



GORDON BENNETT ROUTE

# *Drive the Historic* **GORDON BENNETT ROUTE**

A journey through counties Carlow, Kildare and Laois



KILDARE  
LAOIS  
CARLOW

  
Ireland

[www.gordonbennetroute.com](http://www.gordonbennetroute.com)

# Welcome note

by Mr. Martin Cullen, T.D.,  
Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism



I welcome this brochure, which traces the route taken through the roads of Laois, Kildare and Carlow, by the famous Gordon Bennett Cup Motor Race in 1903 - an international contest that was the precursor of the present-day Formula 1 Grand Prix. I am sure that this brochure will prove to be a marvellous guide to the Route.

We must be grateful to the dedicated motoring historians who have unearthed so many interesting facts about the 1903 race, including the lobbying campaign to bring it to Laois, Carlow and Kildare, which stressed its value for tourism and the improvements it would bring to the roads.

In 1903, the motorcar had a future that few would have dreamt of in those days when the speed limit in Britain and Ireland was 12 miles per hour. A special Act of Parliament was passed to allow the circuit to be closed in for the Gordon Bennett Cup and this enabled the winning Belgian driver to average 49.2 miles per hour in a time of 6 hours and 39 minutes.

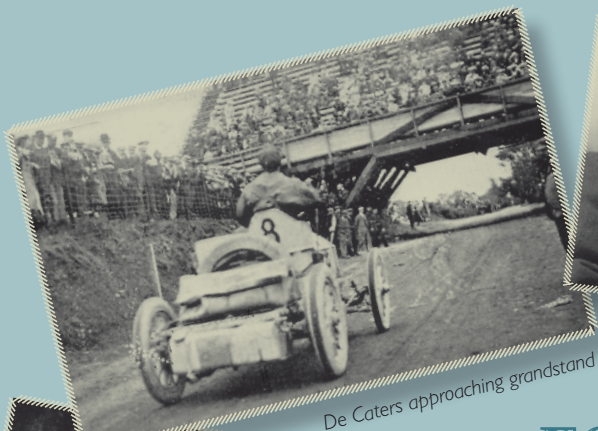
The original route is now a focused tourist attraction in its own right, taking in quiet and scenic country roads, towns and villages, with many heritage attractions. I congratulate all involved in this excellent brochure and I hope its wide circulation and association with the annual rallies and other motoring events will do much to promote the great benefits of motor sport and tourism in these counties.

## CONTENTS

Welcome note	02
Foreword by Bob Montgomery	03
How to Enjoy the Gordon Bennett Route	04
James Gordon Bennett – The Man, the Myth, the Race	05
The 1903 Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race	06
Family Fun Activities	08
Gordon Bennett Stage 1 – Ballyshannon to Carlow	10
Gordon Bennett Stage 2 – Carlow to Athy	12
Gordon Bennett Stage 3 – Athy to Kildare	14
Gordon Bennett Stage 4 – Kildare to The Heath	16
Gordon Bennett Stage 5 – The Heath to Athy	18
Finish Line – Results table, events today and further reading	20
Map	22
Contact Details – Tourism Organisations	24



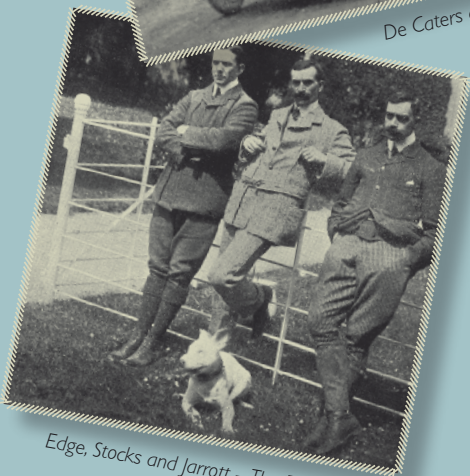
Choosing your Route



De Caters approaching grandstand



Camille Jenatton – "The Red Devil"



Edge, Stocks and Jarrott – The English Team

## FOREWORD

### Bob Montgomery

Motoring Writer & Historian  
Curator - Royal Irish Automobile Club Archive

I am delighted that this initiative has been taken to bring the Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race of 1903 and its importance to a wider audience.

When the race was run on July 2nd 1903, Ireland was for a short time at the epicentre of the motoring world and the significance of the Irish race lived on long after the race itself was run. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that international motorsport and in particular, the modern Grand Prix series, came directly from the events which took place in counties Kildare, Carlow and Laois on that day.

It is particularly appropriate that this initiative has been taken to highlight the route and explain the significance of the Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race. This was a unique and very special event in Irish history as well as in the history of motorsport. It is also a very human story, peopled by many of the giants of the heroic age of motor racing: in particular, Le Diable Rouge - Camille Jenatton, "The Red Devil", whose day of days this would be.

So, spare a thought for these brave drivers as you explore the spectacular landscape over which they raced at the dawn of motoring.



**GORDON BENNETT ROUTE**

*To follow the route, look out for this logo on road signage.*

*'The publishers gratefully acknowledge photographic contributions from Fáilte Ireland and the R.I.A.C.'*



Castletown, Co. Laois



St. Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare



Liberty Tree, Carlow Town Centre

## How to enjoy the Gordon Bennett Route:

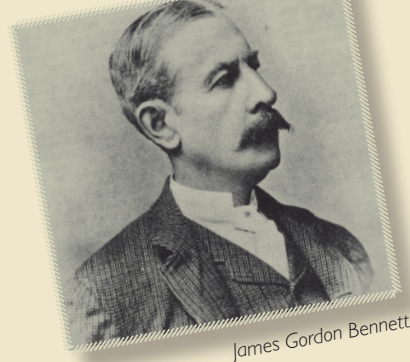


Let the Gordon Bennett Route take you on an historic journey across spectacular Irish countryside and into the picturesque towns and villages of counties Kildare, Carlow and Laois in the heart of Ireland. While the famous Gordon Bennett Route was raced by the world's greatest daredevils at record-breaking speeds in 1903, we suggest you set yourself a much easier pace. Relax, get your motor running and follow gently in the footsteps of our motoring pioneers taking time to enjoy many of Ireland's best-loved visitor attractions and breathtaking scenery along the way.

Identifiable road signs make the Gordon Bennett Route an easy-to-follow tour through one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland offering a unique insight into the lives, atmosphere and sheer adrenalin behind the historic car race that roared across this 166km (104 mile) route. There is plenty to see and do along the Gordon Bennett Route for all the family, for motoring enthusiasts and for motor club members alike. This guide brings you specialist reports, fun facts and in-depth analysis of one of the world's greatest sporting events ever.







# The Man, The Myth, The Race. . .



JAMES GORDON BENNETT (1841 – 1918)

The son of a New York media baron, James Gordon Bennett was a flamboyant character whose love of sport and all-round derring-do was reflected in the six annual, white-knuckle car races that bore his name. Born into the upper echelons of New York society, Bennett loved nothing more than a crazy wager or a madcap dash to settle a score. At 26, he took control of his father's news empire, boosting sales at the New York Herald with a number of lavish publicity stunts.

