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New Hopes for the Belfast Hills?

Our first issue of the new millennium. Hardly a bright new dawn yet for the environmental cause. The pressures for unsustainable development that began with the industrial revolution have since run on apace. In the Belfast Hills we have had fifty years of warnings — it was just after the Second World War that it was first suggested that they should be preserved as a regional park. Nothing was done. The perimeter of meadows, which within living memory rang to the cry of the corncrake, has vanished now. McArts Fort, gaunt and battered as much by circumstance as by nature, looks out on the playground of the developer, the dumper, the quarryman, the vandal, and over the fiefdoms of failed planners and politicians.

Yet there is much still to be saved. There is a powerful popular momentum to do it. The penny has dropped — the half million inhabitants of the urban jungle of Greater Belfast look up and hope, and recognise an environmental asset on their very doorstep, and one that is unique to any city in these islands.

Sentiment, of course, will not do. We can do little for the environment in an armchair. The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign has worked since 1988 in a variety of ways, and as the times have required. By protest, by raising public awareness of issues on the hill, by positive voluntary endeavour — cleaning the hill, planting trees, surveying use of the hill, and organising a watch scheme for dumping and vandalism. We have also sought to work with other groups and friends working to preserve Carnmoney Hill, Squires Hill, Divis, and Black Mountain.

Areas adjacent to the Belfast Hills are a potentially large and powerful constituency, and if, as we all hope the war is over, politicians have even less excuse than before for evading popular demand on environmental issues. Let us make it clear; this is not for the moment the manifesto of a new political cause. Far better that politicians and planners respond to the prevailing wind of public opinion before it

blows them over. Put it another way: we would far rather work in a consensual way with public representatives fully committed to the proper protection of the Cave Hill and the Belfast Hills, than consign ourselves to an eternity of often ineffectual protest.

That does, however, beg the question — are there meaningful prospects of progress in this way, after years of neglect?

There are in fact promising signs that a better future for the Hills can be secured without immediately taking to the barricades. Certainly the new City Council has been more receptive to the needs of the Cave Hill. The old fetish for commercial development at all costs (and often literally!) is no longer in the ascendant. As we report elsewhere, the Council has now, in a long overdue and very welcome step, commissioned highly credible environmentalists to draw up a management strategy for the Cave Hill, and, furthermore, the Campaign has been consulted at the very outset with regard to this step.

Meanwhile on the Belfast Hills generally, there is to be no Regional Park, but the government has lent its support to steps to create a powerful Belfast Hills Trust, with, amongst other things, the potential power to acquire and manage land. The Cave Hill Conservation Campaign is represented on the steering committee which is working to establish the Trust.

It is too early to predict outcomes in either area, but for the moment we are fully supportive of both processes, with this caution: we need to see steady progress towards the implementation of measures to materially improve conditions on the Cave Hill, and in the Belfast Hills generally. There must be no repeat of the empty promises of the last half-century.

John Gray
Chairman

Cave Hill Users' Survey

A long-felt need was addressed by the Campaign when we did a survey of those people who were using the Cave Hill on 9 May 1999. We were aware that this had never been done before and that no-one had any idea of how many people frequented the hill and what issues concerned them. We were meeting and debating the use of the hill and Belfast City Council were taking decisions about it and yet none of us knew in detail how the hill was being used.

We identified seven main access points and we decided to survey the users over a twelve-hour period, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Each access point was assigned to a committee member whose task was to find a small band of volunteers to man that point in shifts over the twelve hours.

We also devised a short questionnaire which people would be asked to complete. This was to identify the type of person using the hill and to ask about their concerns. We also recognised that some people might not have the time to reply, or that they might be spotted at a distance. We devised a sighting report to try to include such occurrences.

The day, chosen in advance, proved to be far from ideal. The morning started overcast, the cloud thickened during the day and by mid-afternoon the rain was falling. It was so bad that we abandoned the survey at about 5 p.m.

However, we did garner some very useful results. Despite the weather, a surprisingly large number of people were on the hill. Over the day we surveyed 576 visitors. We were able to show that by far the majority were local, with only a few from other areas of Belfast, never mind from further afield. We were able to identify the most popular access point (Upper Cavehill Road) and to chart the way the number of

visitors varied during the day, peaking, to no ones surprise, in the late morning.

Older visitors were very definitely a minority on the hill that day — 64% were aged under 40. Many dogs (116) were recorded and it was noticeable that 66% of lone females were accompanied by dogs. Most of the visitors that day were frequent visitors to the hill, two-thirds of them coming more than once a week.

We did not identify specific issues in the survey. We invited the person surveyed to indicate his or her concerns. The ten issues most often mentioned were:

- ¥ Bikers (mountain bikes and scramblers)
- ¥ Path maintenance
- ¥ Rubbish / litter
- ¥ Supervision / warden / security
- ¥ Drug / drink users
- ¥ Tree maintenance
- ¥ Provision of signage / visitors centre
- ¥ Dog mess
- ¥ Threats from thugs
- ¥ Provision of seating

We intend to repeat the exercise on Sunday 21 May 2000. If the weather threatens to be bad, we will postpone the exercise, Sunday by Sunday until we are assured of good weather. This should provide a very useful contrast with last years exercise. Volunteers are welcome! See back page for details.

Cormac Hamill

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Napoleon's Nose?

