SHANNON ERNE WATERWAY FACT FILE

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How many boating visitors used the Shannon Erne Waterway?
Since the canal reopened 1994, on average over 3,500 boats have gone through the system each year. This means that the average number of boating tourists is about 15,000 per season. The figures for 2000 are approximately 15% up on last year. It is estimated that 70% of boats are from hire companies with 30% being privately owned.

"Full Steam Ahead" – The Louise Brighouse approaches harbour.

How long is the season?
The boating season traditionally runs from mid-March to mid-October with over half of all visitors coming in July and August. The barge companies tend to have a longer season and it is quite usual for them to have all their boats out at Christmas time.

What is the Irish boat hire fleet like?
The Irish boat hire fleet is the third largest in Europe with nearly 700 boats. These boats are located in about 20 marinas from Belleek on the border of Fermanagh and Donegal to Killaloe just north of Limerick. About 95% of the total fleet are fibreglass cruisers. The rest are mostly wide beam barges. There are two barge hire companies and one cruiser company on the Shannon Erne Waterway. The Grand, Royal and Barrow have some small barge hire companies but the main boating activity takes place on the Shannon and Erne systems. The whole Shannon Erne Waterway system is the longest navigable leisure waterway in Europe measuring 750km.

When was the canal first built?
Excavation commenced in 1846 on the Ballinamore Ballyconnell Canal and it wasn't completed until 1860. Only 8 boats negotiated the system in its short 9 year history. The canal was abandoned in 1869 as the age of steam came into its own.

When was it restored as the Shannon Erne Waterway?
By the last quarter of the 19th century the canal was being reduced to a sad, weed-choked channel of broken bridges and missing locks. The communities through the generations had turned their back on the canal. It became a dumping ground for supermarket trolleys and Ford Cortinas. Its strategic importance as the link between the two great waterway systems was lost to the majority of people in the local community. With increased cooperation between the British and Irish governments in the late 1980's it was decided to restore the former canal allowing navigation from north to south and south to north. At the time it was an ambitious engineering project and it cost approximately £30million with the money coming from the European Union, the two national Governments and the International Fund for Ireland. It took 5 years to restore and opened for business in March 1994. Interestingly it has been calculated that the private and community sectors have invested another £30m in facilities since 1994.

Did the restoration employ new technology?
The waterway was redesigned to service the needs of modern pleasure cruisers and the lock system converted to operate by a push-button electro-hydraulic system. The control panel is operated by a 'smart card' containing a microchip. These lock cards give access to the locks and the six service blocks where the visitor can shower, pumpout and do their laundry. In the unlikely event of the user needing assistance there is an intercom system at each lock which connects to a ranger who will be on hand in less than 20 minutes. The Shannon Erne Waterway is the only canal system in the world that employs this advanced technology.

What is the capacity of the system?
The 1.55 metre minimum depth can accommodate boat draughts of 1.2 metres at a maximum speed of 3.4 knots (5 km per hour) in a chan-

nel width of 13 metres. The air draught is 3.2 metres over a 3 metre width above summer navigation levels. One of the most frequent

A Carrick Craft cruiser in the lock.

comments by our overseas visitors is the seamless way that the Shannon Erne Waterway blends canal, river and lake sections in its overall 63 km length.

How long does it take to do the system?
It takes approximately 13 hours at full pace to go from Leitrim village (Lock 16) to Corraquill (Lock 1). Along with the 16 locks the boating visitor will pass under 34 stone bridges. Most of the visitors will spend approximately 3 days in the Shannon Erne Waterway.

How many jobs has the Shannon Erne Waterway created?
A recent independent economic impact study has calculated that there are approximately 300 full-time/part-time jobs being sustained in the region as a direct result of the reopening of the Shannon Erne Waterway. Similarly it is calculated that IR£7.7 million are being left in the local economy.

Tell us where these visitors come-from?
Nearly 60% of all boating visitors are German speaking (German/Swiss/Austrian). The majority of the remainder are British and Irish, with France, United States, Scandinavia and Benelux accounting for the remainder.

Will this change in years to come?
As more and more people use the Internet to book holidays we will see more nationalities represented on our waterway with definite growth from the likes of.USA, Sweden and France.

If the Ulster canal was restored what impact would it have on the Shannon Erne Waterway?
If the Ulster Canal was restored it would link Upper Lough Erne to Lough Neagh. Currently there are over 4,000 boats registered on the Shannon. For these boats to explore the Ulster Canal they have to come up and down through the Shannon Erne Waterway. This should result in more business for the region, emphasising its position as a 'bridge' or 'gateway' between two great systems. However it's worth noting that if the Ulster Canal does get the go-ahead, realistically it won't see it's first visitors for about another 7 years.

Could you tell us more on why the boating visitor to the Shannon Erne Waterway is so important to Leitrim?

Recent Tourist Board figures suggest that the average visitor to Ireland spends about £250. It is calculated that the boating visitor spends on average £650. In addition a recent Market Research Survey carried out by the Shannon Erne Waterway identified that over 95% of visitors intend returning to the Shannon Erne Waterway for a future holiday and 99% would recommend it to friends!

Who manages the canal?
Shannon Erne Waterway Promotions Ltd was established by the two Tourist Boards in 1993 to market the Shannon Erne Waterway to the world. Since then it has delivered a number of Strategic Marketing Programmes which involves, for example, representing the waterway as a holiday destination at consumer and trade shows world-wide. Last year alone 44 media organisations from all over the world did features on the Shannon Erne Waterway. The Company has a very close working relationship with the other tourism promotional agencies in the region and nationally and the boat hire industry. Running in tandem with the Marketing Programme is an International Fund for Ireland Development Programme for the Shannon Erne Waterway.

Waterways Ireland, the new All-Ireland Implementation Body, is responsible for the day to day management and maintenance of the system.

The Shannon Erne Waterways Holidays cruiser "Inishfree" manoeuvring beside weir.