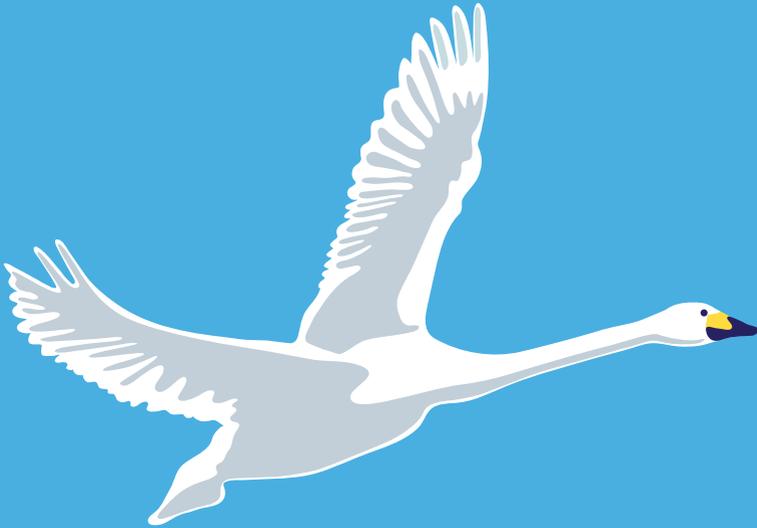


Inch & Foyle

An exploration of wildlife, history and landscape for Inch Wildfowl Reserve and Eastern Lough Foyle Shore



This project is part-financed by the European Union's INTERREG IVA Cross-border Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

Welcome to the Inch & Foyle Wildfowl Project. This project aims to deliver two world-class visitor and outdoor recreation attractions at Inch Wildfowl Reserve at Inch Levels in Co. Donegal and at the East Coast of Lough Foyle near Limavady. The project is funded by the European Union through the Interreg IVA Programme.

Our new project logo is a Whooper Swan flying in a bright winter sky and in many ways captures the heart beat of this project as thousands of winter wildfowl use these sites as a first stop on their migratory journey south for

the winter months. It's not unusual at Inch or Foyle during Winter months to see fields with several thousand Greylag Geese or Whooper Swans grazing or to witness the return of the birds to the lake at Dusk one of the most impressive displays of bird watching you are likely to witness. Both sites have a wealth of wildlife to experience and the pathway infrastructure caters for outdoor recreational activity including walking, running, cycling or just to visit in the car and experience the coastal views at one of our car parks where information signs are erected.



Inch Wildfowl Reserve

Situated in the shadow of Scalp Mountain on the eastern shores of Lough Swilly, tucked neatly behind Inch Island, you will find Inch Wildfowl Reserve. The combination within this site of extensive feeding areas and safe resting and roosting sites makes this site one of the most important wetlands in the country for wintering waterfowl.

This site is situated to the east of Lough Swilly, approximately 8 km to the south of Buncrana. It supports a wide diversity of wintering waterfowl, notably swans and geese, as well as breeding terns, gulls, waders and duck. However you will experience much more than just wetland birds here at Inch, it's a haven for farmland birds and birds of prey. Being on the western-most part of Europe it also attracts a fair share of unusual birds throughout the year. It is also an important link in the overall Lough Swilly wetland system, which includes Blanket Nook and Big Isle to the southwest.

Pump House Car Park

Slab Road, Inch Levels, Burt,
Co Donegal. Lat/Long: 55.0517, -7.4440

If you were standing here 200 years ago you would be either stuck in the mud or under the water of Lough Swilly. The farmland behind you is reclaimed from the sea over 160 years ago and turned into some of the richest farmland in the country. The embankment you are standing on was hand-built by labourers from all parts of East Donegal, and their craftsmanship is testified by the fact that the bank is still doing its job today.

This is a great place in the winter season to see wildfowl flying in and out of the lake, birds like Whooper swans and Greylag geese. Keep an eye in the fields both summer and winter for wading birds such as Lapwing, Redshank and Curlews amongst others. It is also a great place to look for some of our more threatened farm and hedgerow birds like Yellowhammers and Tree sparrows. In the summer hosts of Swifts take full advantage of the embankments for feeding on clouds of flies, a fantastic place to see their aerial acrobatics.

If you walk towards Tready Point you will see the "new" pumphouse which pumps the water from the farm into the lake.



Tready Hide

Inch Levels, Burt, Co Donegal.
Lat/Long: 55.0459, -7.4502

Did you know the path you have been walking on was once part of the railway line from Derry to Letterkenny. Imagine the spectacle to witness this view from the inside of a railway carriage.

