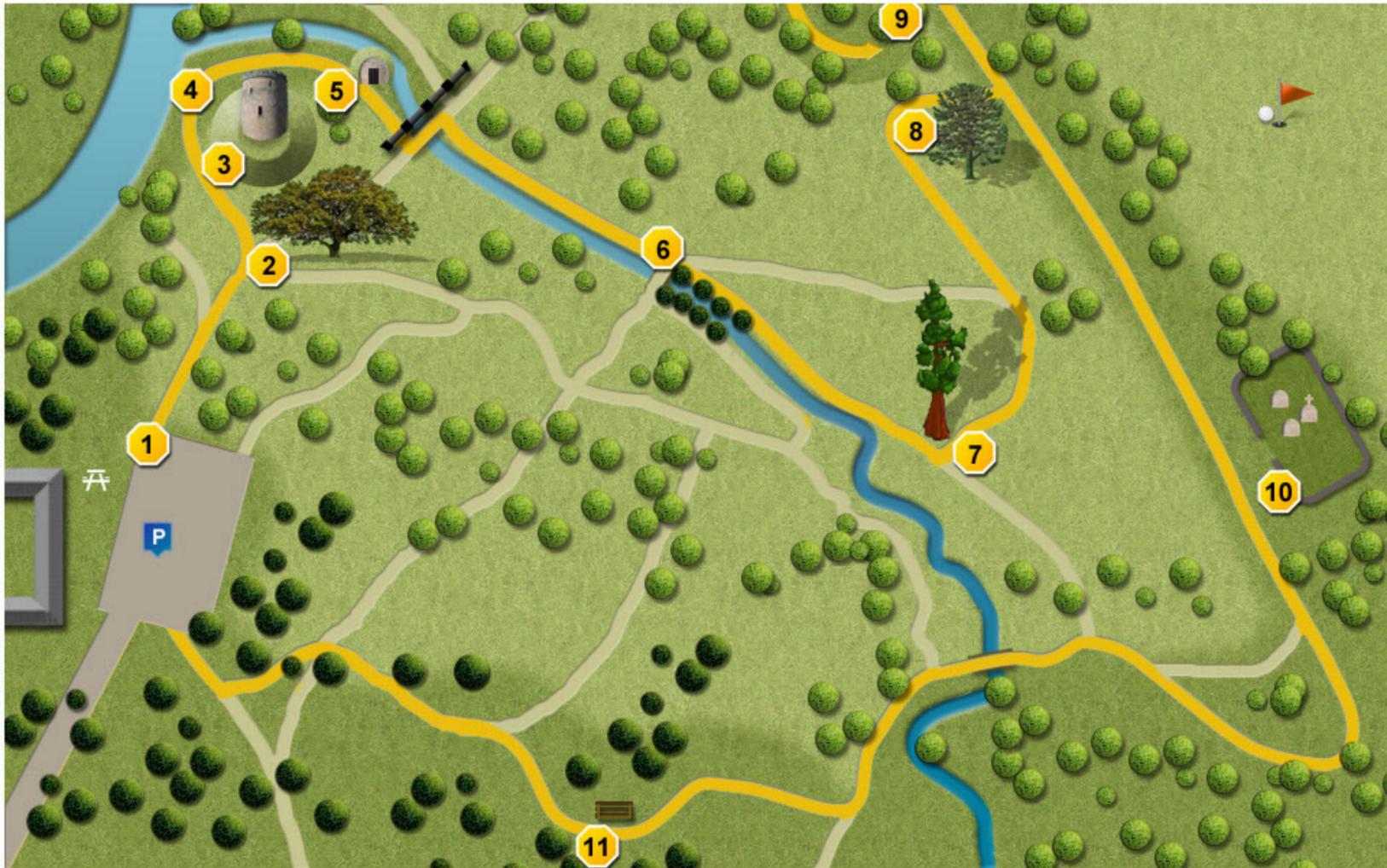


This 2 km route reveals a 12th century Norman motte as well as the remains of an 18th century Manor House with Belfast's first ice house still intact and ready to explore. Belvoir is also home to a huge diversity of wildlife in particular Ireland oldest oak tree which dates back to 1642.