Unfortunately for New York, Bennett's rapacious playboy nature and extravagant spending habits led to him scandalizing many in "high society". This notoriety forced him to relocate to Europe and it was in Paris that James Gordon Bennett developed an all-consuming passion for the newly emerging technology of the motorcar. In 1900 he sponsored the first-ever international motoring competition, the spectacular Gordon Bennett Cup Race which was held in Ireland on July 2nd 1903. A precursor to modern Grand Prix motor racing today, the Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race was the first ever international race held on a closed circuit. Bennett also sponsored the Americas Cup yacht race as well as a Gordon Bennett Cup balloon and airplane race.

*"With the institution of a challenge cup, manufacturers would have to fight to uphold their reputation..."*

Gordon Bennett

## DID YOU KNOW?

James Gordon Bennett appears today in the Guinness Book of Records, not for his love of cars, horses or yachts but for the world's "Greatest engagement faux pas". Rumour has it that his engagement to prominent Baltimore socialite Caroline May was cut short when he arrived intoxicated to her family's New Year's Eve celebrations and proceeded to relieve himself into their grand piano.



# THE 1903 IRISH GORDON BENNETT CUP RACE

*By Bob Montgomery*



*Farman and De Knyff – French drivers*

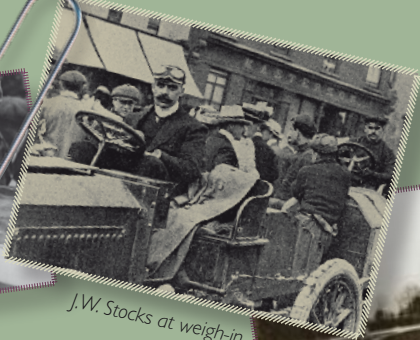
The 1903 Gordon Bennett Cup Race came to Ireland because of the remarkable victory by Selwyn F. Edge in the 1902 race. The rules required the winning country to stage the following year's race and so unexpected was the British victory and so strong the establishment opposition to motoring in that country that there was little hope of the race being staged there. A number of enthusiastic motorists seized upon the opportunity to unite all shades of Irish political and public opinion by securing the race for Ireland.

The race, it was decided, would form the central element in a fortnight of motoring contests held throughout the length and breadth of Ireland. What followed next can best be described by the modern phrase, "media frenzy", as preparations got underway for the biggest sporting event ever to take place in Ireland up to that time. Many thousands of visitors came by boat to view the race while some 1,500 brought their cars with the intention of touring the countryside while here. As the total number of cars in Ireland was only around 300 at the time, this was a huge influx and provided many Irish people with their first opportunity to see a motor car.

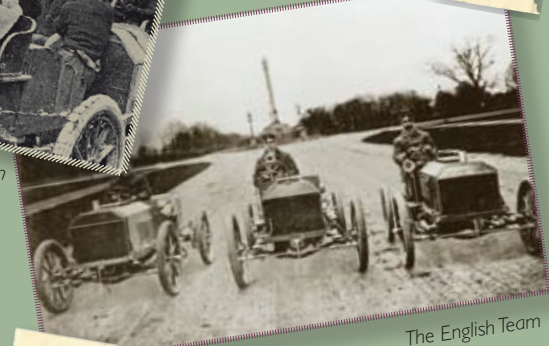
Four countries entered teams of three cars each for the contest: France, the United States, Germany and Britain. The cars were to be painted in national colours - France in blue; the United States in red; Germany in white and Britain, in deference to Ireland's role in organising the race, chose emerald green. The chosen route was a figure eight course centred on Athy. The cars would complete three laps of the eastern circuit and four of the longer western circuit giving a total distance of 524km (327.5 miles). Unlike the great city-to-city races, which had taken place across France prior to the Irish race, this was a race over a "closed" circuit. As a result some 2,300 policemen were drafted in to marshal the course, with great success.



Fernand Gabriel – the third French Team mate



J.W. Stocks at weigh-in



The English Team



The race itself was hard-fought and without serious incident except for the terrifying crash of Charles Jarrott which he and his mechanic were lucky to survive. The Belgian driver, Baron De Caters compromised his own chances in the race to bring the news that the pair were alive and well to the officials at the start area - an action for which he was justly acclaimed.

It fell to the great Belgian driver, Camille Jenatzy, to run out the winner of the Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race after a particularly fine drive for the German team. The French placed second, third and fourth while Selwyn F. Edge, the 1902 winner, trailed home in fifth and final place only to be disqualified for receiving outside assistance during the race.

The impact of the 1903 Gordon Bennett Cup Race was enormous and it was to shape the future of motor racing world-wide. For the Irish people, it was to have an equally significant impact, being the event that is credited with making the Irish public "car-conscious" for the very first time.



Foxhall Keene – German Team



Alexander Winton, American driver in trouble!

# Family Fun Activities

For those who are young, or just young at heart, there are heaps of fun activities for the whole family waiting to be enjoyed in Carlow, Laois and Kildare.

## COUNTY CARLOW – THE DOME FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE



The first of its kind in the country, this centre features a state-of-the-art computerised 12-lane bowling alley and automated bumpers. Other activities include an 8,000 square feet children's play and activity area, water bumpers, pool tables, SKY dome with wide screen televisions, relaxation lounges, juvenile disco and cinema. Carlow Business Park, Graiguecullen, Carlow. Entrance charge. Tel 059-9141555



**CARLOW TOWN PARK** A wonderful attraction for all the family, this 12 acre site on the banks of the River Barrow has been completed to the highest standards with a safe and secure children's playground. The park was the inaugural winner of the National Tidy Towns Waterside Award in 2004.

**GRAIGUECULLEN SWIMMING POOL** is a fully heated, 25m public facility, where visitors are made very welcome. Full gymnasium and leisure centre on site. Graiguecullen, Carlow. Entrance charge. Tel 059-9140330



**BALLYKEENAN PET & AVIARY FARM** Enjoy a great day out for all the family with a wide variety of fowl, animals and unusual birds with a feel and touch pet section. The farm-yard at Ballykeenan is full of ducks, geese, turkeys, chickens and dogs. Horses, ponies, deer, goats and sheep all have their homes in the fields, while gerbils, hedgehogs, mice and various exotic birds are housed in the stone outbuildings and paddocks. All visitors to the farm are given a fully guided tour: Robert McCord, Myshall, Co. Carlow. Entrance charge. Tel 059-9157665

## COUNTY KILDARE – LULLYMORE HERITAGE AND DISCOVERY PARK



The whole family can run riot here, discovering dwellings from Ireland's past, searching for fairies in the Fairy Bower; being adventurous in the Adventure Park, trying out skills in the indoor Funky Forest play area, or taking a ride on the road train. You might just have to stay all day! Lullymore, Rathangan, Co. Kildare. Entrance charge. Tel 045-870238 [www.lullymorepark.com](http://www.lullymorepark.com)

