

If riverbanks could talk

A self-guided walk along the River Quoile in Downpatrick



Explore tranquil riverbanks with a hidden history

Find out how the waterway has influenced human settlements

Discover a long history of traders, invaders and settlers who arrived by boat

See what happens when saltwater turns to freshwater

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*the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks*





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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If riverbanks could talk

A stroll beside the River Quoile near Downpatrick

Rivers are constant yet ever changing. The River Quoile that flows through County Down has witnessed millennia of people come and go.

Prehistoric settlers, Viking invaders, Celtic monks, English aristocrats, industrial traders and modern pilgrims have each left their mark.



The walk along the riverbank and into Downpatrick looks at the natural characteristics of the Quoile and the surrounding landscape of rounded hills and marshes. Find out how this has influenced where humans have established their settlements throughout history.

Discover why Downpatrick developed as an important centre and find out why the geographical location and natural characteristics of the Quoile presented both opportunities and limitations for transporting people and goods.



See how humans have tried to manage the Quoile and its seasonal flows through a variety of flood control schemes.

The most recent is a tidal barrier which has transformed a tidal river into a freshwater wetland thriving with wildlife.

Stroll along and allow the river to reveal its stories and secrets.

Top: Down Cathedral from Inch Abbey © Jenny Lunn
Bottom: Cow in the Quoile marshes at Jane's Shore © Howard Lunn

Practical information

Location	Downpatrick, County Down, Northern Ireland
Start point	Quoile Countryside Centre, 5 Quay Road, Downpatrick BT30 7JB
Finish point	St Patrick's Centre, 53a Market Street, Downpatrick BT30 6LZ
Getting there	<p>Car - Downpatrick is about 20 miles southeast of Belfast on the A7. The Quoile Countryside Centre is just off the main Downpatrick to Strangford road (A25) about one mile northeast of Downpatrick; it is well signposted. There is a free car park at the centre.</p> <p>Bus - Downpatrick is well served by local buses from various directions including Belfast. The nearest you can get to the Quoile Countryside Centre is old Quoile Bridge (about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away) using service 14 from Downpatrick to Killyleagh (every 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 hours from Monday to Saturday). Check with Translink before you travel (www.translink.co.uk).</p> <p>Bicycle - National Cycle Route 99 passes through Downpatrick and alongside the River Quoile; it passes within half a mile of the Quoile Countryside Centre.</p>
Return to start	Please note that this is a linear walk and public transport is limited. Suggested means of returning to the start point are given in Directions 18 but you may also consider parking part way along the route to avoid a long return walk.
Walk distance	4 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles
Level	Gentle – A mostly level route along the river bank and into the town centre with some steps.
Terrain	Predominantly paved or gravelled paths; some grassy tracks; and lanes and pavements in the town.
Conditions	Waterproof footwear and covered legs are recommended after wet weather due to long (and frequently damp) grass in places.

Best time to go

For appreciating the wildlife along the river the best times of year are:

- April to September for breeding waterfowl, kingfishers and butterflies
- October to March for wintering teal, widgeon and mallard

Suitable for

Families - There is plenty of wildlife for children to look out for along the river but little legs may need to have the full walk broken into sections.

Wheelchairs and pushchairs - Quoile Countryside Centre is fully accessible as is about three-quarters of the walk along Quoile Pondage and Jane's Shore (Stops 1 to 13).

Dogs - Dogs should be kept on a lead as the river banks are rich in wildlife.

Toilets

- Quoile Countryside Centre (start of route)
- Quoile Quay (Stop 7)
- Down County Museum (just before Stop 16)
- Down Cathedral (Stop 17)
- St Patrick's Centre (end of route)
- Market Street, Downpatrick (near end of route)

