



the
way to
go



A guide to the history and wildlife of the Connswater, Loop and Knock rivers

Connswater Community Greenway

Trails Guide

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It's your **Greenway**

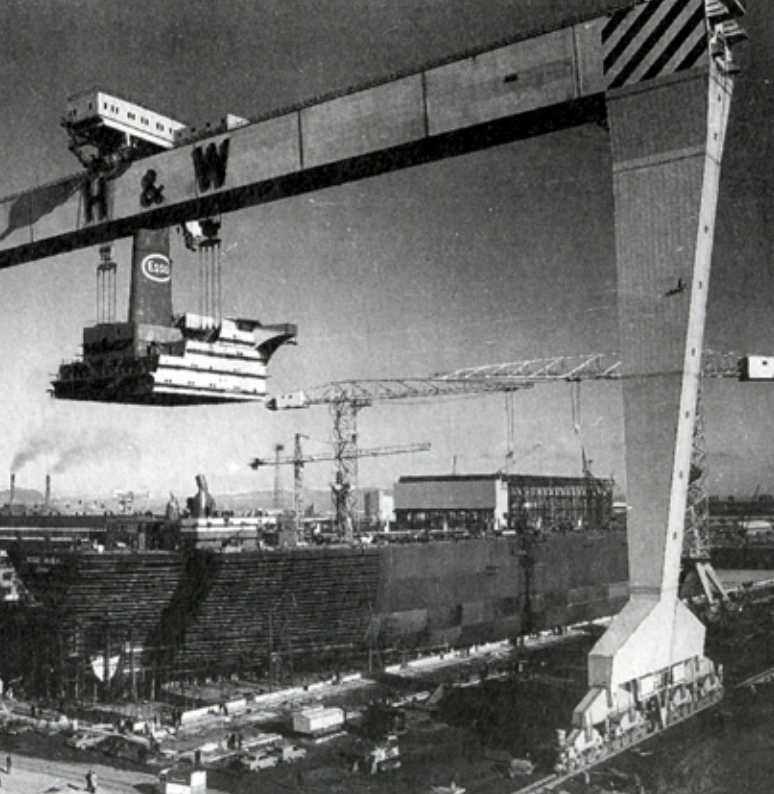
Imagine a network of public pathways running through the heart of east Belfast, following its rivers, revealing this area's rich heritage and uncovering its abundant natural history. Imagine walking these pathways with your friends, family, students, visitors and tourists. Imagine these landscapes being protected and cared for, so that present and future generations can explore and enjoy them.

This vision is becoming a reality for the people of Belfast. The Connswater Community Greenway is a 9km linear park that follows the route of east Belfast's three primary rivers: the Connswater River, from Victoria Park to Beersbridge Road; the Knock River as far as the Sandown Road; and, the Loop River to the Cregagh Glen in the Castereagh Hills.

Construction of the Connswater Community Greenway will commence in late 2010 and is scheduled for completion in 2013. This wonderful resource will create attractive, safe and accessible parkland that everyone will be able to use and enjoy for leisure, recreation and community events and activities.

And the **good** news is . . .

Many parts of the Connswater Community Greenway are already accessible and ready for you to explore. The map in this booklet will help you do just that. It follows the route of the three rivers, and highlights the fascinating features you'll find along the way. So put on a pair of comfortable walking shoes, bring this map and a bottle of water, and start enjoying the trails!



An industrial giant

For many years Belfast led the world in manufacturing and technology. Our ships transported goods and people across the globe; our ropes secured the navies of the world and our linen graced many a table. At the heart of this mighty giant was east Belfast, the industrial powerhouse of the city.

Until the eighteenth century, the land that now forms east Belfast was heavily wooded, but during the 1700s woodland gradually gave way to industrial development. This process was helped by the rivers which run through the area, as well as its proximity to the growing town of Belfast. In time, workers moved into the streets of terraced houses built by factory owners and many wealthy citizens built large villas in the surrounding parkland. However, it was not until 1892, when the area was incorporated within the city boundary, that all of its residents became citizens of Belfast.

