

This is an access for all circular route and is approximately 1.6km in length. The main route has excellent pathways; however some of the activities may require you to venture off the main trail to walk in woodland areas and meadows along uneven terrain. This is a fantastic opportunity to explore the Lock Keeper's Cottage, woodlands, meadows and minibeasts



## Facilities

The Lock Keeper's Visitors Centre has toilet facilities; there is also an adjacent cafe. There are no lunch rooms available at this site however there is ample space to picnic.

Guided tours can be pre-booked by contacting Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Tel: 028 90491922

Email: [admin@laganvalley.co.uk](mailto:admin@laganvalley.co.uk)

Website: [www.laganvalley.co.uk](http://www.laganvalley.co.uk)

## Equipment needed for the trail

- Outdoor shoes & clothing
- Trail booklets
- Teachers guide
- Clip boards / pens / crayons
- ID charts
- Measuring tapes
- Minibeast jars (optional)
- Tray for collecting minibeasts
- Camera (optional)



## Stop 1 – The Lock Keeper's Cottage and Lock no. 3

Lock keepers were employed to look after the locks and help the boats pass through them. They had to ensure that the locks were kept clean and operational and that the banks were kept clear. Most lock keepers had a weir to look after as well to help maintain the correct water level. If it was too high or too low the boats could not pass. Sometimes in severe weather conditions they had to stay up all night moving constantly between lock and weir to make sure the water levels were correct. Each lock keeper was paid a wage and given their own house with a small piece of land where they could grow their own food.

The two families associated with Lock No 3 were the McLeaves and the Kilpatricks. The McLeaves were lock keepers from 1861.

George Kilpatrick was the last lock keeper at Lock No 3. He came there in 1922 and raised 10 children in the house with his wife Sarah. His son Stanley lived in the house until 1993. On his death it went to his sister Dorothy who sold it to Castlereagh Borough Council. It is being refurbished in partnership with Lagan Valley Regional Park under the Laganscape Partnership Scheme.

### **The Canal and the Lagan Navigation**

The eighteenth century was a time of massive change for the whole of the Lagan Valley. New industry depended on fast movement of supplies and produce. Transport by road was frequently slow and inefficient. Rivers, lakes and seas were faster and more efficient where they were navigable. On rivers and canals one horse could pull a sixty foot long barge, or "lighter", as they were known in Ireland, thereby transporting tons of produce.

The lighters needed straight stretches of river with enough depth and adequate water level. Most of the River Lagan is like that between Belfast and Lisburn. Where the river bends or it is not deep enough, Thomas Omer, the first engineer, would make a new "cut" which would avoid the bend in the river, and locks and weirs which kept the water at the correct level.

In September 1763 the Belfast to Lisburn stretch was opened. "The Lord Hertford" was the first boat to travel along this stretch of the navigation and was greeted by bands and cheering crowds!

The three photos in the trail booklet are:

1. Bollard used to tie up the barges (lighters). The bollard is on the other side of the Red Bridge.
2. The balance beam used as leverage to open the lock and to counter balance the gate when the lock is empty and there is no water to support its weight.
3. Winding gear was used to open the sluice gates.



*Take the path that runs beside the Lock Keeper's Cottage. Follow it upstream until you reach a woodland area just before a metal bridge.*



## Stop 2 - The woodland

This is a great place to talk about woodland ecosystems, insects, birds and mammals. You can get the kids to look for minibeasts and record what they have found in the table inside the trail booklet.

There are a number of trees in this area that the kids can explore; beech, sycamore, ash, birch, maple, horse chestnut and lime.

They can use the ID charts to correctly identify the trees by their leaves (in summer) and their buds (in winter).

Other activities include: bark rubbings & leaf rubbings.



*From the top of the Bailey Bridge ask the pupils to look at the River Lagan and to complete their activity sheet.*



## Stop 3 - The River Lagan

The River Lagan is one of the major rivers in Northern Ireland which runs 40 miles (60 km) from the Slieve Croob Mountain in County Down to Belfast where it enters Belfast Lough.