## Facilities

Toilet facilities are available on site. There are many areas where you can have a packed lunch including a covered pergola if it rains. There is also a café on site, as well as a play park.

Guided tours can be pre-booked by contacting Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Tel: 028 90491922

Email: [admin@laganvalley.co.uk](mailto:admin@laganvalley.co.uk)

Website: [www.laganvalley.co.uk](http://www.laganvalley.co.uk)

## Equipment needed for the trail

- Outdoor shoes & clothing
- Trail booklets
- Teachers guide
- Clip boards / pens / crayons
- ID charts
- Measuring tapes
- Minibeast jars (optional)
- Tray for collecting minibeasts
- Camera (optional)

## Stop 1 – Belvoir House

There is a picnic area in front of the building. This is a good place to complete ‘the big house’ activity. the the pupils to tick of any trees that they find. Belvoir House was built by the Hill family in the 1750’s. They were very rich and the name Belvoir may be short for “belle voir” or “beautiful view”.

When Arthur Hill-Trevor died in 1771 the estate should have been passed down to his eldest son but he died in 1770 so it went to his grandson who was only eight years old. He became the second Viscount Dungannon at the age of eight. From this time on the Hill-Trevor family only stayed in the house occasionally.

Between 1809 and 1818 Robert Bateson acquired Belvoir estate. The Batesons came from Yorkshire. Robert Bateson, founder of the house of Deramore, was born in 1782 and died in 1863. He was created a Baronet in 1818. His eldest son Robert died in 1843 so his second son Thomas inherited the estate and was made Lord Deramore in 1885.

Lord Deramore died in 1890 leaving no male heirs so the title went to his brother, George William. He sold the estate and went to live in Yorkshire.

The last resident was Sir James Johnston who was Lord Mayor of Belfast in 1917 and 1918. He was married to one of the Gallagher family of the tobacco firm. The estate was sold to developers for building purposes in the 1930s.

During World War II, before the site could be redeveloped, it was used as a munitions store. Army and Navy personnel occupied the house and buildings. They stored torpedoes and large shells for battle-ships which were brought up from the Belfast docks. They were brought up the Lagan Canal by lighter (barge) and unloaded at the wharf at Belvoir. Because the site had to be secured there were military barricades with sentries at each end of the road at Newtownbreda. The soldiers would have parties and concerts in the old house.

### **The End of an Era**

By this stage the house was in such bad repair that it had to be demolished. The demolition was called “Operation Lusty” and on 18th February 1961 the house was blown up. The rubble was used to build the car park where the house had been sited.



*Standing with your back to the stable buildings go left across the car park and follow the path downhill until you reach a magnificent old oak tree.*



## Stop 2 - The Oak tree

### Seeds: Acorns

Oak trees are widespread throughout Lagan Valley Regional Park; in fact, Belvoir Park Forest is home to the oldest oak tree in Ireland which we believe is about 500 years old. Oaks are deciduous, broad-leaved trees that can support more species of wildlife than any other Irish tree. They have lobed leaves and rough bark. You can identify oaks in winter by their bark and brown coloured buds. This tree however is about 300 years old.

### Stories:

Known as, 'The King of the Trees', oak trees are a symbol of strength. The acorns were often used for fattening pigs.

### Uses:

Oak wood was valuable and was used for making ships.

Ask the kids to examine the bark, it's a perfect habitat for minibeasts. Oak trees are great for talking about food chains. Ask the pupils to complete the 'life in an oak tree' activity, other activities include: bark & leaf rubbings.



*To the left of the ancient oak tree you will see a hill with steps going to the top this is the old Norman motte.*



## Stop 3 - The Normans

The Normans, who invaded England in 1066, came from Normandy in Northern France.