Belfast grew and prospered throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, largely through the endeavours of its thriving industrial heartland in the east. The ropeworks, factories, mills and shipyards of east Belfast employed thousands of workers, the Harland & Wolff shipyard alone built over 2000 ships, including RMS Titanic.

Much of this industrial might evolved along the Connswater River and evidence of it can still be seen to this day. The fold-out map will show you where to look, and tell you some of east Belfast's story.

Art at its heart

East Belfast has a rich heritage of culture and art. One of Belfast's most famous literary sons, the author C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) was born in Strandtown and our very own Van Morrison continues to leave an indelible mark on the sphere of popular music. Other contemporary names such as Marie Jones (playwright), Peter Wilson (aka Duke Special, musician), James Ellis (actor), Peter Corry (tenor) and Glenn Patterson (author) reveal how arts and creativity continue to flourish among the people of east Belfast.





Connswater Community Greenway

At £32.5 million, the Connswater Community Greenway represents a massive investment in east Belfast. It will create a superb facility for more than 40,000 local residents and provide vision, resources and a sense of pride and identity for all communities in this part of the city.

What's more, from its concept to its implementation, the Connswater Community Greenway is a local community project. It has been developed and managed by the East Belfast Partnership, an organisation comprising representatives from Belfast and Castlereagh Councils, community sector organisations, statutory sector agencies and private sector businesses. The project is funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Belfast City Council and the Department for Social Development.

The vision is to develop a safe, accessible, sustainable greenway which is an inspirational living landmark that improves the quality of life for the people of east Belfast, now and for future generations.

For you, for me, for everyone

The Connswater Community Greenway will provide the people of east Belfast with increased access to open parks and green spaces. It will deliver an improved urban environment for all, with more pedestrian and cycle routes into and out of the city. It will create linkages between communities and help local people to adopt healthier lifestyles. It will act as a key tourist attraction, drawing thousands of visitors into east Belfast.

And there's more. In effect, the Connswater Community Greenway is an outdoor classroom - a place where people of all ages can learn about the environment and about the unique social, industrial and cultural heritage of east Belfast

So, Connswater Community Greenway, really is for you, for me, for everyone!

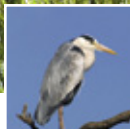
Connswater

As you follow the trail along the Connswater River you'll discover more about the fascinating history of this ancient waterway.

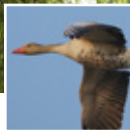
River Trail

At various points marked on the map you'll learn about the industries and activities that flourished here and become acquainted with famous east Belfast folk whose roots are steeped in this region.

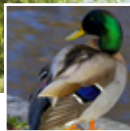
Heron



Greylag goose



Mallard



Black headed gull



Redshank



Victoria Park

On 15 September 1906 Victoria Park opened to the public. It replaced an earlier pleasure park on Dargan Island, now Queen's Island. Victoria Park features a lake, originally used for boating, with two small wooded islands which offer sanctuary for nesting swans and ducks. The park once had an Edwardian outdoor swimming pool which was in use until the 1970s.

Today Victoria Park is designated as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). Birdlife is abundant in the park, particularly in the winter months. Species found in the park include greylag geese, blackheaded and herring gull, heron, mute swan, mallard, tufted duck, and pied and grey wagtail. The mudflats surrounding the park are rich in oysters, cockles, snails and worms, such as lugworms and ragworms. These provide a vital food source for populations of wintering waders and wildfowl, including oyster catchers, terns and redshank.

Harland & Wolff

The names Edward Harland and Gustav Wolff are inextricably linked with Belfast's ship building industry. Their partnership in 1861 laid the foundations for what was to become one of the greatest shipyards in the world. The yard built over 70 vessels for the White Star Line, the most famous of which was the trio of Olympic-class vessels, Titanic, Olympic and Britannic, designed and built at Harland & Wolff from 1908 to 1914.

