

Faite

A HERITAGE
GUIDE TO
O'BRIENS BRIDGE
Loop Walks

Fáilte

O'Briensbridge had been on the main water- road from Limerick to Dublin from 1799 until the last trading boat passed through in June 1929

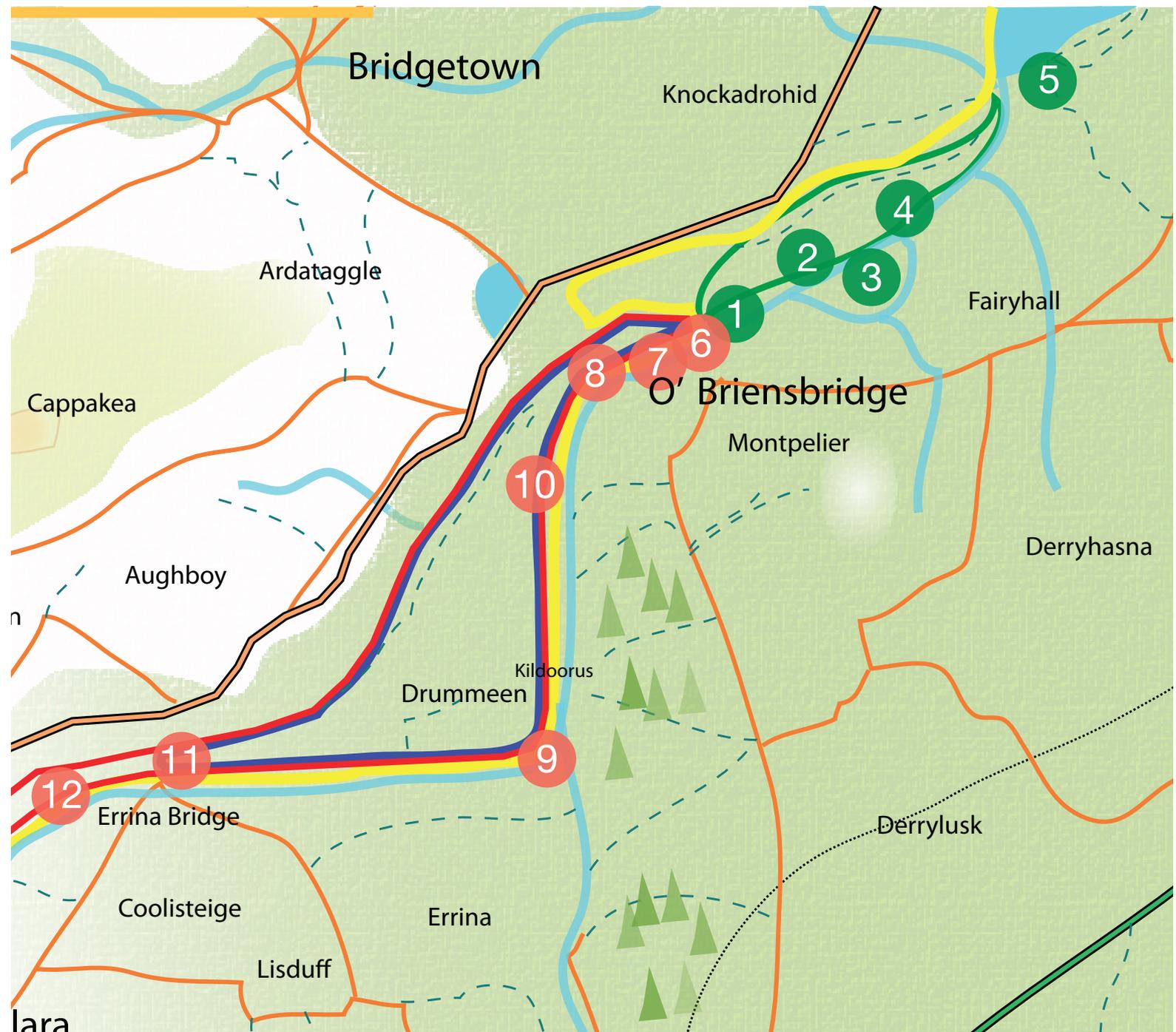
From the late eighteenth century it was the only significant port between the two ends of the Limerick Navigation, which used three canals and two river sections to bypass the shallows on the Lower Shannon.

The navigation dates from the days of the horse-drawn barges, and left an extraordinarily rich heritage of artefacts. It was one of Ireland's first steamer routes and part of the agricultural export chain that linked the west of Ireland to the British market.

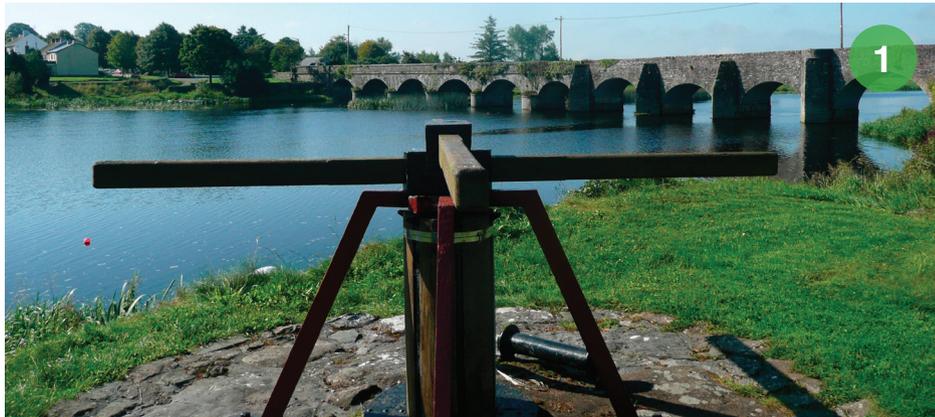
O'Briensbridge / Montpellier was at the centre of two major energy industries, the turf trade in the nineteenth century and the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme in the twentieth. However the Shannon Scheme ended the very significant role O'Briensbridge had in Ireland transport system.

