

22. Castleconnell River Walks



Castleconnell

These walks follow the banks of the River Shannon and are considered to be one of Limerick's Best Kept Secrets. The lazy flow of the river that is enhanced by birdsong, the smell of wild flowers and pleasant atmosphere makes this a place to visit regularly. The car park is a popular area for feeding the feral Mallard ducks and Greylag Geese. There are also many places to fish along the bank.

Walking distance for both walks total 6km, Time 1.5 hrs. Terrain easy/casual (there are some stiles to climb over). O.S. Map 58: Start grid ref R658624

(The second walk follows the River Shannon upstream and is suitable for buggies or pushchairs).

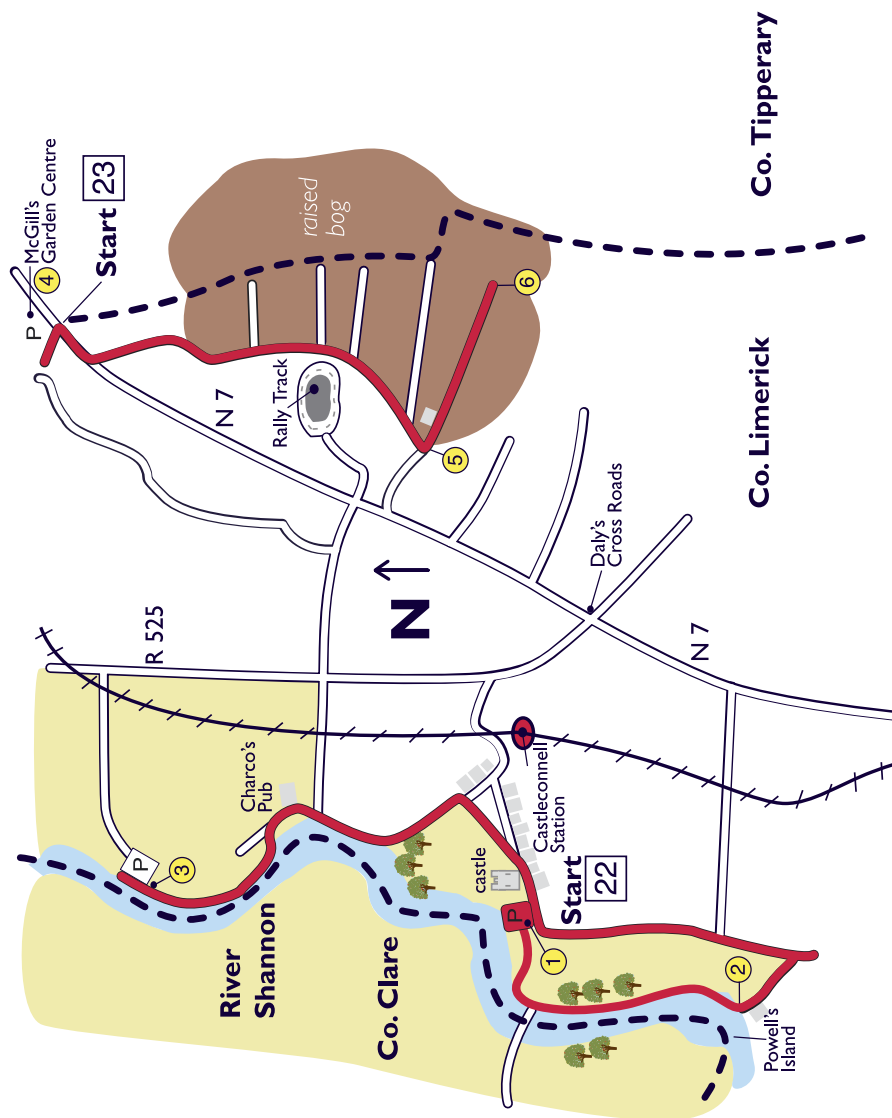
Walk 1

Starting at the car park [Point 1], there is a stream running alongside where you will find Common Bluetip, Spring Redtail and Azure Bluet damselflies on the vegetation and flying low over the water. All along the bank there are Banded Jewelwing, which are green and look almost like butterflies at first. Spring Hawkets are seen in May and June whilst Amber-winged Hawkets emerge in July. This is one of the best places in Limerick for seeing Kingfisher. Look to see if it has a fish in its bill; if it has, it will return again shortly to look for more. Cormorants are often seen upstream on the rocks, drying out their wings. Follow the pathway to your left, passing the footbridge that crosses the Shannon. From the bridge you can best view the islets in the river and their undisturbed flora, including Hemlock Water-dropwort, Wild Angelica, Water Mint, Purple-loosestrife and Meadowsweet. Spring flora under the narrow strip of woodland by the path includes Primroses, Violets, Lesser Periwinkle, Sanicle and Enchanter's-nightshade. Also at this time of year you will see the bright yellow flowers of Marsh Marigold scattered along the riverbank. Continue along the path, passing two stiles and into a field. Climb over a low barrier and go on through a third stile. Walk as far as the gate **[Point 2]**. This is the end of the walk. Retrace your way back to the start.

