




Belfast Hills
Partnership

**RECREATION
GUIDE**









BELFAST HILLS

GO EXPLORE

Belfast Hills

0 1 2 2.5
kilometres

-  Motorway
-  A Road
-  B Road
-  BHP Area
-  Car Park
-  Areas managed for conservation and/or public amenity



A STRIKING VISUAL BOUNDARY

The Belfast Hills make up the summits of the west and north of Belfast city. They form a striking visual boundary that sets them apart from the urban populace living in the valley below. The closeness to such a large population means the hills are becoming increasingly popular among people eager to access them for recreational activities.





The public sites that are found across the hills certainly offer fantastic opportunities for organised and informal recreation.







The Belfast Hills Partnership was formed in 2004 by a wide range of interest groups seeking to encourage better management of the hills in the face of illegal waste, degradation of landscape and unmanaged access.



Our role in recreation is to work with our partners to improve facilities and promote sustainable use of the hills - sensitive to traditional ways of farming and land management in what is a truly outstanding environment. Over the coming years we will work in partnership with those who farm, manage or enjoy the hills to develop recreation in ways which will sustain all of these uses.



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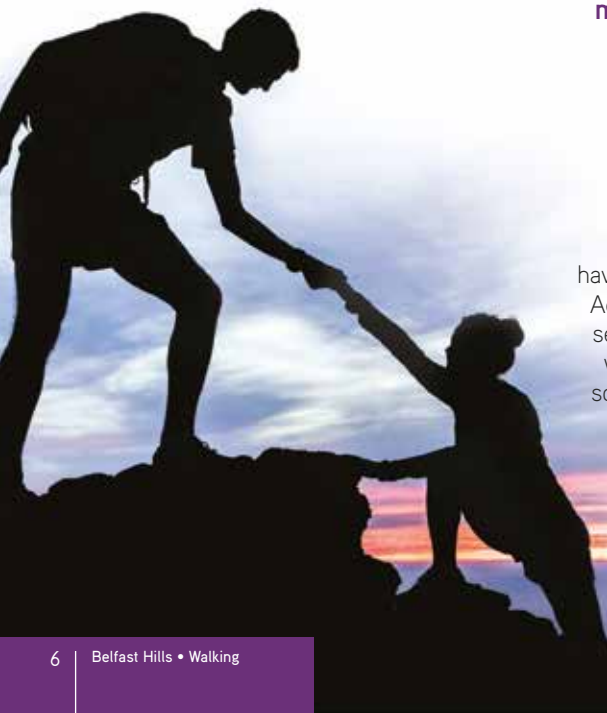
WALKING



With well over half a million hikes taken every year, walking is the number one recreational activity in the Belfast Hills.

A wide range of paths and routes are available - from a virtually flat 400 metres path at Carnmoney Hill pond, to walking the boundaries of Divis and the Black Mountain stretching almost seven miles (11km) across blanket bog and upland heath with elevations of 263m to 377m high.

To help judge which paths best suit you, we have marked these paths on a scale from Easy Access, suitable for all abilities, to Strenuous, serving experienced, fit walkers only. It's well worth paying close attention to this guide as some of our easiest walks are not where you might expect - like flat tarmac paths up on Black Mountain (see map on page 28).



As well as providing varying lengths and ease of use, these paths lead you to a tremendous variety of spectacular views, upland wildlife and areas rich in archaeological significance.

There are plenty of events and guided walks to make the most of what's on offer in the hills and to introduce new visitors.

Most of the routes are also signposted to help you discover the hills in your own time with details of the walks available either on site leaflets, information panels or websites.

If you have a group wishing to walk the hills, you may want detailed advice or a guide service. Contact site staff or Belfast Hills Partnership, all of which are accessible at www.belfasthills.org. Also see our Further Information page at the back of this booklet.

The public sites in the hills provide a wonderful backdrop for any walk however, it is vitally important to plan ahead for your visit. A few simple precautions such as adequate clothing and footwear will keep you safe and are detailed in our Access Code on page 20.

Also highlighted in the code is the need to respect the hills and particularly those who live and work in these uplands, striving to keep the landscape and wildlife that we come to enjoy in good condition. Please make this easier by leaving no litter, closing gates, sticking to public areas only and keeping dogs under control.

