



The Cave Hill CAMPAIGNER

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NEW STRATEGY NEEDED FOR THE CAVE HILL

An unprecedentedly dry and sunny early spring. It is the season when the Cave Hill burns. This year we could already have faced disastrous damage if it were not for the prompt response of the Fire Brigade, who have already on a number of occasions limited the damage done by mindless vandals. Our thanks to the fire-fighters.

Truth to tell there are worse threats to the Cave Hill, which go on all year whether rain or shine. As we report elsewhere, we have at least temporarily stalled potentially devastating plans for a cableway to the very summit of Cave Hill. The notion of instant travel to the summit of the Cave Hill, and regardless of environmental cost, is what could be described as a hardy perennial, which is not easily burnt off. There was the pre First World War plan for a railway to the summit, a plan for a ski slope in the late 1970's, and consultants' proposals for a cableway in the early 1990's. Meanwhile the world has moved on and generally, if painfully slowly, we are more appreciative of unique environmental assets. Yet here we were in late 2002 with the Parks and Amenities Committee of Belfast City Council seriously discussing yet another Neanderthal cableway proposal!

Part of the Council's problem is that it has no firm policy for the Cave Hill. If it had clearly committed itself to the overriding importance of preserving the hill as a natural amenity, and as such a huge asset to the city, then the temptation to consider any would-be developer's notions would not arise. Since the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign was formed we have had to resist a succession of such proposals, and not just relating to cableways. While some councillors have opposed plans of this kind on environmental grounds, it has to be said that for the majority the environment is not an issue. Plans have most often fallen because of the failure of the would-be developers to bring sufficient ready cash to the table. Such indeed was the case with the new proposal by the Bellevue Cableway Group.

Meanwhile, while council officers do their best with very limited resources, there is little sign of an on-going and coherent management strategy for the Cave Hill. This may be part of a wider malaise with regard to the council's management of its parks: one thinks of a heavily used inner city park like the Waterworks, which is broadly a scene of dereliction and which also provides an alfresco venue for drinkers, drug takers, and glue sniffers, who entertain themselves in full view of North Belfast's largest police station. If they cannot begin to manage the problem there, the Cave Hill drinkers, who menacingly frequent the path above the Old Cave Hill Road, can rely on a free rein.

There is a particular problem in respect of the Cave Hill. As the one truly wild space (different forms of wildness inhabit the

others parks!), the Cave Hill requires tailor-made and different strategies to the other parks. The question has to arise, after many years of disappointing experience, as to whether the council can provide a special focus on the needs of the Cave Hill.

However, there is another option for the council. A new and powerful Belfast Hills Partnership is finally due to come into existence this summer, and with powers to manage land. If, as is hoped, the National Trust acquires Divis later this year, it will work with the new Belfast Hills Partnership in managing the area. Meanwhile the City Council, and commendably, is supporting the creation of the Belfast Hills Partnership, as are almost all other interests in the area, including the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign.

Perhaps the City Council should consider entering into an arrangement with the Belfast Hills Partnership to manage at least the upper areas of the Cave Hill. That would be a major step forward.

John Gray

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Off Piste

One of the more obvious features of the growth of Belfast in recent times – and a process whose lineaments are very clear from the summit of Cavehill – has been the sprawl of the city into the surrounding farmlands and communities. In this respect at least Belfast has tended to follow an American rather than a European model of urban growth. Many of the developments are driven by commercial calculation rather than any discernible civic interest. Around the base of Cave Hill the Antrim Road area has increasingly seen the demolition of family homes – many of which were of architectural merit and historical significance – and their replacement by high density apartment complexes. Apart from the changing demographic profile, characteristically from family units to single occupancy, the scale of apartment development will place an increasing strain on the local infrastructure. The number of private cars launched onto the Antrim Road area will hugely increase the flow of traffic into and out of Belfast from the rapidly expanding communities based in Glengormley and Carmony.

The irony of this, as Alan Jones points out in the January edition of *Fortnight* magazine, is that Northern Ireland is supposed to have a brown-field led housing regime. That means that new houses should mainly be built on land which has previously been developed, and not in green-field areas. But Jones insists that Northern Ireland has no senior planners who know how to make this policy work. The result is the kind of sprawl that is now so familiar, with increasing pressure of traffic on the main arterial routes. Ultimately, as Jones points out, this is socially and environmentally unsustainable.

Just last year the Planning Service produced a glossy catalogue of the *Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan* (BMAP). Complete with an agreeable photograph of the Cave Hill, this publication reflects on the importance of the physical and cultural heritage of the city and proclaims the need to balance economic development with effective protection of the environment. Some of the features which apparently are to be taken into account are sites of local nature conservation, areas of high scenic value, and landscape wedges separating urban communities. But it was the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign that first drew the attention of the public to a likely application for outline planning permission to build 160 houses on a 120 acre site occupied by a farm above Upper Cave Hill Road. This would be a major incursion into green-belt land and hugely destructive of the character of the area.

The BMAP plan document was followed in February 2003 by publication of *The Implementation Plan for Modernising the Planning Processes*. It contains a pledge to engage with environmental groups as well as the public and community sector in the evolution of planning policies and proposals. This is to be welcomed.

However, if residents are concerned about threats to the community that has grown up around the Cave Hill, the message that emerges from policy declarations of the Department of the Environment is that continuous pressure on the planning authorities can be effectively focused through community based organisations. To the older established Cave Hill organisation may now be added the Fortwilliam Action Committee (FAC) and the Cavehill Residents Action Group (CRAG.) If loosely regulated urban sprawl is to be avoided, and the fine sentiments expressed in the metropolitan plan are to become policy rather than public relations exercises, continuous scrutiny of and sustained opposition to unsympathetic development is absolutely essential.