Option for a loop walk back to the start: Turn left along a boreen beside a stone wall. Turn left again at the T-junction and continue along this road, which will bring you back to the start. This road can be busy and dangerous. As there is no pavement for a short distance, therefore it is not suitable for small children.

Walk 2

Starting from the car park [Point 1], exit the car park onto the tarred road and walk east towards Castleconnell, passing the remains of the Castle. Ignore the side streets and turn left at the T-junction. Soon woodland appears on the left where Coal Tit, Tree Creeper and Goldcrest occur. There are splendid views of the Shannon with its weirs and small islands. Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff join Grey Wagtail, Reed Bunting and Stonechat during the summer. Follow the road passing Charco's pub and turn sharp left, which brings you back overlooking the river. Enjoy the pleasant scenery as you walk up to the car park **[Point 3]**. This is the end of the walk. Retrace your way back to the starting point.



23. Castleconnell Bog



Castleconnell Bog

Situated to the east of Castleconnell, this is a large area of cut-over raised bog, most of which is in County Tipperary. However there is plenty to find on the Limerick side. A summer visit is best for wildlife, when the bog comes alive with flowers, insects and birds. It can get waterlogged and muddy during the winter and is therefore not recommended. Best visited from May to August.

Walking distance 6km, Time 1.5 hrs. Terrain easy. O.S.Map 58: Start grid ref R683645

Start at McGill's Garden Centre [Point 4]. Cross the Dublin road (N7) with great care and turn right where you will meet a bog road on the left. Continue down this; as the noise of the main road gradually fades you will reach the bog itself. Sycamore, Ash, Elderberry and Birch are common along the track. A small green insect known as a Green Lacewing can be found perching low down on the leaves of Willow; it has delicate translucent lace-like wings. Look under the canopy for Royal Fern, Rosebay Willowherb, Foxglove and Meadowsweet. The latter is said to relieve headaches and migraine. On the track Green Tiger Beetles hunt for food. These are the fastest ground-travelling insects and can outrun their prey. You can expect to see Stonechat, Reed Bunting and Whitethroat. The Grasshopper Warbler may be heard, but is difficult to find.

The first track you will meet on the left has become overgrown with vegetation and is worth exploring for a while, as there is a bog pool nearby. Continue along the stony track where you will see a Dirt-bike rally track on the right, which was a disused sandpit. Look for the nest holes of Sand Martin at the back of this track. Pass the second and then a third track, which is a short distance ahead. After a while you will reach the fourth track where our track bends to the right and enters under a stand of willow. Follow the track until you reach the 5th track immediately after a two-storey house **[Point 5]**. Turn left at the side of this house and follow the track. Where it emerges into open bog listen out for the repetitive calling of Cuckoo and Skylarks constantly singing from above. Wheatears may occur here in spring, passing through the area on migration. Along this track you will find the Green Hairstreak, which is a delightful little butterfly. It is brown in colour when in flight but when it lands the metallic green under-wings show up beautifully. For those that like to take pictures you will find that it is surprisingly easy to get close to without disturbing it. Recent surveys have shown that the Large Heath butterfly is in serious decline throughout Europe. This is the only site in the County of Limerick where this butterfly has been recorded. Along the track grows Bird's-foot Trefoil that attracts the Common Blue butterfly. Orange Tip has also been seen, which would indicate the presence of Lady's Smock. Further along the track there are some bog pools where the Water Scorpion can be found clambering amongst the vegetation on the surface of the water. It has a long tube at its tail, which it uses to breathe under water. These pools are excellent for dragonflies, which include Four-spotted Chaser, Common Darter and Black Darter.

23. Castleconnell Bog

In the past, dragonflies were known as the 'Devil's darning needles', and were ignored by many naturalists. Downy Birch and Rhododendron are invading the bog. However you will find Bilberry, Lousewort, Cottongrass, Bog Myrtle with its sweet smelling leaves and the insectivorous Sundew that has oblong shaped reddish leaves. The track finishes at the County Boundary **[Point 6]** where our walk ends. Return back along the path you have just travelled.



Large Heath (Ian Rippey)



Green Hairstreak (Ian Rippey)



Castleconnell Riverwalk