	5
3.7	Walk Manager identified	5	4	7
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	4	11
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	4	11
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	5
3.11	Insurance in place	5	5	5
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	23	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	4	12
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	3	12
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	2	12
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	3	13
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	3	14
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	4	15
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	16
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	2	16
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		30	23	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	4	
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	5	
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	3	14
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	3	14,17
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	4	17
2.16	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	4	18
TOTAL		250	196	

Comments

1. The route passes through one landscape character area defined in the County Development Plans as the Northern Lowlands. However Donadea Forest is recognized in the County Development Plan as an area of mixed woodland including individual trees, groups of trees and avenues worthy of preservation. Some scrubland with natural vegetation has been set aside. A new oak wood has been planted beside the 9/11 memorial. There are some interesting excavations associated with bridge building on the estate that reveals the underlying marly clay full of freshwater mollusc shells that could be preserved as a stopping point of geological interest along the nature trail.
2. In addition to the nature trail in the forest with its mixture of broadleaf, conifer and some exotic species there is a magnificent grove of beech, approximately 150 years old, which covers an area of 1 hectare. Other broadleaved species include young oak , planted in 1938 and common ash. Sitka spruce, grand fir and Norway spruce are also present. The Shrubbery Trail has holm oak, horse chestnut, copper beech, silver birch, larch, hazel, yew, Lawson cypress and monkey puzzle. Along the walls, the ivy-leaved toadflax, maidenhair spleenwort and hart's tongue fern can be observed. The muddy bottom of the shallow lake provides an ideal habitat for aquatic plants. Pond weed is abundant while reed mace is prominent in the shallow waters. The large-leaved yellow water lily can also be seen. There is a lake walk with abundant coot, moorhen and mallard. The mute swan is an occasional visitor. The lake is also stocked with coarse fish. Rabbits and squirrels are a common sight in the forest.
3. From a practical point of view the route is only accessible by car. Ample car parking is provided. It is only 20 miles from the centre of Dublin. In terms of its link to the towns of Kildare people interviewed had traveled from Newbridge and Leixlip and did so on a regular basis. The Park is perceived by many in urban Kildare as a place to introduce their children to the wonders of nature and the countryside.
4. The Forest Park contains the remnants of Donadea Castle, home of the Aylemer family from 1550 to 1935. The original building was burnt in the 1641 rebellion and was rebuilt. The adjacent tower was built in 1836. There is a 17th century walled garden (unfortunately not open to the public) and nearby St. Peter's Church of Ireland graveyard with many interesting gravestones dating back to the 1700s. A neglected, but well preserved ice house is worthy of restoration. The ice house was the 18th century equivalent of the fridge where meat, game and dairy products were stored. The walled streams are a fascinating example of water engineering in the 18th century that was designed to drain the estate lands and controls the level of the lake using sluice gates. There is a memorial dedicated to the memory of the firemen and policemen of New York who gave their lives in the 9/11 tragedy. The family of Sean Tallon, one of those who died, lives in Donadea. All of the sites are located on the actual route and most are accessible to the public.
5. Donadea Forest Park is owned and managed by Coillte. Coillte promotes recreational walking at Donadea and have an open access policy. Coillte developed an Environmental Management Plan for the Park and involves the local community group in the process. Where on going development work is in progress the hazards are well signposted. A low hanging cable close to the ruin of Donadea Castle is a potential hazard that is not properly signposted. Given the large number of visitors a limited amount of littering does occur. There is an element of private sector involvement through the franchise for the coffee shop which is privately owned.
6. Donadea is designated as a proposed Natural Heritage Area in the Draft County Development Plan for Kildare.

7. Several events are organised in the Park during the year including events during Heritage Week such as a Bat Walk & Talk. Orienteering meetings are frequently held at Donadea. Rangers are available to take school groups on tours of the forest. The 9/11 memorial has become the focus of annual events. There is a Forest Manager appointed.
8. The underfoot conditions are firm ranging from hard gravel surfaced path to narrow forest track, of which there are many through the woodland. There are sections of the route that are wheelchair accessible including the Lake Walk of 0.8kms. Signage is good but requires maintenance in places. Some sites, such as the Ice House, are not signposted. There are excellent information boards around the lake. The practice of families donating seats dedicated to their dead relatives provides a pleasant connection to the local community. There is scope to position more information boards around the wood along the nature trail. There was some litter on part of the route on the day of the audit and the flowers on the 9/11 memorial had wilted. A moving poem dedicated to Sean Tallon appears on a large board at the 9/11 memorial site.
9. There are a number of looped walks within the Forest Park. The Lake Walk is 0.8kms, The Aylmer Walk is 5kms and the Nature Trail is 1.6kms.
10. . – NOT USED -
11. There is a well established community groups associated with the Park, Tir na Móna. Kildare European Leader Teoranta (KELT) has funded several Tir na Móna projects including capital assistance towards development of three new walks, the 9/11 Memorial Site and technical assistance towards a plan for the restoration of the walled gardens at Donadea. There is a good track record of community projects successfully completed.
12. There is a coffee shop and toilets. The shop sells tea, coffee, hot chocolate and home made pastries all year round. It is considered by visitors to be expensive. There are plenty of picnic tables and seats provided. There is no B&B accommodation within 2 kms of the Park. The stately home accommodation at Donadea House is nearby.
13. There are no visitor attractions adjacent to the route although the 9/11 memorial contained within the Park could be considered a separate visitor attraction and the 17th century walled garden, if it is developed, could be considered as a separate visitor attraction.
14. Most local accommodation providers include Donadea Forest Park as an attraction in their promotional literature.
15. Fishing in the lake was observed. Many parents allow their children to cycle along the broad pathways. The open areas are used for casual family ball games. There are opportunities for bird watching, photography and landscape art in the Forest.
16. Facilities for walkers such as drying rooms are not available nearby. Entertainment is not available in the vicinity of the Park but visitors would tend to stay in the larger towns and make day visits to Donadea.
17. Donadea Forest Park is well advertised on www.ireland.ie, www.coillte.ie, www.goireland.com, and other websites.
18. The Park is a recognised local picnic spot and it has national importance as an 18th century demesne associated with the Aylmer family since the 1500s. Its proximity to Dublin gives it national importance as an amenity site.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 3: Barrow Way 1 (Lowtown to Monasterevin) (Map Series 3A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	48	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	9	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	9	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	5	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	7	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	9	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	9	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		70	59	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	5	8
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	4	
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	4	8
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	2	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	2	7
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	3	8
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	4	
2.12	Car parking available	5	4	
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	4	5
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	4	8
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	3	9
2.16	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	4	10
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	39	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	5	5
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	5
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	5
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	4	5
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	1	
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	5
3.7	Walk Manager identified	5	2	
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	3	11
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	2	12
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	5
3.11	Insurance in place	5	5	5
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	23	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	2	13
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	5	13
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	2	13
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	5	14
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	2	15
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	3	16
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	17
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	2	17
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		25	16	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	4	
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	5	
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	2	
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	1	
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	4	18
TOTAL		250	177	

Comments

1. The route passes through three landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the Western Boglands, the Chair of Kildare and the Southern Lowlands.
2. Canals have many features in common with ponds and small lakes. They each have **open water** with small submerged and free floating plants. Nearer the banks **transitional emergent vegetation** composed mainly of sedges and horsetails stand clear of shallower water. At the **margins** these are succeeded by grasses, tall herbs with moisture demanding trees such as alder and willow. The range of habitats supports a wide diversity of wildflowers, trees, shrubs, insects, mammals, fish and birds.
3. Towns such as Monasterevin have bus connections but public transport options in North Kildare are sparse. The Bus Eireann website gives the most updated schedule of services to Robertstown, Allenwood, Monasterevin and Rathangan (Numbers 12, 120, 123, 126). The route links several attractive villages, rural communities and towns such as Robertstown, Rathangan and Monasterevin.
4. Along the route are a series of locks including the 19th Lock with its plaque on the chamber wall reciting its history; the typical sixteenth century fortified house at Ballyteige; three-arch rubble stone road bridge over river, c.1780 and terraced Georgian houses, c.1760 at Rathangan with its 1798 connections; a single-storey thatched cottage, c.1885, near Robertstown; a series of single-arch cut-stone hump back road bridges over the canal, dated 1788; a good example of a canal milestone near Spenser Bridge, and Monasterevin with its maze of waterways, roads and railway with an interesting lifting bridge, canal warehousing and Moore Abbey built in 1607. Almost all of the sites are located on the actual route and are accessible to the public.
5. The route is under the control of Waterways Ireland who are responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of the Grand Canal principally for recreational purposes. Waterways Ireland employs local people as lock keepers and provides training in health and safety. Waterways Ireland has an ongoing Marketing and Promotional Strategy that includes promoting recreational walking.
6. The entire Grand Canal Route is designated as a proposed Natural Heritage Area in the Draft County Development Plan for Kildare. There are three Special Areas of Conservation adjacent to the route, Pollardstown Fen with its unique fenland flora and fauna, Ballynafagh Bog and Ballynafagh Lake with its semi-natural shallow alkaline wetland with rare plants.
7. Several Festivals occur throughout the year at locations along the route including the Gerard Manley Hopkins International Festival in Monasterevin (exhibitions, concerts, lectures and fieldtrips) and the Lughnasa Festival in Rathangan (arts & crafts, local history), both in July.
8. The underfoot conditions are firm ranging from hard gravel surfaced towpath to narrow grassy track along pleasant embankment. There are short sections along surfaced public road without footpaths. The route consists of 5kms road and 19.5km grassy path. The road section can be busy. On towpath Sections of the route are wheelchair accessible including a stretch at Ballyteige where there are ten (10) disabled angling stands.
9. There are two potential looped walks along the route. One starts at Lowtown and loops north along the Grand Canal to Lullymore Briquette Factory, then south through Lullymore Island to Glenaree Bridge on the Barrow Line returning along the canal to Robertstown. The second walk is an 8km spur along the Milltown Feeder to Pollardstown Fen.

