



 **ecotrails**

VICTORIA PARK

GUIDE TO ECOTRAIL



Location

Victoria Park car park on Google maps - Victoria Park, Belfast

On grid refs - 54°36'22.9"N 5°53'10.5"W

Also general and Coach parking at Airport Road, Harbour Estate,

On Google Maps at 54.607186, -5.892958

On grid refs - 54°36'25.9"N 5°53'34.6"W

Getting there by road - *Please note* – entrance off the Sydenham Bypass is not accessible by car. Access via Sydenham Bypass on foot is not recommended unless the visitor or group leader is familiar intimately with the area (see by train below).

From the Newtownards Road, in the East Belfast area of the City, the park is signposted from the Holywood Road, Connsbrook Avenue and finally Park Avenue leading to the car and mini-van (**definitely not coach**) underpass beneath the road and railway track.

For all vehicles: out of the City, or coming in from the Holywood direction, take the A2 Sydenham Bypass to Dee Street/Titanic Belfast/ Odyssey exit, take the first exit at Dee Street roundabout and third exit at Sydenham Road roundabout to Airport Road lay-by (opposite Bombardier main entrance)

Getting there by public transport:

By bus, use Metro Service 3A, get off at Inverary Drive (Sydenham Halt). Cross the pedestrian bridge (over the Sydenham Bypass). Once at the bottom of the steps continue straight ahead along the footpath, past the East Belfast Yacht Club until you come to Sydenham Bypass entrance to Victoria Park.

OR use Metro Service 26, get off at Bombardier Main Office on Airport Road. Cross the Sam Thompson Bridge to access Victoria Park.

By train, take the Bangor/Belfast Translink service to Sydenham Halt and cross the pedestrian bridge. Once at the bottom of the steps continue straight ahead along the footpath, past the East Belfast Yacht Club until you come to Sydenham Bypass entrance to Victoria Park.

Route: Circular route following park paths.

Terrain: Level, enclosed parkland grounds with encircling raised embankment.

Access: Accessible for all walkers, runners and cyclists.

Wheelchair access is possible for most of trail, but the outer grass path may only be passable with support.

Safety: Ecotrail begins in a car park, so normal road safety precautions should be taken.

In places, there is open access to lakes and the river.

Time: Allow 2 hours.



Welcome to Victoria Park!

To start using the Ecotrail, make your way to the post E1 on the grass beside the bridge.

The car park and some of the paths are open to traffic, so please take care.

This Ecotrail will guide you through the park via a series of points of interest which will provide you with the opportunity to both discover and investigate.

LEADERS POINT – Some things to remember during your visit:

- be careful of your own and others' safety - especially near water;
- 'Leave No Trace' – your visit should not harm or leave any mark on the landscape;
- work together – the Ecotrail should be fun, so help each other!

These wee folk may help! Together you can,



Discuss



Look



Write

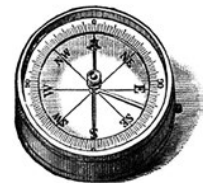


Check

E1 Using the Map

As well as helping you find your way around the park, the map can tell you a lot more about the landscape and its features, both near and far -

- a map represents what's around you using a variety of symbols all shown in a **KEY**,
- distance in real life has been made smaller onto the map using a **SCALE**.
What is the scale of this map?
- direction is found using the points of the compass, and **NORTH** is shown on the map.



Remember the **clockwise order** of the main points of the compass by learning, "Never Eat Shredded Wheat" (North, East, South, West)

Check to make sure that you can all find the key, scale and north on your map.

Now, **ORIENTATE** the map – hold it the right way up and face towards the bridge.

And so from E1,

- in what direction is the observation area?
- in what direction is the underpass entrance?
- what symbol is used for an aircraft guidance light and in what direction is the nearest?
- in what direction is the nearest pair of goal posts?

North
South



North-east
North-west



The Bridge

Victoria Park is looked after for the people of Belfast by Belfast City Council. The Council built this bridge to replace the old one which had become unsafe.

By looking around carefully, can you find who represented the Council at the bridge's official opening?