Before the time of Napoleon, this may well have been known simply as the nose. In the Scottish highlands, there are many hills named an tson (pronounced untrone) which is Gaelic for the nose. This may also account for the name of the Throne area near Bellevue, a change of meaning in English due to the similarity of sound with the Gaelic.

Elizabeth Madill

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Belfast Hills Walk: Obstructed Again!

This year's Belfast Hills Walk is scheduled to take place on Sunday 28 May 2000. It is organised by the Belfast Hills Regional Park Development Officer, John O Boyle, his deputy Gerry Daye, John McMullan, the head honcho in Bryson House and by myself, Cormac Hamill.

My presence among the organisers is a direct result of the leading role played by the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign in the foundation of this annual walk. Over ten years ago, Belfast City Council issued a prospecting licence to the Glenshesk Mineral Company to enable them to prospect for zeolite on the back slopes of Cave Hill. There was a fear that if this road-fill material was found in economic quantities, the company would seek a mining concession.

A public meeting was held and a Save the Cave Hill Campaign founded. In an effort to raise public awareness of the issue, it was decided to organise a Belfast Hills Walk. Three of us from the Campaign, John Gray, Phil McGrory and myself along with representatives from environmental groups from West Belfast organised the first walk in 1990.

The walk attracted about 250 people and went from Hannahstown to Cave Hill on, as I remember, a very wet, miserable day. Encouraged by its success, we organised the next two. In the following years the walk grew in numbers and we were grateful that after three years, Bryson House with its organisational expertise and led by the late Peter McLachlan, offered to take over the organisation.

Unfortunately, in the last three years the walk has run into difficulties with landowners. We appreciate their

difficulties and would like to see a partnership in which farmers allow restricted access by agreed, way-marked routes which would be maintained by an outside agency such as a Belfast Hills Trust. Until this happens, some farmers are proving reluctant to cooperate. Until 1999, we were able to find alternative routes where difficulties occurred. But last year one farmer, Charlie Mallon, refused us permission to cross two metres of his land near Wolf Hill. As a result, the walk had to be drastically curtailed, starting at Collin, walking to Divis and returning to Collin. Although this totalled 12 miles, the same as the original length, it could hardly be called a Belfast Hills Walk.

This year, the same farmer is continuing to obstruct us. Unfortunately, there is no alternative route and so we are being forced to organise a variant of last year's walk. The walk will begin and end at Collin but will follow a wide six kilometre sweep around Armstrongs Hill and Divis. This is an area of the Belfast Hills less well known and well worth getting to know.

Do come and take part. It is still a lovely walk with great views over Belfast and an abundance of wildlife. There will be local publicity but if you need information, feel free to contact Bryson House or me. Please remember that you will need good footwear, appropriate clothing and refreshments.

Cormac Hamill

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Management Plan Breakthrough

In a very welcome development, the Parks and Amenities Department of the City Council has approached John O Boyle, the Belfast Hills Development Officer, and Dermot Hughes of the Ulster Wildlife Trust with regard to commissioning them to draw up a Strategic Management Plan for the Cave Hill Country Park.

Very encouragingly, the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign has been consulted from the outset. Given the record of both John and Dermot in moving forward plans for the Belfast Hills, we have every confidence in their ability to undertake the task, and, indeed, it is proposed that the work be undertaken under the auspices of the Belfast Hills Planning Sub-Committee Working Group, on which we are also represented. It is further proposed that the report be completed by the end of June this year.

This really does appear to offer the prospect of a new beginning on the Cave Hill.

John Gray

Crow Population: Control Needed

Many people have noticed the significant growth in the number of crows in the Cave Hill Country Park in recent years. Magpies are now by far the most common bird to be seen. According to some estimates, their general population has increased ten-fold over the past thirty years.

There is plenty of evidence that crows can have a damaging impact on both the variety and numbers of song birds. This is mainly due to nest raiding, when they take both eggs and chicks. To maintain the diversity of bird life, it is essential that an appropriate programme of culling is introduced to keep the crow population under control.

Hopefully, this issue will be addressed in the Strategic Management Plan which we report on this page.

Editor

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The Geology of the Cave Hill

The distant past

We live in the here and now. We think about history as the last few hundred years, or at most the last few thousand. But a brief look at the geology of Belfast's most familiar landmark confronts us with amazing timescales.

About 600 million years ago, what is now Ireland lay under the ocean, somewhere in the southern hemisphere. About 510 million years ago land began to form due to crustal movement and the part of the crust where Ireland was to form migrated northwards towards its present location. Ireland had a recognisable landmass about 340 million years ago, but after tens of millions of years, the land was worn away and largely covered by sea. Mud, rich in the remains of sea-life was deposited on the floor of this sea and gradually formed what was to become the carboniferous limestone which covers a large section of present-day Ireland. With further crustal movement, Ireland's limestone cover was thrust upwards about 300 million years ago and heavily weathered.

About 290 million years ago, the sea invaded large parts of Ireland again and deposits of salt at Carrickfergus, for instance, are the remains of this incursion. This continued into the Jurassic period, about 190 million years ago, and during this time, the clays and schists underlying the basalt and chalk of the Antrim region were laid down.

About 65 million years ago, in the Cretaceous age, much of the land was inundated by rising sea levels and the remains of sea creatures were deposited as the soft chalk we see on Cave Hill. This chalk is particularly rich in flint nodules, which are the fossilised remains of Cretaceous sponges. The flint was valuable to Stone-Age man who worked it into tools and weapons. The climate was probably tropical or sub-tropical.