Edward McCamley

News in Brief

The male red panda which escaped from the Belfast Zoo over a year ago is still at large. It is believed to be successfully foraging over the area of the Cave Hill, much of which provides a suitable habitat. The animal is mostly nocturnal, but although there have been several sightings, it is similar in size and appearance to a fox, so not all sightings are reliable. The female which escaped a few months ago was soon recaptured in a garden at Colinbridge, so any hopes they had of establishing a colony in the wild were dashed!

A firework ban was agreed for the Belfast Castle estate by Belfast City Council at a meeting of the parks sub-committee in September 2002. This followed widespread complaints (including one from this campaign) after a lengthy firework display at Belfast Castle in May 2002 at which very powerful fireworks were used and the noise was heard over a wide area of Belfast. We welcome this action on behalf of local residents and the wildlife in the Cave Hill Country Park. *If you hear any fireworks in the area of the castle, you should report it immediately to Belfast City Council.*

An illustrated talk on herbs will be given by the distinguished herbalist Barbara Pilcher at Belfast Castle on Thursday 19 June at 7.30 pm. Admission will be £2.50 and proceeds will go to the campaign.

MacArts Fort will have a fence installed in the ditch within the next few weeks. This is to protect this important archaeological site from damage from scrambler bikes.

New paths are being considered for the area above the caves and the sheeps' path which goes to the right of the caves to the top of the escarpment. These would be constructed using a method developed for the Snowdonia National Park which entails cutting down to the base clay and using no stone surface. This has the advantage of minimising the annual maintenance and establishing a viable, long-term path which is in keeping with its surroundings. Unfortunately, there is as yet no plan to provide a viable path across the scree area which exists between the caves and the direct route to MacArt's Fort. We have suggested that a competition should be run by Belfast City Council and the Institution of Civil Engineers with a prize for whoever comes up with the best solution to this problem.

Tree planting was carried out by the campaign on 1 March. We planted 200 beech in two hours in the area to the left of the main driveway a few hundred yards from the gates.

Tree clearance has been in progress for several months in the park. In most cases, this is the removal of dead elms or other dead trees which pose a danger. Although it leaves gaps in the short term, it lets in more light for ground flora and opens up new areas for future tree planting. We are involved in an ongoing programme of removing sycamore, laurel and rhododendron, all of which are highly invasive and which crowd out more desirable species.

Divis Mountain and Black Mountain are being sold off by the Ministry of Defence to the National Trust which plans to develop a major hill-walking facility which should be open to the public in 2004. They also plan to rebuild ancient dry-stone walls and install a circular path to guide ramblers on a three-hour trek. The two peaks are higher than Cave Hill (1,188 ft) at 1,562ft and 1,275ft respectively, and their boggy heath and heather-covered slopes are home to the source of four rivers, as well as many species of animals and birds, wild flowers and rare fungi.

Our second annual table quiz took place at Fortwilliam Golf Club on Friday 22 November. The event was well-supported and we raised over £750. We plan to repeat this in November 2003.

Cableway Plan Still a Threat

In the last *Cave Hill Campaigner* we were guilty of complacency. We suggested that the era of grandiose and environmentally damaging schemes for the Cave Hill was over, and that the Council seemed to be more committed than ever before to the proper environmental management of the upper areas of the hill.

Even as we wrote, the previously unknown Bellevue Cableway Group was lobbying individual councillors with regard to their plans for a cableway to the actual summit of Cave Hill and for a major building as a summit visitor centre. Within days they had announced their plans to the press, and to add insult to injury, had claimed that they had consulted with environmental groups. On 13th August they presented their plans to the Parks and Amenities Sub-Committee of the Council. Immediately following that meeting, at least one Councillor, Jim Rogers, publicly announced his support for the scheme.

It was all a very good example of how the would-be developers get a running start over environmental groups, and also in terms of Council procedures. The Bellevue Group claimed that they could not actually consult environmental groups until they had presented their case to the Council. Council officers claimed that they could not inform their supposed close partners on the hill of the cableway plan because of confidentiality. In any case the Cableway Group got the first chance to present their case and win over councillors.

Our turn did not come until October. By then, the Cableway Group had been more forthcoming with their plans. The proposed Cableway would run from the main entrance to the zoo, via an intermediary station just above the top perimeter of the zoo, and then to the summit of Cave Hill. The proposed visitor centre would have risen 5 metres above the summit and would have had a substantial 82.6 square metre/ 888 square feet 'footprint'.

The promoters estimated the capital cost at £5 to £6 million and suggested that 50 jobs would be created. In the absence of any detailed calculations from the promoters, we prepared estimated costings ourselves. These indicated that the project would run at a significant financial loss even if it managed to attract an average of 384 customers per day throughout the year. This would imply almost 1,200 customers per day in July. The cableway could carry up to 480 people to the summit in an hour which equates to over 4,000 visitors per day. This compares with the 200 walkers who reached the summit as counted by a Cave Hill Conservation Campaign survey on a fine summer's day in June 2002.

It takes little imagination to perceive the devastating impact such an influx would have had on the fragile high hill environment of the Cave Hill. In responding to the proposal, we highlighted the threat to bird life, flora and fauna. We emphasised the threat to archaeological sites, not least because it was proposed to locate the visitor centre on top of one! Path erosion and safety were also significant issues.