**ON THE BRIDGE WALL-PLAQUE – official opening 7 Dec 2005.
Councillor Jim Rodgers OBE with Lord Mayor, Wallace Browne.
Belfast City Council manage/look after all public parks in Belfast.**

You can find out more about the City Council and its parks at,
<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/leisure/parks-openspaces/parksAtoZ.aspx>



E2 The White Willow Tree



This willow is the oldest tree in the park.

If, **for example**, it started growing in 1900, what age would the tree be now?

Also, discuss ways in which you can tell that it's the oldest tree? For example, can you find ways to compare it to other trees?

**Age – 100 +14 (at time of writing)
Oldest by, a) Girth (measured by tape, string or no. of arm spans); b) Height; c) Crown size**



The Tree Identification Guide at www.ecotrailsni.com will help you to identify this and other

Now, look at this image, can you find this part of the tree?

AT ADULT HEAD HEIGHT ON PITCHES SIDE OF TREE

A tree can support a large number of other species such as birds, animals and insects when it is living and also when it has died and is rotting.

This image shows another plant growing in the bowl of the tree made by the shape of the trunk and branches. It doesn't grow into the tree or harm it – its roots stay outside the bark. The name for this type of plant is an **EPIPHYTE** (epi – fite).



So, if it's on the tree, but doesn't get food from the tree, how do you think it manages to survive?

Rotting leaves and other vegetable matter provide nutrients.

Find out more about epiphytes at,
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/190131/epiphyte>

There's another park relic nearby - can you find the old park bell? Look all around. In days gone by, the bell would have been rung in the evening by the Park Warden to warn visitors that the gates were about to close.



Can you think of other places where a bell would be rung to make an announcement?

Church, school, on a ship, town crier, front door, big clock, old telephone...



Now! Before you go.

Take a close look at the piece of apparatus – the wooden structure right beside you. You'll have to be able to remember some things about it in just a little while!



Now it's time to walk for a while. Make your way to E3.

E3 The Woods



Mature mixed woodland has a range of distinct layers. Can you identify them here?

Canopy – the highest layer, formed by the leaves and branches of the highest trees.

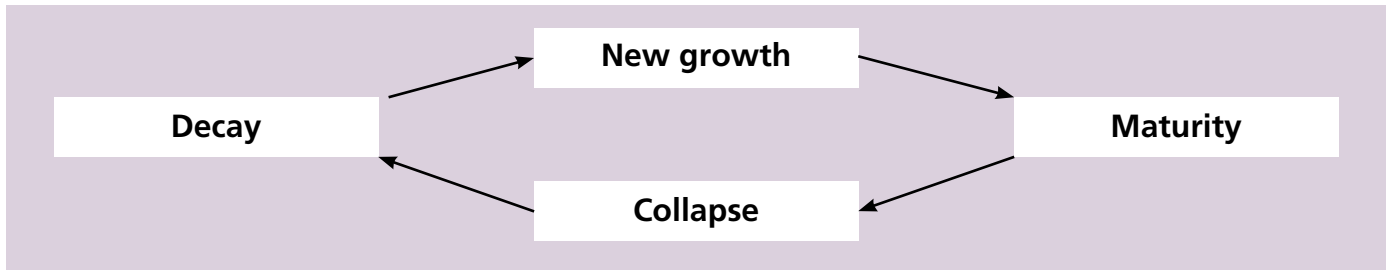
Shrub – up to 2 metres high, formed by larger woody plants, small trees, brambles and flowering bushes.

Field – tender or annual plants, ferns and herbs.

Ground – grasses, mosses and creeping plants.



This diagram shows the **WOODLAND CYCLE** – it is encouraged here and in other places in the park even though most of the growth is quite young (unlike the White Willow!):



On the ground, you may see a layer of leaves, twigs, berries and nuts. This 'leaf litter' forms part of the process of decaying and providing food for new life amongst the plants, animals and insects. Look around carefully and find evidence of some of the **DECAYERS** -



Insects – worms, slugs, woodlice, centipede, earwig, snails. They eat living and dead things and some break up wood by boring holes.