Lava and basalt

The soft chalk deposits have disappeared from most of Ireland over the millennia. But they have survived in County Antrim due to being covered by lava that flowed

over them, probably in two distinct phases, between 56 and 62 million years ago. A large lake of molten basalt about 100 metres deep formed in what is now North Antrim and its slow cooling, perhaps under water, gave time for the particles in the rock to arrange themselves in the unique patterns familiar to us in the Giants Causeway.

In between lava flows, there was time for weathering of the basalt to occur and in the tropical climate of the time, red laterite formed. In some places, this laterite was baked by subsequent lava flows to form a very hard, dense rock called porcellanite. This material was used (much later) by Stone-Age Man to make axe-heads, as at Tievebulliagh near Cushendall in County Antrim.

The remains of the lavas are known as basalt and are visible everywhere from the river Bann eastwards to the Antrim coast and southwards to the Lagan valley. The Belfast Hills, including Cave Hill, mark the south-eastern edge of the lava flows. Cave Hill is a basalt layer which lies over a much older limestone base. This can most easily be seen along the face of the old limestone quarry on the slope of Cave Hill above Carr's Glen. The quarry excavation has cut down through the basalt and limestone and exposes the layers clearly.

The phenomenon of basalt overlying limestone can also be seen along the Antrim coast road. This is no coincidence, as the Cave Hill was formed at the same time and by the same volcanic events that created the whole of the Antrim Plateau.

Ice ages

The scraping and weathering were caused mainly by huge ice-sheets that have covered large parts of Ireland at intervals over the last two million years. These ice ages had little effect in County Antrim other than reducing the thickness of the basalt. But they had a profound effect on the development of the fauna and flora of the region.

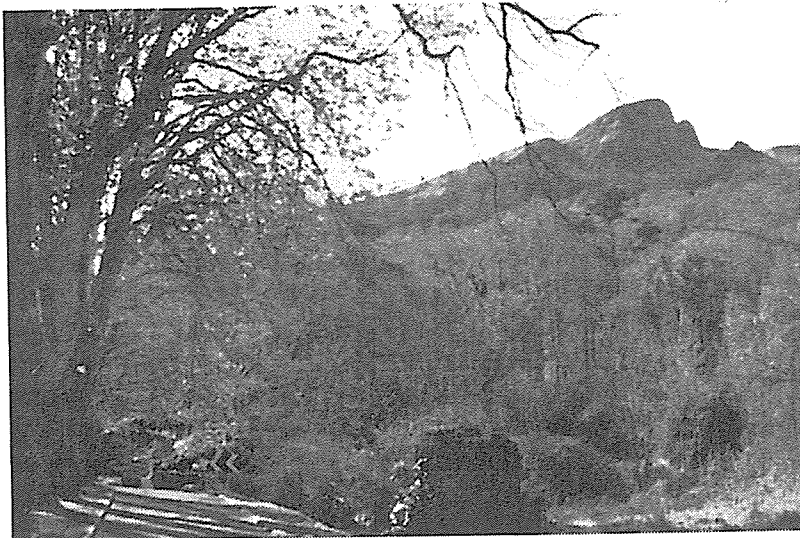
In some places the upwelling lava did not reach the surface and cooled more slowly to form a denser rock called dolerite. This resisted subsequent weathering and survives above the present-day landscape. Slemish, which is associated with Saint Patrick and is visible from the Cave Hill, is an inclined volcanic plug.

Cormac Hamill

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Photograph: Tommy McLaughlin



The Cave Hill Diamond

Most legends of the Cave Hill have at least a modicum of fact behind them. The tale of the Cave Hill diamond sounds an unlikely candidate, at least as described in 1926 by that considerable authority John Crone, a friend of the celebrated antiquarian and chronicler of the hill, Francis Joseph Biggar:

‘There was a tradition current in my youth, that there was a diamond in the Cave Hill – it was said to have shone in the face of the cliff and that vessels in the lough had fired on it to secure the precious jewels.’

(*Belfast Telegraph*, 16 March 1926)

Thirty years earlier in the 1890s, the last of the Belfast ballad sheet printers, John Nicholson of Church Lane had printed not one but two songs entitled *The Cave Hill Diamond*. Perhaps Crone was familiar with them. Both songs, as local singer and expert on Belfast folk song, Maurice Leyden, has pointed out, probably owed something to Sir Samuel Ferguson’s historical romance, *CorbyMac Gillmore* which had been published in 1887, and which dealt in a fairly fanciful way with the feuds of the old Irish clans on the hill.

One of these Cave Hill Diamond songs finds no more of a diamond than the beautiful Eileen O’Neill hiding, disguised as a hermit, in the bottom cave, and here to be found by a passionate young Magennis. There is a much earlier song, an 1810 version of *The Belfast Mountains*, which makes a more specific reference to geological diamonds. The complaining maid of the song laments:

‘Had I but all the diamonds, That on the rocks do grow, I’d give them to my Irish laddie, If he to me his love would show.’

She doesn’t actually say that she found any diamonds, and nor, alas, does she appear to have got her Johnny.

