



'Fermanagh Lakelands'

Our panel showcases the central feature in our county - water. We wanted to illustrate how water is used by locals and visitors for recreation, enjoyment and pleasure with activities including swimming and fishing. A source of comfort for those who live around the water. Fun intertwined with historical elements. We convey life returning to normal, yet abnormally high numbers of visitors to our region. There's plenty of water to go round!

Caroline Johnston (NIPA Novice) created the first image of Toms island, on Lough Erne from on the trail between Castle Archdale and Old castle Archdale. It was a peaceful evening walk with the dog where social distancing was easy with good weather and not too many about. It was Carolines first chance to use her tripod in a while with a slow shutter speed.

Dawn Somerville's Fishing by Devenish image was taken just after the first Covid lockdown had finished. All activities on the Fermanagh Lakes had been prohibited for some time. My intention here was to convey the sense of life returning to normal and how comforting and calming our waterways are. The presence of Devenish Tower in the background is representative of the challenges people in Fermanagh have faced over many hundreds of years – yet the lakes remain unchanged and a source of comfort to those who live in and around them.

Wayne Hazlett commented that as lock down restrictions eased Fermanagh became a destination for tourists in significant numbers. Local beauty spots normally empty and silent suddenly became unusually busy and often unofficial camp sites. Indeed, it was curious to see how increased numbers of tourists on staycations behaved, interacted and used familiar places and facilities in different ways, possibly establishing new normal in some cases. Several car parks at quiet often deserted beauty spots became impromptu overnight camp sites. A neatly parked row of motor homes in a car park overlooking the River Erne as it flowed past Enniskillen Castle just as restrictions eased in spring was one such curiosity and his panoramic image shows that. The orderly way the vehicles were parked seemed to demonstrate a particular level of organisation, and respect of, and cooperation with other visitors.

Dawn Somerville's image 'Sunset at the Forum' was taken at Enniskillen Forum just before sunset on a beautiful summer's evening. There was a steady stream of little boats passing the Forum and

I wanted to capture the sense of people drifting by on the calm water, enjoying the warm, balmy air and trying to squeeze the last few minutes of pleasure before the light disappeared.

Johnny Watson's (NIPA Novice) image of Maguire's Enniskillen Castle is a major landmark on the lakelands. As a key worker he passes the castle every morning on his way to work. The view inspired him. The castle was a stronghold that kept people safe. His role involved keeping my customers and staff safe through the pandemic..... Strong and safe.

Anita Kirkpatrick photographed the Erne Water Taxi, a thriving business by Barry Flanagan, started only within the last few years which all drew to a halt with covid. When you're a small business downtime hits hard, but it brings out the ingenuity and Barry now has an all-electric boat, a first in Northern Ireland. This yellow boat is his original taxi taking tourists on runs as part of Festival Lough Erne and celebrating our special environment.

Wayne Hazlett's image of Claddagh Glen reflected that even with the welcome influx of increased numbers of visitors, Fermanagh still had plenty of beautiful, almost isolated, locations to get away from things, and people. Through a combination of main beauty spots being busy, being discouraged from unnecessary travel, and a bit of boredom from repeatedly visiting and photographing the same popular locations, restrictions did induce a search for fresher, different photographic locations. No lesser places, but often with little or no signage, not on maps, and relatively poor access. This gave rise to exploring locations that may have been by passed en route to some further afield honey pots, and in Fermanagh, a large proportion of sites involved water.

Anita Kirkpatrick photographed her son Callan as part of Festival Lough Erne. Anita captured her son jumping into the water at the Share Center and I think it reflects people's new found love of the outdoors. It's always been there but most of us haven't appreciated it so much. The ability to walk with friends or family in an open environment became highly valued.

Caroline Johnston (NIPA Novice) observed the Enniskillen swan as a cheery sight during bleak times.

Sarah Jane Gibson (NIPA Novice) noted that we are a Fermanagh Family that loves exploring. Water is our happy place, water is home to me. Growing up on the lough shore myself, the lakelands hold a lovely calming, safe and content feeling. Sarah commented that this snap I caught of my daughter is a big favourite of mine as it gives me all them feelings just looking at it, one proud mama.

I can offer no history, just the personal experience, so you'll need to visit to find that out for yourself! As I said 'there's plenty of water to go round!'