Bogs of Ballymoney

Welcome to Ballymoney's Bog Land Biodiversity

How to use this guide

This guide will introduce you to the fantastic bog land resource that exists within the Ballymoney area, highlighting the areas where you can experience this first hand and the species you might see there.

There is also a brief identification guide to some of the bog land biodiversity; birds, plants, and insects that you will encounter in these special places.

Only two of the sites mentioned are publicly accessible and simple directions of how to get to each site are given along with the main parking areas, and Ordinance Survey grid references are included.

Symbols are used to indicate the facilities you can expect at the two publicly accessible sites (see key).

The wildlife at some points may be more sensitive to disturbance, so please follow the principles of Leave No Trace.

1/ Plan Ahead

2/ Be Considerate of Others

3/ Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife

4/ Travel and Camp on Durable Ground

5/ Leave What You Find

6/ Dispose of Waste Properly

7/ Minimise the Effects of Fire

www.leavenotraceireland.org

IRELAND leave no trace

Key:

Parking

Waymarked Trail

Dogs Welcome (Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times)

No Dogs

Antrim Coast and Glens AONB

Introduction

Peatlands or bogs are an ancient landscape, up to 10,000 years old, and are a characteristic part of the Irish landscape due to the islands cold, wet climate. In Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland there are three different types of bog; lowland raised bogs, blanket bog and lowland fens.

NI contains a significant proportion of the remaining bog resource in Europe and therefore the importance of these bogs cannot be over-emphasised.

Ballymoney has an internationally important peatland resource of both lowland raised bogs such as Garry Bog and blanket bog such as Slievanorra and Croaghan. Our bogs have a unique range of plants and animals that use them from insect eating plants like sundew to birds of prey like hen harriers.

This booklet gives an introduction to the bogs of Ballymoney Borough and highlights the two sites which have public access that lets you experience this rich biodiversity. Use this booklet as a starting point to dip your toes into Ballymoney's bog land biodiversity.

Threats

Across Europe, bogs have been destroyed or changed significantly through drainage, agricultural reclamation, afforestation, burning, and peat-cutting for fuel and gardening.

Opposite page, left: Cross-leaved heath
Opposite page, right: Four-spotted chaser dragonfly
Background: Hen harrier

Why we need our bogs

In addition to the unique biodiversity found in our bogs, they also contribute to providing us with clean drinking water, flood control and carbon storage.

A substantial portion of our drinking water filters through peat. Maintaining and improving our bogs is a good way to ensure our continued good quality drinking water.

Bog mosses, can store up to 20 times their own weight in water, and active bogs release their water slowly and evenly into streams and rivers which aids flood control.

All green plants take in carbon dioxide, then when they die they release their carbon back into the air. However when bog plants die they along with their carbon form peat. So while our bogs are active and growing they continue to lock up more carbon.

Garry Bog

Garry Bog is one of the largest areas of lowland raised bog in NI and is especially important for its partially intact lagg. Its importance for biodiversity is recognised with several national and European designations: Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), National Nature Reserve and Ramsar Site.

In the past there was extensive drainage to improve the land for forestry and agriculture, the site is now protected from further drainage through the designations. The turf cutting has left a mosaic of water-logged cuttings and elevated ramparts, creating a different species diversity; in the waterlogged cuttings you will find, cross-leaved heath, deergrass and cotton grass. Within the dome of the bog there are many typical and rare plant species, one of which is the nationally rare Sphagnum pulchrum a prominent 'pool edge' species.

There are many other interesting plants and species that can be found including bog asphodel, white beak-sedge, common cotton grass, sundews, and white-tailed bumble bee.

Garry Bog is important for the development of Dendrochronology, the science of dating trees by counting and measuring growth rings. It is also a pioneering site of Tephronchronology, the study of fine tephra which is dust fragments resulting from explosive volcanic activity. When tephra falls into places like Garry Bog, it may be possible to date the volcanic events that created them.

Access and facilities

The main access to this site is from the Ballybogey Road, approximately 2 miles from the Portrush Road roundabout, Ballymoney. Parking is possible along the road side. The entrance gateway has a Northern Ireland Environment Agency sign. This is a short linear route along a strimmed grass path, approximately 0.25miles.

Starting point grid reference: IC931299

You can also access the bog through Garry Wood, via Conagher Road. There is limited parking at the entrance to the forest. Access is along forest paths and grass paths. This is a linear route approximately 0.5miles

Starting point grid reference: IC949307

Background: Garry Bog

Opposite page, left: Great sundew

Opposite page, right: Sphagnum

Above left: Common lizard

Above right: White-tailed bumblebee

Slieveanorra & Croaghan

Slieveanorra and Croaghan is one of our best areas of blanket bog, which is recognised by its designations both nationally, Slieveanorra and Croaghan ASSI and at a European level, Antrim Hills Special Protection Area (SPA).