Fungi – they get their food from living and rotting things. The fruit is the bit you can see like the mushroom. The fungus spreads thin roots underneath the surface and helps to rot material away.

Bacteria – these are so small that you cannot see them.

Things we found that help with rotting:

woodlice, spiders, worms, centipede, ant, other insects, fungi – the white threads running underneath leaves and humus are probably the branches, or plant part of fungus, called mycelium

Now!

The TRIM TRAIL. It's time to remember some of the details about the Trim Trail station that you saw at E2. Along with the ones here, decide how people are meant to use them.

Turn to **E7** in your booklets and look at the table -

Activity	Push	
Tally	III	



As you go along the path, look at each part of the Trim Trail and fill in the details on the table at **E7**

LEADERS POINT – it may be necessary to outline how a TALLY is made.



E4 Air Navigation

You've maybe already heard and seen aircraft arriving at and departing from George Best Belfast City Airport during your time in the park.



Together, can you find the symbol for this pictured feature on the map and what it stands for?

Also, what direction are the planes going if they are landing over your heads?

Aircraft guidance light

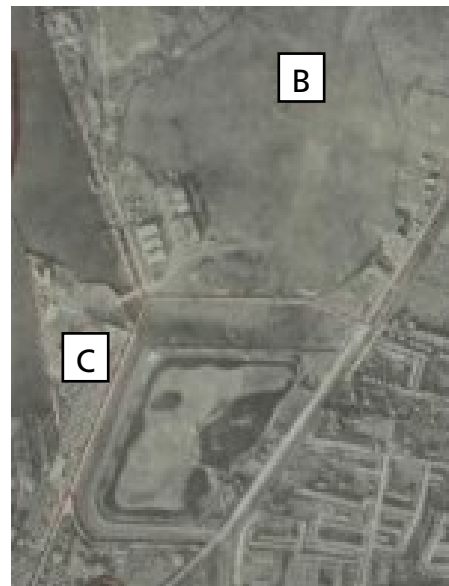
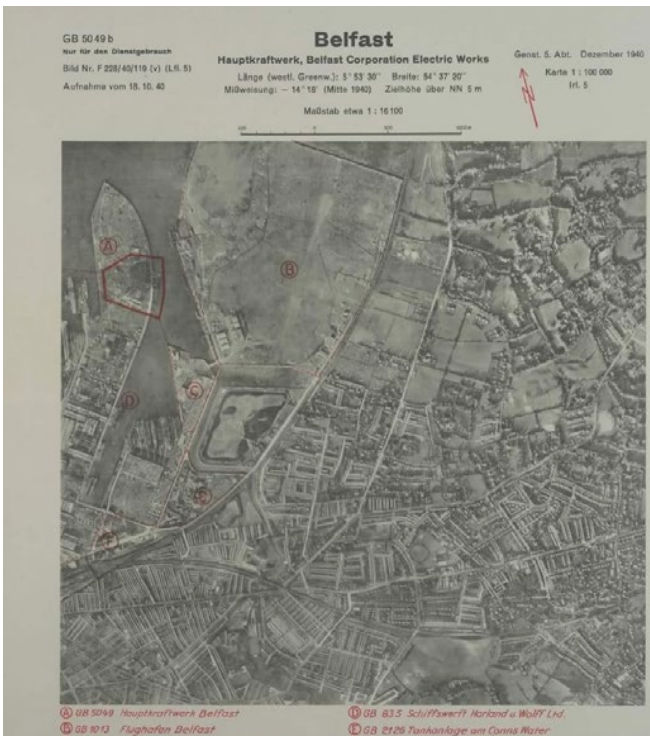
North-east



During the Second World War, the airport was a target for German military aircraft bombers – it was also close to the major Electric target of the harbour with its ship building industries.

On this WW2 German aerial photo below, the airport is target 'B' and Shorts Brothers Ltd (now Bombardier), which was an airport for sea planes at that time, is 'C'.