Here you will find the Tready Birdhide which offers great views of the lake looking north and west.

The wet grassland in front of the hide is a safe roost for wintering wildfowl, thousands of Whooper Swans and Greylag geese roost here each night through the winter and provides an unsurpassed wildlife spectacle, to experience the birds coming into roost in the evening has to be seen and heard to be believed.



It is also a great place to see a variety of birds using the lake edge and the deeper water, diving ducks and birds are easily seen out on the lake, with common and the more unusual waders such as Ruff using the shallows to feed. Keep an eye for a passing predator such as the Peregrine falcon in the air or the cautious Otter in the water.



The stone structures that you can see at low water are old wildfowling hides used in times past for hunting, when wildfowling was a means of income for locals.

Farland Car Park

Inch Levels, Burt, Co Donegal.

Lat/Long: 55.0428, -7.4767



When the Reclamation project was started about 1850, three embankments were created, The Tready Embankment, The Farland embankment and The Inch Embankment. The Farland and Inch Embankments were created to hold back the tides, and the Tready Embankment was built dividing the lake and farm.

Here you can see the tidal waters of Lough Swilly on one side and the brackish waters of Inch Lake on the other. The water from the lake is released into Lough Swilly here via eight sluice gates which open at low tide, the gates then swing closed when the tide comes in.

If you look out towards the Lough you will see what remains of Farland Point, this was used as a jetty in the past when potatoes were brought via steam train and loaded onto ships for export.

When the mud is exposed a wealth of waders can be seen feeding, Oystercatchers, Redshank, Godwits, Curlews, Herons to name a few.



It's also a great place to watch diving birds such as Merganser's, Grebes and Divers, and it's worth approaching quietly as it's a regular place for sighting the blue flash of the Kingfisher and the quiet stealth of the Otter.

Farland Bank Hide

Inch Island, Co Donegal
Lat/Long: 55.0496, -7.4701

Now at the Island end of the Farland Bank, you have unsurpassed views over and beyond the Reserve. You will be able to see An Grianan Fort to the southeast, Burt Castle to the southwest, Inch castle to the west and Scalp Mountain to the northeast.

Close to the embankment on the lake side you can see a small islet. This is the most densely populated part of the Reserve in the breeding season. It's home to hundreds of breeding Sandwich Terns and Black-Headed Gulls, as well as an unusual breeding colony of Mute Swans, not to mention Tufted Ducks, Mallard, and Common Terns.

Sandwich Terns are a globally



threatened species, which requires extra effort in their conservation. They migrate each year to spend the winter in the warmer climes of western Africa. They were struggling to cope with our increasingly wet summers and high water levels which are a constant threat to the unfledged chicks. So to decrease the threat of flooding we set about creating an artificial platform on the islet with rock and sand, thankfully the Terns were agreeable to their new home.



McGraths

Baylet, Inch Island, Co Donegal
Lat/Long: 55.0547, -7.4602



This area is known locally as McGraths, a common local name. This part of the island has been a busy place for hundreds if not thousands of years, were the old public road arrived on the island. The marks showing the old road going across the lake can be clearly seen today.



This is a great place to view the shore of the lake, an area known locally as "the long point" and the shallow waters close to it provide a sheltered retreat for a variety of waders both in summer and winter. The area of grassland here is managed by grazing, mowing and controlling rush, resulting in ideal habitat for breeding Redshank, Lapwing, Snipe and Dunlin. Geese and Swans are regular grazers here throughout the year.



Keep your eyes and ears open as you walk along the old shoreline of Inch Island towards the Bank End.

Bank End

Inch Island, Co Donegal.

Lat/Long: 55.0614, -7.4620

As you enter the wet woodland boardwalk you are immersed into a new habitat, listen for singing birds both in the trees and from the sedges at the lake edge. In the summer a chorus of Willow Warblers, Sedge Warblers along with the common woodland birds will greet you, in the winter listen for the robin, wren and blackbird warning of your advance.

When you emerge from the boardwalk you are standing on the edge of the main road onto Inch

Island, keep going right. As you walk along the Inch embankment you will encounter some of the more social birds, the birds here have become accustomed to humans and are willing to let you see them up close. Have a look further out and you will see a rich variety of diving ducks, coots and grebes.



Fowlers

Watery Road, Inch Levels, Fahan, Co Donegal.