Refreshments

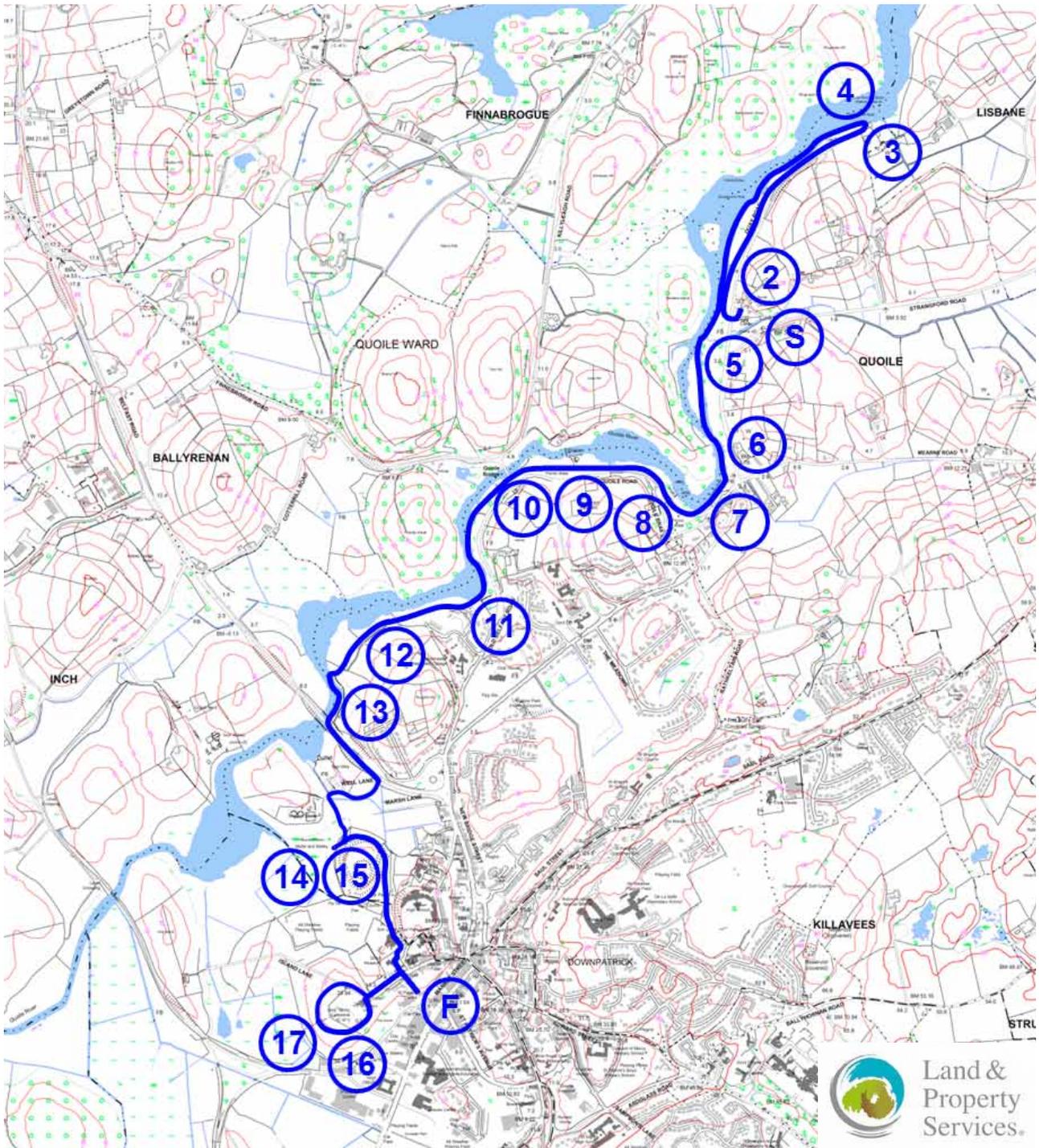
- Quoile Countryside Centre has a water dispenser but no café (start of route)
- There are picnic sites with benches along the river between stops 1 and 9.
- Down County Museum has a café (just before Stop 16)
- St Patrick's Centre has a cafe (end of route)
- Various cafes, restaurants and pubs in Downpatrick town centre (end of route)

Tourist information

Downpatrick Visitor Information Centre
Inside St Patrick's Centre, 53a Market Street, Downpatrick
Email: downpatrick.vic@downdc.gov.uk
Tel: (028) 4461 2233

Visit Strangford Lough
www.visitstrangfordlough.co.uk

Route overview



Start Quoile Countryside Centre
Finish St Patrick's Centre

Places to visit

Quoile Countryside Centre (start of walk)

A visitor centre with displays on the unique wildlife and history of the area plus nature garden
Open daily 10am to 5pm from June to September and 12 noon to 4pm on weekends and public holidays for the rest of the year; admission free
www.discovernorthernireland.com/Quoile-Countryside-Centre-Downpatrick-P2892