10. The Royal Canal Way (77 kms), Grand Canal Way (114kms) and Barrow Way (109kms) are three of the forty eight Great Irish Walks (Waymarked Ways) promoted in Tourism Ireland's brochure "Walking in Ireland". This walk is on the Barrow Way.
11. There are several well established community groups who run community enterprises and organise festivals such as the Blueberry Fair, Open Day on the Bog of Allen and International Bog Day in February, March, May, June July and August along the route. The groups include Ballyteague Community Council; Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park Ltd; Monasterevin Community Council; Allenwood Community Development Association; Tir na Móna Community Development Council; Robertstown Development Association; Kildare European Leader Teoranta (KELT). KELT has funded several projects in the area including tea rooms at Lullymore Heritage Park, self catering accommodation at Robertstown and marketing grants to community development organisations. KELT has also secured EC funding for Waterwaysnet a project aimed at producing a set of best practice guidelines for dealing with waterways that are distressed or under some form of pressure from pollution, invasive species, or other sources. The project concentrates on the Blackwood Feeder adjacent to this walk.
12. There is a need for focus. Many different community groups are pursuing separate agendas that would benefit from co-ordinated action lead by the public sector. There is potential for private sector involvement through lending of resources or financial support for signage or route maintenance. Roadstone has a quarry at the Hill of Allen and may consider exploring ways of contributing to local initiatives.
13. Shops, pub and post office is available at Robertstown at the start of the walk. The Barge pub serves meals. There is a pub, the Traveller's Rest, at Littletown. There are good shopping facilities and other services in Rathangan and Monasterevin. Walkers are not particularly catered for along the route (eg drying rooms). Accommodation is limited. There are self catering cottages in the village of Robertstown at the beginning of the walk and in Rathangan at the end of the walk. There is Bord Failte approved B&B accommodation available 3kms outside Rathangan and 3kms outside Monasterevin. The Hazel Hotel in Monasterevin is adjacent to the walking route.
14. Two successful visitor attractions, Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park (25,000 visitors per annum) and the recently opened Bog of Allen Nature Centre at Lullymore run by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council are within 5kms walk of the main route along country roads. There is the potential to incorporate these attractions in a looped walk (see note 9).
15. Tour Operators that specialise in Walking Tours report that lowland walking routes, in spite of heavy promotion including TV coverage, do not attract any bookings. The market is the independent traveller or the Irish Walking Clubs that look for weekend breaks.
16. Fishing is well promoted along the canal by Waterways Ireland. The recent publication of a book on cycling the towpaths will generate interest in cycling. Although the canal bye-laws prohibit swimming in the locks, harbours and docks the locks are attractive to swimmers because of the deep weed free water. Perhaps selected appropriate areas could be designated for swimming. The development of towpaths for cycling could be encouraged along appropriate selected stages while ensuring that motorcycle use is discouraged in the design of gates. The towpaths are not suitable for pony trekking because of the physical damage caused. There are opportunities for bird watching, photography and landscape art along the canals.
17. Facilities for walkers such as drying rooms are available from the Hazel Hotel in Monasterevin. Entertainment including dancing on Sunday and Monday nights in the

Hazel Hotel is available. There is music in the Bellyard pub in Monasterevin on the weekends.

18. The Barrow Way and Grand Canal way are well advertised on www.ireland.ie and through that site to <http://walks.iwai.ie/grand/> and the www.walkireland.ie sites.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 4: Barrow Way 2 (Vicarstown to Athy) (Map Series 4A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	38	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	6	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	7	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	5	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	7	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	8	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	5	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		65	49	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	5	7
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	4	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	4	7
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	4	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	3	9
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	3	10
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	4	7
2.12	Car parking available	5	4	11
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	4	12
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	4	10
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	2	13
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	39	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	4	12
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	12
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	12
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	4	12
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	2	14
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	12
3.7	Walk Manager identified	5	2	12
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	2	15
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	3	15
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	12
3.11	Insurance in place	5	5	12
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	28	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	3	16
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	4	16
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	4	17
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	4	18
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	3	
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	4	23
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	4	19
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		30	21	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	4	20
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	3	20
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	4	20
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	2	21
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	4	22
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	4	22
TOTAL		250	175	

Comments

1. The route passes through two landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the Southern Lowlands and the River Barrow Valley. The route starts in County Laois and the Castlecomer Plateau breaks the flat terrain to the west. The land use on either side of the route is dominantly tillage for barley, wheat and oats.
2. Along both banks of the canal and river there is a wide band of vegetation consisting of reeds and wild flowers; short grass on the towpath, longer grasses and flowers on either side of it; a species rich hedgerow on the boundary and a variety of habitats on the non towpath side – woodland scrub and grass land. The range of habitats supports a wide diversity of wildflowers, trees, shrubs, insects, mammals, fish and birds.
3. Athy has frequent bus and rail connections. This is a linear route. Vicarstown is not well served by public transport. The route is quite isolated and monotonous but acts as a link between urban Athy and the picturesque country settlement at Vicarstown. The route is linear and requires a drop off at one end and a walk to pick up your car at the other end.
4. Along the route is an aqueduct, a single arch rubble stone hump back bridge at Bert, a detached three bay single storey thatched cottage and former mill owners house. At Bert there is an impressive seven bayed Georgian mansion, now a luxury hotel. Closer to Athy are the 1840s workhouse and adjoining cemetery. Athy is a heritage town with a canal harbour and associated warehousing and former canal hotel. Almost all of the sites are located on the actual route and are accessible to the public.
5. The route is under the control of Waterways Ireland who are responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of the Grand Canal principally for recreational purposes. Waterways Ireland employs local people as lock keepers and provides training in health and safety. Waterways Ireland has an ongoing Marketing and Promotional Strategy that includes promoting recreational walking.
6. The entire Grand Canal Route is designated as a proposed Natural Heritage Area in the Draft County Development Plan for Kildare. There are no Special Areas of Conservation adjacent to the route.
7. The underfoot conditions are firm ranging from metalled roadway, hard gravel surfaced towpath to narrow grassy track along pleasant embankment. There are sections along surfaced public road without footpaths. The route consists of about 2.5 km road, 0.5 km track, 8 km grassy track. The road section is not busy with local traffic only. Walking time is about 3.5 hours.
8. The route is straight and signage is adequate for requirements. There are information boards at Athy canal harbour.
9. Several Festivals occur throughout the year in Athy including the Sir Ernest Shackleton International Autumn School, the Kildare County Show in July, the Athy Water Festival, Athy Medieval Exhibition and the Athy Bluegrass Music Festival.
10. There are disabled angling stands near Cardington Lock just outside Athy and much of the route is passable by wheelchair along towpath.
11. On street in Vicarstown and in the carpark at the 27th Lock in Athy canal harbour.
12. The route is under the control of Waterways Ireland and is supervised by NWWAC. There is adequate signage to identify hazards along the route. Waterways Ireland have an environmental plan for the waterways and contract the Central Fisheries Board to monitor environmental aspect of the Barrow Navigation and Grand Canal. Waterways Ireland operates a health and safety policy.
13. There are no identifiable loop walks along the route.
14. There is no identifiable private sector involvement with the route.

15. There is a Heritage centre in Athy and a company established to address heritage issues in the town. There is no direct involvement with the route. Athy does have a significant number of active community groups and there is a track record of successful local initiatives.
16. There is a shop, pub, post office and garage at Vicarstown. Athy has all services. There are picnic tables and seats at Vicarstown and Athy.
17. There is a quality hotel in Athy, The Clanard Court, self catering accommodation beside the canal at Leinster Lodge and Mill Holiday Homes and approved bed and breakfast accommodation within 2km of one end of the route in Athy.
18. Athy is a designated heritage town with numerous attractions nearby including the Heritage Centre in the market square, a heritage town trail, Kilkea Castle, The Gordon Bennett Memorial at Ardscull and much more.
19. There are several restaurants to choose from in Athy and a selection of pubs that provide musical evenings.
20. The Royal Canal Way (77 kms), Grand Canal Way (114kms) and Barrow Way (109kms) are three of the forty eight Great Irish Walks (Waymarked Ways) promoted in Tourism Ireland's brochure "Walking in Ireland". This walk is on the Barrow Way. "A Walkers Guide to the Canal Towpaths of County Kildare" is out of print.
21. Tour Operators that specialise in Walking Tours report that lowland walking routes, in spite of heavy promotion including TV coverage, do not attract any bookings. The market is the independent traveller or the Irish Walking Clubs that look for weekend breaks.
22. The Barrow Way and Grand Canal way are well advertised on www.ireland.ie and through that site to <http://walks.iwai.ie/grand/> and the www.walkireland.ie sites.
23. Fishing is well promoted along the canal by Waterways Ireland. The recent publication of a book on cycling the towpaths will generate interest in cycling. Although the canal bye-laws prohibit swimming in the locks, harbours and docks the locks are attractive to swimmers because of the deep weed free water. Perhaps selected appropriate areas could be designated for swimming. The development of towpaths for cycling could be encouraged along appropriate selected stages while ensuring that motorcycle use is discouraged in the design of gates. The towpaths are not suitable for pony trekking because of the physical damage caused. There are opportunities for bird watching, photography and landscape art along the canals.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR WALKING ROUTES (Map Series 7A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title: GRAND CANAL – SALLINS TO HAZLEHATCH	Max	Rank	Comment
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	50	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	7	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	8	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	8	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	7	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	10	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	10	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		65	41	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	4	7
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	4	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	4	9
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	4	10
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	3	11
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	2	
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	13
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	2	13
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	4	14
2.12	Car parking available	5	2	15
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	2	14
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	2	13
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	4	16
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	39	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	5	17
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	17
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	17
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	5	17
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	0	18
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	5	18
3.7	Walk Manager identified	5	5	18
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	0	18
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	1	18
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	18
3.11	Insurance in place	5	5	18
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	16	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	3	19
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	2	19
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	2	19
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	2	19
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	0	20
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	3	20
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	20
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	2	20
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		30	14	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	2	21
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	3	21
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	1	21
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	1	21
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	3	21
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	4	22
TOTAL		250	160	

