



HOST GROUP

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

ACTIVE

Nature and the Environment
Virtual Guided Walk



OXFORD ISLAND NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

Guided walk – by Robert Sergeant

Pre-walk

- Before leaving home check the weather forecast, but don't let that put you off, remember there is no such thing as bad weather only inappropriate clothing.
- While the walk is primarily on reasonable paths, good footwear will never go a miss and remember this is Northern Ireland, you will probably need a coat and sun protection all on the same day!!
- This walk can be carried out in a number of different fashions :-
 1. Brisk Walk – approximately 1 hr.
 2. Leisurely Stroll 1.5-2hrs.
 3. Or take in the full experience of nature and beautiful environment - anything from 2-8hrs.
- To get the best from your experience I would recommend you take your time, stop often and look and listen for the wildlife and birds; rest regularly and take in the beauty of the landscape.

Learning Experience

- During your walk, why not take the opportunity to learn a little bit more about the nature you see and hear along the way and challenge yourself to identify something new that you saw on the route.
- So how can we do this:-
 1. Take someone with you who can tell you about the environment and the wildlife.
 2. Unfortunately this is not always practical, so why not consider bringing a pocket guide book(s), something like the RSPB Guide to UK Birds or their Guide to Wildlife.
 3. Also worth considering in this age of technology is some of the fantastic Apps for your phone. A few I'd recommend are:-
 - iNaturalist** – this allows you to take a photo of plants and wildlife and it will attempt to name the species.
 - BirdNET** – this allows you to record bird song and it will tell you the species - your challenge is then to try and see them.