Down County Museum (The Mall, Downpatrick, BT30 6AH, near Stops 15 to 17)

Permanent exhibition of 'Down Through Time' covering 9,000 years of history
Open Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm; Saturdays and Sundays 1pm to 5pm; Admission free
www.downcountymuseum.com

Down Cathedral (Stop 16)

Site of Christian worship since the 6th century and burial place of St Patrick
Open for visiting from Monday to Saturday between 9.30am and 4pm and on Sundays from 2pm to 4pm; check website for service times; admission free but donations welcome
www.downcathedral.org

St Patrick's Centre (end of walk)

Exhibition about Ireland's patron saint; includes art gallery, gift shop and café
Open all year round Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm and on Sundays in July and August from 1pm to 5pm; General admission free; charges for exhibitions
www.saintpatrickcentre.com

Inch Abbey (one mile outside Downpatrick; accessed off the A7)

Ruins of a large abbey dating back to the 12th century
Open access all year round; admission free (site only partially accessible for wheelchairs)
www.discovernorthernireland.com/Inch-Abbey-Downpatrick-P2876

Ballydugan Mill (two miles southwest of Downpatrick)

Spectacular 18th century, six-storey flour mill by the River Quoile now a restaurant and hotel; top floor houses a permanent exhibition on the history of the mill
Open access all year round; admission free
www.ballyduganmill.com

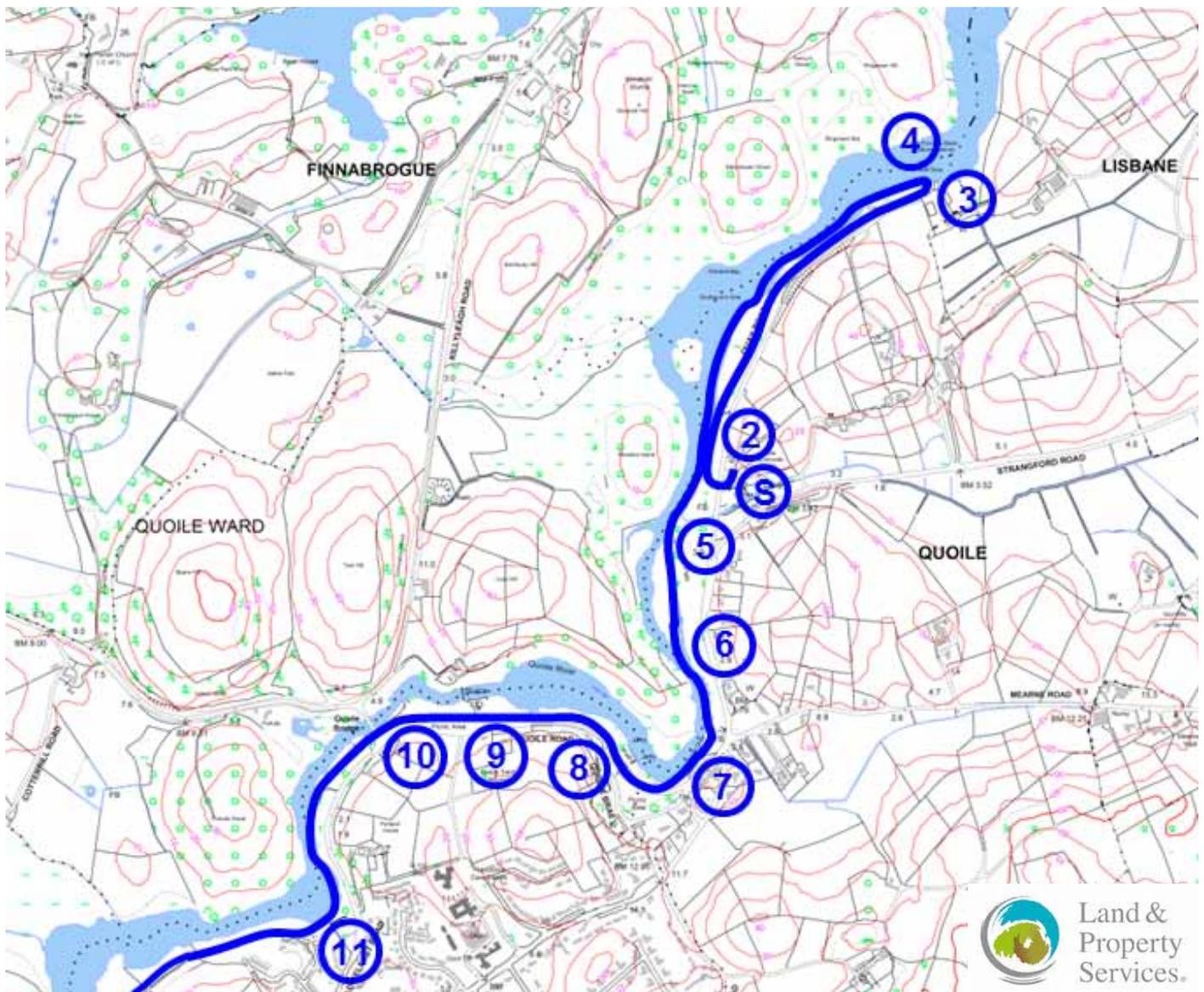
Saul Church (two miles northeast of Downpatrick)

