



Fairhead



Sculpture, Broughshane



Natural Heritage

Cushendun



Heath spotted orchid



Glenariff Glen



Wood Anemone

Antrim COAST & GLENS

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB)

Background

In Northern Ireland the Antrim Coast & Glens AONB is one of eight scenic areas designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Three of these, Causeway Coast, Binevenagh and Antrim Coast & Glens AONBs and part of another, Sperrin AONB, are within the Causeway Coast & Glens area. AONB designation recognises each of these landscapes as having national importance and aims to protect and enhance their landscape quality for the benefit of those who live there and for those visitors who come to enjoy it.

Antrim Coast & Glens AONB

The Antrim Coast & Glens AONB was designated in 1988 under the Nature Conservation and Amenities Lands (Northern Ireland) Order. It includes Rathlin Island, the Glens of Antrim and the coastal area between Larne and Ballycastle. There is no doubt this area contains some of the most beautiful and varied scenery in Northern Ireland.

The area is dominated by the Antrim Plateau rising to over 500m and cut by fast flowing rivers to form a series of picturesque glens running east and north-east towards the sea. Above all the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB is an area of contrasts with Northern Ireland's only uninhabited offshore island, gentle bays and valleys, dramatic headlands, farmland and the wild open expanse of moorland on the plateau. Added to this 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 20 km away from Torr Head.

Geology

The geology of the Antrim Coast & Glens is dominated by tertiary basalts which formed part of a massive lava flow some 55-60 million years ago overlying other older sedimentary rocks including sandstone, shale and limestone. In the north-eastern part of the area the basalt has been eroded away to reveal silvery schists more than 300 million years old.

This has created a landscape of many contrasts with red sandstone, white limestone, black basalt and grey clays often reflected in place names such as, Red Bay, Black Cave and White Bay. The area is also characterised by a series of deep glens running eastwards to the North Channel, known as the 'Nine Glens of Antrim'. These are the product of glaciation and were formed during the last Ice Age.

Travelling north the coastal part of the AONB is characterised by a series of striking headlands including Ballygally Head, Garron Point, Torr and Fair Head and by Rathlin Island. Inland the Antrim Plateau, an exposed and desolate landscape, has its own wild beauty. Slemish Mountain is a distinctive landmark and Trostan, the highest point on the plateau, reaches a height of 550m.

The unique geology of the area has also created

some varied and dramatic coastal scenery. Following the last Ice Age sea levels fell to leave a series of raised beaches along the coast such as those at South Bay near Carnlough. Sea stacks such as the White Lady at Garron Point and often caves like those at Red Bay were also left high and dry as sea levels adjusted after glaciation. Other features of interest along the coast include the conglomerate caves at Cushendun and fossils are common within the lias clay and white limestone at Drumnagreagh near Glenarm. There are dramatic cliffs along much of the coastline but this is particularly the case on Rathlin Island.

Flora & Fauna

The Antrim Plateau is a harsh and open landscape. Partly covered by blanket bog its mosaic of heath and pools can provide cover for ground nesting birds such as the red grouse and hen harrier. It is also home to many rare plants such as the insect-eating butterwort.

The rocky coastline supports a rich array of marine life. Whales, dolphins, seals and occasionally otters visit this coast and Rathlin Island attracts over 250,000 breeding seabirds each year including razorbill, kittiwake and puffin. It is also noted for its many rare sponges. Elsewhere fulmars breed along

the cliffs whilst cormorants can often be seen diving and fishing from the rocks.

Buzzards are common in the more intimate landscape of the glens which includes some fine native ash and hazel woodland such as the Nature Reserves at Straidkilly and Glenariff. The small spate rivers, home to the dipper, still receive runs of both sea trout and salmon.

Yellow 'whin' bushes and red fuchsia break up the hawthorn hedges and primroses, bluebells and orchids provide colour in spring. As summer progresses these give way to harebell, bird's-foot-trefoil and the rare wood vetch. Other less common plants include the pyramidal bugle on Rathlin Island and the rare wood crane's-bill at Feystown.

Many other species make this AONB their home including for example the common blue and large heath butterflies, damselflies, bats, badger, fox and hare.