The O'Briensbridge Community Group has now conserved and restored some of these very rich artefacts and has made them visible and accessible to locals and visitors alike with the provision of the O'Briensbridge National Loop Walks. They continue to promote the rich heritage of their village and surrounding areas.

Signed, *Michael Murtagh*,
Chairman.



The Green Loop



1. The **green loop** starts at the trail head at the village centre and runs up stream to the Hydro Dam. The first heritage artifact that you come across on the **Green Loop** is The Capstan. The capstan was used as a device to haul the barges up through the navigation arch in high waters. It is said that the villagers would assist in helping the barge owners too haul the barges up through the navigation arc in flood conditions.

2. An Old Anchor was found just out from the Capstan recently which could suggest that this anchor was part of this system. This is presently under investigation and the anchor which is eighteen century because of a wooden stocks presently being preserved and hopefully can be put on show at a later date.



For further information on this important artifact visit www.irishwaterwayshistory.ie

3. As you walk further upstream on the **green Loop** towards the Hydro Dam if you look to your right you will see Innislosky Island which means The Burnt Island, on closer inspection the ruins of an Old Church is clearly visible. This is a twelfth century Romanesque Oratory and is very old and historic church.



4. Also on the **green loop** as you walk upstream you will come across a beautiful decorative cast iron bridge. This bridge was restored by The O'Briensbridge Community Group with help from the E.S.B. Also on this section you will find an old water milestone which gives direction to Killaloe and Limerick.



5. At the top end of the **green loop** stands the *E.S.B Hydro Dam* which was built in the twenties as part of The Shannon Scheme. The dam holds back the mighty *Lough Derg* and diverts two thirds of the Old Shannon down the Tail Race to feed Ardnacrusha Power Station. The Shannon Scheme powered Ireland into the future. It was the first major project undertaken by the new Free State. The hydro dam today has international status.

The Red & Blue Loop



6. The **red loop** and **blue loop** run from the trail head downstream and as you walk down river on your right you will find the Heritage Garden developed by The O'Briensbridge Community and also an Old Mill Wall and Navigation Wall. The Old Mill Wall is all that remains of a five storey corn mill that was built by Hood and Boyd of Glasgow in the 1830's which gave employment to about 100 men. The famine indirectly caused it closure.



7. As you walk further downstream you will meet the first of seven very quaint and beautiful little humpback bridges all of which were restored by The Community Group. The lower wall on the river side of these little bridges was to accommodate the barge ropes to the horses tackle.



8. If you look to your left across to the other side of the river you will see acres of low lying land which once was Mc Nabs Bog which played a major role in providing energy in the nineteenth century. The first steam engine in Limerick City which was located at the Distillery was powered with turf from Montpellier. The turf was taken by horse drawn barges down the Errina Canal to Limerick City. At one stage up to 400 men were employed at the bog.



9. At the mouth of the Errina Canal, the walkway leaves the banks of the Shannon and runs along the canal towards the village of Clonlara. Along the Errina you could allow your mind to wonder back to the times when this was a traffic route, when lords and ladies traveled along here and the people who were leaving Ireland for good during famine times to find a new life or indeed the chained convicts on their way to the prison ships. Limerick historian Kevin Hannon described it as "the canal of tears."

Daniel O' Connell is said to have traveled to Westminster this way and the route was plied by the intriguing Non such. Charles Wye Williams 80 ft horse drawn passenger boat with lifted bow and stern sections to suit shorter locks.



10. This is another of the old artifacts found along the red and blue Loops, a water milestone. These water stones were responsible for giving distances and direction to both Limerick and Killaloe.



11. Having reached Errina Bridge which is a beautiful heritage stone bridge, one then has a choice of returning along the blue loop to O'Briensbridge by using the Headrace Canal which will also take the walker back to the Hydro Dam at the top of the green loop.



12. Having left Errina Bridge and heading towards Clonlara village and the end of the red loop you will reach Errina Lock said to be the only triple lock in Ireland. You can stand and admire the excellent stone work. The amazing thing is that all the locks on the Errina Canal system are in perfect condition and prompts the question why is this very historical navigation route never restored?



For more information visit www.obriensbridge.com and www.irishwaterwayshistory.ie

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O' Briensbridge is situated on the Lower Shannon River, and takes its name after the Bridge crossing the river at this point. The first bridge was built in 1506 by Turlogh O' Brien , First Earl of Thomand, who possessed a manor at the end of the Bridge at the Clare Side, and by his brother, the Bishop of Killaloe. They were descendents of Brian Boru, who was killed at the Clontarf in 1014.

The first bridge was a wooden structure. During the war between the provincial king, Gearoid Mor, the Great Earl of Kildare, burnt down the bridge 1510. The O' Briens now realized the weakness of undefended wooden bridges and replaced the structure with a "Great Bridge". Castles of Marble were built on each side of the bridge with walls 12 ft thick and well defended. Each was built in the water a short distance from the land and was

connected by a massive wooden bridge of seven arches and height of 15 ft. above water.

In 1537 Conor O'Brien and his brother Murrough, sons of Thurlough, who owned the land at both the Clare and Limerick side of O'Briensbridge sided with Silken Thomas in his rebellion against King Henry VIII and The Lord Deputy Leonard Gray, who made an attack on the Bridge. The battle lasted for several days ending with destruction of the "The Great Bridge". A stone bridge with twelve arches replaced the bridges.