LEADERS – the writing on the maps is unclear, but the important point to note here is the park's proximity to the port and other targets. The smaller map is detail from the main one.



Can you align your park map with the photos to see how it fits in with the WW2 targets?

There were, indeed, air raids in 1941. To find out how the area suffered as a result of the German bombing, visit:-

http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/4_11/pfocus/history/summer2000/

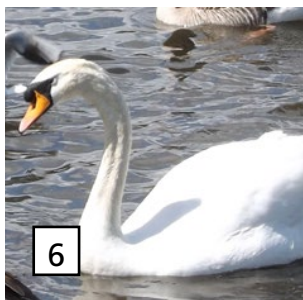
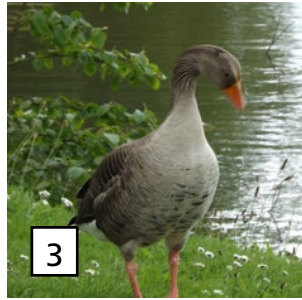
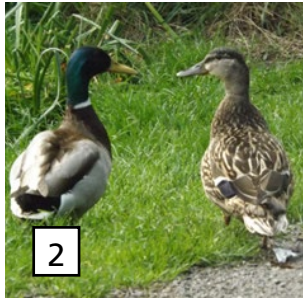
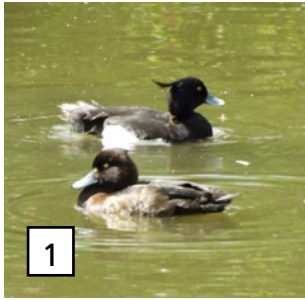
http://www.proni.gov.uk/no.2_-_the_belfast_bltz__65kb_.pdf



E5 The Lake

The water in the lake is **brackish** – which means it is a mixture of fresh and salt water (the river runs into the sea nearby).

Because of this, the park attracts a wide variety of sea birds and water fowl. Some stay the whole year, and others visit as they migrate during the summer or winter.



How many of the birds pictured can you spot on your visit? Tick the box in the chart below and name them if you can! Later on you can fill in the ones that you don't know. Remember to work together!



Number	1	2	3	4	5	6
Found						
Name	Tufted Duck	Mallard	Greylag Goose	Coot	Black-headed gull	Mute Swan

Find out more about birds and discover the answers at,

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/families/swans.aspx>

<http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/IrelandsBirdsfurtherdetails/Waterbirdsmenu/tabid/401/Default.aspx>



Victoria Park is a unique habitat at one end of a very important wildlife sanctuary. The park itself has been designated as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) within the wider Special Protection Area (SPA) which is managed by the RSPB.

The remaining wetlands and mudflats on the edge of the city offer a fertile habitat and sanctuary for native and visiting birds. Places where they overlap with our urban and industrial world are particularly important, which is why Victoria Park – a place built for people but also a valuable wildlife haven – is under special protection.

Find out more about wildlife habitats from,

<http://www.communitygreenway.co.uk/section-d6/victoria-park>

<http://www.rspb.org.uk>



E6 Recreation

If you haven't noticed already, most of the grounds on the island are given over to one particular sport...**Football!**

Every weekend during the season, and many other evenings in-between, the pitches are crowded with players from teams of all levels and abilities.



They are following in a long tradition of people using the grounds for sport.

A bit of history...

In 1854 the Belfast Harbour Commission agreed to grant the Belfast Corporation (now Belfast City Council), 'not less than 50 acres of land for the purposes of a public park to be called, Victoria Park.'

By 1864, the land, as it appears today, had been reclaimed and in 1902 the City Council eventually agreed to fund the remaining works to complete the park.

In 1904, the Railway Company built the underpass and in 15 September 1906, Victoria Park was officially opened.

On 31st March 1909, Harland and Wolff began work on the world's largest passenger liner, RMS Titanic.



By 1909, Harland and Wolff employed around 15,000 people, mainly men, who lived within walking distance of the shipyard in the dense maze of streets springing up around it. From the late 1800s, Victoria Park had become the only open level space in the vicinity, so it was no surprise that it became a focal point for sports and field games, especially football, with teams made up from different ship building trades.