Bizarrely, the promoters suggested that their proposals would improve the environment. There would be less wear and tear on paths up and down the hill (everyone would go by cableway). If visitors left the summit visitor centre, wear on summit paths would be reduced by the installation of boardwalks. The summit visitor centre would be made of environmentally friendly material. Summit rangers would police the whole area.

It is quite possible that some Councillors would have rested quite content with these fig leaves of assurance. There were,

however, inescapable facts, or lack of them, that they could not evade. The Bellevue Cableway Group was not even constituted as a company, it had no business or marketing plan, and could provide no evidence of having any financial backing. Unpleasant visions of a need for Council financial backing began to surface. The Committee decided to take 'no further action in the matter'.

Note well that they did not decide that the construction of a cableway to the summit was against Council policy. If that was the position they would not have entertained the Bellevue Cableway Group in the first place. Nor did they decide to reject the proposal. They merely decided that the matter 'should not be considered further until an official and detailed proposal has been submitted ... by the Bellevue Cableway Group'.

This is a deplorable stance, and one which can only offer encouragement to any group which has a money-making scheme for the Cave Hill. Say, for example, that you and a group of friends, in the pub of a night, and over a pint or few, come up with a scheme to mine for the Cave Hill Diamond, then the City Hall awaits you with open arms!

John Gray

Events

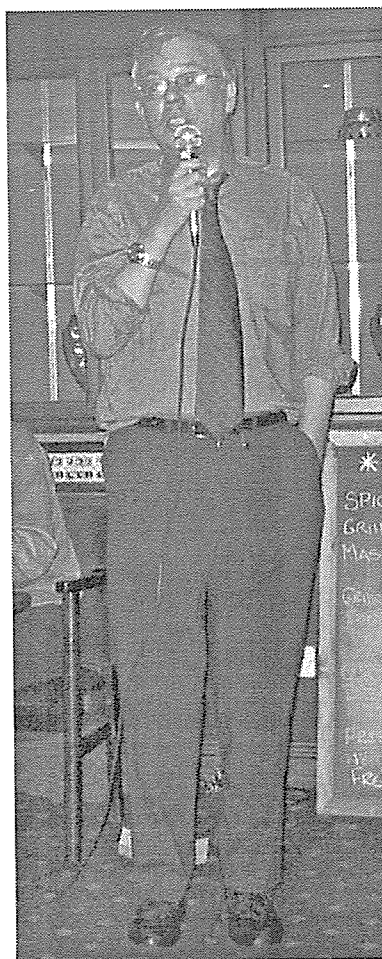
Cleanup day is Saturday 31 May. Meet at north car-park (near Adventure Playground) at 2 pm. Please wear appropriate clothing and footwear.

Annual General Meeting is on Wednesday 4 June at Fortwilliam Golf Club at 7.30 pm. The meeting will include a talk on the new Belfast Hills Partnership and what it hopes to achieve and will be followed by musical entertainment. Please note that the club operates a strict "no jeans" rule.

Annual user survey of Cave Hill is on Sunday 15 June from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm. This is an important project at which we monitor the number of people using the hill at various points. If you would be prepared to help by volunteering for a two hour shift, please get in touch.

Contact us by email at cavehill@freeuk.com
And don't forget our website: www.cavehill.freeuk.com

John Gray addresses supporters after the table quiz last November.



Wildlife on the Cave Hill

For an area on the edge of a city, the Cave Hill has an abundance of wildlife. This is about some of the animals which live there, their history in Ireland and the threats they face.

Rabbits

Rabbits are not native to Ireland and were introduced by the Normans as an important source of meat and fur. They probably became established in the wild soon after this period and became numerous over the following two hundred years. Domestic and wild rabbits formed the basis of an important skin-export industry in the 17th and 18th centuries. The rabbit is generally regarded as a pest as it can cause major damage to crops and newly planted forests. The laboratory-developed disease Myxomatosis was released to control rabbits in the 1950s and was extremely successful. However, in recent times, rabbits have begun to develop resistance to this disease, much to the relief of foxes and stoats.

Hedgehogs

It is not clear when and how the hedgehog reached Ireland. It was certainly present in England from about 10,000 years ago, after the last ice age, and may have been introduced to Ireland by man sometime in the 13th century as a food source. Hedgehogs have been persecuted for their predation on eggs of game birds and waders (see the current attempt to remove them from Uist in the Hebrides, where they were introduced in 1974) although, in actual fact, damage was small. One of the most common road kill animals is the hedgehog with large numbers of deaths occurring during periods of peak abundance and at certain 'hotspots'. *Hedgehogs are particularly vulnerable to garden pesticides and many are poisoned by eating slugs which have fed on the poisonous slug bait put out by gardeners.* They are often caught and trapped in man-made objects with steep sides such as garden ponds and cattle grids. A wide publicity campaign a few years ago raised public awareness of the situation and suggested the solution of placing a plank within these structures so that the animals can escape. Hibernating hedgehogs reside within self-built nests with one of the most appealing spots being inside piles of garden bonfire material. Many hedgehogs are killed in this way – so check before lighting or, better still, move the pile to a 'burning site'. The hedgehog's main natural enemies are foxes and badgers.

Stoats

It is not known exactly when the stoat arrived in Ireland although it was probably present as long as 35,000 years ago. Confusingly, stoats in Ireland are often called weasels, although the weasel is in fact a smaller animal which has never been native here. Stoat numbers declined with the fall in the rabbit population due to myxomatosis, but now that the rabbit has become resistant to the virus, this prey item is once again available in large numbers. Stoats can be found in many locations, including woodland, farmland, mountain and hedgerows. The stoat is quite a ferocious animal and can kill prey more than five times its own body weight. However, small mammals such as mice and rats make up the majority of its diet.

