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BEYOND FOOT & MOUTH Charting a Future for the Belfast Hills

At the time of writing, there are signs that the foot and mouth disease crisis in Northern Ireland may be receding, but caution is the watchword. While the woodland areas on the Cave Hill have now been re-opened, grazed areas and the summit remain out of bounds. The same applies to farmland and grazing areas in the Belfast Hills generally. We fully support strict observance of these restrictions - it is a time for urban dwellers to show solidarity with the farming community and others in the rural community who are indirectly affected.

Foot and Mouth Disease is a naturally occurring virus, but on this occasion its wildfire spread through England and Scotland, and the threat it presents to us, has been greatly exacerbated by modern marketing methods involving the assembly, movement, and further dispersal of tens of thousands of sheep daily right across the country. No doubt, as with the feeding of animal remains to herbivores which caused BSE, it is the most profitable way of doing things.

If any good is to come out of this new agricultural crisis, it will be in a dramatic re-appraisal of priorities, with a much higher emphasis on environmental issues, and on safe and good quality food production. That should include a shift in support structures away from intensive and factory farming production, and in favour of those farming in more traditional ways in environmentally sensitive areas such as the Belfast Hills. We will have to be equally insistent that any new order provides a secure living for the farming community, even if that means higher prices.

It is doubly unfortunate that desperate farmers are often their own worst enemies. That has certainly been the case in the Belfast Hills. Yes, while foot and mouth threatens, we are urging all to stay off the Belfast Hills. But unfortunately that appears to be the permanent position of farmers' representatives from the area and the Ulster Farmers Union. The Belfast Hills Walk has not been able to traverse the full line of the hills for the last two years because access has been refused by some farmers.

With or without Foot and Mouth, farmers' representatives have given the impression that they would prefer interlopers from the city to be disinfected at all times, that is if they cannot be shot. They make no distinction between teenage vandals and responsible representatives of environmental groups or of public bodies. The very notion that there might ever be an approved walking route along the Belfast Hills is met with the response, 'sure, you can go on the roads', as though there is a linear road

along the skyline (forbid the thought!).

Do we exaggerate? Consider the record. Farmers effectively sabotaged the proposal for a Belfast Hills Regional Park which was briefly government policy in the 1990's. Precisely because the importance of working with the farmers and not against them was recognised, environmental groups supported a shift in emphasis to the creation of a less over-arching Belfast Hills Trust.

Farmers grudgingly agreed to serve on the Belfast Hills Trust Steering Committee which had the responsibility of progressing the concept. From the outset it appeared that their hearts were not in it, and every meeting of the Committee was treated to an hour long filibuster on the irresponsibility of the others present. At the November 2000 meeting, in the least surprising event of the Committee's entire history, the farmers' representatives walked out. It was no coincidence that this meeting was due to discuss the final draft of the proposed Hills Trust's Business

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Charting a Future for the Belfast Hills

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Plan. The farmers were seeking to torpedo the Hills Trust in the same way in which they had seen off the earlier concept of a Belfast Hills Regional Park.

What precisely were they resisting? The first operating principle in the Business Plan makes clear that the future Trust will "promote recreational projects only on public lands or on lands where public access has been agreed with the owners". What could be clearer? In the context of the Plan enhanced access has to be a matter of consent. Elsewhere, the Plan fully recognises the need to support what are marginal farming undertakings on the urban fringe.

Farmers argue that "they themselves are best placed to conserve the hills". Certainly they are an indispensable element in any future conservation programme, but reliance on their capacity to do the job alone has already failed. Their own rage at urban vandals, or the existence of 52 sites in the Belfast Hills where illegal dumping has taken place and as identified by the Belfast Hills Watch, makes the case for a more systematic approach and for the Belfast Hills Trust.

Certainly the as yet non-existent Trust can hardly be blamed for the existing lamentable state of affairs! Because farmers, who are not fools, have failed to make any cogent case against the proposed Trust, we are bound to ask are there other agendas at work? In a period when high hill farming is close to non-viable, their real fear may be that other sources of income or of future economic opportunity may be closed to them in a more tightly controlled environmental framework. Certainly any possible proposals for improved support for urban fringe or hill farming will not be able to rival the prospective gains from sale of land to property developers, illegal dumping, in-fill dumping disguised as agricultural improvement and so on. Farmers should note, however, that, with or without a Belfast Hills Trust, public opinion has moved inexorably against such activities.

Perhaps farmers may simply be seeking to up the financial pay-off to allow public access to the Belfast Hills. The danger here is that farmers may have an exaggerated idea of the possibilities of their position. They should know that there is a limit to how much the future Belfast Hills Trust or any other public body can stake in this poker game.

Quite rightly, and for the moment without the farmers, the Business Plan for the Belfast Hills Trust was approved in January and matters should now proceed inexorably to the creation of the Trust during the summer. It remains essential that the public bodies involved thus far, including government departments and district councils, ensure that the new Trust is properly funded. The interests of half a million citizens in the Greater Belfast area demand it.

And as for the farmers, you remain essential to the future of the Belfast Hills, and we will fight to secure your position. Just remember though that you depend, and particularly in present times, on the support of the urban community. Lose that and you are truly lost.

John Gray

Belfast Hills Walk Cancelled

Due to Foot and Mouth restrictions, this year's Belfast Hills Walk, scheduled for Sunday 27 May has had to be cancelled. It is hoped to organise a full walk in 2002.

