

# Cave Hill Country Park

Cave Hill, its familiar outline visible from so many parts of Belfast, has captivated generation after generation. It has become ingrained into the city's social history and culture and is one of the most celebrated landmarks of Belfast.

The hill abounds in natural and historic features and has much to offer within minutes of Belfast city centre. In recognition of this, a country park was established in 1992. It includes land on top of Cave Hill, and at Hazelwood, Bellevue, Belfast Castle and Carr's Glen.

## Green Flag



Cave Hill Country Park is now recognised as a Green Flag site having achieved this prestigious award in 2009. The park excelled in a range of criteria such as:

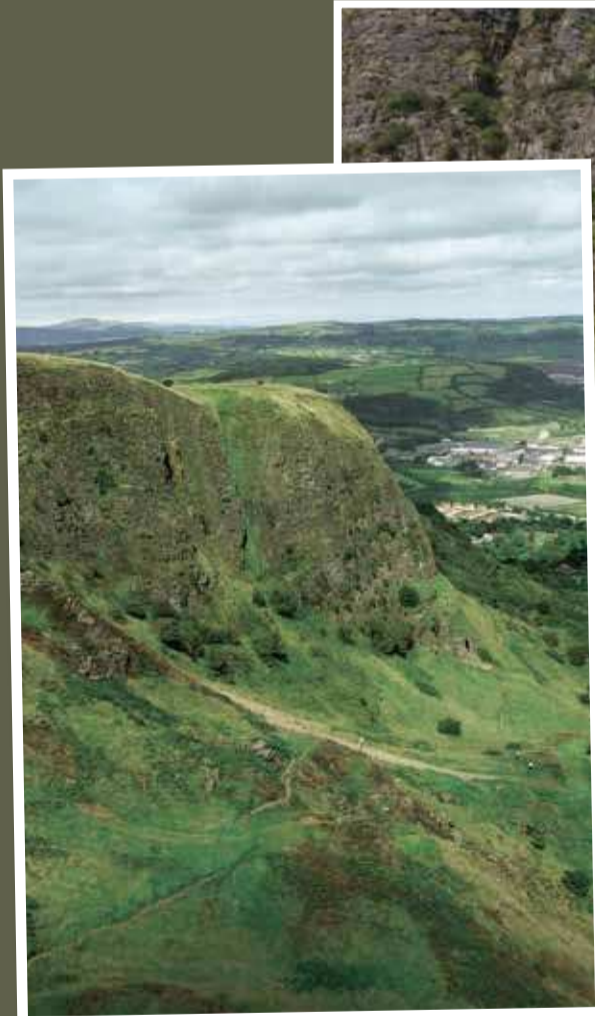
- a welcoming place,
- conservation and heritage,
- biodiversity,
- children's play, and
- good overall management practices.

We aim to continually improve these areas to enhance your experience of the park. This will ensure that Cave Hill Country Park remains a must-see visitor attraction.

Please contact us with any suggestions you have for further improvements by emailing [bcr@belfastcastle.co.uk](mailto:bcr@belfastcastle.co.uk)

Come and see for yourself

On a visit to Cave Hill Country Park, you can experience the sights and sounds of this amazing place and enjoy breathtaking views across Belfast.



## People on the hill

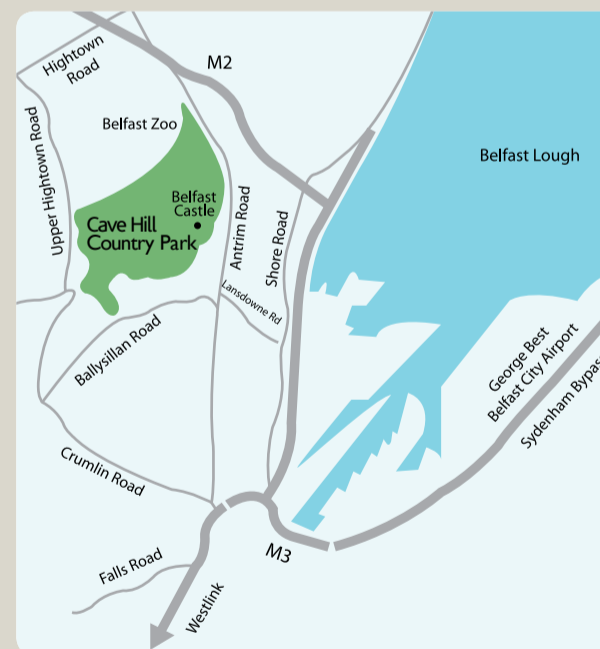
Early man settled on Cave Hill, where the steep terrain helped in defence against rival tribes and wild animals. Remains of early settlements include:

