Waterways Ireland
Uiscebhealaí Éireann Watterweys Airlann

Nature Navvies Programme

THE CRAZY CANAL CYCLE



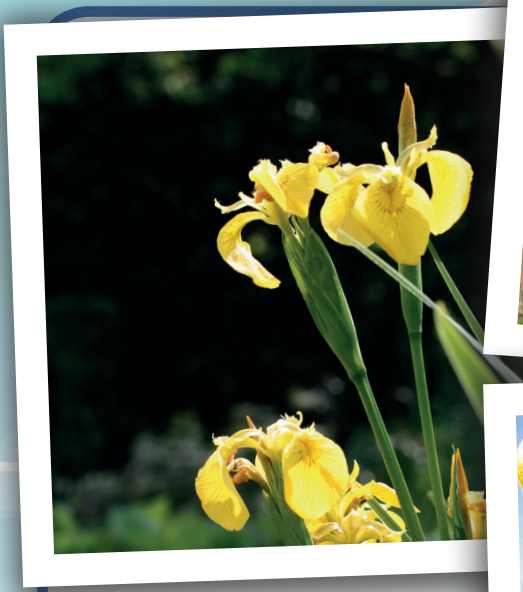
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The sun sparkled in the sky as Lucas pumped his tyres and checked his brakes in preparation for his Saturday cycle with younger sister Lottie. The glistening Royal Canal was where Lucas and Lottie had decided to venture to that day. The towpath provided the perfect route for a colourful adventure. With their loyal dog Heidi in tow, an adventure was guaranteed. There was never a dull moment when she was around. Helmets fitted properly they set off from their home in Mullingar and headed for their local canal.













"This is a cyclist's paradise" said Lucas as they peddled along the towpath. "So peaceful" said Lottie as they passed by fishermen entranced by the stillness of the water hoping for a good catch of Pike or Rudd. "This place is awash with colours Lucas" observed Lottie. "Look at the variety of plants at the canal edge". Yellow Flag Irises, Purple Loosestrife and Meadowsweet were dancing in the gentle summer breeze, their scents attracting blissful butterflies and bouncy bees.





Sceeeechhhh…. Lucas suddenly pulled hard on the brakes and came to an abrupt stop as a Kingfisher had flown in front of him like a rainbow rocket "Wohh… that was close" uttered a shaken Lucas as the majestic bird swooped over the open water collecting its fish dinner in doing so. Dragonflies danced in the air celebrating that they weren't on tonight's menu. Further down the towpath the children passed a beautiful barge boarded by a family glowing with lifejackets making holiday memories as they chatted and laughed their way through the open water at snail's pace appreciating the sumptuous scenery before them.









"Heidi, come back" yelled Lottie as the zany white fluff ball sprinted way ahead of them greeting joggers on her way. The children peddled faster until Heidi stopped in her tracks beneath the impressive canal bridge and began to dig like a mad mole. Soil was flying in all directions creating a brown fog through which a brown faced Heidi appeared with a bone in her mouth and a look of delight on her face. Lottie giggled at the sight of their dively dog while Lucas moaned as he anticipated an evening of scrubbing a muddy dog.

Lottie took in the sight of the impressive structure that lay before them. "What are those marks all down the side of the bridge Lucas? Did vandals do that??" quizzed the little girl. "Four-legged vandals" laughed Lucas. Those marks were made by the horses that towed the barges before engines were invented along the canal.

"The towpath was pounded every day by the strong horse's hooves. With ropes attached from their harness to the goods laden barges they hauled the boats on long journeys ensuring goods like turf, whiskey and flour were distributed safely to their destinations. The Royal Canal and the Grand Canal were a hive of activity 200 years ago. The barges were pulled with such ferocity that the ropes cut through cement as the horses ventured on the narrow path beneath the canal bridge" explained Lucas.











"Gosh those rivers must have been like the M50 years ago" commented Lottie. "River……...No, no Lottie… this is a canal…. completely different from a river. Canals were man-made by navvies who dug them out by hand. They provided a route to transport people and goods across the country before railways or decent roads existed" explained a knowledgeable Lucas. "Seriously" remarked a surprised Lottie. That must have taken a lot of hard work…..



"But where did rivers and lakes come from then"? questioned Lottie. "Well, rivers and lakes formed naturally after the Ice Age" explained Lucas. "Cool" remarked Lottie. "Yeah! Freezing" laughed Lucas. "Imagine what the Ice Age looked like... like Lapland. But how did the Ice Age make rivers and lakes Lucas?" said his inquisitive little sister. "Wouldn't it be epic to be there in the Ice Age and see it for real.."