Cormac Hamill

The Cave Hill Campaigner . 2

Wartime US Plane Crash to be Filmed

In early February this year the Cave Hill hit the headlines for quite an unusual reason. A film, to be entitled *Closing the Ring*, is being based on a US Army plane crash, which occurred on the Hill in June 1944. The crash resulted in the deaths of the ten men on board.

The incident was recalled by James Doherty, an Air Raid Warden at the time, in his 1989 book *Post 381*, about the war period in Belfast. He was one of only a few local people to arrive on the scene. James Doherty received a call early one morning alerting him to a plane crash on the Cave Hill, behind the Floral Hall, at Bellevue. On arrival at the scene he and a friend were confronted with the scattered remains of a B17 Bomber, nicknamed the Flying Fortress. US Army personnel immediately cordoned off the scene of the crash, the reason for which still remains unclear. He suspected that the plane was carrying top-secret military equipment. Whatever the case, no one was permitted to leave the crash site until about 4.00p.m. the following day. During their confinement, to add to their distress, a soldier known as 'Crazy Guy', because of his trigger-happy nature, was the sentry for part of the night.

Interestingly, James Doherty found a letter written by one of the young soldiers containing the lines, 'Mother, we are now flying over Ireland and we will be going down in a few minutes.' This was followed by an illegible scribble presumably as the plane had begun a sudden descent. Mr. Doherty passed this letter to an American soldier in the hope that it would offer some consolation to the grieving mother.

But it was a more recent find at the crash site which was to be the inspiration for this movie. In August 1996 the Belfast Newsletter reported how Alfred Montgomery found a wedding ring, which subsequently turned out to belong to Lawrence Dundon, a soldier on board the ill-fated flight. Determined to return the ring, Alfred set out for Louisville, Tennessee, in September 1996, hoping to make contact with any surviving relatives. He successfully returned it to the airman's widow. The story was made into a documentary for BBC Radio 4. Linda Gabriel, an American playwright, on hearing the story, scripted a film in classic Hollywood style, which is due to hit the big screen in the near future. Watch out for it!

Ruairi MacLeanachan



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Cave Hill Residents Action Group

A turn-out of more than 100 concerned residents crowded into one of the Committee Rooms of Cavehill Bowling Club for the first ever such meeting of residents to express their condemnation of unwanted developments in the area, and deliberate neglect by greedy developers of derelict sites. The meeting unanimously voted to establish an Action Group with the task of bringing about positive change on these issues.

"This is a beautiful part of Belfast," said Sue Burns, local resident and Committee Press Officer, "but its attractive townscape character is being allowed to deteriorate by the uncaring decisions of our totally unaccountable Planning Authorities. The situation is further exacerbated by greedy property developers and speculators. They are permitted by the Planners to deliberately allow previously mature sites to become derelict and undeveloped, whilst they wait for further profits from property increases. These sites frequently become an attraction for young people with consequent vandalism, drinking, even solvent and drug abuse. It is nothing short of a public scandal."

Others expressed concern at the absence of safe playing areas for children. Many underlined frustration at the negative impact on their area when Planners are prepared to permit inappropriate facilities such as Bookmakers and Hot Food Bars, against the expressed wishes of the residents and their elected representatives. Another resident, Michael McCann added: "Increasingly, these developers are permitted by the Planners to build multiple dwellings, of design inappropriate to the character of the area, on sites previously occupied by single Edwardian houses. The resultant loss to the built heritage and social fabric in our area is permanent and irreversible."

A committee was formed to represent the wider Group, now called Cavehill Residents Action Group (CRAG). CRAG is now drawing up a dynamic Action Plan and Strategic Development Plan for the Cavehill area, with a view to bringing about radical change to the current situation. CRAG further intends to submit constructive proposals for the area to the impending Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, and also to link up with other appropriate groups. The Group is developing an internet website, which can be found at <http://crag-online.tripod.com> and the email address is crag-online@bigfoot.com

Fortwilliam Action Committee

A new residents' group, the Fortwilliam Action Committee, has been formed to co-ordinate an effective response to planning and development issues which affect the Fortwilliam, Somerton and Innisfayle areas of North Belfast.

A packed meeting of local residents turned out at the initial meeting in the Lansdowne Court Hotel on Thursday 15th February to express their concern about British Telecom's third attempt to obtain planning permission for a mobile phone mast on the Somerton Road. The application has since been rejected, but the meeting provided clear evidence of residents' concern about a number of other issues, such as the apparent lack of a planning policy, and the consequent abundance of un-sympathetic property developments which threatens to radically change the nature of the locality. A particular concern was the number of recent planning applications for apartment complexes as well as commercial undertakings of dubious worth, such as fast-food outlets and betting shops.

It was pointed out that 'developers' (often outbidding local

families) target the larger houses for purchase and - often after a calculated period of dereliction - demolish, and then replace them with intensive infill, which adversely affects the character of the district.

Local councillors, and residents of the area, Tom Campbell and Alban Maginness, addressed the meeting, and expressed their concern about the future for the neighbourhood if residents did not mobilise to protect this part of Belfast with its distinctive historical and architectural character. Fifteen volunteers constituted a committee and each household represented at the meeting donated £5.00 towards running costs and the establishment of a permanent organisation.