On the matter of diamonds, the second Nicholson version of the 1890s is much more specific. This time both the geological and the romantic varieties are separately identifiable, albeit in an improbable enough tale:

‘A diamond bright, that shone by night, did often glitter there, But Mary’s eyes were brighter gems, thought Dermoid in despair, And many a time did Dermoid think of these beauties rare, The Cave Hill Diamond that shone so bright, or Mary that was so fair.’

Certainly this was a modern song, written by Professor Robert Hanna of Queen’s University, and dedicated to Lady Shafstebury. Why should the Professor have taken up the theme of “the Diamond”? Why should John Nicholson have

simultaneously published another song alongside it and with the same title? Clearly the subject was topical, because it makes an appearance in the *Ulster Saturday Night* of 23 February 1895:

‘There used to be some curious stories told about the Cave Hill diamond before it was unearthed. One was that mariners entering Belfast Lough used to be dazzled by its glints and used to set their course by its brilliance. Then there was the legend that Finn McCool used to wear it on his watch guard until he dropped it one day and in disgust deserted the Cave Hill altogether.’

More of the fanciful stuff then, but the author of these ‘Random Notes and Notions’ uses the phrase ‘until it was unearthed’, and then goes on to tell us ‘I know the man who found the Cave Hill Diamond.’ Thirty years later, the very same column described the stone:

‘It was indeed a monstrous gem to be weighed in pounds avoirdupois and not by the orthodox carat. It formed the chief decoration of a draper’s, not a jeweller’s window, where at night by its beams it made even the unbleached calico look like something which might grace the lines of royalty itself.’

(*Ireland Saturday Night*, 12 June 1925)

By 1926, even John Crone doubted whether this was any more than a tall story, and Maurice Leyden, chronicler of the songs in our own time, asks ‘was it just a piece of limestone or did it really exist?’ Turn then to George Henry Bassett’s *Book of Antrim* published in 1888, and the entry for Whitewell.

‘Last year a very good example of the Irish diamond was found at Cave Hill by a little boy, son of Mr Hanna, belonging to Belfast. It is 11 inches in circumference, and weighs about a pound. Mr John Erskine, of North Street, Belfast, purchased and advertised the crystal as the ‘Cave Hill Diamond’, finally disposing of it at a good price to the proprietors of Madame Tussaud’s Gallery, London.’

Hence indeed the publication of two Cave Hill Diamond songs around the same time – clearly a large semi-precious stone of some kind was found, but what was it? Perhaps our geological friends can enlighten us. In the meantime anyone wanting the full text of those songs can find them in Maurice Leyden’s, *Belfast, City of Song* (Brandon Press, 1989).

John Gray

5 Millennium Projects

... and five members of our committee outline their millennium projects here.

1 PONDS & HEDGEROWS

People say that one person can't make a difference but that's not strictly true. Thanks to the Millennium Awards Scheme, individuals have been given the chance to prove that with the right knowledge, a bit of money and community support, they can indeed do their bit to improve the environment. The biggest problem facing wildlife today is loss of habitat due to intensive farming and the demand for new housing and roads. I used to think when somebody took out a hedge or pond or cut down trees, that the birds and other animals just went somewhere else. However, the situation has got so bad that often there is nowhere else, even in Northern Ireland. Every tree, hedge, pond and ditch has a variety of plants, animals and birds dependent on it. The harsh reality is that when the habitat is destroyed they either die or fail to reproduce.

My award enabled me to create ponds and plant hedges to encourage wildlife to return to an area of rough grazing land at the back of Cave Hill. In less than six months, the results have already been amazing. Already frogspawn has been laid and hatched in one of the ponds. On Saturday 11 March, 23 local people of all ages (from 11 to 74) and backgrounds turned out to help me plant a 130 metre hedge of 1,000 young trees, a mixture of native species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, crab apple, spindle, willow and whitebeam. It was a great community effort, with everyone enthusiastically digging.

The new hedge is starting to come into leaf and will soon provide a food source for all sorts of wildlife. As the years go on we'll all be able to watch the hedge develop into a significant habitat. We'll know that without us all those birds, animals and insects wouldn't have a place to eat, live and breed. So maybe, just maybe, the individual has made a difference.

Martin McDowell

2 MAZE

When the idea of applying for a sustainable millennium award was first suggested I immediately knew that I wanted to do a project either in the grounds of Belfast Castle Estate or on the slopes of Cave Hill itself. I have walked in the area for many years and I know that I am not alone when I say that I love the land dearly.

I thought of various ideas and indeed many hours were spent with the other award winners discussing different schemes and plans before making the final decisions on our individual projects. I decided that if successful in obtaining my award, I would create a maze on the site of the old rose garden. I am sure most of you are familiar with the area but if you are not, it is to the north side of Belfast Castle, on the left hand side of the main pathway if you enter the grounds from opposite Guys shop on the Antrim Road. I was delighted when I obtained my award, as were the other four members of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign who also applied successfully.

I am working closely with the Parks Department within Belfast City Council and the only stipulation they made was that the theme of the maze should be in keeping with the castle and its grounds. I am being assisted by P6 schoolchildren from several of the local primary schools.

I do not want to give away too many secrets regarding the design and materials to be used in the project, save that it will not be a traditional maze. I hope that when it is finished in November 2000, it will greatly enhance the castle grounds and be something of which we can all be proud.

Louise Wilson

HERB GARDEN

I was very happy when in November 1999 I was awarded a millennium grant, which would enable me to design and plant a herb garden in the grounds of Belfast Castle. This award will help me fulfil my personal goal, expand my knowledge, encourage practical changes and increase public awareness of the benefits of a more sustainable lifestyle.

