

Belfast Castle Estate



Route description

A walk through the woodland and parkland of the Belfast Castle Estate on mainly gravel paths with some steep hills.

Distance

2.4 miles 3.9 km.

Average Time

1 hr – 1 hr 10 mins.

Access

By bus - Metro Services: 1A-1H (Mon-Sat) 1C-1E or 1H (Sun).

By car - Car park at Belfast Castle, signposted from Antrim Road.

Trail Route

From the car park just before Belfast Castle **(1)** this route follows the blue waymarked "Estate Trail". Cross the main driveway and take the path down the hill, turning left in front of the castle (outside the security fence). Turn right down past the Adventurous Playground **(2)** and its car park.

As the main driveway veers to the right, take the small path on the left leading uphill. This will take you past the rear of the Millennium Maze, on the site of the old rose garden. This path will lead you on to another tarmac driveway.

Turn left and follow the drive uphill for a short distance. Where the drive veers left, take the gravel path to your right, keeping to the right of the next junction. You will soon come to the

Volunteer's Well **(3)** on your left with a stream on your right.

At the well on your left, continue uphill before taking the second gravel path on your left to begin the descent back towards the castle.

At the next two junctions keep right. Occasionally you will get glimpses of Belfast Castle and the city below through the trees.

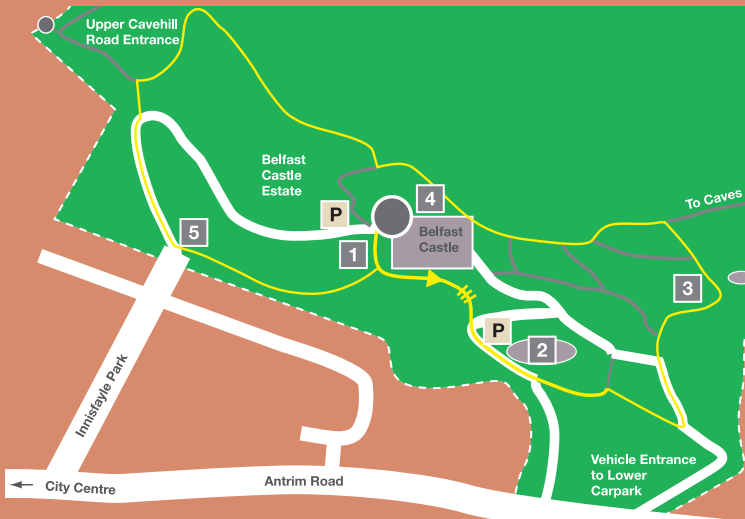
This path continues along the back of the castle for some distance, before doubling back on itself and descending on to the main driveway. Turn right and follow the footpath until you reach the main gates to the park **(4)**.

Watch for traffic as you cross the driveway and take the footpath ahead. This leads back up the hill to the car park, past the sculpture of a peregrine on your right **(5)**.

Refreshments

The Cellar Restaurant Belfast Castle; Monday-Saturday:- closed on Monday nights
Lunch 12pm – 3pm, Early Evening Meal 5pm – 6.45pm, Dinner 7pm – 9pm
Snacks and light refreshments available 11am – 5pm

Trail 02



History

The estate lands at Belfast Castle, once known as the Deerpark, were owned by the Donegall family. In the late 1860s, the Donegalls decided to build a new home, the current castle, on the slopes below Cave Hill.

After the building was finished the estate was planted out with trees. All of today's woodland in Belfast Castle Estate dates from the late nineteenth century. It contains a mix of broadleaved and conifer species. About half the trees were elms, which in recent years have succumbed to Dutch elm disease.

Things of Interest

Belfast Castle (1)

Built in the 1870s, Belfast Castle is the former home of the Donegall and Shaftesbury families. It was given to the city in 1934 and is now managed by Belfast City Council as a function and conference centre. You can visit the Cave Hill Visitor Centre on the 2nd floor and toilets and refreshments are available in the basement.

Adventurous Playground (2)

This is a popular venue for 3 – 14 year olds. Tel 028 9037 1013 for booking times and admission charges.

Volunteer's Well (3)

This well, which is now dry, commemorates the connection of the United Irishmen with Cave Hill. Towards the end of the 18th century they met at the top and took a vow to free Ireland.

Main gates (4)

These gate posts remain from the Donegall era. The family crest can be seen on top of each post.

Peregrine Sculpture (5)

This sculpture, which sits atop a high pole, was commissioned in 2002 by the Forest of Belfast, one of many sculptures throughout Belfast.

Look out for

- rabbits on the lower grassy slopes of the estate.
- views over the city and beyond, especially from the later stages of the trail.
- woodland flowers in spring, and fungi in autumn.

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