

Cave Hill Country Park



Route description*

This route climbs up the Cave Hill over unsurfaced paths and gives breathtaking views over Belfast.

Distance
4.5 miles 7.2 km.

Average Time
2 hrs 30 mins. – 3 hrs.

Access

By bus - Belfast Castle and Hazelwood entrance; Metro Services: 1A-1H (Mon-Sat) 1C-1E, 1H (Sun), Carr's Glen; 12, 61.

By car - Car parking at Belfast Castle, Belfast Zoo (Hazelwood), Upper Cavehill Road, and Upper Hightown Road.

Trail Route

This is a challenging circular route beginning at Belfast Castle and following the green waymarking arrows. However it can be joined from Bellevue car park, Upper Hightown road or Upper Cavehill road.

Begin at the interpretive panel in the car park just before the entrance to Belfast Castle. Climb up the path on your left until you reach the first junction. Turn right.

Follow this path through the woodland (1) keeping to the left of any junctions you come to. This path leads up through the trees, climbing on to a plateau, giving excellent views of Belfast and Belfast Lough (2).

Continuing on, take the next path on your left. This skirts round the edge of the Devil's Punchbowl (3), passes below the largest cave (4) before veering to the right. Follow this path as it climbs steadily up the hill, pausing to take in the surroundings and views on the way.

Continue climbing up the steps to a cattle grid and fence and before reaching the escarpment. Veer to the left and follow the grass path to the top of the hill and McArt's Fort (5). Pause again to take in the magnificent views before joining the main path on its gradual descent down the south facing slopes of Cave Hill (6).

Continue downhill taking the next lane on your left. This leads down past the top of Carr's Glen and carries on for some distance before reaching the Upper Cavehill Road.

*Advice

Suitable warm outdoor clothing should be worn when visiting Cave Hill.

Trail 07



History

There are many signs from the past illustrating man's long association with Cave Hill. These include a stone cairn on the summit; a crannog or lake dwelling (now part of the zoo); several raths and ringforts; McArt's fort and Belfast Castle.

The Belfast Castle Estate was donated to Belfast by the Donegall family. Various parcels of land were acquired by Belfast City Council to make up Cave Hill Country Park.

Go down the footpath a short way and take the path to the left. Climb over the ridge and descend into Belfast Castle Estate. Return to the starting point by means of the footpath up the main driveway.

Things of Interest

Woodland (1)

Planted towards the end of the 19th century, the woodland contains a blend of elm, oak, sycamore, larch and pine trees. Dutch elm disease has decimated the elms, which are gradually being replaced with other trees.

Views (2)

There are numerous good viewing points along this walk. On a clear day you should see Strangford Lough, Scrabo Tower, the Mourne Mountains away to the south, Slemish to the north and the coast of Scotland across the Irish Sea.

Devil's Punchbowl (3)

A local name for this steep-sided depression in the ground.

Caves (4)

It is not known for sure whether the caves on the hill are natural or man made. They may have been early iron mines. Only the lowest of five is any way accessible and even this requires care.

McArt's Fort (5)

A former defensive fort built on the promontory at the front of Cave Hill. Little remains today of the original fort, although the moat that once surrounded it can still be distinguished.

Cave Hill (6)

Cave Hill stands some 368 metres above sea level. Its outline, likened to Napoleon sleeping on the hillside, is one of the city's most familiar landmarks. From the top, the city looks like a scale model set out before you.

Look out for

- kestrels, peregrines and buzzards flying overhead.
- wild orchids on the heathland on top of the hill.
- some of the animals within Belfast Zoo visible from certain parts of the hill!

For more information see the Cave Hill Country Park and Belfast Castle leaflets.