**BOG OF ALLEN NATURE CENTRE** An international centre for peatland education, conservation and research. Here you can explore the history of peat and the unique flora and fauna associated with bogs. You can walk right into the Bog of Allen, participate in workshops and see over 50 different species of insect-eating plants from around the world. Lullymore, Rathangan, Co. Kildare. Entrance charge. Tel 045-860133 [bogs@ipcc.ie](mailto:bogs@ipcc.ie) [www.ipcc.ie](http://www.ipcc.ie)



**THE MILLENNIUM MAZE** The only place where you can legitimately lose the kids for a few hours. It's a real hedge maze with a sand pit and pets corner to boot! Open June - August, seven days a week. Ballynafagh, Prosperous, Co. Kildare. Entrance charge. Tel 045-868151

**SWIMMING POOLS** Athy Tel 059-8631524 and Naas Tel 045-876119

**PLAY GROUNDS** Athy, Kildare, Moone, Naas and Newbridge.



**COUNTY LAOIS – KILVAHAN HORSE DRAWN CARRIAGES** The award winning experience gives you the opportunity to step outside of the everyday bustle and unwind in the beautiful Irish midlands. The freedom of the countryside is yours at a slow and relaxing pace. Tel: 057-8735178 info@horsedrawnrcaravans.com [www.horsedrawnrcaravans.com](http://www.horsedrawnrcaravans.com)



**LAOIS ANGLING CENTRE** combines the peace and tranquility of the Irish countryside with exceptional game and coarse fishing. The four large spring fed lakes provide the perfect natural conditions for both the fish and fisherman. Whether you are a beginner or an expert, the Laois Angling Centre provides the complete fishing experience. Tel: 087-9962864 info@laoisanglingcenter.ie [www.laoisanglingcentre.ie](http://www.laoisanglingcentre.ie)



**ROLL 'N' BOWL** Conveniently located just off the M7 and N8 interchange at Portlaoise on the Dublin/Cork & Dublin/Limerick roads. Providing ten pin bowling, soft play centre, crazy golf (18 holes) outdoors, indoor soccer (5-a-side astro turf), skating at polar pass rink, pottery painting, all-day coffee dock, supervised car parking, wheelchair accessible, parties - birthday parties, special occasions, school tours. Free parking for cars and coaches. Tel: 057-867005 rollnbowl@eircom.net [www.bowlingireland.com](http://www.bowlingireland.com)



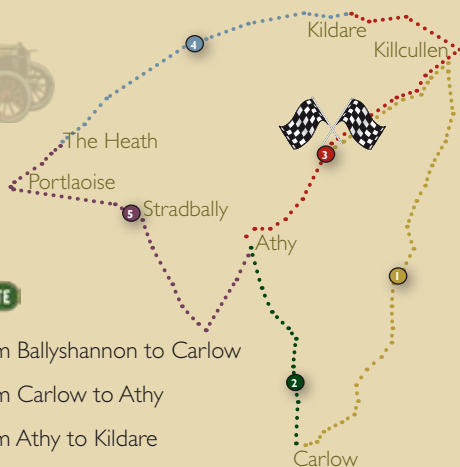
**PORTLAOISE LEISURE CENTRE** Facilities include: 25m deck level pool, deck level learner pool, café, changing village, group changing rooms, fully equipped gymnasium including cardiovascular and resistance equipment, multi-purpose classes studio/meeting room. Adjacent to the leisure centre are the following: outdoor running track, full size soccer pitch, 7-a-side soccer pitches, outdoor children's playground, picnic tables and seating. Tel: 057-8681200 info@portlaoiseleisurecentre.ie [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie)

**PASSPORT TO LAOIS** available from all local tourist offices or from [www.laoistourism.ie](http://www.laoistourism.ie)

## “GENTLEMEN... Start your engines...”

### The Route

The 1903 Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race consisted of two parts forming a figure of 8 over 166km (104 miles). The shorter eastern loop, taking in Old Kilcullen, Castledermot, Carlow town and Athy was raced three times. The longer western loop through Kilcullen, Kildare, the outskirts of Maryborough (Portlaoise) and Athy was lapped four times. Control zones were set up in six towns on the circuit. At these points the cars travelled behind bicycles to ensure compliance with speed-limits.



STAGE ① From Ballyshannon to Carlow

STAGE ② From Carlow to Athy

STAGE ③ From Athy to Kildare

STAGE ④ From Kildare to The Heath

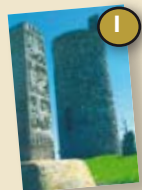
STAGE ⑤ From The Heath to Athy

# GORDON BENNETT STAGE I

## FROM BALLYSHANNON TO CARLOW



Setting out from Ballyshannon Crossroads southwest of Old Kilcullen at the end of the M9 motorway from Dublin, follow the Gordon Bennett Route signposts through Co. Kildare heading for Carlow town.



- 1 OLD KILCULLEN** Once an important, walled town. Now only the trunk of a round tower and three cross shafts remain of the monastery believed to have been founded by St. Isserninus, a companion of St. Patrick. The graveyard was the scene of a bloody battle in the 1798 rebellion.

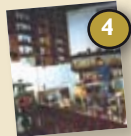
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- KILGOWAN LONG STONE** A granite monolith over seven feet high, unusual among standing stones in that it has a small cross with slightly expanded terminals cut on one face. Excavations have unearthed burials of the Iron Age and early Christian periods.



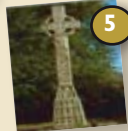
3

- BALLITORE** has been associated with The Society of Friends since the first Quakers settled here from Yorkshire in 1685. Ballitore Quaker Museum contains a collection of artefacts on the Quaker settlement in Ballitore. The Quaker meeting house is still in use. Entrance charge. Open all year. Tel 059-8623344  
ballitorelib@kildarecoco.ie



4

- IRISH PEWTER MILL**, Timolin, where the craft of pewter making was revived in Ireland after centuries in limbo. Makes awards for major sports and corporate events. Tel: 059-8624164 timolinpewter@eircom.net



5

- MOONE HIGH CROSS** The five-metre granite high cross at Moone is one of the finest examples of high crosses to be found anywhere in Ireland. Open all year.



6

- CASTLEDERMOT ABBEY, ROUND TOWER AND HIGH CROSS** The historic grounds of St. Diarmaid's Church (1247) contain two unique granite high crosses, a 10th century round tower, a well preserved Romanesque arch from a church that has since vanished and a number of ancient stones and grave slabs.



French driver René De Knyff had a hairy moment approaching Castledermot as he swerved to avoid a spectator who ambled drunkenly onto the course.

## Nearby Attractions



A

**MONDELLO PARK MOTOR RACING CIRCUIT** Ireland's only international motor racing circuit, Mondello hosts over 30 motorbike and car events every year and has a museum of motorsport. Open on event days. Entrance charge. Tel 045-860200 [info@mondellopark.ie](mailto:info@mondellopark.ie) [www.mondello.ie](http://www.mondello.ie)



B

**PUNCHESTOWN RACECOURSE AND STANDING STONES** Home of Irish National Hunt Racing and famed for its four-day annual race meeting each April. Open on race days. Entrance charge. Tel 045-897704 [www.punchestown.com](http://www.punchestown.com) Punchestown is also famous for "Fionn's Needles" three granite standing stones, erected between 2,000 and 500 B.C., accessible all year.