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR WALKING ROUTES		
No.	Walk Title	GRAND CANAL ROUTE 7 : SALLINS TO HAZELHATCH
Comments		
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		
1	Variety of landscapes	The route passes through the Northern Lowlands, along the Grand Canal 'landscape within a landscape', as defined in the Kildare CoCo CDP 2005-2011. This comprises flat pasture & tillage, with stud farms, in very pleasant and quiet rural area. The prominent ridgeline of Lyons Hill between Kill and Newcastle lies c. 2km to the southeast, with the Saggart Hills of the Eastern Uplands visible in the southeastern distance. The canal landscape, with well developed hedgerows, encloses a haven of solitude despite being so close to the Greater Dublin metropolis. Geologically, the canal route straddles the southwestern margin of the Dublin Basin 'calp' limestones and the carbonate Ballysteen and Waulsortian limestone formations, with complex northwest faulting of the bedrock.
2	Diversity of natural flora & fauna	Canal habitat is dominated by fringe of Common Reed & sedges, rare water lilies & flag iris, with clovers, celandine, meadowsweet, cow parsley on banks. A variety of ash, willow, hazel, alder, birch, whitethorn & elder trees fringe the canal, but ash & whitethorn dominate for entire length of the walk, with mixed deciduous in adjacent hedgerows of beech, chestnut, (oak, scots pine, lime) whitebeam, linked to the local estates' heritage. Haws and rosehips berries abundant through hedges, with rare yew and holly near Ardclough. Lower order plants include Hart's Tongue & Marsh Ferns and mosses in shaded habitats. Gunnera sp. present but receding by October; also Loosestrife and Willowherb receding after bumper Summer'05. A group of 5 swans (1 female, 4 cygnets), heron and waterhen observed; overall birdlife relatively low (& quiet).
3	How route links between villages, towns & countryside	The route endows a sense of the canal's importance as a major thoroughfare of commerce and social connection in the nineteenth / early twentieth centuries. Modern car transport has destroyed this strong physical link to some extent, but the quietude of the canal, despite being so close to the Dublin metropolis, is its strength. A narrow vehicular roadway links the south side of the canal between Ponsonby and Henry bridges. Hazlelatch village lies to the north, while Sallins lie to the southwest, with Wheatfield village just north of Henry bridge.
4	Diversity of built heritage and archaeology	Built heritage: The canal architecture is particularly well demonstrated along this stretch, having the 13 th , 14 th and 15 th locks and associated lockkeepers' cottages. Each lock displays excellent engineering, weir & bypass features. Six hump back road bridges (named Sallins, Devonshire (Morell), Ponsonby, Henry, Aylmer, Hazlelatch) are single-arch cut-stone structures, with widening of Sallins and Ponsonby bridges on their eastern sides. Many display rope chafings from barge moorings etched in the limestone underpasses. The lockkeeper's cottage on 14 th lock has been tastefully restored, while those on 15 th and 13 th are in ruins. The 18 th century (?) Lyons Estate of the Hon. Baron Cloncurry dominated the 'Big Houses' of the district ⁴ , and is currently undergoing major renovation. Lyons House and interiors boast the presence of Gabrielli murals, while the Lyons Demesne hosts the Lyons Church & carvings, as well as the site of a medieval castle and village. Original stone (1.5m) walls, gate lodges and gateways are preserved, although new stone walls are being constructed to >2.5m height at the 13 th lock, bordering Lyons' Estate. At Oughterard, c. 2km south of Henry Bridge along a surfaced road, Oughterard church & round tower can be seen, as well as Oughterard Castle a little further south. Ardclough townland boasts an excellent cluster of 18 th / 19 th century period features, including a partially renovated national schoolhouse dated 1839; an old church converted sensitively to a residence; a late 18 th century(?) farmhouse at Waterbury, with an original manual waterpump beside the canal; a series of single-story limestone, slated cottages on the north and south sides of the canal and a round tower/ folly (?) one field south of the towpath (latter not listed on CDP). Archaeology: Discovery Sheet 50 records a moated site at Clownings 1km north of Ponsonby Bridge, and a single earthen ring fort at Ringwood just north of Hazlelatch Bridge. Earthworks on Lyons Hill within the demesne are protected structures.
5	Level of co-operation from landowners	No access issues regarding the canal itself; managed by Waterways Ireland. However there may be issues concerning access to heritage sites along the route (e.g. the Lyons Demesne) and private lands in current climate.

⁴ John Roe's 1801 "Map of the Manor of Lyons, the Estate of the Rt Honble Lord Baron Cloncurry" indicates an acreage of 1060.2.12 (A.R.P.), which was subsequently revised and annotated for a total acreage of 1090.2.17 (A.R.P.).

6	SACs/ NHA	The Grand Canal is designated as an NHA (the section in question is numbered 02104-SH-14).
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		
7	Underfoot conditions along the route	The surface varies along the route as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sallins to railway bridge east – good gravel, accessible to all • Railway to Devonshire (Morell) Bridge – wet, long grass underfoot, but gravelled from 15th to 14th locks with good towpath. • Morell Bridge to Ponsonby – wet, long grass underfoot, unpleasant as far as Painestown. • Ponsonby to Henry Bridge – surfaced, suitable for vehicles/ wheelchairs/ buggys (c. 2.5km); • Henry to Aylmer, good towpath surface; • Aylmer to Hazlelatch, pleasant towpath, suitable to most users.
8	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	Signage poor – finger posts at each bridge, but no explanatory signage/ information boards. Yellow barriers at most bridges, unsuitable for buggies/ wheelchairs, as have to go down gravel track under bridge to easily pass.
9	% of route tarred or on-road	2km of entire 11km is a narrow surfaced, vehicular road (18%) with low traffic volumes.
10	Accessible by public/private transport?	ARROW rail links from Dublin to Hazelhatch & Sallins (Mon-Sat, no Sun), with regular 30-40min services. Dublin Bus operates No 68 to Newcastle, every 70mins from Aston Quay, with 2km walk to Hazelhatch. Dublin Bus No 67/67a to Celbridge from Pearse St every 15-20mins (M-F); 0.5-2hr intervals (Sun), with 2km walk to Hazelhatch. Bus Eireann operates a regular daily service to Sallins, leaving Dub 06:45am, leaves Sallins 19:15pm (www.iarnrodeireann.ie/ www.dublinbus.ie/ www.buseireann.ie for details).
11	Access to heritage sites from the walking route	Yes, for the most part, along surfaced tracks. Unsure if Lyons Demesne heritage features are open to the public – may be limited to one day per annum.
12	Existing local events and walking festivals	Data not available
13	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	Suitable for most users, except wheelchairs and buggys between Devonshire/ Morell Bridge and Ponsonby. More maintenance of some sections is required. Generally ok from Hazlelatch southwest to Henry Bridge (c. 4km) for disabled and elderly users.
14	Safety of road walking sections	Signage to vehicles to slow down at bridges is poor – significant danger at crossing points due to vehicular speeds. Vehicles along Ponsonby-Aylmer Bridge canal section travel too fast (80km speed limit should be reduced). No visible recognition of health & safety issues - poor signage in this regard, particularly at road crossings.
15	Car parking?	Poor at most locations, except on north side of Sallins Harbour. Limited (unofficial) parking at all of the bridges.
16	Opportunity to provide looped walks	Excellent potential for spur walks, particularly around the Lyons Demesne, providing access is permitted. Wheatfield/ Ardclough zone also offers loops and northeastwards to Skeagh/ Kearneystown. Sallins itself permits loops around the village, and to 16 th lock at Aghpaudeen.
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		
17	Route development, management & maintenance supported	Waterways Ireland maintains and manages the route. Waterways Ireland maintains and manages the route – could improve signage about environmental issues and awareness of the unique habitats which the canal provides. General maintenance is excellent, but some sections needs grass cutting more frequently. Litter is a serious problem at the Sallins end of the walk; where a vehicular road passes directly alongside the canal path to the golfclub at Kerdiffstown, people are dumping onto the towpath.
18	Public sector role and involvement	Waterways Ireland is a statutory agency with full responsibility, with public liability insurance for all recreational users. There is limited involvement of voluntary/ community groups in maintenance, or of collaborative working along this specific section of the Grand Canal. There may be scope to link to the private sector (e.g Mr Ryan at Lyons Demesne?) for specific heritage issues, or to the golf club on the south side at Kerdiffstown for added walking packages for e.g golf spouses.