Modern church on the site of St Patrick's first church in Ireland
Open daily for visiting with services on Sundays; admission free but donations welcome
www.saintsandstones.net/saints-saulchurch-journey.htm

Slieve Patrick (three miles northeast of Downpatrick)

Giant statue of St Patrick on a hilltop with stunning panoramic views of the Quoile, Strangford Lough, coast and mountains
Open access all year round; admission free
www.discovernorthernireland.com/Slieve-Patrick-Saul-P3148

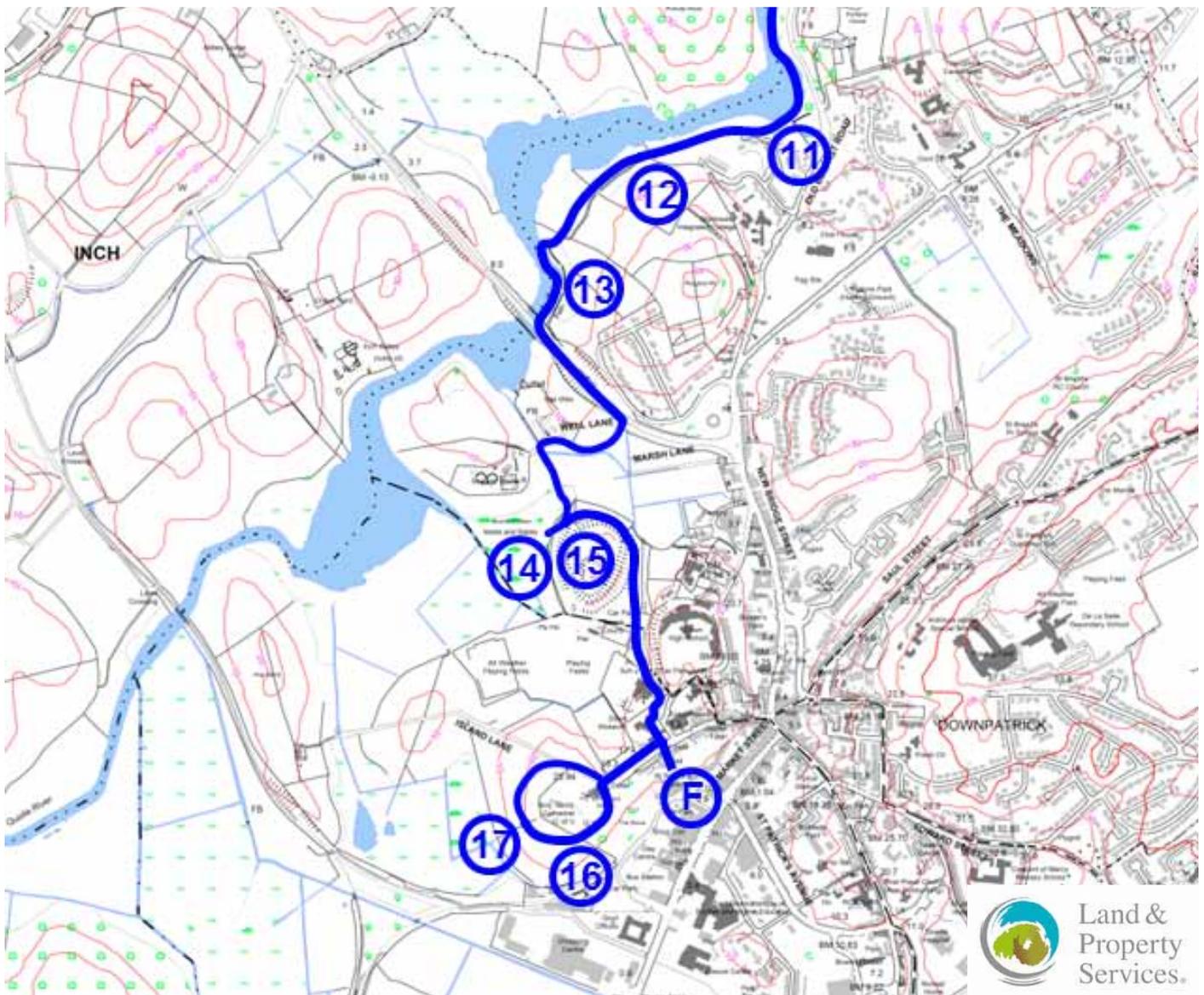
First part of route



Stopping points

- Start** Quoil Countryside Centre
- 2.** Quoil Castle
 - 3.** Top of Steamboat Quay
 - 4.** Bottom of Steamboat Quay
 - 5.** Riverbank by The Cut
 - 6.** Riverbank by the remains of a boat
 - 7.** Quoil Quay
 - 8.** Disabled anglers' jetty
 - 9.** Stone structure near old floodgates
 - 10.** Riverbank near old Quoil Bridge

Second part of route



Stopping points

- 11.** First boardwalk on Jane's Shore
- 12.** After triple kissing gate on Jane's Shore
- 13.** Second boardwalk on Jane's Shore
- 14.** Top of the Mound of Down
- 15.** Top of the Mound of Down
- 16.** Grave of St Patrick by cathedral
- 17.** View from Cathedral Hill
- Finish** St Patrick's Centre

Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions in the boxes below to get to the next stop

1. A narrow place

Quoile Countryside Centre

Directions 1

Look at the ruined tower next to the countryside centre.

2. Location location location

Quoile Castle

Directions 2

Go through the gate onto Quay Road and turn right. Follow the lane about a quarter of a mile past two small car parks. Shortly after the second, the lane comes to an end at the gateway to Steamboat Lodge. Go down the steps to the left of the lane and turn right at the bottom on the first path. At the end of the path, go up the steps onto the raised platform area which is the old Steamboat Quay.

3. From saltwater to freshwater

Top of Steamboat Quay

Directions 3

