

Corbally - Trip up the Line - Oct 2009

02 November 2009

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Commercial Era

In their book, *Civil Engineering Ireland*, Ronald C Cox and Michael H Gould state the branch to Naas was originally known as the Kildare Line and was acquired by the Grand Canal Company in 1808 from the bankrupt County of Kildare Canal Company. In 1811 the GCC extended the line a further 8 kilometres to Corbally. Its main traffic during the commercial era is reputed to have been malting barley for Reeves' mill at Athgarvan, two miles to the west of Corbally Harbour. The culvert stopping navigation along the Corbally Line, was created in 1954 as part of the old main Limerick road and the Naas Line was closed to navigation in 1961.

Recreational Use

The Naas Line was reopened to navigation in 1987 with a Rally and Festival inaugurated by Padraig Flynn, Minister of the Environment. Peter Hanna, President of the IWAI and representatives of the NUDC, KCC, AnCo, CIE and the Commisioners of Public Works were all there to celebrate.

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In August 2005, the Heritage Council in its document "Integrating Policies for Ireland's Inland Waterways" wrote about the Grand Canal, Naas Branch extension to Corbally, as follows: "It is well recognised that the short Naas Branch is under-used by boats. This is partly due to the need to progress through a flight of five locks in a distance of 4km to reach Naas Harbour, and also to the absence of security at the harbour itself. A culverted road crossing on the outskirts of Naas prevents access to a very attractive 8km lock-free stretch of rural waterway to the harbour at Corbally.

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The bypass has now taken much of the traffic away from the old main road; if the culvert was replaced and this stretch opened up it would make the Naas Branch a much more attractive option to visit. The extension is kept in water because it is a water supply channel and a rich water-based flora and fauna has become established. The environmental impact of restoring the waterway would need to be sensitively assessed but it would be wrong to rule out the re-opening to navigation which would in turn create its own ecology.

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The condition of the line between Naas Harbour and the main road, which is full of litter and rubbish, is due in no small degree to the fact that it is disused. There are some canal buildings at Corbally Harbour which could be restored. However, restoring the navigation would have a considerable environmental impact and this would need to be carefully assessed."

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More recently, in its Keep Ireland Open submission of July 2009, Kildare County Council submits that the towpaths on the Corbally Line and the Blackwood Feeder be restored for cycling and walking. There is now a well maintained and well used path for cyclists and walkers, but this ends at the culvert.

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Eamon O Cuiv announced in the Dail Jun 17th 2009 that "It is intended, subject to availability of resources, to carry out feasibility studies and preliminary designs in relation to the Longford Branch, the Kilbeggan Branch and the Corbally Extension, along with"

We all had a positive experience navigating the Naas Line in Oct 2009, because the canal had been dredged and the lock gates had been recently cleaned, allowing the old canal boats to squeeze through the locks. The Kildare Branch of the IWAI are campaigning to have the line opened to navigation all the way, and in our trip we found this to be a lovely stretch of canal, as you can see from the photographs. When navigating in medium sized barges, as far as the culvert, there was good water depth. A few days later others went all the way to Corbally Harbour in a dinghy and found that the canal has been recently well maintained by Waterways Ireland along most of its 8km stretch.

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As stated at the Reception in the Canal Stores, the HBA will be back soon!

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Photographs by Larry Breen, Mick Kinahan, Joe Treacy and others

[Double click on the image displayed to see a larger picture. Use either the right and left arrow on your keyboard or your mouse, to view the next or previous image. Loading may take a few seconds.]

{gallery}Event Photos Corbally Line Oct 2009{/gallery}