

# Scenic Walks around Mullingar



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Mullingar and the immediate surrounding area are full of interesting places packed with history and folklore and are of general interest to young and old alike. There are hundreds of walks you can do around here; this booklet gives details of just a sample, varying in length to cater for the walking ability of all.

There are numerous places of interest within a 30 kilometre radius of Mullingar: the Seven Wonders of Fore; Belvedere House, Gardens and Park; the Hill of Uisneach; Locke's Distillery and Museum; and Clonmacnoise to name but a few. If you wish to explore Mullingar itself then this selection of walks should be helpful. All walks start and finish at the main post office in Dominick Street, Mullingar.

### **A Few Reminders**

The Mullingar area is fairly flat and most of these walks are on paths or roads so any comfortable shoes will do, but please be aware that some of these walks are lengthy. Wear walking shoes, or preferably boots, on the longer walks and off the road. Although the roads are generally quiet, watch out for traffic. As you may have noticed, we do get the odd shower of rain and so you should bring good rain gear.

Walking alone may be alright for the town centre walks but remember for the out of town walks that even a simple ankle twist can be a problem, so inform someone of your walk plan – a friend or your hotel reception is ideal. A mobile phone can be very useful in an emergency. Where children are involved parents will know their walking range and it is always easy to curtail a walk by turning back. If you have a dog the law in Ireland requires you to keep the dog on a lead at all times when outdoors.

Most of all use your common sense and do not take chances. If you do get lost use the oldest system on earth .... ask someone for directions!

The author of these routes makes no guarantee as to the conditions, safety, distance accuracy, or suitability for walking. You walk at your own risk.

## **Walk 1: Mullingar Town Centre**

**Distance: 2 km approx. Terrain: Flat; on pathways**

Starting with your back to the Post Office in Dominick Street, turn right and head towards the Green Bridge. (At the Green Bridge you can cross the road and divert to the left and visit the Railway Station, built in 1848, with its rare curved platform.)

Over the Green Bridge, turn right and walk 200m to the Carey Bridge, a pedestrian bridge on the right which crosses over the Royal Canal and Dublin-Sligo railway line. Before crossing the Carey Bridge look to the top left hand corner of the Fair Green to see Columb Barracks, a military barracks since the 1600s; the present barracks was built in 1811. The barracks ceased to be used by the army in 2012 and is now occupied by a number of sporting and community organisations.

Cross the Carey Bridge and on your left you will pass St. Mary's Christian Brothers primary school, built in the late 1950s; set at the far end of the grounds is the Christian Brothers Monastery which was built by the Hevey Trust and was occupied by the Christian Brothers from 1856 to 2006. The monastery housed the original primary and secondary schools for boys before a new secondary school was built in the 1970s. Among famous alumni are Joe Dolan, Niall Horan, and Bressie. Opposite the schools is the Garda Barracks which is the divisional headquarters of the Gardaí for County Westmeath.

Standing out above all other buildings in Mullingar is the Cathedral of Christ the King. This Roman Catholic Cathedral was consecrated with a Solemn High Mass on 3<sup>rd</sup> September

1939, the day World War II started. The Cathedral houses its own museum which is located over the sacristy. A visit to the Cathedral is a must and a book giving details of this beautiful Cathedral is available in the Cathedral shop.

Continue down Bishopsgate Street and on your left you will pass Cathedral House, the priests' residence which was built in 1870, and then the Parish Community Centre, which housed a church during the penal days.

At the end of Bishopsgate Street turn right into Castle Street and on your left is the former Presbyterian Church, built in 1821 and now a restaurant. At the end of Castle Street turn left and continue onto Austin Friars Street and the statue of two monks. In 1227 an Augustinian priory was founded here but was forced to close in 1539 during the Reformation. In 1996, during building excavations, the foundations of this priory and its adjacent burial grounds were discovered. The statue of the monks was erected in 2000 as a memorial to the many religious orders who founded priories in Mullingar.