4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		
19	Walker friendly services present	Two pubs/ 2 restaurants at Sallins Harbour in pleasant surroundings. Taxi/ Bus hire also at Sallins bridge and railway station close by, to link to Naas for full town facilities. Two pubs serving food at Hazlehatch & railway close by. There are not many B&B accommodation outlets visibly targeting canal users, but likely available in Sallins & Hazlehatch/ Newcastle. There are no specific walker-friendly attractions or activities.
20	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	No tour operators connect to the Canal walks, while opportunities to cross-sell are limited, unless meals packages with the B&Bs/pubs at both ends of route with drying facilities could be negotiated. Could strengthen the angling facilities and opportunities for photography, wildflower/ environmental / educational walks, and water based activities such as boating. Music in pubs in Sallins and Naas at weekends
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		
21	Links to website/information services in place	The Grand Canal Way is a national waymarked route and has the potential to be a much more successful tourism spine for Kildare and onwards to the midlands. It is under-utilised both locally and by tourists. Waymarked Ways of Ireland – www.walkireland.ie Also Grand Canal is promoted in Tourism Ireland's 'Walking in Ireland' brochure, but is not promoted in a commercial fashion
22	Potential local, national and international recognition	Enormous potential as an easy-access, no-climb route for recreational users.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 9: Kilcock (Slí na Sláinte Variation) (Map Series 9A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	26	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	4	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	4	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	3	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	3	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	8	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	3	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		70	38	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	4	7
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	3	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	1	9
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	5	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	2	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	2	10
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	11
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	3	11
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	2	11
2.12	Car parking available	5	4	12
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	3	13
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	3	13
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	2	14
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	36	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	4	15
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	15
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	2	15
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	3	13,15
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	2	13
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	15
3.7	Potential Walk Manager identified to lead groups	5	2	
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	3	13
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	4	16
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	15
3.11	Insurance in place	5	3	15
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	22	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	3	13
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	5	17
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	1	18
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	2	19
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	2	
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	4	19
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	19
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	3	10,17,20
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		25	15	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	3	21
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	4	21
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	1	
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	1	
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	4	21
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	2	22
TOTAL		250	137	

Comments

1. The route passes through one landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the Northern Lowlands. The route is characterised by flat terrain and open lands with regular medium sized field patterns. Hedgerows are well maintained with scattered trees along field boundaries. Land use is predominantly pasture for cattle. The route crosses the M4 motorway twice affording, on a clear day, views of the Dublin and Wicklow mountains. The route passes through a small wood of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. A section of the Royal Canal passes through the village and the walk can include a short 2km spur along the canal towpath which is described in walk 16.
2. The walk is along country road with hedgerows and occasional stand of trees along field boundaries. The hedgerows abound with bramble, elder and hawthorn. There is a short section of the walk through a mixed wood of deciduous and evergreen trees. The range of habitats supports a diversity of wildflowers, trees, shrubs, insects, mammals, and birds.
3. The Bus Eireann website gives the most updated schedule of services to Kilcock which is a frequent daily service. Kilcock is also served by Dublin Bus (66) and Iarnród Eireann with regular daily train service. The route links the growing urban development of Kilcock with its adjacent rural landscape of pasture and cattle rearing, the built heritage of Courtown House and ecclesiastical tradition of the Mass Rock.
4. Along the route are the detached eleven bay three storey gothic style Presentation Convent c1870, the gothic revival former Christian Brothers school, the Market Cross (1640), a mass rock dating from Penal times and views of Courtown House, an early nineteenth century house built to replace the one burned in 1798. There is a picturesque foresters cottage dated 1896. The Mass Rock is not signposted and is on private land. There is no access at present to Courtown House which is underdevelopment as a spa hotel.
5. The route is along public road and no landowner issues apply. The Royal Canal Walk is under the management of Waterways Ireland.
6. There are no Natural Heritage Areas or Special Areas of Conservation adjacent to the route.
7. The underfoot conditions are firm along metalled road throughout with footpaths in places.
8. Signage is infrequent and small. Hazards, such as bulls, are noted. There is a need for "Caution Walkers" signs along this narrow busy road which is popular with walkers.
9. The entire route is on public road.
10. There are no annual festivals or events listed for Kilcock.
11. The entire route is 5.5kms on the flat along public road with footpaths in places. The route is busy with traffic and walkers. There is inadequate signage for motorists to slow down.
12. Car parking is available in Market Square beside the railway station.
13. The route is along a narrow busy road with inadequate footpaths and poor signage to alert motorists to the presence of walkers. At the canal bridge there is wheelchair access to a mooring point. There are picnic tables and benches. There is a Kilcock Branch of the Royal Canal Amenity Group that cut grass at the canal side on a voluntary basis.
14. The route is a spur off the existing Royal Canal Way.
15. The route is supported by Kildare County Council. Sections of the route near the railway station had a significant amount of scattered litter and overflowing litter bins. The Kildare Sports Partnership provides training for walking leaders.
16. There are a number of community groups in Kilcock with an interest in the route including Kilcock Tidy Towns, Kilcock Canal Restoration. A community group was set

up to negotiate the development of the Bawnog area adjacent to the motorway along the walking route and plans were produced.

17. There are number of pubs and restaurants, facing the picturesque harbour, that are lively and entertaining on summer afternoons with outside picnic tables. The bypass has added to the amenity value and the local canoe club use the harbour for water polo competitions in summer.
18. There is no accommodation listed within 2kms of the route.
19. There is fishing and canoeing available locally along the canal.
20. Murphy's is a friendly traditional local pub with live music on weekends occasionally.
21. The route is a Slí na Sláinte promoted by the Irish Heart Foundation, Kildare County Council and the Kildare Sports partnership. There is a published walking route guide which can be downloaded from the internet.
22. The route is of local significance judging from the numbers of walkers that use it and their interest expressed in interviews by the researcher.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 10: Kilcullen (Slí na Sláinte Variation) (Map Series 10A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	49	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	8	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	8	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	8	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	8	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	8	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	9	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		70	48	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	4	8
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	3	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	4	8
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	5	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	2	7
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	3	8
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	3	8
2.12	Car parking available	5	4	
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	3	5
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	3	8
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	2	9
2.16	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	4	10
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	33	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	2	5
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	2	5
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	2	5
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	3	5
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	2	11
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	5
3.7	Potential Walk Manager identified to lead groups	5	2	
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	4	5
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	4	5,11
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	5,11
3.11	Insurance in place	5	3	5
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	24	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	4	12
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	5	12
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	3	12
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	2	13
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	2	14
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	4	15
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	16
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	2	17
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		25	8	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	2	
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	3	18
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	1	
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	1	
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	1	18
TOTAL		250	162	

Comments

1. The route passes through two landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the River Liffey Valley and the Eastern Transition Lands. The River Liffey bisects a landscape of undulating topography with classic meander formations, some of the finest in Ireland. The section of river between Kilcullen and Ballymore Eustace is proposed by the Geological Survey of Ireland as a site of significant geological heritage. Land use is mainly pasture with some stud farms and tillage. There is natural and shelter vegetation along the banks of the River Liffey.
2. The river bank walk passes through natural woodland with sycamore, elder and ash. The river is fast flowing with grey wagtails and kingfishers. The route passes across open fields and along shaded country roads under a canopy of beech trees. The hedgerows abound with bramble, elder and hawthorn. The range of habitats supports a wide diversity of wildflowers, trees, shrubs, insects, mammals, fish and birds.
3. The Bus Eireann website gives the most updated schedule of services to Kilcullen (Numbers 004, 007) which is a frequent daily service. The route links the fast growing urban development of Kilcullen with its adjacent natural heritage along the River Liffey, the built heritage and history of St. Brigid and the Franciscan monastery and the rural landscape of stud farms and tillage.
4. Along the route are the six-arch rubble stone road bridge over river, c.1850; detached eighteen-bay three-storey convent, dated 1886; detached seven-bay single- and two-storey Gothic Revival Catholic church, built 1872; detached single-bay two-storey over open arcade rubble stone building, dated 1830, originally part of larger corn mill building; St. Brigid's Holy Well; a Mass path, detached five-bay single-storey former gate lodge, c.1900; Freestanding cast-iron water pump, c.1905; remains of detached rubble stone Catholic church, c.1700, originally on a cruciform plan and possibly incorporating fabric of medieval abbey, pre-1496; medieval effigy, c.1500. At one point on the route the broken round tower at Old Kilcullen with its 1798 connections can be seen. Most of the sites are located on the actual route and are accessible to the public.
5. The Valley Riverside Park was developed by Kilcullen Community Action and rights of way were established along the mass path to Newabbey. The Slí na Sláinte route was developed by the Kilcullen Lions Club and the Eastern Health Board and sponsored by Kildare County Council. KELT funded Kilcullen Tidy Towns for assistance towards materials for environmental works to the Valley Riverside Park. The Kilcullen Heritage Group also received funding towards the publication of a historical booklets including one on 1798. There is an ongoing dispute with a landowner over the recent removal of right of way to Carnalway Bridge. The community organises occasional clean up of litter along the route but no organisation is responsible for regular maintenance.
6. The walk is near the Liffey Valley Meander Belt, a proposed Natural Heritage Area in the Draft County Development Plan for Kildare. There are no Special Areas of Conservation adjacent to the route.
7. There are regular open days at the Camphill Community in nearby Dunshane. Kilcullen Parish Feis occurs in March each year. There is a recently opened Heritage Centre on the Main Street overlooking the River Liffey with interesting displays and access to books on local history.
8. The underfoot conditions are firm ranging from hard gravel surfaced path to fenced off narrow grassy track across open fields. There are sections along surfaced public road, without footpaths in some places. The route consists of 3.5kms road and street with 1.5km of gravel and grassy path. The road sections are quiet but one crossing point of the L19 at Newabbey can be busy. The riverside section of the route to St Brigid's Well is wheelchair accessible. The Kilcullen Access Group has identified major access problems in Kilcullen for people with disability. However Kildare County Council is actively working towards

addressing some of them. Signage is quite good but will need some updating and maintenance. One of the Slí signposts was lying on the ground. Stiles may need some maintenance and signage across field to direct people along the headlands will be necessary. The riverside walk is littered with rubbish and there are sections where short term unsightly new construction activities spoil the serenity of the walk.