The Fortwilliam Action Committee has distributed copies of its first newsletter, and the members hope to establish links with similar associations which are concerned with protecting and advancing the character of their environs. Anyone who would like to join the FAC should contact Kevin Davis at 90229527, or email us at fortwilliamaction@hotmail.com

Edward McCamley

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign has written to the planners with our initial submission before the deadline of 11 May.

Our position is straightforward. We strongly believe that there should be no further development around the edges of the Cave Hill. Too much land has already been lost to house-building.

Several months ago, we were very concerned to learn that planning permission for a major housing development was going to be applied for in what is currently greenbelt land in the area of the farm above the Upper Cave Hill Road. This area is on the edge of the Cave Hill Country Park. We wrote to the planning authorities, stating that we would demand a public enquiry if any such application was listed. Our latest information is that the application will not now proceed, but may well do so in the future. It is therefore essential that this land continues to be zoned as greenbelt in the new Metropolitan Area Plan.

We have made initial representations on these lines to the planners and will take further action, if necessary, when the initial plan is published.

Editor

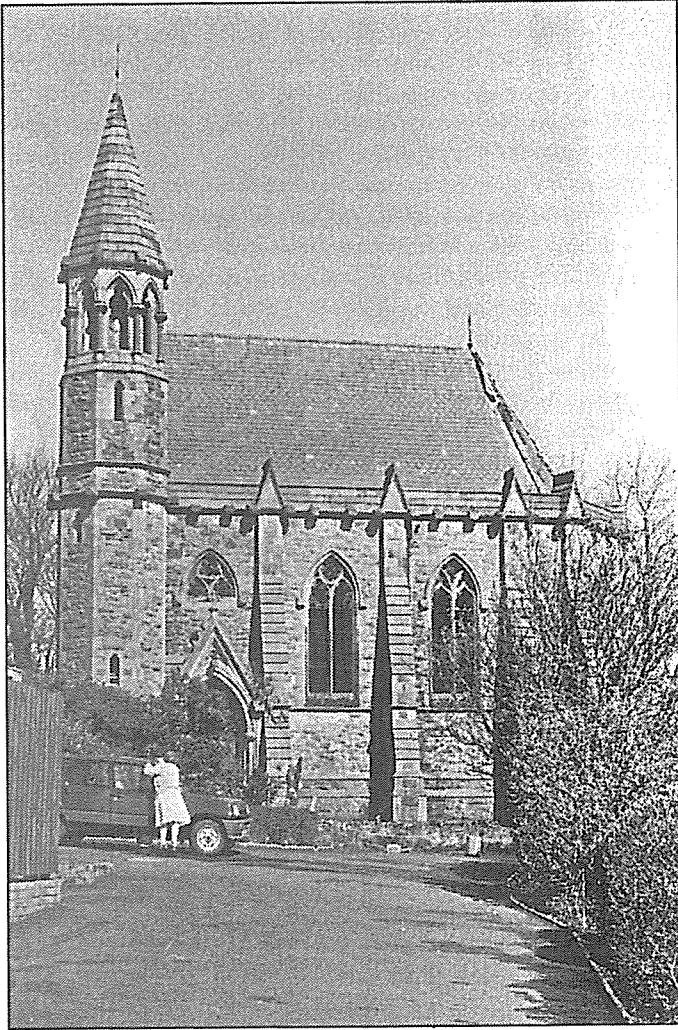


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The 'Late' Chapel of the Resurrection



This is a very brief history of the Chapel of the Resurrection, which is accessible from Innisfayle Park on the Antrim Road. This article could not have been written without information kindly supplied by Charles McCollum, Rector of St Peter's Parish Church. I say 'late' because services ceased in 1972 and though it became a listed building in 1974 it has been increasingly vandalised since then. In 1982 grave robbers got in and desecrated it, so in 1985 it was deconsecrated and eventually sold. The Belfast Buildings Preservation Trust became involved in the future of the Chapel but sadly an agreement couldn't be reached between them and the site owners. Unfortunately the building is becoming more and more dilapidated, though it appears the owners intend to develop it into apartments. If this is the case it seems foolish to allow it to deteriorate to such an extent. In St Peter's Church on the Antrim Road opposite North Circular Road, the side chapel has been reorganised and is now called the Chapel of the Resurrection in memory of the once fine building now in ruins.

In April 1708 the old Belfast Castle in the centre of the town was destroyed by fire. There was no Belfast Castle, until 1868 when the third Marquis of Donegall started building the present Castle in what was known as the Deerpark, in the shadow of Cave Hill. It was completed in 1870. During this time the Marquis also built the Mortuary Chapel as a memorial to his son Frederick Richard, Earl of Belfast, who had died and been buried in Italy in 1853. The Chapel was erected from the designs of Messrs Lanyon, Lyn & Lanyon, Architects and the

builder was John Lowry.

Frederick's body had been exhumed and buried in the family vault in St Nicholas' Parish Church in Carrickfergus. When the new Mortuary Chapel was ready in December 1869 he was exhumed again and reburied in the vault under the Chapel. When the building was vandalised and desecrated in 1982 he was cremated and his ashes taken to St Nicholas' Church!

The third Marquis brought six coffins of his immediate relatives from Carrickfergus to the vault of the new Chapel. He himself was also buried there in 1883, as was his wife who was presumably one of the six, as her death occurred in 1860.