- a stone cairn on the summit (dating back to the New Stone Age: 4500 – 2500 BC),
- a crannog or lake dwelling (now within the zoo), and
- several raths or ringforts (from early Christian times: 400 – 1200 AD). The best known of these, McArt's Fort is on the highest rocky outcrop.

Between 1840 and 1896, limestone was quarried from the southern slopes of the hill and transported to the docks by railway. The large hollow below the caves, known as the 'Devil's Punchbowl', may be a result of quarrying. Have a look and see what you think!

Belfast Castle, sited on the slopes of Cave Hill, was built by the Donegall family in 1870s. Ownership later passed to the Shaftesbury family, who donated it to Belfast in 1934.

## Find us



### By car

Follow signs along Antrim Road. Free parking is available at Belfast Castle and Belfast Zoo.

Limited parking is available at Carr's Glen (via Ballysillan Road) and Upper Hightown Road. Pedestrian entrance at Upper Cavehill Road.

### By bus

Metro Services – Any number 1 bus to Antrim Road (Belfast Castle or Belfast Zoo entrances) departing Donegall Square West.

### By rail

York Station, approximately 10 minutes by taxi.

For further information on bus and rail services call Translink on 028 9066 6630 or go to [www.translink.co.uk](http://www.translink.co.uk)

## What's in a name?

Cave Hill gets its name from the caves on the cliffs. These were possibly early iron mines. There are five in total and you should be able to spot at least three.

The hill is also referred to as 'Napoleon's Nose'. When seen in silhouette, the skyline resembles a gigantic profile staring upwards, with McArt's Fort forming the emperor's distinctive tricorn hat.



# Cave Hill Country Park



### Parks opening hours

Cave Hill is an open park, operating 24/7 for your enjoyment. Admission is free.

# Cave Hill Country Park



## Walking in the park

A network of paths allows you to explore the park and enjoy its sights and sounds. Several routes of varying length have been waymarked. The suggested starting point for these is the car park at the top of the main driveway to Belfast Castle. All times are approximate and should be used only as a guide.

Parts of Cave Hill are exposed and can be subject to extreme weather, while certain paths follow steep and difficult terrain. Water proofs and suitable footwear are advised, especially if you are following the Cave Hill Trail.

DISCLAIMER: the former "sheep's pad" to MacArt's Fort is not recommended for use as it is in a dangerous condition. Anyone using this section does so at their own risk.

## Trails

**Cave Hill trail** - a challenging route past the caves to McArd's Fort, and crossing moorland, heath and meadows. You will discover much of what the park has to offer, from archaeological sites and wildlife to panoramic views.

**Distance:** 4.5 miles/ 7.2km

**Time:** 2 hours 30 mins approx. (This route can also be joined from Upper Cavehill Road, Carr's Glen, Hightown Road and Belfast Zoo car park)

**Route description:** some steep ascents and unsurfaced paths.

**Estate trail** - a medium-length trail with some fine views over the city and the castle, and glimpses of Cave Hill above. You will pass through park and woodland with an opportunity to enjoy the abundance of wildlife.

**Distance:** 2.4 miles/ 3.9km

**Time:** 1 hour approx.

**Route description:** gravel paths, some steep ascents.

**Castle trail** - a short, circular route through attractive parkland, with views over the city. On this walk you will pass an impressive peregrine sculpture, the adventurous playground and a millennium maze, finishing with a stroll in the themed castle gardens.

