



# History of Bog Meadows



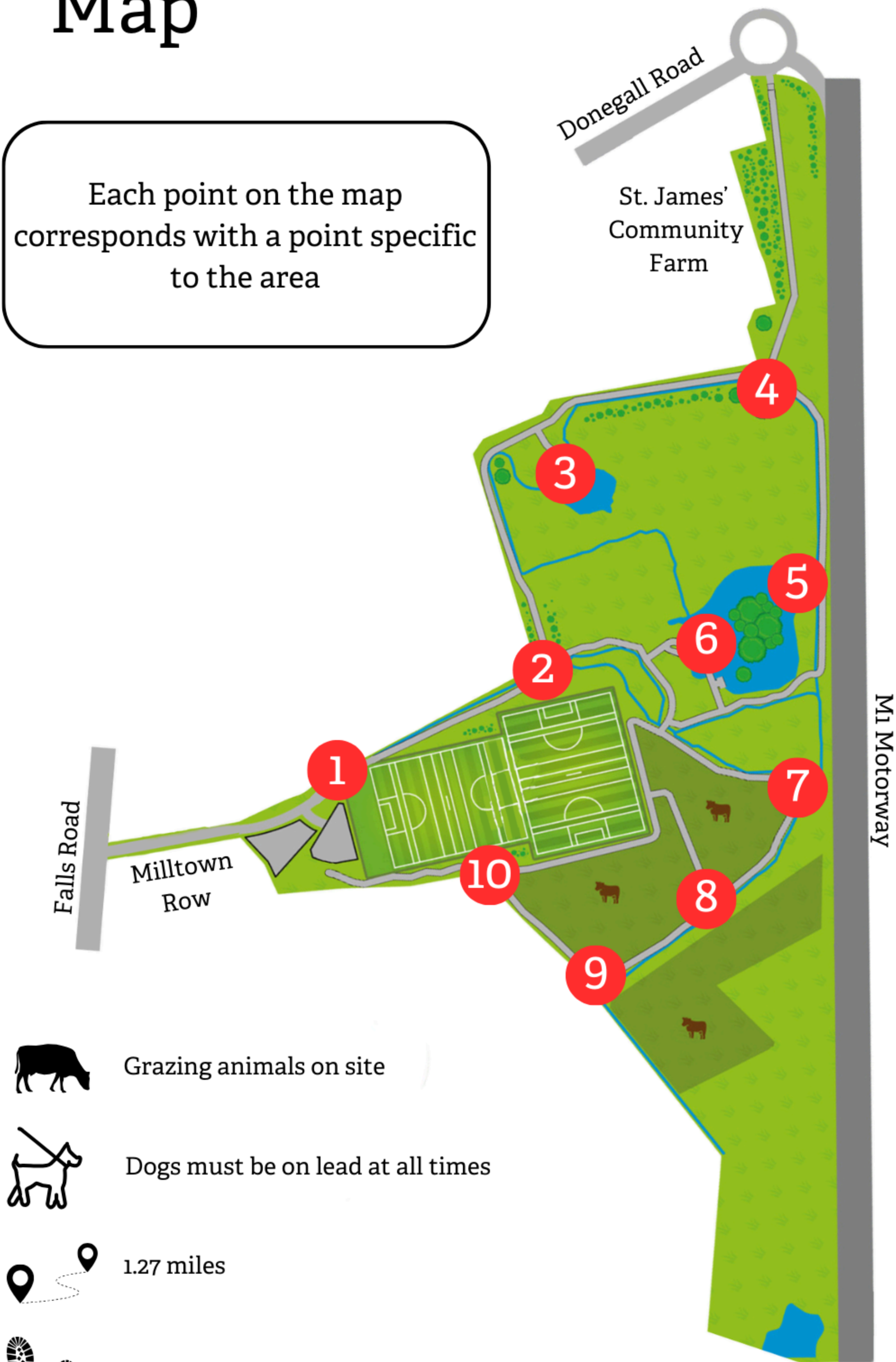
**COMMUNITY**  
FUND



**Ulster**  
**Wildlife**

# Map

Each point on the map corresponds with a point specific to the area



Grazing animals on site



Dogs must be on lead at all times



1.27 miles



3,000 steps



Easy Terrain





## **Introduction**

Welcome to Bog Meadows Nature Reserve, an urban oasis with a long history.

On this stroll through the wetland today you will be taking a step back in time and thinking of how people have shaped this landscape throughout the years.

We hope you enjoy pondering the Bog Meadows of the past, leave with an appreciation of its current role and a desire to see it continue to flourish, for people and wildlife in the future.





## One

**At the start of this walk, take a look at the surrounding area.**

The Falls Road was once a country lane, but following the Industrial Revolution the area grew into a bustling hive of factories which forever changed the landscape.

This lane is called Milltown Row, named for the mill workers that once lived in a row of houses that once stood here. In the 19th and early 20th century, Belfast was known as 'Linenopolis' and many people lived in mill houses. Belfast had more spindles than any other country in the world at the time.



Working conditions were difficult, with long hours and low wages. The site is now home to St. Galls and the Ulster Wildlife community garden



## Two

**As you walk the path towards the nature reserve you can see St Louises Comprehensive College built in 1958 and the pitches of St. Gall's.**

St. Gall's began in 1910 when pupils from St. Gall's De La Salle School persuaded their teacher, Brother Albeus Ryan, to start a football and hurling club.



