



Stemish



Slemish Mountain

This guide introduces you to the rich geology, biodiversity and landscape you will find during your visit to Slemish Mountain.

Visitors are encouraged to remain on the well-defined trails both up and down the mountain. These are indicated on the enclosed map.

Symbols are used to indicate the facilities you can expect at the site.

Many plants and animals across the mountain are sensitive to disturbance, so please Leave No Trace by:

1. Planning Ahead and Preparing
2. Being Considerate of Others
3. Respecting Farm Animals and Wildlife
4. Travelling and Camping on Durable Ground (*camping is not permitted at this site*)
5. Leave What You Find
6. Disposing Waste Properly
7. Minimising the Effects of Fire

www.leavenotraceireland.org



Key:



Toilet facilities



Interpretation and Orientation Area



Car Park



Picnic and BBQ Area



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



Antrim Coast & Glens AONB

Introduction

Located within the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Slemish Mountain, historically called “Slieve Mish” (Irish: Sliabh Mis) dominates the landscape near Ballymena. Slemish is said to be where Saint Patrick tended livestock for his master during the 5th Century. Today large crowds walk to the top of the mountain as a pilgrimage to Ireland’s Patron Saint every year on St Patrick’s Day (17th March). From the top of the mountain there are breath-taking views of the Antrim and Scottish coasts to the east; Ballymena town, Lough Neagh and the Sperrin Mountains to the south-west and the Bann Valley and Antrim Hills to the north.

Slemish is the remains of an extinct volcanic plug. This gives rise to its distinctive appearance with steep rugged upper slopes, relatively flat bogland to the east and small, neat fields on its lower western slopes.

A living landscape

From the top of Slemish there are spectacular views across the surrounding landscape and as you make your way to the top you may spot many plants and animals which are of interest. This short guide will help you identify many of these, if you have any questions or spot anything unusual don’t hesitate to take a picture and contact your local biodiversity officer.

In general the uplands around Slemish are predominantly covered in rush pasture, heath and blanket bog. This type of habitat is common in upland areas across Northern Ireland such as the Sperrins and the Mourne. The uplands around Slemish are important for breeding curlew, lapwing and snipe. You might even spot a hen harrier during your visit. This raptor nests on the ground and uses the large expanse of open habitat to feed. Other common birds that can be spotted are merlin, buzzard and red grouse. (<http://biodiversityni.com/>)

Slemish and Saint Patrick

Legend has it that following his capture and arrival in Ireland, Saint Patrick worked as a shepherd on Slemish Mountain for six years for a man named Milchu (or Miluic). During this lonely time on Slemish Saint Patrick turned to prayer for comfort. It was during this period that Saint Patrick had a vision that he should escape and return home to Wales.

Having escaped, Saint Patrick later returned to Ireland to spread Christianity. Saint Patrick was not the first Christian Bishop in Ireland; however he established many churches and strong Christian values among the population. One such church is thought to have been founded at the nearby Skerry Churchyard.



Geological Origins of Slemish

The iconic Slemish Mountain is a prime example of a volcanic plug (the root of an ancient volcano).

Following millions of years hidden beneath the landscape, the volcanic plug has been exposed by weathering and erosion and now stands proudly as the most dominant feature in the surrounding countryside.

This ancient volcano would have been active around 60 million years ago (when Europe and North America split apart) and formed as molten rock, or magma, forced its way upwards through the pre-existing rocks.

Slemish Mountain is just one of a network of sites in the area that tells the story of volcanic activity during the early part of the Palaeogene period. Whilst such activity ceased millions of years ago, the legacy of such dramatic Earth processes is still clearly visible in the landscape.

Sites which began to form at the same time as Slemish, include the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site, the distinctive Binevenagh Mountain, Carrick-A-Rede, the Ring of Gullion and the Mourne Mountains.



Antrim Coast & Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Antrim Coast & Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 1988. It includes Rathlin Island, the Glens of Antrim and the coastal area between Larne and Ballycastle. This area contains some of the most spectacular and varied scenery in Northern Ireland.





Dominated by the Antrim Plateau which rises to over 500m, the entire area is cut by fast flowing rivers to form a series of picturesque glens running east and north-east towards the sea. The Antrim Coast and Glens AONB is an area of contrasts with Northern Ireland's only inhabited offshore island, gentle bays and valleys, dramatic headlands, farmland and the wild open expanses of moorland on the basalt Antrim Plateau. The area has a long settlement history with many important archaeological sites, listed buildings, historic monuments and conservation areas. Rich in folklore, it has a strong cultural heritage and close associations with Scotland. On a clear day there are fine views eastwards to the Scottish Islands and the Mull of Kintyre which is only 12 miles away from Torr Head.