As a member of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign, I am striving to make a positive contribution to the local community through personal action. In the next nine months, I intend to establish a herb garden on the site of the old castle kitchen garden, so in a way I will be carrying on the old tradition into the new millennium. I have always been interested in alternative medicine and in particular herbal health and healing. After attending a course on organic herb production and visiting herb farms in Great Britain I will have accumulated sufficient knowledge to commence the project. The plants will be for the use of the castle restaurant. The general public will be invited to visit the garden to sample the herbs, enjoy the scents and the peaceful ambience – and yes – appreciate the beautiful views of Cave Hill and Belfast Lough.

Geraldine Birch

“Never doubt that a small group of caring people can change the world because indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

SKYLARK HABITAT

The skylark, that small brown bird with the magical sustained spring song flies in broad sweeps over high open ground. Unfortunately, like many other species, it has declined alarmingly in recent years. This is a direct result of farming practices which have diminished their natural feeding grounds.

With the aid of my millennium award, I am engaged on a habitat restoration project for skylarks at the back of the Cave Hill. This began recently with a friends of the skylark day. Two handsome shire horses pulled an old fashioned plough across open ground, creating folds of earth in which we sowed oats from a traditional seed bag. A group of enthusiastic children followed behind, gleaning unwanted stones from the ground. The sown field was then left guarded by three frighteningly impressive scarecrows, imaginatively created by the children. The converted field lies below a natural lark heath and will hopefully offer the birds a convenient and much-needed feeding ground in the months ahead.

Katherine Hall

COMMUNITY COMPOST SCHEME

My project is to develop a scheme for collecting kitchen waste from households and turning it into compost for use in gardens. The scheme will operate in the area where I live. The objective is to reduce the volume of waste that now goes into landfill sites, and to produce a valuable community resource, namely environmentally-friendly compost. I will also collect hedge cuttings and newspapers for compost. To set up the scheme, I will be contacting local people by leaflets which will explain exactly what can be composted.

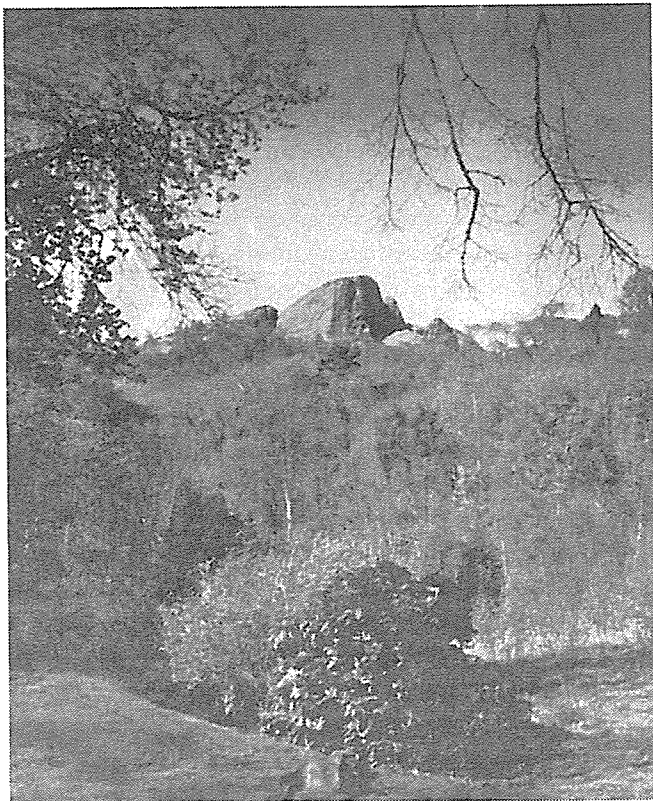
The scheme will use five-gallon drums, which will be collected each week, probably on bin collection day, either by pickup truck or tricycle with load carrying box. A horse-drawn cart would be the most eco-friendly solution, but I'm worried that it might bolt into someone's garden! The compost will be collected by the people who donate their kitchen waste and I will use some of it in my work.

Philip Allen

A Personal Memoir of Cave Hill

My earliest memories of Cave Hill, in the 1930s, are patchy. For a school term, Easter to summer 1939, I came from my home in London and stayed with my maternal grandparents in Waterloo Gardens to convalesce in the fresher air of Belfast. Normally, my annual visits, with parents and younger brother, consisted of two or three weeks each summer, divided between Belfast, Derry and Castlerock.

I recall pre-war outings to Hazelwood and Bellevue, sometimes by tram, but usually we walked up the Antrim Road, stopping at O'Neill's for sweets. O'Neill's was at the top of Gray's Lane, the same building that has been Guy's for many years. Miss O'Neill manned the shop while her brother, Tiny, short for Constantine, delivered the "messages" with the help of his pony and trap. There was a brother, Father O'Neill the priest, greatly respected by Tiny and his sister. I remember going out to my grandparents' side-gate, on Innisfayle Road to talk while my grandmother and Tiny had a bit of 'crack' at the back door. Sometimes we stopped at Cavehill Post Office at 694 Antrim Road, which was also one of the two gate-lodges for the Castle. Frank Beamish had succeeded his father as postmaster and was assisted by his mother, old Mrs Beamish, small and white haired. When we reached Hazelwood, we children skipped ahead up the earthen path, with logs as step risers, which followed the bank of a small stream. The alternative to climbing the steps of the path was a ride up the zig-zag road in the charabanc, popularly known as the "toast-rack". Having alighted outside the Floral Hall, we would have a stroll around the pond to watch the ducks before setting off for Bellevue to see the animals. On other occasions we approached the zoo up the concrete steps from the Bellevue



tram stop. About half way up the broad, impressive steps were the turnstiles, which made a succession of most satisfying clicks as one passed through. Many years later I heard this entrance referred to as "the moving staircase", on account of the cracks which appeared regularly due to subsidence.