The most recent change to his area was the Forth Meadow Community Greenway an EU PEACE IV-funded project officially opened in September 2023, with the goal of connecting open spaces in north and west Belfast along a 12km route from Clarendon Playing Fields to the city centre.



## Three

**Wetlands have historically been seen as wastelands and many have been destroyed.**

Since 1971 when the Ramsar Convention was established to protect wetlands, 1/3 of the world's wetlands have been destroyed.



Following along the edge of the reedbed you can get a clear view of this now rare habitat filled with reedmace (bulrush), marsh marigolds, yellow iris, and purple loosestrife.

Bog Meadows is an important site for insects which in turn feed birds such as the chiffchaff and willow warbler which return here from Africa to breed each summer.

In the summer months, watch closely as you may see a dragonfly or damselfly darting over the water.





**As you stand on the mound looking across the reedbed you are looking at a fragment of ancient landscape.**

This is a surviving remnant of the floodplain of the River Blackstaff, formed by melting glaciers during the last Ice Age. Back then Ireland would have been home to Mesolithic people who shared the land with many species of wildlife no longer with us today e.g. grey wolf, eurasian lynx, wild boar and brown bear.

There may also have been cranes which in Medieval times were the third most popular pet in Ireland and are deeply connected to culture and history. They are found in tales such as Fionn Mac Cumhaill, St Colmcille and the Book of Kells. Cranes went extinct in Ireland around the 1700s as many wetlands were drained.

In 2023 for the first time in 300 years, a common crane chick has fledged on restored Peatland in Ireland bringing hope that this once iconic species may someday return.





## Five

**The Industrial Revolution brought rapid change as many more people moved to work in the mills and factories needing housing and facilities in Belfast.**

This human impact meant the large wetland that once stood here got gradually smaller.

In 1962 the M1 opened, before this time the reedbed and wetland extended across to the area now built up on the Boucher Road. As you walk along the side of the M1 imagine how much quieter and larger the Bog Meadows would have been just over 60 years ago.



This habitat once covered around 1000 acres, however the growth of Belfast has reduced the natural area down to just 46 acres.



## **Six**

**As time progressed there were plans for development of the land that became the Bog Meadows Nature Reserve.**



Bog Meadows was the last recorded breeding site in the Belfast area for the corncrake, an extremely rare bird in Northern Ireland. In 1987, the “Friends of Bog Meadows” worked to raise awareness of the rich biodiversity within the site, removed lots of waste that was threatening the habitat and were successful in preserving this remaining area of wetland.

In 1989, Friends of Bog Meadows teamed up with Ulster Wildlife to purchase the land and manage it for conservation, recreation, and education. Following on from this, Bog Meadows was designated a “Local Nature Reserve” in 2000 and recognised by Unesco with a “Man and the Biosphere Urban Wildlife Award” for the role it plays in the positive contact between people and wildlife.





## Seven

**The pond that you see here was put in by Ulster Wildlife to benefit the many birds visiting the site.**

It's beautiful on a summer evening to watch the house martin, swallow, and swift swooping low over the water as they Hoover up insects.

The plaque in the ground on the mound was completed by pupils from St Louise's, it is interesting to look around and orientate yourself to many landmarks around Belfast.





## **Eight**

**Did you know the name Bog Meadows comes from the habitat you are now walking past, the wet meadows.**

These waterlogged fields were farmed up to the 1970's, and now provide another rare habitat for wildlife.

In Autumn the fields are grazed by hardy cattle to help maintain the biodiversity. Common snipe, now an endangered species, hide in the cover of the rushes. Look out for the common buzzard hunting in these fields for pygmy shrew and mice.



Come in summer to enjoy the meadow flowers in bloom e.g. meadow sweet, common spotted orchid, and great willowherb, adding a brilliant splash of colour and providing important sources of food for the many species of bees and butterflies that thrive here.



## Nine

**Look up towards the hills, think of how they have also changed.**



The hills were once covered in trees, providing many environmental benefits to the city and surrounding wildlife. As with Bog Meadows, there are now organisations and dedicated people conserving and enhancing the area to benefit wildlife.

Everyone knows the benefits of trees in combating climate change, but did you know that wetlands also have an important role to play? Wetlands are some of the most threatened habitats in the world but when properly managed they are an important carbon sink, filter the water flowing through them and can mitigate against the impacts of floods and droughts – both predicted to rise as our climate changes.

All at the same time as providing wonderful blue space which is proven to help reduce stress in those visiting the site.





## Ten

**“The ecotherapy the bog meadows have given me saved my mental health and life.” Response from 2023 Survey by Ulster Wildlife, Bog Meadows Past, Present and Future.**

In the survey many local people warmly recalled playing here as children, with the bull rushes, hearing the corncrake and reminiscing about the benefits of having a bit of wildness, Springsprog land to some, on their doorsteps. During the stress of Covid it provided a welcome respite for many, including medical staff working nearby.





Since 2020 Ulster Wildlife and St. James Community Farm have been working in partnership to create a vibrant community hub helping people develop skills offering a range of volunteering events and education programmes based around nature, conservation, animal husbandry and gardening, all thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund.

What is the future of this oasis for people and wildlife? Surrounded by dense housing on two sides and cut off by a busy motorway this is an unlikely environmental good news story.

Hopefully this will continue providing a much-needed haven for wildlife and people in the city.



Enjoyed this self-led walk of  
Bog Meadows Nature Reserve?

You can help protect this special  
haven for wildlife by becoming a  
member of Ulster Wildlife today.

**[www.ulsterwildlife.org/join](http://www.ulsterwildlife.org/join)**



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