Designated Natural Heritage Sites

The Garron Plateau has been designated as a RAMSAR site. This recognises this site as a wetland of international importance. The blanket bog habitat is particularly important for a range of breeding

birds including golden plover, red grouse, merlin and hen harrier and for its specialist bogland plant communities.

Rathlin Island is the only Special Protection Area within the AONB. These are breeding bird sites recognised by the UK government as having international importance and are protected at European level. Rathlin is important for its breeding seabird community.

There are three Special Areas of Conservation within the AONB. These areas are considered as some of the most seriously threatened habitats in Europe and are protected at European level. Rathlin Island, Garron Plateau and Breen Wood are all designated sites with Breen recognised as one of the best examples of old sessile oak woodland in Northern Ireland.

In addition to these designations, five sites have been designated as Nature Reserves. Slieveanorra NR is important in helping to explain the different stages of peat bog formation. These sites are considered to be of national importance.

Finally NIEA has designated over 26 Areas of Special Scientific Interest within the AONB such as Scawt Hill near Ballygally which has geological interest and is also a breeding site for the peregrine falcon.

Further Information

For further information on the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB contact:

Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
'Tilly Molloy's', 18 Main Street, Armoyle, Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, BT53 8RQ.
Tel 028 2075 2100 Fax 028 2075 2101
Email: info@ccght.org Web: www.ccght.org
www.antrimcoastandglensaonb.ccght.org

NI Environment Agency (NIEA)

Klondyke Building, Cromac Avenue, Gasworks Business Park, Lower Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 2JA.
Tel: 0845 302 0008 Email: nieainfo@doeni.gov.uk
Web: www.ni-environment.gov.uk/index.htm
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Cultural Heritage

Scullion Hurl

Much of the character of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB is derived from its close associations with Scotland. Previously part of the ancient sea kingdom of Dalriada, the Scottish influence is evident everywhere in place-names, music, language and dance. Fought over by the McQuillans, McDonnells and near neighbours the O'Neills its turbulent history is reflected in the many battle sites throughout the area such as Slieveanorra, Glentaisie and Rathlin. Glenarm Castle has been home to the Antrim McDonnells for over 400 years.

Folklore is alive and well within the Antrim Coast and Glens and the area has always had strong associations with the 'wee folk'. Many of the place names reflect this tradition such as Feystown (town of the fairies), Breen (the fairy palace) and Skeagh (the fairy thorn). In terms of mythology the area has associations with 'Ossian the bard', the 'Children of Lir' and also produced Julia McQuillan, Bonamargy's 'Black Nun' who could reputedly predict the future. The area has many literary associations and oral history, music and dance are all still strong. The middle glens around Cushendall are famous for traditional sports especially hurling whilst four oar gig racing takes place within many of the coastal villages but is especially popular in Carnlough. Other more unusual traditions include model boat racing which takes place on Rathlin every year.



Farming

The Antrim Coast and Glens AONB is a living landscape and its many small farms have produced an intimate patchwork of hedgerows and dry stone walls. Most of the farming is beef and sheep with some potatoes grown on the better ground such as the Braid Valley. A large part of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB has been designated as environmentally sensitive helping to ensure this rich agricultural heritage is retained for the benefit of future generations. Glenariff has distinctive 'ladder farms' allowing each farm to have a strip of land running from the valley floor to the upper slopes.

Industry has also had a significant impact on the area. Limestone quarrying was previously important at Carnlough and still continues today at Glenarm and Kilwaughter. Similarly Iron and Bauxite ores were previously mined at Glenravel and shipped to Scotland. Low quality coal was also mined near Ballycastle.

Fishing has been confined to mainly inshore lobster and crab. Torr Head is the only fixed net salmon fishery still in use along the coast.

Tourism has always been important. The Antrim Coast Road now known as part of the 'Causeway Coastal Route' was built between 1832 and 1842. A plaque north of Larne commemorates both William Bald, the Scottish engineer and the 'Men of the Glynnnes' who helped to build this famous touring route.