SEE MAPS

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TRAILS & WALKS

Walk	Location	Distance (miles)	Difficulty	Page
 Englishtown Trail	Colin Glen	2.2	E	26
 Castle Trail	Cave Hill	0.4	G	24
 Hannahstown Trail	Colin Glen	4	L	26
 Lough Trail	Divis & The Black Mountain	0.9	L	28
 Ridge Trail	Divis & The Black Mountain	4.2	L	28
 Lower Woodland Walk	Carnmoney Hill	1.2	M	22
 Cave Hill Trail	Cave Hill	4	M	24
 Priest's Hill Walk	Slievenacloy	1.4	M	32
 Summit Trail	Divis & The Black Mountain	3	S	28

E Easy Access

Walks for everyone, including people with conventional wheelchairs and pushchairs, using easy access paths. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn. Assistance may be needed to push wheelchairs on some sections: please enquire.

G Gentle

Walks for anyone who does not have a mobility difficulty or a specific health problem or is not seriously unfit. Suitable for pushchairs if they can be lifted over occasional obstructions. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn.

L Leisurely

Walks for reasonably fit people with at least a little country walking experience. May include unsurfaced rural paths. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are recommended.

TABLE



Description

This follows the river closely and will take about an hour through the broadleaf woodland.

A loop which takes 30 minutes through attractive parkland including Belfast Castle gardens and great views over the city.

Travelling further up into the National Trust's property at Upper Collin Glen, this path gets rougher as you ascend. It should take roughly 2 hours and is worth it for the spectacular river gorge and ancient woodland at the top. Steep sections at the upper end so take care.

This 1 hour walk takes you past an enigmatic stone circle at least a thousand years old and up to a great viewpoint looking across the moorland and bogs over to Collin valley, Collin mountain, the Mourne, west to Lough Neagh and the Sperrins beyond.

Walk to the Black Mountain trig point and back via path over moorland and bog with extended views of Belfast, the Lagan valley and the Mourne. Roughly 2.5 to 3 hours.

A circular route which takes about 45 minutes through ancient woodland to a viewpoint overlooking Belfast Lough. Some short steep sections.

A more challenging walk which takes around 2.5 hours. Walk past the caves to McArt's Fort, crossing moorland, heath and meadows.

With great views from a couple of viewpoints on the summits, this walk has no obvious path in places but has route markers at points as you cross the upland grasslands. Exposed in winter so wrap up well but worth it for the views.

This trail takes roughly 2.5 hours. It starts with the tarmac road up to the top of Divis mountain, then a rough stone path down the western slopes to the Tipperary Road. Truly spectacular views over much of Northern Ireland and beyond to Scotland and England on a clear day!

M Moderate

Walks for people with country walking experience and a good level of fitness. May include some steep paths and open country. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are essential.

S Strenuous

Walks for experienced country walkers with an above average fitness level. May include hills and rough country. NB Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are essential. People in doubt about their fitness are advised to avoid these routes or seek more guidance.



CYCLING



Like walking, cycling has seen an explosion of interest with more and more cyclists seen on the roads and trails of the Belfast Hills every year.

While the area can be too small for some long distance cyclists, the Hills offer a great extra to a weekend run in terms of good training hills and access to some quiet roads across south Antrim to Crumlin, Antrim and Ballyclare. If you avoid the busiest times or routes such as the A501 or B38, you can have a great run up inclines such as Derriaghy Cutts to Wheelers Road, Carlisle Circus to Upper Hightown or even Black's Road to the top of Divis. Many of these possible routes are highlighted on our webpage -

www.belfasthills.org

For those that like steep practice climbs, these will give you maximum inclines of up to 28% if that's what you're looking for.

There are a number of stop off points and car parks along these routes and regular race events, some ending up at the top of Divis Mountain, worth it for the spectacular views. Many local cycling clubs from the Belfast and Antrim area use the hills regularly for training runs and events.



With the high population nearby, the great range of possible routes, terrain and steep countryside slopes, it is not surprising that areas in the hills have attracted mountain bikers. Cave Hill Country Park in particular, has had increasing numbers of bikers and informal routes developing over recent years.

Care must be taken, however, as some routes are not suitable due to high pedestrian use or clay substrate liable to erosion. We would therefore ask bikers and pedestrians to exercise care and consideration when considering using these routes.





Many of our trails and paths are used as training routes from gentle joggers up to hardcore fell runners with multiple options for off-road running. The spectacular landscape and fresh mountain air are great extras!

Just as for walking, these routes can vary from high quality surfaces on the flat to rough steep ground only suitable for the most experienced runner.

See the Walks & Trails Table pages 8-9 for the main options. Try some of the easy routes first to get to know the sites, before using the more adventurous hill slopes at the main sites. Modern thinking suggests using hills as part of your training is a fantastic way of improving your health, particularly if your lifestyle means that time is short – 30 minutes of hill training can be worth over an hour on the flat.