Look together at the map and find the symbols for goal posts in the key – how many pairs can you find on the island?

Now let's see if you can work something out...
If a soccer pitch is 100m long by 50m wide,
how many m² are there in one pitch?

5000 m²



**For 7 pitches
35000 m²**

By counting the number of pitches on the map,
calculate how many m² in the park are given over to football?



E7 Trim Trail



You'll have seen a number of pieces of apparatus like this pictured one along the path – they are part of the Trim Trail.

Since the start you've been completing a table of the activities at each of the stations along the way.

Now can you agree together on a final, complete table?



Firstly, find the map symbol for Trim Trail point and agree the total number for the tally. Here are some activity examples – choose from these and make up your own:

Push Pull Roll Balance Jump Squat Hop Throw

Examples below will vary – construct an agreed group.



Activity										
Tally										Total 13

E8 Poetic Inspiration



Here you have reached a part of the park which is quite different to the island trail. It is a path much better suited to visitors who want to stroll along by the water and enjoy the birds, trees and flowers.

On the posts, pupils from local schools have written poems to describe the things they can see, and how being in the park makes them feel relaxed.

Together, make a collection of words to describe how you feel and the things that you see.

Build a collection of descriptive words and phrases using;

- **Adjectives (before the noun) - noisy duck, ancient tree, rusty leaf**
- **Adverbs (after the verb) – sway gently, gaze quietly, glare fiercely**



Later, you can make up your own poems from your shared bank of words and phrases. Here's a sentence as an example, *'Strolling quietly along the winding path, I listened joyfully to the brightly coloured ducks quacking noisily.'*



E9 The Sam Thompson Bridge



For the first time since the original reclamation that created the land for Victoria Park, there is a physical link across the Connswater to the Harbour Estate where some of the park users over the years have spent their working lives.

This aerial photo from the 1980s is a crisp, full-tide shot which shows the park surrounded on three sides by water with the Sydenham Bypass on the fourth.



Can you match the features in the photo with the map?



The bridge was installed as part of the Connswater Community Greenway www.communitygreenway.co.uk

The project has connected the existing natural features of the Connswater, Knock and Loop Rivers with new paths and bridges. With significant improvements and enhancements the greenway has created a 'green lung' for the city, extending from Belfast Lough to the Castlereagh Hills

Why do you think the greenway is called a green lung for the city?

Provides fresh air for people to breathe – green for nature and conservation

What benefits do you think the greenway should bring to the residents of the city?

Health and Leisure - walking, jogging/running, cycling, bird watching, etc.



<http://www.communitygreenway.co.uk/trails>



Some follow-up ideas: Who was Sam Thompson? Why was his a good name for the bridge?



Artistic reflections – note the play of light and shadow on the lines and shapes across the bridge. How do these inspire further poetic or creative...**ART?**



E10 The Observation Area



Like the bridge, the observation area has been laid across the landscape with tactile curvilinear features – a fusion of the natural and manufactured.

It provides an enclosing space where the story of the development of Belfast can be traced through echoes in the surrounding panorama.

These flow from the basalt heights of the Antrim Plateau opposite, sloping down the rocks of the cliff face to the harbour and shipyard amongst ghosts of the iconic sweeping lines of the Titanic, past the tubular cylinders of the refinery in front, through the fringe of sails and rounded hulls on the shoreline, and over the steel, stone and brick of the urban sprawl to complete the eclipse in the rolling hills beyond.

E11 Transport Links

E11 is a good point at which to take note of the key transport and communication links for which the city of Belfast lies as the hub.

Here, you can make sense of the pylons of the aircraft navigation system seen in the park, and lined up as symbols on the map.

Can you find Victoria Park in the photo below? Remember to help each other.



Now, by observing the things around you at E11 and by looking at the map, can you list the types of communication links for Belfast on the doorstep of Victoria Park?

Road, rail, air, sea, telecoms, foot (with the new bridge and Greenway)



E12 Get Active!



Have you noticed the advertising board in the shelter? Take a closer look and you'll see how the montage is formed.