9. There are no identified looped walks adjacent to the route.
10. This is a local urban route which is of regional but not necessarily national importance. It does have the theme of Pilgrimage through its association with St. Brigid's Well and the Abbey at Newabbey and Equestrian with the stud farms in the area and could be promoted on that basis.
11. Kilcullen Community Action has been successful in securing some private sector funding for development of the riverside walk since the 1970s. There are a number of new companies based in Kilcullen that could be approached as well.
12. The Camphill Community run a coffee shop on the main street in Kilcullen which also houses a craft shop with books, gifts and pottery as well as wooden toy's and products from their weaving workshop. Shops, pub and post office are available on the Main Street at the start and end of the walk. There are several pubs that serve good food and an award winning restaurant in the town. There are two Bord Failte approved bed and breakfasts in Kilcullen (one is three miles from the town on the Dunlavin Road close to the walking route)
13. There are no visitor attractions within walking distance of the route.
14. Tour Operators that specialise in Walking Tours report that lowland walking routes, in spite of heavy promotion including TV coverage, do not attract any bookings. This route is of local and regional interest and could be promoted by local B&Bs and Bus Eireann as a one day break from Dublin.
15. Fishing is well promoted along the River Liffey by the local angling club and permits can be purchased in the petrol filling station in the town. Kilcullen is close to three race courses at Naas, Punchestown and the Curragh. Family breaks that include walking, fishing or cycling as an alternative to racing could be based in Kilcullen. The Pilgrimage/St. Brigid connection could be promoted as one of a string of one day visits to sites associated with early Irish monasticism.
16. Walker specific services like drying rooms and packed lunches are not particularly catered for.
17. There is a lively pub culture in the town at night with an award winning restaurant on the main street.
18. There is an information board at the start of the Valley Riverside Park with comprehensive information on the route, including built heritage, flora and fauna. Apart from promotion of the Slí na Sláinte route on the Irish Heart Foundation website there was no other promotion of the route found.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 11: Killinthomas Wood (Map Series 11A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	27	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	4	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	7	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	2	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	3	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	9	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	2	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		70	49	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	5	8
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	4	8,5
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	4	8
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	2	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	1	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	2	7
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	3	8
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	5	
2.12	Car parking available	5	5	
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	4	5
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	4	8
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	3	9
2.16	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	3	10
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	40	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	5	5
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	5
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	5
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	4	5
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	1	
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	5
3.7	Potential Walk Manager identified	5	2	
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	4	11
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	2	12
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	5
3.11	Insurance in place	5	5	5
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	18	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	2	13
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	2	13
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	2	13
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	2	14
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	2	15
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	3	16
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	17
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	3	11,17
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		25	9	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	2	18
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	3	18
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	2	
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	1	
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	1	18
TOTAL		250	143	

Comments

1. The route passes through the Western Boglands landscape character as defined in the County Development Plan. The route is through coniferous and mixed woodland with views across the Snipe Bog.
2. The forest is made up of coniferous and mixed woodland with Norway spruce, Scots pine, Douglas fir, ash and beech trees. Bluebells and wild garlic are found under the beech trees and wood sorrel, wild strawberry, primroses and wild violets are found along the pathways. The Hazel Walk route adjoins the Snipe Bog with heather, bog cotton, broom, mountain ash, silver birch and sally. Curlew and snipe may be seen on the bog. Rabbits and squirrels can be seen in the wood with evidence of badgers and foxes.
3. The route is confined to the wood and those not link with any village or town. Towns such as Allenwood have bus connections but public transport options in North Kildare are sparse. This route is reasonably isolated and requires private transport to get access. There is a car park with information board.
4. There is a small house built as a hunting lodge in the 1940s for a local priest Fr. Doyle. Killinthomas House has been completely demolished and little trace remains. The original wood was planted with oak which was used for railway sleepers and pit props in the mines in England. There is interesting local history associated with the families of Mac Ainch who owned the local sawmill, Murphy's who owned the wood, Fr. Doyle and Killinthomas House.
5. The route is under the control of Coillte who manage the commercial forest recognising that biodiversity and nature conservation are an integral part of forest management. Coillte operates a policy of providing access by the public to its forests. Coillte promotes recreational walking in their forests and provides facilities for the public such as seating, picnic tables and information boards.
6. There are no Natural Heritage Areas or Special Areas of Conservation adjacent to the route. In some respects this is an advantage because it reduces the potential for damage to these sites by large numbers of visitors.
7. The Lughnasa Festival in Rathangan (arts & crafts, local history) occurs in the summer. Coillte encourages school groups to visit the forest as part of the Social and Environmental syllabus of the primary school curriculum which aims to help children understand the natural environment in which they live.
8. The underfoot conditions are firm ranging from hard gravel surfaced paths to narrow track through pleasant woodland. Parts of the route are suitable for wheelchair access. The route consists of 5.7kms of forest paths. The signage is good with an information board at the starting point and colour coded signs throughout giving a choice of four different walks of varying lengths.
9. There are four looped walks that make up the route. They are called Fr. Doyle's Walk (1.35kms), the Killyguire Loop (0.63kms) the Hazel Walk (2.0kms) and the Ballydermot Loop (1.72kms).
10. The route is of local significance. It is not included in the recreation sites in Co. Kildare promoted by Coillte on their Tourism and Recreation website.
11. There are several well established community groups who run community enterprises and organise festivals in nearby Rathangan. Rathangan Trade and Industrial Association and Rathangan Community Arts Group are involved in developing amenities locally. Coillte has a track record of working closely with community groups including the Rathangan community in developing the recreational amenity at Killinthomas.
12. Coillte has engaged with the local community in Rathangan in the development of the Killinthomas amenity. The local school was invited to participate in naming the walks. The

local community groups have a track record of organising local festivals and community development projects. Tir na Móna Community Council and Balyna Rural Enterprise and Development Association (BREDA) also operate in the area.

13. This is a local amenity used by surrounding residents. Walkers are not particularly catered for with services adjacent to the route. Accommodation is limited. There are self catering cottages in Rathangan and Bord Failte approved B&B accommodation available 3kms outside Rathangan.
14. The visitor attractions at Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park (25,000 visitors per annum) and the recently opened Bog of Allen Nature Centre at Lullymore run by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council are more than 10kms away from Killinthomas Wood.
15. Tour Operators that specialise in Walking Tours do not include such forest walks in their promotions. The amenity is essentially a local one. It is similar to many other forest properties around the country.
16. Locals do use the paths for cycling, although cycling is not encouraged by Coillte. It could be suggested to Coillte that certain suitable forest properties might be designated for use by cyclists. Killinthomas might be a pilot candidate.
17. Entertainment is limited.
18. The walk does not appear on any existing website for recreational walking. There is a promotional brochure produced by the local community group in Rathangan.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 13: Mullaghreeelan (Map Series 13A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	41	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	7	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	7	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	6	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	9	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	7	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	5	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		65	52	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	4	7
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	3	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	4	9
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	3	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	3	10
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	11
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	3	11
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	4	11
2.12	Car parking available	5	5	12
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	3	13
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	3	11
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	4	14
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	42	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	4	15
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	15
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	15
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	3	13,15
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	4	13,15
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	15
3.7	Potential Walk Manager identified to lead groups	5	3	
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	3	16
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	4	16
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	15
3.11	Insurance in place	5	4	15
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	36	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	3	17
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	5	17
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	5	18
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	5	19
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	5	19
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	4	19
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	5	19
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	4	10,20
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		30	20	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	4	21
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	4	21
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	2	
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	3	
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	4	21
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	2	22
TOTAL		250	191	

Comments

1. The route passes through two landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the Southern Lowlands and the Eastern Transition. The route is a combination of mixed woodland, quiet country road and the well maintained grounds of the twelfth century Kilkea Castle. The wood surrounds a ringfort with a viewing point that provides a panoramic view of the Southern Lowlands with its open fields of oats and barley and the Eastern Transition to the upland area of Wicklow with the Rath of Mullaghmast, Ardscull Moate and Corballis Hill. The edge of the Castlecomer Plateau, the town of Athy and the round tower of Kildare Cathedral can be seen from the summit.
2. The walk is through mixed forest of ash beech and sycamore with conifers. There are stretches of open woodland with abundant wildflowers and shrubs such as hazel, bramble and elder. There is a limestone outcrop in the wood and a road cutting through the glacial boulder clay showing the soil profile. The land use along the road section is dominantly tillage with barley and oats and well maintained hedgerows with crab apples. Within the Castle there is a well maintained seventeenth century walled garden. Surrounding the castle is an 18 hole golf course with parkland trees, remnants of the original demesne forest. The river Griese, a source of trout, meanders through the estate. The range of habitats supports a diversity of wildflowers, trees, shrubs, insects, mammals, fish and birds.
3. There are no public transport services to Kilkea. It is 40 minutes by car from Dublin and 15 minutes from Naas. The location is popular with the people of Castledermot and Athy as a picnic spot. The route links the natural woodland heritage with the built heritage of the Kilkea Demesne and its rich social history and legend and the pilgrim/ecclesiastical heritage of St. Laurence O'Toole who was born here and is commemorated with a memorial that links the spot to the town of Eu in France where he died.
4. Along the route are a single storey cut stone foresters cottage (1820), the iron age ring fort with its viewing point, two memorials on the roadside commemorating rural workers of the 1940s, the impressive Fitzgerald Norman Castle (1180), which is now a hotel, is the oldest continuously inhabited castle in Ireland., the medieval church and graveyard of the Fitzgerald family, a granite memorial to St. Laurence O'Toole, a detached four bay single storey former national school (1863), a detached four bay double height rubble stone Gothic style Church of Ireland (1850), a detached five bay two storey rubble stone Tudor style former rectory (1852) and a free standing cast iron water pump (1905). There is a unique horse powered water pump used in the 1840s to pump water from a well to a cistern on the roof of the castle. There is a pets cemetery for faithful hunting dogs with interesting headstones. All of the sites are accessible from the route.
5. The route is along Coillte forest path, public road and hotel access roads. To fully develop the route the hotel owner will need to work with Coillte to upgrade sections of it.
6. There are no Natural Heritage Areas or Special Areas of Conservation adjacent to the route but the picturesque meandering River Barrow SAC is visible from the ring fort viewing point.
7. The underfoot conditions are muddy and wet and partly overgrown over a short distance at one end of the walk. Most of the route is firm along forest path and single track. Some of the route is along quiet country road and access roads within the hotel grounds.
8. There is limited signage at present at the start of the walk in the car park and picnic area. Arrow marks and information boards would enhance the walk.