There were several brasses on the walls of the Chapel commemorating various members of the Donegall family and Anthony Ashley Cooper better known as the eighth of Shaftesbury (son of the crusading Shaftesbury of the Factory Act fame). He had married Harriet, daughter of the third Marquis of Donegall, thus bringing the Shaftesbury connection to the Antrim Road.

At the beginning of the First World War services in the Chapel were discontinued. However it re-opened again in 1938, having been transferred with the freehold of the ground on which it stands, by the Earl of Shaftesbury to the Church of Ireland in that year. The estate and the Castle had been presented to the City Council in 1934.

The Chapel bell which had been silent for years was cleaned and re-hung at the end of the Second World War, when it was rung in honour of the Allied Victory. The Chapel suffered superficial damage during the air raids on Belfast but services continued every Sunday. Many Belfast parishes helped St Peter's to keep the Chapel going by conducting Sunday services. However, there was no endowment of any kind and all outgoings had to be met from the collections, so there was increasing difficulty in funding major repairs.

Sadly, on 27 August 1972 the last service was held. The building had become impossible to maintain any longer and it was deconsecrated in 1985.

It now appears to be falling into ruin. Why should this be allowed to happen?

Diane Hunter

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Return of the Red Squirrel?

The red squirrel is one of our most popular wild animals. Everyone knows that it has been gradually losing out to the alien grey squirrel, which was introduced from North America in the late nineteenth century. The red is now almost completely absent from England, but still has significant populations in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. However, its history is more interesting than people realise.

Millions of years ago, when Europe and North America were joined together, the red and grey had a common ancestor. As the landmasses drifted apart, the squirrel gradually evolved into the two distinct animals we know today. In the middle ages, the red was hunted for its fur and is thought to have become extinct in Ireland around 1500, probably due to disease. It was reintroduced in the nineteenth century and spread so rapidly that it was killed as a pest. Numbers declined again between 1900 and 1920, but recovered again afterwards. Since about 1950, the spread of the grey has driven the red from many areas of Ireland. However, the North East is still a stronghold and in the Belfast area there is a healthy population in Belvoir forest.

It is not clear why greys invariably drive reds out, but there is virtually no evidence of the two species sharing a territory — when the greys arrive, the reds disappear within a few years. Reds have been absent from the Cave Hill for many years and greys are now established in the area. If no action is taken to check the spread of the greys in the Belfast area, it is likely that the red population in Belvoir forest will have disappeared within twenty years.

The good news for the Cave Hill is that Belfast Zoo is hoping to carry out a captive breeding programme in order to reintroduce the reds in this area, using animals from Belvoir. However, for this to succeed it will be necessary to remove the greys from the area before any reds are released. In addition, a supplementary feeding programme may be desirable to help the reds to re-establish themselves.

A further reason for removing the greys from this area is the serious threat they pose to the important hazel wood habitat area above the zoo. The problem with grey squirrels is that they strip the hazel nuts in September, before they are ripe enough to germinate. As a result, the hazel woods fail to regenerate naturally. This has become a serious problem in England, in areas where no attempt is made to control the number of greys.

Editor

Source: Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside*

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Mountain Bikers: a Code of Conduct

The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign is in no doubt where it stands with regard to motor bike scramblers and quad bikes on the Cave Hill. They are a polluting and seriously damaging menace. Riders, if they persist in coming onto the hill, should be prosecuted.

The Committee's feelings about mountain bikes are more equivocal. They are non-polluting and their use is a form of healthy exercise. Individually, they cause much less damage than motor bikes. However, the sheer number of mountain bikers on the hill means that, cumulatively, they are causing serious damage in certain areas. When inconsiderately ridden downhill at high speed they also alarm and pose a physical risk to pedestrians.

There is no doubt that unless mountain bikers show more restraint, the demand for an enforced ban, or their restriction to limited areas, will grow. It is less clear how any ban or restrictions might be enforced so long as there is no regular wardening of the upper areas of the Cave Hill. In the meantime we urge mountain bikers, both in their own interest, and that of other users of the hill to observe the following voluntary code of conduct:

1. Stick to gravel paths in wet weather or when the ground is saturated.
2. Avoid the following paths where serious damage has already been done or paths are fragile:
 - (a) The path from McArts Fort to Bellevue.
 - (b) All paths from the caves to the summit plateau.
 - (c) McArts Fort itself (this is an ancient monument).
3. At weekends go early in the morning or late in the afternoon avoiding periods of maximum pedestrian use.
4. Please slow prior to entering blind corners!
5. Break well before you reach pedestrians.
6. Generally, show respect for pedestrians.

We would welcome the opinion both of our own members and of mountain bikers on this proposed code. It is a matter we intend to discuss further at our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 3 May.

John Gray

Crackdown on Scramblers?

Belfast City Council is considering ways of tackling the growing problem of scramblers and quads in the Carrs Glen and Belfast Castle woodlands. Use of these machines is contrary to the bye-laws and there is concern that even when the bye-laws are enforced, the penalties are inadequate as a deterrent.

Anyone who regularly walks in this area will be aware of the noisy and physically intimidating presence of scramblers, especially at weekends. Often, they show no consideration whatever for those on foot and are a particular threat to the many dogs which are regularly exercised by their owners. There is an increasing risk that walkers will be seriously injured or even killed by the reckless use of these machines by teenagers. It is understood that the bye-laws may be revised in attempt to solve this problem.

