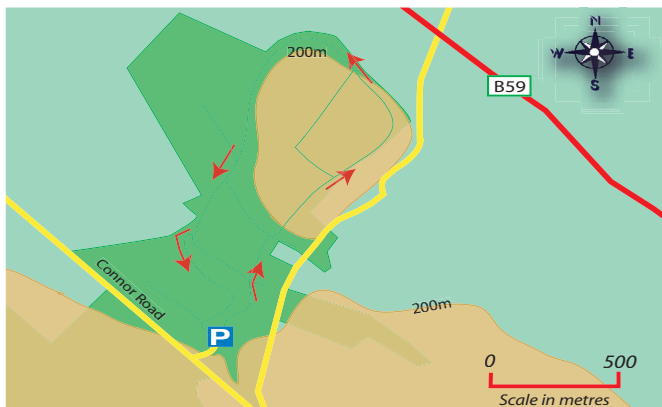




TARDREE



Total length: 4km Grade: Moderate, some steep sections

Standing at 323m and 247m respectively, the forested hills of Carneary and Tardree are prominent features for travellers on the M2 motorway between Antrim and Templepatrick. At 336 hectares, Tardree is one of Northern Ireland's oldest state forests and provides ample opportunity for walking. To get there, follow the signs for Parkgate from Templepatrick. Just after reaching Parkgate, turn left onto the Connor Road. After 5km, turn right, following the sign into Tardree Forest.

Although now forested, Tardree derives its name from the Irish, "An tArd Fhraoigh" meaning, "The height of heather." However, long before it was covered in the heather, this was the site of a large, explosive volcano and evidence of those times will be seen on this walking route. From the car park, follow the red route as indicated by painted arrows on woodland posts. Although the forest is mainly comprised of the Sitka Spruce, a few older Scot's Pines, may also be found. Sitka Spruce is an import from the Pacific North-West of North America but its ability to grow quickly to maturity in the poor soils of this area make it an ideal choice for forestry. After several turns the track clears the forest and views open-up ahead towards the windfarm on Elliotts Hill. A cairn is visible on top of one of the adjacent hills, Big Collin. The hillsides here show a clear stepped profile. This has arisen because these hills are made up of lava that was erupted here some 60 million years ago, each lava flow creating the individual steps that we can see today.

Soon after, the Belfast Hills come into view towards the south. These hills too are made up in part from lava, now hardened into the rock basalt, that erupted here 60 million years ago. The small distinctive profile of Carnmoney Hill can just be made out. It was one of the

TARDREE



volcanoes that fed the lava flows of this area at that time.

Continuing ahead, as you turn the bend and begin a sharp descent along the track, the prominent profile of Slemish Mountain dramatically enters view. Often associated with Saint Patrick, Slemish is all that remains of a large volcano that was active here 60 million years ago. At that time, Europe and

North America were still joined and as they tried to separate, north-east Ireland was rocked by intense volcanic activity. When active, Slemish would have been similar in size and shape to the great present day volcanoes of Hawaii.



As you walk downhill you soon pass Tardree Geological Nature Reserve on your left. Tardree Hill too was once a volcano, but here the activity was explosive in contrast to the more gentle volcanic eruptions that would have typified Slemish. The lava that erupted here gave rise to the rock rhyolite rather than basalt. Rhyolite is a light coloured rock. You will see it scattered on the ground all along this walk and it is known locally as Tardree Stone. Although the Nature Reserve is home to a range of plant types and one of the forest's largest badger sets, it is because of the geology, and not the flora and fauna, that this is a protected site. The adjacent photograph shows what the quarry was like before it became overgrown. The resemblance to parts of the more famous Giant's Causeway in North Antrim is striking.



After visiting the Nature Reserve, continue to follow the red arrows. As the track bends southwards, brief views open-up westwards to the Sperrin Mountains. After another kilometre or so, the path eventually leads you back to the starting point at Duncan's car park. There are, of course, many other walking routes or combinations of routes available for you to explore, not only here on Tardree Hill but also on nearby Carneary Hill.