C

**DUCKETT'S GROVE – NEAR CARLOW TOWN**, the 18th, 19th and early 20th century home of the Duckett family, has dominated the Carlow landscape for over 300 years. The ruin of the gothic mansion and surrounding grounds were acquired during Heritage Week 2005 by Carlow County Council. Since then the revival of two old walled gardens has been completed. Open all year Tel: 059-9131554



D

**BROWNSHILL DOLMEN – NEAR CARLOW TOWN** This great prehistoric monument has a granite capstone weighing about 100 tonnes and is the largest of its kind in Europe dating back to 2500 B.C. It is testament to the fact that even our ancestors in the mists of pre-history regarded the area as somewhere special. Open all year.



E

**ALTAMONT GARDENS, TULLOW** Widely respected as the jewel in Ireland's gardening crown, Altamont Gardens are an enchanting blend of formal and informal gardens with riverside walks covering over 40 acres. Tel 059-9159444 [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)



### RACE FACTS: THE TEAMS

The 1903 Gordon Bennett Cup Race brought to Ireland the world's fastest road vehicles and 12 of the greatest daredevil drivers of their day.



**THE GERMANS**, all driving 9.2 litre engine Mercedes cars, took top honours in the 1903 race with the Red Devil, Camille Jenatzy, roaring to victory after a blistering 6hr 39mins behind the wheel. Team mates Baron Pierre De Caters and James Foxhall Keene failed to complete the full course.



**THE ENGLISH** victory of 1902 ensured the staging of the 1903 Irish event. It was not to be English team leader Selwyn F. Edge's day however crossing the line in fifth place in his Napier car only to be eventually disqualified for receiving a push at a fuel stop. English teammates JW Stocks and Charles Jarrott failed to complete the course.



**THE FRENCH** trio of René De Knyff, Henry Farman and Fernand Gabriel, driving Panhard and Mors cars, were the only full team to finish the course. Race veteran De Knyff secured second place while teammates Farman and Gabriel took third and fourth respectively.



**THE AMERICANS**, driving both Peerless and Winton cars, all failed to complete the 1903 Gordon Bennett Cup Race. Driver Percy Owen made the best attempt staying the pace for five laps. Teammates Alexander Winton and Louis Moores never got past laps four and one respectively. See complete listing of race results pg 20

# GORDON BENNETT

## STAGE 2

### FROM CARLOW TO ATHY



Follow the Gordon Bennett Route signs into Carlow town before heading north-west towards Athy.



- 7 CARLOW TOWN** The county capital and gateway to the South-East is strategically sited at the confluence of the Barrow and Burrin Rivers. A bustling market town, Carlow enjoys a thriving arts and crafts community, an exciting nightlife, a strong tradition of Irish language and culture and a superb range of shops, boutiques and restaurants.



- 8 COUNTY CARLOW MILITARY MUSEUM** Athy Road, Carlow. The museum features a wide range of exhibits relating to Carlow's military history. Artefacts date from the late 18th century to the present day. Entrance charge. Open on selected days throughout the year. Contact Carlow Tourist Office or [www.countycarlowmilitarymuseum.com](http://www.countycarlowmilitarymuseum.com)



- 9 DELTA SENSORY GARDENS AND GARDEN CENTRE** Strawhall Industrial Estate, Carlow. A series of interconnecting gardens of a multi-sensory nature covering 2.5 acres. The gardens include a water and woodland garden, a sculpture garden, a musical garden and a formal rose garden amongst others. Entrance charge. For opening times, Tel 059-9143527 [info@deltacentre.org](mailto:info@deltacentre.org) [www.deltacentre.org](http://www.deltacentre.org)



- 10 THE BARROW WAY** This beautiful walk alongside the River Barrow can be joined in Carlow town. Originally created to allow the pulling of barges or boats for transport, it offers much of architectural interest to the visitor and an amazing array of flora and fauna, which can be explored in a number of easy strolls. (Full length: Lowtown – St. Mullins 11.3km)

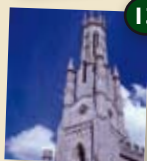
## Around Carlow Town



- 11 CARLOW COURTHOUSE** Designed in the late 1820s by architect William Morrison, this building is one of Ireland's finest examples of ancient Greek revivalist architecture. The Courthouse has two large court rooms contained within the impressive granite decagonal shaped building and is said to have cost over £30,000 to construct. A canon from the Crimean War stands on the podium.



- 12 ST. PATRICK'S COLLEGE** One of Ireland's oldest educational institutions, the college has educated generations of politicians, priests, poets and leaders in the public life of their day.



- 13 CARLOW CATHEDRAL** The Cathedral, completed in 1833 was the brainchild of the energetic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, James Doyle, the prominent champion of Catholic emancipation. Open all year.

**ÉIGSE** is a 10 day feast of art, crafts, street entertainment and music, celebrated each June in Carlow. [www.eigse.ie](http://www.eigse.ie)





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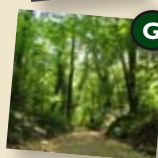
**CARLOW CASTLE**, Now a ruin, Carlow Castle is thought to have been built by William de Marshal, Earl of Pembroke and Lord of Leinster between 1207 and 1213. In 1814 a local physician tried to remodel it as an asylum. In an effort to demolish the interior he placed explosive charges at its base and demolished all but the west wall and towers. Open all year. Nearby Graiguecullen or Wellington Bridge is an attractive five-arched stone structure and one of the oldest and lowest bridges on the River Barrow. To discover more call to the Tourist Office on College Street and ask for a copy of the Carlow Heritage Trail, Tel 059-913 1554.

## Nearby Attractions



F

**KILLESHIN ROMANESQUE DOORWAY** Dating from the 5th century the most striking and beautifully carved Romanesque doorway in Ireland can be found among the ruins of the monastery at Killeshin, which dates back to the mid 12th century. Open all year.



G

**OAK PARK FOREST PARK** is a mature, mixed species woodland of over 120 acres. Colour coded circular walkways of varying lengths with excellent accessible surfaces and easy gradients make a visit here an enjoyable experience for young and old alike. The proximity of the walkways to the extensive collection of ferns, mosses and woodland flora provides the visitor with an ideal opportunity to interact with nature while the park also boasts a rich diversity of wildlife. Extending over 4km the walks include the Butlers Wood Loop (700 metres), the Lake Path (800 metres), Fox Covert Track (1100 metres) and Sally Island Trail (1700 metres). All the walks are wheelchair accessible. Tel: 059-9131554



H

**OLD LEIGHLIN AND LEIGHLINBRIDGE** St. Lazerian's Cathedral was built here in the 13th century on the site of a church founded by St. Gobban in 632 A.D. One of the foremost monastic houses in Leinster; a church synod held here in the 7th century determined the date of Easter for the entire Christian world. Tel 059-9721570 for opening times. A visit to the nearby pretty town of **Leighlinbridge** should not be missed with its graceful bridge, 14th century mediaeval castle and series of fine gardens.