My happy childhood memories of Bellevue and Hazelwood pale into insignificance compared with a wonderful and unusual event which took place in June 1939 on the lower slopes of the hill. I have a cherished photocopy of the programme. Its front cover declares "St. Peter's Dramatic Society presents Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Open-Air Theatre at the Chapel Grounds on Friday & Saturday June 23rd & 24th 1939, at 8 p.m. Programme - two pence". Inside are listed the "Dramatis personae" including Yours Truly as the fairy Cobweb. Three of my school fellows (at Holyrood School, 42-44 Lansdowne Road) were Peaseblossom, Moth and Mustard-Seed. Our headmistress was the wardrobe-mistress and the producer was her husband, A.W. Bowyer (who taught in the Tec' with my aunt). The then curate at St Peter's Parish Church, J.E. George, played the part of Nick Bottom, the weaver, with great éclat. I like the programme note: "As in Shakespeare's day, the same uncurtained stage must suffice for every scene, whether it be the palace where the Duke holds revel, or the fairy-haunted forest to which the lovers flee, to which the "rude mechanicals" resort to rehearse their play, and through which Theseus and his bride go hunting. Day and night are indicated by the poet, and are to be imagined by the audience." The "Open-Air Theatre" was a quarry which was shaped, fortuitously, like a Greek or Roman amphitheatre and situated close to the Chapel of the Resurrection, somewhere between, and half-way up, Innisfayle Park and Waterloo Park.

During the Second World War (1939-1945) my parents sent my six year old brother and me to Northern Ireland, from 1940 to summer 1942 and again from summer 1944 to summer 1945. I think it was in the autumn of 1945, when I was fifteen and back at school in London, that I had a most graphic and horrifying nightmare. In my dream my brother and I were lying looking down over the cliff of McArt's Fort, or the Nose, at a Belfast which was a smouldering ruin as the result of an atomic bomb such as those which had fallen on Hiroshima and Nagasaki a few months earlier. I knew in my dream that we were the only survivors, bereft and alone.

In 1948 I came back to Belfast to go to Queen's University, staying with my grandmother and aunt in Waterloo Gardens. Among my many and varied cronies at Queen's were two male friends whom I shall refer to as BB and JM. On several occasions we wound up late on a Saturday night at 3 Cedar Avenue, the home of HM (JM's father, a politician). The assembled company would include the three of us, HM himself, his daughter and son-in-law, and maybe one or two others. We would linger over a supper enlivened with pleasant conversation and then

adjourn to the drawing room for an impromptu musical soiree around the piano. HM's son-in-law was a good singer. I remember one such occasion in 1949 or 1950 when BB was walking me home up the Antrim Road in the early hours of the morning. It was light and before we got to Waterloo Gardens the birds were singing. A good many hours earlier I had been at a Queens hop (in the Students Union Dining Hall which was later upgraded to the Harty Room). BB, in his normally polite and punctilious manner was carrying my dancing shoes. But we had an argument as we walked along. (I can't recall the reason — possibly JM.) I don't remember what I said but, in a fit of pique, BB flung my shoes away and, moreover, left me to retrieve them from a gorse bush. I mention this incident because it occurred somewhere between Strathmore Park and Waterloo Park where, apart from the odd house and garden, the Castle grounds — gorse and blackcurrant bushes, wild flowers and coarse grass abutted on the pavement on the west side of the road. Changed times nowadays when every possible particle of land is being built on.

In many ways, Cave Hill has not changed greatly in the

last sixty plus years, but I feel sad when I look at the ruinous state of the Chapel of the Resurrection where I sometimes attended 3.00 pm Evensong on a Sunday, and see the additional building that is taking place in such very close proximity. I regret, too, the demolition of the Castle Stables, which have now made way for the childrens playground. When I was young the Stables appealed to me more than the Castle, which looked rather self-satisfied in comparison. Perhaps because the Stables were less well-groomed, rather sadly neglected, they looked more mysterious and romantic. Whenever I walked past them I thought of Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your gold hair!

Nowadays, sometimes alone and sometimes with Diane Hunter and her dog Clemmie, and equipped with poop-scooper and plastic bags, I take my border collie cross, Becky, up the hill. We go down to the Volunteers Well and up again through the trees. We take various routes and re-explore the many paths.

How lucky we are to have Cave Hill! We need to try to help preserve it for the future.

Elizabeth Madill

Painting the Cave Hill

Reaching up from the urban sprawl, the squat outline of Cave Hill dominates Belfast — visible however one approaches the city and from almost any point within it. A much loved feature of the area, it has, over the centuries, been included so often in representations of the city that it is, in a very real sense, almost impossible to imagine Belfast without its basalt guardian.