The Anglo-Norman invasion of Ulster began in 1177 when John DeCourcy led a private venture of 22 knights and about 300 soldiers north from Dublin and defeated an Irish chieftain named MacDunleavy at Downpatrick. His military successes enabled him to occupy most of the lands which today comprise Co Down and South Antrim, and he rewarded his knights with manors defended by mottes and castles. Unlike English medieval barons, the Ulster Anglo-Normans were not lords of demesnes and villages but lived off rents they exacted from tenants in dispersed settlements. DeCourcy had to secure his hold on the land quickly and effectively. He built two great stone fortresses at Carrickfergus and Dundrum and his lords hurriedly, erected other castles of earth and timber, which had mottes and palisades, trenches and wooden archery towers and in some places baileys. The bailey was the area surrounded by the palisade, used to house the lord's servants and livestock or often, in Ireland, the soldiers.

### Belvoir Motte

Belvoir was one of these private mottes. "Motte" is a French word meaning "mound". They were man-made and were constructed by digging earth up from a ditch and then covering it with a layer of clay to stop erosion and slippage. At Belvoir the motte rises on the highest point of the river bank, with the bailey to its North East at a lower slope of the bank.

The bailey has been largely displaced, first by the construction of a carriage way, that extends between it and the motte, and then by the erection of the ice house. From the top of the motte in Belvoir you can see how they would have been able to defend it from people attacking from the river which would have been one of the main means of access at that point.

## The Keep

On top of the motte there would have been a wooden castle or “keep” which would have housed the knight and his family. The bailey was the area where the ordinary people and all the animals, or often the soldiers, would have lived. It would have been connected to the motte by a wooden bridge or causeway and in times of attack everyone would have retreated into the keep for safety.

The lord could over look the River Lagan and most of his land which would have included most of Belvoir Forest. John DeCourcy was based in Carrickfergus so all his knights would have travelled there for important occasions.



*Follow the path to the left of the motte. Be careful as you pass, the path is narrow.*



## Stop 4 – The River Lagan

The River Lagan is one of the major rivers in Northern Ireland and flows 40 miles (60 km) from Slieve Croob Mountain in County Down to Belfast where it enters Belfast Lough.

This is a good spot to chat about freshwater ecosystems and what kind of wildlife lives in the river. When you find a safe place to stop complete the River Lagan activity sheet.

## Animal Tracks

As you walk along this path the river will be on your left. Look at the steep banks on the right this is a good place to see any signs or tracks through the mud.

**Answers to tracks & trails:** 1. badger, 2. duck, 3. fox, 4. dog, 5. heron, 6. squirrel



*At the bottom of this path you will come across an old ice house building on your left. Get the kids to explore this site. Let their imaginations run free by asking them what they think this building was used for?*



## Stop 5 – The Ice House

In common with other large country houses of the late 18th and early 19th centuries an ice house was built to store ice to keep food fresh.

The ice house consists of an entrance at ground level, facing north to keep the temperatures down and a conical underground chamber which would have contained the ice. It is brick-lined for extra insulation.

The reason it is underground is to keep the general temperatures down. At the bottom of the chamber there is a drain which lets the melted water from the stored ice drain away, in this case into the River Lagan.

Ice was sourced from the River Lagan, packed into the interior during the winter when the rivers and ponds froze over. This task was probably done by the head gardener and his staff. Once the store was filled it was shut up and the entrance tunnel filled with straw for extra insulation. This was only possible due to the severity of the winters during this time.

All this was done in order to preserve and maintain the food stuffs for the landowner and his family. This meant the landowner would have a varied diet even during the winter months when the produce available was limited unless imported. Another example of how those with money and power could maintain a lifestyle which not only showed their social status but meant their general wellbeing was much improved especially compared to the working classes.



*Follow the path; you will pass under a large metal pipe. Ask the pupils to come up with ideas as to what it may contain.*

### The Pipeline

This pipeline carries sewage from South Belfast to the sewage works at Knockbreda.