Badgers

Badgers have been present in Ireland for about 10,000 years. They make their setts in a wide variety of places in woodland, scrub, hedgerows, moorland, open fields, embankments and occasionally under buildings. In Ireland, which has the smallest percentage of tree coverage in Western Europe, badgers are normally found in hedgerows and scrubland. Badgers are truly omnivorous, their diet depending upon availability. Small mammals such as rabbits, rats, mice and hedgehogs are taken as

well as slugs, snails, large quantities of earthworms and large insects. They also eat vegetation, plant roots and an assortment of fruit.

The badger does not appear to be under any major threat in Northern Ireland. However, bovine tuberculosis is present in about 8% of badgers. As a result, many cattle farmers view all badgers as a potential source of disease. Current threats to badgers include the occasional exclusion due to property development and the cruel practice of badger baiting. The latter threat, although illegal, can be quite significant on a local scale.

Foxes

Fox bones have been found in archaeological sites dating from about 5,000 years ago, although it may have been present before this time. Foxes are becoming increasingly urbanised due to their ability to scavenge on discarded food. They are frequently seen at night in gardens and roads in the vicinity of the Cave Hill. Foxes have been generally considered vermin and every possible means has been used to kill them in Northern Ireland. From the early 1940's to the late 1970's, a bounty was paid for each fox killed, and during this time about 200,000 dead animals were submitted for the bounty. Today, foxes may be affecting the numbers of breeding waders in some parts of the country and may also be having an impact on Irish Hare populations. However, the evidence is scant. The few organised fox hunts in Northern Ireland probably have little impact on fox populations, apart from the terror they cause to the individual animals hunted. Source: www.habitats.org.uk

Editor

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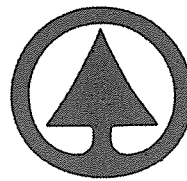
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Andrew Nicholl

Andrew Nicholl painted "MacArt's Fort" in 1830 and you can see this watercolour on our web site. He was born in Church Lane in 1804 and as a young boy was apprenticed to F.D. Finlay's printing shop, drawing and painting in his spare time. Later he went to London where he copied paintings in the Dulwich Gallery and was greatly influenced by Turner. While in London he exhibited at the Royal Academy and sent work over to Dublin to the Royal Hibernian Academy but probably maintained himself by giving private lessons.



In 1835 Nicholl provided seven drawings for *Picturesque sketches of some of the finest landscape and costal scenery of Ireland*, three of Northern subjects. That same year he made illustrations for the *Dublin Penny Journal* and for *Views of the Dublin and Kingstown Railway*.

Andrew and his brother William were among the members of the Belfast Association of Artists which mounted the first of its three annual exhibitions in 1836; the catalogues of the first and third exhibitions may be seen in the Linenhall Library.

In 1846 he was appointed to teach painting at the Academy in Colombo, Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. There are a couple of watercolours in the Ulster Museum from that period.

Returning from Ceylon, Nicholl divided his time between London, Dublin and Belfast where he taught landscape

painting privately. In 1860 he was elected an RHA (Royal Hibernian Academician).

Most of us today know him through a few of his landscapes of Co Antrim especially that of *MacArt's Fort*. In his book *Art in Ulster 1* John Hewitt describes his work as *uneven... fond of dramatic effects, of ruins, rugged cliffs... of caves... his colours restricted to browns, russets... his statement of human figures or cattle... inexpert...* Those of us who regularly climb to MacArt's Fort would assume that Nicholl painted this from memory rather than from observation and artistic licence certainly came into play in those distant hills, and he must have been thinking of the Giant's Causeway when he painted that rugged cliff!

Nicholl died in London in 1886 when a memorial exhibition of nearly 300 works was mounted at 55 Donegall Place, Belfast.

Catherine McWilliams

The Caves

The caves, which may have given the hill its name inspired the Irish poet Sir Samuel Ferguson to write stories of Corby McGilmore, a rogue and villain who would use the caves as hideouts for his prisoners. It is from these caves, so the story goes, that McGilmore would invite his prisoners to escape, if they dared.

There are five caves in all but little is known of their history. Man made, they are cut from the rock like others around Belfast at Ballymartin and Donegore. According to the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*: *No distinct age can be credited with their formation, as no direct evidence of the occupation has been discovered. The floors of each are cut in the solid rock and there is no accumulation of ages to contain any implements or other articles.*

The first cave is at ground level and can be easily entered. About seventy-five feet higher up, on a ledge, is the second cave; on another ledge about one hundred and thirty feet above the entrance to the first are the third, fourth and fifth caves.

The entrance to the first cave was originally in the shape of a door and measured just three feet six inches across. Its inner

walls still show that it was fashioned with some regard to regularity of form. The entrance to the second cave is made by climbing the ledge that runs up and across the face of the cliff—a difficult and dangerous climb. It is the smallest cave of the five, but is the best formed, its roof being dome shaped.

The ledge by which the third, fourth and fifth caves are reached has its beginning to the west of the entrance cave, but the climb is even more dangerous than that leading to the second, and many lives have been lost attempting it.

The fourth and fifth caves are entered through the third—a tunnel connects them. The fourth is the largest of the caves and has a window or opening situated near its entrance. At the bottom of this window, which is well formed and has a rounded top, a channel has been cut in the rock, six inches deep, for the purpose of draining off the rain water that would otherwise flood the interior. The fifth cave is situated above the third and is reached from the latter by steps cut in the cliff.

