

# RIVER BANN & LOUGH NEAGH

FROM ALASTAIR UPRICHARD



Special visitor arriving at Ram's Island



## CHRISTMAS ISLAND

The idea to transform Ram's Island into 'Christmas Island' for a weekend in early December was mooted back in September 2013 and after a feasibility study, lots of debate between the Directors of RBLNAC, and a hard sell to the faithful volunteers it was decided to proceed.

Accordingly, it was agreed to begin preparations on Sat. 22 November Unfortunately we had not taken the heavy rainfall of early November into our calculations – the water level rose about 2' making access to the island virtually impossible. At this stage lesser mortals like myself would have thrown in the towel and cancelled the whole thing but the determined and resourceful Michael Savage reacted much more positively, so that when we arrived at Sandy Bay there was a large pile of

scaffolding poles and planks awaiting delivery to the island. These were loaded on to the pontoon and ferried across to the island where work began immediately to construct over 50m of walkway above the flood waters. The dozen volunteers worked with a will and no little expertise and three hours later we had dry access to the barge and the store sheds.

By the end of the following Saturday the island was almost ready to receive Santa and his Elves. What a transformation! Derek Gibson and Michael Stevenson, our *son et lumiere* experts had been hard at work. Lights illuminated the walkway, the Elf Train route and the barbecue area. They outlined the cottage and cast ever changing colours on to the round tower. Laser lighting projected patterns on the trees and Christmas

music added to the magic. Santa's Grotto held the children (and some adults) spellbound and the barge was decorated to perfection.

Work continued the following week right up to the 'kick-off' on Friday. Each day brought new ideas, most of which were taken on board and by 4.00pm everything was in place. The *Island Warrior*, decked out in multicoloured lights lay at the jetty ready to receive the first customers. On the island, Elves met and greeted their visitors and led them to the barge where Flo, aka Mary Christmas, resplendent in a beautiful red and white flowing dress took charge of refreshments (drinks, mince pies and shortbread). Outside malloes were being toasted round a brazier and chicken drumsticks and burgers were on offer in the gazebo. Michael Stevenson negotiated the Elf Train through the dark woods to the cottage where the children were greeted by Gerry the lively Snowman and Robbie the shy Reindeer. Finally everyone got to meet the man himself (Brian/Kevin) lounging in a large armchair and ready to hand out presents (but only to GOOD children!). After an hour of wonderment each group took the Ferry back to shore - most were still on a high!

The weekend was a success beyond our wildest dreams and reinforced by the many favourable comments posted on Facebook. BUT without our

sterling band of volunteers who gave selflessly of their time, expertise and money the project would have been dead in the water! So to Drew, Angus, Jack, Dominic, Michael and Alan Crossen, Brian, Kevin, Robbie, Derek, Michael St., Gerry, Michael and Flo and their entire extended family – THANK YOU! YOU WERE MAGNIFICENT!

Will we repeat it next year? Probably, but the foreshore will have to be raised to avoid the flooding and consequent time and expense of providing alternative access. So the big project this summer is likely to involve building up the flood-risk area with hardfill!

## WINTER LITTER LIFT.

Where does it all come from? Over the past few years a dedicated team has met two or three times a year to perform this boring but necessary task. Recently the volunteers have been augmented by a group from Asda led by Barbara. On Sat. 6 February, 22 participants started on the shore opposite Ram's Island on the theory that a large proportion of the litter was washed down the Ballinderry River onto the shore and thence over to the Island. Time will tell!

Both lifts filled 24 bags and included 9 fully inflated soccer balls and 5 tennis balls. Perhaps planners should revise siting of sports facilities!

**Photos: Michael Savage**



Ram's Island Litter Lifters