Slemish Habitats and Biodiversity

Slemish Mountain and the surrounding area comprises of a rich mosaic of upland habitats, containing a diverse variety of plants and animal species. These habitats are the result of varied slope, drainage and soil structure across the mountain coupled with the effects of public access on the plants and animals.

The base of the mountain has well drained acid grassland habitat characterised by species such as Mat Grass (*Nardus stricta*), Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) and Heath Bedstraw (*Gallium saxatile*). This area has been colonised by significant areas of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), which is suited to well drained upland habitats and when allowed to grow unchecked can dominate large areas of land due to its resistance to grazing and it's few natural herbivores. The scattered wind battered Hawthorn trees (*Crataegus monogyna*) around the base of the mountain give a bleak appearance and many are of a considerable age.

Further up the south and west sides of the mountain where the soils are thinner and the gradient is steeper, the habitat is very well drained and is more suited to dry heath species such as Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), the areas dominated by these species form a mosaic with acid grassland patches and exposed rocky outcrops.

The North East face of the mountain is more gently sloping than the other sides and is therefore home to species which favour these wetter conditions such as Cotton Sedge or Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), moss communities including Sphagnum species and bog species such as Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) and Orchids.

The summit of Slemish is under significant pressure from trampling due to the number of visitors to the site. As a result, the species which may have been dominant here such as Heather and Blaeberry have been replaced by species such as Deer Sedge (*Trichophorum cespitosum*), Great Wood Rush (*Luzula sylvatica*) and Mat Grass (*Nardus stricta*), which are tolerant to a high level of trampling and disturbance.

Scattered throughout the site are flushes which are extremely wet habitats caused by the channelling of water to a specific small area by a spring or the presence of a spring. These areas are home to another group of water loving species the most interesting of which are the small carnivorous plants such

as the Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) and Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*). These three species use specially adapted leaves that excrete sticky fluid to capture and digest small flies and invertebrates. Other species found on flushes include Orchids (*Dactylorhiza*), Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*).

Various other species of interest are found across the site as individual plants on rocky outcrops and ledges. These include Sheepsbit (*Jasione montana*), Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*), Bitter Vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*), Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*) and Cats Ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*).








Managing Visitors

Between April 2013 and March 2014, 3,314 vehicles visited Slemish, giving an estimate of 12,338 visitors, with a recorded 2,750 visitors on Saint Patrick's Day alone. This represents a large number of visitors throughout the year and particularly on Saint Patrick's Day, making the trampling of vegetation and the subsequent altering of habitats a major concern for management of the site's biodiversity.


Uncontrolled access and large visitor numbers or concentrations can create issues with particularly sensitive habitats, particularly in wetter areas such as flushes and the wetter heath on the east side of the mountain, as indicated by the presence of Cotton sedges and Moss communities. Visitors are advised to follow the route of the Slemish Trail and not to stray onto sensitive habitat areas.