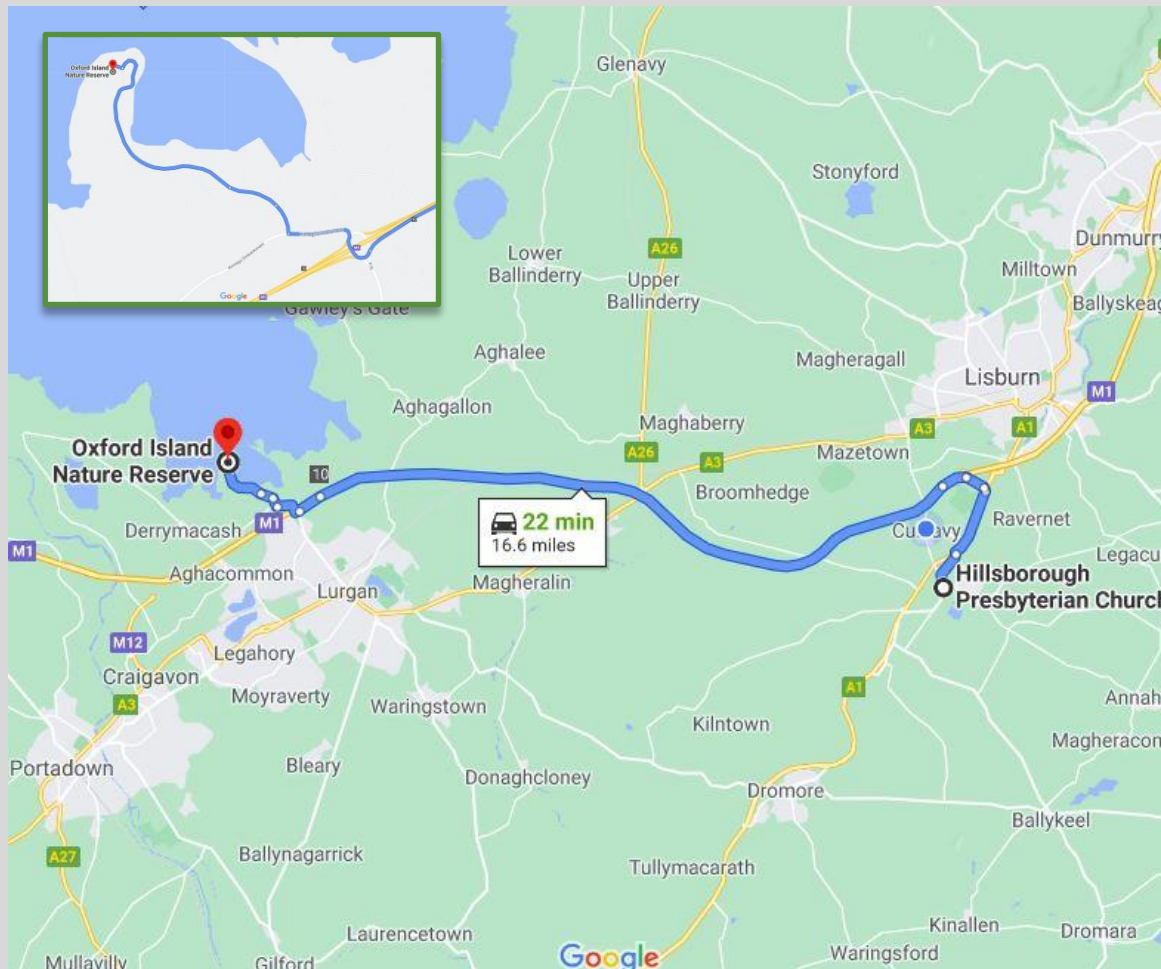
Oxford Island National Nature Reserve

- The Reserve is situated on the southern shores of Lough Neagh, the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles. It is a haven for wildlife and the visitor can explore a range of habitats ranging from woodlands to reedbeds, with trails covering 4miles in total. Most are suitable for wheelchair use and there are motorised disabled scooters available. There is also a children's play area and picnic areas.



- The Lough Neagh Discovery Centre opened in 1993, has recently been refurbished. The café, specialising in home cooking, now boasts a comfortable seating area upstairs and a new extensive range of menus, offering customers a much wider choice. The trails take in Kinnego Marina, also situated at Oxford Island. From here the visitor can enjoy boat trips along the secluded bays and small islands off the Lough Shore, including Coney Island. The marina has been refurbished with new mooring berths and a new building including a café. There is also caravan and campsite available.

How to get there



Around 17 miles and approximately 22 mins away from Hillsborough.

By car – Take M1 west bound and turn-off at Junction 10, sign posted for Craigavon (Lurgan). From the roundabout follow the brown signs to Oxford Island.



How to get there



After entering the Reserve from the Kinnego Embankment road continue straight along the entrance drive for approximately 1 mile until you pass the Discovery Centre on your RHS and then you will find the Car Park on your left (the start of our walk).





Oxford Island

A Bird's Eye View!

Welcome to Oxford Island National Nature Reserve

This great location on the southern shore of Lough Neagh offers lots to see and do for families, bird watchers, walkers, sports enthusiasts and those who just want to get outside and enjoy the natural environment. Every season brings something different to see at Oxford Island - wintering wildfowl, spring wildflowers, summer butterflies and nature tree species.

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre

The perfect place to start your visit. Tourist and local information, café, toilets, local history and Christian heritage library, temporary museum and conservation exhibitions, growing area and conference facilities.



Leave no trace

- Please respect the countryside and its wildlife
- Take your litter home
- Keep your dog on a lead
- Leave only footprints, take only memories and come back soon!

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre Tel: 028 3832 2205

Kinnego Marina Tel: 028 3832 7573

Facilities

- There are 2 main Car Parks at either end of the Reserve, one adjacent to the Discovery Centre and the other at Kinnego Marina. You should note that while the paths are available at all times the Car Parks are locked each evening (check signage as times vary per season)
- Toilets and refreshments are available in the Discovery Centre and the Welcome Centre at Kinnego Marina.
- The following facilities are available at the Discovery Centre for users with limited mobility:
 - – Café (wheelchair accessible)
 - – Shop (wheelchair accessible)
 - – Disabled toilets
 - – Disabled parking

Accessibility

- There are many paths providing areas for all abilities.
- Some paths may not be hard and firm in all weathers with loose stones (not bigger than 10cm) with occasional tree roots and pot holes and they are at least 80cm wide for its entire length.
- The path gradients and cross slopes may be greater than 6 degrees
- Obstacles such as steps or stiles are to be expected and surface breaks may be larger 75mm in width.
- There is clear head height of at least 2.10m for the entire length of the route.
- There is limited passing places for wheelchairs and rest areas may not be formalised, but new seating areas have recently been introduced.