Although no evidence of the caves' occupation has been discovered, stories are told of the famous Ness O'Haughan, the highwayman from the Braid valley, having used them as a hideout for himself and his band.

Catherine McWilliams

Scramblers and quod bikes

an anti-social menace

There is growing concern among many people who use the Cave Hill Country Park at the apparently unstoppable use of motor bike scramblers and quod bikes. These are likely to hurtle straight at you as you walk along the marked paths. Their riders usually show no consideration for walkers and expect you to get out of their way. The machines are noisy and smelly. They shatter the peace of a country park and cause considerable damage to paths and grass areas in both winter and summer.

The use of these machines in the Cave Hill Country Park is illegal. It is contrary to the bye-laws of the park and there are prominent notices which say so. Unfortunately, the bye-laws are not enforced effectively. The reasons for this are a combination of a lack of police resource, a lack of a sufficiently deterrent penalty and a failure by magistrates to impose an appropriate penalty even within the existing bye-laws. The most likely fine for a first offence is £25. In our view, there should be a minimum fine of £100 for a first offence and confiscation of the scrambler / quod for a second offence. The bye-laws should be amended accordingly and you should lobby your local councillor to press for this change.

Another problem with enforcement is that scramblers and quods do not have registration numbers. However, there are also incidences of licensed scooters and motor bikes in the park. *If you see these, please take a note of their number and report it to either the police or Belfast City Council.* You can be sure that if you take this action, the perpetrators will at least receive an official caution from the police. The Parks Department has been in discussion with the police about more effective enforcement against scramblers and quods, but if you use the park you may be able to help by reporting them as well - even if there is no number plate there may be other ways to identify them, such as colour of machine or clothing. If you have a camera with you, take a photograph! *Please do whatever you can to help eliminate this menace.*

Editor

My Extended Back Garden

Each morning as I wake to the sound of Radio Ulster News (usually depressing) I'm so grateful that just five minutes walk from my door I can be lost amongst the peace and beauty of the woodland of Cave Hill. Here I can imagine all the troubles of the world are a million miles away and that all these gifts of nature are for the enjoyment of my dog and me alone - so much so that I can even resent other walkers "intruding" on my territory.

But of course it's there for all to enjoy - even though I'm reluctant to tell too many about it!

M. Murphy



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Lost in Time

Several years ago, a gold dress fastener was found on top of Cave Hill, just off the pathway that runs between the Hightown Road and MacArt's Fort. It is believed to be around 3,000 years old. It was subsequently acquired by the Ulster Museum, and for reasons known only to themselves, it is still not on public display.

However this gets away from my tale. A few years ago my girlfriend Patricia and myself were out for a walk on one of those pleasant summer evenings (remember them). We had noticed a fire blazing blaze on top of Cave Hill and being good citizens we proceeded to make for the high ground to see what could be done. When we arrived at the conflagration it seemed easy enough to tackle it by ourselves, so we set about it - much to the bemusement of passersby - and after about half an hour managed to quell the flames. On returning down onto the lower slopes of the hill I went to check the time on my watch - a lovely pocket watch that Patricia had bought for my birthday a couple of months previously. Gone! Check again - still gone! Are you sure? still gone! Well, I was inconsolable. We thought about retracing our steps but the light was fading fast so we just had to consign it to experience. I've never had much luck with watches anyway. So maybe, in a few millennia, someone may find a rusted lump of metal because I don't think it would stand the test of time. They don't make things like they used to. They might wonder what it was and how it got there. A case for the "Time Team" perhaps?

E O'Gorman

Native Birdlife in Belfast Zoo

Visitors to Belfast Zoo will be familiar with the zoo's extensive collection of rare and beautiful birds - including cockatoos, pheasants and waterfowl. However, they are probably less aware that the zoo plays host to many species of native wild birds. With the help of fellow keepers, I have recorded a total of 57 native species, of which 23 actually breed in the zoo grounds. These are impressive numbers by any standard, but the main reason is not hard to guess - namely an abundance of food!

Natural food includes the shrub cotoneaster (for thrushes and warblers), beechmast and seedling weeds (finches), and small invertebrates such as spiders and flies (wrens, wagtails and swallows). Of course, many birds take full advantage of the free meals available from the animal enclosures. For example, greenfinches, blue tits and house sparrows will often fly into the parrot enclosure to help themselves to sunflower seeds and other grain. Robins - always remarkable for their boldness - will often hang about when animals are being fed, hoping for a morsel of cheese or even a piece of fat from the tiger's lunch! Another attraction for the birds is the security provided by the extensive plantings within the zoo perimeter. This gives cover for small birds which need to escape the attentions of predators such as sparrowhawks, as well as offering nesting opportunities.

Some of the species - such as swifts, song thrushes and even house sparrows - are in serious decline in both Ireland and Britain from a combination of loss of habitat (from tree-felling and building in the greenbelt) and changes in farming, especially the use of herbicides and pesticides which combine to reduce the food from weeds and invertebrates. Ploughing-in of cereal stubble in autumn may enable the farmer to plant a winter crop, but deprives many birds of winter food.

The range of species (see the lists below) includes both our tallest and smallest birds, namely the grey heron - 39 inches long and more common in wetlands than the Cave Hill - and the goldcrest - at 3.5 inches it is slightly smaller than the wren. Five species of birds of prey have been seen - sparrowhawk

(currently enjoying a big revival), kestrel, peregrine and long eared owl. All of these breed within the vicinity of the zoo and at least one pair of sparrowhawks breeds in the zoo grounds.