RUNNING



The hills are great to try for running on rougher ground or even fell running, but as with other recreation in the hills, do make sure you have the correct gear, right advice and that you have sensible precautions in place.

Make sure someone knows where you're running and when you should be back.

Take an extra layer of clothing in case you find yourself running in a cloud as sometimes happens. Running events in the hills include the 10k Challenge Run at Cave Hill, organised by local running clubs.

Mobile phone coverage is actually very good in most parts of the hills (you're probably running past the relay masts) but best to check just in case.

If you are a novice, try some Saturday Park Runs, usually 5k morning runs at your own pace. Club members, volunteers and park staff give plenty of support, help and advice at locations including Falls Park and the Waterworks that run along the fringes of the Belfast Hills.

If you want to try running in the hills, why not check out our routes on www.belfasthills.org.

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GEOCACHING



If you have a smartphone, iPhone or any small GPS unit, the hills are your oyster in terms of searching any of our stash of geocaches.

Geocaching is a great outdoor recreational activity in which you use Global Positioning System (GPS) to hide and seek containers called "geocaches" or "caches". A typical cache is a small, well-hidden waterproof container complete with logbook.

The successful geocacher enters the date they found the cache and signs it with their user name. After signing the log, the cache must be placed exactly where the geocacher found it.



Exact co-ordinates and hints can be found in popular websites and participants are encouraged to feedback on the website when they've found a geocache.

It's a great activity to try because sites used are often chosen for being out of the way and in striking locations which you wouldn't otherwise find.

Geocaching is a great motivator for walking just that bit further, plus it's simply great fun and a challenge to be enjoyed for small groups and families.

The Belfast Hills is a perfect area to begin with over 30 geocaches highlighted on www.geocaching.com and more appearing all the time.

While out geocaching remember to respect the hills and particularly those who live and work in these uplands, striving to keep the landscape and wildlife that we come to enjoy in good condition. Please make this easier by leaving no litter, closing gates, sticking to public areas only and keeping dogs under control.

Check out www.geocaching.com for further information.

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ORIENTEERING



Orienteering is an outdoor activity where navigational skills, a map and compass are used to navigate from one point to another on an unfamiliar site.



Participants use a specially prepared orienteering map to find specific control points, often against the clock or just a fellow orienteerer!

Orienteering, particularly for beginners, needs to have a lot of permanent navigational points/features in the landscape to enable a course to be set up.



We have some great courses in parts of the hills but not in the wide open upland summits where obvious features are few and far between.

Lagan Valley Orienteering Club hold regular taster events in places around Belfast so why not give orienteering a try with them?

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Permanent orienteering courses are installed in Colin Glen Forest Park and Cave Hill Country Park as part of the Ecotrails NI series.

These orienteering maps are available to download from <http://www.ecotrailsni.com>

A second Junior Orienteering Course is also established at Cave Hill.