9. The route is 4.5 kms on forest paths and public road. Seven hundred metres (15%) is along quiet country road.
10. There are no annual festivals or events listed for Kilkea although nearby Athy (5 kms) has the annual Ernest Shackleton Autumn School, the International Bluegrass Music Festival, the Kildare County Show, and the Water Festival while close by Castledermot has a local festival in August. The Castle is a popular venue for weddings which are a daily event. The Golf Course hosts regular competitions.
11. The entire route is 4.5kms on forest trails and tarred public roads. There is an optional gentle climb to the top of the ring fort. The route is not wheelchair accessible. No special equipment is needed apart from stout walking shoes. The road sections are quiet with little traffic but caution is still required especially with young children.
12. Car parking is available at both ends of the walk, in the Coillte forest where there are picnic tables and in the car park of the golf club at Kilkea Castle.
13. The route is under the control of Coillte and the proposed extension is under the management of Kilkea Castle Hotel. Both Coillte and the hotel have a safety policy in place.
14. There are three looped walks of about 1 km each within the wood.
15. The route is managed and maintained by Coillte. The proposed extension into Kilkea demesne would be under the control of the management of the hotel. Coillte and the hotel maintain the route and grounds to a high standard.
16. Local historians in Castledermot have developed the St. Laurence O'Toole memorial in the wood and former estate workers now employed by the hotel have voluntarily restores parts of the medieval church and cleared undergrowth from the Fitzgerald family graveyard. Castledermot Enterprise and Development Association have developed an action plan for the area and the Narraghmore Local History Group published a local history book on the area.
17. There are picnic tables at the car parks at both ends of the route. Toilet facilities are available in the hotel and golf club which also has a restaurant and pub that serves food all day. The hotel has a separate pub and restaurant.
18. There is the four star Kilkea Castle Hotel and two bed and breakfast within 2kms of the route.
19. There is golfing, horse riding, clay pigeon shooting, fishing and cycling available locally through the hotel and the other accommodation providers. The provision of walking would be an extra activity to add to an existing bundle. The hotel would include walking in their existing promotional package. Drying facilities for outdoor pursuits is catered for in the hotel and guest houses.
20. The hotel provides regular nightly entertainment for its guests.
21. The route is promoted by Coillte but has the potential to be included in the activities advertised by the hotel in its country pursuits and wellness centre in brochures and on the existing internet site.
22. The route is of local significance but combined with the unique setting of Kilkea Castle it is of national and international importance.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 14: Naas Town (Map Series 14A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	42	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	6	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	6	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	6	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	8	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	9	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	7	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		65	54	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	5	7
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	5	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	2	9
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	5	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	10
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	3	11
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	5	12
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	5	13
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	4	14
2.12	Car parking available	5	5	15
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	4	14,16
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	5	12,13
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	3	17
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	40	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	4	5
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	5,18
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	19
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	4	19
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	2	20
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	5,18,19
3.7	Walk Manager identified	5	3	5,18,21
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	3	22
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	2	22
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	5	5
3.11	Insurance in place	5	5	5
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	29	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	4	23
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	4	24
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	4	25
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	4	26
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	3	27
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	3	27
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	3	28
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	4	29
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		30	16	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	3	30
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	5	30
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	2	31
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	2	32
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	2	33
2.16	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	2	34
TOTAL		250	181	

Comments

1. The route passes through two landscape character areas, as defined in the County Development Plan, the Northern Lowlands and the Grand Canal.
2. The route is 6.4km of which half is through an urban landscape and half is through the “linear park” along the canal bank. Habitats along the way include the mixed forest of the de Burgh estate, stud farm pasture, open water and transitional emergent habitats of the canal and a rich hedgerow habitat. Coot, water hen and swans are commonly observed along the canal.
3. Naas is well served by rail and bus with regular connections to Dublin and provincial towns. There is also a community bus service that links Naas with Clane, Sallins and Newbridge. The walk serves as an educational route for an urban population informing them of the links between the activities of the town and the rural hinterland. The stud farm at Keredern House with its tidy fenced pastures, grazing mares and foals is an example of one of the primary commercial activities in Kildare. The canal harbour and old gasworks is a reminder of former commercial activities when local agricultural produce was sent to Dublin by canal for sale. The de Burgh estate, the Town Hall, Courthouse and former police barracks on the main street are a reminder that Naas is primarily an administrative centre, the county town.
4. Being the county town Naas has a rich built heritage which that can be appreciated on this walk. The route begins in the canal harbour with a detached five bay two-storey former canal hotel c 1800, with the attached former corn market, a detached six bay, two storey house on an L shaped plan c. 1820; the harbour has sections of cut granite retaining walls and a detached three bay two storey former canal warehouse c. 1780. The route continues up the main street past the detached five bay three storey former Royal Irish Constabulary barracks c. 1870; the detached seven bay two storey Classic style courthouse built in 1807; detached four bay double height Presbyterian church built 1868; detached seven bay three storey Classical style Town Hall renovated in 1904 on the site of the former gaol; Saint David’s Castle c 1600; a Gothic style Church of Ireland church c 1830 incorporating the tower of the earlier church c 1600 with an interesting collection of gravestones dating back to early 1700s; detached four bay double height Gothic style Catholic Church built 1827 with associated convent and parish hall c. 1810; a detached five bay two storey international Modern style cinema built 1939; several imposing Classic style bank buildings c. 1920; along the Sallins Road the route passes a detached four bay two storey yellow brick house c 1870 typical of the prosperous merchant class dwelling in the mid nineteenth century; a Georgian villa style house c. 1820; There are several single arch rubble stone hump back canal bridges c. 1780 along the route with several canal locks retaining the early timber gates and lock mechanism; a collection of buildings associated with the Naas Gas Works 1865 with its attractive chimney still intact; a collection of industrial buildings on the canal associated with a former flour mill; Naas Moate is built on the site of the ancient royal residence of the Kings of Leinster. All of the sites are either accessible or visible from the walking route.
5. The route is along public road and pathways under the management of Naas Urban Council or Waterways Ireland. There are no access issues.
6. The Grand Canal, which is part of the Naas walking route, is a proposed Natural Heritage Area in the County Development Plan.
7. The underfoot conditions are good. The route is along public road footpath, quiet public road and single track gravelled towpath.

8. Signage is good with a numbered tourist trail in place highlighting buildings of interest. The Slí na Sláinte route signs are in place. There are information boards on the main street giving tourist information and at the canal harbour giving historical information.
9. The majority of the 6.4kms is on tarred road with only a short 0.5kms along single track canal towpath.
10. Most of the built heritage is along the route and can be appreciated without requiring access to private property. The most interesting buildings are open to the public, such as the Town Hall, Court House, Former RIC barracks, Church yards, etc.
11. There are regular Race Meetings at Naas and Punchestown including the Irish National Hunt Festival in April. The Moate Theatre has a continuous programme of theatrical events throughout the year including the hosting of the annual All Ireland One-Act Drama Finals. The Naas County Library organises lecture series and art exhibitions on a regular basis. Nearby Mondello Park hosts motorbike and car racing including the British Touring Car and British Superbike Championships. There are no established walking festivals in Naas.
12. The route is on the level with no climbs or steep slopes to negotiate. There are no styles to cross (apart from one detour along a towpath if desired). The underfoot conditions are firm requiring no specialist walking equipment apart from a stout pair of walking shoes. The route is suitable for all levels of walker.
13. The route has firm underfoot with no styles to negotiate and frequent pedestrian crossing points making it suitable for wheelchair access.
14. In the town the route follows the pedestrian footpaths with frequent pedestrian crossings available. Along the public road sections by the canal there are speed bumps to slow down vehicular traffic. Sections of the route do not have speed bumps or signs warning motorists that walkers can be expected.
15. There is ample car parking in the town including a covered multi-storey car park on the route.
16. There is life saving equipment provided along the canal and speed bumps to reduce the speed of motorists along the canal bank roads. An alternative tree lined single track tarmac path along the canal is provided to avoid traffic.
17. There is a linked 3km Slí na Sláinte route that has additional built heritage, including the former Naas Railway station stores and section of railway now incorporated into a walk, the Fairgreen, the pleasant Lakelands Park with flocks of mallard and nesting swans, the Workhouse Graveyard and the new Catholic Church at Ballycane with its interesting architecture.
18. The Slí na Sláinte route is sponsored by Co. Kildare VEC, Kildare County Council and Naas Urban District Council. Kildare Sports Partnership provides training courses for walk leaders to encourage groups to engage in healthy walking pursuits.
19. The route is maintained by Naas UDC and it comes under the environmental plan for the Naas urban area.
20. There is no private sector involvement but private business along the route such as Millenium Park, which owns the old Leinster Mill building and Keredern Stud could be approached to provide access or signage to enhance the route.
21. The route is a Slí na Sláinte route and a walk manager could be identified.
22. There is an active Local History Group that has developed a tourist trail in the town. There is a Naas Tidy Towns Committee.
23. There are public toilets, seats and picnic tables along the route.
24. The town has a wide selection of pubs and restaurants that serve food throughout the day.