The following five lists group the birds into appropriate categories. Of course, some appear in more than one.

Birds which are resident all year: Grey heron, grey lag goose, mallard, sparrowhawk, kestrel, peregrine, pheasant, moorhen, black-headed gull, herring gull, lesser black-backed gull, wood pigeon, collared dove, long-eared owl, grey wagtail, pied wagtail, wren, dunnoek, robin, blackbird, song thrush, mistle thrush, goldcrest, long-tailed tit, coal tit, blue tit, great tit, tree creeper, magpie, jackdaw, rook, hooded crow, raven, starling, chaffinch, greenfinch, goldfinch, bullfinch, linnets, water-rail, coot, little grebe.

Summer visitors: Swallow, swift, house martin, chiffchaff, willow warbler, spotted flycatcher.

Winter visitors: Fieldfare, red poll, redwing, black cap, siskin, woodcock, merlin.

Birds which breed in the zoo grounds: Mallard, sparrowhawk, moorhen, wood pigeon, collared dove, swallow, grey wagtail, pied wagtail, wren, dunnoek, robin, blackbird, song thrush, mistle thrush, chiffchaff, goldcrest, coal tit, blue tit, great tit, tree creeper, house sparrow, chaffinch, greenfinch.

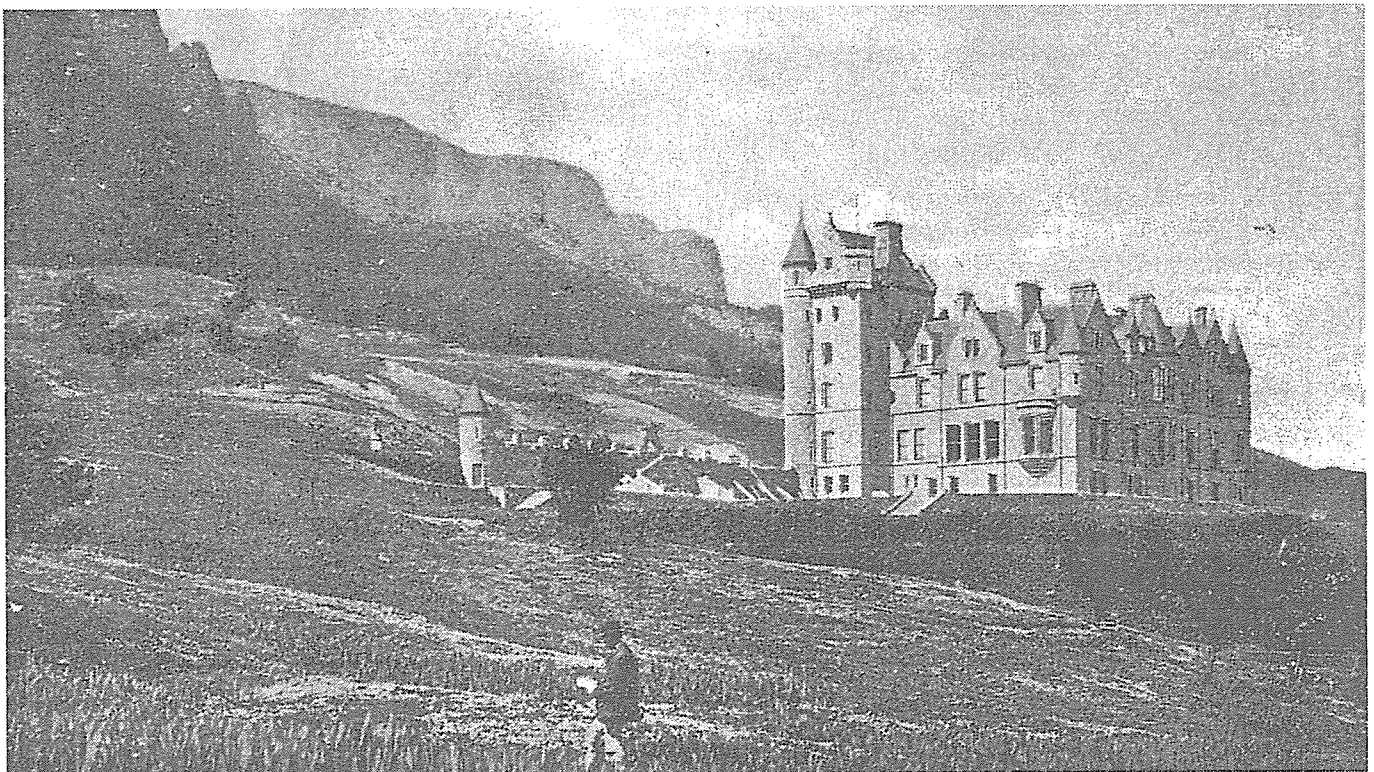
Birds in decline: Swift, house martin, house sparrow, song thrush, willow warbler, spotted flycatcher, bullfinch.

Raymond Robinson, Zookeeper

This is an edited version of an article which appeared in the Belfast Zoo magazine in 2001. We are grateful to Raymond for his permission to reproduce it here.

Action point: If you want to see more birdlife in your garden, think about putting out food, such as peanuts and seeds. You should remember the danger from cats and you may need to get squirrel-proof feeders, but it won't be long before you see some birds!