Lat/Long: 55.0625, -7.4538

The Fowler family took up residence here around the time the embankments were built in the mid 1800's. They owned the adjoining farmland and were very much considered part of the local community, even willing part of their estate to the building of the local parish hall, now known as the "Fowler Hall". All that remains are the wall-stead's hidden amongst the trees. Ms Fowler died around 1940.

This corner of the site is now dominated by wet woodland scrub, with a rich shoreline favoured

by various dabbling ducks. Just behind the woodland on the old railway line is a large heronry, in late spring the cacophony of noise will be hard to ignore.



Tooban Hide

Tooban, Inch levels, Fahan, Co Donegal.
Lat/Long: 55.0577, -7.4368

As you have walked back from the Island of Inch towards Tooban, you have enjoyed walking along the old Buncrana to Derry Railway Line, here at Tooban is where the line split one for Carndonagh and the other for Letterkenny/Burtonport, it is known locally as Tooban Junction.

Opened in 1868 for the branch line to Farland Point, the Tooban station survived the closure of Farland Point branch by 2 years. It was reopened in 1883 upon the opening of the line to Letterkenny. The Letterkenny line was a narrow gauge line, this gave the station the unusual situation of having a narrow gauge line on one side of

the island platform and a standard gauge line on the other for two years until the Buncrana line was converted to narrow gauge. Access to the station was pedestrian only via a footbridge.

The bird hide at Tooban overlooks the main area of wet grassland and is a favoured roost for Whooper Swans and Greenland White-Fronted Geese. It is also a great place to see breeding lapwing in the summer, and keep your eyes peeled for hunting Hen Harriers or on occasion Marsh Harriers.



Grianan Farm

Inch Levels, Burt, Co Donegal.

Lat/Long: 55.0459, -7.4312



Grianan Farm was created from the mud and salt marsh of Lough Swilly over 160 years ago. This farm boasts over 2000 acres of reclaimed land, which is some of the most productive land on the island of Ireland today.

It is this intensive agriculture and the large fields that make it so attractive for the visiting wildfowl. The farm is managed in a tillage type system with a mixture of grazing animals, cereal crops and potatoes being grown on the land. Much of the farm is now managed as an organic farm, this means that it is an even greater challenge for a balance to be found with the interaction between wildlife and food production. The farmers are involved in a management agreement which means that the birds are tolerated and left undisturbed through the winter months.

The farm with its hedgerows and wet patches in the field allow an opportunity to see other species such as some of the more threatened farmland birds like tree sparrows and large flocks of finches in the winter, also some of the wading birds such as the lapwing breed on the large fields in the summer.



Inch Wildfowl Reserve



A238

Inch Road

Bank End

Fowlers

Tooban Hide

Inch Level

McGraths

P

Farland Bank Hide

Baylett

P

Pump House Car Park

Tready Hide

Grianan Farm

P

Farland Car Park

Carrowtrasna

N13

Eastern Lough Foyle shore

Lough Foyle is a large, shallow sea lough on the North coast of Ireland nestled between the Inishowen peninsula and Binevenagh Mountain. It takes its name from the Irish Loch Feabhail which is believed to translate as the lough/estuary of the lip.

This guide provides information on the safest accessible points along the Eastern Lough shore from Ballykelly northwards to Roe Estuary and Ball's Point, as well as what you might expect to see when visiting the site.

Designated as a Ramsar site, Lough Foyle is an internationally important wetland habitat because of the intertidal mudflats that attract waders and migratory wildfowl including whooper swans, pale-bellied Brent geese, widgeon and bar-tailed godwit. In addition the RSPB has a reserve on a portion of the lough. Whilst the Autumn and Winter months see thousands of migrating visitors, the Lough is a great place to see birdlife all year round.



In 1845 work began to reclaim some 22,000 acres of slobland at Ballykelly, Ballymacran and Myroe to lay the tracks for the Londonderry & Coleraine Railway. The lands backing onto the shore are protected by a sea wall and are some of the most productive arable land in the country growing cereals, potatoes, coppiced willow and more recently oil seed rape and lawn turf.

The Brighter Gold was discovered in the nearby townland of Brighter believed to be an offering to Manannan mac Lir, the Celtic god of the sea, recognition of when this section of coast was under the lough.



Carrickhue

Townland: Carrickhugh

Lat/Long: 55.042606, -7.067849

Adjacent to the A2 on the Causeway Coastal Route Carrickhue picnic area is located between Greysteel and Ballykelly on the southern shore of Lough Foyle. This view point, at about 30 metres above sea level, provides a panoramic view looking northwards over the expanse of Lough Foyle towards Inishowen sweeping eastward to Binevenagh Mountain.