This is an area of largely intact blanket bog, which means the peat lies like a blanket over the hill. There are areas of bog pools where you will see plants like sphagnum, bog bean and aquatic bog mosses. Other plants you should see as you walk along are bog asphodel, both round-leaved sundew and great sundew. Much of the bog is dominated by heather, cross leaved heath, hare's-tail cotton grass, crowberry and bilberry. This area of bog provides an important habitat for upland birds, especially merlin and hen harrier which breed near-by and use the area for feeding. Other birds you may be lucky to see are snipe, skylark and raven. Common lizards have also been seen here.

Slieveanorra and Croaghan ASSI also incorporates Slieveanorra National Nature Reserve which covers an area on the summit of Slieveanorra Mountain, which is important as it shows the different stages in the formation and erosion and regeneration of peat.

Access and facilities

The Croaghan Way incorporates two self-guided circular trails; the 'Milibern Walk' (3 miles) and the longer 'Breen Forest Walk' (5.5 miles). Parking is available at Altarichard car park, Altarichard Road, accessed via the Orra Scenic route. There is a short walk along the road at the start and end of the walks, with the rest being way marked trails over blanket bog and along forest tracks.

The trails exist by way of an access agreement between Ballymoney Borough Council and the landowners, Blakiston-Houston Estates, with the cooperation of Forest Service.

Starting point grid reference: ID123295

You can access the NNR via Altarichard Road on the Orra Scenic Route. There is limited parking on road at the entrance to Slieveanorra summit. Access is via the Moyle Way along a metalled track. This is a linear route approximately 0.5miles

Starting point grid reference: ID144278

Background: Croaghan Way
Opposite page, left: Bell heather
Opposite page, right: Bog asphodel
Above left: Deergrass
Above right: Raven

Main Valley Bogs

The Main Valley Bogs SAC is an important concentration of lowland raised bogs along the River Main valley. It includes three active raised bogs namely; Dunloy Bog ASSI, Caldanagh Bog ASSI and Frosses Bog ASSI. Frosses Bog lies within Ballymena and is included due to its importance within the SAC as a whole. Unfortunately no public access is available to these sites however, it is important to highlight these unique habitats for wildlife.

Caldanagh Bog (background)