Carefully descend the other set of steps from the top of the quay to the riverside path, noticing a plaque on the wall. Turn back and look at the stone quay.

4. Steamy scenes

Bottom of Steamboat Quay

Directions 4

Follow the riverside path for about a quarter of a mile which runs parallel to the lane you came along. Go past the two small car parks and path up to the Countryside Centre. Cross a small wooden bridge and look for the next fishing platform on the right. Go to the end of the platform and look to the left at the entrance to a long thin channel called 'The Cut' which was a short canal created in 1857 to help ships avoid an awkward bend in the river.

5. Invasion invasion invasion

Riverside by The Cut

Directions 5

Continue along the riverside path until you see the remains of an old sailing ship on the left side of the path behind a wooden fence.

6. The unhappy fate of Hilda

Riverbank by the remains of a boat

Directions 6

Continue along the riverside path ignoring all left forks. At the end, climb the steps and turn right. Almost immediately you are on Quoile Quay (also known as Coal Quay).

7. A bustling port

Quoile Quay

Directions 7

Follow the paved path between the river and the road as it bears round to the right. When you see a large car park on the opposite side of the road, take a path on the right leading down to a large wooden jetty that provides access to the river for disabled anglers.

8. From work to leisure

Disabled anglers' jetty

Directions 8

Return to the roadside path and turn right. Follow the path for about a quarter of a mile as it follows a large left bend in the river. Look for a vehicle entrance on the right with gateposts. Turn in here where you will find a large stone monument and views to the old floodgates from the riverbank.

9. Holding back the tide

Stone structure near old floodgates

Directions 9

Return to the roadside path and turn right. After about 150 metres, and opposite the far entrance to the layby opposite, look for a gap in the wooden fence on the right. Follow this small, unmarked track through the grass to the riverside.