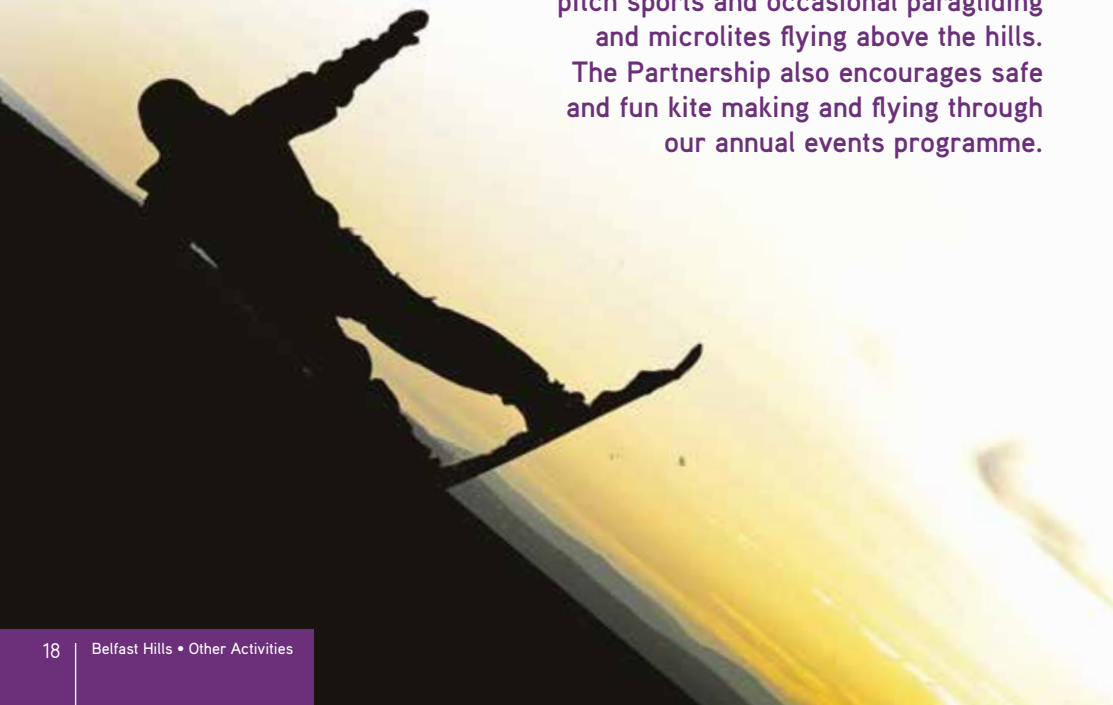


OTHER ACTIVITIES



There is a host of other recreation and sports activities in and around the Belfast Hills

such as the iconic Ulster Grand Prix motorcycling championship in August, pitch sports and occasional paragliding and microlites flying above the hills. The Partnership also encourages safe and fun kite making and flying through our annual events programme.



As more people venture to use and appreciate the Belfast Hills and the opportunities they present, there will be more recreation taking place in terms of numbers and new and exciting activities such as mountain boarding and zorbing.

The Sky Trek High Line Ropes Course at Colin Glen Park is a high octane assault course activity. This is a great example of more ambitious plans to use and appreciate the Belfast Hills as the fantastic recreational resource they are.

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THE ACCESS CODE

To keep the hills as we all would like them, please ensure that you use them in keeping with our Belfast Hills Access Code available on our website www.belfasthills.org.

- 1. PLAN AHEAD** - know where to walk, what to wear and how to minimise waste
- 2. BE SAFE** - pay attention to signs, weather conditions and traffic levels
- 3. UNDERSTAND ACCESS** - know where you are allowed to go and leave gates as you find them
- 4. MINIMISE IMPACT** - take litter home, extinguish matches and cigarettes carefully, don't pollute water
- 5. CONTROL DOGS** - Please keep dogs on a lead especially near farm animals
- 6. RESPECT THE COUNTRYSIDE** - don't disturb or feed wildlife
- 7. CONSIDER OTHERS** - don't interfere with livestock, crops or machinery. Minimise noise

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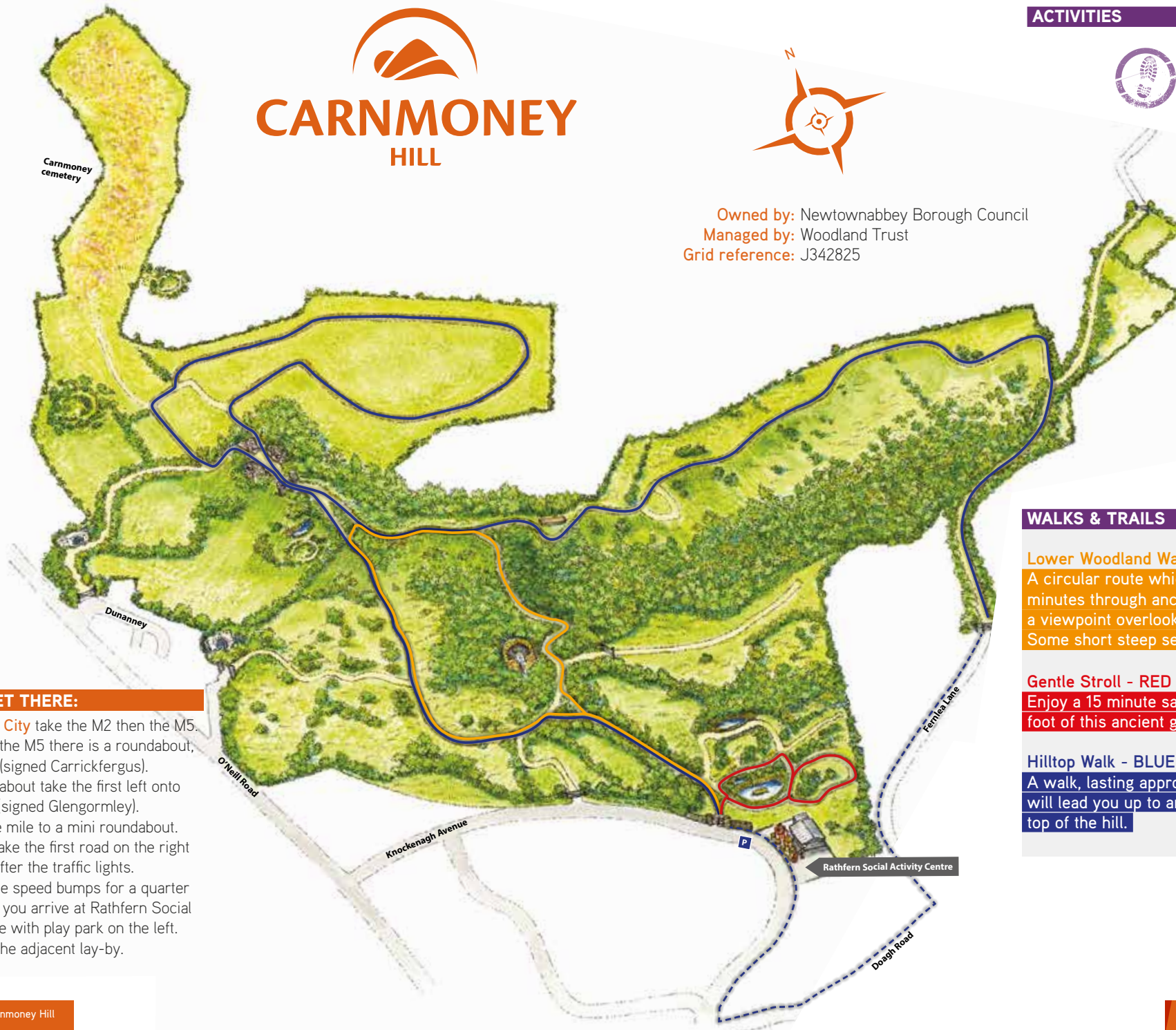