Nature and the Environment

Virtual Guided Walk

- The walk as detailed will take you from the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre to Wetland Pond area behind Kinnego Marina and then back to the start. While I recommend you start at the Discovery Centre, as there is more parking at this end, you could equally start at Kinnego Marina if desired.
- The walk is approximately 5 Km (3.5 miles) and can be completed in just over an hour, although with many places of interest it can take considerably longer, as you stop, to see wildlife and the nature along the route.
- During this virtual tour not only will I endeavour to detail the route, but I will also endeavour to highlight some of the points of interest you might see along the route.
- At the end I will also show you some flora and fauna photographs I have taken while visiting the area and hope they will whet your appetite to get out there and enjoy the Reserve.

Start/Finish
Discovery Centre
Car Park

Lough Neagh
Discovery Centre
Oxford Island
Nature Reserve
Oxford island jetty

Route Overview

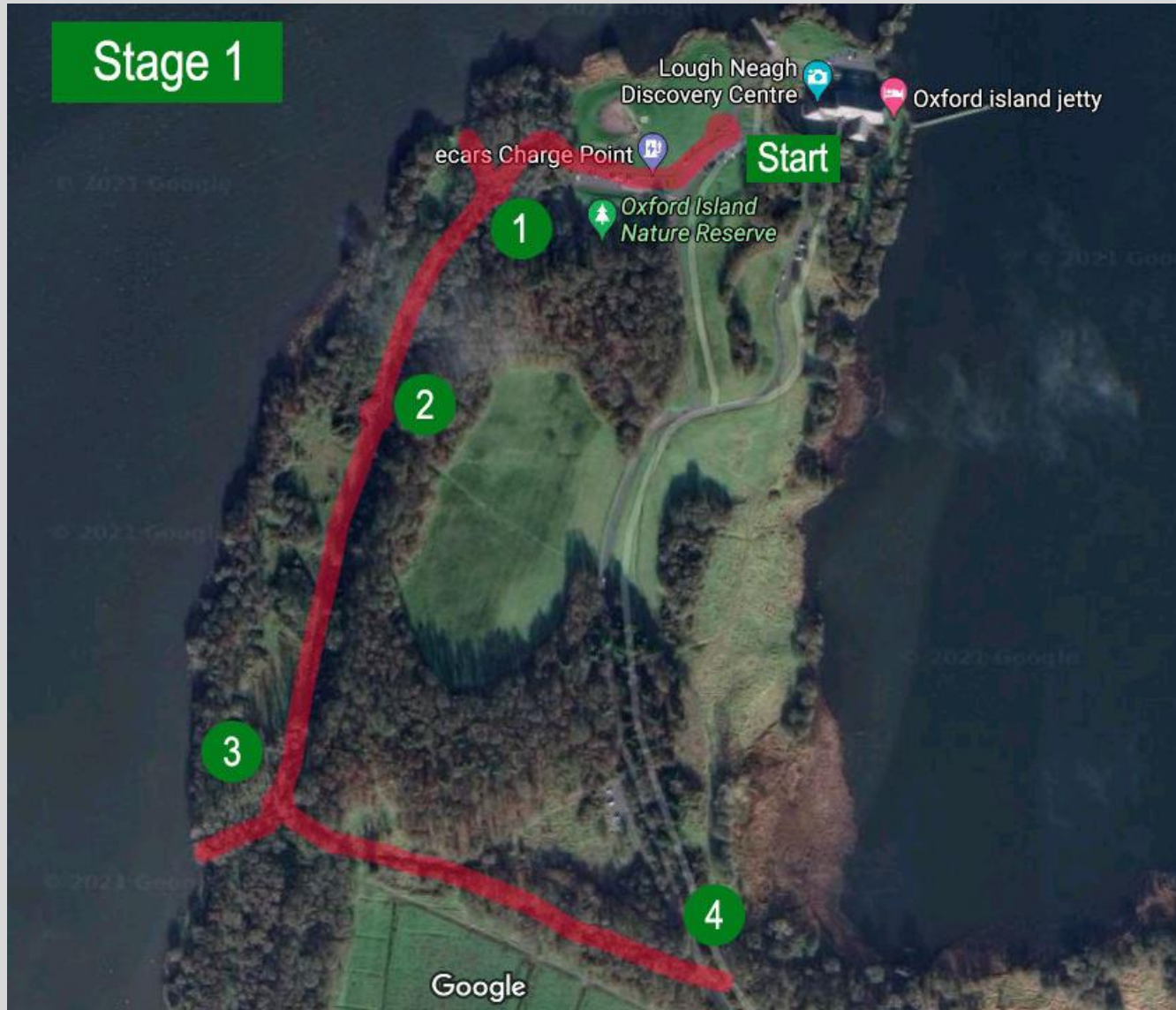
Crainavor Commercial
Vehicle Dismantlers