10. Fight!

Riverbank near old Quoile Bridge

Directions 10

Either retrace your steps to the roadside and turn right or, if long grass and nettles don't concern you, follow the riverside path through the undergrowth until it reaches the steps up to the road. Carefully cross over the road at the bridge, remaining on the same side of the river. Follow the pavement at the side of the road towards Downpatrick for about 100 metres then look for the sign which marks the way back down to the riverside. This next section of the riverside is known as Jane's Shore. Follow the path about a quarter of a mile until you reach a boardwalk beside rushes.

11. Lord Dunleath's legacy

First boardwalk on Jane's Shore

Directions 11

Continue along the riverside path. Go through a single kissing gate and stop after passing through a triple kissing gate that allows livestock access to the river.

12. Big fish, little seals

After triple kissing gate on Jane's Shore

Directions 12

Continue along the riverside path passing through several sets of kissing gates. Stop when you reach the next section of boardwalk.

13. Battling nature

Second boardwalk on Jane's Shore

Directions 13

Continue along the riverside path until you reach the end where it makes a sharp left turn up a slope to the main road. Follow the path by the road past the metal sculpture of St Patrick. When you are level with the town sign carefully cross the busy road into the small lane opposite. As the lane reaches its highest point and begins to bend to the right look for a farm gate on the left. Go through the gate and follow the track straight across the field under the telegraph wires.

The next gate takes you into the site of the Mound of Down. This is an almost circular site comprising a ditch (where you are standing), outer rampart, inner rampart and summit. Follow the path straight ahead through the walls of the outer rampart. Turn right at the next junction and follow the path for 90 degrees round the mound. At the next junction go straight ahead through the inner rampart and climb up to the top of the mound.

14. Mysterious mound

Top of the Mound of Down

Directions 14

Remain at the top of the Mound of Down.

15. Abbey on an island

Top of the Mound of Down

Directions 15

Retrace your steps down from the top of the Mound of Down and through the inner rampart. At the first junction turn right and follow the path past an information board and to the far side where modern steps lead through the outer rampart. At the bottom go straight ahead through the ditch and then turn right. Follow the grassy path with the cathedral straight ahead.

Go through the gate in the far corner into the small car park and follow the steep lane up past the primary school. At the top turn right onto Mount Crescent. Follow the road round to the next junction and turn right onto English Street. The Down County Museum (housed in the old gaol) is on the right and is well worth a visit once you have finished this walk.

continued over...

Directions 15 continued

Follow the pavement towards the cathedral. Stop where the road splits around the cathedral and look at the large stone cross on the grassy area. Walk up the road round the left side of the cathedral. At the top of the slope, turn left up the few steps and follow the path to the large stone which marks the grave of St Patrick.

16. Holy smokes!

Grave of St Patrick by cathedral

Directions 16

Go back along the path and down the steps. Turn left and walk through the parking area to the gates at the far end that lead into another graveyard. Stop here and look at the view.

17. Living on a prayer

View from Cathedral Hill

Directions 17

Do take time to look inside the cathedral. When you are ready, follow the road back down the other side of the cathedral. Go a short way along English street. Opposite the museum look for a set of steps on the right signposted for St Patrick's Centre. The centre is the large building at the bottom.

18. On borrowed land

St Patrick's Centre

Directions 18

To return to the Quoile Countryside Centre by public transport you can catch a bus from the bus station 200 metres away (turn right onto Market Street) but these only go to the old Quoile Bridge (service 14 to Killyleagh), the service is infrequent (1.5-2 hourly) and no buses run on Sundays. From the stop it is a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile walk to the Quoile Countryside Centre. Alternatively there is a taxi rank just before the bus station on the opposite side of the road.

To return to the Quoile Countryside Centre on foot it is a 2 mile walk by road. Turn left into the main shopping street (Market Street). At the traffic lights, bear left then right and follow the main road (Church Street). At the large roundabout where the A7 to Belfast goes left, bear right on the A22 for Killyleagh. After a short distance bear right on the A25 (Strangford Road). After 1 mile bear left onto Quay Road and the Quoile Countryside Centre is on the right.

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

Verity Peet for researching and writing the walk materials and providing the audio commentary

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Jenny Lunn for editing the walk resources, providing photographs and acting as narrator

Howard Lunn for testing the walk route in monsoon conditions and going back to take photographs on a sunnier day

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