Built Heritage

Glenarm Castle

Archaeology

The Antrim Coast and Glens has been settled since Mesolithic times (7000-4000BC). Later during the Neolithic period (4000- 2500 BC) porcellanite axeheads from Tievebullagh and Brockley on Rathlin were traded throughout Britain and Ireland. Court, Portal and Passage Tombs are common such as at Carnanmore close to Torr Head. Bronze Age sites include Dunteige Wedge Tomb and Knockdhu promontory fort overlooking Ballygally. A second large promontory fort at Lurigethan near Cushendall may date from the Iron Age (300BC-AD400). Rath and Cashels, such as Altadore Cashel near Cushendun are typical of the Early Christian period whilst medieval monuments include Bonamargy Friary and Bruce's Castle on Rathlin. Ballygally Castle is the most famous building dating from the plantation period and has been in continuous use for over 400 years.

Conservation Areas

Glenarm is one of the oldest villages on the coast and the 'seat' of the Antrim McDonnells. It includes the remains of a Franciscan friary, Glenarm Castle, the Barbican Gate and the old core of the village with its 19th century shop fronts.

Carnlough's 19th century industrial heritage is



Londonderry Arms, Carnlough

associated with the Marchioness of Londonderry who developed the limestone industry. The conservation area includes the railway bridge, harbour, hotel and town hall.

Often referred to as the 'Capital of the Glens' the growth of Cushendall was associated with Francis Turnley. The conservation area includes the Curfew Tower, 'Cottage site' and surrounding woodland.

Cushendun is one of the prettiest villages on the coast and its distinctive architecture is associated with the architect Clough William Ellis. The conservation area includes Cushendun Hotel, the 'Square' and Maud Cottages.

Famous for the Lammas Fair Ballycastle is the largest of the five conservation areas. It has great character and includes many fine shopfronts along Ann Street, Castle Street and the 'Diamond'.

