

# Inland Waterways News

## The Bann

### The Lower Bann: a great water highway

*Victor Hamill, Chairman RBLNA,  
with acknowledgements to Wallace Clarke*

Halfway along the north coast of Ireland lie the seaside resorts of Castlerock and Portstewart. Between them lies the tidal estuary of the River Bann, which enters the sea at the Barmouth. The river entrance is relatively safe for small boats but is not for the faint-hearted in strong northerly or northwesterly winds.



The river is famous for its salmon and the estuary is pretty, with sandhills on each side, containing fine golf courses and rich agricultural land. Seaton's Marina lies approximately three miles upstream on the east bank. Diesel and water are available, together with berthing and lift-out facilities and advice about the river. The public marina lies further upstream, also on the east bank, and has good basic facilities for visitors.

Five miles up lies the university town of Coleraine. St Patrick built a church here in the fifth century and the town is one of the leading plantation towns, and well worth a visit. Coleraine has a harbour with a 30-tonne crane, good quays and boat-storage facilities. Just above the harbour, headroom at the town's stone bridge is restricted to 13' at low water.

The river is tidal for two miles above Coleraine to the sea-lock at the Cutts, just upstream of the great earth fort at Mountsandel on the east bank, a site of archaeological importance that rises majestically out of its pine trees. There is a small jetty to enable visitors to tie alongside for short stays.

The lock will take boats up to 100' X 18'; the river will take boats drawing up to 4'. In the 32 miles up to L Neagh, the river rises 50' but if the massive floodgates are open more than 18" at the Cutts there is a 4' fall in the stretch of a mile above them. Great care is needed at this point in flood conditions.

Just above Loughan Island, on the east bank, lies the relatively new Drumaheagles Marina, run by Ballymoney Borough Council, which has camping and caravanning facilities. At Portna, near the town of Kilrea, 16 miles from Coleraine, there is a dry dock above the upper lock, which blocks the channel when in use. Fortunately this does not happen very often and is advertised in the press in advance. The locks at Portna lie on a short canal west of the river.

Portglenone is a further 7 miles upstream and boasts a new marina with a pub and shops within easy reach. The forest here has many riverside walks and the scenery is serene. The fishing here is arguably the finest in the whole length of the river.

Four miles upstream the voyager comes to Newferry, where there are facilities for tying up on both sides of the river before entry to Lough Beg (3 miles long by 1 across). Navigation is marked by perches and leads to Toome, at the entrance to Lough Neagh, which has a jetty

where it is possible to tie up and buy provisions.

Through the lock at Toome lies Lough Neagh, an inland sea 17 miles X 11 miles: the largest inland lough in the British Isles. Lough Neagh and its hinterland are strong in character and traditions. In fine weather the water becomes a blue mirror and at sunset the whole lough often resembles a sea of molten gold.

There is a newly refurbished marina at Ballyronan on the west bank. Other places of interest are Coney Island, Ardboe Battery, Kinnegoe Marina, Castle Bay (with its new community centre and restaurant) and Rams Island. It is possible to visit Antrim and to navigate the River Blackwater from Maghera.

Lough Neagh requires care in strong winds because the waves are short and steep. Sand dredging is an important commercial activity and there are many fishermen who earn a living catching pollan, a freshwater herring peculiar to Lough Neagh.

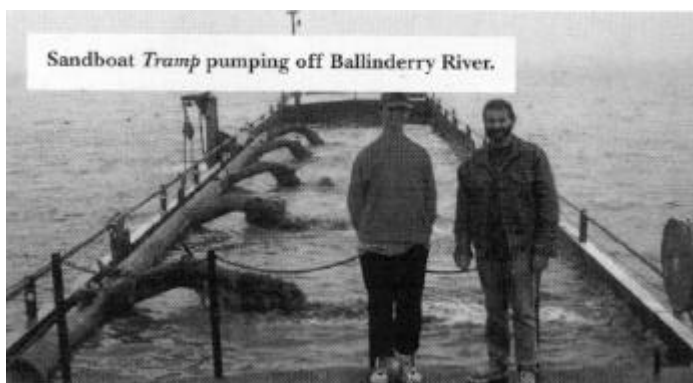
The prospect of reopening the Ulster Canal between Lough Neagh and Lough Erne, and on to the Shannon, is eagerly awaited. It will provide the missing link between these important waterways with all their tourist potential, which will in turn provide opportunities for further economic development.

## **The Upper Bann**

*Michael Savage*

The Upper Bann enters L Neagh about 1.25 miles south-east of Coney Island flat. The entrance is shallow and not properly marked or maintained. Entry should not be attempted without local knowledge. A quarter mile upstream is the site of the old Bann Ferry, which no longer operates. The jetties can be used for a short stop. The villages of Charlestown (Bannfoot, east bank) and Columbkille (west bank) can be visited by a 10-minute walk.

From the Bann Ferry the river meanders deep and wide through the open meadows of its flood plain, for 6 miles to the M1 motorway bridge. The airdraft at this bridge is 3.050m on the north soffit and 3.075 on the south, assuming a Lough Neagh level of 12.5m OD. A change of wind direction on L Neagh can cause the river to back up and reduce the airdraft.



Once through the bridge the river becomes more enclosed. Three miles south is Shillington Quay in the heart of Portadown, with jetty (only 0.6m depth) and slipway; there is another jetty, with the same depth, about half a mile upstream, behind a supermarket. The town, about 5 minutes walk, has all the usual facilities: refreshments, takeaways, garages etc. There are three bridges in Portadown centre but all are higher than the M1 bridge.

One mile upstream from Shillington is the Point of Whitecoat, where the Newry Canal and the river Cusher join the Upper Bann. The Bann is navigable for another half-mile beyond this point. The Newry Canal (see page 16) is navigable by dinghy from the Point to Moneypenny Lock, about 1 mile. The canal is very weedy in summer but has ample water until about 100m from the lock. It is well worth the effort to bank moor, and either walk the towpath or travel by dinghy to Moneypenny. The lock is in remarkable condition for its age.