

# The Lagan Towpath

The river and canal system form the backbone of the Lagan Valley Regional Park. This low lying area of outstanding natural beauty is a mosaic of private and publicly owned land connected by the River Lagan, the Lagan Canal and the towpath. Full of history, wildlife and tranquillity, the Lagan Valley Regional Park offers the chance to explore and enjoy the countryside right on the doorstep of both Belfast and Lisburn.

The Lagan towpath, owned by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, can be accessed from numerous locations including Lockview Road car park and Union Locks. It provides 11 miles / 17km of continuous off-road public access linking the cities of Belfast and Lisburn.



**Shaw's Bridge;** is named after Captain John Shaw who built a wooden bridge at the site in 1655. The bridge was rebuilt from stone in 1698, but was swept away during flooding and the bridge that remains today was rebuilt in 1709. Shaw's Bridge provides another major access point for the towpath, offering parking facilities and canoe access to the river.



**Barnett Demesne and Malone House:** The former residence of William Barnett, Malone House, is open to the public. It includes both a restaurant, toilets and an art gallery. The demesne is now the property of Belfast City Council and offers a wide range of walks and activities.

**Mary Peter's Athletics Track;** provides a modern sports facility whilst wooded paths give access points to the towpath.

**Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park:** This is one of the most popular and attractive public parks in Belfast, renowned for its ornamental gardens and rose trials.

**Lock 6;** known as The Drum. Drum Bridge, a stone bridge dating to the early 19th century. Relics of the navigation are evident at the sixth lock where tie up bollards, to secure the barges, still remain. One of the original lock houses can be seen from the bridge in the grounds of Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park. Drum Bridge car park offers another access point to the towpath via a short riverside path. Across the road from this car park is St. Patrick's Church framed behind a topiary archway. The first record of a church on the site is 1306.



**Lock 7;** known as McQuiston's, still has the original arch bridge. Though the lock house lies in ruin, its sandstone remains can be seen from the towpath. Here the motorway blocks the old Canal system but the towpath continues underneath it through an underpass.

**Lock 8:** Continuing in a south-westerly direction the towpath passes the Seymour Hill Housing Estate above the river on the right, which can be accessed by the green footbridge, known as the Rambler's Bridge.

**McIlroy Park;** is a riverside park open to the public which can be accessed by two access points, one at the bridge, the other just past the eighth lock and island footbridge.

**Lock 11:** Following a bend in the river the towpath passes the eleventh lock, known locally as Scott's Lock. At this point three water courses run parallel with each other, the river, the Canal and the mill race. The water from the mill race was used to power the machinery in the mill and factory. The towpath continues between two housing estates, Millbrook, and Hillhall, where waterfowl add life and colour to the river.



**Lagan Valley Island:** The site of Lagan Valley Island used to be known as Vitriol Island and once housed the Island Spinning Mill. The modern facility is a mix of civic, business and arts facilities as well as a restaurant. From here access to toilet facilities and car parking are available and this is one of the main access points for the City of Lisburn.

**Lock 12;** known as Hanna's Lock, was restored as part of the Lagan Valley Island project. The towpath originally followed Canal Street to Union Bridge. However the path now veers northeast of the Island Civic Centre and on to a system of pedestrian crossings to rejoin the towpath on the other side of Union Bridge.

**Lock 13:** From here the lock, the weir and the sluice gate for the mill race were managed by the lock-keeper. It is often referred to as Becky Hogg's after the lady who worked the lock. The path that the mill race took is still evident in places between Hogg's Weir and Lisburn, adjacent to the towpath.

## Key to Map

	Lagan Canal		Rath or Motte
	Towpath		Ancient Site
	Running Trail		Church
	Footpath		Pedestrian Access
	Rivers		Bollard
	Lock		Suitable for Canoeists
	Bridge		Lock Keepers Cottage
	Footbridge		Food/toilet facilities
	Car Park		
	Weir		



**Lock 1;** known as Molly Ward's, after the 18th century tavern. It was run by Molly and her husband William, a lock-keeper. The site of their original cottage is now home to Stranmillis Boat Club.



**Lagan Meadows:** The next access point is beside the fishing stands, where disabled parking is available at the foot of Sharman Drive. Continuing upstream Lagan Meadows Local Nature Reserve lies to the right and includes walks through meadow and woodland over a 120 acre site.

**Lock 2;** known as Mickey Taylor's after one of the lock-keepers. Here the Canal splits from the river and a small bridge adjacent to the lock links the towpath to the island, the lockkeepers path and Moreland's Meadows.

**Belvoir Park Forest;** is on the opposite bank of the Lagan, linked to the towpath via a footbridge. Formerly the estate of Lord Deramore, it is now managed by the Forest Service. Belvoir offers a variety of woodland and riverside walks.

**Lock 3;** is known as McLeave's Lock. One of the few places on the Lagan Canal where the lock, the lock-keeper's house and stone bridge all remain intact. The fully restored house and lock are open to visitors.

**Clement Wilson Park:** The towpath here forms part of a circular access-for-all route that runs through Clement Wilson Park.

**Minnowburn:** On the opposite bank the Purdysburn river joins the Lagan. The National Trust owns and manages the adjacent lands comprising woodland, meadows and farmland with a network of paths and for those who venture to the top, there is an impressive view from Terrace Hill out across the valley and Malone House. The Giants Ring trail can also be accessed from Minnowburn, a circular route that includes one of Northern Ireland's most important Neolithic monuments.

**Gilchrist Bridge;** connects the towpath to the riverside path. Minnowburn and Edenderry Village can be reached over the bridge. Edenderry was once an important part of the local linen industry. The Mound on the opposite bank is beside a tranquil pocket of woodland rich in wildlife.

**Lock 4:** The Canal once again splits from the river forming an island. A footbridge leads to the picnic site where the Lagan races over Eel Weir.

**Lock 5:** The peaceful stretch of Canal between the fourth and fifth locks provide important wetland habitat for birds. In early spring and summer mute swan, dabchick, ducks and moorhen nest along the Canal.

**Ballyskeagh Bridge;** is a rather majestic sandstone bridge. From the road above can be seen another of the lock houses that still remain, giving a rare glimpse of the architectural style of Thomas Omer, the original engineer for this stretch of the Canal.

**Lock 9:** The large buildings of the old bottling plant, dominate the edge of the towpath where it meets Tullynacross Road. The Lambeg Bleach Works formerly occupied this site. Both chose the location because of the deep underground aquifer that supplies large amounts of clean fresh water. A bleach green was first established here between the river and Canal in 1626.

**Lock 10:** At Hilden the towpath approaches the tenth lock and crosses the road next to an old bridge. Just beyond the bridge is the site of one of the last working mills. It was originally known as Hilden Mill and was one of the largest in the area. Further upstream the mill quay can be seen with the tie up rings for the barges still in place.

**Moore's Bridge:** The Ravarnet River joins the Lagan just before the towpath reaches Moore's Bridge. From here it is a short walk to the Old Warren Nature Trail which can be accessed from the towpath or from the Old Warren Housing Estate.

**Union Locks:** The flight of four locks and a passing chamber were built to overcome a difference of 26ft (8m) in level between the Lagan and the channel that would have linked the Lagan Navigation with Lough Neagh. From here the river and the Canal separate.

This is the southern end of the Lagan Valley Regional Park. Although the river flows on, the Canal channel has been built on and now lies beneath the motorway. It re-appears near Moira to continue towards its final destination at Ellis' Gut, Lough Neagh.