This is a good spot to chat about freshwater ecosystems and what kind of wildlife lives in the river.



*Cross over a zebra crossing; follow the path until you enter a Clement Wilson park. When you enter the park you will see a trampled path to the right through the meadow. Take this path and follow it until you're deep into the meadow.*



## Stop 4 – In the Meadow

A meadow is an area of open grassland managed using traditional farming techniques which ensure that it maintains a large and interesting variety of plants and flowers and grasses.

Meadows are a fantastic place to chat about wildflowers and grassland ecosystems. Kids can look for meadow minibeasts such as grasshoppers, ladybirds, butterflies and beetles.

### Discovering the natural world activity

Ask the pupils to find their own quiet spot and to sit quietly and observe the natural world around them, making notes or drawing pictures to represent what they've found. After about 5 or 10 minutes ask them to form a circle so they can discuss their findings.



*When you have finished the meadow activities make your way back to the main path and continue along until the path reached a t-junction. You will see the early Christian rath on the right.*



## Stop 5 – The Hill fort or Rath

There are many of these “forts” throughout Ireland. They date back to early Christian times and beyond so many of them would be approximately 1500 years old. They were lived in from approximately 500 AD until about 1200 AD so these are the types of houses that many Irish people would have lived in at the time of the Vikings.

The forts were really farms and were usually built on raised land like the top of a drumlin. In many cases they are located close to sources of food and water which was obviously very important.

Rivers and the sea were both sources of food and communication because travel by water was much easier than travel by land.

The forts were built mainly to keep the animals safe but also to help defend the families themselves from other people. Usually three forts were built very close to each other so that if there was an attack or a cattle raid the people in the next one could be warned.

The two smaller round houses would have been outhouses for animals or places for important individuals to stay.

A larger round house would have been the main living space and would have had 2-3 families in it. It is closer to the centre so that in times of attack it is the most difficult house for the raiders to get to.

Buildings were built with materials that were close by. This included wood and wicker with the roofs covered with wheat or corn thatch. Some of the buildings had floors made of hardened earth and some were stone paved. Later on they were built out of stone again with wooden roofs.

The only source of heat would have been the fire which probably burnt wood. In our modern houses if we have an open fire, the chimney takes away most of the smoke because of the way it is constructed. In those houses the fire was in centre of the floor and the only chimney was a hole in the roof which meant that it probably got very smoky inside.

Hunting was a very important for gathering food for the family. The kind of food that might have been hunted would have been wild red deer, wild boar etc. They would also have had plenty of fish, particularly salmon from the rivers.



*Follow the path under the 'new' bridge. This will bring you to Shaw's Bridge car park. You will find a Lagan Valley Regional sign where the pupils can carry out their fact finding activity.*



## Stop 6 – Shaw's Bridge

**1655** - Captain John Shaw of Cromwell's army built a wooden bridge for military transportation during Cromwell's campaigns. It was built near one of the finest oak plantations in County Down so presumably this was the timber used.

**1698** - Thomas Burgh, Third Engineer of Fortifications, built a stone bridge there.

**1709** - Bridge destroyed by a flood and was rebuilt by Major James Wybault. This is the bridge that remains today.

The main uses of the bridge were military and civilian transportation. When the Lagan Canal was in use, the towpath crossed over the river at this point.



## Stop 7 - Sport along the Lagan

From the top of Shaw's Bridge you can see evidence of a canoe slalom, on the towpath you can see a bicycle lane, you may also see walkers, joggers, dog bins for the dog walkers.



*Cross over Shaw's bridge and follow the path that leads you back onto the towpath. Follow the path downstream this takes you back to the Lock Keeper's Cottage.*

### **Birds along the Lagan**

As you walk along the path back to the visitor centre, keep an eye out for river birds. Ask the kids to keep a tally of how many they see. This data can be used back at class for maths and graphs.