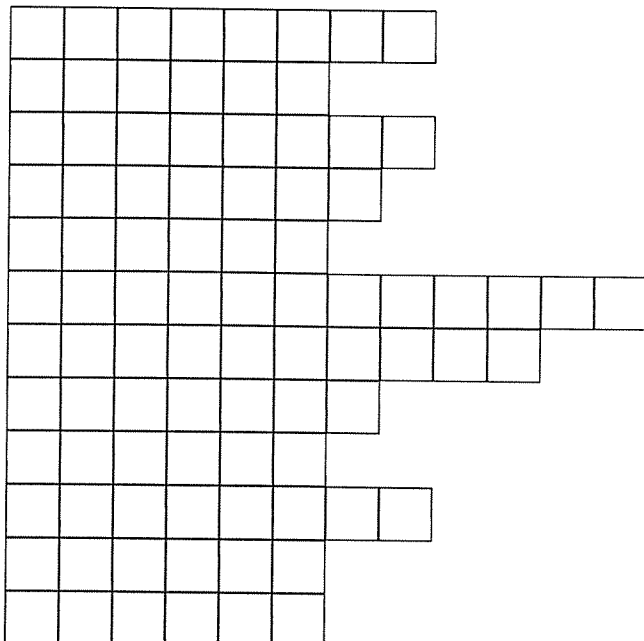
An early photograph of Belfast Castle, taken before the Italian staircase was added. This places it between 1870-1884. Note the absence of trees in the immediate vicinity.



Cave Hill Quiz

Solve the riddles to reveal the hidden word. Answers will be posted on our website early in June.

1. To maintain and improve, that's our game,
Ben Madigan by another name.
2. A treasure hunt if you please,
this family will bring you to your knees.
3. Climb my face? Yes you may,
revolution - s'il vous plait!
4. Look out MacGilmores, here they come,
wild and untamed from father to son.
5. Roll up, roll down, it's time for the fair,
music and poteen filled the air.
6. Kneel down a minute and say a prayer
that this old building might repair.
7. Put your name forward, come here, sign up,
want a drink, well where's your cup?
8. A royal edifice, known to inspire,
replaced by flats, bigger or higher.
9. A chair made of stone, tumbled down,
filled by a man sporting a crown.
10. From the top of the hill, a pledge so true,
a united approach for Roisin Dubh.
11. Naoise will send your back a shiver,
this 'Tory in Arms' shouts 'Stand and Deliver'
12. Lend a hand there's work to be done,
to protect and save this worldly mum.



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An open letter from the Belfast Hills Waste Management Group

If you were to take a walk nowadays along any of the roads through the Belfast hills, you would struggle to find a single dwelling which didn't have lorries or machinery parked in the yard, or evidence of at least some small engineering/construction-related business on site. Any vision for the hills cannot ignore this reality, and any umbrella group must take account of these individuals and their micro-economy in seeking to draw up a development plan which reflects the interests and values of all stake-holders in the region. With the participation of the Belfast Hills Waste Management Group in the Belfast Hills Shadow Trust since January 2003, I am optimistic that an effective partnership can be formed - one which will be effective in delivering on the vision of conservation, recreation and economic regeneration.

The waste management group is an alliance of small waste/plant operators who live and work in the Belfast Hills, representing at present 22 companies with about 120 employees and with 390 acres of hill land under their control. It is worth noting that this alliance encompasses both sections of our community.

The waste operators on the hills are hardworking people, for whom 8am represents a late start. During the "good nights", any business ceasing operation at 5pm or 6pm will be thrashed by its competitors. It is a hard, relentless activity with spiralling costs seldom covered by revenues - e.g. the market price for the average 8 tonne builder's skip is £80, yet the cost of legal disposal is in the region of £300-£400! With the added pressures of compliance with more and more regulation, it is little wonder that illegal dumping is a growing problem on the Belfast hills.

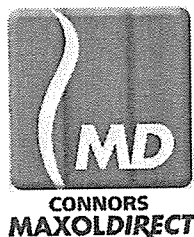
As a reader of this magazine you are probably asking yourself "yeah, great, but what has this got to do with conservation?" The answer - *everything!*

For anyone with an interest in nature conservation, the apparent proliferation of heavy lorries and landfilling on the Belfast Hills is an understandable concern, especially given the seeming absence of regulation. Now for the first time conservationists can engage with this group of operators and hopefully tackle these problems from the ground up, not forgetting that most of these people are hills residents. The waste operators offer a unique opportunity for the future Belfast Hills Partnership, in that

- they are a hardworking group, and with the right direction and controls in place they will turn out to be valuable resource with a major contribution to make;
- the fact that these operators have thousands of tonnes of waste under their control on a weekly basis creates the potential for the partnership to be involved in pioneering recycling projects in line with N.I waste management strategy objectives;
- with the waste management group "signed up" to the partnership, a plan can be devised for the management of all such activities on the hills based on the principle of best practicable environmental option.
- there is an added advantage in that with careful management of these activities, the environmental policing of the hills can rely on the support of local operators and not merely be seen as a thankless task left to a few individuals involved in the hills watch.

This is a Herculean task confronting us, but the Belfast Hills Waste Management Group is eager to be involved. We in turn would hope to see a positive and imaginative contribution from all sections of the Hills Partnership.