"Well maybe we can sis……" whispered Lucas "What…. you're crackers…" laughed Lottie. "Eh…no I am not…See my helmet Lottie… It's quite old and not very cool but…… I received it from Great Uncle Baz. He used it in his crazy canoeing days" explained Lucas. Great Uncle Baz, who had turned 80 the previous week, and insisted on a bouncing castle for his party, had worn this helmet since he was a teenager as he canoed his way along the various waterways in Ireland winning countless competitions down the years. "I love Baz's Canoe stories. He's had some wild adventures. Imagine he was crowned world champion in Brazil in 1979, wearing this rickety helmet. If this helmet could speak…" thought Lucas. Lucas recalled the moment that Uncle Baz had told him about the powers of the helmet. He remembered the glint in his warm eyes as he said "Lucas this helmet will keep you safe and you shall have plenty of adventures should you wish for them, even time-travel".
On one of his expeditions he won gold and the prize was that a magic wishing spell be cast over the winner's helmet.



With a nod from Lottie it was clear they both were prepared for a Saturday to remember. She cuddled a muddy faced Heidi in her arms as Lucas rubbed the helmet saying the words "Take us to the last Ice Age". Lucas grasped his sister's hand. They both closed their eyes and were spun into a sharp whirlwind. The children were forced into the air, spinning faster and faster. Lucas could be heard shouting "wheeeee" in a very excited tone. With a blast of freezing cold air the children found themselves perched upon what appeared to be a giant ice cube, Heidi skating beside them in what was not a prize winning performance. As they looked at the scene that lay before them they gasped in awe of the Lapland like landscape. Sitting upon the glacier there was complete silence in this winter wonderland.





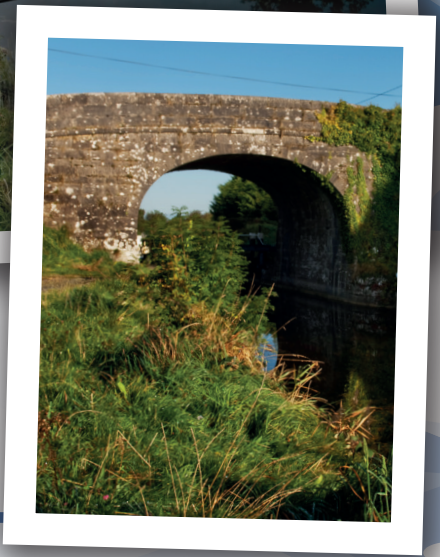
"What year is it Lucas?" questioned Lottie. "20,000 years ago sis. Ireland is covered in mountains of snow which have become huge blocks of ice over tens of thousands of years. It's a permanent winter. Paradise for a snowball fight!" exclaimed Lucas. Lottie gazed into the sky and noticed the sun making an appearance, shining brightly behind the snow filled clouds. Clouds began to clear and a sparkling blue sky emerged. "The climate is changing Lottie, this is the beginning of the formation of Irish lakes and rivers" announced the older brother. With that their ice cube began to move as snow and ice began melting all around them. "This is like the best theme park ride ever bro" squealed an excited Lottie as they glided through the melting winter wonderland.



"There are many enormous ice cubes like this one moving with speed to lower land cutting through mountains and creating valleys and eroding land, chiselling out lakes on its route to lower ground. Moving bodies of water that will be rivers are being created from the melting ice, flowing from high in the mountains to lower ground below. The waterways of Ireland are being carved out by the glistening glaciers. Imagine we are witnessing the River Shannon being formed before our very eyes. The Lower Bann Navigation, the Barrow and the Erne system were all etched out by the movement of melting glaciers during the last Ice Age" explained Lucas. "Wow, such a phenomenal natural physical process. That is pretty amazing Lucas" shouted Lottie.

"Brrrrr…I am freezing. Let's head back to The Royal Canal" said a shivering Lottie. With difficulty, Lucas grasped their ice skating dog, clasped his sister's hand and rubbed the helmet making a wish to return back to The Royal Canal. Caught up in a whirlwind once more they closed their eyes and dreamed of home. In the blink of an eye they were once again beneath the canal bridge. The fishermen still focused upon the open water as barges floated by.





"I totally understand the difference between canals, rivers and lakes now Lucas. What wonderous men those navvies were, digging by hand, re-creating the work of the glaciers. How lucky are we to have such fantastic waterways throughout Ireland. I appreciate them so much more now that I have seen how they were made" stated the little girl.

"All thanks to Uncle Baz" said Lucas as he clipped his helmet on with pride. "Let's head for home sis, I am starving after our crazy canal cycle" laughed Lucas. "Heidi, hop into my basket" pleaded Lottie. A tired muddy Heidi hopped on board and the three of them set off down the towpath in the direction of home. It wasn't the end of their aquatic adventures though "Lucas, remember it's your turn to wash Heidi" reminded Lottie.. Ha ha.. "That is going to take quite some time sis"






THANKS FOR
JOING US ON
THIS WONDERFUL
ADVENTRE



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