I

**BAGENALSTOWN** Founded on the River Barrow in the 18th century, Bagenalstown is a charming town, with riverside walks, picnic tables, a public park and a picturesque lock close to the fine estate house of Dunleckney Manor. Also known as Muine Bheag, Bagenalstown derives its name from Walter Bagenal, whose original concept for the town was based on Versailles, and the palaces of Louis XIV, with fine streetscapes and classical buildings. The impressive courthouse modelled on the Parthenon in Athens is all that remains of Walter Bagenal's dream but today Bagenalstown is the perfect location for outdoor activities with excellent angling and walking along the Barrow Way.



J

**BORRIS** is a beautiful, untouched Georgian town, full of charm and heritage nestling in the fertile valley of the River Barrow, below the curve of the Blackstairs Mountains. 9km south of the town is the beautifully preserved 6th century ecclesiastical site of St. Mullins.



K

**MOUNT LEINSTER AND THE BLACKSTAIRS MOUNTAINS** At 796 metres Mount Leinster is the highest hill in the Blackstairs Mountains range. Park at the Nine Stones vantage point and enjoy the splendid view, from the Wicklow Hills to the north to the Irish Sea and extensive coastal plain to the east. Splendid walks to suit all ability levels.



L

**CLASHGANNY LOCK** 5km south of Borris on the New Ross Road is one of Carlow's and Ireland's most famous landmarks which offers a panoramic view of the surrounding countryside.

# GORDON BENNETT

## STAGE 3

### FROM ATHY TO KILDARE



From Athy, follow the Gordon Bennett Route signs north taking in for the second time **Ballyshannon Crossroads**, the starting point for the famous 1903 race, and on to Kilcullen before crossing the Curragh Plains into Kildare town.



**15** **ATHY** is a fine example of an Anglo-Norman settlement, dominated by the 16th century White's Castle on the bridge over the River Barrow. The story of Athy, south Kildare's market town, is told at the **Heritage Centre**, housed in the former market house on Emily Square. The exhibition here is a must for Gordon Bennett route followers, as it features contemporary film footage and artefacts from the race. Entrance charge. Tel 059-8633075 [www.kildare.ie/athyheritage](http://www.kildare.ie/athyheritage)



**16** **THE MOAT OF ARDSCULL** This 13th century Norman earthworks is one of the biggest of its kind in Ireland. It is also the site of a memorial to the Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race. An ideal spot for a picnic.



Germany's Red Devil Camille Jenatzy was raring to go on the Ballyshannon start line, wheel-spinning and belching sheets of flame and black smoke from his 60hp Mercedes engine.

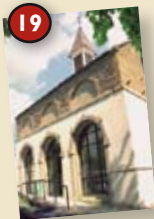


**17** **KILCULLEN** The building of the bridge across the River Liffey here in 1318 resulted in the Old Kilcullen settlement diminishing and Kilcullen becoming the established town. A modern 114 seat theatre is situated in the heart of this historic and busy town. The theatre's foyer is also the town's heritage centre. Main Street, Kilcullen, open all year; mornings only. Tel 045-481613



**18** **THE CURRAGH** Stretching over 1,977 hectares the Curragh plains are famed for producing some of the world's finest thoroughbred racehorses. The Curragh is the site of a famous boxing match between Dan Donnelly and the English champion George Cooper on December 13th 1815. At the place called Donnelly's Hollow, you can still see giant footprints in the ground, reputed to be Donnelly's. A pleasant site for a picnic. Curragh Racecourse is the headquarters of flat horseracing in Ireland with over 20 fixtures a year. Open on race

days - Entrance charge. Tel 045-441205 [info@curragh.ie](mailto:info@curragh.ie) [www.curragh.ie](http://www.curragh.ie)



19

**KILDARE** The town which gave the county its name, Cill Dara (the church of the oak) was an important settlement in pre-Christian times and continued so after St. Brigid opened her monastery there in the early 6th century. Located in the restored 18th century market house opposite St. Brigid's Cathedral, the **Heritage Centre** and **Tourist Information Office** tells the story of Kildare in a multi-media presentation. Outside the centre is a plaque commemorating the centenary of the 1903 race. Open all year. Tel 045-530672 [kildaretownheritagecen@ireland.com](mailto:kildaretownheritagecen@ireland.com)



20

**ST. BRIGID'S CATHEDRAL AND ROUND TOWER** Market Square, Kildare. The site where St. Brigid reputedly founded a monastery in 480 AD. Climb the round tower for stunning views of the plains of Kildare. Open May to September. Entrance charge. Tel 045-530672 [www.kildare.ie/heritage](http://www.kildare.ie/heritage)



21

### **IRISH NATIONAL STUD, JAPANESE GARDENS AND ST. FIACHRA'S GARDEN**

Tully, Kildare. See the world-class thoroughbreds, mares and foals for which County Kildare is famous. Then discover the joy of the Japanese Gardens created between 1906 and 1910 by Japanese gardener Tassa Eida and his son. Also enjoy the Irish water and rock garden with a monastic cell as the centrepiece dedicated to the patron Saint of Irish gardeners, St. Fiachra. The refurbished horse museum opens in 2006. Open February – November. Entrance charge. Tel 045-521617/522963 [japanesegardens@eircom.net](mailto:japanesegardens@eircom.net)



### **RACE FACTS: THE RED DEVIL**



Camille Jenatzy, winner of the Irish 1903 Gordon Bennett Cup Race, was feared and revered in motor racing circles. A member of the German Mercedes team, Jenatzy was in fact a Belgian gentleman whose fiery nature, spectacular and often reckless driving style made him a motoring legend long before he had reached Ireland.

Dubbed the Red Devil by race fans and the motoring press of the time because of his great, pointed ginger beard, Jenatzy once likened motor racing to being at the centre of a hurricane. *"The car in which you travel seems to leave the ground and hurl itself forward like a projectile ricocheting along the ground,"* he said.

The great man who ripped home to win the Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race in 6hr39min predicted that one day he would die in a Mercedes. But it was not a car accident that took the life of this motorsport pioneer. Camille Jenatzy died while playing a prank on friends out hunting wild boar. The motoring legend ducked into the brush pretending to be a charging animal, a shot was fired and the Red Devil was unwittingly slain.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Camille Jenatzy became the first man to record a speed of over 100kmh. In April 1899 he tore into the history books at 65.79mph.

# GORDON BENNETT

## STAGE 4

### FROM KILDARE TO THE HEATH



Follow the Gordon Bennett Route signs out of Kildare to Monasterevin and south-west towards Portlaoise.