Key

 Causeway Coastal Route

 Additional Scenic Routes

 Motorways

 Roads

 Railway

 Ferry Crossings

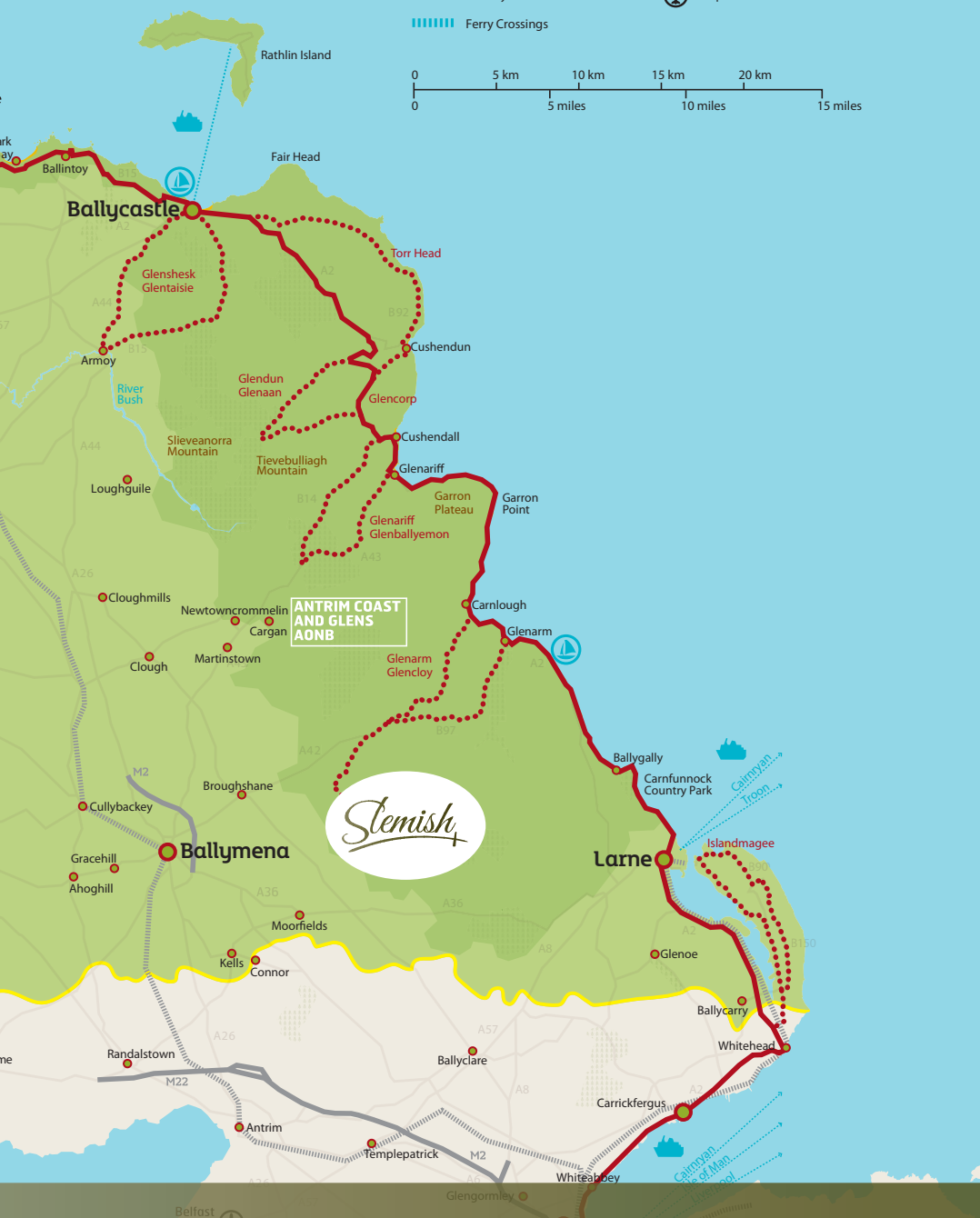
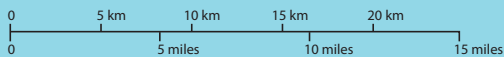
 Causeway Coast and Glens Region

 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty AONB

 UNESCO World Heritage Site

 Marinas

 Airports



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**Slemish is sign posted
from Broughshane Village**