On the paths around, you'll find evidence of one type of activity which takes place on a regular basis in the park...it's obvious from the picture!

Together, examine the map details from this point to the car park along the strip between lake and road.

Finally, as you continue the route to complete the trail make a note of the activities on offer.

Running, biking, basketball, playground, bowling green



Later, check out these websites for up-to-date news, and, GET ACTIVE!!!



<http://www.parkrun.org.uk/belfastvictoria/>
<http://www.outdoorni.com/local-outdoors/venues/victoria-park/>
<http://www.walkni.com/walks/91/victoria-park/>
<http://www.communitygreenway.co.uk>



E13 The End... for now!



Well done! Just a few things before you go. Chat with each other about the things you've seen, heard, felt, and smelled today. Perhaps you've noticed different things?

LEADERS – lead discussion for follow-up opportunities

And the final word should belong to the oldest park resident – the White Willow tree – here since 1860!

Imagine the things that it has seen in its lifetime...



LEADERS – aides to the Ecotrail

–all websites have been vetted for appropriate use and are live at time of writing

Reference material:

- Collins 'Complete Irish Wildlife', Intro. Derek Mooney, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2004
- 'Titanic Port: an illustrated history of Belfast Harbour', Alf McCreary, Booklink, 2010
- 'Rivers of Belfast: a history', Des O'Reilly, Colourpoint Books, 2010
- 'A Breath of Fresh Air: the story of Belfast's parks', Robert Scott, The Blackstaff Press Ltd, 2000
- 'Sydenham and Strandtown 1902', Old Ordnance Survey Maps, Alan Godfrey Maps, <http://www.alangodfreymaps.co.uk/>

Other useful Websites for information and follow-up ideas –

History, Art & Culture:

BBC Belfast Shipyard 'golden age' story http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/topics/belfast_golden_age_shipbuilding
Street Directories shipyard Street Directories easy access <http://www.lennonwylie.co.uk/index.htm>
Titanic Belfast <https://www.titanicbelfast.com/>
Titanica exhibition at Ulster Folk & Transport Museum <http://www.nmni.com/titanic/Home.aspx>
Connswater Community Greenway www.communitygreenway.co.uk/trails

The Area:

Belfast Harbour Commissioners <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/interactive-harbour>
Visit Belfast – East Belfast <http://visit-belfast.com/things-to-do/member/east-belfast-1>
Connswater Community Greenway www.communitygreenway.co.uk
East Belfast Partnership www.eastbelfastpartnership.org
DRDNI map protected areas Belfast Harbour http://www.drdni.gov.uk/ysi_s2ar_vol_3_figure_6.4.1.pdf
East Belfast Community Development Association <http://www.ebcda.org/>

News and Issues:

Belfast Forum – Belfast message board and blog site <http://www.belfastforum.co.uk/>
Flooding of Connswater in 2014
<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/belfast-avoids-major-flooding-as-tide-peaks-29885250.html>
Belfast City Council www.belfastcity.co.uk

Activities:

- Outdoor NI – types of outdoor activity - <http://www.outdoorni.com/local-outdoors/venues/victoria-park/>
- East Belfast Yacht Club - <http://eastbelfastyachtclub.yolasite.com/>
- Victoria Park Run - <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/belfastvictoria/>
- Victoria Athletic Football Club, Victoria Park, Sydenham,
- South Antrim Football League, <http://southantrimleague.niclubs.co.uk/>

Follow-up writing ideas:

- <https://www.youngwriters.co.uk/>
- <http://www.stonesoup.com/>
- <http://www.readingjuice.co.uk/>
- <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/browse/>

More about woodlands and their birds, insects and animals can be found at:

- <http://www.ulsterwildlife.org/wildlife/habitats/woodland>
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/science/ocr_gateway_pre_2011/environment/0_ecology_organisms2.shtml
- www.woodland-trust.org.uk
- www.nativewoodtrust.ie

Travel & Communications:

Bus & Railway <http://www.translink.co.uk/>
Roads <http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/roadsni-3.htm>

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