The many depictions of Belfast from the late 18th century onwards, whether from Cromac Wood (by Jonathan Fisher), from Newtownbreda Churchyard (Andrew Nicholl), or from the Castlereagh Hills (J W Carey) invariably portray the rising industrial town, as it then was, against the omnipresent Cave Hill. The ubiquity of these, as well as other more popular representations, was made possible by the lithographic and steel engraving techniques developed by the well-known Belfast firm of Marcus Ward and Company. Viewed from the rural hinterland of the city (as it became in 1888) or through the smoke that spilled from the tall chimneys of the mills and factories, the Cave Hill may be seen as a counterpoint to the industrial clamour over which it presided — and which it now has outlived.

By the end of the 19th century Belfast was the only industrial city in Ireland and had a population larger than Dublin. A century later the Cave Hill overlooks a radically transformed urban environment. A window in time, which lets us glimpse this changing economy, is William Hollywood's view of the city from just beyond McArt's Fort painted in 1951. In this evocative work, two girls look out from an impressively green summit towards a great manufacturing city, but one whose essentially 19th century

industrial base was by then, as we now know, increasingly under threat.

More recently the hill has been depicted in less sentimental form. This may be an unconscious reflection of perceived threats to the area from the environmental damage that results from ill-considered and poorly regulated recreational use and encroaching urban development.

A reminder of the pristine glories of the Cave Hill can be seen in the super-realism of Dennis Kelly's depiction of the area under snow, a view complemented by the brisk, airy, blue-green treatment of the familiar view of the summit in the work of Simon McKinstry. The more widely frequented lower slopes have provided Dan Dowling with inspiration for a number of his immensely successful, humorous and affectionate depictions of friends and families relishing the pleasures of each others company in an increasingly threatened part of the local environment of Belfast.

In May 1998, the appropriately named Cavehill Gallery presented an exhibition of art exclusively devoted to paintings of the Belfast Hills. Cave Hill featured prominently in the collection and the show, which was a resounding success, provided a unique opportunity for the public to enjoy a splendid demonstration of how the city's most prominent natural feature had provided inspiration for another generation of artists, such as Richard Croft, Anya Waterworth, John Conway, Catherine and Joseph McWilliams as well as those mentioned above.

An old and familiar landmark was interpreted anew.

Eddie McCamley

A Belfast Hills Trust?

A major feasibility report in April 1999 has recommended that a Belfast Hills Trust should be set up. The report was commissioned by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) of the Department of Environment, acting on behalf of the Department of Agriculture (DANI), the Planning Service, the four local authorities (Antrim, Newtownabbey, Belfast and Lisburn) and the Belfast Hills Regional Park Committee. The multi-professional study team was instructed to consult interested parties and make recommendations on the most effective and achievable ways of advancing the conservation of the Hills and their sustainable use. A steering group consisting of representatives of the commissioning bodies was formed to liaise with the study team and receive its report.

Summary of the report

The report notes that the Belfast Hills face a number of threats, including development pressures and environmental degradation. There is a clear need for agreed objectives, supported by appropriate intervention. The main recommendations are:

- ¥ Establishment of a Belfast Hills Trust.
- ¥ Definition of an operational boundary for the Hills Trust.
- ¥ Preparation of a non-statutory Hills Local Plan.
- ¥ Acquisition of lands at Divis and Slievenacloy.
- ¥ Safeguarding of the open space of Carnmoney Hill.
- ¥ Protection, enhancement and development of public access.
- ¥ Preparation of an urban fringe farming support initiative.

Key recommendations for the Trust

The operational boundary proposed by the report includes all of the Belfast Hills, from Carnmoney in the north to Boomers Hill in the south. It would have power to acquire lands and would be charged with implementation of a non-statutory Hills Local Plan. Its core funding would come from EHS, DANI, and the four local authorities. There would be potential for project funding from a range of other sources, including Landfill Tax, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

The Trust would be accountable to the EHS and local authorities and would work in partnership with other interests, including farmers and local community and environmental groups. The selection of an appropriate chairperson would be important, to ensure that the Trust is both accountable and effective. The DoE Planning Service would be a key player in the preparation and implementation of a Local Plan for the Hills. The Department of Agriculture and the farming and commercial sectors would also be key players at both the strategic / advisory and executive levels.

Reaction to the report

The steering group gave its unanimous approval to the recommendations of the report. In November 1999 the EHS set up a committee to produce detailed proposals for the establishment of a Belfast Hills Trust. The committee includes representatives from the Belfast Hills groups, including the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign. It is hoped that the group will be in a position to report by late 2000 and if all goes well, there is a realistic prospect that the Trust could be up and running by the end of 2001.

This would be a very significant landmark in the long struggle to conserve the environment of the Belfast Hills, encourage appropriate use and achieve greater public access for recreational purposes.

Editor

Northern Ireland Environment Day

On 28 February 2000 we took part in an Environment Day held in the Long Gallery at Stormont. It was organised by Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) with the support of the environment committee members of the Legislative Assembly.

NIEL is an umbrella organisation with 39 full members (including the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign) which are voluntary organisations involved in environmental matters. It also has 42 associate members who have an interest in the environment but are not in the voluntary sector. It has a useful website at www.niel.demon.co.uk.

Our stand was manned by members of the committee. We had the opportunity to make visitors aware of our aims and activities. We also had a useful exchange of views with members of the various other groups present. It was interesting to note what is being achieved by these voluntary organisations in their respective fields.