CARNMONEY HILL



Owned by: Newtownabbey Borough Council
 Managed by: Woodland Trust
 Grid reference: J342825

ACTIVITIES



HOW TO GET THERE:

From Belfast City take the M2 then the M5. At the end of the M5 there is a roundabout, head straight (signed Carrickfergus). At next roundabout take the first left onto Station Road (signed Glengormley). Travel for one mile to a mini roundabout. Go straight. Take the first road on the right immediately after the traffic lights. Travel over the speed bumps for a quarter of a mile until you arrive at Rathfern Social Activity Centre with play park on the left. Parking is in the adjacent lay-by.

WALKS & TRAILS

Lower Woodland Walk - ORANGE Route
 A circular route which takes about 45 minutes through ancient woodland to a viewpoint overlooking Belfast Lough. Some short steep sections.

Gentle Stroll - RED Route
 Enjoy a 15 minute saunter around the foot of this ancient green woodland.

Hilltop Walk - BLUE Route
 A walk, lasting approximately two hours, will lead you up to and along the top of the hill.



CAVE HILL COUNTRY PARK

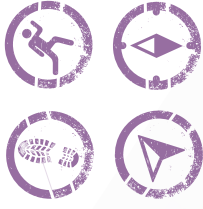
Owned by: Belfast City Council
Grid reference: J326796

HOW TO GET THERE:

From **Belfast City** go north along the Westlink and take Clifton Street exit. At the top of slip road turn left, then at the roundabout take the third exit onto the Antrim Road (Belfast Castle and Zoo are signposted). The main car parks are at Belfast Castle and at the Zoo. Other car parks are at Carr's Glen (via Ballysillan Road) and Upper Hightown Road. There is also a pedestrian entrance at the Upper Cavehill Road.



ACTIVITIES



WALKS & TRAILS

Castle Trail RED Route

A loop which takes 30 minutes through attractive parkland, including Belfast Castle gardens and great views over the city.

Cave Hill Trail GREEN Route

A more challenging walk which takes around 2½ hours. Walk past the caves to McArt's Fort, crossing moorland, heath and meadows.

Estate Trail - BLUE Route

a medium-length trail with some fine views over the city, castle and glimpses of Cave Hill & above.



COLIN GLEN FOREST PARK



To the
Belfast Hills

Tri Bridge

Weir Bridge

Mia's lake

Gamekeepers Bridge

Stewartstown road

HOW TO GET THERE:

From Belfast leave the M1 at Junction 3. Turn right off the slip road under M1 bridge and head straight onto Black's Road. Go to 'T' junction at the end of Black's Road, turn left. After the next set of traffic lights continue for 100 metres to Colin Glen car park on the right.

