

## A stroll through the Anne Valley



The scenic Anne Valley Walk in Dunhill.

COUNTY Waterford has many natural amenities which are proving increasingly popular with locals and visitors alike.

Many people are eager to discover new walking routes, but finding a route which is both interesting and safe can be a difficult task.

Dunhill's Anne Valley Walk has proven to be an immense hit since it was officially opened in 2013 and it's easy to see why.

The route, which is almost 2.5km in total, travels from Ballyphilip Bridge to Dunhill Castle and meanders alongside the Anne River through scenic landscape.

The walkway offers plenty of peace and tranquillity and the area is a veritable haven for wildlife such as herons, kingfishers and otters as well as an abundance of flora and fauna.

Signage (which was erected with thanks to FÁS) displays information about the walkway including the bird types which can be found in the area.

A quirky addition is the presence of the eye catching 'fairy doors' which have proven very popular with visiting children.

Apparently the fairies are regular visitors to this enchanting area which certainly does possess a magical quality.

Resurfacing work took place along the route last year and the newly developed path allows for comfortable wheelchair and buggy access.

As there aren't any steep slopes, the route is suitable for all abilities and if you do feel tired, or would like to sit and admire the surroundings, there are several benches where you can relax.

The Anne Valley Walk has received huge praise and support from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and is listed on its website and in its promotional material.

The walk, which takes around 45 minutes to complete, has attracted many visitors from throughout the locality and also further afield.

"You'd nearly want traffic lights here on a Sunday!" said Willie Moore who is Chairman of the Anne Valley Farmers Group and one of the driving forces behind the project.

"I'm very proud that we got the project to this stage," he said.

A Visitor Data Analysis Report shows that almost 15,000 people used the walk in a six month period alone in 2014.

Pedestrian footfall counters were installed from March until October which revealed a total pedestrian traffic number of 14,919.

Willie said there has been excellent support for the walkway.

A huge number of people have been involved in contributing to the success of this fantastic amenity, which helped ensure that the original vision for this area came to fruition.

Prior to the walkway being developed, man-made pools were developed using water coming down from the surrounding hills by Dr Rory Harrington of the National Parks and Wildlife Service along with assistance of Ger Murphy Plant Hire.

"This wetlands project, which was developed as part of the Anne Valley Project, transformed this area from a bog. Without the ponds being there, the walk would never have happened," said Willie.

Major contributors to the development of the walk were the Anne Valley Walk Farmers Group; Dunhill Multi-Education Centre; Waterford County Council; Waterford Leader Partnership; the National Development Plan; the European Union; and FÁS.

Landowners Damien and Mary Finn; Declan, Mary and Kitty Power; Anthony and Kathleen Murphy; Mike and Bernie Walsh; and Edmond and Mary Murphy provided land for the ambitious development.

Willie also praised Eoin Dullea of Waterford County Council; Claire Connors and Jimmy Taaffe of Waterford Leader Partnership; Helen Kavanagh of Dunhill Multi-Education Centre; and Liam Connolly of Anne Valley Angling.

In addition to the involvement of all of the above, a huge amount of voluntary work was carried out by locals as well as

people who had no connection with the area but simply wanted to be involved with the project.

“Often when we’d finished our day jobs, we’d start working on the walkway at 6pm,” explained Willie.

“And there were lots of people who even took time off work just to help out,” he added.

Willie said the goodwill shown towards the Anne Valley Walk has been incredible.

As a thank you to the community, a special event was held at the end of December which was very well attended and featured treats such as sherry and mince pies.

Plans are underway to host similar community events at the walkway later in the year.

The Anne Valley Walk certainly is a fantastic example of what can be achieved when enthusiastic community members come together.

So, what are you waiting for?

Put on your walking shoes and pay a visit to this beautiful area of County Waterford.