Cross the street and turn back towards Pearse Street; the entrance to the town park is on your left. Within this park is a public swimming pool, a children's playground and a skate park. Continue past the entrance to the park and on your left is Fagan's Office Supply stationery shop, used by James Joyce in *Ulysses* as Phil Shaw's photographic shop where Mollie Bloom, daughter of Leopold Bloom, was apprenticed.

Continuing on up the street turn left into Church Avenue and straight ahead is All Saints' Church. This Church of Ireland church has been a place of continuous worship for 800 years.

To the right of the church is a laneway which opens out onto Mount Street. At the end of this lane turn left and after 60m you will see on your left the Court House, built in 1825, and across the road the Westmeath County Council Buildings including the Mullingar Arts Centre. This council administrative head-quarters stands on the site of the jailhouse where in 1846 Brian Seery was the last man to be hanged in Mullingar. Parts of the old jail wall still exist, visible to the right as you face the County Council Building and at the rear of the Council Buildings (entrance 100m down the Jail Hill).

Turn around and walk up Mount Street; the Market House (built towards the end of the eighteenth century) and Square are on the right at the top of the street where the statue of Mullingar's famous singer, Joe Dolan, stands. Turn left at the Square and walk straight up Oliver Plunkett Street, passing on your right the sculpture commemorating the famine in the Mullingar area, and into Dominick Street to complete your walk at the Post Office.

## **Walk 2: Royal Canal and Supply**

**Distance: 7 km approx. Terrain: Flat; on pathways and roads**

Starting with your back to the main Post Office in Dominick Street, turn right and walk to the Green Bridge. Turn right down the Royal Canal bank, between the railway line and the canal and walk for 800m, passing under three bridges before crossing the canal by the footbridge at Scanlan's Bridge at the harbour. Turn right to continue onto the other side of the canal and you soon reach Lough Owel Feeder, known as "the supply", a manmade river feeding water into the canal. Cross the small bridge and turn left, walking along the supply for about 400m before crossing over a small narrow road and continue on for another 400m to cross a main road (watch out for traffic travelling in both directions). Continuing on along the supply you pass the Famine Graveyard on your right where more than 3,000 victims of the Famine are buried. One kilometre further on, with the railway on your left, there is a fish farm on your right; pass through the gate at the end of the path onto a small road where on your right is the path to St. Brigid's Well, a holy well and a place of worship for generations.

Leaving St. Brigid's Well turn left, cross the railway crossing and turn left again, heading back into Mullingar by the old Longford Road. After 1 km St. Finian's College, a diocesan secondary school, is on the right and Ballyglass Cemetery, the main town cemetery, is on the left. After 400m you will pass by the side of the old hospital on your left; continue straight on through the roundabout and pass the Midland Regional Hospital on your left. At the next roundabout keep straight and head into town, passing Loreto College, a girls' secondary school founded in 1881, on your right and then, crossing over Scanlan's Bridge again, St. Brigid's Special School is followed by Presentation Senior School.

Continue on for 300m to a T-junction and turn right to head up Pearse Street where you pass the Greville Arms Hotel on your left. This has been a hotel for nearly 200 years; prior to that it was a jail until a new jailhouse was built at the bottom of Mount Street (since replaced by the local authority County Administrative Building and Arts Centre). The Greville Arms Hotel was used in the writings of James Joyce who was a regular visitor to Mullingar in the early 1900s. Continue on past the Market House and Square with the Joe Dolan statue, up Oliver Plunkett Street and into Dominick Street and pass Dolans' public house to finish your journey at the main Post Office.

### **Walk 3: Royal Canal West**

**Distance: 7 km approx. Terrain: Flat; on pathways**

Starting with your back to the main Post Office in Dominick Street, turn right and head towards the Green Bridge. Turn right down the Royal Canal bank between the railway line and the canal, and at the bottom of the incline take a sharp left and head under the bridge.

As you walk along the canal bank for 800m you pass the railway station on your left, the old railway engine repair shop, the water tower, the engine turntable, and many other relics of the age of steam locomotion. After another 800m, with the old Galway railway line on your left, you pass under a new bridge, Grange Bridge, the construction of which necessitated the rerouting of the canal. After this bridge you have peace and quiet to appreciate the flora and fauna, the swans, birds, and fish. (On the left immediately after Grange Bridge is the entry to the 'Old Rail Trail' cycleway, which goes as far as Athlone).