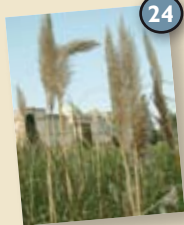
**22 MONASTEREVIN** is an historic and thriving town of many bridges, the oldest being the Ballagh or Pass Bridge. Also of note is the aqueduct carrying the Grand

Canal over the Barrow River and the Lifting Bridge. The town has associations with the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins who is honoured with a summer school each year.

**23 MOORE ABBEY WOOD** Monasterevin. A spectacular broadleaf plantation with a variety of walks, picnic tables and car park, adjacent to the M7. Open all year. Tel 045-528986/086-2576709

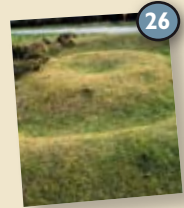


After a spirited first lap by English team leader Selwyn F. Edge, the radiator cap on his Napier car blew off just minutes before reaching Monasterevin never to be seen again. It was the first in a long line of mechanical mishaps on the day for Edge and would cost him dearly.



**24 EMO COURT & GARDENS** One of the finest stately houses in Ireland and located in County Laois, Emo Court is a magnificent example of neo-classical architecture. Designed by James Gandon, in 1790, who is best known for his great public buildings, including the Custom House and the Four Courts in Dublin. The house is open from June to September and by appointment. Gardens are open all year round. Admission free to gardens. Tel 057-8626573/056-7721450 [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

**25 COOLBANAGHER CHURCH** Close to Emo Court, this is the only church designed by James Gandon, the Church of St. John the Evangelist, constructed in 1786. Inside the church, a fine gothic baptismal font has been preserved.



**26 THE HEATH OF MARYBOROUGH** One of the most important archaeological sites in Ireland, located in County Laois. Iron Age burial mounds known as ring barrows are to be found over the area, in addition to Neolithic, early Christian and mediaeval remains. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the open common of the Heath was used for horse races, military manoeuvres and political meetings. Today, the Heath is an important area for wildlife, biodiversity and recreation.



27

**MORETTE CASTLE** These ruins of a castle, seen from the route, were home to the renowned family, the Fitzgeralds. Gerald Fitzgerald, ancestor of the Queens County (County Laois) Geraldines, was killed by the O' Moores and his castle burned in 1599. Not open for visitors.

## Nearby Attractions



M

**VICARSTOWN/FISHERSTOWN** These picturesque villages along the Grand Canal are a useful base for walking, cycling, boating, fishing and barge trips. They are also home to a number of historically important buildings and landmarks such as the 1860's Grattan School and Grattan Lodge. For information on barge trips and fishing Tel 057-8625189 [www.barrowline.com](http://www.barrowline.com)

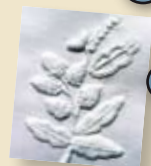


N

**POLLARDSTOWN FEN** Milltown. Situated on the northern edge of the Curragh plain, covering 220 hectares, this wetland of international importance is a good example of how Ireland's raised bogs would have looked 6,000 years ago.

O

**THE HILL OF ALLEN** One of Kildare's few hills and the base camp of legendary hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill and his warriors, the Fianna.



P

**MOUNTMELICK**'s fine buildings and historical sites are identified on its Heritage Trail, signposted throughout the town. The Mountmellick Museum tells the story of Mountmellick's rich Quaker and industrial history. It also showcases Mountmellick Work, a uniquely Irish form of embroidery that was developed in the 1800s.

Entrance charge. Tel 057-8624525 [www.mountmellickdevelopment.com](http://www.mountmellickdevelopment.com)



Q

**PORTARLINGTON** – Founded in 1666 by Sir Henry Bennett, Lord Arlington, this modern town features exceptional Huguenot, Georgian and Victorian buildings.



**RACE FACTS: GORDON BENNETT CUP HISTORY** The 1903 Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race was the first time the international challenge was held outside France.

- 1900 – The inaugural Gordon Bennett Cup Race saw three French drivers battle one American and one Belgian. The French took double victory as only two drivers, both driving for the home country, crossed the finish line.
- 1901 – Little changed in the second year of the Gordon Bennett Cup Race with only Selwyn F. Edge of England taking on a strong French trio. Edge was forced out and again the French claimed victory.
- 1902 – This was the year the tables were turned on France as Edge stole victory on French soil in a blistering duel that brought the Gordon Bennett Cup Race to Ireland in 1903.
- 1903 – Ireland was chosen to host the fourth Gordon Bennett Cup Race on July 2nd over a gruelling course across counties Kildare, Carlow and Laois where Camille Jenatzy, the Red Devil, won for Germany.
- 1904 – The race in Germany featured six nations and saw a return to form for the French drivers who were victorious against new teams from Belgium, Italy and Austria-Hungary.
- 1905 – In the last ever Gordon Bennett Cup Race France repeated the victory on home ground amid an 18 driver field.

The Gordon Bennett Cup Race paved the way for modern Grand Prix racing and the first French Grand Prix of 1906 was testament to the growing commercialisation and international trend in motor car manufacture.

# GORDON BENNETT

## STAGE 5

### FROM THE HEATH TO ATHY



Follow the Gordon Bennett Route signs east across Co. Laois towards Athy.



#### 28 THE ROCK OF DUNAMAISE

One of the great monuments and fortresses of Ireland towers over the Portlaoise / Stradbally road, offering

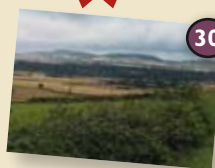
breathtaking views of the county. Through the centuries, warriors have fought to control this renowned fort.



**29 STRADBALLY** This picturesque town is home to Stradbally Hall Estate and showcases a number of activities including point-to-point racing, paintball and the annual Stradbally Steam Rally and Electric Picnic Festival. Stradbally is home to the **Steam Museum** and the narrow gauge heritage railway, Tel 057-8625154 [www.irishsteam.ie](http://www.irishsteam.ie) Stradbally Lake and picnic amenity area is popular with families, anglers and general visitors.

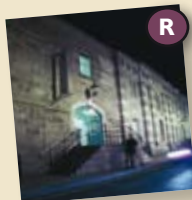


The word 'Paris' was engraved in a stone in a wall in Stradbally by one of the mechanics during the race.



**30 WINDY GAP** One of the most spectacular views in Ireland can be enjoyed from this point on the Carlow Road approach to Stradbally. There are picnic and amenity areas available.

## Nearby Attractions



**R PORTLAOISE** (Maryborough) is the principal town in County Laois. A compact market town, formerly known as Maryborough, Portlaoise offers a relaxed shopping experience with many friendly, family-run shops and a number of award-winning restaurants, hotels, bustling pubs, traditional music and great nightlife. The Dunamase Arts Centre offers a diverse arts and drama programme, [www.dunamase.ie](http://www.dunamase.ie) Tel 057-8663355. The Tourist Office is located on Lyster Square in the centre of Portlaoise for detailed town and county maps. Tel 057-8621178 (Portlaoise Tourist Office) or Tel 057-8664132 (Tourism Laois County Council)



**S ROUND TOWER OF TIMAHOE** A beautifully carved doorway makes this one of the most interesting round towers in Ireland, built in the 1100s on the site of an earlier monastery. Timahoe is a quiet, rural village located close to the scenic Fossey Mountain Springs area in County Laois.