**Distance:** 0.8 miles/ 1.3km

**Time:** 30 mins approx.

**Route description:** surfaced paths, slight gradients, some steps.

## The Cave Hill Country Park code

Enjoy and respect the countryside and wildlife.

- Take all litter home.
- Keep all dogs under control.
- Guard against the risk of fire.
- Respect other users of the park.

## Attractions and activities

### Belfast Castle



- Available for conferences, meetings, social functions and weddings.
- Guided tours are offered by arrangement, a small charge applies.
- The Cellar Restaurant; step back to Victorian times and enjoy a splendid dining experience in this atmospheric setting.
- Castle Antiques; browse and buy from a unique selection of goods.

**Orienteering and ecotrails** – packs and maps are available from the castle reception, a small charge applies.

### Castle Gardens

A stunning feature of the castle's landscape are the attractive formal gardens themed on the castle cat. See if you can find the nine cats hidden in the gardens outside the castle.

### Cave Hill Visitor Centre

Located on the second floor of Belfast Castle, discover the fascinating story of the building's heritage and that of the surrounding area, Cave Hill.

### Cave Hill Adventurous Playground

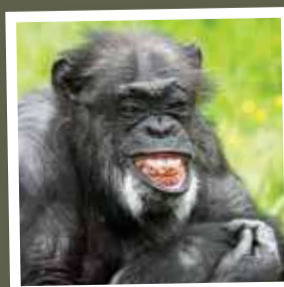
Fun and adventure for 3-14 year olds.

- Open times vary dependent on weather conditions.
- Booking during summer months is advisable.

For opening times or further details on any of the above attractions and activities; call 9077 6925 or go to [www.belfastcastle.co.uk](http://www.belfastcastle.co.uk)



### Belfast Zoological Gardens



One of the top visitor attractions in Northern Ireland, Belfast Zoo's 55 acre site is home to more than 1,200 animals and 140 species.

For details on opening times and admission prices call 9077 6277 or go to [www.belfastzoo.co.uk](http://www.belfastzoo.co.uk)

## A natural setting

Cave Hill is one in a line of low mountains stretching for almost 11 miles between Newtownabbey and Lisburn, with stunning views southwards over the city and Belfast Lough.

These form a magnificent backdrop to the urban area, possibly unrivalled in the British Isles.

Like most of the Belfast Hills, Cave Hill is made up of black basalt rock overlying a bed of white limestone (chalk). The basalt was formed around 65 million years ago when hot lava flows erupted to the surface and cooled slowly.



Cave Hill rises to 368 metres (1207 feet) above sea level. Climbing to the summit, you can experience the wilderness of the mountain, yet look out over the busy but silent city below. Dominating the urban landscape are Samson and Goliath, the mighty cranes of the shipyard. On a clear day you can see the Mourne Mountains, Strangford Lough, Scrabo Tower and much of the County Down countryside. You can also spot the Isle of Man and the Scottish coast across the sea.

## A wildlife refuge

The park forms a mosaic of natural habitats ranging from parkland and broad-leaved woodland to meadows and moorland. It is often ablaze with seasonal colour - carpets of spring flowers, purple heather in late summer and dramatic autumn foliage.

The rock crags and cliffs are hunting grounds for peregrines, ravens and kestrels. On warm summer days, meadow pipits and skylarks provide a chorus over the open moorland. As you venture through the trees listen for the variety of woodland birdsong. If you are fortunate, you might glimpse a grey squirrel or, towards dusk, a bat, hedgehog or badger.

**Two areas of high importance for nature conservation have been set aside as Local Nature Reserves:**

- Ballyaghagan: upland meadows, where the grazing regime allows a rich tapestry of wild plants to flourish.
- Hazelwood: broad-leaved woodland, dominated by hazel and noted for its spring flowers, insects, mosses and lichens.