Kinnego Marina

Sands Marine

Car BodyShopLurgan
Google





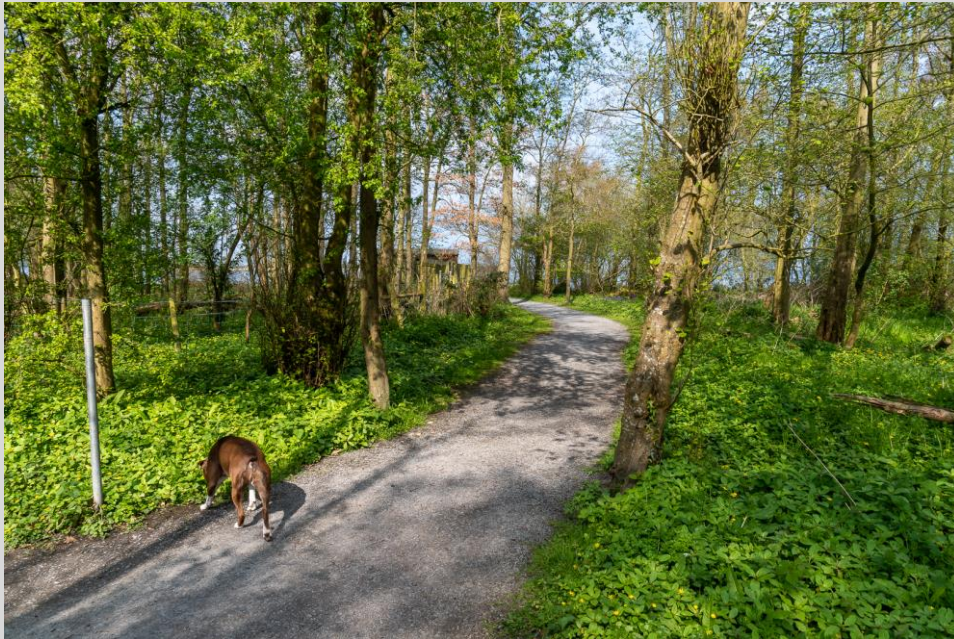
- Start at the Car Park adjacent to the Discovery Centre.
- Head towards the children's play area, keeping to the LHS.



- Continue on the path around the side until you see a Noticeboard and follow path into the wood to point 1, path to the Croaghan Hide .



- Point 1 is the first place you can divert from the main route. A path on the right will take you out to the Croaghan Hide and Sandmartin nest bank (less than 50m and worth a look).