ACTIVITIES



Owned by: Northern Ireland
Environment Agency
Managed by: Colin Glen Trust
Grid reference: J285705

WALKS & TRAILS

Hannahstown - RED Route

Travelling further up into the National Trust's property at Upper Colin Glen, this path gets rougher as you ascend. It should take roughly 2 hours and is worth it for the spectacular river gorge and ancient woodland at the top. Steep sections at the upper end so take care.

Englishtown Trail - YELLOW Route

This follows the river closely and will take about an hour through the broadleaf woodland.

Tom of the Tae End - GREEN Route

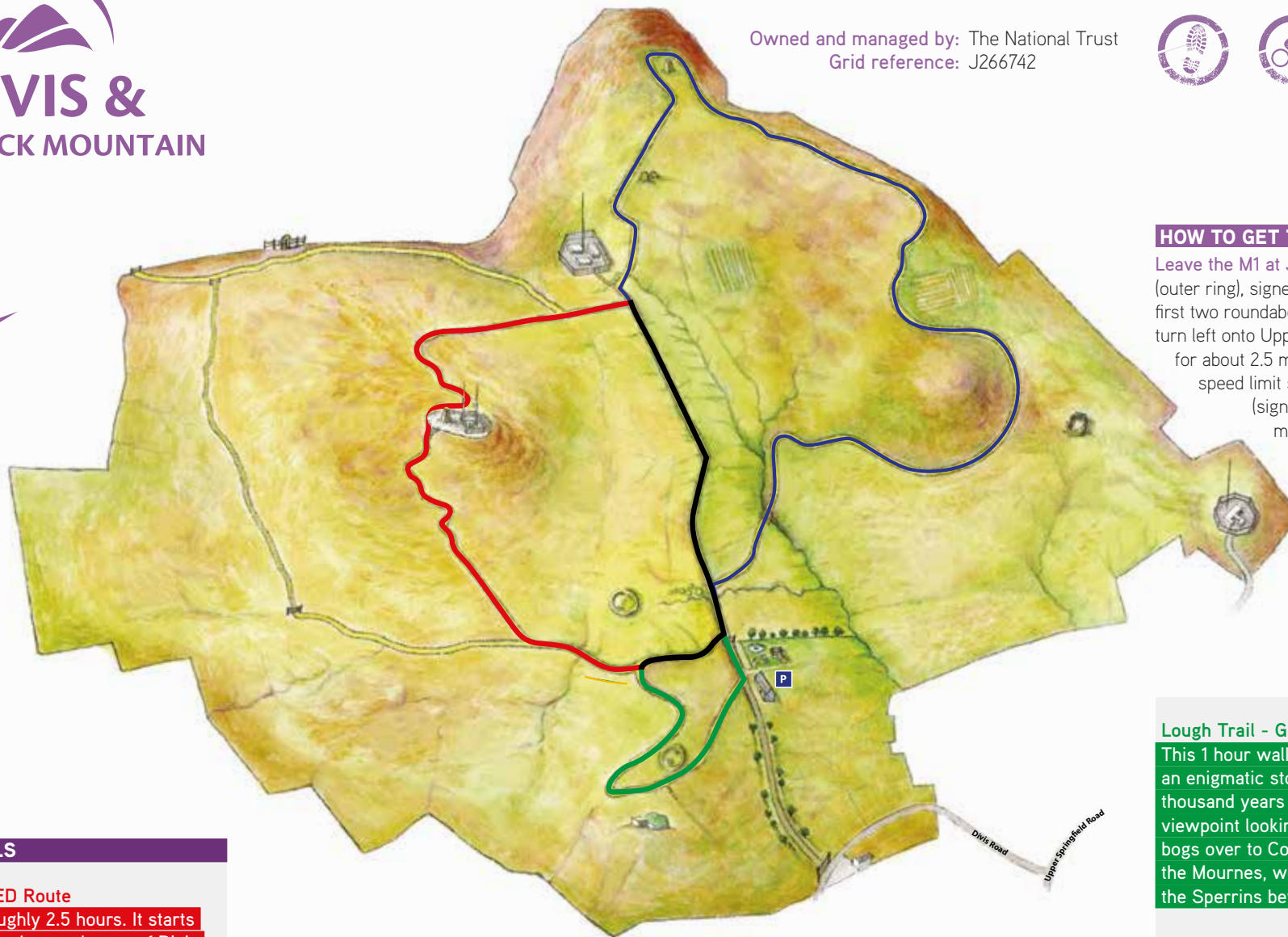
A short easy walk of the lower section of Colin Glen Park.

Ballycullo Trail - BLUE Route

This walk takes in the open meadows and wildlife lake at the top of the Glen.