**Ballymena 9 miles
(via Broughshane)**



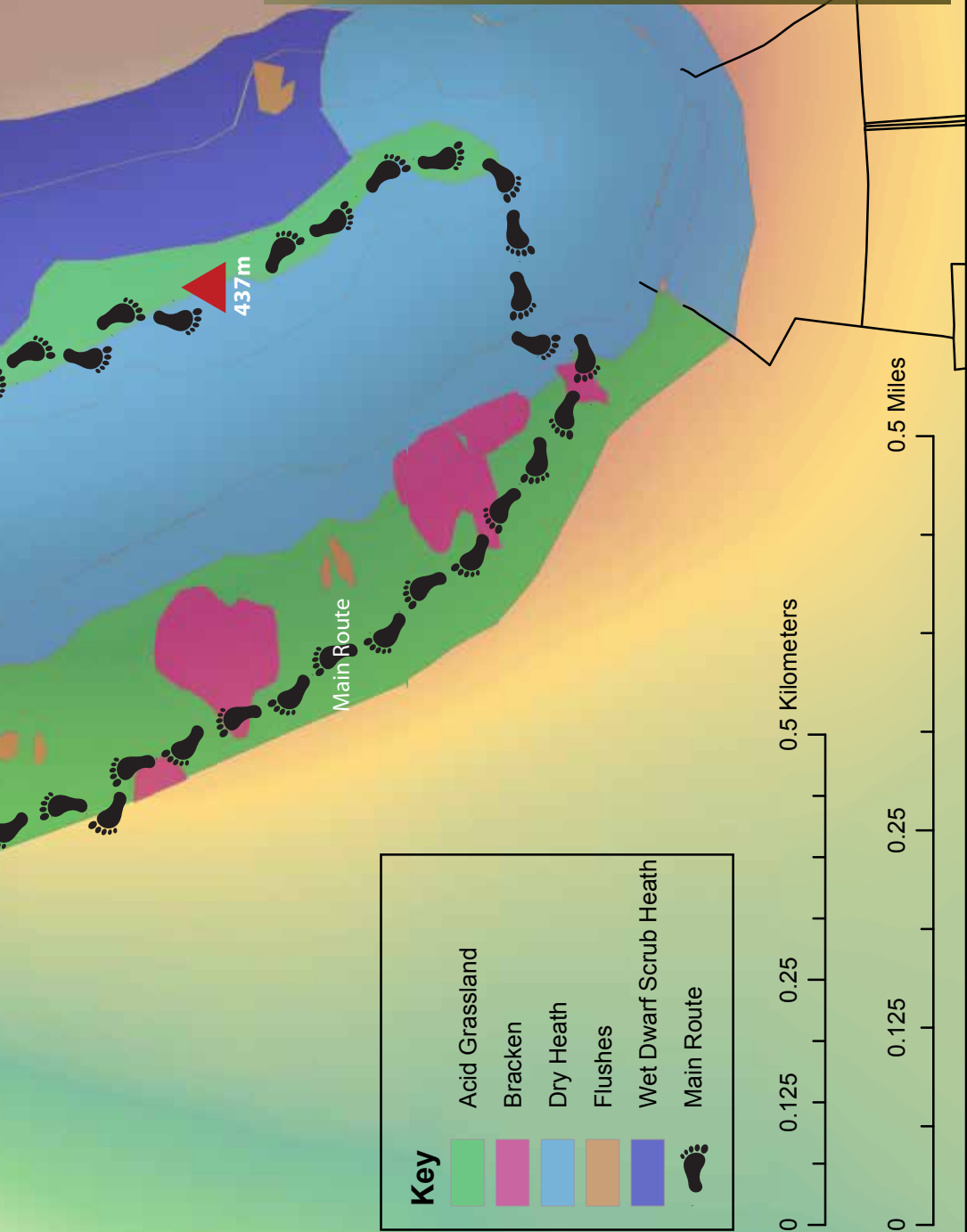
Carnstroan
Lane



Main Route



Slemish Habitat and Access map



Curlew



Lapwing



Snipe



Hen Harrier



Merlin



Red Grouse



Birds



Species Identification Chart:
Some of the biodiversity you may come across on your visit to Slemish.

Common Heath Moth



Emperor Moth



Four Spotted Chaser



Fox Moth



Ginger Tailed Bumble Bee



Meadowbrown Butterfly



Insects

Northern Eggar Caterpillar



Orange Tip Butterfly



Small Copper Butterfly



Small Heath Butterfly



White-Tailed Bumble Bee



Other Common Species Found at Slemish

Cinnabar Moth
Drinker Moth
Six-Spot Burnet Moth
Green-Veined White Butterfly
Meadow Brown Butterfly
Peacock Butterfly
Ringlet Butterfly
Small Tortoiseshell

Species Identification Chart:

Some of the biodiversity you may come across on your visit to Slemish.

Ling (*Calluna vulgaris*)



Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*)



Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*)



Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*)



Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*)



Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*)



Plants

Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*)



Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*)



Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*)



Wild Thyme (*Thymus polytrichus*)



Great Wood Rush (*Luzula sylvatica*)



Blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)



Species Identification Chart:
Some of the biodiversity you may come across on your visit to Slemish.

Common Deergrass (*Trichophorum cespitosum*)



Fir Clubmoss (*Huperzia selago*)



Cat's Ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*)



Acid Grassland

Mat Grass (*Nardus stricta*)
Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*)
Tufted Hair Grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*)
Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*)

Flushes

Common Yellow Sedge (*Carex demissa*)
Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*)
Common Cotton Sedge (*Eriophorum angustifolium*)

Dry Heath and Acid Grassland Mosaics

Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*)
Bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)

Bracken

Pteridium aquilinum

Wet Dwarf Scrub heath

Deer Sedge (*Trichophorum cespitosum*)
Cotton Sedge (*Eriophorum angustifolium*)
Great Wood Rush (*Luzula sylvatica*)

Other Common Species Found at Slemish

Bitter Vetch (*Lathyrus linifolius*)
Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*)
Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*)
Sheep's-bit (*Jasione montana*)
Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*)
Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*)
Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*)

Further Information

Useful Contacts

Causeway Coast and
Glens Heritage Trust,

The Old Bank,
27 Main Street,
Armoyle,
Ballymoney,
Co. Antrim,
BT53 8SL

Tel: +44 (0)28 2075 2100
info@ccght.org

Ballymena Visitor Information Centre,
The Braid Ballymena Town Hall,
Museum & Arts Centre,
1-29 Bridge Street,
Ballymena,
Co. Antrim,
BT43 5EJ

Tel: +44 (0)28 2563 5010

www.gatewaytotheglens.com
tourist.information@ballymena.gov.uk

Alison Diver,
Biodiversity Officer,

Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

Tel: +44 (0)300 1245000
biodiversity@midandeastantrim.gov.uk

www.biodiversityni.com

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David Armstrong

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