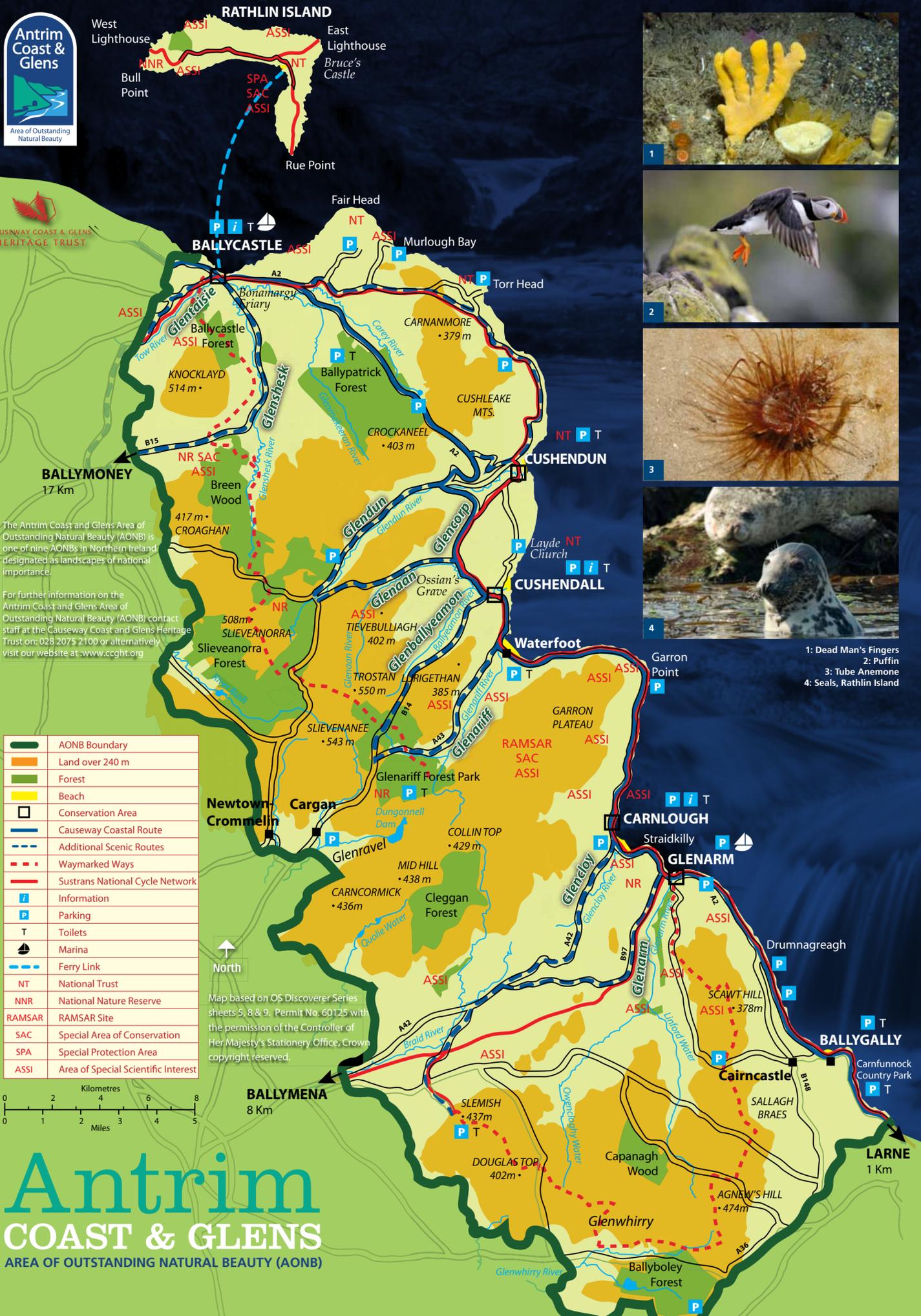
Listed Buildings and Historic Monuments

There are many listed buildings and historic monuments within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. Five of these, including Ossian's Grave in Glanaan, Layde Church near Cushendall and Bonamargy Friary at Ballycastle are in state care.



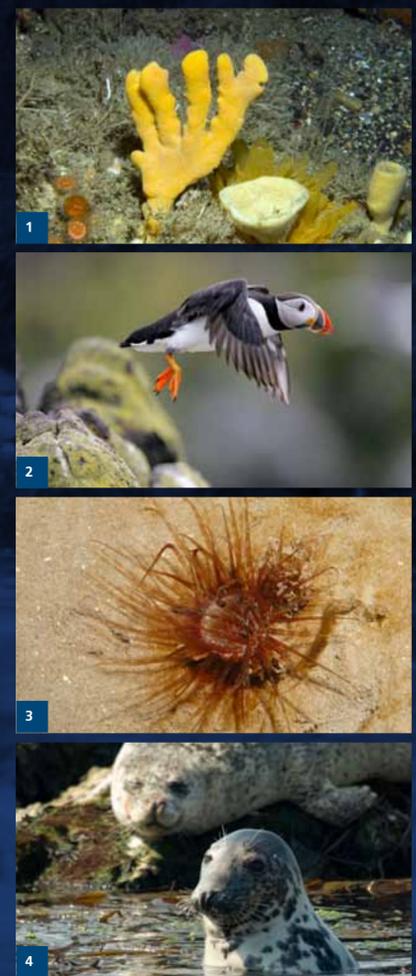
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1: Dead Man's Fingers
2: Puffin
3: Tube Anemone
4: Seals, Rathlin Island



Glendun Viaduct

Rathlin Island



Top: Slemish
Above: Ballycastle



The Nine Glens of Antrim

No guide to the Antrim Coast & Glens AONB would be complete without reference to the famous 'Nine Glens of Antrim'. Like many other sites within the area these place names are derived from Irish and often provide a link with how the area was used in the past. Roughly translated they mean the following:

Glenarm	Glen of the army
Glencloy	Glen of the hedges
Glenariff	The arable glen
Glenballyeamon	Edward's town glen
Glenaan	The glen of the colt's foot
Glencorp	Glen of the slaughtered
Glendun	Glen of the brown river
Gleneshesk	Glen of the reeds or sedges
Glenaisie	Glen of the Princess Taisie of the bright sides

Outdoor Ethics: Leave no Trace

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
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

Practising a Leave No Trace ethic is very simple: Make it hard for others to see or hear you and LEAVE NO TRACE of your visit.



