

All in a Day's Work

Environment & Heritage Officer — Waterways

PROFILE

Cormac McCarthy works as an Environment & Heritage Officer with *Waterways Ireland*, one of seven North South Bodies responsible for managing Ireland's major inland navigable waterways. He advises on work undertaken by the organisation and also works with the public as coordinator of their Heritage Plan.

www.waterwaysireland.org



Images courtesy of Waterways Ireland

Cormac McCarthy

over the country, North and South. It takes me everywhere and anywhere. Our seven waterways are the Shannon, Shannon Erne Waterway, Erne System, Lower Bann, Grand & Royal Canals and the Barrow Navigation. We are also looking at projects relating to the Ulster Canal. I have been privileged to be on boats on the Shannon, walk the canal towpaths and work on sensitive repairs to weirs on the Barrow, to name but a few. My work also brings me to the amazing lakelands of the Erne system and right up to the Lower Bann and the rich heritage that surrounds it. To have that balance of desk work and fieldwork is a rare thing and I am fortunate to have it in my job.

What is the worst thing about your job?

Being spread all over the country and having so many communities who would like to work with us but not having enough hours in the day! We try our best to engage with as many local groups and communities as possible but with limited resources unfortunately we can't help everyone – doesn't stop us trying though.

Do you enjoy your work?

I love my work. I always have in all my jobs, but there is something very special about Ireland's waterways and the

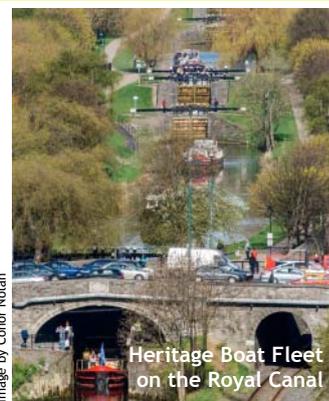


Image by Conor Nolan

Heritage Boat Fleet on the Royal Canal

rich mix of natural, built and cultural heritage that form a rich tapestry in the landscape.

Do you work alone or as part of a team?

I work with three others as part of the Environment & Heritage team: Eamonn, Paula and Sabine. As we were the first ever Environment & Heritage Section in *Waterways Ireland* we got to put our own stamp on how we worked, which is a great opportunity.

What would you say to someone who wants to do your job?

No matter what you learn in school or college, common sense and respect for others will see you far in any career you wish to pursue.

What would you do if you weren't doing what you do?

Tough question... I think I would still be involved in heritage, perhaps more in a community role.

Where do you work?

I work in the Environment & Heritage Section of *Waterways Ireland* which is based in Scarriff, Co. Clare. My role is to make sure works carried out by our organisation comply with relevant environmental and heritage legislation. We also undertake a lot of work with local community groups, such as helping with heritage awareness initiatives, pollinator-friendly management on our property and looking after the cultural heritage of our waterways.

Have you always been interested in what you do?

Yes absolutely. From a very young age I was privileged to grow up on the west coast of Co. Clare, at the edge of the Burren National Park. Being exposed to such a landscape from a young age definitely left its mark! I knew that once I left school I wanted to study the environment.

What training did you do to get where you are today?

I studied for my undergraduate degree in Environmental Science in NUI Galway. From there I started work and completed professional development courses that helped me with my work. This can be very varied, from understanding the law around the Habitats

Directive to studying how to identify aquatic plants and know the difference between an otter and a mink footprint. Very varied to say the least!

What is your day like?

What's great is that every day is so different. One day you could be working with specialists on creating a register for heritage boats. Next you could be working on botanical surveys in the morning and that evening a strategy document on Blueways to promote more sustainable travel.

What is your main aim?

My main aim, both professionally and personally, is to be true to my word and stand over the work I do. I have a great respect for our environment and I would like to think that everything I do helps to preserve that for my kids and for future generations.

What is the best thing about your job?

The variety of the work and the fact that it is based all



Image by Dariusz Radaszewski

Aerial shot of a canal



Image by Gearoid Gibbs

Walking along the River Barrow