

# Inland Waterways News

## Expanding the system

*Fred Share*



*Fred Share, Shannon Harbour*

Inland waterways are now firmly established in Ireland with the River Shannon, in particular, a market leader in the tourist industry. It is not overcrowded and overdeveloped and does not cost an arm and a leg to keep a boat on. However, all this is under threat with more boats coming on to the system. Unless something is done about it, we may fall into the money trap.

The successful restoration of the Shannon-erne Waterway has increased boating numbers on both rivers with a knock-on effect on local business and communities. It proves what can be achieved where there is a will and a way.

There is potential to greatly increase the boundaries of navigation. I suggest that we embark on a nationwide development of the canal and waterway system, trebling our total navigable mileage. The object of my proposed new canals is to increase tourism; the actual route is of no great importance other than accommodating as much scenery as possible.

### **Barrow-Shannon link**

The river Suir used to be navigable as far as Clonmel. I propose a route to the Shannon along the Suir valley through Ardfinnan, Cahir, Golden, Borrissleigh, Nenagh and into the river Shannon at Dromineer via the Nenagh river. Later on, a branch line could be link other towns in the vicinity, eg Thurles and Cashel.

This would create a circular route encompassing the Grand Canal, the Barrow and Suir and the lower Shannon, generating increased traffic through the entire system. It would also allow direct access into the system from continental Europe: the passage around West Cork to Limerick is too arduous for lots of small boats.

The link should use a mix of canalised rivers and proper canals. The locks should accommodate vessels up to 120': with Waterford enjoying a growing sea trade and the city now a major port, barges could come into service again, bringing commercial traffic back to the inland waterways. It might be worth putting in pairs at the summit (near Borrisoleigh) to avoid congestion.

### **Kilbeggan–Belturbet**

This route would use the old Kilbeggan branch line, continuing northward into Lough Ennell and on through to the Royal Canal at Mullingar. This would link the two major canals and the Shannon.

A northern route through Westmeath, Longford and Cavan could connect the Erne to this system. This would be done by linking the Royal canal to Lough Owel and on through to Ballinalack (via Lough Iron). From there follow the river Inny to Lough Derravaragh and on to Lough Sheelin and Lough Gowna along the river Erne on to Lough Oughter and through to Belturbet, thus completing the circuit.

Along this line one can take in the towns of Castlepollard, Finnea, Granard, Crossdoney and Butlersbridge. A connection should also be made to Lough Ramor and link the lovely town of Virginia to the system.

This would provide two new circular routes: the larger taking in the Shannon, Grand Canal, new Inny-Erne system and the Shannon-Erne Waterway; the smaller taking in the Shannon, Grand and Royal. It would provide a perfect holiday for canal enthusiasts, with the added bonus of not having to retrace your steps midway through your trip.

### **Grand to Royal**

A link from the Grand to the Royal at Sallins, via Clane or Prosperous to Maynooth or Kilcock, would create yet another circular route (Kilbeggan to Maynooth) and a smaller Greater Dublin Ring Route through to the Liffey Basin. This would benefit everybody as it would create a new green corridor for canoeing, walking and other recreations.

### **Clare**

A lovely inner lake system, like that at Kilglass, could start at Scarriff, linking these lakes to the Shannon: O'Grady, Bridget, Kilgory, Doon Lough, Clonlea and Cullaunyeeda. This would bring the towns of Feakle, Callaghansmills and Kilkeshen into the net. From Lough Cullaunyeeda it may be possible to push on through to Quin and into the tidal Shannon below Clarecastle, a distance of less than ten miles.

### **On Derg and Ree**

Towns such as Whitegate, Lorrha, Carrigahorig and Woodford could easily be linked to Lough Derg as they are all situated on rivers that run into the lake. Similarly, on Lough Ree, the towns of Ballymahon on the Inny and Glassan, a few miles to the north of Athlone, could be linked in this way.



## The west

A very scenic route could start at Boyle and follow the river Boyle west to Lough Gara and on via the Lung River to Ballaghadereen and perhaps Ballyhaunis, harnessing many of the small lakes between. From Lough Caheer at Ballyhaunis, a route to the north-west would follow the river Moy through Island Lake and Mannin Lake on through Kiltimagh into Foxford. That could link up with Lough Cullin and Lough Conn which, because of its size, would bring several more towns, including Crossmolina, on to the system.

South from Foxford, linking up with the Manulla River should make it possible to work a channel to Lough Carra and into Lough Mask. The river Robe connects Ballinrobe to Lough Mask from a distance of about 2.5 miles: its source is only a few miles south-west of Ballyhaunis and it meanders past Claremorris before coming into Ballinrobe — more possibilities!

Less than three miles separate Lough Mask from the great Corrib Lake and once this is breached the Corrib in all her beauty is linked to the chain, bringing us to Galway. To link back to the Shannon, we could use the Clare river and link it to Lough Rea via Athenry, then south-east using the Kilcrow river, coming into the Shannon at Cloondavaun Bay just below Portumna, thus completing the circle with miles of beautiful waterways.

Let us take advantage of the present economic climate and embark on a sound investment for the country. Think of the number of jobs that would be created in deprived areas, both short term and long term, what with cottage industries springing up all over the areas to accommodate the influx of foreign visitors from all over the world.