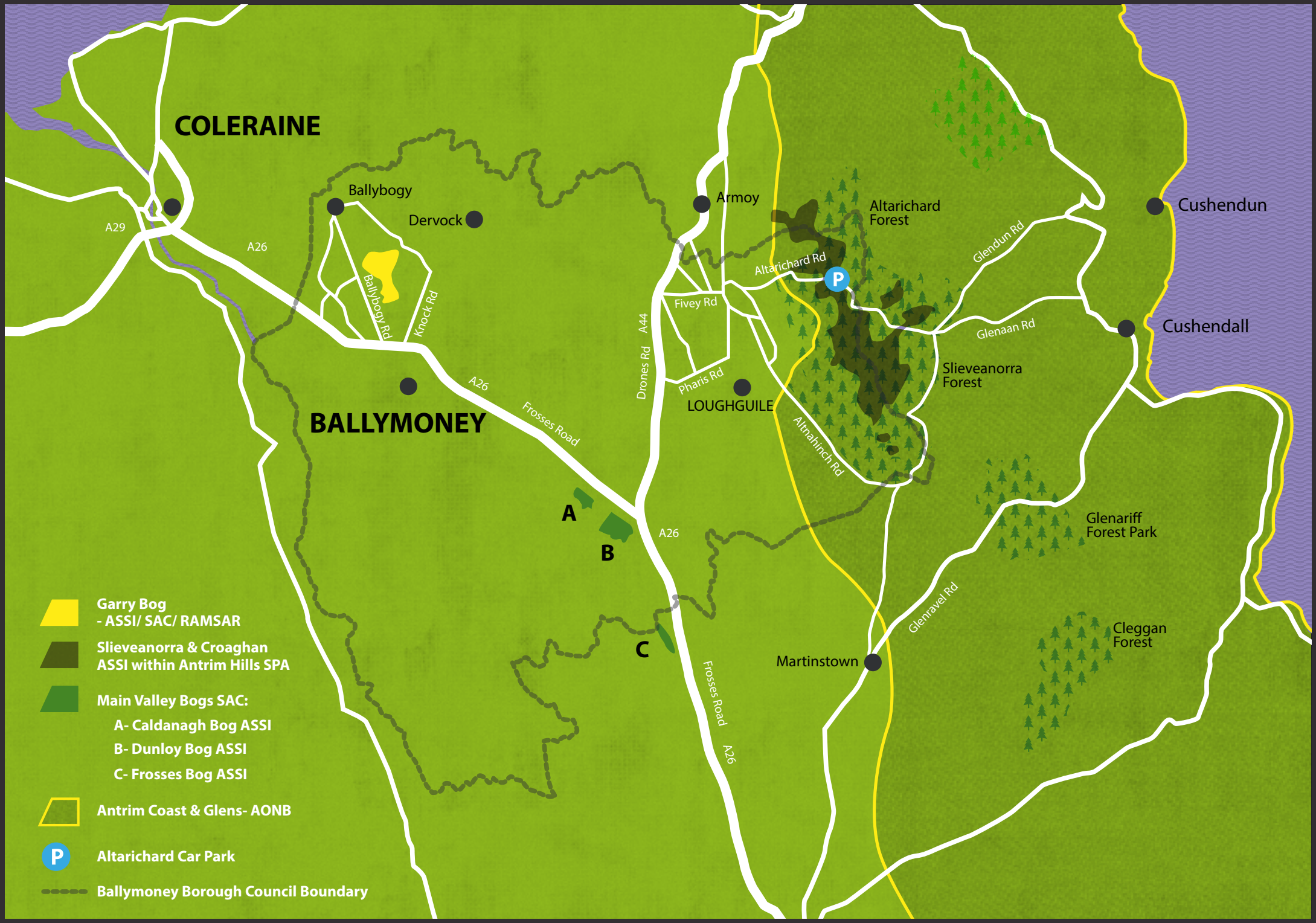
Compared to its neighbour at Dunloy, Caldanagh Bog is a more compact lowland raised bog at 35.5 hectares. It displays the classic domed profile of a lowland raised bog and there is minimal turf cutting on its margins. Where cutting has occurred, vegetation varies from bogbean and great sundew supported by deep artificial pools through to purple moor-grass dominated grasslands. One of the most important features is an area of intact lagg along the north-eastern edge. The surface of the bog is exceptionally wet supporting a dense and diverse cover of Sphagnum mosses, most notably the nationally rare Sphagnum pulchrum, abundant in the hollows. Similar to Dunloy, the overall diversity of the bog is enhanced by a small esker ridge to the south-west. The site is also an important nesting and winter feeding habitat for curlew and snipe and golden plover have been recorded feeding on the bog.

Dunloy Bog (left)

At 108 hectares, Dunloy Bog is one of the largest remaining areas of undamaged lowland raised bog in NI. Even with burning and turf cutting around the margins, the bog still retains a large intact dome with a well-developed hummock/hollow complex. It contains extensive Sphagnum lawns and the rare mosses Sphagnum fuscum and Sphagnum imbricatum. The most important feature is the unbroken transition from bog to lagg, the most extensive and least disturbed bog to lagg transition in NI. On its western edge, an unusual esker ridge provides an area of both unimproved grassland and heath. Here some interesting plants can be found including the notable burnet saxifrage. Unusually, cowberry, regarded as an upland species, can be found.

Frosses Bog

The most southerly of the Main Valley Bogs, Frosses Bog is another fine example of a relatively undisturbed lowland raised bog with an intact surface and well defined dome covering 43.4 hectares. An abundance of cranberry throughout the bog plain is notable among the sward of heather, cross-leaved heath, common cottongrass and scattered tussocks of hare's-tail cottongrass and deergrass. The dwarf shrub crowberry can be found on the intact dome, unusual within a lowland raised bog.


COLERAINE
BALLYMONEY
LOUGHGUILE
Ballybogy
Dervock
Armoy
Cushendun
Cushendall
Altarichard Forest
Slieveanorra Forest
Glenariff Forest Park
Cleggan Forest
Martinstown
A29
A26
A44
Ballybogy Rd
Knock Rd
Frosses Road
Drones Rd
Fivey Rd
Pharis Rd
Altarichard Rd
Glendun Rd
Glenaan Rd
Altnahinch Rd
Glenravel Rd
A
B
C
P
Garry Bog
- ASSI/ SAC/ RAMSAR
Slieveanorra & Croaghan
ASSI within Antrim Hills SPA
Main Valley Bogs SAC:
A- Caldanagh Bog ASSI
B- Dunloy Bog ASSI
C- Frosses Bog ASSI
Antrim Coast & Glens- AONB
Altarichard Car Park
Ballymoney Borough Council Boundary

Birds

Identification Sheets: Here is some of the biodiversity that you might come across on your travels through the Bogs of Ballymoney