- Path out to the hide

- View out of the Hide

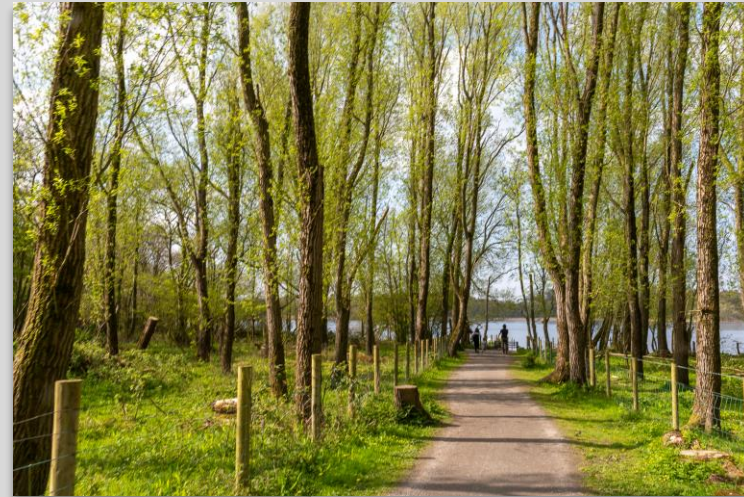


- After you have finished in the hide return to the main path and turn right and continue towards point 2, leaving a path on your LHS (beside a red bin), you will then come to the second path on the left, point 2.



- At this point you have an option to divert through the woods to the wild flower meadow. This would be a good option during the summer where you could see lots of butterflies and then continue on to pick up the route again at point 4.

- If you decided to stay on the main route you will soon pass a set of steps on your LHS. Approximately 50m further you will come to a view point with a panoramic view across Closet Bay. Here you may spot Herons, Swans, Terns, Grebes and Mallards.



- After a rest at the Closet Bay view point you should make your way back to the steps at point 3 and ascend into the woodland.



- If you have time you may wish to explore around here. In recent years there have been reported sightings of Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Long Eared Owls and numerous Jays but if you are not lucky enough to see them I'm sure you will not be disappointed with the variety of other small birds and flora.



- If you left the path return to it and continue on to the main drive at point 4.

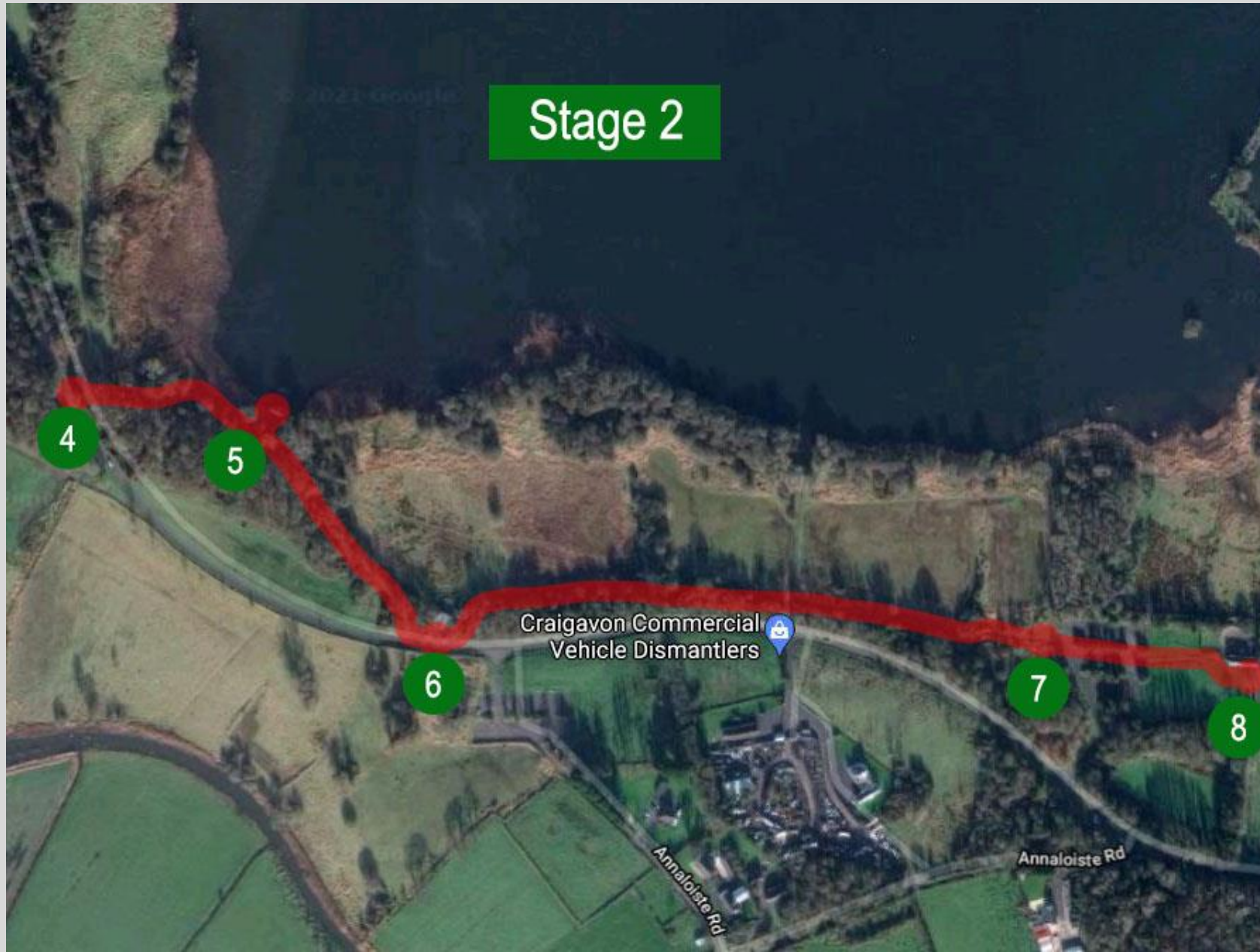
- As you approach the road look to your left where during winter and spring there is a well stocked bird table. Not only are you likely to see a wide varieties of small birds it is also regularly frequented by Grey Squirrels.