DIVIS & THE BLACK MOUNTAIN



Owned and managed by: The National Trust
Grid reference: J266742

ACTIVITIES



HOW TO GET THERE:

Leave the M1 at Junction 2. Take the A55 (outer ring), signed Falls. Go straight across the first two roundabouts. From dual carriageway, turn left onto Upper Springfield Road. Continue for about 2.5 miles. Shortly after national speed limit sign, turn right onto Divis Road (signposted). The car park is 0.5 miles on the left hand side.

WALKS & TRAILS

Summit Trail - RED Route

This trail takes roughly 2.5 hours. It starts with the tarmac road up to the top of Divis mountain, then a rough stone path down the western slopes to the Tipperary Road. Truly spectacular views over much of Northern Ireland and beyond to Scotland and England on a clear day!

Lough Trail - GREEN

This 1 hour walk takes you past an enigmatic stone circle at least a thousand years old and up to a great viewpoint looking across the moorland and bogs over to Collin valley, Collin mountain, the Mourne, west to Lough Neagh and the Sperrins beyond.

Ridge Trail - BLUE Route

Walk to the Black Mountain trig point and back via path over moorland and bog with extended views of Belfast, the Lagan valley and the Mourne. Roughly 2.5 to 3 hours.

LIGONIEL DAMS AND PARK



ACTIVITIES



Owned and managed by: Ligoniel Improvement Association

Grid reference: J295775

HOW TO GET THERE:

From the Westlink take the Glengormley (Clifton Street) exit. Then follow the sign for Glengormley (Clifton Street). After 100 metres this will take you to the roundabout at the bottom of Crumlin and Antrim Roads. Take the second exit straight onto Crumlin Road. After 2 miles turn left onto Ligoniel Road and take a left at Mill Avenue (the last left turn before you leave the urban area). Continue along Mill Avenue which becomes Thornberry Road. Turn right into Thornberry Mews. Follow the footpath at the far end towards the site's main entrance.