After another 1.5 km you come to the next bridge, Kilpatrick Bridge, where you can start your return journey to Mullingar on the other side of the canal by heading up onto the road and turning right across the bridge and then right again. After 250m you will see an old graveyard on your left. Here are buried the countless number of victims of the plague whose remains were brought here by canal barge from Mullingar.

Continue on towards the Grange Bridge and 500m past it, where the canal pathway ends, join the roadway and turn right for Mullingar, continuing straight on to the main Post Office in Dominick Street, 1 km further on. (If you are still feeling energetic as you reach Grange Bridge on your return journey, turn left and leave the canal path. At the Grange Roundabout with your back to the canal walk 200m to the next roundabout and turn right into Ardleigh Crescent and take the second left to the home of Niall Horan.)

### **Walk 4: Lough Owel**

**Distance: 9 km approx. Terrain: Flat; on footpaths and roads**

Starting with your back to the main Post Office in Dominick Street turn right and walk over the Green Bridge where you turn right and walk out the Green Road for 1 km to the Midland Regional Hospital. Keeping to the left side footpath, pass straight through the main roundabout. The old hospital is on your right; continue towards a small roundabout and

taking the first exit, go up the hill towards the back entrance to St. Finian's College, the diocesan secondary school.

After a further 1 km, turn right at the T-junction and proceed along this road for almost 600m before taking the second turn on the left. This road brings you down to Lough Owel at Tullaghan (800m away), very popular for water sports including fishing, swimming and sailing. Return to the T-junction and turn left; after 400m you will see a big house on the left; this is the residence of J.P. Dunleavy, best-selling author of *The Ginger Man*. This house was also the home of W.C. Levinge where James Joyce lived for six months in 1900 with his father and some members of his family.

Turn right at the next T-junction and after 250m you will see a railway crossing on your left. Go left here for 100m and you will see the entrance to St. Brigid's Well on your right. This holy well has been a place of prayer and pilgrimage down through the centuries.

Leaving St. Brigid's Well turn left, back over the railway crossing and left again towards Mullingar. After 1 km you pass the main entrance to St Finian's College on the right and Ballyglass Cemetery, the main burial grounds for Mullingar, on the left. After 400m you will pass by the side of the old hospital on your left; continue straight on through the roundabout and pass the Midland Regional Hospital on your left. At the next roundabout keep straight, taking the second exit, and head on into town, passing Loreto College, a girls' secondary school founded in 1881, on your right and then, crossing over Scanlan's Bridge, St. Brigid's Special School is followed by Presentation Senior School.

Continue on for 300m to a T-junction where you turn right, passing the Greville Arms Hotel on your left and then the Market House and Square (with the Joe Dolan statue). Continue on up Oliver Plunkett Street to the main Post Office in Dominick Street.

### **Walk 5: Royal Canal East**

**Distance: 12 km approx. Terrain: Flat; on pathways and roads**

Starting with your back to the main Post Office in Dominick Street turn left and walk down town for 800m, through Oliver Plunkett Street and Pearse Street, passing the Market House and Square on your right followed by the Greville Arms Hotel, and pass the statue of the monks in Austin Friars Street.

At the next crossroads turn right and passing the Community College on the right continue on for 300m to a narrow lane leading up to the Royal Canal on your left. This lane is Pipers Boreen where, years ago, a piper played while emigrants boarded a barge to bring them to Dublin and on to the new world.

At the top of Pipers Boreen there is a monument to commemorate the arrival of the canal to Mullingar in 1806. Keeping right, walk along the Royal Canal path, under Saunders Bridge, for about 4 km (2.5 miles) of peace and quiet with wonderful flora and fauna. At the next bridge, Baltrasna Bridge, exit the canal and turn left onto the road; after 2 km this road brings you to Marlinstown, a townland on the eastern outskirts of Mullingar. At the roundabout go straight for Mullingar (Mullingar Park Hotel is on your right). Walking straight on from here through the town, finish at the Post Office in Dominick Street, 3 km away.