Francis Devlin
Belfast Hills Waste Management Group



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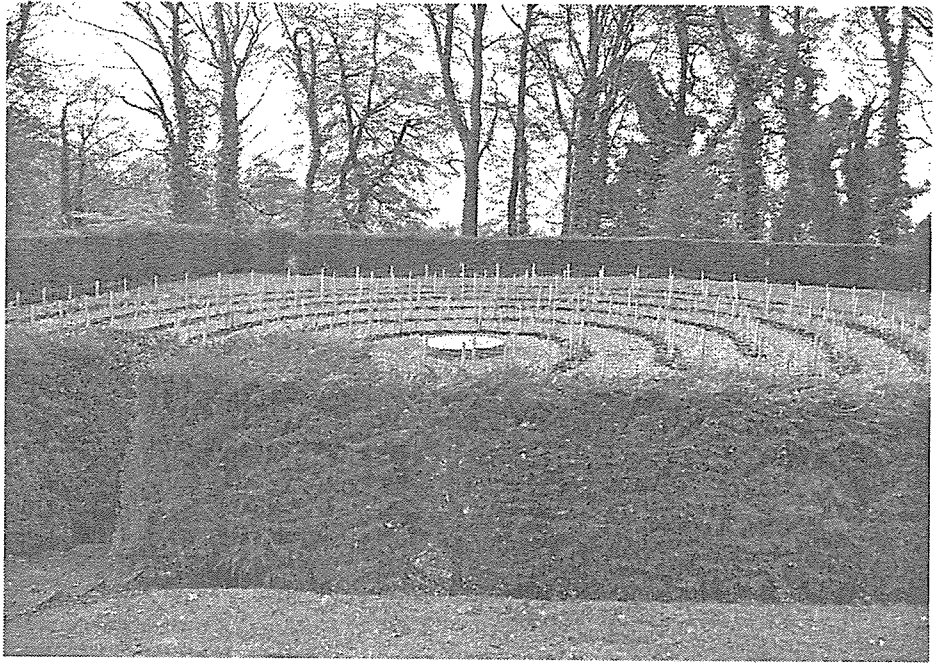
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The Cave Hill Millennium Maze

The maze was officially opened by Margaret Crooks of Belfast City Council Parks and Amenities Section on Thursday 7th November 2002. It was also the opening of the revamped Cave Hill Visitors Centre in Belfast Castle and the Millennium Herb Garden.

The beech trees in the maze are growing well, although unfortunately, due to vandalism, a few have been pulled out and destroyed. I am very proud of the cat mosaic which looks really well although a few finishing touches still have to be put to it. When I decided to incorporate a cat themed mosaic as the centrepiece of the maze I asked the P6 pupils of the three primary schools involved (Cavehill Primary, Ben Madigan Preparatory, and Park Lodge) to draw pictures of cats and these were given to the artist Angela George to pick the most suitable. It was a very difficult task as all the pictures were very good. However, after a lot of deliberation Angela decided that the picture drawn by Anne Crummey age 9 years of Park Lodge fitted the bill, and I think you will agree if you visit the Maze that a first class choice was made.

The Maze can be clearly seen from McArt's Fort and is already drawing quite a lot of interest and visitors to the Castle



grounds. It is an ongoing project and I hope to have gravel paths laid and work carried out to the steps leading into it. A plinth will be erected at the entrance providing information for visitors of the history of its creation. I think it's well worth a visit, so the next time you are in the area please do walk round to the site of the old rose garden and decide for yourselves!

Louise Wilson

The Truth About Trees

FACT: Trees are important.

Why should they matter to you? They produce the air you breathe and can help to offset the catastrophic effects of global climate change that has been wreaking havoc on the world's weather in recent years.

FACT: The government is running a campaign to encourage people to recycle, reuse and but not enough people realise they need to do anything.

What can you do?

- If you work in an office or have a home printer, use recycled paper.
- Recycle your newspapers and bottles - it's as easy to collect them as it is to throw them in the bin!
- Think before you buy hardwood products such as mahogany - could they have originated from the rainforests that (most of) the world's governments are trying to protect?
- Plant an extra tree in your garden or plant a hedge instead of buying a new wooden fence.
- Educate and encourage your children and family to respect the environment around them.
- If you are a student, write on both sides of the page!

The project which I have been involved in has succeeded in planting over 11,000 trees in the Belfast Hills over the last three years. The City Council is to be congratulated for continuing to plant trees alongside some of our major roads whilst groups including the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign and even volunteers from the Social Security Agency have been actively involved in planting a significant number of trees in the Belfast

Castle Estate.

This is all good work and very important but of course trees don't grow overnight.

FACT: It takes longer to fix the problems of our society than it does to cause them.

The overall effect of tree planting on the environment is reduced by every person in Belfast who continues to throw away their rubbish and contributes to making Belfast a poorer place to live in. Please recycle and help to put something back. Everyone has a part to play.

Governments, councils and voluntary bodies can't fix things on their own. What is needed is the collective support and co-operation of everyone who is reading this now. For every magazine or newspaper you throw away, it is taking others longer to grow that amount of wood to replace that magazine.

What are you going to do when you finish reading this magazine?

Martin McDowell

The Millennium Herb Garden

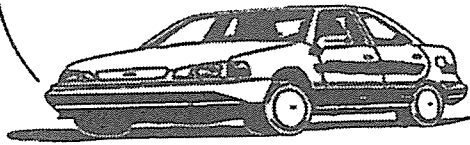
The millennium herb garden at Belfast Castle is now well established, despite attacks from winter weather. When the annuals are replaced after Easter, we can look forward to a colourful and fragrant display.

Hopefully, this will coincide with the visit to the castle on Thursday 19 June of Barbara Pilchar, the well-known herbalist who can be heard on Radio Ulster's gardening programme. She will give a talk called "Salad days" as part of an evening of looking and learning about herbs. The talk will start at 7.30pm and admission will be £2.50 at the door - proceeds go to our Cave Hill Conservation Campaign.

Everyone is welcome!

Geraldine Birch

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