Standing sentinel over the city are two towering yellow cranes of Harland & Wolff's Queen's Island shipyard. Known locally as Samson (1974) and Goliath (1969), they measure 106 metres and 96 metres tall respectively. Although fully operational, they are now protected as historic monuments.

The Oval

The Oval Stadium is home to Glentoran Football Club, one of the oldest and most famous teams in Ireland. Founded in 1882, the team moved to the Oval in 1892. The club's colours are green, red and black and a cockerel features in the centre of its badge, hence the fans' nickname, "The Cock 'n' Hens", which rhymes with "The Glens".

Many Glentoran players have gone on to play for teams in England and Scotland. These include Danny Blanchflower, Peter Doherty, Bertie Peacock, Billy Bingham, Jimmy McIlroy, Terry Conroy, Tommy Jackson and Tommy Cassidy, and more recently, Glen Little, Stuart Elliott, Andy Kirk and Andy Smith.

The Connswater River

The Connswater wasn't always the sleepy waterway it appears today. Four hundred years ago, it was a wide, deep river. Folklore suggests that smugglers led by Conn O'Neill, the last of the Ulster chieftains, transported stolen wine along it and held riotous parties at his hilltop stronghold, Grey Castle. This gave rise to the place name, Castlereagh.

In the mid and late 1800s, the Connswater River was the driving force behind east Belfast's industrial growth. Barges laden with raw materials and goods travelled its length and its waters powered many cotton and flax mills, such as the Owen O'Cork Mill at Beersbridge Road.

Glentoran playing at the Oval, 1937



Connswater **Bridge**

The first bridge over the Connswater, the New Bridge, was built in 1758, following the tragic death of Richard McCleery. He was a master baker who drowned while using the stepping stones that preceded the bridge. The new road built at this time later became known as the Newtownards Road. The present bridge was widened in 1890. It stands near the area known as Hollywood Arches, named after the massive stone arches that used to carry the County Down Railway across the junction of the Newtownards and Hollywood Roads. At its peak in the early 1900s, the line carried more than one and a half million passengers into Belfast every year. The arches remained in use for exactly 100 years, from 1850 until they were demolished in 1950. The old Belfast to Comber railway line now forms the Comber Greenway. This eleven kilometre traffic-free pathway provides a tranquil green corridor with views along the route of Stormont Buildings and Scrabo Tower.

Connswater **Distillery**

For over 40 years this 12 acre site was home to one of the largest distilleries in the world. The Irish Distillery Ltd. at Connswater was founded in 1886 and produced two million gallons of whiskey per year at its peak. River barges, called lighters, were used to bring in barley and other raw materials for the production of whiskey. The lighters then carried the barrels of whiskey out to ships anchored in Belfast Lough.

Much of this distillery's whiskey was exported to the USA, but the introduction of prohibition (a ban of alcohol in some American states) in 1919 caused a massive drop in sales. The company was acquired in the early 1920s by Distillers Co. Ltd of Scotland but was closed by the end of the decade.

C.S. Lewis & The Searcher

Clive Staples Lewis (1898–1963), more usually known as C. S. Lewis, was an Irish author and scholar. Although best known today for his fictional children's series 'The Chronicles of Narnia', he is respected in academic circles for his work on medieval literature, Christian apologetics and literary criticism. His family home from 1905 until 1930, 'Little Lea', is located on the Circular Road on the outskirts of east Belfast.

The life-size statue 'The Searcher', situated outside Hollywood Arches Library, depicts C. S. Lewis as Narnia narrator Digory Kirke stepping into a wardrobe - no doubt in search of his mystical land. Sculptor Ross Wilson unveiled the bronze statue in 1998 - the centenary of Lewis' birth.