Editor

Millennium Projects Update

Land Restoration Project

It has now been a year since I was awarded a Millennium Award to create hedges and ponds on a piece of land adjacent to the Cave Hill. During the course of the year I have been involved in training courses, planning, publicity and video production but the most important part is the environmental improvement that has resulted.

The land has undergone a total transformation in the space of 12 months. What was once an area of unimproved grazing land is now a haven for wildlife. A hedge of over 1000 trees has been planted, four wildlife ponds have been created/improved and over 7000 trees have been planted as a legacy for future generations. The chosen trees are all native Irish species which will help to support a rich variety of insects, birds and wildlife. The badgers, foxes, hares and rabbits in existence will now have the opportunity to increase in number, their future guaranteed.

I read recently that it takes 15 trees to counteract the pollution caused by each individual alive today. Every extra tree planted helps to reinforce the fragile eco-system in which we live and helps to counter global warming and air pollution.

One very important lesson I have learned is that making a difference to the environment is not beyond the reach of the average person. All it takes is a bit of enthusiasm and time. So what can you do? Plant an extra tree in your garden. Reduce the amount of weedkiller and pesticides which you use. Buy a bird table. Recycle your newspapers. You might not think this will make much difference, but it will, it will make the world of difference.

Martin McDowell

Castle Millennium Herb Garden

During 2000, the millennium herb garden was planned and planted by me with the help of friends from the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign. There was substantial financial backing from the Millennium Fund and Belfast City Council Parks Department. The herb garden is situated in the grounds of Belfast Castle on land which was once the kitchen garden.

In keeping with the ideas and spirit of the award, the garden was planted to encourage public awareness of the benefits of a more sustainable and healthy lifestyle. In its early stages, the garden has been set out mostly for culinary use, with the intention of adding aromatic and medicinal herbs in the coming years.

Herbs enhance the foods we eat. Apart from the vitamins and minerals they provide, it is the taste, mood enhancement and health benefits they give foods that make them so valuable. They are the aphrodisiacs of the culinary world.

For thousands of years physicians of the body and spirit were gardeners and botanists. Herbs have always been used to heal aches, pains, injuries and ailments. Today's alternative medicine uses herbs in massage, meditation, acupuncture and aromatherapy. The use of herbs is experiencing a rebirth of enormous proportions.

The garden seats invite you to rest and enjoy the panoramic view of Belfast Lough. In this tranquil setting, it is difficult to believe that you are only a few miles from Belfast city centre.

Geraldine Birch

The Millennium Maze

"Where is the maze," I hear you ask. Due to unforeseen circumstances planting has had to be postponed until autumn 2001 when some 1,500 beech trees will be planted and 2,300 feet of protective fencing erected in the grounds of Belfast Castle on the site of the old rose garden.

Despite the delay in planting, the creating of the mosaic for the centrepiece has progressed. With the help of the P7 pupils from Cavehill Primary School, Ben Madigan Preparatory School and Our Lady of Lourdes (Park Lodge) Primary School, very enjoyable and productive hours were spent in the respective classrooms creating the cat mosaic. Under the expert guidance of artist Angela George, the children, some 198 in all, stuck tile pieces onto hessian squares which will be transferred onto a cement base in the middle of the maze.

The children were all very enthusiastic about the project and a pleasure to work with. I would like to extend my thanks to the teachers and heads of the schools involved for their interest and support and also to Angela, the brains behind the creating of the mosaic. Incidentally, Angela designed the cat mosaic from pictures drawn by the children and these will be displayed in the heritage centre in Belfast Castle later in the year.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my work on the maze project and spent three very interesting days in England and Wales visiting various maze sites looking for inspiration! I would like to express my thanks to Belfast City Council for their assistance in the project, especially Agnes McNulty from the Parks department who has been extremely supportive.

The maze, when planted, will be an added attraction to Belfast Castle grounds and something that will flourish and grow alongside the children who have been involved in its creation.

Louise Wilson



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A Belfast Hills Trust is on the Way!

On 30 January 2001 the Belfast Hills Trust Steering Committee adopted a Business Plan for the future Trust. This means that its actual creation has now come within sight and should follow during the summer. The Business Plan follows on from the 1999 Belfast Hills Feasibility/Options Study which recommended the creation of a powerful Trust with the capacity to acquire and manage land and to raise funds. The following, in abbreviated form, are the key elements of the Business Plan:

Mission

- To provide a practical and integrated management mechanism for the Belfast Hills.
- To contribute to the quality of life of Hills residents and the wider city of Belfast.
- To work in partnership with others.

Strategic aims

- To conserve, protect, and enhance the natural, cultural and built heritage of the Belfast Hills.
- To encourage individuals, communities and organisations to care for the Belfast Hills.
- To raise awareness of the value of the Belfast Hills and of issues relating to their protection.
- To facilitate and manage recreational use of the Belfast Hills.
- To support and assist farmers and owners under pressure from urban development and from inappropriate forms of countryside recreation.
- To contribute to the economic regeneration of communities in the Belfast hills and adjoining city.
- To contribute to a positive image of Belfast.

Operational Programme

The Trust will focus on five operational areas during its first five years:

- (1) Conservation and enhancement.
- (2) Facilities for countryside recreation.
- (3) Communication, information and education.
- (4) Partnership programmes.
- (5) Corporate activities necessary to support the operational programme.

It is envisaged that the Trust will work in the context of a wider Belfast Hills Sustainable Development Initiative involving all the relevant statutory bodies, and may also provide the secretariat for it.