25. Naas has a selection of hotels and B&Bs along the route (Harbour Hotel, Naas Court Hotel, Osprey Hotel) as well as within 2km of the town.
26. Naas has a variety of visitor attractions including the two race courses at Naas and Punchestown, car and motor cycle racing at Mondello, theatre performances at the Moate, Wolfe Tone's grave at Bodenstown, and Jigginstown Castle built for Charles II. There is a GAA, Athletics and Rugby Club that host regular sporting events.
27. No tour operators specifically market the route but Naas is included in horse racing, golfing, coarse fishing and motor racing promotions and walking could be included as an additional attraction.
28. There are a number of outdoor pursuit shops in Naas that could benefit from more walkers and could be encouraged to promote the route in their premises.
29. Naas is renowned for its range of shops and wide selection of restaurants. There are two nightclubs at the Court Hotel and the Osprey Hotel, a cinema, theatre and a number of atmospheric pubs.
30. The route map is published by the Irish Heart Foundation and is available for download from their website. Sections of the route are mentioned in the "Towpath Trails" published by the County Kildare Sports Advisory Committee and a "Signposted walking tour of Naas Town" published by Naas Urban District Council. Several of these publications are out of print.
31. The canal bank portion of the walk is promoted by Kildare Fáilte.
32. There are no walking packages on offer that include the entire route but part of the route is on the Grand Canal Way that is sometimes promoted by walking tour operators, although they inform us that there is little to no take up of inland flat walking routes by their customer base.
33. There is no immediate link to the route through google but the route can be downloaded in pdf format from the Irish Heart Foundation website.
34. The route is of local importance only.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 23: Moate of Ardscull (Proposed) (Map Series 24A, B, C)				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	32	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	7	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	7	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	5	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	6	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	5	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	2	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		70	45	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	4	7
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	3	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	2	9
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	3	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	10
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	4	11
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	12
2.10	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	4	13
2.11	Safety of road walking sections	5	2	14
2.12	Car parking available	5	5	15
2.13	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	3	16
2.14	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	3	12,13,14
2.15	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	4	17
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	39	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	3	18
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	18
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	3	16
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	3	16,18
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	3	19
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	3	20
3.7	Potential Walk Manager identified to lead groups	5	4	18
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	4	18
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	4	18
3.10	Legal structure in place	5	4	20
3.11	Insurance in place	5	4	20
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	20	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	2	21
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	2	22
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	4	23
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	3	24
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	2	25
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	3	24
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	2	24,26
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	2	27
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		25	15	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	3	28
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	3	28
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	2	28
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	2	28
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	2	28
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	3	28
TOTAL		250	151	

Comments

1. This 13km walk is situated in the Southern Lowlands Landscape Character as defined in the Kildare County Council County Development Plan. The walk begins at the elevated site of the Moate of Ardscurr giving pleasant views across the Barrow Valley to the Castlecomer Plateau and to the east the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains. The route is along country roads through dominantly tillage farm land with a section which skirts bogland at Blackwood with some forestry plantations along the way
2. The route commences in mixed woodland planted in the nineteenth century on the Moate. Adjacent to the Moate is a small garden with native shrubs, flowers and trees clearly identified. The walk passes through tillage and some pasture land with pleasant views to the SW towards the Barrow Valley and Castlecomer Plateau. The roadside supports a diverse hedgerow habitat and section of the walk is through raised bog with riverbank and coniferous forest plantation.
3. The route is just four kilometres from Athy, situated beside the village of Kilmeade. There is a regular bus service. The Moate is a popular destination for day trippers from Athy.
4. Ardscurr has the largest Norman Motte in Ireland built in the twelfth century. Beside the motte is a plaque to commemorate the 4th Gordon Bennett motor race in 1903, the first motor race to be run over a closed circuit. There is a former RIC barracks c 1830 and a wall mounted cast iron post box c. 1905 with ER VII royal cipher and raised crown motif.
5. Most of the route is along public roadway with a short stretch of bog road which may be in private ownership. Access to the bog itself is under the control of Bord na Móna and is restricted.
6. There are no SACs or NHAs along the route but the Moat of Ardscurr is a protected structure.
7. The underfoot conditions are good along public roadway but bog road with potholes requires some care.
8. There is adequate signage at the starting point of the walk with information boards and plaques explaining the local history and flora. Stiles giving access to the Moate are safe and well maintained. There is neat fencing around the garden area.
9. The entire route is on tarred surface or potholed back roads.
10. The heritage sites are all accessible or visible from the route.
11. Apart from the annual Gordon Bennett Memorial Vintage Car Rally there are no events of national importance advertised for the locality.
12. The route is on the level and does not require special navigation skills or equipment other than stout walking shoes. However it is quite long at 13kms but variations are available to make shorter looped walks.
13. The majority of the walk is suitable for wheelchair access and alternative looped walks accessible to wheelchairs are available.
14. Most of the walk is along quiet country road but sections are along the busy N78 although there is a wide hard shoulder for walkers.
15. There is ample safe car parking at the Moate of Ardscurr.
16. There is a need for signage to warn motorists of the presence of walkers. There are sections of the bog road that are badly littered and illegal dumping continues to be a problem. There is evidence of erosion of the Motte due to the number of visitors climbing to the summit.
17. A number of short looped walks are provided off the main walking route to suit different levels of walker and walking times.

18. This a route proposed by the Kilmead Tidy Towns Committee who have a track record in local projects such as the upgrading of the Ardsclull Motte site including a wildflower garden, picnic tables and signage. Several members of the committee have attended training courses as team leaders for Slí na Sláinte walks and are active walkers.
19. There is no apparent private sector interest in the walking route. Kilrush Engineering is a local business that might contribute to signage etc.
20. Kildare County Council has developed and maintains the Ardsclull site and road sections are under the care of Kildare County Council.
21. There are picnic tables and benches at the start and finish of the route but no toilet facilities.
22. There are no restaurants or pubs nearby.
23. There are two country home B&Bs within 2kms at Moate Lodge and Ballindrum Farm and camping and self catering at Forest Farm.
24. The main attraction of international importance is the Gordon Bennett Vintage Car Rally. The bog area attracts landscape artists and a well known landscape artist lives on the route. The bog is also suitable for bird watching. Farmhouse Holidays are a feature of the area.
25. There are no tour operators promoting the route.
26. There are no retail outlets in the area that could benefit from walkers but the farmhouse holidays could include walking and landscape painting in their advertising.
27. There is no nigh time entertainment in the immediate area although Athy (4kms away) has all services.
28. This is a proposed route and therefore is not mentioned in existing literature. The Moate of Ardsclull is mentioned in almost all tourist literature relating to County Kildare. There is no specific guide of the route published and no tourism service provider is currently promoting the route. The Moate of Ardsclull and the Gordon Bennett Memorial give the site a national and possibly international importance.

EVALUATION WALKING ROUTE 25: Lullymore (Proposed) (Map Series 25A, B,C				
No.	Walk Title	Mark	Score	Comments
1. Nature and Characteristics of the Route:		60	46	
1.1	The variety of landscapes along the route	10	9	1
1.2	The diversity of natural flora & fauna along the route	10	9	2
1.3	How the route links between villages, towns and countryside	10	7	3
1.4	The diversity of built heritage and archaeology on the route	10	8	4
1.5	The level of co-operation from landowners along the route	10	7	5
1.6	The existence of SACs/ NHAs along the route (cf with Heritage Offices/NPWS)	10	6	6
2. Physical Attributes of the Route:		70	52	
2.1	Underfoot conditions along the route	5	4	7
2.2	Standard of signage, stiles, surfaces, gates	5	3	8
2.5	Percentage of route that is tarred or on the road	5	4	9
2.6	How accessible is the route by public/private transport	5	3	3
2.7	Is there access to heritage sites from the walking route	5	4	4
2.8	Existing local events and walking festivals	5	5	10
2.9	Suitability of the route for all levels of walker	5	4	11
2.1	Suitability of route for disabled access	5	4	11
2.1	Safety of road walking sections	5	4	11
2.1	Car parking available	5	5	12
2.1	Health and Safety issues recognised	5	3	13
2.1	Accessibility for the elderly and disabled	5	4	11
2.1	Opportunity to provide long and short looped walks and spurs	5	4	14
3. Management and Organisational Structures:		55	44	
3.1	Route development, management and maintenance supported	5	4	15
3.2	Training programmes for management & promotion in place	5	4	15
3.3	Level of environmental management in place	5	4	15
3.4	Level and management of maintenance of the route	5	3	13,15
3.5	Private sector role and involvement	5	4	13,15
3.6	Public sector role and involvement	5	4	15
3.7	Potential Walk Manager identified to lead groups	5	5	16
3.8	Voluntary sector role and involvement	5	3	16
3.9	Evidence of existing or previous partnership/collaborative working	5	4	16
3.1	Legal structure in place	5	5	15
3.1	Insurance in place	5	4	15
4. Commercial Attributes of the Route:		40	34	
4.1	Walker friendly services present	5	4	17
4.2	Availability of food in cafes, pubs and restaurants	5	5	17
4.3	Accommodation provided on or close to route	5	4	18
4.4	Availability of associated products and services e.g. visitor attractions and activities	5	5	19
4.5	Availability of existing tour packages and operators	5	4	19
4.6	Opportunity to cross-sell to other activities and attractions	5	4	19
4.7	Opportunity to provide services required by walkers	5	5	19
4.8	Entertainment e.g. music at night and festivals	5	3	10,20
5. Marketing and Sales Issues		25	19	
5.1	Route marketing and promotion ongoing	5	3	21
5.2	Walking route guides published	5	3	21
5.3	Sales plan in place	5	2	
5.4	Links to sales intermediaries established	5	3	
5.5	Links to website/information services in place	5	4	21
5.6	Potential local, national and international recognition	5	4	22
TOTAL		250	195	