- This is the end of Stage 1 and if you want to shorten the walk you have the opportunity to return to the start either via the road back to the Discovery Centre Car Park or alternatively cross the road and take the first path on your left and follow the route described in final Stage 6 (point 22) of this described walk.



Stage 2



- Stage 2 starts when you cross the main drive (be careful cars can come from either direction).



- Keeping to the right and make your way through the trees towards the Kinnego Hide. Along this section you should get the opportunity to see lots of little hedgerow birds as the locals regularly leave out seeds along the path.

- As you progress along the path you will find the Kinnego Hide on the LHS (point 5). This is a large purpose built hide that can accommodate 10-15 people comfortably, with views out over Kinnego Bay and the adjacent reedbeds (currently closed due to Covid Restrictions). From the hide you will have the opportunity to see a great variety of waterfowl, the highlight being the Great Crested Grebes, which put on a spectacular display during spring and summer.



- When you leave the hide you should return back to the path, turn left and continue on towards point 6. As you approach the Art Centre you will come out again onto the main drive.



- Pass around the front of Art Centre and take the path on your left.



- This section of the walk is alongside an area of managed meadowland and during summer you will see a variety of colourful Vetches, Trefoils and Meadowsweet which attract butterflies such as Common Blues and Wood Whites.



- As you approach the closed off Car Park at point 7 you can take another detour to the Waterside Viewing Area. This can be a good spot to watch wintering duck on Kinnego Bay.
- When you arrive at the Car Park you should see a white building straight across from where you enter.



- This the Bush Craft Centre and this is where you are heading for now.



- As you round the continue around the side of the building with the Mural, this completes Stage 2.

Stage 3



- Stage 3 leaving the Bush Centre follow a pleasant little path around the back of the main building.



- Follow this path to a intersection in the path (point 9), where you should go straight across into a woodland area.



- This section of the path takes you through an area of mixed woodland which during autumn is a great area to look for fungi.



After going through this woodland you come to point 10 where the path crosses the access road to the Kinnego Marina. Take care as this can be busy. Go straight across into the Wetland Wood.



- At the first intersection (point 11) keep straight on past the information boards detailing how the reeds were used and the wildlife they attracted.



- As you follow the path around you reach the view point to the main pond (point 12). You should stop here for a few minutes and take in the peace and tranquillity of this area, as it is rarely busy. During the summer you will find a large selection of Damsel and Dragon flies.



- As you continue around the pond you will cross a section of decking before turning right onto a straight path that will take you up to the marina and waters edge (point 13).

- The marina is always a hive of activity, between boat owners, campers and families out with their children at the play park, but you will still find the bolder wildlife along quay. Ducks and Gulls can make a healthy livelihood scavenging food here.
- You are now on the turn home and if the café is open you could take the opportunity to relax and get some refreshments (point 14).