Remember we all have a part to play, whether walking your dog, fishing, hiking, biking or visiting your local park - please Leave No Trace and be an advocate for the message.

"... the person who goes with reverent feet through the hills and valleys, accompanied by neither noise nor dust to scare away wild creatures, stopping often, watching closely, listening carefully. Only thus can they, at length, feel at one with what is, after all, their natural environment." (Praeger 1937).

leavenotraceireland.org

Visitor Information

For further information on where to stay, places to visit or things to do within the Antrim Coast and Glens contact:

Northern Ireland Tourist Board
59 North Street, Belfast BT1 1NB
Tel: 028 9023 1221 Fax: 028 9024 0960
E-mail: info@nitb.com
Website: www.discovernorthernireland.com

Causeway Coast and Glens Ltd
11 Lodge Road, Coleraine, Co. Londonderry BT52 1LU
Tel: 028 7032 7720 Fax: 028 7032 7719
E-mail: mail@causewaycoastandglens.com
Website: www.causewaycoastandglens.com

Ballycastle Tourist Information Centre
Sheskburn House, 7 Mary Street
Ballycastle, Co. Antrim BT54 6QH
Tel: 028 2076 2024 Fax: 028 2076 2515
E-mail: ballycastletic@hotmail.com
Website: www.moyle-council.org

Larne Tourist Information Centre
Narrow Gauge Road, Larne, Co. Antrim BT40 1XB
Tel: 028 2826 0088 Fax: 028 2826 0088
E-mail: larnetourism@btconnect.com
Website: www.larne.gov.uk

Ballymena Tourist Information Centre
The Braid, 1-29 Bridge Street, Ballymena, BT43 5EJ
Tel 028 2563 5900
Email: tourist.information@ballymena.gov.uk
www.gatewaytotheglens.com

Ballymoney Tourist Information Centre
1 Townhead Street, Ballymoney, Co. Antrim BT53 6BE
Tel: 028 2766 0230 Fax: 028 2766 0222
Email: touristinfo@ballymoney.gov.uk
www.visitballymoney.com

Additionally visitor information is available from Local Information Offices in Carnlough (tel: 028 2888 5236), Cushendall (tel: 028 2177 1180) and Carnfunnock Country Park (tel: 028 2827 0541)

How to get there and how to get around

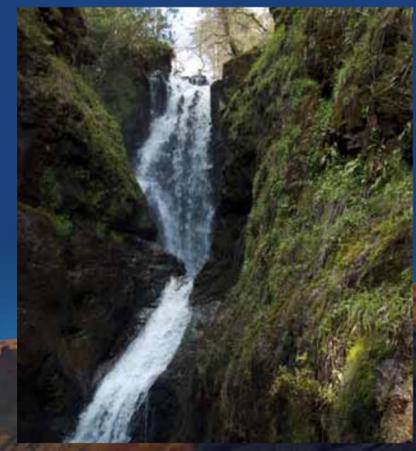
The Antrim Coast & Glens AONB is situated in the north eastern corner of Northern Ireland and within one hour's drive from Belfast City, Belfast International and City of Derry Airports. Ferry services operate from Scotland to both Larne and Belfast. There is also a ferry service between Ballycastle and Rathlin Island.

Ballymena, Ballymoney and Larne are part of the Northern Ireland rail network and the AONB is accessible by bus from each of these towns. In summer the Antrim Coaster bus service operates regularly between Larne and Ballycastle. Cyclists can use the Sustrans National Cycle Routes 93 and 97.

For walkers the AONB includes the Moyle Way running from Ballycastle to Glenariff Forest Park and the Antrim Hills Way running from Glenarm to Slemish Mountain. For more information on the Waymarked Ways in Northern Ireland please visit www.walkni.com or www.outdoorni.com

The Causeway Coastal Route covers eighty miles of coastline across two counties and passes through 3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty including the Antrim Coast & Glens AONB. www.ccralive.com

Other transportation links include: www.translink.co.uk www.rathlinballycastleferry.com www.portoflarne.co.uk www.belfast-harbour.co.uk



Above: Cranny Falls
Inset: Glenariff