Key elements of the proposed operational programmes are as follows:

Conservation and enhancement

A pro-active strategy is provided for which covers repair of damage by removal of 'eyesores' and also enhancement which in areas of particular conservation interest may include "purchasing lands or entering into management and enhancement agreements" with other owners.

The Trust will also develop views on planning policy with a view to influencing future government policy in a manner favourable to the Hills.

Countryside recreation and enjoyment

This includes the provision of a Belfast Hills ranger service.

Important objectives with regard to public access include:

- (a) Acquisition and management of suitable strategic areas of public open space, either by the Trust or other bodies.
- (b) The development of a Belfast Hills walking route.

It should be noted, however, that these objectives are also governed by one of the operating principles which states that the Trust will promote "recreation projects only on public lands or on lands where public access has been agreed by the owners".

Partnership activities

These include an agri-environment grant programme, and a pilot urban fringe farming support programme.

How will the Trust operate?

The Trust will be established as an independent not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and will seek charitable status. It is intended that it will be formally established in the spring of 2001 and that for the first six months of its operation, existing Bryson House staff engaged in hills work will be seconded to it. During a lead-in year a major priority will be to secure adequate grant support which will be vital to sustain projected annual expenditure of £640,500 by year three. In the initial year, recruitment of key staff will take place, and by year three it is envisaged that the Trust will have eleven full-time staff and additional training programme and volunteer support.

John Gray

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The Archaeology of the Cave Hill

At first sight, it may be thought surprising that there are not many more remains of human occupation of Cave Hill, given that humans have lived in this area since shortly after the last retreat of the glaciers, about 9,000 years ago.

However, it must be borne in mind that most traces on this upland area have been covered over by the growth of peat and heather over the last two thousand years. To give one example, there exists on the summit of Cave Hill a large stone cairn (about 16 metres in diameter and 1.15 meters high) which has almost completely been covered over by peat. The path from McArt's Fort to McLaughlin's quarry runs right over this cairn. The cairn is probably Neolithic (4500 BC to 2500 BC).

But there are some remains to be noted. Close to the entrance to the Cave Hill Country Park on the Hightown road is a cashel. Technically, this is an enclosure surrounded by a dry stone wall. It has been speculated that this is the remains of an eighth century fortified farmhouse. It is a large structure, consisting of a low ring about 40 metres in diameter with another rectangular structure about 9 metres by 12 metres straddling it. This may be a later feature.

In August 1993 a gold dress-fastener was found on the side of the new gravelled path to the summit, near its highest point. The Ulster museum followed up this find with a small three-day excavation. They concluded that it belonged to a period (1000BC-700BC) within the late Bronze Age. It is a reasonably common find in the south and midlands of Ireland but no others are known from the Belfast area. It is interesting that the extremely localised dig also uncovered an Early Mediaeval fireplace about 30 centimetres from the fastener. It can be speculated that the some early mediaeval person had a form of picnic, little knowing that they were very close to a precious object lost at least a thousand years earlier.

Little is known about McArt's Fort. It is roughly circular, about 50metres in diameter and surrounded by an earth bank and ditch, now badly eroded through path construction and natural slippage. Despite its name, it may not have been defensive. It seems too small to have offered its denizens shelter from missiles launched from the other side of the ditch and it has no water supply. It may have had a ritual purpose in Neolithic times, but one can only speculate.

There is some evidence that McArt's Fort did experience some amateur treasure-seeking. George Benn records, in his history of Belfast in 1823, in relation to McArt's Fort:

Near the centre is a large hole of a dry gravelly soil called the Giant's Punch Bowl, a very incongruous name. The punch bowl, however, has lately received a vast addition to its dimensions, owing to the havoc of a certain adventurer, assisted by a number of persons unknown, who heard, or dreamed, or fancied that they were to be the discoverers of hidden treasure. This was the greatest of several attempts that had been made in the same place, and for the same purpose. For one whole day spades, mattocks, and shovels were in requisition; the labour was vast; the hopes were great; now elevated; now depressed. It was the effort of a day, and nothing more; "gloomy and sad" returned the hero of the piece, and his coadjutors followed "humming surly songs".

This probably accounts for the large depression near the SW edge of the Fort.

The five caves were first described in detail in the Ulster Journal of Archaeology in 1902. Little can be said about them

except that they appear man-made, though nothing has been found within them to indicate permanent or semi-permanent residence. We may speculate that they were temporary refuges for the Neolithic inhabitants of the foreshore of Belfast Lough when they were threatened by sea-borne raiders.

There are the remains of a crannog in Hazelwood, in the lake that is within the grounds of Belfast zoo. A crannog is an artificial island built in a lake. When the zoo grounds were landscaped, the lake, which had dried up, was restored and it was decided to cover up the structure of the crannog with a lot of extra earth and so leave it undisturbed for the attention of future archaeologists. The crannog probably belongs to the late Bronze Age (1500 BC - 500 BC).

In December 1947, workmen discovered a rath and souterrain in what is now Shaneen Park, off the Upper Cave Hill Road. This is not far below the nineteenth century limestone quarry. Estyn Evans, who carried out the original excavation, was of the opinion that it dated to about 900AD. Subsequent excavation in 1958 revealed a second period of occupation in about the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. The site is large, about one hundred feet across and is in the grounds of a private dwelling and so not readily available for visits by the general public

There have been a few scattered finds elsewhere within Cave Hill Country Park. Close to the path previously mentioned, there have been separate finds of early mediaeval pottery, Neolithic pottery and also a Neolithic flint and across the same general area there are earth banks which may only date to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

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Cave Hill Quiz

We will publish the correct answers on our website (www.cavehill.freeuk.com) after our AGM has taken place on 23rd May.