Stage 4



- This is your final chance to use the washroom and toilets before starting your walk back to the car.



- As you leaving the facilities take the path adjacent to the marina until you come to point 15, where you turn left, back inland. If time permits you could explore the two breakwaters, one to the left and one straight in front of you, but you must come back to this point before preceding.

- Between point 15 and 16 there are little ponds on your LHS, during the summer period these are a hive of activity with insects, again an excellent opportunity to observe damsel and dragon flies.



- After this section you will come to an intersection which you have already crossed at right angles. Here you have a choice, if it's wet under foot or you just want to take a short cut, turn right and back track your outward route to the end of the Stage at the far side of the Car Park (point 19).

- I would really recommend you don't take the shortcut but go straight over the crossroads and take the opportunity to visit the bee meadow.



- From the bench in the photograph you can transverse the field by any number of routes to the opposite corner where you will cross a little bridge. Don't rush, take your time and look out for the different flora. During the summer you will find lots of different Orchids in the next few fields, also note the very decorative bee hives structures to be found here.



- When you cross the bridge (point 17) you need to keep to the obvious path straight across the field to the drive way that leads to the Bush Centre. As you leave this field you will see a small break in the trees in front of you (point 18), which will take you into a further wild flower meadow.



- Once again go straight across this field, to the obvious gap in the hedge at the far side. Go through this to a closed road, turn right and you will return to the Car Park you crossed on the way out. Point 19



- Possible detour to the look out. This ends Stage 4.

Stage 5



- Stage 5 is the reverse of Stage 2. - the managed meadows are on your right until you come out on to the main drive at the Art Centre (20). Then take the first path on your right back into the woods and past the Kinnego Hide (21).
- Before coming back onto the drive you should take the path on the right, shown on the photo below (22).



- This ends section 5.

Stage 6



- Stage 6 – The final section.



- This section of the walk from (22) has reed beds to your right and mature trees and bushes on your left, both are haven for small birds but if you are lucky you may see some of the many Jays that frequent this area. Some of the more unusual small birds found in this area are Reed Buntings, Willow Warblers, Tree Creepers and Long Tailed Tits.
- As you progress along the path you should take the kissing gate on your right into a meadow (23).

- At some times of the year this meadow is closed for grazing by the cattle they used to manage the grassland. If there are notices, "Do not to enter", you should respect these as there is normally a large Black Bull with the cows which you probably couldn't out run. If field is closed you should proceed onto the road, turn right and follow it around to the Discovery Centre (26).
- We will now assume you have made it into the meadow, another area full of flora and fauna.



- Off to your right you can make your way to the waters edge(24), this will give you another opportunity to see the ducks, grebes and other water fowl that use Kinnego Bay during various times of the year.



- You leave this area by a further kissing gate onto the road (25), keep right, but be careful as there is no path here, but the verges are wide.



- Before returning to your car I would suggest that you take a little more time out and visit the Discovery Centre and the surrounding area (24).



- The Centre has a very nice café, shop and information section.

- Also around the outside of the Discovery Centre are many interesting areas to explore.
- As you pass the large wooden Kingfisher there is a Wildlife Garden off to your right(27).
- Further around the building you will pass the old and new piers on the waters edge to your right.
- The eaves at the back of the building are a popular nesting area for Swallows, Swifts and House Martins.
- To the rear of the building you will also find the Herb Garden (28), which attracts lots of insects and birds, particularly Pied Wagtails.
- The final path off to your right will take you out to the Yacht Club's Start and Finish station which gives you excellent views of both Kinnego Bay and out onto the main lough.
- Finally make your way around the building to the Car Park and the Finish of the Walk.
- I hope you get the opportunity to enjoy this area.



TO VIEW A SERIES OF PHOTOS I HAVE TAKEN IN
AND AROUND OXFORD ISLAND PLEASE CLICK
THE LINK BELOW TO VIEW THE VIDEO ON
YOUTUBE

<https://youtu.be/ecMwTGEKGdY>