Connswater River photographed from the ropeworks chimney, 1895



Belfast **Ropeworks**

In the 1870s, the Harland & Wolff shipyard required a large and reliable source of rope. In 1873, Edward Harland helped to set up the Belfast Ropework Company. Barges on the Connswater River transported raw materials to the Ropeworks and took the finished rope back to the shipyard on Queen's Island. The Belfast Ropeworks Company was an important industrial success for Belfast and became the world's largest manufacturer of rope and twine during the early 20th century. One third of the ropes (a quarter of a million tonnes) required by the war office during the Second World War were made at the Belfast Ropeworks. The Ropeworks continued to trade until 1983.



Bloomfield **Stone Cottages**

There are now only four of these stone cottages left from the original row of ten. Known as Bloomfield Terrace, the cottages were most likely built to house mill workers in the local area. They are built from local Scrabo stone and feature a front dormer, which would have been an unusual feature for houses in Belfast at this time. This area was once known as the village of New Bridge.



Owen O'Cork Mill

Now an auction house, office space, and workshop for local artists, Owen O'Cork Mill was part of the linen tradition of east Belfast. It was built as a corn mill by the De Beers, a Huguenot family who came to Belfast from Europe.

In the mid-1800s it became an important linen mill, as the opening of the Lagan Canal allowed raw materials like flax to be brought by barge down to Belfast and up the Connswater River to the mill. One of the mill's original weighbridges has been relocated to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra.





Elmgrove Primary School

Elmgrove Primary School first opened its doors in 1893, when over 30 children were transferred from the old infant school in Benthams Road. This listed building, noted for its beautiful brickwork, is still in use as a primary school. Elmgrove Primary School has a number of famous past pupils.

Van Morrison

'Van the Man', as he is affectionately known in Northern Ireland, was born August 31, 1945. He attended Elmgrove Primary School until 1956, then Orangefield Secondary School for Boys. His journeys through east Belfast often feature in his work, but it is the tree-lined Cyprus Avenue which Van has turned into the most famous street in east Belfast, thanks to the track of the same name. Van's lyrics are peppered with references to his east Belfast roots: 'On Hyndford Street' immortalises his childhood home; Orangefield is captured in the song 'Avalon Sunset' and Saint Donard's Church of Ireland and the Connswater River are also mentioned in his songs.



Billy Bingham, MBE

William Laurence "Billy" Bingham (Laurie to his school friends) was born and raised in the Bloomfield area of east Belfast. In 1945 he captained Elmgrove's football team, to an Ulster Schools Cup victory. Bingham was 19 when he was called up for his first Northern Ireland cap. He played 56 out of a possible 61 international games before moving into coaching. He was awarded an MBE for services to football in 1981.



Conn O'Neill Bridge

The O'Neill's were for one thousand years great warriors in Ulster and Conn O'Neill was the last of these great O'Neill chieftains. Conn was something of a rogue and liked to hold great parties at his stronghold, Grey Castle, also named "The Eagle's Nest" due to its situation on the Castlereagh hills. Conn O'Neill gave his name to the Connswater River, Connswater Bridge and the Conn O'Neill Bridge. This bridge, located in a green bower known as 'the Hollow', is recorded as being built in the late 1800s however local legend would suggest that Conn and his clansmen used it to travel from the Grey Castle to Belfast town in the early 17th century.



The Loop River was once the focus of intense industrial activity, but today this sleepy, meandering waterway is a natural habitat for many native plants and birds including reed beds, kingfishers and cranes.

River Trail

As you follow the Loop River Trail, you will discover more about it's fascinating social, industrial and natural history.

Beersbridge National School



Grove Flax Spinning Mill

The outbreak of the American Civil War meant that raw materials could no longer be transported to England. While this crippled the cotton industry of Lancashire, it led to a boom in cotton manufacture in Belfast throughout the mid-1800s. Belfast's population grew from 20,000 in 1801 to 345,000 in 1901 and numerous mills were built, including the Grove Mill in east Belfast. As the population grew, more schools were needed. Beersbridge National School, which opened in 1864, was attached to the Grove Mill. Some of its pupils were part time who attended classes either in the morning or afternoon, depending on when they were working in the mill.