- (1) Which well known European's nose has become an alternative name for MacArt's Fort?
- (2) Name the ninth century chieftain who is said to have ruled in the Cave Hill area.
- (3) Name the local highwayman written about by John Heron Lepper in his book 'A Tory in Arms'.
- (4) During the nineteenth century an annual festival was held on the Cave Hill. At which time of the year did this occur?
- (5) In which year did Wolfe Tone make his 'solemn obligation' on Cave Hill?
- (6) On March 12th 1890 what tragic event occurred on the Cave Hill?
- (7) In 1840 a railway line opened on the slopes of the Cave Hill. What was its main cargo?
- (8) In which decade was the Antrim Road officially established?
- (9) For which purpose was Park Lodge used during the Second World War?
- (10) The townland Ballysillan stems from the Irish Baile na Sailean. What does this mean literally?
- (11) In 1894 the ninth Earl of Shaftesbury added the Italian baroque serpentine staircase to Belfast Castle. Why?
- (12) Who was born on July 17th 1863 and later lived in 'Ardrigh' on the Antrim Road?
- (13) In 1859 The Right of Way Association brought criminal proceedings against whom for blocking access to the Cave Hill?
- (14) Which local figure wrote a novel set in the Middle Ages about Corby MacGilmore?

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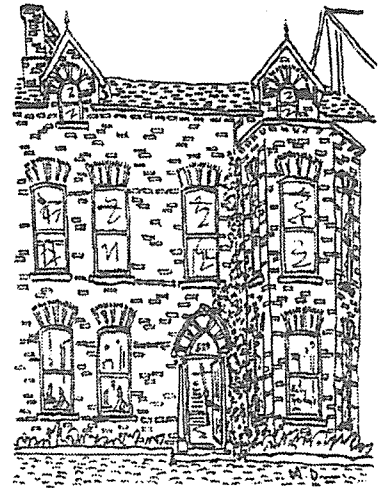
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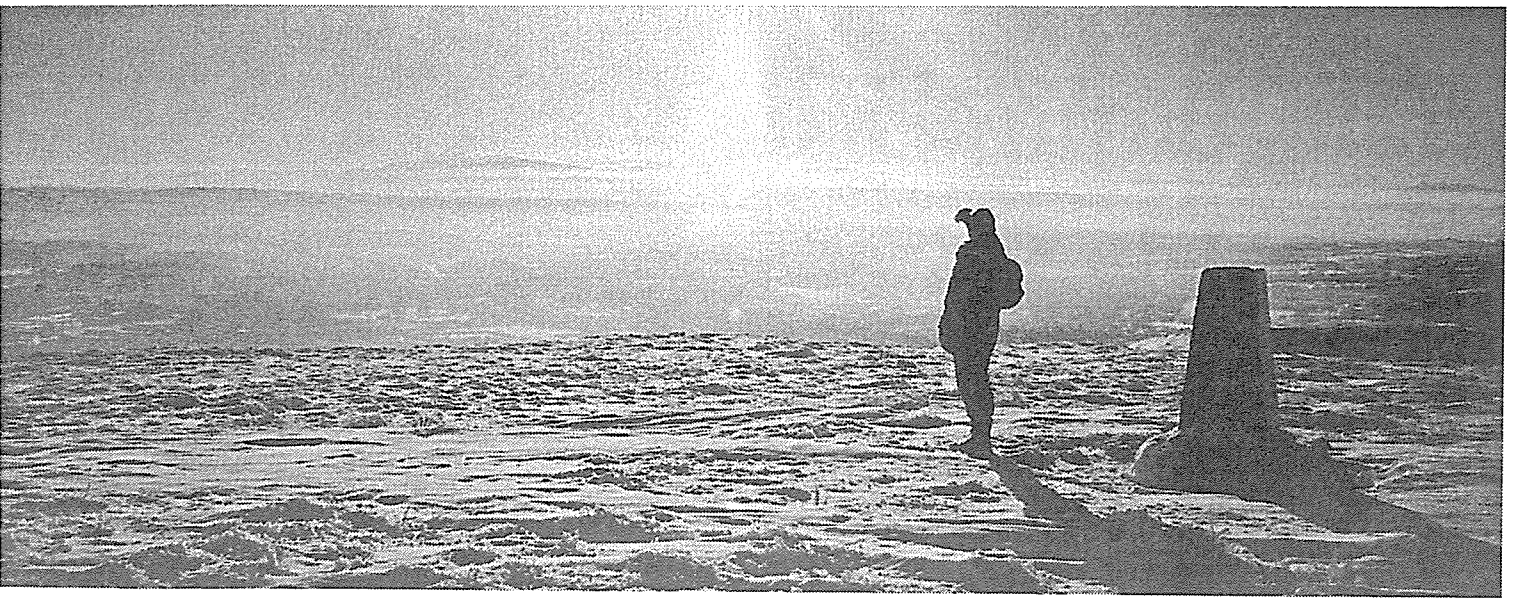
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A Belfast Hills Walk in the Big Freeze

Saturday 30 December 2000 — four days into our exceptional freeze up — time to put in a decent walk. Too often nowadays the presumption is that it isn't a decent walk until you have driven 30 miles to the Mourne. Well, this year the car went to the knacker's yard in November and there sitting above me were the Belfast Hills gleaming — simple solution!