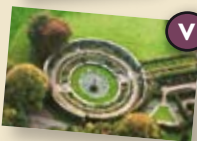
T

**HERITAGE TOWN OF ABBEYLEIX** One of Ireland's finest heritage towns, Abbeyeilex is a planned estate town where visitors can admire the fine period buildings. Abbeyeilex Heritage House and Sexton's Cottage are well worth a visit. Abbeyeilex Heritage House. Tel 057-8731653 [www.abbeyeilexheritagetown.com](http://www.abbeyeilexheritagetown.com)



U

**DURROW** The planned estate village of Durrow features fine Georgian and Victorian buildings including Castle Durrow, one of the last pre-Palladian houses built in Ireland. The Leafy Loop is a 14 mile series of way-marked walking routes around the town.



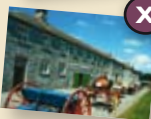
V

**HEYWOOD GARDENS** Known as the "Secret Garden", it features two garden types: the great park created by Frederick Trench in the late 1700s and the small interlocked formal gardens created by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll in the early 1900s. Admission is free. Tel 056-7721450 [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)



W

**IRISH FLY-FISHING & GAME-SHOOTING MUSEUM** The only museum of its kind in Europe, it explores 300 years of hunting and fishing in Ireland. Entrance charge. Tel 057-8736112 [www.irishflycraft.com](http://www.irishflycraft.com)



X

**DONAGHMORE WORKHOUSE & AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM** See the rooms of an Irish workhouse almost exactly as they appeared in the late 1800s. The workhouse housed families immediately after the Great Famine and during the Land War. Tel 0505-46315 / 086-8296685 [www.donaghmoremuseum.com](http://www.donaghmoremuseum.com)



Y

**AGHABOE ABBEY** Founded by St. Canice in the 6th century, Aghaboe Abbey is the site of four different phases of Christian life in Ireland. Admission free.



Z

**SLIEVE BLOOM MOUNTAINS** Breathtaking mountains offering mysterious glens, rivers, waterfalls, historic sites, folklore, villages, pubs and festivals. On a clear day it is possible to see the highest points of each of Ireland's provinces from the summit. Tel 057-8621178 for more.



## RACE FACTS: STRADBALLY CRASH

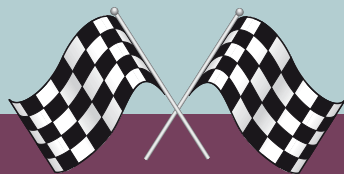
Like all great race circuits the twists, turns and sweeping slopes of the 1903 Irish Gordon Bennett Cup course provided plenty of thrills, spills and, at one stage, the presumed death for the occupants of one of the competing cars. Battling to keep his English team in the race Charles Jarrott literally flew off the Irish course with devastating effect. Jarrott's spectacular exit occurred as he barreled through the picturesque landscape by the Rock of Dunamase two miles outside Stradbally.

The steering of Jarrott's thundering Napier failed suddenly as he descended a slope. The car hit a bank and somersaulted off the course. Jarrott was thrown out of the vehicle while his 17-year old mechanic, Bianchi, was trapped underneath. The English men were presumed dead as spectators arrived to the scene. White sheets were thrown over them and their bodies were taken to a nearby shed. But the pair were far from dead as Jarrott later recalled: "When I came to, I wondered if I was dead. I tried to scratch away the blur before my eyes and found it was a sheet".

Jarrott's traveling companion Bianchi also came around shortly after and both were further restored to good health when a local priest prescribed a dose of strong Irish whiskey in large measure.

# FINISH LINE

*How the 1903 competitors fared:*



RESULTS TABLE

NAME	COUNTRY	CAR	TIME	AV SPEED
Camille Jenatzy	Germany	Mercedes	6hr 39m	49.2 mph
Rene De Knyff	France	Panhard	6hr 50m	47.85 mph
Henry Farman	France	Panhard	6hr 51m	47.72 mph
Fernand Gabriel	France	Mors	7hr 11m	45.33 mph
Selwyn F. Edge	England	Napier	9hr 28m	(disqualified)
Baron Pierre De Caters	Germany	Mercedes	completed only six laps	
Percy Owen	America	Winton	completed only five laps	
Alexander Winton	America	Winton	completed only four laps	
James Foxhall Keene	Germany	Mercedes	completed only three laps	
Louis Mooers	America	Peerless	completed only one lap	
Chales Jarrott	England	Napier	completed only one lap	
J.W. Stocks	England	Napier	no laps completed	

## SLANG TALK

You can hear the words “**GORDON BENNETT**” commonly used today throughout England and especially London. The slang term derives from the disbelief expressed at our hero’s lavish stunts. As a newspaper editor Bennett is remembered for sending Stanley on his successful mission into deepest, darkest Africa to look for Dr. Livingstone. He was also infamous for his bad manners when, on entering a restaurant he was reported to have pulled the table cloths and contents off every table before producing a wad of cash to pay for the damage. James Gordon Bennett is further believed to have frittered away \$40 million dollars by the time he died in 1918.





# EVENTS AND FURTHER READING

If this guide has given you the drive to find out more about the golden age of automobile racing, the following events and publications will be of interest.



**THE INTERNATIONAL GORDON BENNETT RALLY** is held across the original Gordon Bennett Cup circuit through counties Kildare, Carlow and Laois every year and has a big international appeal. This rally is organised by the Irish Veteran and Vintage Car Club (IVVCC) and is for all cars manufactured before 1931. [www.ivvcc.ie](http://www.ivvcc.ie)

**THE GORDON BENNETT IRISH CLASSIC CAR RUN** is an annual rally for classic vehicles of all types registered before 1974. The rally is organised by a group of local vintage/classic car owners in conjunction with Laois Tourism. The rally is held over the first weekend in June. For more details or entry forms Tel 057-8664132 [www.gordonbennettclassic.com](http://www.gordonbennettclassic.com) or [www.laoistourism.ie](http://www.laoistourism.ie), or Gandon Inn Tel 057 8626622 and email [gandoninn@eircom.net](mailto:gandoninn@eircom.net)

## *Books on the Irish Gordon Bennett Cup Race:*

**THE GORDON BENNETT RACES** - *Lord Montague*, various editions 1963 onwards (usually available through second-hand motoring booksellers)

