

# Belfast Hills Access Code

1. **Plan ahead**- know where to walk, what to wear and how to minimise waste.
2. **Be safe**- pay attention to signs, weather conditions & traffic levels.
3. **Understand Access**- know where you are allowed to go and leave gates as you find them.
4. **Minimise impact**- TAKE ALL LITTER HOME, extinguish matches & cigarettes carefully, don't pollute water.
5. **Control dogs**- Please keep dogs on a lead especially near farm animals.
6. **Respect the countryside**- don't disturb or feed wildlife.
7. **Consider others**- don't interfere with livestock, crops or machinery. Minimise noise.

The Belfast Hills are renowned for providing a unique backdrop to a thriving urban area. From Colin Mountain in the south to Carnmoney Hill in the North, the hills have sheltered Belfast, Lisburn and Newtownabbey for centuries. The hills are much more than a backcloth to the city. They are home to communities, farms and a wide range of important flora, wildlife, archaeology and have stunning landscapes. With an increasing number of publicly accessible sites, the general public may now walk over roughly 30% of the Belfast Hills.

The aim of this Access Code is to provide some general guidelines on how to look after both yourself and the environment when out and about on the hills.

## PLAN AHEAD-

**Much of the Belfast Hills is above 300 m and liable to sudden poor weather.**

- Ensure that you know where you are allowed to walk (70% of the Belfast Hills are privately owned and is not open to access, see Belfast Hills Walking Map).
- Have suitable waterproof clothing, footwear and equipment.
- Bring a bag to bring home any litter or dog mess.
- Listen to and heed the weather forecast.

## BE SAFE-

**The terrain in the Belfast Hills varies from good paths to rough and steep terrain.**

- If possible go walking with others.
- Pay attention to warning signs, they are there for your protection.
- Quarries are dangerous, even when disused; where entry is allowed avoid approaching steep slopes as there may be risk of landslips.
- Some areas of the hills are floating bogs and should be avoided.
- Take care when walking on roads, wear bright clothing and where appropriate walk in single file facing traffic.
- When driving on country roads, SLOW DOWN, as you may be endangering people and wildlife.
- Ensure that someone knows where you are going and when you are coming back. Bring a mobile phone but do remember that reception in some areas of the Hills is sporadic.

## UNDERSTAND ACCESS-

**Roughly 30% of the Belfast Hills is open to access.**

- Know where you are allowed to go and what activities you are allowed to do there. Always respect the land owner's wishes.
- Keep to paths and other indicated routes.
- Livestock roam freely in a number of public sites on the hills. Do not disturb livestock or wildlife, so as not to cause them stress or endanger yourself.
- Use gates and stiles. Leave gates as you find them. Do not climb fencing. Damage caused to fencing can allow animals to stray onto roads.

## **MINIMISE IMPACT-**

**The Belfast Hills contain some of the finest scenery in Ireland, however it is a vulnerable natural resource and must be protected.**

- Take ALL litter home, even items which are biodegradable as they take a long time to break down and are unsightly. Litter such as glass, tins and plastic bags can be dangerous to people, livestock, and wildlife.
- Guard against risk of fire especially during dry weather. Put out all matches and cigarettes VERY carefully. Never throw cigarettes out of a car window.
- Do not pollute water. Do not interfere with water troughs which provide clean water for livestock.

## **CONTROL DOGS-**

**Much of the Belfast Hills is working farm land and so has livestock in the fields.**

- Dogs should be kept under control so that they do not disturb, scare or attack individuals, farm animals, or wildlife. Please put your dog on a lead.
- By law farmers are entitled to destroy a dog that injures or worries their animals.
- Don't let your dog wander where it may disturb birds that nest on the ground or other wildlife, as eggs and young will soon die without their parental protection.
- Dog mess is unpleasant and can spread infection, always clean up after your dog and take the mess home.

## **RESPECT THE COUNTRYSIDE-**

**The Belfast Hills are mainly basalt and limestone, and have heather moorland, wet grassland and wooded glens.**

- Leave all natural places as you find them. Don't uproot pick plants.
- Keep in mind unwanted plants, animals and diseases can be spread on boots etc, so wash them after every trip.
- Observe wildlife from a distance, but don't attempt to approach or follow.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times such as when they are mating, nesting or raising young.
- Do not feed wildlife as this damages their health, alters their natural behaviours, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.

## **CONSIDER OTHERS-**

**Make the Belfast Hills a place for everyone to enjoy.**

- Respect and consideration both of other recreational users and people who live and work in the countryside makes the hills a pleasant place for everyone.
- Think on the needs of others e.g. don't block gateways or driveways.
- Do not interfere with livestock, machinery or crops as they are valuable, also interference with animals or machinery could endanger you.
- Report anyone who is vandalising property or land to the police.
- Keep out of the way when farm animals are being moved. Follow directions from the farmer.
- Do not make unnecessary noise which may annoy others or frighten farm animals and wildlife. Enjoy the sounds of nature.

### **Please note:**

There is no provision for motorised vehicles, camping, horse riding or rock-climbing at any of the public sites in the Belfast Hills.

Limited wheelchair access is provided at Divis, Colin Glen and Slievenacloy due to the rough terrain and gradient.