Comments

1. The route passes through three landscape character areas defined in the County Development Plans as the Western Bogland, Southern Lowlands and the Chair of Kildare. It also falls within the "Robertstown Countryside" defined in the 1999 County Development Plan and still recognised in the current plan as highly important with respect to the development of the waterways for development purposes. The route is a combination of canal walks through open country with localised views, smooth terrain and long distance visibility on the western boglands with low vegetation complimented with existing hedgerow trees and conifer plantations. Mineral islands within the bog at Lullymore are quiet oasis with tillage farming and pleasant woodland. The Chair of Kildare ridgeline is a prominent to the south east with its mythological Hill of Allen associated with Fionn MacCumhaill and the Fianna.
2. The walk is along canal bank towpaths through bogland in places. Where the canals passed through the bogs soil was often brought in to build up and strengthen the banks. This was usually the limestone based soil found in the midlands areas where bogs have not developed. This soil is alkaline, not acidic and is very rich in lime. The two types of soil, one calcareous with a very high pH and the other wet with a very low pH support very different types of vegetation. The different habitats also support different species of Butterfly and Dragonfly. The canal bank has hedgerows of wildflowers hawthorn, brambles, wild roses, ash, elder and blackthorn. Between the hedgerow and waters edge scrub, wetland and different types of grassland have developed. The species composition varies between sections that are grazed and sections that are mown. The low level of nutrients in the limestone soils common along the canals gives rise to a unique composition of wildflowers and grasses. Meadowsweet and yellow iris are found between the channel and the towpath in damp, water logged soil. The reed fringe supports a variety of rushes and sedges. A variety of birds Wren, Song Thrush, Blackbird and Robin are found in the hedgerows with hedgehog and pygmy Shrew. Otter spraints can be found along the bank. A variety of butterflies and Moths with dragonflies and Damselflies inhabit the canal bank habitats. A number of different species of coarse fish inhabit the slow moving water of the canals. Heron, Grey Wagtail, Mallard, Coot, Swans, Moorhen and the occasional Kingfisher can be seen along the route. A section of the walk departs from the canal path and crosses open bogland. On the bog Sphagnum mosses and heathers are found with insectivorous plants such as sundews, butterworts and bladderworts can be found. There is a section of boardwalk where pond dipping in the bog pools can recover a range of water insects and even fish. Curlew, Snipe and Skylark can be seen. On cutaway sections of the bog scrub has developed and provides a valuable habitat for birds and mammals. On the mineral islands there is an oasis of tillage and pastureland with small mixed deciduous and conifer woodland.
3. The circular route links the Grand Canal with the Barrow Navigation and encloses a pilgrims oasis on an island surrounded by bog. Public transport options in North Kildare are sparse. The Bus Eireann website gives the most updated schedule of services to Robertstown, Allenwood, Monasterevin and Rathangan (Numbers 12, 120, 123, 126). Community bus service links were recently introduced. The route links the rich natural habitats of canal banks and bogland with very the ancient ecclesiastical settlements associated with Lullymore Island and the modern villages of Robertstown and Rathangan on the canal.
4. Along the route are several single arch rubble stone hump back bridges over the canal dated 1796, the typical sixteenth century fortified house at Ballyteige, a wooden

causeway dating from the Iron Age, a monastic enclosure and earthworks from the early Christian times with the imprint of St. Patrick's feet on a stone. There is a 1798 memorial to Captain John Doorley, United Irishman and leader of the attack on Rathangan in 1798 and an eighteenth century walled estate farmyard which now houses the Irish Peatland Conservation Councils Bog of Allen Nature Centre. In Robertstown there is a detached seven bay three storey over basement former canal hotel built in 1801, a single arch rubble stone aqueduct c 1780, free standing cast iron gas lamp c. 1900, an attached three bay single storey thatched cottage c 1885, and a section of the Grands Canal c 1785 with dressed stone retaining walls. All of the sites are accessible from the route.

5. The route is along canal towpath managed by Waterways Ireland, public road, bog road managed by Bord na Móna, paths managed by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council. If the walk is to be fully developed as a circular looped walk then negotiations with private land owners to complete the loop along existing pathways across what appears to be private land will be necessary. Local farmers are supportive of heritage development and have a record of active participation in the development of walks bordering their land to give access to monastic ruins and a local graveyard.
6. The Grand Canal is a designated Natural Heritage Area. There is no Special Areas of Conservation adjacent to the route but the Irish Peat Conservation Council has recently acquired remnant bog from Bord na Móna along the route and are developing it as a conservation site of international importance.
7. The underfoot conditions are muddy and wet and partly overgrown over a short distance at one short section of a proposed link walk to develop a this as a looped walk with reduced section along tarred road. Most of the route is firm along gravel and single track grassy towpath, quiet country road and hard packed farmyard access road.
8. There is limited signage at present. Additional arrow marks and information boards are required before the walk can be promoted.
9. The route is 30 kms on canal towpaths and public road with the potential for several lopped walks within it. Four kms (13%) is along busy country road.
10. The Lughnasa Festival in nearby (3 kms) Rathangan (arts & crafts, local history) is in July. During Heritage Week in September a number of events occur in the area including guided canal bank walks and workshops on bog conservation at Lullymore. Throughout the year the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC) organise a series of events including guided bog tours, workshops and exhibitions at here centre in Lullymore.
11. The entire route is 30kms on level towpath trails and tarred public roads. Most of the route is wheelchair accessible with boardwalk section in the bog. No special equipment is needed apart from stout walking shoes. The road sections are quiet with little traffic but caution is still required especially with young children.
12. Ample car parking is available at the Bog of Allen Nature Centre and Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park.
13. The route is under the control of a number of organisations including IPCC, Bord na Móna, Waterways Ireland and Kildare County Council. A co-ordinated approach to health and safety along the proposed route is required particularly in relation to uniform signage to identify hazards along the route.
14. There are three optional detour walks of about 1 km each to visit Lullymore Heritage Park (including a train trip out to a mineral island in the bog at Lullybeg), a monastic settlement and the ancient Iron Age wooden causeway.
15. Sections of the route are developed, managed and maintained by different organisations. A co-ordinated approach to between IPCC, Bord na Móna, Waterways Ireland and Kildare County Council is required if the proposed walk is to reach its full

- potential. Roadstone have a quarry on the Hill of Allen and could be approached to assist with signage and other aspects of the route development as a contribution to environmental management. IPCC has a well established education centre, a maintained bog trail and a strong environmental protection policy in place at Lullymore.
16. Local community leaders have developed and maintain a successful Heritage Park at Lullymore. Local residents have actively developed the 1798 memorial and signage along sections of the route on public road. IPCC could be nominated to manage the route and provide rangers for guided walks.
 17. There are picnic tables and toilet facilities at both the car parks. There is also a restaurant at the Heritage and Discovery Park. Robertstown has a variety of shops and pubs for food and entertainment.
 18. Robertstown Holiday Village has eight self catering cottages. If the route is to be developed An Oige, the Irish Youth Hostel Association would consider re-opening a youth hostel in the area. They previously operated a youth hostel in the Robertstown Canal Hotel building.
 19. There are two well established visitor attractions on the route, The Bog of Allen Nature Centre with a permanent exhibition on peatlands, an art gallery, a shop specialising in environmental items, and a fully equipped education centre for schools and weekend workshops, The Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park has indoor exhibitions, replica ancient dwellings, woodland walkways, a children's adventure park and a train trip onto the bog to visit Lullybeg. There are tea rooms and a souvenir/craft shop. Coarse fishing is available along the canal. There are opportunities for bird watching and landscape art. A co-ordinated approach is required to promote the area. IPCC are already successfully promoting the Bog of Allen Nature Centre internationally. Accommodation providers in the area already cater for coarse fishermen. The two shops in both centres could increase their product range to facilitate walkers.
 20. The pubs in Robertstown provide regular nightly entertainment.
 21. The route is located in an area promoted by IPCC and Waterways Ireland. It has the potential to be developed as a world class heritage site that combines remnant unspoiled native wild bogland, a pilgrim oasis with ecclesiastical ruins, canal bank walks with views of Fionn Mac Cumhaill's Hill of Allen and two existing visitor attractions. The IPCC has a well developed website promoting the area and is in the process of developing a walking trail in the area. The Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park website is also promoting the area. The Grand Canal Way and Barrow Way are well advertised on www.ireland.ie and through that site to <http://walks.iwai.ie/grand/> and the www.walkireland.ie sites.
 22. The route encloses bogland which is of national and international importance.

REFERENCES

A large amount of promotional literature was collected from tourist information offices in the county and consulted. A sample is included below. A large number of websites were also consulted. The principle ones are referenced in the text of the report.

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