A number of the MLAs attended throughout the day and showed a keen interest in the activities of the various groups. The former Minister of the Environment, Mr Sam Foster, visited all the stands. The day was an informative and enjoyable experience and it was good to see that the preservation of the environment is a major priority with so many people as well as our legislators.

It is sad to reflect that it now seems unlikely that those legislators will be in a position to do anything practical for the local environment, due to the suspension of devolution.

Joe Nagle

Tree Planting

Let's Rise to the Challenge!

We had a successful millennium tree planting on the morning of Saturday 4 March. The trees were supplied by Belfast City Council Parks Department. Our committee, supported by Dr Ben Simon of *The Forest of Belfast Initiative* and Agnes McNulty of Belfast City Council, planted two hundred trees in the space of two hours. Over 1,000 trees have been planted in the Cave Hill Country Park in the last five years and continued planting is scheduled for years to come. The policy is to plant native species in order to maximise the benefit to native wildlife, including birds, mammals and insects.

Only 6% of the land area of Northern Ireland is covered with trees, compared to a European average of 36%, despite our tree-friendly climate. At one time, most of Ireland was tree-covered, but by 1900 very little old woodland survived, mostly due to clearance for farming. It was only in the later twentieth century that Northern Ireland began to plant significant numbers of native hardwoods such as oak, ash and birch, and native conifers such as scots pine. Although the local timber industry still depends on non-native conifer species, most of the plantations now contain some native hardwoods, to the benefit of wildlife.

The environmental value of trees in the urban environment has been well understood for several generations. Many of the mature street trees in Belfast were planted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *The Forest of Belfast Initiative* was launched in 1992 and has planted over 100,000 trees in the Greater Belfast area. *The Woodland Trust* has recently arrived here and has been involved in several projects, including the successful restoration of Throne Wood on a thirteen acre site at the old Throne Hospital near Bellevue.

The Millennium Tree Campaign — which was launched by David Bellamy in March 1997 — has so far planted about 1.3 million trees and expects to hit its original target of 1.5 million by May 2000, which is roughly one tree for each person who lives in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that over 90% of the trees planted by the Millennium Tree Campaign are native species. Many were grown from seed by members of the public and many others were supplied by *Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland* from their Clondeboye nursery.



Tree planting near Belfast Castle on Saturday 4 March 2000. We hope to organise a similar event before the end of this year, with the support of Belfast City Council Parks Department.

However, *Conservation Volunteers* estimates that even this splendid effort will only increase the area of tree cover in Northern Ireland from 6% to 6.1%. This shows how much remains to be done. It is so important for our environment and our biodiversity that we give this a high priority and find the necessary resources. A target of ten million trees in the first ten years of the new millennium should not be beyond us. After the success of the *Forest of Belfast*, why not the *Forest of Ulster*?

Editor

We're on the Internet!

The Campaign now has a website which contains a lot of information about Campaign aims and activities, and about the Cave Hill. We intend to make sure that it is the primary source of up-to-date information on all issues affecting the Cave Hill, in the context of the Belfast Hills generally. Some of the issues in this newsletter are dealt with in more detail on the website.

Visitors to the website are welcome to contact us with suggestions and comments. Our email address is:

cavehill@freeuk.com

The website is at:

www.cavehill.freeuk.com

Editor

THE CAVE HILL CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN

Our objectives are as follows:

1. To secure the preservation of the Cave Hill as a natural and unspoilt environment.
2. To encourage public access for appropriate purposes.
3. To encourage Belfast City Council (the principal landowner) to adopt an environmentally-friendly management strategy for the Cave Hill.
4. To oppose all intrusive development.
5. To support the creation of a Belfast Hills Trust.
6. To oppose further degradation of the Belfast Hills.
7. To support the implementation of environmentally friendly policies for the Belfast Hills.
8. To support the creation of public rights of way across the Belfast Hills.



We try to ensure that the Cave Hill's natural environment and public amenity value are protected and, where possible, enhanced. As well as producing this annual newsletter, we have a website which you can find at:

www.cavehill.freeuk.com



Our programme for the remainder of 2000 is as follows (further details are on our website):

- ¥ **Cleanup and seed planting day** —Saturday 6 May (meet at north carpark Belfast Castle 2.00pm)
- ¥ **Annual general meeting** —Wednesday 17 May (Lansdowne Court Hotel 8.00 pm) — followed by traditional music with Jane Cassidy, Maurice Leyden, Brian Moore and others
- ¥ **Cave Hill users survey** —Sunday 21 May (can you help? Volunteers needed at all times of day!)
- ¥ **Educational walk (flora, geology)** — late May (date to be finalised)
- ¥ **Belfast Hills walk** —Sunday 28 May — see article on page three
- ¥ **Archaeological walk** —Saturday 24 June — meet at Hightown Road entrance at 9.00 am
- ¥ **Get fit walk** —Saturday 19 August — meet at Belfast Castle at 9.00 am



We would particularly like to hear from volunteers for Saturday 6 May and Sunday 21 May — please get in touch if you would like to help and have some fun as well! If you're online, you can email us at:

cavehill@freeuk.com

Otherwise, please phone Cormac Hamill at (028) 9029 1357.

If you would like to join, please complete the enclosed membership form, or contact us.



We are grateful to Tommy McLaughlin for photographs in this issue.

Tommy can be contacted through the Campaign.



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