Colin Glen

Brilliant day though it was, as soon as we hit the shade of the Glen the cold was penetrating — after four days the six inches of snow lay as it had fallen. Collin Glen, at first just the deep cut of the wooded glen running up through housing estates, is always a pleasure and a credit to the Collin Glen Trust who manage the lower end; with every branch festooned in snow it was spectacular. For the moment we followed in many other footsteps up the well managed path. We even met a woman walking a dog, a matter of remark because, although it was a Saturday, we were only to meet one other person on the entire walk. True enough, the footsteps faded as we passed under the Glen Road into the upper part of the Glen and into National Trust territory. They make few concessions in terms of way-marked paths for the unwary. Missing the way, we were soon floundering in deep snow, and, extraordinarily, given the intensity of the freeze, with wet clay bog below.

Breathlessly up a slithering slope, and we were into the new plantation on reclaimed land provided, in a rare example of corporate enlightenment, by Readymix plc. And now as we approached the Hannahstown Road we became aware of the biting north wind and the landscape widened out, albeit partially wreathed in freezing mist. Collin Mountain appeared to the south, and disappeared, and by one of those tricks of mist it seemed vastly larger than it actually is. On to the UTV transmitter, and on virgin snow. No sooner past its fortifications and the new fortifications of the Black Mountain Quarry appear. Its barbed wire fences, fit for a First World War battlefield, have advanced a good thirty yards since I was last here. When is this rape of the land going to stop?

Black Mountain

On up, and only a couple of hundred feet, to the trig point on Black Hill and a wondrous view over a silver sea

of mist to the Mourne, with the snow-plastered city seemingly only a stone's throw below us. Little time was lost on lunch just beyond the summit of the Black Mountain. We thought we had found a dip sheltered from the wind — we were wrong. Even twenty minutes of a halt in full winter gear left us freezing. On round the BBC transmitter and up the track to the army base on the summit of Divis. It was here that we met our second walker — he was amazed to see us.

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A Belfast Hills Walk in the Big Freeze

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Divis

Round the army base, which encrusted in snow and ice as it was, looked like something out of a science fiction movie, and then swimming down the waves of snow on the north slope of Divis. Good to think that if all goes well this will pass into public ownership in the near future. It is certainly the wildest part of the Belfast Hills, and haunt of at least a few red grouse in summer. Today not a bird flew. Racing on over heather clad Wolf Hill, we crossed three roads, and the high farmland that intervenes before Squire's Hill, as dusk truly fell.

As we turned into the lane to the west of Squire's Hill we passed the only cattle seen on the day, steaming in the cold and making the most of the fresh hay laid out for them. Along this lane lies what must be the highest occupied farmhouse in the Belfast Hills, and open to the prevailing west wind. Today, the hawthorn hedges around it were layered in snow and encrusted in hoar frost. It takes no imagination to appreciate that it can only be a hard life up here. From the summit we could see the last glimmer of light from the summits of the Mourne, but these were fast being eclipsed by the myriad of city lights coming on.

A fast flounder down to the Upper Hightown Road. Decision time; do we, for the sake of completeness, go on over Cave Hill — with snow cover and light from the city it is easy enough on a clear night — or do we chicken out. Screaming muscles had the final say — the Green Road beckoned and a plunge into those city lights. And in the morning as all turned to slush we felt delight at what we had done — we had seized the moment!

Reflections

This was the route that has been denied by some farmers to the Belfast Hills Walk for the last two years. Well, if you are going to have a mass walk, it goes without saying that you have to secure the specific permission of the owners of the land. On the other hand, if, as individual and hopefully responsible walkers, you have to secure advance permission from all the landowners involved, you are effectively being banned from all hill walking in Northern Ireland as it has been practised down the years. That would be a particularly ludicrous notion with regard to the Belfast Hills, which are as unique a potential recreational resource in relation to a city as can be found anywhere in the British Isles. I reflect further that as individual walkers we



merely followed in the footsteps of Wilfred Capper who, on coming to Northern Ireland in 1946 from the North of England, wondered why we had no equivalent of the Pennine Way. He it was who first charted the Ulster Way across the Belfast Hills and you can find it mapped in *The Ulster Way* as published by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland in 1975, and an account of the route in Alan Warner's, *On foot in Ulster* — a journal of the Ulster Way (1983). Then again the path is shown running across the Belfast Hills (even if often not a path at all) on the 1988 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey Map.

I think that farmers can be reassured that this determination by individual walkers to continue to do what others have done before is not going to lead to a tidal wave of marchers right across the Belfast Hills. Footsteps in the snow tell a story - yes in Collin Glen or along the Green Road on the Cave Hill there are many footsteps, but elsewhere almost none. The chief demand is for short walks at the most immediately accessible points on the hills, and also those with the best viewpoints.

Even in summer it is only a small minority of serious walkers or fell runners who will want to do the whole 4 or 5 hour route, and they are also likely to be amongst the most responsible hill users. Accordingly the least pressure will fall on the middle section, and the most farmed area — the stretch between Wolf Hill and Squire's Hill, and even here we are talking of high grazing rather than intensive farming.

Surely we can reach a reasonable understanding!

John Gray