Continue approx 500m to the Forth River

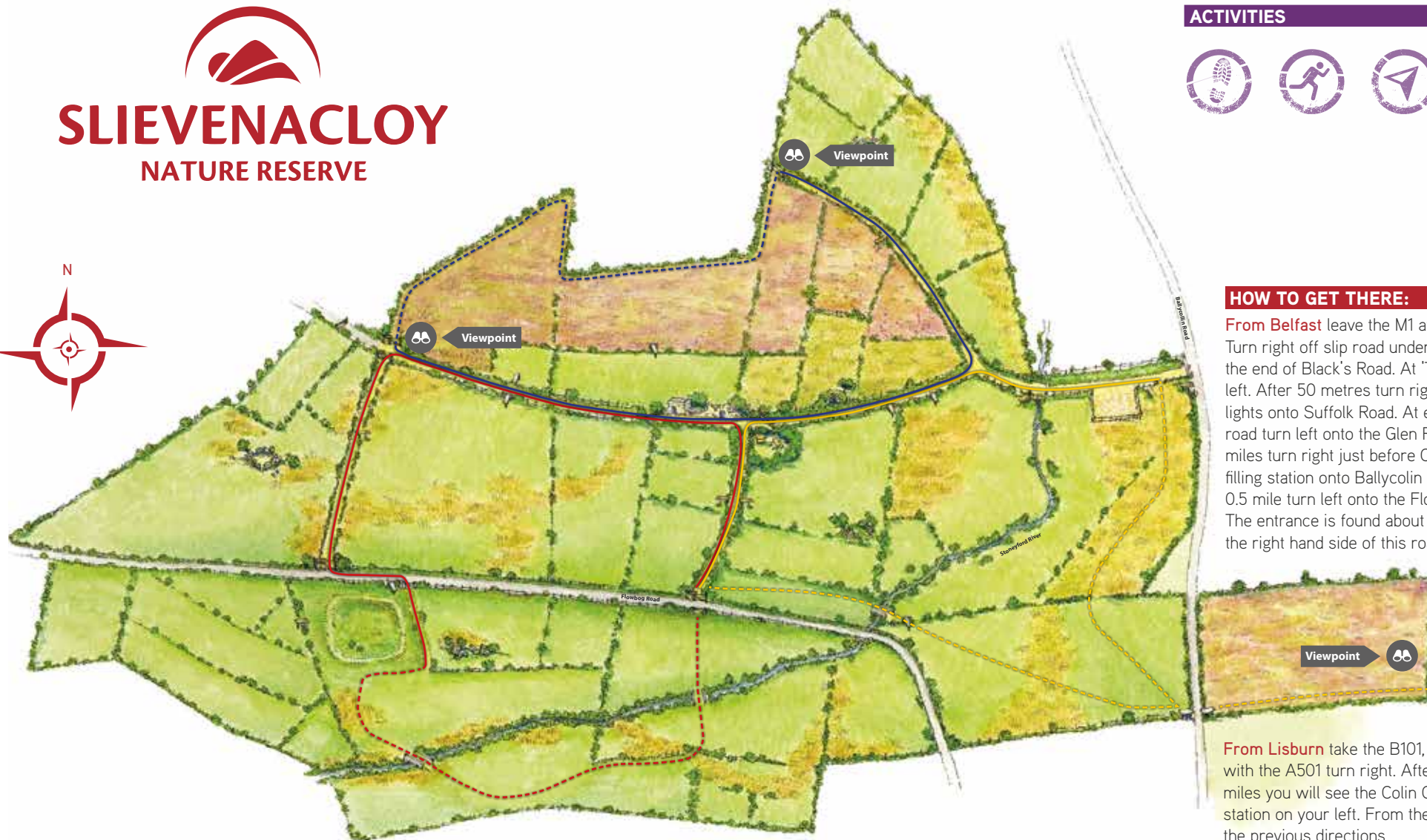
WALKS & TRAILS

The paths in Ligoniel Dams and Park offer a range of gentle walks around the woodland dams and meadows of the site. No fixed trails have been marked out yet but the site is well worth a visit.



SLIEVENACLOY

NATURE RESERVE



ACTIVITIES



HOW TO GET THERE:

From Belfast leave the M1 at Junction 3. Turn right off slip road under M1 bridge, to the end of Black's Road. At 'T' junction turn left. After 50 metres turn right at traffic lights onto Suffolk Road. At end of the road turn left onto the Glen Road. After 2.5 miles turn right just before Colin Glen Road filling station onto Ballycolin Road. After 0.5 mile turn left onto the Flowbog Road. The entrance is found about 0.7 mile on the right hand side of this road.

From Lisburn take the B101, at the junction with the A501 turn right. After about 2 miles you will see the Colin Glen filling station on your left. From there follow the previous directions.

Owned and managed by:
Ulster Wildlife
Grid reference:
J249708

WALKS & TRAILS

Priest's Hill Walk - BLUE Route

With great views from a couple of viewpoints on the summits, this walk has no obvious path in places but has route markers at points as you cross the upland grasslands. Exposed in winter so wrap up well but worth it for the views.

The Stoneyford Walk - RED Route

This walk takes you along the lower wildflower meadows and stream of the Stoneyford valley.

The Ballycolin Walk - YELLOW Route

Heads off into the east of the nature reserve, into rush pasture and through some great examples of a species rich landscape.

ABOUT THE BELFAST HILLS PARTNERSHIP

The Belfast Hills Partnership (BHP) was created in 2004 to provide a practical and integrated way of managing the Belfast Hills. The Partnership spearheads the conservation, protection and enhancement of the hills and their natural, built and cultural heritage.



BHP encourages responsible countryside enjoyment and aims to improve the quality of life for communities in and around the Hills by working in partnership with others to develop and sustain the Hills area.

The work of BHP is made possible by the support of our funders. Our core funders are the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Belfast City Council, Lisburn City Council, Newtownabbey Borough Council and Antrim Borough Council.

In 2012 a Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme commenced which includes a broad range of access and recreation projects including new and improved paths, access links, information and interpretive panels. It also enabled a host of other heritage, landscape, biodiversity and community projects. It also re-connects people to the Belfast Hills. Match funding for all this work and this publication was secured from the Rural Development Programme, Ulster Garden Villages and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

THANKS!

The Belfast Hills Partnership would like to thank the various funders for enabling this Recreation Guide to be produced. We would also thank staff from our partnership organisations and from Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland for their assistance in developing recreation in the Hills and in particular in putting together this publication. Thanks must also go to all those who helped in proofing and editing this document.



IMAGE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those who kindly donated or agreed the use of their images for inclusion in this publication.



FURTHER INFORMATION

We have endeavoured to put as much useful information as possible on to our website www.belfasthills.org, including links to the individual site manager websites, but for further information on recreation we would also recommend the following websites:-

www.walkni.com

for a vast array of information on trails, events and accommodation

www.cycleni.com

provides the same as above for cyclists

www.geocaching.com

is the first port of call to learn about geocaching in the Belfast Hills

www.visit-belfast.com

is a great general resource for anyone planning a visit to Belfast

www.ecotrailsni.com

is a great resource for orienteering maps.



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