Aunt Sandra's Candy Factory

Aunt Sandra's Candy Factory's pink building at 60 Castlereagh Road is hard to miss. This local institution produces a wonderful selection of chocolates, fudges and boiled sweets made from 100-year-old recipes, using authentic 1950s equipment. The shop's decor brings to mind the sweet emporiums of the past. At the back of the shop is the factory where most of the candy is made. Tours can be booked to view candy-making up close and to learn about the history of the factory itself.





Loop Bridge Mill

The Loop Bridge Mill was developed from the 1850s as a flax spinning mill and weaving factory by Moreland Cowan and Co. The nearby Loop River fed a mill dam which provided the water supply for the mill. In the 1890s ownership passed to the printing company, McCaw Stevenson & Orr Ltd. They renamed the premises Linenhall Works and carried on business there for the next 95 years, before rebranding their company as MSO printers and relocating to different premises on the Castlereagh Road.



Cregagh Road 'Homes for Heroes'

Many of the houses on the Cregagh Road were built in the 1920s for First World War veterans. Before leaving for France the soldiers were promised they would be given homes with gardens and bathrooms. The street names in this area signify battles and battlefields from the Great War: Somme Drive, Albert Drive, Hamel Drive, Bapaume Avenue, Picardy Avenue and Thiepval Avenue. At the junction of Bapaume and Thiepval Avenues is the Cregagh War Memorial, erected in memory of those who died from the Cregagh and Castlereagh areas.



George Best, Northern Ireland versus England, 1965

George Best

George Best is probably east Belfast's most famous sporting son. Born and raised in the Cregagh Estate, his talent was spotted by Manchester United. Best established himself as a footballing colossus, inspiring United to many honours including the European Cup in 1968. He went on to play almost five hundred games for Manchester United, before retiring at the age of only 28. He was capped 37 times and scored 9 goals for Northern Ireland. He died aged 59 in November 2005, and his funeral brought Belfast to a standstill. A large mural depicting George Best in his prime overlooks the Cregagh playing fields where he first kicked a ball.





Schomberg House & Orange Order

The headquarters of the Orange Order is at Schomberg House on the Cregagh Road. The Orange Order is an institution which remembers and celebrates the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, when the Protestant King William III defeated the Catholic King James II in Ireland, and resulted in the beginnings of constitutional democracy in the United Kingdom. The battles which took place in Ireland were part of a wider European conflict. The Orange Order has around 100,000 members worldwide with approximately 1200 lodges in Ireland. Schomberg House has a museum that is open to the public. It includes artefacts which belonged to William of Orange, as well as Orange Order exhibits from around the world.



Cregagh Glen

This wooded glen is all that remains of a forest that once covered 1000 acres.. There are several waterfalls on the river, and the glen contains some mature mixed woodland of sycamore, beech, Scots pine and ash. The story is told of a local woodsman, James Witherspoon, who had a small cabin in the woods. In 1803, following a failed uprising, he hid Thomas Russell, the leader of the United Irishmen, in his house and would not give him up, even with a £1500 reward on his head. Russell was later hanged at Downpatrick Gaol.



Lisnabreeny Former American Military Cemetery

This site was used as a burial ground for 148 American servicemen who died in Northern Ireland during the Second World War, mostly from road accidents and natural causes. The cemetery was closed when the bodies were exhumed and reburied in England and in the USA. A memorial plaque to those who died can be found at the site. Nearby is Lisnabreeny House, which in 1937 was donated to the National Trust. Used briefly as a youth hostel, the house became a US army headquarters. It fell into disrepair after the war but was reconstructed by Lagan College and opened in 1991 as Belfast's first integrated school.