*After you cross the bridge and pipeline you will come to crossroads. Turn right; follow the stream upwards until you reach a little stone bridge. There will be yew trees on either side of this ornamental canal.*

## Stop 6 – The Arboretum

This area would once have been the gardens of the big house. They would have had a kitchen garden and an orchard that would have provided much of the food to the house. It was fashionable for wealthy families to have exotic trees from all around the world such as Japanese Maple, Redwoods, Cypress, Spanish Oak and Bamboo. There were a series of ornamental canals, bridges and terraces that were built to enhance the landscape of the gardens and some of these can still be seen today. They would have been used to provide interest while the residents of the house, especially the ladies and their visitors, went for gentle walks.



*Complete the first part of the arboretum activity at the bridge. Then staying on the left hand side of the stream, follow the path until you reach a turning on your left. You will see a giant redwood tree.*

## Stop 7 – Giant Redwood Trees

Giant Redwoods come from North America and are the world's largest living organisms. They can grow up to 90m in height and up 8m in diameter. These trees can live up to 2000 years. Giant Redwoods are an evergreen tree, native to California. The soft, fibrous tree bark can be up to 90cm thick and is red-brown in colour. The reason the bark is so thick is to protect it from fire. In Britain the tree was named *Wellingtonia gigantea* after the Duke of Wellington, who died in 1852.



*With the giant redwood on your left follow the path to the top of the hill. You will find a maple tree with a grassy area to complete the activity below.*

## Stop 8 – Discovering the Natural World Activity

Get the children to find their own quiet spot. Ask them to sit quietly and observe the natural world around them, making notes or drawing pictures to present what they have found. After about 5 or 10 minutes get the children to form a circle and discuss their findings.



Take the path to the left, walk for about 30 meters and you will find a woodland area on your left. Complete the activity below.



## Stop 9 - The Woodland

This is a great place to talk about woodland ecosystems, insects, birds and mammals. You can ask the children to look for minibeasts and record what they have found in the table inside the trail booklet.

There are a number of trees in this area that the children can explore; beech, sycamore, ash, birch, maple, horse chestnut and lime. They can use the ID charts to correctly identify the trees by their leaves, in summer, and their buds, in winter).

Using a measuring tape complete the age of a tree activity. Other activities include: bark rubbings & leaf rubbings.



With your back to the woodland, turn right (back the way you came). Follow the straight path that runs along the top of the park. (don't turn down the hill towards the giant redwood tree) Keep walking until you reach an old graveyard. You cannot access the graveyard due to health and safety, however you can ask the pupils to look through the gate and complete the activity.



## Stop 10 - Bredagh Church and Graveyard

This is the graveyard of the old parish church of Breda, in the Townland of Breda. Previous to 1658 there were two separate parishes of Knock and Breda but as both had fallen into decay one new church was built in 1747 for the parish of Knockbreda.

The graveyard at Newtownbreda goes back to medieval times and would have been associated with Breda Church. Members of the Hill family were buried here and the site includes their mausoleum. There were burials still taking place until the 1920s but after this period several gravestones had been removed and the graveyard was not well maintained. More recently the entire site and many of the graves were vandalised with the vault of the Dungannon family raided for the lead coffins.

This is also a good area to look for conkers as the trees adjacent to the graveyard are all horse chestnut.



*With the graveyard on your left follow the path, it has a horseshoe bend. At the bottom of the bend turn left crossing the bridge. Walk up the hill and take the right fork in the path. Continue to the top of the hill, you will find a wooden bench this is a good spot to carry out the next activity.*



## Stop 11 – Squirrel Country

Larch trees are the only conifers that are deciduous. In the autumn they turn beautiful shades of orange, red and yellow before they lose their needles in winter. Larch cones are a favourite food source of the red squirrel. As you walk through this section of woodland you will almost certainly see a red or grey squirrel. Squirrels build their nests (dreys) in the top of trees. They look very similar to a crow's nest. Squirrels are excellent climbers and can often be seen running along the branches jumping from tree to tree. A baby squirrel is called a kitten.



*Continue along the path, turning left at the next t-junction. Follow this path, at the top turn left; this will bring you back to the car park.*