During Autumn and Winter you can observe groups of Whooper Swans feeding in the fields between the shore and the road.



Ballykelly Bank

Townlands: Ballykelly

Lat/Long: 55.058027, -7.044497



Ballykelly Bank may be accessed from Station Road just off the A2 to the west of the Ballykelly village. Park just before the bridge over the Ballykelly River on the northern side of the level crossing. Please don't block the gate! From here you can follow the track along the Ballykelly River to meet Lough Foyle after a short distance.

Ballykelly Bank is an inter tidal area which provides a great feeding ground for waders such as curlew and redshank as well as the noisy pale-bellied Brent goose. On your return to the bridge keep an eye out



for dippers feeding in the river or reed buntings foraging along the tall grasses.

You will also see part of the former Ballykelly airfield which played a key supporting role during the Second World War.



Ballymacran Bank

Townlands: Ballykelly Level,
Ballymacran, Myroe Level
Lat/Long: 55.079633, -7.013444

Ballymacran Bank is located off the southern end of the Carrowclare Road close to the old Limavady railway junction.

A glance at a map hints at the area's wildfowl connection with reference made to Barnacle and Widgeon Lodges. One of the widest parts of Lough Foyle, Ballymacran is a very important agricultural area. Winter sees flocks of wintering wildfowl feeding in the fields, lapwing with their distinctive pee-wit call and silhouette in flight can be seen all year with numbers boosted in the winter months. The drainage channels behind the sea wall also present opportunity to see a range of waders including redshank, godwits and dunlin. The intertidal area where the Burnfoot River flows into the lough is also a great place to view the birds.

At low tide the wreckage of a Vought Corsair aircraft which crashed in the later years of the Second World War can be seen.



Myroe

Townland: Myroe Level

Lat/Long: 55.095852, -7.022112

From Carrowclare Road take Shore Avenue, crossing the railway line you come to the sea wall. Here you will discover a diverse range of bird life as well as a diverse range of crops. The drainage channels behind the sea wall offer sheltered feeding for egrets, grebes and waders. Crops vary here from coppiced willow to potatoes to lawn turf offering a range of cover and habitat for the bird life.

High tide will push birds onto the farmland to feed, including golden plover, but the sand and mudflats provide opportunities for oystercatcher, curlew and bar-tailed godwit.

From the sea wall you can take in a 360° view over Lough Foyle towards Inishowen, Magilligan Point, Binevenagh and the Roe Valley.



Roe Estuary

Townlands: Carrowmuddle, Myroe Levels
Lat/Long: 55.105971, - 6.99839
(Lough Side) 55.104164, -6.989121

The extensive mudflats of Roe Estuary offer a great feeding ground for overwintering and resident wildfowl alike. Inside the railway bridge within the Nature Reserve is an area of salt marsh when exposed at low tide is a popular feeding ground for curlew, lapwing and other waders.

The best view of the estuary is on the outer side of the railway bridge which can be reached via Myroe. Here the River Roe meets Lough Foyle and the expansive sand and



mud flats are full of bustle with a diverse range of waders, geese and swans feeding at low tide. Look out for turnstone, bar-tailed godwit and Brent geese.

Ball's Point

Townland: Minearny
Lat/Long 55.115917, -6.988561

Ball's Point is found at the end of the Scotchtown Road on the northern side of the Roe Estuary. Here in the shadow of Binevenagh an informal car park overlooks extensive mud and sand flats. A favoured spot for geese, bar-tailed godwit, curlew and oystercatcher and a great place to watch birds in flight.

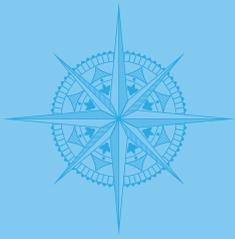
Lough Foyle Wildfowlers Association owns a portion of the shore line between Roe Estuary



and Ball's Point managing it for shooting and conservation interests.

To visit most of these sites you will have to cross the railway line. Please do so carefully and only at approved crossings for your own safety.

Eastern Lough Foyle shore



Ball's Point

Minearny

Scotchtown

Roe Estuary

Myroe

Carrowmenagh

Carrowmuddle

Carrowclare

Ballymacran Bank

Broighter

Ballykelly Bank

Broharris

Glebe

Ballyspallan

Carrickhue

Walworth

A2

Ballykelly



Photographs courtesy of Andrew Speer, Richard Gillen, Alyn Walsh, Desmond Loughery, Limavady Borough Council and Owen Anderson.