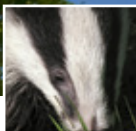
Lisnabreeny Rath

This well preserved rath, or ring fort, is thought to have been built in the early Christian period between 500 and 1000 AD. Rathes served as homesteads, providing protection for family and livestock from wild animals and warring neighbours. This fort would probably have had a simple dwelling within the protected area. The Lisnabreeny Rath gives the townland its name: in Irish 'Lis' means fort and 'breeny' means fairy, therefore 'Lisnabreeny' is said to mean "Fort of the fairy dwelling".

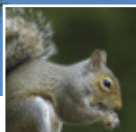
Knock River Trail



Badgers



Grey squirrels



Foxes



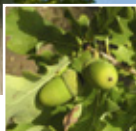
Kingfishers



Grey wagtail



Oak tree



Ash tree



Open parkland packed with wildlife; an ancient burial ground that's the last resting place of war-time heroes, and an immigrant family that helped shape this region and whose name lives on in stone.

You'll discover all this and more as you travel the Knock River Trail.

Orangefield Park

In 1938, Belfast Corporation (now Belfast City Council) bought part of the Orangefield estate from its then owners, the Blakiston-Houston family, to develop as a public park. Development plans were put on hold during World War II. The American Army was based here and trained in Orangefield Park from 1942-1944. A German Prisoner of War camp was set up nearby. Today the park's features include horticultural displays and a children's playground. Orangefield Park Playing Fields, located within the park, contain a bowling green, soccer pitches, tennis courts and a cycling and BMX track.

You don't have to be a nature-lover to enjoy Orangefield Park, but if you keep your eyes open, you'll find an amazing variety of wildlife thriving in this busy public space. Public events take place in Orangefield Park throughout the year, planting trees and wildflowers such as purple loosestrife, St. John's Wort, ragged robin, devil's-bit scabious, yellow rattle, bird's foot trefoil, red campion and ox-eye daisy.



Orangefield Velodrome

The Orangefield Velodrome track is a 396 metre outdoor banked oval track, the only surviving facility of its kind in Northern Ireland. It opened for competition in 1957 and was used extensively throughout the 1950s and 1960s when track cycling was tremendously popular. It continues to be used to this day, with the traditional Tuesday evening Track League running throughout the summer months. In 1981, it was re-named the Tommy Givan track, in honour of this former National Track Champion, one of the stalwarts of track cycling in Belfast.



The Classics

In British horse racing, 'The Classics' are a series of horse races run over the flat (i.e. without jumps). Each classic is run once each year and is restricted to horses that are three years old. There are five Classic races: 2000 Guineas, 1000 Guineas, The Oaks, The Derby and St Leger.

Trigo, Pommern, Donovan, Grand, Cameronian, Ladas, Orby and Cicero are all local streets named after horses that won a Classic Race.



Knock Burial Ground

Set on a commanding hilltop and enclosed by a high stone wall, Knock Burial Ground is one of the most ancient sites in Belfast. This land has been associated with religious use for over seven hundred years - its name derives from the Gaelic word 'cnoc' meaning 'hill'. The taxation of 1306 shows that the church at Knock was valued at 40 shillings.

The oldest gravestone dates from 1644. There are numerous 18th century gravestones, many of which are inscribed with the names of local townlands, such as Ballyhackamore, Ballymacarrett, Bloomfield, Castlereagh, Dunover, Gilnahirk, Knock, Mountpottinger and Tulycarnet. More recent headstones mark the last resting places of Privates J Corbett and Henry Best, killed in action at Dunkirk on 28 May 1940. Other noteworthy graves include that of William Nichol (1794-1840), a Belfast-born painter whose works were exhibited in the Ulster Museum.

In 1896, Knock Burial Ground became public property when the extension of Belfast's boundary brought it under the control of Belfast Corporation (now Belfast City Council).

Disclaimer

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