Hare's-tail cottongrass

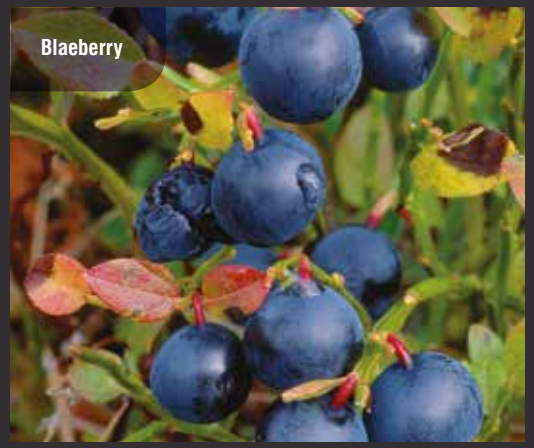

Great sundew

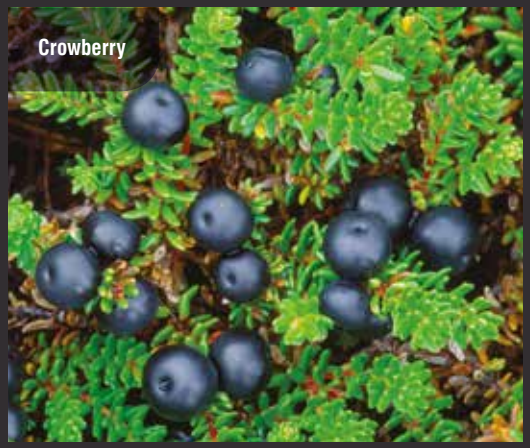

Deergrass


Sphagnum


Bell heather


Bog asphodel


Blaeberry


Crowberry


Bogbean

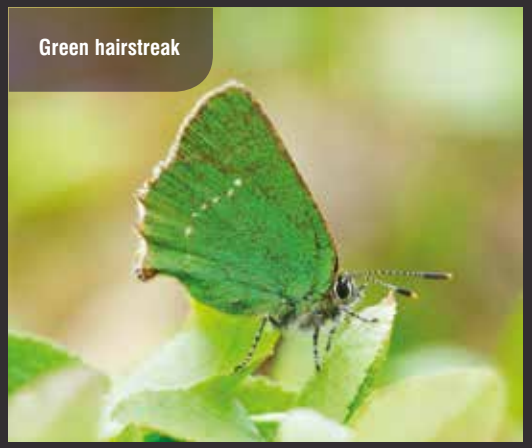

Cross-leaved heath


Butterwort


Lesser butterfly orchid

Plants

Identification Sheets: Here is some of the biodiversity that you might come across on your travels through the Bogs of Ballymoney



Insects

Identification Sheets: Here is some of the biodiversity that you might come across on your travels through the Bogs of Ballymoney

Different types of bog explained

Lowland Bog (right)

Lowland raised bogs get their name because the bog is raised in the middle like a dome and this dome develops and increases in size as the lowland raised bog grows upwards from the surface, and the dome is fed solely from rain water. In a natural state, this dome may be totally or partially surrounded by an area of shallow peat or soil which may be subject to ground water influences or periodic flooding known as the 'lagg'.

Blanket Bog (background and right)

Blanket bog generally occurs in higher altitudes of around 200m or more and is a layer of peat and associated vegetation of an average depth of 0.5 - 3m covering the land like a 'blanket'. Globally it is restricted to cool, wet climates like the UK and Ireland, and is one of the most extensive semi-natural habitats in NI due to the high annual rainfall, topography and glacial soils. It builds up slowly as the vegetation dies back and decomposes, accumulating to form peat under waterlogged conditions. It can also form on steeper slopes where drainage is freer.

Similar to lowland raised bogs, the surface of an intact blanket bog is waterlogged, acidic and deficient in plant nutrients. Only a limited number of plants that can tolerate these harsh conditions grow on blanket bogs.

Lowland Fen

Lowland fen is a wetland with a permanently high water level at or just below the surface. Fens can be further subdivided into many categories according to the rock substrate below, their location in river valley basins, floodplains or on higher ground adjacent to blanket bogs and their occurrence beside other habitats. Distinguishing fen from a range of closely associated habitats can be difficult as they often occur within a matrix of raised bog, wet grassland, open water and wet woodland plant communities.

Further Information

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Above: Variable damselfly
Front cover: Ling heather

Inside front cover: Merlin
Back cover: Slieveanorra

Inside back cover:
Cross-leaved heath

NGO CHALLENGE FUND 2014
Funded by
NIEA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Environment
FORESTSERVICE
DARD Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
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environment link
BALLYMONEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CAUSEWAY COAST & GLENS HERITAGE TRUST
Antrim Coast & Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
heritage lottery fund LOTTERY FUNDED
Heart of the Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme