



# Book reviews

## In Ireland's waterways

**Edward O'Regan.** Published by Currach Press, Blackrock, Co Dublin. ISBN: 1-85607-9155. €12.99. ST£9.50.

To say that Ireland has changed rapidly and dramatically over the past few decades is a cliché. But it's also true, and this book demonstrates just how great the changes have been.

'Tent and Canoe in Irish Waters' is about journeys made on the Irish inland waterways between 1939 and 1949 by Edward O'Regan. It was written some time later and then the typescript lay unpublished for many years. The result is a travel book that not only takes us on journeys along rivers, lakes and canals but also takes us on a journey back in time. We are visiting a foreign country --- an Ireland that no longer exists.

Of course, the rivers lakes and canals are still there and exploring them is still an adventure. In the 1980s I took my own tent and canoe on many of the same waterways that Edward O

Regan had paddled 40 years previously. I didn't know about his explorations and I thought I was a pioneer.

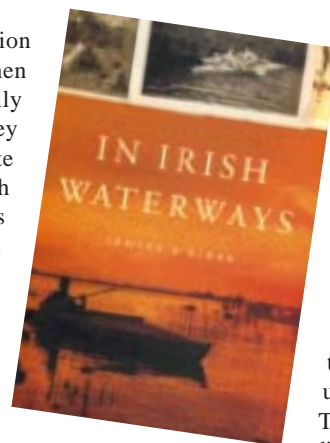
I used a slightly different craft, an open Canadian style canoe made of fibreglass. I had abruptly terminated my relationship with kayaks some years previously after I borrowed one that was too small and got jammed in it going down a weir on the River Barrow upside down. I met many of the same problems as Edward O'Regan --- bad weather, bullocks that trampled tents and wet provisions. But I also experienced the same sense of natural beauty, freedom and unexpected wilderness.

Nowadays a lot more people, Irish people and foreigners, are exploring our inland waters. Some of them are even using canoes to do so. They know the satisfaction of travelling by their own muscle power. They know

the extra dimension that's revealed when you travel virtually soundlessly. They know the intimate relationship with nature that develops when you're low in the water in a frail craft. It's really quite different to looking at the river from the fly bridge of a twin screw diesel yacht.

When you start reading this book you react first of all to everything that has changed in this country in sixty years. But, if you love rivers and canals, you will end up being impressed by what is still the same. By the timeless and unchanging beauty of our waterscapes and how, even today, they can be channels leading to unspoiled wilderness.

Ireland is not as unhurried, not



as friendly, not as safe as it once was. Many things have changed. Hunting badgers with a bow and arrow is not only illegal today, it's also unacceptable. Things were different then.

But the waterways still have the essential magic that is captured in this book. It will sit on that short section of my book shelves that's devoted to classic writing about the joys of inland boating. ■

*Dick Warner is a member of the Kildare branch of the IWAI, and a writer, broadcaster and environmentalist.*

## Dancing on the waves

**John Mulligan.** Published by Collins, Cork. ISBN: 1-90346-4730. €15.

When I picked up this book I was looking forward to revisiting the wonderfully wild country that the Grand Canal passes through on its journey from Grand Canal Basin in Dublin to Shannon Harbour in Co Offaly.

My memories of travelling on the Grand Canal are of vast stretches of bogland with little or no sign of human habitation between the many locks. There was frequently a low-flying heron that would glide ahead of the boat, showing the way. The tranquillity and beauty of this wild place is, in many spots, inaccessible by any road. There are lots of rare flowers, and animals must have a particular haven here, away from man the predator.

There are, of course, the towns and villages along the route, the bridges, the roads, the cars, the lock-keepers cottages.

It is these that John Mulligan focuses his attention on as he walks the banks of the canal's full 84 miles.

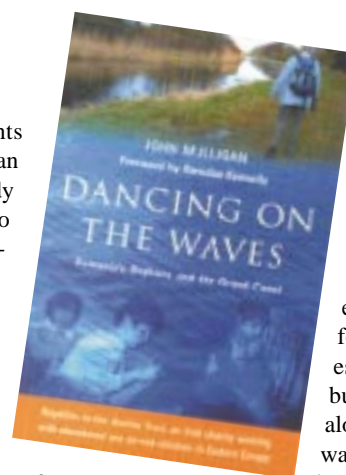
In his introduction he invites us to 'Come for a walk with me along the canal and I will show you its treasures, and tell you a story as we go.' But we hear only of bricks and mortar, the architecture of the bridges, abandoned cottages, graffiti, grave stones, barking dogs, and fishermen, (but not the fish).

The story he tells us along the way is a diary of trips the author has made to Romania's orphanages.

These accounts occasionally give us an insight into the tragedy of the children who live in appalling conditions.

But more often the narrative is taken up with the explanation of a faulty sewerage system or the fire risk of the wiring. We also hear of the political meetings and wranglings with the Romanian authorities to effect change in the system.

The book swings, somewhat disjointedly, between the walking diary and the Romanian diary. I was disappointed with the style of story-telling here, but if you



enjoy a factual read, then perhaps you will enjoy reading this book. An excellent book for those interested in the built heritage along our waterways, but not a book for the nature lover.

All royalties go to the Aurelia Trust, an Irish non-government voluntary organisation working in Central and Eastern Europe. ■

*Maeve Kelly is a waterways lover and user, and an experienced hill-walker.*