

Inland Waterways News



Waterways Ireland has done a huge amount of work on the Barrow in recent years, clearing the channel, improving locks and bridges and building (very welcome) landing stages below the locks. The Lord Bagenal has built moorings at Leighlinbridge; the village won the 2001 Entente Florale competition. There are more hire firms on the river and on the Barrow Line. There has been a big increase in the numbers of private boats on the river, especially those based at Graiguenamanagh. And both the Barrow and the North Barrow Branch of IWAI are very active: the latter is reviving the North Barrow rally this year, based at Athy and Vicarstown.

But, compared with the Shannon, the Barrow is woefully underused. It is undoubtedly more challenging than the Shannon or Erne: we learned more about boating in a few weeks on the Barrow than in years on the Shannon. But it's perfectly practicable in a suitable boat (Carlow Bridge limits the height), and if you don't have such a boat, you can hire: the hire craft are well suited to the conditions. The river and its surroundings are gorgeous, and you can go further afield by hackney: we visited Kilkenny one day and took the kids quad-biking on another.

But don't just take my word for it: here's what some other recent visitors had to say.

Thomas Kehlrein

We are from California and spent a week on the Barrow at the end of April 2001 and it was the most enjoyable vacation we have ever taken. We hired a Barrowline boat from Vicarstown and made it all the way to Graiguenamanagh and back. It would take me hours and pages to tell you all the wonderful tales of that trip. Some highlights? First and foremost the people: at every stop we met the friendliest natives! The countryside: beautiful, and at 4mph we saw it all! The food: fabulous restaurants: The Bistro in Athy, Lord Bagenal in Leighlinbridge, Weeping 'Tai'ger in Carlow. Working the locks: that was a new one! And since it was only my wife and I, and never having piloted a 47' barge before, it was left to her to operate the locks! Our favorite spot: I think it was called Mountain river, in the middle of the forest, and at night with the engine off it sounded like a jungle outside, what must have been thousands of birds serenading us. The Guinness: so much better than in the USA. Will we do it again? In a heartbeat! Photos on <http://www.kehlrein.com/barrow.htm>.

Kieran Walsh (Setanta)

I spent a weekend on the Barrow on a narrowboat/barge from Valley Boats, Graiguenamanagh. It's been 20 years since I've been down that corner of the country in a boat. The sun shined on us all weekend: no rain, no grey skies. Only met 7 boats in 4 days between St Mullins and Bagenalstown. No lager louts on hire boats, no wet bikes, speedboats or lock queues. Only unspoilt scenery, unguarded weirs; even the crocodiles were nice. The Waterways Ireland crew were working at 3 different locations in that short distance, building jetties beside locks and dredging. The only problem we had was trying to shoot the outflow from a turbine outlet below the lock at Bagenalstown. This section is canal and has rocks on both banks. This needs to be sorted out as it severely interferes with the navigation.

If you have not been down that end of the Barrow you don't know what is one of the best-kept secrets around, especially since a lot of people may have been put off going there since the Waterways series was shown on TV a few years ago.

Leave your own boat alone for a weekend and give yourself a treat. Most people think this kind of experience can only be had abroad, at enormous expense.

Charly Neissner

Four of us, from New York City, rented a canal boat from Celtic Canal Cruisers on a one way trip from Tullamore to the Fenniscourt lock on the Barrow. [...] Almost missed the turn on the Grand as it heads down to the Barrow. Had a good time wandering around Monasterevan including a walk around Moore Abbey. Spent a good deal of time in Athy, again with no problems, except that there was no water available. Town Hall had cheap internet access so we caught up on email. Our first night on the Barrow had us mooring by the Rowing Club, in Carlow [...] a great place to provision for bakery, cheese and general gourmet food. Two pubs of note for the evening were Finnegans and the Barge.

Final night we moored at Bagenalstown and took a taxi back to Leighlinbridge for dinner and later Irish music at the Lord Bagenal. At Fenniscourt we had rented cars delivered to the lock and we continued for a week of driving.

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Six members of the Athy Community Barge Project were awarded the Level 2 Inland Waterways Helmsman's Certificate. John Carton, Bertie Kiernan, Patricia Keogh, Joe Ward, John Shaughnessy and John Horgan took part in a training programme organised by the Lough Ree Powerboat School. Senior Motorboat Instructor Mark Maguire devised a course to teach the IWA/ISA syllabus and to give the participants specialised tuition in the unique handling characteristics of their barge, in its intended area of operation: the Barrow Line of the Grand Canal.



Aiseiri 54M is a Dept of the Marine licenced passenger vessel with full bar facilities, ideal for parties and functions as well as hospitality, promotional and pleasure trips. Bookings and information: Athy Community Council 0507-38099.