**THE IRISH GORDON BENNETT RACE 1903** - *Bob Montgomery*, Dreoilín Album 1999.

**THE 1903 IRISH GORDON BENNETT - THE RACE THAT SAVED MOTOR SPORT**, Bookmarque 2000.

**THE TRIUMPH OF THE RED DEVIL** - *Brendan Lynch*, Portobello Publishing 2003.



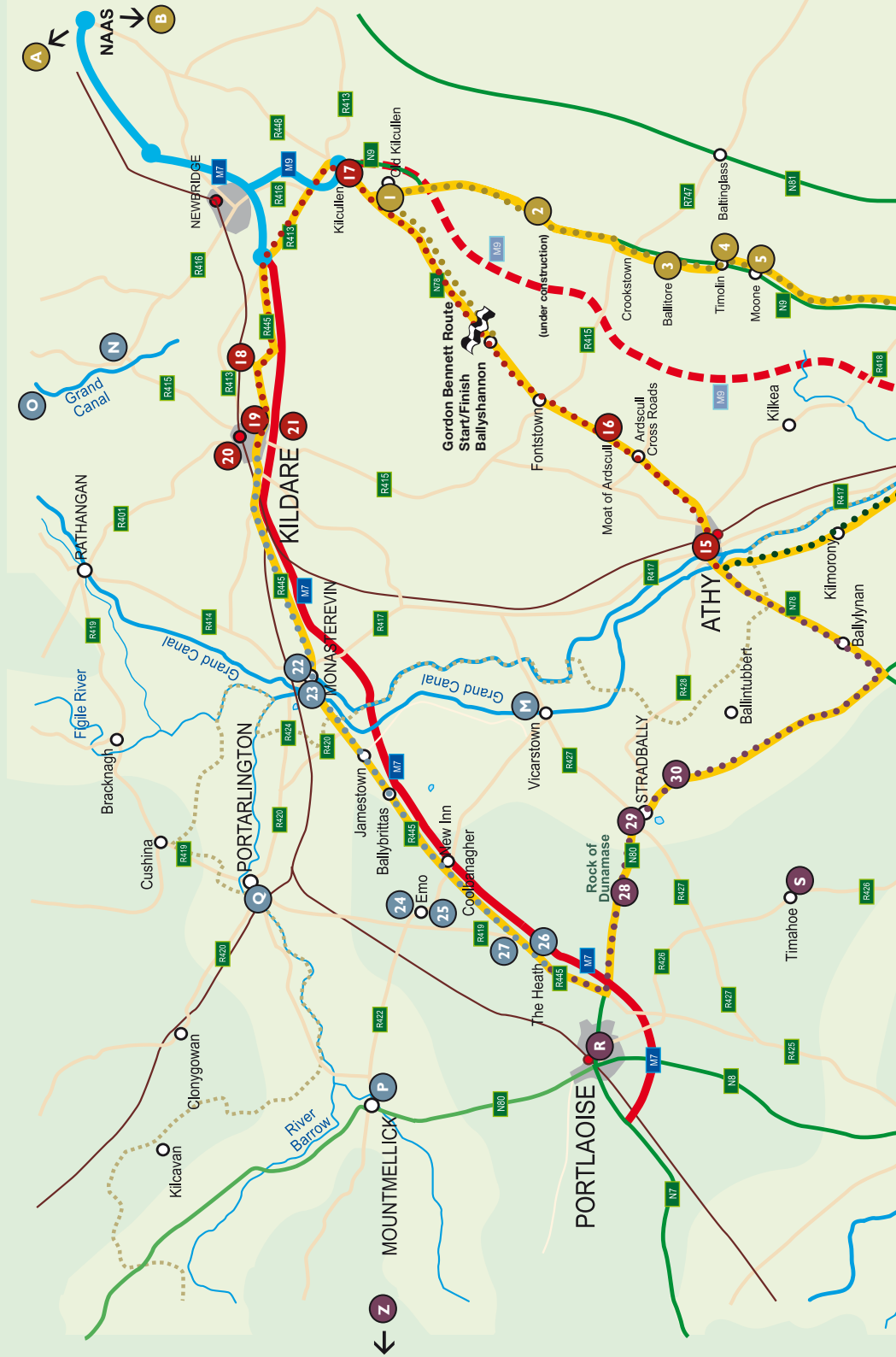
### **RACE FACTS:** Count Eliot Zborowski – Course designer

The man who plotted the famous 1903 Gordon Bennett Cup Race was a dashing count who never lived to see his circuit used. Tragically, Count Eliot Zborowski, an elegant aristocrat of Polish descent died behind the wheel of his racing car just weeks before the race, his cufflinks jamming the throttle of his new 60hp Mercedes while racing at the 1903 Nice Speed Week. Having searched Ireland for a suitable course location, Zborowski chose a circuit centred on Athy and incorporating Maryborough (now Portlaoise), Kildare and Carlow.

The course quickly met the approval of the Gordon Bennett Cup Committee. Its long, leafy stretches and picturesque hilly climbs through some of Ireland's most beautiful open countryside made this a course to rival any existing on the continent.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Count Eliot Zborowski's son also met his end on the racetrack. Louis Zborowski died in a car crash at Monza wearing the same cufflinks his father had been wearing on his last outing.





- Gordon Bennett Route
- Gordon Bennett Route Start/Finish
- National Route
- Secondary Route
- Rivers and Canals
- Railway Route
- County Boundary
- Motorway

- ROUTE 1 From Ballyshannon to Carlow
- ROUTE 2 From Carlow to Athy
- ROUTE 3 From Athy to Kildare
- ROUTE 4 From Kildare to The Heath
- ROUTE 5 From The Heath to Athy

continues to Waterford



A full range of local tourism information and accommodation booking is available from tourist offices in the following counties:

## COUNTY KILDARE

Kildare Tourist Office, Kildare Heritage Centre, Kildare. Tel 045-521240/530672

County Kildare Fáilte, Naas, Co. Kildare. Tel 045-898888

The Heritage Centre, Emily Square, Athy, Co. Kildare. Tel 059-8633075



## COUNTY CARLOW

Carlow Tourist Office, College Street, Carlow. Tel 059-9131554



## COUNTY LAOIS

Portlaoise Tourist Office, Fintan Lalor Avenue, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. Tel 057-8621178

For further details on the Gordon Bennett Route please contact:

COUNTY KILDARE FÁILTE, Naas, Co. Kildare.

Tel 045-898888 Fax 045-898887 [info@visitkildare.ie](mailto:info@visitkildare.ie) [www.visitkildare.ie](http://www.visitkildare.ie)



CARLOW TOURISM, The Foresters Hall, College Street, Carlow.

Tel 059-9130411 Fax 059-9130477 [info@carlowtourism.com](mailto:info@carlowtourism.com) [www.carlowtourism.com](http://www.carlowtourism.com)



LAOIS TOURISM OFFICER, Laois County Council, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

Tel 057-8664132/8621178 Fax 057-8622313 [info@laoistourism.ie](mailto:info@laoistourism.ie) [www.laoistourism.ie](http://www.laoistourism.ie)



[www.gordonbennettroute.com](http://www.gordonbennettroute.com)



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Fáilte Ireland  
National Tourism Development Authority



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While every care has been taken in the compilation of this guide, neither the author nor publisher can accept responsibility for errors or omissions. Where such errors or omissions occur and are brought to our attention, future editions will be amended accordingly.